

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

# **Solidarity**

**& WORKERS' LIBERTY**



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**No to Serbian and  
Russian bullying!**

**YES, see page 3-4**

**KOSOVA  
SHOULD**



# Socialism for the rich!

BY COLIN FOSTER

“ALL comparisons with the 1970s are absurd”, squeaked one of Gordon Brown’s media people, embarrassed about the Government’s decision on 17 February to nationalise Northern Rock. “The man running it has credibility in the City, it will be run on a commercial basis.” There is nothing “welfare-state”-ish about this nationalisation! No, sir! “Credibility in the City” is still the highest principle! Actually nationalisation cannot be a “social” measure. It is even a “welfare state” measure. Only... the “welfare” being tended to is the welfare of the rich. According to the writer Gore Vidal: “America is a unique society in which we have free enterprise for the poor and socialism for the rich”. Not so unique after what Gordon Brown and New Labour are doing here. One hundred and forty years ago, Marx defined developed capitalism as the combination of social production with the rule of private gain — “the co-operative form of the labor-process, the conscious technical application of science... the transformation of the instruments of labor into instruments of labor only usable in common, the economising of all means of production by their use as means of production of combined, socialised labor, the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world-market” together with “the

constantly diminishing number of the magnates of capital, who usurp and monopolise all advantages of this process of transformation...”

He didn’t know the half of it. In the relative boom of the last decade, as the BBC’s business editor Robert Peston points out in a new book, “investment bankers, hedge fund managers and partners in private-equity firms all did very nicely from the bonuses and the capital gains and the fees... The triumph of the super-rich has been the most striking social phenomenon of the New Labour year...”

Now, says Peston, “most of us are paying for their foolhardiness”. Except that is not quite right. The working-class majority are paying, all right; but the super-rich were not foolhardy. They knew that the Government would bail them out.

When Northern Rock went bust, the Government stepped in with vast guarantees to prop it up. It was an effective subsidy — the bank would have had to pay huge fees to get such credit, or credit guarantees, commercially — and more, since the bank in fact could not have got the guarantees commercially at any price.

The Government’s aim was to nurse Northern Rock into a condition where some private capitalist would take it over - make a tidy profit, of course, but release the Government from its guarantees.

The bidders were not willing to meet even the Government’s most minimal hopes. So the Government is nationalising it, handing it to Ron Sandler so that he will strip it down, sack most of the workers, and chop the residue into shape where it can be sold off.

The Northern Rock shareholders may lose out, getting little or nothing for their shares. They are squawking loudly about it. If hedge funds make big gains when business is good, then they should accept losses when dodgy investments go bust? Oh no! It’s boom we win (the market must be allowed to work freely), slump you lose (the taxpayers should bail us out).

Whatever happens there, things look good for the big players in Northern Rock. Most of Northern Rock’s best assets were siphoned off to a series of separate offshore companies called Granite. Granite’s assets, and debts, were in Northern Rock’s accounts; but the assets are also legally “off the balance sheet”.

The nationalisation does not include Granite and the “good” assets. It covers only the “rubbish” assets held in the main Northern Rock company. But the nationalised Northern Rock remains responsible for Granite’s debts.

If the world downturn now shaping up proves severe, then Northern Rock will collapse completely, but the Government will pay the price, and many financiers will escape very well. And if it proves not so severe, then even more financiers will do very well out of

the episode.

The nationalised Northern Rock will be run by Ron Sandler and Ann Godbehere. They will be paid £90,000 and £75,000 respectively. Per year? No, per month. And although Sandler has lived and worked in Britain since the mid 1980s, they are both “non-domiciled” for tax purposes, so will benefit from the Government’s recent climbdown on “non-domiciled” tax.

Peston’s book explains why the Government runs this way. “The new super-rich have the means through the financing of political parties, the funding of think-tanks, and the ownership of the media to shape Government policies...”

“Since 2001 the private-equity doyens Sir Ronnie Cohen and Nigel Doughty have contributed £1.8 million and £1 million respectively to Labour, the former Goldman Sachs partner John Aisbitt has given £750,000 and the hedge-fund executive William Bollinger has handed over £510,000.

“Tony Blair decided it was preferable for Labour to be financially dependent on wealthy individuals than on the party’s trade union founders...”

A socially-interconnected economy should be socially owned and socially (democratically) controlled. But for that we need a workers’ government, a government based on the independent representation of the working class in politics.

## One secular law for all!

BY GERRY BATES

WHEN Archbishop Rowan Williams proposed that British courts should use Islamic sharia law for family matters among Muslim citizens, he met with a just uproar of denunciation.

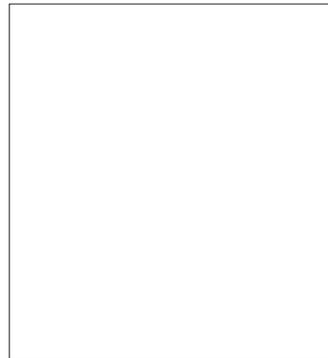
Williams was not concerned only with extending the role of sharia law amongst Muslims in British society. He wants — and he said so clearly — to increase the role of all the different religions, in British society, and not least the one at whose head he stands.

Williams’ ostensible chief rival, the Catholic Cardinal, Cormac Murphy O’Connor, rushed in to defend him. It is yet another example of the pattern which we have commented upon in *Solidarity* more than once: the different religious sects tacitly collaborating to use each others’ demands to boost the overall role of religion in society. They support each other — for now.

The militancy of one religion in its own cause spurs on and encourages the others to militancy in theirs. All of them work to subordinate society to organised superstition. The experience of Canada, where, in Ontario, similar moves to what Williams advocates were defeated by a big campaign, is of interest here.

A report by Ontario’s former attorney general Marion Boyd had recommended the use of Islamic law to settle issues such as divorce and child custody. Ontario had allowed Catholic and Jewish faith-based tribunals to resolve family disputes on a voluntary basis since 1991.

After prolonged protests, the government backed down. In February 2006 the Ontario government announced that: “Under [new] legislation, resolutions based on other laws and principles — including religious principles — will have no legal effect and will not be enforceable by the courts”. Not only was the proposal to import sharia law rejected: the previous concessions to Jewish and Catholic



*More power for me!*

religious law were rescinded.

Attorney General Michael Bryant said: “when it comes to family law arbitrations in this province, there is only one law and that is Canadian law.”

The point, of course, is not that the law should be “Canadian” — or “British” — but that it should be secular and should guarantee equal rights to all women, regardless of religious background.

The campaign against Sharia law was led by left activists of Iraqi and Iranian background. Homa Arjomand, coordinator of the International Campaign Against Sharia Courts in Canada, said:

“Once again I want to thank all the people who worked on the campaign. This victory was the result of the hard work of thousands of activists, across Ontario, Canada and Europe who volunteered their time and skills to help bring an end to faith-based arbitration and Sharia courts in Canada. To each and everyone of them I want to say thank you, we did this together. This is a great achievement for the women’s rights movement.

“We started with a handful of supporters and grew to a coalition of over a thousand volunteers and activists...together we defeated the forces of ‘Political Islam’ in Ontario, but this is just the first step... My concern now is to prevent religious arbitration from continuing underground and to assist women and children to get the full benefit of Canadian law when settling family legal matters”.

The same activists have since then campaigned against a proposal by the Ontario Conservative opposition leader John Tory that “taxpayers should fund Islamic, Hindu, Jewish and other faith-based schools just like public and Catholic ones”. Their slogan has been: “One secular school system for all”.

## Teachers vote yes!

From back page

EVEN more blatantly for a lot of younger teachers (or the parents of recent students) the Government recently increased the rate at which graduates have to repay their student loans to 4.8% and justified this by claiming that this figure reflected inflation. So when they increase our pay, they use the lower inflation rate, but when we have to repay them they use the higher rate!

Teachers, like many other groups of public sector workers this year, will need to take action just to avoid having their living standards reduced, and no amount of New Labour spin should be allowed to hide that basic fact.

NUT branches around the country are working hard to ensure that we get support for action. Leeds NUT is holding a meeting for school reps on 5 March mailing “Vote Yes” postcards to every members home address during the first few days of the ballot and emailing and phoning members with reminders to vote and vote yes. It is also visiting as many schools as possible to argue the case for action; and hoping to hold a joint pay rally with the UCU and to

involve activists from other public sector unions who may be brought into struggle on pay later in the year.

Of course it will take more than one day of strike action to defeat the government’s pay limit. The original position of the NUT was to ballot for “discontinuous” action (allowing a number of strike days to be called) but this was reversed at the January Executive and replaced with a call for a one day strike “in the first instance”.

It is still the case that more action will be needed, but the prospects of that taking place will probably depend on two key developments: a successful ballot and an effective, well-supported strike on 24 April; the emergence of other unions willing to challenge the similar pay cuts being imposed on their members in the public sector.

Civil servants, health workers, local government employees and others are also the victims of Brown’s policy of keeping wages below inflation. If their union leaders follow the example of the NUT, we can still hope to build a cross-sector campaign of action to defeat pay restraint and protect workers’ living standards.

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

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

- Speakers include John McDonnell MP, trade union activists and organisers, people who have successfully fought back against the immigration system and from a broad range of migrant communities
- Workshops and plenary sessions with plenty of time for discussion.
- Creche, please book in advance

Suggested donation: £50 pounds for trades unions, £25 pounds for other organisations. Send money and registration details to: Immigration Conference, Dean O’Hanlon, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, Euston, London NW1 1JD. Cheques to Finsbury Park RMT, clearly marked “Immigration Conference” on the back. www.29thMarch.co.uk e-mail contact: davidlandau9@aol.com

# Yes, Kosova should be free!

ON Sunday 17 February Kosova declared itself an independent state. It has been recognised by the European Union and the United States; it is opposed by Serbia, Russia, and others. As we go to press, Serbs have burned the customs posts on the new border between Kosova and Serbia. Conflict may escalate.

The declaration of independence by the Albanian people of Kosova, who compose about 93% of the population, was overdue. The Kosovars should have been independent — or united in a single state with Albania and other Albanians in the region, if that is what they wanted — long ago.

Decades ago! Kosova was a Serbian colony. Back before the First World War Marxists defined it as such — Trotsky for example.

There are no valid democratic arguments against Kosovar self-determination, though there is an unanswerable argument for the majority areas in the north, contiguous with Serbia, being able to be part of Serbia rather than Kosova.

But the idea that because the Serbs in Kosova, maybe five percent of the population, are against Kosova separating from the Serbian state, therefore the Albanian 93% of the population should not have self-determination, is plainly absurd.

So is the dominant Serbian idea that because centuries ago Serbs occupied Kosova and because Serb Orthodox monasteries and historic sites — like the site of the Battle of Pristina between Turks and Serbs in 1389 — are now in Kosova, therefore the will of the living people now in Kosova, who want self-determination, should not prevail.

The imaginary community of the “dead generations” with the living nationalists and chauvinists of a given nationalism now is usually a force for unreason and chauvinist intractability: here the dominant notion is that the imagined community of the living Serbs in Serbia with long-dead Christian Serbs who lived in Kosova centuries ago should control the political destiny of the living Muslim residents of Kosova now. It is preposterous.

The continuing formal union of Serbia and Kosova against the will of the overwhelming majority of the population of Kosova would be a force for perpetuating the animosity of Serbs and Kosovars, where, paradoxically, separation can work as a force for reconciliation: separation according to the will of those who live in Kosova cuts the roots of animosity.

When things settle down, the sort of amiable collaborative relations that exist now between the countries in most of Western Europe, where two World Wars were fought out in the first half of the last century, have a chance to develop.

With normal relations between Serbia and Kosova (or a larger Albanian entity) the Serbs will be able to have free access to the places and buildings Serbian nationalists hold sacred. But even if they will not, the sentimental nationalism of the Serbs and its historic relics cannot in any reasonable and in any democratic scale weigh more than the rights of the living people of Kosova.

Only consistent democracy, only the primacy of the rights of all the peoples and fragments of peoples to self-determination, limited only by geography and demography, will work towards uniting the working classes of the different peoples, including those of peoples whose relations are blighted by ancient conflicts and animosities.

Opposition to Kosovar independence is influenced by ancient and present hostility between Christian Serbs and Albanian and other Muslims — and that is a fact that goes way beyond Serbia: it has shaped the attitude of Greece, for example, which, like Serbia, was for centuries held within the Islamic



Turkish empire.

The widespread underlying racism against Albanians in the Balkans and beyond is also a factor in determining attitudes towards the rights of the Kosovar Albanians.

But there is also opposition from countries not influenced by historic affinities animosities. Countries with their own oppressed, or restive, national minorities, which fear the precedent of Kosovar secession from Serbia. Thus Spain fears the effects of this precedent upon the Basques within the Spanish state.

The Serbs have admonished the “international community” against agreeing to, or tolerating, Kosovar secession, by raising the

spectacle of many future secessions by peoples within other existing states. They have invoked the convention that minority peoples can secede from an existing state only with the agreement of that state and its majority.

Pan-Slavism and concerns of regional influence alone do not account for Russia's attitude. Their attitude is determined by their savage war against the Chechens, and their fear of other minorities in the Russian state seeking to secede. In many countries there are minority peoples. For Marxists the basic principles of our approach here are simple and straightforward: we are for the fullest democracy in the relations between peoples and frag-

ments of peoples.

We want unity of the working class and of all working people across state borders and national and communal animosities and despite them. The formal union of peoples some of whom are denied national rights does not bring, nor can it ever bring, such unity.

Invariably — except where the workers of a dominant state or people side with the oppressed nationality — it does the opposite: it sharpens, deepens and perpetuates division and hostility.

The Russian Bolshevik Revolution took place in an empire in which the dominant Great Russians were a minority, and the many oppressed peoples in the state collectively represented a majority in the well-named Russian “prison-house of the nations”. The October Revolution of 1917 battered down the walls of that prison house and freed the peoples (the Stalinist counter-revolution recreated the walls).

The approach of the Bolsheviks, which is the only consistently democratic approach is summed up succinctly in the following resolution passed by the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party in 1913.

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

## The SWP goes Neo-Con

NO better, more democratic, or more effective rules for organising relations between peoples and fragments of peoples exist than those of Lenin, Trotsky and their comrades. Nothing else is more conducive to working class unity across the divides and despite them. They are the principles of all who are Marxists and stand in that great tradition.

The consequences of the opposite approach — or of an approach of unprincipled eclecticism and zig-zags — are well illustrated by the politics of *Socialist Worker* and the SWP on Kosova.

When Yugoslavia was breaking up, when terrible things were being done by the Serb chauvinists to the non-Serbs, the SWP was determinedly “neutral” — but in a way that favoured the Serbs. For instance, accepting the arms embargo, which favoured the forces and the allies of the old Serb state, which had arms.

They denounced all talk of help — such as arms or medical aid — for the Bosniaks. The future self-proclaimed “best fighters for Muslims” could in that situation not rouse themselves even to active sympathy with the Bosniaks who, as it happens, were mostly Muslims.

They did worse in 1999 when the Serb-dominated Yugoslav state under Slobodan Milosevic attempted a generalised drive in Serbia's colony Kosova to kill or expel the

entire Albanian population.

The future “best fighters for Muslims” were then not only remiss in solidarity or even sympathy with the Kosovars. They sided stridently with the Serb would-be exterminators of the Kosova Albanians — who, as it happened, were Muslims.

The NATO powers — some of whose leaders may perhaps have felt ashamed of their passive collusion with which they had stood idly by while the Bosnian Muslims were slaughtered — mounted an international police operation to stop genocide in Kosova.

The SWP launched an “anti-war” campaign that quickly became a campaign of lying propaganda on behalf of Milosevic.

The Milosevic regime could have “stopped the war”, and eventually did, simply by desisting in Kosova. The SWP denouncing NATO one-sidedly and in a way that amounted to the demand: stop the war and let Milosevic have a free hand in his war of attempted extermination on the Kosova Albanians.

They rejected and denounced as “pro-imperialism” any suggestion that their “anti-war” movement should demand that the Serbs stop their war against the Kosovars and withdraw from Kosova. That is what the imperialists were demanding!

Their lying war-propaganda for Milosevic ranged from blaming NATO for the mass movement of Albanians fleeing for their lives from the Serbs, to arguing publicly that the

destruction of the Albanian population was already an irreversible fact (and therefore other socialists could with a clear conscience join the SWP in backing Milosevic against “imperialism”).

(The reader does not have to take our word for it here in this editorial — it is copiously documented in *Workers Liberty* 2/3, which is on our website.)

*Socialist Worker's* comments on Kosova's formal declaration of independence from Serbia are in keeping with what they said and did in 1999.

Ordinarily, the SWP does not bother much about consistency or continuity. Since 1999 the SWP leaders have had their own conversion — not as with the Christian patriarch Paul, on the road to Damascus but on the road to a conference in Cairo — to an attitude of supportive sympathy towards political Islam, including Islamic clerical fascists such as the Muslim Brotherhood.

The “anti-war” movement which the SWP led in 2002-3, sided entirely with Saddam Hussein (though many who were involved in the demonstrations of the Stop the War Coalition did not).

The SWP sided with Hezbollah in the Lebanon war of 2006, and with Hamas in

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From page 3

Israel/Palestine.

Under the banner of "Respect", SWP leaders stood for election, presenting themselves in Muslim areas of Britain as "the best fighters for Muslims".

They even felt obliged to revise their own history and implicitly to publicly criticise themselves for having supported Salman Rushdie when a death sentence was pronounced against him by the Iranian clerical-fascist regime. They made a mistake, Alex Callinicos wrote in *Socialist Worker*.

To make up for that, they supported the religious bigots who demonstrated two years ago against the Danish cartoons showing Mohammed.

Anyone who hoped that in this vein they might have had a second look at their politics on Kosovo and on Milosevic in 1999 has been disappointed. They publicly repent for having opposed the fatwa on Rushdie, but not for having been war-propagandists for those attempting genocide on Kosovo in 1999! Consistency does not live at the SWP's address!

Callinicos, writing recently in *SW* (17 December), was unrepentant about Kosovo in 1999. This time too, as in 1999, he expressed attitudes to Albanians that might reasonably be described as deeply prejudiced if not — dare we say it? — racist. Why we say this will become clear as we go along.

There is a Marxist tradition on such questions as the right to self-determination. Is there a Marxist, or a general socialist, or even a liberal case to be made against these basic attitudes, in relation to the Kosovar Albanians? If there is, Callinicos does not attempt to make it. His article is not that of someone within the Marxist tradition arguing why that tradition does not cover the Kosovar Albanians but the work of someone willing to use any arguments that he thinks might serve.

Callinicos says that he "nearly threw up" recently when he heard US ex-president Clinton claim that in 1999 the NATO powers achieved "a humanitarian triumph" in Kosovo.

The very moral Mr Callinicos says that Clinton's view here is evidence of the abysmal "moral measure" of the so-called "international community". Stopping genocide was not a "moral triumph". And why? The US and others disregarded the legal rights of Serbia over Kosovo.

That legalistic argument is the root and anchor of Mr Callinicos's case. He is all for international "legality". It is an important consideration for socialists and anti-imperialists, isn't it? Think what its absence can mean.

Chechnya against Russia. Algeria against France — which had held Algeria for a full century and a quarter by 1954 when the bandits of the Algerian National Liberation Front started, in the deepest illegality, shooting French soldiers. Ireland in 1919-21, where they started shooting the agents of the UK government whose state had legally held Ireland for seven hundred years already.

Such outrages against international legality are enough to make a decent chap like Mr Callinicos rip up his copy of the *Daily Telegraph* in righteous outrage.

And don't think that such things as majority rights are enough to override international law. Callinicos concedes "the majority of Kosovo's population are now Albanian". (This fact is here a partial lie, expressed by way of understatement. A majority might be 55 or even 51 percent. The Albanian majority in Kosovo is 93%. The overwhelming majority!)

The Albanians are the majority. But, says Mr Callinicos, in the same sentence in which he has grudgingly conceded that the Albanians are a majority: "but Kosovo retains an important place in Serbian nationalist ideology".

Yes, of course it does. And? The sentiments of a different people, and the rampant chauvinism of many of them — do what to the rights to self-determination of the Kosovar Albanians? Override them?

Override the wishes of the people who live there, whose ancestors have lived there for centuries, for separation from the state that has oppressed them for a century, that attempted to massacre or drive them out less than a decade ago?

Nobody but a brain-pickled Serb chauvinist would argue that!

Mr Callinicos, who is not Serbian, is a Serb chauvinist? That's certainly what he was, vicariously, in 1999, acting as a propagandist for Serbia even as genocide was being attempted against the Albanians of Kosovo.

Callinicos recalls that the last of the Balkan wars which Milosevic launched in the 1990s was that in Kosovo, in 1999. What was happening there?

"A vicious but small scale counter-insurgency campaign was waged by the Yugoslav army against the KLA, demanding national independence". And then what happened?

"Clinton and his European allies... Tony Blair mounted a bombing campaign against Serbia". And then? "Milosevic reacted by ordering the Yugoslav army to expel hundreds of thousands of Kosovars, but eventually had to abandon control of Kosovo to the UN".

This is a bit more truthful than what Callinicos was saying about the same subject in 1999, when it was happening, but nonetheless it is a shameful pack of lies.

The attempted genocide by Serbia was not a response to the NATO bombing, but its prime cause. When the Serbs retreated from Kosovo, the bombing stopped.

Even so, says Callinicos, "Kosovo remained legally part of Serbia". (And it's very important the Serbs nationalists, don't forget.)

Serbia had been balked in attempting genocide, but Kosovars and readers of *Socialist Worker* must respect its continuing international legal rights in Kosovo? Make sense of that if you can!

And now, says Callinicos, Kosovo's "Albanian-dominated government" is threatening to declare independence. You can see how grossly unjust it is, can't you?

Callinicos adds: though Kosovo is "legally" part of Serbia, it has an "Albanian-dominated government". Only 93 percent of the population, and they still think they have the right to form a government!

This is an imperialist crime! It is only because NATO imperialism inhibits Belgrade and stops it exercising its legal rights over Kosovo that such an outrage takes place.

Callinicos warns that the recently elected Prime Minister of Kosovo, Hashim Thaci, "was one of the leaders of the KLA" which — if we understand Callinicos' drift — betrayed Serbia: during the 1999 war. It "worked with NATO" forces coming to stop Serbian genocide against Albanians!

And you won't, reader, be astonished to learn that Bush is backing Kosovo's independence.

But the really shocking thing about Kosovo is how crime-ridden it is. Hashim Thaci was widely criticised, Callinicos says, for the "crime that flourished" when he ran Kosovo just after the Serbian army withdrew.

Callinicos indicts Hashim Thaci for "the crime-wave and... widespread atrocities against Kosovo's Serb minority".

Now, atrocities are atrocities — and attacks on unarmed civilians of the "wrong" ethnicity are indeed atrocities.

The Serbs in Albanian-majority areas have reason to feel insecure. And therefore? Therefore the majority Kosovars' right to self-determination is indefinitely annulled?

The question arises here: why, of all peoples in the world, including peoples in countries where there are far worse conflicts that that between the Serbs and the Albanians in Kosovo, do the Albanians in Kosovo not have the right which socialists and even decent liberals recognise for all peoples?

Well, why? Callinicos approvingly quotes a writer in the *Financial Times* predicting terrible things in an independent Kosovo: "an independent Kosovo... likely... a failed state, ethnically cleansed of all its minorities...".

Callinicos adds his own bit to that "... Thaci

and the thugs around him won't now be restrained...". The KLA warlords who run Kosovo will have "... a regime run by nationalist gangsters".

The KLA thugs and gangsters in power naturally outrage the one-time propagandist against them on behalf of the gentle and civilised humanist-minded Slobodan Milosevic!

Now, of course, guerrillas in civil wars often have many of the characteristics of gangsters. We have no brief for the KLA. Ethnic conflict, victimisation and persecution are in all conditions deplorable. But the conclusion here is that the Albanians are simply not fit to exercise self-rule.

And therefore? There should be continued UN control? (In fact a large measure of EU control over Kosovo will continue).

This is a novel approach to such questions for the SWP. And what if it were to be generalised? Why are the sort of difficulties he describes and plausibly predicts for independent Kosovo an argument for denying them self-determination?

The Provisional IRA functioned, and some of them still function, as gangsters. Callinicos favours continued British control? In which of the many other troubled places in the world do Callinicos and the SWP want UN international supervision?

