

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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For a Workers' Government!

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Take the fight to the Tories!

On 10 November, 50,000 students marched in London against the government's plans to cut university teaching budgets by 75% and raise student fees to £9,000 a year, thus closing the doors to higher education for students from worse-off families.

Trade unions are still dawdling, planning no national demonstration until 26 March. Union members should insist that their organisations follow the students' lead!

• Full coverage: see Student Solidarity inside

50,000 students
march: an
example for
unions
to take!

WELFARE REFORM

Stop “work for your dole” scheme

BY MATTHEW THOMPSON

Iain Duncan Smith, Tory Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, has published a White Paper, “Universal credit: welfare that works”. Following on from the Comprehensive Spending Review’s cutting of pensions, child benefit and housing benefit, it is another major attack on working class people.

Universal credit will replace means-tested benefits including Income Support, Jobseeker’s Allowance and Working Tax Credit with a single payment, made to unemployed and low-paid workers. It is to be introduced in 2013 alongside a new Work Programme.

There will also be new benefit regime for the unemployed — benefits will be cut for a period of between three months and three years if the Jobcentre Plus thinks claimants have breached strict conditions linked to attending work-focused interviews and applying for vacancies.

Duncan Smith says an increased earnings disregard will mean claimants can move into jobs without being worse off than they are on benefits. But the obvious question is where are these jobs going to come from?

Two and a half million unemployed people are now chasing 467,000 job vacancies.

Long-term unemployment has doubled since 2008 to 797,000.

The Government intends to cut around six hundred thousand jobs in the public sector over the next six years.

From April 2011 2.6 million Incapacity Benefit claimants will be transferred onto the new Employment and Support Allowance. The Department for Work and Pensions is already predicting that

around three quarters of IB claimants will be found fit for work by the ESA medical and forced to sign on.

There are simply not enough jobs. But the Tories and their Lib Dem coalition partners have a solution to this problem. It is a US-style solution — workfare (work for your dole) schemes.

From next year, long-term JSA claimants will be forced to undertake “mandatory work activity” of at least thirty hours a week for a four-week period in order to receive their benefits.

As opposed to the Tory concept of the “Big Society” — getting people to volunteer in their communities in order to fill in the gaps in local services created by cuts — this “mandatory work activity” aims to transform the unemployed into a pool of forced labour, carrying out full-time jobs for councils and private sector employers on way below the minimum wage.

It will also parallel the community work schemes for those convicted of criminal offences. The meaning here is clear — the unemployed are to be punished for the lack of decent jobs, they are part of the “undeserving poor”.

Companies such as A4e who currently have contracts worth £80 million under the last Labour government’s Flexible New Deal will surely be first in line to scoop even more public money into their shareholders’ pockets.

As the Work Programme will be based on targets for getting unemployed people into jobs, such companies will concentrate their efforts on those most likely to get work, discriminating against those with disabilities or learning needs.

The proposals have been attacked by a number of charities. The chief executive of Scope asked: “What about those disabled people who ... try repeatedly to get

work but are not successful? The sanctions the government is going to introduce will effectively penalise them, pushing them further into poverty”.

We need a labour movement drive — starting with workers in the Department for Work and Pensions — to halt the

introduction of sanctions and workfare. Millions of workers — including trade unionists threatened with redundancy as the result of public spending cuts — now face destitution and exploitation on a massive scale.

The other world of Iain Duncan-Smith

BY IRA BERKOVIC

Iain Duncan-Smith wants to drag British politics into a Dickensian dystopia where unemployment and poverty are seen as moral failings rather than social problems. In a recent interview he appeared to be describing the refusal of the unemployed to take up offers of work as “a sin”.

But who exactly is this egregious scumbag who pronounces upon the moral fortitude of people who have faced hardships beyond his worst imagining?

Duncan-Smith has personal wealth of over £1 million. That puts him towards the bottom of the Cabinet’s rich-list (23 out of 29 Ministers are millionaires) but on a different planet from the people he will be throwing off or forcing to work for benefits.

After a private education at a naval college, and a few years as an officer in the British army in Northern Ireland, he walked into a highly-paid job at arms manufacturer GEC.

As Tory party leader, he was involved in a scandal about dubious expenses claims he submitted on behalf of his aristocratic wife, Betsy, who worked as his secretary and for whom he drew a hefty salary.

What makes Duncan-Smith’s welfare reforms galling is not the mere fact that he has a lot of money but that he has lived a life walled-off from the merest trace of any of the problems that the vast majority of Britain’s benefit claimants have had to do deal with. His life has been characterised by privilege, entitlement and the easy transition from one job in the upper echelons of the ruling-class to another.

The only way to respond to him is by building for a future in which the views of people like Iain Duncan-Smith are treated with the same beligerent contempt as he now treats the poorest and most vulnerable people in society.

LABOUR

Phil Woolas: his shame, our gain

BY DAN KATZ

Phil Woolas, former Immigration Minister in the last Labour government, is in big trouble. As someone who remembers him from Manchester University Labour Club and the National Union of Students in the 1980s, may I go on record as expressing my great pleasure at the scale and nature of his shame?

And on behalf of all the children of asylum seekers he had jailed in New Labour’s detention centres, may I hope he lives out his days in isolation and on the crappy minimum wage his government set?

Woolas, an MP since 1997, held onto the Oldham East and Saddleworth seat by only 103 votes in the recent general election. If Labour selects a decent candidate to replace him, it has a chance of a better result in the coming by-election; the Lib-Dems, who ran second in May, have deeply discredited themselves by joining Cameron’s government.

Two high court judges have ruled that Woolas knowingly misled the public in claims he made about his Liberal Democrat opponent, Elwyn Watkins, during the election campaign. The court found Woolas had deliberately stirred up white fears and anti-Muslim hatred,

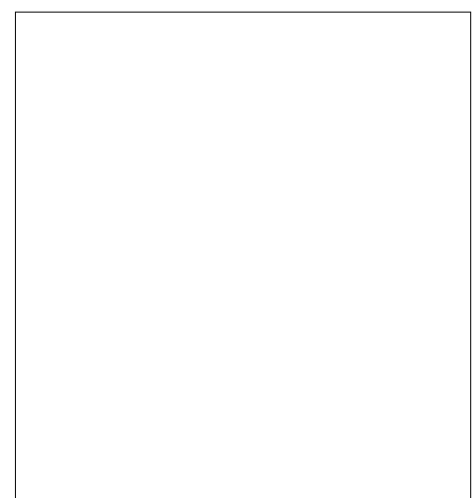
knowingly lying about Watkins’ supposed links to radical Islamists, for his own electoral advantage. Election statistics suggest that the net effect of Woolas’s dirty tricks was to limit the Lib Dem vote but also to lose Labour votes (the Labour score went down 10.7%) and boost the Tories and UKIP (they gained 10.5%, bringing the Tories up to a good third where in 2005 they got less than half Labour’s score).

Woolas ran a nasty, divisive campaign that should be condemned by all labour movement and anti-racist activists. Cynical opportunists like Woolas have no place in our movement.

The judges overturned the election result and have barred him from parliament for three years. Woolas says he will appeal against the decision.

John Mann, a Labour MP and a friend of Woolas, said: “This has got profound implications for British democracy. The idea that a judge rather than the electorate can remove an MP is farcical”. Woolas’s is the first case of an MP being disbarred by the courts for malpractice since 1911.

However Labour immediately suspended him. The sharpness with which Labour Deputy Leader Harriet Harman distanced the party from Woolas is a measure of how unpleasant his cam-



paign was.

Harman said on national television: “Whatever happens in an appeal... they could say on the basis of the facts that the election court found it was not warranted for them to strike down the election result and disqualify him, so he might win on a legal basis.

“But it won’t change the facts that were found by the election court, which was that he said things that were untrue knowing it, and that is what we are taking action on - because it is not part of Labour’s politics for somebody to be telling lies to get themselves elected.”

She went on: “That’s not going to change, and that’s what we regard as very serious and that’s why we have suspended him.” Harman might have added that leader Ed Miliband should never have kept Woolas on as a Shadow Minister after the election defeat.

Woolas started his political career alongside John Mann as a student Kinnockite at Manchester University. He was president of the National Union of Students in 1984-6. In terms of broad public perceptions, then, he was part of the Labour left; but he was also a pace-maker in a process, from the mid 1980s, of a big swathe of the Labour left adapting to Thatcherism by shifting further right than the old Labour right wing.

He was an “operator”, a smarmy, manoeuvring hack. Presumably, at one point, there had been a vision of a better world in his head. But after three decades of machine politics — in the student movement, as a union full-timer and as an MP — look what’s left: a man who picked on vulnerable black children so Labour could get electoral advantage by looking tough on immigrants. And then he took that idea one step further by conspiring to produce division in the working class along race lines for his own, petty, electoral advantage.

IRELAND

The bank that ate a country

James Connolly, the Irish socialist and trade union leader shot by the British in May 1916 for his part in the Easter Rising, was convinced, early in the last century, that capitalism simply could not develop fully in Ireland.

From that assessment he argued that only a Workers' Republic could really free Ireland from foreign domination. In any case, he didn't want capitalism to develop — didn't want the Irish bourgeoisie to climb on the backs of the working people of Ireland.

He was wrong in thinking that capitalism could not develop fully in Ireland. The way Ireland's financial crisis is going now suggests he was entirely right that only a Workers' Republic could honestly serve the people of Ireland.

The bullying by the international capitalist money markets of this small country of 4.5 million people is scandalous. The European Union governments are trying to force the Irish Republic to accept their proffered big loan to help in its economic difficulties. The Dublin government is resisting because with the bail-out will go handing over key areas of state independence to the money-lords of Europe — for instance, giving them the right to dictate higher taxes to Dublin.

Ireland boomed in the 1990s and until a couple of years ago. There was much talk of its "Celtic Tiger" economy. But it was an economic boom that rested on top of a financial quagmire — a great property boom financed by mortgages from banks that themselves built up a pyramid of debt to other banks.

In 2007-8 the collapse of a bubble of "subprime" (that is, bad) mortgage debt in the USA panicked American and other financiers, bankers, and speculators, and led to a global economic crisis. Ireland's "Celtic Tiger" quickly turned into a scared and very small cat in the international financial jungle.

The Anglo-Irish Bank had been the most reckless of all in seeking fabulous wealth for its directors by way of making enormous numbers of dodgy loans and recklessly borrowing to finance its operations. It faced sudden bankruptcy. Its bankruptcy would have had catastrophic consequences for the other Irish banks. If the banks collapsed, the country's economy would seize up.

Irresponsible bankers had brought the Irish economy and the Irish people to the brink of catastrophe.

And so, as in Britain and America, the government stepped in to bail out the banks. The Irish politicians (the government is a coalition of Fianna Fail, De Valera's old constitutional nationalist party, long a party of big business, with the Greens) went further. In September 2008 the government guaranteed all the deposits and debts of the banks. No other country went that far.

The measure caused resentment in Britain, because it gave the Irish banks an "unfair" advantage in the competition for customers: if the Irish government was offering such guarantees, why should anyone stay with shaky British banks?

Like the mythical Atlas holding the world on his shoulders, the Irish coalition government heaped the financial institutions on the shoulders of the Irish state. It nationalised the Anglo Irish Bank to save it. In late 2009 it paid out 54 billion euros to the banks to take "bad" assets off their hands (at above market price) and quarantine them in a government-run agency, NAMA.

It brought in a raft of savage cuts in welfare and social spending. The living standards of the people

were pushed down ten per cent and more. Unemployment rocketed. It is now 14% — double Britain's rate — and rising.

These savage attacks on the working class and working people were better, so Ireland's rulers thought, than the surrender of control of taxes and so on that would go with a European Union or IMF "rescue" package.

But the Irish state is no Atlas. Underwriting the debt of the banks pushed the state itself towards financial default. How would it finance what it was doing? By selling bonds (IOUs) on the international financial markets.

Seeing the country's weakness, the international financiers have made it very costly for the Irish government to raise money. They have demanded prohibitively high interest rates.

If Ireland collapses financially, it will be a catastrophe for its creditors, mostly banks based in the bigger countries of the European Union. It will also impact badly on the other weak EU economies — Greece, Portugal, perhaps Spain, perhaps Italy. If one or more of them collapses, that will, like falling dominoes, hit the bigger economies.

To change the image — like mountain climbers roped together, one could drag another down, and they would drag another, and so on. The abyss yawns.

That is why the EU is twisting Dublin's arm to let it come to the rescue — in the interests of all the countries of Europe and beyond, and in the first place of their bankers.

Dublin will probably give in. The government's

25,000 students marched in Dublin on 3 November against hikes in fees. Irish working people should not pay for the economic crisis.

resistance may only be "for show", to an electorate that is already hostile to the politicians and would probably resent very much the affront to a national sovereignty won with so much difficulty.

The whole international crisis of the last three years is portrayed vividly in the Irish story. Crazy irresponsible, greed-maddened, self-serving private citizens in control of the commanding heights of the economy, and running things for their own benefit. A system that lets them go scot free from the catastrophe they made for millions of people.

Politicians who are in the pockets of the very rich. Who put in billions of taxpayers' money to rescue the bankers.

In Ireland politicians have long scarcely bothered to hide corruption. Charles J Haughey, Taoiseach [prime minister] in the 1980s and early 90s, took a million pounds from the man who owns the Dunne's chain-store network, and didn't spend a day's time in jail for it. Now the politicians are hand in glove with the looting bankocrats to the tune of billions.

An angry electorate is more or less powerless until the government decides to call a general election, and then faced with little choice: the main opposition party, Fine Gael, agrees with the basics of what the government has done.

Capitalism is rampant in Ireland — contrary to what James Connolly thought. Rampant capitalism is what Connolly knew it would be. There may be a lot of Irish workers who will draw the obvious conclusions from that in the years ahead.

Cleaners' struggle goes on

Unison bureaucrats and London Citizens are celebrating a victory for cleaners and academic staff at the University of East London (UEL) who have won their campaign for the London Living Wage (LLW).

However, the victory is not as glorious as it seems. Sub-contractors will have to pay the LLW when their contracts with the university are renewed, which in some cases will not be for another five years.

This is the second LLW deal that Unison has secured in recent weeks. UCL cleaners won a similar deal at the end of September. On this occasion the union-bashing *Evening Standard* claimed that their philanthropic intervention secured the victory.

Cleaners who are unhappy with this deal should continue to fight and refuse to allow their struggle to be controlled by £40,000-a-year union officials, *Evening Standard* journalists and London Citizen do-gooders. If £7.85 an hour is a living wage, they need it now, not in five years time.

RMT ELECTIONS

Canvassing for votes, arguing for socialism

BY DARREN BEDFORD

AWL members have been taking our politics to the gate-lines, ticket offices, drivers' cabins, platforms and engineering depots of the London Underground combine as we mobilise to canvas for our comrade Janine Booth in her attempt to win a seat on the RMT Council of Executives.

AWLers in London have taken responsibility for stretches of lines or groups of stations, as well as participating in canvassing days where we've met centrally and divided up sections of the tube map between us. It's not difficult to get into conversations with workers at stations; many have seen our industrial bulletin, *Tubeworker*, before so they know we're people who are serious about what we do and have something informed and interesting to say. The response we're getting on stations about Janine is overwhelmingly positive; some workers say they're voting for her because they think it's important to have a female representative on the council. Some say they're voting for her because she puts union

BBC

Strikes off for more talks

The 48-hour strike called by the NUJ for 15/16 November was called off in order for further talks to take place with management about the pensions dispute.

A solid strike on 5/6 November with lively pickets at several BBC offices

TUBE JOBS FIGHT

Strike against victimisations!

The tube workers' dispute over staffing levels continues, with a further 24-hour strike planned over Sunday 28 and Monday 29 November.

London Underground managers have gone on the offensive against the union with a series of victimisations against prominent reps. Eamonn Lynch, Arwyn Thomas and Peter Hartshorn have all been disciplined on trumped-up charges (Eamonn has been dismissed). RMT members in their areas have voted to ballot for strike action.

RMT London Transport's *London Calling* newsletter reports on the status of the staffing levels dispute:

"RMT has been taking part in talks with London Underground at the arbitration service ACAS. Recently, this has taken the form of a 'review', where union reps have obtained information from LU managers about the facts and formulae behind the company's jobcutting plans.

"This information provides more evidence that LU's plans are irrational and dangerous. Health and safety reps have

shown how safety standards would fall with the proposed, lower levels. And stations reps' questions revealed that LU manufactured figures used to justify ticket office cuts by doubling the rate of ticket sales required to keep a ticket office open in any particular hour from 15 ticket sales per hour to 30! With the 'review' stage over, unions and management will restart negotiations aimed at resolving the dispute.

"RMT firmly believes that we are only making progress in talks because we are keeping up industrial action. To make the talks succeed — keep the action strong!"

"Less safe on poorly staffed stations"

The Greater London Assembly passed a motion opposing the job cuts on 20 October. Tube unions should fight for the elected GLA to impose its will on the unelected LU management!

"The London Assembly is opposed to Transport for London's proposals to shed up to 800 ticket office and gateline jobs on London Underground. The number of stations which will be staffed by only one person working alone for some time will increase. Ticket machines alone are no replacement for the presence of trained Underground staff and the over-reliance on ticket machines will disproportionately impact on those passengers who have a disability. This Assembly believes that passengers will feel less safe on poorly staffed stations particularly at early mornings and in late evenings. This Assembly urges Transport for London and its Chair, Mayor Boris Johnson, to review this decision and re-affirm reasonable and safe staffing levels right across the London Underground network to ensure passengers continue to receive excellent service from London Underground."

•More: www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk and www.workersliberty.org/twblog

UNION-BASHING

Scummy Standard

BY DANIEL RANDALL

The *Evening Standard* (which, since it became a free-sheet, is read daily by countless London commuters) has been on a crusade recently to consistently outdo itself by publishing ever more vitriolic condemnation of any group of workers who have the temerity to object to cuts.

The tube workers and London firefighters have been a particular focus for their ire, and on November 9 Simon Jenkins took the opportunity of the recent BBC journalists' strike to write a particularly vile piece denouncing all three groups of workers in one big go.

His article went beyond (or perhaps below) "normal" standards of "times are tough, maybe the cuts are bad but these workers should just put up with them"-type grumbling and reached new planes of shocking anti-working class venom.

Jenkins' argument, in brief, is that the firefighters', tube workers' and journalists' strikes are particularly outrageous because these workers are "better-off", that they should refrain from striking (ever) and that they are "striking against all of us as taxpayers" rather than against their bosses. But Jenkins, an extremely well-paid journalist himself, can hardly be said to have much in common with "the poor", who he claims are the strikes' main victims.

