

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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TORIES PLAN CUTS WAR

UNIONS SHOULD FORCE LABOUR TO SCRAP CUTS PLANS

BY JILL MOUNTFORD

Last year, when the Tories were very confident about winning the general election, Tory leader David Cameron promised "an age of austerity" and boasted he would take "difficult, unpopular" decisions.

Shadow Chancellor George Osborne said: "After three months in power we will be the most unpopular government since the war."

As the election approaches, the Tories have toned down their talk. But they haven't shifted on basics.

They declare: "A Conservative Government will hold an emergency Budget within 50 days of taking office... The first measures will start to take effect this year".

Alistair Darling's Budget, also promising big cuts over coming years, was bad enough. But a Tory vote is a vote to translate the general promise of future cuts, made by all parties, into a hard commitment to cuts now — and crucially an accompanying drive to break the power of the public service workers' unions.

The unions should start organising now against the coming cuts. Yes, they should support the re-election of a Labour government rather than a Tory victory. But they should also start campaigning now, within the Labour Party, on the streets, and inside workplaces, to combat cuts, to make the Labour leader's promise to "protect front-line services" a reality, and to demand no job losses!

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**Defending public services • Saturday 10 April • Temple Tube,
London • Assemble 12 noon • Rally 2pm Trafalgar Square**

BUDGET

Recycling old and useless remedies

By JOHN MOLONEY

In the 24 March budget Chancellor Alistair Darling announced the first tranches of cuts to the public sector. But he did this by saying he wanted to save hundreds of millions of pounds through “improving efficiency”. What does this mean?

As with so many New Labour announcements, this efficiency drive recycled elements from previous initiatives.

For example, in December 2009 the Government launched “First Line First”. This had the same recipe as the budget — improvements in procurement, reducing sick leave, moving civil servants out of London, cutting back on consultant spend etc.

Before “First Line First” the Government had announced that in the next three financial years — apart from for those workers in multi-year deals — pay rises in the public sector will be limited to 1%.

In essence the budget offered nothing new. Except that by putting it all in the budget the Government is investing more *political capital* into delivering cuts.

When interviewed about the budget, Treasury Minister, Liam Byrne, was clear that part of the plan to reduce sick absence involved sacking more people; though he put this in sinister management speak and talked of “exiting” people.

The possible model that they may have in mind is that operating in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). That organisation has, in some years, sacked about 1% of its work force annually for sick absence related reasons. During the periodic crackdowns on sickness, DWP can, in some areas give 10% or more of its staff warnings for sickness; in intense crackdowns that figure can head towards 40%!

If these methods were applied to the public sector as a whole then you would expect over half a million staff on warnings, and sick-related sackings to be in the region of 60,000 a year.

Little chance perhaps of Labour taking on board the lessons learnt through the Whitehall studies (a 20-plus year health examination of civil servants). That shows there is a better way to reduce sickness. That is improve the well being of public sector workers!

The studies (which have been incorporated into Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett’s book *The Spirit Level*) show that giving workers greater control over work, improving job security and improving support to workers will actually and permanently improve absence levels.

The government/DWP methods will in fact increase sick levels; hence the need for continuing crackdowns, more sackings etc. What they do not realise, or do not care about, is that work organisation (targets, over strict supervision, hierarchy etc) is the *cause* of the problem.

Instead of treating this pogrom against the sick on a one-by-one basis, as personal cases (as does the leadership of the PCS union in the DWP) the public sector unions have to raise and agitate for different ways of organising work.

CATHOLIC CHURCH CHILD ABUSE SCANDAL

Religion as licence to prey

By ANNIE O’KEEFE

Ireland in the 20th Century: for countless small children, orphans alone in the world and children confined in special prisons for some petty crime against property or for bunking off school, life in institutions and schools run by Catholic priests and nuns was a childhood-long nightmare of violence at the hands of nuns, priests and Christian Brothers (a male, monklike, celibate, teaching order).

There was no escape other than by way of the slow process of growing up in a priest and nun-made Hell, and then being released, often psychically maimed, into the adult world.

In the nature of things, some of the victims would in turn prey on children as they themselves had been preyed upon.

A religious person, therefore, might see the hand of a just and vindictive God in the protracted nightmare in which the Catholic Church itself has now been caught up for more than a decade. Waves after seemingly endless waves of revelations about the abuse of children all across the world have battered the Church.

The latest allegations concern Pope Benedict the 16th, who is accused of personal involvement when he was a bishop in covering up for paedophile priests — one of whom is alleged to have sexually assaulted 200 deaf children — and allowing them to continue working with children in the dioceses to which they had been moved.

In this chapter of clerical horrors, it was common practice, a clerical ritual you might say, to move paedophile priests, whose character had become too well-known where they were, into new areas where they were not known. In practice, that was to give them a new supply of children to molest.

In the Bible, Jesus Christ is made to say: “Suffer the little children to come unto me.” In this church, a vast number of paedophiles were moved about as if with the intention to reverse the meaning usually attributed to Christ’s words: they inflicted unspeakable suffering on hordes of innocent children.

The mixture of cynicism, moral imbecility and long-sustained arrogance is

The Pope: implicated in the cover-up

breath-taking. The story is so bizarre that we might be watching a very crude anti-clerical film made in 1930s Mexico or by Spanish anarchists in the same period.

It beggars the imagination to understand what the administrators of the church thought they were doing. And how they reconciled what they did with any code of right and wrong, clerical or secular.

Religion is “the opium of the people”? This religion became a licence for priests to prey on the young and vulnerable.

Of course it was not only in Catholic institutions that children were, and are, thus abused. It is now clear that orphanages and children’s prisons were — and many still surely are — everywhere an archipelago of physical and sexual abuse of the children “cared for” by adults, many of whom had been drawn to such professions for no other reason than the opportunities they offered for such abuse. Yet there is a peculiar horror in such behaviour by priests — priests who collectively lay down the moral law, especially the sexual moral law, and police it.

This Pope, this Church so many of whose priestly elite were the worst sort of sexual criminals, lays it down that it is a mortal sin, even in AIDS-ravaged Africa, to use a penile sheath to prevent the spread of disease (or for that matter a sheath or an IUD, or chemicals, to control conception)! In his capacity of spiritual absolute monarch of one and a quarter billion Catholics, he tells his “flock” that they will burn for all time in the never-ending fires of Hell for such sexual offences against “God’s law”!

In Ireland, from the second half of the nineteenth century until very recently, the bishops and their legions of priests imposed a particularly severe and savagely enforced sexual puritanism that maimed many generations of those who accepted its norms of sexual right and wrong, sin and spiritual cleanliness. The revelations that many of those who enforced such rules were sexual predators against children, and that priests and bishops who were not themselves predators protected and covered up for those who were, has had a shattering effect on the standing and moral credibility of the Catholic Church.

For many people the scandal is playing the role of spiritual and intellectual liberator — a liberation that comes at a very high price to the victims of the clergy. For them it may also be a lesson in the absurdity of basing morality on “traditional values” and on sacred texts interpreted by priests — on anything other than reason.

The crying need for reason, human reason, for a rational, humanist outlook on life and on morality, could not be more strongly made than it is in this sorry tale.

Marxists are not *simplistic* secularists and rationalists. Religion is rooted in the human condition, the social as well existential. The fundamental fight against religion is the fight to change the human social conditions that need and therefore creates and recreate the hunger for religious consolation.

“Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.” Karl Marx: (*Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*).

Even so, this affair, as well as the present world-role of political Islam, dramatises the need to fight here and now for humanism and against God-ism — for human reason against irrational faith and organised religion.

The elderly cannot afford these politicians

By VICKI MORRIS

On Monday 22 March sheltered housing residents from around the country, many elderly and disabled, stood opposite Parliament to shout “Save our wardens!”

They were protesting against the removal of residential wardens from sheltered housing schemes. Since the government removed the ring fence from the Supporting People budget, councils, mainly Tory and Lib Dem, have been raiding this pot to fund other services.

A motorcade of chauffeur-driven cars bearing dignitaries in wigs, with their families, left the Palace of Westminster. We hadn’t a clue who they were, but perhaps we were able to make an impression by waving our placards at them through the bullet-proof glass. This certainly wasn’t access to ministers.

We stood there with Brian Haw, he of

the nine-year-long Iraq protest. We were photographed by the local press and the *Times*, who might cover the issue depending on whether it is a quiet news day.

Then the less able pensioners climbed into their hired minibus, while the rest of us set off on foot. We headed to 30 Millbank to deliver a letter to Tory Party HQ. The campaign is asking the main party leaders to say where they stand on the issue. We called at Lib Dem HQ and, finally, 10 Downing Street, to deliver a letter to the PM. We didn’t see a single politician all day.

In the past year we have organised several protests, largely paid for by residents themselves. Many of the wardens losing their jobs and sometimes homes through these cuts are members of the GMB and Unison, but, apart from some local government branches, the unions have given little help. A ragtag army of bloody-minded residents, Christian lawyer Yvonne Hossacks, and the odd

left-wing well-wisher has fought a rear-guard action.

Under SOCPA, our small protest on Whitehall was, strictly speaking, illegal, but we held it anyway. That evening I watched the Channel 4 *Dispatches* programme “Politicians for hire”, exposing politicians, prominent among them Blairites Stephen Byers, Patricia Hewitt and Geoff Hoon, selling themselves to lobby on behalf of business. The contrast with this and how I had spent my day was stark.

Where cuts are concerned, but there is no organised — or bribed — interest lobbying for its victims, government doesn’t want to know. (Even when there are votes in it — around half a million people live in sheltered housing.)

We will join the Defend Public Services march in London on 10 April. Perhaps we will finally get noticed!

• Comment, John McDonnell MP, centre pages.

BRITISH AIRWAYS STRIKE

The unions control Labour? If only that were true!

The Tories have used the BA dispute, and the membership of BA workers in the Unite union, to depict the Labour Party as a “prisoner” of the trade unions. Their campaign is being supported by right-wing papers like the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail*, with the latter publishing an “expose” of a supposed Communist Party plot to take control of the Labour Party and the government. They say Unite is controlled by the Communist Party

The Lib Dems have also chimed in, with shadow chancellor Vince Cable using his 29 March TV debate with Alistair Darling and George Osborne to attack Labour for being funded by “militant unions” as well as the more usual, and not unrelated, witch-hunting words about striking workers “holding the country to ransom”.

All claim that union involvement in politics is undemocratic. There is now renewed speculation that, if the Tories win, they will legislate to make it difficult or impossible for the unions to fund a political party.

What is never explained is why union-funded and controlled-politics is dangerous, illegitimate and undemocratic, but big business channelling millions to the Tories and Lib Dems (and New Labour) is fair and democratic.

Yet the unions are, for all their flaws, democratic organisations through which millions of workers without the individual wealth and influence of, say, an Ashcroft can attempt to exercise some power over their basic conditions of life, in the first place their work, but also the overall shape of society. All workers — including unemployed workers — can join these organisations and with collective organisation can, or potentially can, change their

policy, direction and leadership.

By contrast big business funding of politics represents a real “special interest”, a mechanism to get political parties to protect the profits and privileges of a privileged minority.

In other words, this is an argument about class. Supporting and advocating a political voice for the unions is about organising the labour movement to more effectively fight in the interests of the working class — and right now to more effectively fight for BA workers — and in the interests of democracy.

Unfortunately, the unions are in reality very far from “controlling the Labour government” and the

left and the rank and file are far from controlling the unions. Unite hands over £11 million for Labour’s election campaign, but Gordon Brown continues to bully the BA workers and back their strike-breaking bosses. The unions have some voting power in Labour’s structures, but their leaders have not used these or other means to fight for or enforce even union policies.

We will fight for the unions to really assert their influence in the Labour Party and in politics more generally. Rank and file workers in the unions need to take control from the self-serving bureaucrats who have shored up Brown and Blair in New Labour.

Daily Mail “exposé”

May Day Event:

We will not pay for the bosses’ crisis! For class struggle and international working-class solidarity!

A rally and social on International Workers’ Day organised by the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty and the Worker-communist Party of Iraq

**7-11pm, Friday 30 April
The Bread and Roses, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4 6DZ**

Speakers:

Jill Mountford, Workers’ Liberty candidate in Camberwell and Peckham * **Jade Baker, student activist at Westminster University, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts** * **Houzan Mahmoud, Worker-communist Party of Iraq** * **Aysen Dennis, tenant activist on the Aylesbury estate, south London** * **Network Rail striker**

Speeches accompanied by Iraqi food and followed by drinks and socialising.

Will you help the socialist alternative?

In the 2010 General Election the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty will raise the banner of a socialist alternative — to give clear political answers to both the Tories and New Labour.

We will work for a Labour vote tied to a positive campaign against the cuts and privatisation agenda of Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

We will be standing a candidate against Harriet Harman in Peckham and Camberwell, south London; Jill Mountford will stand for a workers’ voice in Parliament.

Getting across our messages will take money, yet we have no rich donors or “captains of industry” to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this election year

CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college (contact our office for details)?
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to “AWL”, account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and press the donate button.
- Send cheques made payable to “AWL” to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA; or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank (to “AWL”, account number as above).
- Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

FIGHTING FUND

In the fortnight we have received £64.00 in new monthly standing orders. That gives a consolidated amount of £512 towards our grand total. We also received £35 in new subscriptions and donations of £100 from D, £100 from B and £1280 from A. Our fund so far stands at £7,203.50. Thanks.

MY LIFE AT WORK

“The days of the 11am finish are long gone”

Ken is a postman in East London

Tell us a little bit about the work you do.

I'm a delivery postman. I get up very early and work a system called the “starburst” where I work in a team with four other postmen. We sort the mail together, load up a van and deliver five rounds. This system came in as part of the 2007 deal and we're piloting it in our office.

Do you think that you and your colleagues get the pay and conditions that you deserve?

Probably not. People will always want more money and better conditions and understandably so, especially in the current economic climate. We have had a few big strikes and it feels like we are winning concessions — not as much as some of us would like — but it's moving in the right direction. I expect there will be more big strikes in the years to come and we will win a little bit more.

Has the economic crisis affected your work? Has it affected the way workers think about their jobs?

Without a doubt. We are now really beginning to notice it. The workload has gone down. We have had far too many quiet periods and people are getting worried. If the letters aren't there then the jobs aren't there either. Unfortunately, the days of us finishing at 11am are gone and we're having to do door-to-door deliveries of leaflets. It's not ideal, but if these things keep us in work then we'll do them.

What do people talk about in your workplace?

Most people at work aren't politically motivated. Out of the 50 people at work maybe only four of us talk about politics. Some of that changed with the strike last year when people realised we were up against the government. But generally people are a bit naive when it comes to politics. Also we have a lot of migrant workers who don't understand how British trade unions and British politics work. It's not their fault, but that's the way it is. In my workplace, myself and the other rep have done a lot of work in educating the other workers and organising them into the union.

What are your bosses like?

My frontline boss is very good. He used to be a postman and he knows the score and tries to play fair. His manager is a different matter. Unfortunately, he is more motivated by budgets. I haven't got much time for him and would trust him about as far as I could throw him. The higher up you go the worse they get.

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

To be honest, I'd like to be able to just get on and do the job without all the politics. But that isn't going to happen. I'd get my pension sorted out. That's caused a lot of sleepless nights over the last five years. I'd like to have the same pension I had when I started 23 years ago before Leighton and Crozier trampled all over it.

NETWORK RAIL STRIKE

“Flexibility” will undermine safety

RMT members have voted to take various kinds of industrial action, including strikes, across the four days after Easter. As we go to press Network Rail bosses are due to make a High Court legal challenge to the strike. *Solidarity* spoke to a track maintenance worker and RMT member.

The dispute involves signalling staff and engineering workers. Signallers are faced with longer hours and changes to rostering.

The engineering dispute is about how we do our work in greatest safety and to best effect. Managers want to cut back the number of staff employed, impose changes on certain working-practices, and re-configure where we work and for how long.

Management want to cut the workforce from 8,000 to 6,500 people. They also want to water down, or remove, current limits on how many nights and weekends people work each quarter. The proposals would leave the way clear for someone to work 39 full weeks of nights. They would also significantly increase the number of weekends someone might find they had to work.

The proposals also carry a risk that workers would be de-skilled over time.

Currently, dedicated teams of maintenance workers with in-depth knowledge of their particular stretches of track oversee the permanent way. Under new proposals staff are to be “multi-skilled”, meaning that anyone from a given pool of staff could be tasked to do a maintenance job. While this might sound efficient in theory, what it is likely to mean is firstly that the detailed knowledge

gained by working only on given stretches of track will be lost over time, and secondly that increased numbers of mistakes will be made. People doing a given job, sourced from this multi-skilled pool, might not be used to doing that particular task. Most of the time they are doing something different. Their expertise and experience is in a separate area or aspect of work.

Management also want to remove limits on the geographical location within which a maintenance-crew will work. We'll be expected to do any job which we can actually get to and return from within the stated hours.

Over time, this is likely to lead to a loss of area-specific knowledge. It may also result in less stringent maintenance, since at the moment we find ourselves routinely doing maintenance which has not been directly tasked because we know our track-area and tend it daily. It's our patch, and we try to keep it in good order.

This way of working is partly a result of changes in the late 1980s and early 90s when crews were divided between maintenance teams and fault-attender teams. That re-organisation saw a dramatic drop in the number of faults. Now the proposal is to return to the status quo ante.

The current set-up enables the system to be maintained to a very high level. My worry is that it won't be possible to sustain this level of maintenance across time under the new proposals.

This attention to detail in established and limited locations is further threatened by a proposal to limit the number of times a named piece of equipment can be visited in a year. Apparently studies in

the aircraft industry have suggested that the most common time for a piece of kit to fail is soon after it has been maintained! I don't know how true that is, but applied to the railway it would have us leave kit for long stretches of time, perhaps even until it fails and so has to be replaced.

Demand for night-work is likely to increase because of track-access issues. Maintenance-teams can't access increasing numbers of areas without stopping trains, and this is better done at night.

There's also a proposal not to pay us for the first hour's travel to and from work. Apart from the loss of money for those who travel some distance to do their work, there's an implication for working hours. After the Clapham crash workers were limited to 12-hour shifts. Will unpaid travel-hours be counted as part of this time, or could some people be faced with say an hour's travel in, a twelve-hour shift, and an hour's travel home, essentially making a 14-hour day? Quality of work is likely to suffer if this is the case.

In a nutshell, management want to push “flexibility”. But their proposals are likely to result not only in job-losses but in more nightwork for those still employed, a decrease in the ability of engineering-teams to maintain the system at its current high level, loss of local knowledge and dedicated skill-sets, and more stressful working-conditions for those at the front line. There are huge safety implications for the travelling public in this.

ROYAL MAIL

Vote against this deal!

The ballot on the Communication Workers' Union's deal with Royal Mail will now run from 7-23 April. The leadership is now busy giving union activists their marching orders, lining up reps and branches to go out and campaign for a “yes” vote in the upcoming ballot on the deal.

One rep told *Solidarity*, “there have been a number of reps' briefings going on recently, but it's generally just the top table talking up the deal”.

Another said, “the leadership have made it quite clear that there is no plan B — this is it. They regard the deal we have as a strong bargaining position”.

The deal is bad. It represents no concessions from management on the big questions of job cuts and restructuring, and will allow Royal Mail to continue with its agenda of eroding wages and casualising the industry unabated.

Delivery staff will find themselves carrying more junk mail for less money. All postal workers should join with delivery workers in rejecting this deal — in the name of solidarity with their colleagues in deliveries; but also because this deal will sign away the job security of all postal workers.

Several branches of the CWU have already voted to recommend a no vote in the ballot — including Bristol and District Amalgamated and South East Wales Amalgamated and the unit reps' network in the North Lancashire and Cumbria branch. We will be speaking to branches that vote to reject the deal, and

reporting on the campaign for the “no” vote.

Branches, reps and CWU members and activists who oppose the deal should co-ordinate their campaign against the deal nationally as a first step in creating a rank-and-file platform of postal workers which is politically independent of the official leadership.

Ed Maltby

Rob Wotherspoon, a deliveries rep from Bristol, spoke to *Solidarity* about the decision by the Branch Committee to reject the deal.

Why was the vote to reject the deal unanimous?

Because we believe it's a very bad deal for delivery workers who make up the majority of workers in our branch. So in the name of unity, people who didn't work in delivery were prepared to reject it because it wasn't good enough for part of the membership.

But there are no guarantees that mail centres will stay open, either. They reckon Royal Mail plan to close half of all centres within the next three years. We don't believe that anyone who works in a centre can feel secure in their jobs; there are no safeguards in this deal.

Delivery workers are going to end up working longer on the weekend, on the street longer, and to add insult to injury many delivery workers will be taking a pay cut for at least the first year. We currently get paid an extra rate for doing

“door-to-doors”, unaddressed items of mail [junk mail]. We get paid a piece rate per item for those. This is all going to be put into one payment but that also includes an earlier sum, so effectively you only get paid £8 a week for doing door to doors. On average now, people are getting £20-30 a week for doing this.

Why did the CWU postal executive committee vote “overwhelmingly” to accept this deal?

I think a lot of them are out of touch with the membership; and there's probably a few people who don't have the courage to stand up and say when something's wrong.

What should other people who disagree with the deal do?

They should as we are: meet the members in the workplaces. For the next few weeks our branch will be going out, meeting members in delivery offices, and we'll be sending out a letter to people's home addresses telling them to reject the deal.

In terms of the wider union we have expressed our opinion at briefings and other branches will make up their own minds. We intend to lead by example.

What about a co-ordinated national campaign of opposition?

Maybe not a bad idea. But we do not have much time before the vote, and we will be concentrating on meeting with our members.

NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS

Preparing for Tory cuts

BY PAT MURPHY, NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS EXECUTIVE

The first major trade union conference in the pre-election period will be of the largest teachers' organisation, the National Union of Teachers, meeting in Liverpool over the easter weekend.

Gordon Brown is set to announce the election on 6 April, the last day of the conference. But the education policies supported by NUT delegates will be a long way from those on offer from any of the major political parties.

What are NUT policies?

- Reduce class size dramatically with the aim that by 2020 no child is in a class of more than 20.

- End SATs and league tables.

- Stop the privatisation of schools and the break-up of local authority-run education by ending the Academy and trust programmes and bringing the existing Academies back into local authority control.

- And the NUT policy of a good local school for every child is the alternative to the main parties' mantra of "choice and diversity".

The conference will endorse a priority motion which champions these demands during the election and tests the policies of the main parties against them. The fact that the NUT relies on this kind of all-party lobbying for policy support, however, leaves us fighting with one hand tied behind our back.

As a politically unaffiliated union we have never been part of the debate in the labour movement about education policy, not to mention all the other questions of government that affect our members and the communities they serve. Neither

is there space within the union's rules or constitution to consider the need for working-class or trade-union representation in politics.

It will be a lot better if the NUT used the election period to provoke debates about what education is for and how a different vision for schools is possible. But right now it will have to be done in a way which inevitably mutes and blunts the effect as we cannot actually shape a radical working-class alternative to what is on offer from the mainstream parties.