Is Callinicos a closet neo-con? Well for Kosovo he is! But only for Kosovo.

What Callinicos says and seemingly advocates for Kosovo would be roundly denounced by the SWP if proposed for any other place on Earth. Kosovo is special. Albanians are — what?

This is what Callinicos says they are: "the US and European Union are rushing to back a regime run by nationalist gangsters whose independence may destabilise [the] region".

Again we ask: is he a neo-con? Or is it only in Kosovo, as must be inferred from what he writes, that he wants the old colonial power Serbia, to be restored in order to control the "gangsters" and the inextricably crime-ridden Kosovar Albanians, who plainly aren't fit to rule themselves. Those Albanians! Sheep-shaggers and thieves, most of them!

Or is it just the old SWP syndrome of using any argument that will help the case you want to make now? Yet the neo-con implications are there, unless the argument is that the Albanians are hopelessly inferior to people everywhere else.

In his time Saddam Hussein "destabilised" his region, invading Iran in 1980 and Kuwait in 1991 for example. And? Callinicos will soon publish a confession in *Socialist Worker* to say that he was wrong to oppose the intervention of the US and Britain (backed retrospectively by the UN)?

Make sense of the SWP if you can!

## New Labour calls on "the nation" to sort out youth

BY MAX MUNDAY

FROM binge drinking and the problems associated with it, to privatisation, the dumbing down of education and low paid, "flexible for the bosses" work, life under New Labour has a bit of everything bad for working class youth. At work, millions of working people are paid a pittance, and the younger you are the worse it is.

To add insult to injury the Tories, the government and the media have stepped up the crude cultural bigotry about youth, while competing to find the best solutions to their bad behaviour based on developing ever more coercive interventions. There seems to be no end to the negative categorisations of working-class youth which dehumanise individuals and transform them into either statistics (39% of young people "binge" drink) or figures of fear and ridicule ("chavs" and "hoodies").

Many of the young people who are classified as "binge" drinkers or who drink a lot, do it because they enjoy it. They get excitement and a positive "collective" feeling from drinking and being out on the streets. If that's all you've got, is it really the place of politicians to stamp down on it? The problem is the fighting and different types of crime that accompany "binge" drinking — their peers, the elderly, their parents, communities shouldn't

be subjected to violence and abusive behaviour of some youth. So what is the answer?

The Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith has some answers. She has said that the government will use many routes to change the behaviour of disorderly and drunk young people. Along with existing family interventions into "problem cases" there will be more parenting programmes, contracts committing parents to an authorised method of parenting. Schools will be made to clamp down harder on the "problem cases" — no doubt making them even more isolated from their teachers and motivated peers. Police will confiscate alcohol from young people and prosecute more of the shops that sell booze to underage customers.

In a gesture to appease those who think that policy should be more than just punishments, the Home Office has also said local services will be "more responsive" to local people and there will be more activities for young people. "More responsive" like "more choice" in the vocabulary of New Labour will probably have some privatisation, contracted-out agenda attached to it.

And recent proposals for extra curricular activities have included the training and deployment of working class youth to the Middle East on imperialist adventures — can we expect more of this in the future?

Everybody in this debate has missed (or rather ignored) the only response that will really change the status and outlook of alienated youth: the positive collective action of the youth themselves; the knowledge that as an organised class, with their peers and their communities, they can do something to change "sink estates", fight for better jobs, education and training and challenge the ever-more complex ways the authorities blame and shame them.

New Labour's policies are a diversionary tactic to pull attention away from working class self-empowerment by focussing on a "national crisis" and a "national effort".

Such a response is typical of a government that responds to fears and scare-mongering within the middle classes — be it immigration, obesity, terrorism, climate change or education — with a call for the nation to get active, for "stakeholders" together to find solutions.

But where are the young people themselves in this series of great national efforts? Who are the people representing them? Are they taking part in discussion about new home building? Are they involved in creating inspiring estates and public spaces? Or are developers given a free reign in constructing more glass-fronted, chrome-laden blocks of expensive flats?

Is the school curriculum being amended to shape education to fill the intellectual, emotional and practical needs of young people? Or are schools and colleges filling timetables with uninspiring vocational courses that pander to a stratified labour market, that separate people out into historians and hairdressers (the idea being that you cannot be both)?

New Labour poses as a neutral arbiter between competing interests in pluralist society. In fact it wants to be a bureaucratic enforcer of a morally homogenous nation.

Seeking to create from on high a "culture of respect" using a combination of family policing, the education system and shallow spin politics, can only side-step the hard underlying socio-economic issues.

They want to erect a barrier of moralism between the civilised middle class and the "swinish multitude" whilst talking abstractly and pointlessly about bringing communities together.

Working people within the labour movement should draw sobering lessons from this approach to young people: when your representatives mix utopian rhetoric with "paternalist" libertarianism, add privatisation to further distance communities from control over their homes, services and environment, you have a disastrous future for children.

# Iran's new left

The last two years have seen an upsurge of the Iranian student movement — and a sharp turn to the left, as more and more student radicals become influenced by Marxism. Since December, the Iranian government has arrested dozens of socialist students for attempting to organise demonstrations. Laura Schwartz, Sacha Ismail and Sofie Buckland spoke to Azadeh and Kaveh, two activists now living in London who were until recently active at Tehran University.

**Kaveh:** The British left seems to be in a horrible state. There are so many groups, and many of them are soft on political Islam, on Hizbollah, Hamas and Ahmedinejad. I have only found a few groups with more progressive ideas, including Workers' Liberty and HOPL. The most important thing for me is to persuade socialists in Britain to support the left in Iran.

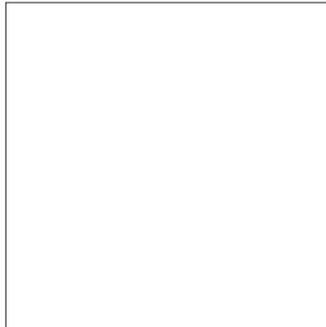
Since the collapse of the reformists [the modernising wing of the Islamist regime, who held the presidency until Ahmedinejad's election in 2005], there have been big left movements in Iran, but these have faced heavy repression, including widespread arrests and torture. Still, in Tehran University — I am not a student but my political activity was there — we had a big demonstration, perhaps 1,000, with red flags and pictures of Marx. We shouted slogans like "Freedom and equality", "No to war" and "The university is not an army garrison".

**Azadeh:** At Tehran University there was also a big demonstration to protest against an exhibition in the political science faculty celebrating the Iran-Iraq war [1980-88]. The university has many links to the military, with many military cadets, particularly in the political science department. Young members of the Revolutionary Guard [a highly trained counter-revolutionary Islamist militia] walk around the university with guns! So left activists smashed up the exhibit, pulled down the statues, burnt the flags. It was brilliant. After that they held a ceremony, but it was more like a funeral!

**K:** Student activists have been thrown in prison, and subjected to torture and immense pressure, both physical and psychological. A number have been forced to "confess" on TV.

**How did the socialist movement among students develop?**

**K:** Six years ago there were very few communists in Iran. The debate was between the conservatives and the reformists, who dominated student Islamic associations (in Iran,



Students protest against Ahmedinejad

remember, everything has to be "Islamic"!)

The reformist groups, of course, put their faith in the wing of the regime around president Khatami. Since then, many of their leaders have become disillusioned and turned to support for liberal capitalism and for the US — even, in some cases, for a US attack on Iran. One of the leaders of this group, Peyman Aref, recently declared publicly that most of the students jailed in December were Hekmatists [members of one of the wings of the split Worker-communist Party of Iran], inviting repression against them.

**A:** Yes, comrades have paid dearly for his comments. The communist movement began with a few determined activists, people like Behrooz Karimizadeh [who is now in prison following the recent demonstrations]. After a while leftist papers or bulletins, usually 12 pages, began to be published, beginning in Tehran and then spreading elsewhere — to Isfahan, cities in Kurdistan, to the north of Iran. The different groups established loose relationships with each other. That is how Freedom and Equality Seeking Students began.

**K:** The government would close the papers down, at which point they would start again with a different name. Sometimes the new paper would be ready to print in advance!

At one point, before FESS was established, some ex-reformists developed links to the Tudeh party [Iran's Stalinist party, who took a cravenly pro-Islamist line during the Iranian revolution]. Tudeh is a deeply reactionary organisation: their press ignores student protests, but, we like to say, it carries pages and pages if a mullah sneezes. Tudeh made a big deal about

Shirin Ebadi, claiming she was a model for women, despite being an Islamic nationalist who said she wanted to kiss the hands of every Iranian MP! [We pointed out that the SWP have also talked her up!]

Every June, there are student demonstrations to mark the anniversary of the 1999 protests in which Ahmed Batebi was arrested. Back then, it was mainly reformists, with a few left-wingers around the edges. By 2006, the left was strong enough to have our own demonstrations. That is how FESS came into existence.

It can't do national conferences, for obvious reasons, but it does hold events. I spoke at a big event at Tehran university on May Day this year. Sometimes we go up for walking trips in the mountains, which is the only safe place to meet free from interference!

Before FESS, most student activists were at just a few universities. Repression has done us one favour, by making us more popular!

Suddenly there were reports, posts on the internet and so on, of students campaigning "for freedom and equality" in all parts of Iran, in small towns, even in religious institutions. There is a branch at the International Qazvin Khomeini University!

**Tell us more about students in Iran.**

**K:** There are about two million students in Iran. Some are at state universities, which are free; others at private ones, where you have to pay. The University of Tehran is free. There has been a lot of privatisation in Iran, but not yet in the universities. We don't really campaign much on issues like fees — when even having a demonstration is illegal, there are more important things to worry about!

**A:** 68% of university students are women; in fact, the government has a project aiming to reduce this to 50%, as part of its attempt to privilege boys. In my political science class at Tehran University, about 70 out of 100 are women.

**K:** When I studied architecture, there 15 men and 80 women!

**A:** Yes, but there are some subjects which women are not allowed to take: 56 courses in fact. Electrical engineering, mine engineering, pilots, some areas of law.

**What sort of campaigns do you run?**

**K:** Our most important campaign is to get support for FESS, both inside Iran and internationally. We want our group to be known across the world.

**A:** We have done a lot of campaigning for women's equality. Do you know about the 1

Million Signatures campaign? [An attempt to collect 1 million signatures to amend the existing Iranian constitution to include equality for women.] I was involved in this initiative.

However, the general trend of it became to argue that there is no problem with Islam, that Islam is perfectly compatible with women's rights and that the problem is merely the current government. In Qom, which is a sort of Vatican city in Iran, many of the clergy became leaders of the campaign. As a result of these developments, many of the activists, including most of the students, left the campaign.

I would like to strongly disagree with this view of Islam and women's rights. The Koran is a book of Islamic regulations governing how people live, including the relationships between men and women. According to this book, women are property!

**K:** Maybe many individual Muslims are okay on women's rights. But we are not talking about individual religious people, we are talking about a campaign whose specific aim was to bolster the reformist wing of the regime. It looked to people like [former reformist president] Khatami, [defeated reformist presidential candidate] Moeen and even [former president] Rafsanjani. They claimed to be non-political, but of course the issue of women's rights is highly political. It was a political project, and its politics were defined by its softness on religion. The campaign would issue statements attacking the left, making clear their hostility to leftists.

**A:** Some activists, including Anoosheh Azaadbar [the jailed student Education Not for Sale has nominated for NUS Honorary Vice-President] tried to start an alternative, secular campaign, but it was not possible.

**K:** The 1 Million Signature people wanted a stage army who could be wheeled out to help them manoeuvre with the government — not an activist campaign.

**A:** I was also involved in campaigns against child labour in poor parts of Tehran, in supporting prostitutes and in a group which tried to get financial support for poorer students at Tehran University. I felt it was necessary to indicate my politics with action, not just words. Because of previous behaviour by some leftists, socialism has a bad reputation; thus I have tried to demonstrate our real values.

**Continued in the next issue of Solidarity: Kaveh and Azadeh will discuss the relationship of the students to Iran's rising workers' and women's movements.**

## Lebanon needs a left independent of Hezbollah

BY JACK STAUNTON

SEVEN people were killed on 27 January as the Lebanese army clashed with rioters in southern Beirut in the wake of a Shia demonstration. The incident has drawn the army into Lebanon's political crisis, which has seen three months of impasse as parties close to PM Fouad Siniiora squabble with Syrian-backed parties such as Amal and Hezbollah over the election of a new president.

The 27 January demonstration in Mar Makhail was called to protest about the chronic power cuts which take place in predominantly Shia districts of the Lebanese capital. The army attempted to break up the demonstration, shooting dead an Amal activist and provoking a riot which continued late into the night. As news of the shooting spread, more and more people joined in the protest, with some rioters torching cars and firing back at the troops. In nearby Ain Roumaneh, where civil war broke out in 1975, a hand grenade wounded seven people. Troops had already taken to the streets that

week in response to a general strike called by transport and agricultural unions, called in response to the rising cost of living and high fuel prices. Although the union leaderships claimed that the strike had little to do with the Amal-Hezbollah political opposition, it was clear that the pro-Western versus pro-Syrian divide had everything to do with the observance of the strike. Roads were closed and stacks of tyres were set ablaze in Shia areas where support for Hezbollah is strong, such as south Beirut, southern Lebanon and the northeastern parts of the Bekaa Valley, while there was little sign of the strike in cities such as Sidon and Tripoli where the government has stronger backing.

Communist pro-Syrian parties such as the Islamist Hezbollah and Amal have nothing to do with a workers' movement which organises the working class as a class to fight for democracy and liberation. Recognising the power of strike action to undermine the government, these parties seek to mislead workers, using them as a battering ram to achieve their own sectarian goals and give weight to their drive to take up

posts in the government. Yet in the wake of the general strike *Socialist Worker* meaningfully claimed that "among supporters of the opposition there is a frustration that the mass demonstrations that brought two million on to the streets before Christmas were not enough to topple the government, and that more radical action is necessary", failing to pose the questions of precisely who the opposition is and what radical action might constitute.

However, it is clear that Hezbollah's ability to mobilise workers behind their cause is related to the genuine economic and political grievances which much of the population experience, and even beside plainly bourgeois non-sectarian allies (such as the Free Patriotic Movement), we can see the Lebanese Communist Party lining up with Hezbollah. The Lebanese CP's website ([www.lcparty.org](http://www.lcparty.org), in French) points out that the price index has risen by 37.4% in the eighteen months since the war with Israel, while one third of Lebanese families live on the minimum wage (frozen for the last ten years) of £100 a month. Many working class areas, in particular Shia districts, lie in darkness due to the constant

power cuts.

The Lebanese Communist Party's response is uncritical support for Hezbollah and participation in the opposition, despite the fact that this is almost entirely composed of plainly bourgeois parties, many of them Shia sectarians who opposed the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the country. It has absolutely no independent working-class perspectives, and thus facilitates Hezbollah's moves to mislead the unions and workers.

It is precisely this failure — the lack of a secular left which unites workers across sectarian divides — which has led to a political situation where US allies battle with Islamists to dominate Lebanon. Strike action, although at this point badly misled and harnessed for the aims of the far-right Hezbollah movement, has however given a glimpse of what kind of power a workers' movement could have in Lebanese society. In order to build such a force, the central challenge is the fight for a democratic and secular labour movement and independent political leadership for the working class.

# Defend Orlando Chirino!

BY PABLO VELASCO

**T**HE campaign to defend sacked Venezuelan trade union leader Orlando Chirino is gathering momentum within the country as well as internationally.

A national coordinator of the National Union of Workers (UNT) and an elected official in the oil industry union Sinutrapetrol, Chirino was sacked from his job in the state-owned oil company PDVSA at the end of last year.

Chirino argues that this is an act of "discrimination and political persecution" and that the decision to sack him was based on his opposition to President Chavez's proposed constitutional reforms at the end of last year. He says the Ministry of Labor and the chavista Bolivarian Socialist Force of Workers (FSBT) are complicit in the victimisation.

Chirino has a long record as a socialist and trade union militant, leading the C-CURA rank and file grouping. His political activity pre-dates the rise of Chavez movement, when he fought the old CTV union bureaucrats. He was active in opposing the attempted coup to oust Chavez in April 2002 and involved in defending the oil industry when the oil bosses organised a lock out in 2002-2003. He became one of the leaders of the UNT in 2003 and was part of the majority pushing for elections within the federation in 2006. However he also critically supported Chavez in the presidential election in December 2006.

Chirino has received widespread support

in Venezuela. Members of the Sutiss union, who are currently in a bitter dispute with their employer the Sidor steel firm, have pledged to support his reinstatement. He has the support of the Marea Socialista current, led by Stalin Perez Borges which is prominent within C-CURA and the UNT – although it broke with Chirino over the constitutional reforms and has joined Chavez's PSUV party.

Hundreds of Latin American socialists have backed him. Since his case became known in Europe at the end of January, a number of organisations, including the LCR in France and the SWP in Britain have written letters to Chavez demanding his reinstatement. However the pro-chavista left in Britain have been largely silent – an absolute disgrace considering Chirino's record and socialist politics.

The problem for the Chavez worshippers is that that Chirino's case demonstrates once more the character of the regime from a working class point of view. Instead of ruminating about the r-r-revolutionary process in Venezuela, the left needs to look at the reality in Venezuela: the most prominent socialist and trade unionist is victimised by the state-run oil company because he wants a more independent course. Theoretically this points to the bourgeois Bonapartist character of the Chavez regime; practically it means choosing sides – Chavez or the workers' movement.

The AWL has never been in any doubt about supporting the latter. But much of the left needs to sober up – and start by making solidarity with Chirino.

## More than an apology needed

**K**EVIN Rudd, the Blair-model new Labor prime minister of Australia, has made the long-awaited official apology from Australia's government to the country's Aboriginal peoples for mistreatment over the centuries. Sam Watson, a Murri activist in Brisbane and a member of the Socialist Alliance, has commented:

"I propose that there should be a national monument erected in front of Parliament House to honor the victims..."

"Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Aboriginal Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin still haven't made any attempt to meet with the genuine leaders of the Aboriginal community. We endorse Macklin's decision to close down the National Indigenous Advisory Council, which is only a handful of Howard's puppets.

"However, the new government now needs to put into practice genuine consultation with the Aboriginal people, in order to make a real apology and to begin to right the wrongs of

the past – including offering real compensation to the Stolen Generations.

"We must reject the invasion of the Northern Territory [an imposition of almost martial law in Aboriginal communities there] by the previous [conservative] government, and any attempt to extend this intervention to Queensland or other state. We need to seriously challenge Black deaths in custody, and continued discrimination against Indigenous people in all areas of society.

"We call on the Australian people to mobilize to defend human rights in all sectors of our country, as well as internationally. Australia needs to recognize that the wealth of this society was gained from the stolen land and resources of the Indigenous people.

"Now is the time to remember this history by negotiating a Treaty to truly recognize the rights of the original people of this country, and to provide fair compensation for the theft of their land and resources".

## Taslina Nasrin threatened

**I**N India the liberal feminist Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasrin is being threatened with expulsion from India in the aftermath of Islamist protests against her criticisms of religious fundamentalism.

After violent demonstrations in November the writer, who recently released a new book *Women Have No Country*, was rushed out of her home in Kolkata (Calcutta), then taken to Rajasthan and finally a safe house in New Delhi, to which she is not allowed to invite visitors.

Nasrin has angrily criticised her treatment by the Indian government – not only have they locked her away under pressure from Islamists, but Information and Broadcasting Minister Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi says Taslima Nasreen should apologise "with her hands folded" to the Muslims of India for hurting their religious sentiments.

Instead, she wants to publish in freedom and say what she thinks, vowing to stay in India and continue to fight for women's rights.

# A new opposition in Zimbabwe

FROM A REPORT BY THE ZIMBABWEAN INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION

**O**N 8-9 February 2008, over 3,000 delegates from fifty civic groups, social movements, trade unions and the revolutionary left including 300 from the International Socialist Organisation and its allies, gathered in Harare, Zimbabwe for a convention entitled: "Reclaiming Our Future, Deciding Zimbabwe's Destiny."

The People's Convention was following up the All-Stakeholders Conference held in Bulawayo on 29 September 2007 which had rejected the secretive and exclusive Mbeki-mediated talks on Zimbabwe's future. A National Task Force was set up to meet the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations, the ruling Zanu PF and the South Africans to demand an all inclusive process, especially on the issue of a new constitution. Dialogue with the leaders of the two MDC formations failed whilst Zanu PF refused to talk.

This Convention was highly significant. The last similar event had been the February 1999, a Working People's Convention convened by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and attended by 400 delegates, which led to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

The delegates adopted the Zimbabwe Peoples Charter and a Plan of Action on the way forward. On political issues the most significant resolution was one declaring an urgent need for a new people driven constitution ratified by a referendum, before any free and fair elections could be held and that any elections held under the current constitutional framework, including the scheduled 29 March 2008 harmonised elections, were illegitimate.

The Zimbabwe Peoples Charter declares "that the neo-liberal profit driven agenda of the economy in the colonial and post-colonial periods has resulted in massive growth in social inequality.... That our national economy belongs to the people of Zimbabwe and must serve as a mechanism through which everyone shall be equally guaranteed the rights to dignity, economic and social justice and democratic control of the means of livelihood."

There was an explosive debate that nearly wrecked the Convention – calls to support Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC in 29 March elections. This was backed by some from ZCTU, Bulawayo Agenda and ZINASU and some activists. It was vigorously opposed by ISO, WOZA, the teachers union, PTUZ and many activists in the Zimbabwe Social Forum and other smaller NGOs who argued that participation would legitimise elections that the Convention had held to be illegitimate.

In the end it was agreed the Convention would not adopt any position on participation in the elections but leave the decision to individuals and organisations.

As we pointed out in *Socialist Worker*, the Convention was significant because it created "the real possibility of creating a split between organised labour and the progressive civic groups, and MDC, for the first time since 1999. One of the fundamental reasons why it has been impossible to establish an anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist united front alternative to MDC, is because of the hegemony MDC has had over organised labour and progressive civic groups... any strategy of fighting the dictatorship based on a movement dominated or controlled by the MDC will remain prisoner to the glaring ideological and strategic confusion it has shown since 2000 and is bound to fail ... its primary pre-occupation is towards reaching a sell out settlement with the Zanu PF dictatorship that will not benefit the poor and working people."

In its current form, the Convention is not the alternative radical united front. It is a

bambazonke, grouping left, radical and progressive civic groups and trade unions with right-wing ones, supporting imperialist-inspired agendas.

Another area of concern is the unclear and undemocratic leadership structures in which mass organisations have the same power as the smallest of right-wing NGO. It is a cocktail for disaster, paralysis and endless squabbles. The progressive forces will have to fight to ensure democratic and transparent control of the financial and administrative aspects of the Convention. Currently these are largely under the control of elitist or neoliberal or pro-west NGOs and organisations, many fronting the interests of imperialist powers who largely funded the Convention.

Despite the above challenges the Convention has set a very powerful platform for radical, anti-capitalist and left forces to move forward.

Finally of utmost importance was the successful resolution calling for a national day of protest before the elections to declare to the government and political parties that the March 29 elections are illegitimate.

The mass action together with the report back meetings in the various towns will provide a powerful platform for progressives, anti-capitalists and the left to learn to work together and popularise the anti-neoliberal ideological basis of the Peoples Charter. All this will lay firm foundations for a future working people's party to fight the dictatorship of Zanu PF and that of the money-bags, the capitalists.

At the same time any attempts at turning the Convention into a party immediately must be resisted, because such a party like MDC will be dominated by opportunists and money-bags. There will be need for serious debates and fights for some period after the convention, on questions of ideology and strategy as well as engagement in serious mass actions to weed out opportunists before a genuine working people's party is formed.

Starting with the national demonstration, the ISO will be at the forefront of mobilising and campaigning with other progressive groups to ensure that the right-wingers, neoliberals and imperialists do not again hijack this new project as they did with MDC.

We are therefore appealing for solidarity from the international working class and socialist movements to facilitate an effective intervention of the left in this fight.