At one point, Jenkins sneers that the strikes are "not even about pay". The hypocrisy is utterly staggering; if the strikes were straightforwardly related to pay disputes, there is no question that Jenkins would still be denouncing the greed and selfishness of workers who dared to demand more in these austere times.

Unfortunately, ideas like Jenkins' are not confined to opinion columns in detestable right-wing rags but are gaining wider currency. Many people oppose strikes on the bizarre basis that in the context of widespread cuts, there is some kind of moral obligation for everyone to

Simon Jenkins

level down to the level of the worst-paid and worst-treated. Workers striking to defend their hard-won pay, terms and conditions are castigated as greedy and selfish.

The labour movement has political duty to respond to this kind of ideological assault. Jenkins' facts are extremely selective; while it is true that some Tube workers are paid well above the average working wage for the UK, many (lower grades of station staff and cleaners, for example) are paid distinctly less well.

But the more important point is that these workers should be congratulated for being "better-off"; they are better-off precisely because they have been well-organised and militant over a number of years and fought to win better conditions. Better-organised groups of workers must use their strength however they can to support the struggles of lower-paid and more highly-exploited workers, arguments like Jenkins' will be used as part of a moral and ideological offensive from the bosses and their media aimed at demoralising and dividing our class.

Our fight is not a narrow, selfish, sectional battle to preserve the "special" conditions of the "better-off" workers at the expense of the rest, but a fight to level everyone up to the conditions of the best-off!

FIREFIGHTERS

Rallying, and fighting the cuts

BY DARREN BEDFORD

Two and a half thousand firefighters lobbied parliament on Wednesday 17 November, to kick off a national campaign against cuts in the fire and rescue service.

The lobby heard speeches from Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary as well as MPs John McDonnell, Katy Clark and John Cryer, Frances O'Grady from the TUC and Mark Serwotka from PCS.

Matt Wrack said that previous generations had fought for public services and that workers "should not accept the race to the bottom". "Public sector workers should campaign together and strike together", he said.

The government claimed it would protect frontline services, but the comprehensive spending review cut the capital grant to fire authorities by 25% over four years. This grant accounts for around half of spending on the fire and rescue service overall, but up to two-thirds in metropolitan areas where more firefighters work (the rest comes from council tax). The FBU estimates such a cut amounts to over 7,000 firefighter jobs — more than one in nine firefighters.

The impact on public safety would be stark. Fire authorities are drawing up plans to reduce fire cover at night, which is precisely the time when the casualty rate from fires is highest, because people are asleep in their beds. Management are also looking to cut the ridership on fire engines.

The callous disregard for public safety is revealed by response times. On average, fire engines take two minutes longer to arrive at fires than they did a decade ago. The FBU puts this down to cuts under New Labour. Government figures show this means every year more people die in fires and in road traffic collisions. Yet its attitude is to say response times don't matter, or that they are "offset" by having smoke alarms.

After the lobby, firefighters blocked the roads outside Westminster before an impromptu march to Downing St. In all, the mood was resolute and determined to face down the Tories and the Lib-Dem allies.

THE BATTLE CONTINUES

The bitter dispute in London over mass sackings was not resolved as *Solidarity* went to press.

The FBU held two solid strikes on 23 October and 1 November, with the private AssetCo scabs successfully picketed and most stations effectively closed. In the course of the second strike, three FBU pickets were run down by scabs, while the media bleated about FBU "intimidation".

The FBU London regional committee called off strikes planned for 5-7 November, after management moved on the substantive issues in the dispute. The London fire authority was due to impose new contracts under the Section 188 process from 18 November, but agreed to postpone any decision on this until its next meeting on 26 January.

Although this has not removed the sacking threat completely, it may provide a window to resolve the underlying dispute around shifts.

Management also moved on the shift patterns. Currently firefighters in London work two 9-hour day shifts, followed by two 15-hour night shifts, then three days off. Firefighters around the UK work a variety of shift patterns. Management originally wanted to impose shifts of 12-12, which is rarely done elsewhere. However just before the bonfire night strike, they offered 11-13 without strings and agreed to go through the non-binding, fire service arbitration process (called RAP).

The FBU London regional committee voted 19-3 to suspend the bonfire night strikes and at station meetings since, most firefighters have supported the decision. The SWP has criticised the decision, but they have not had a coherent alternative strategy. *Socialist Worker* accepts that the employer moved, but said the strikes should have been kept on because the union "missed a key opportunity to stretch the private AssetCo scabbing operation beyond breaking point". This seems to mean, have some people die or get injured on bonfire night just to "prove" the scabs are useless. Such a scenario wouldn't help the union's case; arguably it would damage it with other workers.

The dispute is not over yet. The recommendations from the arbitration process were not available as we went to press. There are other secondary issues that still need to be resolved, around the action short of a strike, where money has been docked. Some firefighters have been disciplined over the action. The detail of any agreement will be important — and both the union and management could reject it, putting the strikes back on.

Warwickshire council unions step up fight against job losses

BY DANIEL RANDALL

Warwickshire County Council has become the latest public sector employer in the West Midlands to announce devastating cuts, with the GMB union revealing that nearly 2000 jobs will be axed as part of a proposed 26% spending cut. This represents the loss of over 12% of the council's total staff, excluding teachers and firefighters.

Inevitably, these cuts will hit some of the poorest and most vulnerable people hardest. They will see a 20% job-loss in adult social care, meaning that, for example, adults with learning disabilities could go without vital support. An entire youth service will be lost, and children's centres will see their funding slashed.

Stuart Richards, GMB organiser in the region, spoke to *Solidarity* about the

TEACHERS

Starting the fight on pensions

BY PAT MURPHY, NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS (P.C.)

At a meeting on 11 November the National Executive of the largest teachers' union, the NUT, instructed its General Secretary to draw up a timetable of campaigning and action on pensions.

Such a campaign will take place before the Hutton Commission on public sector pensions produces its final report in Spring 2011. This timetable will include a ballot for strike action to take place in the spring term (ie between January and April).

The motion passed at the meeting called for other activity such as meetings, rallies and demonstrations, and the production and distribution of campaigning materials.

The fact that one of the public sector unions has decided to plan for action on the threat to pensions is very good news indeed. The fact that there was a unanimous vote on this, on a fairly evenly divided Executive, is another indicator of the changing mood in some sections of the labour and trade union movement.

The decision was heavily influenced by three major considerations.

There was a feeling that the best time for initial action was around the time of the final Hutton Report. John Hutton has already made it very clear that public sector workers will be expected to pay more (through higher contributions), work longer (by a raised retirement age), and get less (by a move to a lower method of index-linking pensions and away from final salary schemes). The final report will simply put some detail on that basic approach. If we fail to mobilise the anger his reports generate, we could miss the boat.

Secondly there is already evidence that members are in the mood to resist. Anecdotal reports from local areas and school meetings suggest that the threat to pensions is moving to the top of teach-

union's plans for resisting the cuts.

"Since the day after the CSR was announced we've been doing stalls on market days in towns around the county of Warwickshire. We've been taking down our union banner, giving out leaflets and petitioning members of the public. It's about trying to build wider public involvement and support.

We've also met with the other unions involved, Unite and Unison, to try and work out a collective response. We also want to reach out to the union movement more widely. The three unions will be organising joint public meetings which will give trade unionists and other members of the public a chance to get involved with our campaigns.

The proposed cuts would see job losses across 52 service areas. There are also cuts in areas that won't affect local government workers, but will affect service users. That's why we want to involve service users as much as possible and



John Hutton

ers' concerns and that they are expecting the union to do something.

A third factor has been frustration with the slow pace of movement at the TUC. At the Public Services Liaison Group (PSLG) there was an attempt, led by PCS, to call for a major protest before 26 March and preferably before Xmas. It got the support only of PCS, NUT and POA, and was dismissed out of hand by the larger unions. There was even some indication that the TUC was relieved that Hutton's report was "not as bad as it could have been". The NUT Executive felt that we could not limit our response to the pace and rhythm of such a sluggish and complacent beast.

Joint action on pension remains the best hope of defeating these proposals and the NUT will continue to work for that but from the basis of getting on with it rather than waiting for the slowest to agree to move.

Our General Secretary has to seek maximum co-ordination with other public sector unions in all activities. We now need to press for similar decisions across the other teaching unions and the public sector.

Workers know the threat to their pensions and they are worried and angry about what faces them. They need unions which will reflect and direct that anger and to create a movement that can throw out the proposals. Such a movement could also begin to mobilise and give confidence to those in the private sector where there even worse pensions,

build alliances with them. One problem is that while the consultation on these proposals runs till January, the cuts are spread over three years. The council has left much of the detail sketchy, and the exact nature of a lot of these cuts won't become concrete until after January. This may catch people on the back foot. We've got to use the time between now and then to make people aware of what this really means and to build the widest campaign possible.

When our anti-cuts campaigns are seen as narrow disputes around jobs, it's sometimes hard to win public support. But this is a clear case where both workers and service users will be massively affected, so we have an opportunity to build a real resistance to the council's plans."

For more info on the campaign, including on how to get involved, email Stuart Richards at stuart.richards@gmb.org.uk or ring 07957 265774.

LABOUR PARTY

The most political conference in years!

BY ELAINE JONES

North West Labour Party conference was attended by 360 delegates and 700 over the weekend of 5-7 November. Organisers claimed it's the best attended in years and that 5,000 new members had joined since May — 500 of those Labour students.

A lot of MPs spoke and the message from all was: fight the cuts; link up with trade unions and community groups; be proud of our record in government, but we made mistakes.

They also stressed that the Tories attacks were ideological and that they represented the interests of the rich.

They definitely think that this can be a one-term Tory government.

There was some saying: poor Labour councillors will have difficult choices.

At a Unison fringe meeting Frank Hont (regional secretary) attacked the Labour Party for not supporting the unions and said the relationship needed to change. This is the second meeting I have seen him make a speech critical of the leadership — a welcome change to his usual uncritical support.

Motions on post office privatisation; the axing of the School Buildings programme; and opposing public sector cuts (from Unison and Unite) were discussed.

Speeches calling for the repeal of the anti-union laws and support for strikes were well supported. As were those opposing all cuts and calling on Labour Councils not to implement them.

Following a speech on why we need to restore Labour democratic structures, over 30 people signed up to the Task Force (see below).

The CWU delegation supported the restoration of Labour party conference democracy, and so did the USDAW delegation. The Unite regional secretary criticised the Labour Party for not turning out in Parliament to support John McDonnell's Bill on the anti-trade union laws.

The event felt like a TUC conference, with lots of uninteresting, worthy speeches. However, many said this was the most political conference in years.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy has initiated a "Party Democracy Taskforce" to campaign over the next year to in support of a thorough review of Labour's structures and an open debate about improvements.

• Check briefings at www.grassrootslabour.net and www.leftfutures.org
Contact: labourdemocracymission@gmail.com

Useful link

<http://anticuts.org.uk>

National day of action against tax avoiders on 4 December

<http://ukuncut.wordpress.com/>

SCOTLAND

SNP's "Social Contract" means cuts

BY ANNE FIELD

At the time of going to press (17 November) the SNP is announcing the Holyrood government's budget for the financial year 2011-2012. Huge cuts are expected.

The Con-Dem government has cut the grant for Scottish government for 2011-2012 by £1.2 billions (out of a total budget of £30 billions).

But over the next four years the Holyrood budget for health, education and council funding will be cut by 7%. Its "capital grant" (for infrastructure projects) will be cut by 38%.

Cuts in welfare benefits will add to the damage inflicted on the Scottish economy by the cuts in the Westminster grant.

According to the government's chief economic adviser, it will be 2025 before the Westminster grant to Scottish government returns to its 2009 level. In the intervening period the total amount of cuts will be in the region of £42 billion.

In an echo of the Wilson-Callaghan Labour government of 1974-79, Finance Secretary John Swinney says his budget will be based on the idea of "a Scottish

social contract".

The "good" side of this social contract is an extension for another two years of the freeze on the council tax (in place since 2007), guarantees to maintain free personal care and other benefits for pensioners, and scrapping prescription charges.

The "bad" side of the social contract is a one-year pay freeze for all workers in the NHS, the police, the fire service, schools and the civil service who earn more than £21,000 a year. This pay freeze is likely to become a two-year pay freeze. Local government employees will be subject to a similar pay freeze.

Swinney claims the money saved from a pay freeze will prevent 10,000 jobs from being axed.

But the "bad" side of the social contract must also involve major cuts in service provision. The money saved by the pay freeze amounts to nearly £300 million, whereas the cut in the Westminster grant amounts to £1.2 billion. That leaves a black hole of £900 million.

No one should be taken in by the argument that the budget is based on a trade-

off between saving jobs and freezing the council tax on the one hand and cutting services and freezing pay on the other.

Labour will attack the SNP for making such cuts (conveniently forgetting the cuts which Labour would have implemented if re-elected in May). The SNP will blame Westminster for the cuts and argue that only independence will protect Scotland from such cuts.

The Tories and Lib-Dems will argue that such cuts are required as a result of Labour's financial legacy, made worse by the allegedly spendthrift policies pursued by the SNP.

But what none of the major political parties will do is argue in favour of defiance of the cuts. In fact, Labour-controlled local authorities' main line of attack is that the SNP wants to maintain the freeze on the council tax instead of allowing them to increase it.

This underlines the need to build effective campaigning against the cuts at grassroots level, bringing together trade unions and community activists, and combining support for industrial action against the cuts with a political strategy of campaigning for defiance of the cuts.

"Then we all walked out together"...

BY A LAMBETH HOUSING WORKER

At the Lambeth Living [Lambeth Council's housing "Arms Length Management Organisation"] staff conference on 8 November there was a lot of anger and nervousness at the announcement of job cuts.

Cuts are coming when directors are on salaries of over £100,000 a year and consultants on thousands a month, and all announced in a hall in London Bridge costing £9000 to hire.

The Chief Executive said nothing precise could be told to staff that day. After she finished her speech the Unison convenor stood up and said the union was angry, an industrial action ballot had been agreed by the union's London region (with GMB also balloting), and asked staff to leave the conference in protest.

At first people didn't know what to do, as the convenor marched towards the doors and the Chief Executive tried to mock him. Some of the stewards started to walk towards the doors. Then more staff started to follow them.

In the end people were queuing to get out of the hall, with those who had already left clapping them out.

Over 100 workers left. We had a quick meeting outside and decided we would all return to our workplaces.

It was a great feeling that we hadn't just sat there, and that we stood up for ourselves. We got buses back together and talked about how industrial action couldn't come soon enough.

At work the next day all the people who hadn't walked out said they supported it and most said they would join industrial action.

The following day at the Lambeth Unison branch meeting other members gave us lots of applause and the mood of the meeting, also buoyed up by the student demo, was one of determination.

As one steward put it, we could see the glow of the embers of the anti-cuts fight back.

There was also a lot of support for the Lambeth Save Our Services, where we are linking up with tenants' organisations, pensioners' groups and local community groups.

Many of us are very proud of what we did and the union is getting stronger by the day, with more members and more stewards. Everyone is talking about standing together and there is not just worry of what is to come, but hope about what we can do to stop it.

• lambethsaveourservices.org

Sheffield Anti-Cuts Campaign to be launched

A new anti-cuts group will be launched in Sheffield on 24 November. The group has the backing of the Trades Council, a number of individual local union branches and other groups.

In the run up to the meeting local activists are leafleting in the city centre and on University campuses.

• **Thursday 24 November, 6pm, Sheffield Novotel, 50 Arundel Gate.**

Adult learners fight back

BY VINCE BROWN

Adult education students in Southwark returned to the Calton Centre in Peckham this term to be told that classes were facing near complete closure in the New Year and that the subsidy for those on benefits was to be limited to just one term of one course. A class costing £46 this term would soar to £165 after Christmas!

Each course would also be required to recruit eight new learners each term in order to continue. Classes would close due to an apparent "lack of demand".

Students and staff quickly came together to form the Southwark Save Adult Learning campaign, leafleting

widely, lobbying councillors and gaining great support from local trade unionists and Labour Party members. Southwark Council have agreed to meet with students and have indicated that those on benefits should not face a fee increase next term!

The situation is still unclear, but we are hopeful that the threatened course closures will not take place in January. Fees for the next academic year, however, will be set in February and adult learning is likely to be again under threat. Luckily, we already have a campaign up and running!

• Further information and messages of support to: southwarksaveadultlearning@gmail.com

Save South Manchester Law Centre organised a protest against its closure for Monday, 15 November outside the Legal Services Commission at Lee House, 90 Great Bridgewater Street in central Manchester.

The proposed closure now coincides with huge cuts in Legal Aid.

The Law Centre was under threat of closure after its funding for immigration work was withdrawn. But there will now be a judicial review.

• www.smlc.org.uk

AWL NEWS

Help Solidarity move offices

BY COLIN FOSTER

As well as taking *Solidarity* weekly, we have another big task in the coming weeks. The paper will be moving offices. The move is a practical necessity, but also an opportunity. With new technology, we can operate with smaller premises, and probably find a place more central, in better repair, and more accessible to our activists.

That will be good. But it will cost a lot of money. We will have to pay a deposit, and rent in advance, on the new place. We will have to pay for any refurbishments necessary at the new offices. We will have to pay the costs of moving our equipment and our files.

Moving to a smaller place, we will have to pay to put some of our archives into storage. Our new offices should be a

secure, suitable, and convenient base for the expansion of publishing and of activity which the new political situation calls for.

When we last moved offices, in 1985, we needed a fund appeal of £15,000 - the equivalent of about £35,000 today - to cover the costs of moving and getting the new place ready.

This time, moving to a smaller place in (we expect) better condition, and already owning the equipment we need, we should be able to make do with less money for premises, and free up more money for publishing and organising.

But we'll still need the sort of thing we did then: collecting boxes; sponsored cycle rides, mountain walks, and haircuts; jumble sales; a "drinks levy" in local AWL groups, with each person putting in a small amount each time they buy a drink.

And, to be able to move promptly, some big donations, soon!

Please help. Send a cheque, payable to "AWL", to us at P O Box 823, London SE15 4NA. For electronic ways of sending in money see www.workersliberty.org/donate.

In the last week we have received £666 in donations (the donations of the beast, perhaps?). Thanks to Terry, John, DF, KE, Hannah T, Eric, Helen, Les and Mandy. Our fund drive total now stands at £18,125.

