

# Solidarity

SUBSCRIPTIONS

## & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 182 7 October 2010 30p/80p

For a Workers' Government!

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**Boris Johnson  
opposes London  
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Voted in as Mayor by  
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strike ballots must  
win 50% of those  
balloted.**

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**Labour must back union rights!**

## COMPREHENSIVE SPENDING REVIEW

## Cuts to “middle-class benefit” hurt us all

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

**I**t was always going to be a politically divisive cut among Tory supporters. That is why the Tories used their own conference to announce the cuts in Child Benefit for the better-off.

They wanted to tackle this most tricky announcement before the much more devastating cuts due in the Comprehensive Spending Review (20 October).

Patrick O'Brien of the *Daily Express* defied logic by denouncing it as “the worst proposal since the poll tax”... But I don't remember the *Express* being a big supporter of the anti-poll tax protests. It was, he insisted, a “kick in the teeth” for middle-class people everywhere.

You and I might be tempted to shrug and say this is one of those cuts that

don't matter so much — £40,000-plus earners can afford it. According to one poll, 83% of voters say the cut makes sense.

Far worse, you might reasonably conclude, is the proposal to cap all benefits for the unemployed and their families irrespective of their needs. That would — if it does not prove too expensive and too complicated to be implemented — be devastating for the worst-off.

Nonetheless, neutrality on the issue of child benefit cuts would be a big mistake.

Critics were right to point out that this was a measure of huge symbolic importance. It undermines an important long-term element of universality in the welfare system.

Somewhat more problematic is the critics' point that such measures alienate the better-off from support for public

services and a willingness to pay higher taxes.

Problematic because the Tories' attempt to “draw in” the middle classes on other measures are either disingenuous or regressive. Disingenuous on the issue of the NHS, because their support for the privatisation and fragmentation of the NHS begun by Labour will make the NHS less and less “universal”. Regressive in the case of tax allowances for married couples. (It is surely time for couples who are “living in sin” to rise up!)

Nonetheless, the principle of universality is important for socialists. It bolsters our argument for driving out all private health care and all private education from social provision.

The child benefit cut is likely to be the “thin end of the wedge”. The universality of other benefits such as the winter

fuel payments will also be ended.

The introduction of universal child benefits represented a recognition in society, won by centuries of working-class struggles, that there is a cost involved in bringing up children, and that a child's “start in life” matters.

In this respect the so-called middle class “stay at home” parent living in a tidy suburb does have something in common with a single parent struggling on benefits or low wages on a council estate. They share responsibility for the life of a child.

Children are not responsible for their parents' relative advantage or disadvantage in a system of wage-slavery. If child benefit is worth keeping — though it is not enough to end the poverty of children whose families are on the lowest incomes — it should benefit *all* children.

## “Women at the Cutting Edge”

Saturday 30 October

The Arbour, 100 Shandy Street, London E1 (Tube: Mile End or Stepney Green)

A conference hosted by Feminist Fightback, open to people of all genders.

Participatory workshops on:

- What's going on? Mapping cuts and campaigns
- Who do the cuts affect? Why are cuts a feminist issue?
- What does it mean? Demystifying the “economics of the crisis”
- What do we want? Fighting within and against the state

For more information see [www.feministfightback.org.uk](http://www.feministfightback.org.uk), email [feminist.fightback@gmail.com](mailto:feminist.fightback@gmail.com) or call Laura on 07971 842 027.Free creche available: email [feminist.fightback@gmail.com](mailto:feminist.fightback@gmail.com) to confirm a place.

One of the better RMT banners on the march

## Tories plan to chuck you out

BY JACK ROBERTS

**D**avid Cameron has said that “There is a question mark about whether, in future, we should be asking when you are given a council home, is it for a fixed period? Because maybe in five or 10 years you will be doing a different job and be better paid and you won't need that home, you will be able to go into the private sector.”

Under Labour creeping privatisation of social housing saw an initial assault on tenants' rights with “introductory tenancies” for Housing Association tenants which act very much like a probationary period in a permanent job. The Tories are looking to take this further.

For those who became social tenants because they are homeless, suffering domestic abuse or violent attack it would put a deadline on overcoming such circumstances — completely detached from the reality of the situation.

Vulnerable people will have to find a new place to live, maybe in a completely different neighbourhood, away from a job, a child's school, friends and relatives.

Social housing is being rolled up with the benefits system. Yet council housing has been seen by successive governments not as a state benefit, but as a profit-making directorate of local authorities that central government takes a sizeable slice from.

BY TONY BYRNE

**U**nder the slogan “No to austerity. Priority for jobs and growth” 100,000 workers marched through Brussels on 29 September. I traveled as part of the delegation from the rail union RMT.

With 200 marchers, we were the largest component of a British contingent that included workers from CWU, FBU, TSSA, Unison and Unite.

The RMT leaflet contained the now familiar charge that it is the EU alone that is driving privatisation and austerity, that if only we were free of it “...elected national governments could develop vital public services...” Maybe that's

why the Tory party has such a problem with Europe — they'd like to be nice to the workers but those nasty EU bureaucrats won't let them!

As the whole British contingent was marching behind the RMT they were, unwittingly I suspect, lending support to one of the banners at the front which proclaimed “No2EU — Yes to Democracy”.

Better were those that declared “No to EU austerity, stop EU liberalisation” and “Rail Safety Before Profit, Stop EU liberalisation”.

If only there had been one that said “No to EU austerity, yes to EU democracy” or, better still, “No to EU austerity, yes to European workers' unity”.

## General strikes in France and Spain

BY IRA BERKOVIC

**W**orkers in France continued their struggle against the government's pension reforms, with a general strike on 23 September and a wave of demonstrations on 2 October.

On both days, around three million workers took part, with more than 200 local demonstrations on 2 October. The next general strike is due to take place on 12 October but more plans will be announced by union leaderships as *Solidarity* goes to press.

Sarkozy's government is trying to force workers to contribute more to their

pension and retire later.

Union leaderships in France are pursuing a strategy that seems designed to wear the strike down — calling one-day demonstration strikes several weeks apart with no plan for continuing the action.

This is not a strategy that can fend off a determined rightwing government. But at the time of writing, it appears French union leaders may escalate the action by organising rolling 24-hour strikes in the transport sector if the government does not back down.

Meanwhile, more than 10 million workers participated in a one-day general strike in Spain, bringing large sections

of the country's economy to a virtual standstill. Estimates for participation vary, with some sources estimating that up to 70% of the workforce took part. In certain cities and sectors, participation reached 90% or higher.

Transport services were severely hit, with the majority of all inter-city train travel being cancelled. Police attacked picket lines in many places as well as clashing with demonstrators.

**T**he strike was called in response to Spanish austerity measures imposed by the country's “Blairite” government, including a 5% cut to civil service pay and new laws that make it

easier for bosses to sack workers. These follow a €750 billion IMF loan in May.

The leaders of the UGT and CCOO, the two union federations, have been somewhat sluggish in their response to the cuts, only calling the strike after the measures had been introduced and then only for one day. However, the experience of the general strike will have demonstrated the enormous potential power of organised labour to disrupt the day-to-day functioning of society (and, implicitly, to reorganise it).

The strike was also a success for the opponents of insipid rock music, as U2 were forced to cancel a scheduled concert.

## ANTI-CUTS FIGHT

# Fight bosses' drive to shackle unions!

**B**ritain already has the tightest and most worker-hostile trade-union laws in the European Union. And now what do they want to do now, the bosses, sections of the press, and sections of the Tory party? To tighten the laws even further! To hog-tie the workers and our unions even more than we are hog-tied already.

They have the jitters about what the labour movement will do when the details of the government's cuts programme are spelled out on 20 October.

The bosses' "trade union", the Confederation of British Industry, has called for a series of new laws.

- Ballot decisions to strike should be invalid unless the "yes" vote is over 40% of those balloted as well as over 50% of those voting.
- All strike ballot papers should go with a statement from the employer and "a notice warning that pay and non-contractual benefits can be withdrawn if an employee goes on strike".
- Even after a strike ballot victory, the delay before a strike can be legally called should be extended from seven to 14 days.
- Employers should be able to use agency temps to break strikes.
- Financial penalties for unions should be raised.
- And more.

Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who normally presents himself as a lovable, bumbling buffoon, has dropped the mask and come out snarling, like the vicious right-wing Tory he is, against the right to strike which London Underground workers still have and make good use of.

He wants a new law to say strike ballots must get 50% of those balloted (not just the CBI's 40%).

The Lib Dems already favour a new law to give the government power to ban strikes in "essential services". Vince Cable reaffirmed that policy during the election campaign.

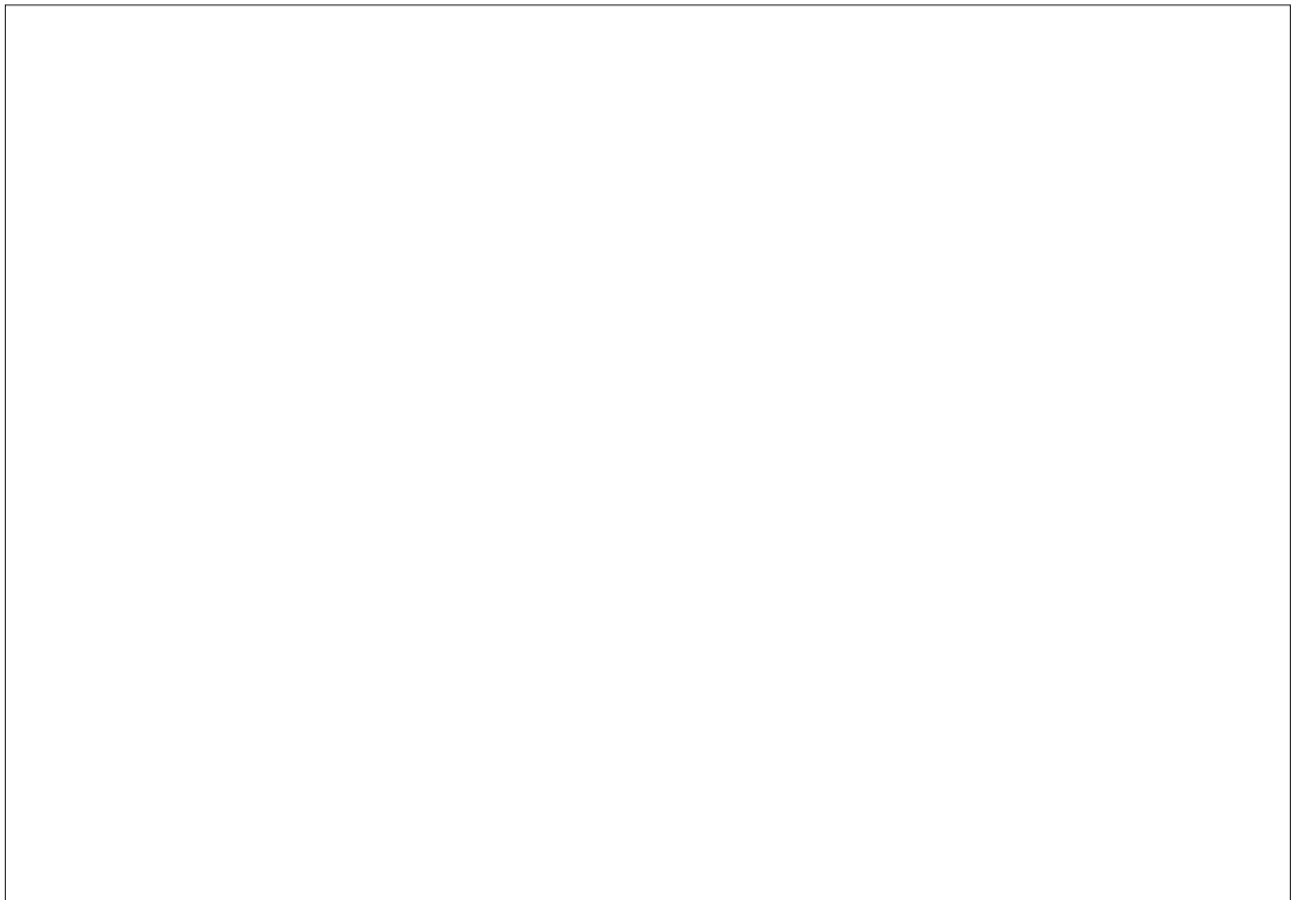
The CBI, Boris Johnson, and the rest are building up a head of steam in an ongoing campaign. The labour movement would be foolish to dismiss it as idle talk.

The Tories and their Lib-Dem stooges are frightened men and women. They plan to plunge British back decades in terms of welfare provision and living standards. They say they have no choice because the deficit has to be reduced. That's a lie.

This Cabinet of millionaires and glib public-school-trained guardians of the interests of the rich is set on making the working class and the poor pay for the almighty mess which their friends, the bankers and financiers, have made.

They don't know how the working class will respond. They fear a social rebellion like that provoked by Thatcher's poll tax two decades ago — and more. Maybe far more.

Compared to what the Government plans to do now, the poll tax was pretty small beer. Opinion polls show that most people accept that some cuts are "necessary". Most of those who say that will



**BA bosses took the unions to court. Bosses now want to shackle the unions and potential industrial struggles. Photo: Justin Tallis/reportdigital.co.uk**

not accept a cut as being "necessary" when they themselves are targeted. And millions are being, and will be targeted.

Lots of people think it reasonable that well-off people should not get child benefit. That has not prevented a backlash among mostly Tory-supporting people, now faced with losing a sizeable chunk of money.

So it will be, and more so, when people learn on 20 October what "reducing the deficit" will mean for them, personally.

The agitation against "the unions" and against workers' rights to withdraw their labour is a pre-emptive blow against the resistance which they all fear.

In the social crisis which engulfed Britain in the first years of the Thatcher government, the half-demented brutality of the press against "loony left" Labour councils was a major factor.

We are slipping back to a so-far-mild version of that. The *Daily Mail* has carried idiotic front page headlines denouncing the very moderate new Labour Party leader, Ed Miliband, as "Red Ed".

What do they think they are doing?

In part the bosses and the press are trying to intimidate the Labour Party and trade union leaders, as they intimidated them in the 1980s. That they feel this need is a measure of how jittery the ruling class and its militant supporters are now.

Any new anti-union legislation will build further on the Thatcher anti-union laws. Those laws combined with economic slump to hold down the working class during the Thatcher years. Laws

alone would not have done it, but, combined with mass unemployment and many factory closures, the anti-union laws were no small thing.

Outlawing solidarity strike action, those laws outlaw effective trade unionism beyond very narrow limits.

It was a crime for the Blair and Brown governments not to have repealed the Tory anti-union laws. It was a crime for the union leaders not to insist on their repeal after 1997, when New Labour came to government.

It will be a crime now if they don't insist that Ed Miliband's Labour Party pledge itself to repeal the Thatcher laws, and any new anti-union laws which the Tory/ Lib-Dem coalition government brings in, at the first opportunity.

The union leaders should be pressed to say that they will where necessary defy both the old and any new anti-union laws. The labour movement across the European Union can be got to raise an outcry in Europe against the repression of its British sisters and brothers and the denial of their full trade union rights.

The Tories and Lib Dems are readying themselves for serious class war in the period ahead. If the labour movement does not do the same, then we will be steamrollered by the ruling class and their Cabinet of sleek and callous millionaires.

The entire labour movement — in the first line, Labour councils — should pledge itself to resist and defy anti-union laws and any coalition cuts and impositions which hurt the interests of the working class.

# Local anti-cuts movement grows

## NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

**A**round 150 people turned out for the second Notts anti-cuts meeting on 22 September. The meeting saw a real political and organisational debate.

Two Labour MPs spoke (they positively asked to speak rather than being invited), along with the Labour opposition group leader on Notts County Council. All good “fighting talk” but all three failed to respond positively to calls on them to defy demands on them to make cuts.

Nottingham AWL put out a leaflet outlining the politics of the cuts and repeating the demand (passed successfully at the Trades Council) for Nottingham’s Labour city council to defy the cuts and help mobilise workers and communities against the government.

*Tom Unterrainer*

## CHESTERFIELD

**C**hesterfield Trades Council will be holding an open anti-cuts meeting on Monday 11 October at 7pm in the North East Derbyshire District Council offices on Saltergate. The meeting will discuss how to defend home help services from Lib-Tory cuts.

Currently Derbyshire County Council provides the only free home help service in the country. The Liberal Democrats and Tories on the County Council are moving to change this, and make service-users pay for this vital service.

## CHELMSFORD

**T**here was a good turn out at the anti-cuts meeting in Chelmsford on 22 September. Sixty people came, mostly unaligned local activists and concerned workers or residents, but members of left groups too.

The event was organised by the Chelmsford Trades Council; there were three speakers, one a regional GMB organiser, one a Unison national executive member (but speaking from Public Services Not Private Profit), and one from Harlow Defend Council Housing.

An open steering committee was set up. There was also talk about doing stalls, local demos, door knocking and contact work with local groups such as housing associations.

One floor member spoke up against union members paying a political levy, saying that New Labour was disgraceful. A few people made the point about its importance, and the GMB speaker spoke about fighting within the Labour Party as well as outside. The campaign has a website — [chelmsfordagainstcuts.wordpress.com](http://chelmsfordagainstcuts.wordpress.com)

*John Hutt*

# Government gears up to sack civil servants

BY COLIN FOSTER

**T**he Lib/Tory government has broken off talks with the unions about the redundancy pay entitlements of civil service workers.

The government plans to “cap” redundancy payments for those sacked at a maximum of 12 months’ pay, and for redundancy-volunteers at 15 months’.

This will make it cheaper for the government to make the vast job cuts — maybe one-third of total staff — which they plan for the civil service.

The Labour government introduced milder plans to reduce severance pay. In May the PCS union won a legal ruling that the change was illegal.

The new government has introduced

legislation for far harsher cuts in severance pay, and will make other legal changes to make a new court challenge unworkable.

Until 28 September the government was negotiating with the unions about its legislation. On that day it said it would no longer negotiate with PCS, the biggest civil service union, but would continue talking with five other unions — POA, Prospect, FDA, Unite, and GMB — who organise a minority of the workers covered by the Civil Service Compensation Scheme.

The government has made its plans clear, and there is no chance that the talks will do more than tweak them at the edges.

Sadly, however, the PCS leadership’s response is inadequate. Its recommendations to members are all on the level of

“write to your MP”.

And it makes no mention of the tens of thousands of workers, members of the inferior Nuvos pension scheme introduced under the “two-tier” deal negotiated by the union in 2005, who even before the planned Lib/Tory changes are entitled only to statutory minimum redundancy payments.

Generally the PCS leadership is not even beginning to agitate among the membership towards industrial action, let alone to plan action. Insofar as it indicates an intention for industrial action, it is focused on the issue of public sector pension changes likely to be pushed by the Lib/Tory government.

It can’t make sense to try to mobilise workers only, or primarily, around pensions, if a third of them are likely to lose their jobs long before pension age.

## LAMBETH

# “We need strikes and demonstrations”

**Dan Jeffery, Assistant Branch Secretary of Lambeth UNISON, spoke to Solidarity in a personal capacity about Lambeth Save Our Services and the anti-cuts fight.**

**S**ave Our Services initially came out of Lambeth UNISON, GMB, NUT and UCU thinking there needed to be an anti-cuts campaign in the face of the huge cuts from both the Tory/Lib Dem government and the local Labour council.