If you are able to assist in any way or receive regular updates please get in touch with us: [iso.zim@gmail.com](mailto:iso.zim@gmail.com)

*The convention rejected calls to support Morgan Tsvangirai's "Movement for Democratic Change" in 29 March elections*

# Unexpected results in Pakistan election

BY FARYAL VELMI

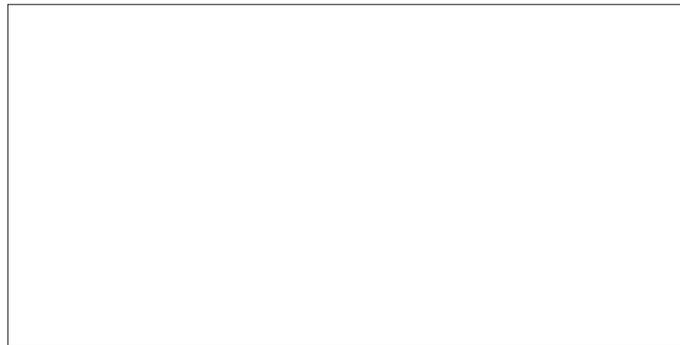
**T**HE tumultuous political scene in Pakistan, took an unexpected turn on 18 February, when President Musharraf's political party Pakistan Muslim League 'Q' took a battering in the general election.

As we go to press, unofficial results show the Pakistan People's Party, the party of assassinated ex-prime minister Benazir Bhutto, has won 86 seats out of 256 National Assembly seats. The PPP won a clear majority in the southern province of Sindh and have enough seats to rule the federal government there.

In the populous province of Punjab, Pakistan Muslim League-N led by Nawaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister deposed by Musharraf in a "bloodless coup" eight years ago, almost swept the board. Across the country, PML-N have won 65 seats.

The current ruling party PML-Q, made up of a colourful assortment of political opportunists, trailed far behind with 37 seats. However, that low figure tells only half the story. Almost unheard of in Pakistani politics, key ministers and politicians close to Musharraf lost their seats in the cull. These included PML-Q's chairman, the religious affairs minister Ejaz-Ul-Haq, son of the dictator Zia, and the outspoken railways minister, Sheik Rashid.

Musharraf's popularity has been rapidly declining for a long time, but it reached its nadir after the storming of the Red Mosque last year,



Election billboards in Pakistan

when scores of Islamists were killed, and the huge strike and protest movement of lawyers and barristers that swept the country late last year. The fact that large sections of the PPP still see a link between his government and the assassination of their leader Benazir Bhutto has further undermined the President. The rising cost of flour and the frequent electricity cuts have had caused great discontent.

The Labour Party of Pakistan, along with Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf, and the bulk of the Islamist alliance "MMA" —

together forming (shamefully in the case of the LPP) the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy — boycotted the elections. This in turn boosted the other parties. The anti-Musharraf vote was not as split as it could have been. Turnout was low, as fear of suicide bombing and violence kept people indoors. There were also signs of electoral rigging, with many people turning up to the polls expecting to vote and finding they were not registered.

The relatively secular Pashtun-nationalist party, the Awami National Party, has taken

control of the North West Frontier Province, winning 19 seats in all.

The MMA and Islamist parties have also been a loser in the elections; going down from 13 percent in 2002 general elections, to less than five percent now.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement, the party led by Edgware-dwelling exiled leader Altaf Hussein, won 19 seats, mainly in their strong hold in Karachi.

It is clear that Musharraf's grip over Pakistani politics will loosen; it is less clear what the new government will look like, and who the new prime minister will be. With a coalition between the PPP and PML-N the most likely scenario, both parties have a leadership crisis.

PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif was not permitted to stand in the election due to outstanding corruption charges and Bhutto's death has seen her unpopular husband Asif Ali Zardari ("Mr Ten Percent") become chair of the party.

Musharraf, now a civilian president, will be acutely aware that if his opponents take control of two-third of the national assembly he may be impeached. Could he do a deal with the PPP?

The tragic irony of the whole situation is that when both the PPP and the PML-N were in government they were thoroughly corrupt, nepotistic and, of course, capitalist. These old elites are bad news for the workers.

• London AWL forum: "Where is Pakistan going?" 28 February, 7.30pm, Union Tavern, 52 Lloyd Baker St, London WC1

# Cuba after Fidel: what next?

## The Chinese road?

Samuel Farber, Cuban "Third Camp" Marxist and author of *The Origins of the Cuban Revolution Reconsidered*, was interviewed about the book in US socialist journal *Against the Current* (November 2006). Here we reprint an extract with his predictions for Cuba without Castro.  
[www.solidarity-us.org/node/311](http://www.solidarity-us.org/node/311)

**T**HERE are many indications of Raúl Castro's outright support for China's direction. Visiting Shanghai in April 2005, Raúl said: There are people who are worried about the Chinese model — I'm not; China today proves another world is possible.

I find this comment obscene, in appropriating the slogan from Seattle and the global justice movement to promote the Chinese model. But it's more than statements alone: there's the role of the Cuban army, Raúl's stronghold, as a big player in joint enterprises, including the tourism industry.

You have a number of army officers who are businessmen in uniform, deeply involved in transactions with international capitalism through the Cuban armed forces. The military has also been involved in what they call "enterprise improvement" [perfeccionamiento empresarial], i.e. organizational efficiency, the kind of economic experimentation that would be consistent with the Chinese model.

Raúl of course will not move a finger so long as Fidel is active. The question will be what kind of forces will exist in Cuba both for and against this kind of direction. I believe those forces exist in embryo. So the whole relation with Washington and Miami will be entangled with the emergence of that kind of "party."

The existing small enterprise sector in Cuba has been sharply reduced since the concessions of

the 1990s. It was never that important; at one point there were up to 150,000 people licensed to operate very small independent enterprises (e.g. beauty parlors, small family restaurants, the so-called "paladares"), but now fewer.

I see it [the impetus toward authoritarian capitalism] coming from people in the army and outside civilians who are engaged in joint-venture capitalism. It's interesting here to contrast what Raúl Castro said in Shanghai in April 2005 (cited above) with an interview with Fidel Castro by Ignacio Ramonet, Spanish-born editor of *Le Monde Diplomatique*. When the topic of China came up, Fidel's answer was pure evasion.

Politically of course Fidel wasn't about to openly criticize China, but he certainly didn't praise it. So within the Cuban regime there's clearly this difference over the Chinese model. But in pointing to tendencies, one can't predict events that will be brought about by a combination of internal and external forces.

There will be people in the apparatus who will resist these changes, people who are called "Talibanes" (i.e. ideological fundamentalists) such as Felipe Perez Roque, the foreign minister, who was essentially Fidel Castro's chief of staff and became foreign minister when the previous one got into trouble. He's young, in his forties.

But I must caution that there are elements of speculation in all these things.

## No solidarity with the regime!

Dan Jakopovich, editor of *Novi Plamen* (a left-wing magazine on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia — [noviplamen.org](http://noviplamen.org)), on Cuba today.

**I**t would be sad to succumb to capitalist propaganda which characterizes today's Cuba in a chiaroscuro technique, where great progress has nonetheless been made since the fall of the

odious dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959. Free healthcare, free education (but completely state controlled), a successful literacy program, a high degree of ecological protection, interesting (although very limited) experiments with participation by the population in decision-making at the local level (in a broad authoritarian context, of course) — are all noteworthy.

## The regime insures the obedience of the population through criminal prosecutions, long and short-term detentions, mob harassment...

**M**oreover, solidarity is a natural reaction of people who know something about decades of countless forms of sabotage and terrorism, the continuing comprehensive blockade/embargo of the US, hundreds of assassination attempts on Castro etc., etc.

Solidarity with the Cuban people is fully justified — but not with the Cuban regime. Cuba is enslaved in a system of a one-party dictatorship, a political and economic monopoly of a small minority — of the party-state apparatus. Castro greatly consolidated his power through the execution of thousands of political opponents, court-martials, and brutal prisons (in which many were held without trials), as well as the suppression of free unions (which also included the killing of union organisers) and the suffocation of any type of workers' democracy. Workers are still supposed to remain silent if they do not agree.

It is less well known that there were still labor concentration camps in Cuba during the late 1960s for "social deviants" (an Orwellian term) which included, for example, homosexuals and Jehovah's Witnesses! Like other non-governmen-

tal organisations, associations for homosexual rights still lack the right to public assembly.

It should also not be forgotten that the Cuban bureaucracy rode the coattails of the monstrous Soviet Union to the very end. Such a regime, naturally, could not and cannot be excessively interested in the idea of democratic socialism and social self-management.

Even today, according to the Human Rights Watch, the regime insures the obedience of the population through criminal prosecutions, long- and short-term detentions, mob harassment, police warnings, surveillance, house arrests, travel restrictions, and politically-motivated dismissals from employment. The end result is that Cubans are systematically denied basic rights to free expression, association, assembly, privacy, movement, and due process of law." [hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/cuba12207.htm](http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/01/18/cuba12207.htm)

The Cuban regime has criminalized "enemy propaganda", the spreading of "unauthorized news" and the "defamation of patriotic symbols." Today Cuba's prisons/torture chambers (Cuba is one of the few countries that does not permit the Red Cross to inspect) hold dissidents without charges, solely because they have been denounced as dangerous for state security. The death penalty has still not been abolished. People are not permitted to leave and enter the country without official state permission. Parents are frequently not allowed to take their children with them on trips out of the country, a measure intended to prevent them from emigrating.

The victory of bureaucracy and the state marks the death to the prospects of a new society based on freedom and equality. Authentic libertarian democratic socialism must be based upon respect for the broadest human rights and democratic freedoms, for direct economic, political and social democracy (actual self-management), which also implies a pluralism of perspectives on the future (as opposed to party-state paternalism).

Until Cuba achieves this, it will remain — unfortunately — only another unsuccessful attempt at overcoming capital-relations, an attempt which drowned in a swamp of violent, authoritarian bureaucratism.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

## Good turnout for union conference

BY PAUL VERNADSKY

Around 300 trade unionists and environmental activists attended the Campaign against Climate Change (CCC) trade union conference on 9 February.

The turnout exceeded expectations and showed that there is a real interest in fighting climate change among union activists. The conference was organised by members of both sides of the Respect split (ISG and SWP) and the Green Party and backed by some union leaders. Frances O'Grady (TUC), as well as Matt Wrack (FBU), Chris Baugh (PCS), Christine Blower (NUT), Linda Newman (UCU) and Tony Kearns (CWU) spoke from the platform.

There was wide agreement that the labour movement must be central to the fight against climate change, and that this required the revival of ideas such as public ownership and workers' plans for conversion (like Lucas), as well as more immediate demands such as legal rights for trade union environmental reps.

There is undoubtedly a need for a rank and file current pushing for action on climate change within the unions and the CCC is probably the best umbrella to develop that at present. Although the final plenary passed a pretty bland motion – and, worryingly, blocked amendments from the Workers' Climate Action campaign, which would have given it more edge – there is nevertheless a basis for the campaign to go forward.

Socialists should help organise CCC fringe meetings at union conferences and propose motions for affiliation. We should also attend the 1 March organising meeting at ULU in London, when the campaign will plan its next steps. We must fight to make the campaign politically sharp, whilst being savvy enough to tackle the difficult sectors such as energy and aviation. It needs to be organisationally open and democratic, as well as representative of wide layers within the unions – preferably as delegates from labour movement bodies.

## SHELTER

## Shelter workers vote on national strike

BY A TGWU MEMBER

ON Thursday 21 February, we will find out if some 450 members of the TGWU/Unite have voted in favour of national strike action, an event which would be a first in Shelter's 41-year history.

They are faced with a package of cuts which will result in all 800+ staff working two and a half extra hours per week (unpaid) and without the current incremental pay scale which they are currently entitled to (worth £2k-£3k on top of starting salaries).

On top of this, scores of frontline advice and support staff are to be made redundant and "redeployed" into lower-paid jobs in a "new operating model", which will effectively mean that they are doing exactly the same jobs as they were before but for nearly £3000 per year less. For these staff the total payout will be nearly £5k per year, on top of below-inflation pay increases for the last two years and the 07/08 pay claim talks stalled at 2.75%.

The drive to impose these "organisational changes" on resistant staff has led Shelter management to stoop to the most verminous of tactics. Staff have been issued with a "contract variation memo" and told to sign it or have their contracts of employment terminated with an offer of re-engagement.

These bullying tactics have led to hundreds of new workers joining the union, and a definite awakening to some of the ideas of class struggle among the staff.

The result of the ballot will tell us whether the fight in Shelter will continue, and the whole of the voluntary sector, workers and bosses, will have their eye on what happens next.

## Temporary and agency workers fight

BY MICK DUNCAN

LAST week a group of cleaners at Stansted airport were told not to come to work the next day as they were no longer required. Most are from Eastern Europe and Africa. All are agency workers.

Temporary and agency workers are in a particularly precarious position. They can be hired and fired almost at will. They have no guaranteed hours or permanent contract of employment. They often work for lower wages and receive less favourable sick pay and other 'perks' than the directly-employed colleagues they work alongside. Added to this, scams and abuse such as categorising these workers as "self-employed" contractors in order to avoid holiday pay and other rights, are widespread.

Some of the workers sent packing at Stansted held contracts claiming they are self-employed contractors and tying them to the agency on pain of punitive financial penalties should they seek direct work with

the client company. They were paid less and received no company sick pay.

The Morecambe Bay cockle-pickers were a tragic example of the ruthlessness with which agency bosses will exploit. Disproportionate among these vulnerable, low-paid workers are the weaker sections of our class – young, migrant and women workers.

The Temporary and Agency Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Bill has its second reading in Parliament as we go to press. It would make these abuses illegal. It would legally require employers to offer the same terms and conditions to temporary and agency workers as the directly employed. It would also require the client employer to offer direct employment to agency workers in their employment as vacancies arise. Both the client employer and the agency would be liable for breaches. Expect the Government to do everything it can to prevent it from becoming law.

The passing of this Bill into law would be a serious step forward in fighting the super-exploitation of some of the most vulnerable

workers in society and socialists should support it. But the Bill alone will not stop the problem.

The workers at Stansted are winning their jobs back. The client has promised to start taking those who have been there a long time into direct employment. The workers are taking legal advice and can enjoy the support of their colleagues. This is because they are in a union, Unite. Their colleagues and employees of the union were able to threaten the company with press attention and demonstrations at the workplace and home of the manager who treated these workers so appallingly.

Even with this Bill as law, workers will be exploited. Only serious, industry-wide, trade union campaigning can level the playing field between temporary and agency workers and direct workers, and can drive up conditions for all. Only solidarity can enforce the current legislation and any new protection that comes in; only solidarity has the power to stop the scams and abuses currently so prevalent.

The New Labour government continues to pursue its agenda of privatisation by contracting out social care and legal aid services to the private and "third" sectors – Shelter's management want to emulate the reviled Capita (they even went to one of Capita's offices on a fact-finding mission last year) by increasing their share of legal aid contracts. But Capita provide a notoriously awful service with low paid, poorly trained staff giving bad advice while the company's shareholders rake in the profits.

Shelter's senior management have refused to deny that they have awarded themselves (with the help of Shelter's Board of Directors) huge hikes in pay at the beginning of 2007, just a few months before they announced these devastating cuts to staff pay and conditions.

This dispute may mark an important change in the voluntary sector. If workers in Shelter win, we may see more voluntary sector workers in other charities and NGOs taking on their employers to try and halt the increasing corporatisation of the sector and the onset of self-serving managerialism.

If they lose, it may give the green light to the management of other charities to push through similar changes.

Either way, we could see the voluntary sector becoming a more central frontier in the class struggle – if the battle is won, the victory will be important for all workers.

If the battle is lost, the political dead end that is charity will become yet more futile.

Shelter is an organisation that supposedly campaigns against homelessness and bad housing by providing advice on the ground and by lobbying the government to make policy changes. The irony here is that Shelter management, by attacking their staff in this way, are contributing to the same economic process that creates homelessness and bad housing in the first place.

As socialists, we must first and foremost support the workers at Shelter in fighting off this most despicable of attacks and fight against the Thatcherisation of the not-for-profit sector.

But we must also seek to involve more of these workers in "big politics", the kind of politics that seeks to alleviate social ills like homelessness by smashing their root cause – capitalism.

• For more information and a campaign leaflet see [www.workersliberty.org](http://www.workersliberty.org)

## LONDON UNDERGROUND

## Prepare to fight!

BY A TUBE WORKER

AWL tubeworkers have been arguing for some time that the unions should get on with action against casualisation and destaffing. So we are pleased that RMT and TSSA have said they will ballot. ASLEF, sadly, still deludes itself that drivers are somehow immune from

management's attacks: as if.

Union activists now need to be out talking to all workers, making sure they know the issues and the stakes. We need strong support and leadership from head offices, and we need our officials, including full-time release reps, to throw their energies into this dispute and talk it up not down. We should have a central strike committee of rank-and-file activists organising workplace canvassing, pumping out leaflets and responding to management's propaganda. We need to take our case to the public.

TSSA has started its ballot, but RMT has still not named dates. TSSA members will get strike ballot papers before RMT members, surely an unprecedented event.

Unlike TSSA, RMT has to convince drivers to vote Yes. But it seems to have decided that the best way to do this is to delay and 'buy time'. But this could be counter-productive. Delays do not always convince more workers of the need to strike. Rather, the union risks giving the message that it does not feel confident and the issues are not that urgent. But the issues are that urgent, and the union should feel confident. Even if some drivers are not yet convinced, the union should go out and convince them.

## Cleaners fight Livingstone for a living wage

BEFORE Christmas, Ken Livingstone promised to pay the "London Living Wage" of £7.20 an hour to Underground cleaners when he took over Metronet. Unsurprisingly, he has not delivered. Transport for London has delayed taking over Metronet and Livingstone has gone quiet about the pay rise.

Therefore cleaners in both the RMT and the T&G are pressing ahead with plans for a strike. Ballot papers will go out in March and cleaners should strike in April – hopefully alongside other Tube workers fighting casualisation and in time to embarrass Livingstone before London elections on May 1.

## JOB FIGHTS

## Remploy strike against closures

IN a shocking example of its free-market savagery, the Government is closing 28 of the 83 Remploy factories, which employ disabled workers to make work-wear products in a unionised workplace with union-agreed terms and conditions and rates of pay. Meanwhile, it is outsourcing more and more work, putting up "for sale" signs at factories not yet closed and using "modernisation" funds to push for voluntary redundancies at the factories that are remaining open.

On 6 and 7 February, workers at the Remploy factories in Birkenhead and Aintree went on strike against the redundancies; on 13 and 14 February they were joined by workers in York. There are further strikes planned for the 21st and 22nd, and the action will continue after that, with five further official strike ballots in the pipeline and more likely. Ballot results are expected shortly from Remploy factories in Hartlepool, St Helens, Treforest, Ystradgynlais near Swansea and Bryanmanman in South Wales.

New Labour had promised a change in policy on the closures, but quickly reneged on this. New Labour's tactics managed to prevent a majority voting for action across the whole company, but workers at the factories in Merseyside (Liverpool and Birkenhead) took the initiative and delivered huge majorities for strikes.

The Merseyside Association of Trades Union Councils has played an important role in preventing other groups of workers from crossing the picket lines at Remploy. The question now is whether whether the Remploy workers can develop the confidence to push the action further – for instance by occupying factories due for closure. This is not a strategy likely to find favour with the leaderships of the T&G and GMB; but it is hard to see what else can stop the closures. Solidarity is an urgent necessity.

• For more information and how to support the Remploy workers, see

[www.gmbremployworkers.info](http://www.gmbremployworkers.info)

## Stop Rolls-Royce closure on Merseyside!

HUNDREDS of Rolls-Royce workers and their supporters marched through Liverpool on 8 February to protest against the company's plans to close its plant in Bootle and transfer the work to the US, with the loss of 200 jobs. The Bootle workers were joined by solidarity delegations from other Rolls Royce plants including Bristol and Derby.

The plans for the closure come shortly after Rolls Royce announced £800 million in profits, up by 13% from £705 million in 2007, and promised its shareholders a 35% increase in pay outs.

The protest in Liverpool was addressed by Tony Woodley – whose record of saving jobs in the car industry is not exactly sparkling, as workers at Longbridge, Ford Dagenham, Vauxhall Luton and others sites have found out to their cost. Woodley's strategy, naturally, is to plead with Gordon Brown to find an alternative private owner for the plant.

Socialists should demand nationalisation, without a penny of compensation, under workers' control. Meanwhile, on 10 February, the workers voted almost unanimously at on-site meeting to ballot for industrial action. It will take determined strikes, backed by tactics like occupation of the factory, to prevent the closure going ahead.

# The real reasons to criticise Ken Livingstone

BY MIKE ROWLEY

THE mayor of London receives the salary of a Cabinet Minister - that is, £137,579 per annum plus expenses. The latter are bound to be high. In 2005 Livingstone went to visit the right-wing Republican Mayor of New York, Rudi Giuliani, from whom he hired the infamous Bob Kiley to oversee PFI on the Tube. Last year he went to the annual jamboree of the ultimate capitalist club, the "World Economic Forum" at Davos in Switzerland, as well as leading a "delegation of London ambassadors" to India, while highly-paid members of his staff went to Venezuela to meet Hugo Chavez. The total cost of foreign trips for the mayor and his senior staff since April 2004 is declared by Livingstone himself to be "slightly under £370,000".

John Ross of the bizarrely named Socialist Action group, Livingstone's "Director of Economic and Business Policy" responsible for selling London to capitalist investors and helping out PFI on the Tube, has been on twelve freebie trips abroad in less than three years, but ironically Mark Watts, "Principal Adviser on Climate Change", leads the field with thirteen. The Davos event takes place behind high security and various exclusion zones to combat the threat of anti-capitalist protesters - no wonder Livingstone has condemned the latter so strongly!

For all his occasional leftist rhetoric, Ken Livingstone's view on capitalism is very clear. Last year he wrote in the Blairite magazine *Prospect* that "I used to believe in a centralised state economy, but now I accept that there's no rival to the market in terms of production and distribution... There isn't a great ideological conflict any more. The business community, for example, has been almost depoliticised. [A representative of the City capitalists] came and said, 'We've all changed, it won't be like the last time, there's so much we can do together.' I didn't believe a word of it, but it turned out to be true."

So capitalism is now politically neutral! (That is, equally and uncritically accepted by all parties.) I leave it to the reader to reflect on who has really changed: the exploiters or the erstwhile leaders of opposition to them.

When ex-Red Ken says he no longer believes in reformism, he's not kidding: from supporting PFI on the Tube to urging Tube workers to cross picket lines, condemning striking firefighters and praising Maggie Thatcher for deregulating finance capital, Livingstone is now a docile representative of those forces in society that in the 70s he claimed to be spearheading the fight against.

Livingstone believes that the super-rich investors of the City are the key to London's prosperity, and ignores completely their role in pushing London's house prices out of the reach of working-class Londoners (at an average of just over £400,000 the highest in the country). Due to all the subsidies to private investors, transport fares in London are now 26% higher than in Livingstone's beloved New York.

Ken's flagship project, the 2012 Olympics, is supposedly a shining example of how private investment can "regenerate" working-class East London. But when the razzmatazz is over and the hangovers subside, the end result will be some new parks and 4,000 new houses for a total expenditure of £20,000,000,000. That's £5,000,000 per house.

According to Livingstone's spokesperson

"The chairman [sic] of the [London] Assembly has postponed the scrutiny of the Mayor's international work despite the fact that the answers to their questions had been prepared because he knew that to proceed with the sessions would have involved serious discussion about the fact that 700,000 jobs in London are employed by foreign companies or working the tourist industry".

Last year Livingstone publicly accused members of the London Assembly scrutinising his international trips of "being entirely out of touch with London's position in the modern international economy" and of "endangering Londoners' jobs and incomes". He even had the nerve to say that for him not to visit India at taxpayers' expense would be an insult to all Londoners of Indian origin!

As the above implies, Livingstone really does seem to consider himself some kind of head of state. The GLA Group maintains "embassies" in Brussels, Beijing and Shanghai, at a total annual cost of £765,000; and following his trip to India Livingstone has announced the opening of two more, in Delhi and Bombay. The policy idea here is very simple: exploiting low-paid workers.

As Livingstone himself says (letter to the Chair of the GLA, 14 February 2008) in India and China "high quality staff can be secured at substantially lower rates than in the UK or markets such as the US or Europe."

Additionally, "Think London", an agency run by the GLA to encourage investment in London by American capitalists, has an office in New York and is in the process of opening one in San Francisco. Livingstone says these offices yield high "publicity value" and even puts a number of precise figures on this value, which don't bear repeating here because such figures cannot but be plucked out of thin air.

