

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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STOP DEPORTING CHILDREN TO WAR ZONES!

Start of the anti-migrant drive: Tories plan to send orphans to Kabul

Afghan teenagers in the UK

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

The Government's decision to fast-track the deportation of child and adolescent Afghans from Britain to Afghanistan is an outrage against public decency and elementary human rights.

If the people of Britain have not been numbed and brainwashed by the torrents of scapegoat denunciations of immigrants in the press and by politicians (including the New Labour government), then this decision will be met by the fierce outcry it merits.

These are children and adolescents who sought refuge in Britain as "unaccompanied asylum seekers". They have no parents, or are separated from their parents. Living in this country, they have

become accustomed to British conditions — supported by social services, going to school...

Now the government plans to expel them forcibly into a war-torn and war-wrecked country in which large numbers of children manage to stay alive only as scavengers on rubbish dumps.

A society that treats young, and therefore especially vulnerable, human beings, because of their origin and ancestry, as something to be disposed of like toxic waste, is a sick and deeply corrupt society. It is a society in which self-proclaimedly enlightened politicians — Lib Dem as well as Tory — bow to the ignorant and irresponsible press, and to demagogic racist fringe politicians.

The Tories and the Lib Dems continue, in essentials, the policies and the demagoguery of the previous

New Labour government. The decision to fast-track deportations indicates a new energy and urgency which the coalition government is bringing to the issue.

Reportedly, the Government is telling the judges not to grant delays which allow legal appeals against the deportation orders. The judges should not listen to them.

The contingent of children now earmarked for quick expulsion will be the harbinger of many more, adult and child, deportations.

The labour movement should take the lead in protesting against these deportations — and as loudly as possible. Trade union branches and local Labour Parties should pass resolutions demanding that Labour MPs protest in Parliament.

“Greece shows other countries their future”

Vasilis Grollios is a Greek researcher in political theory, currently studying at York University. He spoke to *Solidarity* about the cuts in Greece.

The standard of living for 95% of the population has been seriously reduced. Wages are already very low, and pensions are very small as well. Most hospitals have cancelled appointments.

Doctors have not had money for overtime work for four or five months, and after several months of overtime pay being withheld, doctors have the legal right to cease attending appointments. That means more money for private sector hospitals, because people who can afford it go private instead.

In education, the plan is to have 50% less teachers and 30 students in a class instead of 20.

People who work under contract for the government will get their first salary ten to twelve months after they have started work. Although they will not be paid, the government still asks them to pay tax!

Indirect taxes are now rising seriously, and they are already among the highest in Europe. It is a squeeze on the working class's standard of living.

The capitalists enjoy 8 billion euros in tax relief. Their standard of living is hardly squeezed. The tax on private companies' profits is now 24% instead of 40% in 1980, and the programme of Pasok [the governing party] is to reduce it further to 20%. There has been an extra

tax this year only on their profits, but generally the tax will continue to be 24% and then reduced to 20%.

The government has done absolutely nothing to cut military spending. They say haven't announced any cuts because they must pay for the contracts which they have already signed.

Pensioners have lost out because they will no longer get the “13th and 14th month” payments. [Pensions and some wages in Greece have traditionally been paid in 14 instalments each year, one each month plus extra instalments at Christmas and Easter. The government has cancelled those “13th and 14th month” payments].

Ordinary people are disappointed and see no solution to what has happened. They are not informed about the democratic deficit in the EU, or what would be the repercussions of stopping payments on the debt, because no serious discussion has taken place in the mass media beyond certain small newspapers.

The discussion is only about which of the two main parties, Pasok and New Democracy, has stolen less money.

Here is one example: one month ago, prime minister George Papandreou, in parliament, said to New Democracy [the conservative opposition party]: “Shame on New Democracy! One of your ministers bought rugs for his office at the cost of 28,000 euros.”

The leader of New Democracy just said, “Look who's talking! Pasok has stolen more than us”.

It is just a competition over who has

stolen less money from state funds.

In the mainstream media no serious discussion has happened. In universities and some other circles there is a lot of discussion to the effect that the Greek crisis is part of a general crisis in capitalism, and that Greece is a “social experiment” in how the working class can be made to pay the cost of the crisis. In fact, George Papandreou has said as much, in order to palm off some responsibility.

Marx said in *Capital* that the “the country that is more developed industrially [Britain, then] only shows to the less developed the image of its own future”.

The same applies for Greece today: it shows other countries the image of their future as the crisis develops.

Pasok and New Democracy say that because they've been elected, the cuts are democratically decided. The whole capitalist class and the mainstream media are also saying that.

They are saying that we have the right to express disagreement through demonstrating — but not the right to be any more radical than that.

KKE [Greek Communist Party] people did some symbolic occupations in the ministry of finance and the whole mainstream media was against them.

But democracy presupposes not only form but also content — that is, the essence of social relations, meaning the way that people come into contact with each other and with nature in order to satisfy their human needs. A genuinely democratic society presupposes democratic control over the way that produc-

tion takes place.

A democratic society presupposes the overthrow of the capitalist relations of production, of private property in the means of production.

In the 19th century, the concept of democracy had a clear class content. That notion has now disappeared, which is deplorable.

The liberal John Stuart Mill rejected the label of “democratic philosopher”. The liberal tradition is not the same as the democratic tradition. But if Mill could see the excessive power that the European Central Bank has over European governments, he would turn in his grave.

Even the liberal tradition is a very radical one nowadays. We have turned into Americans — liberals are now considered to be on the left. Even social-democratic policy is very radical by the standards of our current society.

The possibility of an alternative government to replace the current one and carry through different policies in place of the cuts could emerge if a great revolt takes place and the government is overthrown — if we have not just general strikes but people occupying ministries and overthrowing the government, which is what I and many other Marxists think must take place. But for that to happen the left must be united around a common programme. Unfortunately that is not yet the case.

• A longer version is at www.workersliberty.org/node/14366.

WORLD CUP

Forced evictions and hyper-exploitation

By DANIEL RANDALL

Even for those of us who love sport, the saccharine liberal puff that inevitably accompanies any major sporting event can be a little nauseating.

Once you realise that it's not an insufficient quantity of football in the world that causes poverty, racism etc, and that these things cannot be magicked away by the unifying power of the beautiful game, you begin to begin to find statements like this one, accompanying FIFA's “Win With Africa” campaign, very tiresome:

“The goal is to reach beyond football, because FIFA firmly believes its responsibilities extend outside the sphere of the sport itself. In fact, FIFA hopes:

- to use football's potential for human and social development, the promotion of health, the development of communities and the promotion of peace, by supporting local organisations who work in these fields

- to ensure the entire African continent will benefit from the long-term effects of the 2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa™

- to send the whole world a positive message from Africa”

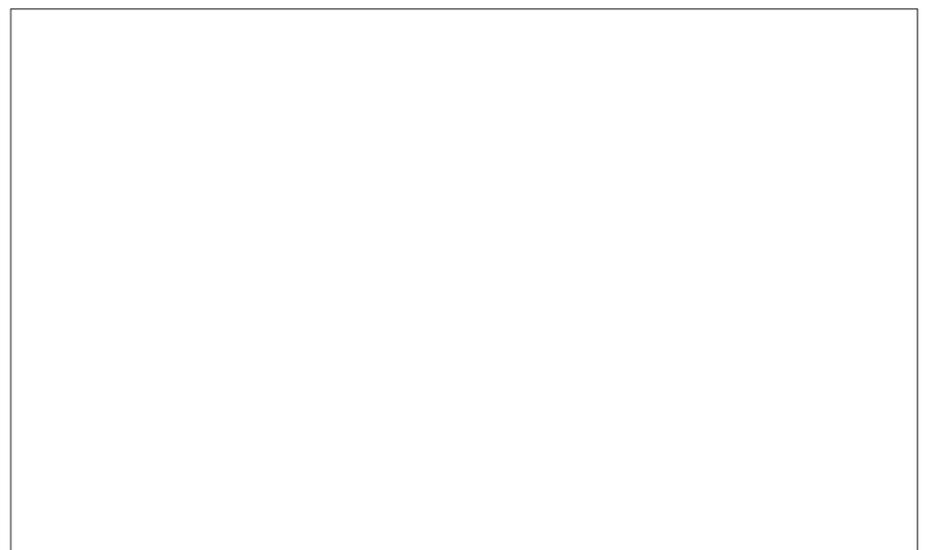
It's just as well FIFA doesn't specify which people in “the entire African continent” it hopes will benefit from the World Cup (trademarked, remember), because the Cape Town slum-dwellers who've been evicted in a nifty bit of social engineering to make the city look tidier before all the foreign fans arrived, are probably feeling that it's only the city's rich that are really benefiting.

Impoverished Cape Town residents from the 20,000-strong Joe Slovo slum have been forced into Tin Can Town, essentially a refugee camp for evicted slum-dwellers established as an allegedly temporary settlement in 2008.

Tin Can Town is plagued with crime and its gates are locked nightly, turning it into something not unlike a social detention centre.

Cape Town authorities plan to clear slums in order to build 600 new brick homes, but this initiative wouldn't even make a dent in the massive housing crisis faced by Cape Town's poorest residents.

When the South African government is shelling out £3 billion for the World Cup, including spending millions on a new stadium in Cape Town, it's easy to see why residents of Tin Can Town might not quite feel like entering into the



Tin Can Town

“festival of football” spirit.

The plight of Cape Town's slum-dwellers is just one example; sporting events like the World Cup also mean misery for millions of other workers — the sweatshop workers in the Far East making kits and balls for poverty wages, or the construction workers risking death to build the stadia without basic health and safety regulations. The

hyper-exploitation and anti-poor social engineering that lie just behind the World Cup's paper-thin philanthropic veneer doesn't make it morally reprehensible to enjoy the tournament, but it does show us that sport, as much as anything else, is locked into capitalist organisation within which profit comes first and people's rights — even the most basic, such as the right to decent housing

LABOUR MOVEMENT

Union democracy is needed to fight cuts

Public sector workers in Germany will demonstrate against cuts on 12 June. Government employees in Spain struck on 8 June.

Italy's biggest union federation has called a public sector workers' rally for 12 June. Portugal had a big anti-cuts protest march on 29 May. Greece has already had several general strikes.

On 22 June the British government will announce its cuts. Welfare benefits, tax credits, and public service jobs and wages, are sure to be among the first targets. That is where the government can save cash quickly.

As in other countries, trade-union action has to be central to fighting these cuts.

That makes union democracy an urgent need.

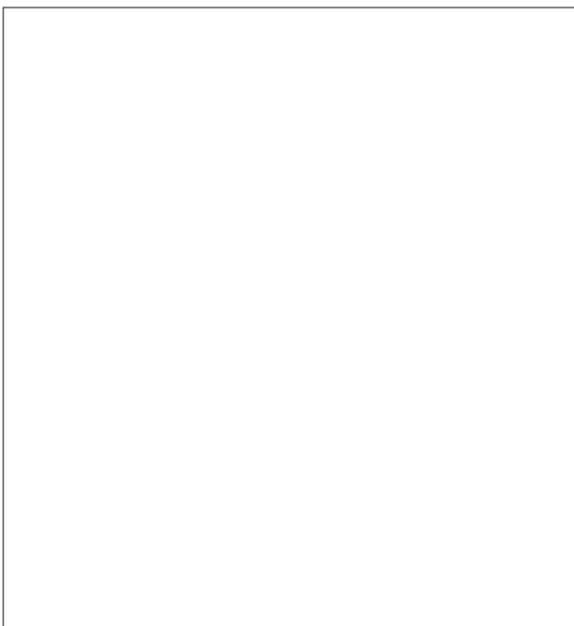
We have had two decades of trade-union "muddling through". Trade-union action has usually meant a one-day strike, or a string of one-day strikes, punctuated by negotiations and followed by a "not as bad as it might have been" deal.

Now unions have to go into a different gear. We have to fight a government which will not retreat and strike a compromise after just one or two protests, if only because it does not think it has the leeway to do that.

We have to face cuts and freezes which are not just temporary measures, but designed to shift the whole balance of class forces.

The battles we face call for a different level of union democracy from what we've been used to.

That is one of the lessons from Greece. The general strikes there are inspiring. But it took a lot of rank-and-file pressure to push the top union leaders into calling them. The union leaders still limit the mobilisation to one-day actions, called from the top, without any comprehensive and continuous discussion among the rank and file about a strategy.



Unison general secretary Dave Prentis.

The new conditions call for strike and dispute committees constantly accountable to the membership; able to know, from workplace meetings and votes, when workers are willing to step up action and when they have to step back; and able to take decisions.

They call for officials who live the same sort of life as the members they represent, who are accountable to them, and who are subject to regular elections just as branch secretaries or workplace reps are.

They call for all members to be able to know what the union committees debate and vote on, and exactly what is being said in negotiations.

At present the momentum of past decades is taking unions in the opposite direction.

The TUC plans to make its full congresses only once every two years, instead of yearly — as if the pace of things is slowing down, so that a single year will not yield enough substance for discussion!

The post and telecom union CWU has knocked back a proposal from its leadership to make its conferences only one every two years, but accepted one to have its Executive members elected every two years rather than yearly.

The public services union Unison continues its drive to expel left-wing activists or bar them from holding union office. It maintains its ban on branches linking up with each other "horizontally", to establish communications not controlled by union HQ.

The civil service union PCS is led by left-wingers nominally committed to union full-time officials being on workers' rather than top managers' wage levels, but at its recent conference the platform beat back moves to put that policy into practice.

The big conglomerate union Unite has just concluded its first Policy Conference. It was organised in such a way that many, perhaps most, Unite branches did not know the conference was happening until it was far too late to submit motions to it.

The momentum of "muddling through" and "leave it to the officials; they'll negotiate something, and call for action if they need it" still dominates.

We need to change direction in the unions. AWL activists in the rail unions have developed a detailed programme for change in that sector. We appeal to activists across the unions to join with us in working out plans for union democracy, coordinating them across different sectors, and organising for them.

- * Rail unions: www.workersliberty.org/fur
- * More: www.workersliberty.org/uniond

Ideas for Freedom 2010 Trotskyism and the capitalist crisis

**A weekend of socialist discussion and debate
hosted by Workers' Liberty, 9-11 July**

Film showing on the night of Friday 9 July
Highgate Newtown Community Centre, North London

Many of the ideas and arguments of Leon Trotsky, killed by a Stalinist agent 70 years ago, are acquiring fresh relevance:

- How do we fight fascism? "Maximum unity" or working-class united front?
- How do we develop independent working-class politics as a "Third Camp", opposed to both capitalism and the dead-end "anti-capitalism" represented in the world of 1940 by Stalinism and today by Islamist clerical-fascism?
- How do small Marxist groups relate to workers' movements which have a mass base but remain politically tied to capitalism in crisis?
- How do we build links between the workers' movement and other struggles against exploitation and oppression?
- Do we need to build a revolutionary party, or are loose coalitions a better answer?

Sessions will include:

- * How do we make the labour movement fight? With Maria Exall of the CWU, Jerry Hicks of Unite and Joe Marino of the Bakers' Union
- * Greece: fighting the cuts, with a Greek Trotskyist speaker
- * Alfredo Saad-Filho, author of *Marx's*

Capital and Anti-Capitalism: a Marxist introduction, on the economics of the crisis

- * Workers' plans and environmentalism: lessons of the 'Lucas Plan' with Dave Elliott
- * Class struggle under the last Liberal-Tory coalition: lessons of the Poplar struggle 1919-21, with Janine Booth, author of *Guilty and Proud of It*
- * The Plebs League and working-class self-education
- * 1982-2010: A history of the student left
- * Why inequality is growing and how to fight it, with Becky Shah from the Equality Trust
- * Protest songs and working-class culture
- * The political economy of Shanghai
- * Gramsci and Marxists today

Debates will include

- * Progressive politics or class politics? with Compass
- * Palestine: what should socialists say? Two states and workers' unity or single state and right of return? with Workers Power
- * Is capitalism in decline? with Hillel Ticktin of *Critique* magazine
- * The working class and the Eurozone crisis, with Greek Marxist economist Costas Lapavistas
- * The Trotskyist tradition today, with Socialist Appeal

We will also be running our "Introduction to Marxism" series for young and new comrades.

Creche, accommodation, and cheap food provided.

Weekend tickets bought before 12 June are £18 waged, £10 low-waged/students and £6 unwaged/school students. Day tickets also available: £10, £6, £4. Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

For more information email awl@workersliberty or ring 020 7207 0706.

BRITISH AIRWAYS STRIKES

“It’s Willie Walsh or us”

By IRA BERKOVIC

As the British Airways cabin crew workers’ dispute reached an apparent impasse, spirits remained high on picket lines at Heathrow Airport.

After several rounds of strikes, shenanigans in the courts (resulting in the latest round of strikes being declared illegal and then reinstated following an appeal) and a vicious campaign of victimisation from management, the apologetic and defensive attitude many workers displayed at the

beginning of the strike seemed to have been replaced with a kind of kamikaze confidence as workers face up to the reality of an all-or-nothing battle with Willie Walsh.

“If Walsh wins, I’m leaving” one striker told *Solidarity*. “It’s him or us now.”

However, other BASSA activists have told us that they are not certain the workforce as a whole has the confidence to fight an all-out trench war with BA bosses, and that they would probably settle for a management climb-down on the victimisations and a reinstatement of staff travel allowance. That would certainly be a defeat for the workers,

meaning the only “gain” of the strike would be the recapturing of things that were lost during the dispute itself.

But if the strike as a whole can take its lead from the spirit of the workers who turned out the picket lines last week (of whom there were, unfortunately, noticeably fewer than at earlier stages within the dispute) then there may be some possibility of exerting sufficient pressure on Walsh to force him to back down on some of his plans, or at least sufficiently expose him as enough of a liability that more moderate elements within BA management move against him.

Certainly, if he wins then the attacks on the cabin crew will be just the beginning. One check-in worker told *Solidarity*, “we’re all waiting to see what happens with the cabin crew. We could be next. Walsh will try to pick off different sections of BA workers one grade at a time.

“The cabin crew have more of a history of organisation than other workers, so they’re fighting back. If they lose, there’s no telling who Walsh will go after next.”

Tube workers strike to demand bosses pay for PPP blunder

By CLARKE BENITEZ

The RMT has announced two 48-hour strikes, beginning on 23 June and 14 July, in a dispute over jobs and pay on London Underground.

