

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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TOWER HAMLETS COLLEGE TEACHERS FIGHT BACK WITH INDEFINITE STRIKE

ENGLISH COURSES FOR MIGRANTS CUT 50%

BY JEAN LANE, TOWER HAMLETS UNISON

Management at Tower Hamlets College, in East London, have insisted that they must show a profit at all costs by the end of the financial year.

So thirteen workers (equivalent to 6.75 full-time teaching posts) have been threatened with redundancy. These posts add up to a saving of just £300,000 for the college, which has £6,000,000 in reserves.

Many staff have been pushed into taking voluntary redundancy — equivalent to 20 full-time teaching posts.

The worst hit courses will be those most used by

local people and school leavers: Hair and Beauty, IT, and most of all, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages).

Teachers at the college, members of the UCU union, have been on indefinite strike against the cuts since the end of August.

The strikers insist that they are fighting for more than their jobs, for the right to education and for their community. Tower Hamlets is one of the poorest boroughs in London, overwhelmingly working-class and with large black and Asian communities, including many migrants for whom ESOL courses are vital, for access to jobs and the whole society around them.

The strike has already won several small gains.

There was to have been a reduction in A-Level teaching hours, which has now been fought off. Three ESOL compulsory redundancies have been withdrawn, and learning mentors whose contracts the college intended not to renew have been reinstated.

Originally the cuts in ESOL provision were going to mean the loss of 1,000 places.

Support from students, workers from other colleges and other local unions has been impressive. Teaching was cancelled in the week beginning 7 September and teachers are planning to organise classes for their students in community sites independent of the college.

Continued on centre pages

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Is Ryanair the Tory model for councils?

By VICKI MORRIS

Barnet trade unionists got a nasty shock on the morning of Friday 28 August, finding our borough was front page news in the *Guardian* newspaper: "Tories adopt budget airline service model — London borough's radical no-frills approach could drive Cameron policy".

The reason it was a shock was because we felt we were successfully heading off the Tory administration's mass privatisation plan, "Future Shape". Future Shape was floated initially as a grandiose scheme that would see the council reduced to a "strategic hub", while the vast bulk of services would be outsourced as part of a pan-public-sector comprising the council, NHS, Barnet College, Middlesex University, local Jobcentres, etc. Future Shape was nurtured by secondees from British Telecom, who probably hoped that their company would get the contract to deliver the IT for this new "place shaping" alliance.

In spite of the hype and the tens of thousands of pounds spent on consultancy fees, Future Shape has run up against reality: few companies can deliver most of the services that the council needs or provides. The council has little expertise in the contract culture that Future Shape implies.

The council unions, Barnet trades council, and disgruntled residents pulled off two large public meetings and two large lobbies of council Cabinet meetings against the scheme. The scale of savings likely to be achieved is unclear and could be small for the amount of political effort expended selling it to the public and council staff, just

at the time that the banking crisis calls into question the sense of putting the private sector in charge of vital areas of the economy.

In short, Future Shape looks like it is about to be kicked into the long grass, as Barnet trade unions and many residents hope.

So the *Guardian* articles that talked about how Barnet might model its service delivery on budget airlines such as Ryanair, where only the most minimal service is provided and customers pay for "extras", and dubbing Barnet "easyCouncil", did come as a shock. Barnet Unison secretary John Burgess, responding in the *Guardian*, said: "We don't need any ideas which will promote inequality." In its negotiations with the council unions over Future Shape, such ideas have only been mooted in the margins.

TORY MEDICINE?

Barnet's Tory administration, led by Mike Freer, considered a right-winger, portrays itself as a trailblazer.

It has a reputation for successfully pioneering the use of social networking media as innovative new ways to engage with politically apathetic residents. The reputation is out of all proportion to the achievement. Likewise, Future Shape was meant to be a new way of doing things, and other councils were watching to see how it developed.

Is Conservative leader David Cameron allowing the supposedly maverick Barnet to test the water for some radical and unpalatable ideas that could become widespread under the next Conservative government?

Barnet public sector trade unions and

supporters have begun to meet regularly, in addition to Barnet trades council, and a loose network of concerned residents called Barnet Community Campaign. Our thinking is that, since leaders of the public sector bodies in Barnet have been meeting to discuss how to save money — or implement cuts — the public sector unions should be meeting as well. We are planning a lobby of the cabinet on 26 October that is due to reveal the latest incarnation of the Future Shape plan.

At our last meeting we discussed the significance of the *Guardian* articles. Opinion divided as to whether the council's chief executive Nick Walkley has shot himself in the foot, with a careless soundbite about Ryanair — an idea he had mentioned in roadshows he has been holding with staff — or whether Walkley and council leader Mike Freer really are acting as sounding boards for the Conservative's deeper plans for public services.

Cameron has distanced himself mildly from what Freer has said, but that surely isn't decisive. Freer is the parliamentary candidate for Golders Green and Finchley, so not all that maverick.

Whatever the case, it's clear that most local authorities in the land, run by whichever party, are going to face brutal spending cuts, along with the rest of the public sector, and are looking for ways to save money. Who would follow Freer's Ryanair model and how on earth would it work?