Livingstone's presentation to the GLA explaining how he sees London's place in the world economy is worth a look for sheer mind-boggle value: see

[www.london.gov.uk/mayor/brief-for-assemblyplenary-20070117.pdf](http://www.london.gov.uk/mayor/brief-for-assemblyplenary-20070117.pdf). Starting with a triumphalist paean of praise to the City's finance capitalists, the document is an uncritical endorsement of all investment, illustrated with an amateurish little graphic with some drawings of cars, and enlivened by some sentences which don't even make sense: "London has over 60,000 foreign students the largest of any country in the world." (Is London now a country and Ken head of state?)

Of course many critics of Ken Livingstone's policies are not seriously trying to get him to "open the books" for democratic purposes, or motivated by opposition to capitalist exploitation. Livingstone seems fond of quoting the more outrageous statements of racist Tory Brian Coleman, one of the most outspoken critics of his expensive office and international ventures. This character opposed Livingstone's support for London Metropolitan University by demanding: "Why should the people of north London suffer in order to attract hundreds of foreign students? They are such a crap university they only attract foreign ones."

Criticism of Hugo Chavez's government in Venezuela, for example, must go hand in hand, indeed be motivated by, solidarity with Venezuelan workers - something in which Livingstone's Tory critics are not interested. The internationalism of capital, to which Ken Livingstone has committed himself, can only be opposed by the internationalism of the working class.

## Other left news

### Defend Tony Greenstein!

NOT a headline you'd expect to see in *Solidarity*, since Tony Greenstein has spent much of his energy, for many years, on denouncing and traducing the AWL because we support the right to self-determination for Israeli Jews as well as for the Palestinians. But read on.

Greenstein has been the most high-pitched and abusive of those who say that when AWL argues against left anti-semitism, we are just labouring an invented straw man, and de facto helping the ruling circles in Israel.

Well, now Greenstein himself - a vehement supporter of boycotting Israel, etc. etc. - has fallen foul of people on the left who take even further the idea that Israel is a nation so bad that it cannot be allowed to continue to exist.

He has been banned from the left-wing Internet network Indymedia for protesting - obstreperously, to be sure, but that is the right way to protest in such cases - at Indymedia carrying anti-semitic comments from ex-Israeli musician and SWP associate Gilad Atzmon.

Atzmon has written such things as: "We must begin to take the accusation that the Jewish people are trying to control the world very seriously... American Jewry makes any debate on whether the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' are an authentic document or a forgery irrelevant. American Jews do try to control the world, by proxy..."

But Atzmon continues to appear on Indymedia, and his obstreperous critic is banned.

"Indymedia capitulates to the anti-semites and the holocaust deniers", writes Greenstein, aptly.

He also manages to blame "the Zionists" for this... "Zionists have for so long attacked supporters of the Palestinians and anti-Zionists as anti-Semitic, that now that the real anti-Semites are coming out of the woodwork, the IM Collective, and to be fair not only them, have difficulty in telling the difference between the genuine article and the person that the Zionists have defamed".

In fact real anti-Semitism has been "out of the woodwork", and poisoning the left, primarily through the old Communist Parties, for a long time.

Protest to any Indymedia activists you know! And draw the lesson that left anti-semitism is not a "straw man".

Debate: [www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/02/14/defend-tony-greenstein](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/02/14/defend-tony-greenstein)

### Which party?

ONE of the four SWP-Respect councillors in Tower Hamlets has defected... to the Tories.

SWP-Respect issued a statement on 14 February: "We are sorry to hear that Cllr Ahmed Hussain has joined the Tories. We had discussions with him yesterday where he agreed that he was going to stay with Respect. We issued a statement saying that, in good faith, but clearly his assurances meant nothing.

"He has joined a party which supports war and privatisation, which has little representation among ethnic minorities, and which has few supporters among working class people in Tower Hamlets or anywhere else.

"This is a betrayal of the principles on which he was elected..."

The *East London Advertiser* reports:

"After being greeted like a king at Tory HQ in Millbank yesterday morning, Cllr Hussain had a sudden last minute attack of nerves sparking a day of dramatic twists and turns..."

"About an hour before he was due to inform council chief executive Martin Smith of his move, he told Tory group leader Peter Golds he needed 'more time'..."

"Respect Unity group leader Oli Rahman and SWP boss John Rees then issued a press statement in the early hours of this morning attack-

ing the Advertiser's story as "a rumour". They insisted Cllr Hussain remained firmly on their side.

"But after spending the night thinking, Cllr Hussain called the paper at 9.30am to confirm he was defecting.

"Three hours later, he met Cllr Golds and former Tory group leader Simon Rouse to sign his party membership forms, then emailed the council's chief executive shortly after.

"It means the Tories, who less than two years ago had just one councillor at Tower Hamlets, now have eight and have become the main Opposition group..."

Every left movement in history has suffered defections. But it's hard to think of a parallel.

Hussain went in the Respect split with the SWP - with the side that said it was the left, and indeed would have been the left if it had spelled out any politics instead of just whingeing about being allegedly "witch-hunted".

On Wednesday afternoon he was going to the Conservative Party. Wednesday night, he was staying with the socialist, revolutionary SWP. A few hours later... he is with the Tories.

When the former Russian revolutionary populist leader Lev Tikhomirov went over to Tsarism in 1888, soon becoming a leading right-wing journalist, at least he knew he had a lot to explain. He wrote a whole book: *Why I ceased to be a revolutionary*.

What has Hussain said to explain his defection from the cause of labour to the cause of capital? "I've signed the forms and I'm just relieved it's now all settled so I can look forward to the future."

It shows the falsity of the SWP's idea that with Respect they can build a "broad left" movement with just a few "bullet point" slogans and a puff of ballyhoo instead of clear politics.

### Charlatan backs charlatan

THE second issue of the Respect Renewal newspaper (established when the ISG stopped publishing *Socialist Resistance* and handed over its operation to Galloway) featured an article by the Great Leader announcing he would be standing for the Greater London Assembly on a "progressive" list. The article also announced his backing for the individual the headline bizarrely described as "Red Ken".

Galloway makes some limited criticisms of Livingstone (privatisation of the East London Line, support for the Met over Jean Charles de Menezes, but nothing about strike breaking or embracing City capitalists.) However, he backs him on two grounds.

Firstly, Boris Johnson and the Tories are really bad. (Yes, really!) Secondly, Livingstone's opposition to the Iraq war, his support for Latin American Stalinism and populism and "his support for Muslims" - in fact softness on Islamic communalism and Islamist reaction - makes him a "left candidate" whose defeat would be "a disaster for London and the left".

The AWL is advocating a first preference vote for Lindsey Germany of Respect/SWP, and a second preference for Livingstone on the basis that the breaking of the Labour Party's ties to the workers' movement, though now completed, may not yet be consolidated. We reject the kind of popular front politics of "Anyone but Boris" and "Good old Ken" which Galloway's article expresses with such wonderful crassness.

The politics of the "Progressive List", and even who might be on it, are left totally undefined. In addition, since Galloway was previously backing Lindsey German for mayor and has only recently discovered the pressing need to keep the Tories out, a big dose of anti-SWP sectarianism appears to be involved.

Galloway's article has sparked sharp debate in Respect Renewal, with Andy Newman of the Socialist Unity blog defending him, and Alan Thornett of the ISG replying with some very accurate criticisms of Livingstone (though he gives too much credence to the idea that he was really red in the 80s).

The AWL has many disagreements with the ISG, but this prompts us to say to them: comrades, why are you in this appalling organisation?

Between 11 and 19 February, the anti-sweat-shop campaign No Sweat organised a speaker tour with New Zealand union organiser and French union activist Axel Persson. Both have been involved in organising, unionising and fighting for the rights of — mostly young — workers in the fast food industry. This is what they had to say to a meeting in the University of London Union on Saturday 16 February.

#### AXEL PERSSON

UNION activism in the fast food industry first started up after a 2002 strike in McDonalds that lasted for over a year. About a year ago a few of us in the CGT union decided to do some serious union work in the industry. We decided that we needed at least one person in each restaurant if we were going to be successful. Given that no one was coming to the union by us leafleting outside, we decided to “colonise”, to send members in to work there.

I applied for a job at a Quick in Paris [Quick is a French fast food chain, similar to McDonalds]; it is the biggest in France with over 150 workers. I needed to let people know that someone in the restaurant was a union member. Either I could try to talk to each and every worker (and of course I tried to talk to many people) or I could produce a bulletin to get out to everyone. The bulletin option proved to be the most useful tool, providing a backbone for the union.

The bulletin’s contents related to the working conditions of the restaurant; everyone could recognise what the bulletin was talking about — this was their working life. Facts about the inadequacy of the equipment, about a manager making a racist remark, about promises on wages being renegeed on, and so on.

I produced this bulletin on my own initiative, but others in the union helped me to do it.

I started handing it out in front of the lockers, talking to people about what was in it. I also put it in each and every locker. The bulletin told the workers that the union would be operating in the workplace and if they wanted to discuss anything they could come to me.

Some of these workers had never met a union activist before, and maybe didn’t even know what purpose the union served. The first step then is to explain the role of the union, that it was there to stand up for the workers.

After a few weeks of handing out the bulletin, discussions began to multiply. People began to talk about the content, point out what was missing etc. I would suggest they should write the next article... people began to be associated with the bulletin. I was no longer the only person.

After about two months we had a group of members and union sympathisers. We decided to announce the presence of the union in a bigger, more public way. We put a union table outside the restaurant with flyers, papers, leaflets. Union activists from other fast food restaurants came along. We advertised the event to the workers inside and told people they could come along to discuss any issues they might have. Several dozen people came and talked to us. It was the start of a real union of seven people within the restaurant.

After asking people what the main demands should be, we launched a petition. The demands were better pay, better job security and more regular and predictable hours. We didn’t think the managers would cave into our demands. The petition was to help build organisation, to get names and contact details. And we wanted show the workers what the managers were about — they rejected the demands. We got about 60 signatures.

We haven’t managed yet to organise a complete walkout at my restaurant. We have organised strikes of specific groups of workers. Usually these take place between 11am and 2pm, as that is the time when 80% of the profits are made. We organised a picket line in my kitchen, to demand gloves for handling hot water.

We are not yet at the stage where we can organise a national campaign against Quick. We are still building the organisation at the grass roots.

This kind of union activity has been much more successful in southern France. This month the CGT managed to organise a 24 hour strike simultaneously at 17 McDonalds restaurants.

It is also important to address the issues that affect these young workers outside of their work. In Paris especially these workers come from the poor neighbourhoods and they face poverty, unemployment, poor housing and sometimes police harassment. Usually they end up in the fast food industry because they need the money and there are no other jobs for them. So we used more direct political propaganda to get talking to people and get into wider discussions.

A significant proportion of the workers leave after a short time. There is an extremely high turnover. They want to find something better. It has been difficult to convince people to join a union if they don’t intend to stay. That is why we make sure that the people building the union whom we rely on intend to stay there for at least six to eight months.

All of us working in fast food unionism in France agree that our activity has to be extremely dynamic, offensive, radical and directly political. If union activism has no backbone no one will see the need for it. As the saying goes, you should be “as radical as reality itself” if you want to be up to the task.

Any time strike action has happened in fast food in France it has always been very radical, pretty impressive, with demonstrations, picket lines and occupations. People don’t usually go on strike but when they do it usually lasts.

For example the first strike ever in fast food was not over pay, but a solidarity strike in defence of two sacked union activists. It lasted for a year and they won.

#### MIKE TREEN

IN 2005-6, over those two years, there was a campaign to reunite the fast food sector as well as call centres, hotels, casinos and similar industries. At the end of that campaign we had union-negotiated collective employment agreements at all of the big fast food chains: McDonalds, KFC, Burger King, Starbucks, Wendy’s and some smaller ones.

We had recruited two to three thousand fast food workers. And we had organised a major political campaign associated with the key demand for \$12 [about £5] an hour minimum wage and the abolition of youth rates for 16 and 17 year olds countrywide. From beginning of this year we will have a \$12 an hour minimum wage and the abolition of youth rates in fast food. Winning those key demands was a big issue in New Zealand’s broader political and industrial news.

Where did it all start? It was a very long way from here. In the early 1990s, the New Zealand labour movement went through a deep recession, lasting five or six years. During this period, industrial activity declined to the lowest point since records began. Union membership went from 49% of the workforce to 22%.

Industrial laws were adopted that made it very difficult for unions to organise: outlawed strikes outside the negotiating period, outlawed political strikes, outlawed solidarity strikes. It made it very difficult to access workplaces to recruit etc. It was illegal to organise industrial action for a multi-employer collective agreement.

When the law was brought in every single worker was put onto an individual agreement that was the same as their previous collective agreement, but in order for the union to be able to continue to negotiate on your behalf you had to sign an individual authorisation. It was very difficult for some unions to manage that. Many were eliminated overnight.

The central bureaucracy of the union movement capitulated completely to these changes and refused to organise broader industrial struggle, let alone a general strike, despite the fact that there was overwhelming sentiment for such a struggle and a general strike. Motions calling for it in workplaces were crushed by the bureaucracy.

The impact of the recession and the new law was intensified by the demoralising effect of this failure to resist. From that time real wages were under sustained attack. In New Zealand real wages, hourly rates, for unskilled workers declined by 25%. Real incomes for the people we represent declined by 30% or 40%.

All of the legal wage protections which stipulated overtime rates, Sunday rates and so on, went. Minimum conditions were now very limited - three weeks holiday, five days sick leave, that was about it, especially in areas where the workers were more vulnerable. The unions had no strength. Everything else had to be negotiated again. It was a stunning assault on working people.

Officially unemployment was 10% (although in real terms higher). Official unemployment for Maoris (who make up 14% of the population) was 30%, again higher in real terms. Working-class communities in south Auckland were devastated.

The free trade policies adopted by both Labour and the Tories [the New Zealand National Party] led to massive factory closures. The entire car industry was eliminated, textile industries were closed. Other industries with traditionally strong union organisation, like the meat industry, were restructured and thousands lost their jobs. There used to be four meat plants with one or two thousand workers each. There is now one plant.

# Organising young workers: it can be done!

Union bargaining became concession bargaining only. Over 15 years there was no attempt or struggle to maintain levels of income or organisation. In so far as you had a collective agreement, it was how much below inflation your settlement was going to be. It was accepted that it was going to be below inflation. There were exceptions, but in general that was it, especially in the private sector.

In the private sector levels of unionisation went down to 9%. In other countries union rates went down, but collective bargaining coverage remained very high (in Australia for example). In New Zealand that wasn’t the case at all.

Concession bargaining remained the norm until 2005. In that year things began to change. Even the more conservative unions, for instance the engineering and manufacturing union, were calling for 5% when inflation was running at 3%. This was a radical change. But it happened far too late.

From the mid-1990s there was a sustained economic recovery. It came after a decade of rising unemployment. Unemployment levels are down to 3.4% of the workforce, one of the lowest in the OECD. From 1996 the union movement should have been reorganising and rebuilding in the private sector. Unemployment was no longer the terror it had been prior to 1996.

In 1999 a Labor-Alliance [the Alliance Party was a leftish split from Labor] government changed the law on union rights. Union organisers regained access to workplaces. The unions now had the right to pursue multi-employer collective agreements through industrial action. Political and solidarity actions are still outlawed, and you can only take action in the bargaining period. But there are few other limitations. You don’t have to give notice to employers or ballot for example. In 2000, replacing striking workers with outside scabs was also outlawed. However,

there was still voluntary unionism, there was a freemarket in unions and the unions still competed for each others’ members.

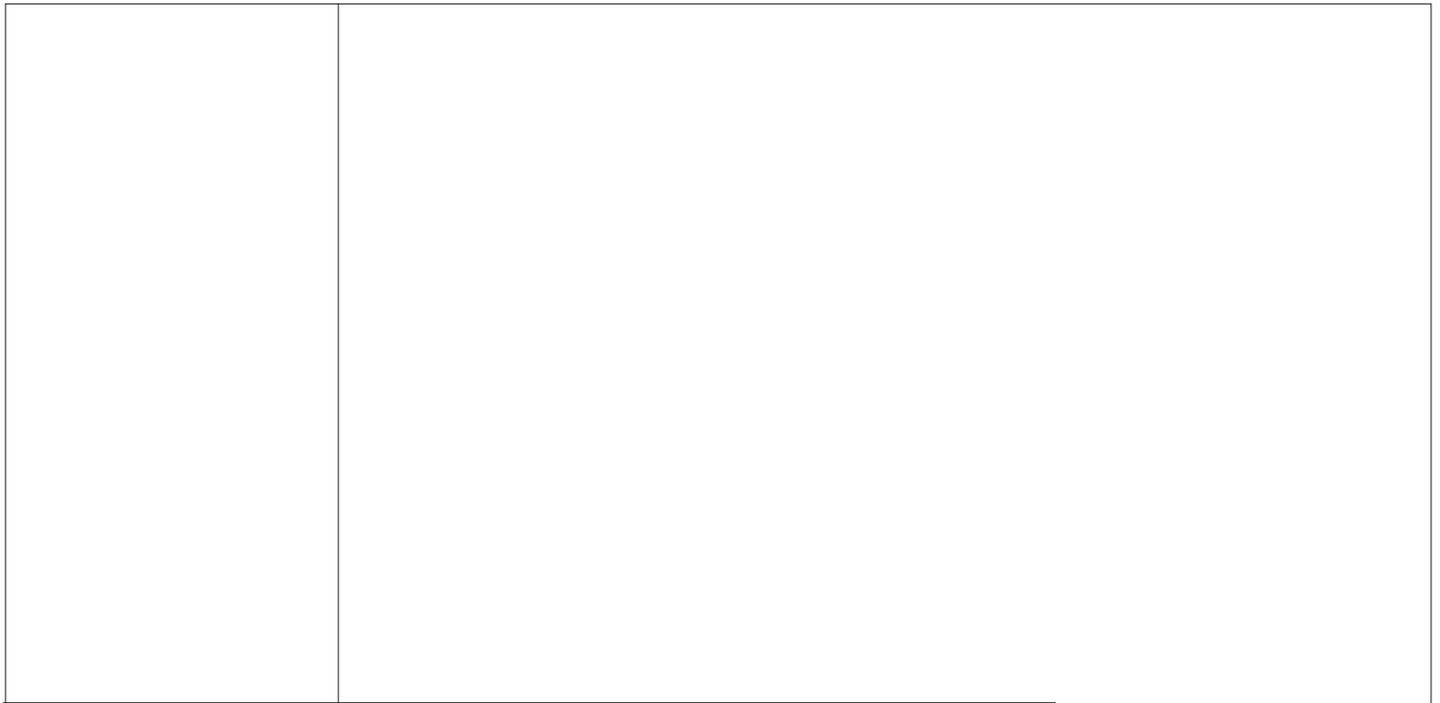
Left activists, in the Alliance Party, were bewildered by the failure of the unions to take advantage of this new law. If someone rang up a union for help, it wasn’t a recruiting opportunity. They would refuse to talk to you. If you weren’t a paying member of the union you had no rights to any support. The loss of confidence in organising workers for struggle, the cynicism involved, was total. However, more struggles began to happen in the mid-2000s, as some unions began to raise their sights.

As a consequence of the implosion of the Alliance Party [over sending troops to Afghanistan, which the left opposed] some of us were liberated from the parliamentary framework; we were able to reorient, to help to organise the people we’d claimed to be the political representatives of. We needed to re-earn the right to speak for working people. In the 2002 election the vote for the Alliance Party (now two organisations) collapsed.

Many of us still wanted to be part of a political anti-capitalist project, but we felt we had to re-earn the right to do that. One way we can do that is by seriously engaging in struggles to advance the interests of workers, through political and industrial campaigning. In some cases that involved getting jobs with existing unions.

In my and Matt McCarten’s case there was another job we wanted to do — to organise the working poor, to reunite the precarious. We decided to form a new union.

In the end we didn’t have to do that because a little union called Unite existed, with less than a hundred members, run in a voluntary capacity by Alliance Party union officials, with a broad membership clause. We were given the mandate to do an organising campaign in Auckland and an initial donation of \$500.



*Clockwise from right: Starbucks workers strike in New Zealand; a Paris McDonalds shut down by strike action; No Sweat protest for union rights outside Starbucks, Central London*

We had a gut feeling and confidence that we could do this. We did not believe young people wouldn't join a union if they were asked and we had the right now under the new law to ask them. They were on the minimum wage, and with minimal unemployment there was not much to lose even if you did stick your neck out. It would always be possible to get another job with no rights.

Surveys also said that the main reason people don't join unions everywhere in the world is that nobody asks them. That statistic applies to young people as much as anyone else.

We had no plan B. This was not play acting. We borrowed, begged, stole money to do this. We weren't new to this, of course. Matt had been a union organiser and leader of the hotel workers' union, leading a struggle to democratise it, before he became President of the Alliance Party. When Matt said he was going to do something, people took note. They gave or lent us the money we needed.

In Unite, we faced no encumbrances. No-one telling us they knew better. No one telling us about the "organising model".

I had never heard about the "organising model" until we started doing this. We were told off for not following the model that had been so successful in the previous decade in organising no one at all! It was almost like a religious mantra with some unions.

Our premise was to have a public political campaign, and that we were going to throw everything possible at the organising effort. We had three or four paid organisers, on the minimum wage. That's all. All the rest was done by volunteers.

These workers had nothing to lose. But in order to fight, they had to believe you were going to fight with them, you weren't going to be there one week and gone the next week, you were going to come back. If they were victimised you were going to protect them. If

you could show that militancy, people would rise to the occasion.

We tested it out in a couple of places, and as we had no bureaucracy involved, we could change our minds, switching things around if they didn't work.

We had a membership form which we copied off another union with all the usual personal details. One day one of our organisers, a hotel worker and volunteer, went to one of the nice hotels in Auckland to speak to the housekeepers and came back with a notebook full of names and addresses of people interested in joining the union, 60 names. We thought "if only she'd taken some membership forms."

Then we thought, hang on, all the information we want is name and address, phone and email. So our membership form became like a petition, with half dozen names per sheet. The process of signing up became more collective.

We made our fees simple. Our fees were 1% of earnings up to a maximum. We had to give people something before they started to pay. We told them we would deliver the company to the negotiating table. You don't have to pay the fees until we've got them to sit down with your representatives.

We hand over the memberships at that point. Everything is a collective process and there is no chance of victimisation. What we achieve at the negotiation is up to you we said. That depends on how many members you have, how willing you are to fight, what sort of struggle you want to organise.

A lot of people hadn't seen a union before, they didn't know what a union was. Our message was that you can't negotiate individually, you can only do it as part of a collective.

The trial in two places, two cinema complexes, was a great success. It was a very young, very casualised workforce. We signed up around 300 workers, which was pretty much everyone.

We discovered the big issues were ones involving personal dignity. These kids were given two free tickets each week, but they were taken off you for every petty infraction. If you were five minutes late, if you had a sick day, looked the wrong way at the manager, you lost your "comps". The main issue was having the tickets as a right.

We also got an extra five minutes on the paid break in the shift inserted into the contract, so that people could actually have a cup of tea, or a cigarette, or whatever. This was the first time a paid break had actually been negotiated in New Zealand for a very long time.

We also found that we could sign people up very quickly. That gave us confidence to move on.

We were never going to be able to organise trench warfare in these industries, pull people out for long periods of time. But we were going to be able to push employers into signing agreements.

We went after the brands with a public, political campaign, to humiliate them.

In May 2005 we launched a recruitment drive in against Restaurant Brands, who run Starbucks, Pizza Hut and KFC in New Zealand. They were the biggest. They had 7,000 employees, the biggest employer of young people in the country. We signed up about 1,000 members in Auckland.

We had little strikes, for a couple of hours each, in different stores, moving from store to store. This helped build confidence. But it wasn't enough. So then we did marches in Auckland, a Town Hall meeting with a broad range of speakers, a big concert in the park. But none of this was enough.

Then a group of high school students came to us and said they wanted to organise a strike of their own. They had been inspired by this campaign (and many of them worked in the stores). They wanted twenty buses, so we hired

twenty buses. They filled them! The police tried to stop them marching, but they streamed through the centre of town, stopping, sitting down and screaming outside every fast food outlet. A few days later the company called us and said they wanted to talk.