The dispute is bound up with the recent collapse of the PPP agreement, whereby the private entity TubeLines was bought back in-house by Transport for London for £310 million, becoming a wholly-owned subsidiary company of TfL.

Despite the blame for the failure of the scheme clearly lying with TfL and TubeLines bosses, there have been no guarantees from management that the costs of the buyout will not be passed onto workers.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said “we have made it perfectly clear to Transport for London that we do not expect our members to take the hit for the final collapse of the disastrous tube privatisation experiment. Those respon-

sible for the fiasco have creamed off vast amounts of Londoners’ cash in profits and are even getting a further £310 million ‘golden goodbye’ pay off in what is a reward for failure on a massive scale.

“We have sought concrete assurances that staff will not be expected to pay off the Tube Line’s exit costs in job losses, attacks on safe working conditions and an undermining of pay rates. Now that we have this massive mandate for action it’s essential that those assurances are forthcoming as a matter of urgency.

“With the transfer of Tube Lines we expect TfL to take responsibility for maintaining the pay, jobs and conditions of the workforce that they will need in place if they are going to get the upgrade programme back on track in time for the Olympics.”

Over 90% of workers balloted voted yes to action, which will primarily affect maintenance work on the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines.

Issues for UCU activists

By JIMMY DONAGHEY, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST UCU (PC)

The current position in the Higher Education sector is complex in terms of the mandate which the union’s HE Committee has been given in organising industrial action.

The first is that we are mandated to ballot for industrial action to take place at the start of the autumn term should no adequate progress be made. Any ballot over the summer runs the risk of a low turnout.

Whatever happens, we need to prepare for a highly aggressive assault by employers. We know from last year that the employers clearly have an agenda to up the ante on issues like docking pay of striking workers.

On the issue of the Israel-Palestine motions at congress, I think anger at what the Israeli state is doing translates into supporting all motions which invoke criticism of Israel. For me, it is important to be critical of the Israeli government but not to write off all Israeli workers.

For example, on the final day of Congress, a motion critical of the aggressive actions of the Israeli government was overwhelmingly supported by delegates. But the motion passed included breaking off links with the Histadrut, which is highly regrettable. Breaking off links (if any actually existed) with Israeli unions sends a clear message that, for UCU, worker solidarity comes a long way behind opposing anything to do

with Israel.

The first problem the left faces in UCU is that the “Left” label has been hijacked by a very narrow section of the left, who often pursue reactionary policies and seek to divide rather than unite the union. The name “UCU Left” [the SWP-run grouping within the union] is attractive to new activists who attend congress; very few who are active in unions would label themselves as being on anything other than the left.

Organisationally, the SWP has been quite successful in labelling anyone who does not take their whip as being “UCU Right”. However, how many of the approaches being taken really are genuine left wing-trade union strategies? Does having a walk around Brighton chanting anti-Labour Party slogans outside the Labour Party conference really strike fear into employers?

I helped organise a meeting of the broader left at UCU congress this year with a view to organising some sort of platform that can develop industrial strategies capable of taking on the employers. In terms of increasing democracy, the first principle must be that branches or local associations are the core organisational unit in the union.

Through the “National Organising Plan”, branches seem to have to be answerable to regions; this completely distorts the need for representatives to be accountable to those who elect them. Rank-and-file members also must be encouraged to actively mandate their delegates at congresses and conferences.

BT dispute: attacks when times are tough, and when they’re good

By IRA BERKOVIC

British Telecom workers are holding strong as they build towards their first strike in nearly 25 years, despite attempts by management to undermine them.

BT bosses put a new offer on the table at the last minute and, despite the offer including no substantial improvements on their previous proposal, they launched a vigorous press campaign trumpeting the “improved pay offer” they had extended to BT workers.

CWU deputy general secretary Andy Kerr said “BT’s revised offer remains materially unchanged for this year in terms of pay. As we’ve made clear, two per cent is unacceptable for our members as it does not reflect the reward they expect given the contribution they have made to cost savings of £1.75 billion and profits of over £1bn.”

Several top BT bosses earn over £1m per year (plus bonuses), and many have had pay increases of up to 80% due to the company’s huge profits. It doesn’t take a revolutionary anti-capitalist analysis to

see the glaring injustice in a situation in which a profit-making company whose bosses pay themselves such obscene figures is attempting to keep the wages of its workers so low.

The CWU has already been rather more acquiescent than socialists within the union might like, and its press release proudly proclaims the £1.75bn savings it “helped” the company make by persuading its members to accept pay freezes, changes to their pension schemes and 30,000 job losses.

The situation now, in which management is still intransigent on pay, should be a lesson to everyone in the trade union movement; helping bosses make cuts when times are hard is not going to make them any more inclined to treat us well when profits go up. Our starting point should always be to fight for decent pay and conditions for workers, regardless of whether or not the bosses have managed to keep the books in the black.

The CWU have set management a deadline of midday on Friday 11 June to improve their offer. If BT bosses fail to do so, workers will be balloted for action.

Coke workers set to strike

By DANIEL RANDALL

Resistance to Coca-Cola’s union busting in Colombia or its trampling of villagers’ rights in India are well-known to many activists on the left. Less well-known is the fact that Coca-Cola employs thousands of workers in the UK; now, those workers are going into battle with their bosses.

Over 2,000 employees of Coca-Cola Enterprises at 12 sites across the UK are members of the GMB or Unite, and from June 11 they will be balloted for strike action to win national bargaining on issues such as pay, conditions and pensions. Coca-Cola bosses have refused to enter into bargaining to secure national agreements for these workers, insisting

on bargaining on a plant-by-plant basis.

The strike, if it takes place, will go ahead during the World Cup. With Coca-Cola a key sponsor, the negative publicity this could create for the company is substantial.

Support for a strike is absolutely solid. A consultative ballot returned a 96% majority in favour, mirroring recent trends across a variety of sectors and workplaces.

The dispute involves a recent raft of changes that bosses introduced to the pension scheme, which made substantial cuts to the pension scheme offered to any worker who retired at 60 (only those who worked on until 65 would be entitled to the full scheme).

The ballot result is expected to be returned before the end of June.

MY LIFE AT WORK

“The managers understand what a unionised workforce could mean for their bonuses”

Abdi-Nasser is a retail worker for a franchise in a large train station.

Tell us about the work you do.

I work for SPS, Select Service Partner, the catering multinational that runs franchises in thousands of stations from here to Sydney — in Britain, it runs the Burger Kings, Upper Crusts, the bars and pubs at every station and airport.

It's a minimum wage job, using mostly migrant labour. A lot of workers are here on student visas, with a limit of 20 hours on how long they can work, which means having more than one job under the counter. I know two Afghan workers who do 12 to 14 hour shifts seven days a week. There's a very high turnover; it's mostly people between 18 and 35, but with some older workers too. We're under pressure to work fast because it's a station with streams of customers.

What are the pay and conditions like?

Most of us get the minimum wage. The chefs at some of the restaurants are on £6.50 to £7.30 an hour, depending on how long they've been there — but they're working eight hour shifts with no break. That's as high as it gets. Overwhelmingly it's £5.80.

We have a combination of long hours and not enough hours to get by. Everyone is contracted to do 20 hours; one shift is eight to twelve hours, so in effect they can cut back people's hours whenever they want. They never ask. If the “take” isn't high enough they'll send some people home and the rest of us will be overstretched.

Managers get bonuses for lowering the number of workers relative to take on a shift, so there's a constant pressure to push down the number of hours people get. You have to keep careful track of what you've worked, as they routinely cheat you by “forgetting” hours you've done.

A lot of jobs have disappeared and been allocated to other workers on top of their existing role. One example: instead of having kitchen porters to assist the chefs and waiters, they'll now rely on waiters to do everything. There was a kitchen porter at the bar I was working at last year; in October he was fired and not replaced — and new workers didn't know any better.

In theory I get a half an hour lunch break, but you can't take it during peak hours and in practice it's often squeezed to the point of non-existence. There are all kinds of encroachments on our rights which seem small but are very significant. Workers in the coffee shops were recently told they can't have drinks while they're working, though a coffee costs 8p and tea even less. The taps are not drinking water taps! Some people are getting into work at quarter to six so a cup of tea is really pretty essential. The manager responsible for that one got a huge bonus apparently.

What are your bosses like?

In general the managers are getting worse, as the result of a systematic policy. One who'd been working for three

years was sacked recently because he was too friendly with the workers. They brought in someone from outside. The people who do move up the ranks are the people who are willing to make the most brutal decisions.

How was the economic crisis affected your job and the way workers see things?

It's now much more of a regular occurrence that people get sent home because of “overstaffing”. But in fact, the company is not in trouble. The *Financial Times* publishes a thing called Top Track 100, with the top hundred UK companies, and SPS is in the top 30. Last financial year their pre-tax profits were £235 million! I'd say less than ten percent of sales money on each shift goes to labour costs. If anything, I'd say SPS has benefited from the recession, as it gives them an excuse to do what they want to workers. As a socialist, I'd still oppose attacks on workers even if the company was losing money but in this situation it's just absurd.

A lot of people have been sacked. One guy had been working at the bar nine years when I started and was sacked for something utterly trivial. I've made sure that everyone across the station knows about the company's profit margins; it's common knowledge now and there's massive discontent, but people don't see what we can do about it. A lot of them just hope to find different jobs.

Is there a union?

The union that covers us is the RMT. But because turnover is so high, membership is very low. They lowered the membership fees from £14 a week to £1, which should make a difference, but people need to see a solid reason why they should join. Unless the union can do something, to a lot of people it seems too abstract.

Some people are joining now. When managers do something outrageous you'll get a new recruit; one woman joined recently because she broke her arm and, as there's no sick pay, she had to take time off, without pay. For now, though, there's only ten RMT members out of 150 retail workers in the station. Sometimes RMT organisers come down and they've made some effort to talk to people, but it hasn't got very far.

We don't have much contact with the rail workers themselves. In the same way, catering and cleaning staff have relatively little to do with each other,

though we obviously work together all the time. I guess forging those links is the key to really getting organised.

Another problem is that several managers have joined the union, some with the deliberate intention of heading off the development of workers' organisation. On a crude level, they understand what a unionised workforce could mean for their bonuses!

A big problem is that there's not much downtime when you're on a shift, so you don't necessarily get a chance to talk to people. You can talk to workers from other units a bit on breaks, but the main chance to talk to people is outside work. When we have social events, for instance football in the park recently, the conversation does turn to pay and conditions and what's happening at work, so for me as a socialist it's about being prepared to give that discussion a steer in the right direction.

What do people talk about on the job? Is it easy to talk politics?

People talk about pay and conditions all the time, and about the way management conduct themselves. That's pretty much non-stop. In terms of “big” politics, obviously I try to start discussions. People like to discuss the politics of wherever they come from — and in this station it's literally dozens of countries; Burma, Iraq, Poland... I've learn a lot; for example, I recently learnt that in Poland, the time prisoners are meant to spend sleeping doesn't count as part of their sentence, and that you can go to prison for crossing at a red light!

People didn't have much to say about the recent election or know what to make of it, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're disengaged. One Burmese worker has been involved in democracy protests, for instance, but unfortunately there's not much experience of trade unionism or class politics from what I can tell.

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

If we had the choice we'd allocate jobs and hours between ourselves to make sure everyone had enough work but wasn't overworked. We'd get a wage that meant you wouldn't have to go to a loan shark or borrow money off each other at the end of the month. And we'd get lunch breaks that allow you to eat and do what you need to do without getting indigestion!

“Workers unite to fight cuts”

BY BEA MILLS

That was the headline on the front page of the *Jersey Evening Post* after the new Jersey Council of Representatives, a cross-union committee, held a hustings for the vacant Senate seat in the States Assembly.

The government has announced ten percent cuts over three years including:

- Scrapping plans for anti-discrimination legislation
- Scrapping subsidy for diabetic medication
- Cutting back Special Educational Needs services
- Stopping “non-essential” minor surgical procedures
- Reducing physio services
- Removing Christmas bonuses for those on pensions and benefits
- Freezing accommodation component of income support
- Ceasing funding for school milk
- Hospitals must reduce patient costs by ten percent.

67 jobs will go in the first round — on an island of 90,000. That's one fifth of the planned job cuts.

Saturday's hustings were the first trade union-organised hustings ever to happen on the island. 52 union reps and members turned up to quiz seven of the nine candidates.

Of the seven, only Geoff Southern of the (liberal) Jersey Democratic Alliance and left-wing candidate Nick Le Cornu said even vaguely anything pro-worker.

Southern made some okay noises about supporting the unions, cuts and the need for a progressive taxation system. But his platform is also anti-immigration and advocates a ‘population ceiling’ (he didn't say if he would introduce euthanasia for OAPs and a ban on having children to follow this up...)

Le Cornu was much better. He said clearly that he supported the fight against cuts and workers organising to defend themselves. He demanded taxing the rich, no privatisation, no job losses and no victimisation of workers involved in taking action. I think some of the workers found it disconcerting that he mainly answered questions by promising to support their struggles rather than by promising to deliver the earth himself in the States!

Stuart Syvret, the former senator who fled to the UK after he was persecuted for exposing a child abuse scandal, triggering this election, came out with a load of middle-of-the-road populism. His record is not pro-worker and he voted for the anti-union laws when they were introduced in the 90s.

The consensus seemed to be that Nick Le Cornu came out on top. Following the hustings, new unions signed up to the JCR.

The CWU has now signed up, as have the potentially very powerful dockworkers, who are in Unite. Unite members are very discontented with the way their union has handled the pay freeze and threat of cuts — and its organiser's unilateral decision to back Geoff Southern for Senator. Hopefully the JCR can help Unite members reclaim their union.

The JCR is not yet at the point where people feel comfortable endorsing candidates as a collective body. Things are at an early stage politically. The AWL will continue to argue for Jersey labour movement to create its own workers' party capable of translating Jersey workers' growing militancy into the political sphere.

INTERVIEW

Build student-worker action

A number of socialists, including supporters of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, have recently been elected as full-time student union sabbatical officers. Ashok Kumar is a non-aligned leftist, NCAFC supporter, and Vice-President Education-elect at the London School of Economics Students' Union.

What's your political background/previous involvement?

I was born and raised in a Marxist household in Chicago, a city with a rich history of social and political resistance. I was the US equivalent of academic affairs sabbatical officer at the University of Wisconsin where we fought alongside workers against cuts and fee hikes. After that I worked at organising to pass laws expanding workers', immigrants' and gay rights and fighting against racism in the criminal justice system.

What's the political culture like at LSE?

The LSE student union is rooted in a proud tradition of radicalism and commitment to participatory democracy. It is the only students' union in UK to have weekly Union General Meetings, which has remained a politicising, radicalising, and consciousness-building exercise for students from the beginning.

Well into the 80s the LSE students' union banner remained "Arm the Workers and Students — Education is a Right not a Privilege", and the union "president" title was changed to "general secretary" in solidarity with striking miners.

LSE has continued to remain active in recent years, particularly around Palestine solidarity.

Sadly, the current sabbatical officers chose to spend the 2009-2010 year campaigning to shift UGM floor voting to online voting under the hollow auspices of "reform" and "change". Indeed, in a move taken straight from the New Labour playbook, the LSE constitutional amendments localised and mimicked the undemocratic NUS reforms. Almost all of the SU leadership tried to ram through the institution of external trustees via referendum, yet students resoundingly rejected this move. However the sabbaticals succeeded in ending the voting power on the UGM floor, by a total of three votes. An inside-clique of union leadership chose to ignore the requirement for 2/3 majority for constitutional amendments.

This will no doubt lead to a more bureaucratized union where discussion and grassroots student dissent will remain institutionally stifled.

How did you decide to run?

The initial motivation to run was my opposition to the reforms and the fact that all the candidates standing had campaigned to pass them. The ultimate motivation to run was to actively fight the expected avalanche of cuts and the expected lifting of the cap on fees. I come from the US where fees are so high that the last vestige of the working class has been priced out of higher education, and university debt is carried throughout a lifetime. I don't want the UK system to become the like the US.

What was your campaign like?

Even though LSE is seeing some of the largest cuts, the university will be able to absorb them since it makes about £26

million profit from overcharging its large international student body. If government decides to increase the cap on fees, or removes it all together, once the recommendations from the Brown Review come out, then LSE will no doubt institute those increases to highest point feasible. So, I ran on fighting the fees.

I didn't run on a slate but there was an informal group of candidates with similar politics.

My primary support came from the Islamic Society, Palestine Society, and the LGBT Society. Our slogan was a "Ashok to the system". It's both catchy and captures the essence of our platform — putting robust union democracy and student/worker power above petty backroom deal-making for meaningless policy changes.

What do you hope to achieve next year?

We will be organising a broad-based campaign to fight any and all fee increases by demanding a five year freeze on fees for EU and international students for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. This issue is one that hits home for all students and will require organizing beyond our comfort zone of the traditional "left" ..

I intend to work towards LSE and other similarly situated universities becoming a hub of solidarity for organising and resistance against the cuts across the country — a base for organising and solidarity for worker and student actions and coordination

At the NUS level I hope to work with others on the left to push our national union away from the bureaucratic, undemocratic, careerist-hack organisation it has become towards an organisation that is a "union" in the true sense of the word.

At next year's NUS conference I will argue for a mandate that would require all the apparel produced for the over 700 affiliate unions come from factories with democratic unions. NUS spends millions of pounds a year contracted out to produce NUS's affiliate apparel. These clothes come from sweatshop factories consisting mostly of women of colour in the global south who have struggled to resist and organise into unions. When they do succeed they find themselves locked out, orders halted and factories shut down. My proposal will no doubt come up against some resistance, so I am hoping to get support from many factions to build real global student-worker solidarity.

What are the prospects are for building a united, effective student left?

I think it is crucial to find the points of intersection to build a broad based coalition of students and workers. We have to find creative actions and ways that not only "build" quantifiably, but also build a culture of resistance, our own hegemony on campus. Many have tried, some have succeeded, but clearly this isn't an easy task.

As the conditions worsen it will be up to us to help harness the anger into collective action. Sectarianism and petty infighting has become a running joke on the left. I am confident from what I've seen so far that socialists, anarchists, greens and others on the left will be able to unite around a common cause — namely the cuts.

Labour takes the Brazilian road

BY RHODRI EVANS

When Brazil's military dictatorship wanted to ease off and restore civilian government, in a controlled way, in the late 1970s, it licensed two officially-permitted parties to compete, PDS and PMDB.

