They say the crisis is over... but the big fight is still ahead

CUTS
Huge public service cuts and contracting out

JOBS
More jobs face the axe

Labour movement needs workers’ plan for fightback

Turn to page 2
They say the crisis is over...

By Rohdie Evans

There is likely to be at least a 10 per cent squeeze in [local government] from next year, possibly more, the Conservatives following the next general election", reports the Financial Times (11 November).

Since much that local councils do is a matter of legal obligations, with their costs largely fixed beyond each council’s control, ten per cent is a huge squeeze. It comes from probable cuts by the New Labour government in the local government “settlement” for April 2010 (tax money redistributed from central government to local government), from reductions in local income, from fees and charges, already suffered by councils; and from losses by some councils in the collapse of the Icelandic banks. Share prices have been going up since March. Bankers’ bonuses will fall again this Christmas. There is talk of the economic crisis being over. But, for working-class people rather than bosses and bankers, the worst of the crisis is yet to come. The Tories say that if they win the general election — as they probably will — they plan cuts that within three months will make them the most unpopular government in Britain since World War Two.

New Labour plans cuts, too, starting with local government. The cuts in services are sure to bring more cuts in jobs, and more contracting-out, and will spill over into further job cuts outside local government, in suppliers, contractors, etc. All these cuts come from a drive to off-set the huge borrowings made by central government in order to bail out the banks. Their urgency comes not from the government having exhausted its ability to borrow, but from the desire to keep the British government’s standing good in the international financial markets where it borrows.

The issue is what gets priority — the revenue for the banks, bosses, bankers, or the services and jobs on which working-class people depend.

Local labour-movement campaigns against cuts already exist in some areas, usually where gung-ho councils have tried to make an early start on the cuts. They have won some victories. For the avalanche of cuts coming over the next months, we need a whole network of labour-movement campaigns against the cuts, pulling the local government workers’ unions into action alongside them, and fighting for a workers’ plan in response to the crisis and for a workers’ government as the political answer.

A wave of cuts in universities

By Ed Malby

On Monday 16 November 100 students and teachers of the University of the Arts London staged a demonstration outside the Chelsea College of Art and Design. They were protesting against the management’s new business plan for the University which will see 100 jobs cut, including 36 compulsory redundancies and the elimination of 16 courses in one school alone, the London College of Communication (LCC).

The week before, students at LCC, organised in the LCC Oppose Campaign, had staged a sit-in protest in one of the lecture theatres at the Elephant and Castle LCC campus. Despite the sell-out leadership of the students’ union ignoring the campaign, the management hiring national contractors and getting court injunctions to turf the students out of their lecture theatre, the campaign has gained mass support among students at LCC. It has increased the confidence of teaching and admin staff across the whole of the University.

The cuts, the heavy-handed represen- tion of students, and the sacking of the lecturers’ union rep, Kubir Bara, are the work of a new management team, recently brought in to transform the LCC into a new-look, prestigious, profit-making operation.

The new Rector of UAL, Nigel Carrington, is not an academic, but a for- mer corporate lawyer for British Petroleum. Sandra Kemp, head of school for the LCC, whose first act at LCC was to cancel Black History Month (it should also be noted that the courses she has chosen to cut are ones with the highest concentration of black and ethnic minor- ity students in the school), is also a lawyer, whose previous job at the Royal College of Arts saw her make enormous cuts to the school.

Management want to make savings on staff and teaching, and instead to plough money into prestigious building proj- ects. This is an approach familiar to students around the country — at Leeds University, the anti-cuts campaign has taken up the slogan, “What can a brick teach us?”, as management cuts jobs to pay for an Olympic swimming pool and a pavilion.

Management have also “privatised the space” at LCC — hiring security guards and restricting students’ access to the school, turning an institution of educa- tion into a private, heavily controlled space which is more like a modern shop- ping centre.

Mainly organised through Facebook, the LCC Oppose Campaign is mobilising previously unpolitical students into action. Oppose member Ludwig Reuter addressed students in a meeting at UCL following the demonstration, saying: “Before this campaign I had never been involved in politics. Three weeks ago I would have told you that anyone occu- pying a lecture theatre must be stupid — and here I am doing it myself?”

Another member of the campaign told Solidarity, “We’re not trying to damage the reputation of the University: we’re trying to save it. No one has any trust in management.”

The UCU at UAL has been mobilising teachers against the redundancies. One rep told us that union membership had increased 30% in the last term: “People are emailing me every week who had never previously considered union membership. The move has shifted from being an issue of ignorance... If it came to it, we would now be capable of staging indus- trial action”. While students told us that their Oppose Campaign would have never got off the ground without the assistance of UCU members, UCU activists countered that the student mobilisation was giving confidence and courage to their members.

Get in touch with the campaign against job cuts at the UAL. Contact educa- tion.not.for.sale@gmail.com or visit lccoppose.blogspot.com

In occupation

The attacks at LCC are only one part of a nationwide wave of cuts. Staff at Westminster University are striking for their back pay; students at Leeds University are organising a cam- paign against staff cuts; teaching jobs are also under threat at UCL, Sheffield University, London Metropolitan, and many other higher and further educa- tion institutions besides.

On the day that we go to press, reports are coming in of major demonstrations and student strikes across Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Illinois, California, Indonesia, Italy, Sierra Leone, Hungary, Macedonia, Poland and France, as part of the International Students Movement’s global day of action against cuts and privatisation.

• Contact the Leeds campaign: email enluc@leeds.ac.uk or ucu@leeds.ac.uk.

On Facebook search “Student Protests Against Job Cuts at Leeds”

• For information about other anti-cuts campaigns, contact education.not.for.sale@gmail.com or see www.free-education.org.uk

• For more information about the global day of action, see: http://emancipating-education-for-all.org/
For a real united front against fascism!

The growth of the British National Party and the rise of organisations like the English Defence League are stark evidence that the anti-fascist movement is failing.

The campaigns which dominate this movement, United Against Fascism and Hope Not Hate/Searchlight, are congenitally incapable of pushing back the fascist offensive.

There are important differences between the two campaigns, but these are variants of a shared strategy. Blame free to criticise the police and failure to defend us from fascist demonstrations and violence. Both believe that class struggle and class politics should be kept strictly excluded from the anti-fascist movement, lest it jeopardise "unity" with bosses and capitalist politicians who claim to oppose racism and fascism.

Probably your average Lib Dem, Blairite or even Tory MP genuinely believes that fascism is a nasty and undesirable thing. But the capitalist parties' desire and ability to fight fascism is strictly subordinated to their more fundamental drive: to protect and promote the interests of the rich against those of the exploited and oppressed. In the process, many poor people and even disoriented, demoralised workers are being driven into the arms of the fascists. In this context, it should be obvious that a movement which fails to integrate the anti-fascist struggle with a fight to defend and extend the living standards, rights and organisation of workers and the poor will be at best an irrelevance and at worst actively counter-productive.

Tragically, the socialist organisation with the strongest influence in anti-fascist campaigning, the SWP, has adopted a pretty much chemically pure version of the cross-class strategy (UAF). The nadir, so far, came at the 31 October demonstration against the EDL in Leeds, when SWP/UAF organisers worked with the police to prevent anti-fascists from marching and put on the platform a Lib Dem councillor currently engaged in trying to smash the council refuse workers' strike.

If we continue down this road, it is overwhelmingly likely that British fascism will soon take a great leap forward.

We need something different: an open and democratic "united front", linking up the organisations of workers and the oppressed to confront racism and fascism. That implies mass mobilisation for physical self-defence, but also — and even more importantly — a fight for the working-class politics and social demands necessary to neutralise the fascists' demagoguery and begin to disintegrate their at present rapidly expanding social base.

It does not mean we demand that the anti-fascist movement adopts a revolutionary socialist programme — how could we when socialists are a small minority in the British labour movement? A platform of working-class struggle — within which, naturally, socialists will remain free to criticise our allies and put forward our broader ideas — is what is needed to build an effective anti-fascist organisation.

How can such an organisation be created? Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP is discussing calling a conference in the new year, probably in February. We appeal to all serious socialists, trade unionists and anti-racist and anti-fascist activists to get in touch with the campaign and take part. Above all, we appeal to members of the SWP and UAF who are disturbed by their organisations' current trajectory and want to change it.

Back the Palestinians, reject "Jew conspiracy" theories

The plain facts will impart a strong bias against Israel in any simple, straightforwardly honest report of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Today it is a David and Goliath story, with the Palestinians in the David and Israel in the Goliath role. Whether measured by economic weight, by military strength, or by diplomatic clout the disproportion between the strengths of the David and the Goliath is simply enormous.

To translate the natural pro-Palestinian bias which the facts of the conflict suggest into ideas that there is a Jewish-Zionist conspiracy behind US, British and European Union failure to act to compel Israel to make peace by allowing the Palestinians to have their own state, you need something else again: you need to tap into History's very large and very septic tank of Jewish and Zionist conspiracy theory.

The Channel Four TV programme, Inside Britain's Israel Lobby (16 November), was a case in point.

There are many difficulties in the way of a settlement, and only a fool or someone mortally hostile to Israel would pretend otherwise.

The idea that these difficulties justify continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, the slow expansion of Israeli settlements, the gruesome winding-out of Palestinians, and at the end the elimination of the Palestinians as a distinct people — that idea is compatible only with extreme Israeli chauvinism. Justice demands that the Palestinians have their own state; so does any hope of general peace for generations to come. Two, three, four or more generations, most likely.

It is plainly in the interests of general peace in the Middle East that the Arab-Israeli antagonism be ended. The USA's alliance with Israel does create difficulties for it with economically and strategically important Arab states in the region. It has been in the interests of the whole policy for the Middle East which the USA launched with the invasion of Iraq that there should be a settlement.

US President George W Bush went further, in words, than any of his predecessors, coming out explicitly for a two-states settlement and for the so-called "road map" of 2003.

But Bush did nothing to force Israel to agree. The fact that the USA's invasion of Iraq was not the quick triumph Bush expected, and drew the USA into a long war there, was probably one factor in Bush's inaction.

So why do the USA, Britain, and other powers not exert the severe pressure on Israel that is the only way to achieve even serious negotiations for a settlement? Why has President Obama retreated, in the face of Israeli opposition, even from the demand on Israel that it stop expanding its West Bank settlements?

Part of it is inertia. Israel is a solid and strong ally for the USA in the region. Some Arab states are US allies, but all have regimes which the USA distrusts. But is that sufficient explanation?

Thus the stage is set for an explanation of US and European policy by way of conspiracy theories — assertions that there is a vast and powerful Jewish-Zionist network that exercises something like controlling power in the USA, Britain, and other countries; and it is the behind-the-scenes working of the conspiracies that explain why Israel is not compelled by the USA and the European Union to reach a settlement.

Paranoid right-wingers in the USA even believe that the USA is ruled by a "Zionist Occupation Government" (ZOG). Now, it is a matter of fact that there is a powerful pro-Israel lobby in the USA. In that phato-democratic system, rich people and organised pressure groups buy elected representatives by providing money without which they can not effectively stand for election and win. Organised lobbies can thus put themselves in a commanding position vis-a-vis the legislature, and secure their own interests.

It is notorious that the tobacco industry, the oil industry, the arms industry, big media corporations, and many other "interests" have thus been able to avoid regulation that would serve the public better. American politics is also in part structured in "national" blocs.

Second, third, fourth, etc. generation immigrants still call themselves "Greek", "Italian", "Irish", etc. The Irish lobby was once immensely powerful. It got the plain facts will impart a strong bias


to all serious socialists, trade unionists and anti-racist and anti-fascist activists to get in touch with the campaign and take part. Above all, we appeal to members of the SWP and UAF who are disturbed by their organisations' current trajectory and want to change it.

Israel’s peace movement makes solidarity with Palestinians

Editor: Cathy Nugent

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SOLIDARITY 3
The Palestinians are a people under foreign — Israeli — occupation and control. They have the right to a national state of their own, which they have repeatedly demanded, for more than two-thirds of the time that Israel has existed.

Yes, Israeli occupation is brutal, and it is predatory. Over decades Israeli settlers have inflicted steadily colonisation of the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, relentlessly winding back and displacing the original inhabitants. They are still advancing now.Plainly it is the intention of the dominant forces in Israel to colonise and permanently annex as much as they can of Palestine.

