

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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ANTI-FASCISM

SDL Glasgow turn-out flops

BY DALE STREET

The Scottish Defence League (SDL) had planned to stage a city-centre rally in Glasgow on 14 November. In the event, they spent most of their time sitting in a pub, reliant on the protection of a couple of hundred police officers.

"Scotland United" (SU) — launched in October to meet the SDL threat — staged a rally followed by a demonstration through the city centre on the day. It staged the rally and demonstration as an alternative to mobilising to confront the SDL.

An alternative group, "Glasgow Anti-Fascist Alliance" (GAFA), was also set up because activists were concerned that any SDL activity carried with it the threat of physical attack — or, at the very least, intimidation and threats — directed at members of ethnic minorities. Not confronting the SDL would only embolden them and give them the confidence to stage further protests, which, again, could easily flow over into racist attacks.

GAFA mobilised to do this.

Around 300 people had turned up at the GAFA assembly point on 14 November. An SWP/UAF contingent was present, but not in any great numbers. The police were out in force at Cambridge Street, where the SDL were. After a few minutes of facing up to the police lines, the GAFA contingent marched back through the city centre to join up with the SU event. With the benefit of hindsight, the GAFA contingent should have stayed put.

In the event there were fewer than a hundred of SDL.

After staging a tiny demonstration, they turned around and marched back to the pub, where they were put on buses by the police and driven away.

GAFA supporters wanted to return to where the SDL were but SWP/UAF organisers told people to stay put in Glasgow Green (on the SU protest) and not to head off to Cambridge Street. The bloc which did leave Glasgow Green was devoid of the SWP/UAF.

There were about 2,000 on the SU demonstration. But by this time the SDLers were already on their way home.

The SDL suffered a real setback. Only around a hundred of them turned up and they had to rely on police protection.

Again these events emphasise the huge gap between those intent on confronting the SDL and the "official" labour movement. There was not even a single trade union banner nor any kind of organised turnout from the unions on the GAFA mobilisation.

• Full report and analysis: www.workersliberty.org/node/13355

PUBLIC SPENDING

They say the crisis is over...

BY RHODRI EVANS

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

Since much that local councils do is a matter of legal obligations, with their costs largely fixed beyond each council's control, ten per cent is a huge squeeze.

It comes from probable cuts by the New Labour government in the local government "settlement" for April 2010 (tax money redistributed from central government to local government); from reductions in local income, from fees and charges, already suffered by councils; and from losses by some councils in the collapse of the Icelandic banks.

Share prices have been going up since

March. Bankers' bonuses will be fat again this Christmas. There is talk of the economic crisis being over.

But, for working-class people rather than bosses and bankers, the worst of the crisis is yet to come.

The Tories say that if they win the general election — as they probably will — they plan cuts that within three months will make them the most unpopular government in Britain since World War Two.

New Labour plans cuts, too, starting with local government.

The cuts in services are sure to bring more cuts in jobs, and more contracting-out, and will spill over into further job cuts outside local government, in suppliers, contractors, etc.

All these cuts come from a drive to offset the huge borrowings made by central government in order to bail out the banks. Their urgency comes not from the

government having exhausted its ability to borrow, but from the desire to keep the British government's standing good in the international financial markets where it borrows.

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

Local labour-movement campaigns against cuts already exist in some areas, usually where gung-ho councils have tried to make an early start on the cuts. They have won some victories.

For the avalanche of cuts coming over the next months, we need a whole network of labour-movement campaigns against the cuts, pulling the local government workers' unions into action alongside them, and fighting for a workers' plan in response to the crisis and for a workers' government as the political answer.

HIGHER EDUCATION CUTS

A wave of cuts in universities

BY ED MALTBY

On Monday 16 November 100 students and teachers of the University of the Arts London staged a demonstration outside the Chelsea College of Art and Design.

They were protesting against the management's new business plan for the University which will see 183 jobs cut, including 36 compulsory redundancies and the elimination of 16 courses in one school alone, the London College of Communication (LCC).

The week before, students at LCC, organised in the LCC Oppose Campaign, had staged a sit-in protest in one of the lecture theatres at the Elephant and Castle LCC campus.

Despite the sell-out leadership of the students' union ignoring the campaign, and management hiring security contractors and getting court injunctions to turf the students out of their lecture theatre, the campaign has garnered mass support among students at LCC. It has increased the confidence of teaching and admin staff across the whole of the University.

The cuts, the heavy-handed repression of students, and the sacking of the lecturers' union rep, Kulbir Basra, are the work of a new management team, recently brought in to transform the LCC into a new-look, prestigious, profit-making operation.

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

Management want to make savings on staff and teaching, and instead to plough money into prestigious building projects. This is an approach familiar to students around the country — at Leeds University, the anti-cuts campaign has taken up the slogan, "What can a brick

teach us?", as management cuts jobs to pay for an Olympic swimming pool and a pavilion.

Management have also "privatised the space" at LCC — hiring security guards and restricting students' access to the school, turning an institution of education into a private, heavily controlled space which is more like a modern shopping centre.

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

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

The UCU at UAL has been mobilising teachers against the redundancies. One rep told us that union membership had increased 30% in the last term: "People are emailing me every week who had never previously considered union membership. The move has shifted from blithe ignorance... If it came to it, we would now be capable of staging industrial action".

While students told us that their Oppose campaign would have never got off the ground without the assistance of certain courageous UCU members, UCU activists countered that the student

In occupation

mobilisation was giving confidence and courage to their members.

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

AROUND THE COUNTRY

The attacks at LCC are only one part of a nationwide wave of cuts.

Staff at Westminster University are striking for their back pay; students at Leeds University are organising a campaign against staff cuts; teaching jobs are also under threat at UCL, Sheffield University, London Metropolitan, and many other higher and further education institutions besides.

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

• Contact the Leeds campaign: email en08cw@leeds.ac.uk or ucu@leeds.ac.uk
On Facebook search "Student Protests Against Job Cuts at Leeds"

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

• For more information about the global day of action, see: <http://emancipating-education-for-all.org/>

For a real united front against fascism!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Israel's peace movement makes solidarity with Palestinians

Back the Palestinians, reject "Jew conspiracy" theories

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

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

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

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

The idea that these difficulties justify continued Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory, the slow expansion of Israeli settlements, the gruesome winking-out of Palestinians, and at the end the elimination of the Palestinians as a distinct people — that idea is compatible only with extreme Israeli chauvinism.

Justice demands that the Palestinians have their own state; so does any hope of general peace for generations to come. Two, three, four or more generations, most likely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Paranoid right-wingers in the USA even believe that the USA is ruled by a "Zionist Occupation Government", "ZOG".

Now, it is a matter of fact that there is a powerful pro-Israel lobby in the USA. In that pluto-democratic system, rich people and organised pressure groups buy elected representatives by providing money without which they can not effectively stand for election and win. Organised lobbies can thus put themselves in a commanding position vis-a-vis the legislature, and secure their own interests.

It is notorious that the tobacco industry, the oil industry, the arms industry, big media corporations, and many other "interests" have thus been able to avoid regulation that would serve the public better.

American politics is also in part structured in "national" blocs.

Second, third, fourth, etc. generation immigrants still call themselves "Greek", "Italian", "Irish", etc. The Irish lobby was once immensely powerful. It got the

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US Congress to vote for Irish independence during Ireland's war for independence from Britain.

There is an "Arab lobby" in the USA, mainly, it appears, of corporate bosses with economic ties to Arab countries. The Israeli lobby is part of the system, and a very powerful and intensely motivated part of it.

And it is not only a matter of a pro-Israel lobby sustained by Jews in the USA. One of the strangest things in modern America has been the conversion en masse of the old Christian anti-semitic "constituency" into fervent Zionists — of "the-Jews-killed-Christ" types who would in the past have blamed Jews for the operations of financial institutions, and once expressed their prejudices in such populist phrases as William Jennings Bryan's refusal "to be crucified on a cross of gold".

Today they argue that the Bible says that in the days before the end of the world, the Second Coming of Christ and the day of God's final judgement on humankind, Israel will be reborn. Lo and behold, Israel is reborn, and all is right with the Bible prophecy.

Here the intellectual and spiritual barbarism in which so many Americans live is the basis of an unreasoning commitment to Israel by millions of Americans. In the USA, all candidates for high office, the presidency for example, have to publicly proclaim a strong religious faith if they are to have a chance of election. Intertwined with the USA's wonders of technology are still the superstitions of the Dark Ages.

So the Israel lobby is strong. So are other lobbies. With the Israel lobby alone, we get in response a revival of old conspiracy theories.

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

To make that translation you need to have a certain predilection towards it — or to find the idea, once formulated, powerful because, subconsciously or consciously, you tap into the vast septic reservoir of ideas about "the Jews" and "Jewish control" that is there for the tapping into.

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

theory.

Channel Four's *Inside Britain's Israel Lobby* was part of that.

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

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

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

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

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

And it is not all that new — the sugar industry waged a vigorous campaign during the 1945-51 Labour government against a proposal to nationalise it.

The pro-Israel lobby at Westminster is part of a whole system which is long-established and recently much inflated. To present it as something hidden and especially sinister is, whatever the programme-makers say, to foment belief in "Jewish conspiracy" — or to tap into a pool of anti-Jewish paranoia that exists in British political sub-culture too.

That is what the Channel Four programme did, without making any real "revelation" to justify its tabloid-journalism-style "exposé" format and self-promotion.

Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Guardian*, spoke on camera of the exceptional number of protest letters which any criticism of Israel provokes. So — there is a sizeable and passionately active group of people who back Israel? A large number of Jews in Britain back the Israeli Right? That is news? It is surprising? There is something specially sinister about it? Only if you slot it into preconceptions about a Zionist or Jewish network or conspiracy. Given the history of the 20th century, there is nothing surprising or sinister in passionate diaspora-Jewish support for Israel.

The "rabbi emeritus" of the Reform Synagogue in London spoke on camera of Israel as like South African apartheid. How? There are two systems of law in operation, one for Israeli Jews and another one in the Occupied Territories. A serious point and one worth thinking about.

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

And so on.

There really is a powerful and highly motivated pro-Israel lobby, in which many Jews are active. It exerts influence within the US and British pluto-democratic systems. That is fact. To go beyond that, to "exaggerate"; to postulate something more, a sinister Jewish conspiracy, is not harmless.

In recent times the financial segment of capitalism has justly come in for much criticism. Not enough, but good! But the whole of capitalism, not just the banks, is rotten.

And the traditional corollary of the viewpoint that financial capital is particularly bad is that the problem with capitalism is "Jewish capital".

A powerful cultural reservoir of "Jewish conspiracy" ideas exists. The connection of the current criticism of financial capital with that reservoir is as easy as raging fire jumping across a small gap. Programmes like *Inside Britain's Israel Lobby* blaze a trail for such connections. Right wingers and fascists "on the ground" draw out the implications.

Anti-Semitism in Britain has risen alarmingly in recent times. Jewish conspiracy nonsense, even timid and half-hearted stuff such as *Inside Britain's Israel Lobby* cannot but feed it.

A Jew-hunt will not help the Palestinians.

Issues in the conflict

The Palestinians are a people under foreign — Israeli — occupation and control. They have been in that position for two generations, for more than two-thirds of the time that Israel has existed.

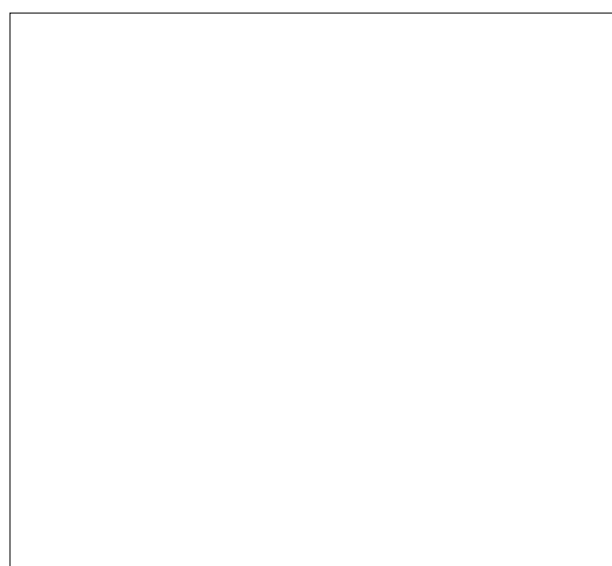
Yes, Israeli occupation is brutal, and it is predatory. Over decades Israeli settlers have inched slowly into colonisation of the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, relentlessly winking out and displacing the original inhabitants. They are still advancing now.