"I like *Solidarity* because it combines activist news with diverse parts of the left's forgotten history. It's a place for current, relevant news as well as a wealth of ideas from which to learn and discuss. It also has a healthy attitude to debate". Rowan Rheingans, student at the University of Newcastle and leading activist in Newcastle Free Education Network

Organising for the weekly

BY MARTIN THOMAS

In the run-up to *Solidarity* going weekly at the start of 2011, AWL groups across the country have two big jobs.

One is increasing and regularising public paper sales, on the streets or door-to-door. The other is making distribution of the paper speedier and more reliable.

Both North East London and South London AWL branches now have routines of four public sales a week.

North East London's public sale at Highbury Corner on Tuesdays now shifts up to 30 papers each week, and rarely fewer than 20.

Lots of papers were sold on the student demonstration on 10 November. Sacha Ismail reports that the AWL people who were focused on paper-selling rather than other tasks of stewarding, leafleting, and so on, shifted an average of about 20 each.

Sporadic sales outside the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, in interludes of the Historical Materialism conference there, shifted papers at the rate of ten in quarter of an hour.

From Nottingham, Tom Unterrainer

"There are so many important issues that the mainstream press covers badly or doesn't cover at all. Even if it is sympathetic to a certain issue, its role is purely information giving. I think we need papers like *Solidarity*, so we can think about what is really going on and how to organise. I find it useful having a paper that provides national and international information as well as details about union and local struggles. I think *Solidarity* does this, and does it well." Rebecca Galbraith, No-one Is Illegal and Feminist Fightback activist

"I first read *Solidarity* (or rather its forerunner) in 1975 and since then I have read no other. It is a crucial publication, which would only be better by coming out more frequently." Colin Waugh, Vice-chair of CONWL UCU branch (p.c.)

reports: "we're selling more at meetings (there are more meetings!) and on anti-cuts stalls. Regular 'AWL sales' are good when they happen but yet to be regularised".

The local anti-cuts campaign's organising group has met weekly for the past month or so. There are regularly over thirty people at each meeting, and not just the "usual suspects". The campaign stall in Beeston last week had 15 people on it, most of them local Labour Party people.

From Hull, Stephen Wood reports: "We are discussing estate sales at our next AWL branch meeting. We also plan more regular stalls at the university".

To make all this work, we have to have a system in each branch of getting the paper out to every AWL member within 24 hours of it becoming available. From the start of 2011, the printed paper will be available at the AWL office in London from Wednesday afternoon each week, and arrive, via couriers, on Thursday in cities outside London.

With a fortnightly paper, we've allowed delays to be commonplace, with some members not getting the paper until they come to a meeting maybe a few days after the paper has arrived in their city. With a weekly, such delays become completely unaffordable.

Some branches are shifting their meeting nights to Thursdays, and some are setting up special meeting points on Thursdays to get the paper out.

The left in the anti-cuts movement

Tom Unterrainer discusses one of the issues on the agenda at Workers' Liberty's trade union dayschool on November 28 (see box).

The development of anti-cuts campaigns and committees has been one of the most immediate political consequences of the government's cuts programme. The formation of such groups is of great significance.

Local, fighting campaigns of action and solidarity could become a key element in reviving and re-making parts of the working class movement.

The exact origin and composition of these committees varies from place to place so no tidy 'general picture' assessment of these initiatives can be made. In some places, sectarian projects like the SWP's Right to Work are substituted for or counterposed to representative committees. In other areas the SWP and other left groups are totally absent.

Even within campaigns that can be genuinely described as "broad", "representative", "democratic" and working class orientated there is variation. The movement is heterogeneous and uneven; the result of continued political disorientation on the left, the absence of a finely tuned and grass-roots organised "reformist" pole of attraction and the political 'freshness' of newly mobilised activists.

It is likely that time will resolve the last two factors; the first is a bigger problem.

"CATCHING SPARKS"

The question of how the left intervenes in anti-cuts campaigns and the tactics and politics we propose is of some consequence.

Within most anti-cuts campaigns and within the national "initiatives" attempting to coordinate the various campaigns, the left carries far greater political weight than in the labour and workers' movement more generally.

This situation creates advantages but also dangers. Advantages because a coherent, united and class orientated left could generate a decisive shift within the movement with such leverage. Danger, because such opportunities expose the crass sectarianism, opportunism and political limitations of much of the left.

These problems are most clear in relation to questions on the Labour Party, "campaign building" and future tactics. For example, the early stages of any campaign are generally focussed on building a base of support and forging this support into a viable mobilising network. Campaigns call organising meetings, rallies and demonstrations to establish the "fact" of their existence and promote the key message — in this case "no cuts". The merit or otherwise of any campaign is often assessed on an ability to reach and sustain a "critical mass" of support.

Such activity is necessary but not sufficient: political questions cannot be ignored or brushed aside. Such an attitude was a problem in the early stages of the campaign against the invasion of Iraq and it is something of a problem again.

The Socialist Workers Party — and their offspring Counterfire — suffer most from the blind "build, build, build..." perspective. The SWP are past experts at "movement building" but it would be a mistake to imagine that this is the alpha and omega of their politics.

Whereas non-sectarian, working-class socialists orientate to the labour movement, the SWP's focal orientation is on themselves: on building a substitute "party" of the working class.

By catching the mood and generating layers of activists around them — by whatever means, including crossing clear class lines — they hope to "catch the sparks" generated by mass activity.

Where the SWP operates on these terms with some élan, the Socialist Party has a very similar orientation but without the 'bells and whistles'.

POLITICS

If anti-cuts campaigns are to fulfil their possible political significance, they must become more than recruiting grounds for the sects or unfocussed activity organising centres.

First and foremost, this will be done by securing the active involvement of wider layers of trade unionists and labour movement activists on the basis that "these committees can regenerate the movement".

Secondly, relations with local Labour Party branches and members must be made. The lack of seriousness with which the left treats the Labour Party — either uncritical phrase-mongering as with the SWP or dunder-headed mortal hostility as with the SP — is dangerous. What Labour does or does not do against the cuts will be decisive not just in terms of policy outcomes but in terms of the confidence of workers. This does not simply mean inviting Labour politicians to speak at meetings or rallies, it means putting demands and holding to account. This cannot be done in the absence of politics or with a crass political outlook.

Finally, if anything is to be achieved at all it will be done on the basis of independent working class politics. This means actively proposing socialist politics and allowing for debate and discussion. It means creating a political culture where serious questions are addressed and where disagreements are argued out. Such a culture will not — as some will suggest — be to the detriment of "movement building" but is a necessary component of a real working class movement.

AWL TRADE UNION SCHOOL 2010

Unions, Socialists and the fight against cuts
Sunday 28 November,
11am-5pm
Highgate Newtown
Community Centre, 25
Bertram Street, London
N19

Sessions on:

- organising against cuts
- union democracy
- producing workplace bulletins

more: 02072074673 or www.workersliberty.org/tuschool

IRAQ

Iran wins in political tussle

BY COLIN FOSTER

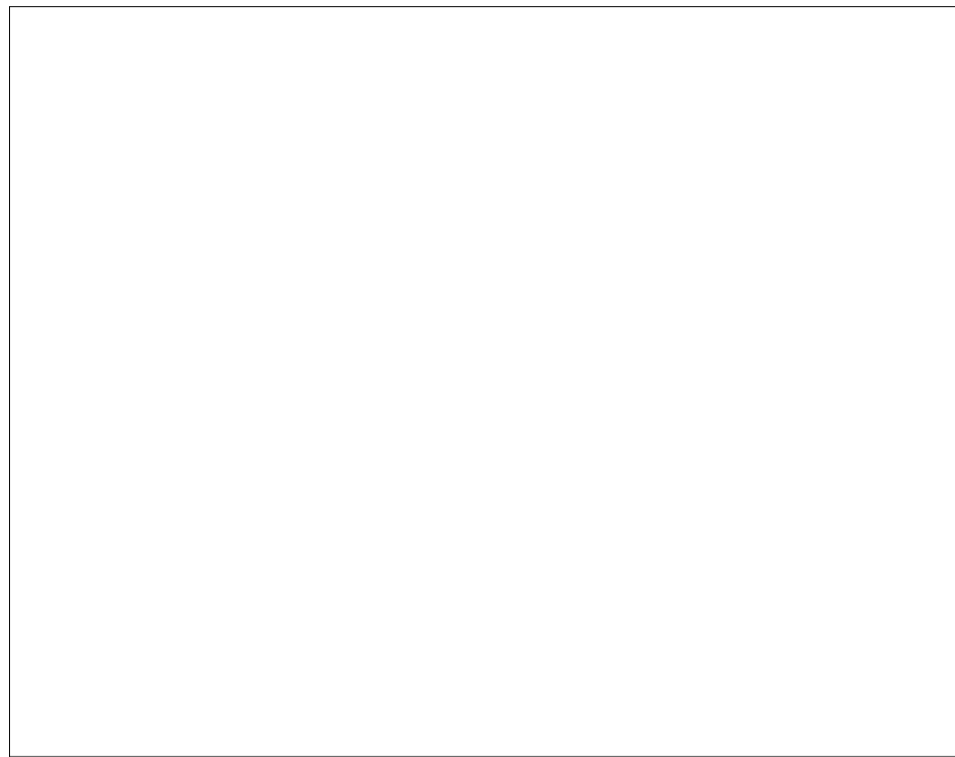
According to US academic and Middle East expert Juan Cole, "Washington lost big" in the long negotiations over forming a new government in Iraq.

Parliamentary elections on 7 March 2010 put Iyad Allawi's Iraqiyya marginally ahead of outgoing prime minister Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law party, but gave neither a majority.

On 13 November the parliament finally convened, re-elected Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani as president, put a member of Iraqiyya in as Speaker of the parliament, and voted to call on Talabani to appoint Maliki prime minister. (Reports differ on whether Talabani has made the formal appointment, or only indicated that he will).

Iran president Ahmedinejad quickly congratulated Maliki in lavish terms, and declared: "The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to deepen ties with the neighbouring and friendly country of Iraq". Maliki responded: "expansion of ties with Iran is demanded by Iraq as well".

The US administration, according to many reports, had been pressing to have Allawi, who did well in the election among Sunnis Arabs, made president or, alternatively, joint prime minister with Maliki (each to hold the office for a period, in alternation). It tried to get the Sadr movement, a Shia-Islamist faction which



Maliki and Ahmedinejad

until maybe 2008 had a large armed wing (the Mahdi Army) in on-off conflict with the US army.

The US lost on all counts. Allawi is to lead a new national security council, but it may have no significant powers. So dissatisfied was Allawi that he and other Iraqiyya members walked out of parlia-

ment after the election of Talabani as president on 11 November, returning only on the 13th.

Formally there will be a "national unity government" including all the main factions. Maliki's main base, however, is the various Shia-Islamist factions — his own "State of Law" group (an off-

shoot of the old Dawa party), together with other Dawa factions, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and the Sadr movement.

They can ally with the Kurdish groups on the basis of common hostility to the old Sunni-Arab-dominated elite in Iraq, and a common bias towards large regional autonomy.

Before the March elections, Maliki tried to present himself as a "national unity" figure, downplaying religious and specifically Shia identifications, seeking Sunni-Arab allies, and advocating stronger central government.

He has swung back to the old axis of Shia-Kurdish alliance. This swing may sustain or even revive the continuing strand of Sunni-sectarian militia violence in Iraq.

Maliki lived in Syria when in exile under the Saddam regime, and is close to the Iranian regime, which keeps its options open by having links also with ISCI and the Sadr movement. Allawi lived in London (his wife and children still live here, or did so until recently), and had close links with the CIA.

Maliki has yet to appoint ministers or announce a government programme. The creation of a "strong" government would not have been good news for Iraq's harassed labour movement, which still has to operate under Saddam-era laws making most of its activities theoretically illegal, but this sort of "weakness" in the government offers nothing good either.

Fighting for the right to organise

BY FALAH ALWAN (PRESIDENT, FEDERATION OF WORKERS' COUNCILS AND UNIONS IN IRAQ)

The biggest sector in Iraq is the public sector. According to the decrees of the former regime, public sector workers are prohibited from organising. The current Iraqi authorities still impose the same decisions.

For example, Shahrstani, the Electricity Minister, has clamped down on unions organising in his sector. But they haven't only prevented organisation; they've actively punished trade unionists. Shahrstani was also in charge of the oil ministry and played a similar role.

On 17 October, leather workers in Baghdad held a strike calling for security benefit, which was one of the remunerations that the administration has refused to give them.

They held a one day strike and the administration agreed to pay the money.

In a textile factory in Nasiriyah, 1,500 workers have signed a complaint against a manager because of his policies against workers and his failure to come up with a long-term plan for operating the factory.

Workers are worried about losing their jobs as production has now stopped. 1,500 out of a total of 1,900 workers have signed their petition.

Many factories in Iraq are in the same situation. The management and the Ministry of Industry want to privatise



many factories. They claim they are not profitable but this is just a pretext for privatising these factories. So the petition of the workers in Nasiriyah is focusing on refusing privatisation.

We have many examples that are similar. In Basra, after the decisions of Shahrstani, the Ministry of Electricity issued new orders to punish workers who were involved in unions. We have copies of those orders. In factories 30km south of Baghdad, which include thousands of workers, you find conditions like those of the 19th century. It is very dangerous to work there.

In the Gas Company of Basra, I spoke to the president of the union. He spoke about foreign investment in the sector and how several companies, including the Gas Company and the Southern Oil Company, are working together in agreement with the Iraqi authorities to prevent the unionisation of the public sector.

There are also reports of huge wage differentials between workers employed by new foreign investors and

the Iraqi workers who were already working there. That was the cause of huge protests amongst the workers, demanding the same opportunities for Iraqi workers to work.

Workers in the health sector in Sulaimaniyah tried to organise their own independent union, but the official union and the authorities prevented them. They're trying to impose the same decrees as the Saddam era.

Lack of security is becoming a very important issue again. For workers who want to organise demonstrations or strikes, this is becoming a more important issue. A large number of the victims of terrorist attacks, especially in the private sector, received no compensation from the authorities because of this.

There are many issues we want to start international solidarity campaigns around, especially strategic issues facing the workers such as the attempts of the authorities to impose elections and committees on the workers. We need international solidarity to prevent the authorities from intervening and imposing their hegemony on the workers' movement.

The second important issue is the attempt of the authorities to impose a new labour law which would disregard workers' interests. The draft is worse than the one that existed in the Saddam era! We want a labour law that includes freedom of organisation; this is the main and most important issue for us. We need a very strong international solidarity campaign to put the Iraqi authorities under pressure.

Israel-Palestine solidarity delegation

BY HEATHER SHAW

Between 22 November and 2 December, nine members, supporters and friends of the AWL will be taking part in a solidarity delegation to Israel and the West Bank.

The delegation is intended as follow up to the speaker tour we organised last year with Tamar Katz, one of the Israeli school students jailed for refusing to serve in occupied Palestine. Our aim is to build direct links between left, labour movement and solidarity organisations in the UK, Palestine and Israel. We will be meeting a wide variety of activist organisations on both sides of the border.

So far we've raised over £1,000 to fund the trip? including sponsorship from the Finsbury Park branch of the RMT, a sponsored walk by comrades in London and a benefit gig in Sheffield.

What you can do to support us:

- Donate via PayPal to centre_stage_red@yahoo.co.uk : <http://bit.ly/aZD8Vz>
- Follow our progress on our blog: ipsol.wordpress.com
- Most importantly: invite us to speak at your union branch, student union or public meeting when we get back: email centre_stage_red@yahoo.co.uk.

EUROZONE

Through cuts to more cuts... and default?

BY MARTIN THOMAS

As of the end of October, Ireland's banks held about a quarter of the "liquidity" (short-term cash loans, against "collateral" of financial paper) issued by the European Central Bank for the whole continent.

Ireland's total short-term cash drawings had risen from 89.5 billion euros at the end of July to 130 billion by the end of October.

Those figures lie behind the flurry in mid-November, when the European Central Bank formally called on the Irish government to get a further long-term loan from the EU's European Financial Stability Fund, or from the IMF. As I write, the Irish government is still stalling.

Portugal, Greece, Spain, and Italy, in that order, are queued up behind Ireland to appear on the "acute financial crisis" stage.

All have big budget deficits. All have to sell lots of bonds (government IOUs) in 2011, if only to pay off previous bonds (IOUs). All have to offer high interest rates (or, what comes to almost the same thing, accept lower prices) to sell their bonds (Ireland, Portugal, and Greece much more so than Spain and Italy).

Their governments' current plans are that by making huge social cuts, they will reduce their costs, set a basis for gradually reducing their debt burden, and so see the crisis through.

It might even work, in capitalist terms, if they could increase income from exports at the same time as they make the social cuts. In fact, with demand stagnant almost everywhere, the social cuts are bringing with them a general slump in production and thus a slump in the income which might pay off the debts.

The German government is worried that German banks, which have lent billions to the high-debt countries, will end up having to accept reduced, delayed, or cancelled repayments on their loans. Thus it organised the EU "bail-out" in mid 2010.

But at the same time it is pushing hard, and successfully, for a concerted and sharply neo-liberal economic policy across the EU to "tidy up" the crisis. It wants to impose financial discipline on the eurozone's big borrowers, and to keep up the value of the euro in world markets.

In some ways, a decline of the euro relative to other currencies can help rather than hinder German capital. It makes German exports outside the eurozone cheaper.

But there are disadvantages. And German governments and bankers also have a deeply-ingrained bias towards prioritising the stability of the currency, rooted in old histories of hyper-inflation in their country.

Between 1950 and 1995, the value of 10 deutschmarks in dollars went up from \$2.40 to \$7.02, while the value of the pound went down from \$4.03 to \$1.60, and the value of the French franc and the Italian lira went down even more.

The European Central Bank, unlike for example the Federal Reserve in the USA, has been legally mandated to keep the euro stable, at a low inflation rate, above

all else.

The trouble is, the "deflationary" bias which the EU is imposing on the high-debt countries blocks the way for them to generate more income and pay down their debts. Usually, a high-debt country would see its currency's exchange rate sink (thus increasing its exports and decreasing its imports) and its central bank able to limit slump by issuing new credit. The eurozone's high debt countries do not have those options.

So far, the May 2010 bail-out has failed to bring any sort of stability. Many mainstream economists see no prospect other than some of the high-debt countries defaulting (saying they can't make payments due, and negotiating deals to pay more slowly, or less) and some countries leaving the eurozone, or even the eurozone breaking up completely. (That would not necessarily, or even probably, mean the EU breaking up).