We have various community groups and activists to come on board, produced 10,000 newsletters for the Lambeth Country Show, and organised several anti-cuts demos and lobbies. This resulted in saving over 50 jobs and stopping union-busting in the One O’Clock clubs and Adventure Playgrounds. We are now trying to stop the housing ALMO, Lambeth Living, cutting up to a fifth of its staff.

We are building for a demonstration in Brixton on 30 October and want a Lambeth wide anti-cuts assembly soon.

The campaign has a very active base of trade unionists and some community campaigns such as the Lambeth Pensioners Action Group.

We need to become a far bigger campaign and also get more community groups and TRAs involved. As with all the local anti-cuts campaigns, we need a national umbrella group.

The trade union bureaucracy is a big obstacle, with words not being followed up by action. In Unison we have faced severe witch hunts against left-wing activists, with whole branches being shut down and taken over by regional bureaucrats.

Hopefully a big anti-cuts movement will mean union members can get rid of the current set of leaders with people who will really represent our interests and take a worker’s wage. We will also need to take on and break the anti-union laws.

Another weakness is the total sectarianism coming from some quarters, including the SWP setting up a separate anti-cuts meeting long after Save our Services was established. However, hopefully unity will prevail!

There are a huge number of varied issues locally: cuts in the NHS, welfare

cuts, massive cuts in Lambeth Council, thousands of job losses, cuts to funding for community groups. These cuts are already affecting almost every area of people’s lives, hitting the poorest and most vulnerable hardest. This is why it is really important we get as many different campaigning groups and activists on board so we can give each other solidarity rather than fighting things cut by cut.

The job cuts and service cuts will affect us all and we need a combination of strike action, demonstrations, occupations, lobbies and hopefully new and innovative ideas.

The Labour Party leadership is no friend of the anti-cuts movement. New Labour councils, including Lambeth, were already making deep cuts even before the Tory/Lib Dem announcements.

There are a handful of Labour councillors who are supporting us, and Labour Party members. If councillors and MPs are prepared to genuinely put themselves behind an anti-cuts movement and oppose all cuts, rather than using our campaigns for their own political careers, then we want them on board. But personally I think that most Labour Party MPs and councillors are very far from the pro-working class representation that we need.

This reflects a wider degeneration of the Labour Party. The link between local working-class communities/the trade unions and Labour has shrivelled to almost nothing in most areas. In the unions it is essentially a link up between trade union bureaucrats and Labour Party bureaucrats for the most part.

I think we definitely need national co-ordination. But it needs to be open, inclusive and democratic. So far Right to Work seems anything but this, and seems like just another front organisation (for the SWP). They have recently put out a call for unity, but their actions aren’t backing up their words at the moment.

I think the Coalition of the Resistance has more potential to be inclusive and democratic. At this point we need to let a thousand flowers bloom, and not be concerned about branding at a local level, but we do need a national organisation to co-ordinate things.

# BBC strike on hold

**S**taff at the BBC called off their 48-hour strike planned for 5-6 October. BECTU, NUJ and Unite are consulting members on an improved offer in the dispute over pensions, but it seems at the moment unlikely that members will accept it.

There is no doubt that the threat of strike forced BBC management to move, but events were complicated by a letter from some BBC staff working on political broadcasts (not all of them union members). The letter regretted the timing of the first strike, which would have disrupted David Cameron’s speech to Tory party conference. One problem with the latest offer is it offers more generous terms to existing employees but worse terms to new entrants, which would erode solidarity between members of the workforce.

# Tunnocks workers take action

BY CLARKE BENITEZ

**W**orkers at iconic biscuit company Tunnocks, which is based in Lanarkshire, Scotland, took two days of strike action this month after pay talks with bosses broke down.

Management made a renewed pay offer of 2% but workers decided to continue with the planned walkouts.

Unite regional organiser Derek Ormston said “The union is disappointed that the company has not approached us with an improved offer to avoid this action. Our members will be considering what the next stage will be once we have seen the result of the ballot on the 2% offer.”

Workers, who are already operating an overtime ban, will vote on the new deal by postal ballot due to close on 4 October.

TUBE STRIKE

# Keeping up the pressure on Tube bosses

London Underground workers are fighting proposed cuts which will see the equivalent of 800 jobs lost. Against a barrage of media abuse, they have stood firm for the vision of an underground system that meets the needs of both workers and passengers. Janine Booth, Alliance for Workers' Liberty member and Secretary of the London Transport Region of the RMT, spoke to *Solidarity*.

**How did the second strike day go?**

Even better than the first. There was no slip in support among the workforce, and in some areas, it was stronger. More rank-and-file ASLEF members were out with us, despite their leaders' failure to join the dispute. Lots of people took part in picketing, even members who are not usually active in the union.

**Is the action short of strikes is having an effect in between strike days.**

Yes, it has been having an effect. The

overtime ban has led to station closures, trains being cancelled, and even week-end engineering works being called off. Members are pursuing the battle to save jobs every day, rather than passively waiting for the next strike. And it means that negotiators have action going on as they talk, which puts them in a stronger position. The unions have now added further "action short" — a ban on some higher grade working, and a boycott of the £5 minimum Oyster top-up policy.

**Do you workers think they can win? Do they feel as if they're just in a war of attrition with bosses that could go on and on, or do people see cracks beginning to show?**

We have the upper hand both with the strength of our industrial action and with our level of public support. But it depends on how determined the company is to push through the job cuts, which in turn may depend on how determined the politicians are to defeat the unions.

**Were people prepared for the hostile media?**

I don't think anyone expects the *Evening Standard* to report our disputes fairly, or even accurately. But the anti-union coverage still makes people angry. Staff are particularly annoyed with the BBC and others repeatedly stating that the 800 job cuts are all ticket office jobs. In truth, only just over half (450) are ticket office jobs. Most of the rest are CSAs — people who work around the stations, assisting passengers, making announcements, dealing with emergencies.

**But there seem to have been significant levels of support from the labour movement and from the public. Does that have a galvanising effect?**

Yes, it really helps. We've had stacks of messages of support and various polls have shown a majority backing us. Public opinion alone does not win disputes, but it helps keep up morale, and put pressure on the company and the politicians.

**Support for the strike is growing**

**Are 24-hour strikes sufficient? Is the spirit there for longer action?**

Many of us were disappointed that the strikes were not for longer — say, 48 hours. But as it turns out, the 24-hour strikes have kept nearly everyone on board with the dispute, and ensured that the action has been solid. We may need to step it up — is important that the unions are flexible and responsive enough to escalate if we need to and if the members are up for it.

**How have workers reacted to Boris Johnson's call for a 50% turnout requirement for strikes?**

Angrily! Loads of people are saying that he is a hypocrite because he was elected Mayor, and his party is running the country, with way less than 50% of the vote! But most importantly, everyone knows that this is simply an attack on our right to strike. Chaining up the unions will leave London's transport companies free to attack services and safety, which will be much more inconvenient than the occasional strike day! If the Tories try what Boris suggests, the whole working-class movement should mobilise to fight it.

**What can socialists involved in the dispute do to fight for more rank-and-file control?**

Our rank-and-file strike committee has proved really important in organising for the action, and in discussing tactics. But it would be better still if there were more definite structures through which

rank-and-file members can steer their dispute.

**You're running for the RMT Council of Executives; tell us a little bit about your campaign.**

I'm standing for the Executive so I can push for changes in the union to build on its strengths and make it more responsive to its members. Executive members need to stand up for the rank-and-file, not simply go along with what national officers want. The majority of branches, and many reps, are backing me, because they know from my record that I can fight for the changes that the union needs. Members will start voting by post in late October. My supporters are already out campaigning, but more volunteers are always welcome!

**Why Tubeworker matters**

*Tubeworker* is a rank-and-file bulletin produced by worker-activists on London Underground. It is the only consistently-produced bulletin of its type and was founded for AWL members working on the Underground 20 years ago.

It is produced democratically in open editorial meetings and has built up a reputation for bringing workers the news, discussion and analysis that neither the bosses nor the union bureaucrats want them to read.

In the context of a strike, *Tubeworker* becomes an essential forum where rank-and-file workers can discuss their opinions.

We organise regular distribution of *Tubeworker*; to get involved, email [skillz\\_999@hotmail.com](mailto:skillz_999@hotmail.com) or visit [www.workersliberty.org/tubeworker](http://www.workersliberty.org/tubeworker)

**Help Janine's campaign!**

Over half the RMT branches in London have now backed Janine's campaign.

Having her on the Council of Executives would mean securing a voice for independent working-class socialist politics, union democracy and accountability, as well as securing the election of the first woman ever to hold the London transport workers' seat on the NEC.

But the campaign is not just about getting an individual elected to a committee; it's about spreading class-struggle political ideas and persuading RMT members to become active on the basis of those ideas within the union.

You can help by taking leaflets, stickers and other materials to distribute around London Underground and other London Transport workplaces.

- To get in touch, email [janine.booth@btopenworld.com](mailto:janine.booth@btopenworld.com).

FIREFIGHTERS

# "Cuts will affect public safety"

Ian Leahair, FBU Executive Council member for London, spoke to *Solidarity*.

The action short of a strike has been very strong all over; fire engines have been taken off the run right across the brigade. We've seen 56 engines taken off, along with boats and special equipment. That's all because of lack of crews, which shows how solid our overtime ban has been.

It's not just business as normal, which is proved by the fact that management have begun threatening pay cuts and mass disciplinaries for alleged breaches of contract. Management have clearly upped the ante. Our Regional Committee is meeting tomorrow and we will be discussing the possibility of escalating the action short of strike in response to the threats of discipline and reductions in member's salaries by 20%.

Management are clearly under extreme pressure. They've been making up policy on the hoof with total disregard for safe systems of work, to cover

the gaps left by our action and they clearly have no plan for dealing with it whatsoever. They said beforehand that our action would have no effect and that's clearly been proven wrong.

Our ballot for strike action closes on October 14, and we are convinced that it will be an overwhelming yes vote; strike action could begin from October 21 if necessary. We believe that firefighters across London would support any strike very solidly because they don't feel like they have any choice left, when threatened with the sack. Strike action is not something we want to take but this is not a dispute of our making; management could end it tomorrow if they lifted their threat of mass sackings.

Firefighters are certainly looking closely at similar struggles faced by other groups of workers. It's no accident that the introduction of the changes to our shift patterns are being timed to coincide with the Comprehensive Spending Review. What we're facing is part of a general project of cuts against public sector workers.

As far as we're concerned, the fire service in London is one of the best in the country. We've already had to make cuts in the past and our argument now is that further cuts will seriously endanger firefighter and public safety. One thing the Fire Brigades Union will never do is accept cuts that endanger the safety of firefighters or the public, no matter which government is in power."

## Norwich FBU fights cuts

BY PAT YARKER

Sixty members of the FBU in Norwich rallied on Saturday 2 October in the city-centre to protest cuts to the fire-service.

Tory-controlled Norfolk County Council is taking advantage of a welcome reduction in the volume of city

call-outs to cut one of four whole-time fire engines from Norwich. The council also wants to remove more than twenty per cent of current fire-crews from the city. The FBU argues such cuts will increase the risk to the first crew attending a fire, and lengthen the time taken by a second crew to respond. This in turn intensifies the risk of death or injury to members of the public and to firefighters. Other frontline cuts are being made across the county, yet the number of fires breaking out in Norfolk homes has risen over the last four years.

The rally was supported by members of Norfolk Coalition Against Cuts, which has affiliations from local UNISON, PCS, NUT and other union-branches, and many left activists in the city. Firefighters will lobby County Councillors on October 11 when a decision on cuts is likely. Should cuts go ahead, local FBU members have indicated their willingness to strike to defend the service. More information via:

[norfolkcoalitionagaincuts.org](http://norfolkcoalitionagaincuts.org)

## MASS REDUNDANCY NOTICES

# Local government bosses launch class-war offensive

BY DARREN BEDFORD

Several local authorities have sent out redundancy warning notices to large numbers of workers, in some cases to their entire workforce.

There aim is to set the unions a choice: accept cuts in pay and conditions, or job cuts, or both.

Councils in Sheffield, Croydon, Neath and Port Talbot, Walsall and Birmingham — as well as the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority — are all employing the tactic. The message from the bosses is explicit: “accept the changes we’re proposing or you’re sacked”.

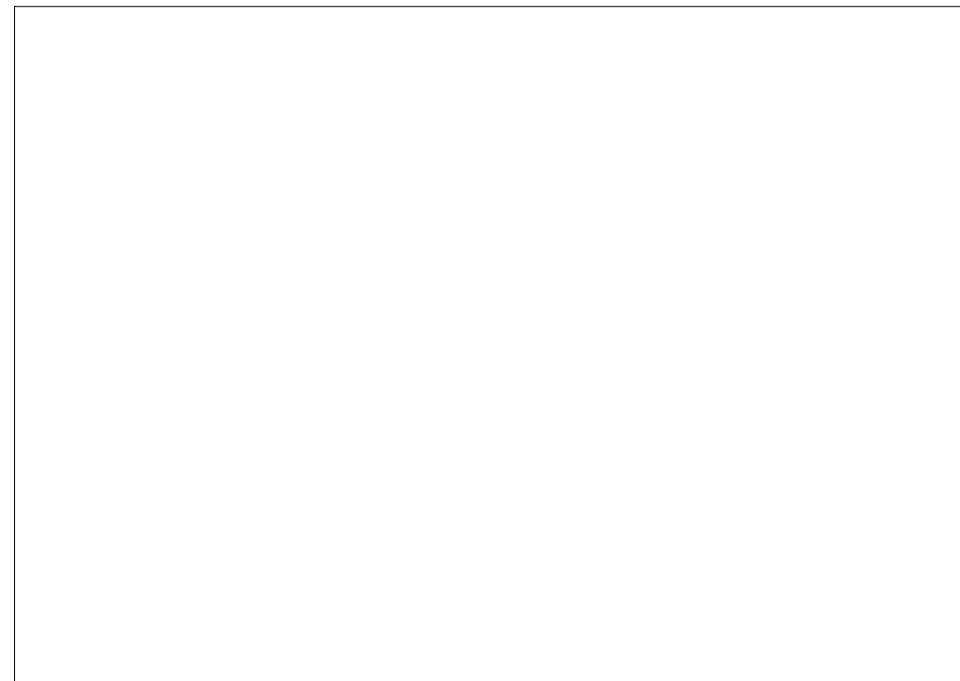
The public sector is the main bastion of organised labour in Britain. The meaning behind this kind of belligerence from local government bosses is clear: if the public sector unions can be smashed then the road is clear for cuts. Unfortunately, however, the war tactics of the bosses have not been matched with equivalent war tactics from the unions.

Within Unison, a union in which is it notoriously difficult to get any industrial action organised and where the leadership spends more time witch-hunting the union’s left than fighting bosses, the focus has been almost exclusively on closed-off negotiations.

In Neath and Port Talbot, talks around the issue have been rumbling on for months (the notifications were first issued in late June), with the authority now asking to wait for the outcome of October’s Comprehensive Spending Review before proceeding. It had previously been looking for £24 million worth of savings; whatever the CSR produces it is unlikely to tell Neath and Port Talbot council that it no longer has to save this money.

Unison has failed to organise any significant public protest in the area, and sources within the local union bureaucracy confirm that it will continue to focus on negotiations rather than other means of action or pressure.

Unison activists in Croydon have had a



The public sector unions are not yet prepared for an effective defence, let alone an offensive

slightly better experience. Council bosses there have threatened to cut 35% of the workforce, although they claim it won’t be “all in one go.” Bosses are attempting to slash £70 million from spending as well as finding £60 million in “efficiency savings.”

The Unison branch resolved to “use all available means to oppose [the cuts] implementation, to include public campaigning and industrial action.” After Croydon won an overwhelming yes vote in a consultative ballot, Unison head office sanctioned a ballot for industrial action.

Local activists suspect that this may well be because Croydon is a flagship Tory council, so the political lines of are clearer for the Labour-loyal Unison leadership. A lobby of the council’s meeting on October 18 is planned.

The GMB, the other union with a significant number of members involved in these battles, has displayed somewhat

more truculence than Unison. In Sheffield, the local GMB branch is mobilising for a TUC-called demonstration outside the Town Hall on October 23. In Birmingham the GMB’s Roger Jenkins asserted that the union “will do everything in our power to protect our members’ jobs, and the provision of frontline services to the people of Birmingham.” (See below for an interview with Stuart Richards of the GMB in Walsall.)

Unions need to organise real fight-backs, both industrially and politically. Unison and the GMB are both Labour-affiliated and should use that link to apply maximum pressure to Labour councillors.

They should gear up for an autumn of direct actions including demonstrations and, where possible, strikes. The bosses are on the offensive; workers can only resist that offensive if we gear up our unions to fight in a similarly belligerent fashion.

## Sheffield rally

Deep, rapid spending cuts will hit the vulnerable, undermine vital services and threaten both private and public sector jobs. Join us at a regional protest and rally being organised by the Yorkshire & Humber TUC and let your voice be heard.

**SATURDAY 23  
OCTOBER SHEFFIELD  
CITY CENTRE  
MEET TOWN HALL  
12:30-3PM**

Speakers to be confirmed.

Trades Unions and Trades Union Councils are asked to mobilise support and bring along banners.

If you need further details, please contact: Yorkshire & Humber TUC on 0113 242 9696

## Labour councils should defy cuts

BY MARTIN THOMAS

In many areas Labour councillors say they will “fight the cuts” — but also implement them! They say they have no choice. In fact they can and should use their positions as platforms to mobilise to defy the cuts.

The alternative is not a little harmless trimming. Central government is set to cut councils’ funding by 25% over the next four and a half years. Since much that councils do is “statutory” — background stuff that they must do, by law — a 25% cut is huge social destruction.

Defiance involves risk for councillors. The Poplar councillors were jailed for a short period; the Clay Cross councillors were surcharged and made bankrupt. Actually the legal risks for councillors now are smaller than they used to be, but there are still some.

The question for councillors, as for workers in a strike, is whether they are prepared to take risks in the cause of working-class solidarity, or choose to save their own position at the expense of others.

We say Labour councils should put working-class solidarity first. They should:

- **Not make social cuts now!** Whatever the coming central government cuts, councils are large organisations with complex finances which give them leeway. They can cut top management and councillors’ expenses. They can juggle accounts in various ways.

- **Mobilise council workers, council tenants, and local communities for a fight.** Financial gambits are no long-term answer, but they can allow for time to mobilise. Obviously councillors will have little credibility when calling on workers and tenants to fight unless they make a stand themselves.

- **Aim towards a concerted act of local working-class defiance** — councillors refusing to budget within central government limits, council workers striking, council tenants rent-striking, residents withholding council tax — with the demand that central government restores the money for local services.

If all Labour councils took this stand, then the Lib/Tory government would have to retreat very quickly. If even a sizeable few did, then the government would be in big trouble. Poplar and Clay Cross showed that even a single council, on its own, can win a victory.

Once such a mobilisation is started, it should be controlled democratically by a local delegate committee of working-class organisations, with the councillors taking part alongside others. The time to move to all-out defiance should be decided by that delegate committee.

It will depend on the tempo of mobilisation, on possibilities of linking up with other working-class struggles against the government, and so on. (To aim at budget-setting day may be right — or may not).