The main threat carried by the election is the possibility of a Tory government and an immediate future of much more defensive battles. This is reflected in the motions submitted and prioritised by branches.

In contrast to two years ago, when we were preparing for the first national teachers' pay strike for 20 years, no motion on salaries has been prioritised by members. The big industrial concerns are defence of pensions and jobs, opposing cuts in the service and continuing and stepping up the fight to tackle workload.

Dismayed as teachers are by the record of Labour since 1997, it is very clear that a Tory victory in June will mean the destruction of local authority-run education, savage and early cuts and a full-scale attack on public sector pay, pensions and working conditions.

Michael Gove's plans to establish so-called "free schools" will unleash unbridled market forces and that means the closure of hundreds of existing schools and job losses in as many others.

In a related debate, a motion from Central Notts and Kirklees calls on the union to "campaign in the forthcoming general election showing the link between issues over jobs, housing and

public services and how fascist and racist organisations use these issues to scapegoat and divide people". An amendment from Leeds and Islington adds in references to the EDL and calls for work in schools to counter the stereotyping of immigrants and asylum-seekers and support anti-deportation campaigns.

The big political issue here will be around a second amendment from Stoke-on Trent which calls for "legislation to ban members of the BNP and other fascist organisations from working in education, serving on governing bodies and local authority Children and Young Persons Services committees". The fact that NUT activists in Stoke are sympathetic to any possible way of keeping the BNP out of schools is wholly understandable. It isn't at all clear how such legislation would not (or should not) be used against other far-right groups such as the Islamist Hizb ut Tahrir or even the far left.

The entire experience of our movement shows that when we support or accept an extension in the policing powers of the state in the interests of anti-fascism or anti-racism we also end up being its victims, sometimes its main victims.

The state which weighed into the anti-EDL protesters in Bolton with truncheons and arrested central UAF leaders will not be our ally in fighting fascism.

There is no place in our schools for fascists, whether as teachers, support staff or governors. But we should be the people to drive them out. We can expel them from union membership and mobilise parents and staff to evict them. That way we decide who to target and fascists will find it harder to claim that they are the victims of state persecution. We should ensure they are pariahs, not martyrs.

CIVIL SERVICE STRIKE

Win full rights for all!

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

On Budget Day, 24 March, the civil service union PCS took a third day of strike action over detrimental changes to redundancy and early retirement rights.

Overall this strike seems to have been more solidly supported than a two-day strike on the 8 and 9 May.

Despite the Government's call to the RMT and Unite unions that they must get around the negotiating table to solve their disputes (with Network Rail and British Airways) they are not following their own advice over our dispute, and have refused further talks.

Therefore the PCS has no choice but to continue its campaign.

Over the General Election period we intend to make "interventions" into the constituencies of Cabinet members.

And on 22-23 April the High Court will hear the union's case. The essence of it is that members have accrued (banked) redundancy and early retirement rights for each year they have been employed. If this argument were legally accepted then long-serving members of staff would gain substantially. Such a victory would be very important. But new entrants and those with only a few years of service will gain nothing from a legal victory. It is for those members that the union has to win future rights.

But first of all the union must make clear that it is *not* looking for a two-tier deal. If the Government had offered such a deal last year, then the union, unfortunately, would have accepted it. That is to say, if the Government had offered staff who joined the civil service before 1 June 2007 their existing rights but gave those recruited after that date (and who are in different pension scheme) lesser rights, then PCS would have agreed with this arrangement.

Now we have to be clear that all members must have the same deal; with all members getting the best terms. There must not be a two tier agreement.

This strategy inevitably leads us back to the issue of industrial action. It is highly unlikely that there will be any strike action during the election period. The calculation is that members cannot "afford" more action in the run up to election day.

But the current leadership of the union has no further options with a strike action campaign. They have, as a matter of principle, ruled out selective action. Therefore they have nothing to infill "gaps" between national actions or to continue the action. The rejection of selective action is a gross error. So is the refusal to have a strike levy.

The dispute over redundancy and early retirement rights is just a prelude to a forthcoming and main fight over jobs and pensions.

We have to learn some lessons from the current and past actions. Use of selective action and raising strike funds though a levy are just two of the important points that have to be taken on board.

NUT POLITICAL FUND

"Vote to stop the BNP" not enough

BY JOE FLYNN

The left in the NUT almost universally celebrated the establishment of the political fund as a (limited) success. But the current fund actually hinders rank and file activists from promoting socialist politics — that is, the only politics working class militants should be interested in, the only politics which can secure the liberation of our class.

Take the coming general election as an example. This will be the first chance to see the NUT political fund in action. The NUT slogan for the election is "Vote to stop the BNP" and posters, stickers and other materials bearing this message have been sent into schools.

In London, the Regional Office is encouraging members to travel to Barking for "days of action" where leafleting and other activities will be taking place under the same political banner, in association with Searchlight and UAF.

The fund explicitly prevents associations/divisions from positively endorsing local socialist or left Labour candidates, as its only purpose is to allow strictly anti-BNP campaigning. To have any slogan other than "Vote to stop the

BNP" would require a campaign for a change in the political fund to allow for endorsement of local candidates. The left in the NUT should be urgently organising such a campaign.

Instead, the NUT left are throwing themselves into the "Vote to stop the BNP" campaign. Workers' Liberty teachers believes this is a mistake, as the slogan is not only inadequate but, in practice, actually counter-productive.

The Barking issue throws this into sharp relief. If ever there was a case for campaigning for a right wing Labour MP, Barking is it (Margaret Hodge). In any case, it is perfectly possible, and legal, for individuals to organise their own campaign materials arguing for a Labour vote while promoting socialist policies (the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists is an example of this).

We would encourage NUT members in Barking to do just that.

As it stands, members of socialist groups who believe in a Labour vote will be organising NUT members to go to Barking giving out leaflets saying "Vote for anyone but the BNP". This offers nothing positive to the people of Barking who have real concerns about housing and other issues — not least the attempted privatisation of their community

schools — which can only be solved by a working class, socialist programme.

Working class activists, including NUT members, should be raising such a programme and linking it concretely, in this election, to a call for a Labour vote where there isn't a serious socialist candidate (as in Barking). Evading the issue of who to vote for isn't good enough — not for a trade union, and certainly not from socialist militants.

A political fund which only allows negative campaigning is worse than useless, particularly as could become a witch hunters' charter for any bureaucrat who wants to go after activists in associations/divisions which endorse local socialist candidates as this would break union rules.

Will this happen? As a period of serious class struggle approaches, divisions between right and left in the union are likely to become much clearer, and activists need to be prepared for that.

We need to be prepared to defend activists in those associations/divisions which break the political fund rules by endorsing local candidates in this election, and then building a campaign to change the rules of the fund to allow for such endorsements to happen legally in the future.

CABIN CREW DISPUTE

British Airways workers can win

Stuart Jordan outlines the key issues in the British Airways cabin crew dispute.

WHAT'S THE STRIKE ABOUT?

The crux of the dispute is the 1948 Redeployment Agreement, which says that wages and consequently pensions can never be cut.

Back in October, in order to address the company's £600 million losses this year and its £3.7 billion pension fund deficit, BA sought ways of ripping up the redeployment agreement. Their first strategy was to tell staff that a new deal on their terms and conditions was a fait accompli.

In a letter, dated 27 October, from Unite national officer Steve Turner to BA negotiator Tony McCarthy, Turner said:

"Recent communications from Bill Francis [head of inflight customer experience at BA] in particular have explicitly stated that new redeployment arrangements have been agreed with the trade union national officers.

"This is not true, you know it is not true and I expect you to put the record straight immediately. As you are very well aware, the national officers have no agreement with you on changes to the

British Airways Redeployment Agreement."

Unite have responded to this unilateral action by demanding that BA come to the negotiating table. In fact, this appears to be the sole demand of the strike, "negotiation not imposition".

The striking workers have not raised any concrete demands over their terms and conditions or the terms and conditions of future workers. The strikers' bottom-line demands are left entirely up to union negotiators; but before the strike had even begun the union had agreed that members would increase pension contributions from 8 to 13.5%.

"We offered a pay cut" was one slogan emblazoned across their Unite placards on the first day of the strike.

Yet even these concessions have not satisfied BA management. Instead the focus of the dispute has shifted to New Fleet — a company within a company where BA want to employ workers on separate terms and conditions. New Fleet is understood by both sides as a project to create a two-tier workforce, where new employees will have worst pay, precarious contracts and whatever else management can squeeze out of the talks.

Unite's "please negotiate with us" demand is actually an acceptance of the

principle of a two-tier workforce. Tony Woodley confirmed this in an interview with the BBC where he stated that he knew New Fleet had to go ahead but just wanted the union to be talked to about it and negotiate a fair deal. This stance will undermine union organisation. It is likely the number of workers on the second tier will grow at the cost of the better paid top-tier. Cabin crew basic rate is quite low, and they are given a top-up for different flights that they go on. It is likely that the New Fleet will take the best paid flight (e.g. Tokyo and New York), thus siphoning workers into the second tier.

Cabin crew should organise mass meetings to formulate positive demands and reject any deal to impose a two-tier workforce.

WHY NOW?

Many capitalist firms are using the spectre of economic crisis to try and impose austerity measures on their workforce.

However, BA also has plans for a lucrative merger with Spanish airline Iberia. This deal was set up in November 2009, and Iberia's executive board were expected to announce the merger on Thursday 24 March. However, the business pages have fallen silent and it looks like any deal will be postponed until they know the outcome of the strike.

Iberia were looking for some reassurances that they will not be burdened with BA's £3.7 billion pensions deficit. When the merger was first raised in November 2009, Iberia included a clause that allowed them to pull out of the deal if the pensions deficit was not sorted.

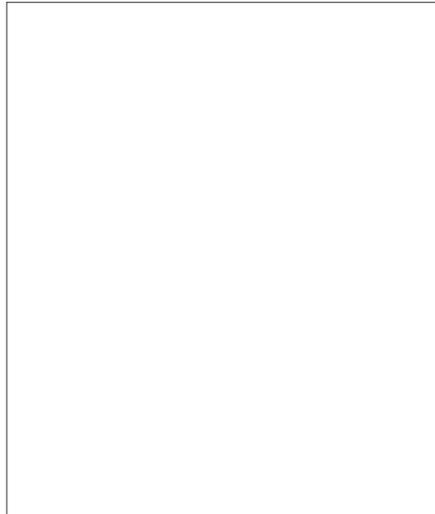
Despite this get-out clause, the Iberia bosses are treading carefully, suggesting that confidence in the capitalist camp is far from solid. Also, from the period when Unite announced the strike to 24 March, share prices increased 22 per cent. Investors are not only hoping to make a windfall from the merger but are also signalling a vote of confidence in Walsh's handling of the dispute. The lack of a merger deal on 24 March may see investor confidence drop and BA thrown into real financial difficulty.

If this happens then the workers must move quickly to demand nationalisation and fight for maximum workers' control. Walsh's mismanagement and the profligacy of shareholders has caused these problems, not the wealth-creating efforts of the workforce.

THE MOOD ON THE PICKET LINE

Having been battered in the mainstream press, harassed and bullied by management, workers seem to be slowly rebuilding their confidence and resolve.

Despite the hostile coverage, solidarity is coming in from all sides. One worker told *Solidarity*: "I was flying into Heathrow late last night [during the strike period] and the mood was terrible — everyone thought I was a scab!" A tubeworker at the local station commented: "It's good to see them standing up for themselves. I've been on the Tube 25 years and learnt that unless you take regular action, management walk all over you. We've got our own problems coming up. Expect we'll be all be out soon!"



Unite's leadership seem to have accepted principle of two-tier workforce

Pickets on Saturday 27 March were brought solidarity greetings from trade unionists in Iberia airlines and there are low-level murmurings about various bits and pieces of unofficial action taking place across the world against scab planes.

The high level of victimisation and bullying is no doubt part of their well-planned union-busting strategy. Many workers are facing disciplinarys for the most irrelevant misdemeanours.

Fifteen workers have been suspended for talking about BA on Facebook — some of these workers were suspended for simply receiving messages.

Striking workers have also been told they have lost their ID90s, which entitle them to 90% off travel with BA. Many workers on long-term sick have not been paid for strike days. Workers who are mid-flight or overseas when a strike begins have not been paid for their work on the way home.

Workers also have also been denied the right to real pickets — instead, the British Airport Authority has designated various bits of pavement around Heathrow where no more than 14 workers can gather and demonstrate.

Some of these actions are probably illegal. However, the response over the weekend suggests these attacks have only furthered workers' anger and resolve. "You can stick your ID90s up your arse!" has replaced "Willie, Willie, Willie, out, out, out!" as the favoured chant.

For the time being, the cabin crew are going back to work. The Unite leadership have said that there will be no more action until after the Easter holidays (14 April).

Cabin crew need to ensure that their negotiators do not negotiate away all their hard won terms and conditions or sell-out future workers. They need to assert what Marx called "the political economy of the working class" — the idea that capitalist profit is created in the long hours of the working-day, not in the board meetings of the idle rich.

If BA is suffering from the economic crisis, who should pay? The workers who have created multi-billion profits since 1987 or the shareholders and executives who pocketed the money?

Solidarity is strength! Rank-and-file — take control! Spread the action, link up the disputes!

WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION

Workers, the environment: one struggle

Workers' Climate Action have been busy trying to get environmental activists to the picket lines.

Climate Campers have been engaged in many years of conflict with Heathrow airport and often find themselves on opposing side to the workers in the industry. This dispute offers an opportunity to build links with workers in the industry.

Workers' Climate Action are trying to establish a new environmentalism based on class struggle and workers' control.

Carbon emissions are produced everyday in our workplaces — workplaces where we sell our time and follow orders. We believe that these workplaces need to be taken under democratic control, where working-class communities can decide how best to use the Earth's resources. Only by seizing democratic control of the environment can we hope to avert climate change and best contain its worst consequences.

Workers' Climate Action have been busy at the picket lines trying to engage workers with ideas of working-class environmentalism.

Basing ourselves in at Grow Heathrow

— a squatted community centre in Sipson where activists are mobilising resistance to the Third Runway — we have been offering our solidarity.

Many cabin crew had understood environmental issues. Many were furious that planes were being flown empty around the world to create space at the airport.

Another told *Solidarity* that a while ago cabin crew had been collecting all the foil tins and cans from in-flight meals into bags and donated them to charities for recycling. But BA had put an end to this practice because it was "BA property".

We need to run our workplaces in a democratic way and decide collectively what we produce and how we produce it.

This is a difficult conversation to have with workers in high emissions industries. But one rep seemed to be getting the idea: "Willie Walsh is viciously seeking profit wherever he can, especially through New Fleet and airport expansion, hopefully both; for this he needs break the union."

Workers' Climate Action will continue to mobilise environmentalists to support the strike.

CABIN CREW DISPUTE

“We’ve got to be ready to stand up again”

BY A BASSA CABIN CREW WORKER

There are conflicting figures about the impact of the strike. BA are claiming that most flights flew, but we reckon around two-thirds of workers were on strike.

That’s positive, but there’s still an awful lot of fear; we’re not like the dockers or the miners where you had a strong culture of trade union militancy.

Walsh used “wet leases” from other carriers such as EasyJet and Monarch to get some planes in the air, as well as running a few flights with volunteer crews. A lot of empty planes were moved around, too. That happens normally — smaller aircraft need to be moved to allow large planes to park — but BA can use those figures to claim there were more planes in the air. It’s also obviously very environmentally wasteful and damaging to move empty planes around like that.

Spirits amongst the workers are fairly high when people are together. At the strike centre in Bedfont near Heathrow, people were very upbeat and ready for anything.

But when we’re on our own things get harder. People have lost huge amounts of pay — a lot more than they should’ve done. One worker’s pay-slip said her basic pay was zero! That was obviously a mistake, but there have suddenly been lots of errors like that. People who weren’t at work because they’ve been sick for long periods of time have had pay deducted.

Management is now saying that each case will be looked at individually — so in other words our bosses are going to decide if we’re actually sick or not! One worker worked the first half of a “back to back” [two long-haul flights with brief stopovers worked over a six-day period] and not the second half, as that fell on strike days. They’ve been deducted pay for the whole thing, even the bit they did work.

Another worker was on a flight in

between the strike days and was taken very ill. When she landed she received an almost-immediate call from her manager saying that any time she missed would be dealt with as industrial action!

All the “accidental” errors on pay-slips seem rather deliberate. Lower-level managers are obviously under a lot of pressure from above; they might not necessarily agree with treating us in that way but they’re following their orders.

Everyone’s having their staff travel allowance docked, and Walsh is saying that it won’t be reinstated. A lot of workers live abroad and need their allowance in order to get to work in the first place. If they can’t afford to get to work, then that’s constructive dismissal as far as we’re concerned.

People were specifically recruited from abroad because of their language skills, and now Walsh is basically telling them they can’t come to work. The union has said any eventual deal must include reinstatement, but Walsh is adamant that he won’t budge. The level of sheer intimidation and victimisation makes it very clear that he wants to break the union; there are no two ways about it.

It’s true that a lot of the placards and material around the strike was a little apologetic, rather than taking the offensive and making ambitious demands. But that’s because we genuinely care about upsetting people. Our job is about compassion so it’s understandable that we might take that emphasis. People would really rather be doing their jobs and looking after customers than be out on strike, but we’ve got no choice.

Some of us from BASSA met with seven Labour MPs recently, including John McDonnell. They’ve said they’ll

take up cases of bullying. They were very receptive to us, but workers’ confidence in the Labour Party is extremely low. They’re absolutely outraged at Gordon Brown’s condemnation of the dispute. When he weighed in, over 300 workers rang our office to cancel their political levy.

Things don’t look like improving through negotiations. Talks will continue but I can’t see Walsh backing down. We have to be ready stand up again. This is a bigger fight than just us; if our bosses get away with these attacks on us, it’ll be a green light for other employers to do the same to their workers.

BRITAIN 2010: LIVING WAGE

Thousands of young people across the UK are currently engaged in vocational or apprenticeship schemes through their Further Education institutions, which see them balancing near full-time employment with their studies.

Apprenticeship schemes are not subject to the national minimum wage, so students on these schemes could be limited to the insultingly-low £30-a-week Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) as their only source of funding. And with the economy still in recession, there’s not even any realistic guarantee that their participation in such schemes will result in an actual job at the end of it.

And what is New Labour’s answer to this shocking state of affairs? Increase the minimum wage, perhaps? Abolish its youth rates which legalise age-discrimination in the workplace? At least enforce an across-the-board application of the minimum wage so bosses employing apprentices cannot exploit their labour for free? No; New Labour’s answer is to introduce a new tier of the NMW for apprentices at the princely sum of £2.50 per hour. It is a return to the model of Thatcher’s YTS schemes of the 1980s, that locked working-class youth into hyper-exploitative low-paid work.

Currently, the NMW has three tiers (£3.57 for workers under 18, £4.83 for 18-21 year olds and £5.80 for workers aged 22 and older). The apprentice rate would represent a further entrenchment of the institutionalised poverty pay that the discriminatory minimum wage has represented for so many workers. While even a discriminatory minimum wage is better than none at all, trade unions must fight for a real living wage, based on what all workers (regardless of age) actually need — not on what exploitative bosses say they can afford.

Gas workers strike against bullying

From back page

Gary Smith, GMB national secretary for the energy sector, spoke to *Solidarity* about the dispute.

Q: What are your demands in the strike?

We want an independent investigation into what’s going on — the company says that they do a survey on employee satisfaction, and we don’t agree that what it says is accurate.

There is an aggressive bullying management culture; constant pressure to do more work, encouraging engineers to constantly sell, and engineers have had their job times cut: effectively they have to work faster.

Standards have been compromised in

pursuit of profit. Such is the pressure on engineers that we are worried that health and safety might be compromised. It hasn’t been yet, because of the professionalism of the workforce. But if you put enough pressure on people, they will be tempted to cut corners.

Q: How did a collective, rather than an atomised, approach to tackling management bullying develop? Was there a natural move towards tackling it collectively, or did the union give leadership on the question?

The latter. The national trade union has been talking to the company for some time, we talked to the engineers about their experiences at work, to give the company evidence of what was going on. The company imposed a new

“performance management” regime last year, and they refused to negotiate that with us. So we gathered the troops and told members that if you want to do away with bullying culture, you’d better vote to strike. 62% turn out in a ballot with a very short turnaround. We balloted over three weeks, and with a workforce of over 8,000 people you’d expect that to take a month.

We think that the new “performance management” regime is part of a longer-term strategy to break and sideline the union over the coming years. They’ve talked about rolling out voluntary contracts of employment, stopped us talking to apprentices about joining the union, and they’ve been showing a more hostile attitude more generally.

SUSSEX UNIVERSITY

From a campaign to a movement

BY PATRICK ROLFE

The anti-cuts campaign as Sussex University has grown massively in the last few weeks. It has seen two occupations, numerous demonstrations, and the first signs of victory against the course cuts, service cuts, and 115 redundancies.

The last Thursday of term (March 18) saw a solid strike by academic staff, and the University and Colleges Union has promised more industrial action.

On March 3, around 80 students entered the offices of the Vice Chancellor and his executive group, asked staff to leave the building and chained the doors closed. Riot police with dogs were on the scene very soon, as the head of security locked himself in an office, claiming he'd been "taken hostage". The police used excessive force against the demonstration that had gathered outside management offices, arresting two students and snatching many from the crowd. The student occupiers left after five hours, vowing to continue the fight.

Just hours after the occupation, the university served an injunction on all students, forbidding "occupational protest". This injunction was sought on the basis of dubious evidence — its justification was the fake "hostage situation" created by the head of security and other senior members of staff. Making false statements to seek an injunction is perjury, and any members of management proved to have made false statements will surely have to resign.

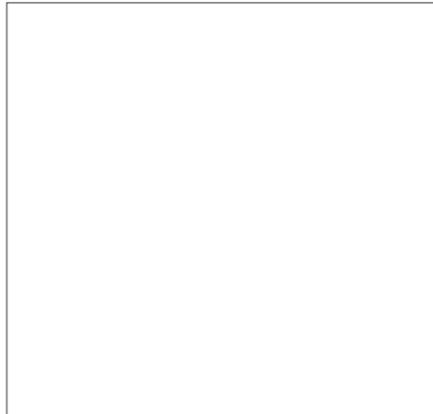
Two days later, six students were suspended for their involvement in the occupation on 3 March. The Vice Chancellor used his autocratic power under statute 4 of the university, which

allows him to suspend any student without giving reason and without initiating an open disciplinary hearing. Students and staff at Sussex immediately swung into action to defend the "Sussex 6", as they came to be known.

On Thursday 11 March, students occupied the largest lecture theatre on campus, demanding the reinstatement of the Sussex 6, and using the space for meetings, events, and daily "teach-ins", as well as music and poetry. They defied the court order forbidding occupations.

During the next week, 850 students packed into a students' union meeting (with hundreds more spilling out the doors), and voted for a motion of no confidence in the vice chancellor and senior management. University council voted against the student suspensions, and also voted down seven of the 115 redundancies proposed by management. On Thursday the 18th, the day of the UCU strike, management reinstated the Sussex 6, and a few days later, Paul Layzell, one of the bosses who planned the cuts, left Sussex to take up a place at Royal Holloway in London.

