

**An injury to one is an injury to all**

# **Solidarity**

**& WORKERS' LIBERTY**



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Stop the bludgeoning of Gaza  
Two nations, two states

**ISRAEL OUT OF  
THE OCCUPIED  
TERRITORIES!**

**See page 3**

# Tories want to break Tube workers' power

BY JACK STAUNTON

TORY candidate for mayor of London Boris Johnson unveiled his transport policy on March 3, including a promise to obtain a no-strike agreement on London Underground as well as the capital's train services. This policy, echoing an earlier UK Independence Party manifesto pledge, further demonstrates the utterly reactionary agenda of the ex-public schoolboy Henley MP, who appears to have a serious chance of winning the election against Ken Livingstone.

Johnson, who previously attracted controversy by referring to black people as "picaninies", also announced plans to scrap the £25 congestion charge for those people who feel the urge to drive their Land Rovers through the city. But more dangerous is his plan to attack the power of the RMT and one of the country's most powerful groups of workers. Johnson commented,

"The RMT leadership have their thumb

around the windpipe of London commuters and it's time it was prised off. I want to end the chronic strikes by doing a deal with the workforce in which they agree in principle not to go on strike in exchange for an independent arbitration in the case of a dispute on pay and conditions."

There is no way the RMT would agree to such a no-strike deal, a red herring policy designed by the Tories to answer *Evening Standard* style rants about tube workers. Neither would the ASLEF union, and (hopefully!) the TSSA, which very rarely takes industrial action. But while Johnson's commentary is plainly reactionary, one of his points worthy of reply.

It really is true that many people — not just tube bosses — are pissed off when strikes happen. However, socialists must make the case that tube workers have the power to fight for commuters' rights — as exemplified by striking against Metronet last autumn, which challenged privatisation and therefore opposed safety cuts and fare rises.

Furthermore, we must not foster any illusions in Ken Livingstone, who, while more palatable than the Tory bigot Boris Johnson, is by no means in the camp of the working class. Infamously, so-called "Red Ken" called upon tube workers to scab on strike action, crossing picket lines in the interests of his "progressive" administration. He furthermore endorsed the privatisation of the East London Line. His interests are promoting London as a centre for investment, somewhere where international business can make a profit.

In the mayoral elections we will critically call for a first preference vote for the Socialist Workers' Party/"Left List" candidate Lindsey German, despite all of the faults of that organisation. We will call for a second preference vote for Livingstone — not because he is "less bad" than Boris Johnson (although that is in several ways true), but because of the vestigial trade union link to the Labour Party and the very marginal possibility of regaining a working-class voice in the party, despite Brown's complete demolition of party democracy.

## Vote Lindsey German no. 1

"RED" Ken Livingstone's campaign for re-election is being supported with a high profile statement signed by... trade union militants? left activists? anti-cuts campaigners? No, instead we have a statement of the great and good, launched by that oh so radical organisation Compass.

Its signatories include Sir Jeremy Beecham of the Local Government Association, former Unison gen sec/sell-out Rodney Bickerstaffe, NUS president/sell-out Gemma Tumelty, NUS president/sell-out-in-waiting Wes Streeting, various Blairite MPs and the head of the Cooperative Party. To be fair, it does include a few trade union general secretaries and lefties like Hilary Wainwright, Lynne Segal and Tony Benn who should know better. But, overall, this is a statement of the Brownite establishment's left fringe.

Which is appropriate really, since that is exactly where Livingstone is — despite his maverick comments, left rhetoric and support

for Cuba and Venezuela.

There's really nothing much to add, except to quote one paragraph from the statement: "Of course, like all of us, Livingstone operates in the here and now. For London that means the domination of the Square Mile in the form of financial capitalism. He cannot be expected to address such forces at once or alone. He has set up a Living Wage Unit for which he gets a big tick. He would get a bigger tick if he talked about the policy more. Trying to ensure everyone shares in success is difficult. But Livingstone is trying. Boris Johnson would just make everything worse."

Left-wingers with an ounce of self-respect, left-wingers who don't believe you can grovel to the City and still call yourself a socialist, should join the AWL in (critically) backing Lindsey German for mayor.

• For the full statement see: [www.compassonline.org.uk/campaigns/campaign.asp?n=1364](http://www.compassonline.org.uk/campaigns/campaign.asp?n=1364)

Sights set on privatisation

# A profitable way to "happiness"

BY MIKE FENWICK

THE recent survey of all the existing evidence for the effectiveness of the anti-depressants of the type made famous by Prozac has demonstrated how easily drug companies can get away with cherry picking studies that highlight the effectiveness of their drugs whilst hiding any negative results.

The survey revealed that *none* of these drugs had an effect better than a placebo in any but the most depressed patients.

Prozac was the first of the group of drugs called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) where a massive marketing campaign was launched to put depression in the forefront of the minds of patients and doctors alike.

In the US prescribed medicines can be marketed directly to the public, so you can go for an appointment with a preconceived idea that a "wonder drug" is now available to ease your pain. For example Venlafaxine, another one of these drugs, was advertised to the public under the slogan "here comes the sun". Brand names are chosen to reflect the uplifting effects of the drug — e.g. Lustral — and presented with a smiley logo.

Such advertising probably raises the expectations people have of the drug and contribute towards the placebo effect. In the same way a man in a white coat might make you think a particular soap powder will wash whiter.

In Britain these adverts can be seen only in the trade press such as the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, usually in colour multi-page spreads that will earn the publishers a reason-

able income. That it also affects the line they take on printing reports on the effectiveness of these medicines is underlined by the fact that the new research has been published on a free online journal.

Such was the impact of the marketing campaign that Prozac became a cultural phenomena leading to books and films (*Prozac Nation*). You can now even get a version for your dog for relief of "separation anxiety".

It is only after a long battle using freedom of information legislation that the full details of the research used to promote these claims have been revealed. That the pharmaceutical companies make huge profits by unscrupulous means is no new revelation. Profit is the central motive and the saving of lives a lucrative market rather than an ethical or moral duty.

A backlash against the SSRIs has been long in coming and unfortunately, because of the weakness of regulatory powers, may eventually end up benefiting exactly the same big pharmaceutical companies in the long term. Because you can bet your mental health that the next generation of anti-depressants are on their way, and they too will be best ever available, at a price of course to match.

The hope must be that the current interest in how the drug companies have manipulated people will mean more caution in buying their lies next time round.

You can read the research for yourself. If statistics aren't your thing it includes a useful summary: <http://tinyurl.com/2y6o8u>

## AN INTRODUCTION TO MARXIST IDEAS Organised by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty

12-7pm, Saturday 19 April 2008

University of East London Docklands campus (Cyprus DLR)

This year is the 40th anniversary of 1968, when French workers and students rose up against the rule of capital, in the vanguard of a worldwide upsurge against capitalism and Stalinism. We will be discussing both the lessons of 1968 and the significance of the struggles by workers and young people which are shaking France today.

Sessions will include:

- Young workers in struggle: why anti-capitalists should look to the labour movement, and how we can help revive it
- Revolution, democracy and violence
- "Radical chains": how does class struggle relate to the fight against women's, black, LGBT and other forms of oppression?
- Marx's ecology: rediscovering a forgotten tradition
- Iran and Iraq: what do "imperialism" and "anti-imperialism" mean?
- How (and how not) to fight the BNP
- Venezuela, Bolivia, Cuba: models of 21st century socialism?
- Why is the left so divided? Do we need a united socialist party?

Followed by a fundraising social with Marxist hip-hop artist the Ruby Kid @ the Ivy House, 8-10 Southampton Row, Holborn (a few minutes from Holborn tube).

Ticket prices £5 waged, £3 unwaged — with a £1 discount if you pay in advance. Whenever you pay, please preregister if you can by emailing [skillz\\_999@hotmail.com](mailto:skillz_999@hotmail.com) or ringing 020 7207 0706. (We can find you somewhere free to stay as many nights as you need.)

## Under attack from immigration controls: trade unions and communities fight back!

Saturday 29 March 2008 from 10.30 am  
SOAS, Malet Street, London WC1

- Speakers include John McDonnell MP, trades union activists and organisers, people who have successfully fought back against the immigration system and from a broad range of migrant communities
- Workshops and plenary sessions with plenty of time for discussion. Creche, please book in advance
- Suggested donation: £50 pounds for trades unions, £25 pounds for other organisations. Send money and registration details to: Immigration Conference, Dean O'Hanlon, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, Euston, London NW1 1JD. Cheques to Finsbury Park RMT, clearly marked "Immigration Conference" on the back. [www.29thMarch.org.uk](http://www.29thMarch.org.uk) e-mail contact: [davidlandau@aol.com](mailto:davidlandau@aol.com)

# Stop Israeli atrocity in Gaza!

THAT Israel should want to stop the clerical-fascist Hamas regime in Gaza lobbing rockets into Israel is understandable and unobjectionable. That is has a right to defend itself will be denied only by those who share Hamas's belief that Israel itself has no right to exist, and the Jewish Israelis no right to be where they are, except as a vulnerable, stateless, disarmed religious minority within an Arab state.

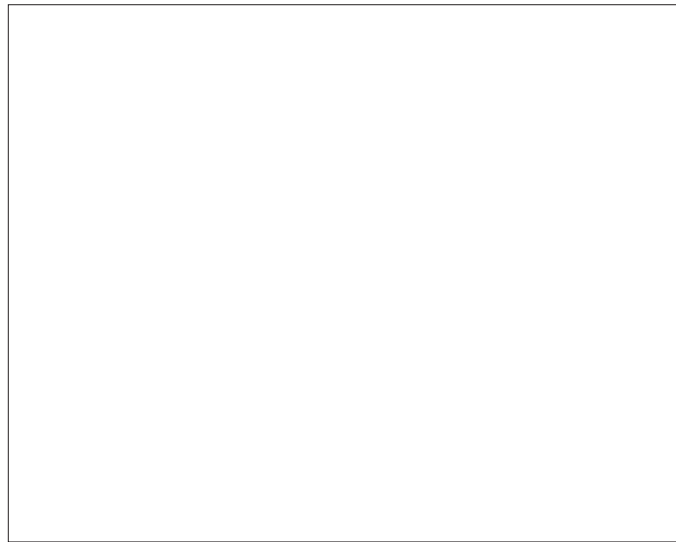
In principle, Israel has a right to attack those in Gaza who make feeble and intermittent war from the sky on its citizens.

*Despite all that, when you look at what is happening in Gaza, at what the Israeli state is doing to the Palestinians, you are faced with a crying obscenity!*

Israel has tremendous military superiority. It has the power to exact the penalty of one hundred, or two hundred, or three hundred Palestinians dead for every one Jewish Israeli dead at the hands of Hamas. It uses that power with a savage, chauvinist, relentless indifference to the Palestinians. Indifference, to put the case at its most favourable for the Israelis, to Palestinian women and children non-combatants as well as — more than! — to Hamas fighters.

It is grotesque. Unspeakable. Beyond defence and beyond justification.

The unctuous hypocrisy of the Israeli government representatives, the cant against "terrorism" in which they indulge, seemingly without intended irony and sarcasm against themselves, compounds the disgusting spectacle.



Pointing out that Hamas fighters deliberately hide in the civilian population cannot justify or excuse what Israel does. The Palestinian rockets would have to be inflicting immensely larger Israeli casualties than they do to make legitimate self-defence of

operations which impose the casualties that Israel is imposing on Palestinian non-combatants.

The disproportionality cries out against the Israeli state and the Israeli government. Hamas are clerical-fascist medievalists.

Israel is one of the most democratic societies in existence. That the Israeli government uses that fact frequently and inappropriately to justify Israel's attitude to the undemocratic Arab states and Arabs does not detract from it. But what follows is that Israel should be correspondingly humane and enlightened.

What Israel is doing in Gaza is a terrible abuse of power. It should stop. Socialists in Britain and elsewhere should support and help those Israelis who are demanding that it should stop.

Despite Israel's loss of military prestige as a result of its performance in the war with Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006, Israel is in a position to achieve a comprehensive peace with the Arab world and a settlement with the Palestinians that would go as far as any treaty or agreement could in guaranteeing Israel's future. It is a crime, a crime against the Jews of Israel as well as against the Palestinian Arabs, that Israel does not use that position of power to bring about a just and democratic settlement with the Palestinians.

Such a settlement would involve, minimally, Israel agreeing to, facilitating, and respecting the national integrity of a genuinely independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel.

Despite lip-service to a two-states settlement, it is not ready to do that. That may be as big a tragedy for the Israeli Jews, in the long term, as it is now for the Palestinians, and most immediately the Palestinians of Gaza.

## The Orange Godzilla retires

IAN Paisley did not jump out of the position of First Minister of Northern Ireland. He was pushed. Nudged, anyway.

He came under strong pressure from the leading circles of the Democratic Unionist Party to go, and go now.

Paisley's resignation may turn out to be for Northern Ireland politics as if President De Gaulle of France had been assassinated early in 1962, at the time of the Evian agreement that gave Algeria independence after an eight year war.

It depends on whether the power-sharing arrangement in Northern Ireland, which has gone on very successfully in the last year, really is as "bedded down" as it seemed with Ian Paisley as First Minister.

Without Paisley, the agreement to work the power-sharing system, suspended for five years, would not have been reached, or made to work as smoothly as it has done. In fifty years Paisley had indeed, as he claimed, become "the leader of the Ulster people" — of the Protestant majority, not of course of the Catholic minority.

Paisley started out as a marginal John the Baptist or Protestant Savonarola figure, scourging and castigating the sins of the Unionist Establishment and the timidity and lack of zeal of those Protestant ministers and political leaders who were not, as Paisley proclaimed himself to be, militant "soldiers of Christ".

He denounced all attempts at a political settlement in Northern Ireland based on power-sharing. He wrecked, or helped to wreck, every move towards easing the Catholic-Protestant conflict, from the mild reforms of Unionist Northern Ireland prime minister Terence O'Neill, in the second half of the 1960s, through the power-sharing government set up at the start of 1974 under the Sunningdale agreement and the constitutional assembly of 1975-6.

He opposed every feeble attempt to move towards compromise after that, all the way to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

Through all that, he moved from the fringes to the centre of Unionist politics, battering and trampling everything in his way like a lumbering Orange-Unionist version of the movie monster Godzilla.

He erected his throne as the "leader of the Ulster people" on the ruins of the old Unionism. By the end, he had achieved a formidable power, status, and influence.

In 2003 Paisley's party became the majority party of the Unionist camp, in parallel with Sinn Fein's rise to become the majority party in the Catholic camp. And then, seemingly, he ate his words of intransigence and his vows never even to "sit down" with Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA.

Or did he? On one level, yes, he did. But he did not go into government with the old Sinn Fein-IRA. It was a Sinn Fein-IRA that had been defeated in its goal of achieving a united Ireland by military force and, more than that, had been convinced by experience and by the ambitions of its leaders to embrace the parliamentary politics that it had denounced.

The fundamental, the substantial, "concessions" that underlay the power-sharing agree-

ment of Paisley, Adams, and McGuinness all came from the Sinn Fein-IRA side. Whatever elements of personal ambition of the one-time outsider to be First Minister there may have been in Paisley's turn to power-sharing with Sinn Fein, it would not, could not have happened without the political and military collapse of the old Sinn Fein-IRA.

Even with that, the DUP decision to enter coalition with Sinn Fein would not have happened without Paisley's weight and influence and the pull of the gravitational centre Paisley had come to be. Extreme Protestant groups are as fractious as Trotskyists!

The DUP is far from a homogeneous organisation. There are in it many different currents, including some — and some leaders — who were critical of Paisley's decision to share power with Sinn Fein, and reluctant about the present arrangements.

TV and newspapers have reported the name among Northern Ireland MPs for the good-humoured, jocular rapport between Paisley and his deputy Martin McGuinness, a one-time chief of staff of the IRA — "the Chuckle Brothers". The name was coined by a leading DUP'er, and functioned with some in the DUP as a bitter criticism of Paisley for the relationship.

The pressure within the DUP for Paisley to go was sharpened and strengthened by the involvement of his son and chief lieutenant, Ian Paisley Junior, in a sleazy relationship with a property developer. But it existed before that, rooted in political dissatisfaction.

And there is a purely religious dimension. Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church — which he founded and leads — bears a relationship to the DUP something like the one which once led to the Church of England being called "the Conservative Party at prayer".

That church, under Paisley's control, retains weight and power within the DUP. But by no means all DUP'ers are members of the church. Paisley's most likely successor, Peter Robinson,

also a priest, is not. They all take their religion seriously. That is a potential source of disruption.

Robinson has been Paisley's deputy for decades. He is reputed to be a capable man, committed to power-sharing. But he isn't Paisley. He doesn't have Paisley's public standing or his political clout, or anything like it.

A year is too short a time for the system Paisley, Adams and McGuinness set up a year ago to have set in place. That, combined with the fact that it probably wouldn't take much to set the different groups in the DUP to quarrelling and fighting among themselves, may give Paisley's going an enormous political importance — as if De Gaulle had been killed by the opponents of his policy in Algeria before the war had been brought to an end.

As well as that there is the recent increase in the activity of those Republicans who, holding to what was once the Provisional IRA's viewpoint, repudiate the Adams-McGuinness "compromises".

They, however, are very much an isolated, fringe force among Northern Ireland's Catholics. And there is the accelerating economic knitting-together of the Six and 26 Counties into an all-island economy, something which has never existed before. A lot of the fear and antagonism has gone from North-South relations.

There is a powerful feeling in Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, in favour of peace and the prosperity and optimism which it has brought. "Nobody" wants to turn the clock back. It may be that nobody can turn it back.

And yet, in such situations of communal conflict, reckless minorities on both sides — as in Northern Ireland itself in 1968-9 — can spark off each other and over time pull whole societies whose majorities would never have chosen such a thing, into the abyss.

Despite the loosening of North-South suspicions and antagonism, giant walls still divide Belfast's Protestant and Catholic areas.

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[solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

Editor: Cathy Nugent

## CIVIL SERVICE

## Fighting low and unequal pay

ON the 29 February members of the PCS union in the Department for Transport (DfT) took strike action over low and unequal pay, jobs and privatisation.

The strike had a great impact:

- Picket lines were in operation across Britain;

- MPs joined the pickets in Stockton, Northampton and in London;

- At the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) the support was very strong, with the huge main office in Swansea making top billing on BBC Wales at lunchtime. Local activists believe that it was the best supported action held in Swansea for years;

- In the local DVLA office network members managed to bring about the closure of offices in Shrewsbury, Bangor, Edinburgh, Brighton and Nottingham. Support was good, with a strong turnout, at Glasgow, Manchester, Stockton, Leeds and Chester and other VROs;
- In the Driving Standards Agency it is estimated that approximately 5000 driving tests were cancelled and booking of tests was badly affected by support from members in the central call centre in Newcastle.

The union believes that the dispute was the better supported than the one day strikes called last year as part of the national action.

There was a week's work to rule following the strike, prolonging the disruption caused by the strike and keeping the work backlogs in place.

In early March the coastguards (who are part of DfT) will take their first strike action since the service was formed over 140 years ago.

Their dispute has a different basis from that of the rest of the department. In 2005 a pay comparability study concluded that coastguards were "underpaid" by £2,000 compared to the other emergency services. Local management agree this is true but ministers will refuse to fund the necessary pay increases.

The union has also started equal pay cases in DfT and is seeking a judicial review claiming that the DfT Secretary of State Ruth Kelly's refusal to check whether the unequal pay in the department is gender-related and a breach of the DfT's legal duties. PCS is campaigning amongst MPs on this last point as well.

Further industrial action, including selective action, is planned. For more information visit [www.pcs.org.uk/dft](http://www.pcs.org.uk/dft)

## UNISON

## Oppose the witch-hunt

A statement from "Defend the Five" Campaign —

This campaign has been launched because of the attack by Unison's leadership on four London branches and five officers of these branches.

The attack began at the June 2007 Local Government and National Delegate conferences when these branches sought to challenge why our conferences are constantly denied the right to debate issues because some see them as too controversial.

The five officers under investigation are Glenn Kelly, NEC member and Bromley branch secretary; Onay Kasab, Greenwich Branch secretary; Brian Debus and Matthew Waterfall; Hackney branch chair and secretary respectively and Suzanne Muna, Housing Corporation branch secretary.

They are being investigated for producing and handing out a leaflet that complained about the above manipulation of the conference agendas.

Despite the leaflet making no derogatory remarks about any individual member of the standing orders committee, the former president announced an investigation and then allowed and supported an unsubstantiated and unjustified attack of alleged racism without giving the branches the right to respond.

BY FRANK MITCHELL

RECENTLY there have been a number of strikes and protests in local government in response to settlements of Single Status Agreements.

The most significant was a one-day strike in Birmingham which has brought the local authority back to the negotiating table. The industrial action is now officially suspended as talks progress. Three days of strike action in Argyll and Bute also led to new negotiations and a commitment to a collective agreement rather than the imposition without formal consultation of a deal.

Numerous "final deadlines" have now passed since Single Status Agreements were first rolled out ten years ago. The aim of the agreements was to settle the historic inequalities in pay suffered mainly by low paid women workers and set up a new system that would guarantee "equal pay" in the future. But the current situation is now a complete mess.

Some councils and unions have made deals seemingly to their mutual satisfaction. But even here the deals are at risk of unravelling. "No win, no fee" solicitors are taking out individual grievances for women workers who think they have been sold short in the collective agreements. And it's not just the employers who are facing claims (thousands of claims) for unequal treatment, the unions are too.