The first argument is that council Labour groups (or groups of Labour councillors who want to oppose the cuts) should integrate themselves into local anti-cuts committees, and make their strategies and options a matter for democratic debate in the local labour movement, rather than “there is no alternative” announcements.

- More (including on the legal details) at [www.workersliberty.org/defy](http://www.workersliberty.org/defy)

## “We won’t accept any cuts that hurt our members”

Stuart Richards from the GMB in Walsall spoke to *Solidarity*.

There was no indication at all that the council was going to go down this route. We were engaged in a process of negotiations which they’ve decided to break away from. Birmingham council’s decision to pursue a similar course of action has given other councils the confidence to do it as well; they definitely see it as a way to undermine collective agreements and avoid the need to negotiate with trade unions.

We had commitments from councillors than any changes to pay and conditions would be negotiated collectively and they’ve reneged on that.

It’s unclear at the moment exactly how things will develop. The council are

adjusting the time-scale they started with so we’re waiting until we have a clearer picture of their plans before we work out a detailed response. We think those changes in time-scale might effect whether the employer has actually fulfilled the legal obligations associated with Section 188 notifications so we’re investigating that avenue as well. On the whole though unions in Walsall have taken a very solid stance. We won’t accept any changes that will be detrimental to our members.

Our local activists are mobilising politically; we’re already engaged in a process of lobbying our GMB councillors and other Labour group members to use the link between our union and the Labour Party to put pressure on those councillors to vote and campaign against any cuts that hurt our members.

## LABOUR CONFERENCE

# What's new in Ed Miliband's party?

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

**That New Labour would be shaken up by electoral defeat, and that defeat would allow "old Labour" and trade-union discontent with what Blair and Brown had done to the Labour Party to emerge, has been obvious for a long time.**

That the shake-up would within four months of the general election and New Labour's defeat produce the transformations expressed in the election of Ed Miliband — the trade unions' candidate — as leader of the party, and in his speech to conference on Tuesday 28 September, is nevertheless startling. The speed, scope, and (in a limited sense) completeness of the change is startling.

Although the press has not reported this, the conference voted, on trade-union initiative, to restore to unions and local Labour Parties the right to send (a limited number of) motions to annual conference.

This reverses the decision of 2007 conference to end completely the old practice of having conference act as a forum and parliament of the labour movement, and to turn it into a rally instead.

That 2007 decision had been a sealing-off and completion of the rule changes introduced in 1997 that destroyed the structures that had allowed the rank and file and the affiliated unions to function — however inadequately — in politics.

The reversal of the 2007 decision can be made the beginning of a reconstruction of the Labour Party, and its reclamation by the trade unions and the Labour Party members.

In his speech, Ed Miliband said he was "proud" of some New Labour government achievements. What is significant for the way things are moving is that he explicitly repudiated much of "New Labour".

On the level of generalities he tried to wipe the New Labour slate clean. The big question is: what will he — and the labour movement! — write on it? In deeds, and not only in words?

There are two ways of assessing the Labour Party conference and Ed Miliband's speech, and for the sake of discussion they are separable.

One, from the point of view of revolutionary socialism, and of those like *Solidarity* and the Alliance for Workers' Liberty who want the working-class movement to adopt the goal and the policies of severely limiting market operations and subordinating them to social control; abolishing capitalism; and substituting for wage labour (wage slavery) a society based on cooperative, non-exploitative, socially self-employing labour.

Anything said by ex-minister Ed Miliband was bound to be unsatisfactory from that point of view, and so it was.

Secondly, we can assess the conference

## Ed is not red

**Above is how the press reported the election of Ed Miliband as Labour leader. It isn't true: New Labour policies and structures, and the personnel of the New Labour machine, are still in place.**

But the press coverage is not inconsequential, either.

It certainly reflects a new mood in the unions. The union leaders went against the Parliamentary leadership over the choice of a new leader — the big majority of the ex-Cabinet wanted David Miliband — and they won.

Tens of thousands of trade union activists now know that they can go against the Parliamentary leadership and win. The 35,000 new members who have joined the Labour Party since the election, and the tens of thousands of older members who have "sat it out", resenting the "New Labour" shift but seeing no way to stop it, have been given a signal

that things should change and can change.

New Labour isn't dead. But to have its death announced, in a labour movement where tens of thousands of activists have a deep-rooted hatred of New Labour, is a sizeable blow to its smooth continuation.

As John McDonnell MP put it in a fringe meeting on Sunday evening, 26 September, we are potentially at a turning point — at the point where the Labour left hits bottom and starts to climb back.

That is not, McDonnell stressed, because we can or should have any confidence in Ed Miliband to change the Labour Party for the better. It is because we have a new chance to begin to organise a more confident and assertive rank and file.

It won't be easy, and it's unlikely to be quick, and we can't even guarantee that the left will be smart enough to seize the opportunity, but an opportunity is there.

### What does he believe in?

for what it tells us of the development and evolution of the mass labour movement.

It is from that viewpoint that the conference tells us things that we did not know before.

While Marxist socialists always engage in our fundamental educational work for socialism, we do not counterpose the socialist programme to the evolution of the broad, non-Marxist, labour movement. We work to help the labour movement develop in a political direction. We "intervene" in the political processes of the broad working-class movement to help it develop in our direction.

From that angle, shifts like those at the conference, remote though they are from bringing the labour movement to full socialist awareness, are extremely important.

On one level, purely electoral reasons impelled Ed Miliband to escape from the New Labour shroud. As the Lib-Dem trimmings allow the coalition government to present itself as "progressive", that creates a mechanical pressure on the Labour Party to move left.

Even so, and irrespective of motive and calculation, what Ed Miliband said will resonate in the labour movement and in a working class faced with the coalition onslaught.

Ed Miliband:

- Repudiated Blair-Brown's subservience to the rich and powerful. He attacked the stark and indefensible inequality of a care worker earning in a year what a banker gets in a day. He put the idea of equality back in place, and counterposed it to Blair-Brown's advice to the rich to go on enriching themselves.

- He pointed to a connection between enrichment for a few, and cramped incomes for so many.

- He apologised for the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

- He condemned New Labour's record and attitudes on civil liberties, and such episodes as the attempt to legislate for ninety days' — three months' — imprisonment without trial.

- He said New Labour had been right to endorse markets, but "naive" in its attitude. He repudiated the idea that markets should be worshipped, or can be relied on to produce desirable social results. In the context this was a — too

mild! — attack on New Labour's market-fetishism.

He rejected the idea that efficient economic functioning within the world market should be the central social goal. He said he believed in "community, belonging, and solidarity".

He accused the coalition of being driven in its cuts policy by ideology, using the economic crisis as an excuse. He pledged Labour to oppose coalition cuts — though "not all" cuts.

He counterposed to the coalition's projected cuts a policy of slower and longer-term cuts that would not undermine economic recovery.

That is only a perfectly respectable *bourgeois* alternative policy to that of the coalition (the alternative the US government is applying, and that is advocated for Britain by the economic columnists of the *Financial Times*).

But, from a Labour leader, and in the context of British politics and the coalition's plans, this stance means "legitimising" working-class resistance to cuts.

To the ideology-driven coalition response to the crisis, he invoked, as an alternative, the creative approach to society of the 1945 Labour government, which created the modern welfare state despite an accumulated debt burden much bigger than today's.

He said he would not support "waves" of "irresponsible" strikes — implying that he would, or anyway should, support, or anyway not condemn, strikes that are not "irresponsible". (What about strikes against the coalition cuts policy which he condemned?)

Miliband was simultaneously defending himself against the charge of being "in the pocket of the unions", and counterposing to the Tory press's caricature of the unions and the working class the idea that there can be "responsible" strikes.

No one should rely on Miliband supporting *any* strikes! Even so, this aspect of his speech was a long way from the hard face of New Labour against any working-class action, and that is important in assessing how things are moving.

He talked about the need for legislation to protect migrant workers and pre-

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## TUSC mark 2?

BY DALE STREET

**E**ighty people turned up to a conference on "Crisis in Working Class Political Representation", in Glasgow on 2 October, organised by the Wishaw and Motherwell branch of the RMT.

The meeting was held in preparation for next year's Scottish Parliament elections, to create a coalition of trade unionists and socialists to stand agreed candidates on agreed policies.

Ed Miliband and the Labour Party were denounced from the platform and from the floor. According to Brian Smith (Glasgow City Unison Secretary), there was only a 1% difference in the votes of the Miliband brothers, but the political differences between them were even smaller. Ed Miliband was "a creature of New Labour" and the Labour Party "cannot be changed".

According to RMT General Secretary Bob Crow, trade unionists enthusiastic about Ed Miliband's victory were wrong. The Labour Party was "finished". Speakers from the floor said that the Con-Dem cuts were no different from the cuts which Labour would have imposed had it won the general election. Labour would merely have spread the cuts over a longer period of time.

Mixed opinions were expressed about previous decisions to stand independent left candidates in Scotland in the aftermath of the 2006 split in the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP).

In this year's general election, 10 candidates had stood under the banner of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Six of them scored less than 0.7% of the vote, and two just over 1%.

One RMT speaker described the votes for left candidates in 2010 as "derisory". A Socialist Party leaflet distributed at the meeting referred to the candidates having secured "modest votes".

But according to Bob Crow both the "No to EU, Yes to Democracy" intervention in the 2009 Euro-elections and the TUSC intervention in this year's general election had been "a success".

There was praise for Tommy Sheridan, in attendance but not on the platform, whose trial for perjury was beginning just two days later.

If "state of denial" is too strong an expression to describe the meeting, then "systematic evasion" is not. David Miliband's defeat in the Labour leadership contest does not signal the transformation of the Labour Party. But the idea that it simply had no significance at all was a refusal to engage with reality.

The pretence that the vote for independent left candidates has not been in decline in recent years, and that the vote for TUSC candidates (and SSP candidates) in 2010 was anything other than close to derisory was another side-stepping of reality.

There was hand-wringing about the fact that there had not been a single slate of left candidates since the 2006 split in the SSP. What was evaded was the reason for the split — and the fact that the forces represented at the meeting had been responsible for it in the first place.

The meeting concluded by agreeing to set up a Steering Group to "produce a socialist programme and determine the selection of socialist unity candidates." There would also be a recall conference in November to formally launch the coalition.

Clearly, there will be some kind of TUSC Mark Two contesting next year's Holyrood elections. Whether the SSP will join up is another question. It has already finished selecting its own candidates to contest the Holyrood elections.

## What's new in Ed Miliband's party?

Continued from page 7

vent them being used to undercut other workers.

He denied that the proper role of a political party was to establish, through "focus groups", what the electorate wanted, and then reflect it. He counterposed to that the idea that a political party should be an educator — that is, campaign to shape and reshape "public opinion" and create "demand" for policies it decides are right. "We do not have to accept the world as we find it. We can leave it better".

- He condemned the foolishness of Gordon Brown's claim that he had abolished booms and slumps (that is, the fundamental cycle of capitalist functioning).

- He rejected the "pessimism" of the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition which, he said, would, at the expense of the poor, abandon all concern for social improvement or advance.

In effect, Ed Miliband defined himself, in terms of attitudes, pretty much as "old Labour".

What he said, and the attitudes he announced or implied, remain generalities. What they will mean in practice is in many areas still open.

Just as the new leader has the power to wipe the slate clean, so also he has considerable freedom to write on it now. He may well, under pressure, rewrite elements of New Labour attitudes and policies onto it.

Stalin's successor Nikita Khrushchev, in February 1956, repudiated Stalin's methods — and ten months later used the most brutal Stalinist methods to repress the Hungarian revolution...

Ed Miliband was democratically elected as Labour leader. But the system that gives the leader of the party such power over policy and attitudes is radically undemocratic. The restoration to Labour Party conference of the pre-2007 right to discuss a limited few motions from unions and CLPs modifies that system only at the edges.

One of the most indicative things in Manchester was that New Labour ex-ministers sat stony-faced and unapplauding, but defeated and helpless, as Ed Miliband, the new elected dictator, condemned much of what they had been doing for the last 13 years.

The great tragedy of labour movement politics, through the whole New Labour period, was that change, or lack of it, depended on the top leaders of the trade unions and on the elected king of the Labour Party. Without movement at the top, nothing short of a society-shaking mass revolt "from below" could reshape Labour's organisation or politics.

Almost like in a totalitarian society, nothing could move until the tops moved. What was imposed this way from the Blair-Brown top can be, so to speak, unimposed by an Ed Miliband. It can also be reimposed.

No less significant, in the longer term and from a socialist, consistently working-class point of view, than what Ed Miliband said, is what he didn't say.

He did not mention the Thatcher-Blair anti-union laws, which outlaw solidarity action, still less pledge Labour to get rid of them. He did not even commit himself to back John McDonnell MP's Bill to stop the courts using trivial errors to disqualify strike ballots.

He did not say how he would fight the cuts he opposes. He did not demand of Labour councils that they refuse to implement Tory/Lib-Dem cuts in their

areas.

He did not announce that the labour movement would refuse collaboration with the government in its cuts, or even in those cuts which Labour will oppose as "unfair" or economically destructive.

He did not commit himself to measures to reconstruct democracy in the Labour Party.

He did not even mention privatisation. In his speech he did not commit himself to oppose the new wave of privatisation now planned by the coalition government, or even specifically the sell-off of Royal Mail (though he did do that in a written statement to TULO before the conference). He attacked the easy and now common target of bankers' bonuses and incomes. He did not indict the whole system of which the bankers are only the most noticeable pustule now.

He obfuscated with his claim, modelled on John F Kennedy in 1961, that a new generation is in charge — expressing the shift in ideas in soundbite terms as a question of generations.

All that said, and even if one dismisses Miliband's speech as merely "New Labour in opposition", "New Labour for the age of austerity", in terms of its resonance with the working class and other working people it is a great step away from the last 15 years of official labour movement politics.

The pledge to make the coalition a "one-term" government can, as in the 1980s and 90s, become a fetish that reshapes everything. In the 1980s and 90s the crying need to get the Tories out pushed the Labour Party, inch by inch, onto Thatcherite territory, so that by the time they finally got the Tories out, in 1997, the alternative to the neo-Thatcherite Tories had become another neo-Thatcherite party — New Labour.

We must fight to kick out the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition — but no less important than that is what the labour movement is ready to put in place of the coalition. At the conference, much was focused on winning local government elections next May. But it matters what Labour councils are elected to do.

**M**any New Labour ex-ministers will go along with the "left" turn and yet remain what they were. In the conference hall, David Miliband sat angry-faced as Ed Miliband repudiated the invasion of Iraq.

When Labour deputy leader Harriet Harman applauded, David Miliband spat at her: "Why are you applauding? You voted for it". She muttered: "He's the leader, and I'm supporting him".

She will support him whatever he may, at a given moment, stand for, as she supported Blair and Brown.

There are a lot of such people still at the top of the Labour Party. Neil Kinnock, Labour leader from 1983 to 1992, and political father or grandfather of New Labour, backed Ed Miliband. He sat in the hall beaming at his protégé's performance. Kinnock, too, started on the soft left.

The precedent was probably lost on Ed Miliband: it should not be lost on socialists.

Where does all this leave the mass working-class movement in politics?

The unions have used their clout in the Labour Party to put in their chosen candidate as leader. Some of the rights of the unions and of the members in conference are (so reports say) being restored.

That is important, not least in giving

trade-unionists and party members a voice and a forum.

There was much chicanery from the platform in the conference, over rule changes and other issues. But a "review" of the whole party structure has been started. A number of rule changes which would make the party conference a live decision-making body already have sizeable union backing, and a campaign is underway to promote them.

Ed Miliband's alternative to Tory/Lib-Dem economic policies is a species of Keynesianism. It is benign compared to the coalition government's plans. It is not radical in social terms — as the variant of it used by both the Obama administration in the USA, and the previous right-wing Bush administration, demonstrates.

The Labour Party in the country is still depleted and dried up. The majority of individual Labour Party members voted for David, not Ed, Miliband.

There is a now a significant growth in membership (about 35,000 since the general election).

Opposition to the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition, even if it is mealy-mouthed and far from socialist politics, can not but encourage the growth.

Of central importance to the work of helping the labour movement develop in politics is what the revolutionary Marxists do. The crisis of capitalism gives us opportunities for explaining to the labour movement what capitalism is, and why the working class and other working people should work to replace it by socialism.

The stance of the Labour Party against Tory/Lib-Dem cuts (even if "not all" of them) cannot but encourage working-class resistance. Some local Labour Parties and Labour Party members will participate in anti-cuts committees, and socialists should encourage that.

Socialists should demand of the union leaders that they work to commit the Labour Party to repeal of the anti-union laws.

Strikes and occupations should be central to the resistance to the cuts programme of the coalition government. But they cannot be the whole of it.

The labour movement needs a political alternative. Ed Miliband's alternative is not what the labour movement needs. But a Labour Party reclaimed by the trade unions would be a vehicle for a political alternative.

The work of fighting in the labour movement for consistent class-struggle socialist alternative will rally, educate, and regroup the working-class forces for the fight.

### Miliband tells BBC unions: don't strike

**L**abour Party leader Ed Miliband Lweighed in to the BBC workers' dispute with their management over pensions. He urged them not to go ahead with a planned strike during the Conservative Party conference.

Miliband said: "Whatever the rights and wrongs of the dispute, they should not be blacking out the prime minister's speech. My speech was seen and heard on the BBC and in the interests of impartiality and fairness, so the prime minister's should be."



LEADERSHIP ELECTION

# A symbolic blow to New Labour

By Rhodri Evans

**O**ne sharp-suited young man leaving the Labour Party conference session on 25 September shook his head in disgust at a comrade offering him a leaflet from the Labour Party Democracy Task Force, a group set up to win real life and decision-making power for the Party conference.

"After this, I'm getting out of here as soon as I can", he muttered, referring to Ed Miliband's victory in the Labour leadership election.

Shortly afterwards, in the Grass Roots Umbrella Network meeting, left Labour MP Kelvin Hopkins gave the same assessment from the opposite angle: "This is the end of a dark night. This is the end of New Labour".

Trouble is, the New Labour machine is still intact. The great bulk of the pastel-shaded neo-liberal careerist political advisers and assistants, think-tank oper-

atives, media manipulators, and NGO types who have taken over the top levels of the Labour Party since the mid-90s are still there. Few have joined the disgusted leaflet-refuser, John Hutton, and Alan Milburn in quitting.

Many trade unionists coming out of the conference felt boosted and encouraged. "At least the unions managed to get their candidate in"; "It's the best result we could have hoped for".

The general "feel" of the crowd coming out of conference — as measured, for example, by its willingness to take left-wing leaflets and buy left-wing papers — was more open, confident, and leftist than in recent years, though still, of course, an order of magnitude less so than before the great neo-liberal counter-offensive in the Labour Party between the mid-80s and mid-90s.

Even the delegates most pleased by Ed Miliband's victory seemed aware that what Ed Miliband's prominent backers among MPs are saying is true: politically,

Ed Miliband is within the New Labour mainstream, different only in shadings from David Miliband. He gave virtually no hard commitments during his leadership campaign.

The significance of his victory is that, instead of having a new leader with an open, hard commitment to Blairite continuity, Labour now has one open to pressure from the unions and the Party rank and file *as well as* from the apparatchiks and the media people.