Management has begun to show weakness — students have been reinstated, they have been able to defy a court order with no repercussions, and one of the bosses has resigned — we are beginning to see small signs of victories yet to come. UCU members will strike again in the next few weeks, and UNITE members on campus may ballot as well. Students will continue to make it impossible for the bosses to manage the university. One Sussex student told *Solidarity*: "For a week, we controlled the space around the occupation, the Library Square, the lecture hall and the corridors. Management wouldn't dare show their faces around there."



Defending the occupation

March against college cuts

Perhaps as many as 1,000 demonstrators — staff, students and their supporters — marched against proposed college cuts in London on 20 March. The march was called by the London region of the lecturers' University and College Union (UCU).

This is a real sign that all the recent anti-cuts efforts and feats (student occupations and staff strikes at Sussex, Leeds, London Metropolitan, Tower Hamlets, etc) are inspiring, encouraging and giving teachers the confidence to mobilise.

Police had pleaded with demonstration organisers to stick to the pavements; luckily our numbers were huge, so this wasn't a possibility. We took to the roads for our march from King's College, on the Strand, to Downing Street.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts had a lively contingent on the march, as did the school teachers' union, the NUT.

Fight cuts in further education

Further Education (FE) colleges in England are facing a cut to adult education budgets of over £191 million

for the year 2010-2011. That's an average 16% budget cut per college, but in some institutions the figure is as high as 25%.

The employers have set the number of jobs under threat nationally at 7,000.

The FE sector, like the HE sector, is moving toward a business-focused, market-driven funding model that serves the needs of local employers at the expense of less vocational courses and adult learning.

Against these cuts, UCU lecturers' union members in 11 colleges in London will be balloting for strike action.

The ballots are to open in the week beginning 5 April.

Striking lecturers would be supported by the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, to which Lambeth Unison has now signed up.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEES AND CUTS (NCAFC)

NCAFC is playing a coordinating role for college anti-cuts campaigns. To get in touch, email againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com; join our Facebook group — The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts.

NEWCASTLE

Workers and students link up

BY ROWAN RHEINGANS
(NEWCASTLE FREE EDUCATION NETWORK)

Newcastle University's Free Education Network held a rally on 18 March to mark the day the government announced massive cuts across the public sector.

The rally was addressed by the rep from the Newcastle's University and College Union branch and a speaker from the civil service union PCS to make the links with attacks on public services. There were also student speakers from the newly formed Free Education Network (a group of students and staff at the university who are collectively opposed to tuition fees, course cuts and job losses on campus)

On 18 March, the Government announced cuts to higher education amounting to at least £1 billion over

three years or 14% of the annual spend. Universities across the country are feeling the burden of this already with job losses, department closures and even losses of whole campus sites. The Association of Colleges says current cuts put more than 7,000 jobs at risk nationally.

We believe Newcastle, like other universities across the country, will be announcing cuts following its cut in funding of 4.7% in real terms. Rumors about the closure of the philosophy department at Newcastle are made more worrying when University management are trying to push through changes to University statute 57, to make it quicker and easier to sack staff by removing their job security and academic freedom. The UCU completely opposes this move and sees it as groundwork for job losses. Students should see any attack on lecturers' job security as an attack on our education.

While university staff are losing their

jobs, more than 80 university heads now "earn" more than £200,000. Newcastle University's Vice Chancellor Chris Bank earned £280,000 last academic year! Before there is any talk of job losses on our campuses, senior management at all universities need to take a big pay cut.

But there is a fightback.

Victory following the threat of lecturers' strike action at Leeds, and the recent wave of student occupations against cuts show that there is a national fightback which is gaining strength and momentum.

Not far from Newcastle, staff at Northumberland College in Ashington will soon be balloting for strike action at plans to sack all teaching staff and reemploy some of them on lower pay. We will support them in this struggle. The Sussex occupations are inspiring and show that intimidation tactics do not work if students and staff are united — senior management's tactics only galvanized their campaign.

The Newcastle Free Education Network believes that Newcastle University, and all colleges, should be run in the interests of students and staff. Any attack on lecturers is an attack on students, and we need to fight these attacks together. We set up the Network to do that. We have made links with national campaigns and sent delegates to last month's National Convention against Fees and Cuts and will continue to help build this movement. More than this we will link up with other civil services and public sector workers who are fighting attacks on transport services, schools and hospitals.

As students and workers in the education and public sectors we are being forced to pay for an economic crisis that we did not cause. This is an attack on a national scale — we must fight back, united, on a national scale.

• Contact rowan.rheingans@ncl.ac.uk and check out the Facebook group "Newcastle Free Education Network".

THE TORIES' MODELS: CANADA AND SWEDEN

The shape of cuts to come

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Q. *The Tories promise an emergency cuts Budget within fifty days if they win the general election on 6 May. What will that include?*

A. The Tories aren't saying, but they look for models to the Moderate-led Swedish government of 1991-4, and the Liberal Canadian government of 1993-8.

Q. *What happened in Sweden?*

A. Prime minister Carl Bildt reduced welfare payments, introduced voucher schools, liberalised markets for telecommunications and energy, privatised health care, privatised the post office.

In the 1980s Sweden had a markedly lower unemployment rate than most capitalist countries. After the cuts, it had a higher unemployment rate than the USA (an average of 7.1%, 1990-7).

Q. *And Canada?*

A. The Liberal government of 1993-8 slashed public expenditure by a fifth. Some 23% of public servants (45,000 jobs) were made redundant. Business and agricultural subsidies were cut by 40%-60%. Military spending dropped 15%. The transport and science budgets were halved.

A report in the *New Statesman* from Toronto, after the cuts had been pushed through (24 June 2000), gives the picture: "Cardboard villages are being established in underpasses on the lakefront. With budget cuts eroding full-time jobs, nurses either work a series of part-time shifts or move to the United States to look for a secure post. Select medical services are ebbing away; for example, 200 of 1,700 severely disabled children in Ontario receive specialist care.

"Teachers coping with ever larger class

sizes now face the prospect of compulsory (and unpaid) after-hours supervision of children's activities..."

University fees were raised, and courses cut. The minimum wage was frozen for several years.

Q. *But New Labour will do the same as the Tories. It's inevitable either way.*

A. A Tory election victory means immediate cuts, and at a pace which will involve union-breaking unless the unions simply submit.

A New Labour victory should be a signal for the unions to fight to hold the Labour leaders to their promises about "front-line services".

And remember, behind the smooth-talkers like Cameron the Tories have people like Nick Walkley, chief executive of Barnet's Tory council, who has said: "My view is we can't waste this crisis".

Q. *Even the Tories have promised to maintain frontline spending on the health service. It may all be not so bad.*

A. There's a trick here. The cost of maintaining the same level of health service rises faster than general inflation, because the population is ageing and because new treatments keep people alive (expensively) when before they would have died (cheaply). So maintaining, or even increasing, "real" NHS spending will mean cuts in services.

To say that "frontline services" can be kept intact while overall public spending is axed is obviously a lie, anyway.

Q. *A lot of backroom costs could be cut.*

A. The Trident replacement (maybe £30 billion) could be cut. Military spending (total £37 billion a year) could be reduced. Spending on "business consultants" (about £3 billion a year); the vast

fare state.

Q. *It's different now, because then there were strict controls on currency exchanges. The government could stretch its credit — in pounds — with a smaller risk of a flight of capital, or of having to pay inflated interest rates. Today, governments operate in fast-moving global financial markets, which will punish them instantly — as they are now punishing the Greek government — if they run big deficits.*

A. Yes, any government immersed in global financial markets will make cuts. We want a workers' government that will take over high finance and link up with workers' governments and workers' movements in other countries rather than through the financial markets.

Q. *But any government short of that revolutionary assault on high finance will make cuts?*

A. Some. But the amount of cuts is not fixed in advance. Nor is whether the burden of deficit-reduction falls on the Trident replacement, on military spending, on fat-cat "consultants", on taxing the rich, or on health-care, schools, and welfare payments for the worst-off.

Working-class activists should refuse even to discuss supporting cuts in social provision until the Trident replacement has been axed, military spending has been cut, and taxes on the rich and business have been raised.

Q. *So what do we do?*

A. Stop a Tory victory on 6 May; get the unions mobilised now to demand Labour cuts military spending and taxes the rich, rather than chopping welfare payments, public services, and jobs.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/cuts

THE ROBIN HOOD TAX

Merry, but is it effective?

BY COLIN FOSTER

After a dizzy moment in November-December 2009 when Gordon Brown and then a European Union summit endorsed the idea, the "Tobin Tax" has disappeared from the discourse of governments.

But it is a long-circulated idea — first proposed nearly 40 years ago by the liberal US economist James Tobin — and is now gaining new momentum in the labour movement.

A website advocating it under a new name, Robin Hood Tax, has been backed by the TUC, GMB, NUT, PCS, and Unison, as well as many NGOs: <http://robinhoodtax.org.uk>.

It advocates a tax "as low as 0.005 per cent... average 0.05 per cent... on the billions of pounds sloshing round the global finance system every day through transactions such as foreign exchange,

derivatives trading and share deals...

"It can raise hundreds of billions of pounds every year. And while international agreement is best, it can start right now, right here in the UK.

"That can help stop cuts in crucial public services in the UK, and aid the fight against global poverty and climate change".

Tobin proposed the tax mainly as a device to "throw sand in the wheels" and drastically reduce the number of international financial transactions, a move which he thought would make capitalism less unstable.

Even on a reduced number of transactions, the tax would raise cash. The new campaign stresses the revenue-raising side of it.

As a "what if" exercise, exposing the squeals about the need to make "hard choices" to cut benefits while vast cash-stashes circulate unscathed amongst the wealthy, the Robin Hood Tax proposal is excellent. As a practical proposal to

focus our political campaigning, it has problems.

Agreement on such a tax between all the major centres — or potentially major centres — of financial dealing world-wide is unimaginable short of vast shifts in the balance of forces (and that is why Brown and the EU leaders felt safe about advocating it!)

If a national government imposes such a tax off its own bat, the main effect cannot but be to shift foreign-exchange dealing from that country to somewhere else.

The labour movement will get such a tax only when we are tough enough to overwhelm the great City financial interests who would fight to the death against the loss of London's gigantic foreign-exchange business, most of which would move off-shore in the event of a British Tobin tax.

When we are strong enough to wrestle the bankers to the floor, I trust we'll do more than say, "hand over 0.05%, then

you can get up and resume profit making with the other 99.95%".

When labour internationalism is strong enough to force financiers and their paid-for governments to their knees world-wide — as it would need to be to get a world Tobin tax — then the strength must be used for more drastic measures than a 0.05% tax.

The Tobin tax is both too "minimal" to be an ultimate goal and too "maximal" to be a good immediate stepping stone.

Moreover, if we reckon on a world Tobin tax on world finance, then we should not reckon on Britain getting a huge share and leaving the poorest countries with pennies.

The Robin Hood/Tobin proposal is misleading, because it gives the impression that misery, poverty and cuts can be mended just by sucking up a little of the soup off the plates of the rich (just 0.05%). In fact, we will need to dispossess the wealthy much more drastically.

GENERAL ELECTION

What is the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists?

We pose the questions in the form of a dialogue.

Q. What is the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists?

A. It is an attempt to maximise the socialist presence in the general election.

Q. How?

A. By running an election campaign wherever we have people, whether or not we have a socialist candidate.

Q. That sounds like a whimsical or “Irish” joke, an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

A. It is neither a joke nor an oxymoron, but an attempt to grapple with the contradictions.

Socialists are organisationally weak. There is no broader left coalition, even on the small scale of the Socialist Alliance of 2001, in which we can take part.

The scattering of “left” election candidates this time round is both weak in numbers and (with exceptions) weak politically, or simply worthless and unworthy of support. There is no chance of it even registering a minority vote sufficiently focused and coherent to become a worthwhile political fact.

Anyway, even if all “left” candidates were to win, the resultant bloc of MPs would not be numerous enough to form a government, still less a strong workers’ government, even in the most minimal sense of a government intent on carrying through reforms in the interests of the working class and mobilising extra-parliamentary working-class support for that purpose.

Faced with what the Tories are likely to do if they win the 6 May general election, the working class and labour movement desperately need a potentially government-forming presence in the general election.

Q. And so?

A. And so we run an election campaign on the basis of fighting within the unions and the working class to call the New Labour leaders to account, to pressure them, to replace them...

Q. For the sake of the argument, I will go along with you for now. Let me get it straight: an election campaign without candidates? But that is an impossibility. It is not an “election campaign” unless we support a candidate who is on the ballot! AWL does not have candidates, except one, Jill Mountford, in Camberwell and Peckham. So we advocate that voters spoil their ballot papers, or don’t vote — a sort of anarchist-abstentionist election campaign?

A. No. We urge people to vote.

Q. But we haven’t got candidates! And there are not enough “left” candidates, even leaving aside problems of the politics of the thin scattering of “left” candidates who are standing.

A. We advocate a Labour vote — everywhere, wherever there is not a socialist candidate we think worthy of support.

Q. A Labour vote? You mean a New Labour vote! Don’t falsify the picture of reality here.

A. Yes, a vote for the New Labour candidate. I have no intention of falsifying the realities we face.

Q. But this gets more and more absurd — Alice Through The Looking Glass stuff! We solve the difficulty that there is no adequate socialist presence in the general election, and therefore no possible socialist government, by backing the re-election of the New Labour gang — of the neo-Thatcherite government that has run Britain for the last 13 years! That we have spent 13 years criticising and denouncing! And even before 1997 we denounced the Labour right wing, and the soft left that let the right wing take over.

A. Exactly.

Q. But, just as an “election campaign” isn’t an elec-

tion campaign unless we have candidates (or campaign for abstention), an election campaign to promote a governmental alternative to the Tories is impossible — unless we have a governmental alternative to the Tories and to Tory-style policies! And we don’t. Plainly we don’t. So you want to pretend? You want to play the political equivalent of fantasy football? You want to make New Labour candidates “honorary” working-class or socialist candidates for the purposes of the general election?

A. No fantasy. We want to ground socialist politics more firmly in the reality we have to grapple with. The New Labour candidates will be backed in the general election, and heavily financed by, the trade unions — by the organised working class.

Q. But the New Labour government has been backed by the unions for 13 years! We’ve railed against that for 13 years. So you think that now, for the duration of the general election campaign, we should tacitly back New Labour politics? And after the election, go on backing neo-Thatcherite policies?

A. No, the opposite. Nobody said anything about socialists backing New Labour policies! That would indeed be absurd, a form of political suicide.

The purpose of SCSTF is to be more effective, to get more grip, in campaigning in the general election against New Labour policies. We tell the people whom we urge to vote Labour also to prepare to fight a new Brown government, and advocate the politics that will make that fight possible.

Q. But this gets more and more fantastic and self-contradictory!

A. The contradictions are in the reality which the working class, and therefore AWL and all working-class socialists, face. What seems to you to be nonsense, self-contradictory, oxymoronic, is in fact an attempt to make sense — to carve out a socialist line of action in the general election that deals with this contradictory reality.

Q. Explain, please!

A. What are the concrete realities which the labour movement and the working class face in the general election?

In a few weeks’ time the British people will elect a government to run the country during the worst economic crisis for many decades.

For the first time in many years, in the election, there are major differences of policy between the two main political parties, Labour and Tories — the parties one of which, alone or in coalition with the Lib-Dems, will run British society for the next four or five years.

Those differences are being played out in the debate about how soon, in how short a time, the national debt — massively increased by the cost of what the British government did to stop the banking system collapsing a year ago — should be reduced.

The difference between Tory and Labour timescales here implies a *big* difference in immediate social consequences. Definite big cuts within the next year are different from unspecified big cuts promised to the international financiers. A Tory government will attempt to smash up the public service unions to push through the intensive cuts they wish to make. It may even extend the anti-union laws, the Thatcher laws which the New Labour government has scandalously left untouched and unrepealed.

Q. But Labour is cutting, and will cut! It announced in last week’s Budget plans for cuts over the coming several years bigger than Thatcher’s in the 1980s.

A. Yes, indeed, but even so, the social consequence, for working-class people, of the difference in tempo is massive. A Tory government committed to, and with a fresh electoral mandate for, big immediate cuts is different from a New Labour government willing to placate the global financial markets longer-term.

Once in power, the Tories will behave as Tories — people who are tied directly to the capitalists and who

serve them without even the minimal restraint New Labour has because of its ties to the labour movement.

Q. So you mean we should back New Labour and New Labour cuts as a lesser evil?

A. Nothing of the sort. We should fight the New Labour public service cuts, and urge the labour movement to fight them, every inch, every pound and every penny of the way. We should demand that they cut military spending and place the weight of any cuts they say are “unavoidable” because of global conditions on the rich, by taxes.

Q. But your basic idea in the election is that we should support the lesser evil? I thought AWL rejected the idea that we should choose bourgeois lesser evils, and said instead that we should always establish a “Third Camp” position.

A. No, we do not advocate support for the Labour Party in the spirit of supporting the lesser evil. The basic reason for voting Labour is because of its ties with the trade unions, and thus the possibility of combining a Labour vote with leverage to get the organised working class to assert itself politically.

The “Third Camp” is a catchphrase meaning “independent working-class politics”. It means striving to make the organised working class an independent force in politics. To do that we have to start with the organised working class as it is, and connect with the immediate issues facing the organised working class as it is.

Q. In fact you want people to back working-class policies, the policies in the SCSTF platform — but not to express them politically by voting against New Labour?

A. In most constituencies, voting against New Labour means voting Tory, Lib-Dem, UKIP, BNP, or some sort of nationalist. Do you want that?

Q. Of course I don’t!

A. We want people to be able to commit themselves to socialist, class-struggle politics, without having to do what will not make sense to a lot of working-class people and to most labour movement activists — that is, abstain at the election.

Make no mistake about it, labour movement people know what the governmental options in the election are. And they care about the outcome. Elections concentrate people’s minds. The choices and the realities loom more starkly than at other times. In the election campaign proper there will be a polarisation.

Q. You are being anachronistic here. Much of the old working-class reflex loyalty to the Labour Party has been eroded. That is one of the stark realities we face. You are in denial, comrade!

A. No, I’m not! I know that one of the terrible things in this election is that many working-class people will vote fascist or UKIP, or abstain, because they feel betrayed by New Labour.

Even so, labour movement activists, not all of them but most of them, will vote Labour and advocate a Labour vote. The SCSTF is an opportunity to advocate socialist politics — against a new Brown government, too — within such labour movement loyalties and gritted-teeth opting for the Labour Party.

It is a way to advocate those socialist politics without the encumbrance that the politics are presented as part of a package that includes — no, whose centrepiece is — either a token vote for nondescript socialistic candidates, or abstention.

Most labour movement activists know what the alternatives in the election are. Socialists should not, faced with the Tories now, repeat the idiocies of many of the left in the 1979 general election, when most of them were blissfully unaware of the threat which the Thatcherites posed to the labour movement. On behalf of the SWP — then a far more serious organisation than its descendant is today, after a decade of alliance with Islamic clerical fascists — Duncan Hallas said



We need a policy for the labour movement as a whole in the general election: vote Labour and prepare to fight

that they were “not getting excited about the election” and had plenty of other activities to keep their members busy.

Q. What you are saying would rule out socialist candidates in any election. You claim that the best way to ease the acceptance of class-struggle politics, in any likely election, would be to uncouple those politics from any difficult choice as to how to vote in the election. That reduces the role of socialists to making passive propaganda. It rules out organisational initiative.

A. It depends. In principle we are always in favour of socialist candidates standing — if we can do it properly, that is, do it so effectively that it has real political meaning. We will run the most effective candidacy we can against Harriet Harman in the Peckham and Camberwell constituency. The effect on the overall outcome of the general election would not necessarily be our main concern. We are advocates of socialism, not, to use Trotsky’s words, “the inspectors-general of history”.

Q. “It depends” — on what?

A. It is a question of concrete assessment. Will standing candidates augment the effective forces of socialism, or won’t it?

As Lenin never tired of repeating, the truth is always concrete. In May 2010, most of the nominally socialist candidates in the general election are candidates of small sectarian groups — the SWP, the Communist Party of Britain [CPB], the SP — whose central purpose is to build support for those groups.

The AWL has a candidate in Camberwell and Peckham. We will support other socialist candidates if they are worthy of support.

By no stretch of the imagination is the thin and scattered range of socialist candidates an alternative to New Labour and to the unions (most of the unions) which back it. It is surely not an alternative to the Tories or a Tory-Labour coalition.

And as socialist propaganda candidates per se, most of those candidates are not remotely adequate. In some respects — and this needs to be said and understood — the politics they advocate are reactionary even compared to Brown and New Labour.

Q. The SWP and the SP, and four or so candidates from outside their immediate orbits, are standing as a coalition. That should be supported as a move for left unity.

A. We are, in general, in favour of left unity. But the “Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition” is not left unity: it is a half-hearted electoral bloc, not much more

than people huddling together for the animal warmth! The SP tried to get a new coalition with the CPB, to follow up their No2EU alliance for the June 2009 Euro-election; drafted a platform combining SP and CPB wording, but then saw the CPB walk out and the new “coalition” reduced to the SP alone.

The SWP then made a temporary arrangement-of-convenience to run its few election candidates under the TUSC banner.

TUSC has no life as a movement, and is unlikely to continue after the election except perhaps as a signboard kept in reserve by the SP.

Even if TUSC were a sort of “left unity”, it would be a unity pointedly excluding the AWL. How could we build on that?

Our sort of left unity would be based on open democratic structures and a critical debate about socialist ideas.

Q. Whatever criticisms one makes of them, the SWP and SP are a left, socialist, bloc, a left pole of attraction against New Labour. We should focus on supporting them.

A. Are they? Think about that. They are would-be socialists. Of course. But much of their politics are inadequate, wrong, or plain reactionary, and we denounce those politics. Then they are magicked into being a roughly adequate left pole of attraction against New Labour — just by standing in an election? Really?

There is more than a touch of what Marxists have long called “parliamentary cretinism”, or “electoral cretinism”, in such a view, don’t you think? “Electoral cretinism”, combined with making a fetish of electoral opposition to New Labour, on no matter what vaguely leftist basis.

Q. You say some of their politics are reactionary even compared to Brown! Come on! You are the sectarian here. They are socialists!

A. Again, the truth is always concrete. Socialists, or even remotely adequate working-class advocates, are defined by their politics and by what they do, not by how they label themselves, or by their headline slogans at the moment of the election.

The CPB’s daily paper, the *Morning Star* — continuation of the long-ago Stalinist *Daily Worker* — supports the Stalino-Thatcherite government of China, for god’s sake!

The SWP has spent the last decade as an advocate and sometime practitioner of alliances with Islamic clerical fascists. To the white-working-class chauvinism of the BNP it has counterposed not working-class unity — not a call for workers, black and white, of all religions and none, British-born and migrant, to unite

and fight — but the inverted chauvinism of vicarious Islamic communalism (“the best fighters for Muslims”).