In the *Guardian* Freer says: "Some things will be cheap and cheerful and in other areas we will provide complete services. This is not about rolling back the frontiers of the state, but about targeting our interventions." Freer wants

"a new relationship with citizens", which, as the *Guardian* puts it: "will include the understanding that, as with budget airlines, the council will not automatically provide blanket coverage of services as they tried to do before... He denied service standards will fall under the reform programme and said by careful targeting of resources, standards could be maintained."

I doubt anyone but a hardline Tory buys that. For starters, the council is busily drawing up a list of things it is obliged by law to provide, and cutting the rest, such things as the Welfare Rights Unit that provides a vital service to adults with severe disabilities or illness.

The council has recently found itself repeatedly in the news for its decision to cut the wardens from sheltered housing schemes for the elderly and replace them with a "floating support" service. This measure is happening all over the country, thanks to a decision by the Labour government to remove ring-fencing from the sheltered housing budget, but Tory Barnet has suffered a particular blow to its reputation through the dogged campaigning of local residents. If the sheltered housing scenario is what Freer means by "targeting", it is deeply unpopular and will be fiercely resisted.

At the end of the day, budget airlines offer a bargain basement experience, with many hidden costs, and they ruthlessly exploit their staff. To equate this in any way to the delivery of vital public services in local government has been deeply insulting to employees and residents alike. If Mike Freer and even David Cameron think that people will willingly vote for that, or accept it without a fight, they are surely fooling them-

Megrahi, Lockerbie, and British capital's love affair with Libya

By SACHA ISMAIL

Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi is the Libyan man convicted for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie, in which 270 people died. The Scottish government's decision to return him to his home country on compassionate grounds (he has terminal prostate cancer) has generated a lot of controversy.

The FBI has condemned Megrahi's release, telling Scottish justice minister Kenny MacAskill: "Your action gives comfort to terrorists around the world". The Scottish Parliament has voted to condemn the decision.

But the Scottish government's decision is, in itself, perfectly reasonable. Why shouldn't a dying man, imprisoned thousands of miles from his home country, be returned home for his last few months?

Beyond that, there has been a lack of openness and evidence of manipulation about the whole case, from start to finish. We are not qualified to assess claims made, by John Pilger for instance, that Megrahi was framed according to the needs of US and British alliances in the Middle East. It is possible. The British government gives every impression of

having something to hide.

Many of the families of the Lockerbie victims have been demanding a public enquiry for years. It does not look like they'll get one.

The background to Megrahi's release is the growing links between the Libyan regime and international, including British, capital.

Both Peter Mandelson and Gordon Brown have had repeated discussion over trade with Libya in recent months. Prince Andrew, "Britain's Special Representative for International Trade and Investment", visited Libya three times last year. There is a "Libyan British Business Council" which includes BP, Barclays, GlaxoSmithKline and British American Tobacco.

The UK imported £1 billion of petroleum from Libya in 2008, a 66 percent increase on 2007, and the export of goods from Britain to Libya rose nearly 50 percent in the first half of 2009. In 2007 BP signed a £545.5 million deal allowing it to search for Libyan gas both on and offshore.

The Gaddafi regime, previously at daggers drawn with the Western powers, has now been brought in from the cold. No one should imagine, however, that it was ever anything other than a nationalist dictatorship.

The dictator who came in from the cold

The "Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya" (the last word means "state ruled by the masses", something like "people's republic") was established forty years ago, after a coup by nationalist army officers in September 1969. Claiming to chart a "middle-way" between Stalinism and capitalism, its

ruler colonel Muammar Gaddafi indulged in ornate rhetoric about creating a state ruled by grassroots people's committees — while in fact creating a militarised autocracy. He has not held any formal position in the state since 1979, but in reality continues to exercise power under titles like "Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution".

Arbitrary arrest and detention, and prisoners held incommunicado and for long periods of time without charge or trial, are common in Libya. In May, Fathi Eljahmi, the country's most prominent democratic dissident, died in Jordan, where he had been rushed for treatment after falling into a coma in custody. He had spent most of the previous seven years in prison.

Naturally there are no independent trade unions. The National Trade Unions' Federation is controlled by the state. The International Centre for Trade Union Rights says that "no strikes have been reported for many years. According to the government, workers may strike but do not need to because they control their enterprises. External sources, however, reject this assessment."

Brown, Mandelson and co. may be happy to overlook Libya's human rights record in the interests of trade. We are

TUC CONGRESS

TUC failures show need for a rank-and-file movement

The motions on the agenda for the TUC, meeting in Liverpool from 14 to 17 September, show that Britain's trade-union establishment is far from facing up to the battles ahead.

Unemployment is heading towards three million. Cuts in public services will soon be sharper than ever before.

Workers at Vestas, Visteon, Prisme, and Thomas Cook have occupied workplaces to try to save jobs. The Vestas workers have called for nationalisation where a workplace is shut by a private owner. Anti-cuts campaigns are emerging around the country.

Yet the agenda contains only one motion directly about jobs, number 3 from Unite. And it concludes with nothing more than two feeble, plaintive calls on the Government, to:

"review its current plans for statutory redundancy pay and to support the proposals contained in the Private Member's Bill currently being considered in Parliament which would raise the maximum weekly pay to the equivalent of average earnings and maintain such a link in the future... introduce a temporary short-term working compensation scheme to ensure essential skills are not lost to the economy."