Israel has strength, power, and overall control of relations with the Palestinians. It could now, probably, reach a modus vivendi with the surrounding Arab states, with the Palestinians on the backburner, allowing a Palestinian state on the territory occupied in 1967, or even that territory with some deductions. It wants an “Arab lobby” in the USA, mainly, it thinks, to get in response a revival of old conspiracy theories.

The pro-Israel lobby is part of a problem from the normal workings of American plutocratic democracy, of the power in public life of any well-financed and highly motivated lobby and of primitive Christian religion, into a problem of conspiracy. It is translated into a modern manifestation of the ages-old “Jewish conspiracy”, ideologies and variations of which are threatened throughout Christian civilisation.

To make that translation you need to have a certain political reading to find the idea once formulated, powerful because, subconsciously or consciously, you tap into the vast septic reservoir of ideas about the “Jew” and “Jewish control” that is there for the tapping into.

Almost as strange as the conversion of the too-recently anti-semitic “Christian Zionists” of the USA has been the de facto conversion of much of the international left to a variant of Jewish conspiracy theory.

Channel Four’s “Inside Britain’s Israel Lobby” was part of that.

Though it insisted that its “exposé” of the lobby was not an allegation of a Jewish or Zionist conspiracy, in fact, the “expose” character of the programme belied that insistence, and its upfront “demand” for “transparency” more or less proclaimed the behind-the-scenes existence of some sort of conspiracy now.

In the programme, a very great deal was made of not much. Things that are not secret and not sinister were made out to be both. Contributions to MPs by Zionist pressure groups, individuals, and political lobbyists were presented as if they are unique, or uniquely influential, and of course they are not.

Either the programme meant to say or imply that there is a sinister, hidden, Zionist-Jewish influence or controlling hand in British politics on policy towards Israel — though, if it exists, why would its influence and control stop at that? — or it said very little. It said little, but implied a great deal more.

The programme wobbled badly in its targets, for instance on what motivates the pro-Israel lobbyists at Westminster. Commitment to Israel, its interests, and its defence? Yes. But one of the lobbyists — “the 18th [sic] richest man in England”, so the programme told us — owns a shopping mall in the Israel-occupied West Bank and thus, the programme said, has a personal interest. So behind the Zionist, pro-Israel ideology they found and “exposed” the age-old image of the money-grubbing Jew.

The truth is that there are all sorts of organised lobby-bies at Westminster. The increasing Americanisation of British politics makes lobbying in Britain too a large “industry”. Britain, too, is now, and increasingly so, very much a democracy. The transformation of the old Labour Party into New Labour, has accelerated that development. Political campaigning, by big companies and industries is now pretty much the norm.

And it is not all that new — the sugar industry waged a vigorous campaign during the 1945-51 Labour government against a proposal to nationalise it. The pro-Israel lobby at Westminster is part of a whole system which is long-established and recently much inflated. To present is as something hidden and especially sinister is, whatever the programme-makers say, to foment belief in “Jewish conspiracy” — or to tap into a pool of anti-Jewish paranoia that exists in British political sub-culture too.

That is what the Channel Four programme did, with-out making any real “revelation” to justify its tabloid-journalism-style “expose” format and self-promotion. The placement of settlements and roads indicates that this is the Israeli aim.

We must back the Palestinians’ demand for a state of their own alongside Israel. There are difficulties on the road, and we must register them.

Israel had to fight for its very existence in 1948, against five invading Arab armies, one at least of which was supported by the slogan, “Drive the Jews into the sea”, and against a sudden Egyptian attack in 1973.

It is surrounded by fundamentally hostile states. To this day only two Arab states, Jordan and Egypt, recognise Israel.

The demands of both the Palestinians and the Arab states are on the basis of which the Arab League proposes to reach a settlement with Israel, include, as well as a Palestinian Arab state alongside Israel, the “return” of the “refugees” — of over five million people, all but a fraction of whom are not refugees but the descendants of the 750,000 Arabs who fled or were driven out of Israeli territory during the 1948 Arab invasions.

The existence of so many people classified as “Palestinian refugees” is the result of the deliberate policies of the Israeli state towards the Palestinians. This is why a “solution” to the “refugee problem” is so important.

The demand for the “return” of the refugees is the cutting edge, still, of a drive to destroy Israel and in contradiction to the Arab League’s declared willingness to reach a settlement with Israel in return for a Palestinian state in the territories occupied in 1967. It is the cutting edge, also, of the claim that all pre-1967 Palestine is “Israel”. It is the claim that the “refugees” — of over five million people, all but a fraction of whom are not refugees but the descendants of the 750,000 Arabs who fled or were driven out of Israeli territory during the 1948 Arab invasions.

The “rabbi emitus” of the Reform Synagogue in London spoke on camera of Israel as South Africa applied. How? There are two systems of law in operation, one for Israeli Jews and another one in the Occupied Territories. A serious point and one worth thinking about.

The widespread idea (especially on the left) that Israel is equivalent to South Africa usually implies that the Israeli Jews — a compact nation — should go the same way as the South African whites, a minority priviledged caste. That idea was proclaimed openly from platforms of “anti war movement” protests against Israel’s Gaza war. The rabbi emitus agrees? Or he forgets the content in which his emulations emerge?

There really is a powerful and highly motivated pro-Israel lobby, in which many Jews are active. Be it its influence within the US and British plutocratic democracies. That is fact. To go beyond that, to “exaggerate” or “postulate” even more, a sinister Jewish conspiracy, is not harmless.

In recent times the financial segment of capitalism has become extremely powerful, but good! But the whole of capitalism, not just the banks, is rotten. And the traditional corollary of the viewpoint that financial capital is particularly bad is that the problem with modern Judaism is “Jewish money”. A powerful cultural reservoir of “Jewish conspiracy” ideas exists. The connection of the current criticism of financial capitalism with that reservoir of ideas raging fire jumping across a small gap. Programmes like “Inside Britain’s Israel Lobby” blaze a trail for such connections. Right wingers and fascists “on the ground” draw out the implications.

Anti-Semitism in Britain has risen alarmingly in recent times. Jewish conspiracy nonsense, even timid and half-hearted stuff such as “Inside Britain’s Israel Lobby” cannot but feed and fuel a Jew-hunt will not help the Palestinians.
Rank and file anger

BY EDWARD MALTBY

On 18 November CWU postal workers’ union leader Dave Ward sent out a letter to branch union members about the “Interim Agreement” made with Royal Mail bosses by the union leaders on Thursday 5 November. Responding to widespread rank and file anger against the deal, Ward wrote that “genuine problems persist” and “the Postal Executive [of the union] has agreed to review the position next Tuesday” [24 November].

However, the bottom line is that “divisive and expletive-laced language is not an effective way to solve problems”. The letter also calls for the first meeting in the national talks between CWU and Royal Mail bosses, to take place on 19 November.

In an attached “CWU reps’ brief”, Ward claims it as a great prize that “Royal Mail is working on a clear process that for the first time ever will include an independent third party” — namely steps to organise a Business Link London (a business advisory service), but was until the early 1990s a NUTP union official.

Ward says that the CWU can return to strike action if Royal Mail is seen to “break an agreement supported by an independent chair and ACAS”. The problem is that all Royal Mail have agreed to are “independent” and not to impose further changes or stop both national and local strikes, with strong language committing the union to negotiations. A few branch secretaries and area reps defended the PEC’s decision, but the tone of the discussion at workplaces was overwhelmingly against the agreement.

Postal workers expressed:

- frustration that the pressure on Royal Mail of an accumulated backlog of pressies had been frittered away for out of members’ lost wages — being frittered away.
- that the “truce” may become a surrender, because it will be difficult to go the membership back up for action.
- that a “secret motivation for this new process” — namely to “break an agreement supported by an independent chair and ACAS agreeing that Royal Mail has not agreed to negotiate — without the national basis, People will be reluctant to go out again, given we have lost momentum, but the alternative is to roll over and accept what management want to do to us.

We need to keep the pressure up on the Postal Executive to reinstate the strikes, and to call a national meeting of branches in favour if they refuse.

But we also need to assert control over the dispute, electing strike committees in every workplace and sending delegates from them to regional and national meetings. The disastrous “interim agreement” can’t have to be in the hands of those affected on the ground.

After Xmas, who knows?

BY A LONDON POSTAL WORKER

Where are we, since the return to work on the basis of the “interim agreement”? Management in many areas are continuing their bullying and harassment as before.

They are charging people with wilful delay for not completing their deliveries in time and taking them off pay. They are keeping casualties in many mail centres and delivery offices. And they are refusing to listen to the changes brought in by Executive Action over the year. Rather, they are making plans for their next round of job cuts. Some areas have already walked almost already.

When the union announced it was calling off the planned strikes in exchange for an agreement to keep talking, the immediate response was “what the ‘f**k’, and ‘we’ve got nothing in exchange for our strike action’.

Now we’ve had a chance to read the “interim agreement”, we can see precisely what we’ve got.

The agreement amounts to a wish-list from the union — it contains lots of good things we want to see coming out of the dispute, but only in the form of “reviewing” and “examining”. On the other hand, management has got its wish of calling off the strikes.

The agreement commits management to reviewing changes they have introduced through executive action. Reps have been asking for that — a serious review of duties they have taken on, or walks they have collapsed, of shift times they’ve changed.

It says work should return to its proper mail centre — we have to monitor that. Things that must mean casuals are only used in the usual way in the run up to Christmas.

The agreement states that there will be independent review every two years of progress, and the union insists that strike action can be re-instated at any time.

Management are doing worse than standing. They are not even pretending to stick to the letter of the agreement. They must be hoping that the call off of the strikes means they can string us along with promises that mean nothing until we feel it is too late to do anything. And that without any agreement, beyond talking, about the future.

We need the strikes reinstated on a national basis. People will be reluctant to go out again, given we have lost momentum, but the alternative is to roll over and accept what management want to do to us.

In the Interim Agreement, CWU agreed to call off its strikes over job cuts and speed-up for at least two weeks. The bosses agreed to negotiate, at national level over a new agreement on jobs and conditions, working hours, and pay, and management banned people from taking their vans home with them, which they need to get to work the next day.

But also we need to assert control over the dispute, electing strike committees in every workplace and sending delegates from them to regional and national meetings. The disastrous “interim agreement” can’t have to be in the hands of those affected on the ground.

And the CWU rep in Glasgow gave us this personal opinion of the Interim Agreement and the Postal Executive Committee’s decision to call off the campaign of industrial action:

“I’ve seen the Interim Agreement. But, personally, I’m a bit worried about it because of our dealings with Royal Mail since the 2007 dispute. I see this dispute as an extension of the 2007 campaign, because that dispute was never really resolved. I think Royal Mail are being a little bit coy. They want to get the Christmas delivery delivered, and then in January we’ll have no leverage left because mail volumes go down in the New Year. And then Royal Mail could dig their heels in and say: ‘Two fingers to you!’

Before the official action Royal Mail was provoking unofficial action, and then using that as an excuse to bring in restrictive practices.

They were asking drivers before they went out if they were prepared to cross picket lines. When drivers said that they wouldn’t, they were sent home without pay, and management banned people from taking their vans home with them, which they need to get to work the next day.

Where I work management has been willing to review restrictive practices and they have stuck to what they have said. But that’s not the case everywhere. Things have been left to local agreement, and I’ve heard stories that what’s been happening elsewhere is different from here.

The national ballot result is still active. We can call another strike by giving Royal Mail seven days notice, to meet the legal requirements. Because the ballot is still active, I’m hoping that Royal Mail will play ball, because of that threat. But when mail volumes go down after Christmas, who knows about the Christmas bonus?

Personally, I think that Royal Mail does not want to deal with the union they way it has had to deal with us in the past. And that’s what this dispute is all about — our right to negotiate terms and conditions, and for ‘modernisation’ to take place through negotiations, not through Executive Actions.”
IN BRIEF:

DEFEND CAROLINE Bedale

The political witch-hunt inside the public sector union Unison has intensified with the banning from union office for eight years of leading Manchester branch activist Caroline Bedale. Caroline was the Secretary of the Manchester Community and Mental Health Branch of the union.