We got a deal. Security of hours, a youth rate that was 90% of the adult rate, minimum length of shifts, union rights. It was only a matter of time before we knocked over McDonalds. They fought it. They gave a pay rise to all the non-union staff, they threatened to sue workers who went on strike, they threatened to sue us; but we won. The very last was Burger King.

What was proved conclusively was that young workers will fight if they think they have a chance of winning.

During the campaign there were lots of texts and email messages going out. We did mass texting and emailing to let people know what was going on. We should have a regular electronic newsletter, that's on our agenda. Even when we do our stop-work meetings, at Sky City for example, we will do a mass text to everybody. We use it whenever we have an event.

How will we keep up the membership? We have an absolute insistence on routine visits to all of the sites. We have a monthly newspaper, which gets out to all of the sites. We also have a constant process of trying to identify delegates and get them to our regular delegates' conference. They have a role in maintaining the organisation on their site. We can keep up membership through developing a delegate structure.

Getting the supervisors in is very important. They are the people that carry the experience to pass on to new people. We are careful about formulating demands in contract negotiations that relate to that group, and each time we've negotiated we've managed to win improvements. We've not had to have strikes in this round, mostly, though there have been a few in the picture theatres.

Generally the employers know we could cause them quite a bit of difficulty if they don't negotiate seriously. So delegates are pretty proud of the union and make sure people join the union.

We have mostly kept up the membership, despite the huge turnover, so we must be doing some things right.

We are now looking at ways to get the minimum wage up to something like \$15 an hour (which is almost two thirds of the average wage). If we can do that for some groups of workers, it will help win it more generally. The next big thing is to raise the bar of the minimum wage. We need to develop a public campaign around that.

The other thing is fluctuating hours. Hours are more secure now, but not good enough; the companies are still not obliged to offer regular hours. There is still lots to be done.

# What some soldiers know

PAT YARKER REVIEWS 'HERE, BULLET' BY BRIAN TURNER

*You carry the pearls of war within you, bombs swallowed whole and saved for later. Give them to your children. Give them to your love.*

From: *Dreams From The Malaria Pills* (Barefoot)

THESE are poems out of the Iraq War. Many are located by title or sub-heading at precise places or moments on a battlefield whose contours are exactly those where civilians try to live their non-combatant lives: a city ring-road or central square, a town's backstreets, a child's bedroom, a riverbank.

Turner writes from Ashur Square in Mosul when a 2000-pound suicide-bomb is detonated, from the haunted alleys of Balad, from a US Army Forward Observation Post set up on a family's roof, from an interchange on Highway 1 in Baghdad where graffiti on the overpasses read: "I will kill you, American", from the Al Harishma weapons market and from the shade of eucalyptus trees beside the Tigris.

Brian Turner knows all these places firsthand. After taking a Masters Degree in poetry he enlisted with the US Army, served in Bosnia at the end of the millennium (about which he has written another collection of poems, as yet unpublished) and in 2004 he was deployed for a year's tour in Iraq. Turner was a Combat Team leader with the 3rd Stryker Brigade, the Arrowheads, escorting convoys through Baghdad and fighting the Battle of Mosul. All but two of the poems in this collection were written on that tour; the other two within a month of its completion.

Turner, then, was a volunteer with the imperialist occupying forces in Iraq! His poems report from the ubiquitous frontline where he is a combatant, not a journalist, an ambulance-driver or an official war-artist. Turner has said little in interviews about his decision to enlist. He cites a desire for "adventure". He acknowledges a family tradition: his infantryman grandfather fought in the Pacific in World War Two, his Russian-speaking father was a military linguist in the Cold War. He also says joining up was a quick way to repay his student loan.

Perhaps these explanations suffice, but Turner must also know that he is taking his place in another tradition, that of the writer who deliberately goes to war. The first poem in this remarkable collection carries an epigraph from a dispatch Ernest Hemingway wrote from Madrid in 1937, and Turner has acknowledged the influence of other soldier-writers (notably Tim O'Brien), as well as the example of Walt Whitman, who tended the wounded in the US Civil War.

Reading his work I thought what it might have been like to meet the trench-poetry of Sassoon or Owen in the very years it was written.

Turner has read the poetry and history of Iraq. His collection makes frequent use of quotations from the Koran, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and

several Iraqi poets. The opening poem engages directly with how English (or American English) encounters Arabic, both spoken and written, and how through that meeting matters of love, death and history are also to be worded. The Arabic word for love, *habib*, returns more than once, most poignantly at the end of the poem about the Mosul suicide-bombing. Other words and phrases in Arabic, sometimes translated and sometimes in the original, appear across the 47 poems in the collection.

To be a country's invader and occupier is also to be "invaded" and "occupied" in turn, if only by the non-lethal force of another language and the perspectives it opens into another culture and history. Turner dedicates a poem to the scribe who carved the Gilgamesh epic onto stone tablets later found at Nineveh, near present-day Mosul. He writes a poem to the tenth century physicist "Alhazen of Basra", and another to what's left of the Garden of Eden.

But three-quarters of the poems here are about death, or speak to the dead, or include the dead in some way, either individually or as a collective. How could it be otherwise? "Nothing but hurt left here./Nothing but bullets and pain" as one poem begins.

Sometimes the dead remain distinguished by their nationalities too, as if in Turner's imagination the resonance of the US decision to invade Iraq sounded on into the afterlife. He has the ghosts of dead Americans "wander the streets of Balad by night/unsure of their way home..." while from the rooftops the ghosts of dead Iraqis look down (surely in every sense) in silence.

Sometimes the dead look to comfort the grief-stricken living. In one poem they are clothed by a woman who hangs out her washing. Another poem acknowledges "an American death puts food on the table". A US private kills himself. Sixteen Iraqi policemen are vaporised. A surgeon fails to save a shrapnel-victim. The executed are hauled from the Tigris or kicked and body-bagged. A US sniper clears his mind.

Some poems are from an Iraqi perspective. In one, Iraqi men repair a bullet-riddled wall. In another Turner imagines himself a skeleton

from the Iran-Iraq war, repatriated after twenty years. In a third he evokes three moments in an Iraqi woman's day.

Accompanying its fear, slaughter and brutality Turner includes poems which present the war as surreal. Lions, giraffes, bears and pelicans run or fly free from the Baghdad zoo among military hardware. A ferris wheel "frozen by rust like a broken clock" overlooks a moment of heroism and loss. The gas-flares of Kirkuk's oilfields signal that Iraq is the roof of Hell. Anti-malaria pills generate vivid and terrible dreams. Perhaps strangest of all, there is beauty among the horrors. One poem uses the Arabic word for "beautiful" as its title, and without irony.

In others Turner's perceptiveness offers the reader something untaintedly good: "orange groves/with ice forming on the rinds of fruit", white birds rising from the Tigris on a day without bombs or panic, women harvesting salt "with buckets and bare hands". Even the Highway of Death is also "the spice road of old...where merchants/traded privet flowers and musk, aloes/honeycombs and silk..." The penultimate poem revisits the image of a caravan on the road, only now it is a vast corporate caravan of container-ships and trucks supplying the Occupation with boxes of bullets, light-bulbs and food. Turner ends this poem reflecting on other boxes, those which hold the dead and which "will not be taped and shipped/to the White House lawn... to say/if this is freedom, then we will share it."

These moments of individual perception may carry symbolic weight. Early in the collection a sergeant shoots a crane roosting above the highway. It falls "in a slow unravelling of feathers and wings", recalling Coleridge's albatross. Albatrosses themselves fly through the end of a later poem.

Writing about the remembering of war, Turner imagines Katyusha rockets landing among the veterans of a Memorial Day parade back home: "Rockets often fall/down the night sky of the skull... into the seat of memory." He writes of the bomb disposal officer "determined...to dismantle death, to take it apart/piece by piece..." Perhaps this was one of the tasks Turner set himself, or found his poems trying to do, as if his writing might provide a way for him to "dismantle" the consequences of the invasion and Occupation.

He offers no overt condemnation, and none of his poems confront US atrocities or war-crimes, far less consider directly US policy. His poems are evidence of some of the results of that policy, and of Turner's ability imaginatively and humanely to engage with what he finds. He brings his experience of the war home in plainly-worded descriptive and declarative statements, and very few images. His power comes from the authenticity of physical detail he presents precisely and often resonantly, and from the variety of ways he finds to speak of, and out of, the appalling circumstances into which his choice to enlist has led him.

Turner writes in a variety of forms, eschewing end-rhymes. One poem is set out as urgent prose, calling in a helicopter to evacuate

wounded soldiers. The title-poem addresses that bullet any soldier may believe has his or her name on. Turner has called this poem a kind of taunting of death to its face: "And I dare you to finish/what you've started." The bullet and everything it represents is always insufficient, until it finds the defiant living human: "Because here, Bullet, here is where I complete the word you bring..." Turner asserts the vitality and potential of the body alive in the here and now, even as the bullet seems to speed towards him through the poem's sixteen lines, strategically placed opposite the poem about the US sniper, the last line of which rhymes with the repeated "here" of the title poem.

In one interview Turner appears to say that the war has not been worth its cost in lives. In a poem near the end of this collection, set as he is flying out of Iraq, he writes: "What do I know/of redemption or sacrifice, what will I have/to say of the dead—that it was worth it,/that any of it made sense?/I have no words to speak of war./I never dug the graves in Talafar."

This might seem disingenuous coming at the end of a collection all of whose words speak one way or another of war. Turner points out that other soldiers experienced the war in far more devastating ways than he did. His unit did not fight in Fallujah or Talafar. He himself returns to the USA unscathed, at least physically. He has also said that compiling the collection, ordering its poems and arranging it for publication (with the publishing co-operative Alice James Books) has helped him begin to fashion some order out of the chaos he experienced.

The collection's closing poem both addresses Iraq's desert sand, and points to sand as a destination for all the ordnance and all the victims (both human and animal) of war. The compacted and strange final lines suggest that even the burden with which war stowed the unconscious may find a resting-place: "to sand/each head of cabbage unravels its leaves/the way dreams burn in the oilfires of night."

The cover of *Here, Bullet* shows a single US infantryman in desert fatigues posed in a digitised desert terrain. The soldier stands not as a conqueror, raised above the landscape, but isolated within it. He has grounded his rifle. The skyline hills or dunes run higher than the top of his helmet. He stands under the title, a target for the bullet it summons and goads, and looks at us. Perhaps he is recalling lines in Turner's poem 'What Every Soldier Should Know': "There are men who earn eighty dollars/to attack you, five thousand to kill./Small children who will play with you/old men with their talk, women who offer chai — /and any one of them/may dance over your body tomorrow."

• [www.alicejamesbooks.org](http://www.alicejamesbooks.org)

• Brian Turner will be reading at the South Bank Centre, London 20 March 2008 as part of a nationwide tour. Some of the poems from this collection are available in various forms on the net, including via YouTube and iTunes.

Brian Turner

## WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social

partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

### WE STAND FOR:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.

- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

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

# Iraq by allegory

## MATT COOPER REVIEW THERE WILL BE BLOOD

ALREADY hailed as a masterpiece, this film is one of the bookies' favourite for the Oscars, particularly for Daniel Day-Lewis's portrayal of oil man Daniel Plainview. His performance certainly dominates the film — he is central to all but two scenes in the film — and it is as subtle and understated as it is masterful.

The cinematography and look of the film are pitch perfect too, the production only being a little undermined by Johnny Greenwood's (of Radiohead) unsubtle orches-

tral score that inserts a sometimes shrill note of discordance and unsettled wrongness. That contrasts too much with Day-Lewis's much more nuanced performance.

The film is directed — and written with real flair — by P T Anderson, previously best known for his 1999 film *Magnolia*.

The story is entirely focussed on Plainview, from his time as lone prospector for gold in the 1890s, to his end as a reclusive millionaire at the end of the 1920s. From the start he is driven by success, dragging himself with a broken leg for miles not to seek treatment, but to register a claim at the assize office. What becomes evident very quickly is that Plainview is a heartless individualist driven

not only by his need to be rich, but as he himself explains, a need to see everyone else fail.

Plainview's show of concern for others are exactly that, performances, something that allows him to see through Ely Sunday (Paul Dano), an evangelic preacher in the community which lives on top of the oil, the people whom Plainview cheats to make himself rich.

It is these two elements, the quest for wealth through oil and the corruption of religion, that are the heart of the film. What little humanity there is in Plainview's heart is burnt out by his greed. When facing a choice between his son HW (Dillon Frazier) and oil, he chooses oil. (One of the subtexts of the film is that it is

Plainview's lack of family and community that has led to his greed and antipathy towards humanity, although even here Plainview is fixated with his own "blood", looking for people embodying something of himself.)

The church offers neither salvation for Plainview nor any meaningful community resistance to him, but offers to sell its blessing like medieval indulgences. In the person of Ely, the church fixated by the wealth that oil brings.

All of this adds up to a very good film, a depiction of the lust for oil and the futility of religion. Very timely at the end of Bush's presidency.

But, and this is a very big but, whatever the subtleties of Day-Lewis's acting, his role has been written as a one dimensional monster. To become rich Plainview has to be callous to everyone, and in becoming rich he becomes ever worse. Plainview is an entirely allegorical character, more like Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now!* than Kane in *Citizen Kane*.

It is worth comparing the film to the novel *Oil!* by the American socialist Upton Sinclair on which the film is very loosely based. Of course a film has to be much briefer than a book, and it is always unfair for a film to be chastised for not doing all a book can, but there are two central and important elements to the book missing in the film.

In the book the oil man (J Arnold Ross) is a family man, and this makes his amoral search for profit all the starker; he is not a monster driven by his own moral failure but by a system that puts profit before humanity. Also in Sinclair's version there is resistance, the oil workers (who in the film are sweaty industrial eye-candy) are unionised, strike and struggle against their exploitation. Most importantly, Ely's brother Paul is a communist agitator.

It is understandable that a film made in the USA in 2008 sees only a futile dance of selfish struggle and embrace between capital and church, but reading Sinclair's book will leave you with a feeling that the film could do so much more.

All this said, *There will be Blood* remains a very good film. A much better film than some other Hollywood reactions to the war in Iraq (Robert Redford's *Lions for Lambs* being perhaps the worst example). Those films that tackle the subject tangentially do best — another example is Paul Haggis's *In the country of Elah* — as they ask the audience to think rather than telling them what to think.

Upton Sinclair's *Oil!* is still in print (available in the newly packaged movie tie-in Penguin edition at an inflated £8.99). After you've seen the film you might wish to read the book too.

## PETER BURTON CONTINUES A HISTORY OF THE BLUES

BEGINNING around the First World War, millions of black US Southerners moved north to cities like Chicago, Detroit, and New York. Known as the Great Migration, this population movement changed the course of American history. People left the South to escape the oppressive racist system, but also, and more importantly, because of the job opportunities and promise of economic security in Northern cities.

Blind Blake sang about getting a job at Mr Ford's place in *Detroit Bound Blues*. Jobs in the automotive industry were an important factor pulling African-Americans to Detroit. And cars and trains provided transportation to the North. Many from Alabama headed to Detroit via railroad. And many from Mississippi and Tennessee headed to Chicago. From Georgia and the Carolinas, they went to DC or New York. The route of the migration patterns was often identical to that of the large railroad lines.

Tennessee native Bessie Smith sang about missing her man who had caught the train to Chicago in her song *Chicago Bound Blues*. In this song, she references the *Chicago Defender* newspaper. The *Defender* actively encouraged African-Americans in the South to come to Northern cities and was very successful at recruiting wage labour for Chicago's industries.

Though the traffic of the "Great Migration" was largely one way, at times economic opportunity dictated a return down south (in recent years moving back down has become even more common). In 1948, Roosevelt Sykes sang of a time when cotton prices made

# Migration blues

working in the Southern fields more profitable than the Northern factories.

Between the entire period 1914-1950 in several waves, millions of black Southerners arrived in Northern cities. The transition from the acoustic Delta blues of the 20s and 30s to electric Chicago blues is one of the easily observable musical manifestations of the Great Migration. But the migration changed more than music, it changed race relations, economics, and living conditions for millions. Blues musicians were some of the best observers of their own lives and the changes in the world around them.

## BONUS BLUES

THE earliest recorded blues were made in the wake of the First World War. It's tough to know how many blues musicians served in the armed forces, but the war was clearly a formative experience for many. Every veteran of the Great War was promised a pension that includes \$1 for every day served on the home front and \$1.25 for every day served overseas. The fight to actually receive this money would turn into one of the most important experiences of the Great Depression and inspire several blues songs.

From 1929, Congress had reviewed the bonus situation several times and in 1932 a

bill to allow immediate payment passed in Congress, but not in the Senate. In 1932, a Veterans' Bonus Army known as the Bonus Expeditionary Force (in an echo of the American Expeditionary Force that served in Europe) had marched on Washington to demand payment. Black and white soldiers came from all over the country and formed integrated camps in south-east Washington along the Anacostia River. The veterans' camp presented a stark contrast to the strictly segregated units the soldiers had served in during the war as well as to the still segregated streets of Washington D.C.

After the defeat of the Bonus Bill, President Hoover ordered the camp of the Bonus Army be disbanded. General Douglas MacArthur led the effort to burn down the camp and force the veteran's army out of the city. The images of the standing army attacking veterans from its own ranks were printed in newspapers across the country, cementing national anger with the Hoover administration, and creating great sympathy for the veterans.

After being cleared out in 1932, the veterans continued their campaign to receive the bonus money including additional marches on Washington that had vast public support. The Government continued to resist immediate payment, citing concern about the effects of

the huge expenditure on the economy. The veterans were finally successful in 1936. A bill to allow bonds to be cashed whenever the veteran chose passed over President Roosevelt's veto.

Joe Pullum may have been the first blues singer to reference the bonus in his 1934 song *Black Gal What Makes Your Head So Hard?* At that time the bonus money was available only in the form of bonds that could not be cashed out until 1945. Many veterans were able to capitalise on the bonuses through loans, but that entailed paying interest. That's what Joe Pullum referred to when he sang about having his bonus money. Joe Pullum eventually recorded several more songs that reference the bonus including *Bonus Blues* in 1936.

Most of the blues songs that address the bonus talk about how the money will be spent when they finally get it. These include songs by Carl Martin, Peetie Wheatstraw, and others. The political issues are referenced indirectly as they often are in blues songs.

## LIVING IN A VIOLENT WORLD

BLUES musicians of the 1920s and 30s existed in a violent world. Fights were common and it was usual to carry a weapon, a gun even, and to keep an eye open for the quickest way to get off the stage and out of the building. Some blues musicians still exist in this kind of world, and it's common to other musical worlds. It was reflected in the music. Will Shade recorded *She Stabbed me with an Ice Pick* in 1928.

Carrying a weapon was seen as an essential part of life for many blues musicians dealing with rough crowds and tough situations and "self-defence" murders by bluesmen, fighting jealous husbands were common in the 1920s.

# The tragedy of Pierre Lambert

**Pierre Lambert, long-time leader of what was once the most prominent Trotskyist organisation in France, died on 16 January aged 87. David Broder assess his political life and the organisation he founded.**

**P**IERRE LAMBERT was in his time one of those “orthodox Trotskyists” who kept a banner of anti-Stalinist revolutionary Marxism flying in the worst years of Cold War and declining class struggle.

They tried — incoherently, but they tried — to resist the move of most “orthodox Trotskyists”, in the early 1950s, to see the Stalinist parties as the “owners” of all short-term revolutionary possibilities; they tried to sustain the idea of building an independent revolutionary working-class party against both capitalism and Stalinism.

Today the “Lambertist” organisation, now known as the Parti des Travailleurs (“Workers’ Party”), is a shadow of its former self. It has lost the thousands-strong activist base which Lambert won in the 1970s; it retains only some cranky ideas and a bureaucratic internal regime to remind Lambert’s disciples of what once was. The death of the sect-leader Lambert is far less sad than the tale of those who followed him, committed revolutionaries who acquiesced to the rule of a petty tyrant and his coterie in the belief that they were contributing to the cause of socialism and the liberation of humanity, and were politically destroyed and demoralised by the experience.

Lambert’s early record was rather better. Having joined the Trotskyist movement in 1939, Lambert was arrested in the early months of the Second World War and sentenced to a year in prison for his “anti-militarist” attitude to the French government. Escaping en route to prison, Lambert joined Henri Molinier’s La Commune group, but was soon expelled due to his hostility to the organisation’s efforts to win supporters from the Nazi-collaborationist Rassemblement National Populaire.

In 1943 Lambert joined the Parti Ouvrier Internationaliste, which the following year merged into the Parti Communiste Internationaliste (PCI), an ancestor not just of the Parti des Travailleurs but also of another current French Trotskyist group, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire.

By the end of the Nazi occupation, there were maybe three hundred Trotskyists in the PCI in France. These activists attempted to organise unrest in industry as well as promote working-class internationalism, using the slogan “behind every Nazi soldier is a German worker!” to combat the French chauvinist ideas of the Kremlin-backed Parti Communiste Français, whose watchword was “everyone kill a German”. Facing tough

circumstances, the PCI mounted a heroic effort to propagandise for socialism among the German troops, organising the clandestine production and distribution of a newspaper *Arbeiter und Soldat* (“Worker and Soldier”). No doubt, the PCI bent the stick too far with its June 1944 claim that the Normandy landings would see no improvement over the rule of the fascist Vichy government. It took a while before they could recognise that bourgeois democracy was in fact being restored in France. They hoped that the end of the Second World War would end with a revolutionary wave akin to the struggles of 1917-1923 proved to be naive. Nonetheless the group had a firm orientation to working-class political independence.

That was more than could be said for the Parti Communiste Français which allied itself to Charles de Gaulle and served in a cross-class government after the end of the war. Among many Communist Party crimes in this period perhaps the most ignominious was its complicity in the bombing of Sétif in Algeria — overseen by its Minister of Aviation, Tillon — which left 45,000 dead. The Trotskyists supported national liberation movements in France’s colonies — for example organising Marseilles dockers not to load arms into boats headed for Indochina.

But the CP’s patriotic aura from the Resistance, and the great prestige of the Soviet Union, assured it a dominant role in the working-class movement, with over a million members and near-monopoly control of the apparatus of the largest union federation, the Confédération Générale du Travail.

Pierre Lambert became the central trade union organiser for the PCI, which grew to about 1000 members by 1947.

The PCI was divided. Yvan Craipeau, Paul Parisot, Albert Demaziere were influenced by the arguments of the American Trotskyist Felix Morrow, who called for less declamatory revolutionism, more attention to concrete political demands including simple democratic demands, and more recognition of the realities of relative bourgeois stabilisation. They hoped to build a broad party by merging with the left-moving youth of the social-democratic SFIO.

A minority, led by Pierre Frank, Marcel Bleibtreu, and others, denounced Craipeau’s group as “right wing”. Lambert was not a major figure in these political battles.

Since 1944 the CP had been able to prevent almost all strike action. In April-May 1947 the dam broke, in a big strike at the Renault Billancourt car factory. Trotskyists played a big role in this; Pierre Bois, a member of a forerunner group of today’s Lutte Ouvrière was a strike leader, and PCI members were also active at Renault.

The Communist Party left the government coalition. In

November-December 1947 the CP launched a big strike wave, but pretty much as a political gambit to counter the harder attitude De Gaulle and the bourgeois parties were taking to the CP with the development of the Cold War.

The right wing in the CGT, with CIA backing — and a fair number of left-wingers, too, including anarcho-syndicalists — split from the CGT to form a new confederation, Force Ouvrière.

At first the rise in strikes encouraged the PCI. The “left wing” of Frank and Bleibtreu won a majority at the November 1947 congress of the PCI. Agitation to “build the revolutionary party” became more strident.

The strikes, however, were the start not of a real rise in working-class self-assertion, but of the dark years of the Cold War. The Communist Party waged war on all Trotskyists and independent minded revolutionaries in the labour movement, hounding its opponents out of the CGT, breaking up meetings and perpetrating physical assaults.

In early 1948 the PCI suffered a major collapse. Its weekly paper stopped appearing after 16 April 1948; it resumed regular publication, and then in diminished format, only from November, with just three issues published in the interim.

Most of the left wing Socialist Party youth went into to Jean-Paul Sartre’s short-lived Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire; so did many of the Craipeau wing of the PCI. Two smaller groups in the PCI who believed the Soviet Union to be state capitalist also left.