The Socialist Party is the rump of the old Militant organisation (in private, the Revolutionary Socialist League), which in the 1980s led the Liverpool labour movement into fiasco and political collapse after choosing to do a deal with the Tory government rather than bring that labour movement into battle alongside the miners during their 1984-5 strike.

In the Euro-election nine months ago, they campaigned under the slogan “No2EU” with a platform condemning “the so-called freedom of movement of labour” within the EU.

The SP does not even call for a fallback Labour vote in that big majority of constituencies where it and its allies are not standing.

Q. But... they are “reactionary” even compared to Brown? Come on!

A. The Blair-Brown government has accommodated to the power of China. But it has not, like the *Morning Star*, advocated working-class support for the Beijing government that pinions the working class in an iron dictatorship for super-exploitation by capitalists.

One of the crimes of the New Labour government has been to encourage and expand “faith” schools, including Islamic faith schools. That is a damn sight less than the SWP’s militant alliance with Islamic clerical fascists.

The CPB — and the Socialist Party, and the SWP, though these days implicitly and not boldly — advocate the breaking up of the European Union and Europe’s return to the system of walled-off nation states that led to two world wars in the 20th century. (See www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=10974).

Q. No, they don’t! The SWP and the SP advocate the Socialist United States of Europe!

A. Yes, they do! The Socialist United States of Europe is not an immediate alternative to the EU. For that to be the case, we would have to have built adequate revolutionary socialist mass parties throughout Europe, able to carry through a socialist revolution.

The alternative to the EU now and in the assayable future is reversion to the old walled-off nation states, not the Socialist United States of Europe.

In the agitation of the SWP and the SP, the “Socialist United States of Europe” functions only as deceptive camouflage for the poisonous nationalist at the core of anti-EU campaigning. In real politics, the anti-EU “left” boosts and rationalises the worse nationalism.

Right now the anti-EU message has again, as it had in the 1960s and 70s, a subtext of hostility to immigrants. The SWP and SP don’t want that subtext? Indeed not. Nonetheless, that is what their anti-EU nonsense feeds.

Q. Opposition to the EU is not central to their electioneering!

A. No, not for now. But it is only nine months since the SP and CPB campaigned in the Euro-election under the banner “No2EU”, and they have not renounced or disavowed that.

The point of any election campaign for the CPB, the SP, and the SWP is to recruit people to their organisations. It is to nourish and amplify what they can do after the election — based on the policies which they have in the months and years before the election.

And, meeting up with BNP or UKIP sympathisers in their election campaigning, what will the activists of the SWP and the SP say? They will say what their organisations have taught them: “No to EU”.

Is that the way to fight British chauvinism, and oppose the hostility to immigrants which today is heavily focused on East European immigrants able to come here because of EU integration? No, it is now, as it was in the 1970s, a way to duck the burning issues.

But let me continue enumerating the dominant facts of the reality which the working class — and socialists who base themselves on the working class — face in the general election.

The labour movement — or the core of it, the main unions which are politically active — is backing and financing the Labour Party in the election. Even the RMT, expelled from the Labour Party in 2004, and the FBU, which disaffiliated, are focusing their efforts on support for those Labour MPs who back them in Parliament.

There is no credible working-class or socialist electoral alternative to the Labour Party. The Labour Party, linked to the unions, is, despite the terrible policies of

Continued on page 14

Their democracy and ours

WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

By CLARKE BENITEZ



"The energies of a mighty kingdom have been wasted in building up the power of selfish

and ignorant men, and its resources squandered for their aggrandisement. The good of a party has been advanced to the sacrifice of the good of the nation; the few have governed for the interest of the few, while the interest of the many has been neglected, or insolently and tyrannously trampled upon."

From the text of the first Chartist mass petition to Parliament.

Elections, according to Karl Marx's famous adage, give workers the chance to vote every five years or so for which member of the ruling-class will misrepresent them.

While it would be puerile to dismiss the opportunities presented to revolutionaries by even a limited capitalist democracy like Britain's, it would be equally foolish to pretend that it is anything other than a hollow shell of a democracy; a pluto-democracy, run by the rich and in their interests.

When the Chartists, the world's first mass workers' movement, fought for the vote, they did not simply fight for the right to express infrequent, passive, atomised support for individual candidates of a party someone else controls. They fought for the vote as an active process of political self-assertion through which the social majority — the working class — could exercise control over the people who were responsible for the political administration of society.

The original Charter (the document from which the Chartist movement takes its name) included the demand for annual parliaments — a demand which is as pressing today, with our four or five-yearly parliaments, as it was in the mid-19th century.

A labour movement that aspired to democratic working-class rule — a workers' government — would place radical democratic demands front-and-centre. Against the backdrop of mass distrust and disillusionment in professional politicians, it is hard to imagine such demands failing to gain a significant hearing amongst ordinary people.

Such demands would include annual parliaments, the right of immediate recall of all elected representatives, and that elected representatives must only take an average worker's wage.

In a climate where becoming an MP is a lucrative career choice (with a high wage, plentiful expenses and, if you're Patricia Hewitt, Geoff Hoon or Stephen Byers, plenty of lobbyists' money too), the workers' movement must demand that elected representatives are just that — representatives, meaningfully connected and responsive to the struggles of those who elected them — and not a caste of highly-paid self-serving operators cut off from the realities of day-to-day life.

Ultimately, we should aspire to something much more democratic than even an improved version of parliamentary democracy. A real workers' government would be based on direct workplace and community democracy, with workers' councils — responsible for the administration of their workplaces or localities — coming together to form a national body responsible for democratic central planning.

Participating in the life of workers' councils and voting for delegates to them would not be an atomised process in which workers outsource the business of running their workplace or community to a layer of professional political administrators; it would be an organic process of involvement in democratically-elected bodies with direct control over the running of society.

The gulf between that model of democracy and the one currently offered by the British capitalist state is so unimaginably wide as to practically defy expression. But it is through fighting for the maximum possible democracy within the existing system (for annual parliaments, for MPs on workers' wages, for the right of recall and other demands), through pushing capitalist democracy to its absolute limits, that the working class can develop the confidence to supersede capitalist parliamentary democracy and fight for a system of direct working-class democracy — a workers' government.

The left and the movement in the

How should the working-class left respond to the general election and the cuts that are likely to follow, whichever party wins? *Solidarity* spoke to a range of activists (all in a personal capacity) from across the left. We will continue the discussion in future issues.

MAKE THE UNIONS ASSERT THEMSELVES!

Maria Exall is a vice-chair of the Labour Representation Committee, and a member of the national executive of the Communication Workers' Union and of the TUC General Council.

The Hewitt-Hoon-Byers affair is an index of the fact that New Labour — or, at least, that part of New Labour — is not rooted in a commitment to the working class.

Even now, people like Hewitt, Hoon, and Byers are an extreme right wing in the Labour Party. The Blairites always were the right-wing avant-garde. But the unions and the Labour Party members let those people lead the Labour Party — while not agreeing with them — because they thought it was necessary.

And even now, the main people in contention to replace Gordon Brown in the Labour leadership are people from that same political mould, even though the party members want a change of direction.

We have to remember what Peter Mandelson said in 1998: "We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich." That was before the economic crisis. He's not talking like that now. But that is what he thinks.

We need a move towards the centre of gravity in the Labour Party, towards what the unions and the Labour Party members want. How do we get that? By the unions asserting themselves politically, and working with constituency activists.

And the Labour Representation Committee should do more focused work in the Labour Party.

Some say there is no sign of the unions moving to assert themselves politically, and that is a dead end. In my view there is no alternative. There is no alternative to developing mass working-class organisations which have their own political agenda. In the final analysis, the unions remain democratic organisations which are subject to pressure from below.

We need more political trade unionism. Even though we've seen a new generation of trade union leaders who are more political, or more left-leaning, a breakthrough is yet to be made on that front.

Now, if the Tories get in, they will attack the right of the unions to have a political voice. They will try to force changes in the rules governing union political funds.

What should the unions do now? All the affiliated union leaders will be consulted on the Labour manifesto for the general election. They should stand up for what their members want, on issues like an end to privatisation.

After the election, the unions need to take up issues about restoring democracy in the Labour Party. Straight after the election, everyone on the left, and even in the middle, of the Labour Party has got to make a stand for democracy.

At last year's Labour Party conference we were offered a comprehensive review, this year, of the party structures introduced in 1997 ("Partnership in Power"). So far there is dead silence about that.

The fundamental demand has to be for a proper Labour Party conference, with motions debated, and the right to amend reports from the National Policy Forum.

We should also insist on respect for local party structures.

In my view, it's not just about the structures. Unions have to be politically mobilised to use the union-Labour link. If unions get policies through Labour Party conference, their leaders have to be pressed to stand up and say: "That's our policy, we have to enforce it" — not tacitly allow the Labour Party leaders to ignore the conference decisions.

Things are at a low ebb in the Labour Party, but a lot of

people want things to change. There is potential for change, I think.

TORY WIN WOULD BE A DISASTER FOR SCHOOLS

Patrick Murphy is a member of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and of the national executive of the National Union of Teachers.

ATory victory at the next election would be a disaster for teachers and schools. Their headline policy is a promise to make as many schools as possible into Academies run by external sponsors.

They say will cut away the bureaucracy and make it much easier and quicker for schools to change their status in this way. They have also been explicit about their willingness to see sponsors of schools make a profit. One of the things that has held big business back from getting involved in the academies programme is that they aren't allowed to make profits. Under a Tory government the privatisation of schools will be explicit and will affect the core of the education service.

Obviously, Labour since 1997 have paved the way for all this, not least by feeding the myth that comprehensive education has failed. But there is a major difference.

The biggest rebellion in the last Parliament was a Labour backbench rebellion backed by education unions and campaign groups against the Education Bill which introduced so-called trust schools. The rebellion didn't defeat the bill but it forced the government to make such major changes that trust schools, for example, have to follow national terms and conditions and pay rates for teachers. That rebellion grew and could have an effect because there was a commitment to comprehensive education and workers' rights in the labour movement which could find a resonance even in today's Labour Party.

A Tory government will be subject to no such pressure or inhibition. It will be privatisation red in tooth and claw. Teachers and working class parents and pupils have every reason to want to avoid a Tory victory in the 2010 election.

BACK TUSC TO BUILD A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

Brian Caton is the general secretary of the Prison Officers' Association (POA) and a member of the Socialist Party.

I handed back my Labour Party membership card recently after 40 years in the party. I'm a proud member of the Socialist Party and I support the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). TUSC isn't going to make a big impact in this election but it offers people an immediate alternative.

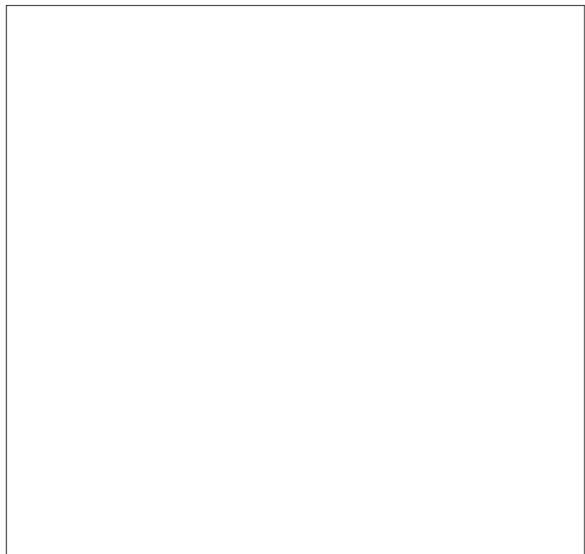
I think we all expected a hell of a lot more from a Labour government. Even the positive things they have done could've and should've been done much quicker. They've gone back on so many commitments; we were given a promise by the Labour Party when they were in opposition that they would end prison privatisation if they got into government. But they've actually privatised more prisons than the Tories.

The Labour Party used to hand out gold roses for people who recruited lots of members to the party; I won three of them. I persuaded people from my industry to join the Labour Party, people who started off with very right-wing ideas. I persuaded them of the case for socialism and convinced them to join the Labour Party. I'm embarrassed by that now.

There's no doubt that any of the three main parties will

about general election

Probe links between New Labour and big business



BY JOHN McDONNELL MP

After the Byers-Hoon-Hewitt affair, there should be a wider investigation into the links between Labour ministers and big business.

I have seen evidence again and again of a revolving-door relation between the aviation industry, for example, and government, both in Number Ten and the Department of Transport.

Positions in Number Ten and the Department of Transport are populated by people who either come from the aviation industry, or are on their way to jobs in the industry.

An unhealthy relation between Labour front-benchers, and their top advisers and officials, and big business, started in opposition. In the 1990s the policy networks at the top of the Labour Party became populated in the 1990s — after John Smith's death, virtually taken over — by representatives of the City, the major auditing and accountancy firms, and major private-sector consultancies.

They groomed the Labour Party in opposition to implement the policies that big business required when it went into government.

So this is about more than a few individuals at fault. It's about a systemic taking-over and infiltration of New Labour by big business in order to influence policy and control the government.

Last year's Labour Party conference promised the party a complete review, this year, of the party structure installed by "Partnership in Power", in 1997.

Our argument has always been that we want to redemocratised the Labour Party so that members and affiliates can have an influence on policy-making and on the selection not just of candidates for parliament and councils but also of the full-time officials of the party itself.

The "Partnership in Power" process has undermined the rights of members, destroyed the viability of Constituency Labour Parties as democratic institutions, and made the Labour Party conference little more than a public relations exercise where front-benchers and the party leader can arrive to rapturous applause, without any democratic decision-making.

We need reform to reintroduce democracy into the Labour Party at every level — constituency, regional, and national. Labour Party conference must be restored as a democratic institution able to take effective political decisions

cut public services and wreck the welfare state. I remember what my father and grandfather fought for and believed in terms of a civil society, and it's not just being picked at, it's being torn to pieces.

The Tories will, of course, be no better, and the Liberals have certainly never been a friend to workers. David Cameron was Michael Howard's advisor when we were taken to court in 1993 and had our rights taken off us. Cameron was an architect of attempts to smash trade unions. That's his political nature. I think Cameron could be worse than Thatcher. His current cabinet is probably just a front; if he gets in he'll fill the front bench with people from the hard-right of his party. I find their views on issues like immigration almost as abhorrent as the BNP.

We owe it to future generations to stand up against these cuts and attacks, but we owe it to previous generations too. People didn't lay down their lives in two world wars and in conflicts like the Spanish civil war to see this happen to their country.

The left needs to get our act together. We agree on 80% of issues, so we need to set aside the 20% we disagree on and stop bickering. I want to see a new alliance of socialists to help make socialism a genuine force in British politics again. I think young people and students also need to mobilise again. In the past they've been able to catalyse significant social upheavals but students' unions seem to be absent from big struggles around public services. A new movement from the left could reassert basic socialist ideas around public ownership and taxing the rich. We should be taxing the bankers, not banking the taxes! We're never going to smash financial markets altogether but we can restrict and regulate them.

If Labour loses, that could shake things up. It could be an opportunity for us. I think the party has gone too far to be retrieved. Corbyn and McDonnell are good people

but I think the party's heading for defeat. In constituencies where there's no TUSC candidate standing, I don't have definitive answers but I have been impressed with some of what I've seen from the Green Party. We need to keep the Tories out, and if that means voting Labour in some places then people should vote Labour. But we need to hold Labour MPs to account and make sure they're genuine representatives. The key fault line is whether they believe in the failed capitalist profiteering approach to running public services or whether they believe that our schools, hospitals and prisons should be publicly-owned.

A Tory victory in this election would mean big battles for us as a union. Put bluntly, you'd almost certainly see prison officers driven to more unlawful industrial action. We don't want to just fight around levels of redundancy pay — we'll fight job losses and job losses altogether.

The POA is not politically affiliated, and I think other unions like Unite need to break with the Labour Party. The RMT were kicked out of the Labour Party for backing candidates in elections who were prepared to stand up for the union's policies and principles; they were right to back those candidates. I want to see unions backing candidates who'll stand up and fight for trade union policies and principles; I think POA members would vote for those candidates. In the upcoming general elections, that means TUSC.

BEATS, RHYMES AND PICKET LINES

AWL fundraiser at the Cross Kings, York Way nr King's Cross, 7.30pm, Saturday 3 April. £6 (£4 concessions). With the Ruby Kid, and more.

Talking socialism on the doorsteps

Solidarity spoke to three people who have recently been out canvassing for Workers' Liberty's socialist election campaign in Camberwell and Peckham.

JILL MOUNTFORD IS OUR ELECTION CANDIDATE:

"Two things have made an impression on me. One is the issue of low pay. On our leaflets we've put forward the idea that MPs should only take a skilled worker's wage — 'about £30,000 a year'. The thing is, that sounds like a massive amount to a lot of people. Many of those we've canvassed work in the black economy and don't even get the minimum wage — they're on £5 an hour or even less. When we say £8.80 with no exceptions that sounds like a fortune.

"The other thing is the kind of people who've been keen to talk and buy papers. It's mostly women, and often young women with children. Last week, I knocked on the door of a house full of Indian women, an inter-generational gathering having lunch. They were running around to find money for the paper and the person who was keenest was a young woman in her 20s. She said that most of her friends and relatives wouldn't think of voting, but she'd had our leaflet and the idea of a workers' voice had made a real impression on her. It had had some resonance."

JADE BAKER IS A STUDENT AT WESTMINSTER UNIVERSITY:

"I'd never been canvassing before. It was a really good experience — the reception was much more welcoming than I thought it would be. Most people aren't happy with what Harriet Harman's done; flats are run down, people haven't had heating for a couple of months, schools are being privatised.... A lot of the people we spoke to were hospital workers, who are obviously very angry about cuts.

"In the middle pages of the paper we had an image of Harriet Harman with her stab vest on, which was a good way to get into conversations! People responded to the fact that she's not comfortable in the constituency she's supposed to represent.

"The main thing we need to do is get more people out there — we'll get more done and it will be a better experience. The key thing is talking to everyone we can. Giving out leaflets is a first step, but actually talking to people, selling them papers, making people think is what we need. It also develops and improves your arguments as a socialist. It's a two-way street."

WILL LODGE IS A STUDENT AT HARLOW COLLEGE:

"This was my first time canvassing. I've done leafletting and basic activity like that, so I was prepared for rejection, and for people not wanting to talk to us. Also, canvassing is pretty daunting, because you're knocking on the doors of complete strangers.

"There was some rejection, but when you get people who want to talk and engage with your ideas it's really uplifting. Even if you don't win a vote you can get people to take your ideas on board. One guy told me he was 90 percent sure he'd vote Lib Dem, but he still had a chat and bought a paper.

"If you're nervous about canvassing, that's understandable. But it's a positive experience and essential for getting socialist ideas across."

There are only five weeks to go till the election! Please get in touch and help us in any way you can.

www.workersliberty.org/election2010
Facebook: Support our socialist candidate in Camberwell and Peckham
jill@workersliberty.org
07796 690 874

From page 11

the New Labour government, the main representation of the labour movement in the general election.

Q. Generalities! Much has changed since Blair took the Labour leadership in 1994.

A. Yes, indeed, yes! The old Labour Party has been gutted by the New Labour gang of Blair and Brown, its democratic structures closed down. That is of tremendous importance.

It means, among other things, that the scope and sense of socialist activity within the local Labour Parties is very small or non-existent.

Nevertheless, the Labour/ union ties remain, although modified considerably. The unions — for practical purposes, unfortunately, that means the union leaders — can still exert great influence, in some ways even controlling influence, within the Labour Party, if they choose to. We advocate, now as in the past, that they should exert that influence to impose union policies against the Blair-Brown gang.

The stupid “trade-unionist-hunt” campaign in the Tory press, focused on alleged union attempts to control selection of Labour parliamentary candidates and so on, does indicate a truth: that the unions retain great weight, or potential weight, in the Labour Party structures.

The tragedy of New Labour is in large part not a matter of the labour movement being helpless in face of the Labour Party, but of the political acquiescence of the trade union leaders.

Q. You want to turn your face to the tired old Labour loyalists in the rump Labour Party branches, rather than to radical-minded trade unionists and young people disgusted with New Labour.

A. No. Here too you are missing the point. Our chief aim is to talk to those trade unionists and young people who are disgusted with New Labour, but also know the Tories for what they are, and do not want to be cornered into abstention in the general election. We want to offer them a way to move from passive disgust into active organising.

Nevertheless, though it should not for a moment be exaggerated, there are still in the Labour Party, even in the Parliamentary Labour Party, people whose gut instincts, if not their politics, in relation to the labour movement and the working class, are radically different from the dominant gut instincts of the Tories. We should rely on that, or on them, not at all, but they are there, and can be a factor in the period ahead, if socialists organise adequately.

And a fundamental fact of the situation for working-class socialists is that in the 13 years of neo-Thatcherite New Labour government, no remotely adequate or plausible left alternative to New Labour of any size — electorally, or in any other field — has been created. The SWP’s defection to an alliance with George Galloway and Islamic clerical fascism killed the Socialist Alliance of 2000-2 and whatever potential it might have developed. The electioneering now of the SWP cannot be separated from that record.

Q. Are you finished?

A. For now!

BRITAIN 2010: HOUSE OF LORDS

With the Labour Party set to announce its commitment to a fully-elected second chamber, Lord Peter Mandelson is up in arms at what he undoubtedly sees as a threat to his future career in politics. He has said he wants to delay any firm commitments until after the party’s manifesto is published — which raises something of a question mark over what the point of a manifesto is, if not to make firm commitments.

The proposals seek to replace the 746 peers (a mixture of government-created peers, hereditary peers and bishops) with elected US-style senators who could serve for fixed terms of up to fifteen years. The new system would, in other words, be a marginally less profoundly undemocratic mess than the existing structure.

The labour movement should fight for the complete abolition of the House of Lords and for some real democratic reform — a single-chamber, annually-elected parliament with the right of immediate recall of all representatives.

Q. You are glossing up every residual possibility within New Labour, and pessimistically talking down the prospects for a socialist alternative to New Labour.

A. I am being neither pessimistic nor optimistic. I am describing the reality and advocating a socialist response to it. We have to start from reality. The rest is fantasy, delusion, wishful thinking.

Fantasy politics is, inescapably, passive politics. You manipulated images and concepts in your head instead of actively working to change reality. To change reality you have to face it, define it, and seek the possibilities, however limited, for action within it.

The idea that the AWL is small, and unable to push the SWP and the SP into even a small beginning like the Socialist Alliance of 2000-1, but by good fortune they have — without us and against us — now constructed an electoral pole on which an adequate socialist and working-class political alternative to New Labour can be built... that would be the worst form of passive fantasy, wishful thinking, “make-believe” politics.

Nothing could be more debilitating to the work of building an adequate socialist and working-class alternative to the Brown gang than to pretend that the would-be socialist organisations whom we have to spend much time combatting, criticising, and denouncing are transmuted into something else, and rendered roughly adequate, by the fact of standing against New Labour in a few constituencies.