Caroline’s crime was to continue to support victimised activist Karen Reissman (from the same branch) after Unison withdrew legal assistance her. Despite the rule that it also supported Karen’s case (despite the withdrawal of legal support), Caroline has been found guilty of “acting in a manner prejudicial to the union”.

Unison’s Disciplinary Committee heard a number of charges against Caroline; these involved activities Caroline did in her own time, with her own resources.

Unison’s leadership are now seeking to not only stifle all dissent within the union, but also to control what union activists can say or do in a private capacity!

Since Caroline is less than eight years away from retirement, this ban from holding office is effectively a lifetime ban.

A support group for Caroline has been established which can be contacted at supportcarolinebedale@gmail.com.

All Unison members should write to Caroline to protest against this decision to Dave Prentis, General Secretary and to Gerry Gallagher, Unison President at UNISON, Mabledon Place, London WC1H 9AJ.

JERSEY CUTS

Workers should not pay for the bosses’ crisis!

From an AWL bulletin against public sector pay cuts in Jersey.

IN JERSEY, like in the UK, the rich are getting richer and workers and the poor are getting poorer as the bosses try to make us pay for their economic crisis. Workers in Jersey are suffering.

Rising taxes. GST [3 percent Goods and Services Tax introduced recently], rising duties and the freeze on tax allowances are making the situation unbearable for most people. We are being forced to pay for the hole left by the Government refusal to seriously tax corporations.

Real-term wage cuts. The States has over-ruled even its own States Employment Board to insist that workers should get no cost of living increase – despite rising taxes and expenditure cut.

Job cuts and privatisation.

For instance, twenty jobs at Jersey Water are under threat as public property is semi-privatised through “incorporation” — preparing for it to be sold off. Jersey Telecom has also been incorporated.

We can expect more to come.

We’re in an economic crisis. Isn’t this inevitable?

When the States [Jersey’s parliament] argues that because workers in the UK are taking cuts, so should we — or that because workers in the private sector are taking cuts, so should the public sector — that’s an excuse to attack all workers. If one group of workers succeeds in stopping cuts and getting a decent pay rise, it will make the situation better for all workers to struggle. We need to take on the bosses, not fall out amongst ourselves.

Since the recession began, workers in the UK have shown that it’s possible to fight back. If you get organised and fight back, you can win. That is how we won the rights we have now; that is how we can stop them being taken away and win more in the future.

For the first time in the history of Jersey, workers across the island have got organised together. The formation of a Trades Council to prepare for the strike is a very positive development.

DEMANDS

• Decent pay rises. We should demand a system where, in addition to pensions, wages rise at the right time to match inflation. The very minimum we should accept is a pay rise that keeps up with inflation (real inflation, not a cooked-up government figure)! now.

• No job losses, no cuts in services.

• As the rich not the poor. Scrap GST. Introduce a proper system of corpora-

tion tax, capital gains tax etc — make the rich pay for the services we need.

For the full text and a downloadable PDF see www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/11/10/awl-jejersey-bulletin-no-1

RAIL UNION

A step forward for democracy

By JANINE BOOTH, DELEGATE FROM LONDON TRANSPORT REGION

MT has changed its rules to allow more members to be eligible to be delegates to its annual General Meeting. This is an important widening of democracy in the union.

Previously, a member could only stand for election as a delegate to the AGM once every five years, which disqualified 45% of members! Several branches submitted a proposal to cut this to three years to the recent Special General Meeting (SGM), where, despite strong opposition from General Secretary Bob Crow, it was successfully passed.

In proposing the rule change, I argued that the five-year rule was unfair and out-of-date. The transport industry has changed: employment is not nearly as secure as it used to be. Even keeping your job for five years can be quite an achievement!

Those who defend the old rule usually do so on the grounds that we need delegates to have experience and to have proved their loyalty to the union.

However, five years’ membership is no guarantee of five years’ active involvement, experience or loyalty. Some people gain more experience in three years of activism than others do in twenty years of passive subs-paying.

Moreover, the Annual General Meeting does not just need experience: it needs fresh ideas. It needs the input of, for example, those Vestas workers who joined RMT this year and who, under the old rule, would not be able to speak for themselves at the AGM for another five years!

The old rule seemed to ensure that you can only attend the body that can change RMT once you have forgotten the changes you once thought it should make! It was a rule that tended towards conservatism in the union, a brake on initiative and change. Maybe that is why the leadership liked it!

Personally, I would like to have seen the qualifying period cut even more, or even scrapped altogether. But that was not what we were debating, and the cut down to three years is a step in the right direction. It will hopefully see an influx of new faces at future AGMs, and a greater willingness to consider change and to question established practices and ideas.

Unfortunately, other rule changes proposed by branch activists were defeated. These were proposals for: a longer period of time to submit amendments to AGM resolutions; a bigger, more repre-

sented AGM; and strike committees to be included in the membership.

Bob Crow opposed all the rule change proposals from branches. His opposition to the proposal about amendments seemed particularly spurious, as it had been passed unanimously at all branches that had considered it, and his argument centred around the idea that two-and-a-half weeks from the resolutions deadline to the publication date was insufficient time for head office to prepare a document.

Bob’s speech against the strike com-

mittee proposal was also illuminating, as he argued that we should not set up bod-

ies that might disagree with the Executive, and should instead support our national leadership at all times. Bob’s was not the only voice against, though: the majority of delegates were not convinced of these three proposals.

Overall, the Special General Meeting confirmed in me that even in the better, more militant, more democratic unions — such as RMT — the bureaucracy will resist change, but the rank-and-file can win progress if we organise. Our job now is to organise more effectively to push for further democratic change, to put more power in the hands of rank-

and-file union members.

INDUSTRIAL

SOLIDARITY

Not so Superdrug

More than 250 warehouse workers at Superdrug’s national distribution centre, in South Elmsall in Yorkshire, are now in their second week of strike action.

Unite members voted 86 percent yes and are now on indefinite strike after being threatened with the sack if they do not sign new contracts imposing wage cuts of £1,800 a year, the withdrawal of overtime premiums and cuts to sick pay and other benefits. Superdrug is also demanding the right to shift pattern changes with only seven days notice and trying to force the workers to opt out of the EU’s 48-hour Working Time Directive.

Superdrug, which made £37 million last year, has set up a scabbing operation in Ilkerton in Derbyshire.

The workers have called for solidarity including a boycott of Superdrug shops. Send messages to superdrugstrikers@yahoo.co.uk and contributions to Superdrug Strike Fund, Unite the Union, 55 Calls Lane, Leeds LS2 1BW.
GAZA

Hamas steps up its control

On 12 November Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas postponed the Palestinian parliamentary and Presidential elections due in January 2010. He said this was because of lack of progress on US-sponsored peace talks. But part of the background to the current situation is the repression of Abbas’s political allies, Fatah, in Gaza, by Hamas. Dan Katz surveys this and other developments in Gaza.

Hamas has decapitated Fatah’s organisation in Gaza. Many of its leaders and activists have been purged, or, like the security forces, rebuilt from scratch with Hamas supporters in charge. Some Fatah members have fled, and others have been detained as Fatah-run political and social organisations have been raided and closed down.

Fatah-led trade unions have also been attacked. Hamas has been in dispute with teachers, health workers and journalists. Most recently, in September, 2009 volunteer teachers, dismissed from their jobs earlier in the year and deemed politically suspect by Hamas, have been banned from working in schools in a move denounced by the teachers’ unions.

According to an investigation by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 87 women activists were prevented by Hamas’ Internal Security Service from leaving Gaza to attend the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) conference being convened in Ramallah on the West Bank. Hamas used the Israeli offensive on Gaza in December 2008/January 2009 to renew thousands of ‘house arrest orders’ against Fatah officials and activists.

And the Independent Commission for Human Rights, an organisation sponsored by the Palestinian Authority, claimed masked [Hamas] gunmen shot at least 49 people in the legs in punishment shootings between 28 December and 31 January 2009.

In the Fatah-run West Bank Hamas supporters have also been rounded up. Some have been tortured. Human Rights Watch has also recorded deaths in custody, and the arrest of journalists considered pro-Fatah.

In July 2009, Hamas officials initiated what they called a “virtue” campaign, saying they were concerned about increasing “immoral” behaviour in Gaza. The main victims have been women.

In July a judge ordered that female lawyers had to wear the hijab (a full-length robe) and the hijab (headscarves) in court. Nearly all the 150 women lawyers in Gaza wear the headscarf already, but they challenged the ruling as illegal and won. One, Dina Abu Dagga, said, “It was not the Chief Justice’s right to change the dress code. It was absolutely illegal… We are not against the hijab. I wear it myself. We are against imposing it… Today you impose the hijab, but tomorrow it will be something else.”

As the new school year began, in late August, pressure was placed on parents to dress their daughters more conservatively. Some female students have been refused entry to schools. Girls are being told they must wear a jilbab and a headscarf. Previously, the uniform typically required for female public school students was a long denim skirt and shirt. Zeinab Gholamny of the Center for Women’s Legal Research and Consulting in Gaza reports that a school administrator slapped one female student in front of her schoolmates for not wearing the jilbab: “Physically assaulting students and humilitating them in front of their peers is simply unacceptable, whatever the reason, and especially to force them to wear certain religious clothing in violation of their religious freedom.”

In mid-October the police began enforcing a new law which prevents women riding motorcycles. The ban, which was posted on a Hamas website claims they seek to “preserve citizen safety and the stability of Palestinian society’s customs and traditions.”

Hamas have banned mannquins and the display of women’s underwear in shop windows.

Hamas police patrols now demand women dress “modestly” on the beach and that women are accompanied by fathers or brothers. Some of those that have broken these rules have been beaten up by the police. One resident told Human Rights Watch that, on the night of 9 July, Hamas police beat up three young men for swimming without shirts.

It is increasingly rare to see women in the street who are not wearing headscarves — something now “mainly confined to the wealthier areas of Gaza City” (Guardian, 19 October). Those that do venture out without their hair can expect to be taunted.

In mid-October the Independent Commission for Citizens’ Rights office in Gaza City was raised by Hamas police and forced to close. Local human rights activists claim Hamas want to stop independent reporting of the current wave of repression.

Gaza continues to be gripped by a humanitarian crisis with 80% of families relying on humanitarian aid, 95% of Gaza’s industrial operations suspended, and unemployment at more than 50%.

New Zealand students fight ban

In October 2009 two socialist student activists were “trespassed” or banned from Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, after a fees protest. Joel Cosgrove, a former Students Association president, and Heleyni Prattley, a former Student Executive member, were “trespassed” for taking part in a protest against the bankrupcty of Chrysler and General Motors.

The result was a 72% No vote.

Full report from the US socialist group Solidarity:
www.workersliberty.org/fordworkersnsw

New Zealand students fight ban

Korean workers defend their rights

Following a demonstration of over 100,000 workers at South Korea’s National Assembly building in early November, one of the country’s main trade union federation has begun bating for a nationwide strike which could take place in mid-December.

Both KCITF and FKITU have been involved in a series of protests against President Lee Myung-Bak’s new proposed labour law, which workers see as a direct attack on trade unions. The law would effectively illegalise closed shops, as well as forbid employers from paying full-time union activists (those on what is referred to in Britain as “facility time”).

Korea’s labour movement has a proud recent history of extremely inspiring militancy and is not afraid to wield its power to beat back the government when it attacks workers’ interests. Kang, Choong-ho, a FKITU official, said “We will thwart the government’s policy by mobilising every means possible. If necessary, we will stage a general strike.”

Despite the ballot results not yet being in, and despite negotiations with government continuing until November 25, unions have already begun levying strike funds to support members. This perspective — of negotiating from a position of strength and a commitment to militant action — is a far cry from the situation in Britain, where strikes are called off at the merest sign of concessions from management, and where successive TUC Congresses have rejected calls for industrial action to defeat our anti-trade union laws.

Ford workers’ “No” heard round the world

By November 1, United Auto Workers members had overwhelming rejected contract modifications, in voting that coincidentally — not coincidentally — the day before Ford announced new profits. An earlier set of concessions were voted up in March, but the members saw these as a giveback too far.

The concessions voted down were to last until 2013. They included severe limitations on the right to strike and a year freeze on new-hire pay that had already been cut in half. The argument of the company and the union leadership was that these measures were needed to “match” the labour costs of bankrupt Chrysler and General Motors.