Plainly it is the intention of the dominant forces in Israel to colonise and permanently annex as much as they can of Palestine.

Israel has strength, power, and overall control of relations with the Palestinians. It could now, probably, reach a modus vivendi with the surrounding Arab states and with the Palestinians on the basis of accepting a Palestinian state on the territory Israel occupied in 1967, or even that territory with some deductions. It wasn't always so, but it is so now, and has been for a long time.

Israel chooses not to. It holds the Palestinian people as a spider holds a fly in its web, slowly devouring it. Any settlement that led to an independent Palestinian state would put a stop to that process. Israel does not want such a settlement.

The consequence of long-continuing Israeli occupation may well be to make the emergence of an independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory impossible. The longer things go on without a political settlement, without the setting up of a Palestinian state, the more the very possibility of such a state, ever, recedes towards impossibility.



The placement of settlements and roads indicates that this is the Israeli aim.

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

Israel had to fight for its very existence in 1948, against five invading Arab armies, one at least of which, the Egyptian, openly raised the slogan, "Drive the Jews into the sea"; and against a sudden Egyptian attack in 1973.

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

nise Israel.

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

The existence of so many people classified as "Palestinian refugees" is the result of the deliberate denial to Palestinians of the right to work and citizenship in most of the Arab states surrounding Israel. The Arab states are as much responsible as Israel is for the present "refugee problem".

The demand for the "return" of the refugees is the cutting edge, still, of a drive to destroy Israel, and is in contradiction to the Arab League's declared willingness to reach a settlement with Israel in return for a Palestinian state in the territories occupied in 1967.

It is the cutting edge, also, of the claim that all pre-1948 Palestine is "Islamic land" and must be reclaimed. It is another way of proposing the end of the Jewish state. No national state would peacefully accept such a proposition, or anything like it.

Without the abandonment of the "Right of Return" the Arab League offer of peace for land — a Palestinian state — is a sham. It indicates that they have no real intention of "normalising" relations with Israel.

The idea that the Arab League will be willing to transmute the demand for the "right of return" into reparations payments and maybe some token "returns" is untested.

ROYAL MAIL DISPUTE

Rank and file anger

By EDWARD MALTBY

On 18 November CWU postal workers' union leader Dave Ward sent out a letter to union branches about the "Interim Agreement" made with Royal Mail bosses by the union leaders on Thursday 5 November.

Responding to widespread rank and file anger against the deal, Ward wrote that "genuine problems persist" and "the Postal Executive [of the union] has agreed to review the position next Tuesday" [24 November].

However, the bottom line is that "divisional engagement must continue in an effort to resolve problems".

The letter also hails the first meeting in the national negotiations between CWU and Royal Mail bosses, to take place on 19 November.

In an attached "CWU reps' brief", Ward claims it as a great prize that "Royal Mail are now locked in to a process that for the first time ever will include an independent third party" — namely Roger Poole, who now works for Business Link London (a business advisory service), but was until the early 1990s a NUPE union official.

Ward says that the CWU can return to strike action if Royal Mail is seen to "break an agreement supported by an independent chair and ACAS". The problem is that all Royal Mail have agreed to do is negotiate — without the CWU setting any clear bottom lines — and Ward seems to make CWU action depend on the "independent chair" and ACAS agreeing that Royal Mail has not negotiated well enough.

In the Interim Agreement, CWU agreed to call off its strikes over job cuts and speed-up for at least two weeks. The bosses agreed to negotiate, at national level over a new agreement on jobs and conditions, and at local level, retrospectively, over changes imposed during 2009. No concrete concessions were extracted from management. Royal Mail bosses say, plausibly, that everything they have given in the Interim Agreement was already on offer before CWU's national industrial action.

CWU leaders say they will review the progress of negotiations every two weeks, and can return to strike action if dissatisfied, since the strike ballot remains live.

But the Interim Agreement contains strong language committing the union to stop both national and local strikes, with Royal Mail promising only to negotiate and not to impose further changes before the end of 2009.

Negotiation is good, but the union should negotiate from a position of strength, with a clear, comprehensive list of demands, incorporating all the "local" issues, and with a clear idea of what it will do if there is a failure to agree.

The strike was solid, workplaces are well-organised, and strong solidarity committees were forming. Royal Mail was under severe pressure from the strike, especially in the run-up to Christmas.

At a national meeting of branch secretaries in London on 12 November, Dave Ward and the union's Postal Executive Committee gave assurances that "If Royal Mail does not significantly shift" on unilateral changes and bullying, then the union would schedule more national

action, possibly within a week. The 18 November letter makes no mention of industrial action, but only of "divisional engagement" with the option of "further national intervention" to negotiate over problems.

Postal workers are massively dissatisfied with the Interim Agreement. The membership was overwhelmingly against stopping the action during negotiations.

A few branch secretaries and area reps defended the PEC's decision, but the tone of the discussion at workplaces was overwhelmingly against the agreement.

Postal workers expressed:

- frustration that the pressure on Royal Mail of an accumulated backlog of mail — pressure which had been paid for out of members' lost wages — was being frittered away;

- concern that the "truce" may become a surrender, because it will be difficult to gear the membership back up for action.

- criticism of the high-handed manner in which Dave Ward kept the membership in the dark until the last possible minute.

One London postal worker told us that the PEC was wary of letting the national industrial action run on because, "they are scared of losing control of the membership; of being overtaken by events".

A West Country CWU member told us that "a secret motivation for this new tough talk" — around 12 November — "was that things had got so bitter that the PEC was worried that there would be unofficial strikes. There is not much of a tradition in the CWU of lobbying and political opposition — instead people tend to react to things by just walking out".

The word in the offices that Royal Mail bosses are mostly flouting by the "spirit" of the Interim Agreement, at least as the Postal Executive presented it. The Agreement was meant to bring a general "cooling down" of hostilities.

Instead, management attacks have continued unabated. In various workplaces, management are still using harsh discipline to bully workers and victimise the more militant CWU members — taking people off pay and suspending workers for such offences as "wilful delay" — i.e. failure to complete one's shift on time. It seems that management attacks are worst in London.

It unclear whether this aggression is the result of a strategy being handed down from Royal Mail's top bosses, or local management initiative. Either way, the top bosses are not countermanding it.

In spite of the Interim Agreement, the postal workers are still strong. The mood among postal workers is still for the fight to continue until real concessions have been won. Solidarity committees and real public support for the postal workers still exist. If postal workers fight on, and seize the advantage they still have in the run-up to Christmas, they can win.

The only way to be sure that the dispute is strong and conducted correctly is to build an organised rank-and-file network to monitor and control the dispute. Branches and reps opposed to the Interim Agreement should convene a national meeting as soon as possible and formulate a bottom-line list of positive demands going beyond Dave Ward's single, bland demand for "proper negotiations".

Don't let truce become surrender

By A LONDON POSTAL WORKER

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

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

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

Now we've had a chance to read the "interim agreement", we can see precisely what we've got.

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

The agreement commits management to reviewing changes they have introduced through executive action. Reps have been asking for that — a serious review of duties they have taken out, of

walks they have collapsed, of shift times they've changed.

It says work should return to its proper mail centre — we have to monitor that.

It says "normal resourcing" — for us that must mean casuals are only used in the usual way in the run up to Christmas.

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

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

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

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

But we also need to assert control over the dispute, electing strike committees in every workplace and sending delegates from them to regional and national meetings. The disastrous "interim agreement" shows control has to be in the hands of those affected on the ground.

After Xmas, who knows?

A CWU rep in Glasgow gave Solidarity his personal opinion of the Interim Agreement and the Postal Executive Committee's decision to call off the campaign of industrial action:

"I've seen the Interim Agreement. But, personally, I'm a bit worried about it because of our dealings with Royal Mail since the 2007 dispute. I see this dispute as an extension of the 2007 one, because that dispute was never really resolved.

I think Royal Mail are being a little bit coy. They want to get the Christmas mail delivered, and then in January we'll have no leverage left because mail volumes go down in the New Year. And then Royal Mail could dig their heels in and say: 'Two fingers to you!'

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

They were asking drivers before they went out if they were prepared to cross picket lines. When drivers said that they wouldn't, they were sent home without

pay, and management banned people from taking their vans home with them, which they need to get to work the next day.

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

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

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

IN BRIEF:

Defend Caroline Bedale

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

Caroline's crime was to continue to support victimised activist Karen Reissman (from the same branch) after Unison withdrew legal assistance her.

Despite the union stating that it also supported Karen's case (despite the withdrawal of legal support), Caroline has been found guilty of "acting in a manner prejudicial to the union".

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

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

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

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

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

Not so Superdrug

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

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

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

The workers have called for solidarity including a boycott of Superdrug shops.

Send messages to superdrugstrikers@yahoo.co.uk and donations to Superdrug Strike Fund, Unite the Union, 55 Calls Lane, Leeds LS2 7BW.

JERSEY CUTS

Workers should not pay for the bosses' crisis!

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

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

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

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

Job cuts and privatisation. For instance, twenty jobs at Jersey Water are under threat as public property is semi-privatised through "incorporation" – preparing for it to be sold off. Jersey Telecom has also been incorporated. We can expect more to come.

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

No. When the States [Jersey's parliament] argues that because workers in the UK are taking cuts, so should we – or that because workers in the private sector are taking cuts, so should the public

sector – that's an excuse to attack all workers. If one group of workers succeed in stopping cuts and getting a decent pay rise, it will make the situation better for all workers to struggle. We need to take on the bosses, not fall out amongst ourselves.

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

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

DEMANDS

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

- No job losses, no cuts in services.
- Tax the rich not the poor. Scrap GST. Introduce a proper system of corporation tax, capital gains tax etc – make the bosses pay for the services we need. "20 means 20" is ridiculous – income tax should be progressive so that the rich pay heavily, workers pay less and the

poor pay no tax at all.

- No victimisation of workers involved in strike action. Defend our unions!

WORKERS' POLITICAL VOICE

Why is politics in Jersey the preserve of the rich? Why do workers and the poor, who make up the big majority of people in Jersey, have to troop to the polls to choose between one or other multi-millionaire Ski Club member every time there's an election? Is it any surprise so many people don't bother to vote?

We agree with the Jersey Democratic Alliance (JDA) that we need party politics in Jersey. Without clear political parties and programs, politics will continue to be dominated by personalities and by individuals and cliques who can use their wealth to hold influence and power.

But what workers need is not a liberal hodgepodge like the JDA, but a workers' party – a party based on the workers' movement, explicitly committed to representing working-class people, electing workers' representatives to the States and seeking to create a workers' government that can serve the interests of the majority as the current government loyally serves the rich.

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

RAIL UNION

A step forward for democracy

BY JANINE BOOTH, DELEGATE FROM LONDON TRANSPORT REGION

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

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

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

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

However, five years' membership is no guarantee of five years' active

involvement, experience or loyalty. Some people gain more experience in three years of activism than others do in twenty years of passive sub-paying.

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

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

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

Unfortunately, other rule changes proposed by branches were defeated. These were proposals for: a longer period of time to submit amendments to

AGM resolutions; a bigger, more representative AGM; and strike committees to be included in the rule book.

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

Bob's speech against the strike committee proposal was also illuminating, as he argued that we should not set up bodies that might disagree with the Executive, and should instead support our national leadership at all times. Bob's was not the only voice against, though: the majority of delegates were not convinced of these three proposals.

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

GAZA

Hamas steps up its control

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

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

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

According to an investigation by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights 87 women activists were prevented by Hamas' Internal Security Service from leaving Gaza to attend the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) conference being convened in Ramallah on the West Bank.

Hamas used the Israeli offensive on Gaza in December 2008/January 2009 to further weaken their internal political rivals. Human Rights Watch notes that, "During Israel's attack on Gaza, Hamas moved violently against its political opponents and those deemed collaborators with Israeli forces. The unlawful arrests, torture, and killings in detention continued even after the fighting

stopped, mocking Hamas's claims to uphold the law."