As the principle being challenged in court is that of the right of a union to make a collective agreement with the support of their members, the court cases have been posed as a threat to "trade unionism as we know it". Of course such deals inevitably require compromises. There will always be winners when a union tries to get the best deal possible in the circumstances. We would often criticise such deals and argue that there is more than can be gained if workers are mobilised into more serious action etc. Nonetheless the principle that unions seek to deliver the best collective agreement stands as one of the historic benefits of being unionised. When that principle breaks down there is the threat of sectionalism, with workers pitted against workers. And then the strongest sections will win deals to the detriment of

others.

Ironically perhaps, it is weakness in the collective power of the union that explain the need for SSAs in the first place. In the past some sections, particularly male manual workers, were able to use their industrial muscle to win better pay and terms and conditions. More poorly organised women workers fell behind or were never able to fight alone.

Unfortunately some of the current agreements will mean significant wage cuts for male workers from employers seeking to level wages down to that of their female counterparts. It's their idea of equality. The alternative of "levelling up" is said to be too costly and would result in cuts in services or redundancies. Unions have felt the need to balance competing demands whilst not being seen as "bankrupt" local authorities.

The no win/no fee solicitors on the other hand pursue individual or small groups of claims with the sole purpose of getting as much money as possible with no responsibility for the costs.

Because the unions have allowed SSA negotiations to go ahead authority by authority, rather than through a national deal, means that what has been decided as a "fair" wage in one council can be very different just a few miles away in the next borough. There has been a lack of central support from the unions to support local negotiators, no up to date information on the deals being made, not attempts to set benchmarks for agreements outside of Scotland. There have been attempts by council leaders to claw money back from the deals, through subsequent changes in terms and conditions — e.g. cutting unsocial hours payments and increasing productivity.

All of this threatens a breakdown in national terms and conditions and pay bargaining. As each council asserts its new independent powers to set local rates of pay there is being created the basis for new and enduring differentials between workers supposedly on the same grade across the country. And if, for instance, care workers in one borough are "cheaper" than in another the their service will be more competitive and sellable to another borough. A market in council services is now being

created.

The NHS's pay reform, Agenda for Change, to achieve equal pay was centrally funded. The costs of SSAs are not. They are expected to be met within current council budgets with little help from national government. The total cost is projected at being between £3-5 billion pounds — a huge amount but a fraction of the cost of bailing out Northern Rock or the war in Iraq.

Because of the threat of further legal action the unions have banned, under legal advice, any discussion of SSAs and equal pay from public forums, including union conferences! This has been the situation for the last few years and seems likely to continue.

Workers' Liberty supporters in UNISON have nevertheless put forward motions for local government conference to try and open up the debate calling on the union to:

- Publish a national report with details on the costs and arrangements on single status for each local authority so that our members and branches can have a national picture.

- On this basis compile a benchmark agreement that incorporates all the best outcomes, as a guide for our local negotiators and as evidence to present to local employers in arguing for a levelling up of all outstanding agreements.

- Coordinate a dispute with employers over pay and single status.

- Demand the government fully fund the 6% pay claim and the costs of single status

The cost of not doing these things will be a breakdown in national pay, terms and conditions and — equally importantly — levels of service and provision. That will mean further rounds of industrial action in defence of local deals and protection of national agreements. In that situation sectional interests are likely to reassert themselves, and new inequalities to be created.

The unity between the unions seen in Birmingham and elsewhere now need to be replicated nationally and national strike action taken to force central government to pay for a full settlement and correct the historic injustice that sees 75% of women in local government still without an equal pay settlement.

The leaflet used the well known cartoon of three little monkeys — "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil". This is a widely used piece of established political satire to express a view of not being heard or listened to; it has no racist connotations.

The leadership's attack has nothing to do with taking the issue of racism seriously, but everything to do with attacking branch officers who all have a track record of challenging the leadership and of fighting racism.

This attack is part of a wider attempt by the union leadership to clamp down the democratic rights of members and branches.

We call on all branches and members to oppose the undemocratic witchhunt on these five union activists and begin the fight to win real democratic control over our union.

More details, model resolutions etc: Defend the Five Campaign, PO Box 858 London E11 1YG

email: [info@stopthewitchhunter.org.uk](mailto:info@stopthewitchhunter.org.uk)

Send protests to: The General Secretary, Unison, 1 Mabledon Place,

London WC1H 9AJ

Also <http://www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk/>

## Rent rises in Lambeth!

BY HEENAL RAJANI AND DAN JEFFREYS

LAMBETH council wants to increase council tenants' rents by 6.5%. This is far higher than the increases in other boroughs and equates to around £250 a year extra for the average property.

How does this council expect tenants to afford this, when food and energy prices are also rising? The increase is far more than the increases in pay, benefits and pensions that most

Lambeth tenants will receive.

The people making these decisions are consultants each "earning" £800 per day! They will never have to worry about not being able to pay their rent! The council's housing department squanders £4.6 million every year on these expensive consultants.

Getting rid of these consultants would pay for the rent increase by itself. On top of that, £2.7 million in rents is lost each year because of empty properties which Lambeth won't repair or won't move people into, and millions more paid to private landlords for temporary accommodation.

At the same time as increasing rents, the council is proposing to privatise even more of the services it provides to tenants; caretaking and emergency repairs are being considered, and they may outsource the Lambeth Service Centre to another country!

The only people who will benefit are the private companies who will get lucrative ten-year contracts — a licence to print money. One of the council's contractors, Connaught, made profits of £18.4 million in 2007. Lambeth public services are being taken even further away from public control — just like the government is trying to do with schools and hospitals. It will mean less accountability, and make it much harder to pick up the pieces when things go wrong.

**Public meeting — Rent rises and privatisation: What do you think about the proposals?**

**All Lambeth tenants/residents and staff welcome, 6.30-9pm, Thursday 13 March Assembly Halls, Lambeth Town Hall, Brixton**

**Supported by Lambeth Unison and Lambeth Defend Council Housing**

## A campaigning union

**Solidarity spoke to Steve Hedley, the newly elected Secretary of the RMT union's London Transport Regional Council. The union is currently gearing up for a number of important fights. See: [www.workersliberty.org/tube](http://www.workersliberty.org/tube)**

**Q: What do you think the RMT in London Transport Region should be doing?**

A: We should have a coordinated strategy to take back into public ownership all parts of London Underground. We should try to eliminate the use of contractors and casual labour and employ all contract workers as full time staff. We need to put maximum pressure on Livingstone before the mayoral elections in May. The RMT needs to become a campaigning organisation that makes links with the local community.

**Q: What changes do you intend to make in your new role?**

A: The Regional Council should start to see itself as a body for campaigning, not just debating. Right now resolutions get debated and passed but they don't get put into effect on the ground. Recruitment days organised by the Regional Council are poorly attended, yet activists seem happy to attend a bun fight at a monthly meeting. The Region needs to focus on relating to ordinary members, on looking outward rather than inward. One part of this will be to move the monthly Regional Council meetings to a non-alcoholic venue! This will open it up to people of all denominations and help to build links with local communities.



# Knowing your place

## From charity to capitalist contractor?

**On Wednesday 5 March 450 members of Unite union who work at Shelter struck for the first time in the housing charity's 41 year history. A Shelter worker explains the background.**

SINCE his arrival in 2003, Shelter's head-honcho has seen his salary increase from "between £50-60,000" to "between £90-100,000". He is paid more than the top boss at Oxfam, despite Shelter having a massively lower turnover than the NGO.

The bosses who award themselves pay-rises of this scale are the same people who are now aggressively pushing a deal that will see Shelter workers' pay and conditions slashed.

The worst of the deal includes:

- Immediate downgrading of one third of frontline advice posts by £3,000.
- Removal of pay increments currently worth around £2,500 over three years.
- Extension of the working week from 35 hours to 37.5 hours.
- Introduction of new, disastrous, working practices which would effectively create a two or three-tier workforce of housing advisers doing the same jobs and leave Shelter as an unprincipled lapdog of the government funding agencies.

This is a ruthless attack on (mainly) lowpaid and overworked voluntary sector workers. The insidious ethos that pervades many charities, whereby workers are expected to develop some kind of martyr complex and made to feel as if they should put up with attacks on their pay and conditions out of some kind of philanthropic instinct, must be resisted; underpaid, over-worked staff who are bullied into accepting deals by their management are not going to be capable of effectively fulfilling the needs of Shelter service-users.

The deal proposed by management isn't something we can tinker with; it needs to be stopped in its tracks and scrapped altogether.

Elected Unite (TGWU) shop stewards and workplace activists need to be in control of the dispute – in terms of the production of material (leaflets, placards, banners etc.) and in terms of deciding where the action should go next – to make sure that it can't be hijacked by people who are more concerned about getting back around the table with their management pals than they are about winning.

## Shelter and the housing crisis

ALTHOUGH Shelter provides a valuable service to many people in bad housing – or with no housing at all – there are problems with some of the campaigns it launches around issues of the housing crisis.

For the two million-odd people who live in council houses, the government is doing everything in its power to sell the homes to private housing associations. Millions of pounds have been spent in trying to convince tenants to give up their tenancies to a private housing contractor, and all sorts of dirty tricks have been employed to rig the votes.

In 2003-4 Commons Public Accounts Committee concluded that selling off council housing costs the taxpayer at least £1,300 a home more than councils doing the improvements themselves. But the real scandal is that

whereas a private housing association would use rent money to maintain its housing stock and reinvest in future developments, central government takes £1.5 billion out of the Housing Revenues Account each year and plugs it into other projects (Defend Council Housing 2004-5).

The only way to get some of this money back is to agree to one of the government's three privatisation schemes – stock transfer, PFI or ALMO. Council tenants are being offered an ultimatum: either give up cheap rents, democratic accountability and publicly-owned housing for future generations or watch while we let your house fall into disrepair. Thankfully, the council tenants are seeing through all this black-mail and fighting back.

Shelter's recent campaign for 20,000 new houses on green and brownfield sites is muddying the waters. The problem with houses is that some people own more than they need. Shelter should be siding with the grassroots campaign to defend council housing and raising serious objections to second (and multiple)-home ownership.

As a "respectable" NGO it is being used as a feel-good PR machine for the government and its fat cat friends in order that they can gain public support for their agenda to destroy our green spaces and build Noddy homes in the interests of private profit.

To really solve the housing crisis, we can't rely on playing on middle-class guilt about homelessness. Shelter should link up with council housing campaigners to launch a real, grassroots working-class campaign for decent housing for all.

For Shelter to make any impact on homelessness in bad housing, beyond bringing about the resolution of individual cases, it needs to be taken out of the hands of fat cat managers and to develop answers to the big political questions that cause the problems they seek to combat. We know that Shelter staff want to work in an organisation like this, and the first step to achieving it is to win this dispute!

## Strike day, 5 March

**Picket lines were generally well attended and buoyant. In Leeds the line spent six hours leafleting the public about the dispute. Union representatives and members of left organisations including the AWL came to help.**

**At the London office 30 plus people came to the picket and were visited by members of Unite's national executive. Manchester was well-attended.**

**In Sheffield 10 pickets were kept going by numerous cars honking in support.**

**The next planned strike day is 10 March, timed to coincide with a Board Meeting of Shelter. There are no signs yet that management want to negotiate.**

**Solidarity spoke to Elizabeth O'Hara, Unite shop steward at Shelter's headquarters in Old Street, London:**

**"It's a good turn out; the building must be feeling pretty empty. Since the dispute began last year, union membership has rocketed. We now have 65% coverage at HQ, and union meetings, once a rarity, are frequent and pretty vibrant.**

**"Management have said they have nothing to say to the union, so we expect more action after today".**

**Pat Yarker discusses the recent debate over "choice" in school provision**

CONTRADICTIONS inherent in New Labour's policy of increased diversity and "choice" in school-provision have surfaced again over admissions to state secondary schools.

Media attention has once again focused on Brighton and Hove, the first Local Authority to make "random allocation" of school places, rather than proximity to the school, the criterion to resolve conflict where schools in the same catchment-area are over-subscribed. (A handful of individual schools in other areas already use the system.) Some Tories have objected, noting that Brighton's "ballot" or "lottery" prevents wealthier people effectively buying a place at a preferred local state school by paying to move into a nearby property.

But ballots and lotteries generate their own problems. Transition from "feeder" primary to given secondary is known to be an anxious and difficult time for many students, and staff in local schools work together to ease that move. Such arrangements may be strained under a ballot system as the number of "feeder" primaries could multiply, perhaps considerably.

Ballots are also likely to disrupt students' friendship patterns, and this can make transition especially daunting for some young people.

The overarching crisis, which New Labour has intensified rather than diminished, remains the persistence of a hierarchised system of education in England predicated on historical and class-based processes of segregation. Accompanying and legitimising this highly-stratified structure is the ideology of fixed innate ability, or the belief that each of us is born with some quotient of "ability" or "potential" which the education-system may bring out more or less fully, but cannot enhance.

Because the principal indicator of academic outcome remains the degree of social deprivation endured by the student, (that is, broadly her social class), this view grounds the common idea that middle class students are more "able" (and hence more academically desirable) than students from the working class. This ideology is also used to justify particular forms of student-grouping within schools of all kinds, a process as central as inter-school selection in the (re)production of students as labour-power for capital in accordance with the socially-prevailing division of labour.

School admissions procedures are basically a trade-off between forms of local control and the centralised framework determined by government. Fee-paying schools operate their own admissions procedures. In the state system significant numbers of schools are also now allowed to be their own admissions authorities.

For community or "Voluntary Controlled" schools which make up 62% of secondaries, the Local Authority will be the admissions authority, and consequently open to some degree of democratic accountability. But for "Foundation" schools such as Trust schools, "Voluntary Aided" schools (mostly faith schools) and academies, the school's own governing body functions as the admissions authority.

New Labour's hyper-accountability system, which ensures grave consequences for schools that fail to meet assigned targets for test and examination results, generates an incentive for such schools to "manage" their oversubscribed applications accordingly. While the newly-strengthened School Admissions Code has outlawed a range of previously widespread selection practices (such as interviewing students), ambiguities inevitably remain to be exploited in the wording of the Code's lengthy regulations.



The Code mixes statutory requirements and advisory guidance, and leaves monitoring its fair application in great part to action by individual users of the system. In the case of academies, which are green-lighted by the Secretary of State, it is also the Secretary of State who hears complaints.

The picture is further complicated by New Labour's supine acceptance of fully selective systems of state education in 15 out of 150 Local Authorities, and the presence in a further 21 Authorities of at least one selective school. Such a school inevitably skews the intake of its neighbours. Unsurprisingly, areas with the highest number of selective schools tend to see the greatest number of students failing to obtain a place in their preferred school.

In 2007, the reformist think-tank IPPR argued no school should administer its own admissions procedure. IPPR research indicated that secondary schools were twice as segregated by so-called "ability" as they would have been if proximity alone were the determining factor in school-admissions. That is, the current situation worked to worsen segregation.

The cross-party campaign-group Comprehensive Futures (which is supported by the three main teaching unions) continues to press for an end to selection by "ability/aptitude". With such selection already outlawed in Wales and Scotland, and with Northern Ireland about to phase out its remaining grammar schools, England is further at variance within the UK in the composition of its school system.

This matters to children. Countries which overtly select students don't have a higher average student performance but do show larger variations of attainment. The more selective the system, the more important the student's socio-economic background to her educational outcome. And the more likely the creation of "sink" schools.

Educational inequalities are not reducible to whether or not a student is placed in their first-choice school. But by encouraging all schools to attain Foundation status and hence become their own admissions authority, by opening the door ever-wider to selection by "ability/aptitude" and by accelerating the imposition of academies and Trust schools whose undemocratic governing bodies are controlled by the sponsor, the government is further embedding such inequalities.

Intensifying anxiety over school-admissions is in fact a fearful response by parents/carers to the widening of social inequalities presided over by New Labour. In the absence of a strong labour movement and campaigning response for resistant solidarity, such fears will only nourish individualistic and self-serving attitudes and actions.

# Egyptian workers step up

BY SACHA ISMAIL

**T**HE class struggle in Egypt, rising since 2006, has reached a new pitch in the last few weeks.

On Sunday 16 February, more than 10,000 workers from the Misr (Egypt) Spinning and Weaving Company textile mill in the Nile Delta city of Mahalla el-Kubra, north of Cairo, staged a mass demonstration against prices rises, low wages and the regime of Hosni Mubarak, joined by thousands more working-class people from the town. The Mahalla workers' action was followed by similar, smaller-scale actions and protests by workers across Egypt.

The Mahalla factory, which employs 27,000 people, has been the site of huge workers' struggles since December 2006, when nearly the entire workforce went on strike over withheld bonuses. In September last year, 15,000 workers were on strike again over profit-sharing, safety and bonuses, leading to a confrontation with riot police; and there have been struggles over issues including services at the company hospital and the provision of free bread to workers.

The difference this time is that the workers' action has been much more directly political. In previous struggles, there were appeals to Mubarak's government to intervene; on Sunday, according to California-based journalist and blogger Hossam el-Hamalawy (one of the very few sources about strikes in Egypt), workers shouted slogans including "Down, down Hosni Mubarak! Your rule is shit!" and "Gamal Mubarak, tell your dad we hate him!" (a reference to Mubarak's son and heir apparent).

Hamalawy also reports that the Mahalla workers attempted, before being blocked by police, to organise a demonstration in soli-

darity with the people of Gaza: evidence of impressive politicisation, even if, like Hamalawy's blog, such actions are polluted by Arab nationalist chauvinism against Israel (this is an important issue which we hope to cover in future issues of *Solidarity*).

The target for the workers' action was the convening, in the context of big increases in the price of basic commodities, of the National Council of Wages, which sets Egypt's minimum wage. The minimum wage has been held at not much more than £3 a month since 1984, despite soaring inflation; the Mahalla workers have demanded £112 a month, while the representatives of Egypt's official General Federation of Trade Unions on the Council have been calling for £55. Including profit sharing, a Mahalla worker currently makes about £40 a month. The government has now announced that the rate will be raised to about £25, making further protests very likely.

Even on official estimates, a fifth of Egypt's population, 13 million people, lives below the poverty line. As another of the slogans from the Mahalla demonstration put it: "We are sick of eating beans while the rich eat chickens and pigeons".

When protests began in the factory on 16 February, the bosses once again called in riot police, but the workers stormed the gates and drove them off before marching into town.

This inspiring class struggle has enormous significance. The textile workers are in many ways the vanguard of the Egyptian working class. The December 2006 strike was followed by action in many other sectors – including rail workers, nurses, cement workers, binmen and tax collectors. Cairo's leading independent and broadly liberal newspaper, *al-Masri al-Youm*, estimates that 226 sit-ins, strikes, hunger strikes and workers' demonstrations took place in 2006;

Hamalawy estimates 387 actions in the first six months of 2007.

This time, the Mahalla struggle has quickly been followed with action by other textile workers, by Suez Canal workers, train drivers, nurses and electricity company lawyers, as well as by working-class protests against housing costs. Meanwhile, doctors are threatening strike action on 15 March if the health ministry does not come up with a better pay offer; and real estate tax collectors, 55,000 of whom went on strike and occupied downtown Cairo last year, have been fighting to establish organisation independent from the official trade unions and discussing the possibility of an independent union.

This is the first time that large-scale workers' demonstrations have raised clear anti-government slogans since the bread riots against the regime of Anwar Sadat in 1977. And the entry of the working class onto the political stage means that Mubarak is being challenged from the left, and not just by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose activists are also struggling against severe repression.

The Brotherhood remains what it always has been: a deeply reactionary and counter-revolutionary Islamist organisation. Yet it is also the biggest and best organised opposition force in Egypt; it does fight repression by the regime (for instance by mobilising thousands of students to protest against the detention of academics at the end of

February) and sometimes gives demagogic support to workers' struggles.

Nonetheless, according to Hamalawy, the Mahalla action was fomented not by Islamists but by left activists inside the factory (which is not to say that the Brotherhood has no influence among the workers, of course).

The growth of mass workers' struggles in Egypt signifies between by far the biggest Arab working class and a deeply oppressive regime which is one of the US's key allies, receiving \$1.3 billion dollars a year in military aid, for instance. It means that both Egypt and Iran, the largest economies in the Middle East, are wracked by class struggle – holding out the prospect, distant but real, of workers' revolution to sweep away all the region's ruling classes, whether pro or anti-US.

As Hossam el-Hamalawy put it in September: "During my phone conversations with the strikes leaders and activists inside the company, they always ask me if people in America and the world have heard about the strike." We need to make sure the world knows, and that its labour movements mobilise solidarity.

- Hossam el-Hamalawy's blog: [arabist.net/arabawy](http://arabist.net/arabawy)
- LabourStart coverage of Egypt: [www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show\\_news.pl?country=Egypt](http://www.labourstart.org/cgi-bin/show_news.pl?country=Egypt)

## Sentenced to death for reading about women's rights

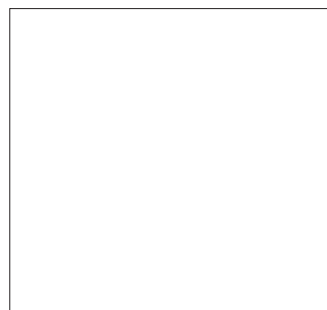
BY AMINA SADDIQ

**A** STUDENT in Afghanistan downloads a report on women's rights from the internet; he is arrested and sentenced to death for blasphemy by an Islamic court. This happened not under the Taliban but in October last year, under the pro-Western regime of Hamid Karzai.