Q. You are defeatist about the possibilities of changing the SWP/ SP left.

A. No, neither defeatist nor victory-is-around-the-corner-ist, but facing up to the real situation we are in. Here you are substituting kiddy-town cod psychology for politics!

There could be no greater form of real defeatism now than passive acceptance of victory for the Tories, who may form a militantly class-struggle government against the working class like Thatcher’s. Indifference to the character of the next government is a variant of defeatism.

Q. But what if Labour wins the election? The Brown gang will make cuts in public services, too. Won’t SCSTF inescapably soften opposition to those cuts?

A. The opposite, in fact! The SCSTF formulates and argues for a specific set of political positions, and tries to group working-class and labour movement people around them and around commitment to fight for them against either Cameron or Brown, whichever of them wins the General Election.

It is an active election campaign against Tories and fascists, for a Labour vote — and for socialist policies and against cuts. It does, without candidates, what a socialist campaign with candidates in many constituencies would do — propagate working-class policies and try to organise people around them, whoever wins the general election.

Q. Just propaganda?

A. With small forces, anything we do is “just propaganda”. If we were to pretend to ourselves and tell others that the would-be socialist candidates are a worthwhile pole of attraction against the New Labour, that too would be propaganda — fatuous propaganda, awash with wishful thinking.

But there is no absolute gap between propaganda and agitation here. We also, in the election campaign, agitate for immediate working-class concerns, against both the present and any future Brown government.

Think of the alternative to an SCSTF approach: advocate abstention, like the SP, or flaccidly advocate a fallback Labour vote, like the SWP. We say: back Brown, and fight him, and prepare to fight him if he wins.

We use the heightened interest in politics which a general election creates to advocate specific policies — a roughly adequate class-struggle platform — against both Cameron and a new Brown government.

Even without SCSTF, AWL would advocate a Labour vote where there were no adequate socialist candidates. It is a hundred times better to do that in the SCSTF way than in the passive SWP way.

Q. It all seems terribly self-contradictory to me.

A. The reality is complex and contradictory: a Tory threat when the only governmental alternative is New Labour. The SCSTF cuts a line of working-class socialist action in the general election through that contradictions.

The more people we reach with our propaganda and agitation, the better and bigger the organised opposition to a new Brown government.

Q. But isn’t a turn to SCSTF politically a right turn for AWL?

A. Not at all. Our politics do not change. What we advocate is what we have been advocating. We criticise Brown and the New Labour neo-Thatcherites no less than we have been doing for many years. Unlike the SWP we won’t just say, passively, vote Labour in most constituencies.

It is not a right turn or a left turn. It is a turn towards the labour movement and the trade-union rank and file.

Q. How can backing New Labour in the general election be anything but a right turn?

A. Our politics do not change. What we say about New Labour and Blair and Brown is not going to change. Our support for Brown in the election is, to adapt an old expression, the sort of support which the rope gives to the hanged man.

Q. Much of the discussion in *Solidarity* in the last months has been about what would happen in the event of a Labour defeat, which seemed certain. Now, to go by the polls, it is not certain at all.

A. No, it isn’t certain any more. Labour may win the general election. Obviously that has massive implications for what happens in the Labour Party and between the unions and the Labour Party. It has no implications for the SCSTF. We support an election campaign based on agitation and propaganda that is equally pointed whoever wins the general election.

Q. We’ll see.

A. One last word: the precedent for the SCSTF is the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory which a bloc of socialists mounted in the 1979 general election as a response to a broadly similar situation to the one we face now — threatening Tories and an outgoing Labour government to which we were very hostile.

As far as one can judge, the scope for the SCSTF is much less than there was for the SCLV. At that time there was a mass Labour Party and lively rank-and-file Labour, and Labour Party conference, opposition to the outgoing Labour government. We tapped into that.

Recognising the differences and what they might mean, socialists can nevertheless support an SCSTF election activity that will be more, perhaps a great deal more, than AWL could otherwise do.

Much depends on rousing AWL and other socialists to energetic action in the next few weeks, and on AWL’s ability to reach out to labour movement people, in the first place trade unionists perplexed by the dilemma posed to them by the New Labour and Tory alternatives on offer in the May election.

Q. What do you propose, practically?

A. Draw up lists of people to approach to endorse the basic statement of SCSTF. Those lists may include Labour Party people if they can be reached, but in no sense should they be limited to Labour Party people.

Go to trade unionists, Trades Council members, single-issue campaign activists, environmentalists, and even members and supporters of the SWP and SP, and ask them to sign the statement.

Argue with them. Explain what we are trying to do. Tell them about the SCLV precedent. Impress on them the need to prepare now to fight on class-struggle politics — SCSTF politics — whoever wins the general election.

Approach individual labour movement activists, and ask them to help actively in the election campaign.

In each area, organise some kind of gathering of SCSTF supporters to plan election work.

Go on the streets and organise an election campaign. Run stalls. Talk to people, given them leaflets. Use a loudhailer. Act exactly as if SCSTF had its own candidate, especially in arguing for SCSTF political positions. Tell people: vote Labour and prepare to fight.

Get unions or campaigns to organise hustings for the election candidates, and intervene as SCSTF.

Go to other election campaign meetings — TUSC meetings, for example — and explain what SCSTF is.

Write on as many blogs and e-lists as you can about the SCSTF.

Set up an SCSTF meeting in your area for after 6 May, and start advertising it now. That meeting will bring together the activists and the contacts from the campaign, and plan for the fight back necessary against the new government.

Get in touch: <http://stopthetoriesandfascists.wordpress.com>

AL BAKER IN CONVERSATION WITH THE RUBY KID

Can music change the world?

The Ruby Kid is a hip-hop artist who performs with Black Jacobins. Al Baker is a songwriter from Manchester who fronts folk-punk band The Dole Queue. As part of the recent "Red Scare Tour" they joined up to play to hundreds of people across the country, including a packed-out benefit gig for Leeds UCU's strike fund. Here they discuss the crossovers between politics and music, and what it means to make "political" art.

The Ruby Kid: We both get referred to as "political" artists a lot of the time; what does that label mean to you? Do you think it's a useful one?

Al Baker: I never describe my music to people as "political", because that has certain connotations that I would prefer to distance myself from. In most people's minds (and with good reason), political music is preachy, unsubtle and, often, just not very good.

I think the problem is that describing music, or any art, as "political" invites a confusion between political ideas expressed as art, and art which contains political ideas. The first is simply propaganda, and there's definitely an element of that in what I do, but the second describes my work better.

There are definitely songwriters out there who operate in the opposite way to how I do, but for me the song comes first and the politics (almost) always come along by accident.

My lyrics are an expression of how I see the world, and because I see it through a particular political framework my songs are shaped by it. My aim is that the audience can, hopefully easily, reverse engineer the aesthetic devices — the rhymes, the melody, whatever — and get at the ideas behind the songs that way rather than me having to shove it down their throats. The most important thing is to make the song sound good though.

Lots of people do call me a political songwriter, but I don't mind it so much, and I guess it is useful, because I have written plenty of straight up protest songs. If people want to call me a political songwriter, that's fine, as long as they don't get offended when I write a love song.

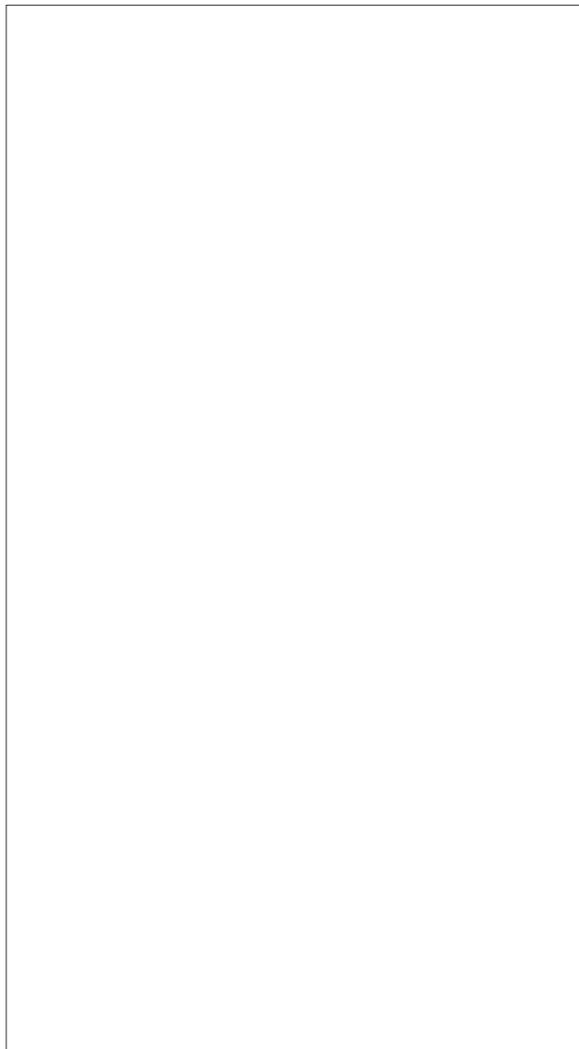
RK: I often find it difficult to write explicitly political lyrics that don't just sound preachy and hectoring. You seem to manage that nuance pretty well; is it a difficulty you're conscious of yourself?

AB: When I started writing songs I just proselytised for two and a half minutes over three chords and called it done, but I was always very careful to pay at least some attention to rhyme and metre. Those songs were pretty good, but I think those I'm writing now, where the poetry is the principal feature, and the meaning's more subtle, are mostly better.

The problems are usually reversed these days for me. I skirt around my subject matter with so many allusions and tricky lyrics sometimes that I have to stop and remind myself to actually say what I mean once in a while.

RK: The whole question of the politics of music is a massive one that we'll only be able to scratch the surface of here, but just briefly — how far do you think it's possible to disconnect the two? For example, a lot of rappers I listen to and whose music I really enjoy have absolutely horrendous politics (particularly on questions like sexuality and gender). I guess there are some analogues on the punk scene with bands like The Ramones, whose politics are a bit problematic to say the least. I've always been of the view that art has to be judged on its own terms and not subordinated to political perspective; what's your view?

AB: P.G. Wodehouse is one of my all time favourite authors, but he is at the very least a horrendous snob, and at the worst, depending on who you read, a Nazi sympathiser. His use of the English language and sense of humour, though, is peerless (case in point — "A melancholy-looking man, he had the appearance of someone who had searched for the leak in life's gas pipe with a lighted candle").



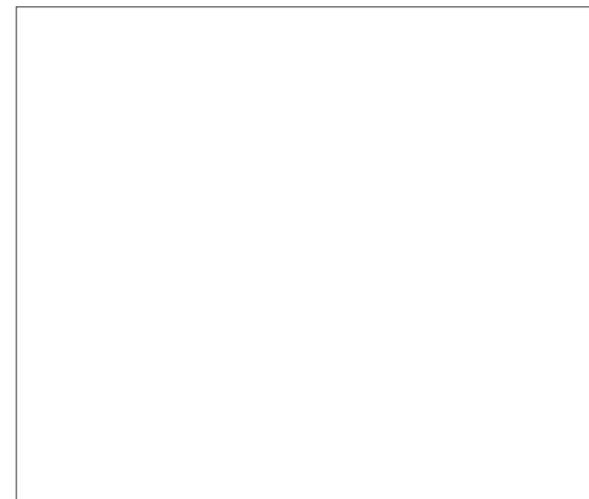
Al Baker above. Right: Al and the Ruby Kid on tour in March 2010

The artist and their art, to my mind, are entirely separate entities, so you can't really draw any strict conclusions about the one from the other. I don't think there can be such a thing as morally bad art, though bigotry is ugly no matter how it's expressed, so, often, art which expresses bad politics will simply be bad art.

RK: We played a couple of benefit gigs on our tour, including one for the strike fund of Leeds UCU. Do you think "using" your music for working-class political causes is the best way that "political" art can have an impact? Is the content of the art actually secondary to the cause to which it's put?

There are some (possibly apocryphal) stories about Wham! wanting to do a benefit gig for the NUM during the miners' strike — obviously the content of their music wasn't "political" but, as far as I'm concerned, an artist who's prepared to raise money and awareness for class-struggle causes is infinitely more politically worthwhile than, say, Rage Against The Machine whose lyrics are full of anti-capitalist bombast but will happily be poster-boys for Shelter — a corporate charity that shits on its own workforce. What are your thoughts?

AB: I do really like feeling that my music has made some kind of practical difference to the world, because I'm so incredibly inept at bringing about any practical change myself. This is kind of related to the last question, in that, if Wham! wants to do a benefit for the NUM, then that's great, but it doesn't make their music any better. If Dylan wants to release a CD exclusively through Starbucks, that's an appalling political decision, but he's still one of the greatest songwriters of all time. So, yes, political art can have an impact, but only to roughly the same extent as a home made cake topped with a catchy political slogan at an anarchist bake sale.



RK: This is the age-old question for aspiring left-wing musicians; would you sign to a major? Let's assume, perhaps naively, that you get offered a "no political strings"-type deal at some major label. Would you take it? (For what it's worth I really can't see a case against; refusing to sign for a label out of a sense of anti-capitalist principle makes about as much sense as refusing to get a job.)

AB: I comfort myself in the absolute certainty that I'll never have to make a decision like this. If I could make a living wage (still a distant dream) out of what an independent label could pay me, then I hope that I'd have the stones to take that over a major contract. However, if Sony BMG wants to give me job security for life, total creative control, a six-figure salary and no restraints on who I can play and raise money for, then I'd have a really hard time thinking of reasons why not. Not going to happen though is it? It'd take a more talented songwriter than me to be able to bend to the will of the big labels. "We need two more love songs on the next album, Al," says they. "You're going to need to break my heart twice before the deadline then, mate", says I.

RK: Fundamentally, what do you see as the interrelationship between art and the kind of struggles you think can change the world?

AB: I think lyrics can change people's minds, but only by being didactic, and perhaps unpleasantly preachy. I think non-lyrical art (instrumental music, literature, visual art), like drugs, can't plant new ideas in people's heads, only reinforce, challenge or alter the perception of what's there already. I think the best way that music can help change the world is by working as a social tool for bringing people together, who can then foment and plot, and of course for raising cash for worthy causes. Thinking your music can change the world by itself is appalling vanity.

RK: What have you got coming up in terms of future releases, gigs, etc. Will "The Red Scare Tour" become a regular fixture? (I certainly hope so...)

AB: We're just about to record my second album, which definitely qualifies as "long-awaited". I'm incredibly excited at the prospect of recording in a "proper" studio, rather than a basement or my bedroom as before. The album will be out in the summer, and I will hopefully find a label to help me put it out. As for the "Red Scare Tour," I think it should definitely happen again. The next few years, whatever happens in May, are going to be politically formative to say the least. I think there's a lot of good to be had from lefty bands pinning their colours to the mast (so to speak) and helping popularise the notion of having opinions again.

• The Ruby Kid and Al Baker online at:
<http://www.myspace.com/therubykid> and
<http://www.facebook.com/therubykid>
<http://www.myspace.com/alandhisguitar> and
<http://www.twitter.com/alandhisguitar>

Gramsci's idea of hegemony

Antonio Gramsci was an activist in the Italian socialist and communist movement from his early 20s (shortly before World War One) until 1926, when he was jailed by the fascist regime.

He was an important figure in the factory councils and factory occupations in Turin in 1919-20, and the central leader of the (then-revolutionary) Italian Communist Party from late 1923 until he was jailed. In prison, between 1929 and 1935, he wrote the *Prison Notebooks* which, while fragmentary, are today his most-read writings. He died in 1937.

After World War Two, the Italian Communist Party (by then thoroughly Stalinist) published the *Prison Notebooks* and tried to present them as authority for a reformist "Italian road to socialism" based on alliances with middle-class and bourgeois groups rather than independent working-class struggle.

Marxist writers disputed the misinterpretation; but, mutating over the decades, that old Italian CP version of Gramsci has today become a basis for writers claiming to propose "post-Marxist" politics.

The following report of a London Workers' Liberty forum in March is one of a series of articles we will be running in *Solidarity* about what can be drawn from Gramsci's ideas for socialist politics today.

Alessandro Carlucci, organiser of the forthcoming London conference on *New Insights into Gramsci's Life and Work*, was a speaker at the London Workers' Liberty forum on 18 March about the ideas of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

Alessandro noted that Gramsci enjoys a huge "success" today in the academic and literary world: about 7,000 new books and articles on him have been published in the last 20 years. He is the only Marxist writer, other than Marx himself, who has continued to enjoy and even increase such "success" since 1989.

Some writers present Gramsci as a "post-Marxist", or at any rate someone pointing the path to "post-Marxism". Alessandro said that Gramsci was, and remained, a revolutionary Marxist. But he was also a "different" Marxist.

Unlike most well-known Marxist writers, he did not come from an urban, cultured environment. He was born in Sardinia, in the "periphery" of the Italian state, and in poverty. Italian was not his first language. When he arrived in a big city, in Turin, as a student in 1911, he had difficulties and keenly felt himself to be "different".

He was a man of action. He did not want to be an abstract theorist. His writings were focused on events. Even when he was in prison, forcibly distanced from events, he wrote short notes, often inspired by current publications he had received, rather than lengthy academic-type dissertations. He offered no "eternal truths".

Recent research has shown that Gramsci intervened personally to defend an Italian communist living in the USSR and persecuted by the regime.

Gramsci was constantly aware of complexity and diversity in society, and the need for pluralism. That awareness was informed partly by his own background, and partly also by the work he did as a student at university, on linguistics.

It was through that study of linguistics that he first came across the idea of hegemony, which famously figured much in his later writings.

Alessandro cited a letter from Gramsci to the Italian CP Executive Committee in April 1924 urging a stand for the rights of Slav and German minorities in Italy, and attention to the Albanian minority in southern Italy.

Gramsci counterposed democratic centralism to bureaucratic centralism, and in his *Prison Notebooks* commented sarcastically on Stalin's exiling of Trotsky: "by abolishing the barometer one can [not] abolish bad weather".

Martin Thomas from AWL also spoke. He argued that of the many "Gramscis" offered to us by later interpretations, the most instructive as well as the one most loyal to Gramsci's own thought is the revolutionary Marxist Gramsci.

To revolutionary Marxists, Gramsci is especially valuable in offering us strategic ideas for the long haul. As Trotsky commented, strategic debate, as distinct from tactical debate, figured little in the pre-1914 Marxist movement (with the exception, he could have added, of Russia). Trotsky's writings after 1917 mostly, for obvious reasons, focused on countries in times of

acute revolutionary, pre-revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary crisis, of which there were many in the 1920s and 30s. Gramsci, if only by force of circumstances, wrote more about the long haul, about times which see ferment but not full-on revolutionary or counter-revolutionary crisis.

Famously, Gramsci discussed "hegemony". Although he picked up the concept before he became familiar with Russian Marxist debates (after 1917), his discussion in the *Prison Notebooks* is much shaped by what he understood from Russian Marxist thought.

Lenin and others developed the strategy of "hegemony" in counterposition to two other outlooks among Russian radicals. They differentiated from the populists, who saw revolutionary action as the work of "the people" broadly defined, with class divisions between wage-workers, peasants, and students or intellectuals being unimportant. And they also differentiated from the "Economists" of around 1900, and the advocates of a "broad legal labour party" of after 1907, who proposed that Marxists should focus on the distinctive, specific, and immediate economic interests and economic struggles of the wage-working class as such, leaving broader democratic struggles for the time being to the liberals.

Instead, Lenin and others argued that socialists should seek to organise the working class as a politically independent force. That politically-independent working class could — and should — develop itself so as to act like a would-be ruling class, that is, to develop its own answers to all the big issues of society, including those whose immediate effect was on other classes and groups than the working class.

In developing itself that way, the organised working class would both educate itself, and win allies in other social strata.

The strategy of "hegemony" rested on a view that broad economically-based trends alone did not entirely determine political outcomes. Broad trends might indicate that a trade-union movement was sure to develop in Russia in course of time; but they would not decide whether that trade-union movement was led by priests and charlatans, or by socialists. Broad trends might compel capitalistic transformation of the big feudal remnants in Russia's society; but they would not decide whether that transformation would come bureaucratically, from above, by a "Prussian road", or in a radical, revolutionary-democratic way.

Political initiative would decide the shape of things; and it would be political initiative focused on key points of flux.

Gramsci is often said to have focused on developing a socialist strategy for "the West" different from the Bolshevik strategy allegedly specialised for "the East". There is a passage in the *Prison Notebooks* that can be read that way.

But Gramsci also remarked that Italy's social and economic structure was much closer to Russia's than other West European countries' structures were. And he expressly objected to the claim of Amadeo Bordiga, a comrade in the Italian CP leadership with whom he argued much, that different social structures in Western Europe meant that Bolshevik strategic ideas were not appropriate there.

It is more accurate to see Gramsci's work as focused on developing "Eastern" strategic ideas for a West European context.

Of course there were differences. Italy before fascism had a developed bourgeois democracy, a structure of bourgeois liberal politics with a sizeable popular base, a legal labour movement, and much bigger urban non-proletarian classes (petty bourgeoisie and semi-proletariat) than Russia.

Gramsci argued that a revolutionary Marxist party must seek to develop a "hegemonic apparatus" of the working class. Despite what it sounds like, what he had in mind was not an organisational machine, an

artefact of "apparatchiks".

He had in mind a system of united fronts — constantly adjusted and revised class-based alliances, with internal dialogue and criticism, to deal with different issues. He envisaged a complex system of organisations, initiatives, campaigns, themes of agitation, all focused around the two tasks of self-education of the organised working class and establishing the organised working class as the leader of broader plebeian layers.

A revolutionary party that could develop that sort of activity would require special characteristics. It would nourish itself intellectually not just on a general programme and a general expectation of revolutionary crisis, but on specific analyses.

It would understand that analysis and activity intertwine. What you pose as a realistic perspective for action, and also, even, what you perceive in the reality around you now, is not just something given "objectively": it depends on your will, your energy, your development of yourself into an active factor in the situation.

Such a party must work constantly to break down division between "workers" and "intellectuals". It must not be like the Catholic Church, which maintains an alliance between "intellectuals" and unlettered people by imposing rigid constraints of dogma on the "intellectuals". On the contrary, it must develop every member as an "intellectual". Every person is in fact a "philosopher": the activists of the revolutionary party must become conscious "democratic philosophers".

The revolutionary party, also, cannot orient on the assumption that the ruling class is more or less immobile — that, once one has indicted it as capitalist, one has said almost all that needs to be said until some promised moment of crisis, when that ruling class will disintegrate. There are processes short of catastrophic crisis in which ruling classes actively transform society in a significant way, while simultaneously reconfiguring and reordering their domination of the other classes in society.

The revolutionary party must conduct its polemics on the level appropriate to its strategy. It must deal with its opponents, not by seizing on their weakest points, or thinking that the task of polemic is completed by exposing venal motives or financial corruption. It must deal with its opponents' strongest arguments, as expressed by their most cogent representatives.

In the debate that followed, Stuart Jordan asked what meaning the concept of hegemony can have in a society without peasants.