Socialists can neither defend the eurozone and its rules, nor endorse individual countries' exits into individual export-oriented austerity plans as the alternative. Our argument must be for Europe-wide public ownership and democratic control of the big banks and financial institutions, financial policy geared to social goals, and social leveling-up across the EU. But for now the high-debt countries are headed through cuts to more cuts and then default.

ZOELICK'S GOLD

The dilemmas of the eurozone may be a fact behind the recent startling call by World Bank president Robert Zoellick for gold to be restored as "a reference point of market expectations" in world currency transactions.

The bigger background fact is the USA's difficulties with managing the dollar's exchange rate with China's renminbi (the USA wants the renminbi's relative value to be allowed to rise faster; the Chinese government, which keeps all exchange transactions under government control, refuses), and the general dilemma of the US dollar serving both as "world money" and as "US money".

For centuries until the 1930s, major states regulated their currencies by a gold or silver standard: for example, for a long time the British pound was set at a value of 0.284 ounces of gold.

A sort of gold standard was restored after 1945, but it was in effect a dollar standard, since the USA held 60% of the

Italian demonstration against austerity cuts

whole world's central-bank gold reserves (in 1948). In 1971 that modified gold standard was abandoned, and since then the dollar has been world money, with other currencies' exchange rates against it being set each day by the markets.

With the USA's economic hegemony looking more shaky, capitalists worldwide are looking for another form of world money. But gold?

In conditions of:

- capitalists having realised that constant mild inflation, rather than stable prices, are best for their system;
- relatively rapid economic expansion (long-term and on a world scale);
- a physical supply of gold tiny compared to the needs of commerce, and not easily expanded;

- no prospect of large new expansions of gold-mining, as in Australia and California mid-19th century, and South Africa late 19th century; a gold price, therefore, very heavily influenced by speculative movements rather than fundamentals of production -

in all those conditions, a gold standard makes no sense. It would be violently unstable and deflationary.

That had been pretty much accepted by mainstream economists. Brad deLong, a liberal US economist, comments that Zoellick "really may be the stupidest man alive".

Other economists have recalled John Maynard Keynes's proposal after World War Two for a transnational "world money", to be called the bancor and issued by the IMF.

The USA was probably in a position to carry out Keynes's scheme, but nixed it. A feeble shadow of the bancor, IMF SDRs, was created in 1969, but has never played much role. It is hard to see how anything like the bancor can be created in today's conditions of capitalist ferment and instability. Thus wild cards like Zoellick's proposal.

The world is set to continue under the conditions described by Marx: "A depreciation of credit-money... would unsettle all existing relations. Therefore, the value of commodities is sacrificed for the purpose of safeguarding the fantastic and independent existence of this value in money... For a few millions in money, many millions in commodities must be sacrificed. This is inevitable under capitalist production and constitutes one of its beauties".

France: more to come?

BY ED MALTBY

The enormous French strike movement of this autumn has ground to a halt. But reports suggest workers do not feel defeated, and their organisations have emerged strengthened.

Sarkozy, on the other hand, although he has got away with the pensions reform for the time being, is under pressure to be less ambitious in his cuts programme.

Yvan, a leading activist in the French New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) told *Solidarity* that the mood among workers is that they are "proud of what they have achieved" and that "no worker is coming out of this movement feeling defeated."

The movement arose because of a combination of two factors: Sarkozy's refusal to negotiate with union leaders shook them, and pushed them to call action. The calls for action co-incided with an upsurge of popular anger among the French working class, and this was channelled into mass strikes.

But movement floundered for two major reasons.

Firstly, because the newly reactivated French workers' movement was not capable of building up grassroots organisation that could keep the strikes going

when union leaders took their foot off the pedal.

Second, the Sarkozy government was clear that the strikes were a matter of either overthrowing the government or accepting the reform. The young strike movement did not feel confident enough to take the action to a high enough pitch to win. There was no victory: the pensions law was passed. But there has been no defeat either.

"The movement has not shot its bolt", Yvan continued, "but has deepened its reserves". Forms of grassroots self-organisation have been built up over the course of the struggles, with the most active section of the French working class setting up co-ordinating bodies of delegates from workplace meetings, strike committees, and carrying out other initiatives, such as visiting neighbouring workplaces to bring them out on strike and organising blockades with local supporters' groups and students.

Some grassroots co-ordinating bodies are still meeting, such as those who produced the Tours Appeal, available in English on the AWL website. These skills and these grassroots co-ordinations mark a re-discovery of methods of struggle by a new generation of French workers. They are a weapon which will be used in the next confrontation.

• www.workersliberty.org/tours

Labour councils and Tory cuts, last time round

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Poplar Labour council's fight against another Tory/Liberal coalition government, in 1921, and the battle by the Labour council in the village of Clay Cross, Derbyshire, against Tory laws imposing council rent rises in the early 1970s, shows that councils can take on the government and win.

In the early 1980s there was a bigger flurry of defiance by Labour councils. Sadly, every single one of them backed down in the end — unlike Poplar and Clay Cross — so the flurry ended in defeat. But there are lessons to be learned from the defeat.

Between the 1920s and the late 1970s, with a very few exceptions like Clay Cross, Labour administration of local government was a routine affair. In his autobiography, veteran Trotskyist Bill Hunter recalls being a Labour councillor in Islington, north London, in the early 1950s. Council meetings routinely lasted only 15 minutes. The biggest left/right battle in the council Labour group was over whether the council would spend money on celebrations to mark the Coronation in 1953.

By the late 1970s, local government was different.

- As services expanded, it had become bigger. By the end of the 1970s, local government employed twice as many workers as in 1945, and was the biggest employer in many working-class areas.

- Local government had also become a base of union strength in many areas. Today the main union in local government is Unison. Its main forerunner in local government was called Nalگو.

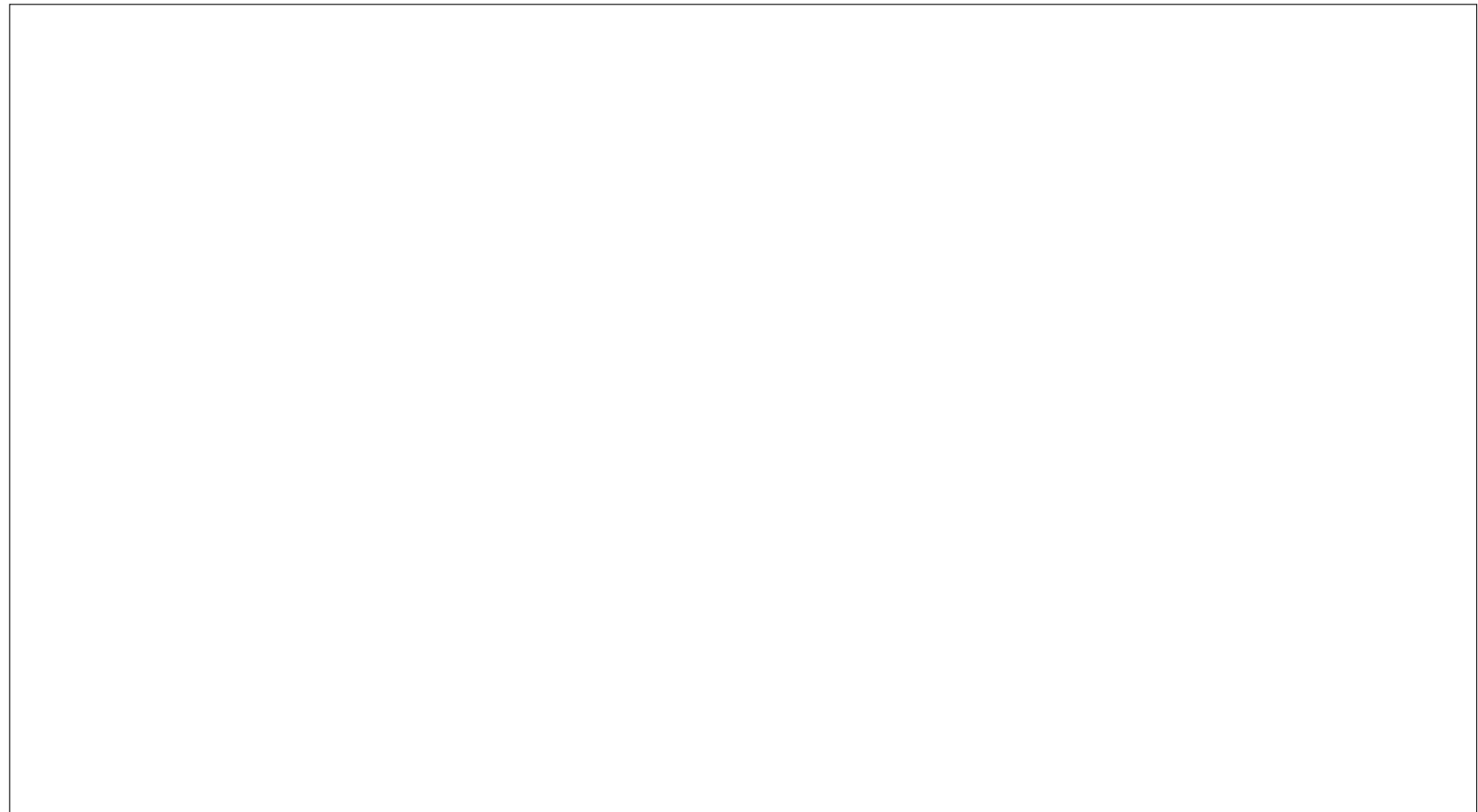
Nalگو was founded in 1905, but for most of its history was more like a staff association than a union. It affiliated to the TUC only in 1964, and called its first strike only in 1970. The joke was that the initials Nalگو meant “not a lot going on”.

By the end of the 1970s, white-collar unionism was burgeoning, including in local government. Many people who had been won to socialist ideas as university students in the late 1960s and early 1970s went on to become union activists in white-collar jobs in local government.

- Local authorities had become bigger and more bureaucratized. A big reorganisation in 1974 merged many authorities and introduced payment for councillors (all previously unpaid). Those payments have continued to rise. By 2008-9, Kensington and Chelsea council, in London, for example, was paying its council leader an “allowance” of £54,000 a year, the deputy leader £41,000, all cabinet members £40,000, and every council member a fallback allowance of £10,500.

Two other changes shaped a sharp clash.

Margaret Thatcher's new Tory government, elected in May 1979, was out to do what Thatcher called “defeating socialism” — in fact, crushing the elements of countervailing power won in the truce which an anxious British capitalism negotiated with its working class in 1945. The Tories saw services and union organisation in local government as part of the “socialism” to be defeated. They cut the tax money transferred from cen-



Above: a mural commemorating the Poplar council's rebellion of 1921. They are one of only two honourable examples of Labour councils resisting Tory cuts.

tral government to local authorities, and changed the law to reduce local government autonomy.

Meanwhile, a slow revival of constituency Labour Party activism, from the very low point it had reached in 1970, had by the end of the 1970s worked its way through to left-wingers gaining leading positions on councils.

A series of Labour councils declared themselves to represent a new left, which would break from the long tradition of timeserving in Labour local government, work to empower communities, and do battle with the Tories.

The first was Lambeth (in south London), led from May 1978 by Ted Knight, a former long-time Trotskyist. Several others would follow.

Knight and many others said that the unions should and would call a general strike to defeat the Tories. The councils would support that general strike when it came. Meanwhile, they should “buy time” by raising rates (local property taxes, levied on tenants) to offset the cuts made by central government.

Today business rates are set by, and channelled through, central government. Then, councils set and collected the rates charged on local businesses. They had more scope to offset central government cuts through their local tax-raising powers than they have now, and more scope to claim that this local tax-raising was in some way progressive and redistributive.

But in fact the first response of Knight's Lambeth council to the new Tory government was — within weeks of the general election — to announce 4.5% cuts! An angry meeting of the local Labour Parties (then active and lively) forced Knight to rescind the cuts. Instead, in the April 1980 council budget, he raised rates 49%.

Big rate rises were not uncommon. Lothian council, another left-Labour

council, raised rates by 46% in 1980.

The rate rises generated two debates. One was within the Labour left. The forerunners of AWL were then organised in a group called the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory, set up to provide a left-wing voice within the Labour election campaign in 1979 and continuing after that with the newspaper *Socialist Organiser*.

SCLV and *Socialist Organiser* drew in a wide range of the left, including Ted Knight himself, and Ken Livingstone (then not famous but soon to become so).

Very quickly after the May 1979 general election a sharp debate broke out in SCLV/*Socialist Organiser* about the rate rise strategy.

The unions had responded to the Tory victory in May 1979 much more confidently than they have responded to Cameron's victory this year. The TUC organised big demonstrations. But — so the forerunners of the AWL argued — a policy of raising rates to buy time until the unions organised a general strike meant that the local government left was betraying its promise to be in the front line against the Tories. It was stepping back into a role of more-or-less benevolent administration, doing “the best it could” within Tory-imposed limits.

When an SCLV/SO conference in November 1979 voted by a majority for “no cuts, no rate rises”, the minority split away, launching a new publication called *Labour Briefing*.

That was not the only argument sparked by the rate rises. There was a big revolt against the rate rises by working people in Lambeth, of all political shades. 49% was a big rise — and it was just to keep services as they were, without cuts, not to bring improvements.

By budget day in April 1981, the Lambeth councillors knew they couldn't go on with huge rate rises. They made 10% cuts. The local Labour Parties, demoralised by the rate-rise episode, did

not reverse these new cuts.

On the whole, opinion within the Labour left shifted against rate rises over the first half of the 1980s. But it never shifted strongly enough to budge a council leadership. The left councils still relied mainly on rate rises. Islington's left-wing Labour council, for example, elected in May 1982, made a 30% rate rise in its April 1983 budget.

In 1984-5 came a new chapter, dominated by two interlinked stories — Liverpool council, and ratecapping.

In May 1983 a left-wing Labour group won control of Liverpool City Council. This left-wing Labour group was different from the others.

Most Labour left councillors across the country had been good trade-union or community activists, but they had no schooling in Marxist theory and were scattered as individuals in a flabby movement. The Liverpool councillors were led by the Militant group (forerunner of today's Socialist Party) — organised activists, who proclaimed themselves Marxists.

Although Militant had been fairly passive in the debates after 1979, it was explicitly committed to no cuts and no rate rises.

Elsewhere left-Labour councillors sometimes had only weak links with local government unions. When Hackney council, in east London, briefly came out for “no cuts, no rate rises” in 1985, it was pushed into backing down not by the Tories, not by the Labour Party leadership, not even by the union leaders, but by the council workers' shop stewards, who preferred rate rises or mild cuts to a confrontation.

In Liverpool, Militant dominated many of the local unions as well as the District Labour Party. The council Nalگو branch was not Militant-led, but it was left-wing. In June 1984 a survey would find that 55% of Labour voters in

Liverpool said they would back a local general strike against the Tories.

So the prospects for another Poplar looked good. From February 1984 they looked even better. The miners were on strike. The strike would last over a year, and shake the Tories.

Workers in Liverpool, led into confrontation with the Tories over council cuts, would know that they were striking alongside the miners. The joint action would increase the chances of both struggles winning. If there were ever a time to be seized, this was it.

On budget day, 29 March, the Militant-led Labour councillors proposed an “unbalanced” budget (one with more spending than income). A few Labour right-wingers voted against it, and it fell. The Liberals’ alternative budget also fell, so the city had no budget.

Five weeks later, in May, a new round of council elections changed the council so as to give a clear majority for the “unbalanced” budget.

But then what? Speeches, rallies, declarations — but no new budget-making, nothing decisive. Local working-class activists waited, puzzled.

In early July the council leaders announced... that they had done a deal with the government. The Tories would give Liverpool a little more money. They would permit fancy accounting to shuffle deficits into the following financial year. The council would make a 17% rate rise and balance its budget.

Militant hailed this as “a 95% victory”. Actually, Derek Hatton of Militant (formally deputy leader of the council, but in fact the chief figure) would recount later, in an autobiography, that they had been told by a Tory MP what was really going on. “We had to tell Patrick [Jenkin, the Tory government minister] to give you the money. At this stage we want Scargill [the miners’ union leader]. He’s our priority. But we’ll come for you later”.

Militant left the miners in the lurch, in return for a sop.

Against all expectations, the miners were still on strike when councils approached their spring 1985 budget-making. In the meantime, the Tories had changed the law.

Rate-rises were not good working-class strategy. But they annoyed business people, especially small businesses, which are much harder hit by rates than big ones. The government responded, passing a law which allowed it to “ratecap” councils — i.e. to outlaw rate rises above a certain amount.

The rate-raising left-Labour councils were up against it. But they looked at Liverpool, and thought they saw an answer.

Liverpool had not set a budget at the usual time (start of April), but instead delayed until July. And, lo and behold, it had got some concessions from the Tory government! Pixillated by a vision of council-chamber posturing as the stuff of politics, the left-Labour councils thought they had an answer. They would delay setting a rate! That would show the Tories!