Sayed Pervez Kambaksh, a 23 year old who was studying journalism at Balkh University in Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, downloaded a report from an Iranian website which stated that Islamists who claim the Koran justifies the oppression of women are distorting the teachings of Islam. When he circulated it to his fellow students and teachers to provoke debate, a complaint was made was apparently made against him and he was arrested and tried by a religious court – in secret, and without the right to legal representation.

Hundreds of Afghans demonstrated in the streets to free him, but the upper house of the Afghan parliament responded instead by passing a resolution endorsing the death sentence – putting the judiciary under massive pressure to resist an appeal. Prominent clerics have organised pro-death penalty demonstrations and argued that, since he was convicted of blasphemy, Afghanistan's supreme court has no power to interfere with the ruling. Now, though the senate has rescinded its resolution, claiming it was a "technical mistake", Kambaksh is still in prison and facing the death sentence.

This is not just a matter of clerical intolerance and bigotry. There are also reports



suggesting that Kambaksh and his brother had upset local warlords with their investigative reporting into corruption and abuses of power. The clerics and warlords who run the Afghan state want to silence dissenting voices, just as they did when they expelled Malalai Joya, a militant democrat and one of Afghanistan's few female MPs, from parliament for criticising them in 2005.

The fate facing Pervez Kambaksh is an outrage – and a reminder of the foolishness of both those leftists who backed the US/UK invasion of Afghanistan in the name of secularism and democracy, and those who downplay the threat posed by political Islam. We should mobilise to secure not only the withdrawal of the death sentence, but his acquittal – and make solidarity with Afghans fighting for democracy against their country's Western-backed warlord-Islamist state.

## After the Pakistan election

**A**T an AWL meeting in London on 28 February, Faryal Velmi spoke about Pakistan after the recent elections.

In those elections the two main opposition parties – the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) – topped the poll and will have a dominant presence in the next parliament. They may form a coalition. Whether they can, or will even attempt to, pressurise General Musharraf, who has now lost many of his supporters in Parliament, into resigning as President is quite another matter. One good thing was that the Islamic party alliance, the MMA, lost control of the North West Frontier Province. During the meeting a phone link was made with Farooq Tariq of the Labor Party Pakistan. For the duration of the election the LPP was part of the All Parties Democratic Movement (a group that included Imran Khan's party). They boycotted the election. Comrades were able to discuss some of the issues with Farooq. This is what he had to say.

**T**HE parties who came top in the election are talking to each other to form a government of national consensus. They have all publicly said they will demand the resignation of Musharraf. They will also demand the reinstatement of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court [his sacking last year led to the lawyer's protests and state of emergency in Pakistan].

The election shows a very big opposition to Musharraf, both those who voted in the election and those who boycotted it.

In the last period there have been huge prices, a result of the neo-liberal agenda implemented fully by Musharraf's regime. The situation is really tough for the working class. There are shortages of many things. Unfortunately the PPP are also following the same policies, also in favour of privatisation. We are organising demonstrations against this. On International Women's Day we have a protest against the price hike and liberalisation.

Our slogan has been "the army out of politics". The military are everywhere in Pakistan, in property, business; they are selling shoes they are selling milk, they are selling insurance. The military have done very well out of being in dictatorship for 23 years out of 61 years of Pakistan's existence. But people don't like the military doing business and taking over peasants' land. There is mass discontent in the military, they all want Musharraf to resign. There is a general feeling that we are all poorer because the military have become richer.

We have been fighting for democratic restoration since the 1999 coup. We have held many many demonstrations in the last ten years. Many of us have been arrested, I have been arrested many times.

The last year was very bad. I was living in absolute fear of being arrested. Sometimes when LPP people have been arrested we knew where they are. Others have disappeared.

The Labor Party has fought for democratic rights all this time. But we don't think democracy can bring food and shelter. For that we need to fight capitalism, imperialism and fundamentalism, and struggle for socialism.

# Iraq is still prey to the militias

BY COLIN FOSTER

THE brief Turkish invasion of the autonomous Kurdish north on Iraq at the end of February is evidence, above all, of how far Iraq is from a liveable political settlement five years after the US/UK invasion of the country.

Turkey has some 15 million Kurds, mostly living in the south and east of the country, near the borders with Iraq and Iran.

Although repression of the Kurds in Turkey has slackened recently, Turkey has a long-standing hostility to Kurdish self-assertion, and especially to Turkish-Kurdish guerrillas who base themselves in remote mountain areas of Iraqi Kurdistan.

In late 1990, on the eve of the Kuwait war, the president of Turkey ordered the military to draw up plans to invade and occupy the northern part of Iraq, inhabited chiefly by some five million Kurds, and containing rich oilfields.

Since 2003 Turkey has had an interest in coming to terms with de-facto-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan. A full-scale Turkish conquest of the area would meet fierce and well-armed resistance, probably be unsustainable, and wreck Turkey's hopes of joining the EU.

The main oil pipeline from the Kirkuk oilfields in northern Iraq runs through Turkey. Because of sabotage, it has been used only episodically since 2003. But Turkey has an interest in having the pipeline in full and peaceful operation.

After 2003, Turkish companies won many large reconstruction contracts in Iraqi Kurdistan. By early 2007 there were 1200 Turkish companies operating in Iraqi Kurdistan, employing 14,000 Turkish citizens there. Turkey supplied 10% of the region's electricity.

But relations have deteriorated since the second half of 2007. The invasion, which alarmed and angered Iraqi Kurds, will make things worse.



Turkish tanks near the Kurdistan border

That is part of a picture where the decline in bloodshed in Iraq, from the catastrophic to the merely horrific, has so far not led to more stable government. The simmering civil war slackened off, it seems, mostly because conflicts between rival sectarian militias had reached a point of balance, with most of the militias fairly solid in their own areas, but not ready to try to attack others in their bastions, nor to risk confrontation with the increased US forces.

Iraqi civilian deaths; militia attacks on US forces; US casualties; Iraqi military and police casualties; the flow of refugees fleeing from one part of Iraq to another, or out of Iraq; and attacks on oil pipelines, have all decreased sharply since about September 2007, albeit only to levels similar to those before the Samarra mosque bombing in

February 2006.

The number of Iraqi civilians killed by US forces has declined, on a best guess, from about one a day in 2005 to about one a week today.

Yet not one of the "political benchmarks" set for the Iraqi government by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in January 2007 has been met. In some cases — in the government's failure to push through an oil privatisation law, for example — that is a good thing. The basic picture is of a government lacking political credibility and the ability to rise above the militias — of inability to construct stable, coherent, accepted civil administration.

15 out of 37 Cabinet posts are still vacant or semi-vacant, the ministers having resigned, or decided to boycott Cabinet

meetings, and not having been replaced.

The Kurdish parties and ISCI (formerly SCIRI) are pressing for the removal of oil minister Shahrastani. There is sharp conflict over legislation on provincial rights, and on provincial elections, which are due on 1 October but may well be postponed.

As far as I know, there have been no opinion polls in Iraq since September 2007. But it's unlikely that popular resentment against the US occupation and the Baghdad government has declined much.

Although oil production and exports have increased since September, the availability of fuel in Iraq has not. Nor has electricity supply, still only seven hours a day in Baghdad. There is no evidence that unemployment has decreased.

The Iraqi labour movement is the strongest anti-sectarian force in the country, and the one that could unite the majority of Iraqis against privatisation, pauperisation, occupation, and the militias. But there has been no rise of workers' struggles over the period of relative "stabilisation" since September.

If the "stabilisation" represents local warlords and sectarian gangs getting a stronger grip on their respective areas, it may even have made things worse for the labour movement. And a strengthening of the central government, if that should happen, may also be adverse: that government has on its books, as yet only part-implemented, Decree 8750 of August 2005 confiscating all union funds, the unrepealed 1987 Saddam Hussein law banning unions in the public sector, and oil minister Shahrastani's assertion last summer that oil industry management should refuse to deal with the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions.

The main duty of socialists internationally is still to mobilise solidarity for the Iraqi labour movement, so that it can become a force capable of leading a struggle to end the US occupation and establish Iraqi self-determination, without throwing the country into the hands of the rival sectarian militias.

## Anti-gay terror by Islamists

IRAQI LGBT have recently obtained new video evidence highlighting the brutality of the Badr Corps and police treatment of LGBT people in Iraq. It shows LGBT people being arrested, held in custody and having their heads shaved and taunted with songs of hate and revenge.

The first video shows two gay men celebrating a wedding ceremony when they are stopped at a checking point between Al-Kut and Baghdad and violently pulled out of their car.

The second video is of Ali, a trans woman — a member of Iraqi LGBT, he was living in a Basra safe house supported and run by the group. Many LGBT people face threats and violence, and these shelters are the only refuges from attacks.

In November, Iraqi LGBT was forced to close the three safe houses it ran in the south of Iraq, including the one in Basra, due to lack of funds.

"We have, sadly, lost contact with many of those who were sheltered in our safe houses which we were obliged to close," Ali Hili of Iraqi LGBT explained, adding, "Of those with whom we have still had some contact,

we know that they have sold everything they had to survive and rent a room to live in, as they were all rejected by their families because of their homosexuality. Some have been forced to work as prostitutes because they are too obviously gay and can get no other work."

Iraqi LGBT members obtained the above listed video by bribing a police officer with \$200.

"The video, apparently made by police for their amusement, is disturbing[...] in addition to showing the police standing around and laughing and making crude remarks in Arabic about Ali's sexuality, it is also dubbed with hate and revenge music in Arabic."

Iraqi LGBT has documented over 400 separate cases of LGBT Iraqis who have been murdered by Shia militias.

Most of these killings have been the work of the Badr Corps, the armed militia of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), the largest Shiite political formation and the core of the current US-backed government. The Badr-Corps' spiritual guide, the 77-year-old Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, issued a death-to-all-gays

fatwa in 2005.

New reports we have received from underground gay contacts inside Iraq suggest intensified homophobic abuse, threats, intimidation and violence by fundamentalist supporters of Sistani and other Shia leaders. Sources inside Iraq report new arrests and disappearing of gays and trans people.

These killings are just the ones information is available about. They are the tip of an iceberg of religious-motivated summary executions. Gay Iraqis are living in fear of discovery and murder.

Hussein, Mawla, Najim, Haydar, Khalid, Basim, and Rasool — are all presumed dead, but their last names cannot be published on the slight chance that one or more of them might still be alive.

Three transgendered Iraqis also disappeared last month in different parts of Iraq after receiving multiple threats of death if they didn't move out of the neighborhoods where they lived.

You can review these videos on this link: [iraqilgbtuc.blogspot.com/2008/01/new-video-footage-show-treatment-of.html](http://iraqilgbtuc.blogspot.com/2008/01/new-video-footage-show-treatment-of.html)

More Iraqi LGBT news: [iraqilgbtuc.blogspot.com/](http://iraqilgbtuc.blogspot.com/)

**NO SWEAT FORUM  
SOLIDARITY WITH  
BANGLADESHI  
WORKERS**

**MONDAY 31st MARCH, 7.30pm,  
OXFORD HOUSE, DERBYSHIRE  
STREET, BETHNAL GREEN**

**In recent months, Bangladeshi textile workers have been waging a militant struggle against poverty pay and sweatshop conditions in the face of severe state repression. Please come to our public meeting and hear the latest news from Bangladesh and to discuss how we can bring practical solidarity to those workers in struggle.**

**Info: Stuart on 07817595626 or  
stuartjordan32@hotmail.com**



# "Stop war" = "back Hezbollah"?

BY JACK STAUNTON

HEZBOLLAH were among the organisations represented at the "World Against War" rally in Friends' Meeting House, London on 25 February, with the Stop the War Coalition seeing fit to give a platform to the clerical fascist Lebanese militia.

Reflecting the StWC's eclecticism, this utter reactionary was speaking alongside Tony Benn, who gave his usual upper-class liberal speech about why the United Nations should be stronger and why we should learn from the Bible's lessons of contrition.

Introduced by Communist Party of Britain member Andrew Murray to rapturous applause from the 250-strong audience, Ibrahim Mousawi shied away from the misogynistic, homophobic, anti-semitic rhetoric which his organisation peddles in the shanty towns of Beirut. Instead, he told us that Hezbollah are oh-so reasonable — "why do the Americans ignore the real terrorists at the expense of us, the bridge-builders?". Hezbollah are not led by a bunch of gangsters, but "engineers, lecturers and people from all walks of life".

Indeed, Hezbollah are fully willing to arrange a lash-up with the rest of the Lebanese ruling class, for example the pro-Western parties behind Prime Minister Siniora, to resolve the political crisis which has seen the country without a president for three months. He said that all Hezbollah want is to be able to veto anything the government tries to do — isn't that reasonable? Along with this, Hezbollah are strong proponents of Lebanon's sectarian political order, whereby seats in parliament are distributed according to religious group and politics is staged at the level of horse-trading between the leaders of competing faith and ethnic communities.

Crashing full frontal into Bond villain-esque self-parody with his long leather coat and black shirt, the speaker — editor of a Hezbollah newspaper and former manager of



*Hezbollah, standing up for... strong government and sectarian politics*

a TV station which put out soap operas about the Jewish World Conspiracy — claimed that the problem in his country was the lack of a strong government, and argued that since the Lebanese government cannot be relied on to keep order and stand up to the Israelis, Hezbollah have every right to arm themselves and patrol the streets. At pains to deny that he hated the Jews (the western Trots don't really like that kind of thing, but it's fine for Lebanese TV), he appealed to "a man's right to protect his family" from Zionism.

The other speeches were rather less spicy. Lindsey German, the Socialist Workers' Party candidate for the London mayoral election, gave a dull talk about the hypocrisy

of the British establishment and echoed much of Benn's liberal sentiment. For example, she talked at length about the "dodgy dossier" used by Tony Blair to make the case for war, and why he should be "taken to a war crimes trial in the Hague".

But who does she think polices "international law"? Last time I checked, the United Nations was a cartel run by the imperialist powers victorious in World War Two. Making no reference to socialism or workers in the Middle East, she did however attempt a "radical" pitch — "Those who support the right of Hezbollah and Hamas to fight back are characterised as extremists. If opposing the government is extremist, then we're all extremists".

The only person on the platform whose views were worthy of respect was Hassan Jumaa, leader of the militant Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions which has waged several strikes against privatisation and looting of Iraq's major resource, demonstrating the potential of the working-class movement despite nightmarish circumstances. Although the union is non-sectarian and organises all oil workers, Jumaa seems to be influenced by the soft-Islamist Shi'ite Fadila group, and so said little about the workers' movement's opposition to clerical reaction in Iraq.

Instead, he focused on the question of the invasion and occupation of Iraq and the destruction the US and UK have unleashed. He commented that "the Iraqi workers will win victory for the oppressed Iraqi people" — given that the American mission's success is reliant on stable control of Iraqi resources, strikes represent a significant challenge for the occupiers. Indeed, Jumaa's attitude to the troops was stark, "you should not be taken in by those who say that the withdrawal of troops will bring death and destruction. The longer they, the source of death, stay, the worse it will get", and said that at the last two May Days the union had raised a call for the troops to leave Iraq. Without doubt, this was an optimistic characterisation of events, but Jumaa's understanding of the situation is certainly worthy of our attention.

Unfortunately, the audience was not allowed to ask any questions or make any comments, so we could not find out more about Jumaa's support for political Islam or how workers organise against the home-grown bourgeoisie. After all, in the eyes of the Stop the War Coalition and its SWP and Stalinist leadership, letting activists talk to the leading trade unionist in Iraq is not as exciting as giving a platform for a fascist to rant in defence of Hezbollah. It seems that for these "socialists", the workers' movement is just one part of the cross-class spectrum of "The Movement", and so giving a token ten minutes to someone like Hassan Jumaa is sufficient to cover their left flank.

## LOOKING LEFT

BY SACHA ISMAIL

### SWP: bad times

IF you believe the official SWP and Respect reports, everything is going swimmingly, with both groups marching steadily from one triumph to the next. But what about debacles like the defection of one of their councillors in Tower Hamlets to the Tories? And the recent Respect rally in Leeds (19 February), considered "big" enough for both John Rees and Oliur Rahman to travel up from London? The total turnout was 12 including the two speakers and interveners from other groups. Meanwhile, in many big cities such as Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham and Manchester, SWP full-timers, once such an important part of the landscape of the left, have totally disappeared.

Every indication is that the SWP leadership will continue to hip-hip-hurray towards over the edge of the cliff. But perhaps some SWP members will be driven to ask what is going on.

### SWP: bad politics

WORKERS' Liberty members Laura Schwartz and Daniel Randall were recently invited to speak at the Oxford Radical Forum, a slightly academically but well-attended and very interesting conference organised by students at Oxford University. Laura spoke in a debate on socialist

vs radical feminism; Daniel as part of a panel on the way forward for the left.

Daniel was joined by the Greens' Peter Tatchell and Hannah Sell from the Socialist Party — but not by the SWP's Alex Callinicos, who withdrew on the grounds that he would not speak on the same platform as the supposed Islamophobe and pro-imperialist Tatchell (who must be really naughty if he ranks lower even than the AWL in Callinicos' estimation...) The announcement of this fact from the chair drew a fair degree of hostility from the audience, as you can imagine.

It fell to the sole, unfortunate SWP student present to justify Callinicos' decision. There is no point, you see, in taking part in small meetings (there were about seventy, mainly young people present) which will navel-gaze (read: discuss ideas) and only end up attacking the SWP. No, the really important thing is to build the anti-war movement, and mobilise for the Stop the War demonstration on March 15.

I'm not joking. That's exactly what he said.

### Left convention planned

ABOUT 30 people, representing a wide variety of organisations from the Manchester left as well as a few fraternal visitors, met on Sunday 24 February and agreed to organise a "Convention of the Left" at the same time as the Labour Party confer-

ence in September. This would involve a one day counter-conference on Saturday 20 September, followed by a day of protests on Sunday 21 and then a series of meetings through the following week.

The four "themes" around which the event will be structured were confirmed at the second meeting on 1 March: Peace; Public Services; Power, Politics, Participation and Oppression; and Planet.

The founding meeting was attended by supporters of groups including Manchester Trades Council, Workers' Liberty, Permanent Revolution, the Green Party, CPGB, HOPI, CPB, CND, Red Pepper, Manchester Stop the

War Coalition, ISG and Respect Renewal. The SWP were not present, and the Socialist Party declined to take part. The wide range of organisations interested is obviously promising, but the prominent involvement of Respect Renewal members means vigilance will be necessary to ensure the convention does not degenerate into populism or become a promotional vehicle for George Galloway.

Workers' Liberty will be actively participating in the Convention.

• For more information watch this space and visit [www.conventionofthelleft.org.uk](http://www.conventionofthelleft.org.uk)

## Solidarity with Iraqi workers!

Debate with Sami Ramadani; why socialists cannot support the US in Iraq; is Iraq another Vietnam?; + solidarity information

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# For an NUS that fights — vote Education Not for Sale!

**T**HE National Union of Students conference is taking place on 1-3 April, with the right wing threatening to close down all of the union's remaining democratic structures with their 'Governance Review'. The Education Not for Sale network, which has played a prominent role in the fight for a democratic union, is standing candidates for four positions in the full-time elections as well as one for the part-time 'Block of 12' posts.

## DANIEL RANDALL (PRESIDENT)

I'M a second-year university student and part-time bar worker in Sheffield. I've been an activist since I was about fourteen and have been a member of Workers' Liberty for most of that time. While at sixth-form college I was elected to the NUS Executive on the first ever Education Not for Sale ticket and sat on that committee in 2005-6.

NUS is about to reach the logical end-point of decades of political and organisational decline. We've seen years and years of anti-democratic cuts that've made it increasingly difficult for ordinary students to exercise any sort of control over NUS's policy or campaigning direction, culminating with the Governance Review. So I think it's important that ENS's direct action, grassroots, democratic and class struggle-based politics are represented in this key election at NUS conference. The other candidates represent various sections of the NUS bureaucracy and I think it's important that voices from NUS's rank-and-file — a constituency which is hardly represented at NUS conference at all, never mind in the NEC elections — are heard.

In discussions with the SWP and SBL over a united left slate we said we were prepared to compromise and support Ruqayyah Collector (the SBL candidate). This despite the fact that we think that, at the very best, SBL represent the left face of the bureaucracy rather than any kind of bottom-up, activist tendency. But while we wanted ENS and SBL to have an equal number of candidates on the slate (given our roughly equivalent size on conference floor) and wanted the slate to commit to some basic political principles, SBL dug their heels in and weren't prepared to compromise. It's unfortunate, but once the discussions reached a stalemate, the alternatives for ENS were either to stand candidates of our own or to censor our own politics.