The rump PCI struggled to reorient itself in a world that was developing in a way completely different from what they had expected.

For a while, activity with the “Titoites” — supporters of the Tito regime in Yugoslavia, which had fallen out with Stalin in summer 1948 — appeared to offer the PCI a way out. Like many Trotskyists, Lambert had been expelled from the CGT in 1950. He started work in Force Ouvrière, and, helped by funds from the Yugoslav embassy, was able to start a newsletter advocating trade-union unity on a democratic basis. The PCI also organised some 3000 volunteers to go to Yugoslavia in work brigades.

But all that was based on gross illusions about the nature of the Tito regime; ended embarrassedly when Tito backed the USA in the Korean war; and anyway brought the PCI little profit.

Michel Pablo, the main international leader of “orthodox Trotskyism”, started to argue that a Third World War between the USA and the Stalinist bloc was imminent and certain; that in that war, the Communist Parties would be forced into a “roughly revolutionary orientation against capitalism”; and that

## LETTERS

### The catatrophist mindset

**A** FOOTNOTE to Pat Longman’s review of *The Shock Doctrine* (*Solidarity* 3-126). Capitalism has always been full of “hard-faced men who did well out of the war” — or out of whatever recent disaster may have thrown society off balance.

It may well be that since the early 1990s the governing circles of capital have become more triumphalist, less concerned for stability, more confident about plunging into crises with the belief that the gains in terms of subsequent “restructuring” will outweigh the losses.

George W Bush’s invasion of Iraq — a project plainly deemed a crazy excess by the top people in the USA when ideologues like Paul Wolfowitz mooted it in the late 1990s — and the subsequent measures by Paul Bremer like disbanding the Iraqi army and police, decreeing a flat-rate tax, and announcing that almost everything was up to be privatised, are a case in point.

But, as Alexander Cockburn points out in a review which, to my mind, makes many other convincing critical points about Naomi Klein’s book, “‘shock and awe’ was a bust”. It didn’t work for Bush and his friends.

Catastrophes are not sure-fire winners for capital. As Pat hints in her review, workers and the left are not “always destined to be victims” in catastrophes. Sometimes it’s the rich who come out much worse.

Cockburn argues cogently that Klein’s book is shaped by the syndrome where “leftists deem capitalism invincible and fearfully lob copious documentation at each other detailing the efficient devility of the executives of the system. The internet serves to amplify this pervasive funk into a catatrophist mindset”.

In fact, Klein seems to be only one step short of the quite-pervasive thinking on the left which holds the US ruling class to be so hideously omnipotent that almost everything that

happens is a scheme secretly calculated to the advantage of that class (and, for those with those mindset, of Israel). Thus the disconcertingly huge influence of “9/11” conspiracy theories.

Martin Thomas

### Honest accounting on nuclear

**I**S this *Solidarity* or *Green World* that I’m reading?

According to Stuart Jordan (24 Jan), whatever the answer to climate change is, it’s not nuclear power! Nuclear plants are always late and over budget, unlike anything else.

Apparently, uranium would run out in 10 years, a fact that had escaped the companies that are keen to build and run new power stations. So why is Gordon Brown keen on nuclear? Because his brother is a “lobbyist” for EDF!

Of course!

Instead, we need “a massive investment in renewables, energy storage and carbon capture technology”, with “a giant international supergrid covering Europe and North Africa”, all by 2017. Am I the only reader who finds this difficult to credit. Just consider how many off-shore wind turbines we would need, with their massive concrete bases destroying the undersea habitat, not to mention the quarrying necessary for the limestone. Tidal barrage across the Severn? Another habitat destroyed for temporary gain (until the river silted up).

Meanwhile, nuclear power is the safest form of power generation and has minimal effect on the environment. “What?! Are you mad?”, I hear people say. “Didn’t we read Paul Vernadsky (*Solidarity*, Debate, 13 October) saying that ‘nuclear power is dangerous, expensive and unnecessary’?”

Consider this. The worst nuclear disaster in the world, Chernobyl, killed less than 60 people (under 50 emergency workers exposed to high radiation levels and 9 fatalities from thyroid cancer). Undoubtedly, there will have been other

cancers caused by radiation escapes but these are almost undetectable amid the millions of cancers occurring “normally” (about one third of people contract cancer at some time).

60 plus deaths — that doesn’t sound too good. But now consider this. 100 coalminers died in October in a mine explosion in Ukraine, in the prime of life. Several hundred have died in Ukraine’s mines since the Chernobyl accident in 1986. In China’s mines, more people die in a week than were killed by Chernobyl (some 4,000 per annum). In UK, more people die from miners’ lung (a legacy of UK’s defunct coal industry) every three months than were killed at Chernobyl.

This is just one aspect of the damage caused by one part of the fossil fuel industry: there’s also acid rain, particulate pollution, asthma, and so on, before we even reach global warming.

OK, you say, but why not just replace fossil fuel power with renewable energy? Well, if only it were that simple. The most proven form of renewable energy is hydroelectric. Like all forms of energy generation, this has negative, as well as positive, effects. Habitats and livelihoods can be destroyed (look at the Three Gorges project in China) and thousands of lives threatened in dam collapses, while silting reduces their efficiency (Aswan Dam in Egypt).

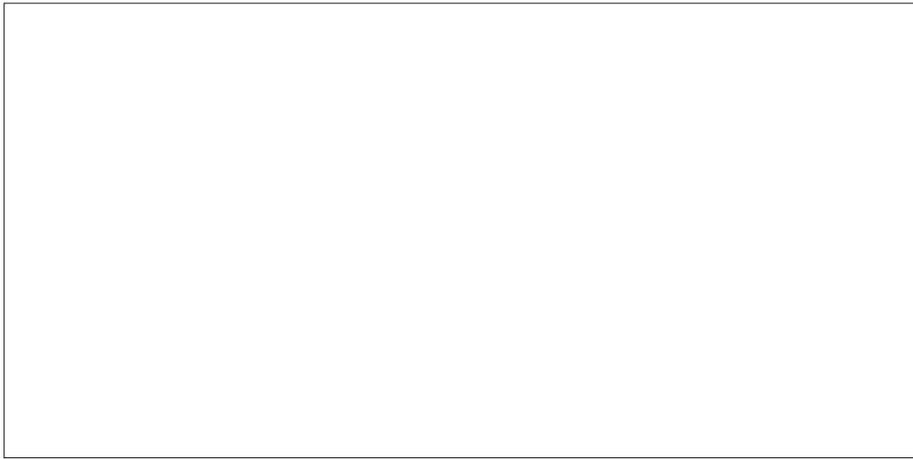
Of course, we need answers to the (greatly overstated) problem of nuclear waste. Suitable underground storage sites exist but scaremongering stories make these unacceptable at the moment. A better option would be to generate less with better reactor designs and to “burn up” existing waste in a new form of reactor that runs on the plentiful element thorium. This process is called Accelerated Transmutation of Waste and could also be used to turn our arsenal of atom bombs into useful energy.

Stocks of uranium probably amount to decades’ worth, even without new discoveries, while fast breeder reactors could convert the 99% of uranium which is presently useless into plutonium. Hundreds of years’ worth of thorium exists.

Nuclear accidents, at present extremely rare, could be made almost non-existent with fail-safe thorium reactors. These do not have a chain reaction and could be simply halted by the flick of a switch.

Yes, we need renewable energy as well, but this comes at a price. Let’s do the sums honestly.

Les Hearn



Students march on the striking Renault factory in Boulogne-Billancourt, May 1968

Trotskyists should therefore join the Communist Parties.

Bleibtreu and others criticised Pablo (though, in hindsight, very insufficiently: their attitude to Tito and Mao was no more critical than Pablo's). They rejected Pablo's notion that world politics was defined by the two "blobs", US imperialism and Stalinism; they contested Pablo's ideas that there was no point in opposing World War Three and that in any case nothing of any significance could be done before World War Three.

Lambert still played little role in the theoretical debates. But he tended towards Bleibtreu, who had a majority in the PCI. And then in early 1952 Pablo instructed the PCI to send most of its activists into the French Communist Party.

The PCI readily agreed to send a limited number of people in to do "fraction work" within the CP. Pablo insisted that the PCI must send its leading activists in, even if they would have to make grovelling denunciations of their Trotskyist "past" in order to gain entry — and, of course, in those days of high Stalinism, they would have to.

The PCI split. A majority, maybe 150 as compared to the thousand members of 1947, defied Pablo. A couple of dozen, with Frank, complied. Lambert, with his trade union work relying on networks in Force Ouvrière, went with Bleibtreu.

Lambert was still not the "leader" of the group. Over the next three years or so, he became that. The "theoreticians", Bleibtreu, Michel Lequenne, Jacques Danos, Marcel Gibelin, were forced out between 1953 and 1955.

From all accounts, this was not just a matter of Lambert being authoritarian. Bleibtreu and the others were demoralised and disoriented. They were flummoxed, and understandably so, by the way the world had turned out.

Lambert had no better theories. But he did have ideas about what to do, organisational talent and energy to make them happen, and a temperament that left him not too bothered about the theoretical issues.

Lambert developed contacts among left wingers in Force Ouvrière and in the Socialist Party, and in the wing of the Algerian independence movement led by Messali Hadj. Operationally, in the mid 50s, the Lambert group became almost a variety of anarcho-syndicalism.

Its paper *La Vérité* had headlines like: "The odious comedy of elections will change nothing. Let's prepare the struggle for power!" (16 December 1955); "General strike for bread and peace" (28 September 1956 and against 19 September 1957); "War and poverty or socialist revolution" (27 December 1956); and "The general strike can win 10,000 francs increase for all and peace in Algeria" (17 October 1957). Week after week it hammered away on the call for troops out of Algeria, wage increases, and a general strike to win them.

1958 brought a sudden shock and a drastic shift in orientation. In May 1958, General De Gaulle was brought back to power by a military coup, executed by the army in Algeria. He abolished the old parliamentary constitution and set up a new presidential "Fifth Republic". As it turned out, De Gaulle would retain an essentially bourgeois-democratic regime rather than going further, and concede independence to Algeria; but many leftists thought they faced a military dictatorship.

Meanwhile, Messali Hadj's movement was eclipsed by the rival Algerian-nationalist FLN, and moved towards compromise with De Gaulle.

Dismayed, the Lambertists shut down their weekly paper, declaring that "It is not slogans for action, which is impossible for now, that the vanguard workers need today". In the modest duplicated bulletin they started to replace it, they wrote: "The working class today is incapable of intervening as such in political struggles".

A heavy stress on defensive demands, on the "workers' united front", and on deep burrowing within trade-union officialdom, came to be the hallmarks of the Lambert group.

They developed extensive contacts within the world of freemasonry and a habit of having "undercover" members in the most unlikely places. Lionel Jospin, who would eventually become Socialist Party prime minister, turns out to have been still being paying dues to the Lambertist group as late as 1987, when Jospin was already a well-integrated part of the inner circle around Socialist Party president François Mitterrand.

THE 1952 SPLIT in the PCI merged into an international split in "orthodox Trotskyism" in 1953. Lambert joined a new international network with Gerry Healy in Britain

and James P Cannon and the Socialist Workers' Party in the USA. They were known as the International Committee of the Fourth International.

In 1963 Healy's and Lambert's groups separated from the Americans. In 1970 Lambert would split from Healy, rejecting the British group's increasingly manic ultra-leftism; but by the 1960s Lambert's group, in its internal organisation, had become much like Healy's.

There was a culture of top-down control, rather than of democracy. More and more, everything was centred round Lambert's efforts to build a strong organisational machine and to establish a network of contacts and influence around by bending the ears of people in prominent positions. At the end, all the general secretaries of Force Ouvrière for the last forty years felt obliged to honour Lambert by attending his funeral.

Lambert's most famous ally was Alexandre Hébert. Hébert, a self-proclaimed anarcho-syndicalist, was operationally a careerist bureaucrat and the little Napoleon of the Force Ouvrière union in Loire-Atlantique from 1947 until 1992 (now succeeded by his own son, Patrick!). Moreover, as I discovered when I interviewed Hébert in researching a study of May 1968, his attitudes to immigrants are racist. In 1995, he contributed to Jean-Marie Le Pen's paper *Français d'abord* ("The French first"), outlining his hostility towards immigrants. Hébert and his periphery joined the Parti des Travailleurs.

From the early 1960s, the Lambert group grew again. It had won over a very slow trickle of discontented CPers and well-known intellectuals such as the historians Jean-Jacques Marie and Pierre Broué. It grew seriously among students, and began to copy the Healy view that its sect was the revolutionary party in embryo. The most startling example was the group's attitude towards the student movements of the late 1960s and the general strike of May-June 1968.

DESPITE the low ebb of the workers' movement, the years leading up to "May '68" saw a rise in student activism, with questions such as the Fouchet plan's technocratic reorganisation of the education system, war in Vietnam, and sexual radicalism feeding a burgeoning movement.

The Lambertists' CLER was the largest student organisation to the left of the Communist Party. It favoured basic bread-and-butter student unionism and stressed that building their own organisation was the best way of fighting the Fouchet reforms. The sexual revolution was very much off the agenda of this group! Eschewing meaningful engagement in anti-war activity with the youth group JCR (close to the mainstream Fourth International) or the Maoist youth, the UJCM, the CLER invited the Lambertists in industry and arranged a panoply of "action committees", "co-ordination committees" and "committees for struggle" which were in reality very shallow fronts for their own organisation. CLER was however (of course!) interested in taking positions in the bureaucracy of the students' union UNEF!

Over the winter of 1967-1968, as Strasbourg and Nantes universities and the Nanterre Faculty of Paris University saw rising waves of student activism, including anti-war demonstrations, occupying halls of residence in protest against gender segregation, and large student strikes, the Lambertists focused their efforts on building a rally of their own members and periphery, looking to galvanise their "party" rather than agitate in broader movements.

The January/February 1968 issue of the CLER newspaper *Révoltes* carried a call for "a rally of 3,500 youth at the Mutualité on the 29-30 June", and articles on both domestic and international politics ended with a call for activists to attend this event, as if it were some catch-all solution. The next month, the April issue of *Révoltes*, had the same theme. One might have assumed that the plans for a rally like this would have been shelved in early May, when protests leading to the occupation of the Sorbonne by police, street battles which pitched students and young workers against the riot cops and anger at the victimisation of student activists signified great unrest among the student population. Even if other groups had played a greater role in setting events in motion than the Lambertists, a revolutionary organisation worth its salt would have wanted to get involved in the struggle. Yet Lambert's group abstained.

The most notable flashpoint came on the evening of 10 May 1968, when a demonstration of students, lycée pupils and young workers through Paris, protesting against the police occupation

of the Sorbonne, met with lines of riot police and blockades in the Latin Quarter. After several days of skirmishes and small clashes, both sides were spoiling for a fight. The demonstrators levered up cobblestones, benches and street signs to construct some sixty barricades, with eight-foot paving slabs for foundations.

Twenty thousand people stood their ground against police aggression, piling up branches, petrol-soaked pieces of wood and even cars to fend off a police attack. The JCR occupied a flat as a command base and communicated to activists over the radio. But where were the Lambertists?

Having refused to cancel a planned "vanguard" meeting at the Mutualité to organise the demonstration for 13 May, the Lambertists' five hundred-strong contingent did not reach the Latin Quarter until one in the morning, marching up to the barricades in close formation and holding red banners aloft. Upon their arrival on the front line the group's leaders grandly announced to the protestors that they refused to "risk the necks of the revolutionary vanguard" in a supposedly pointless fight, and — calling upon the students to "disperse and organise strike committees" — promptly marched away again. *Révoltes* explained that "without the revolutionary party, there can be no victorious struggle. We know that we represent the only force able to organise the workers' and students' fight."

Knowing that in fact they had already lost any opportunity to organise the workers' and students' fight from the outside themselves, the Lambertists had already gone home when the police launched their three-hour campaign to clear the streets of protestors by means of tear gas and truncheons.

THE organisation was not all bad. The first factory occupation in 1968 was the direct result of the agitation of Yvon Rocton, an OCI member who was a Force Ouvrière militant at the Sud-Aviation aircraft plant near Nantes. Rocton had built up an activist base at the plant, whose workers were fighting a difficult campaign against cuts in working hours, and the strength of the student movement and the crisis of de Gaulle's administration gave impulse to more radical workers to risk the occupation tactic rather than just occasional strikes. Rocton was able to win the argument for an occupation of the factory, but the workers also kept their boss as a prisoner in his office for over two weeks during the occupation.

The efforts of Alexandre Hébert were rather less admirable. With the Nantes police force in disarray following the sacking of their headquarters on 13 May, and the local council in considerable trouble as groups of workers in the suburbs of the city began to take over food and petrol distribution for themselves, Hébert arranged with the leader of the social-democrat local government and the head of the police (who, like Hébert, were freemasons) for the trade unions to take over the administration of the Town Hall. It was not "dual power", as described in some accounts; at Hébert's instigation the trade unions sought to prop up the authorities and face off spontaneous working-class action. The local authorities did not react at all to the union bureaucrats' "taking power", and were even invited to speak at public meetings staged by the unions for the sake of public information. As *Noir et Rouge* explained.

"Given the deficiency of the old authorities (police prefecture and municipal government) but also with their active support, the trade unions jointly used their respective organisations, and supporting bodies, to put in place a new power structure. Far from reopening the huge modern distribution centres — of which the workers were on strike — which would have meant taking "risks" and an attack on the rule of private property, instead they supported the small-scale farmers and shopkeepers. Stuck in the middle between this 'social base' of theirs and the old police and administrative apparatus, the inter-trade union committee would limit itself to pathetic vacillation until the 'return to normality'."

It was such bureaucratic manoeuvres that marked Pierre Lambert's decline, rather than the grotesque physical assaults and sexual abuse of Gerry Healy committed against comrades of the OCI's sister organisation in Britain.

The Lambert organisation constantly declared itself to be going from strength to strength, never reviewing its own problems; but in fact, after growing in the 1970s, it declined in the 1980s. Lambert expelled most of his close collaborators, one after another: Michel Varga, Charles Berg, Pierre Broué, Stéphane Just...

At the same time the Lambertists puffed up a ridiculous posture of openness. They declared a new "broad" party, the Parti des Travailleurs, supposedly comprising Socialist, Communist, Trotskyist and anarcho-syndicalist "currents". In fact, the group is weak (except in Force Ouvrière officialdom!), and the diverse "currents" fictional.

The Parti des Travailleurs complains that the European Union is an affront to the "sovereignty" of France and calls for the "defence of the Republic". The EU is blamed as primarily responsible for almost all social ills, and the Lambertists denounce "Brussels" as a vehicle for the agenda of the Vatican. In the 2007 Presidential elections the Parti des Travailleurs promoted Gérard Schivardi, who declared himself the "candidate of the mayors" and stressed that he would defend "mayors' rights" against the Paris government.

It is hard to look at the career of Pierre Lambert and think of him as a defiant opponent of Stalinism or a fighter for the working class. In reality, he was neither, and the sectarian mores of his organisation were matched by its complete lack of internal democracy and debate and the ensuing stagnation of ideas.

Of course, his comrades' intervention in the labour movement was not wholly fruitless. But essentially the activity of the Lambertist group came to be geared towards sect-building and winning influence among trade union bureaucrats rather than encouraging the working class to organise itself. Lambert's story, in the end, is an object lesson in sectarianism, a sad chapter in the history of the Trotskyist left.

# The “hard Trotskyists” of 1969

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

THIS installment is the tenth in a series on the Northern Ireland crisis of 1968-9 and the left. The series is focused on the IS. There are good reasons for that. The descendant (by now, distant descendant) of the IS today is the SWP, the biggest organisation on the British left.

The ancestor of AWL was the Trotskyist Tendency, part of IS at the time.

The main debate on the British left in 1968-70 on Britain and Ireland — and all the issues encapsulated there that are important today vis-a-vis Iraq, etc. — took place between the leaders of IS and the Trotskyist Tendency.

Other left tendencies existed in Britain then. They had “lines”, but all in all most didn’t have much to say about the complexities of Northern Ireland.

One of those tendencies exists still, the Militant (RSL). Its present-day descendants are the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal. It would eventually have distinctive things to say about Ireland, but Militant had very little to say in the period we are concerned with.

A group of supporters of the “Fourth International” current led by Ernest Mandel existed, the IMG. Though in 1969 it breathlessly told the world — in a big headline over a photograph on the cover of its magazine, *International* — that “Permanent Revolution” had “Arrived In The UK” [sic], it didn’t have a lot to say either. The present-day “FI” group of “Mandelite” extraction is a different strain altogether. The leader of the main faction of the IMG in the early 70s, when it occupied a prized place on the lunatic fringe of the Provisional IRA, was John Ross. Ross, today one of London Mayor Ken Livingstone’s well-paid minions, was at the 1969 IS conference a supporter of the IS leaders on Ireland.

Another organisation existed then which has dropped from the stage — the Socialist Labour League (SLL), later Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP). The SLL was the biggest and most important Trotskyist-revolutionary organisation in Britain then.

It had supporters in Northern Ireland, and its paper — the twice-weekly *Newsletter* and, after 27 September 1969, the daily *Workers’ Press* — had a great deal to say about Ireland.

The political “pressure” of the SLL, which was very strident and forceful, affected IS on Ireland, and some of those who opposed the IS leadership on the troops. The IS leaders used the SLL as a scarecrow against Trotskyism in general, and, on Ireland, against the Trotskyist Tendency.

As has been noted in an earlier article, quite a few drop-outs from the SLL were in IS — most eminently, the editor of *Socialist Worker*, Roger Protz, formerly editor of the SLL youth paper *Keep Left*. Some of them were sensitive to the SLL campaign against IS on Ireland.

THE SLL had ancient “Irish” connections. The central figure in the organisation, Gerry Healy, was in origin a County Galway peasant. Born in 1913, he said that his father had been killed by the terrorist auxiliary police of the British occupying forces, the Black and Tans. He also said that he had been a Republican in his late teens before eventually joining the Stalinist movement. He became a Trotskyist in 1937.

In the first half of the 50s, the paper of the Healy organisation, *Socialist Outlook*, had had the identikit British left attitude on Ireland — a working-class-focused version of Irish middle-class nationalism or “anti-imperialism”. That meant presenting Partition as exclusively a British imperialist imposition (not something also rooted in the division between the two peoples in Ireland), and seeing the Protestant-Unionists in the Six Counties as mere dupes of British imperialism.

That approach changed in the second half of the 1950s. The Healy organisation recruited a lot of ex-CPers between 1956 and 1959, after the February 1956 denunciation of Stalin by his successor Khrushchev and the bloody Russian reconquest of Hungary in October-November 1956 led perhaps seven thousand people to leave the British Communist Party. (In 1956 the CP had perhaps 35,000 members). A couple of hundred, at least, from those 7000 were recruited to the Healy group.

One of the most important of the ex-CPers was Brian Behan. Behan was a building worker from a Stalinist-republican family in Dublin. Two of his brothers were the playwright Brendan and the folk-singer and songwriter Dominic.

He was a tremendous agitator on the building sites in London. In recognition of this he was elected a member of the CP Executive Committee in 1952, when he was in his early 20s.

For years before he left the CP, he had been opposed to the party’s policy on Ireland for the very large Irish population in Britain. “Irish work” in Britain was very important for the CP. For that work it had a “front”, the Connolly Association, led by Desmond Greaves, who would become more widely known in the 60s as a writer on Ireland.

So the Connolly Association preached socialism, or at least the Stalinist counterfeit of socialism, to the Irish immigrants who bought its paper, the *Irish Democrat*, in pubs on a Saturday night? No, not at all. The Connolly Association preached an

Irish nationalism that was hard to distinguish from the outlook of the De Valera party, Fianna Fail — the main governing party in the 26 Counties, and identical to that of the Republican movement.

Because Ireland did not join NATO when it was set up in 1949, and Dublin governments followed a mildly independent foreign policy, the 26 Counties state was therefore considered by the Communist Parties to be especially “progressive” — the most progressive country in western Europe, as Greaves said in the *Irish Democrat*!

Brian Behan had argued in the CP that the Connolly Association should make socialist propaganda among Irish workers in Britain. He was not alone in that. In the first half of the 1950s, a sort of fringe ex-CP or critical-CP Irish left grew up around the Connolly Association in London. Some of them would, for instance, in the late 50s want to sell the *Irish Socialist*, the paper of the Irish Workers’ League, rather than the ersatz-nationalist Connolly Association paper. (The IWL was the “Communist Party” in the South; between 1941 and 1970, there were two Irish Stalinist parties, North and South).