Even in the most fully capitalist society, the organised working class has to pay attention to many other groups — the unorganised working class, for a start, and beyond that many other layers: students, petty bourgeoisie of different sorts, semi-proletarians, long-term unemployed. None of these vanish even in the most fully capitalist society. The general ideas to do with "hegemony" are still relevant.

Colin Waugh said that the concept of hegemony — not original to Gramsci — is not the important thing to draw from him. Much more important are the ideas which Gramsci developed in the factory council movement of 1919-20, which involved workers and intellectuals working together and learning from each other organically.

The idea of "hegemony" was certainly not Gramsci's particular contribution. But Gramsci did develop from the idea of "hegemony" more general concepts of "dialectical pedagogy" in political activity.

We should not, however, slide into seeing Gramsci as an advocate of naive "learning-by-doing". In his writings specifically on education, he discussed school reforms introduced by the fascist government under the slogans of "active education" and of "educativity", in contrast to what they dismissed as the formalistic "instruction" of more traditional schooling.

Gramsci responded with a partial defence of the more traditional schooling, and a clear defence of an element of "academic" rather than just vocational education for all students. "It is not entirely true that 'instruction' is something quite different from 'education'... Previously, the pupils at least acquired a certain 'baggage' or 'equipment' of concrete facts... With the new curricula... there will no longer be any 'baggage' to put in order".

Conference: New Insights into Gramsci's Life and Work
Friday 28 May, 9am to 5pm, Chancellor's Hall, Senate House, Malet St, London WC1E 7HU

NOTTINGHAM ANTI-FASCIST CONFERENCE

Working-class network launched

BY CHARLIE SALMON

The opportunities for anti-fascists to meet and debate the issues facing us are few and far between. The need for such opportunities is intensified by the prospect of 400 British National Party candidates in the coming election and continued mobilisations by the anti-Muslim racists of the English Defence League.

Any honest assessment of the current state of anti-fascism would have to concede both the generally unconsidered failings and the massive potential for the movement.

These considerations were the starting point for a conference of anti-fascists and anti-racists in Nottingham on 27 March. Called by Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire Stop the BNP, the conference was attended by 50 delegates representing groups from south London, Liverpool, Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, Stoke, Manchester, Lincoln, Leicester and Nottingham itself. Others attended in an individual capacity and a delegation from London Transport Region RMT was particularly welcome at the event.

Delegates discussed the current state of anti-fascism, the BNP, EDL and the role of trade unions, and debated three motions covering the fight against the BNP, stopping the EDL, and, most important, the need for a new organisational structure for anti-fascists and anti-racists uncomfortable with and critical of Unite Against Fascism and Searchlight's Hope Not Hate campaign.

As Dave Matthews from Notts Stop the BNP explained: "The failures of both UAF and Hope Not Hate to either function democratically or to address the real politics behind the growth in support for the BNP mean that current anti-fascism is ineffective. The recent anti-EDL mobilisation in Bolton, where anti-racists were kettled and brutalised by the police whilst EDLers roamed through the city, shows the inability of UAF to tackle this threat also." [See report below.]

The meeting was united by determination to tackle the BNP's fascist politics head on, and offer working-class politics as an alternative to race-hate.

Conference goers discussed the production of easily adaptable national leaflets for use by local groups,

model motions to trade union branches spelling out the need for a working class approach, and an independent coordination at future anti-EDL demonstrations.

This work, conducted on the basis of sharing information and resources, acting democratically and in solidarity, forms the initial basis of the new network.

From such modest beginnings it is hoped that the network will grow and develop. One major aim should be to reach out to existing anti-fascist groups and help with the formation of new organisations. The formation of independent, more militant groups in both Glasgow and Edinburgh in opposition to the Scottish Defence League shows the potential reach.

The model adopted by Notts Stop the BNP could be more generally useful. Faced with the prospect of a BNP candidate in a small, working-class former mining village, activists from the campaign worked hard to organise and assist local residents into a campaign.

Rather than parachute activists into the village for an afternoon's leafletting, the Nottingham group knocked on doors, helped locals call a meeting, and assisted them in producing materials. Such efforts, made just a few weeks before the election, were not enough. But had this work been conducted while the BNP candidate was fashioning herself into a "community shop steward", things could have been very different.

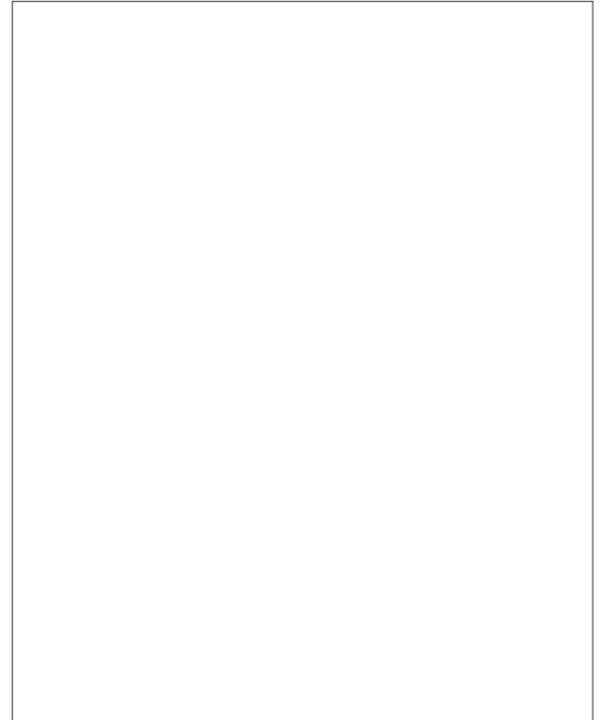
The erosion and in places now-total absence of working class political organisation has given room for the fascists to grow. Whilst remaining realistic, the efforts of the new network could help foster the emergence of an alternative.

For more information on the conference, including motions and amendments discussed, and for updates see nottmstopbnp.wordpress.com.

COMMENTS

Gary Lazell is an activist in the RMT:

"I came because I wanted to see how things were going across the country. Activists need to make contact with each other and discuss ideas about how to build and motivate people. Trade unions have to be central to that. In my area, the RMT is building a big anti-BNP meeting in Barking Theatre. You have to get out to the wider community and give people answers."



Claire Reilly is from RMT East Ham branch:

"We need to coordinate nationally. Instead of having pockets of people working in a disconnected way, we need to unite around some common ideas and campaigning that moves beyond basic differences. Fundamentally it's about giving people an alternative."

Sean Redditch is a shop steward in the public sector union Unison:

"I'm active in fighting cuts in my sector; my union's been incredibly slow to respond to those immediate issues, and anti-fascism is no different. I came to this conference to find out what's going on; I'm a delegate from my union branch to UAF but I'm completely frozen out. There's no open discussion or decision-making. I'm hopeful that something more open and democratic will result from today's discussions."

Justin Baidoo is an activist in Unite, chair of the South London Anti-Fascist Group, and editor of TMPOnline.org:

"The situation is daunting and severe, the socialist left is divided and dwarfed in membership. Working class people are disenfranchised and angry with the free market economics consensus of New Labour, Tory and Liberal Parties. To stop the BNP, socialists must help those who are tempted to vote BNP in protest against neoliberalism. We need a working-class alternative, but before that can happen we first need a united, diverse, democratic and class conscious anti-fascist movement. The launch of this new network is welcome though a bit late. We have less than 40 days before the election. South London Anti-Fascist Group is organising communities against racism and fascism now and also will in future organise against Thatcherite cuts. Black and white must unite and fight!"

Pete Radcliff is a member of Workers' Liberty and an activist in Notts Stop the BNP:

"For three years now, Notts Stop the BNP has grappled with the problem of how we relate to the existing national anti-fascist networks — Hope not Hate and, particularly, UAF. Undoubtedly, the major success of the conference was to seriously begin the task of organising a new national network of working class anti-racist campaigns.

In particular, the EDL provocations over the last year require us to think through how we can organisationally block this mobilisation of racists, whilst engaging and politically persuading those confused working-class youth who are attracted to them. This is a difficult task but the existing networks are clearly not up to either performing that task or even seeing the need for a debate."

BOLTON

Police now the issue

BY DANIEL A

The English Defence League and anti-fascists descended on Bolton on Saturday 20 March, with up to 2,000 on both sides. We were met by a heavy and violent police presence — mainly violent against the anti-fascists. Police violence seriously damaged the ability of anti-fascists to confront the EDL.

Anti-fascists, including local community activists, trade unionists and Asian youth, were separated from each other, kettled, and subjected to considerable force during the long and restless counter-demonstration.

The main demonstration was at Victoria Square in Bolton town centre. The square was split in two, with one side for the EDL and one side for us — with a "sterile" area of a few metres separating the two with solid steel barricades.

Many of us, including UAF members, attempted to leave the square by breaking police lines, but the police aggressively held demonstrators inside the square. Not long after, riot officers were brought in to reinforce the police line.

The police put a stop to any feeder marches attempting to enter the square and forced a tight kettle around the main demonstration. A sizeable group of demon-

strators was kept outside the designated area. It was at this point that things began to escalate. The police began to use real violence — batons were swung, fists repeatedly smacked into the faces of frontline demonstrators, and demonstrators repeatedly pulled from the crowd and arrested for no particular reason.

All official organisation seemed to crumble once it had been announced that leading UAF and SWP member Weyman Bennett had been arrested (on "conspiracy to commit violent disorder").

The EDL made their way into their side of the square at around 1pm, after a bout of drinking at a nearby pub. They were clearly less confident and aggressive than in Stoke and Nottingham, but still ready for confrontation. Noticeable were an EDL LGBT Division flag and a swastika with a red circle and line through it. But St George and Ulster flags and "No More Mosques" signs were present as ever, reminders of the EDL's real, far-right character.

A part from a few missiles flying in from the EDL demo, the barriers kept the opposing sides from engaging in anything other than an exchange of slogans.

Physical confrontation between police and anti-fas-

Continues on page 18

Continued from page 17

cists calmed down once the EDL arrived. Instead, many hundreds of demonstrators moved to engage in chanting at the EDL demo. Chanting over two steel barricades and several ranks of riot police became frustrating after a while.

Around 3pm the EDL finished their static demo and were escorted by police to Bolton train station. The anti-fascists were tightly kettled for half an hour, the police claiming this was to “keep us safe”.

Once released, an unofficial march formed, comprised largely of local Asian youth committed to tracking down any EDLers still hanging around Bolton. The march split after a few minutes as those willing to find and confront EDLers split from those who just wanted to hold up placards and chant “Whose streets?” around town.

Around fifty Asian youth, accompanied by a few anti-fascist demonstrators, ran through Bolton seeking to chase the EDL out of town — but a massive police presence blocking the station stopped any confrontation.

Once again, the EDL were allowed an unchallenged free rein over half the city centre. But had the police not constrained us, the EDL would have been confronted by a sizeable number of demonstrators.

UAF/SWP didn’t behave as usual. They were militant, angry and pissed off with the police. The large number drawn to oppose the EDL in Bolton was positive, and the local mobilisation impressive. Some, but not all, of the UAF/SWP contingent inside the main square seemed genuinely committed to breaking lines and moving towards the EDL. How this sentiment develops remains to be seen.

Drop the charges against anti-fascists

Weyman Bennett, joint national secretary of Unite Against Fascism and a prominent member of the SWP, and Rhetta Moran, joint secretary of Greater Manchester UAF, were arrested at the anti-English Defence League mobilisation in Bolton. So were a significant number of other anti-fascist demonstrators.

The charge against Bennett is “suspicion of conspiracy to organise violent disorder”.

The AWL thinks Weyman Bennett and his associates have consistently misled the anti-fascist movement. However, the only people guilty of such “conspiracy” at the Bolton demo were the police, who harassed and beat peaceful demonstrators in order to protect the right of a gang of racist thugs to maraud through the streets. 55 out of 74 arrests on the day were of anti-fascists, and only nine of EDL supporters.

The arrest of leading UAF organisers is an attempt by the state to batter down the anti-fascist movement.

All this is further evidence that those in UAF who call for state bans and police prohibition of fascist marches are radically wrong-headed.

Drop all charges against Weyman Bennett, Rhetta Moran and the other anti-fascists arrested in Bolton!

TV debate on anti-fascism

On 29 March, Sacha Ismail of the AWL took part in a TV debate with Weyman Bennett of the SWP and Unite Against Fascism, on the Islam Channel.

Other participants were Labour GLA member Murad Qureshi and Birmingham Respect councillor Salma Yaqoob. The host was ex-SWP John Rees. Report at

<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/13913>

THE TORIES AND THE EURO-RIGHT

Still the party of Section 28

By HANNAH THOMPSON

The Tories’ recent attempts at wooing the LGBTQ community shouldn’t fool anyone into thinking that the party can address LGBTQ liberation in any meaningful way. Gay rights campaigners who have taken to schmoozing the right, in expectation of a Conservative victory in the coming election, have clearly lost sight of the rights of the people they claim to represent.

The last Tory government made no secret about its social conservatism; Major and Thatcher’s backlash against the “permissiveness” of the sexual liberation movements of the 1970s, 80s and 90s should not be forgotten. A government that saw the legalisation of abortion, homosexuality, free contraception and sexual health provision as contradictory to the “morality” of British society characterised the Conservatives as much as its crushing of the unions. It has not abandoned this stance.

The act that best summarised the Tory attitude to gay rights was Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act. The act stated that no local authority “shall intentionally promote homosexuality” or “promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship”.

The Labour government did not repeal the Act till as late as 2003. Cameron voted against the repeal. Cameron’s 2009 apology for the implementation of the act on behalf of his party simply testified to his party’s hypocrisy on this issue.

The Conservatives’ proposal to replace the 1998 Human Rights Act with a “British Bill of Rights” demonstrates an ongoing indifference to civil liberties. In this case, in the name of protecting “national security”.

Tory MPs and MEPs are given “free votes” on issues of equality. In Britain this means votes against repeals of homophobic laws such as Section 28, abortion rights, and civil partnerships; and in Europe against condemnation of similar homophobic laws, such as those on education in Lithuania.

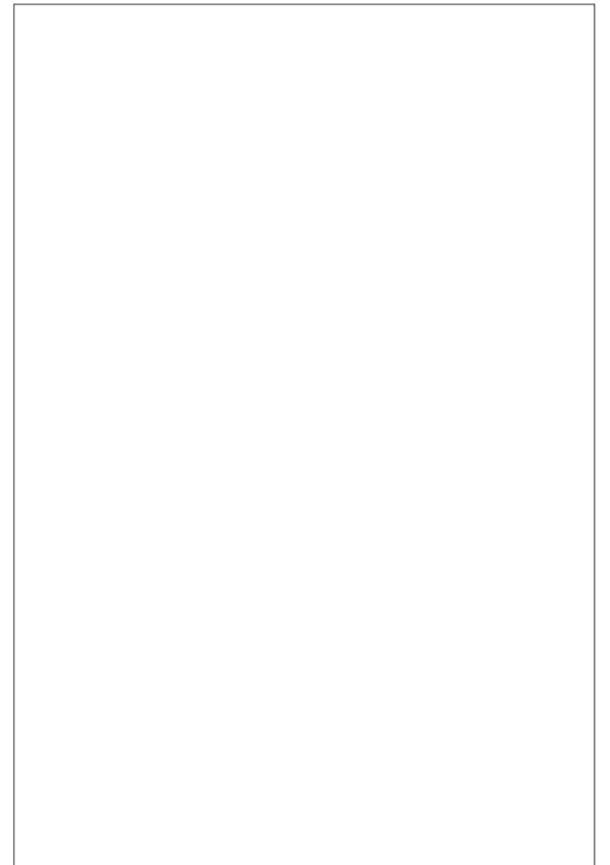
The Conservatives’ attitude to human rights has not been to consider them as fundamental values to society, but as bureaucratic “red tape”, threatening further state authoritarianism. A handful of “openly” gay MPs and empty gestures to the LGBTQ vote are not enough to overcome a century of queer-bashing which its MPs and European party alliances continue to maintain.

The Human Rights Act doesn’t just protect the individual from discrimination in the workplace and on the street, but protects individuals’ rights to such things as the right to join unions — organisations essential for the enforcement of equal opportunities legislation. Trade unions don’t just fight against redundancies, conditions and wage cuts for the “majorities” within their workforce, they defend the legal rights of workers where it is not in the employer’s interest to do so, and address the grievances of minorities in a collective manner that gives them real force in winning battles against their bosses.

The Tories and Liberal Democrats both promise to increase legislation against union powers, but all attacks on unions strip the ability of workers to enforce their demands for equality on their own terms, in effect depriving equal opportunities legislation of any meaningful implementation.

As part of their affiliation to far-right European Parties in the European Conservative and Reformist Coalition established last year, the Tories have connected themselves ideologically with parties with the worst record of racism, sexism, anti-semitism and homophobia, and voted for their policies in the European Parliament.

Parties such as the Danish People’s Party (DPP) advocate drastic reductions in immigration. The DPP



Tory political bedfellow. Jaroslaw Kaczynski: “The affirmation of homosexuality will lead to the downfall of civilisation”

targets “multiculturalism” and the “Islamisation” of Denmark as a pressing threat to national security. One of the Dutch members of the coalition, the Christian Union, proposes the “phasing out” of abortion rights, aggressive combating of pornography and sex work, defends religious schools, and gives civil servants the freedom to avoid performing same-sex marriages.

The Latvian “For Fatherland and Freedom” party periodically celebrates the efforts of the Waffen-SS and has failed to criticise Nazi offences. The leader of the Czech coalition member Civil Democratic Party, Mirek Topolánek, was forced to resign last month for making homophobic and anti-semitic comments about the Polish PM and Minister for Transport.

Most notorious of this party coalition in terms of LGBTQ rights is the Polish Law and Justice Party. It opposes all forms of legal representation for homosexuals, a stance best summarised by the declaration made by the ex Polish Prime Minister and chair of the party Jaroslaw Kaczynski: “The affirmation of homosexuality will lead to the downfall of civilisation. We can’t agree to it.”

Social conservatism does not emerge from ignorance alone; it is a “moral code” that glosses over real socio-economic problems to the benefit of those who can afford to buy their way out of them.

Homosexuality is not a new component of Tory membership, but it is only very recently that gay rights was considered anything but a suitable scapegoat for initiatives such as the current “Mending Our Broken Society”.

The Conservatives continue to blame the move away from “traditional” family structures, and immigration for the problems caused by aggressive capitalism. They base their social policy around reinforcing these structures and “disciplining” or “rewarding” families for their adherence to these, while ignoring the oppressions that go with them.

VENEZUELA

Chávez's state-capitalism falters

BY PABLO VELASCO

A decade since Hugo Chávez proclaimed the “Bolivarian revolution” in Venezuela, his project is mired in stagnation. For all the rhetoric about “21st century socialism”, the Bonapartist regime continues to preside over Venezuelan capitalism and to stifle the emergence of a genuine independent labour movement.

The hostility of the US government may have made Chávez an “anti-imperialist” icon, but it is fantasy to believe his forces are part of the revival of working class politics.

Recently Chávez added three days to Venezuela's Easter holiday to bolster government efforts to reduce electricity consumption, as the country struggles with a severe energy crisis. He blamed the shortages on a drought causing the water level of the country's main hydro-electric dam to drop. But for a state with a massive revenue stream from oil, it is ironic that it should have to introduce rolling blackouts in parts of the country and to limit office hours in state bodies.

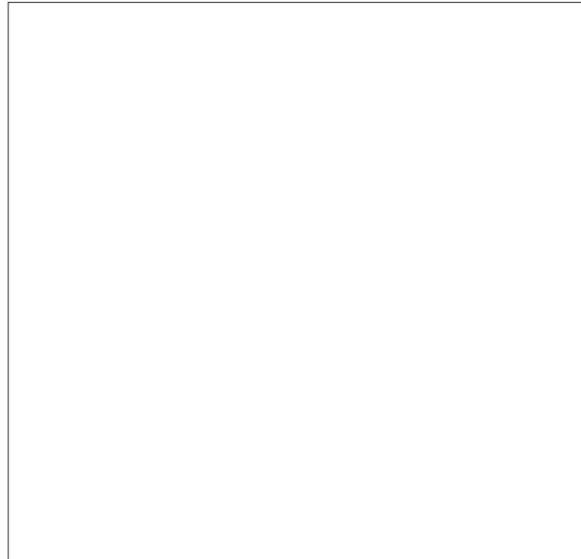
In truth, the entire state-capitalist development model has run into problems. Already facing high inflation (27% last year), in January the government devalued the currency. This brought in more oil revenue and cut the budget deficit, but at the expense of exacerbating other economic problems.

The crisis is well-illustrated by the strategic international alliances pursued by Chávez. He has again lauded the president Lukashenko of Belarus, along with other so-called “strategic partners” in Moscow and Kiev. Chávez also continues to bloc with China and Iran, a phalanx of states where workers' rights are either curtailed or non-existent.

Chávez faces national assembly elections in September and an opposition with sizable minority support. The opposition has been bolstered by the hostility of the Obama administration towards Venezuela. US officials have explicitly equated Chávez with the Colombian FARC.

Socialists can have no truck with the right-wing “opposition” to Chávez. A US-backed coup or even a cold electoral victory for the anti-Chávez bourgeois opposition would be far less democratic and much more reactionary than anything Chávez has done to date. The 2002 coup in Venezuela was a very graphic warning of what they would do.

However the left internationally should not close its



eyes to the anti-working class character of the Chávez regime. For all the social programmes that have been implemented, nowhere in Venezuela today is the working class in power. No factories are genuinely under workers' control, even where they have been nationalised — or even where some participation schemes have been trialled.

Nor is there a powerful trade union movement. The UNT union federation exists mainly as a name, having had no authoritative congress, nor an elected leadership. The rank and file trade union militant grouping, CCURA, represent the healthiest forces, but they are fiercely opposed by Bolivarian trade unionists tied to the state. The Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (PSUV) is a tentacle of the bourgeois state, a top-down bureaucratic control mechanism for Chávez to reproduce his regime. The revolutionary socialist forces are weak and divided.

In recent years there has been significant repression of independent socialists and trade unionists. On 12 March, police in Aragua, capital of Maracay state — run by chavista Rafael Isea — attacked a workers' demonstration and arrested militants. The march, called by the UNT-Aragua union, was backed by CCURA and socialist groups such as the Liga de Trabajadores por el Socialismo (LTS) and Unidad Socialista de Izquierda (USI). The protest was called against the economic

measures of the national government, for the trial and punishment of the murderers of socialist militants Richard Gallardo, Luis Hernández and Carlos Requena, and for the release of the trade union leader of the Ferrominera del Orinoco, Rubén González, of Guayana, and of the Yupka Chief Sabino Romero.

Such repression indicates the snare represented by Chávez's call for a “Fifth International”, which he made last November. Amongst those invited to join were the communist parties and social democrats of Asia and Europe, forces of national liberation of Africa and the Middle East, new left-wing parties like Die Linke, the Left Bloc (Portugal), the Sandinistas, the MAS in Bolivia and, of course, the PSUV. Bourgeois parties like the Liberals in Colombia, the PRI of Mexico and the Argentinean Justicialists (Peronists) were also included. The Mandeliste current seemed very keen to have one more populist bandwagon to jump on.