According to the *Jerusalem Post* Hamas used the Israeli war to renew thousands of "house arrest orders" against Fatah officials and activists.

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

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

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

women.

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

As the new school year began, in late August, pressure was placed on parents to dress their daughters more conservatively. Some female students have been refused entry to schools. Girls are being told they must wear a jilbab and a headscarf. Previously, the uniform typically required for female public school students was a long denim skirt and shirt.

Zeinab Ghonaimy of the Center for

Women's Legal Research and Consulting in Gaza reports that a school administrator slapped one female student in front of her schoolmates for not wearing the jilbab: "Physically assaulting students and humiliating them in front of their peers is simply unacceptable, whatever the reason, and especially to force them to wear certain religious clothing in violation of their religious freedom."

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

Hamas have banned mannequins and the display of women's underwear in shop windows.

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

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

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

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

essary, we will stage a general strike."

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

Ford workers' "No" heard round the world

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

The concessions voted down were to last until 2015. They included severe limitations on the right to strike and a six-year freeze on new-hire pay that had

already been cut in half. The argument of the company and the union leadership was that these measures were needed to "match" the labour cost savings at bankrupt Chrysler and General Motors.

The result was a 72% No vote.

• Full report from the US socialist group Solidarity:

www.workersliberty.org/fordworkersno

New Zealand students fight ban

In October 2009 two socialist student activists were "trespassed" or banned from Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand, after a fees protest.

Joel Cosgrove, a former Students Association president, and Heleyni Pratley, a former Student Executive member, were "trespassed" for taking part in a protest against fee increases by the University Council. At the protest Cosgrove threw one egg, which he later cleaned up, and Pratley held a sign calling for free education.

The pair were then arrested and charged with trespass when they tried to deliver a petition signed by academics and trade union figures calling for the trespass order to be lifted.

• More on the campaign at: liftthetrespass.wordpress.com

IN BRIEF

Korean workers defend their rights

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

Both the KCTU and FKTU have been involved in a series of protests against

President Lee Myung-Bak's new proposed labour law, which workers see as a direct attack on trade unions. The law would effectively legalise closed shops, as well as forbid employers from paying full-time union activists (those on what is referred to in Britain as "facility time").

Korea's labour movement has a proud recent history of extremely inspiring militancy and is not afraid to wield its power to beat back the government when it attacks workers' interests. Kang Choong-ho, a FKTU official, said "We will thwart the government's policy by mobilising every means possible. If nec-

The higher you go, the worse it gets

MY LIFE AT WORK

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

Tell us a bit about the work you do.

Portering work is very labour intensive and quite physical. There's a certain amount of work that has to be done, so if you don't complete it within your contracted hours then you have to work unpaid overtime.

There's a workforce of about 100 people at my hotel, and the chain employs around 6,000 people nationally. I usually start at about 7 in the morning, and finish at around 5:30.

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

The conditions aren't too bad, but it's a very low paid industry. Everyone who works in hotels is lower paid than similar jobs in other industries. We get paid a little bit more than the minimum wage, but not much more. The big majority of people I work with are on less than £20,000 per year. The typical wage is about £16,000, which is absolutely nothing for central London.

Do you enjoy your work?

I do. The work itself is, well, work, but there's a good atmosphere. It's a fun place to work in, but that's because the people rather than the job make it enjoyable.

What are your bosses like?

At the local level, our managers are okay. Part of that's because local bosses tend to have been promoted from lower grades. The higher you go, the worse it gets. Senior management are absolutely terrible. Directives come down from head office that are physically impossible to follow, so a lot of the time we just don't bother.

The top bosses have no understanding of what it's actually like on the shopfloor. No-one in head office understands the nature of the work and hardly any of them have ever actually done shopfloor-level jobs in the industry. Most of them are just university graduates with backgrounds in business. They know the theory but not the practice.

Is there a union in your workplace and does it do a good job?

No, there's no union. Workplaces like mine are very difficult to unionise because of the incredibly high turnover of staff. Many workers only last a few months in one workplace because it's such a mobile industry. People go from hotel to hotel, and ours tends to be one where they start out before moving on.

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

I'd try and keep people on longer before having them moved on to a different hotel. From a union point of view, the turnover issue needs looking at because it makes it almost impossible to organise. The other thing, of course, is a big increase in pay. Our levels of pay are simply not enough to live on in central London.

A week in the life...

We begin an occasional series in which AWL members describe a week (or thereabouts) in their political life.

THE LONDON UNDERGROUND WORKER

Wednesday (11 November): Had a "union day" today. As a local RMT rep for London Underground station staff, I visited my workplaces to investigate members' issues. Some shocking stuff is going on. One person has been given an attendance warning for being in a car crash! But people liked the newsletter I'd written — it tells them information they are lacking from other sources about what's going on with our pay ballot.

Thursday: Had a weekly educational with a comrade. We're working through *Fate of the Russian Revolution*, a collection of Trotskyist writings, trying to make sense of the USSR, as it developed into an imperialist, class society. I am beginning to understand the "political tradition" AWL draws on: opposition to all forms of imperialism, but opposition which makes the struggle of the working-class central.

In bed early for 3am start.

Friday: My biggest achievement of the day was getting sugar and washing up liquid for the staff mess-room! People had been buying their own and washing up with hand soap, even though we're entitled to this stuff. We are socialised into feeling out of control of our workplace — it doesn't even occur to people to demand the smallest things to improve it. It's that sense of having a say over our place of work that I want to encourage as a union rep.

Saturday: After work (early shift) I attended the RMT's conference on working class political representation. Disappointed to find out it is more about top-down initiatives that had been cooked up behind closed doors. No-one from Workers' Liberty was called to speak in the debate. But at least we were there, arguing for more democracy in this initiative for workers' representation. If even a few activists took this idea forward, it might make the wider campaign much healthier.

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

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

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

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

THE STUDENT ACTIVIST

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

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

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

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

erature and campaigns we are involved in.

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

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

At a general meeting we demanded that the business "experts" and Tory councillors that make up our trustee Board are made accountable to ordinary students.

If our union insists on giving the bosses a say on what we do then they should come to our democratic structures and be held to account for their decisions on the direction of our union. For instance they have voted against a proposal to pay the lowest paid staff an equal minimum wage.

AWL members called for the Trustees to be directly elected, with anyone able to stand, and for all those who are elected to come to General Meetings so their shady dealings can be unmasked and scrutinised. Much of the argument was based on our opposition as a whole to such a board which we believe is both undemocratic and unnecessary.

The AWL, together with activists from Education Not for Sale, in the Hull Free Education Network helped to organise of the first demonstrations to happen on our campus for many years.

After two planning meetings and some laborious banner making about 30 people turned out to drop banners facing the main admin building, to chant, hand out over 500 leaflets and march to outside our union.

HFEN is a broad campaign against the cutting of our courses and for free education. For the AWL it is also a forum in which to argue for our politics and positions on wider issues and, importantly, how a campaign should move forward. This kind of work is vitally important for keeping the pressure within the campaign to keep doing more, and giving it a positive direction.

An important part of our work as AWL members is to promote the politics and activities of Workers' Liberty and not to just become "the best activists" on a particular issue.

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

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

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

It is an important part of the AWL's work to educate all these people and by having debates that often seem heated or group and individual discussions we often find there is more agreement than was first thought. At the very least it allows a greater questioning of preconceived ideas about socialism, or free education or the inconvenience many students felt by the postal strike.

AWL members all over the country are engaged in work like this and it helps to keep our group dynamic and open. The work is sometimes routine and appears to achieve little, but with fights going on everywhere it is important that we continue to argue sharply for what we stand for.

THREAT FROM THE RIGHT

Facing up to grim facts

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

A rolling wave of right-wing politics threatens to engulf Britain in the period immediately ahead. The first thing we have to do is tell ourselves the truth about it.

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

The slump has massively undermined capitalism's credibility with wide sections of the people. But the dreadful state of the forces of socialism mutes and stifles presentation of a socialist alternative. And so the major movement is to the right.

The present situation in British politics is characterised by the following features

- The New Labour government is massively unpopular and discredited. The Prime Minister is a figure of contempt and pity. The working-class disillusionment with New Labour, which *Solidarity* thought might come early out of the New Labour government, as a result of its nakedly bourgeois class character and with a left-wing slant, is here now — with a vengeance, and with a right-wing or anti-political drift.

- The Tories are, mostly likely, six months away from defeating New Labour in the upcoming general election, and forming a government. A Brown government too would impose cuts after the general election, but all the indications are that a Tory government will impose far more savage cuts in social services and, maybe, follow the anti-Keynesian, depression-deepening policies which Cameron loudly counterposed to the Brown government's policy of pouring money into the economy. The new Tory government will have to confront and try to break the labour movement, for instance the civil service union PCS.

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

- There is widespread loathing of all "mainstream" politicians. That they are self-serving habitual liars and manipulators who talk out of both sides of their mouths is now widely understood — and, simultaneously, radically misunderstood. This is focused on the scandal of MPs' expenses. The atmosphere of savage disillusionment with conventional politics and politicians can not be too far off the sort of disgust that sent fascist-led mobs (initially backed by the Communist Party of France) to invade the French parliament after the Stavisky financial scandal in 1934.

- The British press, very crudely the tabloids such as the *Daily Express*, and, less crudely and in more measured ways, even the broadsheets, now habitually agitates on social and political questions to a degree that may be unique in the world's press. The tabloid papers assume a major part of the role of severe social and political criticism that a mass-circulation socialist press would play if it existed. They denounce, expose, point the finger of scorn and accusation. They blame the government, government departments, individuals, not the system of which they themselves are a pillar. They personalise everything. They have created a depoliticised political culture in which politicians are evaluated not mainly — and usually not at all — on policy, but on "performance", like footballers, pop-stars, and actors.

- There is massive, especially working-class, hostility to immigration and to most immigrants. Discontent over unemployment, housing, bad social services, bad health care, and so on is now often focused on immigrants, that is, on a scapegoat. Sections of the press agitate on these questions, blaming immigrants, the European Union, and the New Labour government for allowing immigrants in.

In their mixture of irresponsible demagoguery, valid social and political criticism, and scapegoating, sections of the press, the *Daily Express* and the *Star* for example, come

close to playing the political role typical of fascists — demagoguery combined with quack solutions and root defence of the fundamentals of capitalism and class society. The Government runs before their agitation, and thus encourages and augments it. It was prime minister Gordon Brown who most notably raised the slogan, "British Jobs for British Workers".

General and proper working-class concerns over social issues are of course expressed here, and socialists, in our response, have to disentangle the different strands involved.

- One focus on which hostility to immigration is expressed now is hostility to the European Union. The anti-EU message now is regaining the political and social resonance it had in the 1970s. Tory party demagoguery against aspects of the EU makes it an issue in mainstream politics that it has not been for many years. Meanwhile, opposition to the EU remains an article of faith for most of the would-be left.

- There is a deep cultural and religious as well as a "racial" alienation between sections of the white working class and the people in the Muslim areas of British cities. The press, and the "fascistic" section of it in particular, foment, deepen, and politically exploit that alienation.

Meanwhile, the major forces of the would-be revolutionary left have spent the last decade in politics functioning not as socialist advocates of working-class unity across the divide, but as honorary Muslim communalists, recommending election candidates with such phrases as "a fighter for Muslims". For the "best anti-racist" reasons, they attempt to exploit the communal alienation which the fascists exploit from the "other side".

The fascist BNP has experienced spectacular growth in influence, electoral credibility, and membership, winning council, London Assembly, and European Parliament seats.

They may win seats in Parliament in the coming general election. On the basis of social demagoguery, they have created a base in the white working class, even in some traditional Labour Party areas.

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

- The efforts of the would-be left in the dozen years of New Labour government to mount a credible electoral challenge to the Blair-Brown organisation have been singularly unsuccessful. The growth of the BNP is one measure of that failure.

The fiasco of Respect is another. There you had a "progressive" and "socialist" alliance — with one of the most reactionary political and social forces on the planet, Islamic clerical-fascism — and led by a corrupt ex-middle-of-the-road Labour politician, George Galloway, who had sold himself politically to Saddam Hussein's fascist regime in Iraq and to other Arab and Islamic forces.