## HEATHER SHAW (NATIONAL SECRETARY + BLOCK OF 12)

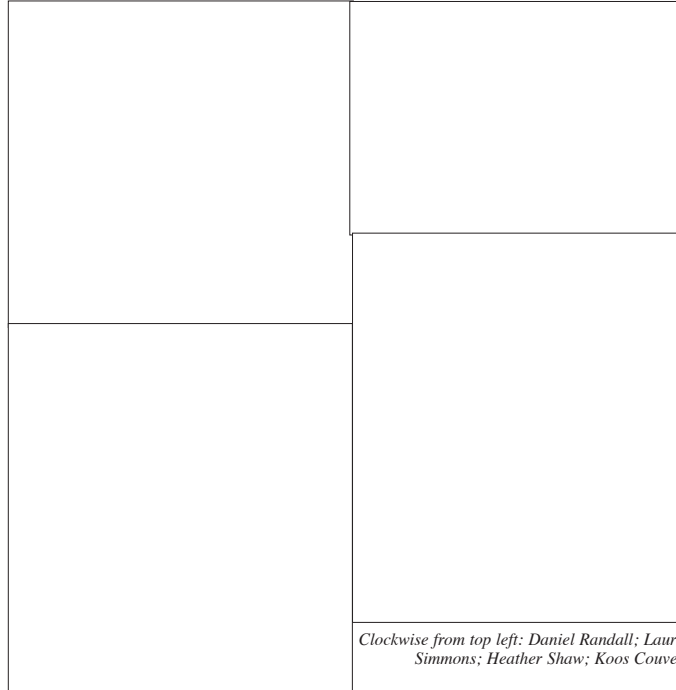
I HAVE been involved in NUS since I was in the third year of my degree and was elected as a fulltime officer in my union in 2005. I am a member of Workers' Liberty, ENS and No Sweat. I am a socialist feminist. I am currently a part time student at Sheffield College whilst working as a support worker for adults with learning disabilities, and am active in Unison.

I believe that the NUS bureaucracy let students down by turning NUS membership into nothing more than access to discounts.

The NUS is supposed to be a union of students, fighting for our rights, but I see very little evidence of this. From the first conference I attended all I saw the leadership do was encourage students to vote for cuts to conference and deliver abstract arguments as to why we shouldn't demonstrate against the government's denial of grants for all and our rights to free education.

I have heard our leadership say we can't afford large-scale national demonstrations against top up fees, but then pay out thousands of pounds to entertain the architects of such policies. I have watched our leadership suck up to government ministers and profile themselves for well paid government jobs whilst selling us down the river.

Frankly, I'm sick of the way NUS is run. I



Clockwise from top left: Daniel Randall; Laura Simmons; Heather Shaw; Koos Couvee

am running for National Secretary and Block of 12 because the NUS needs turning on its head. It is not enough to fight the bureaucracy on a battle by battle basis. We need put NUS it firmly back where it belongs: in the hands of its members.

## LAURA SIMMONS (VICE PRESIDENT FURTHER EDUCATION)

I AM a 19 year old A-Level student at Park Lane FE College in Leeds; women's officer of my student union for the second year running; and have been a delegate to both National Conference and Women's Conference. I defended NUS democracy against the Governance Review at Extraordinary Conference 2007. I have been active in the antiwar, women's liberation and anti-capitalist movements for a number of years; I am also a supporter of Education Not for Sale.

FE students make up two thirds of NUS's membership, and paying lip service to "fighting for FE" is the norm for any candidate standing in national elections. But even though FE students have their own campaign and officer on the Executive, NUS has repeatedly failed to defend us from government attacks — doing almost nothing for a majority of its membership. The reason for this is Labour Students/independent right control of the campaign.

Last year the NUS FE campaign functioned as cheerleaders for New Labour's "FE Bill", because it wrote into law the requirement for college governing bodies to have two student representatives on them. They missed the elephant in the room — the bill also paved the way for further privatisation, and more FE colleges being run like businesses, for profit. The FE campaign has been so blind to this government agenda, creating more highly paid college principals while attacking the pay and conditions of teachers and college staff, that they've formed a partnership with the Centre for Excellence in leadership — a group that teaches college bosses how to "lead" more effectively!

The current FE campaign leadership sees college bosses as allies in "getting things done". But people those who cut our teachers' pay, privatise our services, cut corners to make profit and generally push the government "skills" agenda! There's a struggle on

every campus, be it for free speech, affordable, college-run canteens, or free transport, or against course cuts — I'll be the VP FE who knows which side we're on, and doesn't get chummy with the bosses.

## KOOS COUVÉE (NATIONAL TREASURER)

I HAVE been a campaigner at the University of Sussex for over two years, working with liberation groups, environmental groups and the unions, as well as focusing on organising with students and (academic) staff against the marketisation of the curriculum and research.

As Communications Officer of the University of Sussex Students' Union I have been a leading figure in the Education Not For Sale campaign, an initiative that seeks to unionise students and staff around issues of marketisation and privatisation. Nationally, I work with Education Not For Sale, and I am a supporter of the Radical Students' Network.

Although NUS publishes its accounts, even hacks immersed in student union politics have a hard time understanding columns of numbers with no political content. I will write a detailed briefing of NUS's financial decisions to circulate to members — I won't simply push proposed budgets through the NEC and Conference without arguing for them.

Activists should defend the role of Treasurer against the proposed abolition in the Governance Review — the lack of accountability we've seen from right-wing Treasurers will be a thousand times worse when financial decisions are carried out by a partly unelected body of "externals" and professionals. I'll be a Treasurer who makes NUS's finances transparent and easy to understand; who politicises and democratises spending decisions; who oversees a massive redistribution of funds from bureaucratic waste to democratic structures and active political campaigning.

As National Treasurer I'd also help activists get round ultra vires. I'd campaign against the law so that students, not the government, determine how our unions' money is spent. And I'll oppose NUS becoming a charity — where student unions are hamstrung by charities law, NUS, as their union, should remain a channel for political campaigning.

# Sussex Uni is not for sale!

**I**N the last month, Sussex University (in Brighton) has seen hundreds-strong meetings of students and education workers to oppose the anti-democratic, pro-business "reforms" being pushed by the university's management team. The first mass assembly of the Sussex Education Not for Sale campaign was attended by over 160 people; the second, by more than 300.

The management's "Green Paper" seeks to transform Sussex into a business school, oriented to receive more government funding to research areas like "international security" (ie militarism). It seeks to transform the university into an institution in which students are seen as consumers, and academics enjoy less and less freedom and are increasingly subject to managerial control. (For a detailed explanation of the proposals, see the Sussex Not 4 Sale website below.)

Not just the student union, whose activists took the lead in setting up Sussex Education Not for Sale, and the UCU branch, which is backing it, are opposed. A staff survey found that 57% think the whole restructuring exercise should simply be abandoned, while 67% "doubt the consultation is a meaningful process", 69% are against using the "language of business to talk about education" and 73% are concerned that the reforms threaten academic freedom. Only 14% think the university "urgently needs restructuring", while 3% (not a typo) "understand and trust" the process under way.

Unsurprisingly, then, university management have resorted to highly undemocratic methods to push their reforms through, for instance by reversing the normal roles of the Senate (usually the highest decision making body, composed largely of academics and students) and the Council (composed largely of outside appointees). They have also withheld key documents ("the White Paper") from the university community on spurious pretexts: what else are they not telling us?

There will be a demonstration on Friday 7 March, and more assemblies to follow. The struggle continues!

For more information about the campaign including a detailed summary of the reform proposals, see [www.sussexnot4sale.org.uk](http://www.sussexnot4sale.org.uk) or email Koos Couvee at [communications@ussu.sussex.ac.uk](mailto:communications@ussu.sussex.ac.uk). (Koos is also national ENS's candidate for NUS Treasurer)

# Plane Stupid roof top protest: Climate change, middle class activism and the media

Louise Gold spoke to Graham Thompson from Plane Stupid whose recent action on the rooftop of the Houses of Parliament was widely reported.

**LG: Were you pleased with the media coverage?**

GT: Pleased in quantity terms. You have to work with the media you have. In terms of quality it's not always everything you might hope for. Overall we think our message did get through and has been heard. Some of the coverage was unhelpful and some of it dishonest, but overall we're quite happy. That said, it's annoying that they always tend to focus on the security angle — we tend to think that climate change is significantly more important than the associated threat from terrorism.

**LG: What is Plane Stupid? What does it do?**

GT: Plane Stupid is a direct action group. It is a network of people across the UK, but also has groups in other countries, for instance Canada and Australia. We are opposed to unsustainable expansion of the aviation industry which is threatening the stability of our climate. We believe that the failure of traditional democratic processes to limit this expansion requires us to take direct action. Plane Stupid is very much a single issue campaign group; the only thing that we all agree on is the danger posed by aviation to the climate.

**LG: What is your own political background?**

GT: I've never been a member of a political party or an explicitly political group. I suppose I'd describe myself as a

typical *Guardian* reading lefty green.

**LG: How do you feel about the way both the tabloid and broadsheet press made much of the middle-class backgrounds and education of the plane stupid activists involved in the Parliament action?**

GT: That's not a new thing. There is a general trend in the media to personalise everything and this time they thought the unusual factor was that we were all allegedly middle class. They would go for anything to make it a human interest story, but this is not going to become something prevalent in the climate change discussion.

**LG: But it seems to me that the middle-classness has been used to legitimise your campaign, even by the tabloid press, who've surprisingly got behind the anti-Heathrow expansion message. How do you feel about this?**

GT: We don't mind being seen as quite establishment, because being considered radical and fringe can make your message easier to ignore. But that's a double edged sword, because on the other hand whilst this might help us be considered by the press and public as "reasonable and sensible like us", it can also be used to say we are spoilt children without real jobs or concerns.

**LG: In the past environmentalists were caricatured as "Swampy" type characters. Now it "Otis Ferry" comparisons — they are seen as middle-class pioneers. Does this reflect real changes to the movement — the people and politics — or just the realisation by the media that climate**

**change is a threat?**

GT: There have always been a large number of middle-class people in the environmental movement. Why the media has chosen to focus on that I'm not sure. Maybe it's because the movement has grown as a result of the urgency of climate change.

**LG: Is Plane Stupid anti-capitalist?**

GT: We don't feel the need to comment on issues aside from the single issue campaign, but when applied to aviation, the capitalist model of infinite growth at any cost, is unsustainable. So we would not be surprised if applied in other areas it is also unsustainable.

**LG: There would be far less sympathy, in most current mainstream papers, for a labour movement struggle. They seem to have conveniently ignored the anti-capitalist trend within Plane Stupid. Do you think this matters? And is there room for collaborative campaigns with organised workers and environmental activists?**

GT: There is not just room but a requirement. We need organised labour to realise that the most vulnerable people in society are most threatened by climate change.

Christian Aid claims that climate change will kill 180 million in Sub-Saharan Africa this century; climate change has to be the number one issue for anyone who cares about social justice.

Equally climate change is the most catastrophic effect of unrestrained capitalism. It doesn't make sense to complain about the traditional problems of the economic system and ignore the biggest one.

## TOM UNTERRAINER CONTINUES A SERIES ON THE BERKELEY FREE SPEECH MOVEMENT

*It's very simple. We want to see social change in the world in which we live. We want to see this social change because we are human beings who have ideas. We think, we talk, we discuss, and when we're done thinking and talking and discussing, well then, we feel that these things are vacuous unless we then act on the principle that we think, talk and discuss about. This is as much a part of a university education as anything else.*

Jack Weinberg, Berkeley Free Speech Campaigner

**J**ACK Weinberg was arrested for trespass on the morning of 1 October 1964. His real "crime" was to be the loudest, most outspoken critic amongst a large group of students and campaigners who'd gathered to challenge restrictions against political campaigning at the University of Berkeley. Weinberg was typical of a number of students who'd started to question not only the world around them but the significance and relevance of their day-to-day lives. These students were influenced by and involved in the civil rights movement where their exposure to brutal, institutional racism armed them with the ability to resist oppression no matter how it was manifested.

Students had organised themselves into a united front of Clubs (the main political bodies on campus) in response to the "Kerr Directives" which proscribed many forms of political campaigning and restricted others. The Clubs had already mounted legalistic challenges to the directives, forcing a number of changes and clarifications to the rules through lobbying and debating the university administration.

At the end of this process, they were still faced with a set of directives that severely limited the right to organise politically on campus. They therefore decided to directly challenge the rules, setting up a number of campaign stalls in the heart of the Berkeley campus.

"Shortly after 10, the first table appeared at Sather Gate; then others — about ten in all before long. At 11 o'clock the tables moved over to the foot of Sproul Hall steps. For the next 30-40 minutes the 'table-manners' industriously violated regulations, particularly by asking for contributions." (Draper, *Berkeley: the new student revolt*)

Jack Weinberg was quickly identified by campus police as a leading trouble maker. The CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) stall, staffed by Weinberg, was the largest of those assembled and its activists some of the most hardened campaigners on campus. Weinberg was approached by university officials and Lieutenant Chandler, the campus police chief, who asked him for identification. Weinberg refused. "When the police chief said, 'will you come peacefully, or if not, we'll take you,' the cry went up, 'Take all of us!' The cop went off to get help." (Draper)

Now under the threat of immediate arrest, Weinberg turned to the crowd and gave a short speech outlining many of the ideas developed by university librarian and veteran socialist Hal Draper to explain what was going on at Berkeley: "I want to tell you about this knowledge factory, while we're all sitting here now. It seems that certain of the products are not coming out to standard specifications. And I feel the university is trying to purge these products so that they can once again produce for industry exactly what they specify... Occasionally a few students get together and they decide they are human beings, that they are not willing to be products, and they protest; and the university feels obliged to purge these non-standard products."

As Weinberg responded to a hostile student, a police car drove onto the scene and policemen carried him towards it. Even before they reached the car it was surrounded by students. They were joined by up to three thousand others who blockaded the car — with Weinberg inside — for thirty two hours.

The experience of those thirty two hours must have been as valuable to the students as a lifetime of dry lectures. From the roof of the police car, speaker after speaker put forward analyses of the university, capitalism and tactics. Draper recalled "It was a tense situation, but what was more vivid at the time was a peculiar fact: this

Right: scenes from the Berkeley movement.  
Above: Mario Savio

# Learning more in 32 hours than in 32 ordinary months

was my first speech in stockings feet... There was no loudspeaker, but the immense crowd was amazingly quiet and orderly... By the time I had spoken for fifteen minutes about the basic issues in 'mounting social and political action' that had led to the suspensions and this protest, my voice was breaking."

Speeches from the "platform" were not the only valuable lesson of the day. Questions of tactics came to the fore. In any sharp political confrontation — whether it be a strike, picket, protest or physical blockade — conservative and radical elements come into confrontation. Self-appointed representatives issue warnings of caution, call for reconciliation or a down-scaling of demands before anything has been achieved. Berkeley was no different.

The university administration refused the advances of one student, Jamie Burton, who immediately returned to the protestors and demanded compromise. Mario Savio, who was to become a leading figure in the still unformed Free Speech Movement, replied "Here's a compromise for the dean: release the guy, don't bother the people on the tables, and we'll quietly disperse till the end of negotiations."

For the students to disperse at that moment would have meant victory for the administration and a damaging de-escalation of student activity. All the campaigning efforts so far would have come to worse than nought as eight students were already suspended for political activity and Weinberg was still in the police car.

Rather than pack up and go home the students continued to blockade the car and sent Mario Savio in to issue demands. The administration was intransigent, they refused to negotiate on any but their own terms. In response, around 200 students left the blockade and staged a sit-in of the admin office.

*I would encourage each individual ... to teach children, in the home and in the school, 'To be laws unto themselves and to depend upon themselves,' as Walt Whitman*

*urged us ... for this is the well-source of the independent spirit.*

Clark Kerr, President of UC Berkeley

At what point Kerr repudiated his much-vaunted liberalism is unknown. What we do know is that by October 1964 he had managed to personally engineer a crisis within the walls of his own university. Kerr's reputation as a reasonable, liberal man exposed him as a hypocrite to those with political experience. To some politically raw students it sowed seeds of confusion. Throughout the day a running debate took place on issues of 'Law and Order'. One group was concerned that militant action might not be the best way to oppose the restrictions, that breaking the law — university rules at any rate — would undermine the struggle. As Draper pointed out: "The CIO [US trade union organisation] sitdown strikes of the thirties had been clear violations of law and order. As a result they had brought a measure of democracy and human dignity to the shops

and assembly lines. Many who denounced the students' sit-ins seemed to think the students had invented the tactic. Nor did they ask how 'criminal' it could be if the Berkeley halls of learning suddenly produced such a multitude of criminals ... didn't this suggest there might be something dreadfully wrong with what the administration was doing ...?"

Seymour Lipset, director of the Institute for International Studies, mounted the police car and denounced the students as acting "like the Ku Klux Klan" because they too violated the law.

The political debates played out that day and the lessons learnt are important not just for understanding how the Free Speech Movement developed. They provide an important example of how a relatively small number of experienced, politically educated individuals can influence and lead important political movements and provide guidance for confronting similar situations today.

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# Free speech now!

BY ADAM ELLIOT-COOPER

ON 21 February, around 100 students from the University of Nottingham and the local area took to the campus grounds in a demonstration demanding their basic democratic right to free speech.

The demonstration followed a number of recent protests at the University where this right had been denied. One of these involved the arrest of a member of the Palestinian Society for "breach of the peace". The University authorities had called the police while he was protesting peacefully against the abuse of human rights in Palestine. The University had also banned another student from the library after his much-publicised protest against the cost of library cards. On another occasion, students collecting a petition against rising accommodation fees and declining standards in food and security were fined and had their petition disallowed.

The fact that the University has reacted in such a reactionary and totalitarian manner to "bread and butter" issues regarding campus meals and library cards, politicised these issues a great deal. Many different people at the University stood in support of the protest, and although the protest was small in number, it brought together people with a range of different concerns. Many saw the 21 February demonstration as an opportunity to voice their concerns about wider issues of injustice and inequality.

The University of Nottingham Students Union refused to support the protest, and all the organisation and resources for the event were drawn from grass-roots student activism.

The sound of snare drums and chants filled the air as students rallied support outside the library, in the same spot that the Pal-Soc member had been arrested. That same student led this demonstration with rousing words through a megaphone, as the demonstrators moved on to the imposing courtyard of Trent Building. Standing outside the office of the Vice Chancellor and other leading figures at the University, the demonstrators, who had not sought permission to demonstrate, were watched and filmed by undercover police.

One of the organisers explained some of the other reasons students were protesting that day. "Anti-terror laws are being used to harass innocent, predominantly Black, Asian and Arab people. The same laws are being used to silence peaceful protesters, climate change activists — anyone who raises a voice of dissent against the system."

Some protesters held up signs saying "Freedom of Speech in Lebanon", while others waved placards that read "Danger: Peaceful Protesters", which brought home the message many of the participants were there to send.

The University has yet to respond to the message of the protesters. However, many members of the academic staff signed a petition condemning the University's actions towards students who have fought against policies that they deem unfair or unjust. Only time will tell if the University will choose to respond in a more enlightened manner to the issue of students exercising their fundamental democratic rights and freedoms.



# Bare faced exploitation by the super-rich

Martin Thomas reviews *Who Runs Britain? How the Super Rich are Changing our Lives* by Robert Peston (Hodder and Stoughton)

“NO nation”, Frederick Engels once wrote, “will put up with production conducted by trusts [i.e. big, industry-dominating cartels], with so barefaced an exploitation of the community by a small band of dividend-mongers...”

“The exploitation is so palpable that it must break down...”

Engels was too optimistic. Robert Peston is the BBC’s Business Editor; a former journalist on the right-wing *Sunday Telegraph*; a man who avows that “much of what Margaret Thatcher did was necessary”, and whose most bitter complaint against the Blair-Brown government is that it has not privatised the Post Office.

But his new book shows that the hyper-financial capitalism of today is more and more, indeed, a “barefaced exploitation of the community by a small band of dividend-mongers”.

Despite the ballooning of giant multinational corporations, capitalist competition has not faded away as Engels thought it might. In fact, paradoxically, oligopoly and competition have risen together: global markets dominated by a few huge suppliers have sharper competition than a patchwork of local markets with many local capitalists.

But the state is heavily involved, handing out contracts, providing infrastructure, facilitating, bailing out those in trouble. And at the top of the heap, the “dividend-mongers” run riot.

Bosses’ incomes, generally, have increased more than workers’ wages. In 1989 the average pay for senior directors running the top 10% of British companies was 19 times median workers’ pay. In 2006, the median total earnings for chief executives of the top 100 companies were 75 times median pay.

But, Peston points out, the people who run capitalist corporations producing goods and services are actually “pretty low down the hierarchy”.

Within those corporations, the average rates for production managers are £27,000 to £63,000 a year. Sales managers get £38,000 to £100,000 a year. Corporate treasurers are on £55,000 to £100,000.

You get into the real big money when you get some distance from production proper. Investment analysts’ rates are £110,000 to £130,000 a year, plus bonuses of about 50% to 100%.

According to Peston, “there are hundreds of people in London working in hedge funds and private equity” that make *tens of millions* every year. In large part due to tax changes made by New Labour, these super-rich can arrange things so that they pay very little tax. “In 2006... 54 UK-based billionaires were paying income tax of just £14.7 million on a combined fortune of £126 billion, and only a tiny number paid any capital gains tax at all”.

A chapter deals with “private equity”, the tactic whereby an individual or firm borrows billions to buy a whole company, all the shares, then chops and pummels the company so that it can sell the shares again at a higher price a few years later.

For example, KKR borrowed £9 billion and put in £2 billion of its own to buy Boots in 2007. If it can sell Boots again for £13 billion in a few years’ time, then, after repaying the loan, it has turned its initial £2 billion into £4 billion in just a few years.