As the LTS in Venezuela has argued, this “Fifth International” would be the opposite of the first four workers' internationals. It would be “a broad grouping of old and new political apparatuses — many emptied of all real rank and file activism — which would include even governments at the head of semi-colonial states... sectors of old bourgeois nationalist movements who seek to cover themselves after decades of prostration before imperialism, and diverse populist and reformist currents and subordinated to these, the social movements, the anti-capitalist youth and even some ‘Trotskyists’ ... [grouped] around a nationalist discourse decorated with socialist and anti-capitalist phrases to better serve a strategy of pressure and bargaining for concessions with imperialism and the bourgeoisies.”

Such a lash up, while apparently more numerically imposing, would not be grounded in working-class politics — as the real workers' internationals were until their demise. As the AWL has said from the beginning, what is needed is a class analysis of chavismo. By such a metric, Chávez is no ally or friend of ours.

PUBLIC MEETING

Solidarity with Iranian workers and political prisoners

With Jamal Kamangar, socialist activist from Iran, and a speaker from the AWL

7-9pm, Monday 19 April, The Quadrant, North Street, Brighton (opposite the clock tower)

Since June 2009 millions of Iranians have taken to the streets to call for more democracy in Iran, but they face brutal repression. Workers face and are starting to resist worsening economic conditions, but they need our solidarity. Come and find out more.

Workers' Liberty Australia on the web

Australian capitalism got through the 2007-9 economic crisis with less damage than any other rich capitalist country. Output never actually fell. All the banks got through without nationalisation or government bail-outs. The general crisis pushed much of the workers' movement in Australia into a hunkered-down, holding-tight-while-the-storm-passes, posture; it has boosted the political credit of a right-wing Labour government...

Read more at: <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2010/03/16/australia-preparing-next-turn>

MOSCOW BOMBINGS

Against terrorism

BY DAN KATZ

According to press reports, on Wednesday 29 March two women suicide bombers exploded their bombs on the Moscow underground. The blasts, timed to coincide with the morning rush hour, killed at least 38 people and injured many more, several seriously.

According to local analysts the likely culprits are Islamist rebels from the North Caucasus. The most probable of these are those based in Chechnya using so-called Black Widows as bombers (women who have had husbands or brothers killed by Russian or Russian-backed forces in the region).

Without qualification these acts should be condemned. Both the political rationale for these bombings and their political effects are reactionary. The bombings will neither lead to Chechen freedom, nor will they redress any wrongs that may have been suffered by the women bombers, nor will they make the political environment in Russia or the North Caucasus healthier.

These bombings are part of a cycle which has both reinforced Putin and the right within Russia, and has

made the most crazed Islamists dominant in the Chechen resistance.

The very first consequence of the bombings were attacks on people who looked as if they were from the Caucasus by incensed mobs of Muscovites using the slogan “Russia for the Russians”.

Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin can be guaranteed to use the events as a reason for further repression — and not just in the south, but in Russia too.

Russia has fought two wars against Chechen separatists, in 1994-6 and again in 1999-2005. In 1999 Putin sent Russian troops into Chechnya and he was able to use the nationalist political capital he generated to his advantage.

No doubt Russia's client regime in Chechnya — which is staggeringly corrupt and brutal — will now increase the number of raids, murders and kidnappings.

The Chechens remain oppressed by Russia, but Islamism makes matters worse.

We are for freedom and democracy in Chechnya and Russia and for self-determination for the peoples of the North Caucasus.

ITALY

Striking to demand citizenship

By GABRIELLA ALBERTI

On Monday 1 March many thousands of migrants together with other Italian workers, activists and trade unionists demonstrated in various Italian cities.

They were denouncing institutional racism under the Berlusconi government, claiming to be “the new citizens” and demanding rights to work contributions and other labour and social rights not currently available under Italian migration law.

According to the website of the committee organising the strike, a number of “firm-based trade unions” (the “Rappresentanze sindacali unitarie”) called for the strike of migrant workers.

Workers at more than 70 firms across the north and the centre of Italy participated in the “day without us”. In Brescia, in Mantua province, in Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Parma and Trento, many factories and businesses, especially in engineering but also in the food, hospitality and cleaning sectors, stopped work. In Turin the open air market of “Porta Palazzo” was closed. Also individual migrants in the retail sector in cities like Bologna decided to close their shops for a day in sign of protest.

The “day without immigrants — 24 hours without us” was originally launched by an anti-racist committee of immigrants set up more than a year ago, against the background of increasing racism, in France. In Italy a new restrictive security law criminalises migrants and denies social and economic rights to even the so called “regular” migrants. The Italian decision to join an international day of protest was made following violent attacks against migrant workers in Rosarno in January, as migrants rebelled against the mafia system in the informal economy of the agricultural sector in the region.

The migrants’ strike idea became widely-discussed thanks to the courage of a group of women who launched a Facebook campaign (which eventually gained 47,000 members).

Against the initial accusation of the risk that the strike could be turned into an “ethnic strike” by self-enclosing migrants in their communities, groups such as the “committee for the strike of migrant labour in Italy” highlighted how 1 March could be, on the contrary, a day of unity between migrants and Italians.

Many “isolated” migrant workers struck individually in their workplaces, and some factories where the strike was observed involved mainly Italian workers.

The strike was a mass demonstration of solidarity with and between migrants, and it showed the possibility that even those who are in the most precarious situation (because their right to stay in Italy is tied to a labour contract) can raise their voice against racism, exploitation and the precarisation of working conditions for all. And even in the tough conditions of recession.

• <http://lavoromigrante.splinder.com>

OBAMA’S HEALTH CARE REFORM

For the people? For the insurance companies!

Barry Finger looks at the background to Obama’s health bill recently signed into law.

The United States spends almost twice per capita for health insurance coverage than most other advanced capitalist nations and still leaves almost 50 million Americans uninsured.

About 45,000 people die each year due to lack of insurance or the inability to access the insurance they have due to inadequate coverage. At the rate in which health care costs have been climbing, 20% of consumer spending would be captured by health care costs by 2017.

But thirty cents of every dollar spent on private health insurance is eaten by paperwork and bureaucratic overhead costs. Three thousand lobbyists honey-combed Washington while Obama was promoting his health care bill. They needed to make sure that their influence was decisively felt. Members of Congress from both parties have significant investments in health care and pharmaceutical companies. Obama’s director of health care policy has served on the boards of several health care corporations. It is no coincidence that the health bill resembles the legislation written by a former Vice President of Public Policy for Well Point, one of the nation’s largest health insurance companies.

If Eisenhower worried about a military industrial complex, the debate over health care has highlighted the very real existence of a health care industrial complex every bit as viral as the former.

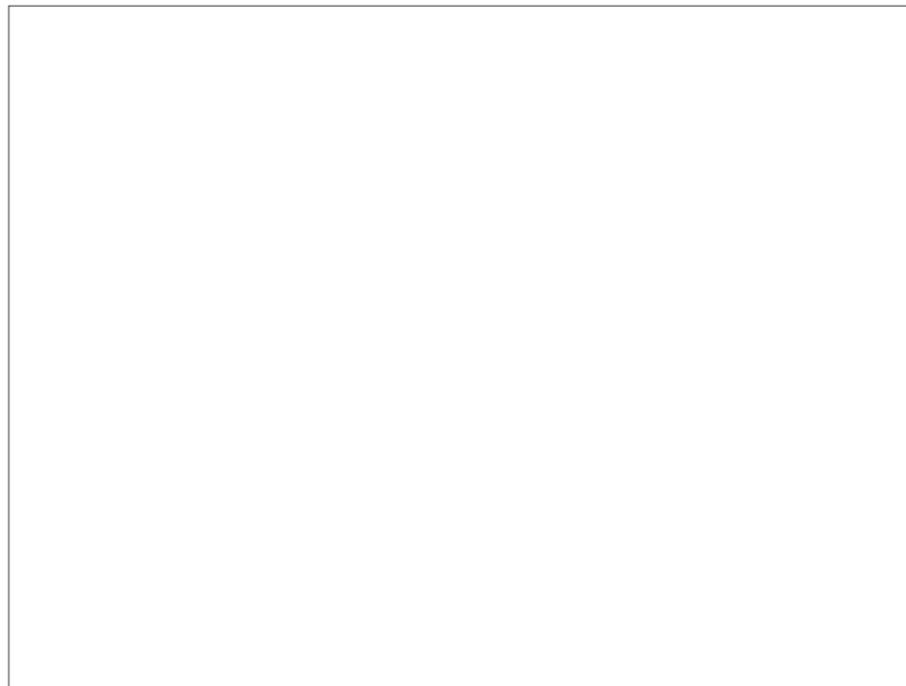
The health care bill — which has yet to win the support of even half of the American population — is touted by its supporters as a “realistic” alternative to single-payer, or Medicare for All, which has the support of well over three-fifths of the population. But realism in American politics is measured first against the gauge of corporate accountability.

Still, even by this standard, it is amazing that the profit-starved American economy had few corporate advocates for socialising this cost and reabsorbing the massive profits otherwise realised in the health insurance sector. Health care costs are, after all, generally recognised as a major overhead impediment to American global competitiveness.

Yet for all that, it was greeted by the Republican Party and its Tea Party ancillary as “Armageddon.” This is despite the fact that the bill in its final form resembles the Republican alternative to the Clinton’s proposals of twenty years ago, and the Massachusetts health care program championed, at the time, by its Republican governor, Mitt Romney.

There is no greater tribute to liberal incompetence than the fact that the Republicans — the avowed champions of market based solutions — were later able to cash in on the public antipathy that their own free market program generated.

The fact that one out of six Massachusetts residents cannot afford care, and tens of thousands have been



Women’s health care betrayed. Passage of the health care bill wasn’t assured until a few hours before the final vote, when Obama agreed to issue an executive order specifying that he would not permit the use of federal funds to pay for abortions except in the cases of rape, incest or if the life of the mother was in danger

ejected from health care due to budget cutbacks, may, in no small part, account for the astounding victory of a Republican in a seemingly safe senate race that was brilliantly transformed into a plebiscite on Obama’s health care bill.

The Democrats, of course, learned nothing from this, but to soldier on. And soldier on they did to an ugly national legislative victory now moronically being compared to Social Security, Medicare and civil rights, but which retroactively cheapens all these previous victories. But as the Physicians for a National Health Program have pointed out, the Democratic hype of surrounding the bill is belied by the facts.

It is true that children can now be kept on their parents’ insurance until the age of 26; that Medicaid has expanded to cover 16 million low income people; that the caps on lifetime health insurance spending limits has been removed; that companies are prohibited from denying coverage to people with preexisting conditions; that it “ends” the practice of rescission in which health care companies have been able to retroactively cancel policies on the basis of an “unreported” illnesses.

But in nine years time 23 million people will remain uninsured. Millions of workers will be forced by law to purchase commercial health insurance policies costing up to 9.5 percent of their income but covering only 70 percent of their health care costs. Many will find such policies too expensive — even after government subsidies — and will face mandated fines. Or, if they buy them, will find them too expensive to use because of high co-pays and deductibles.

Insurance firms will be handed \$450 billion in taxpayer money to subsidise purchases of these useless products, much of which will come from workers

who have employer-based contracts and now face steep taxes on their “Cadillac” benefits as the cost of insurance grows.

Women’s reproductive rights will be further eroded, owing to the burdensome segregation of insurance funds for abortion from all other medical services. And the much ballyhooed end of rescission (sick people being dropped by their insurance company) that this legislation promises is so riddled with loopholes, owing to the part played by the insurance companies in crafting the law, as to be just a tad better than useless.

What next? All the drawbacks to this legislation fall on the backs of the working class and the poor, that is, on Democratic Party constituents.

This is the ultimate victory of bipartisanship, insofar as political suicide by the Democrats is as real a concession as one party can offer another.

Liberal groups such as Move-on.org, the Progressive Democrats of America and the AFL-CIO, all ostensibly in favour of single-payer, played no small role in abandoning their principles to strong-arm recalcitrant Democrats into falling into line with the administration. Former radicals such as Tom Hayden even offered the shame-faced self-justification that channeling billions of dollars into this health care bill will help “starve” the military.

The real question is whether, in the end, the labor movement can find in this legislation anything on which to build.

Failing that — and it is difficult to see a path to progress in a market based framework — the issue is whether activists within the labor movement can seek sufficient allies to build a movement outside the Democratic Party that can force this issue to be revisited, based on a platform that puts working people first.

THE IRISH LEFT BEFORE THE 1968-9 CRISIS

What was the “national question”

By SEAN MATGAMNA

The third and final part of a response to Rayner Lysaght (www.workersliberty.org/lysaghtreply) on the history of revolutionary socialism in Ireland.

Most people know the none-too-funny joke: “Every time the English find an answer to the ‘Irish question’, the Irish change the question”.

In fact there is important truth in it, except that it has usually been the English, by their activities, who have changed the question. The “Irish question” has in history been a succession of different “questions”, each growing out of the previous one and the way it was answered.

In the 1860s the Irish question was mainly three questions: the land question, the Home Rule question, and the fact that a minority Anglican church, alien to both Ireland’s Catholics and its Presbyterians, was the Established Church of Ireland.

No less a person than Karl Marx thought that the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869 would eliminate the religious sectarian question. The Tory party thought that the series of Land Acts that turned peasant rent into lower annual mortgage payments was “killing Home Rule with kindness”, and many European Marxists came to think that too.

The winning of Dominion status and, incrementally, of real independence for the 26 Counties (culminating in the removal of the last English naval bases in 1938), combined with Home Rule for the Six Counties of Northern Ireland, redefined it yet again.

Most Republicans until the late 1930s had tended to accept the verdict of both segments in the 1922 Sinn Féin split and the civil war that nothing much could be done about partition as long as the majority in Northern Ireland wanted that state to continue.

From the late 1930s, to nationalists, Republicans, Stalinists, and republican socialists, the Irish question became the partition question.

This took the form of attributing to England all or most of the blame for partition. For some — the Fianna Fail current and later the Provisionals — the solution was to persuade or (the Provos) coerce Britain into ending partition.

For Republicans, Stalinists and Stalino-Republicans, the focus came to be on denouncing Northern Ireland as a police state for its treatment of the Catholic minority. The fundamental fact that a million Protestant Unionists, the compact majority in north-east Ulster though not in the whole Six Counties, wanted partition, was simply buried in a mixture of agitation — truthful as far as it went — and self-deceiving pretence that Britain is the main opposition to a united Ireland.

So the “Irish question” was the partition question. Most commentators today think the “Irish question” has been solved by the creation after 1998 in the Six Counties of a system of intricate bureaucratic confes-

sionalism, in which the rights of Catholic and Protestant, nationalist and Unionists, are equalised. Almost certainly they are wrong.

The Northern Ireland system, as well as being a poisonous institutional sectarianism, is inherently unstable.

NATIONAL QUESTION

But anyone who talks of “the Irish question” at a particular stage of history needs to define what he thinks the question then was.

Discussing the Irish Workers’ Group of the 1960s, Rayner Lysaght asserts that “the national question” was the most important issue then. Here Lysaght, the adoptive Irish nationalist, as always, gets in his own light. He had a peculiar line on aspects of the Irish question. He reads them back anachronistically on to the IWG dispute.

The “national question” was indeed an overshadowing presence in the IWG — but not as Rayner Lysaght would have it.

We were, all of us in the IWG, to varying degrees but all of us without exception that I can recall, attuned emotionally and in our thinking to the Irish nationalist culture we had received in song and story and school history. We were all influenced by the inherited memories of the older generation, of the War of Independence (1919-21), the Civil War (1922-3), and the struggles of the Republican movement against the “Free State” (the 26 Counties); all of us identified with the long struggle of Irish Catholics in history against oppression and for the freedom to be ourselves.

That culture shaped, enhanced, and sometimes warped even our conceptions of ourselves as individuals.

We were too, all of us, in our basic politics, shaped or at least heavily influenced by the going wisdom in both Catholic Ireland and in the left of the British labour movement, that the “Irish question” was now mainly about partition; that partition was fundamentally imposed by British imperialism; and that the consequence of partition was that Northern Ireland was an oppressive “police state”.

There was also an important strain in both Irish nationalist and British left (then, on this, mainly Stalinist) propaganda that the wretched state of the 26 Counties economy was also a product of partition, which artificially cut the “Irish economy” in two.

A peculiarity of our situation was, as I argued in an earlier article, that Trotskyism, as it was twenty or 25 years after Trotsky ceased to contribute to it, lent itself easily to the role of being merely a loose and unencumbering garment to wrap around the culture, concerns, goals, and “analysis” of both the physical-force-on-principle Republicans and the Stalinist-influenced “left” in Britain and Ireland.

The Republicans told a story of endless, successive, cumulative betrayals by Republican apostates, who

went over to “politics” and to collaboration with British Imperialism, then butchered and jailed their former comrades who remained true to their old cause.

The Stalinists of the Connolly Association told a variant of the Republican story, adapted to their own aims of using Irish nationalism against Britain, NATO, etc.

For orthodox Trotskyists, this story of betrayals resonated with our own story of betrayals by Stalinism.

In the mid-1960s, as the Stalinist leadership of the Republican movement steered unmistakably in the direction of “politics” and away from physical-force-ism, all sorts of “wild men” were shaken loose. They were precocious Provos, except that the Provisionals were an avowedly right-wing breakaway from the Stalinist Official Republicans, and these “wild men” were often “socialists”.

They were also often, despite the political story they told to themselves and about themselves, armed robbers, and, some of them, indistinguishable from simple bandits.

What were the real questions then of analysis and politics on the “national question”, or “Irish question”, that the IWG or any revolutionary Marxist group had to answer? I thought, and think now, that they were these.

REAL QUESTIONS

One: What was the nature and outcome of the Irish political revolution that had occurred between 1916 and 1923, and of the economic land revolution from above between 1869 and the tidying-up Free State and Fianna Fail Land Acts of 1923 and 1933?

Two: What was the nature of partition, and of the division between the peoples on the island that was at least one of the causes of partition?

Three: Did partition mean that Ireland had not completed its bourgeois-democratic revolution?

Four: If it did mean that — if the bourgeois-democratic revolution was not complete — what did that mean for the work of revolutionary socialists? That we should focus on completing it?

Five: If yes — we should focus on completing it — then did that mean relegating to the future the work of building a socialist movement, to fight for the workers’ republic? Did that have to wait, as the Stalinists said, until after we had completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution — united the island in one political entity? Or could the two be combined?

Six: What was our attitude to the extant physical-force-on-principle Republicans? The revolutionary nationalists, the people whose political ancestors the Communist International and the infant Communist Party of Ireland had backed in 1921 and afterwards?

Seven: What was our attitude to “left Republicanism”, the populist-nationalist politics that the Stalinists and such Stalino-Republicans as Peadar O’Donnell had created in the 1930s?

Eight: What public attitude should we take to religion, in which so much of Irish political life had been and was clothed? What should be our attitude to the Catholic Church, which dominated the 26 Counties to the extent that there were large elements of a theocracy in that bourgeois-democratic state? (To Protestant sectarianism in the North we were naturally and unconsciously opposed).

Nine: What was our attitude to Ireland’s involvement in the then-developing European Union?

In the year between the split with the Maoists (in September 1965) and the start of Rachel Lever’s and my efforts to commit the IWG to answering those questions differently, the IWG’s answers were, roughly:

Ireland had had an abortive bourgeois-democratic revolution. It still had to complete its bourgeois-democratic revolution. For practical purposes that meant unifying the island politically under a central government. Partition was an imposition of British imperialism, aided by quislings and traitors in Northern Ireland.

But Ireland could be unified only if the working class took the lead and simultaneously fought for socialism, for the workers’ republic, in a process of permanent revolution.

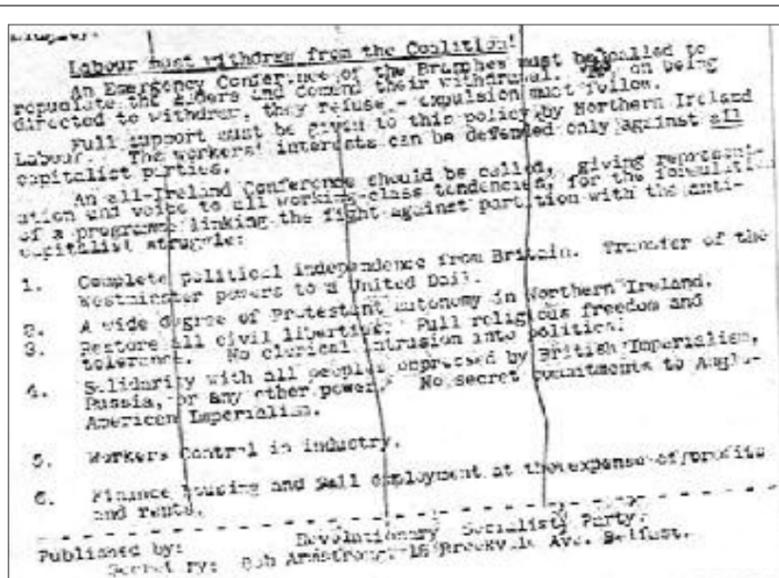
Irish revolutionary socialists had to focus on completing the bourgeois-democratic revolution, but not, as the Stalinists and Republicans said, in stages — first the

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Leaflet of the Revolutionary Socialist Party, a small Trotskyist group that existed in Ireland in the 1940s. The Revolutionary Socialist Party, advocated a policy which resembles our own on the question of Protestant-Catholic relations. It called for a “wide degree of Protestant autonomy in Northern Ireland”.

It seems to us that federalism is the only feasible arrangement now, but our fundamental idea has been expressed like this since 1969: “As much autonomy for the Protestant Irish minority as is compatible with the rights of the Irish majority”. The exact details will be worked out in discussion and negotiation. The RSP’s policy is underdeveloped, but is character, tendency and implications are unmistakable.

The RSP was initially linked to the British Revolutionary Communist Party, and then a separate organisation. In the late 1940s’ discussion



amongst Trotskyists about the class nature of Russia, they adopted the position of the Workers’ Party of America, that it was bureaucratic-collectivist.

Always tiny, the RSP disappeared at the end of The 1940s. One of its members was the late Matt Merrigan, who was central to the Irish left for half a century.

POLEMIC

New feminist group no ally of vulnerable workers

By JADE BAKER

The launch of UK Feminista — a new feminist organisation seeking to link up grassroots feminist activists with larger campaigning bodies — is yet another “feminist” campaigns which will be, in practice, detrimental to the rights of sex workers.

In the run up to the launch on Saturday 27 March, Kat Banyard, the “brains” behind the campaign, spoke at an event launching her new book *The Equality Illusion: The Truth About Women and Men Today* along with Anna van Heeswijk of Object, an organisation devoted to combating the objectification of women. No guesses as to what was top of their agenda: the condemnation of sex work and lap dancing clubs!

It seems that hostility to sex work will be UK Feminista’s main area of work. This is something we have to prepare to counter as socialist feminists.