One was safely "right", the other safely "left", so that the exercise could have the show of democratic choice.

The Labour Party's easing-off from Blair-Brown dictatorship has taken a somewhat similar route.

Five candidates are now in competition, but three of them only just scraped the ridiculously high minimum of 33 MPs' nominations.

Evidently the dominant factions in the Parliamentary Labour Party decided to use "spare" nominations to allow "licensed" left-wing (Diane Abbott) and right-wing (Andy Burnham, Ed Balls) candidates to enter the contest along with the front-runners, David and Ed Miliband.

Left-wing Labour MP John McDonnell had been backed by the Labour Representation Committee, the Bakers' Union, the rail union RMT, Unison United Left, and Unite United Left. The CWU, Compass, LabourList, Save The Labour Party, the Fabians, and the biennial Policy Conference of Labour's biggest affiliated union, Unite, had called for all declared candidates to be on the ballot paper.

But the generalissimos of New Labour decided to have their own choice of left

ED BALLS

The UKIP candidate for Labour leader?

BY ALAN STOKES

The recent disgraceful anti-immigration position taken by Labour leadership candidate Ed Balls is bad enough. Even more worrying is one union's response to it.

Writing in the *Observer*, Balls claimed that immigration from Eastern Europe has had a "direct impact on the wages, terms and conditions of too many people across our country — in communities ill-prepared to deal with the reality of globalisation, including the one I represent." He effectively called for the abolition of the free movement of labour that exists across the EU.

In the midst of the ongoing nationalist, anti-immigration orgy, the left must be very clear. No workers, from anywhere, are responsible for pushing down wages and conditions. Bosses are — aided by the cuts, privatisation and anti-union laws of governments like the one Balls served in. The only answer is for workers to organise together, across divisions of origin, race, religious background etc., and fight back.

John McDonnell: backed by the left but not the "safe" left

candidate, rather than the left's choice.

Now, from 10 June to 26 July, unions and local Labour Parties can make "supporting" nominations.

Ballot papers will be posted out to Labour Party and affiliated-union members from 16 August. The election will be by transferable vote (i.e. you vote 1, 2, 3, 4, not just an X for your favoured candidate). The ballot closes on 22 September. Anyone who joins the Labour Party before 8 September can vote. The result will be announced on 25 September.

Affiliated union members have one-third of the voting power, local Labour Party members one-third, and Labour MPs and MEPs the other third.

The press has speculated that Balls was pitching for support from the unions. With the current crop of trade union leaders, a fight to change Labour Party policy on these issues is too much to hope for. But perhaps a joint statement repudiating Balls' views?

Instead we get deafening silence — broken only by a short statement from Unite, in which assistant general secretary, and candidate for General Secretary in a forthcoming election, Les Bayliss begins: "Ed Balls is absolutely correct."

Bayliss goes on: "The current situation of immigration from the EU combined with weak employment protection in this country has led to widespread exploitation of workers in the construction industry... We need to tighten up on regulations to protect domestic workers' ability to get jobs and to earn a decent living, whilst at the same time allowing skilled workers from the EU to come here without fear of being cheated by unscrupulous employers."

Skilled workers! Unite's position as expressed by Bayliss is to oppose freedom of movement across the EU. Do

BRITAIN'S AUSTERITY DRIVE

Fight the cuts!

BY CATHY NUGENT

On Monday 7 June David Cameron declared war on British workers — the public sector workers who will lose jobs, the jobless who will lose benefits, the working-class people who will find the services they depend on are gone, or have been privatised out.

Britain's "way of life", said Cameron, would be fundamentally disrupted, for years to come. Was Cameron just preparing expectations and talking up the scale of the cuts? No.

One consultancy firm, Capital Economics, predicts as many as 750,000 jobs will go in the public sector.

We are not, as Cameron put it, "all in this together". Bosses who win new private sector contracts for public sector services will not be feeling the pinch. Bankers will not be throwing themselves out of office windows.

Playing on a "threat" that Britain will lose its credit rating if the deficit is not slashed back, Chancellor George Osborne and his Treasury Lib-Dem junior partner — the now-politically-indistinguishable-from-the Tories Danny Alexander — outlined the "processes" by which these cuts will get selected.

After the budget on 22 June, comes an autumn spending review.

An Office for Budget Responsibility

"Public sector alliance" is not the whole answer

The conference in May of the civil service workers' union PCS resolved on "a major call for joint action amongst public sector unions".

There are two problems with making this call "the answer" to cuts.

First, it cuts against more confident or militant unions taking action ahead of the rest.

Some battles can be won by sectional action. And united trade-union action is more likely to start by some unions giving a lead than by waiting until everyone is lined up to make the first step forward in perfect harmony.

Secondly: why the "public sector" limitation? It made some sense when the issue was the Labour government's limits on public sector pay.

It makes less sense when the issue is broader, including cuts in welfare benefits, health care, education, etc. which affect every working-class household.

Also, what do the PCS leaders mean by "public sector unions"? All the big unions except perhaps USDAW figure significantly in the public sector and in public services.

Unite, GMB, CWU, RMT, TSSA, ASLEF all figure there, as well as PCS, Unison, NUT, etc.

An alliance against cuts, local or national, should seek to draw in all unions, not just a minority defined as "public sector".

will oversee economic forecasts.

Departmental ministers will have to justify their budgets to other ministers — inevitably setting up a competition for who can cut the most.

The government will run a consultation exercise over the summer, supposedly to "engage" with voluntary groups, civil servants, etc. to create a national plan to reduce the deficit.

The consultation is a PR ploy, said former Tory chancellor Lord Lawson. He's right. And no self-respecting community group, or anyone connected to the labour movement, should buy into this exercise. Why would you beg for crumbs from people who want to give you... just crumbs?

In any case the lie behind the government consultation exercise is shown up by the fact that government departments have *already* been told to axe hundreds of millions of pounds from their budgets for this year. The key targets for government cuts are benefits, tax credits and public sector pensions.

There may also be tax increases, perhaps a hike in VAT, on the horizon.

As expected, these cuts are being modelled on the Canadian Liberal government's mid-1990s "successful" programme of deficit reduction.

As outlined by Canadian socialist Greg Albo in *Solidarity* 3-173 (www.workersliberty.org/node/14177) the Canadian government radically reduced central social provision, pushing responsibility for the social consequences of the cuts onto the provinces and the cities, and shifted the tax burden onto the poorest people. Although Britain does not have Canada's federal political system, we may see a similar pattern of a heavy, and increasingly unaffordable, spending burden being put on local authorities.

But the central point about the Canadian plan was that no service, no spending item was regarded as sacred.

As part of the already-announced £6 billion package of cuts the government has said it expects local authorities to save £1.165 billion. At the same time there will be a one-, possibly two-year, council tax freeze. £700 million has already been cut from central government allocations to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Most of the cuts outside of England have been deferred to next year.

If local government trade unions do not fight the squeeze, if every Labour-controlled council bows to "the inevitable" and at best looks at how to mitigate the "worst effects" of the cuts, then pretty soon only services regarded as absolutely vital will be left. There will be one central library in every city. Children will go swimming only if their parents can pay an expensive admission price. Adults will not be able to learn to speak English or become more numerate. Such services cannot easily be recreated.

But there are structural problems with some of the government's plans. For instance they will not find it easy to make real cuts in public sector pensions.

These pensions are now held by a little under five million people, across seven main schemes. Only the local government pension fund has assets to cover government pension promises. All of the

ties, and integrating big business into every level of public services.

For instance the Lib-Cons' potential massive extension of the Academy programme, alongside the setting up of "free schools" by parents and other groups, is an invitation for businesses to manage chains of schools, or make money by competing for contracts from school heads.

As in Canada, each concrete cut, each privatisation, each "reform" may spark a concrete struggle. Studying the lessons from Canada will help us.

There, the unions were not prepared to push strikes to another level, to organise sustained and national action. And the unions failed to push for a political alternative inside and outside the social democratic New Democratic Party to which unions were affiliated.

The unions should set up across-the-board anti-cuts committees in all cities. We need to challenge entrenched patterns of official union activity — passivity and minimal bargaining in the face of attacks. We need a movement of industrial and political resistance.

The labour movement needs to defend its very means of fighting. It will need to assert the right to strike if it is to defend working-class people. That means being prepared to defy the anti-union laws, to fight any bans or restrictions on strikes in the public sector.

A legal ban on union finance for political parties is on the cards. We say the unions have the fundamental right to democratically decide where to channel their funds, and the right to use those funds to back political organisations, including the Labour Party.

Right now all the big unions are affiliated to the Labour Party. Yet for many years they have let the Labour leadership get away with restricting Labour's democratic structures, thus easing Labour's economic and political servicing of the bosses. A review of those structures is on the cards — the left in Labour, and crucially the unions, must mobilise on this issue. If they do not they will set back the creation of any political alternatives which could be forged in the struggles ahead.

The AWL thinks left in the labour movement should unite on these four planks. If you agree with us, contact us, to discuss how we can put these ideas into practice.

David Cameron has declared war on British workers

schemes in recent years have been reduced in value to new entrants. But public pensions still account for about 25% of the total national debt. What can the Lib Con government do?

An increase in the retirement age won't fix things up. Nor will a £50,000 cap on pension payments, that is on the pensions of higher paid civil servants. Further change and restrictions will require legislation — and potential legal wrangles.

The government's stated intention of finding a private capital "boost" to Royal Mail (i.e. part privatisation) may fail, as it did under Labour, because of Royal Mail's unattractive £10 billion pensions deficit.

In all areas of deficit reduction the government wants to boost private business. Effectively it is pushing through a radical extension of New Labour's neo-liberalism.

Part of it is a "vision thing". Ex-BP boss Lord Browne has been asked to be an official "super director", to insert private sector business practices into government.

Part of it is handing over responsibili-

Number crunches

There are four sets of figures involved in the government plans.

1. The overall long-term debt.

For 2010-11 this is predicted to be £952 billion.

For 2014-15 this is predicted to be £1.4 trillion

The government wants to reduce this by £64 billion over five years.

2. The annual deficit (i.e. the gap between tax and other revenue and public spending).

For this year it is predicted to be £156 billion.

3. The debt servicing (i.e. the amount of interest paid on the overall debt).

For 2010-11 this is predicted to be £41.6 billion

For 2014-15 this is predicted to be £70 billion

4. Public spending.

For this financial year it has been set at £661 billion. But the government has said it will only ring fence health spending (£119 billion). Everything else is up for the chop. They have already announced over £6 billion in cuts.

BRIEFING

Anatomy of the Labour Party, 2010

Ed Maltby surveys some of the the Labour Party's political factions and campaigns.

CLPD

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy is the oldest group of the Labour left. It was founded in 1973 as part of a broader battle to force the Parliamentary Labour Party to obey the decisions of Annual Conference.

In 1960-1961, rightwing PLP leader Hugh Gaitskell had led a successful fight to overturn the democratic decision of Conference calling for unilateral nuclear disarmament. The immediate trigger for the formation of the CLPD was Harold Wilson's decision to exclude from the 1974 manifesto the Party conference's call for nationalisation of 25 large companies.

CLPD became more prominent in the early 1980s, when it campaigned (with some success) for a right for local Labour Parties to submit MPs to regular reselection, for a more democratic procedure for electing the Leader and for greater representation for women and ethnic minority Party members.

In addition to internal Labour Party democracy, the CLPD has policies in favour of some basic social-democratic demands, around the welfare state, pensions and public ownership. The CLPD opposes state funding for political parties and defends the Labour-union link.

The "cutting edge" of its campaign around Party democracy at the moment is the fight for the right of Conference and the party rank-and-file to amend National Policy Forum documents. At present NPF documents go to Conference in a "take-it-or-leave-it" form, so left-wingers cannot affect NPF policy short of persuading Conference to vote down whole reports.

The CLPD mainly functions by sending out model motions and policy recommendations to its members in the post and trying to get policy passed through the different committees and organs of the Party; lobbying for sup-

What makes you get richer? Starting off rich

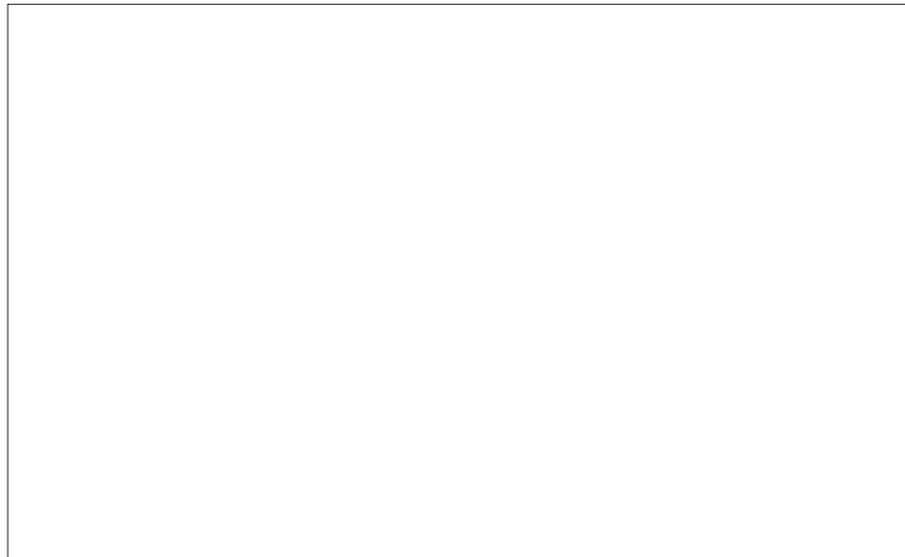
Harsh times for us all, promises David Cameron. But, as ever, much less harsh for the heroes of capitalism — the "entrepreneurs" who, so the theory goes, must have luxury to keep them at the "risk-taking" which supposedly makes capitalism uniquely dynamic.

The *Financial Times* (24 April) recently reported an interesting little bit of research.

Entrepreneurs, so Simeon Djankov and others, are actually more averse to taking risks than other people (for example, boring old workers).

Willingness to take risks does not define entrepreneurs. What does, so research suggests, is receiving large inheritances, or having other entrepreneurs in their family.

Becoming rich, or coming from a rich family, helps you become richer.



Jon Cruddas MP, leading light of Compass

port; working in the unions to push CLPD policy, and so on. It has around 1,000 supporters, including affiliated organisations. Its secretary is Pete Willsman; its parliamentary liaison officer Kelvin Hopkins MP.

Through a network called "Grassroots Labour", the CLPD is linked to other organisations on the left of the Labour Party. The main focus of "Grassroots Labour" has been agreeing a "centre-left" slate for the Constituency Labour Party seats on Labour's National Executive. That slate has won four out of the six seats in recent elections.

The other main groups which have been involved in the Grassroots Alliance are the Labour Representation Committee, Save The Labour Party and Compass Youth (not Compass as such).

LRC

The LRC (Labour Representation Committee) was formed in 2004, taking its name from the original LRC which was the forerunner of the Labour Party in 1900-06.

The LRC has around 150 affiliate organisations, including Constituency and Branch Labour Parties, union branches and trade unions. Nationally, ASLEF, the CWU, the FBU, the NUM, the RMT and the bakers' union are affiliated.

The LRC has around 1,000 individual members. It has local groups, in South and West Yorkshire, Cambridge, London (including branches in Lambeth, Islington and Hackney), Leeds and Liverpool. Non-Labour members and disaffiliated unions, like the FBU, can join the LRC. The LRC's leading figure is John McDonnell MP. The vice-chairs are Maria Exall and Susan Press.

The LRC fights for socialist (left-wing social democratic) politics within the Labour Party, as well as for greater Party democracy. It is unambiguous about the working class being the major agency for social change, and supports trade union struggles.

SAVE THE LABOUR PARTY

Save The Labour Party is a grouping launched in 2003 around Peter Kenyon and Ann Black, two left-ish members of the Labour's National Executive.

Black was previously a leading figure

in Labour Reform, a grouping which advocated Labour Party democracy without being, or pretending to be, particularly left-wing on policy issues.

It focuses on passing information and briefings between grassroots Labour activists, lobbying and passing motions in defence of the union-Labour link and Party democracy, in a broad sense. Both Kenyon and Black publish informative blogs which enable Labour Party members to know what goes on in the National Executive.

Save The Labour Party is focussed on restoring the health of grassroots Party organisations, membership, and functioning at the level of CLPs, in addition to restoring the role and powers of the National Executive. It doesn't pretend to be especially left-wing.

COMPASS

Compass, launched in 2003, has a bigger public profile than the CLPD, LRC or STLP. Unlike them, it is "New Labour", albeit disillusioned "New Labour", rather than "Old Labour" (let alone something better).

Of its leading figures, Neal Lawson used to be a speechwriter for Gordon Brown and Jon Cruddas MP was a Downing Street aide for Tony Blair.

In the 2010 election, Compass advocated a sort of unity offensive with the Liberal Democrats, with the aim of constituting the Compassite wing of the Labour Party as the fulcrum of a "progressive alliance" (i.e. an alliance of nice people with good ideas).

In May I attended a post-election rally held by Compass in London (where entry cost £5). The audience appeared to be made up of young professionals, bloggers, and young researchers for MPs.

I spotted at least two right-wing Labour Students from the National Union of Students Executive, and a handful of former National Union of Students executive members.

Polly Toynbee told the audience that "we're hardly the Militant Tendency" and numerous speakers gloated over an impending influx of young leftish Lib Dems into the Labour Party.

Billy Hayes spoke as a token trade union presence. He pleaded with the audience "not to forget trade unions".

I realised to my dismay that from the point of view of the politics of working-class self-organisation and self-emanci-

pation, Hayes, author of several sell-outs from the top of the CWU union machine, was the best speaker at that meeting.

Compass claims around 30,000 members and supporters around the country. It has an impressive, media-savvy organisation. Around 1,000 people are now registered for its 2010 conference, "A New Hope" (tickets are a steal at £25 unwaged, £37 waged).

Compass Youth, led by Sam Tarry, who is also chair of the (weak) official Young Labour organisation, is a shade more left-wing than Compass itself.

PROGRESS AND BEYOND

To the right of Compass, and lower-profile, are Progress (Stephen Twigg, Alan Milburn, etc.; founded by the notorious Derek Draper) and the magazine *Prospect* (edited by David Goodhart and aimed, so he says, at "a mature, educated, affluent readership, many of whom have reached the top of their profession").