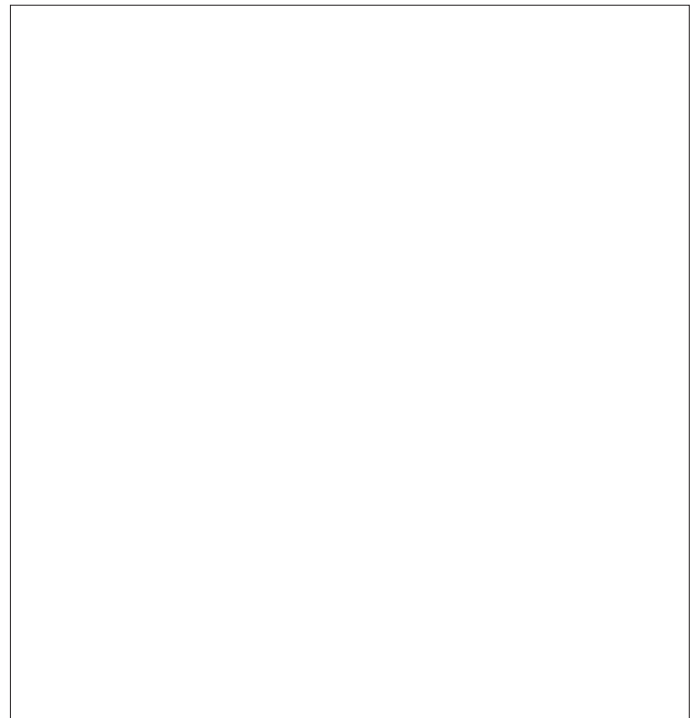
By the use of financial gambits, gains that would otherwise be more or less latent — subsisting in company assets, or shares, which are not sold — are cashed in. And the profiteers pay minimal tax.

“The really striking social phenomenon under New Labour”, writes Peston, “has been the triumph of the super-rich”. A chapter chronicles New Labour’s fund-raising and loan-raising from business, and Blair’s “naïve faith in the ability of business and business people... coupled with contempt for much of the public sector”.

Of Brown he writes that: “The Prime Minister thinks it should be a cause of national joy that the UK is a gigantic tax haven for the internationally mobile business elite”.

It is Blair’s and Brown’s expropriation of what were the channels for working-class political self-expression which explains why people put up with “barefaced exploitation by a small band of dividend-mongers” — why that exploitation generates atomised anger and frustration rather than an effective political response.

It is up to us to change that, by rebuilding working-class political representation.



## Back to the 60s

ROSALIND ROBSON REVIEWS *MAD MEN*, BBC4 AND BBC2

THIS drama about a 1960s New York advertising agency is a full-on period piece. Its attention to historical detail, clothes, manners, dialogue, is very acute. If you were over the age of 16 in the 1960s this will really send you back there. I was just a child, and this is no Janet and John and pink milk drama, yet I still found it very, very evocative. Smoke-filled rooms. Plastic furniture. Stuffier interiors. Brylcreem. Stiletos. But does all that perfectly depicted surface make for a good story? I’m not sure.

If you judge by the first episode — which may be a mistake — *Mad Men* seems more interested in studying character than telling a story. But that is character with a capital C.H. These people are “types”. 1960s people. Advertising people. Executive boys.

Repressed individuals. The men are either shits or double shits. The women streamline their ambitions towards two options — sleeping with the boss or getting married to someone “eligible”.

Which all might be a very historically accurate depiction of bourgeois/petit-bourgeois men and women of the time in this kind of professional world. And that’s the difficulty I have in letting myself actually enjoy this programme (rather than find it interesting and absorbing). It seemed at times as if the writer had swallowed a library of social history, and a stack of second wave feminist classics — *The Women’s Room*, Betty Friedan...

Probably the in-built dramatic possibilities of an advertising agency — of selling “happiness” and convincing people to buy stuff in a world then beginning to be full of much more stuff — will come to the fore in the next episode. Stay tuned!

## Evolution and socialism

WHAT’S Price’s Equation — a mathematical description of evolution and natural selection — got to do with a series of dead bodies turning up in New York? Go and see *WAZ* (written by regular contributor to *Solidarity*, Clive Bradley) to find out.

The central theme of this film is in fact a concept to which the mathematical equation can apparently be applied — altruism. And what kind of person is likely to be altruistic and what kind of person is not? Would you die to save the life of a loved one? These are interesting questions which are often the subject of debates between socialists and conservatives — with the

“natural” selfishness of humans being cited as a reason for why socialism will never catch on, happen, be successful etc. But that’s the big background theme here. The film is also an effective noir/cop thriller in the style and with the gritty feel of *Seven*. If you like this kind of thing (it’s not for the easily scared!) go and see it.

Bob James

## Orwell’s antidote to politician speak

It’s over 60 years since Orwell wrote the essay *Politics and the English Language* — yet its warnings are as relevant now as they were then. Orwell argued that the decline of the English language as a useful tool reflected the political conditions of his time. But it was an inexorable process. He thought the abuse could be stopped. He believed journalists had a particular responsibility amongst writers to show their dissatisfaction.

The power of the written word was being undermined by an adoption of Politician Speak. He gave five examples of bad language accusing the authors of “Ugliness”, “Staleness of Imagery”, and “Lack of Precision”. Political writing was the most guilty of having those characteristics.

Prose construction was avoided by the use of lazy “metaphors”, “verbal false limbs”, “pretentious diction” and “meaningless words”.

Important, precise concepts like fascism and democracy had become distorted and were being used in a consciously deceptive way.

Modern writing shunned originality and was the product of lazy uncritical methods of work.

His antidote? Writers should ask:

1. What am I trying to say?
2. What words will express it?
3. Could I put it more shortly?
4. Have I said anything that is avoidably ugly?

Orwell argued there was causal link between clichéd phrases and the defence of the political status quo, euphemisms numbing the public as words got sanitised by colourless concepts such as “pacification” to describe “genocide”.

Orwell’s goal was not to straitjacket writers. His key was to let the “meaning choose the word”.

It’s almost twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the world in which Orwell lived. WMD’s and “45 minutes” are only the most infamous of many examples that could be given that show Orwell’s essay is, sadly, as relevant as ever.

Peter Burton

# Left unity in the 1890s

## CATHY NUGENT CONTINUES A SERIES ABOUT EARLY BRITISH SOCIALISM

FROM the mid-1890s, British socialists tried to unite under one umbrella. Tom Mann, as Secretary of the Independent Labour Party, was at the centre of the negotiations and debates that took place between the ILP and the Social Democratic Federation. These moves, popular with the members, were supported by the leaderships, mainly that of the ILP.

Left unity was an inevitable question thrown up by the formation of the Independent Labour Party in 1893. Why were there separate organisations of socialists, asked the members. Shouldn't the groups merge, fuse or federate?

Both organisations were recruiting from the same political layer of the working class, after all. In the north of England, SDF and ILP members worked together all the time and some even had dual membership. The idea of left unity was natural, popular and urgent.

To contemporary activists, there didn't seem to be political barriers to fusion. The ILP had a more trade union character, but there were plenty of SDFers in the trade unions. The ILP was more focussed on municipal and Parliamentary representation, but the SDF was increasingly involved in such "political action". The SDF was fond of Marxist education, but many local ILPers were serious socialist pedagogues.

In time the differences would become clearer, but as Tom Mann's biographer Joseph White puts it, at this point in the history, the ILP and the SDF had a "stui generis period-specific socialism from below".

Tom Mann was not convinced of any difference of any great importance: "The only trifling difference discernible between them is that among members of the SDF there are some who question the wisdom of political action whilst in the ILP every member believes in the wisdom of political action and encourages the closest possible connection with the trade union." [*What the ILP is driving at* (1894).]

Unfortunately some in the ILP leadership were so immensely hostile to the SDF that they were prepared to invent as much difference as they could. Bruce Glasier led the anti-unity campaign:

"There is no disguising that the ways of the SDF are not our ways. If I may say so, the ways of the SDF are more doctrinaire, more Calvinistic, more aggressively sectarian than the ILP. The SDF has failed to touch the heart of the people. Its strange disregard of the religious, moral and aesthetic sentiments of the people is an overwhelming defect."

WHAT lay behind the drive for unity? Firstly the idea was already in the air, first put forward by William Morris and his Hammersmith Socialist Society (the group Morris set up after the Socialist League was taken over by anarchists). He proposed union between his group, the SDF and the Fabians, and on May Day 1893 the combined groups issued a Manifesto of English Socialists.

In 1894 the *Clarion* editor, Robert Blatchford (a maverick inside the ILP) had called for the formation of a "United Socialist Party", a fusion of the SDF, ILP and the Fabians.

Secondly, once it was clear that no big break through was going to happen for the socialists, unity seemed a way to strengthen everyone's effectiveness.

In the 1895 election the ILP failed to score highly as they expected. Keir Hardie lost his West Ham seat. The election result must have invoked a feeling that socialists needed to strengthen their forces. In fact the 1895 failure led Hardie and others. ILPers to seek stronger links with the trade unions. Association with the SDF might hinder them in making broader alliances.

Thirdly, the composition of the labour movement was changing. In the 90s the employers had a counter-offensive against the unions. There was a bitter lock out of the engineers in 1897. After the 1894 recession, the working class experienced fifteen years of fluctuating unemployment; union membership was consequently unstable.

All unions, but especially the new unions had to look to ways to consolidate. The gas workers built up their membership in the north of England. There was a new base for a burgeoning political labour movement.

The trade union movement at all levels was reassessing, looking for way to recast how the working class (its members) were represented in Parliament. Both the ILP and the SDF worked to break trade union members from support for the Liberal Party.

Trades Councils began to sponsor "labour" candidates at the municipal level and in general elections with varying success. Sometimes the Trades Councils allied with socialist groups, and these campaigns formed the basis of local ad hoc Labour Parties.

Socialists were beginning to be active agents in the new political development by becoming representatives themselves — on councils and school boards. In West Ham and Bow and Bromley, the SDF was the motivating force in a local Labour Party which won the West Ham Borough Council in 1898 (it included Will Thorne of the gasworkers). In the two years until they were electorally defeated in 1900 they instituted an 8 hour day and a 48 hour week, they brought in a 30 shilling minimum wage for council employees. Free concerts and libraries open on Sundays were on the agenda. The council started to buy land on which to build houses.

Another factor behind left unity was the groups' need to consolidate organisationally. Both the ILP and the SDF grew in the early 1890s, the ILP much more rapidly than the SDF. By 1897 the first flush of growth for the ILP had tailed off and was beginning to decline. The ILP really did need to find alternative sources of support and recruitment.

On the other hand, as the SDF gained ground in the mid-1890s, Hyndman and his supporters in the SDF, became more willing to countenance fusion or alliance with the ILP. The SDF knew they could hold their own in a united organisation.

Finally, and most importantly, the practical working together of the members drove left unity on. Lancashire was the centre of joint work.

By the 1890s it was one of the strongest areas for the SDF. As the SDF got involved in broader political representation it came into contact with the ILP. The SDF co-operated with the foundation of the Manchester ILP.

In Nelson a fledgling ILP and the more established SDF joined together with the Trades Council in the municipal elections of 1893, gaining two successes. That alliance continued into the 20th century.

In Blackburn the SDF and ILP had a political division of labour with the (fond of a tippie) SDFers appealing to working class Tories and the (teetotal) ILPers appealing to the radical wing of Liberalism. The SDF and ILP set up an Unemployed Demonstration Committee, stood in local elections, and produced a monthly newspaper, the *Blackburn Labour Journal*. Bit by bit the combined socialists became the main opposition to all-dominant Toryism in the town. By 1900 there were six — two Trades Council, two ILP and two SDF — on the School Board.

**If socialist unity had been achieved in the 1890s it would have made a great deal of difference.**

AT the 1896 ILP Conference it was reported that Tom Mann had written to other socialist bodies to ask them what their stance was on a united socialist party. The SDF leaders, the delegates were told, were still hostile. However some leading SDF members, such as James MacDonald, the secretary of the important London Trades Council, were in favour.

In 1896 Mann stood in a by-election in Aberdeen as the joint candidate of the local SDF and ILP and Trades Council. Later in the year Mann floated the idea of another labour movement paper which he may have wanted to use a vehicle for socialist unity.

At the end of 1896 Tom Mann resigned as full time secretary of the ILP, in order, or so it was said, to help establish the International Federation of Ship, Dock and River workers. Mann continued to work for the ILP part-time. He spent much of his time campaigning for socialist unity.

At the 1897 ILP Conference Mann moved to change the name of the ILP to the Socialist Party. According to the minutes he argued: "There was no room in the party for anyone who was not prepared to subscribe to the principles of Socialism... the name of Labour had not brought a single trades union to them." This did not go down well with some.

Hardie was against the name change.

Although he could not have then been at all confident of eventual success, he wanted to win

over more trade unionists, and whole sections of the trade union movement. "Socialist" in the title wouldn't help the strategy. Bruce Glasier, Philip Snowdon, Ramsey MacDonald, all now national committee members, were already trying to steer the party in a politically "moderate" direction and were also therefore against.

But unity negotiations continued, and in 1897 the SDF, Fabians and ILP met to consider collaboration. The Fabians and SDF decided they didn't want to work with each other; the ILP and SDF held a joint informal conference on 27 February 1897.

At the end of 1897 Tom Mann sent out a ballot on unity to the membership — voting would be for or against merger. The new moderates on the national committee and Keir Hardie were not happy about the ballot going out without any accompanying position statements. They made more unhappy when a huge majority for merger — 5,158 for and 886 against — was recorded.

Glasier, MacDonald, Hardie and others decided to mix up Mann's handling of the ballot with other aspects of Mann's behaviour which had come to their attention. Salacious and mendacious gossip had been circulating about Mann's drinking and "going out" with a woman whom, Glasier records in his diary, was "regarded as a prostitute". It was awful Victorian priggery, and, in Hardie's case at least hypocrisy. Basically they drove Mann out of the ILP.

Mann took it quite magnanimously, considering no one had bothered to ask him what was really going on in his personal life (his marriage was breaking down and he had met his future partner, Lancashire ILP'er Elsie Harker). Always preferring to avoid unpleasantness, Mann offered his resignation.

Mann was going, not because of his fondness for whisky and women, but because he represented a different future for the socialist movement, one the ILP leaders didn't like.

With Mann out of the way, the ILP leadership was free to undo the results of the ballot. At the 1898 conference of the ILP, despite the clear wishes of the membership, the leadership recommended not immediate fusion with the SDF but federation as a first step.

A resolution was passed which referred the question of federation or fusion to another ballot of the membership. This time a three-quarters majority would be required for fusion. A big ballot majority for federation followed, but the SDF leadership (almost certainly also acting off its own bat) rejected it. Socialist unity now seemed dead in the water, despite all the good will (and continued practical collaboration) on the ground.

If socialist unity had been achieved in the 1890s, what difference would it have made to the history of Labour, of working-class political representation? A great deal of difference is certain, but precisely in what way we will never know.

The issue of socialist unity did not go away. In some respects the negotiations leading up to the formation of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 were another attempt at "socialist unity".

## 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.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

# Once again on "troops out now"

Within the AWL there is a substantial minority critical of the majority's position on the occupation of Iraq. The issue will be debated at the forthcoming AWL annual conference in May. David Broder outlines the minority view.

THE minority argue that the only principled line on the conflict, and only chance to build independent working-class forces, is to stand sharply opposed to US-UK intervention in the region as well as Islamism. In contrast, the majority argue that we should acquiesce to the occupation of Iraq, since if we demanded that the troops leave and they did, Islamist militias would win out and crush democratic space in Iraq.

All AWL comrades say they are for solidarity with Iraqi workers, and the debate is normally posed in terms of what slogans we should add to this position — demands like "troops out now", "troops out" or just a general sentiment "against the occupation". But it is apparent that there is more to the disagreement than superficial differences in wording. The real divide is between those who believe that US "globocop" actions are progressive but that socialists shouldn't "give them any credit in advance", and those who think that this misses the point of how to build an independent "third camp" of working-class forces which can stand on its own two feet.

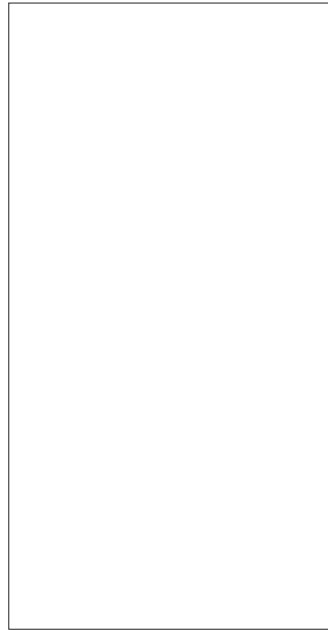
My own differences with Martin Thomas's conference document for the majority (<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/02/01/resolution-iran-and-iraq-awl-conference-2008>) are only partly about analysis of what is going on in Iraq. I have stressed the idea that the Mahdi Army — backed by the Iranian regime — and sectarian militias are increasingly integrated into the occupation government already. I also deny that the imperialist troops protect Iraqi workers (the Iraqi government's Decree 8750 renders unions semi-illegal and gives it the right to confiscate all of their funds; the US Army have attacked trade union offices; while all of the British troops are safely ensconced near Basra airport, since Brown is too embarrassed to remove them even though Moqtada al-Sadr already controls the streets). Martin, on the other hand, focuses on what would happen if the troops left.

I do not deny his assertion that if all the troops magically "disappeared" and the Iraqi government collapsed, the consequence would just be the victory of the best-armed militias. I do not say "troops out now" because I want that to happen. But nor can I accept Martin's terms of argument.

In his only reference to the idea that we should call for "troops out now" he writes: "...if 'troops out now' were somehow to happen, the result would almost certainly be full-scale war between different sectarian clerical fascist militias and then the destruction of the labour movement; the chopping-up of the country; the probable liquidation of any chances of Iraqi (or Arab-Iraqi) national self-determination; and the destruction of any elements of democracy (free press, etc.)

"Solidarity with the Iraqi labour movement against both the US/UK occupation and the sectarian militias remains the indicated policy for socialists internationally. We reject negative slogans like 'troops out now' which the actual balance of forces would fill with a reactionary political content".

This kind of schematic logic is no good. Marxists understand that social forces and classes do not exist in the abstract, isolated from one another, but instead that they are in struggle, and the subjective factor of political struggle can change the "balance of forces", which is neither fixed nor controlled by some ethereal hand of history. Martin's reference to "if 'troops out now' were somehow to happen" makes no sense — in reality slogans do not mysteriously "happen" out of the blue, but are demands raised and fought for by real



people. What interests us here is the slogans of the international workers' movement, the forces to which we are aligned and hope to influence.

Our politics, our programme and the slogans which crystallise them are agitational, designed to organise the working-class as well as forces such as women's, LGBT and student movements for struggle. If the workers' movement raised the demand "troops out now", it would not be some magic wand to make the troops "disappear", but a basis for the working class to organise in sharp hostility to US-UK imperialism as well as confronting Islamists and Iranian regional imperialism intervening in Iraq.

As Sean Matgamna has written: "One makes all kinds of educational agitation and propaganda demands, despite knowing that they will not be implemented immediately or precisely. Agitation, the spotlight of the steady beam of propaganda, is seen as preparing the way. The implementation of the demand presupposes a whole series of changes, which the raising of the demand will help to bring about. As strength is built up it becomes possible to act, to plan."

"Troops out now" is not merely a radical posture. Clearly, we do not raise the slogan because we are comfortable in the belief that we are so weak that the demand will never be realised and so it doesn't matter what we say. Yet we also know that if we ever did organise enough workers around our demands to force the troops out, then the balance of forces would have changed and so the consequences of withdrawal would be different to the troops just "disappearing" tomorrow.

The problem with "troops out now", i.e. with missing out the word "now", is that in the context of the world we live in it would be seen to deliberately avoid saying "now" and give free rein for the troops to stay indefinitely. This looks like a variant of the majority view that we should accept the presence of troops until the trade unions do not need their protection. But the whole point is that the workers' movement will never grow to be in that position if it takes sides with the occupiers. While we may approve of some democratic side effects of the occupation, "refusing to grant it political support" at the same time as you go round telling people that you also "refuse to demand that the troops leave" is tonally and operationally nothing other than fostering illusions in the democratic creden-

tials of the occupiers.

In the case of the majority, this is worsened by clumsy formulations which, for all of the qualifications and equivocation which surround them, imply taking sides with US imperialism.

Martin whose conference motion (before amended by the AWL's national committee) avoided any reference to sanctions and the threat of "surgical" air strikes in Iran, had written in October that although plans for war against Iran were "crazy", it was possible to imagine that "if it were possible to imagine some 'surgical' operation that would stop Iran's hideous regime acquiring nuclear weapons, and take out the foul Ahmedinejad, it would be good". This is precisely the wrong argument to be making at a time when US threats strengthen the hand of the Iranian regime against our comrades, since it is able to appeal to nationalism and portray itself as "anti-imperialist".

The same goes for the argument that we should not call ourselves "anti-imperialist" since clerical reactionaries have adopted the label too.

Firstly, if everyone followed the AWL's majority line, the result would be to buttress sectarian Islamist militias by allowing them to present themselves as the only consistent opponents of US imperialism, and by saying nothing about the need for Iraqi-Arab self-determination we would concede an enormous amount of political territory to Islamists who claim that self-determination should mean a patchwork of statelets run by clerical fascist mafias.

And secondly, just because the words have been dragged through the mud is not a reason to abandon our politics — why should we not also dispense with the word "socialism", which for most people means something between Harold Wilson and Joseph Stalin?