We should demand Miliband's, and the Labour Party's, support for industrial and anti-cuts struggles — but that will not happen through pleading to his "left-wing" conscience. It will only happen through pressure and organisation from below — and that will mean fighting Miliband and his people every inch of the way.

There are immediate dangers. The hard-Blairite MPs and ex-ministers and Labour officials who sat stony-faced in the conference, pointedly not joining

even in routine applause for Ed Miliband's speech, will now put immense pressure on him to "give guarantees" that he will not "move the party to the left" and offer proofs that he is "not in the pocket of the unions".

They will find many weaknesses to play on. For example, questioned on party funding by the *Financial Times* (24 September) and by the Left Foot Forward blog (9 September), Ed Miliband talked about wanting to "make progress on party funding together with other parties".

That is code for the Hayden Phillips proposals: a legal ban on collective union money for the Labour Party, on any large scale, "compensated for" by state funding.

David Miliband, surprisingly, gave the *Financial Times* a clear rejection of Hayden Phillips and a clear commitment to keep Labour's union link.

Don't celebrate — or, rather, celebrate without any naivety. Organise!

## Views from delegates

A Unison activist from Chesterfield told *Solidarity*:

"On one level I was more optimistic about the mood of conference because I think that in some ways the meaning of the vote for Ed Miliband was underestimated. I was pleased that David did not win leadership of the Party.

Although the media said there was only a tiny margin, that one per cent margin represented 30,000 votes of individual levy-paying trade union members. I think it represented real desire among ordinary union members and Labour Party members to draw a line and start off in a new direction, even if it wasn't as radical as we might have hoped.

If you look at the trade union vote, Diane Abbott came third. She got more votes than the other two.

I was pleased that the union resolutions, for example, defending Royal Mail, got through, but I was disappointed that many rule changes didn't get through and that trade union votes were implicated in that. I'm pleased that there will be a review of Partnership in Power and that Party and union members will have their voices heard in a debate over

what sort of Party we want. I was pleased that there was a slight breach in the consensus that there have to be cuts, it's just a matter of time and degree.

There were no radical changes, but little glimmers of optimism and openings that we can work with."

Gary Heather, CWU, said:

"A lot of people are running around euphorically after Ed Miliband's victory. I'm not sure I share that sentiment entirely, but it's better than if David had won.

In his speech Ed indicated a different economic policy to the Tories on the cuts, which is good. I wasn't pleased about how proposed rule changes got ruled out of order by the bureaucracy.

We need to argue in the Party against the cuts and for an alternative which is investment to maintain services and create jobs. We need to argue for democracy in the Party, with members having involvement in the structures and decision making of the Party, and we need to argue for progressive, socialist politics in the Party — no Trident replacement, nationalise the railways, etc.

We've got to deal with inequality, and try to reduce inequality in society. That means not only bringing the least well-off up but reigning in those who get more than they deserve.

The membership of the Party is growing, and we have to make sure that membership means getting involved in the activity of the Party."

## Assert trade unions' right to a political voice

Few things in British politics were as ludicrous as the outcry in the press and from Tory/ Lib-Dem coalition ministers against the trade unions' role in electing Ed Miliband

And few things are as poisonous.

The trade unions, the labour movement, must not — they try to insist — organise and act to secure effective working-class representation in Parliament.

The response of the coalition and their media in effect says that when the unions begin to act that way — and what they have done to elect Ed Miliband is, of course, still a long way from doing it properly — they are entirely out of order.

The truth is that when the labour movement has no party of its own, then the working-class vote in general elections is massively devalued, neutralised, and reduced to little more than a token by the entrenched power of the bourgeoisie, in society and in the bourgeois political parties.

The banks and the stock-jobbers have their own parties — in the first place, the Tory Party. When things get serious they also have the Lib-Dem party.

Under Blair and Brown they also had

the Labour Party. The New Labour government was shameless in its belly-crawling to the rich — to the bourgeoisie.

The British people won't vote for a Labour Party that declares "New Labour" dead! The press and the coalition parties will see to that!

Their idiotic branding of Ed Miliband as "Red Ed" is part of that.

The labour movement should stand up to the witch-hunt and defend the trade unions' right to ensure that their members' votes count for something.

The unions and the Labour Party should not run before the press on this. They should boldly assert the right of the working class and its institutions to work for working-class interests in Parliament.

The unions have every right to participate in the Labour Party. And from our point of view, they have every right to reclaim and reorganise the Labour Party which they founded a hundred years ago.

Their role in the election of Ed Miliband is, we hope, a small down-payment on them doing that.

## March against cuts

Saturday 23 October

Assemble: 11am, Unity House, Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. Marching to a rally at TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street

Called by RMT and supported by FBU, NUT, CWU and others

## Defend the Welfare State: say no to billions in cuts!

March and rally, Wednesday 20 October (day of the Comprehensive Spending Review)

Assemble: 4.30pm, Lincoln's Inn Fields WC2, march to rally in Whitehall SW1 (opposite Downing Street)

Called by Camden Trades Council and supported by GLATUCs, Holborn and St Pancras CLP, RMT Euston no.1 and Camden no.3 branches, Matt Wrack (FBU) and others

# The formation of intellectuals

BY ANTONIO GRAMSCI

**T**he problem of creating a new stratum of intellectuals consists in the critical elaboration of the intellectual activity that exists in everyone at a certain degree of development...

The traditional and vulgarised type of the intellectual is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist. Therefore journalists, who claim to be men of letters, philosophers, artists, also regard themselves as the "true" intellectuals. In the modern world, technical education, closely bound to industrial labour even at the most primitive and unqualified level, must form the basis of the new type of intellectual.

On this basis the weekly *Ordine Nuovo* [edited by Gramsci in Turin from 1919] worked to develop certain forms of new intellectualism and to determine its new concepts, and this was not the least of the reasons for its success, since such a conception corresponded to latent aspirations and conformed to the development of the real forms of life.

The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator (but superior at the same time to the abstract mathematical spirit); from technique-as-work one proceeds to technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception of history, without which one remains "specialised" and does not become "directive" (specialised and political).

Thus there are historically formed specialised categories for the exercise of the intellectual function. They are formed in connection with all social groups, but especially in connection with the more important, and they undergo more extensive and complex elaboration in connection with the dominant social group.

One of the most important characteristics of any group that is developing towards dominance is its struggle to assimilate and to conquer "ideologically" the traditional intellectuals, but this assimilation and conquest is made quicker and more efficacious the more the group in question succeeds in simultaneously elaborating its own organic intellectuals.

The enormous development of activity and organisation of education in the broad sense in the societies that emerged from the medieval world is an index of the importance assumed in the modern world by intellectual functions and categories. Parallel with the attempt to deepen and to broaden the "intellectuality" of each individual, there has also been an attempt to multiply and narrow the various specialisations. This can be seen from educational institutions at all levels, up to and including the organisms that exist to promote so-called "high culture" in all fields of science and technology...

It is worth noting that the elaboration of intellectual strata in concrete reality does not take place on the terrain of

abstract democracy but in accordance with very concrete traditional historical processes. Strata have grown up which traditionally "produce" intellectuals and these strata coincide with those which have specialised in "saving", i.e. the petty and middle landed bourgeoisie and certain strata of the petty and middle urban bourgeoisie.

The varying distribution of different types of school (classical and professional) over the "economic" territory and the varying aspirations of different categories within these strata determine, or give form to, the production of various branches of intellectual specialisation. Thus in Italy the rural bourgeoisie produces in particular state functionaries and professional people, whereas the urban bourgeoisie produces technicians for industry. Consequently it is largely northern Italy which produces technicians and the South which produces functionaries and professional men.

**T**he relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not as direct as it is with the fundamental social groups but is, in varying degrees, "mediated" by the whole fabric of society and by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are, precisely, the "functionaries".

It should be possible both to measure the "organic quality" [organicità] of the various intellectual strata and their degree of connection with a fundamental social group, and to establish a gradation of their functions and of the superstructures from the bottom to the top (from the structural base upwards).

What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural "levels": the one that can be called "civil society", that is the ensemble of organisms commonly called "private", and that of "political society" or "the State". These two levels correspond on the one hand to the function of "hegemony" which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of "direct domination" or command exercised through the State and "juridical" government.

*L'Ordine Nuovo*, edited by Gramsci

The functions in question are precisely organisational and connective. The intellectuals are the dominant group's "deputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony and political government. These comprise:

1. The "spontaneous" consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is "historically" caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which "legally" enforces discipline on those groups who do not "consent" either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed.

This way of posing the problem has as a result a considerable extension of the concept of intellectual, but it is the only way which enables one to reach a concrete approximation of reality...

The political party for some social groups is nothing other than their specific way of elaborating their own category of organic intellectuals directly in the political and philosophical field and not just in the field of productive technique. These intellectuals are formed in this way and cannot indeed be formed in any other way, given the general character and the conditions of formation, life and development of the social group...

That all members of a political party should be regarded as intellectuals is an affirmation that can easily lend itself to mockery and caricature. But if one thinks about it nothing could be more exact. There are of course distinctions of level to be made. A party might have a greater or lesser proportion of members in the higher grades or in the lower, but this is not the point. What matters is the function, which is directive and organisational, i.e. educative, i.e. intellectual...

● From *The Formation of Intellectuals*, in *Selections from Prison Notebooks*

# Gram

Paul Hampton reviews *Antonio Gramsci* by Antonio Santucci, Monthly Review Press (2010)

"In mass politics, to say the truth is precisely a political necessity."

**T**he facts of Antonio Gramsci's life are well known — his birth into a poor household, his role in the Turin strikes and factory occupations, his work for the Communist International and eleven years imprisonment by the fascist Italian government in 1926. Less well-known, and less well understood are Gramsci's writings. Unfortunately this book will do little to remedy that lack of understanding.

Anyone reading a few morsels of Gramsci's writings will immediately recognise his extraordinary revolutionary mind, which, on sending Gramsci to jail, Mussolini's prosecutor swore had to be silenced for 20 years.

First, the flair and verve of his political and cultural writings, which articulated the drive and culture of the cream of the Italian working class in Turin, while being alive to the unevenness of the Italian social formation and the need for workers to ally with the southern peasants.

Second, the excruciating pain of his prison letters, describing the struggle and misery of his life.

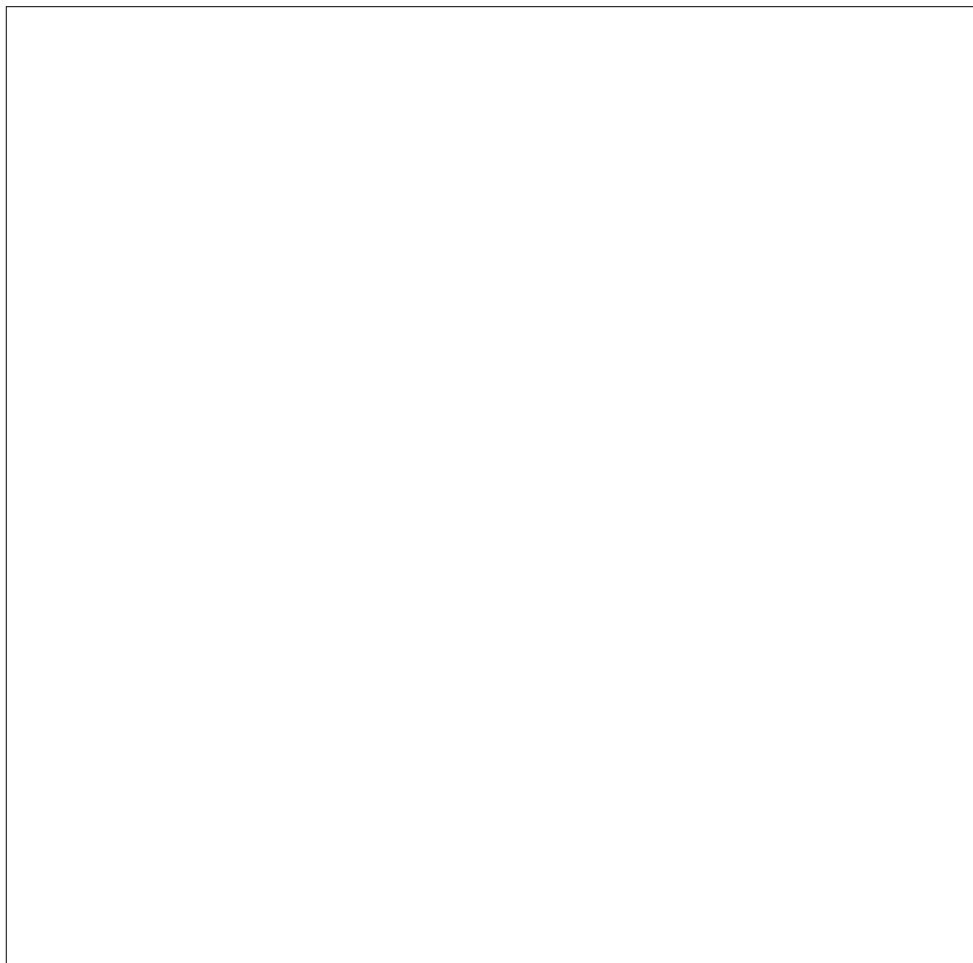
Third, the sweep and insight of his prison notebooks, ground out in the most appalling conditions and cast in a language to decisively the censor, yet so erudite.

Little wonder that Gramsci has been the subject of a feeding frenzy, from which thousands of callow academics

## BIOGRAPHY

- Gramsci was born in Sardinia on 22 January 1891
- Went out to work aged 11 after his father was imprisoned
- Won a scholarship to the University of Turin but was unable to finish his studies
- Joined the Italian Socialist Party and, inspired by the Russian revolution, started *L'Ordine Nuovo* newspaper, which played a pivotal role in the Turin strikes and factory occupations in 1919-20
- Helped found the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in 1921
- Lived in Russia in 1922-23, and was working for the Communist International when Mussolini's fascists seized power in Italy.
- Worked clandestinely in Vienna before returning to Italy in 1924 after his election to parliament.
- Arrested in November 1926 and sentenced to 20 years in prison
- Released shortly before his death on 27 April 1937

# Gramsci is ours!



## Antonio Gramsci

who've never bothered with the labour movement nevertheless find sustenance for their musings in cryptic modes of expression.

But if Gramsci has achieved the status of scholastic vogue, his elevation began and was sustained by a more sinister force. Gramsci's writings and legacy were consciously appropriated and recast by the Stalinists of the PCI (notably Palmiro Togliatti) during the post-war period, to legitimate their popular frontist and reformist turn towards social democracy. In doing so, they sought to manufacture an apparent alternative to the unsullied tradition of Leon Trotsky.

This context is absolutely vital to understand why Antonio Santucci's book, so apparently seductive in its sophistication, is in fact just as hollow as the mountain of academic scribbling.

Santucci was, according to Eric Hobsbawm's preface, the "foremost expert in Gramscian studies" and the "predominant philological scholar of Gramscian texts". Responsible for more than 250 works on Gramsci, editor of volumes of Gramsci's revolutionary journalism, his early letters, his prison letters as well as popular collections, Santucci allows little doubt of his immense scholarship.

However, this is biography with the schism between Leninism-Trotskyism on the one side, and Stalinism on the other, simply obfuscated. Where Santucci suggests continuity between official communism and Gramsci, there are signs of a break. And in fact the real continuity is between Gramsci and the early Comintern.

As Frank Rosengarten, editor of

Gramsci's letters in English, explained decades ago, Trotsky played an important role in Gramsci's education as a communist revolutionary, while he was in Moscow from May 1922 to December 1923. Trotsky's main influences on Gramsci's development were:

- the conceptualisation and application of the policy of the united front;
- the analysis of the fascism;
- the idea that the socialist revolution in Russia was sui generis, and that communist revolutionaries in the advanced capitalist countries would have to confront a different set of tasks and perspectives in order eventually to take power;
- the struggle against the bureaucratisation of the political system in the Soviet Union and within the Communist Parties;
- and the concern with culture and the defence of the integrity of literature and art against harassment by bureaucrats.

Santucci can't avoid the cultural connection — after all Trotsky published Gramsci's essay on futurism in his book, *Literature and Revolution* (1923). But the political collaboration and the wide areas of agreement — and indeed where Trotsky actually schooled Gramsci in the strategy and tactics of proletarian revolution — of this there is not the slightest trace.

## Of seminal importance for the United front was the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern.

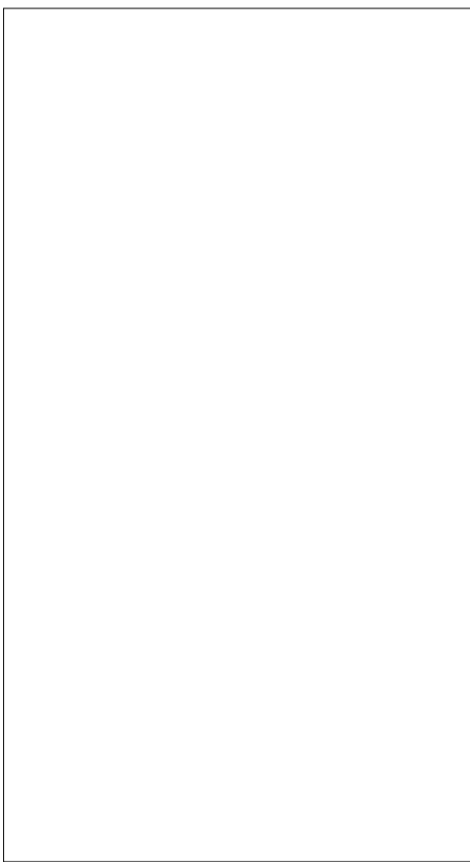
According to Rosengarten, eyewitness accounts of a direct confrontation between Trotsky and Gramsci at a meeting of the Italian Commission on 15 November, 1922 confirm the inter-

action that took place between the two comrades.

When Gramsci wrote to the Russian Communist Party (14 October 1926), referring to the three opposition leaders that had on occasion "corrected us very energetically and severely", it was Trotsky whom he had chiefly in mind. Trotsky was fighting to reorient the leaders of the Italian Communist Party, who, under the influence of Amadeo Bordiga, almost all opposed political united front tactics. Gramsci had deferred to Bordiga, but was won over by Trotsky.

On fascism, Trotsky himself recalled in *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*, that in the early 1920s, almost all the Italian Communists regarded fascism as simply another form of capitalist reaction no worse and no different in nature from others. "The particular traits of fascism which spring from the mobilisation of the petit-bourgeoisie against the proletariat," Trotsky wrote, "the Italian Communist Party was unable to discern. Italian comrades inform me that with the sole exception of Gramsci, the Communist Party wouldn't even allow the possibility of the fascists seizing power".

Gramsci is credited with expanding the concept of hegemony, from the idea that the working class had to win the battle of ideas and lead other subaltern classes, to a more sophisticated conception applied to existing ruling classes, who manufacture consent (as well as force) in order to rule. Given the different mechanisms of hegemony used in advanced capitalist states, the conquest of power by the proletariat in the countries of Western Europe would



**Benito Mussolini. Gramsci, almost alone in the Italian Communist Party, saw the full political significance of and danger in the rise of fascism**

require a significantly different strategy from the one followed by the Russian Bolsheviks. Yet these ideas were anticipated by Trotsky — for example in his speeches to at the Comintern. Trotsky also used military analogies and metaphors (as indeed had earlier Marxists such as Kautsky), which Gramsci made use of in his prison writings.