Beyond Progress and *Prospect*, the spectrum moves out of the Labour Party as such into the world of the think tanks. The biggest of those close to the Labour Party is the Institute for Public Policy Research, rather to the right of Compass, but still embodying the same spirit of watered-down liberal "social justice" delivered from above.

The IPPR is a slick organisation whose major activity is publishing copious and well-researched, academic reports on "policy" matters. Child Trust Funds and New Labour's Flexible New Deal were products of IPPR papers.

It currently employs 42 people as full-time policy wonks, and is one of the Labour hierarchy's hatcheries where future ministers are groomed for leadership. David Miliband started his career there, and Tristram Hunt and Patricia Hewitt are also alumni. "Lord" Neil Kinnock is a trustee. Co-director Carey Oppenheim previously worked as a policy advisor to Tony Blair and as head of research for the Child Poverty Action Group.

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FIRST PERSON

Pregnancy is not an illness!

By ROSIE WOODS

Just after Christmas I had my third baby at home, in a birth pool with two midwives and my partner present. For such a major event it was uneventful — painful but intensely rewarding and an experience I remember with joy.

I can say the same of my first two children. Some women I know had similar experiences of birth either in birth centres, hospital, or at home. But too many women I have met have found either one or all of their births hellish experiences, remembered with horror.

What is it about the way maternity services operate that leave some women feeling as though they have been assaulted and abused?

Maternity services are largely located within the medical setting. Pregnancy and birth come under the auspices of medicine. Pregnancy takes on the form of an “illness” and birth a (too often surgical) procedure which needs management by medical professionals. In all this women are often passive subjects and made to feel quite powerless.

Giving birth is very hard and very painful, and while it is actually happening a woman is literally powerless to advocate what she wants. She needs to be able to trust the people with her to give her strength and support.

However, there is a strong culture which assumes something will go wrong; women “try” for a natural birth, the implication being we are likely to fail. What is often missing is trust in a woman’s body to labour effectively.

If the health professionals meant to guide women do not have this faith it is very hard for women to feel confident in their ability to cope. Among women I



A birthing pool in an NHS birthing centre. Not enough facilities is one issue, but the general powerless women feel when they give birth also has to be tackled

know a large part of their negative experience stemmed from that feeling of being powerless and helpless during labour. Yet a good midwife or birth partner can help a woman to actively manage the pain of childbirth.

But by the time labour starts the role relationships have been set, establishing the woman as a lesser partner.

Discussions about birth and decisions relating to it are not discussions between two equals unless a woman is confident enough to really assert herself. More often she is just told what she should do.

In my own case, I had decided quite early on to have a home birth. When I explained my intention to doctors, they would literally bristle.

One told me I couldn’t just have a home birth. I needed to “fulfil certain criteria” i.e. I needed to get permission from him about where I would have my baby.

Doctors are often very hostile to home birth despite overwhelming evidence that home deliveries and deliveries in birthing centres are much safer and less likely to end in interventions than hospi-

tal births.

There is also extensive argument and evidence from midwives about the risks of intervention, and how a great number of medical interventions in labour are simply unnecessary. See the website of the Association of Radical Midwives (www.radmid.demon.co.uk).

While a doctor is very useful in certain circumstances, most pregnant women are not sick and do not need medical intervention. The medical profession can be amazingly ill-informed about the processes of normal healthy deliveries.

Too often poor decisions are made by medical professionals about management which can lead to subsequent problems, putting mothers and babies at risk.

In short, women’s treatment in pregnancy can mirror our treatment in society. We are demeaned, patronised, bullied, and at times physically assaulted (I refer to the practise of episiotomy, often carried out without the woman’s knowledge or consent). If we do assert ourselves we are basically accused of endangering our babies.

Of course there is more to it than this. Even progressive maternity services can fail to provide adequate woman-centred support because there are simply not enough experienced midwives. Hospital facilities can be poor and there are not enough birth centres to provide a more comfortable “home from home” environment in which women can labour and give birth.

Any campaign around maternity services must include demands around funding and facilities. But more fundamentally, we need to tackle the sexism that has alienated so many women from their own bodies and reproductive abilities.

STUDENT CAMPAIGN

How will education cuts affect women?

By JADE BAKER

The next step for the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is a newly formed and affiliated movement, “NCAFAC Women’s Liberation”.

After six successful months in action, women in the national campaign have taken the decision to pioneer this as a logical route to expansion.

Women, who constitute 65 per cent of the public service workforce and tend to be the main recipients of the services, accordingly suffer more from education, public sector, welfare cuts.

The liberation movement is set to tackle imminent threats to women who are studying and working in education. This will include a resistance to the sudden demise of on-campus nurseries — which are being swatted like flies at Queen Mary University, University of Westminster, University of the Arts London and elsewhere.

It also seeks to link up cuts in ESOL

and make the political arguments about how this specifically targets and discriminates against immigrant women, making them even more vulnerable.

The campaign is intent on wedging into the NUS bureaucracy and lobbying women’s officers to carry out an audit on how education cuts will affect women and to build campaigns on top of the research. Concurrent to that “NCAFAC Women’s Liberation” will be conducting its own audit and will also be urging students to pass motions at their union AGMs in favour of assigning a designated women’s officer where there is not one already.

NCAFAC Women’s Liberation will be making its first public outing by intervening at the NUS anti-cuts meeting on June, 29. Join us!

But most of all we are looking to link up with other feminist campaigns to fight the cuts. For more details contact: jadebaker@hotmail.co.uk.

On WAGs and snobs

By ROSALIND ROBSON

So the WAGs (Wives and Girlfriends) of England’s football team are to be banned by England coach Fabio Capello from attending the World Cup.

Boozing, too much sex and the stress caused by competition over who had the biggest and most expensive handbag (and that’s just among the players) was the reason for failure in the last World Cup... apparently.

Leave aside the heterocentric nature of the tag “WAGs” (so potential boyfriends *would* be allowed into the team camp if they are not acknowledged to be part of the usual entourage?); is there a sexist undercurrent to Capello’s ban? And do we care much about the reputation of the female partners of some staggeringly overpaid young men?

According to Capello, WAGs are a “virus”. That’s nice isn’t it? What kind of virus does Capello have in mind?

But if you thought Capello’s opinion of women couldn’t get any lower, look at a recent *Daily Mail* interview.

On women who hang out with football players he says: “These girls are all the same, all part of a set. Adjusted here, inflated there. They are all interchange-

able and false.”

I’m not so sure that Capello is *just* being a big sexist pig. I think he’s also being a snob, and at £6 million a year an obscenely highly-paid snob at that.

Not for him an “inflatable” woman. His darling wife of 40 years, Laura, (who *will* be joining him in South Africa), is a “real” woman. That’s because she loves to join him at the theatre, at the opera and strolling round the art galleries of the world.

It must be nice to be a globe-trotting culture vulture. But somehow I don’t think Fabio and Laura will backing the call from the Creative Workers of South Africa’s for more South African artists in the opening concert at Orlando Stadium, the shiny new stadium in the middle of Soweto.

Of course, it’s hard to like any of these people. Victoria Beckham’s plan to spend the World Cup visting underprivileged children is just another side of the vomit-inducing spectacle.

Don’t get me wrong; I enjoy watching a game of football from time to time. What I don’t like is hearing stereotypes of women kicked around as a substitute for intelligent conversation about sport... or any other subject.

Oil workers strike and occupy in Colombia

FROM THE COLOMBIA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

On 21 May workers involved in construction operations in BP's Tauramena installation entered into occupation demanding:

- a wage increase; the establishment a wage scale;
- due process in disciplinary decisions;
- labour guarantees for the workers.

On 2 June army forces entered the plant. At time of writing they are harassing the workers, who stay overnight chaining themselves to plant equipment so that they cannot be dislodged.

Since BP began oil exploration and production in Casanare, Colombia in the early 1990s, six thousand people have been assassinated and three thousand people disappeared.

Every time there have been complaints or protests in opposition to BP's interests, the community leaders concerned have been killed. This indicates an elimination strategy of violent social control. The agents have been the military and paramilitary groups, but BP as a corporation has itself been complicit in the human rights violations.

Despite its public statements accepting the right of trade union organization, in practice BP has refused to grant a collective agreement with the National Oil Workers Union USO or recognising any of the principal elements of trade union recognition. USO organisers have been driven out of the region or into exile.

There has been an upsurge in workers' and community protests against BP in Casanare since the beginning of 2010. Workers at the Tauramena Central Processing Facility (CPF) starting 22 January went in strike supported by USO, the National Oil Workers' Union of Colombia. On 15 February riot police brutally attacked the picket line, sending three workers to hospital.

Demonstrations and popular assemblies in support of the stoppage took place in Tauramena and surrounding villages from February onwards. The USO union and many different community sectors came together to form the Movement for the Dignity of Casanare. The strike ended after 30 days when BP promised talks.

BP agreed to enter negotiations and there have since been five commissions dealing with labour issues, the environment, local supply of goods and services,

social investment and human rights. The community has deep and long standing grievances. Environmental damage, for example, is extensive stemming from BP's production practices such as diverting water sources underground to pressure up the oil; contamination from gas flaring and ground failures from seismic testing.

The workers and community report that BP has not taken the negotiations seriously. At first the corporation attempted to decide who the community and labour representatives would be, but this was thwarted by a letter signed by three thousand residents naming their representatives. Next BP threatened legal action because of complaints against it in a Petition of Demands presented to it by the union and the community. Then BP swamped the community with leaflets claiming what a great corporation it is.

Finally, and despite other provocations, initial "pre-agreements" were negotiated in the commissions concerning the environment, local supplies, social investment and human rights; but BP has continued to block substantive progress towards accepting the right of a collective agreement covering its workers, and those employed by its subsidiaries and contractors, at the CPF plant.

The workers and community wanted talks to resume on 12 May, but BP has delayed this until 23 June. Meanwhile threats against community and union leaders began to grow, which is grave indeed given the history of elimination of community leaders in the recent past.

Workers oil multir

Gulf of Mexico disaster: fight for workers' control of energy!

By BOB SUTTON

On the 20 April the Deepwater Horizon oil well exploded in the Gulf of Mexico off the coast of Louisiana, killing 11 workers and rupturing a high-pressure extraction pipe in two places. The full extent of the disaster is not yet fully clear.

As *Solidarity* goes to print oil continues to be pumped into the ocean. British Petroleum (BP) and US government agencies are placing the figure at 5,000 barrels a day. But many independent estimates put the figure higher, up to 100,000 barrels a day. Despite several high profile attempts by engineering teams, no one knows how or when this flow will be stopped, let alone when the slick will be cleared up.

Already this is being described amongst the worst single documented accidents in the industry's history alongside the Exxon-Valdez tanker disaster of 1989 and Saddam Hussein's torching of Kuwaiti wells in 1991.

The immediate ecological impact of an oil spill of this magnitude is nothing short of catastrophic. The oil and the chemicals used to disperse it from the surface are a threat to marine and animal life. Already there is talk of entire species being lost. Anyone who lives or works along the long stretch of the United States' south coast struck by the spill will have had their life turned upside down as the water, beaches and marshlands are, so to speak, turned to shit.

BP is one of the most powerful multinational companies in the world, with a

command, both directly and through subsidiaries, over resources and political sway greater than most national governments or states. It is truly a giant of the modern "imperialism of globalisation". These people are used to getting their way and not facing any consequences for the human and environmental devastation wrought by their operations.

However, even this giant has been rocked by this disaster. The financial costs incurred by the ongoing cleanup operation have precipitated a drop in its stock value from more than \$120 billion to less than 80. The extent of the political fallout and bad press BP has faced over this is demonstrated by the fact that the company has felt it necessary to launch a massive PR offensive — something they have never felt they had to in relation to countless disasters and killings in Nigeria, Colombia or anywhere else.

This time they have splashed millions in order to buy up internet space so that searches of phrases such as "deepwater horizon" and "oil spill" lead to their specially set up public information website. This level of "openness" has meant that the world has been kept up to date with the latest attempted fixes and even allowed online followers of the story to send in technical suggestions!

There has been a campaign launched in America calling for the seizure of BP's assets. This is a demand we can support.

We need to fight for democratic working-class control over these industries and organise international workers' solidarity to begin to challenge the power of the bastards like BP.

UK solidarity with the Casanare occupiers

On the 2nd of June, activists from Workers' Climate Action and representatives of a number of Colombian workers' associations, activists from climate camp, and Colombia Solidarity campaigners, attended a protest outside the St James Square offices of BP, in solidarity with workers at the Tauramena plant in the Casanare region of Colombia, who have occupied their plant as part of their campaign for union recognition.

The picket will now be taking place in support of the occupation every Thursday, between 5pm and 6pm, for the duration of dispute, in front of the BP offices in St James Square, London SW1.

For networks like Workers' Climate Action, which see mass struggle by workers and their allies as the means by which we can put industries under democratic control with a view to protecting the environment, the movement of workers and local communities in Casanare is of key importance.

We should support their fight for a union and for control over the activities of big oil in their region — as a step towards winning fuller democratic control over the energy sector. We should approach other energy workers around the world and help organise solidarity between them and the Casanare workers.

Anti-BP protest

fight the nationals

Organising in the North Sea

The explosion at BP's Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, which led to the deaths of eleven workers, has put a global spotlight on safety practices and workers' rights in the offshore industry. On Deepwater Horizon there was no union. The offshore industry in the US is rife with union-busting and other abuses. Only a strong workers' movement can create a truly safe offshore industry.

Jake Molloy is regional organiser for offshore energy for the RMT which, through its Oil Industry Liaison Committee (OILC) section, organises offshore workers in the British North Sea. He spoke to *Solidarity*.

What is the major improvement to health and safety that union organisation brings?

Workforce involvement: the ability of the workforce to influence the health and safety agenda. The fact that we're still debating this twenty years after Piper Alpha shows some of the shortcomings in the industry. We have elected safety reps and safety committees offshore, but their impact is limited by the industrial relations situation. There are obvious limits to how far they can take that role without jeopardising their employment. There are obvious measures in place to deter the reps from exercising their roles and powers to the extent envisaged by Lord Collins [who led the inquiry into the Piper Alpha case, where 167 workers were killed when an offshore platform caught fire in July 1988].

There's a lot going on but there are common threads: work time, the right to paid leave, the right to adequate rest periods. Starting 13 June OILC and Unite will have representation at the Court of Session in the fifth stage of a seven year legal battle to secure protection from the Working Time regulations, which were only extended offshore 2003.

The industry has spent millions in legal fees to prevent workers from enjoying the protection of the regulations.

It's about excessive hours. A lot of workers, especially those involved in maintaining the wells — a lot of these guys get little or no time off at all. They'll go off for 21 days, stay home for one or two days and then go off to another platform for another 21 days.

A lot of the drilling work is extremely hazardous and physically and mentally demanding. And yet not one drilling worker has seen an hour reduced on their exposure time offshore. The industry is fighting tooth and nail to prevent regulation having any effect.

The other major issue is the physical integrity of the installations. A lot of them are past their sell-by dates and literally falling apart.

I've spoken to US oilworkers and the very mention of the word union will get you thrown off the job. It was like that here before 2000. There was no union recognition, and what we called a "kick-ass mentality" — you never answered back. The Employment Relations Act brought some slight changes. But to the

majority of oilworkers, it's still a regime where you can't challenge the employer.

If you mention a union, you're just run off. You can't even make a claim for unfair dismissal. A lot of it is done through agencies in the US, so you can't easily establish jurisdiction in such a case. In the UK the use of agencies has grown too, and the ability of the worker to counter that is severely curtailed.

NRB [Not Required Back] is the UK equivalent of being run off. It's not even a letter. It's just when you call up your employer to get your hours, and you're told that the employer has been informed by the client that you are NRB. Here, you at least get redeployed to a different installation, but your previous position is ended because of the attitude of a given manager. In the States if you get run off you're run off.

How is the Norwegian section of the North Sea oilfield better organised?

It's a cultural issue. The attitude there is that people come before profits. The legislation which the Norwegians enjoy means that they can take corporations on, and influence and retain the powers and functions they enjoy including the ability to shut an installation down if they feel it is unsafe. In the UK, two reps can make a complaint, but no UK safety rep can do what a Norwegian rep can do, which is to instruct a company to shut an installation down. It's rarely used.

They fought for it, hard. In the 1970s it came to baseball bats on the heli-decks in the fight to get recognition. But soon after that the government took notice.

Is it time for baseball bats on the heli-decks in the UK?

I'd like to think there is a bit of fight left in the UK workforce to improve things, but because of inter-union politics and because of the tactics employed to divide and conquer the workforce, with different rates of pay and work times, the employer have done a job on the British workforce. So it will take a great deal of organising and a significant sea-change in inter-union relations to bring about improvements for British offshore workers.

The Employment Relations act was brought in on the 6 June 2000. 48 hours before the act passed, Amicus entered into partnership relations with the employer. That set back organising on the oil platforms severely. You get handed a membership card for a union selected by the employer — are you going to trust that union and join? Not one worker has been offered the chance to take part in a ballot to decide which union they would like to see on their platform.

What are your thoughts on the situation in Colombia?

What's going on in Colombia is absolutely outrageous, and I'd like to see pressure brought on BP to withdraw from that region until democracy is restored. No corporation should underwrite human rights abuses of that nature.

US government regulators work for the oil companies

The Mineral Management Service (MMS) is a US government agency that combines two asks — collecting revenue from oil and gas for the US government; and regulating health and safety.

The MMS is the second-largest source of income to the US government after taxation, bringing in around \$13 billion a year. A branch secretary for the RMT's offshore energy section OILC told *Solidarity* that in the US, "the operators and regulators have far too cosy a relationship. That was going on here ten years ago. But the employers and the regulators — the Health and Safety Executive — are now separated. That was a result of Piper Alpha. The Dept of Energy regulated the industry at the time, but after Piper Alpha it was passed to the Health and Safety Executive".

What follows is an edited extract from a longer article, *Sex, Drugs and Well Control*, available at <http://www.oilc.org/oilcorg/sex-drugs-and-well-control.html>

Scandal has long surrounded the Royalty In Kind (RIK) scheme at MMS which was designed to enhance revenue collection for the US Treasury. RIK enabled the MMS to take some of the government's share not in dollars but in physical oil and gas and sell it on the open market.