But even before Respect, and even before the SWP used its disproportionate weight in it to liquidate the Socialist Alliance, the electoral enterprises of the would-be left were disappointing and uninspiring. Workers' Liberty, a founder of and central participant in the Socialist Alliance that ran 98 candidates in the 2001 general election, editorialised that the eventual average "was no higher than the common run of scores won by left-socialist candidates for many years now", including long before the Blair coup in the Labour Party.

The sinking of the remnants of the Socialist Alliance into Respect put paid to all hope of creating a sizeable working-class socialist electoral alternative to New Labour. The serious left will have little presence in the upcoming general election — with the exception of Jill Mountford in Camberwell and Peckham and maybe of a few other candidates.

The imminent end of the New Labour government further closes that chapter, of attempts to build on working-

class hostility to New Labour in government to build an electoral alternative — but in fact Respect closed it long ago.

- The union-Labour link has — with a couple of exceptions — survived the twelve years of New Labour government. Unions still finance the Labour Party. But union influence, not to say power, is feeble, in part because of the irresponsible abstention of the union leaders from vigorous assertion of their real strength — including potential strength, should they choose to use it, within the Labour Party structures.

- There will be some "left-wing" candidates in the general election — Socialist Party, SWP, and others. They will not be remotely a credible electoral presence, either as an alternative to Labour or as an effective alternative to the fascists. They will be "propaganda" candidates, but with poor propaganda. This is, perhaps, especially true of the SWP, the erstwhile vicarious Muslim communalists of Respect.

They will echo the chauvinist hostility to the European Union — when in fact a more walled-off, chauvinistic capitalist Britain is the alternative. Both SP and SWP candidates will be more about building their organisations than about credible left-wing electioneering.

Those who want to build the SP, or the SWP, will support their electoral efforts, as will a few leftists for whom not being Labour or New Labour is sufficient recommendation. But for a credible left-wing electoral presence, there would have to be united left-wing candidates with at least some trade-union support — a strong new Socialist Alliance. There is none, nor the prospect of one.

- The Labour-union political relationship will most likely produce new interactions after New Labour goes down in the general election. Both the unions and the out-of-office Labour Party will at least go through the speeches and motions of opposing "Tory cuts", and may be induced to do more. Labour movement — union and Labour — history will, so to speak, resume. The Labour Party is likely to revive, though how much and how soon, we will have to see.

- Paradoxically, therefore, New Labour, or Labour, despite its dozen years of ostentatiously pro-bourgeois neo-Thatcherite government, and its role in creating the present situation, will in the general election still be the default "working-class" force. Not because of its policies — which in toto are anti-working-class — but because it remains the union-affiliated party. Where there is no politically adequate left-wing anti-Labour candidate, socialists will, teeth clenched, advocate a vote for Labour.

- In the 1979 general election, the Thatcherite Tories represented a serious threat to the labour movement; but the unions' alternative was the Callaghan Labour Party, which had been in government since 1974, and had imposed IMF-dictated cuts from 1976. Some socialists resolved the wretched contradiction by launching a "Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory".

Uniting much of the left — including, then, such as Ken Livingstone — and gaining the support of a few local Labour Parties and candidates, the SCLV launched an independent campaign which sharply criticised the Callaghan Labour government and advocated preparation to fight it if it defeated the Tories. It was essentially a propaganda effort, putting forward (as we then phrased it) "a roughly adequate class struggle programme".

It organised some of the forces that went on, after the defeat of the Labour government, to radically shake up the Labour Party in the early 1980s.

In principle that would be a good model of work for socialists today, faced as we are by a serious Tory and right wing offensive on one side and the foul Brown government on the other. The bar to it is a purely practical one. The Labour Party in 1978, and sections of the unions, had a vibrant left-wing rank and file. Local Labour Party life now exists, where it exists, as a series of rumps.

We can organise effective socialist propaganda. We can do effective on-the-ground anti-fascist work. Both require a better-organised and more vigorous AWL. That is one thing we can affect.

We can watch for opportunities in the unions to push for a union (and, where it exists, Labour rank-and-file) drive to recreate a mass union-based working-class political party. We can organise backing for decent Labour Party people such as John McDonnell.

The picture is grim. But if we cannot face and define grim truth when it confronts us, then we will never be able to change things.

How can the Climate Camp progress?

An activist with the Camp for Climate Action (Climate Camp) spoke to *Solidarity* about some shortcomings in its current politics

For me I would note two weaknesses of the Camp's ability to be successful, i.e., to challenge the power structures and fantastical economics that have lead the world towards ecological collapse.

Firstly, its model. The Camp has created a physical space where thousands of people's feelings about climate change (resistance and renewal) can be manifested. The space also brings together people of different politics to debate and educate each other around climate justice, bringing in further thousands via savvy relationships with media.

To say that this is the only form of activism the Camp produces is far too reductive. I believe the Camp has clearly energised and created a space from which local campaigns (such as the activist house in Heathrow or Tipping Point shop near Kingsnorth) can begin the longer task of creating democratic, localised change.

However, I feel we must recognise that the Camp's model produces slightly static manifestations that will become less and less enticing (to media and potential activists) as time goes on. To some extent the camps direct a large amount of activist resources towards these temporary spaces (though the experiences and learning become longer lasting for many participants). Therefore, in the case of the recent workers' struggle at Vestas in the Isle of Wight, the Camp had no mechanism and little time to react as a movement to this struggle.

This problem is also seen in the Camp's preference for "outreach" over solidarity, i.e., drawing people to the Camp and not the Camp to people. This is something which I also believe entrenches the movement as predominantly white and middle class.

The response to Vestas and lack of active solidarity is also partly due to the second arising weakness I want to note. I believe that Climate Camp lacks any meaningful discourse around production and class. What do we need to produce as a society in this ecopocalyptic context, who will do that and how will that happen?

What do we really mean by just transition? Is it just to impose that such-and-such a place should shut without building up a dialogue with the people working there? Will future capitalism renew exploitation of labour as cheap, destructive fuel is used less and are we creating space for that to happen? These are questions Workers' Climate Action (WCA) has also been taking on. Must our tactics of class struggle alter now we understand that much of industry is environmentally destructive?

In terms of what next for Climate Camp I think it is partly a case of giving space for and seeing how the movement will evolve post-COP15 [the upcoming UN climate talks in Copenhagen]. Whether that mobilisation will inject new energy into this movement, new chances for global solidarity and new

meanings to local campaigns.

So for me our response to COP15 is about delegitimising the process. It's about spoiling the grand opening of a new era of capitalism – green capitalism. It's about explaining, as Einstein once said, that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting new results. More Kyoto? More markets for capital? More centralised planning? Really?

It could very well be another Seattle moment where social movements create a scar upon capitalism's already wounded face.

However, what's equally important is that we use this opportunity to form and renew links with other global social movements, most importantly movements in the South. They have a great need and a great chance to step forward in any international campaigns using the summit as a starting block.

Yet again it's important that we don't fragment our energies across the globe and as global social movements we think carefully about what happened post Seattle (what failed?). Ultimately, I hope the mobilisations give people a new sense of global identity, energy and commitment to localised campaigns.

Finally, then, on Workers' Climate Action. WCA has probably given itself one of the most exciting and daunting tasks. On the one hand it tries to bring the necessity of engagement with the workplace to the climate movement and on the other it is trying to bring the scale of climate issues to the workers' movement. I can only speak in some detail from one side.

I feel that in order to engage creative, energetic activists in meaningful class struggle, workers' movements need to be more visionary (and yet firmly unpatronising). We are living in a sea of images. Capitalism is brilliant at selling us dreams; driving a newer 4x4 over rocky ranges, sailing on the ocean with expensive perfume, even world peace with John Lennon Converse trainers. However, what these images lack is authenticity.

Class struggle may not always be fun. It may often be cold and grimy and boring but at the same time it has to be visionary, beautiful and inspiring. We all need things to believe in.

I recently watched some films about occupied factories in Argentina. Seeing hundreds of empowered women and men take collective control of their lives inspired me to continue thinking more of the actions by Vestas workers. How could it have been different? How could it have been bigger?

I feel we need more of that from the workers' movements. We need much less stuffy unions and in-house politics. We need more visions of collective control achieved through organisation in the workplace and community. More enthralling accounts of subverting power relations. We need to work with new, relevant forms of communication. We need to develop a language around dreams to match a strategy based in possibility. Essentially, we need to hear the songs and calls from the barricades of our future.

COPENHAGEN CLIMATE TALKS

We need work

By PAUL VERNADSKY

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

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

Beneath the surface there are still major sticking points to resolve before an agreement can be signed, possibly next year. These include: setting a global emissions reduction target for 2050; setting an emissions target for advanced economies for 2020; what actions developing countries will take to curb emissions; action on deforestation, including creating a market for forest permits; financing for developing countries to adapt to the effects of climate change; and developing countries' access to technology and intellectual property.

Klimaforum09

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

The Political Platform is very confused. It states that, "The basis for Klimaforum09 is the realisation that there is no technological 'fix' to the mounting climate crisis." It then lists nuclear power, biofuels, genetically modified organisms, carbon capture and storage (CCS) as examples of technologies which won't work – with renewables advocated instead. It alludes to the need for changes in social relations, but the platform verges on technophobia.

Its alternative is vague. It states, "In contrast, sustainable societies require a diversity of locally based solutions". This would appear to rule out large scale solar projects in the Sahara for example – and perhaps large-scale wind farms onshore or offshore – if they were to serve more than local needs. The perspective is insular, possibly nationalist and apparently back-to-nature.

The platform talks of "reducing consumption and production", without reference to the impact of this on working class living standards. It talks of a "new means of organising society" without saying anything substantial about the form this might take and who will bring it about.

TARGETS

Climate campaigners want a new climate treaty, coming into force by 2012, in time for when the current Kyoto deal runs out. They want a peak-and-decline in global emissions by 2015, with industrialised countries leading the effort. This means industrialised countries making an aggregate emissions reduction of least 40% by 2020 (compared to 1990 levels) and at least 80% by 2050.

The argument is that the countries with historic responsibility for emissions and with current capability to tackle them should make the steepest cuts. NGOs argue that the developmental needs of the poorest countries needs to be factored into their emissions reduction pathways. There are particular demands on the European Union. Currently, it has a 20% target for 2020, rising to 30% if a global deal is reached in Copenhagen. Climate campaigners want a pledge of 40% by 2020.

TRANSFERS

Climate campaigners are demanding new funding from industrialised countries of at least £110 billion (£100 billion) per year by 2020, of which at least half will be for adaptation, because of current climate impacts.

These commitments would be in addition to the existing internationally agreed aid target for donor countries (0.7% of GDP). Climate NGOs argue that revenues from the auctioning of EU Emissions Trading Scheme permits and/or international taxes on aviation and shipping fuel would fund this spending.

FOREST OFFSETS, CARBON TRADING

Carbon offsetting and carbon trading for forest protection is also being discussed. This involves paying to lock carbon away in trees and forests instead of cutting them down. By preventing trees from being cut down, firms or governments can count the carbon they store in their timber as "balancing" the carbon being emitted by polluters – usually in advanced economies.

The Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) agreement, a carbon-trading scheme that allows companies to buy and trade carbon stored in forests to offset carbon emissions, is due to be decided at Copenhagen. Greenpeace argues that this scheme is still problematic. It looked at the Noel Kempff Climate Action Project (NKCAP), a joint venture between American Electric Power, BP and Pacificorp. These firms paid the Bolivian government in return for the carbon credits from an area of rainforest that was agreed to be protected from logging for 30 years. Greenpeace research concluded that that NKCAP has "yet to produce real, measurable, reportable, and verifiable emissions reductions".

TIPPING POINT?

The need for an agreement is plain from the latest science. A conference in Oxford in September revealed that temperatures could rise by 4°C by 2060.

A 4°C global average is also predicted for the UK by 2080 – meaning that the

Working-class answers

2003 heatwave, which was responsible for more than 30,000 deaths across Europe, will become the norm during many summers.

The Arctic and parts of Africa could experience warming up to 10°C. Emissions have also increased rapidly in the first decade of the 21st century, according to the Tyndall Centre. There has been a slowdown over the last year or so, due to the recession, but emissions rises will resume with economic growth.