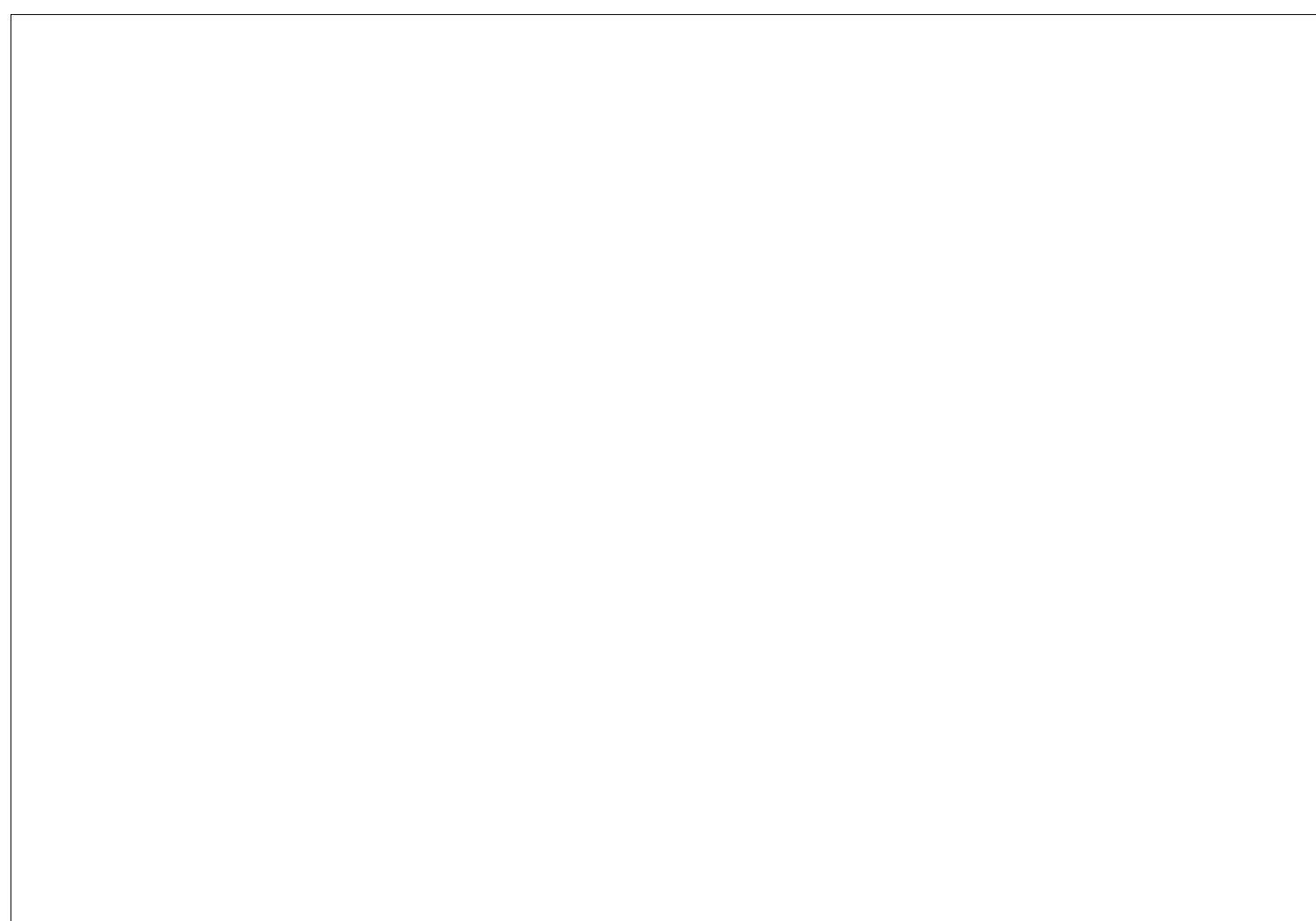
So, for the first time ever, a sizeable number of Labour councils would simultaneously do something in defiance (albeit weak defiance) of the Tory government.

The rate-delay tactic quickly ran into trouble. The miners were forced back to work. The Greater London Council, by now the “flagship” left council, reneged on its promise to delay a rate, and set a budget within Tory constraints.

The left-Labour administration on the GLC, led since May 1981 by Ken Livingstone, had been a different case from other left-Labour councils.

It ran almost no basic services, and got almost no income from central government, and so was not under pressure to cut. For the main public service that it did run — buses and Tube — it had promised a cheap-fares scheme, but then backed down after the Law Lords ruled it illegal.

Its rates were levied on properties right across London, and so its rate rises, unlike



Above: a member of Militant addresses a demonstration in Liverpool. The Socialist Party still laud their leadership of Liverpool council in the 1980s as heroic. In reality, it ended in capitulation to the Tories.

those of borough councils in London, were only a small burden on working people, and drawn in significant part from big businesses.

It had settled into a mode of levying rate rises and using them to fund women’s groups, anti-racist campaigns, aid to workers’ cooperatives, and the like. But it was seen as left-wing. It was left-wing.

And now it complied. That was the point at which Ken Livingstone broke decisively from his left-wing past. He called for the Labour left to reconcile itself with Labour leader Neil Kinnock, who was shifting the party to the right as fast as he could, and declared blatantly: “I’m for manipulative politics... the cynical soft-sell”.

Livingstone’s GLC deputy leader, John McDonnell, broke with him over the rate-capping betrayal, and is still a flag-bearer for the Labour left today.

Liverpool council had not been rate-capped, and on paper Militant was committed to a more combative strategy than delaying the budget. But what did it do?

At first, nothing. It waited. By early June all the rate-delay councils had backed down and set budgets within the Tory limits, except Liverpool and Lambeth. Lambeth would set a legal budget on 3 July, too late to avoid having its Labour councillors surcharged (surcharged, not for confronting the government, but only for delaying too long in setting their budget). What would Liverpool do?

In June, the Liverpool councillors proposed a 20% rate rise which, with some financial juggling, would have allowed the council to scrape through the financial year. The council unions objected. The council now voted through an “unbalanced” budget, and Militant declared: “After two years of shadow-boxing, the gloves are off”.

Then... nothing happened.

Working-class activists in Liverpool — like the non-Militant but left-wing leaders of the Nalگو branch, for example — waited to see what lead the councillors would give. And waited. And waited. The councillors denounced the Tories, appealed for “support”, said that “soon” the council would run out of money and the battle would be on — and left it there.

Then, in mid-September, the council suddenly announced that it would issue 90 days’ notice of redundancy to all its

employees! Oh, “purely a legal device”, it claimed. By showing that the council was doing something to balance its books, the redundancy notices would buy time. Workers should trust the council. They wouldn’t be sacked.

Many workers — especially in the Nalگو branch, which the Militant councillors had antagonised by other foolishness outside the scope of this article — didn’t trust the council. They protested. The councillors withdrew the notices.

In the midst of ensuing acrimony, and having postured and delayed for 17 months, Militant made a snap call for a general strike of all council workers.

The strike call could have been won at a number of points over the previous 17 months. Now, predictably, it was lost, though only 47%-53%.

Five days later, the council actually issued the redundancy notices! The Nalگو branch held a one-day strike against the council, and the NUT branch took the council to court, forcing it to withdraw the notices.

As the council’s political credit collapsed, Militant blandly trumpeted “the success of our campaign”. It floated a scheme to balance the budget — by laying

off the whole workforce from 1 to 28 January!

Finally, on 28 November, the council announced a plan to wriggle through. Some money would be “borrowed” from the next year’s housing repairs account (a tactic already under discussion for months, and previously denounced by Militant). More would be borrowed from Swiss banks (actually, the loan had been negotiated as far back as August, when the council was still trumpeting defiance).

And cuts? Conveniently, those had already been made in the previous couple of months, through emergency measures (turning down the heating, not buying new stamps and stationery, etc.) taken because the cash was running out.

In 1986 Liverpool, still under Militant leadership, would set a routine cuts budget. The councillors still got surcharged for delay in setting a rate in 1985.

And so the wave of “local government leftism” ended, with a whimper. With better political leadership, it could have helped defeat the Tories, with a bang.

The lesson for today is not “don’t fight”, but “fight with better politics”.

•More: www.workersliberty.org/illusions

Labour’s left-wing councillors failed to fight Thatcher’s Tories

ROYAL WEDDING

A landfill of tat and a bucket full of cant

BY PATRICK YARKER

Princes, the dregs of their dull race...Mud from a muddy spring. Percy Shelley on the princes of England in 1819

Tom Paine, standing with Milton and Shelley at the head of England's Republican tradition of writers, reminded us in the revolutionary year 1791 that monarchy was a sham and the principle of hereditary power an affront to all who believed in equality and democracy.

Monarchy was "like something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful aura of seeming solemnity. But when by any accident the curtain happens to be open and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter".

The announcement of a royal wedding next year will unleash much bustle and fuss and "solemnity" (sycophancy and unctuousness) across the bulk of the bourgeois media. We are already enjoined to share in the felicity of the happy couple, and to use their wedding as a way to escape, if only for a moment, the doom and gloom of Austerity Britain. Softer commentators have begun to wring their hands over the likely cost of the event, and to worry about how it might be viewed by those whose jobs, services, pensions and benefits have been hacked back by the Coalition. But not to smile and raise a glass to WillsandCath would be churlish, wouldn't it?

Churlish. The action of a churl or commoner. The opposite of royal or noble or patrician. In Anglo-Saxon times, from whence the word originated, simply a designation of your status in society: neither slave nor thane. Across the centuries of class-society "churl" gathered associations in keeping with the way the ruling-class despise the ruled. To be churlish is to be uncivil, surly, loutish, bad-tempered, a boor, emotionally (and perhaps materially too) a miser. Well give me churlish anytime, if the alternative is...

The behaviour from the Old Etonian millionaires around the Cabinet table. They were sure to raise a manly monarchical cheer at one of their own finding a bride. And at the political bonus a royal wedding will bring as cuts bite hard. A chance for the Big Society to come together. Months of distraction from the "sadly-necessary" economic pain. Pageant! Tradition! Britishness!

The royal wedding offers a windfall for entrepreneurs too. Mugs, tea-towels, union-jack flags and underpants, whole landfills of tat to be bought and sold if the wedding of William's mother Diana Spencer is anything to go by. The "mystique" of royalty sells.

Paine would lament that the institution he opposed on two continents in word and deed has managed to adapt and survive. Capstone to a constitution which retains hereditary peerage, and constructed symbol of the nation's "stability" and "vitality", the monarchy and those who benefit from and support it will look to ensure a blizzard of propaganda prevents any serious challenge to the status quo. The second-in-line to the throne will have a wife, and so the chance of legitimate heirs. The future will look a little more secure.

So our task is to be churlish. To laugh and expose the sham of monarchy's mystique. To throw verbal bricks at their spectacle. To puncture the cant about one nation coming together to celebrate a fairy-tale wedding. To offer instead of a place as extras in the publicly-funded festivities of the House of Windsor a leading role in the alternative festival of the oppressed.



WillnKate. We hope they will be deposed

Why the poppy is wrong

BY MATT COOPER

A couple of weeks ago my daughter, aged seven, came home from school, requesting money for a poppy. With liberal indulgence, I explained why I believe wearing a red poppy linked to those who continue to make war is wrong.

Then, with more difficulty, I explained why the pacifist white poppy is also problematic. I gave her 50p and told her to spend it wisely using her judgement.

The red poppy has been sold by the British Legion since its formation in 1921, but this was not the first veterans' association. After the First World War, demobilised soldiers were promised "a land fit for heroes to live in" but instead found slums, unemployment and poverty. The physically disabled, and the hidden and forgotten masses of psychologically scarred, received scant support.

The first veterans' organisations were, at least vaguely, left wing. The Labour-aligned National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers was formed in 1917, campaigning for better war pensions and job opportunities and excluded officers from membership. At the same time, the left-Liberal organised National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers campaigned under the slogan "justice not charity".

In response to this the right set up their own veterans' organisation. The Comrades of the Great War was set up by the Lord Derby, a Conservative who was still Secretary of State for War, and by 1921 this group and the equally establishment Officers' Association successfully absorbed the two more critical organisations, forming the British Legion in a deliberate attempt to render the veterans' movement uncritically semi-official.

The British Legion still sees itself as a welfare provider to ex-servicemen and co-ordinates remembrance events in conjunction with the military, and although in recent years it has developed a clearer campaigning profile for the rights of ex-service personnel, this is swaddled in promoting the military (one recent campaign was called "doing your bit").

Often they demand not improvement, but priority: in 2008 they won their demand that injured service per-

sonnel be treated first in the NHS.

While it is right that injured personnel should get compensated and treated, their needs and rights are no greater than an injured builder or any other worker.

So if a red poppy is the outward symptom of inward national chauvinism, what of the white poppy of the pacifist Peace Pledge Union?

The PPU originated in 1934 and, paralleling the more recent antics of George Galloway, tended to argue the justice of German claims to parts of Czechoslovakia and Poland. Although Germany had suffered a genuinely unjust peace after the First World War, the PPU failed to recognise the direction of the march of the Third Reich. Worse still, a PPU pamphlet of 1938 stated there is "...no reason why Germany should not have colonies".

The PPU also refused to take sides in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), refusing to oppose the Nazi-backed forces of Franco as they crushed the working class and destroyed democracy in Spain for a generation. The policy of the PPU was exactly that of the British state.

Ultimately the PPU were the product of the craving for peace that dominated British society in the 1930s, a reflexive but inadequate response to the horrors of the first world war. Similarly, the British Legion had undertaken a misguided trip to Germany in 1935 to meet German veterans, only to be drawn into Nazi propaganda, dining with Himmler, being photographed with Hitler and (most shockingly) visiting a concentration camp.

While the British Legion has acted as ideologues for the use of British armed force, the PPU helped shape not even a political pacifist movement but an individualist one. The PPU originally sought pledges from men not to fight, and this led not to a movement against war but encouraged individual conscientious objectors doing nothing to stop war but opting out as isolated individuals.

In the end the white poppy and the red poppy are reverse sides of the same coin — the red poppy suggesting that peace in a world of nationalistic rivalries can be achieved militarily, the white that by behaving in a "reasonable" way the causes of war under capitalism can be undermined.

I have yet to see my daughter wearing a poppy of any kind.

DEBATE

Poppy protest at Celtic

The anti-poppy protest staged by Celtic fans on 6 November was an expression of dissatisfaction at having Remembrance Day commemorations imposed on them. It also shows political activism at a club with an established tradition to that end.

However, the reactions to the protest from the Celtic Board and the Poppy Campaign lobby in the local media raise as many issues as the protest itself.

During the match a group of fans known as the "Green Brigade" unfurled a banner saying: "Your deeds would shame all the devils in hell. Ireland, Iraq, Afghanistan. No bloodstained poppies on our hoops".

The Green Brigade are a loose group of leftist fans, numbering fewer than one hundred who vocally support the causes of the Irish Republican, Palestinian and Basque liberation movements, a thorn in the side to the club's establishment (particularly current chairman, the former Blair government minister, Dr John Reid).

There's not much more to say about them that doesn't exaggerate their significance. To some they're they're the Glaswegian Black Panthers. To others they're a tightly organised Provo splinter cell threatening Scottish democracy. In reality, its sixty blokes singing songs!

The opposition of many fans to the occupation of Ireland is well documented as is the disgust which met the appointment of John Reid because of his intrinsic involvement in the other occupations mentioned in the banner.

However, the imposition of Remembrance Day on all clubs via the embroidery of the poppy on team jerseys has received less consideration. People wishing to

mark the Armistice choose to pin a poppy to their own clothes. That choice is removed when it is sewn onto a symbol which has a distinctly different cultural significance.

The reaction in the local press took the predictable line of "disrespecting the fallen" Admittedly, the emotive rhetoric of the banner comparing them to "all the devils in hell" probably did as much to support the parochial redtops' criticism as it did to alienate large sections of the Brigade's fellow supporters.

That said, the protesters were exercising their rights to free political expression; a vital aspect of any viable democracy.

More shocking though is the decision of the Celtic Board to move to ban all fans who took part in the protest from Celtic Park. One wonders how much John Reid has to do with this decision. Perhaps it's just incidental that the banner explicitly mentions two conflicts that will endure as his regrettable political legacy? (The Green Brigade rightly condemned Reid as a war criminal when he was appointed chairman in 2008.)

Obviously, the issue of the imposition of the Poppy Appeal on society is not just confined to Scottish football, but any resistance to it warrants rational discussion (largely absent in the press). Bypassing the undoubtable political implications for a moment, the principal feature of the act of remembrance is that it is an act of conscience; it cannot and should not be imposed on anyone.

Turning to the political aspect of the campaign, it is interesting to analyse the rationale they present to promote it. Remembering the fallen, soldier and civilian. Remembering the sacrifices; lamenting the horror of war.

The Poppy Campaign in its recent aggressive manifestation hardly heralds these sentiments. Indeed it is more easily likened to a sabre-rattling triumphalism that truly "disrespects the fallen" in both its implicit reverence of conflict and its explicit opposition to the political freedoms for which they have fallen.

David McDonald

• <http://bbc.in/dyh28c>

A man fit for Holyrood?

BY DALE STREET

“Holyrood Could Be Calling Me Home” read the headline above George Galloway’s *Daily Record* column last week, in which he claimed that he was coming under increasing pressure to contest next year’s Scottish Parliament elections.

Unnamed “football supporters, leaders of the Asian community, trade unionists, former constituents, and even members of the Labour Party” were supposedly all urging him to stand for election.

According to Galloway, they were urging him to stand because the Scottish Parliament needed “some heavier-weight members if it is to develop as a real parliament worthy of the name ... it needs members with principles on which they stand, come what may.” Principles? George Galloway? You decide...

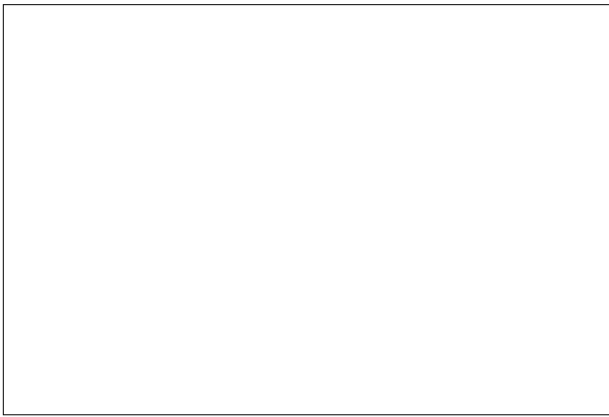
Galloway was first elected as an MP in 1987. Less than a year later the Executive Committee of his Constituency Labour Party (CLP) passed a motion of no confidence in him. In 1989 13 of the Executive Committee’s 26 members resigned after Galloway had managed to secure his re-selection.

In 1990 *Tribune* carried a classified advertisement headed “Lost MP who answers to the name of ‘George’ ... balding and has been nicknamed ‘gorgeous.’” According to the advert the missing MP had last been seen in Romania and had not been to a CLP meeting for a year.

(Galloway threatened legal action over the advert – he had attended five CLP meetings – and reached an out-of-court settlement with *Tribune*.)

In 1994 Galloway first established his reputation as an apologist for Saddam Hussein (and, in subsequent years, various other Middle East dictators).

In a meeting with Saddam, Galloway told him: “I thought the president would appreciate knowing that even today, three years after the war (the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait), I still met families who were calling their newborn sons ‘Saddam’. ... Sir, I salute your courage,



your strength, your indefatigability and I want you to know that we are with you, until victory, until Jerusalem.”

A 1999 meeting between Galloway and Saddam’s psychopathic and rapist son, who had an established record of torture and murder, was caught on video (although the video did not become public knowledge until much later). Galloway greeted Uday as “your Excellency”, joked with him about Cuban cigars, weight loss and hair loss, and promised him: “We’re with you till the end.”