**There is some evidence that Gramsci was sympathetic to the Left Opposition, at least before his arrest. In January 1924 in a letter to his wife, he characterised Stalin's attacks on the Left Opposition as "very irresponsible and dangerous".**

Gramsci attempted to mediate in the conflict, writing on behalf of the PCI to the Russian party in early October 1926. To ensure that the letter would arrive promptly, Gramsci posted it to Togliatti. But Togliatti gave the letter to Bukharin, who did not present it officially to the central committee. Gramsci was angered by Togliatti's tactics and on 26 October, accusing him of being "tainted by bureaucratism" and arguing that what was at stake whether "the proletariat, once power has been taken, can construct socialism".

Rosengarten is right that Gramsci never really called into question the legitimacy of Stalin's role as heir to Lenin. However the political positions taken by Trotsky and Gramsci in response to the Stalinist "third period" reveal many common features.

Both rejected the labelling of social democrats as "social fascists" and both promoted a programme of transitional demands, embracing the concept of a Constituent Assembly in countries dominated by dictatorships.

Gramsci's prison notebooks do contain some criticism of Trotsky, though his views on permanent revolution and on Trotsky's strategic views on seizing power are little more than a "vulgar caricature". We know from Gramsci's letters and notebooks that he requested and received books by Trotsky. We also know that his elder brother Gennaro informed him of the expulsion of his close collaborators such as Alfonso Leonetti and Pietro Tresso from the PCI in 1930, and of their evolution towards Trotskyism.

Gramsci never accounted for Stalinism. This remains the fundamental hiatus in his work and the field where Trotsky's legacy remains far more important. The political and prison conditions of the time cut across Gramsci's development, ultimately neutering him. Had Gramsci been free, the idea that he would have supported Stalin's line through the 1930s seems utterly grotesque. And Gramsci's best years, together with his sharpest writing, his "leitmotif, the rhythm of his thought", belong to the classical Marxist tradition. Neither Stalinist contortion, nor academic caricature: Gramsci is ours.

AWL NEWS

## Debates and demos

**O**n 16-17 October AWL meets in London for our annual conference. We've prepared for this by a series of regional meetings and discussion bulletins.

A lot of discussion has centred round "perspectives", especially in relation to the Labour Party. Readers of *Solidarity* and of our website will know that there has been a running debate in AWL on this since last spring.

That debate has arrived at the point where the contentious points to be voted on concern only small-ish amendments to a perspectives document.

Documents on AWL and the unions, and on feminist activity, have received substantial amendment through the pre-conference discussion.

**N**orth-East London AWL is now keeping a tally each week of the number of copies of *Solidarity* sold on its public street sales.

The latest tally is 56. Branch members are confident of increasing that, with the branch routine now extending to four regular street sales each week rather than three.

**A** number of AWL activists took time out from our conference preparations to go to the "Right to Work" demonstration near the Tory party conference in Birmingham on 3 October.

The combined effects of rain and police rulings about the protest route diminished the event.

"The police marched us from one piece of waste ground covered in puddles to another bit of waste ground covered in puddles, through persistent rain. The closest we got to the conference centre was about 300 yards, and there was a metal barrier and a canal between us and the Tories".

Still, there was a large turnout, and many papers were sold. Activists who went have decided to make sure that next time they bring transparent plastic covers to keep their papers dry!

**O**ther AWL activists have been out and about at "fresher's fairs", the events organised at universities for the start of the academic year so that student clubs, societies, and campaigns can introduce themselves.

We've done a bit better than last year. It seems to be due more to better efforts by us than to any big change in student thinking — yet. That could change as cuts bite.

**A**WL activists in London are involved in discussions about organising a London-wide conference of anti-cuts campaigns, provisionally for the beginning of December.

This is planned not as another in the series of events in which different enterprises in left confectionery (RTW, COR, NSSN, etc) are seeking to catch the anti-cuts wind, but as a representative event sponsored by anti-cuts campaigns themselves.

The idea is that it will include workshops enabling, for example, activists from different local government Unison branches to collate responses to council cuts.

RTW, COR, NSSN

## Fight for anti-cuts unity!

BY SACHA ISMAIL

**T**he "Coalition of Resistance" (initiated by Counterfire, a group of people who recently left the SWP) has called an anti-cuts conference on 27 November.

"Right to Work", a campaign initiated and run by the SWP, has called a "unity conference" for anti-cuts activists on 5 December.

And the National Shop Stewards' Network, mostly run by the Socialist Party, has set an anti-cuts conference for 22 January.

RTW has also announced a conference of its own for 12 February.

The anti-cuts movement is already too vast and too varied for any one "front" to control it. It will become more so after 20 October. Many of the important battles against cuts will be waged by unions, which of course will take their decisions through their own procedures and not on the say-so of this or that campaign centre.

Initiatives to draw together activists, create links, allow discussions, and facilitate protests like the "Right to Work" march at the Tory party conference, or the "Coalition of Resistance" picket at Downing Street planned for 20 October, have a part to play.

But we must not have the movement diverted and distracted by frantic competition between different "fronts" to swing the issue of which of the various (politically more or less similar) conferences each anti-cuts group will support.

None of the "fronts" must try to substitute for the broad movement. The task of active socialists is to mobilise to transform the real labour movement and make it fight, rather than to try to use anti-cuts feeling to construct a series of miniature proprietary "new labour movements" of our own, alongside the sometimes slow-moving "big" movement.

**Solidarity and Workers' Liberty supports all the conferences and protests. And we support the call for**

unity made by "Right to Work" on 3 October.

We would add three points:

1. COR, RTW, and NSSN should get together and find ways to merge their four separate conferences into a single event, run by a joint organising committee which should also be open to delegates from other anti-cuts groups.

2. All these groups — COR, RTW, NSSN, and others — should pledge to unite their efforts to build, in every area, broad, representative, democratic anti-cuts committees, based on delegates from trade union branches, stewards' committees, Labour Party organisations, and community groups.

We now have a great opening to construct such committees, after the TUC congress made an explicit call for local anti-cuts campaigns.

3. Trades Councils can play a central role in initiating these committees, but the committees must be broader than existing Trades Councils. Nowhere should COR, RTW, NSSN, or other specialist groups attempt to substitute for the broad campaigns, nor should COR, RTW or NSSN people allow their respective efforts to promote their own particular front to take priority over developing the broad movement.

## Challenge BNP stalls!

BY JOAN TREVOR

**T**he BNP's internal difficulties continue; they are in debt and have expelled their London Assembly member Richard Barnbrook. However, their "tabletop" campaign is giving them new life at the grassroots.

Nationwide, they are running Saturday stalls under the banner "Support our troops, bring our boys home". They are getting a good response, partly because people don't realise that it's the BNP, confusing them with "Help for Heroes", or because people are not fussy about who brings an "anti-war" message. Where they are challenged, however, as they have been in Liverpool and in north London, they are reluctant to return to even a productive pitch. They must be challenged,

although it won't be easy. A comment on their website boasts:

"This table top single issue concept is the best way to promote us as a group of caring people... This is an ace up our sleeve: small groups of campaigners setting up stalls and campaigning in the traditional age-old way. Two hours here, an hour there, an hour somewhere else. Local planning makes this guerrilla campaigning instantly effective!"

And while they are exploiting popular sympathy for British troops in Afghanistan now, in the spring they could be exploiting anger over cuts to local services.

If they are in your area, write to the local paper exposing them, organise groups of people to go and challenge them. Barnet TUC has produced some materials. Email [info@barnettuc.org.uk](mailto:info@barnettuc.org.uk) for copies.

## EDL in Leicester

**E**DL have been denied permission to march in Leicester on Saturday 9 October, but say they will march and will not cooperate with police on the day — it is not the first time, however, that they have made such threats, and to date they have not acted on them.

UAF have called a static counter-demonstration, assembling at 11.30am at the Clock Tower, Leicester City Centre.

Youth clubs and educational services in the city are putting heavy pressure on young people to keep away from the city centre.

If local people do turn out to confront the EDL, anti-racists and anti-fascists should be prepared to support them, rather than insisting on maintaining the respectable unity of their own protests, most likely at a distance from the EDL. Bradford showed that the EDL can be confronted effectively.

## Student cuts meeting planned

BY EDWARD MALTBY

**A**s *Solidarity* goes to press on Wednesday, a meeting is being prepared by the UCL Students' Union, which is a supporter of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. More than 100 students are expected to attend.

The meeting will hear reports of campaigns going on across the capital — protests, rallies, strike ballot preparations and plans for more dramatic direct action are multiplying in London and elsewhere in the country as the term begins. Education cuts are biting and the student movement is renewing itself and preparing to fight.

But the NUS is not providing the leadership this movement needs — it is neither moving to co-ordinate action, inform its activists of the developments in the struggle against cuts; nor

is it providing a political lead. The union's leadership is pursuing the old Blairite tactic of triangulating "realistic" policy proposals for ministers.

Rather than coming out forthrightly for free education, it prefers to fudge the issue, its top officers quietly preferring to agitate for a graduate tax. The NUS has organised a demonstration for 10 November, jointly with the lecturers' union UCU. But there is no strategy for escalating the fight before or after the demonstration, and the political slogans will be weak.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts aims to give co-ordination to the student movement where the NUS will not. It is also calling on all of its supporting Student Unions and student campaign groups to support a feeder march for free education, leaving UCL at 11am on 10 November to join the main NUS demonstration, carrying banners making a clear call for free education and not a graduate tax.

# Women workers making history

Esther Townsend reviews *Made in Dagenham*.

**T**he strike for re-grading and equal pay organised by women sewing machinists at Ford's factory in Dagenham in 1968 is one of the heroic episodes of British labour movement history. It was a product of rising working-class struggles of the time and an important catalyst for further struggles and gains in the period that followed. This film will help us recapture the moment.

The machinists originally fought for their jobs to be re-graded from unskilled to semi-skilled, but it soon became clear that there was a "women's rate" at the firm which was only 87% of even the unskilled male rate. Equal pay became one of the strikers' key demands, and their action galvanised wider struggles.

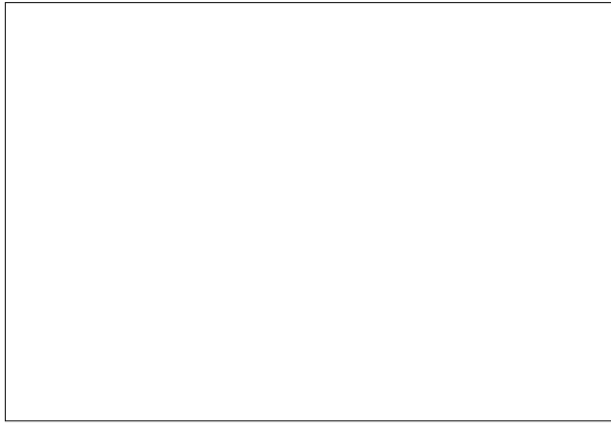
The 1970 Equal Pay Act gave women with the right to demand equal pay with men doing "like work". The 1970s saw other equal pay strikes, the most famous of which was the 1976 Trico strike at a Brentford factory making windscreen wipers.

At first the film's romanticised scenes of smiling workers cycling to work, women in 60s mini-dresses and hot pants, and sunny, summery glow, suggest that *Made in Dagenham* will follow in the footsteps of its director Nigel Cole's previous offerings *Calendar Girls* and *Saving Grace*, which depict women fighting through to a feel-good ending. However, this film is saved from blandness by its well-developed characters, and by the nature of the story and the film's relatively close approximation to the real struggle. Factory workers striking is much more interesting than middle-class ladies baking cakes!

Producer Stephen Woolley amalgamated several real Dagenham strikers into the central character Rita (Sally Hawkins). Rita reluctantly becomes the strike leader. Her development from hesitance and nerves into determination and forceful action mirrors that of the strike, which brought Ford's entire production at Dagenham to a standstill, then spreading to women machinists at Ford's Halewood plant in Liverpool.

The film does a surprisingly good job of depicting a world in which the working class was confident and on the rise — from the fact that the strikers can simply put their hands up and walk out (no ballots for the courts to strike down!) to the fear and desperation of the bosses of multinational companies like Ford.

The film highlights well how women weren't just fighting against sexism in wider society and the law, but also for recognition by their own unions.



The film shows the women's difficulties, but ultimate success, in winning support from male workers, from their own families and men at the plant to their union's national delegate conference.

National Ford convenor Monty (Kenneth Cranham) attempts to palm off the women with lunches at expensive restaurants (on the union), while asking them to keep quiet during negotiations in which they are repeatedly referred to as "the girls". The chauvinist attitudes of union officials are combated by Rita's refusal to be placated and her determination to maintain the principle of striking for equal pay. Dagenham branch secretary Albert (Bob Hoskins) backs them up.

One scene shows an argument between Albert and national officials — apparently Communist Party hacks — who misrepresents Marx as saying "men make history", i.e. that women do not make history. Albert replies by quoting back Marx's "social progress can be measured exactly by the social position of the fair sex", and asking if that was a different Marx, "Groucho perhaps?" The treatment of the strikers is a matter of sexism and bureaucracy intertwined.

The relationships between women are the strongest theme in the film, but not just those of the strikers. Rita develops a friendship with Lisa Hopkins (Rosamund Pike) — the wife of the Ford plant manager who, after studying history at Cambridge, has ended up as a housewife who is not allowed to think or have opinions. This friendship culminates with Lisa standing outside Rita's flat pleading with her not to give up on the strike.

She points out that Rita and the other women are "making history" whilst her husband treats her like "a fool". This scene shows how the women workers have

the potential to "make history" and challenge oppression in a way that bourgeois women like Lisa are not able to. But Lisa's character is not a way of toning down the class-struggle content of the film. It acts as an example of workers being a beacon for all the oppressed.

Miranda Richardson plays Barbara Castle, then the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Castle balances between the company and the workers, hoping the dispute will end, complains about strikes and demands that Harold Wilson give her the power to "regulate the unions" (as she in fact tried, but failed to do). Even in the last scenes she attempts to fob off the women with a vague promise of equal pay legislation. But female solidarity wins through, after Rita ludicrously tells Castle that "we're working women, and so are you", and in the end she helps the women win what is presented as a resounding victory — an immediate rise to 92% of comparable men's wages, rising to 100% in two years, and a promise of equal pay legislation.

In the real world women didn't get the re-grading to skilled status they had demanded. The women only won re-grading in 1984 following a further seven week strike. The Equal Pay Act was passed in 1970, but did not come into force for five years. It did not solve the problem of unequal pay, much of which is a matter not of crude discrimination, but of women's segregation into low-paid, "feminised" jobs. Today, women workers are still paid on average 16% less than male workers, rising to two-thirds less among part-time workers. At Ford in 1970 no male workers were doing "like work", so no comparison could be made.

Perhaps the low point of the film is right at the end, when Rita and Castle chat about the dresses they are wearing, and Castle appears before the press as a friend of the workers. During the credits we are told that Ford — a viciously anti-union company which, since 1968, has laid off millions of workers all over the world and tens of thousands at Dagenham — is a model employer!

There will be more Ford Dagenhams in the future — the struggle of women in low paid and undervalued jobs will be central to the new wave of women's struggles and a renewal of socialist women's movement politics. Whatever the makers of *Made in Dagenham* intended, the film demonstrates that women workers must rely on their own efforts and on class solidarity, not help from above. In the struggles we face today that lesson is more important than ever.

## Hillbilly noir

Jordan Savage reviews *Winter's Bone*, directed by Debra Granik

**W**inter's Bone is a thriller: a detective story in which a girl must find her drug-dealer father to prevent the repossession of her family home to pay his bond. Were it set in some urban future dystopia and populated by gun-toting pneumatic blondes, it would be heralded, like *Sin City*, for its noir echoes.

Set instead among meth-cooking hillbillies in contemporary Missouri, Debra Granik's striking third movie has instead been criticised as "poverty porn," a term which, post *Slumdog Millionaire*, self-satisfied critics use offhand when they are made to think, against their will, about what life is like for the poor.

Poverty is a major character in *Winter's Bone*, but it's not what the film is about. Yes, the film is a moral tale about family values, but the parameters of its morality could scarcely form the sewing sampler and mom's-apple-pie saccharine of mainstream representations of the American rural poor.

Like the best of Annie Proulx's short stories (which is how blockbuster *Brokeback Mountain* started life), Granik avoids language and lets landscape and setting tell most of her story for her. The few words that are spoken between members of the Dolly family run the registers from menacing to wise to comforting and back, and include stand-out lines like "I said shut up once with my mouth", and "never ask for what ought to be offered".

It is the quality of the silence that dominates most of

the film that gives it its character. As 17-year-old Ree Dolly (Jennifer Lawrence) walks miles from homestead to homestead (these farm settlements seem only to have sunk into dilapidation since the days of the frontier) through mud and ice, the setting borders on the expressionist.

Her desperation is obvious from the way that she stands alone, shrouded in her winter coat, staring down the unwelcoming facades of dark, wood-and-corrugated iron buildings with hellish meth smoke billowing from the cellars, open countryside at her back: nowhere to run to, no-one to speak to but a family who would rather beat her than have her ask questions that might endanger her and their way of life.

The unabashedly redneck Dolly family characters are bottomless. Their words never say what they mean; this is a community of people so used to being on guard against intrusion or attack that they do not speak honestly even with one another, although their meaning is always made abundantly clear by the action that accompanies it — as when Ree is told to "go away" by an aunt who passes her a cup of coffee at the same time. The message is not "you are unwelcome" but "you are not safe here".

Ree and her family are clearly living in opposition to law and order as it is dictated by the American state, but "Winter's Bone" cuts against the grain of anti-hero cinema in its sympathetic portrayal of state officials. This is particularly clear in the behaviour of the bailiff who has to threaten Ree with repossession: "but for the grace of God, there go I" is written in his eyes — and later his actions — as one poor American is forced by

his allegiance with the state to mount an attack on another poor American.

When Ree seeks out an army recruiting officer (Russell Schalk), he actually dissuades her from joining up, saying, "sometimes it's harder to stay at home". Several contributing factors make this scene particularly moving. First, there is the tension between Ree's entirely understandable desire for escape, and what would happen to her younger siblings, Ashlee and Sonny (Ashlee Thompson and Isaiah Stone) without her there to care for them. Then there is the fact that she is not permitted to join up, at 17, without parental consent; with her father missing, believed dead, and her mother incapacitated by mental illness, the no-man's land that Ree inhabits is thrown into sharp relief.

This message, that sometimes it is harder to stay at home, sometimes that's the brave thing to do — that's of vital importance in America today. The glamour of the military is being sold to poor people as vehemently as ever, and women like Ree go off to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan every year.

*Winter's Bone* is gruesome at times; it is hard, and the camera work alternates between a grainy, shaky, Dogme-style and montage work reminiscent of the literary stream of consciousness. The film is rough and experimental. It is also honest, and, largely thanks to performances by Lawrence, the two children and John Hawkes as the terrifying and unpredictable uncle Teardrop, it has at its heart such a weight of human compassion and endurance that, for all its cold and poverty, it is never bleak.