According to statistics maintained by the MMS, RIK in 2006 sold over 800 million cubic feet of gas and 150,000 barrels of oil every day. The value to the government of RIK oil and gas sales in fiscal year 2006 was \$4bn, or approximately \$11 million per day.

With so much cash sloshing about at MMS things soon got out of hand. According to a US government investigation between 2002 and 2006, nearly a third of MMS RIK staff received a wide array of gifts and gratuities from oil and gas companies that were regulated by MMS.

The same investigation found that key MMS personnel involved with sexual liaisons with oil company management had discouraged the MMS in 2003 from demanding better systems to prevent well blowouts.

The report uncovered a culture of drug use and promiscuity. RIK staff has also accepted corporate hospitality from industry sources when too intoxicated to drive home.

ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE

Keep bigotry out of east London!

By GERRY BATES

On 20 June the English Defence League plans to march through the Whitechapel area of the east London borough of Tower Hamlets. This is where the borough's 30 percent Bengali/Muslim population is concentrated. We need to biggest possible mobilisation to stop the racists.

Exactly how and on what basis to mobilise, however, is more complicated.

The EDL say they will be marching against the UK Islamic Conference being held at the Troxy, an old East London venue in Limehouse. It's not clear who exactly is behind the conference, but it will play host to notorious far-right Islamists such as Bilal Philips, Hussein Yee and Muhammad Hassan — advocates of marital rape and child abuse, executing gay people and "adulterers", and rabid anti-semitism.

Tower Hamlets has a rich tradition of anti-fascism — from the 1936 Battle of Cable Street to the 1978 mobilisation against the National Front. Unfortunately it has also had, in more recent years, a growing presence of right-wing Islamism. The links of the East London Mosque with a variety of Islamist groups, particularly the Islamic Forum of Europe, were exposed by Channel 4's *Dispatches* program earlier this year. The documentary also discussed the idea that IFE has infiltrated the local Labour Party.

The Islamic conference is not being held at the mosque. Perhaps the mosque leaders are trying to clean up their image; perhaps the politics of the conference are too virulent even for the IFE — a foul group which ironically includes people responsible for Pakistani war crimes during Bangladesh's independence struggle in 1971.

A meeting of the Muslim Council of Britain is being held at the East London mosque on the same day, though whether the EDL intends to disrupt that we don't know.

EDL bigots

The politics of the anti-EDL mobilisation are slightly less murky.

On Sunday 6 June, a meeting was called by Tower Hamlets Unison and the East London Teachers' Association under the title "United East End", heavily dominated by the SWP and its UAF front, discussed the campaign. Alex Kenny of ELTA rightly proposed an ongoing campaign linking anti-fascism and anti-racism to a fight against cuts and for decent housing. The SWP opposed this vehemently; Kenny stormed out; and little came of the meeting except the SWP carrying on as they had always planned to.

The other idea the SWP opposed was that the campaign should also condemn and oppose the misogyny, homophobia and, yes, racism of the UK Islamic Conference. UAF publicity for the 20 June does not

even mention the conference.

Of course driving the racists off the streets is the number one priority. But both the EDL march and the conference at the Troxy are provocations. By taking this line, the SWP are not only revealing the inconsistency and shallowness of their commitment to liberation, but preparing the ground for the EDL and Islamists to spin and to a certain extent turn the day into a Muslim vs. non-Muslim clash. They have obviously learnt nothing from their Respect fiasco in Tower Hamlets.

Luckily, there are other forces organising to oppose the EDL and the Islamists. The Whitechapel Anarchist Group made a strong intervention into the United East End meeting and are working with other class struggle activists like the AWL. The day after *Solidarity* goes to press, AWL members and other like-minded socialists will be meeting to discuss our plans.

We want to:

- Be prepared for physical confrontation with the EDL, and not allow ourselves to be kettled in or kept miles from the action by the police. UAF has cleared three possible venues with the police — Altab Ali park, opposite the Troxy and Cable Street — so this may be complicated.

- Work with Muslim youth who want to do something more radical than the Mosque leaders and UAF may be prepared for — and who are most likely to be victims of police repression.

- Crucially, seek to organise a working-class bloc opposed to both the reactionaries of the EDL and those of the UK Islamic conference — for workers' unity, anti-racism and women's and gay liberation.

- Work with those, for instance in the local trade union movement and in East End United, who want an ongoing campaign against racism and the roots of racism, fighting against cuts and for jobs, homes and services, in Tower Hamlets.

- Get in touch for more information: skillz_999@hotmail.com, 07961040618.

EDL outnumbered in Newcastle

By A NEWCASTLE ANTI-FASCIST

On 29 May "North East Against Racism" (NEAR) organised a protest of 150 activists at 10am on the Saturday morning against the English Defence League rally taking place in Newcastle the same day.

NEAR was joined by the TUC music event at 11am at the same meeting point, the Monument in Newcastle City Centre. At the high point we had maybe 600 at the Monument.

We then took about 100 people on an impromptu march to three different pubs where the EDL were drinking. This was good, but not everyone was up for it or clear about it, and we had to keep running to avoid being "kettled" by the police. Maybe we should have allowed ourselves to be "kettled" at the EDL's planned meeting point.

UAF organised a march of about 350 to oppose EDL which managed to get to the street opposite the square EDL were in.

EDL managed perhaps 700 or 800. The anti-fascists did have slightly greater numbers on the day. The EDL were confined to the Bigg Market, and did not have a free run through town. Lots of passers-by were asking what was going on and were informed by leaflet. We had lots of people signing petitions against racism.

Police were everywhere, but they did light policing as promised. They let UAF march as agreed and didn't kettle them. They let NEAR march even though that was unplanned, and arrested no one.

For more information, contact the newly-founded Stop Racism and Fascism Network: <http://srfnetwork.org>

Why trade unions should not automatically line up with Unite Against Fascism

By PETE RADCLIFF

(Taken from a speech made at the 2010 congress of the college lecturers' union UCU, calling for a motion which advocated affiliation to UAF to be remitted.)

Iam calling for this motion to be remitted because this issue deserves more serious debate and the motion glosses over very serious problems that have existed for some time but have got worse over the last year since the formation of the English Defence League.

The motion does not deal with our relationship with the Hope not Hate campaign. Even worse, although mentioning the existence of local anti-fascist organisations of which there are an increasing number, it does not mention the very poor relationship between UAF and those campaigns.

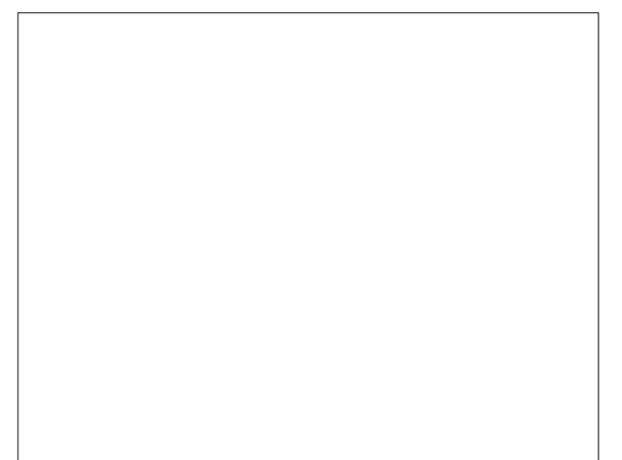
In Nottinghamshire, where I live, we have had a lot of activity by the BNP as well as a violent demonstration last December by the EDL. We have a large local campaign, Notts Stop the BNP, supported by many trade union activists and other anti-racists.

The Notts campaign initiated the demonstrations against the BNP's Summer Festival in our area and when the EDL had their demonstration in December we organised many hundreds against it.

How did UAF respond to our frequent requests for co-operation for these actions. They refused!

They simply demanded that we do as they told us. No co-operation, no discussion, no democracy!

The same thing happened in Newcastle last Saturday when 600 racists of the EDL marched through the town. UAF organised separately not only from the



locally active North East Against Racism campaign *but also* from the Regional TUC.

Why is there this disunity? Because UAF does not want to co-operate with the many anti-racist activists, particularly trade unionists, who know that the BNP feeds off real working class anger and despair at being ignored. In anti-racist work we have to raise *our* alternatives, the policies of our unions, the policies of our working class movement.

We cannot do that in a Unite Against Fascism campaign that treasures its alliance with the likes of Peter Hain and, even worse, David Cameron, *more* than any alliance with working class anti-racist campaigns.

Remitting this motion cannot and will not lead to disaffiliation from UAF. Hopefully it will call UAF to account and allow a serious discussion on how to fight the growing threat of the far right.

ISRAELI ARMY KILLS 9 ON BOARD GAZA FLOTILLA, 31 MAY

End the occupation and blockade!

BY JACKIE CLEARY

An impersonator who looks like the country's leader murders him, takes his place, and thereafter deliberately leads the state to defeat and catastrophe. That was the plot of a Hollywood film I saw long ago.

Sometimes it is almost tempting to think up some such tale to account for Israel's behaviour — to conclude that a bitter enemy of the Jewish state and of its best immediate and long-term interests has somehow got control in Jerusalem and works relentlessly to undermine Israel.

The self-righteous but too often senseless eternal prattle about "terrorists" with which the Israeli governments respond to criticisms only adds an extra element of repulsiveness to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

The flotilla of relief ships which the Israeli army bloodily attacked in international waters was far more a political demonstration against the Israeli blockade of Gaza than an attempt to bring practical relief to Gaza.

The quantity of relief goods it carried was comparatively insignificant in proportion to the needs of the people of Gaza, and at best would have brought a marginal amelioration. Primarily it was a political demonstration of solidarity with the people of Gaza and condemnation of Israel.

The Israeli army's attack on the ships turned the flotilla into a tremendously effective political demonstration against Israel. If that had been the intention, then the Israeli authorities would have succeeded brilliantly. They could not have done more if that had been their intention.

The Israeli army treated the people on the Mavi Marmara with the grotesquely disproportionate lack of

Funeral of the people who died in the raid

restraint with which they habitually treat the Palestinians. The political message of the organisers of the flotilla was made to reverberate like thunder round the world.

None of the Israeli explanations stand up. So, the Israeli soldiers coming down ropes from helicopters were attacked with sticks — or iron bars, knives, whatever — by Islamist militants on the ship, some of whom at least will have advocated the destruction and abolition of the Jewish state by Arab military action?

So? That was not predictable, even as a contingency? That attempt to defend the ship from airborne attack justified the lethal response of armed professional soldiers, the killing of nine and the wounding of at least 30?

Only in the eyes of people who accept no restraint and no limits, people grown used to the exercise of lethal and disproportionate force, justified with the conventional cant against terrorists.

So soldiers do not, by the nature of their trade, make

gentle and restrained policemen? That was not known, not to be expected?

Israeli soldiers captured most of the ships in the flotilla without bloodshed, therefore what happened on the sixth was not the fault of the Israeli army? That is only a variant on the argument that any resistance justifies massively disproportionate response.

The cry of Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu that the occupants of the Mavi Marmara were "terrorists" is as if designed to discredit what Israel says when it is a matter of real terrorists.

What happened on the ships follows from the overall policy of recent Israeli governments: the fact that most Israeli leaders pay only, at best, lip service to the policy of allowing the Palestinians to set up an independent state, alongside Israel, in the Occupied Territories and Gaza. That policy is the only just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Something much better than the Israeli policy that led to the shipboard slaughter, to the Israeli blockade of Hamas-ruled Gaza, and to all the many disproportionate and bloody incidents in the Occupied Territories is, probably, available at will to an Israel acting from its present strength.

The present Israeli government, despite occasional words to placate Washington, is opposed to any just two-states solution. There is opposition within Israel to the government's policy, but Israel will not, it seems, change until it is forced to do so by Washington and the EU.

Will the massacre on the Mavi Marmara and the outcry against Israel lead to the deployment of enough pressure on Israel, and, in the most important place, to US pressure to end the blockade of Gaza? If it does, then those responsible for what happened on the ship will, inadvertently, have served the cause of progress and humanity.

COMMENT

"Only Jewish-Arab workers' solidarity can stop the bloodshed"

BY YACOV BEN EFRAT

Israel's attempt to divert argument away from its blockade on Gaza, and over to the resistance that its troops encountered while attacking the Blue Marmara, is futile and grotesque.

Let's suppose for a moment that its commandos were attacked, as Israel claims, while invading this ship in the Freedom Flotilla. Here you have soldiers sent to prevent civilians from breaking a siege of 1.5 million Palestinians caught in a three-year humanitarian catastrophe.

Israel isn't ready to pay the price of peace — namely, an end to the occupation and recognition of the Palestinian people's right to a sovereign state. Israel is a victim indeed — but of its own refusal. The long-lived Zionist consensus, which views the Land of Israel as the exclusive inheritance of the Jewish people, has victimized the Palestinian people. In its suffering, this people has become the banner of the international community across the political spectrum — on the left among lovers of freedom, people of peace and fighters for human rights, and, unfortunately, on the right, among anti-semites and fundamentalists.

Within Israel, ever since the breakdown of the Camp David talks ten years ago, discourse between right and left, between the proponents and opponents of the occupation, has been limited by mutual agreement that there is no partner for peace. This view was reinforced when Hamas took control of Gaza in June 2007.

Hamas, for its part, demands the lifting of the siege and the recognition of its government. These are its immediate strategic goals. It works to achieve them by every possible means, from rocketing Israel to the current flotilla of aid ships.

Here, however, we see how deeply refusal runs in Israel's veins. The absolute unwillingness of its government to make progress in negotiations and talk about core issues — borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem — bolsters Hamas.

The siege of Gaza also has a regional dimension. It strengthens Hamas' allies in the Middle East, above all Iran, while drastically weakening the status of the US. As for Washington's friends in the region, from Egypt to Jordan and Saudi Arabia, they bear the burden of the pressure exerted by the radical Islamic axis. In this way, the resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict had become a strategic American interest.

Until now Israel has refused to cooperate with Obama. Netanyahu waits patiently for the US mid-term elections in November, hoping that the Democrats will lose their congressional majority and that Obama will be weakened. The severe cracks in the historical relationship between Israel and America have paved the way for Turkey — an old-new player — to enter the arena. Since the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who represents the Islamic Movement, and since its non-admission to the European Union, Turkey has distanced itself from the West, building on alliances with its neighbors: Iran, Syria and other Arab states. Gaza serves as an entry ticket for Erdogan's Turkey into the heart of Arab public opinion.

In the demonstrations launched by Hamas to support the flotilla activists, Erdogan's picture was raised aloft. Most of the funding for the "Flotilla to Free Gaza" came from a Turkish Islamic charity that supports his political party. Thus the Gaza siege creates a new regional conflict between two important American allies, Israel and Turkey. Like its other friends in the region, the Turks face Washington with a hard choice: Israel or us!

For a long time now, Obama has been pressing Netanyahu to change the composition of his government and get free of his right-wing partners. Washington wants to see him heading a new coalition based on the Likud, Kadima and Labour. There is little doubt that Obama will now exploit Israel's international crisis to push for a change in its policy. The current right-wing coalition, featuring racist Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of the world.

One big question hovers in the air: how far will the American president go in his attempt to resolve the conflict? Until now Obama has supported the siege on Gaza; at the same time, he remains fuzzy on the nature of prospective Palestinian sovereignty, the future of Jerusalem, and the refugee question.

As long as Washington avoids saying unequivocally that it supports the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state within the borders of June 1967, all Obama's efforts will remain fruitless, and the region will continue to deteriorate.

The Middle East is divided today between fundamentalist regimes and dictatorial pro-American regimes. Between these stones its peoples are ground. Utterly missing in the public discourse are the oppression and poverty from which the workers are suffering — whether in Egypt, where they demonstrate for a raise in the minimum wage, lifting loaves of bread before the parliament of Hosni Mubarak; or in Iran, where they struggle against privatization and joblessness under Ahmadinejad. In Turkey also the workers have gone to the streets in recent months against privatization and unemployment. The workers of the Middle East do not have a party to represent them. Their voice is not heard.

Israel too can hardly be said to seek the good of its citizens. Jews and Arabs alike suffer here from a gloves-off capitalist regime, which tramples workers' rights. The occupation sharpens the suffering of both peoples. In recent years the number of those who are both employed and poor has grown.

Solidarity between Jewish and Arab workers is the only way to overcome the cycle of bloodshed. The supreme interest of the workers on both sides of the conflict is to build a political and social alternative, egalitarian and humane, against a right-wing Zionist chauvinism and an Islamic fundamentalism that are leading both peoples into catastrophe.

• From the left-wing Israeli magazine *Challenge*. www.challenge-mag.com/en

ISRAEL BOYCOTT

Political hysteria won't help the Palestinians

By SEAN MATGAMNA

On a demonstration near the Israeli embassy during the Hezbollah-Israeli war in Lebanon, I talked with a well-known anti-Israel activist, a woman in her mid-50s, whom I've known since she was 16.

Discussing the agitation for a boycott, I conceded that on principle a case might be made for some sort of boycott. Except, I said, that "any boycott movement against Israel would soon turn into a Jew-hunt".

She responded candidly: "So what?"

A boycott would be an ineffectual, crude, and indiscriminate weapon. And its political cost would be a campaign against Jews — "Zionists" — who refused to support it. That is, as big an upsurge of anti-semitism as the organisers of a boycott could whip up.

Against a background of a steep rise in attacks on Jews in the street, and attacks on synagogues and Jewish graveyards, a boycott would do immensely more harm across the world than it could possibly do good in Israel/Palestine.

The woman I was speaking to is of distant Jewish background. Once upon a time a revolutionary socialist, she now describes herself as a "one-campaign person".

But that is the trouble with the "one-issue" — and sometimes monomaniacal — approach of the high-volume anti-Israel agitators. It blinkers them.

Often it is a matter of "excessive love" and indignation on behalf of the Palestinians confusing and bewildering them. But for many of the obsessive anti-Israel campaigners the expression of maximum hostility to Israel, rather than concern for the Palestinians, is unmistakably the driving force.

They actively oppose the proposal for a sovereign independent Palestinian state alongside Israel — the only plausible plan to rescue the Palestinians from the unequal conflict with Israel.

The SWP paper *Socialist Worker* responded to the killing by the Israeli army of nine Islamist militants on the Mavi Marmara with the page one headline call to the world in general to "Rise Up Against Israel".