The question of working-class agency is of vital importance for the minority. Articles by comrades such as Daniel Randall and myself have stressed the need for a working-class anti-war movement demonstrating that only the workers' movement — and not Iranian regional imperialism and Moqtada al-Sadr — can fight for both democratic rights (including national self-determination) and social liberation. Rather than imagining that occupying troops will protect the working-class, we should be calling for the arming of the workers and supporting efforts at community self-defence.

Also important here is working-class action at home — while actions such as those of the Motherwell train crew and the Italian dockers who refused to transport weapons for use in Iraq are occasional and receive little coverage in the *Guardian*, we must vocally propagandise about them as a means to undermine the war effort, and argue that they are necessarily the same struggle as oil workers in Iraq who strike against the looting of the country's oil by Halliburton.

While in the lead-up to conference the majority have co-opted some of that point into their position, it does not sit well — if you think the occupiers' democratic war effort is the only hope for the Iraqi trade unions, how can you also be in favour of attempts to sabotage the troops carrying out that mission?

To refuse to call for the withdrawal of troops is to refuse to pose yourself sharply against the occupation, and so weakens efforts to organise anti-war workers' action. The majority's position reflects an unwillingness to take on this important question and acquiesces to US imperialism as a guarantor of democracy for a supposedly eternally weak working class. In contrast, the minority argue that we must struggle for a strong and independent third camp, with the international left and workers' movement organising around the slogans "Solidarity with Iraqi workers against the occupation and Islamism. Troops out now". • [www.workersliberty.org/iraq](http://www.workersliberty.org/iraq)

## Nuclear: a blind alley on climate change

I WELCOME Les Hearn's participation in our nuclear debate, particularly as I remember reading about climate change in his science column in *Socialist Organiser* as long ago as 1988-89. However he completely evades the central problems with nuclear (*Solidarity* 3/127, 21 February 2008).

Climate change has apparently given the proponents of nuclear a new lease of life. However nuclear can contribute only on electricity generation, not to the main sources of emissions, namely for heat and for transport. The government's Sustainable Development Commission estimates that if 10 new reactors displaced gas fired power stations, only 4% of carbon emissions would be saved annually. It would be more if coal-fired power stations were displaced, but we need to put the perceived benefits of nuclear for climate change in perspective.

**The reality here and now is that the new reactors will not be built to burn up their own waste.**

And then there are the costs. Les does not discuss the range of safety risks from nuclear, preferring to quote the findings of the 2005 Chernobyl's Legacy report, which attributed 56 direct deaths (47 accident workers, and nine children with thyroid cancer), to the disaster. However he brushes over its estimate of a further 4,000 childhood thyroid cancer cases and 5,000 others among people living nearby.

Of course, none of the new reactors will use the same technology as Chernobyl. And no one in this debate is minimising the risks from coal mining, oil or gas. However the Chernobyl example gives us some indication of what a nuclear accident could do to both workers on the site and others in the surrounding area, which must be part of any calculation on building new reactors.

A more substantial and very long-term cost is nuclear waste. Les might fantasise about thorium reactors but the reality here and now is that the new reactors will not be built to burn up their own waste. Nor is there a suitable site for geological disposal available.

The British government spent £400 million research on a site in Cumbria, only to find that it was unsuitable. The Yucca Mountain site in the US is not operational. In fact none of the advanced capitalist powers have a suitable geological site. Perhaps they will eventually come up with a solution; until then we are right to be sceptical.

What about the alternatives? Gordon Brown said in November that the UK could produce 40% of its electricity from renewables by 2020. The government already has estimates for how much renewables using existing technologies could contribute. Clearly tidal barrages and wind farms have ecological costs, though none it seems to me as serious as nuclear. And a substantial amount of emissions could be saved from energy efficiency measures.

If the government's own estimates are right, then nuclear is not actually necessary for cutting carbon emissions, providing the political will and the economic resources are committed to these alternatives. It is part of our job to ensure that they are, rather than cheerleading for nuclear.

Paul Hampton



# Gaza: the dead ends of Olmert and of Hamas

BY ISRAELI SOCIALIST

THE catastrophic escalation [of the Israeli army in Gaza] comes after a long period of struggling between Israel's military and Hamas. Due to its commitment to the US imperialism and its loyalty to the Bush administration which carries forward the Road Map plan, Israel refused to acknowledge the Islamic rule in Gaza strip and accept the Hamas proposal for Hudna, ceasefire, which meant recognition of Hamas rule.

Under the imperialist pressure, Israel has been willing to negotiate only with Fatah, which is very weak... The influence and support given to the Fatah amongst the Palestinian masses was heavily reduced after the party accepted negotiations with Israel although there was no commitment from Israel to evacuate all settlements as it promised to do since September 1993, stop the expansion of the current ones as it committed to do for years, accept the partition of Palestine into two sovereign states and agree to the establishment of two capitals in Jerusalem/AI-Quds.

In spite of all placatory rhetoric of Hamas, it was clear-cut that any concession it might give — e.g. no more firing on the Southern cities of Israel in return to an end of Israel's military actions — would have to be accompanied by a de facto recognition by Israel of the legitimacy of the ruling murderous clique of Hamas. That was the diplomatic achievement Hamas wanted. The Israeli government, ruled by the neo-liberals of Kadima and the collapsing Israeli Labour, advanced military operations in order to intimidate Hamas and bring about an end to the daily abuse of inhabitants of Sderot city. Israel wanted to avoid the political implication of recognising the rule of Hamas, a step

that will completely undermine Fatah.

The firing at the city of Ashkelon saw Hamas testing Israeli patience and, while completely ignoring the suffering of the unemployed, impoverished and tortured masses of Gaza, carried forward a severe attack on Israel. Hamas, basing itself upon massive financial and military support from Iran and Syria, clarified here that it is willing to fight Israel by massacring its citizens until its rule is recognised and as long as Israeli occupies the West Bank. Support to Hamas was given also by the Hezbollah, whose leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasarallah, has been declaring recently his organization's intentions to destroy Israel completely, in spite of the fact that there is no Israeli presence in Lebanon.

There is no doubt that Israel — after years of refusing to accept the formula of two states in the historic territory Palestine — is responsible for the tragedy; not only the Palestinian tragedy but also the tragedy of the abused people of Sderot and Ashkelon.

During the late 1970s and the mid-1980s, Israel helped build Hamas as alternative to the PLO, hoping it would bring about internal factional struggle within the Palestinian national movement. However, no matter what the Israeli ruling elites have done in the past, Hamas represents a reactionary tendency in which jihad as political and military strategy plays a crucial role in the struggle against the Zionist and Jewish "heretics". Hamas has no will to compromise with Israel or bring about genuine progress and tranquility. It is willing to transform every Palestinian girl and every Arab baby into a martyr, a living bomb, a trained soldier in the army of Allah. This is a recipe for bloodbath, the same one that exists in today's Iraq which is torn into pieces by the Islamists

and the armed phalanges.

Decades of brutal oppression and expropriation of Palestinian lands, along with dozens of barriers within the West Bank and miserable life in refugees' camps, has brought the masses to express their despair, by voting to the Hamas, considering it as the best oppositionist to Israel. However, the Palestinians will not win their liberation by allying with the coarsest reactionaries and abandoning the secular and democratic program of Fatah. Their misery, hardship and poverty will not be removed by armed struggle against the Israeli poor. The inhabitants of Sderot are not settlers; they're not war criminals. They're not the problem of the Palestinians. They have lived in terrible economic condition for decades, discriminated by the Israeli bourgeoisie. Most of them are first, second and third generation of Jews who migrated to Israel from North African countries like Morocco and Tunisia.

An armed resistance, if it is to bring about positive outcomes, is justified only against the occupying army or the settlers' movement while the strategy is directed at liberating the masses and founding a democratic state. South Africa, despite all of its problems, got rid of apartheid and enslavement without murdering hundreds of whites. Although the ANC did use terrorist measures during its history, the policies of the ANC were never terrorist in principle.

The Palestinians could have been unified around the democratic demand for two states and full evacuation of the settlements. Their cause could have been adopted as true, positive and proper by many, many Israelis. Thus, a democratic left opposition could have been created in Israel for an end of the conflict. There is an embracing support within Israel for a two states solution. Nevertheless, the only

thing the Hamas is fostering by its military bloody operations is a lurch to the right among Israelis, empowerment of the fascist Israeli right and a heavy blow to the Israeli left. Even the Communist Party of Israel, one of most veteran Communist parties in the west (founded in 1919), is suffering a major crisis in which the Party is divided between internationalists and nationalists.

Palestinians and Israelis should go out onto the streets under the slogan of "ceasefire now". They must force the leaderships to stop the war now. Only the masses, not the imperialisms of the US or the EU, not the UN den of thieves, can stop the current bloodshed in the region. The current leaderships are bankrupt and have led the masses to living hell.

In the current situation, all democrats, all secularists, all socialists, should build a mass united front for ceasefire and true, sincere and principled negotiation for a national peace in which there is a future to Israeli and Palestinian workers' movement.

The fundamentalists should be removed from power by the masses; the secular and democratic cadres of the Fatah should be reinstated. National elections should be held within the West Bank and Gaza and the program of the two states in Palestine must be re-advanced as a unifying political agenda that can bring about international solidarity with the Palestinians and consolidate an international camp for a two states solution in which the trade unions and the world labour movement will play a major role.

Only this can resolve once and for all the Palestinian question on a democratic, progressive and humanistic basis and pave the way toward a socialist united states of the Middle East.

## PARABLES FOR SOCIALISM

### After the Dictatorship of the Lie

Russian and East European Stalinism collapsed in 1989-91. It was replaced not, as socialist had hoped, by working class rule, but by the capitalism of the state-looting oligarchs. The battle sketched in here, between despair and nihilism on one side and, on the other, understanding and the sense of sharp responsibility, was fought out then in the minds of many socialists.  
SM 1991

"I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name." — William Morris, *A Dream of John Ball* [Ball, a priest, was a leader of the Peasant Rising in England in 1381, in which he lost his life].

A. Yes, in the Century of The Lie  
The greater Lies bred kings  
And gun-clad Liars ruled.  
In the Century of Enthroned Lies  
Truth was defamed, un-natured,  
Constricted, stifled, stulted.  
In the Century of the Lie,  
Usurping Lie acclaimed as Truth,  
Determined what was true.

B. Woe to the defeated!

Ask Leon Trotsky why  
Truth fell before the Lie.

A. And when the seminal, breeding Lie,  
Clad in armour, fire-power, myth,  
Is in command, then Truth  
Alloys with obscurantists,  
With priests who pray alone,  
Cranks, flat-earthists, loons  
Forever out of tune;  
Truth blinks, maimed, ugly

In sudden helplessness,  
Sovereign by right, overthrown,  
Outlawed, hunted, lost,  
Hiding, cold in the heather,  
Afraid of the showing moon.

B. Woe to the defeated!

Ask Leon Trotsky why,  
Truth fell before the malign lie!

A. Woe to the defeated!

'Man makes his history  
Not as he likes or wills,  
And History makes man.'  
Slowly, meanderingly,  
Truth does win fast control;  
What's gone comes back again;  
Though never at your call;  
The beaten rise again,  
Furled flags again unfurl!

B. Woe to the defeated!

No! Don't think that there is  
Some quirky god nearby  
Who hoards a clean discerning  
Bank of seeding Truth on loan,  
Or think for consolation  
That Truth has staying power  
To last and claim its own:  
Annulled in its own time,  
Its seed drawn off, its place  
Usurped, its strength unstrung,  
Aligning eyes all burned out.  
The vanquished banished truth  
Consigned to scolding laughter  
Is a bloodless shade thereafter.

A. 'Till strong lies dry, and crack!

B. By then Time has moved on:  
There is no going back!

A. Woe to the defeated!

B. Your Truth will lose its name,  
Lose both its sense and shape,  
If you let its time escape;  
History's rushing stream  
Is not twice the same:  
You cannot hone your sword,  
You will not plant your flag,  
By this same-stream again:  
You cannot steer your craft,

You will not fight your fight,  
On this same stream twice;  
Truth must ride its Tide:  
There is no going back!

A. Woe to the defeated!

B. And when the Lie, raw malice spent,  
Sinks down on History's tip,  
Shy, limping, ghosted, blind old truth  
Comes bent and shadow king  
To a world the Lie has schooled  
And seeded through with lies.

A. Woe to the defeated!

B. Faint echoed memories remain  
Of outcast, banished Truth:  
Moult words from off a theory  
Whose practice stalled and failed;  
Shard-bits off a perspective  
That lacked the means and maps;  
Shot rags from a philosophy  
That could not fill its sails,  
Interpreting the world  
It tried and failed to shape:  
Ask Leon Trotsky why  
Truth fell, before the rampant Lie.

A. Woe to the defeated!

You fight the fight and lose,  
But then, you'll find your cause  
Work through, not as you'd choose,  
But unexpectedly,  
Made strong in long adversity:  
Humankind makes its history  
Not as we like or will;  
And History makes man.  
(And you? Do what you can!)

B. Woe to the defeated!

Stern History allows  
No replay matches:  
There is no going back!  
Where once the Lie has ruled  
Late-truth will not un-sink  
What lies have sunk, or prop  
What cutting, levelling lies have felled,  
Un-seed where lies have raped,  
Re-group what lies, amok,  
Have disarranged and scattered,  
Un-shrivel what the Lie,  
All overshadowing, shrivelled,  
Or rouse our martyred dead!

A. Woe to the defeated!

And yet, new generations do  
Reclaim defeated Truth,  
Fight its fight once more;  
And then the Truth you lost  
Works its way through:  
We make our history,  
History makes, and remakes, us;  
The beaten rise again,  
The victors fall apart;  
Long furled-up flags unfurl;  
Know this for our new start!  
(And you? Play your proper part!)

B. Woe to the defeated!

Lies make no restitution!  
The Liar keeps the spoils  
His heirs may sell the loot:  
Starved Truth, come back, must sign  
Acts of Oblivion,  
Make peace with the Lie-offshoots!

A. Woe to the defeated!

B. History does not atone!  
Once done, your chance is gone:  
The losers die alone,  
Beaten, barren, sterile as stone.

A. Woe to the defeated!

Yet, we will rise again:  
You fight the fight and lose,  
The victors loot and breed,  
The beaten fall apart.  
And yet, ideas do survive,  
Ideas do re-route,  
Long-doldrumed flags fly;  
Our cause will yet prevail:  
Though mortal men and women die,  
Protean Truth revives, thrives:  
Transformed, renewed, replenished,  
We will rise again!

B. Woe to the defeated!

Ask poor Trotsky why  
Truth fled before the lie,  
And tell dead Trotsky why  
This is the Century of the Lie!

A. Woe to the defeated!

B. Woe to the defeated!

# AWL's record on Ireland

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

WHAT follows is an account of the politics on Ireland of the Trotskyist Tendency, the forerunner of AWL, especially in 1968-70 — that is, of one side in the dispute in IS (forerunner of the SWP), which previous articles have described.

In this aspect of the story, it is necessary, if things are to be put into perspective, to go beyond the period 1968-70 and to give a general outline of the evolution of the tendency's politics on Ireland in the decade and more after the events that mainly concern us in this series.

This is an outline account. Some questions are dealt with in general that will be discussed in more detail later in the series — namely, the debates on “troops out” and on the proposal that the Catholic-majority areas along the border should, in the event of civil war, secede to the Southern state and thereby (so we believed) make the continuation of the Northern Ireland entity impossible.

The politics of the Trotskyist Tendency on Ireland were rooted in the work of the small group of socialists who produced the journal *An Solas/Workers' Republic* in 1966-7, under the umbrella of the Irish Workers' Group, a mainly émigré and mainly London-based organisation.

The group producing *Workers' Republic* was the original nucleus of the Trotskyist Tendency and of the Workers' Fight group. In the first year of our existence as a group, up to the appearance of the first *Workers' Fight* magazine in October 1967, we produced *An Solas/Workers' Republic*, occasional leaflets, and a pamphlet on the important class struggles then being fought out in the British docks, our other main area of work.

Rachel Lever and the present writer produced *Workers' Republic*, with some help from Gery Lawless, the secretary of the Irish Workers' Group for most of that time. In the course of doing that we came up against the fundamental questions of Irish revolutionary politics, and tried to answer them — on Republicanism, physical-force and peaceful methods, the “completion” of the “national revolution” aborted in 1921-2, the nature of the Northern Ireland state and of the 26 Counties whether Permanent Revolution had any relevance to modern Irish politics.

I intend at the end of this series to give an account of the Irish Workers' Group. Here I will say only as much as is necessary to make the story understandable.

THE Six Counties state, with Home Rule and limited sovereignty, is as old as independent Ireland — strictly speaking, a little older, since the establishment of a Belfast parliament in 1921 preceded the setting up of a 26 Counties parliament in January 1922.

It was a great fact, and seemingly immovable. By the 60s, it had even secured a lot of passive Northern Ireland Catholic support.

The people of the Six Counties, Catholic as well as Protestant, had the benefits of the British post-1945 welfare state. Many, perhaps most, were or seemed to be reconciled to things as they were.

Britain guaranteed that there would be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland — that is, its union with Britain and not with the rest of Ireland — unless the majority there wanted it. For practical purposes Dublin accepted that and policed the Six/26 Counties settlement, while simultaneously it made propaganda against partition: it had an ambivalent and contradictory position.

The Protestant majority in Northern Ireland was two-to-one. Greatly disproportionate rates of Catholic emigration ensured that the balance would not soon change dramatically.

That meant that no Northern Ireland political process could ever satisfy those of the minority who questioned the existing arrangement; and that, in turn, recommended violence to some of the minority. But violent methods did not “work”, either. IRA efforts were feeble — a nuisance rather than a threat to the Six Counties state, and with small active support from the Catholic minority.

The Catholic “Nationalist Party” in Northern Ireland looked to Dublin as “their” government, and stood aloof from the structures of the Six Counties state, rejecting it, but impotent to change anything fundamental.

In the first near-half-century of the Six Counties state, no big political mobilisation of the Catholics had taken place. The Northern Catholics had been beaten down during the War of Independence (1919-21) — which in the Six Counties was a communal-national civil war — and immediately afterwards, by a combination of the British Army and Orange militias. They had never risen out of that defeat.

The politics of the Trotskyist Tendency were shaped in the flurry of reactivation on Northern Ireland in the mid 1960s and after. I had been a member of the Connolly Association (the Communist Party's “Irish front”), but in the process of coming to understand the CP had concluded — like, unknown to me, quite a few others at the time — that the CA's Stalinist-ersatz Fianna Fail nationalism had nothing to do with socialism. Since

it was manipulative and in the last reckoning Russia-serving, it had not much to do with real Irish nationalism, either.

I considered myself a Republican, but thought that everything that was positive and politically viable in revolutionary Republicanism was subsumed in revolutionary socialism — the politics of the early Communist International and of the Fourth International of Trotsky's time. I put it like this in 1967:

“All the essential goals of all the past defeated and deflated struggles of the Irish people over the centuries against oppression and for freedom of development and freedom from exploitation, can now only be realised in a Republic of the working people, as part of the Socialist United States of Europe and the world.” [*Towards an Irish October*, 1967]

The work we did in *Workers' Republic* was part of the attempt by the IWG to work out a working-class political programme for the Irish situation.

Here we need to understand what the IWG was, as well as the political situation in which it worked.

## Our politics on Ireland are rooted in the work of the small group of socialists who produced the journal *An Solas/Workers' Republic* in 1966-7

### THE IWU, THE ICG, AND THE IWG

THE Connolly Association bestrode Irish émigré “left-wing” politics. That was a by-product of the fact that the Communist Party and the CP-influenced Labour Left were large, imposing, and in essence constituted the extant labour-movement “left”. Beyond them there were three small Trotskyist organisations and some anarchists.

There existed, as we have seen in the last article in this series, a scattering of left-wing critics of the Connolly Association, “Trotskyism” on Ireland, in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, was the SLL and its Northern Ireland supporters.

In late 1959 something new appeared in Irish émigré politics, the Irish Workers' Union. It was set up as an anti-Stalinist alternative to the Connolly Association. It had some support from the émigré Irish “establishment”, including some priests and the Catholic press in Britain, who were very exercised by what they saw as the threat that “the Connolly Clubs”, as they called the CA, posed to gullible young immigrants.

The IWU was very hostile to the Stalinists and to the CA. A clause in its constitution banned “communists” and fascists from membership, modelled perhaps on the rule then in force in the TGWU which banned “communists” and fascists from holding office.

Yet the IWU was not right wing. It aspired to be a left-wing, “socialist”, alternative to the CA. One of its founders, perhaps the main mover, the late Michael Callinan, was, though a Catholic, a sort of syndicalist. He had been involved in the political wars between the Stalinists, Catholic Action, and others in the Australian labour movement.

Inevitably the IWU attracted leftists who were anti-CA and anti-CP, but who were still influenced by Stalinist ideas, or who supported Russia against America from a critical, vaguely Trotskyist, point of view. One of those was Pat O'Donovan, who would be a member of the Irish Workers' Group. He was associated with the SLL and with Brian Behan — perhaps had been a member for a while.

O'Donovan wrote an article in the SLL paper, *The Newsletter*, early in 1960, critically evaluating the IWU and proposing that leftists should help transform it. For that he was expelled from the IWU.

Brian Behan broke with the SLL politically — he was expelled, Gerry-Healy-style, on the eve of the 1960 Whitsun conference — and rapidly became an avowed syndicalist-anarchist. He joined the IWU. Evidently others did too, people of varying left-wing politics. John Palmer of IS was an early member of the IWU, in 1960 or 61.