What do these events tell us about the current state of climate politics? The principal reason for the stalling of a treaty is domestic rather than international. The US endorsed Kyoto in 1997, only to fail to get anywhere near a majority for it in Congress afterwards. Obama doesn't want to make the same mistake again.

However, in the background, imperial rivalries between states are also a factor. Whilst there is some consensus between the traditional big power blocs (i.e. the US, EU and Japan) on the need for emissions reductions (though not on how much), the rising sub-imperialist powers of China and India are not willing to sacrifice their economic growth to cut emissions – particularly when they will not get the technologies needed at a low cost.

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

The main conclusion we should draw is that we cannot trust global capital and its governments to deliver on preventing climate change. They might sign an agreement next year. They might even begin to reduce emissions in parts of the world. But they will do it too slowly and at the expense of millions of workers.

Their way will not help the millions who will die in the coming years from climate-related droughts and storms, floods and famines.

Their way will see workers pay higher

fuel bills and higher taxes, while private energy and transport firms reap windfalls from emissions trading, government subsidies, and their monopoly power.

ALTERNATIVE

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

Several hundred trade unionists are taking part in the negotiations in Copenhagen, and international unions are organising a side event, the World of Work Pavilion from 14 to 16 December at

the LO-Denmark building, but their political demands are weak. Although the call "for a just transition to a low-carbon economy" attempts to tackle the issue of who pays, who benefits and what kind of jobs come out of climate change, without more control and more action, the demand can be acceded to with little changing in practice.

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

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

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

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

One million green jobs

With nearly three million people out of work who could argue with the demand for jobs, especially jobs that will contribute to the future of the planet rather than detract from it?

The "One Million Climate Jobs" demand has been backed by a pamphlet, edited by SWPer Jonathan Neale for the Campaign against Climate Change Trade Union group. It is well written and researched, with concrete suggestions about the type of jobs needed, how many and how to pay for them – principally by taxing the rich. It is clear that the jobs should be new ones, additional to those that exist already, not relabelled jobs. The pamphlet says that, as far as possible, they should be directly employed government jobs, employed by a National Climate Service. It also recognises that jobs may be lost in older polluting industries, and that the solution is government-guaranteed work for displaced workers in the new sectors. As such, the demand seems a reasonable and necessary response to the climate and economic crises.

The main problem with the demand is that it is presented as a plea for action by the government, rather than as a slogan around which to mobilise workers and transform the labour movement.

It is not clearly linked to existing struggles for jobs – e.g. in the car industry – and therefore does not grow out of the logic of actual struggles. It is not presented as a transitional demand, linked to other issues such as public ownership of energy and transport industries, or to workers' control, or opening the books, or to the creation of climate committees in workplaces.

Most notably, it does not make the case for reduced working time on full pay, which is both an answer to the problem of unemployment and a way to tackle emissions by reducing production in some areas. The demand does not connect with the need for workers to take power, or even with working class political representation.

In short, the call for "One Million Climate Jobs" is a good idea, but one that is in danger of remaining largely in the realm of placards and propaganda, rather than becoming a demand taken up by the labour movement as a vital part of its existing struggles.

Stop Climate Chaos

The Stop Climate Chaos (SCC) coalition aims to mobilise 40,000 people for the largest ever climate demos in the UK on 5 December. In London, the demo is assembling at 12 noon in Grosvenor Square. It plans to climax at 3pm by encircling Parliament with a sea of people wearing blue. The details for Glasgow are not yet finalised.

The platform of "The Wave" is for the UK government to:

- Quit Dirty Coal
- Protect the Poorest and
- Act Fair & Fast.

The demand to "Quit Dirty Coal" means that the government should withhold permission for new coal power stations that cannot capture their carbon emissions. The campaign also wants a legally-binding carbon emissions limit of 350 gCO₂/kWh, which all new power stations should meet.

"Protect the Poorest" means the UK providing funds for adaptation, mitiga-

ENERGY PRIVATISATION

Life or death struggle for Mexican workers

The following article is by Dan La Botz from the US socialist group Solidarity (www.solidarity-us.org). Since it was written, solidarity actions have spread throughout the Mexican working class.

On 11 November, tens of thousands of workers took part in a national strike to oppose President Calderon's liquidation of the state-run Light and Power Company, a move he has taken in order to smash the militant SME electricians' union.

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

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

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

The Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME), made up of approximately 43,000 active and 22,000 retired workers in Mexico City and surrounding states, is fighting for its life. On the night of 10 October, President Calderón ordered federal police to seize the power plants. He simultaneously liquidated the state-owned Light and Power Company, fired the entire workforce, and thus did away with the union's legal existence.

The Mexican president's attack on the Electrical Workers Union might be compared to Ronald Regan's firing of more than 11,500 members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers (PATCO) in 1981 or to Margaret Thatcher's smashing of the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984 in which over 11,000 miners were arrested and the union defeated.

This is a turning point because it allows Mexico's capitalist class to resume the neoliberal project begun under Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1988 but interrupted by a series of unforeseen events: the creation of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in 1989, the Chiapas Rebellion led by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in 1994, president Ernesto Zedillo's precipitation of the economic crisis of 1994-96, and finally the end of the old one-party state under the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and its replacement by the National Action Party (PAN).

Salinas had succeeded in privatising the Mexican Telephone Company (TELMEX), the railroad and the Cananea Copper Company, but he failed to finish the job, with the energy sector, petroleum and electric power generation still state owned. Now, after a 20-year interruption, Calderón has undertaken to finish the job.

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

While the government's attacks on labor unions such as the Mexican Miners and Metalworkers and its massive use of police force are not new, Calderón's move to destroy the SME represents an important turning point in modern Mexican labor history, a decisive step to break the back of the unions once and for all. Even more important, it is, as Manuel Camacho Solís of the Broad Progressive Front (FAP) noted, an act intended "to change the balance of forces" so that they favor the government.

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

the media.

Mexico City, where this blow has been delivered, is the heart of the political opposition to Calderón and the base of support for left-wing leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who claims to have won the last election. The attack on the union is also an attack on the left at its strongest point. And should this attack succeed – as it may, although we still hope to see the Mexican workers take the strong measures needed – it will appear that the government can and has defeated the strongest, and can now turn its attention to the weaker.

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

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

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

SOLIDARITY

Throughout Mexico workers, students, communities, labor unions and left parties rallied and marched to support the Mexican Electrical Workers Union.

In Cuernavaca, Moreles some 3,500 marched. In Oaxaca the Union of Workers and Employees of the Benito Juárez Autonomous University shut down the university in protest and solidarity. In San Luis Potosi the Potosi Union Front protested the development at the State Legislature and expressed their solidarity with the electrical workers. Diverse organizations – the National Union of General Tire Workers, the Broad Popular Front (FAP), and the Party of the Democratic Revolution expressed support at the national, state and local levels.

Expression of international solidarity arrived from the United States and Canada, from Holland, Germany, even from workers in Iraq. Such expressions of solidarity help to give heart to the struggle of the Mexican electrical workers. But unlike in industries such as shipping, where dockworkers' solidarity can have a direct impact, foreign unions can have little leverage on a nationalized power company in another country, except perhaps miners or railroad, dock and marine workers who might act to cut off the company's coal shipments.

While marching in the streets, the SME is also pursuing a legal strategy, having hired Néstor de Buen, the country's leading labor lawyer, to argue that the Calderón government seizures of the company was unconstitutional and illegal.

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

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

ECONOMIC DECISION?

The Calderón government, argues that this was a purely economic decision based on the economic and productive inefficiencies of Light and Power. There is, however, no clear cut economic case to be made; the issues are complex.

The government argues that the Light and Power Company had an annual deficit of 44 billion pesos (400 million US dollars). Georgina Kessel Martínez, Secretary of Energy, asserts that Light and Power's expenses were almost always double its sales, requiring enormous government subsidies. In reality that "deficit" was largely the result of transferring electric power from the Federal Electric Commission (CFE) to Light and Power (LyF), both government owned.

The union argues that for the last 20 years the government declined to invest in the company, allowing the plant and distribution system to deteriorate, in order to create the appearance of worker incompetence.

The Calderón administration has suggested that Light and Power's economic problem was the high cost of workers' wages, benefits and pensions, which threatened to bankrupt the system. The government says that 160 billion pesos out of its 240 billion peso wage bill went toward pensions for 20,000 retired workers.

Without a doubt, over its 95-year history the Mexican Electrical Workers Union had succeeded in winning for its members a labour union contract that might be the envy of workers throughout the country. Unlike most Mexican workers, Light and Power workers earned about 6,000 pesos (600 US dollars) per month, something approximating a living wage. Retired workers enjoyed generous pensions, equal to or greater than their work wages.

Martín Esparza, the union's leader, argues however that the real economic motive for the government's action is the desire of private industry to get its hands on the 100-kilometer network of fiber optic cable that was the property of Light and Power.

In short Calderón has swept away the union and torn its contract to bits. Mexican and foreign capital are thrilled at Calderón's action. Investors.com, speaking for and to international capital, in an article titled "Mexico Knocks a Union's Lights Out" called it, "one of the best things to happen to Mexico." *Business Week*, while less euphoric, speculated that Calderón might now take on the Mexican Teachers Union; PEMEX, the state oil company, and the Petroleum Workers Union; and Carlos Slim's TELMEX with its high telephone costs.

The Business Coordinating Council (CCE), the Confederation of Mexican Employers (COPARMEX), the Federation of Industrial Chambers (CONCAMIN), the National Chamber of the Manufacturing Industry (CANACINTRA), and the Mexican Council of Businessmen (CMHN) all praised Calderón and encouraged him to see the attack on the electrical workers as just a first step. The Mexican capitalist class has had a taste of blood, likes it, and wants more.

Defend the SME!

- Write to President Felipe Calderón at felipe.calderon@presidencia.gob.mx and, if you wish, copy your protest email to the union at sinmex-el@sme.org.mx. Your protest should urge President Calderón to do as the Mexican Electrical Workers Union has asked: 1. Remove the police from their workplaces; 2. Revoke the liquidation of the company; 3. Negotiate the issues with the union. These measures will respect the rights of these workers, their union, and international labor and human rights standards.

- From *Against the Current*, November-December 2009.

JOHN McDONNELL MP

“I’ll stand for leader again when Brown goes”

John McDonnell MP spoke to *Solidarity* at the Labour Representation Committee conference on 14 November after he had announced that he will contest the Labour Party leadership again when Gordon Brown goes.

The Labour Party conference this year was the smallest Labour conference since the Second World War. The number of constituency delegates was significantly down, and even trade union delegations were smaller this year. That’s the sad reality.

But there were victories on the floor of the conference, for example, over the election of the National Policy Forum. That happened for a number of reasons.

There were some stirrings in the constituencies. A lot of the careerists are dropping off now as they see the prospect of Labour losing the election. You have more people turning up now who are the activists who have clung on by their fingertips through the years of New Labour, and many of those are still on the left.

On the trade union side, there is a feeling now of “enough’s enough”. The role of the GMB, in particular, has been important.

It was a useful exercise in some element of democratic accountability. But let’s not exaggerate. We are talking about a party whose rank and file is sadly diminished, and almost moribund in many areas of the country.

I also think the Labour leadership have taken their eye off the ball to an extent as regards internal Labour Party matters. They are more concerned with survival than with planning the issues at Labour Party conference.

But it does demonstrate that with a bit of organisation, even with small numbers, there is a potential for some widening of democratic involvement.

I’m not giving up on the general election yet. It could go either way. There could be a tsunami in which Labour is comprehensively swept out of power, or we could be in a situation where the Tories do not win as they expect to – there is a hung parliament, or Labour has a very small majority.

If there is a hung parliament, or something close to it, it is going to be very interesting to see what power the left can exert with a minimal representation in Parliament but a much wider representation in the trade unions and in the constituency parties.

There will be post-mortems, of course. The response from the right will be to evade any responsibility whatsoever for Labour’s electoral fortunes. They will reject any critique of past policies. They will argue that it’s simply the electorate becoming bored with the Labour government after a long period in office.

What I would describe as the centre-right – Compass and so on – will formulate a critique which will appear to be from the left, but will be significantly tainted because it will stay within the narrow bounds of New Labour’s fundamental neo-liberal practices. I think it will be seen as opportunistic.