Galloway has also had warm words of praise for the former Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz, recently sentenced to death for his role in massacres committed during Saddam Hussein’s rule. When Saddam was still in power, Galloway was on such good terms with Aziz that he described him as “a good friend”. He partied with him. He spent a Christmas with him.

After Aziz had been arrested following Saddam’s fall from power, Galloway called for his release. Aziz was “my friend and I think of him often, he is a good man.” Aziz, claimed Galloway, was “viewed with high esteem worldwide by international figures who have valued his counsel, met him, discussed and negotiated with him.”

Iraq, of course, was not the only dictatorship for whose rulers Galloway could find words of praise.

When a military coup overthrew Pakistan’s elected government in 1999 Galloway wrote: “In poor third-world countries like Pakistan politics is too important to be left to petty squabbling politicians... Only the armed forces can really be counted on to hold such a country together. Musharraf seems an upright sort to me and he should be given a chance.”

(This “poor third-world country” had tested its nuclear bomb the previous year.)

Writing in 2002 about the collapse of police-state one-party rule in the Soviet Union, Galloway lamented its passing: “If you are asking did I support the Soviet Union, yes, I did. Yes, I did support the Soviet Union, and I think the disappearance of the Soviet Union is the biggest catastrophe of my life.”

On a visit to Syria in July of 2005, Galloway said of a meeting with its ruler, Bashar Al-Assad “We covered the whole world in 60 minutes. I was very impressed by his flexible mind. Syria is lucky to have Bashar Al-Assad as her President.” (But the people of Syria had never been asked if they wanted him as their President.)

On a subsequent visit to Syria later the same year Galloway said: “All dignified people in the world,

whether Arabs or Muslims or others with dignity, are very proud of the speech made by President Bashar Al-Assad a few days ago. For me, he is the last Arab ruler, and Syria is the last Arab country. It is the fortress of the remaining dignity of the Arabs.”

In more recent years Iran’s President Ahmadinejad has filled the void left in Galloway’s political universe by the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

Galloway broadcasts for the Iranian government-backed “Press TV” station. Recent gems by Galloway on his show include “If I was Iran, I’d get nuclear weapons”, “Iran has only been a democracy for 30 years but in that 30 years it’s come a long way,” and “those who ridiculously claim that here’s no real democracy in Iran, hah, well, they’ve certainly had their comeuppance in the last few weeks.”

Galloway claims that his election to Holyrood is needed “if it is to develop as a real parliament worthy of the name.”

But Galloway’s record hardly qualifies him for this role. The countries which he has consistently defended over the years are ones in which parliamentary democracy is notable for its absence: the Soviet Union under Stalinism, Pakistan under military dictatorship, Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, Bashar Al-Assad’s Syria, and the Iran of the mullahs.

If elected to Holyrood, will Galloway perhaps work to turn Scotland into a “real democracy” — like Ahmadinejad’s Iran?

If Galloway were to take a transforming role at Holyrood it would require his participation. But that would be in stark contrast to his record as a Westminster MP.

Following his election as an MP for Respect, for example, Galloway’s voting record in Parliament in 2005 was 634th out of 645. Of the eleven with worse voting records, five were Sinn Fein MPs who refused as a principle to attend Parliament, one was the Speaker, and two were dead. By late 2009 he had voted in only 93 out of a possible 1,113 votes.

Just five days after Galloway’s *Daily Record* column was published, the national conference of what is left of Respect passed a motion sanctioning the party’s foray into Scottish politics.

The motion was proposed by Galloway himself, Rob Hoveman and Kevin Ovenden (two former members of the SWP who opted to become professional bag-carriers for Galloway after the latter had trashed the SWP in Respect) and the former Shadwell Respect councillor Abjol Miah. (Are the Holyrood elections really such a hot topic in Bethnal Green and Bow?)

According to the motion, “Respect has not organised in or contested elections in Scotland in the past because of the hegemony of other parties to the left of Labour. This hegemony no longer exists. In the context of unprecedented cuts by the Con-Dem coalition and disappointment with the Labour and SNP, there is now an opportunity for Respect to contest elections to the Scottish parliament with a realistic prospect of success.”

So, in the *Daily Record* Galloway claims he is thinking about standing in the Holyrood elections by popular request. But at the Respect conference the reason given for standing is: the disarray of the left provides an opportunity to carpetbag a seat (for George Galloway). What’s the truth here?

Withdraw the invitation!

Galloway’s first public engagement in Scotland following the effective launch of his campaign to win a seat in Holyrood is likely to be his speech at the Inaugural Annual Lecture of the Bill Speirs Foundation, being held at Paisley University on 29 November.

Bill Speirs was a former STUC General Secretary who died last year. 29 November is the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Speirs was STUC Assistant Secretary from 1978 to 1988, Deputy General Secretary from 1988 to 1998, and General Secretary from 1998 to 2006.

Particularly in his earlier years of working for the STUC, his politics were very much the *Morning Star* version of Labour left politics. His politics were therefore not entirely removed from those of Galloway, especially in relation to the Soviet Union and “anti-imperialism”.

On another level, Speirs and Galloway had little in common.

Whatever his political shortcomings, Speirs had a serious commitment to the labour and trade union movement. He was serious as well about the international campaigns in which he was involved. They were never vehicles for his own ego, nor occasions to hobnob with Middle East despots.

Giving Galloway the chance to speak at the Foundation’s Inaugural Lecture is as inappropriate as backing his efforts to take a seat in Holyrood.

Speirs was the leading figure in the Scottish trade union movement for nearly a decade. But the countries so energetically defended and admired by Galloway suffered (in many cases: continue to do so) not just from an absence of parliamentary democracy but also from an absence of free trade unions.

Trade union activists should be demanding that the Bill Speirs Foundation should withdraw its invitation to Galloway.

Language test penalises poor migrants

From back page

Emily, a woman affected by the new law says, “My husband and I speak Arabic together. He is learning English and we both think this is very important. However, this law is not about enabling new immigrants to learn English.

“This new rule discriminates against spouses from parts of the world where English tuition is poor or non-existent, not to mention those who cannot afford to pay for English classes. What’s more, it doesn’t apply to spouses from within the EU who don’t speak English. The rule shows a complete disregard for the right of married couples and families to be together, and effectively punishes people like myself for marrying outside the EU.”

As the cuts bite and we gear up to fight, there is a danger that the government pushes laws like this through with no one noticing. Let’s show them that we

have noticed.

If the government want to ensure migrants can learn English, then we have some different ideas for them – stop the cuts to English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, scrap the fees introduced in 2007, and fund basic literacy and outreach classes. This is a racist attack from an anti-migrant government – stand up and say no to it!

Please join the protest on Monday 29 November to show your opposition to these measures.

- Demonstrate 29 November 1pm to 2pm near the Home Office. Meet at 12.45pm outside Topshop on Victoria Street, London SW1

- Prop making Sunday 21 November, 4pm to 6pm. London Action Resource Centre, Fieldgate Street, London E1

- Call Alice on 07976274516 or Rebecca on 0797171 9797

- Called by No One Is Illegal www.noii.org.uk

MUSIC

Realising their potential?

John Keyworth welcomes the return of Pulp.

Jarvis Cocker's work with Pulp during the Britpop era did much to keep "class" in the public consciousness at a time when it was being written-out of the rhetoric of New Labour, and barely noticed by the Britpop crowd who were getting high on the hype of "Cool Britannia". If this will be the theme of a "reformed" Pulp then it will a welcome return.

Cocker's social commentary had its fair share of revolutionary sentiment. On 'Different Class', Cocker conjures up the image of a disadvantaged people rising up to claim what they feel is theirs — "Just put your hands up, it's a raid! We want your homes. We want your lives. We want the things you won't allow us".

Elsewhere, he voices a bitter working-class man who seethes with contempt for his bourgeois "betters" and plots his revenge: "I can't help it, I was dragged up, my favourite parks are car parks, grass is something you smoke, birds are something you shag, take your year in Provence, and shove it up your arse."

Other lyrics don't just demand a "revolution" granted to the working class by the bourgeoisie. from above, but describe the working class seizing the means to achieve change. This comes across most strongly on 'This is Hardcore' and 'The Day After The Revolution', where he scoffs at the old mantra "the meek shall inherit the Earth" by spitting "The meek shall inherit absolutely nothing at all, if you stopped being so feeble you could have so much more", and purring "the revolution begins and ends with you".

A belief in the power of the working class is also evident in 'Glory Days', where he laments "Oh, we were brought up on the space race, now they expect you to clean toilets, when you've seen how big the world is, how can you make do with this".

Pulp had their couple of years of media hysteria thanks to the single 'Common People', a tale of the misplaced fascination of the upper classes with the working classes. It was a hit stuck between the end of the Thatcher era and the beginning of the Blair years. The tenor of the times was evident in the songs. Perhaps Cocker's most weary, remorseful outlook on British politics is 'The Last Day of the Miners' Strike'. "The last day of the miners' strike was the Magna Carta in this part of town" he sings, hinting that futures are fixed and possibilities are narrowed.

So with Pulp's announced reformation, are we inheriting a band which will serenade the class struggle? Perhaps. Cocker is a slippery, intriguing character, whose musical output is sporadic and hard to pin down. Maybe it's a mistake. If it is then enjoy Pulp's back catalogue, which has some nuggets of gold — songs that depict the drudgery of working-class life and calls for the emboldening of and the realisation of the potential of the working class.



Jarvis Cocker: tales of working-class life... and more

MARXISM

Lively conference debunks academic economics

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Several hundred people attended the annual conference called by *Historical Materialism* magazine in London on 11-14 November 2010.

It showed that there is a wide and lively interest in Marxist ideas among university students and lecturers.

One centrepiece was Ben Fine and Dimitrios Milonakis speaking in a Friday evening plenary on their book *From Economics Imperialism to Freakonomics: The Shifting Boundaries between Economics and other Social Sciences*. It was a vigorous knockabout polemic against mainstream academic economics.

That economics is skewed, according to Fine and Milonakis, by two methodological quirks: methodological individualism (all its theories are based on suppositions about individual market responses) and axiomatic model-building (based on axioms about those individual responses, axioms often held to even when they are admittedly untrue).

They had some nice quotes. Here is Eugene Fama, one of Chicago's leading right-wing academic economists: "There'll be a lot of work trying to figure out what happened and why it happened, but we've been doing that with the Great Depression since it happened, and we haven't really got to the bottom of that. So I don't intend to pursue that. I used to do macroeconomics [i.e. the study of broad economic aggregates, rather than of the price, demand, and supply of individual items (microeconomics)], but I gave it up long ago".

Or again: an opinion survey asked economics PhD students in the USA what knowledge they considered important for their work. 3.4% said that knowledge of the real economy was important. 57% said that knowledge of maths was important.

I can't give an overview of the whole conference, in part because of its strengths. From Thursday midday through to Sunday evening, and starting at 9 or 9.30 on every day bar Thursday, there were usually seven or eight sessions going at the same time.

It would be good to report that the weekend brought out Marxist analyses of the crisis shaming the academic mainstream. Sadly, I can't claim that, and I doubt I could claim it even if I'd attended more sessions.

On the Friday I made a presentation which generated an interesting discussion. On the Sunday, Simon Mohun gave a more worked-out version of ideas which he previously introduced at the Workers' Liberty winter school of November 2009, on the long-term patterns of profit-rate movements within capitalism and their effect on crises.

On Friday Greg Albo gave a comprehensive survey of the "fourth phase" of the current crisis, the public sector cuts phase.

IMF and OECD papers, he pointed out, are calling for 20 years of fiscal austerity, and "virtually every OECD state" is introducing some structure like the UK's Office of Budgetary Responsibility to drive the cuts process outside the previous political and civil-service structures.

Michalis Spourdalakis gave a sober account of the Greek left's fight against the cuts there.

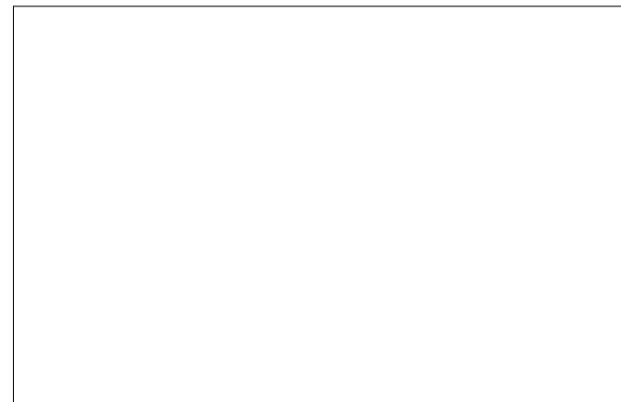
There have been six 24 hour general strikes since May, and the recent local election results show a total score of 20% for candidates to the left of Pasok.

But as yet this is "far from constituting an effective and enduring resistance". The Pasok government been able to impose anti-strike legislation without adequate resistance.

The "sectarianism" — in fact, old-style Stalinist third-periodism — of the Communist Party, the main left-of-Pasok force, and its nationalism, are destructive. The "nihilism" of anarchist groups, especially in Athens, is "not helpful".

In a 2008 article Spourdalakis had held out hopes for Syriza, a coalition built around the ex-Eurocommunist Synaspismos and including bits of the Trotskyist left. But, he said in his talk, Syriza has not adjusted strategy enough for the new situation, and has been wracked by factionalism: it is now effectively divided into three groupings, which competed with each other in the local elections.

Spourdalakis saw signs of hope in "new unions



Daniel Bensaid: a revolutionary, not "professor Bensaid"

emerging, especially among precarious workers" and new "network of civil and social rights movements".

A session on the Sunday about the work of the French Trotskyist Daniel Bensaid, who died in January this year, to my mind showed the "academic Marxist" culture at its worst.

Although Bensaid had a job at a university, he was no "academic Marxist". Even his most abstruse philosophical works were geared into political issues — centrally, for him, readjusting the "Mandelite", ever-ongoing "rise of the world revolution" version of Trotskyism which he learned as a young activist, in the light of the collapse of European Stalinism in 1989-91, and of the terrible error (as he came to see it) which his movement made in not denouncing the Russian occupation of Afghanistan in 1979-80.

He pursued that readjustment more keenly than any other leading former "Mandelite", and came explicitly to reject the old "orthodox Trotskyist" idea that the USSR and the states modelled on it had been "degenerated and deformed workers' states", or "post-capitalist", or "transitional", or had represented a "progressive" camp as against capitalism.

However — it seems to me — he allowed his critique to be "displaced" too much into general "philosophical" arguments, about the non-linearity of the flow of time, and so on, leaving much "Mandelite" baggage in the thinking of his organisation (the LCR, then NPA) undisturbed.

The session had started with three platform speeches, mostly given over to flat expositions of Bensaid's philosophical writings, delivered in such a way that you could scarcely have guessed that any other than the most abstract philosophical arguments ever concerned Bensaid.

I raised my question about Bensaid and the Stalinist states from the floor — without any polemic. Another floor speaker quickly declared: "We should get away from the sectarianism", drawing applause. (I suspect some people saw "sectarianism" in the very fact that I had referred in a hostile way to the old Stalinist states in Eastern Europe — implicitly disputing the view put by Stathis Kouvelakis from the platform that their fall had been a "defeat", a "terrible catastrophe". Others will have seen "sectarianism" in the fact that I raised political issues in a discussion about philosophy, and did so in a way implicitly critical of Bensaid).

Alex Callinicos from the SWP oilily declared that he also privately disagreed with the "workers' state" description of the old USSR, but it was "not helpful" to discuss such things in the session. Instead, he, Callinicos, would talk about something more appropriate: Bensaid's critique of the French philosopher Alain Badiou's concept of "event"... All very professorial.

I was reminded of an SWP (then IS) meeting many years ago, when I ventured to dispute with the speaker on the correct Marxist characterisation of the USSR (the meeting was about the USSR!) and got told by the chair that it was shocking and improper to raise such "sectarian" questions "when there was a worker present".

Today... it is "sectarian", shocking, disgraceful, to disturb *university professors* with such things...

The session seemed to me a demeaning insult to the memory of Bensaid. He was a revolutionary, concerned for the truth, and, I'm sure, as disdainful of academic mutual congratulations as any of us.

SOCIALISM IN DISARRAY, PART FIVE

What a revolutionary party is and is not

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

CULTURAL INERTIA

The precondition for the direct and indirect effect which Stalinism still has on the current would-be left is the fact that a culture, once established, has a tremendous power of inertia.

A culture can be extirpated, wiped out, adulterated, or turned inside out, as the previous socialist and Marxist political culture was by Stalinism; but it can also, left to "itself", go on for a very long time, especially if it still seems to "work" and nothing better replaces it.

The degenerated social-democratic culture in the working class is a case in point. It survived long after the political and moral collapse of social democracy in 1914, even where it had to compete with the vigorous early Communist International.

Antonio Gramsci: "Mass ideological factors always lag behind mass economic phenomena... at certain moments, the automatic thrust due to the economic factor is slowed down, obstructed or even momentarily broken by traditional ideological elements... Hence ... there must be a conscious, planned struggle to ensure that the exigencies of the economic position of the masses, which may conflict with the traditional leadership's policies, are understood. An appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies".

THE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST TRADITION

Today we live in conditions where the tradition of revolutionary Marxism that "flowed" through Trotsky and the Trotskyism of his time is highly fragmented.

Its elements are disassembled and sometimes needlessly counterposed to each other as fetish-objects, that is, dogmatically overemphasised aspects of what should be one integrated movement. This situation has much in common with the state of revolutionary socialism before the Communist International, after the October Revolution, began to reintegrate the contributions of the Social-Democratic left, the revolutionary syndicalists, and the best of the anarchists, into a coherent whole.

Yet the revolutionary socialist tradition is immensely important.

The revolutionary movement is, in Trotsky's words, "the memory of the working class". The bourgeoisie has a vast retinue of intellectuals to record, construe, explain, slant, spin current and past events from the point of view of the ruling bourgeoisies. It has a many-faceted educational apparatus which teaches its history, its values, its outlook, which glorifies its system.

It tells the young that capitalism and bourgeois democracy are the culmination of history. It fights the bourgeois class war on the "ideological front", waging a never-ending ideological war on the bourgeoisie's behalf. (For instance, the way the oil and other "interests" have systematically worked to discredit the evidence about global warming.)

The bourgeoisie also has social and political institutions which "socialise" people in general and the working class in particular, into the values, the outlook, and the tradition which expresses its interests.

The working class has none of that. It exists in a bourgeois world, dominated by commerce, which inculcates bourgeois values. It is constantly under bombardment by the bourgeois media, which do the same.