The result was a 72% No vote.

More on the campaign at
littletreepass.wordpress.com
The higher you go, the worse it gets

MY LIFE AT WORK

All Chatham is a porter at a major hotel in central London.

Tell us a bit about the work you do.

Porters work a very long week — we’re on call 24/7. The work is physically demanding and requires a lot of movement.

What’s the pay like?

The pay for porters is relatively low. The base rate is approximately £8.91 per hour, with a fixed number of hours worked each week. There are additional payments for over-time and shifts worked on public holidays.

Do you work weekends or overtime?

Yes, we work weekends and sometimes extra shifts to meet the needs of the hotel.

What’s the work like for people who have never done it before?

The work is physically demanding. Porters are responsible for moving luggage, cleaning rooms, and maintaining the cleanliness and safety of the hotel. This can be very tiring, especially if the shift is long.

Do you have any advice for someone considering this work?

If you’re considering this work, be prepared for a lot of physical exertion. It’s important to have good physical fitness and to be able to handle the pressure of working long hours.

The London Underground Worker

We begin an occasional series in which AWL members describe their workplace, their experiences, and the struggles they face.

A week in the life...

Tuesday:

On my stations after I finished work and we signed up for my local Trades Union Congress branch.

Wednesday:

I attended the RMT’s conference on working class political representation. Disappointing to find out it is more about top-down initiatives that had been cooked up behind closed doors. None of one from Workers’ Liberty was called to speak in the debate. But at least we were there, arguing for more democracy in this initiative for workers’ representation. If even a few activists took this idea forward it might make the wider campaign much healthier.

Friday:

I did a work engagement training course. I am there with a great bunch of RMT reps who encourage me with their tales of standing up to management. Thank goodness the union keeps throwing up brilliant people who are prepared to stand up for our convictions, day in day out.

 Went to the RMT London Transport Region Executive meeting afterwards. We discussed how to implement a motion to defend station staffing levels on London Underground. We are going to get a campaign off the ground.

Tuesday:

RMT recruitment day. I join RMT activists on my station and we signed up three people! Curiously, the RMT seems to have gained appeal now the prospect of striking is off the immediate horizon. Or perhaps it’s because we all realise big changes are ahead that could threaten our jobs and we will need to defend ourselves. Today was one of rebuilding solid union membership where I work.

In the evening I went to my AWL branch meeting. My chance in the week to discuss politics, catch up with activists from other workplaces and hear reports of activity I was unable to attend. We planned our political activity for the coming week.

The Student Activist

Gender Studies at Hull University is being cut. The local postal workers were until recently striking against their management bullyies. Our students’ union does not yet have a position on education funding. These are the themes of my recent political life!

As an AWL activist all of these struggles have been key to our work as a revolutionary socialist organisation that seeks to draw the links between student and worker struggles.

When the national postal strike started myself and other AWL members and activists went down to the picket lines and showed solidarity with the striking workers and talked about the fights we face as students and how we could support each other.

Later we spent some time outside our student union asking students to sign a petition in support of workers. While explaining the issues around the dispute, we were also introducing them to our paper and other literature and campaigns we are involved in.

Our Student Union Executive Committee passed a motion drafted by an AWL member who is a sabbatical officer in support of the postal workers — arguing students should not be used as scabs. If the dispute starts up again AWL members at HUU will direct the resources of the university into the practical and political solidarity the postal workers need.

An important aspect of our work has been about improving the structures of the student union.

At the general meeting we demanded a committee of our union does not yet have a position on education funding. This is an important part of the AWL’s work to educate all these people and by having debates that often seem heated or group and individual discussions we often seem to be arguing for something that is inherently important.

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As well as educating Solidarity, we have public meetings every two weeks. The last was on “What is Socialist Feminism? Why do we need it?” A comrade from Sheffield AWL led a very productive discussion. That will help us develop a view of feminism that cuts against the liberal and largely anti-working class “official” feminism that comes from our student union.

These kinds of debates and discussions play an important part in educating students.

We have encountered all sorts of people in our activities — people who are openly hostile, those who have very little knowledge or conception of socialism or some who just have a lot of questions.

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At the general meeting we demanded a committee of our union does not yet have a position on education funding. This is an important part of the AWL’s work to educate all these people and by having debates that often seem heated or group and individual discussions we often seem to be arguing for something that is inherently important.
A rolling wave of right-wing politics threatens to engulf Britain in the period immediately ahead. The first thing we have to do is face the cruel truth about it.

Socialists have to look realities honestly in the face if they are ever going to learn how to change capitalist society fundamentally and learn how to replace it with working-class democratic socialism. Especially, the grimness related.

The slump has massively undermined capitalism’s credibility with wide sections of the people. But the demagogues will attempt to take advantage of this situation for a presentation of a socialist alternative. And so the major movement is to the right.

A Tory government is massively unpopular and discredited. The Prime Minister is a figure of contempt and pity. The working-class disillusionment with New Labour, which Solidarity thought might come early out of the New Labour government, as a result of its radically bourgeois character and social character, will want to break with vengeance, and with a right-wing or anti-political drift.

• The Tories are, mostly likely, six months away from deposing its incumbent. It is to be congratulated and try to break the labour movement, for instance the civil service unions.

• The tremendous general sense of disillusion with aspects of the capitalist system is politically and socially ill-informed and demagogued-infected disillusion. It is focused by the press on such obscene but not fundamentally political aspects as the enormous rip-off bonuses paid to bankers even after the state has had to intervene so recently with massive sums of taxpayers’ money to stop the banks going bust. The anger against the bankers is entirely justified, but even to resort to the old delusion that only one part of capital — finance capital — is intrinsically rotten, and not the exploitative capital as a whole.

• The tremendous widespread loathing of all “mainstream” parties, the electoral enterprises of the would-be left, is a way to go. They personalise everything. They不明白 the need to organise some of the forcesthat went on, after the Stavisky financial scandal in 1934.

• The press, very crudely the tabloids such as the Daily Express, and, less crudely and in more measured ways, even the broadsheets, now habitually agitates on social and political questions to a degree that may be unprecedented. The tabloid papers assume a major part of the role of social and political criticism that a mass-circulation socialist press would play if it existed. They denounce, expose, point the finger of scorn and accusation. They blame the government, government departments, individuals, not the system of which they are a part. They personalise everything. They have created a depoliticised political culture in which political issues reduce themselves to — and usually are treated as — only policy, or but “performance”, like footballers, pop-stars, and actors.

• There is a deep cultural and religious as well as a “class” alienation between sections of the white working class and the people in the Muslim areas of British cities. The press, and the “fascistic” section of it in particular, has greatly deepened and politically exploited this alienation.

• One factor on which hostility to immigration is expressed now is hostility to the European Union. The anti-EU message now is regarding the political and social recession it had in the 1970s. Tory party demagoguery is, in any case, of course, expressed against the EU makes it an issue in mainstream politics that it has not been for many years. Meanwhile, opposition to the EU remains an article of faith for most of the right.

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• Meanwhile, the major forces of the would-be revolutionary left in the last decade have spent a lot of money in politics functioning not as socialist advocates of working-class unity across the divide, but as reactionary Muslim communists, recommending election candidates with such phrases as “anti-racist” and “anti-fascism”. For the “best anti-racist” reasons, they attempt to exploit the communal alienation which the fascists exploit from the “other side”.

The fascist BNP has experienced spectacular growth in influence, electoral credibility, and, perhaps, in the near future, an assembly, and European parliament seats. They may very well be the strongest organisation in the coming general election. On the basis of social demagoguery, they have created a base in the white working class, even in some traditional Labour Party areas.

• A dozen years of neo-Thatcherite New Labour government, and fifteen years of New Labour — dating it from the election of Tony Blair as Labour leader, is the case of course its roots go back much further — have wreaked havoc with working-class politics. There is widespread disinformation from New Labour. That the alienation has pushed many people towards the anti-immigrant right reflects the failure of the would-be left. Ideas of class politics are less influential than for over a century. The New Labour leaders have strangled most of the potential of old out of the Labour Party, the local party conference, and the National Executive. New Labour lacks credibility as a political force in the coming general election.

• The efforts of the would-be left in the dozen years of New Labour government to mount a credible electoral challenge to the Blair-Brown organisation have been sinfully unsuccessful. The growth of the BNP is one measure of that failure. The BNP is a most “progressive” and “socialist” alliance — with one of the most reactionary political and social forces on the planet, Islamic clerical-fascism — and led by a corrupt ex-middle-of-the-road Labour politician, George Galloway, who had sold himself politically to Saddam Hussein’s fascist regime in Iraq and to other Arab and Islamic forces.

But even before Respect, and even before the SWP used its disproportionate weight in it to liquidate the Socialist Alliance, the electoral enterprises of the would-be left were disappearing and unrepresenting. Workers’ Liberty, a founder and centre of the Socialist Alliance, which ran 98 candidates in the 2001 general election, edited a paper, “Socialist Alliance to Respect”, that the common run of scum were not socialist candidates for many years now”, including long before the Blair coup in the Labour Party.

The sinking of the remnants of the Socialist Alliance into Respect put paid to all hope of creating a sizeable left-wing electoral alternative to New Labour. The serious left will have little presence in the upcoming general election with the exception of Jill Balute and perhaps one or two other well-meaning, of course, in some Labour-led local council elections.

In their mixture of irresponsible demagoguery, valid social and political concern, and opportunism, sections of the press, the Daily Express and the Star for example, come close to playing the political role typical of fascists — re-agency communications and recasting the basis of capitalism and class society. The Government runs before their agitation, and thus encourages and legitimizes the rich and powerful. Gordon Brown who most notably raised the slogan, “British Jobs for British Workers”.

• The Tories are, mostly likely, six months away from deposing its incumbent. It is to be congratulated and try to break the labour movement, for instance the civil service unions.

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The recession, will be far more savage cuts in social services and, maybe, follow the new Tory government will have to confront and try to manage, and, less crudely and in more measured ways, even try to break the labour movement, for instance the civil service unions.

• The tremendous general sense of disillusion with aspects of the capitalist system is politically and socially ill-informed and demagogued-infected disillusion. It is focused by the press on such obscene but not fundamentally political aspects as the enormous rip-off bonuses paid to bankers even after the state has had to intervene so recently with massive sums of taxpayers’ money to stop the banks going bust. The anger against the bankers is entirely justified, but, even so, it is a variant of the same old delusion that only one part of capital — finance capital — is intrinsically rotten, and not the exploitative capital as a whole.

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How can the Climate Camp progress?

BY PAUL VERNADSKY

The climate talks in Copenhagen in December had been billed as the most important international meeting since the Second World War. Instead, they are likely to be the greatest let-down since global warming was first debated internationally two decades ago.

World leaders are already talking down expectations of the UN Climate Change Conference 2009, which takes place between 7 and 18 December in Copenhagen. Over the last month, it became clear that the US Senate would not pass its climate change bill before the meeting. After talks in Barcelona in early November, most commentators agreed that no treaty will be signed in Copenhagen, making the conference at best another round of bickering.

Bonobos are still the only species with a large surface area, so there are still major sticking points to resolve before an agreement can be signed, possibly next year. These include: setting a global emissions reduction target for 2020; setting an emissions target for advanced economies for 2050; developing countries’ access to technology and industrial property.

Klimaforum09

Klimaforum09 opens on 7 December and ends on 18 December. It takes place at Ørstedbyen, close to the Central Station. Klimaforum09 is organised by a broad coalition of Danish and international environmental movements and civil society organisations.

The Political Platform is very conventional. It states that every effort must be made to avoid warming beyond 2°C. It lists, for instance, the need for: cutting emissions, reducing deforestation; creating markets for forest permits; financing for developing countries to adapt to the effects of climate change; and developing countries’ access to technology and intellectual property.

TARGETS

Climate campaigners want a new climate treaty, coming into force by 2012, in time for when the current Kyoto protocol expires. They want a peak-and-decline in global emissions by 2015, with industrialised countries leading the way. This means industrialised countries making an aggregate emissions reduction of at least 60% by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels) and at least 80% by 2050.