## VENEZUELA

# Election setback for Chavez

BY PAUL HAMPTON

**T**he Bonapartist regime of Hugo Chávez suffered a setback in the Venezuelan elections on 26 September, winning a majority of parliamentary seats but not the two-thirds majority it wanted in order to make further constitutional changes. The ruling party, Chávez's PSUV, gained 98 of the 165 seats available in the national assembly.

The Patria para Todos (PPT, homeland for all) party gained two seats. The PPT was until recently part of the ruling party's coalition — its general secretary was vice-president of the national assembly in the last session and it previously had 11 deputies. The right-wing, pro-US opposition bloc MUD won 65 seats. This was not the "victory" for MUD which much of the international bourgeois press claimed — in fact the right-wing has fewer seats than it did before 2005 (it boycotted the assembly elections after that). However it does represent a resurgence of those forces most closely aligned with international capital.

This is clear from the vote count. The PSUV got 5.4 million votes, while the right wing parties won 5.3 million votes. Turnout was high at 66% of eligible voters. In the 2009 regional elections, the PSUV got 6.3 million votes, compared to 5.2m for the right-wing parties. Therefore the vote for the opposition has grown slightly, while support for the PSUV has fallen significantly.

There were no genuine independent socialist candidates in the election. The LTS in Venezuela argued for abstention, given the bourgeois candidates on offer. Orlando Chirino, from the USI socialist group and leader of the C-CURA rank and file union group, stood as a candidate of the bourgeois PPT.

Much of the international left's coverage of the election has been uncritical Chávez counselling. Alan Woods, leader of the dwindling International Marxist Tendency, warned that the "revolution" was in danger. He quotes Danton and inadvertently reveals the key flaw in his argument: how exactly does a bourgeois revolution (French or Venezuelan) grow over and become a permanent, social revolution?

The agency for socialism is not Hugo Chávez and his

PSUV. Socialism can only be working class self-emancipation. The working class needs its own leadership, its own party, its own organisations, to make the revolution. The problem is not that Chávez won't do it, but that he cannot do it. Chávez is better understood as a bourgeois Bonaparte, balancing between state capital and the subaltern classes.

Similarly, Mike Gonzalez wrote in *Socialist Worker*: "It would be a serious error, in my view, to concentrate

now on a long campaign to re-elect Chávez in 2012. Instead it is a time to return to the grass roots of revolution and build again from there." The problem with Chavismo is not that it lacks a mass base. The problem is the kind of politics they are tied to. But instead of arguing for a break with these politics, Gonzalez prefers to surf the pro-Chávez wave and advise returning to base — whatever that means.

## LATIN AMERICAN LEFT

### Spotlight on Ecuador and Brazil

BY IRA BERKOVIC

**F**ollowing the attempted coup by a section of the police against the government of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, the Mexican section of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (the Workers Revolutionary Party — PRT in Spanish) issued a statement of opposition through the FI's *International Viewpoint*.

It called for "demonstrations of support and solidarity [...] in front of the Ecuadorean embassy in Mexico City". The statement is also clear in rejecting the notion, asserted in some bourgeois media sources, that the upheaval was a legitimate protest by policeman around changes to pay and conditions: "In this right-wing, reactionary and profoundly undemocratic action, the role of imperialism and the forces of the bourgeoisie and the oligarchy has undoubtedly been present."

The statement also hints at left-wing criticism of Correa's government, but ultimately describes it as a "progressive government".

Another statement from radical and civil-society organisations within Ecuador itself opposes the coup

within the context of a general fight for workers' rights and social justice in the country, saying "The working conditions of all the Ecuadorean people, including the police and army, cannot be based on conditions that are unfair or discriminatory; the Ecuadorean state budget should aim to eliminate the disparities that create first and second category workers, that do not ensure full employment or proper social security for both women and men. Special privileges should be eliminated in a country where the poverty of the majority has not yet been eliminated."

• The two statements can be viewed at [www.internationalviewpoint.org](http://www.internationalviewpoint.org)

**I**n Brazil, the main party of the far-left (P-SOL, the Socialism and Freedom Party) had a poor electoral showing despite coming out as the fourth party in the polls.

P-SOL's candidate, Plínio de Arruda Sampaio, polled just 0.87% of the vote (886,816) compared to 47,651,434 votes for the leading candidate, the Workers' Party Dilma Rousseff. Although Plinio's performance in live debates was praised even in the bourgeois media, the result represents a significant setback considering the 6.85% (over 6,500,000 votes) that P-SOL's Heloisa Helena won in 2006.

Despite the large vote, Rousseff failed to win a sufficient majority over her main rivals to take the presidency outright, so the election has entered a second-round run off. A decisive factor will be whether the supporters of third-placed Marina Silva back Rousseff or José Serra of the more right-wing Social Democratic Party.

# Bangladeshi garment workers rise

**F**ollowing a wave of textile strikes in Bangladesh, a reviving workers' movement is facing savage repression in Bangladesh. The campaign in solidarity with victimised strikers and activists continues. The following is an extract from an article on the *US SocialistWorker.org* website.

**T**he strikes began in mid-July when a general strike in the garment industry shut down the capital city, Dhaka. The immediate reason for the strike was the increase in the cost of basic commodities in Bangladesh, especially foodstuffs. Textile workers get 1,887 takas a month (roughly \$25). Most economists put the basic income needed to survive in Dhaka at around 8,000 takas.

Even though the police attacked the strike and forced the workers back to work, the protests scared the ruling Awami League party into offering a minimum wage increase to 3,000 takas a month (roughly \$42) at the end of July.

The textile mill owners shut down 250 factories and asked for police support to crush the strike. 100 workers were injured in the clashes that followed, in which police used tear gas and water cannons against the strikers. There were also attacks on children who live in the area.

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA) have said that it is the government's responsibility to enforce discipline on the workers.

More than 4,000 workers were arrested, and others were later rounded up after the police used television footage to identify strike "leaders". Key leftist figures associated with the strike's more radical wing have

been arrested or threatened with arrest.

Mantu Ghosh, head of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB)'s Narayanganj division and affiliated with the CPB-led Garment Trade Union Center, was detained earlier in the month. Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, president of the Narayanganj branch of the Bangladeshi Socialist Party and connected to the Garments Sramik Sangram Parishad, said that his offices and home were raided by the police.

Part of the way police are making their case against the unions in Bangladesh is by torturing labor activists into making confessions against their respective organizations. As the *New York Times* reported:

"[L]abour and human rights advocacy groups said at least one worker has told his colleagues that he was tortured into giving false evidence against himself and other labour leaders before he escaped from custody."

The Bangladeshi High Court had to order the police not to torture Mantu Ghosh, exposing what are certainly ordinary practices for the Bangladeshi police.

The garment industry is Bangladesh's most important export industry, accounting for some 80 percent of the country's total exports, and the largest, employing some 3.5 million workers.

As a result, no matter which party is in power, it needs to woo the garment industry. This accounts for the position of the ruling Awami League, which relies on workers for votes, but has to do the bidding of the factory owners if it wants to keep the economy afloat in the short term.

But the garment workers haven't disappeared quietly. On August 14, for instance, 4,000 garment workers blockaded the Dhaka-Sylhet highway, leading to a standoff with the police that lasted four hours.

Their demands included the implementation of the

government-mandated wage increase in August (rather than November which is when the minimum wage increase is supposed to take place), an eight-hour workday (workdays are currently between 11 and 15 hours long), and an end to intimidation by factory owners (who have routinely used thugs to attack the workers). The protesters also demanded the immediate release of Mantu Ghosh.

In addition to coercion and repression, the state is also attempting to use divisions inside the labour movement — there are more than 60 unions in the textile industry — to its advantage. Most unions in the industry are illegal and are forced to operate in secret with shoestring budgets.

The new plan, it seems, is for Bangladesh to attempt to expand the base of workers that are represented by the government-backed unions.

Labour Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain has announced plans to get trade unions into the ready-made-garment industry. This would be good news for one of the most thoroughly exploited labour forces in the world — were it not for the fact that the unions are being set up to help the bosses keep production running rather than to help workers advocate for their interests.

The government is hoping that the minimum wage increase will seem like a better option than indefinite protests by workers who are already feeling the pinch. Unions like the National Garment Workers Federation are doing the bosses' bidding in this instance by backing the 3,000 takas minimum wage and encouraging workers to return to their jobs.

• Full article: [www.socialistworker.org/2010/08/24/textile-strikes-rock-bangladesh](http://www.socialistworker.org/2010/08/24/textile-strikes-rock-bangladesh)

## WHY SOCIALISM IS IN DISARRAY, PART TWO

# What Stalinism did to socialism

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

## 1. Stalinism was utopianism

We have seen that Stalinism was a form of “utopian socialism” — totalitarian utopian socialism — on a vast scale. The name which its advocates gave to that utopianism was “Socialism in One Country”.

The Marxist project of subverting and overthrowing advanced capitalism from within gave place to the Stalinist project of building up backward Russia in a long-term competition from outside with advanced capitalism.

In that work, the Communist Parties, which had been founded in and after the First World War to overthrow capitalism, now had only the role of supporting the USSR, in every and any way necessary. If socialism was to be built “in one country”, then there would, by definition, be no other socialist revolutions for a whole epoch.

That meant supporting the Stalinist ruling class — of whose system the 1938 founding programme of the Trotskyist Fourth International wrote that it differed from fascism only “in more unbridled savagery”.

This core utopianism shaped and reshaped everything else. I will list the main ways in which it transformed or negated Old Socialism.

## 2. Absolute anti-capitalism: reactionary-romantic a-historical anti-capitalism

**We have seen that for Marxists advanced capitalism is the irreplaceable mother of our socialism. And not a good mother: a poisonous old harri-dan-spider who eats her own young! Or tries her best to!**

There were communists before Marx and Engels. There were utopians and blueprint-peddlers; there were also activists such as Auguste Blanqui, for whom Marx and Engels had great and well-merited respect. But the Blanquists’ idea of the road to communist revolution was that, whenever the revolutionary communist secret society had enough guns, gunpowder and fighters to put up barricades and rise in rebellion, it would do that at the first politically favourable moment.

They had no idea of the necessary evolution of capitalist society, of its forces of production, as the irreplaceable ground-preparer for socialism; no idea of the necessity of the social, intellectual and political preparation of the proletariat through both capitalist evolution and communist education and organisational work, to make it able to seize power and replace capitalist society with working-class socialist rule.

Marxism sees the rise of bourgeois society and of the bourgeoisie on the ruins of feudalism as a great step forward for humankind. Among other things, it began to prepare the objective prerequisites of socialism. It created bourgeois freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, assembly, press, and religion. (It is true, of course, that those freedoms, those “Rights of Man and of the Citizen”, were not won by the female half of humankind for many, many decades after they were won by men).

The bourgeois revolutions were usually won by the efforts of the plebeians, and the “bourgeois” freedoms were won, or their extension to the whole of the people was won, by the efforts of the working classes.

Reactionary anti capitalism or absolute anti-capitalism in the 20th century was two things close to what the *Communist Manifesto*, in the 19th century, called “reactionary socialism”.

Socialism became possible only when capitalism had created a mass proletariat and created means of production which, liberated of the drives and unreason of capitalism, can create abundance for all in the basics of life.

The programme of abolishing bourgeois society depended on whether or not that society was advanced enough and objectively capable of generating something better and more progressive than itself. On a world scale, in the 20th century, it was. In Russia, though the workers could and did take power, it was not.

\* The first part of this article can be found at [www.workersliberty.org/node/14899](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14899)

Stalinism was a form of utopian socialism — they called it “Socialism in One Country”

The Bolsheviks’ conception of the Russian revolution was that the spread of the revolution to advanced capitalist Europe would link Russia to advanced worker-ruled societies, of which Russia would then become a backward appendage. The implication embedded in Socialism in one Country was the opposite of that.

Now Russia would advance and develop and grow towards socialism on its own strength. The Bolshevik Left Opposition criticised the cutting off by Stalinism of the world market from Russian development. Autarky became a fixed principle of other Stalinists — in China, for three decades over the “high Stalinist” period, for example.

And for the Stalinist movement the programme of abolishing advanced bourgeois society, objectively ripe for socialism, was a commitment to create... a replica of a Russia where Stalinism had wiped out all the conquests of liberty and the human and democratic rights of the citizen — and of economic enterprise — and replaced it with Stalinist totalitarianism. In France this programme was sometimes called the policy of “liberticide”. That is what it was. Reactionary anti-capitalism: an “alternative” development to capitalism that was in a thousand ways, and not least in terms of liberty and democracy, a regression to pre-capitalist society.

## 3. The suppression of the working class viewpoint and class politics and its replacement by a sectarian-utopian outlook

**The axis on which everything now revolved was not the class struggle, not the education of the working class, not the development of working-class political independence, not the centrality of the working class, the protagonist of “old Socialism”, but whatever would best serve the USSR. Class criteria were obsolete.**

What in old socialism had been attributed to the actual working class, was now attributed to the USSR and its rulers.

For all practical purposes the “working class” was a cipher, a notional thing in whose name another class, the Russian bureaucratic autocracy, acted.

In the 1930s this approach led to blocking with the German Nazis against the Social Democrats. At various periods in the mid-1930s and after the creation of cross-class Popular Fronts in France, Spain, Britain and other countries became the goal of the Communist Parties.

What were Popular Fronts? With or without the formal involvement of the Communist Party, they were the broadest possible bloc of middling or right-wing and labour or socialist parties, around the axis of a very limited programme (and for their “communist” supporters mainly a negative one: anti-fascism).

In Britain, the CP wanted to include the Labour Party, the Liberals, and the “progressive wing” of the Tory Party in the broad alliance. As Trotsky pointed out, this put them to the right of the Labour right wing, who wanted a Labour government.

The truth is that even right wing bourgeois liberals were comparatively progressive compared to the Stalinist parties, whose victory would have led to the

replications of the Russian Stalinist regime. But our concern here is with the influence of the Stalinists in pulping the idea of a class politics among a broader left — their influence on people like Nye Bevan, for instance, the late-40s Labour minister who founded the NHS, who was expelled from the Labour Party as a Popular Frontist in 1939.

The Stalinists perverted the idea that in history the bourgeoisie plays a progressive role and made it something entirely arbitrary: a given bourgeoisie was good or bad, historically progressive or reactionary, depending on its relations, for now, with the USSR. They even found good and bad, patriotic and traitorous fascists!

In France, the CP appealed to “patriotic” French fascists — that is, those French fascists who were not hooked up with Nazi Germany — to join their popular front. The consequence of the Popular Front period was the abandonment and destruction of even nominal commitment to independent working-class politics.

The later Stalinists found “good” bourgeoisies primarily in the Third World countries emerging from colonialism, but also, for example, in the 26-County Irish state. The bourgeoisie there was wretchedly stunted, and in social and political terms very reactionary, relentlessly grinding down the proletariat of the cities and towns.

It preened itself in the heroic light of the Irish rebellions which itself and its ancestors had played no part in, or opposed and denounced. (For example, the *Irish Independent*, the paper of the Catholic-nationalist bourgeoisie, after the suppression of the 1916 Rising, had called on the British to shoot the wounded socialist and trade-union leader James Connolly).

It allowed the Catholic hierarchy to run the nearest thing to a theocracy in Europe, not excluding clerical-fascist Franco Spain. It lived by exporting meat — cattle and people, hundreds of thousands of people, wretchedly educated, cast adrift on the tide.

But it was out of step with Britain because of the partition of the country. Decisively it took a neutralist line in foreign policy, standing out against great pressure to let NATO have bases in the 26 Counties. You couldn’t be more “progressive” than that!

So for decades the Stalinists — in Ireland and among the Irish in Britain through the CP’s Irish front organisation, the Connolly Association — devoted themselves to promoting the idea that the Irish bourgeoisie ran “the most progressive state in Western Europe”.

## 4. The “party of a new type” was substituted for the working class as protagonist

**For Marxists, though party and class are not the same thing, there is an unbreakable link between them. “The Communists... have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole,” as the Communist Manifesto puts it.**

Not so the Stalinist parties. The Communist Parties were “Bolshevised” in the early mid 20s, and completely remoulded by the end of the decade. The idea of “the party” now became “the party of a new type”,

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an entity distinct from the working class, as the protagonist in the socialist revolution. The “parties” were Stalinist armies — in some countries, very large armies — operating with mechanical discipline under the command of Moscow.

The Jesuits demanded “Poverty, Chastity and Obedience” from their militant priests. With Stalinism, “discipline and obedience”, and often poverty, and unlimited self-sacrifice, came to be the prime qualities of the militant in its parties. The old idea of the party member as an educated, self-respecting, thinking militant, retaining the right and the duty to think and argue and dispute even while acting as a disciplined executor of the democratic will of the majority of the organisation or of the elected leadership acting within its proper competence — that was condemned as “petty bourgeois”, or as “Trotskyite” sabotage” of the proletarian movement.

Working class “discipline” now meant adherence to the “party line”, whatever it was, and the surrender of every old working-class and socialist position, loyalty, instinct, conscience, to “The Party” and its leaders. For them, political life came to be an endless succession of Jacob-like acts of obedience to a savage God — but where God in the Bible relented, sparing Jacob’s son, Isaac, once Jacob had agreed to cut his throat as a sacrifice to him, the Stalinist Moloch demanded that the blood be drained and many millions of Isaacs eviscerated on its altar.

The propensity to reason and to think politically beyond the decision to submit to “discipline” and rationalise “the line”, variously and repeatedly, was eradicated in the militants of such parties and in the parties as collectives. Stalinist “democratic centralism” meant military-style discipline and hierarchy in any and all conditions, with politics essentially the province of the leadership only — and, ultimately, in all essentials, of Moscow only. There was no provision for what members would do if the leaders were mistaken. Only Moscow could anoint and remove a CP leadership.

#### 5. Annexation of the Marxist criticism of capitalism to the Stalinist — not the socialist — programme

**I**n the beginning of modern socialism is the Marxist-communist critique of capital and capitalist society. It consists of a negative and a positive side — the negative criticism of what exists, and the positive alternative, the socialist programme of working class self-emancipation.

The positive proposals are, for Marxists, extrapolated from the criticism of capitalism. Marx refused to make any detailed picture of the future post-capitalist society, dismissing the idea as utopianism. The future society would evolve out of the expropriation by the workers of the expropriators (the bourgeoisie), and out of the society in which that revolution was made. We have seen what Lenin wrote of that aspect of Marxism.

But the Marxist critique of capital, rooted in advanced bourgeois society and the needs of the working class in that society, and the Marxist working-class programme, can be separated. The positive working-class Marxist programme can be cut away from the negative criticism and condemnation of capitalism.

The programme of another class can be attached to the anti-capitalism — indeed, of a number of other classes or fragments of classes. Fascism, for example, demagogically criticises capitalism, attributing what it denounces to “Jews”, “Jewish finance”, etc.

Among people still calling and thinking themselves communists, valid criticism of capitalism and of capitalist democracy can be combined with positive support and advocacy of worse. Stalinism was worse.

One consequence of the combination was the creation among communists of a comprehensive dualism that was a political split personality. Things given heartfelt condemnation in capitalist society were defended in the Stalinist world.

Genuinely indignant at wrongs and ruling class crimes in Britain, would-be communists simultaneously defended similar and far worse things in the USSR, China, etc. The less worldly-wise simply denied what they didn’t want to know; the sophisticated ones might, in a lucid moment, have summed up their attitude like this: the concentration camps, jails and torture chambers of a socialist state are not the same thing as identical things that, under capitalism, are damnable.