When Behan left the CP he took a layer of those people with him, and a few joined or “came round” the SLL. And he brought his influence among Irish building workers.

From 1957 on, the attitude to Ireland in the Healyite press was de facto acceptance that partition was a fixed fact. It should largely be ignored, and socialists should attempt to relate to the two Irelands in terms of straightforward class politics.

This was a working-class-focused version of the approach IS would adopt from the end of 1968, but without the contradiction — whose unfolding in IS I have described in earlier articles — of focusing on specifically Catholic, communal, cross-class grievances (“civil rights”).

Behan separated from Healy in mid 1960, but the “turn” on Ireland continued. It has been criticised by “left” nationalists and populist-nationalists who call themselves Trotskyists (the ex-Welsh adoptive Irishman Rayner Lysaght, for example). But if it were possible — or looked as if it might be possible — to unite the Irish workers in straightforward class-struggle politics by ignoring the border, then it would, I think, be a socialist duty to do that.

The argument against the Healyites’ post-1957 approach is one of practicalities — it was not in fact possible just to bypass the “constitutional question”. The Northern Ireland socialists in 1968-70 who did ignore the border issue thereby helped ensure that when it “emerged” it would have a Provisional IRA form on the Catholic side and a Paisleyite form on the Protestant-British-Irish side.

The Healy organisation went completely off the political rails into blustering, declamatory ultra-leftism in the first half of the 1960s. Its “class” attitude on Ireland degenerated into treating Northern Ireland politics as a straightforward adjunct of British politics, ignoring the very important specific issues there.

That was important because the SLL, though its work in the Labour Party Young Socialists in Britain, recruited supporters in the Northern Ireland Labour Party youth. (Although the NILP was a distinct Labour Party, and the British Labour Party did not organise in Northern Ireland, the NILP had a YS too).

The SLL’s YS supporters were the first Irish Trotskyists since the demise of the very feeble Irish Trotskyist group of the late 1940s. In Northern Ireland as in Britain, the Labour Party youth movement came to be a battleground between different Trotskyist and quasi-Trotskyist tendencies — between a loose coalition around the paper *Young Guard* on one side, and the Healyites on the other.

Some of the small cluster of Northern Ireland IS supporters who, encouraged by Tony Cliff, came into the Irish Workers Group in early mid 1967 (with no IWG opposition to them coming in, and certainly not from me) had been shaped politically in the YS faction-fighting between *Young Guard* and the SLL.

In the YG/SLL war, YG, like IS as a whole and more so, was anti-Leninist in its notions of organisations and of the relationship of industrial action to politics. It identified Bolshevism with the seriously bureaucratised Healy organisation. It held broadly to the notions of the self-sufficiency of working-class economic struggle which in Russia about 1900 Plekhanov, Axelrod, Martov, Lenin and Trotsky called “Economism”.

Most importantly for understanding IS and PD on Ireland, *Young Guard* was heavily anarchistic. Despite being attached to the Labour Party, it expressed an inchoate, raw contempt for politics, leaders, “Marxist dogmatism”; and a raw belief in direct action.

When IS “became Leninist” again at the end of 1968, the Northern Ireland IS-influenced people (the leaders of People’s Democracy) lagged behind the shift. Much that characterised the early PD was rooted in — or, indisputably, was identical to — the inchoate anarchistic politics of *Young Guard* in the mid 60s.

To a serious extent they were shaped by reaction against the SLL.

In 1969 the SLL remained the main “revolutionary” and “Trotskyist” group in the UK, with a large-ish and serious cadre, an accepted (indeed, fetishised and worshipped) tradi-

tion, and an implantation in a number of industries (far more than IS ever achieved, even in its best period for that, a couple of years in the mid 70s). But it was a radically sick organisation.

It had long had a heavily bureaucratised internal regime. Healy was dictator, in a way that Cliff in IS never managed before the splitting off or expulsion of most of the old IS cadre in 1975.

Free internal discussion — discussion not controlled and licensed by the leadership — and more or less organised, or even expressed, dissent did not exist in the SLL.

The SLL had, under different names, made work in the broad labour movement central to what it was, the guide to what it was doing. It built itself within the Labour Party and the trade unions. From the late 1950s in tendency, and from the early mid 60s more and more all-definingly, the SLL shifted to the proposition that the organisational building-up of “the revolutionary party” in the abstract, namely the SLL, was all-important. In every important respect, it pioneered the politics that IS would adopt in the first half of the 1970s.

It made “Build the Revolutionary Party” a slogan, and increasingly its central slogan. It developed the notion that the SLL itself, an organisation of a few hundreds and then a few thousands — was already the “alternative leadership”, competing on something like equal terms not only with the 20,000-plus-strong CP but also with the “fake” leaderships of the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Incoherent in everything, it combined this “leadership” fetishism with an operational politics that saw “revolution” welling up spontaneously from “the crisis”. We will see this in its comments on Northern Ireland.

The SLL thus transformed itself from an organisation working to develop the political consciousness of the mass working-class movement by the development of the class struggle and by its own educational work into a strident declamatory force, substituting literary “exposures” of the existing leadership’s inadequacies and betrayals for patient work within the movement. Its fetish of its own press and of its own organisation came to be an all-consuming passion. It played a destructive role in the class struggle.

Logically enough, the fetishism of the organisation led the SLL to what can be called “Apparatus Marxism”. The organisation’s needs, calculations, self-development and self-promotion determined what it emphasised, and on the level of political fundamentals.

OF course, every living political organism adapts its “message” to its audience, to the concerns and the level of understanding of the people it reaches. The revolutionary organisation decides in any given situation what ideas, slogans, proposals to put to the fore, and which ones not to emphasise, in order to take the movement forward.

But all of that is properly done within a tight framework of basic ideas, and in the service not primarily of opportunity-grasping and danger-avoiding by the revolutionary organisation, but of developing the consciousness, self-confidence, organisation, and class-assertiveness of workers.

The Communist Manifesto of 1848 put it like this: “The Communists... have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole... [They] are on the one hand practically, the most advanced and resolute section of the working-class parties of every country, that section which pushes forward all others; on the other hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the lines of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement”.

The programme Trotsky wrote for the Fourth International 90 years later put the same idea in a different focus: “to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives — these are the rules of the Fourth International”.

You tell the truth. You analyse and define the given reality. You try to work out what its possibilities are. You deduce what the working class and its militants should propose and try to do to take things forward, to educate and enlighten themselves.

The SLL leaders, in their self-worship of their organisation and their press, had shed most of those guiding ideas by 1969. What they said and did was determined not by the needs of the class and the class struggle, but by what they thought would allow the SLL, the Party, the pre-designated “Leadership”, to grow and accumulate resources. For most of 1967, they went Maoist, backing the Mao faction in the so-called Cultural Revolution in China. In general, they slotted living events into preconceived scenarios borrowed from the past, in a way that allowed them to emphasise the centrality of their own organisation. In 1968-9, they were in effect parodying Third Period ultra-left Stalinism.

The tragic deterioration of the SLL was the core of the tragedy that engulfed the working-class movement and the revolutionary left in the 1970s and 80s. The parallels with what the IS-SWP became in the 1970s and 80s and after do not need stressing.

**workers press**

The daily paper that leads the fight against the Tory government

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THE DAILY ORGAN OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE SOCIALIST LABOUR LEAGUE

PRICE 36 (1970)

4,000 at Alexandra Palace rally say:

# Build mass revolutionary party now!

By a Workers Press reporting team

**Standing ovation**

THEY [the Stalinists and the reformists] will never make a revolution. We need new people, newly selected, newly trained and newly tempered, in short a new generation. Leon Trotsky wrote from exile in 1935.

Over 4,000 of that new generation — the advance guard of the British revolution — massed yesterday in London and Scotland.

**Jobs-for-wages talks at Post Office**

BY DAVID MAHON

London, 15 Feb. — A strike by 100,000 Post Office workers ended in a London headquarters for the second time in the last 18 months after the workers' refusal to accept a 10% wage increase. The strike was called by the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) and the General Union of Public Employees (GUPE) on the grounds that the offer was a "bribe" to end the strike.

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The SLL answer to everything

# The SLL on Ireland

LET us start on 12 October 1968. It was seven days after the RUC had batoned peaceful civil rights demonstrators in Derry. The reverberations were already hitting Northern Ireland and the rest of Ireland.

The SLL's paper, *The Newsletter*, magisterially dismissed all civil rights and civil rights movements: "The only fight possible is that by the Irish Young Socialists in posing and struggling for a principled working-class leadership. The only force capable of overthrowing the state is the working class. Therefore, a revolution is necessary..."

If internal logic was lacking here, the conclusion was clear: "This emphasises the importance of the All Trades Union Alliance and its conference in Birmingham on October 26th..."

The ATUA was the SLL's trade-union auxiliary arm. All analysis had to conclude by exalting the self-declared "alternative leadership", and frequently that predetermined conclusion shaped the analysis.

Despite its barebones "class" emphasis, the SLL agreed with IS on the "colonial" or at least "semi-colonial" nature of Northern Ireland.

"In such a semi-colonial country the state requires a more repressive machine... In Britain and Northern Ireland the working class is on the move and looking for new leadership..."

19 October, on the back page: "Derry workers strike on civil rights? And? The Nationalists, reformists, Stalinists, and revisionists are a cover for Unionism". "Revisionists" was the SLL's term for Marxists other than the SLL. So even those who were on the side of Derry's striking workers were just "a cover for Unionism". Yes! "They are enemies of the working class".

26 October: A full page "by our own correspondent" on "Police Repression in Northern Ireland". A caption to two civil rights pictures uses the key formulae repeated in the text. "Savage breaking-up of civil rights demonstration in Northern Ireland followed by the spontaneous revolt of working-class youth". All working-class youth, including Protestant working-class youth? Of course!

The Northern Ireland "revolt of working-class youth has to be seen as part of international upheavals as the world working class moves into opposition against imperialism". The whole of the working class, throughout the world? Yes!

The events of 5 October 1968 are the beginning of turmoil that will destroy the old order in Northern Ireland, and bring it to civil war in ten months' time. The picture the SLL sees is this: "The Ulster Unionists have shaken their mailed fist at the Irish workers, scattered the middle-class politicians, and given the battle signal to their class allies, the Powellites in the British Tory Party..." (the followers of Enoch Powell, who had been dismissed from the Tory front bench six months earlier for a racist speech).

Nobody living in the real world can fail to see that 5 October was an enormous political blow to the old order, or that the London government was demanding accelerated reforms from the Belfast government.

But for the SLL: "The Unionists are able to destroy reformism and opportunism politically with relative ease. In this one-party state the trappings of bourgeois democracy are

reduced to a tinsel covering. Now even this has gone..."

"The whole [London] Cabinet backs repressive measures..."

"Such is the crisis of liberalism... The criminal role of the liberals [the Civil Rights leadership] has, of course, been that they have actively sought to prevent the development of an alternative working-class leadership in Ireland, giving petty-bourgeois expression to working-class demands, including the call for democratic rights..."

Or, in other words, that they are not SLL-style "Trotskyists".

The SLL is committed to a view of events in which everything in Britain is moving towards dictatorship and military rule, and, simultaneously, working-class revolution is everywhere on the immediate agenda.

Throughout the following months the *Newsletter* will carry headlines and make comments that are blatantly transcribed from Trotsky's amazingly prescient and accurate comments on early 1930s Germany as it moved to the Nazi dictatorship. All that is missing is the prescience and the accuracy. Parody, not Marxist analysis or even responsible commentary, is what the SLL — the main revolutionary organisation in the British state! — deals in.

**In the SLL's pretence that the 'real' struggle is a class revolt, the parallels with IS are strong.**

The *Newsletter* gets very angry at the *Daily Telegraph* for describing the demonstration in Derry on 5 October as "a demonstration of Roman Catholics". It is a "Tory lie"! It "demonstrates that any purely liberal-humanist attempt to break the cultivated religious divide in Ireland or the racial division in Britain are doomed."

"Only the revolutionary party, uniting Catholic and Protestant, black and white, in struggle against the capitalist state, can achieve final victory — the conquest of political power by the working class". There can be no reforms. Nothing but working-class revolution, led by the SLL of course, can stop the drive to despotism.

And yet the people who write so demotedly were once Marxists. Elements of a Marxist culture allow them sometimes also to make sharp and penetrating comments.

The *Newsletter* (Cliff Slaughter, I think) goes on to warn against the Republican movement. Marxist memory-traces from Lenin's writings against the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary populist equivalents of the IRA are mixed here with self-obsessed nonsense — build the magic tool, "the party". It is typical of the SLL then, of its best and of its worst.

"The big danger in Ireland is the cul-de-sac retreat into anarchist Republicanism... Spontaneity replaces all other roads, and what is now seen as talk is dissolved into action..."

"The anarchist has no answer. Republicanism acts in an

anarchist manner in the working class. Without revolutionary theory, religious ideology — the [Republican] idea of blood sacrifice, of victory in defeat, of leaving the future to God, of feeling or faith without thought — rises to the surface in the Irish working class..."

"Republicanism is the spontaneous reaction of an oppressed people, the crystallisation into certain organisational forms of reflex action against the oppressor".

In fact Catholic Ireland is saturated with the ideas and ideals of the Republican movement, which in many of its traits is indeed anarchist. Back in the 1880s, Frederick Engels had already noticed the element of Bakuninist anarchism in the physical-force-on-principle Republicans.

Physical-force Republicanism will revive, and in an astonishingly short time transform the entire situation and dominate events for decades ahead.

WHAT follows from grasping this as a danger? The SLL denounces the rising movement of the long-oppressed Catholics, and demands that everyone line up and take orders from the self-proclaimed "revolutionary leadership"!

"The struggle against religious ideology in Ireland is a struggle for Marxist theory, for..." For what? "For democratic centralism, against defeatism and spontaneity..."

Democratic centralism is a system by which a group of politically like-minded people may choose to organise themselves! To argue for it as the best way to organise a revolutionary Marxist party is one thing.

But this is something else. "Democratic centralism" is now posed as something everyone progressive must fight for — even people who don't support socialism?

If the use of the slogan "build the revolutionary party" as a peremptory injunction to the public in general testifies to disorientation, this posing of "democratic centralism" as a general objective for secular-minded people is a form of political dementia.

What is really happening in Derry? Is it Protestant-sectarian cops batoning Catholics seeking equality? No!

"The 'liberal' faces of [Northern Ireland prime minister] O'Neill and [26 Counties Taoiseach] Lynch began to fall in proportion to the drying-up of foreign capital... under conditions of a growing international trade war".

"The engineers' strike in the North is the real target for police batons in Derry. The Unionist regime, if it is to survive, must maintain in a violent way religious apartheid". (Their emphasis).

Paisleyism, says *The Newsletter*, is "the backward potentially dictatorial force to supplant the action of police and army". That is, Paisleyism will play the role of fascism in Italy and Germany in the 20s and 30s.

"Orangeism runs deep in sections of the Six Counties working class... What used to be, or what is, a privileged layer of the working class... now finds itself being attacked by its own Orange bosses. Workers at the Sirocco engineering works in Belfast were locked out by their 'fellow' Orange bosses. The [upcoming] engineering strike will involve many Paisleyite workers... What alternative has Craig therefore, but to brand even a middle class threat to religious apartheid as Catholic, IRA-inspired...?"

Translation: 5 October and its aftermath were really an attempt to divide the workers in order to check the moves of the Protestant engineering workers towards socialist revolution.

This was the supposedly-Marxist "economic analysis" used reductionally and pushed as the single explanation for political events.

They write this when it is plain and obvious that the recoil from 5 October was counter-productive, politically, for the Belfast regime; and that it has intensified the pressure from London for reform.

Yet the reader must understand what *The Newsletter* and the SLL understand! There are no important divisions among the Unionists. Liberals and unshamed bigots are all one.

"There will be no split in the Unionist regime as such — merely a change of composition. O'Neill may very well become a figurehead, while John Brook [a right-wing Unionist Stormont MP], the police, and Paisleyites work together..." In fact Unionism is beginning to shatter.

AND what is to be done? "A principled struggle against adventurism, anarchism and Republicanism becomes a priority in the fight to unite Irish workers under a common revolutionary programme heading an alliance with the oppressed petty bourgeoisie..." The "struggle against adventurism" here can refer to nothing other than the civil rights demonstrators' defiance of the ban and decision to try to demonstrate on 5 October.

"The Irish Young Socialists will be the spearhead of the struggle inside the unions..."

"Unionism [in the North] and Fianna Fail dictatorship [in the South] can and will be smashed. The revolution in Britain will go hand in hand with the struggle for power in Ireland..."

On 7 December 1968, *The Newsletter* denounces the whole civil rights movement. In fact: "The working class has come to the fore". But Eamonn McCann and others call it a civil rights struggle. "The Irish Young Socialists say this is a criminal diversion from the main question. Civil rights has been used together with Paisleyism to drive a wedge between workers on religious grounds". The "main question", comrade, is whatever the SLL arbitrarily defines it to be.

In the pretence that the "real" struggle is a class revolt, the parallels with IS are strong. The definition of the civil rights movement and the Paisleyites as being twins, equally devices to foment working-class division, is the SLL's alone.

Now, it is true that posing things in terms of Catholic grievances has a built-in tendency to antagonise Protestant workers.

A healthy socialist working-class movement would fight for equality between Catholic and Protestant workers, but it would not pose things as the civil rights movement does. But things are what they are; and to pretend otherwise is to erect additional barriers to being able to affect, and maybe reshape, developments.

There is a curious identity here between these Third Period "Trotskyists", on the one hand, and Michael Farrell and his comrades, on the other. Both SLL and Farrell see liberal Unionism as their main enemy. They work to smash it (and PD and IS say openly, for example, that their objective in the February 1969 Northern Ireland general election is to do that). The SLL denounces the civil rights movement which for Farrell is the weapon to destroy the liberal Unionists; but otherwise the conclusions are politically identical.

The SLL calls for a "Council of Action" in Derry. Yet: "It is not a question of 'Free Derry', but freeing the working class... This is a political question, involving the building of a democratic-centralist party, a revolutionary party of the working class".

The implicit message is for Catholic workers to accept, for now, gross inequality.

Newsletter now has four slogans:

- For a Council of Action of Derry workers, youth and unemployed;
- For workers' defence guards against the police and their allies, the Paisleyite thugs;
- Unity of all workers against the attacks of the monopolists, bankers, and employers [but still nothing about civil rights and equality for Catholics];
- For the socialist revolution in Ireland and Britain.

In contrast to IS, the SLL does not at this stage call for troops out, or for the withdrawal of British subsidies to Northern Ireland (that is, for the expulsion of Northern Ireland from the UK).

But there is a surprisingly large range of things which IS and PD have in common with the SLL — notably, the barebones economic-reductionist quality of the "Marxism" of both of them. It is all really about "the economic crisis". As well as being inaccurate as a picture of economic reality, this approach substitutes economics for politics.

ON 10 December, for example, the *Newsletter* directs its readers' attention to the underlying mechanism allegedly behind it all: "We must understand that beneath the crisis of the Unionist Party is the rapidly unfolding crisis of world imperialism".

Northern Ireland prime minister O'Neill, the *Newsletter* says, came to power "in 1964" (1963, in fact) at the "behest of monopoly capital", to smooth the way for foreign investment. "This was necessary to control the increasing dissatisfaction with the Labour government policies". The Labour government was elected in October 1964! When, in best Third Period style, you deduce reality from your premises, who needs bother with facts? The foolish errors underline the preposterous arrogance on display here.

"Facts" are crude "empiricism". These Marxists are above all philosophers. "For Marxists it was clear that the demonstrations of the civil rights movement and its growing support was no more than a surface reflection of a much more powerful process within the working class".

The civil rights movement, says the *Newsletter*, had been "exposed as a cover for counter-revolution" — as readers have already been told, a cover for Unionism — "which aimed to secure the support of the masses only to dissipate their strength by presenting bourgeois reality as the only true reality and thereby denying the revolutionary potential of the working class".

To relate to reality by first recognising it as it is (i.e. bourgeois-dominated) — that is to accept it and compromise with it, declares the SLL. The alternative? Invent your own reality and insist that things are not as the eyes and ears of others — and your eyes and ears without benefit of SLL "Marxism" — see them.

When the civil rights leaders appeal for calm, "they create the illusion that it is possible to reform the system by attacking partial aspects of it. They deny the need to build a revolutionary party to lead the working class to destroy capitalism and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat".

And when those same civil rights leaders act on the streets... they are "adventurists"...

Tragically, bits and pieces of important Marxist insight are mixed in with this repulsive rigmarole, and thereby discredited by it. The PD leaders, and those who opted for the eclectic shilly-shallying of the IS group, are victims here of the fact that "Trotskyism" seems to be SLLism and the foolishness we are depicting. If that is "Bolshevism", then long live shilly-shallying!

For the *Newsletter*, what is actually happening in Northern Ireland, or what is likely to happen, is only one expression of a world system caught up in the inexorable, mechanical workings of a hypothetical "crisis" which is itself the principal actor in the unfolding world revolution, now looming very close.

"The acuteness of the crisis now brings on to the agenda the question of the proletarian revolution".

The SLL incoherently combines its "alternative leadership" talk with arguing as if "the crisis" could by itself bring revolution.

In practice the SLL ignores the division in the Irish working class.

"The Irish working class must now make a leap, a break with its past". It must reject Republicanism and syndicalism, "which amounts to a rejection of theory — the other side of their traditional militancy..."

"The world capitalist class has declared war on the working

class. Only a successful socialist revolution can answer this attack. This means the working class taking power under the leadership of the revolutionary party..."

The cursing and non-sequiturs are used to reach the perennial conclusion: build our organisation. "Only the All Trades Union Alliance, guided by the revolutionary party, can succeed". Join it if you are not a member, work harder if you are. As with the Stalinist parties in the Third Period, the SLL in this period is run by bureaucratic cynics.

The editorial on 14 December 1968 shows the editor (Michael Banda) deliberately appropriating the title of one of Trotsky's best-known pamphlets warning the German working class about the rise of Nazism: "Northern Ireland: The Only Road". The echoes from Germany will be picked up by hardcore readers.

Working-class support for "middle class radical campaigns for 'civil rights'" has forced concessions from O'Neill, says Banda. But hasn't the SLL repeatedly expressed deep conviction that reform is impossible? That the civil rights mobilisations cannot achieve anything? Aha!

"A moderate path of reform along the lines advocated by the civil rights leaders, let alone O'Neill's proposals, would not satisfy the workers, and yet cannot pass the barriers of right-wing opposition..."

THIS is an early version of what PD/IS will grope towards later. Civil rights will not satisfy workers as workers. They are not socialism. Notice that for the *Newsletter*, one minute the British government is all-powerful, the next it cannot face down the Unionist right wing, the Paisleyites.

"The working class has already shown in Derry that it is the only force that can put paid to the Paisleyites..." (This is a reference to the aftermath of 5 October 1968 in Derry, when dockers and clothing workers demonstrated).

No doubt action by the whole working class in Northern Ireland would put paid to the Paisleyites. The SLL does not stop to note that it was only Catholic working-class action in Derry after 5 October. The SLL is too far above it all, strategist of an immediate world-wide revolution, to notice that the Paisleyites' constituency is mainly Protestant workers. In the pogroms of August 1969, the organised working class in Belfast will act to curb sectarianism. But its grip is limited.

As we have seen, for the SLL Paisleyism in Northern Ireland is playing the role of fascism in Germany in the 30s.

The trouble with defining the vicious anti-Catholic sectarianism of the Paisleyites as fascism is that you blind yourself to the fundamental determinants, using political terms to define what fundamentally is a communal or even "national" social movement. This mis-definition will disorient Michael Farrell and PD for many years.

The SLL's picture is one of a looming showdown between a revolutionary working class and fascism, or fascist-like forces.

"One man one vote in Ulster can be won only on the basis of smashing the forces mobilised by Paisley, which work under the cover provided by Craig and O'Neill".

For PD and IS, as we have seen, O'Neill and the liberal Unionists are the main enemy. For the SLL, all the Unionists are one: O'Neill covering for Craig, and Craig for Paisley.