The question is whether the left can mobilise at that stage, and not only in the Labour Party and the trade unions but also in the wider society, for a real critique of what has happened under New Labour.

In the Labour Party itself, there will be the usual bureaucratic manoeuvres to close that debate down. We have got to break those barriers, but more important is to win the wider movement to the discussion.

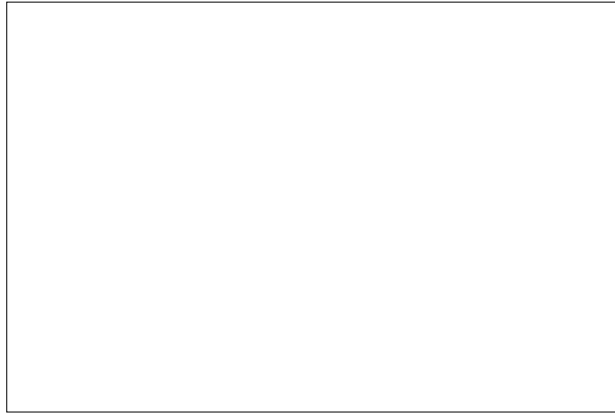
As to what the left does in the general election, there are three levels to that discussion.

First of all, everyone on the left, wherever they are in the country, needs to flock to give their support to the few socialist Labour candidates. Geographical distances are secondary here. We need resources poured into those constituencies.

We need to make sure the funding is there, and we have the people there too, to get our vote out. That’s the first thing.

The second thing, in the wider movement as well as the trade union movement, is to make sure that we start the debate now about how we got into this situation, and what the alternatives are.

After the election, whatever the outcome, we have to be ready to make strategic interventions that come out of the analysis, and make the demands on any future



government. But the most important thing now is solidarity to keep socialists in Parliament, and to engage so that the debate cannot be controlled from the right.

If there is a new Labour leadership election, I will stand again. Last time [in 2007] we were severely limited by minimal resources, but we did take issues out into the affiliated unions.

We tried to ensure that there was a debate in the constituency parties, too, and that happened to a certain extent. We were killed off by the centralised control of the nomination process.

What we need to do different this time, I think, is to make the debate much wider, much broader. We have to be much more media-savvy, use the media more effectively, and take the debate into the social movements as well. There is a whole range of organisations now beyond the traditional Labour and trade union movement whom we need to involve in the debate.

It will be focused around a post-mortem – around what happened to a government that turned on its own supporters.

The People’s Charter? It’s a general statement of aims and a general critique of society as it is now. You will get a broad range of support for that, but it’s a bit like a funnel. It’s the widest end of the funnel, and you can then draw people in, down that funnel, into a much more concrete debate about socialism.

It’s like any other campaigning tool. It gets people through the door, and from there you can go on to have a real debate. In some areas it will work, in some areas it won’t.

I’m working at the minute with a whole range of broad coalitions. They enable you to get people together around an issue, and then you can go further.

Public Services Not Private Profit was launched because the TUC wasn’t running a proper campaign against privatisation. Seventeen unions got involved, and it has been relatively active at different periods when needed. I think the unions take a very pragmatic view on that.

It will be an important tool in the coming months, definitely. The other structure that will be increasingly important is the Trade Union Coordinating Group (TUCG). There are now eight trade unions involved in it, meeting on a regular basis, planning the raising of issues in the parliamentary groups of the different unions and joint campaigns. It is looking to a conference in February which brings people together from across the trade union movement, with others, to talk about the strategy they wish to pursue at and after the general election.

Public Services Not Private Profit will be one element of the strategy, but I think the TUCG now is a really strong potential vehicle for bringing the movement together.

Of course, I am a Labour MP, and I will be campaigning in the general election to secure the election of a Labour government. I can understand why people are setting up alternative coalitions for the general election, but for the period of the election we will have to go our different ways.

The most important thing is to continue the work we have done in recent years to build the broadest possible alliance across the Labour and trade union movement and the social movements. Once the general election is over there will be critical discussions that need to take place on the sort of political formation that is a positive factor for developing that work.

Beacons in the darkness

BY MARTIN THOMAS

In his keynote speech to the Labour Representation Committee conference on 14 November, John McDonnell’s general assessment was that we are in a “difficult period”. We have “got to keep the Tories out”, but we know how bad New Labour is. “Our job is to act as beacons in the darkness”.

In the coming general election, he urged LRC supporters to focus all their efforts on getting left Labour MPs re-elected. It is “not about alternative manifestos, or getting expelled”, he said, but “the same as every other grouping in the Labour Party, we will be setting out our programme, a platform for change”.

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

However, he said, if a dozen or so left Labour MPs can be returned, there is also the possibility that in a hung parliament, or one with a small Labour majority, those left MPs could “hold the balance of power” and be able to negotiate large concessions.

McDonnell also said that if he does not get on the ballot paper in a new leadership election, he will not support any soft “centre-left” candidate. “We have to keep our hands clean for the future”. He said that the LRC will call an emergency conference after the general election to debate next steps.

The LRC conference’s closing speech, from Katy Clark MP, struck a very different note. Arriving only just in time to make her speech, Clark declared that “there is a battle in the labour movement and the Labour Party, and we are on the verge of winning”.

She pointed to “some small victories” already visible — Brown’s talk of a Tobin Tax, the small retreat on Trident, the slight moves on Labour Party democracy, the climbdown on Royal Mail privatisation” — and declared that “they”, the Blair-Brownites, “are the old guard now”.

Where McDonnell had emphasised left Labour MPs retiring, Clark emphasised that many right-wing “New Labour” MPs are withdrawing and can be replaced by more left-wing candidates.

A motion from CWU Central London branch called for the LRC to “approach Labour candidates, CLPs, and trade union bodies to come together for a socialist campaign at the General Election”, advancing socialist ideas as well as campaigning to keep the Tories out.

It was passed, but many even of the speakers in favour of it evidently thought in terms only of the “backstop” activity of LRC members getting on trains and buses to go and canvass for left Labour MPs at the general election. They seemed not to believe it possible for local Trades Councils or trade union branches to make a political intervention at the election in that majority of constituencies where the choice will be between a New Labour candidate and a Tory or Lib-Dem.

• More: www.workersliberty.org/node/13357

Glasgow North-East

Labour bigwigs claimed a “thumping victory” in the 12 November Glasgow North East by-election. But 60% of votes casts translates into just 19% support from the electorate as a whole (because of the 70% abstention rate). The SNP did poorly, but at an all-Scottish level the SNP’s share of the vote remains relatively stable.

Analysis: www.workersliberty.org/node/13360

ANTI-FASCISM

We need a left political alternative

The following discussion article has been circulated by Oldham anti-fascist activist John Tummon

The British anti-fascist movement is at a crossroads. Holding the growth of the BNP is getting harder every year and the post-war strategy of “No Platform” plus “Exposure” is being by-passed by significant changes taking place.

The BNP has achieved a national resonance that cannot be fought any more by us simply targeting their target areas. They have Strasserite anti-capitalist policies that equip them to compete for the huge part of the political territory vacated by New Labour. Exposing them as Nazis is no longer preventing people from wanting to find out about these policies. We already lack a means of effectively countering them at national elections and a “business as usual” approach would probably make this a permanent problem.

Future anti-fascist prospects are hit by the recession, by the crisis in political representation and legitimacy, and by the ways in which our allies in the three “mainstream” political parties, some newspapers, and the celebrity culture, are responding to the BNP. Their rearguard action against the “normalisation” of the BNP has recently involved them in breaching the principle of not appearing on the same platform as the BNP. The dam is burst and there is no going back.

Ironically, this breach has put these social and political forces in charge of articulating the anti-fascist argument and — on Question Time and beyond — has led to anti-fascism being identified with their defence of the withered and degraded democracy in 21st century Britain. Anti-fascism is increasingly defined by

the divide between the BNP and these parties and interests.

Specifically, this entangles anti-fascism, by association, with the arguments between these parties and the BNP over their different conceptions of the nationalism they share, including over how tight immigration control has to be to protect British “national interests”.

This change also identifies anti-fascism with a moralistic demonisation of the BNP for being “extremist”, for being outside the range of acceptable, pro-capitalist politics which self-define as “democratic”. Because this attack coincides with the crisis in British political representation and legitimacy, within which the three “mainstream” parties are seen as essentially the same on key issues, this counterposes the BNP to all three of them as the alternative.

British post-war anti-fascism has hitherto always been essentially a single-issue movement, but the breach of “No Platform” in the course of the BBC Question Time fiasco means that this is changing into tackling the BNP as a political opponent.

In the absence of a unified left capable of putting forward an internationalist, eco-socialist and anti-racist alternative to capitalism, anti-fascism can only slip into becoming a political argument between the representatives of degraded democracy and the BNP.

In the absence of any broad left electoral alliance at the 2010 General Election, this will again condemn anti-fascists to calling on people to vote for the parties, and by implication the politics, of this degraded democracy. This further cements the BNP’s position as

the party of the unrepresented, of the alienated and of the marginalised.

This is a political configuration which is untenable in the medium and long-term and which can only lead to the further growth of the BNP. Added to this, European history shows that fascism and organised racism can only be defeated by the working class movement. Because the British working class has been defeated, divided and weakened over the past 25 years, the only counter-strategy which makes sense is one which works with this reality by engaging simultaneously within the unorganised working class, the organised working class and among all those who want to defend their multiracial communities against the BNP’s divisive racism. A strategy that is capable of bringing each of these forces into play within an anti-fascist struggle can only be delivered by a unified left, because nothing else can have the political positions to compete with the BNP’s anti-capitalist rhetoric.

The problem is that the British left is currently too divided and too disengaged from all sections of a divided and demoralised working class to serve as a reliable basis for a rejuvenated anti-fascism. This call is to the left to get itself into the position from which it can play this historical role and to the anti-fascist movement — to acknowledge the need for a drastic transition from the current approach, which has been by-passed by developments and become untenable as a future strategy, to one which abandons self-indulgence and is based on a sensible, socially-rooted left wing political alternative with its feet firmly planted in the real world.

ITALY

Berlusconi and his “Bonapartist” plan

BY HUGH EDWARDS

While Cath Fletcher (*Solidarity* 3/162) is absolutely correct to point out how any evaluation of an individual or a political situation requires rounded, balanced assessment in order to form as concrete a picture as possible, the evidence she offers in her article “Berlusconi: some further questions” do little to convince me that her image of Berlusconi and of contemporary Italy come anywhere near the reality I sought to convey (in *Solidarity* 3/161).

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

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

Berlusconi incarnates this shameless appeal to the deepest prejudices of large sections of the still comfortably-off petty bourgeoisie from whom the pillars of his political support are founded — those whom Brecht described as “the scum of the earth who want above all to feel the cockles of their heart warmed”.

There is, and has been for years, a serious and informed literature about Italy’s economic decline which takes its starting point from the fundamental historical structural weaknesses of both economy and society. Cath makes no reference to this, instead referring to the present conjunctural “credit-crunch” crisis and correctly points out that Italy, like France and Germany, is statistically out of recession — just!

But there are underlying roots to Italy’s declining economic position vis a vis its major competitors — an economy dominated by five and a half million small- and medium-size businesses whose average is 10 and under employees. There is underinvestment in

research, development and technical innovation, with a consequent barely growing productivity of labour in both public and private sectors. A concentration of exports in traditional areas of strength, now under threat from Asia and elsewhere. A marked absence of foreign investment, deterred by fear of the mafia. And maladministration as well as the still incestuously closed defences of Italian big business and the banks.

All of this guarantees that the decade-long trends of both the slowest pace of GDP growth in the EU and a virtually stationary per capita income will continue.

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

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

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

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

She also stated that he was having sex with under-

age girls. At the same time, the journal of the think-tank of Fini, number two in the government and President of the parliament, carried the former of these stories.

Subsequently it emerged that Berlusconi, courtesy of a businessman pimp, had been “availing himself” of prostitutes at organised orgies across his many palaces in Italy, and in many cases offering them the chance of political office.

Berlusconi is not a private individual, but the head of a government which has based a principal part of its electoral support on its de facto alliance with the Catholic church, championing every reactionary part of that organisation’s hypocritical, pro-family, anti-women, anti-gay, anti-science programme, while fuelling its schools and hospitals with billions of public money and at the same time cutting the public education, health and welfare system to the bone.