Political “processes” unfolded in the IWU, of which to my knowledge no record exists (in contrast, incidentally, with the IWG, from which I possess upwards of 300 documents — letters, bulletins, circulars, financial statements, etc.). Those processes broke the initial framework. A number of ex-Republicans — and at least one one-time ultra-Catholic Maria Duce ex-Republican [see *The Lawless Case*, ECHR 1960/1 Series B] — made their way to the IWU, or its offshoot. They looked to the independent socialist left in Ireland, around the one-time Cabinet minister Noel Browne TD, and to such elements as the Dublin Unemployed Movement, which had elected its own TD, Jack Murphy.

By 1962, they had started to produce a small bimonthly printed paper, the *Irish Worker*. Its editor at one time — according to one account — was the late Dick Walsh (Richard Coleman Walsh), who would become a prominent *Irish Times* columnist and write for such papers as the *Observer* as Coleman

Richard.

By now the grouping was called the Socialist Republican League. It included former members of the IRA such as Liam Dalton and Phil Flynn, and former members — some of the Geraghty brothers, and Gery Lawless — of the IRA splinter known as the Crystal Group after its leader, the prominent athlete Joe Crystal (which had worked with another splinter, Saor Uladh [Free Ulster]).

The SRL had some links with the *Socialist Review* group (forerunner of IS) — of which John Palmer was a member from 1960 or 61 — and with the RSL, later the Militant tendency and now Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal, but then British section of the Pablo-Mandel Fourth International, which Dalton and Lawless supported. IS and RSL collaborated in producing a paper in the Labour Party Young Socialists, *Young Guard*.

The SRL went through political turmoil and crisis. Its politics were, as we'll see below, the same as those of the IWG in 1965-8. The paper ceased publication, after about a dozen issues, in 1963.

Now a new force appeared — Maoism, “revolutionary Stalinism”. Russia and China began to fall out in the late 1950s. From 1960 the Chinese made trenchant criticisms from the “left” of the mainstream Moscow CPs. Beijing directed its criticisms not openly against Moscow but against the “Tito revisionists”, and Moscow replied targeting the Albanian “dogmatists”, but everyone knew what this game of political blind man's buff meant. The Chinese produced “Marxist” criticisms of such ideas as the Western CPs' dogma of a parliamentary road to socialism.

If Marxism is scholasticism, Marxist right lay with the Chinese. It was good stuff — if you forgot, or never knew, who was making the criticism, and what they were. (On the advice of the SLL's North West organiser, Bill Hunter, I had used the first public statement of the Chinese, *Long Live Leninism*, on Lenin's 90th anniversary in April 1960, as part of the case I was trying to make within the Young Communist League against the parliamentary road to socialism and so on). The Chinese also harked back to Stalinism before it turned “right” in the mid 1930s, and defended and glorified Stalin against the “Khrushchev revisionists” in power in Russia and Eastern Europe (except Albania).

As the Russian-Chinese dispute moved towards an open breach, sympathisers of the Chinese emerged in the western CPs. The first public Maoist group came out of the CP in September 1963 — the Committee to Defeat Revisionism (Marxist-Leninist) — and started to publish a big monthly paper, *Vanguard*. When its leader, Michael McCreery, died of leukemia in 1965, it disintegrated into many small tribes of would-be revolutionary Stalino-Maoists.

Elements of the London Irish left rallied to the *Vanguard* (including Noel Jenkinson, who would be convicted for bombing the officers' mess at Aldershot army barracks in 1972, in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, January 1972, and die in jail).

The Irish Communist Group emerged out of this and out of the remnants of the Socialist Republican League, in 1963-4. If I understand it, the process was as follows.

IN 1963, Liam Dalton organised a series of discussions involving a wide spread of Irish leftists in London — Trotskyists like himself, “anti-revisionist” Communists, and left Republicans. About the same time, the *Vanguard* group (CDRML) leaders decided to organise an Irish sub-section of their own, to compete with the Connolly Association and perhaps lay the basis for a “Marxist-Leninist” group in Ireland.

The two small streams converged, or already overlapped, and early in 1964 formed an organisation called the Irish Workers' Group, which very soon changed its name to the Irish Communist Group. It was not the front which the Vanguard group had projected. It included Maoists — the future Irish Communist Organisation and British and Irish Communist Organisation — who had fallen out with McCreery; and the main *Vanguard* man involved in negotiating, Andy O'Neill, did not join. Neither — for some months, perhaps a year — did Liam Dalton, because of personal difficulties.

The ICG evolved as a strange conglomeration of Stalinists, incipient Stalinists, Republicans, and “Trotskyists”. One of its “Trotskyist” participants, Gery Lawless, would later justify himself to me on the grounds that the ICG was committed to “the workers' republic” — socialism — as the “next stage” in Ireland, as against the Maoist-Stalinist assertion that the “next stage” was to “complete” the “bourgeois-democratic” revolution there. That, I think, though it did not justify what Lawless did in the ICG, was true. The Maoists would retreat from it.

The ICG would produce a small duplicated weekly news-sheet, *Irish Workers' News*, and from February 1965 a monthly magazine, *An Solas*. (The group, minus the Gaelic scholar Dalton, mistakenly thought it meant “The Light” in the sense of something like “Enlightenment”. According to Dalton, it means something closer to “The Light Bulb”!).

It seems all the participants agreed to leave contentious questions between them to be resolved later: meanwhile they would study Ireland and respond to public events as they arose. For this group, the events of the last 40 years — the Stalinist mass

murder of Trotskyists, for example — had not yet happened. They would pretend that they had not happened. They would be “communists” of, say, 1930, miraculously brought back to life and kept together by the one thing they had in common: that they were Irish. They would suspend not disbelief but beliefs.

Of course, they couldn't and they didn't. The project was preposterous. Such a conglomerate was possible only if it consisted of people who were very vague about the politics they professed. If they were indifferent to or ignorant of the political ideas; or politically unformed, or politically decayed. Some were both politically underdeveloped and decayed, as for instance Gery Lawless was.

Though Lawless was listed as editor of *An Solas* from no.3 to no.7, the Stalinist-Maoists and their natural concerns dominated the publication — and to the extent that the “Trotskyist” editor found himself publicly and in good faith quoting Stalin as a revolutionary socialist or communist authority (against the idea of a parliamentary road to socialism). An equivalent would have been a reform socialist in the 1930s citing Hitler to prove that you could take power peacefully! (Which, come to think of it, some of the reform socialists did. Stafford Cripps, for example, cited the example of Hitler to prove that a reforming government could pass an “Enabling Act” and then do what it liked. Militant [RSL] would make the idea its mantra for decades.)

Inevitably the ICG divided into Stalinist and Trotskyist sides, in the summer of 1965. That would have been good, a necessary and progressive conflict — except that the “Trotskyist” side was something less than Trotskyist.

Of the Trotskyists, Liam Daltun was the only one who had more than a rudimentary grasp of — or, indeed, more than a rudimentary interest in grasping — the politics they all nominally adhered to; and he wasn't involved for perhaps the first year.

Among the London Trotskyists, Daltun was the political thinker and Lawless the bustling “man of business”, always eager to trade in his nominal politics for an advantage, for personal aggrandisement, or for an ego-salve. Daltun and Lawless were as naturally complementary a pair as you could hope to find. But they loathed, or better perhaps love-hated, each other, and their strife was a constant source of disruption.

Daltun was troubled — he would kill himself in January 1972 — and was rarely able to function at his best. He functioned well for a while in 1965. Liam Daltun is now forgotten. He does not deserve to be.

With the help of Ted Grant, Daltun produced a serious historical account of the Stalin-Trotsky dispute. The ICG split in September 1965. The half-dozen “hard” Maoists formed the Irish Communist Organisation. The “Trotskyist” ICG soon changed its name to the Irish Workers' Group.

What happened was not a separation into Stalinists and Trotskyists, but a hiving-off of the hard Maoists, leaving the

“Trotskyists” more or less in charge of a motley crew of soft Maoists, old half-sceptical Stalinists, Deutscherites (liberal Stalinists), and physical-force Republicans. (One of the latter, Phil Flynn, future trade union official, banker, etc., would go home to Ireland and within a short time be on the Army Council of the IRA).

The Trotskyists had not fought to win the group to the politics of the Grant-Daltun document; they had used it only to argue that people should not back the hard Stalinist-Maoists. “Tactics”! That was Lawless: the ascendancy of short-term advantage over political and long-term viability of the organisation.

It proved to be not just a “tactic”, to be followed up by a drive to win the organisation to Trotskyism, educate it, and render it homogeneous in its fundamental politics. Once the harder Stalinist-Maoists had gone, the group remained a politically inchoate conglomerate, kept together by the fact of being émigré Irish.

The organisation was still a political hodge-podge, indeed now far more wildly zig-zagging and unstable. The politics of the IWG were what the politics of the Socialist Republican League and its paper *The Irish Worker* had been — an incoherent mix of physical-force Republican romanticism and violent anti-Stalinism — combined with the delusion that Russia and its satellites were “workers' states”. Some of the IWG's members, and not the worst of them by any means, were old would-be revolutionary Stalinists, such as Sean Lynch, for example, who had been in the Communist Party of the USA for decades.

The thing that strikes me most today, looking through the file of *An Solas* again, is how all-pervasive in it physical-force Republicanism was — as it had been in the *Irish Worker* of the early 60s. So it would be, much of the time, in *Irish Militant*, the four page monthly started in February 1966 to replace *Irish Workers' News*. (No organic connection with the British Militant group, or with its 1970s paper *Militant Irish Monthly*).

I first encountered the Irish Communist Group around Easter 1965, when I was in the process of becoming a member of the RSL (Militant). I was and would remain active mainly in the British labour movement. I joined the IWG sometime in the middle of 1965, to help the “Trotskyists” against the “Stalinists”, as the organisation was beginning to fall apart. Living in Manchester, I was away from the central area of operations of the organisation, in London. I passively went along with what the Trotskyist faction did, and accepted its account of things. Primarily, I was a member of the RSL (Militant); though I retained IWG membership, until October-November 1966, I was only notionally an IWG member.

Rachel Lever and I, and two other co-thinkers, left the RSL in October 1966, and became the “Workers' Fight group”. In October-November 1966, on my proposal to the IWG, Rachel Lever and I took over responsibility for reviving *An Solas*. The

intention, openly proclaimed and mutually agreed between the IWG and WF, was to make it into a general Marxist magazine that could also be used by the Workers' Fight group in the British labour movement. The other two of the four members of the Workers' Fight group also joined the IWG.

In the first issue we produced, no.15/16, the title was supplemented with the words “Workers' Republic”, and in no.17, *An Solas* became *Workers' Republic*. You might say it was a case of “put out The Light, and then put out the light” — the dim, flickering, grotesquely distorting light of Maoism, pseudo-Republicanism, etc., and replace it with a better one.

In *Workers' Republic* I tackled what I saw as the political problems that confronted the IWG. In the course of doing that, the politics of the Trotskyist Tendency and Workers' Fight on Ireland were hammered out. I propose from this point simply to state what our beliefs about Ireland and Irish politics came to be. The rest of the story of the IWG will be dealt with in an appendix to this series.

## THE IDEAS OF WORKERS' REPUBLIC

**W**E rejected and fought against the fetish of physical force, and the idea that physical force, per se, defined revolutionary politics.

We believed that traditional Republicanism was not and could not be a consistently anti-imperialist force; that it was, by its ideas, goals and methods a petty-bourgeois movement; that its petty-bourgeois nationalism was a barrier to working-class unity, that its “little Irelandism” cut in the opposite direction to the interests of the Irish working class.

We naturally rejected the Menshevik-Stalinist notion that there had to be a two — stage revolution in Ireland — first “the Republic” (re-unification and independence) and then “the workers' Republic”.

We rejected the hybrid “populist Republicanism” — a fusion of the Stalinist two-stage theory with “native” Republicans who were leftwing but put “the national question” first — represented historically by Paedar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and the Stalinist-dominated Republican Congress of the mid-1930s, and in the mid-60s by the “left” of the Republican movement, the future Official IRA and Workers' Party.

In the mid 60s the Stalinist-led Republican movement was becoming “socialist” — in fact, populist-nationalist, seeking to use “social issues” to build up political support. This was very important: one of its consequences was the turn to civil rights agitation in Northern Ireland which helped create the mass political mobilisation of Northern Ireland Catholics which was the basis of the war which the Provisional IRA, breaking from the Stalinist Republicans, launched early in 1971.

We argued that the adoption of a socialist colouration and the

*Pro-IRA mural. The politics of the Republicans was at the heart of the disputes.*



“brand name” “Connolly socialism” by the Republican movement was not progressive but confusing, and could only, at best, produce a populist mish-mash like the Russian Socialist Revolutionary Party.

“...the IRA is just not revolutionary in relation to the objective needs of the only possible Irish Revolution.

“The same is no less true if ‘left’ slogans are grafted onto the old base, and a nominal ‘For Connolly’s Workers’ Republic, pinned to the masthead. Such talk of a socialist programme, a Bolshevik party, a workers’ republic, demands a proper appreciation of the relationship between the party and the working class... It demands a sharply critical approach to the traditional republican conceptions of revolutionary activity. Otherwise these slogans combined with a largely military idea of the struggle against imperialism and the Irish bourgeoisie, will not produce a revolutionary Marxist party, but an abortion similar to the Socialist Revolutionary Party in Russia, against which the Bolsheviks fought bitterly” [*Where The Hillside Men Have Sown, Workers’ Republic* 17]. That would prove true of such organisations as Saor Eire and INLA

“Being a Republican first and a socialist second, he [George Gilmore] concludes that Republicanism, to succeed, needs Labour. No doubt this is true; but for us the question must be — does the working class need Republicanism?” [*Irish Militant*, June 1967].

“For revolutionary socialist workers today, traditional Republicanism is itself just not revolutionary. The heroic Republican tradition must be translated into the conditions of our day: advocating national independence, we must be clear that in the capitalist world today this is little more than a formality.

“Demanding reunification, we must understand that it will be brought about, if not by the capitalists themselves, then as an incidental in the establishment of a workers’ republic...”

“Preparing for the coming workers’ revolution is the only objectively revolutionary activity in Ireland today... Only those who attempt to rouse the workers on their own class programme are revolutionaries today...” [*Irish Militant*, June 1967].

As it turned out, the Provisional IRA was capable of an enormous revolutionary effort, which neither we nor anyone else foresaw. They have achieved no revolutionary transformation, not even of a nationalist sort.

We believed that though the political situation on the island was the result of the abortion of the Irish national revolution; and though there was national oppression — specifically and directly against the Northern Ireland Catholics — this was not simply a matter of “British-occupied Ireland”. It was the product of a split in the Irish bourgeoisie.

**W**e rejected the idea that the partition of Ireland was just a British imperialist imposition. “A division of the Irish bourgeoisie, originating in economic differences, led to a split which was then manipulated by British imperialism, according to its practice of divide and rule. The Northern section, having a measure of political autonomy, kept close links with this imperialism; the Southern section being dominated according to the logic of modern imperialism [i.e. economic weight within more or less free market relations].

“In maintaining their closer links with Britain, the Northern capitalists were aided by British troops, who also assist in holding in sufficient people to make the state viable. Despite this, talk of ‘British-occupied Ireland’ obscures the real identity of the garrison in Ireland — the Northern Ireland bourgeoisie”.

[Editorial of *Irish Militant*, February 1967].

The ideas that Unionists needed the Catholic areas of the Six Counties to make Northern Ireland “viable” was nonsense, but the common wisdom of the time (In *IS Journal* for example, John Palmer and Chris Gray, April 1969).

“The evolution of capitalism and Ireland’s peculiar ‘combined and uneven’ relationship with British capitalism... produced on the island something more like two nations than one — economically, socially, ideologically... [The blows of PD and the civil rights movement] produced a crack vertically down the middle of Northern Ireland’s flawed society; it split along the lines of religion and nationality” [*IS and Ireland*, pages 5 and 9]

Basing ourselves on Lenin’s *Imperialism* and such documents of the Communist International as the *Theses on the National and Colonial Question* (1920), and on what had happened since, we believed that the economic domination over Ireland by Britain and other great powers could not be eliminated except as part of a reorganisation of the world economy through the international socialist revolution.

“The old garrison imperialism, from which Ireland suffered for 700 years, has given way in most areas of the world to modern dollar-type imperialism, which cares little if its victims run their own diminutive armies, have their own parliaments, their own chair at the UN, or speak Arabic, Swahili, Urdu or Gaelic. It has its own language — money.

“National ‘independence’ has been graciously granted to the mass of former colonies because the great powers can rely on their overpowering economic strength to maintain their old dominance in a new form...”

“British imperialism will most likely encourage a capitalist unification of Ireland, given entry to the Common Market [European Union]. But a unified Ireland, of course highly desirable, will still be as much equal to Britain as the worker is equal to the millionaire — the bourgeoisie’s formal equality is just as much a sham internationally as nationally...[between nations]

“The old demand for national independence meant freedom from oppression and freedom of development. Today those goals can no longer be realised by pure and simple ‘independence’ — but by the linking up of a free federation of socialist states” [*Irish Militant*, June 1967].

“The IWG stands against the divided Irish bourgeoisie, Green, Orange, and Green-White-and-Orange, and for the revolutionary unity of the workers of all Ireland in a struggle for state power.

“We stand for the revolutionary combat against imperialism and national oppression in every form, whether that of garrison-imperialism, neo-colonialism, or the glaring economic domination of the small nations by the super-powers which is inevitable where the capitalist market remains as the sole regulator of relationships. But we denounce those who, in the name of ‘Republicanism’ and ‘anti-imperialism’, attempt to subordinate the working class to any section of the bourgeoisie, and who counterpose a defunct petty-bourgeois nationalist narrow-mindedness to the socialist struggle of the workers for power. National unity will be achieved, if not by the coming together of the Irish capitalist class under the auspices of the British imperialist state and the capitalist drive towards West European federation, then as an incidental in the proletarian revolution.

“The possibility of any other revolutionary reunification is long since past. The only revolutionary Republicanism is the international socialist Republicanism of the proletariat”.

[*Towards an Irish October*, preamble to the constitution of the IWG.]

We thought that the nationalist (left and right) focus on gaining “real” independence was both meaningless for the 26 Counties and confusing from the point of view of the Irish working class. We rejected “left-wing” Irish economic nationalism as being no more than the discarded and discredited former economic policy of the 26 County bourgeoisie (1932-58). It was a reactionary petty-bourgeois programme counterposed to the necessary — and, in so far as it was developing and augmenting the Irish working class, progressive — integration of Ireland into the existing world economic system. It was a backward-looking utopia, counterposed to the necessary economic programme of the Irish working class, for whom there could be no purely Irish solution to bourgeois exploitation.

We repeated James Connolly’s idea that the working class had inherited the fight for Irish freedom.

“The one serious progressive act of imperialism and Irish capitalism has been the creation of an Irish proletariat capable of putting an end to capitalism’s futile existence, and capable, as part of a world revolutionary class, of realising the age-old dream of the people of Ireland for freedom. The best traditions of the old, bourgeoisie, Republicanism have passed to the socialist working class, the only class in Ireland today capable of transforming society and the subordinate relation with Great Britain — the only unconditionally revolutionary class”.

Despite the contradictions in Northern Ireland, and the need for unification, Irish freedom could not now, in the era of the independent Irish state, be increased by the traditional “struggle for national independence against Britain”, still less by the reactionary utopia of the populist economic nationalists and the nationalist fetish of post-independence “sovereignty”.

“The only genuine liberation of Ireland will be from the inexorable — uncontrolled — pressures of international capitalism...” [*Towards an Irish October*].

“When capitalism was young and progressive, the means of production grew and developed within the nation states, which sheltered and protected their growth... Ireland, welded into a nation only by oppression, was a vassal of a stronger state, sucked of its wealth and stifled in development...”

## We rejected the mechanical kitsch Trotskyist response to the stages theories of the Stalinists and the populists — the reflex invocation of Permanent Revolution.

“At the period in history when independence offered possibilities of a solution to her problems, all the struggles of Ireland for national independence were mercilessly suppressed. The present ‘independence’ has come at a time when even the former giants of Europe find their ‘independence’ irksome and stifling and are trying to unite in the EEC [European Union] to get rid of it...”

“History will never know a really free Ireland this side of the socialist revolution. And after that it will be in the interests of the Irish Workers Republic to link up with the other workers’ states, as soon as conditions allow it to, as the sole guarantee of future development... To demand national sovereignty in the face of British imperialist domination is one thing — to make a fetish of it a la Greaves is quite another... [Desmond Greaves, leader of the Connolly Association]

“Only a free Socialist Federation of Europe and the world as the framework for full utilisation of the forces of production offers any long-term solution.

“We say the working class should not involve itself in this debate [about entry into the EU or otherwise], but be ready to resist all attacks on wages and conditions in or out of the EEC. ‘We will not bear the cost of your system, nor advise you on how to run it.’