The argument is that the countries with historic responsibility for emissions and with current capability to tackle them should make the steepest cuts. NGOs argue that the developmental needs of the poorest countries needs to be factored into their emissions reduction pathways. There are particular demands on the part of developing countries. Currently, the prime target for 2020, rising to 50% if a global deal is reached in Copenhagen. Climate campaigners want a pledge of 40% by 2020.

TRANSFERS

Climate campaigners are demanding that rich countries pay for forest protection. This is also being discussed. This involves paying to lock carbon away in trees and forests instead of cutting them down. By preventing trees from being cut down, firms or governments can count the carbon they store in their timber as “balancing” the carbon being emitted by polluters – usually in advanced economies.

The Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) agreement, a carbon-trading scheme that allows companies to buy and trade carbon stored in forests to offset carbon emissions, is due to be decided at Copenhagen. Greenpeace argues that this scheme is still problematic. It looked at the Noel Kempff Climate Action Project (NKCAP), a joint venture between Argentina, Brazil and Peru. These countries count the carbon they store in their timber as “balancing” the carbon being emitted by polluters – usually in advanced economies.

TIPPING POINT?

The need for an agreement is plain from the latest science. A conference in Zurich revealed that temperatures could rise by 4°C by 2060. A 4°C global average is also predicted for the UK by 2080 – meaning that the
Capture and storage (CCS) is that if UK sacrifice their economic growth to cut emissions – particularly when they will not get much), the rising sub-imperialist powers of China and India are not willing to sacrifice their economic growth to cut emissions – particularly when they will not get the technologies needed at a low cost.

One of the arguments used by the British government for developing carbon capture and storage (CCS) is that if UK capital develops a competitive advantage, it can sell it to the rest of the world for huge profits. At the root of global and domestic climate policy are neoliberal market mechanisms working to ensure that it is (profitable) business as usual for capital.

The main conclusion we should draw is that we cannot trust global capital and its governments to deliver on preventing climate change. They might sign an agreement next year. They might even do it too slowly and at the expense of millions of workers. Their way will not help the millions who want to improve the coming years from climate-related droughts and storms, floods and famine.

Their way will see workers pay higher fuel bills and higher taxes, while private energy and transport firms reap windfalls from emissions trading, government subsidies, and their monopoly power.

Alternative

The political economy of climate change is crying out for an alternative. Public ownership of the key emitting sectors, and huge public investment in new renewable technologies to create millions of green jobs; workers’ control over production in all sectors; and union-worker climate reps agitating on these issues are just some of the answers that need to be adopted.

Several hundred trade unionists are taking part in the negotiations in Copenhagen, and international unions are organising a side event, the World of Work Pavilion from 14 to 16 December at the LO-Denmark building, but their political demands are weak. Although the call for “a just transition to a low-carbon economy” attempts to tackle the issue of who pays, who benefits and what kind of jobs come out of climate change, without more control and more action, the demand can be acceded to with little changing in practice.

The closure of Vestas, Isle of Wight this summer showed that even in green sectors workers are tossed onto the scrap heap by capital when they are not deemed productive enough for the current market.

The science, the talks and the limitations of the existing labour movement underline the need for more urgent action. Socialists should be in Copenhagen in December for the Klimaforum09, a social forum side event that runs parallel to the official talks. Even though the politics of the Klimaforum09 are very weak and confused, it will attract climate activists who want real action on the issue and could help to coordinate future campaigning (see box).

There is also a demonstration in Copenhagen organised by a broad coalition of organisations and NGOs on 12 December. Its slogan is “Planet First, People First” – not exactly revolutionary, but it also will attract thousands of participants.

There are demonstrations in the UK which all socialists should attend. On Saturday 5 December 2009, the Stop Climate Chaos (SCC) coalition is organising “The Wave” in London and Glasgow. (see box) The Campaign against Climate Change (CaCC) has called a Climate Emergency Rally at Speakers’ Corner in Hyde Park on 5 December at 12 noon, followed by a march to join “The Wave”. Its main demand is for a million green jobs by the end of 2010 (see box). Although the political basis of the demonstrations are weak, as they have been before (last year the Green New Deal was emphasised), they are still worth building and intervening in.
Life or death struggle for Mexican workers

The following article is by Dan La Botz from the US socialist group Solidarity (www.solidarity-us.org).

Since the mid-1970s, solidarity actions have spread throughout the Mexican working class. On 11 November, tens of thousands of workers took part in a national strike to oppose President Calderón’s liquidation of the state-run Light and Power Company, a move he has taken in order to smash the militant SME electricians’ union.

Participants in the work stoppage included telephone workers, miners, metal workers, education workers and the rank-and-file caucus of the Mexican Teachers Union.

Despite media reports that up to half of the 45,000 sacked workers have accepted severance pay, an SME union leader believes the real number is closer to 10,000 and as a majority of workers are prepared to continue fighting.

There have been substantial solidarity actions across the country, including the blockading of a road in Oaxaca by APPO (the working-class community coalition that placed parts of the city under de facto workers’ and community control in 2007/2008). SME leader Martin Esparrza is now calling for a national general strike.

The Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME), made up of 11,000 active and 22,000 retired workers in Mexico City and surrounding states, is fighting for its life. On the night of 10 October, President Calderón ordered federal police to seize the power plants. He simultaneously liquidated the state-owned Light and Power Company (Comision Federal de Electricidad or CFE) in 1982 andorgia Thacher’s smashing of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984 in which over 11,000 miners were arrested and the union defeated.

This is a turning point because it allows Mexico’s capitalist class to resume the neoliberal project begun under Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988 but interrupted by a series of unforeseen events: the creation of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in 1989, the Chihuahua miners’ strike and Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994, president Ernesto Zedillo’s mismanagement of the economic crisis of 1994-95, and recently by the end of the forty-year war against the student Insurrectionary Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its youth, the Revolutionary Student Movement (FMUJ). Salinas had succeeded in privatizing the Mexican Telecommunication Company (Telmex), the railroad and the Cananea Copper Company, but he failed to finish the job, with the energy sector, petroleum and electric power generation still state owned. Now, after a 20-year interruption, Calderón has undertaken to finish the job.

The SME, together with many other labour unions and social movements, and opposition political parties organized a huge protest march in Mexico City on Friday, October 16, which was estimated at between 150,000-300,000 participants. While the march was a strong show of support, it was not a show of force, never attempting to take any of the facilities.

While the government’s attacks on labor unions such as the Mexican Miners and Metalworkers and its massive use of police force are new, Calderón’s move to destroy the SME represents an important turning point in modern Mexican labor history, a decisive step to break the back of the unions once and for all. Even more important, it is, as Manual Camacho Solis of the Broad Progressive Front (FAP) noted, an act intended "to change the balance of forces" so that they favor the government.

Against its electoral defeat and out of fear of social protest which the [economic] crisis is provoking, the government wants to give a demonstration of its power which everybody will understand: the left, the social movements, the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party], the unions, the Congress, the businessmen and the media.

Mexico City, where this blow has been delivered, is the heart of the political opposition to Calderon and the base of support for left-wing leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who came a close second in the last election. The attack on the union is also an attack on the left at its strongest point. And should this attack succeed - as it may, although we still hope to see the Mexican workers take the strong measures needed - it will appear that the government can and has defeated the strongest, and can now turn its attention to the weak.

After a negotiating session between government and union, Secretary of the Interior Fernando Gomez Mont said that the government's decision was "irreversible." The Secretary of Labor also commented, calling the liquidation of the company a "consummated fact."

The SME also refused to compromise on its demands that the police be removed from the workplace, that the liquidation of the company be revoked, and that the government negotiate the issues with the union. Further progress in any negotiations seems less likely with every passing day.

Since the police took control of the plants there have been many localized blackouts that have shut off power for hours.

Solidarity

Throughout Mexico workers, students, communiti~

tes, labor unions and left parties rallied and marched to support the Mexican Electrical Workers Union.

In Guayavaca, Morelos some 2500 marched. In Oaxaca the Union of Workers and Employees of the Benito Juarez Autonomous University shut down the university protest and solidarity. In San Luis Potosi the Potosi Union Front protested the development at the State Legislature and expressed their solidarity with the electrical workers. Diverse organizations – the National Union of General Tire Workers, the Broad Popular Front (FAP), and the Party of the Democratic Revolution expressed support at the national, state and local levels.

Expression of international solidarity arrived from the United States and Canada, from Holland, Germany, even from workers in Iraq. Such expressions of solidarity help to give heart to the struggle of the Mexican electrical workers. But unlike in industries such as shipping, where dockworkers’ solidarity can have a direct impact, foreign unions can have little leverage on a nationalized power company in another country, except perhaps miners or railroad, dock and marine workers who might act to cut off the company’s coal shipments.\n
While marching in the streets, the SME is also pursuing a legal strategy, having hired Nestor de Buen, the country’s leading labor lawyer, to argue that the Calderon government’s actions were unconstitutional and illegal.

The Calderon government has said that, having extinguished the Light and Power Company, it will now turn to what it calls its company’s facilities over to a new company which it plans to meet with the Federal Electrical Commission in the near future. The government plans to hire 10,000 former Light and Power workers for the new company, under new terms of employment.

Each worker is being paid the severance to which they are entitled under Mexican law, 300,000 to 400,000 pesos, the equivalent of 30,000 to 40,000 US dollars each. The 45,000 union workers have been told that they must collect their severance pay by mid-November to be eligible to be hired by the new company.

Economic Decision?

The Calderon government, argues that this was a purely economic decision based on the economic crisis of 1994-95, and that the government was acting in order to create the appearance of worker incompe-
There are three levels to that discussion. Stage one, and not only in the Labour Party and the trade unions but also in the wider society, for a real critique simply the electorate becoming bored with the Labour Party’s fundamental neoliberal practices. I think it is because it will stay within the narrow bounds of New Labour and will be seen as opportunistic.

Any critique of past policies. They will argue that it’s not about alternative manifestos, or getting expelled’, he said, but “the same as every other grouping in the Labour Party, we will be setting out our programme, our case, our vision.”

Although McDonnell stressed that he is not writing off the general election yet as a Tory victory, he was downbeat. Half of the members of the 25-strong caucus of left Labour MPs, the Campaign Group, are retiring at this general election. Others may well lose their seats as a general election against Labour. “We could be down to two or three socialist MPs in the next Parliament.”

However, he said, if a dozen or so left Labour MPs can be returned, there is also the possibility that in a hung parliament, or with a small Labour majority, those left MPs could “hold the balance of power” and be able to negotiate large concessions. McDonnell also said that if he is not able to get on the ballot paper in a new leadership election, he will not support any soft “centre-left” candidate. “We have to keep our hands clean for the future”. He said that the LRC will call an emergency conference after the general election to debate next steps. The LRC conference’s closing speech, from Katy Clark MP, struck a very different note. Arriving only just in time to make her speech, Clark declared that “there is a battle in the labour movement and the Labour Party, and we are on the verge of winning”. She pointed to “some small victories” already visible — Brown’s talk of a Tobin Tax, the small retreat on Trident, the slight moves on Labour Party democracy, the dud campaign on Royal Mail privatisation — and declared that “they”, the Blair-Brownites, “are the old guard now.”

Where McDonnell had emphasised left Labour MPs’ retiring, Clark emphasised that many right-wing “New Labour” MPs are withdrawing and can be replaced by more left-wing candidates. A motion from CWU Central London branch called for the LRC to “approach Labour candidates, CLPs, and trade union bodies to come together for a socialist campaign at the General Election”, advancing socialist ideas as well as campaigning to keep the Tories out. It was passed, but many even of the speakers in favour of it evidently thought in terms only of the “backstop” activity of LRC members getting on trains and buses to go and canvass for left Labour MPs at the general election. They seemed not to believe it possible for left Labour to take the Labour Party seats in a left Labour majority. The SNP did poorly, but at an all-Scottish level the SNP’s share of the vote remains relatively stable.

More: www.workersliberty.org/node/13387
The following discussion article has been circulated by Oldham anti-fascist activist John Tommum:

**We need a left political alternative**

**The British anti-fascist movement is at a crossroads.** Holding the growth of the BNP is getting harder every year and the post-No Strategy of “No Platform” plus “Exposure” is being by-passed by significant changes taking place. The BNP has achieved a national resonance that cannot be fought any more by us simply targeting their target audience. It has become an inescapable anti-capitalist political force that equips them to compete for the huge part of the political territory vacated by New Labour. Exposing them as Nazis is no longer preventing people from wanting to find out about these policies. We already lack a means of effectively countering them at national elections and a “business as usual” approach would probably make this a permanent problem.