TSSA adds a amendment: "Congress congratulates those workers fighting to keep their jobs, including those taking action such as the occupation of workplaces in order to raise awareness and stop closures." But... *congratulations?* Is that really what workers pay union dues for, to have our leaders condescendingly "congratulate" us when we take action?

A number of other motions mention jobs in passing, but none is decisively stronger.

In an amendment to motion 19, from the Bakers' Union, the CWU says: "The time and conditions are right to create one million Government-employed 'green jobs', working on renewable energy, sustainable public transport and energy-efficient house building projects, thereby tackling unemployment and taking positive action on climate change for the benefit of all people."

Note: "Government-employed". That means extensive nationalisation. But then why has CWU general secretary Billy Hayes not added his name to those of the 16 union leaders who signed a letter to the Guardian on 3 August backing the Vestas wind-turbine blade workers? Why has the CWU as a national union — not just the CWU rep at the local delivery office — not actively backed the workers?

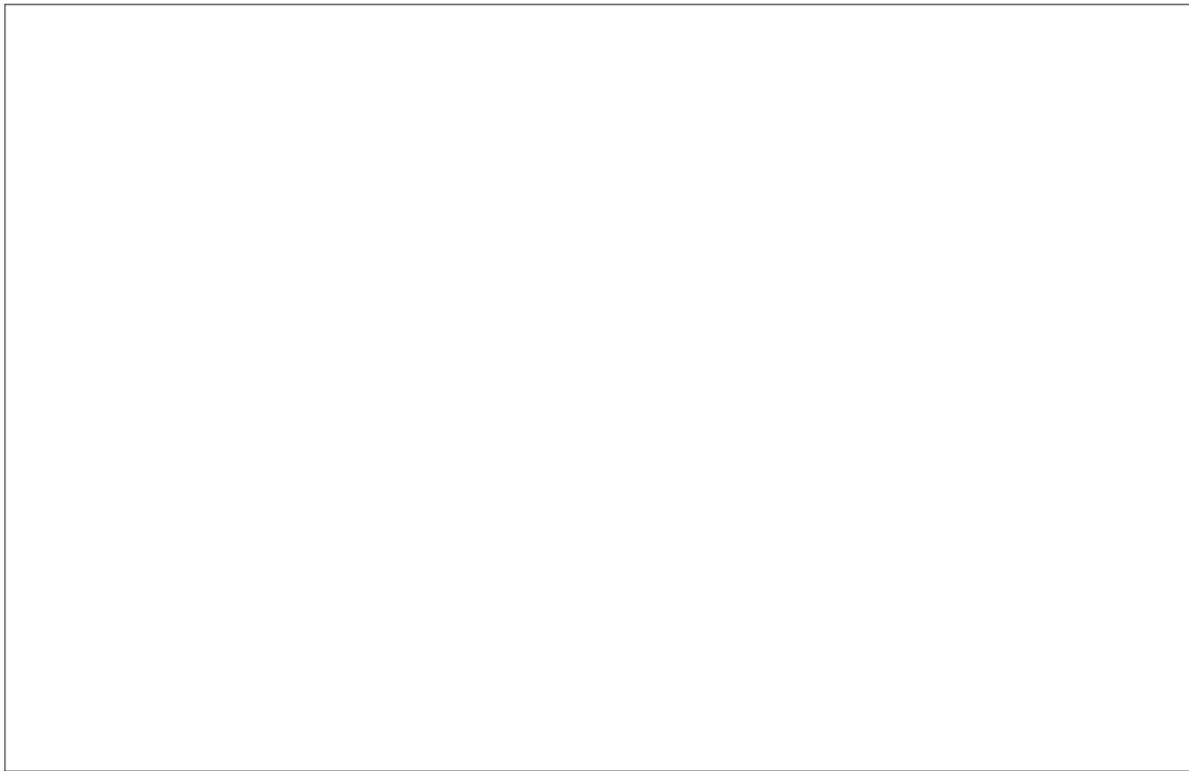
There are a lot more motions on public service cuts, not surprisingly since unions' membership is now heavily concentrated in public services.

The one with some active commitment is from the NUT:

"Prior to the general election, Congress agrees that the General Council should organise, or assist in the preparation and co-ordination of, a major publicity campaign, public meetings and a national demonstration, and, as appropriate, calls for industrial action, with the theme of 'no to unemployment, no cuts in pay, pensions or public services'."

There is also an interesting motion from the CWU on working-class political representation.

"Congress recognises the lack of adequate representation at political level for the members of affiliated unions. Congress notes that New Labour, as currently constituted, is now failing to attract the support of our members and that its vote at the 2009 European Election reached an historic low. The present Government's policy of continuing privati-



The Vestas workers (pictured above) called for nationalisation. What did the TUC do? Pretty much nothing!

sation, cuts in Government spending and failure to remove the anti-trade union-laws is unlikely to change this in the near future.

"Congress therefore calls on the General Council to convene, at the earliest opportunity, a conference of all affiliated unions to consider how to achieve effective political representation for our members".