Stalinism took over and demagogically exploited the Marxist and communist criticism of capitalism and bourgeois democracy, and put its own programme, its utopia, itself, and a drive to replicate the Russian system in the place of the Marxist programme of expanded democracy and working-class self-ruling socialism.

Where communists criticise bourgeois democracy,

we criticise it for not being really mass democracy. We criticise not representative government, but the limitations, class bias, one-dimensionality and hypocrisies. We counterpose to it mass democracy, direct self-rule.

Even the “dictatorship of the proletariat”, for Lenin and Trotsky and the Bolshevik Party, meant only the dictatorship of the working class, a class dictatorship of the mass of the people, exercised democratically, by way of what Lenin called “a state of the Paris Commune type”. It meant “dictatorship” only in the sense of political rule outside the existing laws that protect the bourgeoisie and bourgeois property, overruling those laws and old norms where necessary by direct force.

Disparaging bourgeois democracy, Stalinism counterposed to it not working-class democracy but lawless perpetual bureaucratic dictatorship. Where the communist programme stipulated, and socialism as a social system required, a collectivised economy run and owned democratically, the Stalinists put in its place a collectivised economy run by a totalitarian autocracy.

The “communist” parties, building support as critics of capitalism, complemented that critique with a non-socialist, Stalinist alternative, much of it, as we will see, derived from what had been the social and political Right.

#### 6. Superman-saviours

**T**he Internationale, insisting on the basic truth of Marxist socialism — “the emancipation of the proletariat must be the work of the proletariat itself” — declares:

“No saviour from on high deliver us/ No faith have we in prince or peer/ Our own right hand the chains must sever/ Chains of hatred, greed, and fear”.

Stalinism counterposed to that a “leader” principle. The cult of individuals, in the first place of Stalin, followed by many other Stalins, including Mao and “Fidel”, became in the Stalinist system as intense and all-pervasive as it is in fascism. It is often now forgotten that even Stalinist leaders in countries like France, the USA, and Britain had their own miniature cults, around people like Thorez, Browder, and Pollitt.

#### 7. Substitution of “Party-Marxism” for Marxism

**R**estating the basic idea of the old socialism and communism, in the programme he wrote for the Trotskyist movement in 1938 Leon Trotsky insisted that it was a cardinal rule for Marxists to “be guided”, not by the interests of “the party”, but “by the logic of the class struggle”. There is at any given moment an objective truth, and for Marxists it cannot be dismissed just because it is inconvenient to “the party”.

But in Stalinist politics, everything inconvenient to the USSR and its parties was buried under lies, under an enormous accumulation of lies.

Marxism, as a guide to analysis, and reason itself, were replaced by Authority — party authority, the authority of party leaders and ultimately of Moscow. They laid down the line, sanctified selected texts, interpreted those they blessed, and told the comrades what, “dialectically”, they meant “here” and “now”. This was Stalinist “Party Marxism”.

Mystification and mumbo-jumbo became a central part of the “Marxism” of the Communist Parties. “Marxism” came to be the esoteric knowledge of a secular priesthood who alone could decide what it meant and what adherence to it implied in politics for any given situation.

The Catholic Church has a name for those of its doctrines that defy the rules of logic, things that, by everyday standards and to the untutored human mind, are outright gibberish. The “Trinity”, the dogma that God is both one divine person and, simultaneously, “three divine persons in one God”; or the belief that though the bread remains bread by every test of human senses, still each little piece of bread really is (is “host to”) the real body and real blood of Jesus Christ — these are “mysteries of religion”. They belong to a higher order of things. The bishops know better; the cardinals understand. The Pope is guided by God himself in these matters. These things are beyond you and your puny reason, little man!

That is what the Stalinists said too, in their own way. Their term for it was “Marxist dialectics”. Dialectics, the logic of motion and development, the logic that puts formal logic in its real, evolving, moving, changing, context, became in the Stalinist system an ever-shifting swamp of moral, political, social, historical and intellectual relativism.

It all depends, comrade! Stalin’s 1939 alliance with Hitler is an outright betrayal of the anti-fascist struggle? Not at all! As the Great Stalin said: “Germany did

not attack France and Britain; France and Britain attacked Germany, and it is they who are responsible for the present war”. Put it in context and you will see that objectively Hitler has capitulated to the Soviet Union: that is the inner dialectical meaning of the Hitler-Stalin pact, comrade! (See for example R Palme Dutt’s editorials in the Communist Party journal *Labour Monthly* in the months immediately after the Pact. And the report of the February 1940 “anti-war” conference of nearly 900 labour movement people: *Labour Monthly*, March 1940).

Strike breaking is outright treason to the working class? Not at all: strike-breaking is in this situation the highest form of class consciousness! As Harry Pollitt, the Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, put it: “Today it is the class-conscious worker who will cross the picket line”.

At least we can be certain of one thing: the big capitalists and the financiers are in all circumstances the enemy? It depends, comrade! It depends. In the period of the US-USSR alliance, Earl Browder, secretary of the Communist Party of the USA proclaimed that he would gladly shake the hand of the notorious and hitherto much hated financier J Pierrepont Morgan. Class treason? Not at all, comrade! It flows from the Russian-US alliance. And there is nothing more central to the cause of socialism, and therefore to the cause of the working class, than that. Is there? Browder’s proclamation is the highest form of class consciousness!

Things are not always what they may seem to you, comrade little man!

And so on. And so on. In fact, it was an eternal metaphysical dance of rationalisation around whatever the Russian autocracy did and said. Only an autocratic, Great Russian chauvinist state, deeply hostile to the workers outside Russia, as to those inside Russia, could have demanded from the Communist Parties in the capitalist states such a self-gutting mode of existing and operating. It pulverised and destroyed the norms and standards of socialism and of working-class democracy. It did the same with the standards of reasons and intellect on which Marxism stood and which it needed if it was to sustain and renew itself.

In 1936, 1937 and 1938 Stalin put the surviving leaders of the Russian October Revolution on trail as traitors. Most of them were shot.

Now CP members had to accept as an all-defining article of their socialist faith an absurdity as mind-bending as the doctrine of the Trinity — that all the leaders of the Russian revolution in 1917 and after, except Lenin and Sverdlov, both safely dead, and one or two others, and Stalin, “Lenin’s faithful disciple”, had been agents of hostile foreign government. Accept it or break with “The Party”, “The Revolution”, and “Communism”.

Russia and its rulers, whoever they were, whatever they were, whatever they did, could do no wrong. That conviction was the lodestar. Philby in 1933 saw very clearly how things were — and faced the implications. So, if less lucidly, did vast numbers of other would-be communists.

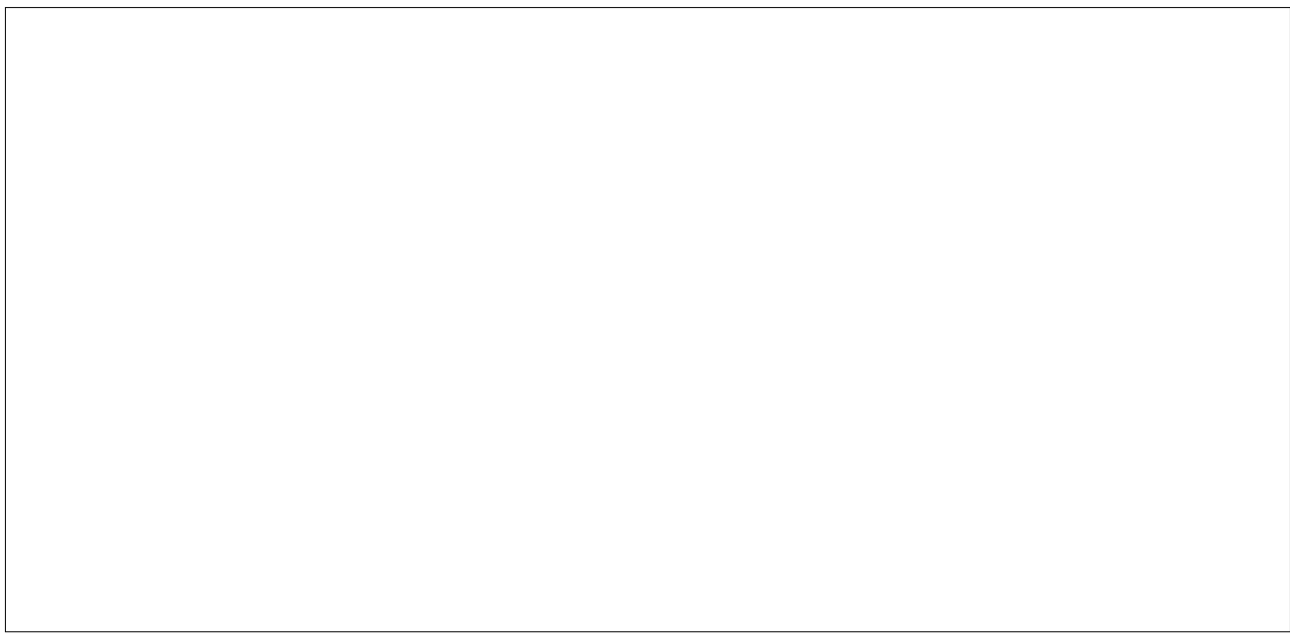
The “cadre” of the CPs, good decent well-meaning people most of them, initially honest but insufficiently self-examining militants surrendered themselves body, mind and soul, to “The Party”. They became in politics de-politicised political sleep walkers. The true portrait of a mainstream 20th century “revolutionary” is that of a rigidly controlled, and rigidly self-controlled, “communist”, whose functional politics was a blind loyalty to the government of a foreign country and to a political apparatus, the CP, its franchised local representatives, both of which were thought to embody socialism and could be trusted to lead the workers on to socialism. “The Party of a New Type”, comrade!

The USSR and “The Party”, the USSR’s party, these were the fixed reference points in a world in which politics and policies were mere artefacts to be used, or jettisoned, as Stalin thought fit...

At each turn there was of course a shake out. But the hard core remained, and was continually replenished. They learned to think according to Stalinist “dialectics”. Everything was relative, forever in flux, in line with Russia’s foreign policy needs. These once-critically-thinking, rebellious, individually and collectively aspiring people surrendered everything to those they took for the pre-ordained leaders of the world socialist revolution — and by doing that, they became the very opposite of what they started out to be, working-class revolutionary socialist militants.

A whole new, reshaped mutant political species numbering many millions was made and bred all across the world. Details would be different from person to person, from country to country, CP to CP, but the twisted utopianism and corrupted personal idealism embodied in the “utopian socialist” fetish of the USSR, accepting it as the measure of all things, now





Harry Pollitt, General Secretary of the British Communist Party with Georgi Dimitrov leader of the Comintern in 1935

and in the future, and its local CP, its vicar in a given country, its franchised sub-group, was common to them all. It was what made them Stalinists, whatever detailed politics they were promoting.

Millions revolted against capitalism and wanted to fight for socialism. Their political spirit and energy, mesmerised by the utopian delusion about socialism a-building in "Workers' Russia", was annexed, with their willing and sometimes fervent agreement, by the Stalinist movement, at the core of which was the Stalinist ruling class of the "USSR". The revolt was transmuted into something else, into something other than itself, into its opposite.

The quotient of un-reason was kept at delusional level by the necessary self-defence of labelling as "bourgeois propaganda" all news and facts about the USSR, etc., that were uncongenial and in contradiction to the teachings of the Stalinist church.

The typical Stalinist-movement militant was depoliticised, irresponsible, crassly ignorant of the socialism she and he sought to serve, and therefore, an obedient tool in the hands of the Russian Stalinist ruling class and its franchised "Communist Parties".

These were "communists" who — never mind what they thought they were — fought not for a cause and for principles consciously understood and used to measure societies, organisations, people, political events and themselves, but for a fetish. The fetish of the USSR and its "communist" parties throughout the world had in their minds and feelings replaced the great socialist cause and come to substitute for it. They might have adopted an inside-out version of the catch cry of Eduard Bernstein, the right wing "revisionist" of old socialism, who said: the movement is everything, the goal (socialism) nothing. Now the USSR and "the Party" was everything, the working class movement nothing.

W B Yeats' play "Caitlin Ni Houlihan" tells of a Queen who surrenders her soul in the cause of her people. Generations of CP members did just that, without fully knowing that they did it, and without getting, without ever having had even a remote chance of getting, what they thought their self-surrender and self-sacrifice would bring — working-class socialism.

It is impossible not to sympathise and empathise with such people on a human level, and with their tragedy, which was also the tragedy of humankind in the mid-Twentieth Century. Impossible not to find something almost heroic in the doggedness of the best and — necessarily — least critical-minded and most self-hypnotised of them. That is what makes the story tragic — the terrible, murdering, effect on the cause which they sought to serve, of the depoliticised, soul and mind-surrendering, operationally mindless, way they worked for it.

But, even so, they were thinking, reasoning beings. They have equivalents now. They made political choices. Even if their thinking never got beyond the "Kim Philby position", that "the USSR is the measure of all things socialistic", and that "Stalin" — like the Catholic Pope when speaking from St Peter's Chair on "matters of faith and morals" — "could not be wrong", thinking people is what they were. They made choices which meant their own political destruction as socialists and contributed to the degradation and rot of socialism, so far for generations.

Two lines from a fine song by an unteachable Stalinist, Ewan McColl, about miners entombed in a pit disaster, almost sums up their tragedy:

"Through all their lives they dug a grave,  
Two miles of earth for a marking stone."

The present state of the labour movement — and much of the contemporary kitsch left — is the marking stone over the grave which they inadvertently dug for socialism in the 20th century.

#### 8. Greatly strengthened one-sided, arbitrary, unstable pacifism

**Socialists and communists are natural "pacifists", in the sense that we want relations between states to be governed by reason and agreement and compromise rather than by war.**

But to make a cardinal all-defining principle of pacifistic methods is to disarm peoples who can only win liberation or emancipation, or avoid conquest, by war. It is to preach support for the status quo until those in power can peacefully be persuaded to agree to change. And in history most pacifists have rallied to wars once they have started.

Socialists therefore came to see pacifism as a treacherous snare. The British pacifist opponents of the First World War did rather better than the old guard Marxists around Henry Hyndman, who self-blinkeredly supported the war as an international "police action" against German militarism. Even so, pacifism erected into the central pillar of a world outlook is for socialists a nonsense or a hypocrisy. So the Bolshevik Communist International taught.

For the Stalinists, pacifism was a force to be manipulated and appealed to against bourgeois governments, in any case when the USSR was the antagonist of their own country's government. In Britain the CP used pacifism very successfully — advocating peace on Hitler's terms — for the first nine months of World War Two, and less successfully for the rest of the 22 months from September 1939 to the invasion of Russia in June 1941.

Thus pacifism with all its ambiguities and contradictions was rehabilitated in the would-be revolutionary movement. It survives Stalinism.

#### THE STALINIST SOCIAL-ECONOMIC SYNTHESIS: FUSION OF LEFT AND RIGHT

**E**litist (Stalinist) ideas of both the class struggle and socialism are a contamination from the right. The condemnation of the left will seem to be the burden of this article, and thereby, intentionally or not, it will seem to be a talking-up of the right.

Not so. In fact the most damning thing about the Stalinist left and the kitsch-left now is that that it is all too often indistinguishable from the right — from the older reactionary right and from the invertebrate liberal left.

In fact the Stalin-remade "left" was not a real left. It was a synthesis that incorporated key elements of ideas that, before Stalinism, socialism had seen as core ideas of its enemies, of the right in instinct and doctrine.

Let us briefly examine some of the ways in which the dominant "left" became a fusion of bits of the old left and of the right, with ideas from the right shaping what in fact the would-be left was in politics.

#### 1. Imperialist "anti-imperialism"

**M**arxists are consistent democrats. We are against the coercion, domination, and exploitation of one people by another; and therefore we are for the

self-determination of nations, and where they want it and it is practically feasible for fragments of nations.

Where full independence is for practical reasons unfeasible (because of the geographical interlacing of populations), we are for the maximum autonomy for minority areas which want it. The Bolsheviks put it very well in 1913, in a resolution written by Vladimir Lenin:

"In so far as national peace is in any way possible in a capitalist society based on exploitation, profit-making, and strife, it is attainable only under a consistent and thoroughly democratic republican system of government... the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges whatsoever to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority. This particularly calls for wide regional autonomy and fully democratic local government, with the boundaries of the self-governing and autonomous regions determined by the local inhabitants themselves on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc."

The USSR itself was an empire in the same sense that Austro-Hungary had been up to 1918. A vast number of its people belonged to subject nationalities oppressed by the Great Russian minority.

Where the Bolsheviks had knocked down the walls of the Tsarist "prison house of nations", the Stalinist counter-revolution erected them again.

In international politics the Stalinists emptied the terms "imperialism" and "anti-imperialism" of all "objective" content. They presented predatory Russian imperialism, ruled over by a savage and sometimes crazily chauvinistic autocracy, as the expansion of the socialist revolution, and therefore, by definition, right on everything over which its rulers — not the imaginary working class rulers, the real ones — clashed with the capitalist-ruled world or were criticised in it.

As vicarious Russian nationalists, the Stalinist parties were vicarious racists at the bidding of the Russian rulers. Toward Germans, for example in World War Two and afterwards, when 13 million Germans were driven west from Stalinist controlled Eastern Europe. The Yugoslav Stalinists massacred tens of thousands of Albanians when they occupied Kosova in 1945.

The Stalinists identified imperialism as only capitalist imperialism; and then they identified advanced capitalism, ipso facto, as imperialism, and therefore historically reactionary. They educated the left to see the seizure, "ethnic cleansing", plunder, and exploitation of countries as good or bad, imperialist or socialist, progressive or reactionary, according to who was doing it. It wasn't put like that — but there could be such things as "socialist", "working class" ethnic cleansing, slaughter or exploitation.

This was an aspect of the comprehensive dualism and political split personality that still exists in the post-Stalinist would-be left, a malign legacy of Stalinism even to some of the "anti-Stalinists".

The Stalinists expunged from the left the very propensity to judge such matters according to observation, facts, reason, and principles of consistent democracy. It was the prerogative of the Russian (and for some, later, the Chinese or the Albanian or the Cuban) Caesar-Pope to decide such things.

Recently the *Morning Star*, the Stalinist paper once called the *Daily Worker*, which calls itself the "paper of the left" and for which all varieties of labour movement dignitaries write, conducted a vicious campaign against the Tibetans, taking the side of China, which by some mysterious logic it seems to see, still, as a socialist state.

#### 2) Stalinism's "hydra-headed" nationalism

**V**icarious Russian nationalism was the core of the Stalinist movement. Lesser nationalisms were adopted too, in so far as they could be aligned with, or made useful to, the custodians of the greatest nationalism, the Russian ruling class.

In the early 1930s, in chorus with the Nazis, the Stalinists campaigned for German "liberation" from the victors in the World War. From the mid-1930s onwards, they operated with categories of good and bad, or worse and better, imperialisms, and, in effect, of good and bad peoples. The bad of one period could turn out good, and the good turn again bad. What was good and what bad at any moment depended on the USSR's alliances or desired alliances, and its antagonisms.