Future anti-fascist prospects are hit by the recession, by the crisis in the traditional political representation and legitimacy, and by the ways in which our allies in the three “mainstream” political parties, some newspapers, and the celebrity culture, are responding to the BNP. Their rearguard action against the “normalisation” of the BNP has recently involved them in breaching the principle of non-appearance on the same platform as the BNP. Their rearguard action against the “normalisation” of the BNP has recently involved them in breaching the principle of non-appearance on the same platform as the BNP. The dam is burst and there is no going back.

Ironically, this breach has put these social and political forces in a position of articulating the anti-fascist political project – to one which abandons self-indulgence and is based on a sensible, socially-rooted left-wing political alternative with its feet firmly planted in the real world.

**Italy**

**Berlusconi and his “Bonapartist” plan**

**By Hugh Edwards**

While Cath Fletcher (Solidarity 3/162) is absolutely correct to point out how every evaluation of an individual or a political situation requires rounded, balanced assessment in order to form as concrete a picture as possible, she misses the point in her article “Berlusconi: some further questions” do little to convince me that her image of Berlusconi and of contemporary Italy is well informed and well thought through (in Solidarity 3/161).

Taking her points in reverse order, Cath says that the idea of an Italy “deep in the throes of economic decline” (a major point in my article) “is a popular image” in contemporary politics. Well, it certainly isn’t in the newspapers, journals and television media controlled by Berlusconi – i.e. 95% or so of the communication industry.

On the contrary, all of that is dedicated to hide the reality, and present to the world a picture of a forever sunny, smiling Italy beset temporarily by a few transient problems in the economy, among which are lazy public service workers, immigrants, etc.

Berlusconi and his allies appeal to the deepest prejudices of large sections of the still comfortably petty bourgeoisie from whom the pillars of his political project are drawn.

Of course, Italy is still a rich country, but it is one where its political system, both internal contradictions are becoming manifestly sharper.

Berlusconi represents, from the point of view of the governing classes, one response to this, mediated through his own highly idiosyncratic personal life story. He is neither a Mussolini nor a fascist (nor a “simple” demagogic populist as Cath aver!) but one who seeks to embody dramatically (melodramatically?) in his own person a reconstituted central authoritarian power so far as the norms of bourgeois democratic practice in Italy. His is a Bonapartist project.

As to the sex scandal engulfing Berlusconi and his government – Cath claims that whether he frequents prostitutes, and the events surrounding his relationship with a 16-year-old girl, are private matters, so the campaign against him is reactionary. This is essentially the view of the radical left in Italy, with added variabilities to the point that the liberal-led campaign was an attempt to divert attention from the effects of the economic crisis.

Berlusconi’s strategy is to portray himself as a reconstituted central authoritarian power so far as the norms of bourgeois democratic practice in Italy. His is a Bonapartist project.

What is the role of the campaign for revolutionary socialism? Berlusconi’s wife, in a letter to the liberal newspaper La Repubblica, announced that she was seeking a divorce from her husband because, among other things, he had systematically begun to offer to a group of showgirls, in return for sex, the opportunity to become candidates for political office in local, regional, national and European assemblies.

She also stated that he was having sex with under-age girls. At the same time, the journal of the think tank of Fini, number two in the government and President of the parliament, carried the former of these stories.

More recently it emerged that Berlusconi, courtesy of a businessman pimp, had been “availing himself” of prostitutes at organised orgies across his many palaces in Italy and in Morocco. The report was published in a branch of Berlusconi’s political party.

Berlusconi is not a private individual, but the head of a political movement which has based a principal part of its electoral support on its de facto alliance with the Catholic church, championing every reactionary position which has been by-passed by developments and become untenable as a future strategy, to one which abandons self-indulgence and is based on a sensible, socially-rooted left-wing political alternative with its feet firmly planted in the real world.

The obscene hypocrisy and cynical sexism of Berlusconi and his cronies ought to have been in the forefront of exposure and attack by any revolutionary, serious feminist or democrat worthy of the name.

This is a country where female unemployment is proportionally higher, discrimination stronger, than any other major European power. And where for millions of young women the highest aspiration is to become someone like Berlusconi’s Mafioso protégé.

There should have been a defence against the degrada tion of public life and the principles of public representation, all the better to underline the limited, partial and corrupting nature of all bourgeois democracy.

La Repubblica, alone, called Berlusconi to account before the parliament for the hypocrisy and the blatant contradictions (Maria Carfagna, his minister of equal opportunity, had been on the point of introducing a bill to abolish marriage (between a man and a woman)), but the leadership of the Catholic church who belatedly entered the scene under the pressure of sections of the laity.

Not for the first time the radical left had failed to grasp the political heart of the question. But that is another story.
A coalition to stand trade union and left general election candidates was announced at the Saturday 7 November conference on political representation called by the rail union RMT. This planned coalition has the backing of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism, and is supported in a personal capacity by Bob Crow (general secretary of the RMT), Brian Caton (general secretary of the POA), National officers in PCS, and national executive committee members of the CWU, UNISON, FBU and USDAW.

According to the leaflet given out at the start of the meeting, the intention is to stand candidates as part of a federal coalition under a common name, but so far no name has been decided and the core politics will "be the subject of further discussions."

There were no democratic decisions taken nor any input from delegates or trade unionists into the nature of the coalition nor its politics.

Many of the speakers, including Brian Caton and Bob Crow, made the case for why the working class needed a new political voice. New Labour has just followed on from the Tories, introducing even more privatisation and attacks on jobs and conditions. There were also many appeals on the need for unity and how we should put aside our petty differences and unite. However, what wasn’t so clear was unite with whom, and on what basis.

The discussions on who and on what basis have been going on during and since the “NoEU, Yes to democracy” campaign of candidates in the European elections. It would seem that the select few involved with these discussions have proved incapable of agreeing any unity this time around. The Communist Party were in, then out, then half in and half out and now in. John Foster (CPB) and others are making it clear that they think the central demand, even in the general election, should be "no to Europe". There is a sham unity and the rest of us are supposed to "stop the talking shops and get on with the business".

The AWL leaflet for the event (none of us was taken to speak in the debate) made the point that what is needed is open, democratic discussion among left groups and interested trade unions and that the politics we stand such candidates on needs to be clearly pro-worker and anti-capitalist, internationalist and socialist.

So far the whole issue of democracy has been ignored and instead we get told that this new steering committee will act by "consensus".

The issue of democracy cannot be an optional extra: it is only basis on which you can have any real unity. In the trade union movement we campaign for rank and file democratic control in order to hold the leaderships to account and organise effective action. You can certainly only have effective working class political representation if you have democratic structures based on the organised working class.

The centrality of democracy is further illustrated if you look at how the Blairites/Brownites came to dominate the Labour Party. Jeremy Corbyn outlined their shift politically to the right but what should have been added was that the key to keeping control was their ability to get rid of most of the democratic structures of the Labour Party.

For us, whether we are discussing socialist unity, trade unionism or working class political representation, democracy is key. Our politics is based on working class self emancipation not a socialism brought in by benign dictators.

In this way we will be supporting the initiative, the Socialist Party will be and seemingly aren’t raising any criticism; Matt Wrack from FBU said that the FBU, although welcoming, will be cautious about who they back as they wouldn’t stop supporting the Labour MPs who back them. Jeremy Corbyn MP didn’t make a hostile speech. Other people from the Labour Representation Committee seemed to be more against any non-Labour candidates. The PCS union wasn’t represented.

All this said, it was suggested that there will be a loose federal structure with local groups being established. If that is the case then it may be possible to argue that local groups should be democratic and should be on-going campaigns for socialist unity and working class political representation.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty has sent the letter below to those involved in the new electoral initiative.

Dear comrades,

We are writing in response to the leaflet distributed at the 7 November conference sponsored by RMT which announced “a coalition to stand trade union and socialist candidates in the general election”.

We address this letter to the CPB, SP and AGS, the sponsoring groups of that projected coalition; to the individual sponsors of the coalition; and to groups such as the SWP which are not so far part of the coalition but have signalled a desire to become part.

The leaflet calls for the participation of “all those who want to see a pro-working-class alternative presented at the election” and invites those who “want to get involved” to contact the organisers. The name and core policies of the coalition are still to be worked out. We want to take part in the discussions about a coalition. As you will know, we are already campaigning on the streets and the doorsteps in Camberwell and Peckham for Jill Mountford as a socialist candidate there.

Obviously a coalition’s policies are not going to be exactly what any one component of the coalition would wish. They will not be perfect and fully-round ed. We are not making any ultimatums before discussion. But we do want to flag up issues which we see as crucial to making an election coalition a productive effort.

A structure allowing open, lively, democratic political discussion in the coalition is vital. The leaflet rightly focuses on the “lack of political representation of... working-class people”. To contribute to working-
Misunderstanding the united front

Sacha Ismail looks at Martin’s Smith’s article on “How do we stop the BNP?” in the summer issue of the SWP’s International Socialism journal

Martin Smith’s article is worth a read – for good and bad reasons. Good reasons? Fact, not bad politics? The good reasons are mainly related to the wealth of factual information Smith has gathered together – particularly on the class composition of the BNP’s membership (primarily petty bourgeoisie, despite the press hype about middle-class working class; which is not to deny that they have built a base of working-class votes and support).

However, the article expresses in a peculiar way the basic problem of the SWP’s anti-fascist politics: “popular front from the idea uniting everyone who opposes the BNP – across class lines, including from the ruling class – instead of a working-class-led campaign. Indeed, because Smith goes out of his way to insist, at length, that the SWP rejects Trotskyist strategy of the “united front” being put into practice in Spain, he explains quite well the origin of these opposites. Popular workers’ political parties to beat back the fascists.

Following its ultra-left binge which allowed Hitler to peacefully take power in Germany, the Stalinist Communist International switched over to advocating a different sort of “unity” – unity between the workers and “progressive”, “anti-fascist” capitalist parties. Popular Front governments came to power in France and Spain with the support of the main workers’ organisations. The result was the demobilisation of the French and Spanish workers, shifts to the right and the eventual victory of fascism along the support lines.

Smith then goes on to explain how he sees the Trotskyist strategy of the “united front” being put into action today:

“Although the situation in Britain today is nowhere near as serious as in France and Spain in the 1930s it is worth looking concretely at what it would mean if the united front strategy were implemented in Britain. The Tories would certainly veto any hard-hitting anti-racist campaign. Boris Johnson won’t even support London’s anti-racist Rise festival. And you can imagine members of the Tory Party, let alone the leadership, supporting a physical confrontation with the BNP?”

“Unite Against Fascism (UAF) is not the classical united front described in Trotsky’s writings on the 1930s. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) is not a mass revolutionary party able to call on the Labour Party to work with it on a single issue. But UAF, just like the ANL before it and the Stop the War Coalition today, does deploy the spirit of the popular front method. It attempts to bring together all those threatened by the fascists – trade unionists, Asians, black people, ethnic minorities, LGBT organise students, disabled, anti-racists and the parties of the left.”

In fact, it would be more accurate to say: “UAF is not the classical popular front described in Trotsky’s writings. But UAF, just like the ANL before it and the Stop the War Coalition today, does deploy the spirit of the popular front method Trotsky denounced.”

We agree that the situation in Britain today is not the same as Germany, France or Spain in the 1930s; the point is that there are common elements from which we can draw general lessons about how to fight fascism.

1. To understand what is wrong with Smith’s argument, let us look at exactly why Trotsky argued that only working-class unity could beat the fascists and “unity” with sections of the capitalist class could not.

a) It is necessary for the workers’ movement and oppressed groups to physically defend themselves and confront the fascists. We cannot rely on the police and other forces of the state, who work for our class enemies and will usually (certainly in the last instance) protect the fascists against us. The workers and oppressed need to learn to rely on their own physical front.

b) Fascism grows out of capitalism’s social decay and social crises, whipping up and organising those in the middle-class who want to protect themselves to be under threat and, as it grows, drawing sections of the working class behind it. In situations of extreme crisis, when the working-class seem to be seriously threatened, capitalism, fascism can win support in the ruling class as the only reliable way of smashing the workers’ movement.