If this does not get passed, CWU should push for the unions affiliated to the Labour Party to call such a general conference, so that discussion about unions' relations to the Labour Party can be made accessible to the rank and file and not confined to cabals of top leaders.

The main motions on public services, from Unite and PCS, limit themselves to general opposition to cuts and wistful suggestions that public finances could be redressed some other way.

Unison: "oppose cuts in public services and pensions... seek union engagement in efficiency programmes... promote the involvement of staff and unions in improving services... fair and increased taxation... a payback tax on profits above a certain level on financial institutions that have benefited from public money".

PCS: "protection of public services and an end to privatisation... ending the systematic tax evasion by corporations and individuals and the current tax privileges of the wealthy... opposing wage cuts, and rejecting any public sector pay freeze... demanding government action, including nationalisation, to protect and create jobs".

Of the left unions, RMT seems to have used its motions to the TUC rather in the same fashion that a grouplet like the Spartacists or Workers' Power might use a chance to put motions to a broad conference organised by SWP, SP, or AWL, i.e. to "make propaganda".

However, its chief effort to "make propaganda" looks to have been successful. RMT's motion calling for the TUC to back the Communist Party of Britain's "People's Charter" (RMT general secretary Bob Crow is close to the CPB) has a more-or-less supportive amendment from Unite, and NUT's

motion also endorses the People's Charter in passing. The practical thing to be done about the Charter, however, is only to "assist in achieving one million signatures" for it, not industrial action for the Charter's demands.

The Prison Officers' Association, of all people has a good "propaganda" motion, with active commitment, on the anti-union laws.

"Congress calls upon all affiliated trade unions and the General Council to organise a series of street demonstrations throughout the United Kingdom, and selective days on which trade unions will break the anti-trade union laws by taking a general strike. Further, these activities should continue until such time as the Government changes this anti-trade-union and anti-working-class legislation".

Unfortunately also, the FBU, another left union, uses its opportunity to put motions to push for boycotting Israel. Difficult for the TUC to be militant against British bosses? Well, then, it can at least be militant against Israeli workers, an easier target.

Or, at least, sound militant. The FBU has all the Israelophobic downsides of general boycottism, with their inevitable anti-Jewish implications if taken seriously - it calls for the TUC to "review" relations with the Israeli unions because of their failure to oppose Israel's attack on Gaza, though the TUC does not cut links with other union federations over such issues — but proposes no trade-union action, only to "promote a targeted consumer-led boycott... encourage trade unionists to boycott Israeli goods..."

The GMB has an amendment to soften the FBU, deleting the hint at cutting links with the Israeli unions and reducing the boycott to one only of goods produced in settlements in the Occupied Territories. (But how do you identify which those are?)

The TUC agenda underlines the need for a rank-and-file movement, across the unions, to push for solidarity, for a workers' plan adequate to the crisis, for union democracy, for calling the leaders to

TUC CONGRESS

What kind of anti-fascism?

This year's TUC has a spate of motions on the BNP. The last time the annual conference of the TUC passed a resolution dealing with racism and fascism was 2005. Then it was still possible to formulate a vague resolution condemning the BNP's racism, labelling them as fascists and urging for "more to be done".

It was possible — but not at all accurate — to talk about the BNP as an isolated entity. It was possible to avoid specifics, for all sections of the labour movement to unite around well meaning verbiage.

This is no longer the case. A succession of electoral gains by the BNP cannot be understood or articulated, not even by the most ostrich-like union general secretary, without reference to the economic crisis and the political collapse that preceded it.

So the resolution from Unison to this year's TUC (14-17 September) states that the growth of the BNP "represents the failure of all political parties to address underlying social and economic problems". PCS (the civil servants union) is more specific: "the collapse in the Labour Party's vote allowed the BNP to gain electoral success." The TUC's LGBT conference motion notes that "while social democratic parties have failed to slow the rise of the BNP, a prolonged economic recession could be the BNP's life support machine".

These declarations give evidence of some political shift. Given the situation in places like Shirebrook, a former mining community in Derbyshire, where an ex-Labour councillor has defected to the BNP taking former NUM members with him, it's understandable why some "shift" has taken place.

But what remedies are proposed? The PCS resolution calls for "Policies to combat rising unemployment, invest in public services, halt privatisation and promote equality". Unison states that "only strong local organisation will defeat the BNP" and calls on the TUC to "develop an economic and social programme that delivers for working class communities". Here, some of the old vagueness remains.

For example, NAPO (the probation service union) calls for TUC affiliates to "re-double ... opposition to the BNP". Along with more specific demands, PCS calls for an urgent "national demonstration".

More than one of the resolutions urge unions to use "resources such as *Searchlight* and Unite Against Fascism." The presence of such statements presents the danger of damaging compromises when the resolutions are composited. For example, to call for a "redoubling" of "efforts" rather than "strong local organisation" would be damaging. To call for a "national demonstration" without specifically calling for that demonstration to march behind working-class politics would be damaging. To tell trade unionists to use the "resources" of *Searchlight* and UAF, when both of these organisations resolutely refuse to engage with working-class politics, is damaging.

If Unison's leadership think the labour movement needs a plan to fight the crisis and the growth of fascism, then the question of exactly what such a "programme" calls for and how far it goes is posed. If the programme is to be just a repetition in more accessible form of resolutions passed at Congress, then there will be severe limits.