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

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

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

La Repubblica, alone, called Berlusconi to account before the parliament for the hypocrisy and the blatant contradictions (Maria Carfagna, his minister of equal opportunity, had been on the point of introducing a bill to punish more severely men who were found with prostitutes!). It was certainly not enough, and inevitably blurred the line with those in the leadership of the Catholic church who belatedly entered the scene under the pressure of sections of the laity.

Not for the first time the radical Italian left had failed to grasp the political heart of the question. But that is another story.

AFTER NO2EU

A new general election coalition

BY ELAINE JONES

A coalition to stand trade union and left general election candidates was announced at the Saturday 7 November conference on political representation called by the rail union RMT.

The planned coalition has the backing of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism, and is supported in a personal capacity by Bob Crow (general secretary of the RMT), Brian Caton (general secretary of the POA), National officers in PCS, and national executive committee members of the CWU, UNISON, FBU and USDAW.

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

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

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

The discussions on who and on what basis have been going on during and since the "No2EU, Yes to democracy" campaign of candidates in the European elections. It would seem that the select few involved with these discussions have proved incapable of agreeing any unity this time around. The Communist Party were in, then out, then half in and half out and now in.

John Foster (CPB) and others are making it clear that they think the central demand, even in the general election, should be "no to Europe". There is a sham unity and the rest of us are supposed to "stop the talking shops and get on with the business".

The AWL leaflet for the event (none of us was taken

to speak in the debate) made the point that what is needed is open, democratic discussion among left groups and interested trade unions and that the politics we stand such candidates on needs to be clearly pro-worker and anti-capitalist, internationalist and socialist.

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

The issue of democracy cannot be an optional extra: it is the only basis on which you can have any real unity.

In the trade union movement we campaign for rank and file democratic control in order to hold the leaderships to account and organise effective action. You can certainly only have effective working class political representation if you have democratic structures based on the organised working class.

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

the Labour Party.

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

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

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

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

Dear comrades,

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

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

The leaflet calls for the participation of "all those who want to see a pro-working-class alternative presented at the election" and invites those who "want to get involved" to contact the organisers. The name and core policies of the coalition are still to be worked out.

We want to take part in the discussions about a coalition. As you will know, we are already campaigning on the streets and the doorsteps in Camberwell and Peckham for Jill Mountford as a socialist candidate there.

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

A structure allowing open, lively, democratic political decision-making in the coalition is vital. The leaflet rightly focuses on the "lack of political representation of... working-class people". To contribute to working-

class representation, it is not enough to say that you want to do that, or to appear for a few weeks of an election campaign and say some good things. An election campaign has to be a tool to build politics and a political structure which can serve democratic working-class political self-expression.

The record of anti-Labour left candidacies over the 12 years of New Labour government has been very modest. For left candidates to appear at each election with a different policy and project from the previous one cannot but encourage working-class voters to hold back from a venture on such candidates until – to their eyes – we have sorted our act out in some stable way.

Realistically, the proposed coalition will judge its success not by winning seats, but by rallying a sizeable minority voice for a clear political message. It may get more than the 1% that "No2EU" got in the Euro-election, but cannot realistically expect to get radically more.

That makes it important that the political message is indeed clear. A small vote for a blurred, ambiguous, or inadequately working-class and socialist message is the worst of all worlds.

To aim just to put up candidates in opposition to New Labour, in abstraction from the politics, would be to make an apolitical fetish of elections. The politics of the coalition are all-important.

To be useful, minority candidates should take a clear stand for the principle of independent working-class political representation. They should make it clear that they represent a workers', and not just a generic "people's", programme. They should indicate that their aim is a workers' government – a government which serves the working-class majority as loyally as New Labour and Tories serve the rich.

They should offer a clear answer to the working class

on issues like jobs: a shorter working week; nationalisation of the whole of high finance to create a public banking, insurance, and finance service; nationalisation under workers' control, with minimal compensation, of enterprises declaring redundancies.

They should be clear against the anti-union laws, and for the right to strike and to picket in solidarity.

In view of the current rise of xenophobia and racism, they should take a clear stand in favour of free movement of people across borders, defending the rights that already exist within the European Union and arguing for them to be extended beyond the EU.

It will compromise any left slogans of the coalition if they are coupled with making "No to EU" or similar into a leading slogan. Pleas that the "no" to the EU is on the grounds of it being capitalist and neo-liberal make no sense to us. A Britain walled off from other European states would be equally capitalist, and more neo-liberal than the EU. That is why the British government sought and got an opt-out from the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights (with its codification of the right to strike), and has delayed and is delaying in implementing the EU Working Time Directive and Agency Workers Directive; that is why the serious anti-Lisbon-Treaty party is the Tories.

Anti-EU slogans do not convey an anti-capitalist or even anti-neo-liberal message. They cannot but nourish nationalist and anti-migrant rhetoric. The left should not go along with that.

All this, and more, needs to be discussed clearly and openly. We want to be part of that discussion. Please let us know about the procedures for getting involved in the talks towards the general election.

In solidarity,
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

SWP ON BNP

Misunderstanding the united front

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

Martin Smith's article is worth a read – for good and bad reasons. Good reasons? Fact. Bad reasons? Politics.

The good reasons are mainly related to the wealth of factual information Smith has gathered together – particularly on the class composition of the BNP's membership (primarily petty bourgeois, despite the press hype about the white working class; which is not to deny that they have built a base of working-class votes and support).

However, the article expresses in a peculiar way the basic problem of the SWP's anti-fascist politics: "popular frontism", the idea of uniting everyone who says they oppose the BNP – across class lines, including from the ruling class – instead of a working class-led campaign against fascism. Peculiar because Smith goes out of his way to insist, at length, that the SWP rejects such popular fronts.

In a section entitled "United front versus popular front", he explains quite well the origin of these opposing concepts in the struggles of the 1930s. Faced by the rise of fascist movements in Germany and France, Trotsky and his supporters argued for a "workers' united front", mobilising trade unions and different workers' political parties to beat back the fascists on the basis of a class-struggle programme. Following its ultra-left binge which allowed Hitler to peacefully take power in Germany, the Stalinist Communist International switched over to advocating a different sort of 'unity' – unity between the workers and "progressive", "anti-fascist" capitalist parties. Popular Front governments came to power in France and Spain with the support of the main workers' organisations. The result was the demobilisation of the French and Spanish workers, shifts to the right and the eventual victory of fascism all along the line.

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

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

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

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

We agree that the situation in Britain today is not *the same* as Germany, France or Spain in the 1930s; the point is that there are common elements from which

we can draw general lessons about how to fight fascism.

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

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

b) Fascism grows out of capitalism's social decay and social crises, whipping up and organising those in the middle classes who are or perceive themselves to be under threat and, as it grows, drawing sections of the working class behind it. In situations of extreme crisis, when the working class seems to be seriously threatening capitalism, fascism can win support in the ruling class as the only reliable way of smashing the workers' movement.

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

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

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

Similarly, one might say that UAF represents an alliance between workers' organisations and the "shadow" of the British bourgeois establishment – an alliance on the basis of a totally bourgeois "anti-fascist" programme, one that is both "morally" wrong and cannot possibly be effective.

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

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

Similarly, on the level of physical confrontation,

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

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

4. Smith argues for the slogan "Don't vote Nazi" on the grounds that it "unites everyone".

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

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

5. A quick look at the UAF website confirms the charge of popular frontism rather dramatically. In addition to a front page statement hailing secretary of state for communities John Denham's stance on the English Defence League, UAF has a list of "key signatories" which includes not only Leroy Logan of the Metropolitan Black Police Association, not only the Liberal Democrats North West Region, but... David Cameron. You almost certainly know who Cameron is. But you may be less familiar with "key signatory" Sir Teddy Taylor.

An MP until 2005, Taylor was a prominent activist in and at various points vice-president of the Monday Club, a right-wing Tory pressure group founded in the 1960s to oppose decolonisation in Africa and support the white supremacist regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa.

Since then, the Monday Club has developed a programme which includes repeal of the Race Relations Acts (which banned discrimination in jobs, services and housing), stopping immigration and creating voluntary repatriation schemes. Taylor was a supporter from 1970; in 1972 the organisation organised a big public meeting at Westminster under the slogan "Halt immigration now!" to promote these aims.

He is also a strong opponent of gay rights, and supports the reintroduction of the death penalty and corporal punishment for young offenders.

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

Clearly this is a united front of a special kind...

OBITUARY

The long march of Chris Harman

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

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

Chris Harman’s near-half-century of political activity encompassed most of the history of the organisation that, despite its recent near-decade of alliance with Islamic clerical fascism, remains the biggest ostensibly revolutionary organisation in Britain and retains influence in other countries.

Of course we offer his family our condolences. And therefore? Therefore praise Harman for what he had in common with all serious socialists? Therefore, submerge everything that was politically specific to Harman in his political life under a politically indifferent cry of humane dismay and lamentation at his death? Remember all the good you can — and forget about the rest of it?

Certainly, remember the good.

One outstandingly “good” episode long ago in Chris Harman’s political history deserves to be remembered. In 1969 a meeting was held in London to commemorate Ho Chi Minh, who had just died. All the left groups active in Vietnam solidarity work were represented, and IS by Chris Harman, sitting on the platform alongside the London representative of North Vietnam’s Stalinist government.

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

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

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

That he spent his entire adult life promoting what he thought was revolutionary socialist politics is, to my mind, worthy of respect.

But “the rest of it”, in the case of this leader of the SWP, was enormous. And in politics “the rest of it”, and its political consequences, does not necessarily die with its author.

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

II

Joining IS’s predecessor, the Socialist Review group, around 1962, when he was 20, Harman lived through the long march of the Cliff organisation, from being, for most of the 1960s, a very loose and loosely defined “Luxemburgist” group, heavily streaked with anarchism and rejecting Bolshevism as any sort of political model — all the way to the tight, heavily depoliticised, caricature-“Leninist”, pseudo-bolshevik machine-party it is now.

From rejecting and mocking, with priggish middle class disdain, the “orthodox Trotskyist” idea that a revolutionary organisation (or, in the first place, revolutionary nucleus) after the model of Bolshevism should be built in Britain, he went with the Cliff organisation — all the way to trying to build a “revolutionary party” as a machine-party that used virtually any “left” (and sometimes far from “left”) politics to feed off and grow.

He lived through the organisation’s evolution from being *on principle* heavily immersed in the Labour Party, and centrally concerned with the political development of the working class and its labour movement, measuring itself by its relationship to that — all the way towards seeing itself, “the party”, as the measure of all things, and the working-class movement as primarily a pool of potential recruits to

“the party”.

From an organisation that made “anti-sectarianism” its badge of honour, and poured heartfelt and just contempt on “toy-town Bolshevik” sectarianism, — to an organisation that, as the battle against Thatcher opened up after 1979, sealed itself off, as in a diving bell, with the “theory of the downturn” (meaning that nothing in the way of working-class resistance or self-protection was possible but work for the self-sustainment of “the party”, the SWP).

He edited the paper, *Socialist Worker*, in which, two months into the year-long miners’ strike, Cliff, in the worst tradition of charlatan effrontery, wrote: “The miners’ strike is an extreme example of what we in the Socialist Workers Party have called the ‘downturn’ in the movement” (SW, 14 April 1984).

He lived through, and helped shape, the organisation’s evolution, from being more or less open and democratic in its functioning — to its present rigidity and authoritarianism in structures and functioning.

He joined an organisation in which some effort was still being made to tackle the political problems of the post-World-War-Two world and of post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyism”, and in which there was still the working assumption that some of their theorising, on some questions at least, and specifically on imperialism and anti-imperialism, might have a prescriptive bearing on the political practice of the organisation. He lived to be a leading theorist in an organisation for which theorising, political formulas, political positions existed and were shifted, dropped, and picked up to serve the organisational needs of “the revolutionary party” — where Marxist theory was a mere handmaiden to its organisational concerns and appetites: development, growth, membership.