To undermine fascism’s base of support and cut its social roots, it is necessary to mobilise the labour movement to fight, in such a way that it can offer society a way out and draw decisive sections of the middle class behind it.

Clearly a “workers’ united front” is necessary for both these tasks, while “popular fronts” are incompatible with them.

2. In the section quoted above, Smith effectively claims that, in accordance with UAF’s supposed nature as a united front, the Tories are not involved. In fact, as we shall see, this is not true. But in any case, it is not necessary for major bourgeois political parties to sign up for a coalition to be ‘cross-class’ and ‘popular front’ in nature. In the Spanish revolution, for instance, the vast bulk of the ruling class had gone over to the Franco. Trotsky described the Socialists, Communists and anarchists as allying themselves with the “shadow of the bourgeoisie” in the form of a handful of bourgeois republican politicians. These figures personified the determination of the main working-class parties to prevent (in the case of the Stalinists violently prevent) the workers and peasants struggling seriously against the ruling class. Thus the revolution was undermined and the way opened for Franco’s victory.

Similarly, one might say that UAF represents an alliance between workers’ organisations and the “shadow” of the British bourgeoisie establishment – an alliance on the basis of a totally bourgeois “anti-fascist” programme, one that is both “morally” wrong and, of course, impossible to be effective.

3. The AWL and others on the left have argued that a working-class-social programme alongside the lines of “Black and white unite and fight – jobs, homes and services for all”, combined with a struggle for working-class political representation and a workers’ government – is necessary to combat the BNP. The exact political content of such a united front would, of course, be subject to discussion and negotiation. And of course the united front concept does not exclude certain flexibility; no one is suggesting that only workers’ organisations can be involved in anti-fascist campaigning. But working-class organisation and struggle are the necessary core of such an approach, for the reasons set out above.

What the SWP and UAF counterparts is an anti-fascist which has no social programme at all – and therefore a bourgeois programme of endorsing the status quo – on the grounds that a working-class orientation and demands would disrupt the unity of the movement. Clearly what is meant is unity with capitalist politicians and other establishment figures.

Similarly, on the level of physical confrontation, UAF is quite capable of working with the police to stymie militant anti-fascist demonstrations and/or manoeuvre against other forces in the anti-fascist movement. Recent examples included in Liverpool and at the BNP’s Red, White and Blue “festival” in Derbyshire. (No, we are not against negotiations with the police when organising demonstrations etc; the point is that UAF is often willing to work with the police behind the backs of, over the heads of and against other anti-fascists.)

In general, a united front would involve the mass mobilisation of workers and their allies in different organisations, trade unions, parties etc to struggle against fascism and the conditions that give rise to it. UAF’s “popular frontism” is expressed both in its political programme and the related fact that it makes no effort to mobilise the working-class. Rather trade union bureaucrats hand over money to a coalition of professional “anti-fascists” over the heads of the workers’ movement, deliberately confusing themselves and many workers that they are doing something serious to oppose the BNP.

4. Smith argues for the slogan “Don’t vote Nazi” on the grounds that it “unites everyone.”

A genuine united front anti-fascist campaign in Britain today would have to discuss exactly what to say about elections; it might have to endorse a variety of options and include the right for minority voices to dissent. But “Don’t vote Nazi” implies that it basically doesn’t matter how workers vote as long as they don’t vote for the BNP. After all, a vote for the Lib Dem, the Tories or even UKIP is not a vote for Nazism.

Once again, Smith contradicts his own historical analogy. He condemns the decision of the German Social Democrats to endorse right-wing militant Paul von Hindenburg as the “lesser evil” against Hitler in the 1932 presidential election (Hindenburg shortly afterwards appointed Hitler chancellor). But in that election, that is exactly what “Don’t vote Nazi” would have meant!

5. A quick look at the UAF website confirms the charge of popular frontism rather dramatically. In addition to a front-page statement calling for a “festival” of state for communities John Denham’s stance on the English Defence League, UAF has a list of “key signatories” which includes not only Reverend Martin Smyth – different “key signatory” Sir Teddy Taylor. An MP until 2005, Taylor was a prominent activist in and at various points vice-president of the Monday Club, a right-wing Tory pressure group founded in the 1960s to oppose decolonisation in Africa and support the white supremacist regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa.

Since then, the Monday Club has developed a programme which includes repeal of the Race Relations Acts (which banned discrimination in jobs, services and housing), stopping immigration and creating voluntary repatriation schemes. Taylor was a supporter from 1970, in 1979, when he was a public meeting at Westminster under the slogan “Halt immigration now!” to promote these aims. He is also a strong supporter of gay rights, and supports the reintroduction of the death penalty and corporal punishment for young offenders.

Lastly, on a vaguely humorous note: another UAF “key signatory” is Reverend Martin Smyth – different spelling, no relation – another former vice-president of the Monday Club. Does the SWP love the Monday Club or what?

Clearly this is a united front of a special kind...
The long march of Chris Harman

By Sean Matgamna

A ny man’s death diminishes me... In deed. So it is with the sudden death of Chris Harman in Cairo, on the eve of his 67th birthday. He was the last of the old guard of the International Socialists to be still close to the central leadership of the SWP; IS’s new distant descendant.

Chris Harman’s near-halcentury of political activity includes most of the history of the organisation that, despite its recent near-decade of alliance with Islamic clerical fascism, remains the biggest ostensibly revolutionary organisation in Britain and retains influence in other countries. Of course we offer our family our condolences. And therefore? Therefore praise Harman for what he had called common with all serious socialists? Therefore, suppress derogating anything that was personally specific. Harman in his political life under a politically indif ferent army of humanism, dismay and lamentation at his death? Remember all the good you can — and forget about the rest of it?

Ordinarily a very good episode long ago in Chris Harman’s political history deserves to be remembered. It took place in London to commemorate Ho Chi Minh, who had just died. All the left groups active in Vietnam solidarity work were represented by IS by Chris Harman, sitting on the platform alongside the London representative of North Vietnam’s Stalinist government.

When his term came to speak, Harman roundly denounced the Vietnamese Stalinists for having mur dered hundreds of Trotskyists in the 1940s. It caused great consternation among the “anti-imperialism-first” SWP would-be left of the time.

It was good work, and needed to be done. Harman’s speech then is not a bad model now for serious socialists faced with the sometimes demeaned “anti-imperialism-first” of the SWP.

Harman was also an ambitious writer, whose books include a People’s History of the World.

That he spent his entire adult life promoting what he thought was revolutionary socialist politics, is, to my mind, worthy of respect. But “the rest of it”, in the case of this leader of the SWP, was enormous. And in politics “the rest of it”, and its political consequences, does not necessarily die with the author.

In his startling mix of ostentatious devotion to the theoretical questions with devotion to an organisation for which “theory” exists only to rationalise whatever the organisation’s leaders think will best serve its members, perhaps, the clearest embodiment of the fundamentals of IS/SWP.

He was, so to speak, the IS or IS and the SWP of the SWP.

II

Joining IS’s predecessor, the Socialist Review group, around 1962, when he was 20, Harman lived through the long march of the Cliff organisation, from being, for most of the 1960s, a very loose and roughly defined “Luxemburgist” group, heavily involved with sectarianism and rejecting Bolshevik as anything other than a method in the struggle, from being, in the first place, revolutionary nuclei which were still being made to tackle the political problems of the time.

From rejecting and mocking, with priggish middle class disdain, the “orthodox Trotskyists” idea that a revolutionary organisation should fight the “left” (or, in the first place, revo lutionary nucleus) after the model of Bolshevism should be built in Britain, he went with the Cliff organisation to fight, as he put it, to try to build a “revolutionary party” as a machine-party that used virtu ally any “left” (and sometimes far from “left”) poli tics to feed off and grow. He lived through the organisation’s evolution from being on principle exclusively in the Labour Party, and centrally concerned with the political development of the working class and its labour movement, to very much its relationship to that — all the way towards seeing itself, “the party”, as the measure of all things, and the working-class movement as a means to a particular political end.

Harman and many others learned from Tony Cliff, the leader of the IS/SWP organisation for the fifty years before his death, and only a certain theoretical framework for viewing Russia and China that they were “state capitalist” systems, but also more important a conception of what revolutionary pol icy is, of what a revolutionary party is, and of how to treat “theory” and political principle.

He learned from Cliff politics and “organisational politics” that were a hybrid, both Trotskyist and Stalinist in which was combined the best aspects of post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyism” and that of the Brandenberry-Lovestone “Right Communist” international of the 1950s, in one of whose groups (in Palestine) Tony Harman learned that politics is organisation. Organisational self-promotion is everything. “The party” must be built by any politics that serve that end. Theory is rationalisation, not science and pre ciptation. As Tony Cliff would openly say on the IS/SWP’s leading committees — “tactics contradict principles”.

A political principle is a principle, but an organisation advantage is tangible and far more useful, and therefore more important. For Tony Cliff, as the dominant figure, this meant that he could say and do what he liked in pursuit of an organisational advantage. For such as Chris Harman, it meant assuming “the servility of a theoretician” (Lenin’s expression) vis-a-vis the “theory” apparatus.

In contrast to most of the other proponents of a theory to which they gave the “state capitalist” label, the Socialist Review/IS group drew very little political or organisational conclusions from its “insight”. That is, perhaps, the most striking aspect of the Socialist Review group in the 1950s. Politically it remained a dialect of post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyism”, with a doctrinal quirk.

For example, in its politics in relation to China, the Cliff group was nearly indistinguishable from the “orthodox Trotskyists”. Tony Cliff had by 1957 a theory of state capitalism for China (in fact a radically different theory from the one according to which Russia was state-capitalist, explaining it more in terms of China’s tradition of “ Asiatic despotism” than, as in the USSR, the product of the defeat of a working-class revolution that had cleared the way for the Stalinist bureaucracy by eliminating the bour geoisie). But that did not stop the group from being “defensive” for China, or from demanding that Hong Kong be handed over to the Mao government.

Harman was, in the early period anyway, to which any direct observation of his activity is limited, an undeviating supporter, always the political “good son” and understudy of the IS/SWP’s founder, Tony Cliff. Like an ancient ship, steering as close to the shore as possible, he watched and seconded Cliff.

For instance, when, in 1971, Tony Cliff decided that the best thing for IS was to go along with the reac tionary “left” (Stalinist-rooted) opposition to the European Union, changing the IS line by 180 degrees, Cliff’s initial document had Chris Harman as co-author.

The International Socialists went through a crisis of Continued on page 18

Chris Harman

Cliff had received his basic political education. In IS/SWP the Lovestoneites came to predominate, decisively.

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The International Socialists went through a crisis of

Continued on page 18
political identity in 1968-9 when Cliff, who for a decade had been a self-proclaimed “Luxemburgist”, suddenly discovered the need to “Leninise” the organisation, that is, turn it from a federation into a “democratic centralist” group. Others of Harman’s political generation and political bent were disorientated.

Some had anticipated Cliff. Most of the best people at IS left before Cliff really went over to the Leninist approach in 1968-9, ISP published a pamphlet with a timidity anti-Leninist piece from 1960 by Cliff, Harman’s “orthodox” Leninist piece; and another article by Duncan Hallas. A liberal and pluralist, rather than dogmatic and authoritarian, approach to political differences, you think?

But which theory was now guiding IS? The seemingly liberal and pluralist, “pay your money and take your choice” pamphlet left the “apparatus” dominated by Cliff for the next 30 years — free to do what it liked in terms of the “party” being built.

The multi-choice approach to the theory of the party left the organisation as an organisation with no clearly and openly defined political position to guide it. “Liberalism” served to liberate the leadership to do what it liked. Anything that did not “work” immediately to build the organisation was bad. The combination of the seeming liberalism, and the liberation of the leadership from restraint, was quintessential IS of that period.

Some of what Chris Harman wrote may have in the long view be of use and value. But “theory” was one thing; practice something more or less separate and compartmentalised. For Harman, the shadow of Cliff — and then of others — always fell between his theory and the practice.