The debate at the TUC conference and the resolutions passed will not be the decisive element in the necessary task of forming a working-class campaign against fascism and racism; but they could strengthen the arm of those seeking to mobilise the labour movement on these terms. If the unions collapse back into a vague and sentimental, essentially right-wing anti-fascism of the sort that David Cameron feels able to support, the anti-fascism of UAF, then the existing problems will remain.

ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE

Oppose racism with workers' unity!

The exact relationship between the fascist far right and the "anti-Muslim" English Defence League is unclear. The EDL claim, implausibly, they are not racists. Perhaps there are direct links between the EDL and the increasingly visible and self-confident British National Party, perhaps the relationship is a little fuzzier.

What is clear, however, is that — de facto — a division of labour has emerged between the "respectable" face of political fascism, the BNP, which leads on anti-Muslim hatred, and the street provocations and violence of the EDL. And the EDL are stepping up their activity. They have called demonstrations in Harrow on 11 September, Luton on 19 September and Manchester on 10 October. This follows a demonstration in Birmingham on 5 September which involved around 80 EDL supporters clashing with anti-fascists.

Wherever Asian communities are attacked by bigots in their homes, in their mosques, we should help their defence. In this we cannot, and should not, rely on the police. We remember the slogan from the 70s: self-defence is no offence. And we will do everything we can to stop the rise of racism.

We also do will not forget who we are. We fight racism to unite workers of all skin colours and backgrounds to fight for human solidarity and socialism. That calls for a radical, socialist programme and no political concessions to any group — such as the political Islamist groups — who would also divide black, Asian and white workers.

In a number of areas of the country Asian and white workers live close to each other, but send their children to different schools and rarely mix. Distrust between Asians and whites in parts of the North West, for example, has been given a sharpness by poverty and the malign influence of the mainstream parties (who compete with each other to be tough on immigration and asylum), as well as by the fascist right. Trade union organisations which could bring black and white together on a progressive basis are weak organisationally, and politically.

The "example" provided by the EDL — that whites

should "stand up for themselves", including by using violence and intimidation — will not be lost on some backward white people.

We can expect a rise in attacks on Asian people — Muslim and non-Muslim alike. And it is not inconceivable that relatively small-scale confrontations between the EDL and Muslim youth could spark much bigger anti-Muslim riots. That polarisation is what the EDL want. And the "electoral" political beneficiaries will be the BNP.

In the 1970s a spate of violent attacks on and racist murders of Asian people led to a radicalisation of Asian youth. But then the youth were influenced by a militant workers' movement (including examples of official labour movement solidarity, backing for instance the largely Asian Grunwick workers). Across the country hundreds of grass-roots anti-racism campaigns existed, often organised by far-left organisations.

And the Asian youth movements of the 1970s were influenced by the far left.

Now the situation is different. Among Muslim youth the Islamist groups are likely to grow partly as a result of the poisoning of white-Asian relations.

We should not forget that the EDL is not the only group to organise aggressive, reactionary provocations which have the aim of driving workers and youth into communalist/religious camps. Islamists — Taliban supporters — organised a stupid protest in Luton recently against soldiers returning from Afghanistan. They got the ugly reaction they were cynically looking for, and publicity for their reactionary cause.

Leftists who continue to believe we have something in common with Islamists, or believe they can opportunistically benefit from such protests, are turning themselves into the dupes of Islamism.

We conceive of ourselves as competitors with the Islamists. Our aim is to win the youth to the labour movement, away from communalism and the influence of the mosque and towards social protest directed against the system which creates poverty and inequality. To do that we need to fight hard to build a working-class campaign against racism and fascism.

BNP AND 'QUESTION TIME'

Free speech is not the issue

The BBC is preparing to invite British National Party leader Nick Griffin to appear on its Question Time programme. We should oppose Griffin speaking.

In general, socialists are for the widest possible freedom of speech. More than any other social force, the working class needs democratic rights in order to organise itself and struggle effectively.

We aim to disrupt and prevent BNP meetings, street activities etc. not because we against fascists having freedom of speech in the abstract, not simply because we loathe their ideas (though we do), but because we know fascist organisations exist to initiate violent civil war against ethnic minorities, LGBT people, the left - and ultimately the whole labour movement.

The issue in this case is different again.

For an organisation to have "freedom of speech" does not require them to be given a spot on Question Time (any more than it requires one of the daily papers to offer Griffin a regular column!) In general such programs give a voice to a very narrow layer of the political and social establishment; when was the last time a striker or grassroots campaigner was invited to speak? So why should Griffin be provided with a megaphone?

The BBC's blasé self-justifications are more evidence of the decline of "liberal" broadcasting and journalism, displaying a lack of the necessary alarm and moral outrage at the growth of fascism in Britain. The BBC tops'

decision to invite Griffin, motivated essentially by the consideration of viewing figures, will help the BNP gain "normality" and build their violently anti-minority and anti-working class organisation. We should demand that they withdraw it.

We support action by unionised BBC workers to refuse to broadcast Griffin, as postal workers have refused to deliver BNP election leaflets.

Whether or not Griffin speaks, however, is hardly the most important issue. The key question is why the BNP are growing.