“The warring capitalists of yesterday’s Europe now recognise the archaic nature of the West European nation states — can socialists then confine themselves to reasserting the claims of a defunct era? To the capitalists’ West European Federation we cannot counterpose various European national socialisms (Greaves, of course, only proposes Irish national capitalism). The choice today is between being international socialists or middleheaded reactionaries. The slogan must be for a Socialist United States of Europe... We mean by it a union of states where the workers have taken state power” [*Irish Militant*, July 1967]

We rejected the mechanical kitsch “Trotskyist” response to the stages theories of the Stalinists and the populists — the reflex invocation of “Permanent Revolution”. We argued that the formula of permanent revolution — the fusion of the tasks of two historical revolutions, that of the bourgeoisie and that of the

working class, under the leadership of the working class, telescoping the tasks performed by the classic bourgeois revolution as in France, 1789-94, with the working-class socialist revolution — had and could have no meaning for modern bourgeois and bourgeois-democratic Ireland.

The job was not to match texts with texts, ours against theirs, permanent revolution against the Stalinist stages theory of the Irish revolution (first “completion of the bourgeois revolution”, meaning reunification; then struggle for socialism), as in a card game. Instead we had to analyse reality concretely. On this approach, the conclusion was inescapable.

**I**RELAND had had its “bourgeois revolution”. In the North, bourgeois relations had been established by extension from Britain after its bourgeois revolution in the 17th century. In the South, land reform was organised “from above” by Britain in the late 19th/early 20th century, under pressure of a mass revolt, and tidied up by the Dublin government in the early 20s. The national division was not pre-capitalist. The basic problem was the split bourgeoisie and the varying links of its different parts with the British ruling class; and the fact that the bourgeoisie, North and South of the Border, could command the allegiance of the working class and shape the politics that divided the working class.

Ireland was a relatively advanced bourgeois country, integrated into European capitalism, albeit as a weaker capitalism.

“The division [in the Irish bourgeoisie] prevented the accomplishment of one of the major tasks of the traditional bourgeois revolution — national unification. However, if history and the relationship to Britain make the two statelets peculiarly deformed, they are nonetheless undeniably bourgeois, as a glance at the social organisation and relations of production makes obvious...”

“We who fight for the workers’ international Republic know that the present Irish capitalists are the only ones we will get. Calling them traitors is useless — they are not traitors to their class, the only sphere in which real loyalty as opposed to demagogic talk of loyalty, counts...”

[Editorial, *Irish Militant*, February 1967]

We rejected the idea that it made sense to speak of the Six Counties as British-occupied Ireland.

“[Sinn Fein is unable] to heal the bourgeois-fostered split in the working class.

“Too often, in fact the implication of such gross IRA simplifications as ‘British-occupied Ireland’ could lead to attempting to conquer by force the Northern workers; a conception which is best calculated to perpetuate the division in the country... They resort to their ‘wrap the Green Flag round me, boys’ Republicanism, which alienates the Northern workers” [*Workers’ Republic* 17].

We accepted that the distinct Protestant-Unionist minority on the island could not and should not be overridden in 1969 we drew this to the necessary conclusion of advocating autonomy for the Protestant-majority area within a united Ireland. For example, in a letter which *Socialist Worker* published on 11 September 1969, I wrote: “*Socialist Worker* must challenge the Partition and demand the breakup of the 6 County state, or at least the right of secession of those areas where Catholics form the majority; ultimately leading to a united Ireland with autonomy for the Protestant areas — not after the Workers’ Republic, but as a necessary and unavoidable step towards it...”

We argued for a consistently Marxist attitude to religion, as an absolute prerequisite, in a world wherein religion still defined and expressed politics as well as childish fantasies about the supernatural — for the creation of a Marxist organisation that could do the job it needed to do.

A dispute on this question was one of the precipitating causes of the breakdown of the IWG in the autumn of 1967.

**I**N IS in the first period after October 1968 we stressed the need to make socialist propaganda and to build an Irish Marxist organisation. Later in 1969, when the situation was unmistakably moving towards an explosion of Catholic-Protestant civil war, and the working class was sharply divided, we focused on the politics that might serve to win the most radical Republican outcome.

When the Catholic civil rights agitation got underway in 1968-9, we supported it, but criticised it on three counts.

(1) Logically the central issue was the national question, and events would inexorably force it to the fore. The basic underlying civil right the Catholics lacked was the right to national self — determination. We said, in early 1969 and long before the Republican movement, some of whose members were leading the civil rights struggle, said it: the goal has to be to smash the Six County state. We rejected the idea that Irish reunification could only come after an Irish socialist revolution: that was the socialist-sectarian version of “stages theory”.

(2) At the same time, because of its petty-bourgeois, Stalinist and populist-Republican leadership, the entire civil rights movement was needlessly divisive. The demands specific to the PD left — one man (sic) one house, one man one job, one man one vote — were inevitably seen by Protestants as a desire to redress what little there was. The issue could have been dynamically and progressively posed in transitional demand terms: build more houses, thus creating more jobs, etc. etc. PD did something like that on occasion (in the February 1969 election, for instance), but it was never central for them.

(3) We criticised the left-wing civil rights movement (PD and its mentor IS) for political confusion on partition and the national question. We also criticised them for organising provocative marches and demonstrations in Protestant areas which were helping stoke up a sectarian explosion.

We tried to bring the national question to the centre in 1969 by posing it like this: the mainly Catholic areas (about half the land area of Northern Ireland) should secede to the Republic. This

was based on the idea that it would make the Northern state unviable.

The belief that secession of the Catholic areas would force the Protestants into a united Ireland was a major reason why the Free State made the deal they did in 1921. Lloyd George promised that a Boundary Commission would in fact redraw the boundaries, thus making Northern Ireland unviable.

In fact, as earlier articles have shown, secession was anyway the trend in Northern Ireland. Three times before August 1969, Catholic Derry, two miles from the border with the 26 Counties, had set up barricades to keep out Northern Ireland state personnel. In August 1969 Catholic Derry and Catholic West Belfast set up "free" areas guarded by their own militias.

But it is clear in retrospect secession was an artificial way to pose the question of the smashing of the Six County state. In the light of experience since then, there can be no doubt that a Protestant state stripped of the mainly Catholic areas would be viable because the Protestants would make it so.

At the September 1969 IS conference the IS leadership used a disloyal misrepresentation of it to distract the discussion. In the meantime they had changed their line from opposition to the British troops to effective support for them, and we were campaigning against this

**T**HE massive revolt of the Catholics in 1968 and after, and then the rapid growth of a new IRA after 1970, forced us to reconsider and modify our assessments, and to respond politically to the new facts.

Many Irish socialists responded initially with the proclamation that "socialism-is-the-only-answer", neglecting the national question. We did not. On the contrary, during the dispute in IS in 1969 we were perhaps the first on the left to point to the nationalist logic of the civil rights struggle, and to argue for raising the national question boldly.

But as the IRA war reshaped Irish politics, we did not go in for romanticism and flights of fantasy about the Catholic revolt being the socialist revolution in the style of Cliff, Palmer of Lawless in 1969, or that what was happening in Ireland was the socialist revolution — "The Permanent Revolution" — in its first, national, stage, like the Mandel FI people later, especially in Britain. Even when the Catholic revolt was apparently most successful, we pointed to its limitations.

"The Northern Ireland Catholics fight in isolation, in the most unfavourable conditions imaginable. The rearguard of the Irish fight for national freedom, they are betrayed and abandoned by the 'leaders' of the Irish nation, and are simultaneously cut off from the allies who would make an advance on a socialist basis possible — the Orange majority of the Northern Ireland working class..." (*Workers' Fight*, 23 July 1972)

We defined what was happening as primarily a Catholic revolt with a limited potential of solving the national question. It was the revolt of the Six County Catholics, not a rebirth of the 1918 all-Ireland nationalist upsurge. It was limited as an anti-imperialist movement because it was confined to the Six Counties and because of the split working class there.

Here the tendency was guided, and in some important respects let itself be politically imprisoned by, an interpretation of the politics of the early Communist International — the *Theses on the National and Colonial Question* of the Second Congress of 1920 and the records of the Congress discussion.

The Communist International distinguished between *revolutionary nationalists* and the rest. The revolutionary nationalists were those who actually fought imperialism and colonialism. It was the duty of Marxists, while retaining their own independence, to back them.

That was our guiding idea, buttressed as it was by a whole system of linked ideas. The unpleasant truth is that we were guilty of that for which we did, and do, sometimes denounce others on the left — letting ourselves degenerate into "paint-by-numbers" Marxists.

The point is that the tactics and principles of the 1920 Comintern — though they remain the basic framework of all communist politics on colonial-imperial oppression and active resistance to it — simply did not "fit" Northern Ireland. Despite Britain's role in Irish history and in partitioning the country, the existence of the Irish Protestant-Unionists as a social reality and a political force meant that Britain was not playing in Northern Ireland then a straightforward imperialist role.

The truth is always concrete. In the tendency's assessment of Ireland we got entangled in an incoherent mix of analysis and images and models from Irish-British history. Eventually we managed to untangle them. But that is general. The specifics of the dispute of "troops out" in IS in 1969-70 will be dealt with in a later article, as will "secession". Here, I will say only that debate in IS, and the centrality of the "troops out" slogan in it, was shaped by the fact that IS had *dropped* the slogan, more than anything else.

**W**HEN the Provisional IRA launched its military offensive in 1971, we critically supported their right to fight against the British government in that way. We defended it outspokenly in the British labour movement.

We did not use our previous assessment of the improbability of a revolutionary reunification of Ireland short of a socialist revolution to draw "sectarian" and "abstentionist" conclusions about the actual struggle that had erupted. But we did not forget that assessment. In fact the 23 years of war and the aftermath have in their own way established very clearly the truth of that assessment.

We maintained a critical political stance towards the IRA. In the early '70s, when such a thing existed, we reprinted Irish socialist criticisms of the IRA from People's Democracy and from the League for a Workers' Republic.

At best we believed that the Catholic and IRA revolt would force Britain and the Irish bourgeoisie into a radical reorganisa-

tion of the Irish state system. Of course it did: Protestant Stormont was abolished in March 1972 and direct rule substituted. In November 1985 Dublin and London signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, giving Dublin a share in the political decision-making in Northern Ireland.

Despite many important twists and turns, the basic facts of the situation remained unchanged, in stalemate, for a long time after 1972. Even though ultimately the IRA was defeated on its political objective — a united Ireland — the British Army could not defeat the IRA. The Catholics could not defeat the combined forces of the British Army and the Protestants. They could never have "beaten" the Protestants, even without the British, in the sense of conquering them and the territory in the north-east where they are a majority: the idea that they should have wanted to is Catholic-nationalist chauvinism pushed to the point of lunacy.

### The only conceivable positive solution, given the facts of the situation or anything resembling them, was a united Ireland with federalism.

Socialists, we believed, had to formulate ideas that would show some way forward from the situation as it was, not as we hoped it might be some day.

As noted above, we advocated autonomy for the Protestant-majority area, which implies a federal arrangement within Ireland, from as early as 1969. We were not the only people to advocate Protestant autonomy then — John Palmer and Chris Gray did in IS journal in April 1969 — but it came to be an idea which among the left was unique to us. The importance of this element in our politics increased with the 20 year stalemate.

In this and other aspects of the Irish-British question we differed from other Marxists. The attitude of those many on the left who argued that "troops out" and "the defeat of British imperialism" were the crux of the Irish question, and all else was pettifoggery and probably "capitulation to imperialism", was empty phrasemongering (to use Lenin's phrases for that sort of politics). But for decades rational discussion of the "Irish question" was rendered impossible by a plague of such phrasemongering which engulfed the left.

#### THE TROOPS OUT SLOGAN

**O**NE of the great errors of the Workers' Fight-AWL tendency was, in the 1970s, to let "troops out" become something of a political fetish. That led, in our publications, to the nonsensical combination of attempts at honest analysis of the realities of Northern Ireland, with deployment of a slogan that grew not out of the situation or the analysis of it in our articles, but from preconceptions and "revolutionary routinism".

Above all it grew from a stubborn refusal to understand — even when what we said about the real situation in Northern Ireland pointed to it — that the fundamental fact in Northern Ireland was not that Britain was an imperialist power being imperialist, but the division of the Irish people and the will of the Six Counties majority to remain British.

Like many others, we were prisoners of Irish and British history, of the terrible story of oppression, would-be genocide, and then botched Liberal efforts (after 1870-81) to sort things out, that was Britain's role in Irish history.

There was no all-Ireland nationalist movement. There was a nationalist movement of the Northern Catholics (10% of the population of the island) which was regarded with bitter hostility by the Northern Protestants (20%) and sporadic sympathy and much alarm by the Southern Catholics (70%).

In relation to Ireland, "troops out" could not be sufficient. Using the pre-1914 term "social democrat" for what is now revolutionary socialism, Lenin argued:

"There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a 'negative' Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to 'sharpen' proletarian consciousness against imperialism' without at the same time offering a positive answer to the question of how Social Democracy will solve the problem when it assumes power. A 'negative' slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not 'sharpen', but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation."

Nowhere was that more true than on the slogan "Troops out of Ireland".

In the mid-70s we argued against the notion (put forward by the Mandelites) that a mass movement could and should be built in Britain on the single slogan, "troops out".

We never saw "troops out" as sufficient, even before, in 1987, we formally decided not to use the slogan and to advocate troops out only as part of a political settlement. We came to register that if British troops had quit Ireland during the Provo war and its aftermath, that would certainly have unleashed a sectarian civil war, leading to repatriation.

Self-determination? Unify Ireland? With the Northern Protestants are actively hostile to it? The Provisional IRA was never strong enough to do it. The 26 County ruling class had no real wish for it.

The scene would have been set for a section of the Protestants to make a drive for an "independent Ulster". That drive would involve probably, the mass slaughter, rounding-up and driving-out of the Catholics from Protestant areas, and of Protestants

from Catholic areas. Ireland would be irrevocably and bitterly split into neatly reinforced Orange and Green states.

The conventional pro-IRA left answer to this, that "there's already a bloodbath", was never a serious answer. Simmering war with hundreds of casualties is different from all-out war with many thousands. Different not only in immediate human terms, but also in terms of the implications for the future possibilities of socialism — that is, of the Catholic and Protestant workers.

The other answer, "revolutions always involve bloodshed", was no better. There was never a comparison between the revolutionary violence of the working class against its exploiters, or of a subject nation against a conquering army, and the violence of two working-class communities slaughtering each other.

All that meant that we had to couple "troops out" with proposals for a solution within Ireland — and condemn those who called for troops out without any such proposal as mindless phrasemongers.

**T**HE only conceivable positive solution, given the facts of the situation or anything resembling them, was a united Ireland with federalism: that is an attempt to negotiate between the sections of the Irish people and conciliate the Protestants. That would probably involve the recreation of closer British-Irish ties so that the two islands would provide the broader framework within which the intra-Irish conflicts could be resolved.

The conciliation, realistically, would be backed up with a certain element of coercion — i.e. strong indications to the Protestants that prospects for an alternative to a united Ireland were pretty bleak — and would involve some repression against die-hard Protestant groups. But that was different from straight conquest of the Protestants. Logically, conquest was the only alternative to such conciliation, given the Protestants' attitude. But it was not possible — who would conquer them? — and not desirable either, from any working class or consistently democratic point of view.

It was possible to evade these issues by wishful thinking. Possible to fantasise that at the crucial point, the nationalist struggle would magically "grow over" into a working-class struggle for socialism, and that in some "dialectical" leap the Protestants would be converted to Republicanism or socialist republicanism. It was possible to remain blinkered in a sort of inverted British nationalism, saying that "the defeat of British imperialism" and its effect on the "balance of world forces" were the things that really matter, and that a positive solution and the avoidance of sectarian civil war within Ireland was a secondary issue.

It was possible to delude oneself with a crude and idiotic theory of the Protestants as pure pawns of Britain, so that their reactionary ideas would drain away like water out of a bath once the "plug" of British troops was pulled out.

But that was not Marxism. It was not serious, honest politics. We are not reliable anti-imperialists if our "anti-imperialism" is only as strong as our ability to use consoling myths to shield our eyes from uncomfortable facts and likely developments — until they explode in our faces. Such fantasies and evasions could never allow those socialists who poisoned themselves with them to make any political contribution to the work of uniting the Irish working class.

The "federal" proposal — which, incidentally, we later discovered, had been put forward at the end of the 1940s by the Irish Trotskyists (such as Matt Merrigan, a left-wing activist and trade union official in later decades) — might not avert sectarian civil war, either. Whether anything short of a mass socialist movement uniting the workers of both communities (or a big section of them) could end the impasse in a progressive sense was to us doubtful. Peace in Northern Ireland now is better than the Provo war, but the post-Good-Friday-Agreement structures, based on rigid communal blocs, can not but entrench communalism.

The tremendous economic changes in Ireland, making it one of the most prosperous parts of the European Union, and now in Northern Ireland too — changes in which an all-island economy is coming into being for the first time in history — work to soften communalism; but it remains entrenched in the political system, and in the Six Counties partition framework.

Our programme was designed — on the basis of the facts and the needs of a consistently democratic solution to the Catholic-Protestant, British-Irish conflict — to develop that united Irish workers' socialist movement. We would not blunt our socialist programme by false "realism", by getting tied up in working out "answers" for the existing big forces in a situation over which we had no control anyway. But a socialist programme — in Ireland, and in all comparable situations — needs to include democratic demands, and a possibility of relating to the political situation now, more concretely than just by saying that a united class movement would be better. Yes, it would. The problem is to get it, to have a programme that deals with the democratic issues and can unite workers across the communal divide.

Whether a revolutionary socialist programme can have any positive influence on the situation within Ireland depends on there being a material force to fight for such a programme. At present there is no such force. But no force can be gathered without first proclaiming a programme. And no adequate programme can be formulated without first looking at reality coldly and "saying what it is". Revolutionary socialist politics begins with telling the truth about the reality it has to confront.

This summary demonstrates, I think, the consistency of the approach that we have had since well before the beginning of the Catholic revolt. Whatever inconsistencies may be found in this or that detail, the fundamental approach was correct. But we also made serious mistakes, which I will survey and discuss in the next article.

[All the quotations are from articles written by the present writer, sometimes together with Rachel Lever, and one with Gery Lawless.]

# Solidarity with Iranian workers

BY HARRY GLASS

**T**HURSDAY 6 March was a day of action for Iranian trade unionists facing political repression, jail and torture. The Rail, Maritime and Transport Union organised leafletting at stations in London, Edinburgh, Bristol Cardiff and Liverpool for the jailed Iranian trade unionists Mansoor Ossanloo and Mahmoud Salehi.

This action is an important example to trade unionists across Britain of the kind of work needed to put real international pressure on the Iranian government.

Mansoor Osanloo belongs to the

Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, a trade union founded three years ago.

He has been beaten, kidnapped, arrested and had his tongue sliced as a warning against speaking out. He is now being held in Evin Prison in Tehran, where he is in danger of losing his sight due to an eye injury.

Even though the union is free, democratic and legal, it has been violently attacked by Iranian security forces.

The action was called on March 6 because this is two weeks prior to the Iranian Parliamentary elections. Oppression of the independent workers' movement in Iran is growing.

Find out more about the campaign and stay in touch with all campaign developments at the ITF website:

- For further details visit the ITF website: [www.itfglobal.org](http://www.itfglobal.org)

## IRANIAN WORKERS LASHED

**L**AST week, the Iranian Workers' Solidarity Network reported that three labour activists who were arrested and tried following last year's May Day celebrations had each been lashed 10 times. The appeal court in Sanandaj, in Iranian Kurdistan, sentenced 11 workers who took part in a May Day event in 2007 to receive 10 lashes and pay a 2 million rials (\$214) fine. The sentences of the other eight activists are expected to be carried out in the next few days.

These workers, most of whom are members of the Unemployed Union, have been found guilty of "disturbing public order" and "taking part in an illegal gathering". Some are also awaiting the outcome of their appeals against sentences of two and half years in jail. If they go down, they will join Mansoor Osanloo, Mahmoud Salehi and countless other socialists and trade unionists imprisoned by the regime.

Although the whipping of women's rights activists stretches back to 1981 and the consolidation of the Islamic regime, this is the first time that labour activists have been sentenced to be lashed.

It is all the more reason for workers of the world to make solidarity with Iranian workers a high priority in the labour movement.

## Teach-in for abortion rights

BY AMY FISHER

**A**lthough this year has seen no defeats for the abortion rights movement, we cannot afford to be complacent. The government has indicated it won't seek to reduce the time limit at the moment but this is predicted on scientific evidence of foetal viability – basing time limits on this means any medical advances could threaten abortion rights. At the same time, David Cameron has spoken about the need to reduce the time limit, after leaders of all three parties came out for a reduction during the last election.

It is not enough that we have suffered no defeats this year – abortion rights activists must go on the offensive, for a real right to choose. It's hard to choose an abortion when the NHS is being privatised out of existence, and it's hard to choose to have a child when the minimum wage is pathetically low, state benefits are being cut and free, good quality childcare is non-existent. The work Abortion Rights do in parliament is important, but it cannot substitute for a mass, active movement fighting for a right to choose that actually means something.

Feminist Fightback is following up on 2007's torchlit march for abortion rights and our continued campaigning for full reproductive freedom with an abortion rights teach-in, 12 April, at London School of Economics. Sessions will include how to campaign: a practical workshop; Imperialism and Motherhood – race, empire and reproductive freedoms; Getting your message across; making the pro-choice case; The current situation: NHS, law, state provision, internationally; Planning for a national day of action.

This event is aimed at feminists, trade unionists, students, school students and others. Come and learn more about the historical and current situation, develop campaigning skills, and get involved in a militant pro-choice campaign.

• 12 April, 12-5pm at Clement House Building, London School of Economics, London, WC2A (Holborn tube).

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