A 1971 document of the Trotskyist Tendency in IS (a predecessor of the AWS) described the dominant attitude in the IS leadership at the time — what Marxist theory was for, like this: “It is in this sense that IS has ‘contempt for theory’ — contempt for the Marxist conception of theory and its necessary relationship to the organisation as a leaven and tool of the whole group. The second and real sense in which IS has ‘contempt for theory’ is in their use of theory, and [their conception of] the function of theory, the relationship of theory to practice: there is no connection between the two for IS. Do you know that in last week’s [mid-1971] debate on the Common Market at the NC Cliff said, and repeated, that principles and tactics contradict each other in real life? This is organically, connected, of course, with their mandariness...” (IS theory is an esoteric knowledge — for if principles contradict tactics and practice; if theory is not a practical and necessary tool; if theory and practice are related only in the sense that theory sums up (in one way or another) past practice, perhaps vivified with a coat of impressionistic paint distil- lent from what’s going on around at the time — but not in the sense that theory is the source of precepts to guide practice, to aid in the practical exploration of reality — why then, where is the incentive to spread theoretical knowledge?”

Harman grew into this system, where Marxist theory flew only in the evening, to rationalise what had already been decided empirically or “instinctively” (according to Tony Cliff’s instinct), rather than flying, so to speak, in the morning, to inform, illuminate and guide the organisation’s decisions. Theory did not guide practice, it cleaned up after it, and made excuses for what Tony Cliff and the “party” apparatus decided was best for the organisation to do and say in the interests of its own growth and development.

Harman’s role in the system was to provide — invariably, as far as I know — a sort of “orthodox”, “left”, “heavy theory” dialect of rationalisation for the party apparatus. He went along with whatever the organisation’s stronger leaders decided was best for the IS/SWP.

He went along with the one-sided “anti-imperialism” of Cliff and the others, even to supporting against NATO the would-be genocidal Serbian imperialism in Serbia’s colony, Kosovo, in the 1999 war. He went along after Cliff’s death with the leading clique that led the organisation into an alliance with Islamic clerical fascism, and even into taking Arab/Islamic political money.

There were some faint indications (that is, gossip) that Harman was not entirely happy with the debauch of vicarious Islamic-fundamentalist “anti-imperialism” in which the organisation wallowed for most of his last decade. Inside the organisation, did he indict those responsible, or even criticise them with the necessary severity and condemnation? There was no public indication of it.

In the pages of Socialist Worker, which he edited until 2004, Harman played his habitual role as rationaliser for whatever the organisation did by “explaining away” even the vile anti-woman practices of the Taliban in Afghanistan, that season’s champion “anti-imperialists”: see Socialist Worker of 6 October 2001.

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In a discussion he and I had, in 1969 perhaps, Harman startled me with his response to my argument that the true measure of Tony Cliff’s book on Russian Stalinism was its chapter on Trotsky’s work on Russia, which was unessential in its presentation of Trotsky’s ideas, trilling, shallow, disloyal, and in general “shoddy”. He replied: “Of course it’s shoddy”.

The implication I took from that was that he intended, or hoped, to improve on such work, believ- ing its fundamentals to be correct. If he did, it was all a matter of compartmentalised “theory”.

Chris Harman and his comrades created an organisation which, in the last decade of Harman’s life, did for other forms of reactionary anti-imperialism, most importantly for Islamic clerical fascism, what the worst and the most Stalinist “orthodox Trotskyists” did for Stalinism.

The fundamental political tragedy of Harman, and others of his generation, is that they embarked upon a project of building a revolutionary party with false ideas about the nature of such a party — of what the relation of theory and practice is for a Leninist organisation. Of what the prime function of such an organisation is, namely, the political education of the working class and labour movement. They substitut- ed for this basic Lenin-Trotsky conception an eclectic rag-bag of SWP organisational self-promotion, seizin- hold of whatever political “positions” its leaders thought would, at the moment, best help its organi-
EVENT

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM WORKERS’ LIBERTY WINTER SCHOOL 2009

How to fight capitalism: the left we have and the left we need

From 11am, Saturday 28 November to 8pm, Sunday 29 November, at Birkbeck College, Malet Street, London WC1.

Sessions and speakers

Book and get more details at www.workersliberty.org/ideas, or phone 020 7207 3997

How can the left move forward?
Saturday 11.45am

Elaine Jones is vice-chair of Wirral Trades Council, and a member of AWL.

Mark Serwadda is general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), and had been a long-time socialist and rank-and-file PCS activist before being elected general secretary.

Joe Martino is general secretary of the Bakers’ Union, and had been a long-time socialist activist before being elected.

Anti-semitism and the pitfalls of anti-capitalism today
Saturday 1.50pm

Moishe Postone is professor of history at the University of Chicago, best known for his book Time, Labor and Social Domination, a wide-ranging rediscussion of the foundations of Marxist theory.

Do we really need a revolutionary party?
Saturday 1.50pm

Sean Matgamna was a founder-member of the AWL tendency, and edited The Fate of the Russian Revolution: Last Texts of Critical Marxism.

Occupy! Lessons from Vestas and other battles
Saturday 3.15pm

Mark Smith was one of the workers who occupied and then blockaded the Vestas wind turbine blade factory this summer to stop closure.

Vicki Morris is press officer of Barnet Trades Council, and was one of the AWL members active in supporting the Vestas battle.

How Australian building workers made the environment a working-class cause
Saturday 4.55pm

Verity Burgmann wrote the book Green Ban, Red Unions, telling the story of the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation in the early 1970s.

Also on Saturday:
• What happened to the anti-capitalist movement? (3.15pm) Roger Geffen and Ian Fillingham, who were active with Reclaim The Streets, discuss with Mark Osborn, AWL member and formerly an organiser for No Sweat.
• Coal and the environment with Paddy Gillett, an activist with Plane Stupid and Climate Camp, and Paul Hampton, a researcher at the Labour Research Department and editor of a forthcoming AWL pamphlet on environmental politics. (3.15pm)
  • Indian Marxists Jairus Banaji and Rohini Hensman discuss with AWL member Dion D’Silva on democracy, capitalism, and the left in India. (3.45am)
  • London postal worker Pete Firmin and Edward Malby from the AWL on the postal workers’ battle. (6.30pm)

Is class struggle out of date?
Sunday 10.00am

Jean Lane is Union convenor for education workers in Tower Hamlets, and an AWL member.

Neil Davenport will be speaking for the Institute of Ideas, a grouping originating from Living Marxism magazine which now organises events jointly with The Times.

When does capitalism change direction?
Sunday 12.50pm

Dick Bryan is professor of political economy at Sydney University, and author (with Michael Kerteyer) of Capitalism with Derivatives.

Simon Mouhun is professor of political economy at Queen Mary University of London, and author of many articles investigating the US economy with the Marxist concepts of “productive” and “unproductive” labour.

Camila Bassi is a lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, currently researching the political economy of Shanghai, and an AWL activist.

The labour movement in Iraq
Sunday 12.50pm

Ruth Cashman was delegate from No Sweat and Iraq Union Solidarity to the international labour conference in Erbil, Iraq, in March 2009. She is an AWL member and an activist in Unison.

Muayad Ahmed is an activist with the Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions of Iraq and the Worker-communist Party of Iraq, recently returned from Iraq.

Can we replace capitalism?
Sunday 12.50pm

Meghnad Desai is the author of Marx’s Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism.

Mark Sandell is an AWL member who has been active as a student, a postal worker, and a full-time union organiser.

AWL in the general election and “son of No2EU”
Sunday 2.05pm

Jill Mountford is AWL candidate for the Camberwell and Peckham constituency in the general election, and former organiser of the Welfare State Network.

Tony Byrne is a longstanding RMT union activist and an AWL member.

Socialists in local government:
Poplar and GLC compared
Sunday 3.20pm

Janeine Booth is an AWL member, London Transport regional secretary of the RMT, and author of Guilty And Proud Of It, an account of the Poplar battle.

John McDonnell was deputy leader of the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone. He ran for the Labour Party leadership after Tony Blair resigned.

LGBT liberation today
Sunday 3.20pm

With Maria Exall, LGBT rep on the TUC General Council, Peter Tatchell from Outrage, Alan Bailey from the National Union of Student LGBT campaign, and Tom Unterrainer from AWL.

Dealing with high finance
Sunday 4.25pm


Martin Thomas coordinated the symposium in Solidarity of Marxists on the economic crisis.

Imperialism today
Sunday 6pm

Leo Panitch, editor of the Socialist Register, an editor of the Socialist Project group in Toronto, and professor at York University, in discussion with Martin Thomas from AWL.

Also on Sunday:
• The revolutions of 1989 with Sean Matgamna.
  Pete Radcliff, AWL member and leading activist in Notts Stop the BNP, on fighting fascism today.
  The miners’ strike of 1984–5 with Dave Douglass, who worked as a miner for 29 years, and Jill Mountford from AWL.
  AWL member Cathy Nugent discusses with Andy Littlechid, a trade-union activist on Metronet on the London Underground and an anarcho-syndicalist, on anarcho-syndicalism and Marxism.

Reel News on using film to help the struggle.
Why vote Labour, with Sean Matgamna from AWL.

Introductory sessions
Clive Bradley on the ideas of Karl Marx (Sat 11.45am).
Roisin Woods on the ideas of Lenin (Sat 11.55pm).
Caroline Henry on the ideas of Trotsky (Sun 11.15am), and Peter Thomas (author of The Gramscian Moment) on Gramsci (Sat 6.50pm).

Saturday evening, from 8.30pm at “Dusk till Dawn” (the Archway Tavern), Archway Road, N19 3TD. A night of live hip hop and spoken-word poetry in support of the postal workers’ dispute, featuring: CAPTAIN OF THE RANT (punk-poet), CLAYTON BLIZZARD & BLACK JACOBINS FEATURING THE RUBY KID. PLUS SKRIBBO & LOKI (of the BEING)
Friends, sympathisers, members of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, and many other leftists interested in exploring ways to rearm the labour movement, will be meeting in London on 28-29 November for the AWL’s winter school.

Unlike many other weekend gatherings of the left this month and next, this event will be about serious debate and study. It aims to be a focal point from which thought-through, collectively-understood ideas and strategies — and people inspired by those ideas and strategies — can radiate out into the labour movement.

Lenin once summed up the job of socialists as “study, propaganda, organisation”, and explained: “You cannot be an ideological leader without theoretical work, just as you cannot be one without directing this work to meet the needs of the cause, and without spreading the results of this theory among the workers and helping them to organise”.

And we cannot do any of those things without coming together, exchanging ideas face-to-face, and organising ourselves into a coherent collective. The twelve years of New Labour rule are probably nearing their end at the same time as the long capitalist expansion since 1991-2 which made it easier for the New Labourites to keep the labour movement politically stifled. A long period of the labour movement rethinking, reorganising, rejuvenating itself lies ahead.

That may happen slowly and gradually, or in rapid spurts interrupted by setbacks. We cannot know. What we can do is prepare — “study, propagandise, organise”.

In the period ahead, the labour movement will also have to come to terms with the legacy of Stalinism. The old USSR collapsed in 1991, shortly before the latest long capitalist expansion began.

The collapse — because it came with a triumph of capitalism — dismayed and confused the left. The dismay and confusion is still with us. This capitalist crisis, shaking up our thoughts, can open the way to go beyond that dismay and confusion, and to get rid of the ideas and practices that seeped into the left over decades of Stalinist domination and are still with us.

Our winter school comes at a pivotal point in the crisis.

Many banks have returned to making profits. Those that have not, like RBS, the Government can nurse. The bosses and the bankers are regaining confidence.

Their next step will be big public service cuts, to offset the huge borrowing the Government has made to bail out banks. As the bankers’ bonuses rise, the crisis will be hitting the working class even harder than it has already done.

On the whole — though there have been important exceptions, some occupations like the one at Vestas — this crisis has at first stunned the labour movement more than it has mobilised it. In that it follows the pattern of previous big capitalist crises.

The revival of profits will start to convince more and more people that the outcome of a crisis like this is not mechanical. It depends on struggle, and struggle depends on ideas and organisation.

The adage, “never waste a crisis”, should guide workers and the left as it is guiding the bosses, Tories and the BNP.

Don’t “waste the crisis”! Join us in London on 28-29 November.

See the full programme for the event on page 19.