The type of person generally invited to speak on Question Time means that Griffin, if he speaks, will be confronted by a united "anti-fascist" establishment. The political parties who, through cuts, attacks on the working class and pandering to racism, have created the political, social and economic conditions for the far right to flourish will wag disapproving but ineffectual fingers at those tempted by Griffin's pseudo-anti-establishment party. No one, on the panel at least, will point out that the BNP defends with racist virulence the same ruling class represented by New Labour, the Tories and the Lib Dems.

Our difference with the "mainstream" i.e. bourgeois politicians is not, fundamentally, that they will debate the BNP when we won't. It is our belief that only a labour movement which struggles against both fascism and the social conditions which allow it to grow can effectively take on the BNP.

AFGHANISTAN

From bad to worse

BY MARTIN THOMAS

On 4 September, a NATO air strike killed about 90 civilians in northern Afghanistan. According to the United Nations, NATO and US operations killed 828 Afghan civilians in 2008, and the Taliban killed 1160.

Other sources give higher estimates for both NATO/US and Taliban killings.

Back in 2001, as the US and its allies were preparing to bomb Afghanistan, we wrote:

"The US-British alliance will not defeat, or cut the roots, of terrorist-fundamentalism. Its stated aim in Afghanistan is to replace the Taliban regime by a 'broad-based' government around the king, the Northern Alliance – and splinters from the Taliban! The Northern Alliance are also fundamentalists. They are guilty of many atrocities – only their atrocities have all been in Afghanistan rather than some being in other countries..."

"And the US-British alliance may well be drawn into a war much wider, much longer, much deeper, much messier and much bloodier than they have started with. It is... quite possible that the US-British attack will end with bin Laden, or his similars, still at large and active, and new masses of recruits for them and other terrorist-fundamentalists".

So it has turned out. Even if US or NATO air strikes kill some Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, the accompanying civilian casualties – and general resentment against the foreign military presence – recruit more fighters to the Taliban just over the border in Pakistan. And US policy has contributed to the decay of the state in Pakistan and the

growth of Taliban and Taliban-type forces there.

Obama's officials want to adjust US tactics to reduce the killing of civilians.

But the US and NATO are trying to control a country which by now has a settled hostility to the foreigners. They have probably even less solid, in the way of local allies, than the USSR had in its murderous but unsuccessful war in 1979–88. (The USSR had the local Stalinist movement, the PDPA, which had some real base of its own).

The civilian deaths are an almost inevitable product of the basic situation, and simultaneously a factor in worsening it.

Meanwhile evidence is mounting of mass fraud and a poor turnout in the 20 August presidential election. On 6 September the election commission said it had annulled votes from 447 polling stations, but many people in Afghanistan say the fraud is much wider than that.

The turnout was first reported as "40 to 50%", passable if not good. Now best guesses are that in fact it was 30 to 35%.

On 8 September official results showed votes for Hamid Karzai going over the 50% necessary to avoid a runoff. Karzai was ahead of his main challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, by 54% to 28%. The recount ordered by the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission could overturn that seeming victory. The commission has said it has "convincing evidence of fraud."

The final announced results (after recounts and fraud investigations) could bring a triple whammy: a low figure for turnout, voting figures requiring a runoff poll in October, and none of the figures credible.

The nominal Afghan government has been shaky enough for years. Eight years after the US invasion, it is worse than ever.

According to a big article by Elizabeth Rubin in the *New York Times* magazine of 9 August, Karzai's government first lacked cohesion because (as she quotes the current Afghan ambassador to Poland saying), "most of the NATO members [had] a gentleman in the cabinet. Each one defends its own man".

As it has become a bit less an uneasy coalition of clients of foreign powers, it has become instead an uneasy coalition of warlords and mafia-type business people. Rubin quotes president Karzai's older brother, who is himself a prominent business figure in Kabul: the government, he says, "is mujahedin, it's per-

sonal relationships, cash basis, no institutions".

Foreign aid money has flowed into the pockets of US contractors and Afghan mafia types, rather than to improvements for the peoples of Afghanistan.

Writer Ahmed Rashid puts the growing dilemma clearly: "without a [credible] partner the US becomes nothing but a naked occupation force which Afghans will resist".

The Taliban remain as ultra-reactionary as ever. The forces which socialists can positively support in Afghanistan, such as the fragile women's movement in Kabul, are weak. We would solidarise with the people of the cities against conquest by the Taliban. But the US and NATO military forces should withdraw.

Electoral farce

Italian teachers: occupying to save jobs

From back page

The education system in Italy is as grotesquely inefficient as it is indifferent to the quality of education offered to working class children.

Ramshackle education-on-the-cheap-Italy spends less than any other industrialised country Europe; only half the population receive any kind of post-compulsory education.

While the government finds money to subsidise private schools, it regards funding teachers in public schools as a subsidy for layabout good-for-nothing graduates, as the Minister for Education Maria Stella Gelmini put it recently: "It is intolerable that in Italy the public school is used as a social welfare network."

The government has little respect for public school students. They will be left with crowded classrooms. Afternoon school and many courses will be cancelled.