In the second half of the 1930s, Britain, France, Belgium, Holland, "the democracies" which had colonial and semi-colonial control of much of the globe,

Continued on page 18

were the good imperialists. For 22 months before Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, the German Nazis who had overrun most of Europe in May-June 1940, were not imperialists but the victims of the old imperialist powers, Britain, France, Belgium and Holland, who had forced war on them.

When Hitler invaded Russia, the Stalinists switched back to glorifying and helping the “democratic imperialists”, now Russia’s allies.

In their zig-zags from right to pseudo-left and back again, the Stalinists built up a repertoire, like a music hall artist of old, from which they could dust off old costumes and bits of political patter for new situations.

After 1945, they supported the restoration of the old empires in “their” old territories, the French in Indochina, for example (where local Stalinists opposed it), and Algeria. Russia tried to take defeated Italy’s old territory in Libya. It tried to stay in Iran, which Britain and Russia had jointly occupied in 1941.

In the 1950s and long after, the CPs of France, Italy, Britain, etc., campaigned against “Yankee imperialism” and for British, French, etc., “liberation” from the American “occupiers”.

They did not succeed in pitting Britain or France against the USA, but they did, with slogans like “Yankee bastards, go home!”, poison sections of the European working class with root and branch anti-Americanism.

The Stalinists treated nations and parts of nations as they treated the working class and labour movements — as tools and instruments, pawns and diplomatic make weights for USSR foreign policy. For example, in the 1930s, they backed Croatian clerical-fascist nationalists — the Ustashe, who in the 1940s ran a genocidal puppet state under the aegis of the Nazis.

In place of the general principles of what Lenin called consistent democracy in such questions, they placed the general principle: support whichever nationalism and chauvinism best serves USSR foreign policy, and change sides when that serves Russian interests. For a large part of the 20th century, long after Hitler and the Nazis had been kicked into history’s abyss, they poisoned labour movements with an anti-Germanism that was indistinguishable from racism.

“Anti-imperialism” came to be riddled with double-standards, arbitrariness and frequent absurdity.

Trotsky observed at the outbreak of World War Two that both imperialist camps were telling the truth — about each other. The Stalinists told a lot of the truth about their enemies, and lies and justifications about their allies and looked-for allies. At any given moment only part of the truth was told about world imperialism.

“Anti-imperialism” as a conception, as a principle, and as a programme, became detached from its rational democratic core meaning and progressive political content, and came to be only an emotion-charged mystification.

There was widespread left-wing support for Russia’s own old-colonial style invasion of Afghanistan in December 1978. The syndrome can still be seen today when the rise of clerical-fascist terrorism in the forging-ground that Afghanistan came to be in the decade after Russia’s invasion is blamed on the USA, for backing the resistance, but not on Russia for invading and trying to annex Afghanistan and make it a colony.

### 3. Denigration of democracy and liberty as mere “bourgeois democracy”

**The Stalinist and Stalinist-influenced “left” abandoned the core working-class fight to extend**

**democracy. They abandoned what the Communist Manifesto summed up as the historic task of the working class — “to win the battle of democracy”, that is to win democratic control of society on the political level as the means to democratic self-rule in society and economy.**

The bourgeoisie tells the people that liberty is inseparable from its own limited “bourgeois democracy”, thus trying to “sell” its gutted and severely curtailed democracy as the only way to preserve liberty. The Stalinist-influenced “left”, idealising the methods of the bureaucratic counter-revolution in Russia, broke with the very idea of liberty — vis-a-vis the state and, for minorities, society — except in demagoguery against the capitalist ruling class.

This too was negativism, combined positively with its opposite — worship of Stalinist state-slavery, in which they accepted the same ground as the Old Right.

The Stalinists redefined democracy out of any concern with actual democracy. Where the extension of democracy was seen by the old socialists — including the Bolsheviks, before the exigencies of the Russian Revolution and its defence pushed them back — as essential for the education of the working class to become a self-ruling class, the Stalinists gutted “democracy” of all meaning.

They substituted double-talk redefinition. “Democracy” in Eastern Europe was full employment, low-rent housing, etc. Even if the claims for social benefits had been true about the Stalinist societies — and largely they weren’t — the argument would have been a negation of democracy as self-rule.

As the bourgeoisie identified democracy with liberty and with their bourgeois democracy, the Stalinists, concurring, condemned democracy and liberty as bourgeois and necessarily bourgeois.

The Stalinist left saw liberty as only a token, something of interest only when counterposed to their bourgeois enemies, only when used as a criticism of them, not as something which we must defend and expand, and not as an irreplaceable part of any socialist programme in which working-class action is central.

The working class and plebeians in history are usually the creators of and fighters for the advanced democracy in bourgeois democratic societies. In an important sense, that democracy is a prefiguring element of socialist society within capitalism, and part of

### 1989: the struggle for democracy in Eastern Europe

the self-liberation and preparation for full liberation of the working class in capitalist society.

Inverting the bourgeoisie which conflates liberty and democracy to disguise the shallowness of its democracy, the Stalinists damned liberty in the name of condemning the shallowness of bourgeois democracy. Both relied on conflation and obfuscation.

Even one-dimensional bourgeois democracy includes great achievements on which the working class can build, achievements that are indispensable to those who must make the proletarian revolution. Without liberty of speech, press, assembly, organisation, and without the exercise of the maximum possible democracy under the bourgeoisie, the working class cannot learn, cannot develop, cannot grow spiritually, intellectually, and politically. It cannot prepare itself to become the ruling class.

That is something the Stalinists demonstrated negatively where they ruled, by the state to which they had reduced the working class, in Eastern Europe and the USSR by 1989-1991. It follows from the idea that the working class and its education, organisation, and political independence are the central questions for socialists that democracy is of central concern. Within capitalism, the left needs to push for the widest extension of democracy.

The proper distinction between revolutionaries and reform socialists is not that the Marxist revolutionary does not want to build on and expand what exists, on the road to replacing it with something better, the “commune state” of direct self-administering rule, but that the serious and honest reformist believes that bourgeois democracy can be extended indefinitely into real political and social democracy, without a revolution, and the revolutionary does not.

The Social Democracy misused the idea of liberty and democracy to serve the bourgeoisie against communism. The Weimar Republic which they set up in Germany, and which paved the way for the triumph of the Nazis, was proclaimed to be the triumph of democracy — not bourgeois democracy, the Social Democrats insisted, but democracy, classless and the same for everyone.

The Communist International, in its early, proletarian-Marxist years, fought for a better, working-class, democracy, against the limited and fragile bourgeois democracy of the big capitalist states. Yet the early

## WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers’ struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

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

#### We stand for:

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

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

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

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

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate. If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



Communist Parties, in reaction to what the Social Democratic right did with democracy in the service of counter-revolution, also tended to glorify and erect into a norm the emergency civil war measures forced on the Bolsheviks in the course of the Civil War, in which Soviet democracy shrank and almost disappeared. They tended to disparage democracy. That was part of an ultra-left infection, and a mistake, an understandable one, of the whole Comintern leadership.

All through its existence, the Stalinist movement oscillated between opportunistic and demagogic appeals to a classless democracy on one side, and utter contempt for any democracy on the other. Contempt, though differently expressed at different times, was continuous.

Democracy? Comrade, a society where there is no unemployment, no hunger, where rents are cheap and there aren't any capitalists — that is more democratic than the parliamentary-democratic system: it is a higher form of democracy, a higher form of society. Even neo-Trotskyists could be found subscribing to this gobbledygook and repeating it (the influential Argentinian "Trotskyist", the late Nahuel Moreno, wrote a book to prove it as late in Stalinism's political day as the end of the 1970s).

At the least, that could not but spread confusion. In practice it created utter chaos on the question of democracy in large swathes of the left. The Stalinists taught people that bourgeois democracy meant nothing to the working class.

#### 4. Anti-semitic "anti-Zionism"

**Anti-semitism, passed down through the ages in Christian society, is one of the basic social and political poisons of the twentieth century. The presently dominant "absolute anti-Zionism" on the "Trotskyist" kitsch left, defined not by just and necessary criticism of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and advocacy of a Palestinian state but by demonisation of and commitment to destroying Israel, comes straight from Stalinism.**

In this too the political spirit of the (anti-Jewish) Old Right prevailed.

The effects of the Stalinist poison injected into how the Jewish-Arab conflict is seen in the labour movement is with us still.

The Stalinists backed Israel in 1947-8 — in the UN, and the Stalinist state in Czechoslovakia, acting as proxy for the USSR, broke the international embargo on guns for the Palestinian Jews, because that disrupted the British plans in the Middle East. Then they did an about-turn, in 1949 and thereafter, for similar motives of power politics. They filled the left with an absolute "anti-Zionism" that identified Zionism with Nazism and grossly falsified the history.

Only a few years after Hitler and the Holocaust, the Stalinists made Arab or Islamic chauvinism, and anti-Semitism, everywhere "respectable" and good "anti-imperialism" by demonising the Jewish nationalists, the "Zionists"; by treating Israel as a historical aberration, an illegitimate and temporary spawn of history; and by equating the Zionists with the Nazis and attributed to them part at least of the responsibility for the Holocaust.

They operated, in effect and inescapably, with the idea that there are good and bad peoples — peoples deserving democratic rights, and peoples so vile, so imperialistic, so much puppets and tools of imperialism, that they and their rights do not come within the proper concerns of socialists. Demagogically, exploitatively, and one-sidedly advocating the rights of one side in various other conflicts, they had no concern with the idea that to reverse the roles between oppressed and oppressor is not part of a socialist, nor of any democratic solution to such conflicts.

#### 5. A future, "other worldly" focus rather than a human-centric one

**When the de facto goal and central concern of communism and socialism became not socialism and the development and education of the working class towards making a socialist society, then socialism was reduced to something parallel to the right's worship of God, tradition, "order", or, now, "the market" — with the promise that it comes right in the future. In both cases there was deception — indifference to life now.**

• In the last part of this article Sean Matgamna will analyse the contemporary would-be (mainly would-be Trotskyist) left, and how the malign legacy of Stalinism shapes it still.

## Ireland: blank cheques for bankers...

Interview with Rob Hartnett, continued from back page

**The Central Bank produced figures three months ago forecasting 0.8% growth for 2011. It's now cut that forecast back to 0.2%, blaming reduced consumer demand. Government policy will lessen that further.**

Our message is that there is an alternative to the notion that's held sway in Ireland for two years that it makes sense to write blank cheques to bail out dying banks while simultaneously slashing and burning public services. The labour-movement view is that this creates a vicious spiral of downwards momentum; we simply cannot saddle future generations with these levels of debt.

The idea that things can only improve from here is very misleading. We were told that a 3 billion euro cut to public spending was necessary, but now the figure that's washing about is 4 billion euros. Things are going to get worse and working people are being asked to pick up the bill.

We organise across a wide variety of sectors so our members are feeling the effects of the crisis in different

ways. Wage-freezes are the least of it; in many workplaces workers are suffering substantial wage cuts. One mortgage in 20 is now in arrears, and low-paid workers are literally struggling to put food on the table and buy school supplies for their children. There's a lot of government rhetoric about how everyone will need to take some of the pain, but it's our members at the lower end of the wage spectrum who are feeling it in the hardest sense.

Unite was the only major union to reject the Croke Park deal. We were extremely worried at the time about the clause that allowed the government out of its commitments in the event of 'unforeseeable budgetary deterioration'; we said that the government policy of writing blank cheques for the banks would lead to 'budgetary deterioration' that was very foreseeable indeed!

However, despite the inadequacies of Croke Park I think there would be a groundswell of anger if the government formally reneged on it. That would certainly put industrial action on the agenda. Wherever employers are using the economic crisis as an opportunity to attack wages and conditions, we'll organise resistance."

## Scotland: cuts begin to bite

From back page

**50,000 local authority workers in Scotland have recently been awarded (i.e. it has been imposed) a pay 'rise' of just 0.65% for this year — even lower than an earlier offer which had been rejected by the unions. This is to be followed up by pay freezes in 2011 and 2012.**

But inflation in August was running at 4.7% (RPI) or 3.1% (CPI). Core inflation (which gauges the underlying longer-term inflation trend) increased from 2.6% (July) to 2.8% (August). Inflation will rise even further with the increase in VAT from 17.5% to 20% in January, and the likely ending of the current council tax freeze in Scotland next April.

Confronted with this assault on public spending, jobs and living standards, the Scottish TUC set up the "There is a Better Way" campaign and initiated the demonstration in Edinburgh on 23rd October. It is making a serious effort to maximise support for that demonstration.

It has sent speakers to the Scottish Regional Committees of its affiliates and to Trades Councils throughout Scotland in order to encourage support for its campaign and the demonstration. It has also encouraged Trades Councils to initiate local anti-cuts campaigns.

The STUC has stressed that its own campaign is an 'umbrella' for the campaigns already being run by different unions, such as Unison and the EIS, rather than being one which is counterposed to them.

Running true to form, the STUC is aiming to build a broad and all-inclusive anti-cuts campaign. On one level this makes sense. What, after all, would be the point of building a narrow, exclusive, and thereby ineffective, anti-cuts campaign?

At the same time, however, the STUC's campaign has yet to address some basic questions.

First and foremost, there is the role of local authorities, especially ones controlled by Labour (either on its own, or in coalition), in either implementing or defying the cuts.

There is no campaign by the STUC for local authorities to refuse to set no-cuts budgets. In fact, the STUC is more likely to take a position that local authorities who impose cuts unwillingly and with a heavy heart should be treated as allies in the anti-cuts campaign.

Nor has the STUC campaign taken a position on the council tax freeze. But the reality is that the STUC (taking its lead from Unison) does not support the freeze. And not supporting the freeze means supporting an end to it.

Apart from not wanting to fall out with Unison, the STUC's reason for taking this position is that the council tax is not a progressive tax. Freezing a non-progressive tax, runs the argument, therefore benefits the better-off more than the worse-off.

But VAT is not a progressive tax either. If there was a

central-government freeze on VAT, would socialists oppose that freeze on the grounds that it is of more benefit to the wealthy than the less well-off?

There is also a certain fuzziness about the overall thrust of the STUC campaign. Is it against all cuts, full stop? Or is it a more Labour-like position that cuts should be imposed at a slower rate and less severely?

The lead slogan on publicity material for the Edinburgh demonstration, for example, reads: "Deep, Savage and Immediate Cuts Are Not Necessary and Are Not Unavoidable."

These are the kind of issues which need to be discussed in union and Labour Party branches and in local anti-cuts campaigns, whilst also continuing to mobilise the biggest-possible turnout for the Edinburgh demonstration (details below).

To take the anti-cuts campaign forward in Scotland the STUC should also convene an all-Scotland anti-cuts conference, open to delegates from unions, CLPs, and anti-cuts campaigns, with adequate time allowed for the submitting and debating of motions.

If the STUC is not prepared to call such a conference, then local anti-cuts campaigns should take the lead in trying to co-ordinate anti-cuts campaigning across Scotland.

**Saturday, 23rd October. Assemble 11.00am, East Market Street (behind Waverley Station). Move off 11.30am. Rally at 12.30pm at Ross Bandstand in Princes Gardens.**



## IRELAND

# Blank cheques for bankers, slash and burn for workers

BY DARREN BEDFORD

**I**reland's labour movement has begun to mobilise against cuts, amid fears that the cost of bailing out the country's shattered financial sector could rise to 50 billion euros — more than one third of the national income.

Unlike their British counterparts, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) got into some kind of gear for the ETUC day of action on 29 September, with demonstrations outside the Dail building in Dublin and Belfast City Hall (the labour movement is organised across the border). There are already plans underway for a further demonstration outside Derry's Guildhall on 23 October.

ICTU president Jack O'Connor accused the government of waging a "doomsday campaign of terror against the people". The Irish government has been pouring money into failing banks Anglo Irish and Irish Nationwide for two years, to the tune of nearly 33 billion euros. Workers have been forced to pay for this bailout through a series of savage austerity policies, including wage cuts and massive job losses. Unemployment now stands at nearly 14%, with long-term unemployment doubling to over 5% in recent years. Quoted in a

**Rob Hartnett from the Unite union in Ireland spoke to *Solidarity*:**

"The 29 September demonstration was organised to coincide with the politicians' return from the summer recess. It wasn't necessarily intended to be a mass public demo but was more about getting the activist voice of the labour movement heard. From that point of view it was a success. Although we perhaps didn't get the headlines of the person who drove a cement mixer into the Dail building, we certainly share their sense of frustration. The government doesn't seem to have any idea about how its lack of consideration and lack of planning is affecting people on the ground."

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## 29 September Belfast demonstration

recent *Guardian* interview, a Dublin-based care-worker said, "We were told that frontline services would not be affected and that jobs would not be cut, but what has happened is that contracts have not been renewed, and people who retire or leave have not been replaced, so we have lost about 20 members of staff."

However, while the ICTU's willingness to mobilise for 29 September place it a few steps ahead of the British TUC, it is dominated by partnership politics that tie the unions' hands. The so-called "Croke Park Deal", negotiated in April 2010, guarantees union cooperation for an "extensive transformation and efficiency drive" within the public sector in return for a commitment not to cut wages or jobs. However, the deal allows the government to renege on this commitment in the event of any "unforeseen budgetary deterioration". Some smaller unions, such as the Irish section of Unite, voted to reject the deal (66% opposed it on a turnout of almost 75%) but following a massive propaganda campaign waged inside the major public sector unions by the leadership, the big battalions — SIPTU and Impact — voted to back the deal.

At a time when real action — including strike action — is clearly necessary to force the government's hand, support for the Croke Park Deal shows up any fighting talk from the likes of O'Connor as little more than empty rhetoric.

## SCOTLAND:

# Mass demo as cuts begin to bite

BY ANNE FIELD

**T**he Scottish TUC's anti-cuts demonstration in Edinburgh on Saturday, 23 October, is likely to be the biggest demonstration in Scotland since the anti-Iraq war demonstrations.

Cuts are beginning to bite.

Housing Benefit cuts amounting to over £27 millions a year will leave 75% of all claimants in Scotland worse off — on average by around £7 a week.

Linking public sector pensions to the Consumer Price Index instead of the Retail Price Index will cost Scottish public sector pensioners around £17 billion over the next 20 years.

Increasing welfare benefits in line with the CPI rather than the RPI will cost claimants in Scotland a total of £92 million each year.

Like the attacks on the public sector carried out by the 1979-97 Tory government, the Con-Dem public spending cuts will hit Scotland even harder than other parts of Britain.

25% of jobs in Scotland are in the public sector, compared with 21% on a UK-wide basis. And in the 2011/2012 financial year Scotland will face two years' worth of cuts, as a result of the Scottish government having been given the go-ahead by Westminster to delay a budget reduction from this year to next.

In real terms, and taking account of inflation, the Scottish government's budget is likely to be cut from £29.2 billion this year to £27.5 billion next year. By 2014/15 the Scottish budget is likely to be cut in real terms by around £4 billion, or 12.5%.

Those cuts will, in turn, be passed on to local authorities. This will lead to the loss of as many as 90,000 jobs in the public sector in Scotland. A total of more than 12,000 job losses have already been announced by Scottish councils.

In the worst-case scenario as many as 37,000 jobs could also be lost in the private sector, as public sector contracts dry up for the private sector.

For those in work the impact of the Con-Dem government's policies will mean falling living standards.

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