Banyard emphasised the fact that, between 2004 and 2008, the number of lap dancing clubs has doubled; but she showed no interest in the growing pool of women workers working in these clubs. Van Heeswijk talked about Object’s “Stripping the Illusion” campaigns, which calls for changes in licensing laws to bring about lap dancing clubs’ demise. From 6 April, it will be much easier for local authorities to prevent clubs from opening.

For those concerned with women’s liberation, this is simply counter-productive. Whatever we may think of lap dancing, moving such work further to the margins, will simply make it even harder, at a time of recession, for some of capitalist society’s most vulnerable women — the impoverished, single parents, migrant workers etc, pushed into the industry by their precarious position — to keep their income and change their conditions of work.

According to TUC figures for 2008, female redundancy rates are double that for men at 2.5%. For a feminist organisation to want to push more women out of work, rather than helping them organise to win safer working environments, better conditions and against sexism through unionisation, is bizarre.

There was much else to criticise in the speakers’ diatribes. For instance, Kat Banyard referred to the “80,000 women in sex work in the UK”. In fact it is not only women who work in sex work that make up this number.

I also cringed at the notion, obviously fetishised by the organisers, that a woman engaged in sex work “sells her body to a man”. As Marxists we know that a consenting sex worker sells her labour power to provide a sexual service — she does not sell her person. The client does not own him or her after the work has been completed. As Marx put it: “Prostitution is only a specific expression of the general prostitution of the labourer”. The question of whether other types of work are fundamentally different on some sort of “moral” level was brought up by an AWL comrade, who referred to super-exploited female migrant cleaners in London. But to no avail.

Anna Van Heeswijk rejoiced in the “feat” achieved by Object’s “Demand Change” campaign. From 1 April, under the 2009 Policing and Crime Act, it will be illegal to pay for sex from somebody who has been “exploited” — this umbrella term here includes those who are pimped, trafficked, forced into prostitution, coerced, threatened and those whose vulnerability has been violated. All of those things are wrong, but fundamentally, the law will not “protect” sex workers. It will give the police a new channel through which to prosecute speedily.

And what that will do is create an even more precarious working environment for women, pushing the sex industry even more underground. We must do everything in our power to repeal this law as part of the fight for unionisation.

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bourgeois-democratic revolution, then the working-class socialist revolution only at a later stage. It should be done by combining the completion of the bourgeois-democratic revolution with the socialist revolution.

The revolutionary nationalists — the physical-force-on-principle Republicans — were seen as having in general the right attitude, the “revolutionary” attitude. But they needed to understand that they must combine their struggle with the struggle for socialism — for “Connolly’s Workers’ Republic” — and take that as their all-shaping goal.

There were a few disrespectful references to the Catholic Church in “Irish Militant”, but never a clear statement for secularism. The IWG did not, as far as I remember, say anything about the European Union before I wrote a piece in mid-1967 denouncing nationalist-Stalinist opposition to European unity even under the bourgeoisie.

A peculiarity of the IWG is that we had very little of the work of previous Irish Trotskyist organisations to draw on. That was in part because little of such work had ever existed, and in part because we were largely ignorant of what little there had been.

For example, the Trotskyists of the extremely small Revolutionary Socialist Party had come out for a federal solution to Irish unity around 1948, but the first I heard of that was in the mid 1990s, when an AWL comrade, Bruce Robinson, unearthed a copy of the Irish Trotskyist leaflet.

A couple of “heavy” articles by Bob Armstrong, a Scotsman who was in the Irish group in the 1940s, had appeared in the British Trotskyist magazine *Workers’ International News* around 1944. It is improbable that none of us had seen those pieces — Daltun and maybe Lawless may have done — but I knew nothing of them.

The biggest influence in the IWG on the national question was Stalino-populo-nationalism. That tradition existed, was known, was accessible, and had been dominant in the Irish Communist Group. It would be propagated by the Irish Communist Organisation (the future BICO) for another five or six years after the 1965 split in the ICG.

One measure of the nationalist-populist-Stalinist influence is that the IWG marked the 50th anniversary of the 1916 Rising by republishing as a pamphlet a 1936 piece by Sean Murray, then the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, with a token introduction by Gery Lawless.

The group had no coherent theory or analysis on Ireland (or anything else). Essentially it had disjointed phrases and name-tags, like “permanent revolution”. The IWG thought those phrases answered the Stalinists, the Maoists, and the “pure” Republicans, but they didn’t. What they did was mystify the issues even further.

The group subsisted on agitation, some of it very good agitation like the campaign it ran against proposed anti-union legislation in the 26 Counties. Everything was agitation-led, and inescapably much of that implied positions and theories that were a long way from revolutionary socialist politics. For instance, the IWG agitated against the Stalinist turn towards politics and towards disarming the IRA, and that implied support for the physical-force-on-principle people.

A while back, looking through a file of the IWG magazine *An Solas* (later *Workers’ Republic*) from late 1965 and 1966, what struck me most was how much of it was straight glorification of physical-force Republicanism and guns which was identifies as revolutionary politics in Ireland. It identified revolutionary politics with physical-force-ism and often with the wild men of fringe Republicanism.

Liam Daltun was named as editor of *An Solas*. My guess is that in practice the magazine was produced by Gery Lawless and whomever he could find to help him, Eamonn McCann most likely. But Daltun too, though by far the best of them politically, was not entirely divested of his physical-force politics of the 1950s.

The truth is that the IWG was intellectually and emotionally parasitic on the Republican physical-force-on-principle movement and tradition. While the Stalinists exploited Irish nationalism for their own ends — to use it against Russia’s enemy, Britain — the would-be Trotskyists were themselves emotionally and intellectually dependent on it. People like Rayner Lysaght and the Irish Mandelites still are.

I will list the issues as they came up, and as I remember them or can find written remains of them in the IWG files I have.

THE DISPUTES

The Flag dispute: in 1966 the group was heavily involved in agitation among the Irish in London

against Fianna Fail’s anti-union legislation, brought in to curb working-class militancy which had risen in the comparative economic boom conditions then.

A dispute emerged between, on one side, Gery Lawless and the nationalism-first “wing” of the IWG and, on the other, Liam Daltun and Eamonn McCann, about whether to display the tricolour or the Plough and Stars flag, the flag of Jim Larkin’s Irish Citizen Army and the flag under which James Connolly took part in the 1916 rising.

Liam Daltun later wrote an account of the antics this dispute generated, including a loud and near-violent clash between Daltun and Lawless at a big broad public meeting on the anti-union laws.

I can’t see now why they didn’t agree to carry both flags — the tricolour to identify themselves to Irish observers of marches and open-air Hyde Park meetings, and the Plough and Stars to identify the IWG politically — but when I became actively involved I came down heavily on the side of Daltun and McCann.

I think it was one of those intractable disputes in which what is ostensibly discussed is actually a stand-in for or token of something much bigger and broader — in this case, for Daltun’s and McCann’s, and my, distrust of the strong nationalist coloration of the whole IWG.

The dispute was effectively over when I became active in the IWG in late 1966.

Permanent revolution? An editorial in *Irish Militant* by Lawless and McCann gave me a chance to start a discussion on the substantive issues — the nature of partition, the “class character” of Ireland, the roots of partition, and so on. The correspondence can be found at www.workersliberty.org/pr-ireland. My understanding at that time was that I had convinced them that “permanent revolution” had no application to Ireland. That is what they said.

Attitude to physical-force Republicanism. In early 1967, *Irish Militant*, the printed IWG monthly, carried a front page article under the headline, “Taking whose gun out of politics?”

It was a straightforward denunciation of the Stalinist Republican leadership for disarming. The article reflected the viewpoint of physical-force-on-principle Republicanism and for all practical purposes embodied it.

We all in the IWG, though for varying reasons, loathed the manipulative Stalinists who had got control of the Republican movement. But the question here was: in the name of what, positively, were we opposed to their “political” turn? In the name of the old physical-force-on-principle Republicanism on whose patent bankruptcy they were building their “political” alternative?

The article, written by Lawless and I guess McCann, appeared under the name of a quasi-Trotskyist member of the IRA Army Council, Phil Flynn, whose first encounter with the piece was when he saw it in the printed paper!

The tone and manner was that of a heresy-hunting denunciation of politics — on the grounds that the politics were Stalinist and parliamentary — from the point of view of an accepted physical force Republican status quo. A picture of IRA volunteers doing weapons training in the dark was not, as it might well have been, offered as a neat metaphor for physical-force-on-principle-republicanism, but as a caption carrying the lamentation: “IRA volunteers learning to assemble guns by touch. If certain people have their way this will become a picture from the past.” This was as politically nonsensical, from a Marxist socialist point of view, as it was simply stupid. It could only cut us off from thinking Republicans who were aware of the bankruptcy of physical-force-on-principle Republicanism and were tempted by the Stalinists’ turn as the only political alternative on offer.

For the upcoming *An Solas/Workers’ Republic* (no.17) Gery Lawless had written a short bombastic piece denouncing an article in the *United Irishman* commenting on the tenth anniversary of the IRA Border Campaign.

His viewpoint was simply and straightforwardly that of the dissident Republicans of the mid-50s, the Christle group and Saor Uladh. (Daltun too, I think, took part in the split in the IRA at the time). I found a copy of Lawless’s article — in Eamonn McCann’s handwriting — in the IWG files.

With the *Irish Militant* nonsense in mind, I wrote an analytic overview of Irish Republicanism from 1916 onwards, tracing the zigzag between constitutionalism and physical-force-ism.

I redid Lawless’s account of the 1956 IRA split as a small subsection of a much longer piece.

I asked Lawless if he would accept the expanded article, or wanted to have two pieces in *Workers’ Republic*, mine and his. I expected a political fight on attitudes to physical-force-ism.

Not only did Lawless — hitherto the most raucous

demagogue of “cowboy” physical-force Republicanism — agree to a single article, but he suggested that he alone put his name to it, “for the good of the group”, to which I agreed. For my political concern — moving us on from romantic and essentially a-political glorification of physical-force Republicanism — this was “game, set, and match”. It was an unexpectedly easy political victory. In serious measure, it was a deceptive one, but of course I didn’t know that.

The article provoked no controversy in the group.

The populist-Republican tradition. Even without the romantic attitude to political violence, the Peadar O’Donnell/ George Gilmore/ Stalino-Republican tradition was (and is) a major element in the “Trotskyisation” of a version of its politics under the wrap-around garment of “permanent revolution”.

I wrote a review in *Irish Militant* of a pamphlet by George Gilmore in which I rejected the central populist-nationalist notion that a working-class orientation was necessary because Republicanism needs the working class if it is to thrive and survive. I asserted that the socialist workers’ movement did not need that kind of Republicanism.

The article passed without controversy in the group — but that, too, I came to think, was deceptive.

The European Union. I used the occasion of a knock-about polemic against the leading Stalinist Desmond Greaves, who ran the Connolly Association, to put the case against making a fetish of Irish “sovereignty” and independence from such international associations.

That created no dispute either — though later Rayner Lysaght, when, towards the end of 1967, he became involved in the IWG, tried to object to it; and not long before the group began to split, Gery Lawless said something to me about his starting to think that we’d “maybe” have to change our line. There would, I think, have been a political fight about that, had the group survived long enough, but in fact there wasn’t.

At the time my deliberately provocative article in *Irish Militant* stirred up no controversy.

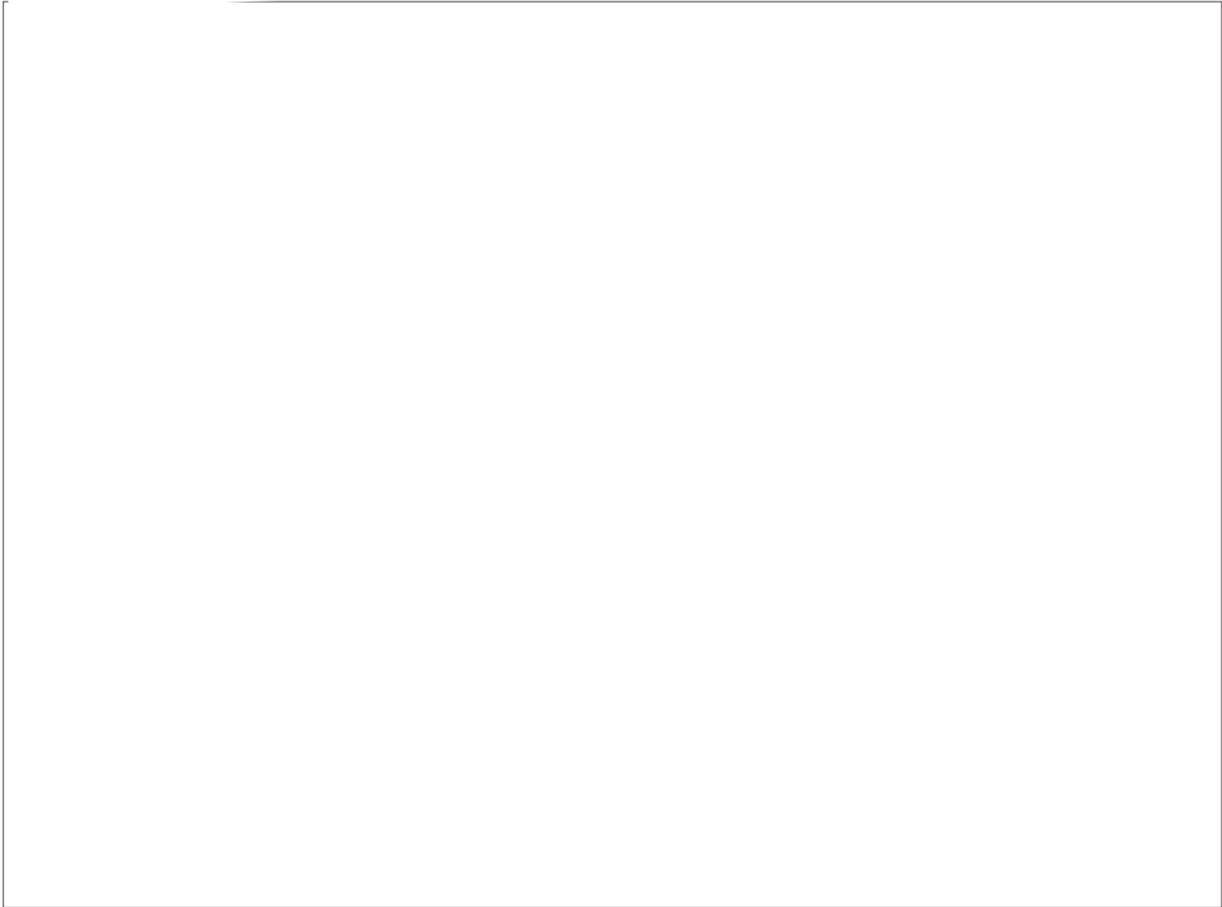
A note of explanation is needed here for readers who will know that opposition to the European Union is now, and has been for decades, an unreflecting article of faith for much of the left. All the British Trotskyist groups rejected agitation against the European Union (then called Common Market) when the Stalinists started it in 1962-3 at the time of Britain’s first attempt to join the EU. We counterposed to it working-class unity against all the bosses, with the orienting slogan, “In or out, the fight goes on”.

In the next decades all the Trotskisant groups came out against the EU and adopted the gist of what had been the Stalinist position. The first was the Healy organisation. In 1966-7, when Britain made another try at entering the EU, the Healyites denounced the Wilson government for wanting to join the capitalist EU instead of building a socialist Britain...

OTHER ELEMENTS

There was a small fracas in the IWG when I, in passing, in an editorial in *Workers Republic* attacked a left Labour man for a “totalitarian pronouncement” against the language freedom movement.

There was a dispute of a rather different sort about how we would commemorate the Fenian rising on its hundredth anniversary in 1967. A member of the IS [SWP]/ social-democratic wing which by then was part of the IWG developed the anti-physical-force-ism



Irish Militant, January 1967, implicitly endorsed physical-force-on-principle Republicanism by way of denouncing the Stalinist Republican leaders for talk of disarming.

ideas in the “Lawless” *Workers’ Republic* article “Where the Hillside Men Have Sown”, into what I thought was a social-democratic incomprehension of the great revolutionaries of the past, and wrote a social-democratic (and to my mind a-historical) critique of the Fenians.

After much discussion, he agreed to re-do the article, then asked me to. When I did as we had agreed, he took great umbrage at it — or at something else.

The incident was thrown about in the faction fight, used by the nationalist wing (the social democrats were now with them) to complain about the way Rachel Lever and I ran the *Workers’ Republic* magazine.

There was also a dispute about coming out clearly against religion and for secularism, centred on a piece I had written for the magazine.

Have I forgotten anything? In the period of the break-up of the IWG, among the charges levelled by Gery Lawless against me was heresy on the national question, but I can’t recall that anything specific was said.

The main charge was that I was a British nationalist. In so far as this chauvinist idiocy had any substance to it at all, it came down to the fact that I was primarily active in the British labour movement — i.e. in the labour movement of the country in which I lived.

But in September 1967 we seemed to have got agreement on the national question and on how the IWG would henceforth relate to it. It was summed up in the IWG manifesto of September 1967, the preamble to the new IWG constitution.

[Only the] Irish proletariat [is] capable of putting an end to capitalism’s futile existence, and capable, as part of the world revolutionary class, of realising the ages-old dream of the people of Ireland for freedom. The best traditions of the old, bourgeois, republicanism have passed to the socialist working class...

The only genuine liberation of Ireland will be from the inexorable — uncontrolled — pressure of international capitalism. All the essential goals of all the past defeated and deflected struggles of the Irish people over the centuries, against oppression and for freedom of development and freedom from exploitation, can now only be realised in a Republic of the working people, as part of the Socialist United States of Europe and the world.

The IWG stands against the divided Irish bourgeoisie, Green, Orange and Green-White-and-Orange alike, and for the revolutionary unity of the workers of all Ireland in a struggle for state power. The Irish working class has no common interest with any section of the Irish bourgeoisie....

National unity will be achieved, if not by the coming-together of the Irish capitalist class under the auspices of the

British imperialist state and the capitalist drive towards West European federation, then as an incidental in the proletarian revolution. The possibility of any other revolutionary reunification is long since passed. The only revolutionary republicanism today is the internationalist socialism republicanism of the proletariat.”

The appearance of agreement was delusory. In truth what Rachel Lever and I ran in *Workers’ Republic* was a tiny literary bureaucracy, cut off by geography from the actual political life of the IWG, which was mainly in London. Add any adjective you like to remove any hint of self-aggrandisement in that statement, but it is true. I would have bitterly resented it if anyone had said that, but it is the truth.

I worked with the not obviously absurd idea that if people do not protest, or object, or respond negatively, then they accept what is written in articles and in formal statements; and certainly that those who endorse the statements, or put their name to the articles, or positively say that they agree, do.

That was naïve. Some start was made in analysing the realities of Ireland, but it was only a start.

Finally, there was in the IWG an atmosphere of Irish chauvinism, embodied in Gery Lawless. The group was a client group in relation to the Militant (RSL, today’s Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal), IS (today’s SWP), and the small Mandelite group. Lawless played the role with them of the professional Irishman, to the disgust of people like Liam Daltun, Joe Quinn, me, sometimes McCann (I think), and no doubt others as well.

If you want to judge that for yourself, have a look at the minutes of the IS (SWP) discussion on Northern Ireland in 1968: www.workersliberty.org/node/9322.

I objected to counterposing Irish-nationalist historical grievances to working for workers’ unity between British and Irish workers in Britain, where there were hundreds of thousands of us, and between the two communities in the North. The reader can get a further idea of that from the files of *Socialist Worker*, where we headbanged on the issue when Lawless (with Chris Gray) wrote a crassly chauvinistic and ignorant piece of the 1916 Rising, to which I responded: www.workersliberty.org/node/9693.

In conclusion: Lysaght, the adoptive Irish nationalist, as always, gets in his own light. He had a peculiar line on aspects of the Irish question. He reads them back anachronistically on to the IWG dispute. The “national question” was indeed an overshadowing presence in the IWG split — but not as Rayner Lysaght would have it.

Workers’ Liberty 3/28
LENIN AND THE
RUSSIAN
REVOLUTION

By Andrew Hornung and John O’Mahony

Who was Lenin? He led the workers of the Tsarist Russian Empire to make the most profound revolution in history in 1917. He was the leader of the Russian Bolshevik Party, without which the workers would have been defeated.

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British Gas workers vote to strike

BY DARREN BEDFORD

GMB members working for British Gas have voted overwhelmingly to strike against management bullying. Over 82% of workers voted for a strike, and 90% voted for action short of a strike.

The ballot result is a resounding mandate for GMB officials and stewards in British Gas to go on the offensive against bosses who have been squeezing their workforce harder and harder, including threatening to axe 25% of the non-customer facing staff. A union survey found that British Gas workers feel massively over-pressured by a management that expects them to deliver top-quality customer service at the same time as it drives through a relentless culture of target-chasing and cuts.

The GMB's national secretary for the energy sector, Gary Smith, said "employees are sick to the back teeth of the pressure they face day to day at work from senior management and the competing demands placed upon them. The company says they want safe working, yet there is constant pressure on productivity. British Gas claim to want great customer service and jobs sorted first time but there are always pressures to cut costs including when it comes to ordering parts for boilers."

The dispute is significant because it could provide a test case for other workers wanting to take action against bullying bosses. As the impact of the recession continues to bite, more and more bosses will ratchet up cuts programmes and target-chasing in order to drive down overheads in the climate of "new austerity". Standing up to bullying bosses is a key part of what the workers' movement must do to resist capitalist attempts to make us pay for a crisis they created.

Workers' Liberty members recently set up the 'We Are Not Slaves' website to act as an online resource bank for workers wanting to resist management bullying.

For case studies and interviews, information on legal rights and Marxist theory on workplace bullying, visit <http://wearenotslaves.blogspot.com>.

Inside: The GMB's national secretary for the energy sector, Gary Smith, speaks to *Solidarity*: page 9.



Photo: Tim Dalinian Jones

BA workers can win

BY STUART JORDAN

BA cabin crew have now taken their seventh day of strike action in their embittered battle with union-busting management. According to the most conservative estimates, the strike has so far cost BA around £42 million, but the real figure is probably much larger.

BA boss Willie Walsh is desperately trying to win the confidence of investors and is spinning the figures. If the cost of his elaborate strike-breaking measures is taken into account, the dispute is probably costing nearer £100 million.

With pilots being paid £116 an hour as scab crew, fully-staffed replacement planes costing £3.5 million a day and empty planes ("freighters")

being flown across the world to make space at Heathrow (and to give the impression of business-as-usual) – Walsh has made it clear that he is willing to pay a heavy price to break the union.

Last week a leaked document from BA revealed that in management have been preparing for a union-breaking dispute for over three years. In a leaked document, Willie Walsh's appointment as CEO came with the instruction to "hit the union where it hurts".

Unite's leadership also seem to be taking this strike seriously, levying members for the strike fund. From both sides of our class ridden society, this dispute is seen as a critical battle, which will have repercussions for how the class struggle plays out as the organised labour movement starts to move in response to the economic crisis.

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