There is nothing at all to be said that can justify the Israeli killings on the ship. Least of all did they make sense in terms of defending Israel.

But the notion that the killings should be met by a world "rising up against Israel" says more about the state of mind of the SWP, as veteran of a decade of alliance with Islamic clerical fascism, than about anything else.

In effect — though SW is habitually mealy-mouthed about spelling things out — SW responds to the killing

by the Israeli army of nine Muslim militants with the demand for the destruction of Israel and the forcible removal of self-determination for the Israeli Jewish nation.

To put it at its weakest, that is political hysteria. It is in practice, implicitly, and whatever the personal intentions of SWPers, anti-Jewish hysteria. If enough people paid attention to the SWP and acted on its call, it could not but lead to an anti-semitic movement.

It is possible for the SWP to do this — and no doubt the leaders of the SWP think it is laudable — because of its basic politics on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

It rejects the political solution favoured since 1988 by the Palestine Liberation Organisation, an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. In internal Palestinian politics, it allies with the clerical-fascist Hamas.

To be sure, the PLO proposal for a "two states" solution includes the demand for the "right of return" of the five million descendants of Palestinians who lived in what is now Israel 60 years ago. Unless that could be reduced in negotiations to some token population movements plus financial compensation, it is just another demand, hidden, for the destruction of Israel.

But in real negotiations about an independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory it might well be reduced to something that the Israeli Jewish nation could live with without abandoning self-determination.

There is good reason to be angry with Israel and for condemning the assault on the ship — and much else.

Too often the anger is used as an excuse for advocating the root-and-branch destruction of Israel, and so — since Israel would not voluntarily agree to be destroyed — endorsing any sort of war on Israel which Arab chauvinists and Islamists feel able to mount.

The renewed call for boycotting Israel and making it a "pariah state" is an expression of that drive. The response of the woman on the demonstration — so what if there is a Jew-hunt? — is part of that mindset.

Serious people will reject the Arab or Islamic chauvinist programme of destroying Israel. We will go on advocating the the only solution that can realistically help the Palestinians — two states, an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

To the point here, that also means the continued existence of Israel alongside a Palestinian state.

We will condemn what needs to be condemned, and in the first political place condemn Israel's refusal to use its present strength to achieve the equitable solution of a Palestinian state. Political hysteria and "so what?" self-righteousness will not help the Palestinians.

6,000 rallied in Tel Aviv against the Gaza blockade

"A government which has crossed all red lines"

FROM THE LEFT-WING ISRAELI "PEACE BLOC"
GUSH SHALOM

"This night [31 May] a crime was perpetrated in the middle of the sea, by order of the government of Israel and the IDF [Israeli army] Command. A warlike attack against aid ships and deadly shooting at peace and humanitarian aid activists. It is a crazy thing that only a government that crossed all red lines can do.

"Only a crazy government that has lost all restraint and all connection to reality could something like that — consider ships carrying humanitarian aid and peace activists from around the world as an enemy and send massive military force to international waters to attack them, shoot and kill.

"No-one in the world will believe the lies and excuses which the government and army spokesmen come up with," said former Knesset member Uri Avnery of the Gush Shalom movement. Gush Shalom activists, together with activists of other organizations, demonstrated on this very day in Ashdod, Tel-Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem.

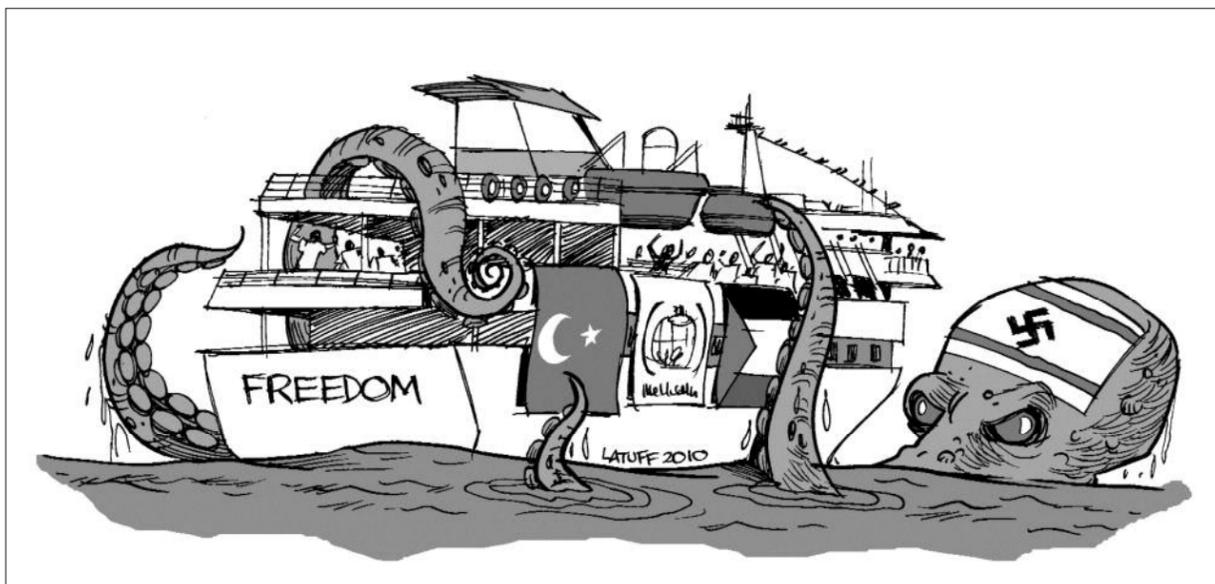
This is a day of disgrace to the State of Israel, a day of anxiety in which we discover that our future was entrusted to a bunch of trigger-happy people without any responsibility. This day is a day of disgrace and madness and stupidity without limit, the day the Israeli government took care to blacken the name of the country in the world, adding convincing evidence of aggressiveness and brutality to Israel's already bad international image, discouraging and distancing the few remaining friends.

Indeed, today a provocation took place off the coast of Gaza - but the provocateurs were not the peace activists invited by the Palestinians and seeking to reach Gaza. The provocation was carried out by Navy ships commandos at the bidding of the Israeli government, blocking the way of the aid boats and using deadly force.

It is time to lift the siege on the Gaza Strip, which causes severe suffering to its residents. Today the Israeli government ripped the mask off its face with its own hands and exposed the fact that Israel did not "disengage" from Gaza. Real disengagement from the area does not go together with blocking the access to it or sending soldiers to shoot and kill and wound those who try to get there.

The State of Israel promised in the Oslo Accords 17 years ago to enable and encourage the establishment of a deep water port in Gaza, through which Palestinians could import and export freely to develop their economy. It's time to realize this commitment and open the Port of Gaza.

Only after the Gaza port will be open to free and undisturbed movement, just like the Ashdod and Haifa ports, will Israel really have disengaged from the Gaza Strip. Until then, the world will continue — and rightly so — to consider the Gaza Strip under Israeli occupation and the State of Israel as responsible for the fate of the people living there.



There is a long tradition of anti-semitic cartoons depicting Jews or Zionism as an octopus reaching out its tentacles to grasp the world. Such images were, for instance, used by the Nazis. And note the swastika in place of the Star of David. Comparisons of Israel with Hitler's Germany and Zionism with Nazism are not only ludicrous, but offensive. No other state, not even much more plausible candidates such as Iran, are regularly described in this way; only the Jewish-majority state is singled out.

CHINA

Hyper-exploitation and resistance in the “world’s sweatshop”

BY IRA BERKOVIC

When the arch-Tory newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* runs exposés of working conditions in your factory, you should know something is up. Terry Gou, the 59-year old Chinese billionaire who owns Foxconn, must be a little shaken-up.

Foxconn is one of the world’s biggest technology companies, producing components for blue-chip giants such as Dell, Sony and HP. Its highest-profile client is Apple, for whom it produces iPhones, iPods and iPads. It has become the centre of a recent scandal after several workers committed suicide (with others making suicide attempts), unable to cope with the pressure of meeting over-demanding new orders.

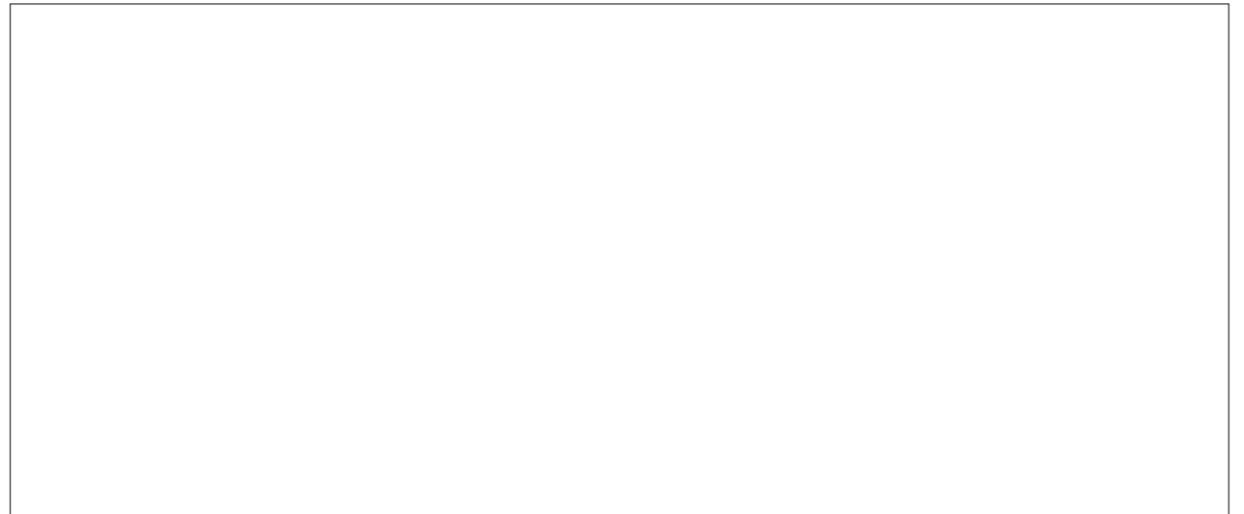
This year alone, 12 workers have died following jumps from high windows. A further 16 have attempted suicide with a further 20 being stopped by the company before they were able to make a suicide attempt.

According to an investigation into conditions in Foxconn’s mammoth Longhua plant (a factory-city where nearly 400,000 workers live and and work), “Hundreds of people work in the workshops but they are not allowed to talk to each other. If you talk, you get a black mark in your record and you get shouted at by your manager. You can also be fined [...] The machines keep moving and the staff have to keep up. The workers need practice to become really efficient, and with a heavy churn of new staff, they cannot adapt. In the past three months, the factory has been losing 50,000 staff a month because workers are burning out.”

Average overtime over the past year was 120 hours per month per worker, meaning that the average working week for a Foxconn worker is around 70 hours. For this toil, they receive a basic wage of just £90 (900 Yuan) per month — an average hourly basic wage of well under £1 per hour.

Foxconn has now begun locking doors and windows in its plant and dormitory buildings to prevent further suicide attempts — a move which has an alarming precedent in the history of sweatshop exploitation. In 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York caught fire and, because of management’s practise of keeping all exits locked, over 100 workers were killed in what was, until 9/11, the single worst workplace disaster in American history.

Foxconn’s Longhua plant combines the technological prowess of globalised late-capitalism with the sheer



Honda strikers

brutality and inhumanity that was exposed in early industrial capitalism and which has necessarily remained at its heart ever since. A veneer of benevolence (Foxconn provides leisure facilities for its live-in workers, many of whom are villagers who have come to Longhua looking for stable work) hides the reality that Foxconn’s workers — like the products they’re making — are nothing more than means to an end for Apple; that end is profit.

The Longhua plant might not be a dingy basement factory producing garments, but it is still, to all intents and purposes, a sweatshop; modern globalised capitalism stripped down to its basic nucleus, the ceaseless drive to accumulate profit by exploiting wage-labour.

China’s ruling bureaucracy, combining Stalinism and capitalist market-worship, clamps down on any expression of independent workers’ organisation.

Trade unions not endorsed by official state labour fronts are illegal and working-class dissidents are routinely imprisoned. Against such a backdrop, it is not difficult to understand why workers felt that jumping from a high window was the only response to super-exploitation available to them.

But, as a 2,000-strong strike of Chinese Honda workers shows, it is possible for workers to organise and take action even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Honda’s Chinese operations are run jointly with the state, with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions acting as a police force for management and government bureaucrats. Workers have succeeded in organising independently of the ACFTU, and their strike has so far resulted in an offer of a 24% pay increase from management (they began the strike demanding 30%).

Unfortunately, there are some on the left who still see the Chinese state as representing some kind of progressive alternative to capitalism. The CPGB-ML (whose leaders also run the “Stalin Society”, aimed at rehabilitating the reputation of “Uncle Joe”) might be a lunatic ultra-Stalinist fringe, but more respect-worthy figures like Bob Crow have also been known to appear at “Hands Off China” events.

The Foxconn suicides and the Honda strike should give those people pause; China is not a valiant and embattled workers’ government, attempting to construct an island of socialism in a capitalist sea. It is a major industrial-capitalist-imperialist power itself, whose state bureaucracy works hand in glove with some of the most exploitative multinational corporations on earth to wring Chinese workers for every last cent of profit that can be made, even if it means driving them to their deaths.

The Foxconn workers were not really suicides; they were killed by capitalism. The Honda workers are beginning to show how things might be different.

IRAQI WORKERS

We are still fighting!

BY FALAH ALWAN, FEDERATION OF WORKERS’ COUNCILS AND UNIONS IN IRAQ

Following a recent strike at the Iraqi Harbour Corp. demanding higher wages, the administration have issued orders to transfer dockworker activists from their workplaces in Basra to Mosul, which is 1000km away. We’re building a campaign of protests against the transfer; we’ll back the workers if they refuse to comply with the orders.

On the issue of a labour law, the GFIW is doing some work and has met the Minister of Labour, but their demands only include the “official” unions, meaning themselves.

We’ve been campaigning on the issue since 2004. We want a labour law that recognises all unions in Iraq, including more independent initiatives like our own. We’ve had support from the AFL-CIO, who’ve called for all unions in Iraq to get involved with a campaign for a labour law.

We have our own opinion of the work of the GFIW; they’ve been mainly backed by the TUC, and they have

their own agenda. They’re not just campaigning for a labour law, but to build a kind of respectable, “official” labour movement in Iraq. It’s unfortunate that the TUC has focused all their work on Iraq only on one federation.

We’ve been campaigning against lay-offs and job-losses; we organised a demonstration at the Ministry of Industry. A delegation from the Minister came to speak to the demonstration, and made a promise to put a halt to the job-losses. We’re also campaigning against the “self-financing” policies that are being introduced in many sectors, which are a form of privatisation.

Of course, we’ve been doing a lot of general work; organising in workplace, organising workshops for our members, producing our newspaper. One of the main challenges we currently face is the attempt by the “official” unions to position themselves as the only legal unions in Iraq and prevent us from continuing our work. Not having legal status is a serious challenge and holds us back from organising, particularly in the public sector.

Hands off Ark Tribe!

Unions are calling on workers to demonstrate on 15 June 2010, when construction worker Ark Tribe appears in Adelaide Magistrates’ Court under the Building and Construction Industry Improvement (BCII) Act.

Ark Tribe could face six months’ jail for trade-union activity. Dave Noonan, secretary of the Construction and General division of Ark Tribe’s union, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU) says: “If Ark is sent to jail we will begin immediate industrial action across this country”.

Ark Tribe’s “crime” is simply to have refused to give evidence to the ABCC, the special industrial police set up by the BCII Act. Under that law, construction workers have no “right to silence” when summoned to give evidence by the ABCC.

Kevin Rudd and the Labor Party promised to repeal the BCII Act and scrap the ABCC. But the promise was only to do that very slowly, and by replacing them with new, slightly softer, versions. In fact, pleading inability to get legislation through the Senate, the Rudd government has done nothing on the issue.

BOOKS

Is neo-liberalism dead?

Martin Thomas reviews *The Enigma of Capital: and the crises of capitalism*, by David Harvey (Profile Books) and *Meltdown: the end of the age of greed*, by Paul Mason (Verso).

Paul Mason's book, written in February 2009, is the best (and best-written) narrative I've read of the world financial meltdown of September 2008.

Mason goes for journalistic sharpness rather than academic hedging-of-bets, and concludes unequivocally: "Whatever you think about it, the neoliberal experiment is over".

He collects shocked comments from capitalist strategists from the midst of the meltdown. He thinks those point to a much more regulated capitalism, and one in which "organised labour is set for a comeback". "Those who want to impose social justice and sustainability on globalised capitalism have a once-in-a-century chance".

David Harvey's book, also scintillating, reckons however that "there is no evidence that [neoliberalism] is dead".

Harvey's book concludes with a call for "revolution" to "dispossess" the capitalist class. In a lecture at the London School of Economics (LSE) on 26 April, he explained that, for him, "revolution" is "co-revolution", a "slow movement across the spheres [of social activity]" in which the organised working class plays no very central role.

Harvey is a well-known academic writer, author of *The Limits to Capital* (1982) and *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990). Mason is a BBC journalist, but with a back-story in active Marxist politics.

Harvey has the advantage that he finished writing in October 2009, eight months after Mason. Those eight months, and the eight months since, help Harvey's argument that neoliberalism will continue rather than Mason's that it is dead.

More extreme doctrinal forms of neoliberalism, such as "rational expectations" and the "efficient market hypothesis", have been discredited. However, the main capitalist government strategists of the last thirty years have not been rigidly tied to such doctrines.

They have privatised industries and services, battered workers' organisations, slashed welfare, skewed tax policies to favour the rich, and reduced barriers to trade and capital flows between states: in short, they have re-gearred capitalist governments to making their countries good sites for global capital to operate in, rather than to building discrete national industrial bases.

But they have never, except perhaps in short periods of political excitement, abjured the insights brought to bourgeois economics by John Maynard Keynes. They have modified, and sometimes reduced, government regulation of economies, but never rejected it.