Against all that we have our under-resourced educational and propaganda work; and a large part of that depends on and is enriched by the written residues of the socialist past — what we have of them.

Lenin towards the end of his life

You cannot at will take the working class through the enlightening experience of a general strike. You can teach workers about the general strikes of history, like Britain in 1926 and France in 1936 and 1968, and about such half-buried events as the British general strike of 1842 (in bourgeois histories, the "Plug Riots").

Our traditions embody our history, our collective, codified experience, spanning generations and the work of generations of socialists. They exemplify our Marxist methodology, our models of how to analyse and think.

In times of adversity, one-sided "sects" can sometimes play a positive role, by preserving valuable ideas, even in a decayed, desiccated, or petrified form.

The "orthodox Trotskyists" did that, and so in their different ways did the others. AWL, over decades, evolved its own political tradition out of the "orthodox Trotskyism" of James P Cannon. We then "discovered" the literary work in the 1940s and 50s of Max Shachtman and others.

We have learned much from the "heterodox Trotskyists" and from attempting to reintegrate the positive contributions of others — the De Leonites and revolutionary syndicalists, for example — into our work. Much of what we had been doing had been done earlier by the Shachtmanites, and done better because the Workers' Party and ISL emerged as part of a general Bolshevik-Trotskyist culture much richer and deeper than was the culture of the politically impoverished dialects and descendants of the earlier Trotskyist movement out of which the AWL tendency evolved.

We live in a situation where the living aspects of our tradition are dislocated, and embedded in partly, or sometimes greatly, alien traditions, for instance, that of the "orthodox Trotskyists", from which AWL has evolved. Therefore, in striving to integrate the sundered elements of the Trotskyism of Trotskyists we face the danger of vapid eclecticism. To a shaping extent, such political and theoretical eclecticism is central to the SWP-UK.

Avoiding that is a question of striving for consistency, critical understanding of what we take as our "tradition", and above all in living by the cardinal rule of

Marxist politics — to be guided always by the logic of the class struggle, and within that by the interests of the working class, including its "interest" in learning what capitalism is and what socialism strives to be and to achieve.

WHAT A MARXIST PARTY IS AND DOES

The working class, at high points of struggle, can and does improvise with great creativity, often forcing the Marxists to shake themselves up and re-think in order to "catch up".

But a lucid overview of the mechanisms of capitalism, of the nature and relations of the social classes, of the long historic evolution of which working-class socialism will be the culmination, and of socialist strategy, cannot be improvised.

Broad labour movements can arrive at generally socialist hopes and aspirations, just as young people can arrive at angry rebellion against capitalism. Scientific understanding of capitalism, of society, of the centrality of the working class and the politics of working class self-liberation — in short, understanding of how we can map the way from capitalism neo-barbarism to human liberation — does not arise "spontaneously".

It has to be brought into the struggle by those who have laboured for years or decades in advance to educate themselves and absorb the lessons of past struggles.

Quick, seemingly miraculous, transformations in the thinking of labour movements have occurred and will occur. Why? Because the worker who accepts capitalism is in a condition in which her and his objective interests as both worker and human being are at odds with the ideas about society and the world she or he has been taught to accept. In times of big struggles, those ideas come into direct conflict with the experience of the worker, and start to totter. Once that begins, everything can change.

Marxism is a necessary part of this process. But it has to be the authentic Marxism, the real Marxism, of its best period.

It is to make Marxist theory a living reality in working-class practice that socialist organisations do what they do.

LENIN ON THE FORMATION OF SOCIALIST LABOUR MOVEMENTS

Writing about Russia 100 years ago, Lenin put it like this:

"Social-Democracy [the revolutionary Marxist movement, in the terminology of Lenin's time of writing] is a combination of the labour movement with socialism. Its task is not passively to serve the labour movement at each of its separate stages, but to represent the interests of the movement as a whole, to point out to this movement its ultimate aims and its political tasks, and to protect its political and ideological independence.

Isolated from Social-Democracy, the labour movement becomes petty and inevitably becomes bourgeois: in conducting only the economic struggle, the working class loses its political independence; it becomes the tail of other parties and runs counter to the great slogan: 'The emancipation of the workers must be the task of the workers themselves.'

In every country there has been a period in which the labour movement existed separately from the socialist movement, each going its own road; and in every country this state of isolation weakened both the socialist movement and the labour movement. Only the combination of socialism with the labour movement in each country created a durable basis for both

Continued on page 16

the one and the other.

But in each country this combination of socialism with the labour movement took place historically, was brought about in a special way, in accordance with the conditions prevailing at the time in each country... The process of combining the two movements is an extremely difficult one, and there is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that it is accompanied by vacillations and doubts."

And again: "The strikes of the 1890s [in Russia] revealed far greater flashes of consciousness: definite demands were put forward, the time to strike was carefully chosen, known cases and examples in other places were discussed, etc. While the earlier riots were simply uprisings of the oppressed, the systematic strikes represented the class struggle in embryo, but only in embryo.

Taken by themselves, these strikes were simply trade union struggles, but not yet Social-Democratic struggles. They testified to the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers, but the workers were not and could not be conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system, i.e., it was not yet Social-Democratic consciousness. In this sense, the strikes of the 1890s, in spite of the enormous progress they represented as compared with the 'riots', represented a purely spontaneous movement.

We said that there could not yet be Social-Democratic consciousness among the workers. This consciousness could only be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own efforts, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., it may itself realise the necessity for combining in unions, for fighting against the employers and for striving to compel the government to pass necessary labour legislation, etc.

The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical and economic theories that were elaborated by the educated representatives of the propertied classes, the intellectuals. According to their social status, the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. Similarly, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose quite independently of the spontaneous growth of the labour movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of ideas among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia".

Today, Marxism, scientific socialism — what in Lenin's time was called Social Democracy — is everywhere separate from the labour movement, greatly more so than when Lenin was writing. To unite Marxism with the labour movement is the task of revolutionary socialists and consistent democrats everywhere. The collapse of Stalinism gives us a better chance of doing that than we have had in 75 years.

But Marxism itself — the consciousness of the unconscious processes of society — Marxism as a guide to revolutionary action, has suffered tremendous blows in the last historical period. The collapse of the Russian state-fostered pidgin Marxism clears the way for the development of unfalsified Marxism. We have a considerable way to go yet to achieve that.

RENEWING MARXISM

The revolutionary Marxist tradition is "given", but Marxism is not. Marxism as a living force in socialist organisations and in the labour movement is not something given — it has to be fought for and

won and then again fought for and won over again, and then yet again.

It has to be clarified and refined and augmented, again and again in a never-ending process. That process is, in a word, "the class struggle on the ideological front".

Lenin said it plainly and truly: "Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement." He also said: "Practice without theory is blind: theory without practice is sterile". In a declaration of the Editorial Board of the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra*, Lenin wrote:

"The intellectual unity of Russian Social-Democrats has still to be established, and in order to achieve this it is necessary, in our opinion, to have an open and thorough discussion of the fundamental principles and tactical questions... Before we can unite, and in order that we may unite, we must first of all firmly and definitely draw the lines of demarcation. Otherwise, our unity will be merely a fictitious unity, which will conceal the prevailing confusion and prevent its complete elimination.

Naturally, therefore, we do not intend to utilise our publication merely as a storehouse for various views. On the contrary, we shall conduct it along the lines of a strictly defined tendency. This tendency can be expressed by the word Marxism, and there is hardly need to add that we stand for the consistent development of the ideas of Marx and Engels, and utterly reject the half-way, vague and opportunistic emendations which have now become so fashionable..."

Having rejected eclecticism and indifferentism, he went on:

"But while discussing all questions from our own definite point of view, we shall not rule out of our columns polemics between comrades. Open polemics within the sight and hearing of all Russian Social-Democrats and class conscious workers are necessary and desirable, in order to explain the profound differences that exist, to obtain a comprehensive discussion of disputed questions, and to combat the extremes into which the representatives, not only of various views, but also of various localities or various 'crafts' in the revolutionary movement inevitably fall.

As has already been stated, we also consider one of the drawbacks of the present-day movement to be the absence of open polemics among those holding avowedly differing views, an effort to conceal the differences that exist over extremely serious questions."

These words offer a guide to revolutionary Marxists now. They guide the conduct of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

MARXISM NOW

The fight for Marxism and for a Marxist labour movement is the fight to prepare the only force capable of taking humanity out of our age of social neo-barbarism, the working class, for that task. It is for that task that the Alliance for Workers' Liberty exists and fights.

In the decades before World War Two, Trotsky organised the tiny forces that could be organised to compete, with desperate urgency, for the leadership of the working class against the perfidious incumbent leaderships of social democracy and Stalinism. But Trotsky and everything he represented was defeated and — as we have to recognise in retrospect — defeated for a whole historical period. Capitalism renewed itself on the mass graves, on the destroyed means of production and the ruined cities of the Second World War, and

began a long period of expansion. Stalinism survived, expanded and then slowly asphyxiated in its own bureaucratic cauldron, for half a century, until, in Europe, it collapsed.

It is impossible to tell how long it will take the working class to make itself ready to suppress capitalist neo-barbarism and take humankind forward. It is more easily definable in terms of things that must be accomplished.

The labour movements again need to learn by way of their own experience and by the enlightening work of socialists:

- That capitalism is neither natural nor eternal. The economic crisis makes explaining this easier now than for decades.
- That it is a historically finite system whose inner processes — the creation and recreation of a proletariat and the relentless socialisation of the means of production, of which "globalisation" is the latest manifestation — prepare its own end.
- That capitalism digs its own grave.
- That the working class, which finds no class in society "lower" than itself and which can only organise the economy collectively, that is, democratically, is the representative within capitalism of the post-capitalist future, and the only force that can suppress this neo-barbarism and replace it with something better.

WHAT IS PROPAGANDA? WHAT IS AGITATION?

In part one of this series, I quoted part of an answer to the question "What is the socialist movement?" given by George Plekhanov, the "father of Russian Marxism".

In other words: what is the revolutionary socialist party, and what does it do? Let us remind ourselves of, and quote more from, his answer, an answer which guided all the Russian revolutionary socialists, including the Bolsheviks. (In *What Is To Be Done?*, for example, Lenin based himself on Plekhanov's ideas on the relationship of propaganda and agitation).

"Shortly before the revolutionary year of 1848 there emerged among the Socialists men who looked at socialism in a completely new perspective... What... the Socialists with the new outlook [saw was] above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie.

In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things...

All their practical tasks are prompted by [the] class struggle... of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie...

Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory. But what exactly can they do?

A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks.

For this reason the new Socialists consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful...

You will only be recognised as a Socialist if your activity

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.

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THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

In Russia the first revolutionary socialists — most of whom also considered themselves “Marxists” — were the populists, peasant-agrarian socialists, who hoped to avoid full-scale development of capitalism in Russia.

The development of the Russian Marxist movement involved a small section of activists separating themselves off from a populist movement which, though in crisis, was still large, active, and influential, in order to argue in theoretical pamphlets for a new approach.

That approach was summed up by Plekhanov in the idea that the Marxists were “convinced that not the workers are necessary for the revolution, but the revolution for the workers”

Later the Marxists became a mass movement in 1905, only to split definitively and be reduced to very small numbers of reliable activists in the years of reaction which followed. As Lenin put it, “Russia achieved Marxism... through the agony she experienced in half a century of unparalleled torment and sacrifice, of unparalleled revolutionary heroism, incredible energy, devoted searching, study, practical trial, disappointment, verification, and comparison with European experience”.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE WORKING CLASS AS A REVOLUTIONARY CLASS

The need for a revolutionary party arises from the fundamental nature of the working class as a revolutionary class.

The working class remains a class of wage slaves until, by seizing political power and the means of production, it makes the decisive step towards emancipating itself. Contrast the classic bourgeois experience.

The bourgeoisie develops historically within feudalism, neo-feudalism, and absolutism as part of a division of labour within society which allows the bourgeoisie to own a segment of the means of production, and itself to be an exploiter, long before it takes political power in society. It thus builds up wealth, culture, systems of ideas to express its interests and view of the world. It, so to speak, ripens organically, and the taking of power, the sloughing off of the old system — even though accompanied by violence — represents the natural maturing and growth of a class already in possession of important means of production, and of the new system it represents.

The working class remains an exploited class — in more developed capitalist countries, the basic exploited class — up to the death knell of bourgeois social and political rule. It does not accumulate leisure and wealth. Its natural condition as a raw social category is to be dominated by the ideas of the ruling class. Its own natural and spontaneous self-defence and bargaining within the capitalist system — trade unionism — binds it ideologically to the ruling class, to bargaining within the system and in times of crisis taking responsibility for it. Its natural tribunes and intellectuals are the trade union bureaucrats, who adopt middle-class lives and standards and thus grow away from — and often into antagonism to — the working class whose interests within capitalism they are charged to represent.

On the face of it the proletariat might be doomed to go through history as a subordinate class. Marx and Engels themselves wrote: “The ruling ideology in every society is the ideology of the ruling class.”

In fact the working class becomes a revolutionary class, conscious of its own historic class interests and possibilities in the following way, according to the views of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg, Gramsci, and all the great Marxists. A set of social theories is created and developed on the basis of bourgeois social science (economics, philosophy, history) which uncovers the necessary logic of the historic evolution of capitalism towards the completion of its organic tendency to become more and more social and monopolistic — by way of common ownership and the abolition of capital and wage-labour. The proletariat is identified as the progressive protagonist in this stage of history.

A segment of the intellectuals of the bourgeoisie comes over to the proletarian wage slaves.

The proletariat itself evolves as a class through the stage of primitive elemental revolt at being driven into the capitalist industrial hell-holes to the stage of organising itself in combinations to get fair wages, and then to the stage of banding itself together for political objectives. It develops various political traditions.

In Britain the world’s first mass working class movement grouped around the demand for the franchise, which meant, in the conditions then, the right to take

power. In France a tradition of communist insurrection, involving sections of the proletariat, developed. It was rooted in the left wing of the great bourgeois revolution. A tradition, experience and theory of working class politics developed.

Instead of control of a portion of the means of production, the working class develops its own organisations. Within these organisations a struggle takes place between the ideas that represent the historic interests of the proletariat — Marxism — and the ideas of the bourgeoisie. This struggle occurs even where Marxists are the founders of the labour movement.

THREE FRONTS OF THE CLASS STRUGGLE

Antonio Gramsci summed up the threefold nature of the class struggle

“We know that the proletariat’s struggle against capitalism is waged on three fronts: the economic, the political and the ideological. The economic struggle has three phases: resistance to capitalism, i.e. the elementary trade-union phase; the offensive against capitalism for workers’ control of production; and the struggle to eliminate capitalism through socialisation.

The political struggle too has three principal phases: the struggle to check the bourgeoisie’s power in the parliamentary State, in other words to maintain or create a democratic situation, of equilibrium between the classes, which allows the proletariat to organise; the struggle to win power and create the workers’ State, in other words a complex political activity through which the proletariat mobilises around it all the anti-capitalist social forces (first and foremost the peasant class) and leads them to victory; and the phase of dictatorship of the proletariat, organised as a ruling class to eliminate all the technical and social obstacles which prevent the realisation of communism.

The economic struggle cannot be separated from the political struggle, nor can either of them be separated from the ideological struggle.

In its first, trade-union phase, the economic struggle is spontaneous; in other words, it is born inevitably of the very situation in which the proletariat finds itself under the bourgeois order. But in itself, it is not revolutionary; in other words, it does not necessarily lead to the overthrow of capitalism...

For the trade-union struggle to become a revolutionary factor, it is necessary for the proletariat to accompany it with political struggle: in other words, for the proletariat to be conscious of being the protagonist of a general struggle which touches all the most vital questions of social organisation; i.e. for it to be conscious that it is struggling for socialism...

The element of consciousness is needed, the ‘ideological’ element: in other words, an understanding of the conditions of the struggle, the social relations in which the worker lives, the fundamental tendencies at work in the system of those relations, and the process of development which society undergoes as a result of the existence within it of insoluble antagonisms, etc.

The three fronts of proletarian struggle are reduced to a single one for the party of the working class, which is this precisely because it resumes and represents all the demands of the general struggle.

One certainly cannot ask every worker from the masses to be completely aware of the whole complex function which his class is destined to perform in the process of development of humanity. But this must be asked of members of the party.

One cannot aim, before the conquest of the State, to change completely the consciousness of the entire working class... But the party can and must, as a whole, represent this higher consciousness.”

THE POST-STALINIST “FETISH-PARTY”

The revolutionary party has as its central task to achieve the political and organisational independence of the working class, i.e. to help the working class learn to see capitalism and itself as they are.

It needs the organisational sinews of a body of socialists organised for combat all the way from the struggle on a trade union level at the point of production through to organising an armed insurrection. But it is centrally, irreplaceably, and uniquely, the carrier of a system of ideas, a world outlook, a socialist programme, a method of analysing the world and society which serves the interests of the working class.

Its core activity and responsibility in history is as an educator of the working class, enlightening workers about the nature of capitalist society and about what the working class can and must do in history.

Paris Commune. The only power the workers have are its own organisations. These can only be strengthened through a struggle between proletarian — Marxist — and bourgeois ideas

has directly facilitated the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat. If it does not exert this direct influence then you are not a Socialist at all...

My view... is expressed in its entirety in the epigram: Without workers who are conscious of their class interests there can be no socialism

If I assert that the promotion of the growth of the class consciousness of the proletariat is the sole purpose and the direct and sacred duty of the Socialists, then this does not mean that the contemporary Socialists stand for propaganda, for propaganda alone, and for nothing but propaganda.

In the broad sense of the word this is perhaps true, but only in the very broad sense... In general it is not easy to draw the line between agitation and what is usually called propaganda.

Agitation is also propaganda, but propaganda that takes place in particular circumstances, that is in circumstances in which even those who would not normally pay any attention are forced to listen to the propagandist’s words. Propaganda is agitation that is conducted in the normal everyday course of the life of a particular country.

Agitation is propaganda occasioned by events that are not entirely ordinary and that provoke a certain upsurge in the public mood. Socialists would be very bad politicians if they were not to use such notable events for their own ends”.

HOW SOCIALISTS ARE MADE

Side by side with the broad, elemental class struggle of the working class — and with some autonomy from it, not necessarily on the same rhythms and tempos — a certain proportion of each generation growing up under capitalism become convinced that they must fight to replace this society of exploitation and competition by socialism, a society of class and human solidarity. And some of them become committed activists.