He joined an organisation one of whose central “positions” was that imperialism had come to an end — and lived to go with Tony Cliff, after 1987-8, into a politically all-else-devouring and in many of its implications, reactionary, “anti-imperialism”; an organisation that has not scrupled to ally with and champion the “anti-imperialism” of those Islamic ultra-reactionaries whom previously they had justly called “clerical fascists”.

Himself coming from some sort of Jewish background, he lived to move with the whole organisation from the 1950s and 1960s politics of Socialist Review and IS on the Middle East to today’s vicarious Arab or Islamic chauvinism.

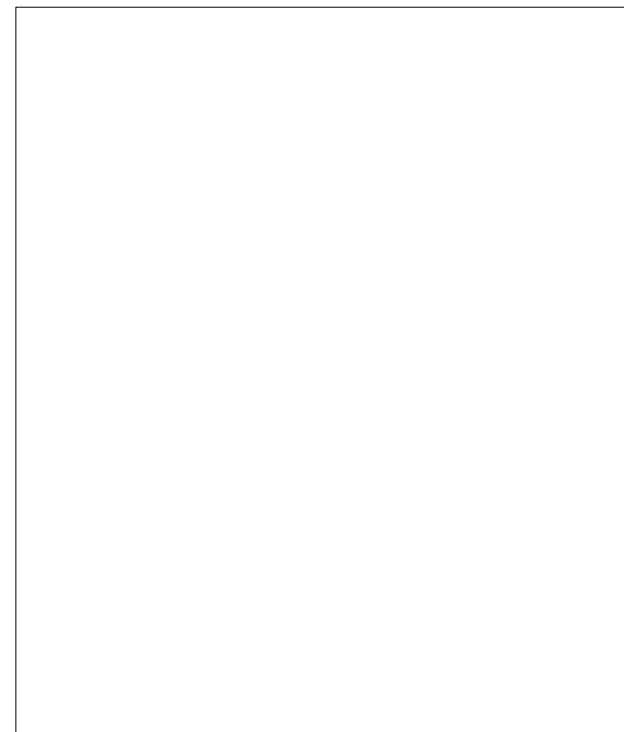
He joined an organisation for which denunciation of Stalinist anti-semitism disguised as “anti-Zionism” was important; in which, though it criticised Israel severely the idea of advocating the conquest and subjugation of the Hebrew nation played no part, even as late as 1967. He travelled with his organisation to its presently dominant and all-shaping politics on the Middle East, in which “freedom for Palestine” functions as code for supporting the Arab and Islamic chauvinist programme of destroying the Jewish state.

By Chris Harman’s end the SWP had long expunged the central Leninist idea of what a revolutionary party’s primary role is — to educate, enlighten, and illuminate the working class on its place in society and its struggle with the bourgeoisie — and substituted for that educational work a sterile onanism of organisational self-promotion

III

Harman and many others learned from Tony Cliff, the leader of the IS/SWP organisation for the fifty years before his death in 2000, not only a certain theoretical framework for viewing Russia and China (that they were “state capitalist” systems), but also and more important a conception of what revolutionary politics is, of what a revolutionary party is, and of how to treat “theory” and political principle.

He learned from Cliff politics and “organisational politics” that were a hybrid or pastiche in which was combined the political approach of post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyism” and that of the Brandlerite-Lovestoneite “Right Communist” international of the 1930s, in one of whose groups (in Palestine) Tony



Chris Harman

Cliff had received his basic political education.

In IS-SWP the Lovestoneite elements came to predominate, decisively.

Harman learned that politics is organisation. Organisational self-promotion is everything. “The party” must be built by any politics that serve that end. Theory is rationalisation, not science and prescription. As Tony Cliff would openly say on the leading committees — in my hearing on the National Committee — “tactics contradict principles”.

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

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

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

IV

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

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

The International Socialists went through a crisis of

Continued on page 18

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

Some had anticipated Cliff. Most of the best people at first tried to go beyond what Cliff at that stage wanted — a merely tightened-up organisation — and to take "Leninisation" seriously where for Cliff it was a new flag of convenience, a mere rationalisation for what he wanted in organisational terms, rather than a guide to what should and should not be done. For varying periods of time, they went into opposition.

Not Harman. He wrote an article on the Leninist "theory of the party", staying very close to Cliff. To reconcile the different conceptions of the party in its leading layer around 1968-9, IS published a pamphlet with a timidly anti-Leninist piece from 1960 by Cliff; Harman's "orthodox" Leninist piece; and another article by Duncan Hallas.

A liberal and pluralistic, rather than dogmatic and authoritarian, approach to political differences, you think?

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

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

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

A 1971 document of the Trotskyist Tendency in IS (a predecessor of the AWL) described the dominant attitude in the IS leadership to what Marxist theory was for, like this:

"It is in this sense that IS has 'contempt for theory' — contempt for the Marxist conception of theory and its necessary relationship to the organisation as a leaven and tool of the whole group. The second and real sense in which IS has 'contempt for theory' is in their use of theory, and [their conception of] the function of theory, the relationship of theory to practice: there is no connection between the two for IS. Do you know that in last week's [mid-1971] debate on the Common Market at the NC Cliff said, and repeated, that principles and tactics contradict each other in real life!

This is organically connected, of course, with their mandarism... [IS theory] is an esoteric knowledge — for if principles contradict tactics and practice; if theory is not a practical and necessary tool; if theory and practice are related only in the sense that theory sums up (in one way or another) past practice, perhaps vivified with a coat of impressionistic paint distilled from what's going on around at the time — but not in the sense that theory is the source of precepts



Harman went along with the one-sided "anti-imperialism" of Cliff et al, even to supporting the would-be genocidal Serbian imperialism in Serbia's colony, Kosova

to guide practice, to aid in the practical exploration of reality — why then, where is the incentive to spread theoretical knowledge?"

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

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

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

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

In the pages of *Socialist Worker*, which he edited until 2004, Harman played his habitual role as ratio-

naliser for whatever the organisation did by "explaining away" even the vile anti-woman practices of the Taliban in Afghanistan, that season's champion "anti-imperialists": see *Socialist Worker* of 6 October 2001.

V

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

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

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

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

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.

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM WORKERS' LIBERTY WINTER SCHOOL 2009

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

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

Sessions and speakers

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

How can the left move forward?

Saturday 11.45am

Elaine Jones is vice-chair of Wirral Trades Council, and a member of AWL. **Mark Serwotka** is general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), and had been a long-time socialist and rank-and-file PCS activist before being elected general secretary. **Joe Marino** is general secretary of the Bakers' Union, and had been a long-time socialist activist before being elected.

Anti-semitism and the pitfalls of anti-capitalism today

Saturday 1.50pm

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

Do we really need a revolutionary party?

Saturday 1.50pm

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

Occupy! Lessons from Vestas and other battles

Saturday 3.15pm

Mark Smith was one of the workers who occupied and then blockaded the Vestas wind turbine blade factory this summer to stop closure. **Vicki Morris** is press officer of Barnet Trades Council, and was one of the AWL members active in supporting the Vestas battle.

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

Saturday 4.55pm

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

Also on Saturday:

- What happened to the anti-capitalist movement? (3.15pm) **Roger Geffen** and **Ian Fillingham**, who were active with Reclaim The Streets, discuss with **Mark Osborn**, AWL member and formerly an organiser for No Sweat.
- Coal and the environment with **Paddy Gillett**, an activist with Plane Stupid and Climate Camp, and **Paul Hampton**, a researcher at the Labour Research Department and editor of a forthcoming AWL pam-

phlet on environmental politics. (3.15pm)

- Indian Marxists **Jairus Banaji** and **Rohini Hensman** discuss with AWL member **Dion D'Silva** on democracy, capitalism, and the left in India. (11.45am)
- London postal worker **Pete Firmin** and **Edward Maltby** from the AWL on the postal workers' battle. (6.50pm)

Is class struggle out of date?

Sunday 11.00am

Jean Lane is Unison convenor for education workers in Tower Hamlets, and an AWL member. **Neil Davenport** will be speaking for the Institute of Ideas, a grouping originating from *Living Marxism* magazine which now organises events jointly with *The Times*.

When does capitalism change direction?

Sunday 12.50pm

Dick Bryan is professor of political economy at Sydney University, and author (with Michael Rafferty) of *Capitalism with Derivatives*. **Simon Mohun** is professor of political economy at Queen Mary University of London, and author of many articles investigating the US economy with the Marxist concepts of "productive" and "unproductive" labour. **Camila Bassi** is a lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University, currently researching the political economy of Shanghai, and an AWL activist.

Left to right: Dick Bryan, Simon Mohun, Camila Bassi

The labour movement in Iraq

Sunday 12.50pm

Ruth Cashman was delegate from No Sweat and Iraq Union Solidarity to the international labour conference in Erbil, Iraq, in March 2009. She is an AWL member and an activist in Unison. **Muayad Ahmed** is an activist with the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions of Iraq and the Worker-communist Party of Iraq, recently returned from Iraq.

Can we replace capitalism?

Sunday 12.50pm

Meghnad Desai is the author of *Marx's Revenge: The Resurgence of Capitalism and the Death of Statist Socialism*. **Mark Sandell** is an AWL member who has been active as a student, a postal worker, and a full-time union organiser.

AWL in the general election and "son of No2EU"

Sunday 2.05pm

Jill Mountford is AWL candidate for the Camberwell and Peckham constituency in the general election, and former organiser of the Welfare State Network. **Tony Byrne** is a longstanding RMT union activist and an AWL member

Socialists in local government: Poplar and GLC compared

Sunday 3.20pm

Janine Booth is an AWL member, London Transport regional secretary of the RMT, and author of *Guilty And Proud Of It*, an account of the Poplar battle. **John McDonnell** was deputy leader of the Greater London Council under Ken Livingstone. He ran for the Labour Party leadership after Tony Blair resigned.

LGBT liberation today

Sunday 3.20pm

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

Dealing with high finance

Sunday 4.25pm

Costas Lapavistas is a professor of economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, and author of *Political Economy of Money and Finance*. **Martin Thomas** coordinated the symposium in *Solidarity* of Marxists on the economic crisis.

Imperialism today

Sunday 6pm

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

Also on Sunday:

- *The revolutions of 1989* with **Sean Matgamna**.
- Pete Radcliff**, AWL member and leading activist in Notts Stop the BNP, on *fighting fascism today*.
- The miners' strike of 1984-5* with **Dave Douglass**, who worked as a miner for 29 years, and **Jill Mountford** from AWL.
- AWL member **Cathy Nugent** discusses with **Andy Littlechild**, a trade-union activist on Metronet on the London Underground and an anarcho-syndicalist, on *anarcho-syndicalism and Marxism*.
- Reel News** on *using film to help the struggle*.
- Why vote Labour*, with **Sean Matgamna** from AWL

Introductory sessions

Clive Bradley on the ideas of *Karl Marx* (Sat 11.45am), **Rosie Woods** on the ideas of *Lenin* (Sat 1.55pm), **Caroline Henry** on the ideas of *Trotsky* (Sun 11.15am), and **Peter Thomas** (author of *The Gramscian Moment*) on *Gramsci* (Sat 6.50pm).

Saturday evening, from 8.30pm at "Dusk till Dawn" (the Archway Tavern), Archway Road, N19 3TD. A night of live hip hop and spoken-word poetry in support of the postal workers' dispute, featuring: CAPTAIN OF THE RANT (punk-poet), CLAYTON BLIZZARD & BLACK JACOBINS FEATURING THE RUBY KID. PLUS SKRIBBO & LOKI (of THE BEING)

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM WINTER 2009 HOW TO FIGHT CAPITALISM

Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 November, Birkbeck College, Malet St, London WC1
www.workersliberty.org/ideas

“Never waste a crisis”

Friends, sympathisers, members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, and many other leftists interested in exploring ways to rearm the labour movement, will be meeting in London on 28-29 November for the AWL's winter school.

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

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

And we cannot do any of those things without coming together, exchanging ideas face-to-face, and organising ourselves into a coherent collective.

The twelve years of New Labour rule are probably nearing their end at the same time as the long capitalist expansion since 1991-2 which made it easier for the New Labourites to keep the labour movement politically stifled. A long period of the labour movement rethinking, reorganising, rejuvenating itself lies ahead.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

See the full programme for the event on page 19

Royal Mail: as management bullying continues, will the strikes restart? see page 5

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