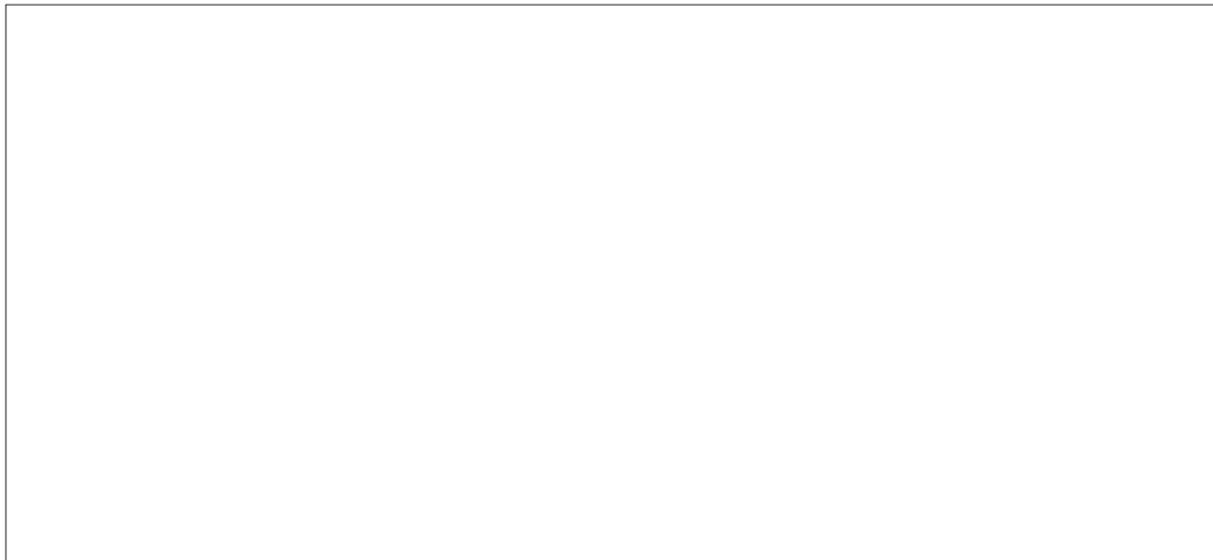
The panic of September 2008 brought a flood of "socialism for the bourgeoisie" by way of governments buying out or subsidising banks and other financial institutions which would otherwise have collapsed. But it could do that without destroying neoliberalism.

The banks still operate in global financial markets. In Greece, in Spain, in Britain, governments are pushing more neoliberal policies, more privatisation, more welfare cuts, more worker-battering, etc.

Obama's administration in the USA twitches in the opposite direction. But its measures on health insurance and financial regulation are still well within the bounds of neoliberalism.

As long as the world-market orientation of the main capitalist governments remains, none of the capitalist governments providing a home base for a big global financial centre can go back to focusing on the construction of a national industrial base without great risk of being overwhelmed by the sharper global competition which has reshaped capitalism since the mid-60s.

Harvey argues that there may be no capitalist way out of this crisis "apart from reversion to fictitious capital manipulation"; however, today's capitalism swims in "fictitious capital manipulation" and is not at all "apart from" it. The broad limits of "neoliberalism" are elastic, and there is room for it to "absorb" emergency measures like those of September 2008 and, conversely, for working-class and other struggles to resist cuts, defend welfare, and impose greater constraints of capital.



Spanish workers on the march, 8 June. Around Europe governments are pushing neo-liberal policies — privatisation, welfare cuts

THREE ACCOUNTS

Harvey's book orbits round three different accounts of the global economic crisis that opened in 2007. The three exist more or less side-by-side throughout the book, and Harvey seems tentatively to endorse all three without teasing any one through in detail.

None of the three accounts is focused inside the financial markets, whose follies are well described, without heavy theory, in Mason's book.

Harvey's first argument is that the markets for property and for land, and the construction industry, are central to capitalism, and yet peculiarly susceptible to speculative capitalist "overproduction", and to creating depressive debt burdens on capitalism: thus the origins of the current crisis in the US mortgage market. He suggests that an archetype of crisis is provided by the crash in Paris in 1868, after Haussman's building boom.

Only the most tentative suggestion of this argument can be found in Harvey's larger and earlier book, *The Limits of Capital*, but it deserves thought. In 2004, total non-financial assets in the UK were estimated at about £6000 billion. Of that total, £3427 billion was residential buildings, £624 billion commercial and industrial buildings, and only £425 billion plant and machinery.

In his LSE lecture, Harvey called his second and third arguments "underconsumptionist". He was defying the well-established Marxist argument (to which Harvey himself has assented in previous books) that crisis must be seen as overaccumulation rather than underconsumption.

The keeping-down of wages — in absolute terms, as in the USA, or at least relative to profits, as in other countries — has led to insufficient demand, says Harvey. The problem was covered over, for a while, by expanding consumer credit, but was bound to explode as soon as the intricate and delicate process of credit expansion hit a blockage.

Harvey refers back to Paul Baran's and Paul Sweezy's once-famous 1966 book, *Monopoly Capital*, which saw the critical problem for US capitalism then as a shortage of openings to invest its plethoric surpluses.

Capital has solved similar problems in past eras, he says, by "spatial fixes" — by opening up markets and industries in new geographical areas — but in today's fully-capitalist world there are no new frontier areas to provide such "fixes".

I think the second and third of Harvey's arguments are wrong. Capital is by no means solely dependent on wage-earner demand to find markets for its products. The capitalist class, and even more so a large class of flunkies, "professionals", and managers clustered round capital, provide large markets with their luxury consumption — larger in recent, in proportion to investment, in recent decades and in many countries. The critical determinant of insufficient effective demand is probably still capitalism's periodic sharp drops in demand for investment goods.

Where can a plethora of surplus come from, if not high rates of profit? And were rates of profit really low, before the 2007-8 crash? There is debate about this, but a recent survey by Michel Husson (<http://hussonet.free.fr/debaprof.pdf>) convinces me that rates were high.

Capital will spread geographically if it can, and not only or even mainly as a "fix" in response to crises. Overseas investment, the "spatial fix", has never really been a product of domestic gluts. In Britain before World War One, for example, the peaks of overseas investment coincided with the peaks, not the troughs, of domestic investment.

Capital can also continue to spread "upwards" even if it can't spread "outwards". A city like London, for example, has looked almost "full up" with everything capital could sell at many previous points in its history. Yet capital continues to sell more and more.

There surely are ecological limits to the expansion. But not geographical. And for now capital presses on towards the ecological limits undaunted, quite ready to crash into them full-speed.

Harvey discusses ecological limits at some length in *The Enigma*, but tends towards an emphasis on capital's still-strong ability to circumvent and modify such limits.

The basic thesis of an uninvestible glut of surpluses gains plausibility from the observation that capitalists have been "investing" more and more in financial markets rather than in expanding production.

But there is an element of optical illusion here. To some degree a whirl of financial transactions can keep value "super-hoarded", outside of production. But if the basic Marxist idea of new value being created in production is true, in the end all the financiers draw their revenues from value created in production — and there has been a large pot to draw from.

In his earlier chapters, Harvey sets issues in a crisp class framework — "whether we can get out of this crisis in a different way [than neo-liberalism] depends very much upon the balance of class forces" (emphasis added). He distinguishes carefully between *class* and populist revolt.

He recognises lucidly that much populist revolt — even revolt sincerely aimed against the bankers and business elite just as working-class socialist revolt is — can be reactionary. Unlike those who see political Islam as a progressive anti-imperialist force, he brackets "religious fundamentalism" with fascism.

The lucidity fades as Harvey approaches the end of the chapter. By the last page he has come to write: "Perhaps we should just define the movement, our movement, as anti-capitalist or call ourselves the Party of Indignation, ready to fight and defeat the Party of Wall Street and its acolytes and apologists everywhere, and leave it at that".

A version of this approach was popular in the late 1960s, summed up in the slogan: "In fighting anywhere we are fighting everywhere".

Indeed. But... not necessarily effectively, and not necessarily even on the right side.

HURRICANE KATRINA

Jailed for helping people in New Orleans

Tom Unterrainer reviews *Zeitoun* by Dave Eggers.

As the eye of Hurricane Katrina passed New Orleans in late August 2005, Abdulrahman Zeitoun remained tucked in the relative safety of his daughters' second floor bedroom. Around him were gathered the books, photographs, mementos and other less valuable but expensive-to-replace items from around the house.

Abdulrahman's wife, Kathy, and children had already left the city with thousands of others. Despite repeated requests to leave, the "man of the house" remained. This decision was not just some macho reflex: Zeitoun sensed that he could be useful in the aftermath of the storm. He felt responsible for his neighbours and their properties, many of which he'd refurbished or repaired over time. He felt that he could make a difference, could cope with the challenges and danger ... and do some "good".

Zeitoun's sense of human solidarity had immediate benefits in the storms aftermath. Whilst the State Governor, National Guard, Federal Government and police appeared to flounder in the face of the damage and the sometimes scattered, sometimes concentrated thousands of poverty stricken and immobile citizens who remained, Abdulrahman swung into action.

Traversing the destruction in his second-hand canoe, he saved more than one life, ensured that abandoned dogs got fed and checked on the state of friends' houses.

Then one day, Abdulrahman's house was raided by heavily armed men and women (some in official uniform, others not). He was taken to "Camp Greyhound" and then to a high security prison. He was not formally arrested, was not charged, did not get a phone call to either lawyers or family. He was "disappeared" and remained so for some time.

When Kathy eventually tracked him down, the Kafkaesque nature of this horribly real story snowballed. In some ways, though, the authors of Abdulrahman Zeitoun's fate outdid the master of the absurd parable: at least Joseph K. in *The Trial* had a prompt hearing, even if the exact parameters of the charges remained unknown. Abdulrahman was kept isolated and abused at length.

So what did he do wrong? Why was he so brutally detained? What crime took place? What suspicions did this Syrian-American "Good Samaritan" arouse? Who did he worry? Why?

As George W. Bush's government abandoned the poor and destitute to drown in their own homes, starve on their roof-tops and rot in the gutter, "National Security" concerns were addressed. Whilst Bush's

racist administration was willing to accept the deaths of mainly black Americans unable to flee the storm, they poured in police and armed forces from across the American South and hired private armies to deal with people like Zeitoun.

Bush and company feared that terrorists could use a natural disaster as cover for an attack: funds, personnel and time were invested in preventing this 'risk'. Thousands rotted and hundreds disappeared as a result.

Dave Eggers' fictionalised version of the story is masterful. His rendition of the nightmarish true story of Abdulrahman Zeitoun's is equally powerful and heart-rending. This mode of writing, presenting political and human reality in an accessible, literary format, can have a special place in chronicling the times in which we live and indicting the powers that deform and destroy human lives. Let's hope others take their cue from Eggers' work.

Abdulrahman Zeitoun was not completely destroyed by his grotesque ordeal. Many thousands of lives were destroyed during and in the aftermath of the storm: if Katrina was a natural disaster, the consequences were a clear-cut case of callous racism by a capitalist state.

MUSIC

Folk music and the far right

By ROSIE HUIZZARD

One strength of the far right in Britain today is in their ability to capitalise on the concerns of working-class and poor people and exploit and twist those interests for their own racist aims.

In the last couple of years, the BNP leadership has recommended to its activists that they start to spread their influence and try to insinuate themselves into the folk and traditional customs of Britain, in an attempt to retain what they call the "pure" culture of the white working classes.

Fortunately, this kind of elite preservationism has not gone down well in British folk/trad circles, which have a history of links to civil rights movements, liberation, and the labour movement — through not only the more obvious protest songs, but also the widening popularity of musical traditions that began in the factories and workhouses and have extended beyond. Clog dancing, for example, originated in the cotton mills of the 18th century industrial north west when workers who wore wooden-soled shoes due to the conditions in the workplace, would have competitions in their lunch breaks for entertainment.

The Folk Against Fascism organisation was started in 2008 as a reaction to the BNP's attempt to appropriate these traditions for its own means.

Various high-profile folk musicians and performers such as Eliza Carthy, Jon Boden, and Chris Wood spoke out publicly about their distaste for the fascist views of the BNP and that British folk music and dance has no room for racism. Folk Against Fascism, a loose grouping of supporters of the idea that folk music can be inclusive and multicultural whilst still retaining respect for working-class tradition, has now sponsored large scale events at venues such as the South Bank Centre and Sidmouth Folk Week.

The Folk Against Fascism website states, "Folk Against Fascism isn't a political party or a bureaucratic, top-heavy organisation. It is any and all of us who want to make ourselves aware of the BNP's bigoted view of our history and culture, and who want to do something about it."

"The BNP want to take our music, want to twist it into something it isn't; something exclusive, not inclusive. We must not let them."

"Folk Against Fascism is a way to demonstrate our anger at the way the BNP wants to remodel folk music in its own narrow minded image."

Eliza Carthy

This assertion that folk culture should be in the hands of the working class and all of the working class is powerful and makes it clear that it believes that the far right does not represent, nor have any claim to, the history of the working classes.

The BNP activist handbook specifically states that the traditionalism within folk communities is a perfect recruitment ground for nationalists. But what we as anti-fascists must remember is that the folk scene celebrates and promotes a musical history that is the product of rank-and-file workers, the pre-industrial peasantry, the war widows and the miners.

Folk songs passed down and (controversially for some Marxist cultural theorists) canonised by people such as Cecil Sharp are the cultural expression of the social experience of working people.

Blackleg Miner, a 19th century folk song used to intimidate miners who crossed picket lines, was revived in the 1980s miners' strike and used once again to show solidarity. Many folk songs tell the working class history that our education system shows us from the ruling class perspective, such as the numerous versions of songs about conscription into foreign wars

that serve no purpose for the masses, and the destruction of family life and communities that it caused.

Traditional folk encompasses the good, the bad, and the ugly of working class history — songs from the point of view of everyone from sex workers to mill workers to slave traders and the slaves themselves.

But it is an international tradition too and has always for instance reflected the struggles of different migrant groups. British folk festivals today host a range of international acts as well as the more obvious, and folk artists draw from Klezmer, Balkan, Indian, African and endless other traditional and contemporary sources in their work.

The folk community has now woken up to the political threat posed to it and as such a number of difficult debates have started to occur in previously apolitical organisations. In my own city of Sheffield, local Morris Dance and other traditional groups debated whether to perform at a St George's Day event hosted by the council, and if they did, whether they should make a political statement.

The threat from the far right has had a positive effect in that it has made many who previously took their alliance of music and politics for granted, and made them think about the difficult relationship between celebration of tradition and history, and the link to nationalism.

For many (including myself) this was never a coalition that needed to be explained, it simply existed as quiet understanding. But being under the spotlight has led many to sign up to the FaF campaign and declare themselves. It has also led to a sharp awakening for many about the real influence of the BNP in local communities — a recent Folk Against Fascism concert around St George's Day was pulled by the venue due to threats from the BNP.

Nevertheless, many folk performers and fans are wary of the politicisation of their pastimes, and many more feel that it is enough to promote themselves as anti-fascist without considering the public perception of the scene and why the BNP was attracted to it in the first place. On the other hand it is no longer acceptable for the traditional scene to ignore the threat, or claim that their hobbies are politically neutral. This is positive even though it is still mainly a publicity campaign with a deliberately broad opposition to the far right. The organised left should relate positively to these developments, but also consider how best to influence them as the threat from the far right grows.

THEATRE

Who's the poshest of them all?

Robert Clarke reviews *Posh* (now showing at the Royal Court theatre, London)

Laura Wade's *'Posh'* caused this reviewer more than a little discomfort and unease. I watched it from within the environs of the Royal Court in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea — notable for being the launch-pad for social realism and gritty, working-class "kitchen-sink" dramas such as John Osborne's 1956 *Look back in Anger*.

In *Posh*, The story of 10 Oxford undergraduates, all members of an elite dining society, The Riot Club (not too dissimilar from The Bullingdon of George Osborne, David Cameron, Boris Johnson et al.), begins in the private dining room of The Bull's Head. Four of the party have taken on different elements of the planning of the night's "festivities", in an attempt to "up" their profiles, impress their cohorts, and thus smooth the way for a possible slide into the retiring President's chair.

It is this play of rivalries which drives the drama forward. As the boys imbibe industrial quantities of the finest wines, tales of extreme hardship are traded —

"so my mother and father are stuck in this tiny little sitting room upstairs, huddled round a gas fire, rooms all round them getting opened up to visitors 'cause they got some cuntin' tapestry, or William of Orange slept there. Next time I go back they'll have stuck them in the fucking Buttery." Paeans to the Club's founding father, Lord Ryott, are delivered. Couplets of dedication are expounded: "you, new members whose minds were made in Harrow (and Eton) show us here the greatness of your drinking."

Each change of scene is punctuated by the surreal spectacle of the assembled "rioters" singing (a cappel-la style) rap and R & B songs in their polished RP, cut-glass accents, accompanied by body-popping, dancing and gyrations.

These comic disjunctures and humorous asides little prepare you for the aggressive discourse on Britain's caste structure from Alistair (the outspoken, true-blue, class warrior of the group): "families like ours have looked after this country for hundreds of years, they're uniquely qualified, why do we have to pretend everyone's the same?" And later: "how did they get everywhere, how did they make everything so fucking second-rate... I mean I am sick, I am sick to fucking death

of poor people."

This drunken, rabid class "analysis" spurs on the lads, leading to the assault on Rachel, the landlord's daughter, the finely staged choreography of the "room trash" and the horrifically realistic, near-fatal thrashing of the landlord himself, after his refusal to accept the usual Riot Club "pay-off".

Posh is well-constructed; humorous, insightful of upper/upper-middle class mores and customs; knowing and disturbing in unequal part. The sensations of unease and discomfort were engendered by the fact of watching the play a few days after the formation of the coalition. These people were well and truly back in the saddle.

Not that they ever went away; they were always ever present as industrial commanders, military leaders and top-ranking civil servants. The aristocratic Alan Clarke "type", whose appearance bookends the drama, explains the links that bind these establishment figures together thus: "my first dinner they rolled me down a hill in a barrel of prunes. Sick all over myself of course, but the chap being rolled down the hill next to me, he pretty much runs the country now, and I'm not talking about the PM."

A hatchet-job on Trotsky

Paul Hampton reviews Robert Service's biography of Trotsky, now released in paperback by Pan.

Robert Service has long advocated the "continuity thesis" — the claim made by cold-war historians and by Stalinist apologists that Lenin (and Trotsky) led to Stalin.

He is explicit about this in the book, but with an added twist. He makes Trotsky an even greater villain than Stalin or Lenin. Trotsky "lived for a dream that many people found a nightmare", claims Service.