For working-class struggles to move towards revolutionary conclusions, what is needed is that those activists organise themselves; educate themselves; keep their theory and their revolutionary drive bright and sharp; and integrate themselves into the existing labour movement and win respect and support there, so that at critical moments of working-class battles they can directly challenge the old time-serving leaders and prevent the diversion of the “spontaneous socialist” impulses of the workers in struggle.

That way the activists can win wider influence, recruit and educate new activists, refresh their own ideas by learning from the battles, and ultimately enlarge, improve, and sharpen their organisation so that at one of the inevitable points where large working-class struggle coincides with drastic internal crisis for capitalism they can lead the working class to revolutionary victory. That is what the Russian Marxists did between the 1880s and 1917.

Continued on page 18

The Stalinist "party of a new type" had an entirely different and antagonistic function, and a substitutionist relationship to the working class. The tragedy of the Trotskyist movement has been its adoption of a Stalinist model of a machine party. Such a party cannot serve our goal of working-class liberation.

The cry "build the revolutionary party" is too often, among would-be revolutionary socialists, an expression of an unthought-through yearning for revolutionary socialist competence and adequacy; and too often it encapsulates a false idea of a "revolutionary party" as essentially a "machine", an apparatus. That conception of a revolutionary party has been dominant in Britain for half a century now.

But revolutionary adequacy in any specific situation will include many factors beside the work of a political machine, many of them not to be created at will by the revolutionaries and dependent on the objective conditions of capitalist society and of the proletariat at a given time.

The cry for a "Revolutionary Party" often works against the revolutionary adequacy it has failed adequately to anatomise and define: it is a snare. This fetish too arises from misreading cause and effect: like the medieval architects who copied the appearance of ancient buildings but had no idea of how exactly it worked: they would make things like columns as mere decoration, that had functions in the structures they tried to copy.

Adequacy, beyond sectist convenience and streamlining of decision-making, is unlikely to be the outcome of creating an infallible "party" Pope, and a college of Party Cardinals — as this project almost always does, and has done in the history of the post-Trotsky "Trotskyists".

Again: such a structure served the Stalinists in what they were really trying to do (as distinct from what they said they were trying to do), but cannot conceivably serve a genuine left wing movement.

"The party" comes in practice to be seen as self-sufficient, and to have interests of its own that it can serve irrespective of the working class. This is a sectist caricature of the pre-1914 Second international approach. The apparatus comes to be seen as in practice more important than the working class. The history of the British Trotskyist movement in the last 30 years contains some terrible examples of this.

The idea that the party is, or can be, counterposed to the working class, and can be set adrift from the core ideas of Plekhanov, Lenin, Trotsky, and others, summarised above, is a source of endless ideological corruption in the would-be left.

Any argument will do to win a point or sustain "a line", and never mind the political education of the working class. Agitation becomes autonomous from propaganda and programme.

The SWP is the great contemporary practitioner in Britain now of the approach that any argument will do; but the approach starts, like so many of the ailments of the kitsch left, with the Stalinist Communist International, which learned to rationalise from the politics of the Russian Stalinist government, whatever they were at a given moment.

To see the revolutionary party only as a "machine" is radically to misunderstand its nature and its prime task — that of education.

To go beyond that to the view that the apparatus can say and do anything that "builds the party", more or less irrespective of the effects on the consciousness of the working class, is a vicious and essentially Stalinist travesty of the idea of "building the party".

Often, by way of demagoguery and the dominance of agitation-led activity to "build the party", this travesty works against the education of the working class.

Only the conscious struggle of the living Marxists, reacting specifically and concretely, focusing and redefining Marxism, can make of Marxism a consistently revolutionary instrument for the working class, for separating out and maintaining scientific consciousness in the working class.

The priorities of the party

If there is no irreplaceable function of this type for the Leninist party, then there is no need for our party. Were it not for the ideological task of the revolutionary party of the working class, were it not for the peculiar problems of the proletariat in that respect, then the working class could be expected to improvise the necessary organisation for the seizure of power, as the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie have done. If all the proletariat needs is an organisation, then the tightly knit revolutionary organisations are just sects, premature and almost certainly irrelevant.

If what the proletariat needs is only a machine, then it does not need to have its militants labouring for decades in advance of the maturation of the situation

where it requires an uprising.

The consequences of this are that our party is in the first place and irreplaceably a selection of politically conscious militants committed to activity in the struggles for the party's goals. It must thus be selected on the basis of a minimum of political education and knowledge, and commitment.

If it is to be a party which is a living organ in the class struggle, then it must try to integrate itself in all the areas of the class struggle and in the actually-existing labour movement. If it is to be a party whose deliberations correspond to experience in the struggles of the working class, then it has to be a party of activists — of people with a minimum of commitment to the struggle. That commitment, under the direct control of the party, must be a condition of participation in the party's deliberations — that is, of full membership.

It has to be a party of the proletariat, but it is not identical to the proletariat: it must be capable of standing against the proletariat and of struggling within it when the mass of the working class is under the influence or domination of the ruling class or of pernicious pseudo-radical doctrines, be they Stalinist, Peronist, Christian or Islamic clerical-fascist, or any of the many variants of reactionary anti-imperialism. Its proletarian political character depends in the first place on its programme and its historical relation to the proletariat. A proletarian character in the crude sociological sense is not sufficient and in some epochs may not be possible.

The proletarian party without a mass working class membership organised at the point of production and deploying the power which the working class potentially has at the point of production, is impotent; proletarian militancy at the point of production devoid of the historical programme of working class socialism and perspectives for achieving it, is sterile and ultimately impotent.

For the keystone Marxist idea that the emancipation of the working-class is the work of the working-class itself — which in the history of socialism was a proclamation against utopian sects and saviours, individual or collective — the would-be left substitutes indifference to the working-class (for instance the old local government Left around people like Ken Livingstone) or reduces the working-class to a cipher, a token, a fetish of the sect.

The Stalinist fetish of the revolutionary "party of a new type" was a by-product of the utopian project of building socialism in Russia, China, etc. A recognisable descendant of that idea of a party continues in the ranks of the Trotskyist left today. Both the SWP-UK and the Socialist Party (Militant) are terrible examples of party fetishism.

In 1984 the SP/ Militant found itself in the leadership of the Liverpool labour movement in conflict with the Tory government, during the great miners' strike. It made a short-term deal with the Tories, which bought the council a year's time. It left the miners in the lurch — and guaranteed its own defeat when, with the miners beaten, the Tories and the Labour Party leaders came for Liverpool council, as they did.

Why did SP/Militant do that? They wanted to preserve their own "apparatus", their "party", and — very foolishly — thought that was the way to do it.

Likewise, as the Tories, intent on crushing the work-

ing class, came to power in 1979, the SWP adopted the thesis that nothing could be done in the period ahead except build "the socialists", i.e. the SWP (the "theory of the downturn").

Both these groups continued the Stalinist conception of the "party of a new type" — only rendered more absurd — and senselessly counterposed it, when they thought that would serve their interests, to the working class.

THE BOMB AND THE BOOK

A hundred and twenty years ago, in the Russian Empire, as far as the Tsarist authorities were concerned the most fearsome revolutionaries were the Narodnik terrorists. They killed a Tsar in 1881. Lenin's brother Alexander, who took part in a plot to kill a Tsar, was hanged in 1887.

By comparison, the Marxists, with their doctrinal disputes, seemed relatively harmless. Some Marxist scientific literature was legally tolerated. Yet, Trotsky would write with perfect truth after the October revolution, it was not those who set out with guns and bombs in their hands who overthrew the Tsar, but those who set out with Marx's *Capital* under their arms.

Of the Ulyanov brothers, it was not the heroic martyr Alexander but the book-worming Vladimir Ilyich (Lenin) who posed the fundamental threat to the system. Marxism offered an alternative world outlook to that of the bourgeoisie and the landlords and those throughout society who supported them. It provided a theory of society and a method of extending and deepening that theory; it offered the perspective of a different type of society growing up within the capitalist class society, but dependent for its realisation on the revolutionary activity of the capitalist wage-slave class, the proletariat. The Marxist socialist movement was the memory of the proletariat.

The "fusion of science [Marxism] and the proletariat" created mass working class movements that did, indeed, seem capable of carving out the future they proclaimed. The battle for Marxism against bourgeois and petty-bourgeois outlooks within the labour movement was understood to be itself a front of the class struggle — the "ideological front".

After the collapse of the Second International in 1914, Lenin and others felt obliged to dig down to the roots of the Marxism that had dominated the International, and worked to define the flaws, mistakes and corruptions of doctrine that had led to the International's collapse. Of the results of this work Lenin's State and Revolution is perhaps the best known.

The Marxist "movement of the book" had to clean, shuffle, re-read and supplement its books. In Russia "science and the proletariat" had been fused as nowhere else — a raw, militant proletariat able to innovate new weapons like the mass strike and a Marxist movement forced to keep its intellectual weapons sharp and clear: "Marxism", which saw capitalism as progressive in history, had been adapted by layers of the Russian bourgeoisie opposed to the backward Tsarist system. The proletarian Marxists had to define and redefine themselves, the nature of the Russian revolution they worked for and their own role in that revolution. "Theory" was central.


Yet, though Lenin and Trotsky, Luxemburg, Plekhanov and Martov believed that there could be no revolutionary movement without a revolutionary theory, they made no fetish of "theory".

What distinguished Lenin's group from all the others was its capacity to pierce through the limits of its own theory and learn from the living working class, adjusting theory accordingly. There was a living fructifying interaction between theory and practice.

Thus, though Lenin and his comrades, like all the Marxists before 1905, believed that Russia needed and could not have other than a bourgeois revolution, they came in practice to differ from the others. Using theory as blindfold rather than microscope, the Mensheviks were content to stay on the level of generalities and to draw conclusions not from life, but from theoretical generalisations. A bourgeois revolution? Then obviously it will be led by the bourgeoisie.

A bourgeois revolution? Yes, said Lenin, in chorus with the others. But, he continued, no longer in chorus, what kind of bourgeois revolution? He insisted on examining the real Russian bourgeoisie as it was in life, irrespective of what theory said. He concluded that the Russian bourgeoisie could not lead a revolution and postulated that the workers and peasants would have to make the bourgeois revolution, against the bourgeoisie.

Focussing on the social realities, he thus concretised



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and deepened theory and laid the grounds for a revolutionary transformation of Marxist theory in the course of the revolution of 1917. The idea of fetishising “theory” in such a way that it blinkered perception and stifled concrete analysis and thought was utterly alien to Lenin. So was the idea that one could blame “bad theory” if, out of deference to “theory”, one failed to keep concrete social, political and economic reality under constant review, testing and honing, and, where necessary, supplementing the theory in the process.

THE “NEVER ON A SUNDAY” LEFT

The SWP’s attitude to Islam is possible only because they themselves have a quasi-religious outlook which they mistakenly think is Marxist and “dialectical”.

They live in a hazy mental world where everything is essentially in flux; where “Revolution” is imminent; where things are therefore never just what they are; where everything solid dissolves into air. Political Islam is only a transient form of something else, the unfolding “Revolution”. Islamic reaction does not matter because the socialist world revolution will soon clear everything up. It is not “really” reactionary because “objectively” it is part of something progressive, namely “revolutionary” opposition to “US and British imperialism”. It is not a threat to anyone because it cannot last long.

“After Hitler, our turn”, was how the complaisant Communist Party of Germany expressed a similar outlook over 70 years ago. “After the Islamists, our turn”?

History is a revolutionary roller-coaster. Realities dissolve into a pseudo-dialectical flurry.

All sorts of accommodations are licensed, because the thing accommodated to is not fully real. Thus their “revolutionary” socialist politics dissolve into a pseudo-historical mysticism which is very much like a religious belief in a godlike spirit of History which will “take care” of everything for us.

But in fact Islam is real — an immensely oppressive reality for many people in Muslim societies and communities, and especially for those of them who disagree to one degree or another. It is worth recalling that most of the left supported, for its “anti-imperialism”, the comprehensively reactionary Islamic regime installed in Iran by the priest-led revolution — it was a revolution, and a profound one — of 1979. The priests are still in power 23 years later.

In *Never on a Sunday*, a once-famous movie made by an American refugee from McCarthyism, Jules Dassin, the heroine is Ilia, an earthy, primitive, whimsical, ignorant, wonderful creature, who makes a living fucking sailors in the Athens port of Piraeus. She loves the ancient Greek tragedies. The hero of the film sits with her in the amphitheatre as Medea, the wronged wife, slaughters her own children for revenge against their father, Jason. Ilia laughs her head off at the tragic events unfolding before her.

Why is she laughing, he asks? She knows it isn’t real. It isn’t really happening, she tells him. The children aren’t really dead. When the play is over they will “all go to the seaside”.

Such a way of looking at contemporary history, with an uncomprehending numb indifference rooted in the belief that horrors are not real horrors, is to rationalise socialism what the religious belief that nothing matters because everything will be made right in the afterlife is to a this-world, humanity-centred philosophy of life. It was at the heart of much 20th century socialist experience, for example of the attitude which people who should have known better took to Stalinism, and not only to Stalinism.

For Marxist socialists in Britain who have to combine defence of Muslim people from racists and scapegoaters with implacable hostility to Islam, the old Catholic tag offers guidance: love the sinner, hate the sin!

Defend Muslim people, fight Islam! Understand that political Islam is the enemy of everything that socialists stand for! Don’t try to relate to the “Muslim community”, but to the Muslim working class and to the “Muslim” secularists. Work to split the “Muslim community”; help organise the ex-Muslims, the insurgent women and the socialists within the “Muslim community”!

For Marxists there is no such thing as agitation that does not enlighten and educate the working class about the system as a whole. But if “building the party” is the goal, then almost any agitation that attracts interest can make sense. “Action” becomes all-important, irrespective of the conditions, and almost irrespective of what action.

BOOK

How Stalinism crushed the Vietnamese Trotskyists

Dale Street reviews *In the Crossfire*, the recently published English translation of the autobiography of the Vietnamese revolutionary Ngo Van.

In the 1930s and 1940s Van was a Trotskyist. In later years, after he had fled to France to escape the massacres being carried out by the Vietnamese Stalinists, he rejected Trotskyism and Leninism and became a supporter of “council communism”.

The bulk of *In the Crossfire* deals with Van’s youth and political activities in Vietnam. The latter part of the book consists of two chapters from Van’s unfinished story of his life in France and three articles written by Van in the 1960s.

The book has its defects.

It is too brief to provide a full insight into Van as an individual and his record of political activities. It is likewise too brief to allow for a proper understanding of Vietnamese politics in those years. The material covering Van’s years in France is really no more than snippets.

And the less said of the appendix entitled “Note on Stalinism and Trotskyism” (not written by Van himself) the better.

Even so, the book is well worth reading for its portrayal of the waves of worker and peasant struggles which swept through Vietnam in the years leading up to the Second World War, and for its graphic descriptions of the brutalities and massacres committed by the French in their efforts to maintain colonial rule over the country.

Equally importantly, the book illustrates what Trotsky meant when he said Trotskyism was divided from Stalinism by “rivers of blood”.

In the stormy class struggles of the late 1930s the Vietnamese Trotskyists campaigned for an end to the French occupation, a united front of workers and peasants against the approaching war, opposition to national defencism, the creation of workers’ committees and peasants’ committees to take over the factories and the land, and the establishment of a soviet federation of Asia.

The Vietnamese Stalinists, organised in the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), advocated very different policies. In the 1930s they even supported higher taxes and the launch of government bonds to finance French imperialism in the coming war:

“The covetous glance Japan is casting towards the island of Hainan directly threatens the security of Indochina (!!! – Indochina was a French colony). In the face of these fascists’ territorial designs, the ICP approves of the measures (taken by the French government of occupation).”

In the upheavals following the end of the Second World War the Vietnamese Stalinists opposed land seizures by the peasantry and the creation of workers councils by miners and factory workers.

According to the ICP: “Those who are encouraging the peasants to take over landed property will be punished without mercy. The communist revolution, which will resolve the agrarian problem, has not yet

French army commanders in Vietnam, early 1950s

taken place. Our government is a democratic and bourgeois government, even though the Communists are in power.”

Nor did the ICP hesitate to ally themselves with the extremist nationalists of the JAG (Vanguard Youth). “The Communists, as the militant vanguard of our people, are prepared to put the interests of the Fatherland before class interests,” it explained.

The right-wing class-collaborationist policies pursued by the ICP in the 1930s allowed the Trotskyists to emerge as a more significant force in sections of the urban working class. According to one police report:

“The influence of revolutionary agitators sympathetic to the (Trotskyist) Fourth International has increased in Cochinchina (South Vietnam), particularly among workers in the Saigon-Cholon region. The workers are supporting the Trotskyist party more than the ICP.”

On the eve of the outbreak of war the French colonial governor explained the difference between the Trotskyists and the Stalinists in a cable to the French Colonial Minister.

The former “want to take advantage of a war in order to win total liberation”, whereas the latter “are following the position of the Communist Party in France” and “will thus be loyal if war breaks out.”

From 1937 onwards the ICP denounced the Vietnamese Trotskyists as agents of fascism. According to a statement issued by the ICP that year: “Our comrade Stalin ... has noted that Trotskyism ceased to be a political current in the working class seven or eight years ago. Trotskyism is the ally and agent of fascism.”

With the end of the Second World War the ICP progressed from slandering the Trotskyists to massacring them. “The Trotskyist gang must be smashed immediately,” proclaimed the Hanoi paper of the ICP. Ho Chi Minh expressed the same sentiment: “Any one who does not follow the line determined by me will be smashed.”

It is from this period that the book takes its title: the Trotskyists were caught in the crossfire between the French military (which massacred two hundred Trotskyists on a single day in late 1945) and the ICP and its military wing.

On page after page of the book Van recounts how long-standing revolutionaries who had often shared the same prison cells as their Stalinist executioners were murdered by the latter: “Of those who had taken part in the revolutionary opposition movement and who had remained in the country, hardly one survived.”

In his introduction to the book Van draws a parallel between events in Vietnam and events in Spain a decade earlier: “In Vietnam, as in Spain, we had been engaged in a simultaneous battle on two fronts: against a reactionary power and against a Stalinist party struggling for power.”

But whereas the counter-revolutionary role played by Stalinism in Spain is common knowledge, at least on the non-Stalinist left, the same cannot be said of Vietnam. In fact, in the 1960s the butcher of the Vietnamese Trotskyists, Ho Chi Minh, became a cult figure for much of the Western left.