Such a system can only survive with the connivance of the myriad teachers unions whose leaders have derailed again and again any serious, united campaign to resist both the cutbacks by successive governments and the chronic inefficiency of the whole system. The creditable exception to this is COBAS – the "Base" union confederation. COBAS has called for one day strike of all its teachers and public sector workers for 25 October.

These protests are long overdue and come at a crucial moment when the conditioned reflex of the leaders of the main confederation unions will be annually activated against the government of the day, with the "threat" of "a hot autumn". This year the verbiage and the rhetoric are thinner and shabbier than usual. No wonder.

Last winter, as soon as the crisis hit sectors of the "real" economy, the leaders of the three main unions set aside their apparently sharp tactical differences about how best to live with the government's announced assaults on public services, education, wage contracts, etc., and fell over themselves to assure the government and the business world of their readiness to accept the "collective sacrifices" necessary to put things right. But this is something they and their predecessors have repeatedly done for the system when things get rough.

In practice, what this has meant in Italy is that the rich and wealthy enjoy generous taxbreaks, investment incentives, and the end of Berlusconi's "crusade" against tax evasion and irregular cheap labour – things that have always seemed to be a natural right to Italy's business class. Is it any surprise that in an economy that has been stagnant for nearly 15 years the possessing classes have exponentially increased their share of the national cake?

The economic situation deteriorated dramatically in 2009 – GNP declined by nearly 5%.

For the workers, union passivity meant an end to any illusion about resistance to government attacks being organised. This is especially so in education, where last autumn the bureaucrats had organised a mass demonstration, announcing a campaign!

We have seen the unions collaborate with the plans to offer an improved social security cushion to workers laid off in struggling plants, with the promise that when good times return they would be rehired. As the crisis deepens, the "redundancy money" offered diminishes – and, in fact, millions of workers are not covered by the scheme.

The poisonous effect has been to further isolate and atomise workers, rendering them passive and vulnerable to the lying racist propaganda of the Berlusconi mass media.

A central tactic of the Berlusconi regime has been to deepen the divisions among the working masses in order to restructure the labour market in the interests of greater capitalist productivity, the long-time weakness of Italian capitalism.

Both the pre- and post-election carnival of hate-filled and lying racist propaganda has shifted millions to the Berlusconi camp – or more accurately to the odious vanguard of his campaign,

the Northern League. This noxious exercise has culminated in a piece of draconian racist anti-immigrant legislation whose vindictive essence is grimly captured in the recent news that the four half-dead Eritrean survivors of 21 days adrift amidst the luxury yacht infested waters of the Sicilian canal, are to be prosecuted for illegal presence in Italy! People whose 74 compatriots perished on the journey!

The criminal silence and inaction of the union leaders, among whose members there are tens of thousands of immigrants, after such events is and will remain a blot on the Italian labour and working-class movement. Such shame can only be removed by the actions of those workers who have started to resist in the only way they can.

Every struggle and every victory, big or small, can begin to embolden both themselves and others and help bring the workers' movement closer to the realisation that the increasing political and social nightmare in Italy will only be brought to an end by mass united working class-led action.

Ultimately it is a battle for a workers' revolutionary government. The Italian left should set itself such a task and be judged accordingly.

- <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=35733685501>
- messages of support: precariscuola@gmail.it

DIAGEO

“Joint” task force fails

BY DALE STREET

In mid-July up to 20,000 people marched through Kilmarnock in opposition to Diageo’s plans to shut down its Johnnie Walker bottling plant in the town, at a cost of 700 jobs, and to shut down its Port Dundas grain distillery in Glasgow at the cost of another 200 jobs.

From the platform at the closing rally great speeches were given by politicians from all the major parties pledging their support for the campaign to keep the bottling plant open.

A government-led task force, involving elected representatives from across the political spectrum, trade union leaders, and civil servants from Scottish Enterprise, would draw up an alternative set of proposals. This would save jobs while also meeting Diageo’s commercial objectives (i.e., maintaining its profits).

Scottish Enterprise commissioned consultants BDO Stoy Hayward to research Diageo’s proposals and draw up an alternative plan to save jobs. The consultants published their findings in late August.

They said Diageo’s proposals to shut down its Kilmarnock plant and reduce the number of its bottling plants in Scotland from three to two made sense.

The consultants’ conclusions about the Port Dundas distillery were equally pessimistic: an attempt should be made to sell it off as a going concern, but, in the current economic climate, it was unlikely that a buyer would come forward.

As an alternative to Diageo’s proposals, the consultants’ report suggested that closure of the existing Kilmarnock plant could be coupled with the opening of a newer, and smaller, bottling facility on a greenfield site in the town, providing work for 350 of the existing workforce.

Diageo welcomed the consultants’ broad findings but rejected the suggestion of opening a new plant in

Kilmarnock.

The consultants’ findings should not have come as a surprise. Their starting point was the same as Diageo’s: how to maintain and boost company profits.

One simple way of doing so is to get fewer people to produce more at less cost. That is Diageo’s case for shutting down Kilmarnock and Port Dundas, and for expanding production in its Fife plant. From a capitalist point of view, in which all that counts is maximising profits, that makes sense.