"[Trotsky's] ideas and practices laid several foundation stones for the erection of the Stalinist political, economic, social and even cultural edifice. Stalin, Trotsky and Lenin shared more than they disagreed about". He adds: "If ever Trotsky had been the paramount leader instead of Stalin, the risks of a bloodbath in Europe would have been drastically increased... The point is that whoever governed the USSR effectively stood in need of deeply authoritarian methods to conserve communist power".

"[Trotsky's] lust for dictatorship and terror was barely disguised in the civil war. He trampled on the civil rights of millions of people including the industrial workers. His self-absorption was extreme. As a husband he treated his first wife shabbily".

From 1923, Trotsky fought Stalinism? "His behaviour had been very different in the period of his pomp from 1917 to 1922", responds Service. "He had crushed opposition in the party and trade unions. He had trampled on institutional resistance whenever he wanted rapid action and obedience. He had a greater propensity for commands than for discussion; he was arrogant and imperious. Trotskyists invented a man and a leader who bore only an erratic kinship to Lev Davidovich Trotsky."

For Service, Trotsky's role in the flowering of working-class democracy in 1917 scarcely figures. He omits important matters such as the democratic votes in Duma elections and in the Petrograd Soviet itself in the autumn, when the most democratic bodies in Russian history voted overwhelmingly for Bolshevik representatives and for Bolshevik resolutions calling on the Soviets to take power from the highly undemocratic, warmongering, pro-landlord and anti-working class Provisional Government.

Service can barely bring himself to recount the threat present by the right-wing general Kornilov, who attempted a proto-fascist coup in August 1917. He suggests that if only the Bolsheviks had left alone, Russia would have evolved smoothly towards a bourgeois democratic republic.

Rather than explain the terrible circumstances of the civil war, and register that Trotsky's intervention was critical in winning it against 21 armies from 14 coun-

tries, Service focuses on Trotsky's decision to have the Bolshevik member Pantelev shot after the battle of Kazan in August-September 1918.

A scandal previously suppressed? Not at all. There was a Politburo enquiry in April 1919. It found that Pantelev was shot as a deserter. The incident was recounted by Trotsky in his autobiography *My Life* in 1930 and discussed by Isaac Deutscher in his biography published in 1954. As Trotsky put it: "I appointed a field-tribunal which passed death-sentences on the commander, the commissary, and several privates — to a gangrenous wound a red-hot iron was applied. I explained the situation to the regiment without hiding or softening anything."

Service expresses contempt for Deutscher, but actually reproduces some of Deutscher's errors. Deutscher, who saw Stalinism as (unfortunately) the only way for progress in Russia at the time, presented Trotsky's call for the "militarisation of labour" in 1920 as a prescient foreshadowing of what Stalin did in the 1930s. Trotsky's account in *Terrorism and Communism* was, wrote Deutscher, "perhaps the only frank attempt made in modern times to give a logical justification of forced labour... A decade later Stalin, who in 1920-1 had supported Lenin's 'liberal' policy, was to adopt Trotsky's ideas in all but name."

Lars Lih has offered a far superior interpretation. Trotsky's reasoning was informed by an assessment that "our position is in the highest degree tragic". Russia was "looted, weakened, exhausted, falling apart". "We must tell the masses tell the masses that breakdown and ruin threaten all of Soviet Russia."

Trotsky used the term "militarisation" in the interests of honest dealing within the workers' state, and not because he rejoiced in repression. "Of course, it is only an analogy, but one that is very rich in content." "An habitual, normal regime — an habitual, normal method of work — will not save us now. We need an exceptional wave of labour enthusiasm, an unprecedented readiness of each one of us to sacrifice himself for the revolution, and we need an exceptionally authoritative economic apparatus that says to each particular person: it's tough for you, you're sick, I know it, but despite the fact that I know it's tough for you, I give you orders, I put you to work in the name of the interests as a whole. This is militarisation of labour."

Trotsky took the responsibility of proposing harsh and unhappy policies — and openly naming them for what they were — in order to win the civil war and defend the workers' government. He understood the alternative of the White armies would have been far, far worse.

Service downplays Trotsky's opposition to the ruling bureaucracy after 1923.

"Trotsky's specific alternatives to the policies adopt-

ed by Stalin from 1928, indeed, were to share many of Stalin's assumptions... Trotsky found much to commend in current soviet policies. He endorsed the rapid industrial expansion — it was only the crudity of Stalin's specific measures he disliked.

"Similarly he disapproved of the campaign of agricultural collectivisation less in principle than on the grounds that it was being waged with gross incompetence and violence. His chief objection to the Politburo... lay in its foreign policy..."

This summary of Trotsky's views can be sustained only by quoting very selectively from the writings in which Trotsky, in exile, sought to make sense of a USSR changing rapidly and unexpectedly. Much of Stalinist policy was unclear, much was inconsistent. Trotsky had to balance his hostility to the regime with his conviction that political upsets were likely to unleash a counter-revolution, based on a resentful peasantry, which would wipe out all socialist and working-class organisation at the same time as it overthrew the Stalinists. But he gradually pieced together a clear picture.

Although Trotsky denied to the end of his life that the bureaucracy had solidified as a full-scale ruling class, he declared in his biography of Stalin that the bureaucracy was now "sole master of the surplus product". He defined the political regime as having been totalitarian "several years before this word arrived from Germany" and having become different from Nazism only by its "unbridled savagery". In the last year of his life he predicted that if the regime survived the war it would have proven itself to be a new exploiting class.

Service makes an astonishing apology for the Moscow trials. The Stalinist secret police agent Zborowski "claimed that Sedov wanted him to travel to Moscow, presumably on a mission to carry out the assassination" [of Stalin]. "If all this were true", writes Service, "it is hardly surprising that Soviet security forces intensified their effort to eliminate him. Even if Zborowski made it up, feeling that he needed to corroborate the official image of Trotskyists as terrorists, it would still have had the same impact on minds in the Kremlin."

Service rounds off his attack on Trotsky by criticising his behaviour towards his family. But, as Gérard Rosenthal wrote, Trotsky's view was that: "It's useless thinking of making revolution with men for whom their professional life comes first, then their family life, and finally the revolution if there's any time left over".

Service's smug condemnation — from the viewpoint of someone who puts an academic career, and publishing success, first, and abhors revolution — fails even to register what Trotsky's life was about.

• A longer version of this article can be found at

The Miliband with something to offer

BY MARTIN THOMAS

At a recent Labour left conference, the writer David Osler quipped that Ralph Miliband, father of David and Ed Miliband, had written at length to show that the Labour Party was no good for the working class — and that the sons are now doing their best to prove the old man right.

Ralph Miliband died in 1994. He had been active in the “Bevanite” Labour left movement of the early 1950s and the “New Left” of the late 1950s and early 1960s. He was the prime mover in setting up the Centre for Socialist Education in 1966.

Two of his books are of great importance: *Parliamentary Socialism* (1961), a critical history of the Labour Party; and *The State in Capitalist Society* (1969).

Oxford, the LSE, and Harvard seem to have destroyed, in the Miliband sons’ minds, all they must have learned from their father. But socialists will not forget. This review of *The State in Capitalist Society* is abridged from one which appeared in *Workers’ Fight* (a forerunner of *Solidarity*), 8 July 1972.

Miliband points out that the “pluralist” view [according to which the state reflects a diversity of lobbies, and not a ruling class] doesn’t recognise the enormous inequalities in society. In Britain 5% of the population own 75% of all private wealth (1960 figures) and one per cent own 81% of all privately owned company shares.

The influential “lobbies” are all closely allied with the wealthy class — usually they are the same people, at the very least they have close personal connections and closely similar attitudes. And in fact state policies do follow the general interests of the wealthy class.

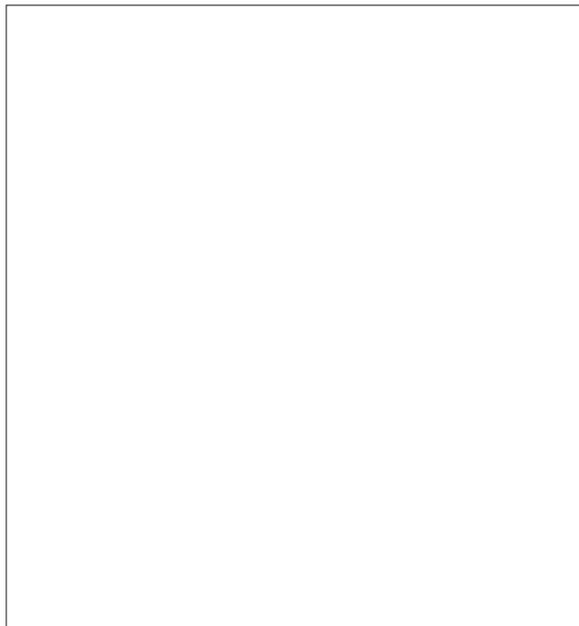
Miliband explains these points carefully.

But the main drift of Miliband’s argument is summarised thus: “as a pressure group, vis-a-vis the state, business enjoys a vast degree of superiority over other groups and interests”. He writes: “the legislative element of the state system, like all the other elements which have been considered previously, has normally remained, notwithstanding universal suffrage and competitive politics, much more the instrument of the dominant classes than of the subordinate ones, even though it is now rather less exclusively their instrument than in former days”.

Miliband still sees the state as a mirror-reflection of society, as “pluralists” also do. Only he sees the social and economic power structure in society before he holds the mirror up to it.

Then what is the difference between the state and a body like the Confederation of British Industry? How do we account for such cases as Fascism, where a political movement establishes, as Miliband writes, “a dictatorship over which [the privileged classes] have no genuine control at all”?

Miliband responds: “The dominant economic interests in capitalist society can normally count on the active good-will and support of those in whose hands state power lies.... But these interests cannot, all the same, rely on governments and their advisors to act in perfect congruity with their purposes”.



David Miliband (left) with this father

That is true, but vague. That capitalist state, as well as being, in the words of Marx and Engels, the “committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie”, is also specifically the organ responsible for the general administration of society, and the arbitration of social conflicts.

So, for example: “In a modern state, law must not only correspond to the general economic condition and be its expression, but must also be an internally coherent expression which does not, owing to inner contradictions, reduce itself to naught. And, in order to achieve this, the faithful reflection of economic conditions suffers increasingly. All the more so the more rarely it happens that a code of law is the blunt, unmitigated, unadulterated expression of the domination of a class — this in itself would offend the ‘conception of right’.” (Engels, 1890)

In *Capital*, Marx shows that the Factory Acts, enforcing safeguards on working hours, were necessary from the point of view of capitalist production, but they had to be pushed into state policy by working-class pressure, utilising the Parliamentary contradictions of backward-looking supporters of industrialism, against the opposition of most leading capitalists.

Working-class action can secure reforms even in a capitalist state; but it can also happen that the state takes the lead in an offensive against the working class, well ahead of individual capitalists.

Individual capitalists and even employers’ federations tend to steer their course by short term sectional interests. The state has to operate more in terms of comprehensive strategy. Governments and the permanent state machine interact, each shaping the other in different ways, and neither can be described as a passive reflection of the employing class.

It is not only that the working class has less power than the capitalist class. Any power the labour movement has within the present system is a different sort

Ralph Miliband’s most important books

of power from the capitalists’ power. It is a negative, defensive power, a power to obtain partial reforms within a hostile total society.

We may gain unemployment benefit; but, within capitalism, we still have unemployment.

The state, Engels wrote, “is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel.” As the contradictions of capitalism become sharper, so the intervention of the state increases. But the intervention of the capitalist state is not socialist.

Nor is there a merging of state and civil society. The relations between the state apparatus and the capitalists may be closer; but the distinction between the two is not abolished. The theoretical mistake of merging the two can lead to disastrous results.

In 1936, in Spain, the working class of Catalonia took power in civil society. The workers controlled the factories and the distribution of supplies. The bourgeoisie did not dare show themselves in the streets.

But the workers’ anarcho-sindicalist leaders did not go on to smash the old bourgeois state — the central banks, the administrative machine, etc. — and build a new democratically-controlled workers’ state. Within months, the working-class conquests in the economic field were whittled down. Controlling the treasury and the banks, the government was able to force its will on the workers by the threat of withdrawing credits.

The state is the product of civil society; the capitalist economic structure dominates capitalist politics in the last analysis. But the crucial problem for changing society is the conquest of state power.

Any positive political programme, any programme to go beyond bargaining within the system, must relate to the question of the state. An attitude of non-cooperation and intransigence towards capitalism is necessary for working class militancy — but not enough.

But to fix our eyes on a promised future big struggle to “smash the state” will leave us tripping over our feet in regard to the possibilities for action now.

Marxists have approached this problem through arguing for the slogan of a *workers’ government* — calling on the established organs of the labour movement to take power, and linking it with proposals for state measures — nationalisation under workers’ control, statisation of the banks, ensuring work or full pay — to resolve the crisis.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade

unions, supporting workers’ struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

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

We stand for:

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

everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

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

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

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

THE CRISIS, PART TWO

BY COLIN FOSTER

On 7 June the German government, which faces no acute government-debt crisis, announced £66 billion cuts.

They came mostly from welfare benefits, but will also slice off 15,000 public sector jobs.

Germany's move is part of a wider pattern.

- Germany is pushing for other European Union countries to adopt a constitutional amendment like the one Germany voted through in May 2009. That amendment comes into force from January 2011 and prohibits all but the smallest budget deficits from 2016.

- France has already made a constitutional amendment, banning budget deficits from 2018.

Britain's coming cuts are part of a drive across Europe for governments to retrench.

The 750 billion euro "rescue package" fixed up in May by the eurozone governments does not fit the pattern, but was adopted only under fear of Greece defaulting. The constitutional amendments include allowance for breaking the bans in economic crisis. But the governments' general direction is clear.

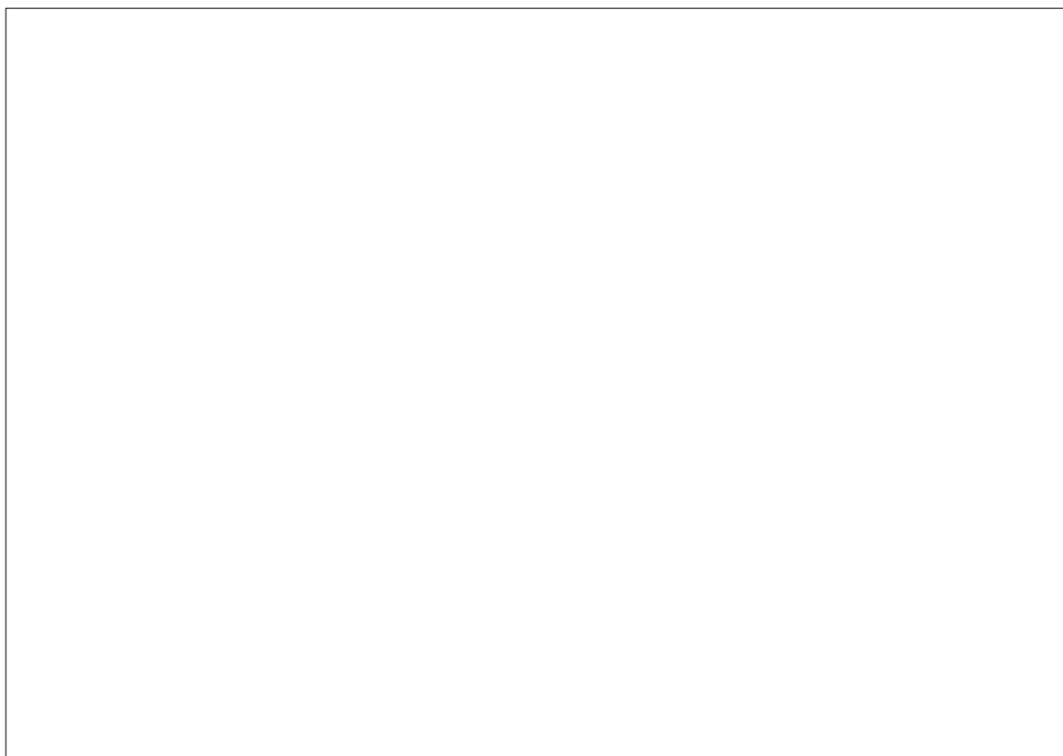
It means that "neoliberalism" still rules. Governments are still geared to keeping their countries as attractive sites for footloose global capital to perch in.

That means open borders (for capital and commodities, not necessarily people); privatisation; easy-going regulation; low taxes on the rich and corporations; and union-bashing.

It also means infrastructure — education, health, transport, and communications systems — good enough for the multinationals. For now the governments reckon that the advantages of keeping inflation and interest rates low will (for the multinationals) outweigh the costs of damage through cuts to public services.

The advantages also, in their view, outweigh the possible costs of a "double-dip" downturn caused by those cuts, so long as the "dip" is mild.

The USA and Japan depart from the European pattern. Both still run huge budget deficits without blinking, though in the USA



Public sector workers in Barcelona join a one-day national strike against cuts

states like California started making big cuts long ago.

Why? The US federal government, whatever the long-term damage to its global hegemony from the current crisis, benefits short-term because US Treasury bonds are the safe haven of last resort for capitalists worldwide. US 10-year bonds are still trading at 3.2% interest, lower than most European countries. (Greece, 8.3%. Portugal, 5.4%. Ireland, 5.3%. Spain, 4.7%. Italy, 4.3%. Britain, 3.5%. France, 3.1%).

Japan's exceptionality is different. The USA had falling prices from August 2008 to April 2009, but is back to about 2.2% inflation now. Japan is still stuck in a long-term pattern of falling prices. The Japanese government does most of its borrowing within Japan, and has to offer only an 0.2% interest rate for short-term borrowing or 1.3% for ten years.

The European governments could choose to allow higher inflation — the IMF has sug-

gested a target of 4% — to erode their debt backlog. For now they have decided not to.

The choice of big, quick cuts is not enforced by iron economic laws. If all the European governments decided differently, world financial markets would have to live with it. The value of the euro would fall relative to the dollar and the yen, and that is about all.

It may come to that anyway. There is a huge wall of debt repayments due in 2011 and 2012 from Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The existing 750 billion euro "rescue package" does not look like enough to ease them through, and the governments may have to choose further emergency measures.

In any case, the cuts drive is not a measure to cure the crisis. It is the form the next stage of the global capitalist crisis takes given the decision by European capitalist governments to cleave to the rules of neoliberalism.

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