Both, however, have pretty much the same conclusion: the forces of reform are a chimera. The SLL can say that, while also rather too quickly accepting O'Neill's promises of reform as good coin (but that was forced by working-class action, you see).

Logic and consistency, and connecting what you say out of one side of your mouth with what you say out of another? That is for people who do not understand Marxist "philosophy" as the leaders of the SLL do! If you are deeply, "philosophically" Marxist, like the leaders of the SLL, you see beyond the mere surface to the inner, "real" truth of things, and know that prime minister O'Neill is a mere "cover" for Paisley.

For all the "revolutionary" declamation the SLL is, like IS, effectively Unionist and Partitionist, though everything there too is chopped and mixed into gobbledygook. The SLL advocates: "A workers' and farmers' government in Northern Ireland [sic], breaking from Westminster, posing unity of action immediately with the workers of the South and of Britain".

This proposal accepts — as IS did, at the time — the Six Counties as a viable entity. It ignores the depths of antagonism, and the consequent fact that a Six Counties cut loose from Britain would immediately dissolve into civil war, probably war involving the 26 Counties state.

What will this Northern Ireland workers' government do? "Nationalise the land and industry; stop all closures and redundancies; all factories to be kept open under workers' control and their affairs investigated by workers' commissions; guarantee all democratic rights, without exception, to the Protestant minority in Ireland under a workers' and farmers' government".

The Six Counties "workers' government", which seeks unity in action with the workers of the South, will guarantee the Irish Protestants — the majority in the Six Counties state where the workers and farmers supposedly rule — "all rights" as a minority in Ireland? The Six Counties government will rule in all Ireland? "All rights"? The rights of a distinct national minority? Everything here is blurred and unfocused and un-thought-out. Gobbledygook!

On 7 January 1969, after the violence against the PD march in Burntollet, and the first barricades in Derry, the *Newsletter* proclaims that workers' defence guards are needed "to curb Derry violence".

"The struggle now being fought out in Northern Ireland requires a revolutionary leadership".

On 11 February the *Newsletter* comments on the Northern Ireland general election due to be held on 24 February. "It is not a question here of O'Neill being the 'lesser evil' as the Stalinists in the civil rights leadership maintain... O'Neill is unacceptable

to the Paisleyites and equally unacceptable to the working class".

Reform would be acceptable to the Paisleyites from someone other than O'Neill? Or the reforms announced by O'Neill would be unacceptable to "the working class", Catholic and Protestant alike, under any prime minister?

Words here express posture, attitude, not how things stand and what can be done with things that stand thus. The "only road" is to build the SLL and its trade-union front and let them take power... It is the curse of "Trotskyism" reduced to kitsch.

Harold Wilson's Labour government in London "have given their full support to Captain O'Neill's repressions against the working class. But in fact O'Neill's fate only foreshadows their own by a few weeks or months".

They are suggesting that O'Neill will lose the election? That the British Labour government will fall within weeks?

What support by London to which repression is the SLL referring to? The British Labour government condemned 5 October, and January in Derry. The SLL's statement is a flat untruth about both the British government and O'Neill.

It is the Northern Ireland Catholics, including some workers, who have faced repression — not "the working class" in general. Here the SLL uses the same ideological redefinition of reality that IS will use up to August 1969.

READING the *Newsletter*, you get the sense, again and again, that you are reading a grim parody, an irresponsible paint-by-numbers parody, of Trotsky. Of a Trotsky in another historical period, on another country, in a radically different situation! Here, the words at the end are taken from Trotsky's ill-fated comment in 1939 on the prospects before Stalin's Russia. Earlier, as we noted, the title of an editorial — "The Only Road" — was adapted from a famous pamphlet by Trotsky on the rise of the Nazis towards power.

On 1 March, after the Northern Ireland general election, "the editor" wrote under the headline: "Ulster election — a warning".

"The political crisis in Northern Ireland spotlights the feverish nature of political events which mirror the growing economic crisis of British capitalism. In essence it is the economic crisis which is now making itself felt in that part of Ireland which is tied hand and foot to the British economy".

This was a pure piece of Third Period Stalinist ultra-leftism — to the Third Period what an ancient pot dug out of a newly-opened tomb is to a vanished culture. It is nonsensical in its picture of "the economic crisis of British capitalism"; and the Third Period "method" is blatant here: assert a metaphysical scheme and then explain every event according to it.

In practical politics, this method is a means of ignoring what is specific to what you are supposed to be analysing. The Stalinists, obliterated specifics, cried endlessly against "fascism". They saw fascists everywhere — social-democratic "social-fascists", "Trotsky-fascists", etc.; simultaneously, they glossed over the threat of the "fascist-fascists", the Nazis... Likewise, the SLL sees "the crisis" everywhere, and can't see the specifics in Northern Ireland, or anywhere.

What, "really", is the split in the Unionist party? "In reality a split in the Tory party [i.e. of Britain: the Unionist MPs at Westminster take the Tory whip]. Paisley's triumph strengthens [Enoch] Powell. The break-up of the Tory party in the direction of fascism and racialism in Britain tomorrow is foreshadowed by events in the Six Counties today. The two-party system of capitalist domination is drawing to a close..."

In fact the Tory party backs Wilson's Northern Ireland policies. It will explicitly back the Government during the crisis in August-October, and send a Tory leader, Lord Hailsham, to Northern Ireland to make sure the Unionists understand that.

The SLL's wild extrapolation here is in fact not far from IS's response, when after the dockers' march in protest at the racist Powell being sacked from the Tory front bench it called for unity of the left to deal with "the urgent threat of fascism". The difference with IS is that the IS leaders were never trapped by the logic of the ideas they deployed for organisational advantage. It was more nimble and empirical.

On 22 April the *Newsletter*, under the headline "Ulster Near Civil War", writes that the "election of Bernadette Devlin is a sure indication that a revolutionary situation is maturing in Northern Ireland". Indeed! But what sort of revolutionary situation? The SLL means a revolutionary situation pregnant with the possibility of socialism.

Like IS, which headlined "Troops Out" on page one after British soldiers were put guarding power stations in response to small Loyalist sabotage bomb attacks (which at the time were attributed to the IRA), the SLL knows, without any need to ponder on events, what conclusions to draw. The conclusions predate the events!

On 26 April, a "statement by the political committee of the SLL" headlines, like *Socialist Worker*: "Withdraw troops from Ulster at once".

IS presented the troops as helping the RUC, playing the role of Orange sectarians. The SLL sees the troops as threatening to "crush" Protestant and Catholic alike.

"The workers of Northern Ireland now stand in the front line of battle for the whole working class of Britain and Ireland. Armed troops and police are being sent by the Labour government in Britain and its Unionist (Tory) partners in Ulster to crush them by force".

Workers in Britain must "force the immediate withdrawal of all troops and of all support for O'Neill's government".

The SLL do not specify "withdraw subsidies". That is territory already occupied by the Tribune Labour Left and IS.

What is to come after O'Neill's government? Direct rule (that is, more troops)? No, working-class rule and socialism, of course! The deep and deepening antagonism between Protestant and Catholic workers is only an unimportant detail.

"Their [the British government's] nightmare is that this [events in Northern Ireland] will unite with the mounting militancy of the workers of Eire and the struggle of trade unionists in Britain against the Labour government". To bring the government down, they mean. In fact the militancy the SLL invokes is very much trade-unionist militancy, in the 26 Counties and in the UK.

The SLL says that civil rights leaders, Stalinists, and so on are holding back the workers, yet Northern Ireland is "on the verge of a revolutionary situation".

In fact the workers in Northern Ireland whom the important layer of Stalinist trade union leaders are "holding back" are mostly a section of Protestant workers whom they are helping to "hold back" from Paisleyism.

**T**HIS SLL is a parody, a gross parody, of the implicitly "spontaneist" approach of James P Cannon and his post-Trotsky Trotskyist comrades after 1945, when they proclaimed immediate revolution in Europe while knowing that there were no revolutionary parties, nor short-term prospects of regrouping large sections of the labour movement into revolutionary parties.

"Build the revolutionary party" is stuck on to the SLL lists of demands as the all-saving and all-changing miracle ingredient. And yet for them a revolutionary crisis can develop without the existence of any such party. In Northern Ireland, the working class can move towards power despite its crippling communal-national divisions.

In fact, though the Paisleyites are a minority, Unionist political concerns — opposition to a united Ireland, and desire to unite with Britain — and Protestant-Unionist bigotry are not at all limited to the Paisleyites.

At bottom, the SLL leaders either do not understand the implications of their central slogan, their supposed raison d'être, "build the revolutionary party" — or do not themselves take it seriously.

The SLL's slogans are:

- Act now! All support for the workers of Ulster!
- Workers' defence guards against Paisley and against police and troops!
- Withdraw all troops now!
- Bring down the Wilson government!

On 29 April, the day after O'Neill resigns as Northern Ireland prime minister, John Crawford writes under the headline, "Ulster crisis moves to climax". "As part of the crisis in Britain, the tension in Ulster escalates towards a head-on clash between the working class and the capitalist state". The working class, one single unit.

On 17 June, the headline is "Ulster, The Grim Warning". (This is Trotsky-parody again, from his 1937 article "Spain, The Last Warning").

"Ulster moves a step nearer to right-wing dictatorship backed by troops sent by Wilson's Labour government". This is the SLL's version of IS's line that the troops will help the RUC and the B-Specials. In fact, it is the very opposite. The Labour government is using the troops to keep the Paisleyites in check.

According to the *Newsletter*, the rulers, in Northern Ireland and in Britain, need "a Bonapartist dictatorship" to solve "the crisis".

19 July: "Ulster veers towards civil war". "150 specially trained riot troops from the Queen's Regiment were sent to Londonderry on Monday [14 July] to reinforce police and the hated B Specials..." Indeed. Civil war between Catholic nationalists and Protestant Unionists? No, the SLL sees civil war between "the working class" and the capitalist state.

In mid-August Derry and Belfast erupt. By the time the 16 August issue of *The Newsletter* appears, the eruptions are subsiding. British troops have assumed the role of "peacekeepers", effectively replacing the forces of the Northern Ireland state (the troops have control of the RUC and its auxiliaries), and are doing their best to persuade the Catholics behind the barricades that cut off areas of Belfast and Derry to take down those barricades and let the British army substitute for their self-defence.

That is not the Northern Ireland that the *Newsletter* sees:

"The editor" (Michael Banda) writes: "The situation can only be described as one of civil war in which the ultra-right government of Northern Ireland in alliance with Wilson and the Labour traitors have encouraged provocation that will now allow them to bring in the armed forces". Since the troops are "in" when he writes, Banda is a prophet of no mean ability.

Why is this Northern Ireland government, which is publicly committed now to reform, "ultra-right"? Because that is what it must be in the SLL scenario! Without SLL "Marxism", one sees delusions!

"The situation" that "can only be described as civil war" turns out in fact not to be civil war at all, but only a "provocation" staged by the Northern Ireland and Wilson governments. The fighting in mid-August is a mere concocted excuse for bringing in British troops.

"The capitalist press has gone out of its way to describe the disturbances as the result of a holy war between Catholics and Protestants". But that is only the surface appearance of things, how they seem to those who have not got the SLL's mastery of "Marxist philosophy". The *Newsletter* prints the next paragraph in bold type.

"While in some cases it may take this form, it is basically nothing of the sort. The real reason lies in the economic crisis now affecting the Six Counties and stemming from the worsening position of British capitalism as a whole".

**T**HE IS leaders use the same notion of "Marxist analysis", though slightly less crassly expressed. It presents basic economic underpinnings — falsely assessed, as it happens — as themselves a social and political force; and it

does this as a means of denying the nature of the forces which the economic crisis has (allegedly) set in motion. It is the "Marxism" favoured by the most hostile caricatures of Marx's actual ideas!

In both SLL and IS there is Economism (pretence that workers' concern for trade-union issues is automatically socialist: in IS, there is also something which the Trotskyist Tendency called "Catholic economism", a similar pretence applied to Catholic civil rights militancy). In both SLL and IS spontaneism (socialist revolution despite the absence in the working class of socialist ideas and a party, and despite the dominance of a mixture of sectarianism and nationalism) as the basis of hope for a socialist outcome.

There has been a breakdown of the Six Counties system — of a part of the UK state? The British ruling class and the Labour government are hostile to the sectarian character of the Northern Ireland state? No! no! no! The SLL knows better.

"The capitalists are determined to crush the Catholic and Protestant workers alike. To do this they drag out all the old prejudices and lies from the past."

The SLL's opposition to the British army is rooted — as IS's before August had been — on a radically false picture of what the troops are doing.

IS had expected the British army to help the RUC and B-Specials against the Catholics, and has shifted in light of the experience in August. The SLL rests its demand for troops out on the delusion that the troops — the advance-guard of fascist-Bonapartist military rule in the whole UK — have gone to Northern Ireland to crush the working class and its movement, Protestant and Catholic alike.

This vision will lead the SLL soon to side with the Paisleyites

## When the troops fight Protestant ultras in the Shankhill — some of whom, like the leader of the "Shankhill Defence" organisation, John McKeague, are fascists — the SLL will see it as "the workers" being crushed.

when they fight the British army and the RUC.

When the troops fight Protestant ultras in the Shankhill — some of whom, like the leader of the "Shankhill Defence" organisation, John McKeague, are fascists — the SLL will see it as "the workers" being crushed.

Caricatural in everything, on this the SLL will repeat the Third Period French Stalinists' expressed sympathy with the fascist gangs who invaded the streets of Paris on 6-7 February 1934 during the Stavisky crisis and were "ill-treated" by the "fascist" French police.

On 19 August the *Newsletter's* editorial headline is: "The issue is not only civil rights, but the Irish Socialist Revolution". It is against the Irish Socialist Revolution that the troops are really being deployed.

Wilson sending in troops is "the most reactionary blow yet struck against the democratic rights of the working class in Ulster".

Civil rights liberals and the Communist Party cause confusion about the real nature of the troops, complains the *Newsletter*. The *Newsletter* quotes the Morning Star: "The root of the present tense situation ... is the failure of the Northern Ireland Government to introduce the civil rights and democratic liberties... demanded by the civil rights movement."

The editorial comments: "This is a deceptive [as distinct from a candid and truthful?] lie. There are certainly civil rights issues involved, but these are only the form the struggle has taken until recently."

The real issue is unemployment, and the fact that the bosses create division. The SLL's programme:

1. Withdraw British troops immediately
2. Repeal the Special Powers Act — release the political prisoners
3. Disband the B-Specials
4. Workers' and Farmers Government, posing unity of action between workers in North and South
5. Immediate nationalisation of the banks and building industry, the land, and engineering under workers' control.

The *Newsletter* has occasionally attacked the B-Specials, the sectarian Unionist militia. There is something worse than that, however — a UK military dictatorship over society, starting with Northern Ireland.

When General Freeland, commanding officer of the army controlled by the bourgeois-democratic British government, is given overall control of the RUC — it is a first move in dismantling the B-Specials — the SLL sees only... soldiers! It knows what is happening. This is the first step in establishing a military dictatorship in the whole UK!

Against this, the *Newsletter* will defend the Protestant sectarians; it will stand with the "people of Ulster" against Army occupation and military dictatorship!

23 August: the front page headline is: "Ulster — another Vietnam". The editor writes: "Harold Wilson's 'Labour' Government has joined hands with Chichester Clark to declare war on the people of Ulster — Catholic and Protestant alike."

"On Tuesday night, 19th August, the General Officer Commanding the 6,000 troops was given full control of all security and police operations in the province. British imperialism and its agents are preparing for Civil War..."

"Moved in under the cloak of mediator between warring reli-

gious factions, the troops are now to take on their real role — that of an army of occupation." Harold Wilson has said that the B Specials will be "progressively stood down", but that is lies.

This SLL lunacy is the stuff which, in IS, the leadership will use to make their own analysis seem the only sensible one and to smear their critics as agreeing with the *Newsletter*. It is not only self-blinding, by way of deducing comments and policy from flawed abstractions; it is also, I think, an attempt to suck up to Northern Ireland Protestant workers.

"No reforms can be granted. The central question facing all sections of the working class is now — will Ulster be another Vietnam?"

This may seem prescient. It is not. The "method" of the *Newsletter* was to permute the possibilities, even the most unlikely ones, and "warn" against the worst possibility and the most extreme extrapolation. In fact what happened in Northern Ireland, and what forces and issues were in play in the IRA's "long war", had nothing in common with *The Newsletter's* scenario for "another Vietnam".

26 August: the main front-page headline: "Military rule in Northern Ireland".

The Government has handed "all power for making major security decisions to General Freeland. To all intents and purposes there is now a Bonapartist military dictatorship in the Six Counties"

"This dictatorship can only function on the basis of a complete political sell-out by the liberals of the civil rights movement and the petit bourgeois nationalists of the South..."

This criticism of those who gave political endorsement to the troops counterposes not working-class political independence, but an implicit siding with the Paisleyites, on the basis of political lunacy.

It is, again, the sort of "analysis" that made what IS was saying seem sensible by comparison. It also made it difficult to discuss the attitude to the troops rationally in the framework of independent working-class (or "Third Camp", though the Trotskyist Tendency would have shunned the term then) politics.

"By making it a Catholic issue", the *Newsletter* continued, "the Civil Rights leaders are deepening the split within the Protestant poor and thus playing right into the hands of the military dictatorship".

It is true that the "justice for Catholics" politics of the civil rights movement — and some of what PD did — cut them off from most Protestant-Unionists. But here the *Newsletter* is blaming the civil rights movement of the victims of the Six Counties system for the events that led to the deployment of troops on 14-16 August.

"Playing into the hands of" was a standard Stalinist weaselling formula for denouncing things "left" and not under their control.

All the SLL's fears have come true — but oddly. They feared — or said they feared — military dictatorship in Britain, and lo and behold, they see it in Northern Ireland.

"The Ulster crisis has completely smoked out the opportunists." The *Newsletter* offers a long chronicle of the Morning Star's call for troops — the troops "who shot James Connolly". And, surely the SLL leaders, who know the history of the movement, can not but be aware of the parallels with the German Stalinists' attempt to answer every question about unity with the Social Democrats against Hitler fascism by way of emotional declaration that they were the "murderers of Rosa Luxemburg"? This is almost evidence of somebody cynically playing nefarious games...

Yet amidst the welter of nonsense, the *Newsletter* can sneer tellingly at *Socialist Worker's* political collapse: "What has happened to fearless 'left' talk today...? The entry of British troops into Ulster forced them out into the open. There could be no in-between position. It is either immediate withdrawal or, whatever the 'left' talk of action on the barricades, endorsement of their presence..."

"*Socialist Worker* of August 21 supports the troops being in Ulster... Its front page demands read: 'The Barricades must stay until: B-Specials disbanded, RUC disarmed, Special Powers Act abolished. Political prisoners released'. No demand for the withdrawal of British troops. Quite the opposite".

It is either the *Newsletter* or *Socialist Worker*: there is "no in-between position". As the IS leaders also insist.

On 30 August, prominent on page one is an article, "Ulster: Revisionists in Action", by Cliff Slaughter. The "revisionists" here are IS and other non-SLL Marxists and socialists.

Slaughter is the SLL's leading academic-intellectual, sharp as a critic, not ignorant or stupid, but sterile because tied to the toy-town juggernaut of the SLL's "Apparatus Marxism". The SLL's line is determined by calculations of what will help the organisation and damage its enemies. People like Slaughter write to those pre-ordered formulae, justifying "the line". They write the "Marxist" equivalent of Catholic apologies.

Even so, some of Slaughter's criticisms of IS are valid.

"In Ulster the Roman Catholic hierarchy is doing everything possible to gain control of the insurgent Catholic workers..." Catholic middle-class politicians... "stretching right down into the Civil Rights leaders... are at one in accepting the virtues of the British Army presence... The whole thing amounts to a conspiracy to lead the Catholic workers to the slaughter."

"While British Army units are preparing to break up the remaining barricades and pockets of workers resistance, the International Socialists can write in their weekly *Socialist Worker*: 'The deployment of British troops in Ulster provides some sort of security against the lawlessness of the RUC and the B-Specials... But the troops cannot remain forever and when they go the working people of Ulster must be secure enough to move on to meet the social needs of this area. To do so requires an end of state terror'."



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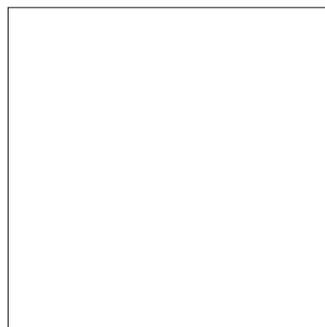
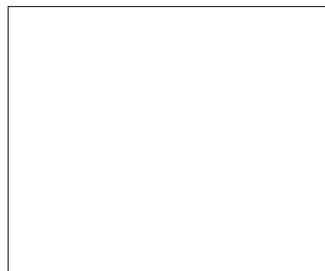
# SOLIDARITY WITH IRANIAN TRADE UNIONISTS

BY HARRY GLASS

INTERNATIONAL union federations are organising a global action day on 6 March to express our solidarity with Iranian workers. The day of action is demanding that Mansour Osanloo and Mahmoud Salehi are released immediately and unconditionally

from prison. The TUC, RMT, ASLEF, T&G Section of UNITE, UNISON and GMB unions in Britain and hundreds of others internationally are backing action on the day.

The campaign is also demanding respect for fundamental workers' rights in Iran. The imprisonment of Osanloo and Salehi are not isolated cases. Nine education workers were sentenced to 91 days in prison recently. The



*Mahmoud Salehi (top) and Mansour Osanloo. Join the protests on 6 March to free them!*

Iranian authorities claim they are "threats to the national security" although in reality, it is genuine trade union activities they want to crush.

Reports from Iran indicate that Osanloo and Salehi continue to suffer in prison. Najibeh Salehzadeh, Salehi's wife and his lawyer visited him in prison on 7 February and after a row with the authorities were allowed to see him. They reported his health has greatly deteriorated. They demanded that Salehi be released by the Iranian New Year (20 March).

Mansour Osanloo is also suffering from ill health. According to his lawyer, he received eye surgery in late January but was sent back to Evin prison just a few days after the operation, despite doctor's recommending five weeks convalescence.

His comrades in the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Bus Company are also being victimised. Some 26 activists from the union who are still suspended from the jobs are facing severe financial hardships and at times cannot feed their own children. The authorities have been trying to force them into exile outside Tehran. They are not receiving any pay, benefits or compensation. Some face further charges for union activities.

• More information:  
[www.iftglobal.org/campaigns/freesosanloo.cfm](http://www.iftglobal.org/campaigns/freesosanloo.cfm)

## Teachers: Vote yes for action!

BY PAT MURPHY, NUT EXECUTIVE

AROUND 200,000 teachers in the National Union of Teachers (NUT) will receive ballot papers from 28 February asking them to vote for strike action on pay.

The importance of a yes vote and a good turnout in this ballot cannot be overstated.

A good result would lead to the first national teachers' strike in over twenty years. The strike is planned for Thursday 24 April. More importantly, teachers are the first group of public sector workers to respond to a pay offer for the 2008 pay round. A successful ballot and strike action could set the tone for more widespread action across the public sector.

On the other hand, a set back could be used by public sector union leaders who have been determined so far to avoid any fight over pay. The lecturers' union UCU is planning to ballot in March for action to coincide with the NUT on 24 April. If these two unions strike together we should use that to put pressure on other union leaderships to pull their fingers out and take action on pay.

Teachers have been told that we will get a 2.45% increase from September 2008, with 2.3% increases in both 2009 and 2010. This at a time when inflation is over 4%, and after two years of real terms pay cuts. For 2006-8 teachers had 2.5% rises with a promise that, if inflation devalued that award, we could seek a fresh pay review. In the event inflation averaged 4% and teachers experienced a pay cut, but the government refused to agree any review.

The strike action call has come about because of this prior pay cut and the threat of three further years of the same treatment.

Education Secretary Ed Balls tried to spin the pay award as a real-terms increase by using the consumer price index, which does not include housing costs. Claiming the inflation was 2.1%, he insisted that we were doing well. The measure accepted by government and employers in the past for upgrading inflation-linked pensions and in wage bargaining has always been the retail price index (RPI). When the government accepted the principle of an inflation trigger mechanism in the last teachers' pay award, they agreed that inflation would be measured by the RPI.

*Continued on page 2*

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