But the costs of that capitalist logic are borne by the workers. For some, it means unemployment. For others it means intensified working conditions. For all, it means constant job insecurity. And after one “re-organisation”, the drive to maximise profits simply begins a fresh cycle of cost-cutting and job losses.

The heady rhetoric about saving jobs has now been replaced by more mundane calculations about trying to save some jobs at least.

Achieving even a “comparably” lower employment loss depends on the Scottish government persuading Diageo to adopt a proposal which — despite the site being provided free-of-cost, and backed up by a government subsidy — they have already rejected, i.e., opening a new bottling plant in Kilmarnock.

The cross-party and union-backed task force set up to keep open the Kilmarnock bottling plant has abandoned that goal. It now accepts the proposals from Diageo for hundreds of job losses.

The trade unions involved in the task force — Unite and the GMB — should withdraw from it, to concentrate instead on mobilising support from across the trade union movement, including the Diageo workforce internationally. They should fight for: no job losses in any of Diageo’s plants; cutting hours, not jobs; the nationalisation under workers’ control of Diageo’s operations in Britain.

FUJITSU STRIKE BALLOT

Fighting for jobs, pay and pensions

Unite members at Fujitsu Services are gearing up for a fight over jobs, pay and pensions.

Fujitsu is a Japan-based multinational; its main UK subsidiary provides IT services to many government departments and large companies. It employs 12,000 workers at over a hundred locations across the UK.

Last year Fujitsu Services’ profits doubled to £177 million — 8,000 per worker! Two directors were recently paid £1.6 million to leave. The parent company paid out dividends of 24.46 billion yen, approximately £154 million. And yet deep cuts are being made.

- The company says 6,000 workers are “at risk” of redundancy, proposing to cut up to 1,200 jobs.

- Having agreed a pay rise (at the cost of £15 million), it has instead imposed a pay freeze.

- It wants to close its final salary pension scheme, typically amounting to a

pay cut of 15-30 percent for the 4,000 staff affected.

Unite members have voted by 87 percent for strike action in a UK-wide consultative ballot. (PCS members have also voted to strike.) They are preparing to hold a legal ballot and start strike action in October.

This struggle, not just in the private sector but in the un-unionised bastion of the IT industry, could not be more important. Fujitsu Services workers have a record of struggle, with Manchester staff striking for 12 days in 2006-7 to successfully defend and extend union recognition. The fight they are preparing for now demands huge solidarity.

- For more information, including how to make solidarity, see www.ourunion.org.uk/fujitsu/mancr.htm www.unitetheunion.com/fujitsu www.iansunitesite.org.uk

Building a new unemployed workers’ movement

BY ELAINE JONES, VICE CHAIR WIRRAL TUC

In Birkenhead in September 1932 there was a demonstration demanding an increase in unemployment relief. More than 10,000 people attended. Several people were arrested and another demonstration organised. For two days there was fighting with the police. On day four they won some of their demands.

This was a result of the work of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement (NUWM), set up in 1921 by members of the Communist Party. The NUWM aimed to highlight the situation facing the unemployed and in particular to fight the means test, which forced workers into almost pauperised conditions before they were eligible for unemployment support. The demands were:

- Raise the benefits of the unemployed
- Remove the “not genuinely seeking work” clause
- Restore benefits to all those excluded by previous governments
- No disqualification unless refused work available on trade union rates of pay
- Shorter working day without loss of pay
- Adequate pension for all over 60.

The NUWM organised a series of hunger marches to London. As with the Jarrow Crusade, these were met with attacks from the bureaucracy of the workers’ movement.

The largest of the NUWM marches was the National Hunger March of 1932. 3,000 marched to London to present a petition signed by more than one million people demanding the abolition of means testing. When they reached the capital, a demonstration hundreds of thousands strong greeted them in Hyde Park.

The then prime minister Stanley Baldwin refused to accept the petition and unleashed police on the demonstrators. Opposition to the role played by agent provocateurs on the march led to the formation of the National Council for Civil Liberties, the forerunner of the campaign group Liberty.*

The NUWM had its faults. In the leadership the CPers Harry McShane and Wal Hannington became notorious for the aggressive manner in which they enforced the Stalinist line. During the Third Period, they made it clear that, within the NUWM’s ranks, Trotskyists, ILPers and other independently-minded socialists were unwelcome. They also believed that in every situation there were revolutionary possibilities and that social democrats were social fascists not to be worked with. Despite these serious faults they did manage to organise thousands of unemployed workers. We can learn a lot from the experience of the NUWM during the 1920s and 30s, while avoiding the mistakes of the Communist Party.

In Birkenhead last week, Wirral Health and Safety Centre launched an Unemployed Workers Movement for Merseyside. Eighty years on, the levels of unemployment in the area are again increasing. Here many people fall into

the category of ‘long term unemployed’ but they are now being joined by the victims of the latest recession. In Merseyside unemployment has increased by 54% in the past 12 months and is now standing at 57,340 or 6.15 percent. This is 2% above the national average which is 4.1%.

The Office for National Statistics has reported that the number of working-age people in so-called workless households jumped by 500,000 to 4.8 million in the year to June. The workless household rate increased by 1.1% to 16.9%, the highest since 1999 and the biggest year-on-year increase since Labour came to power in 1997.

The number of households with someone in work fell by 410,000 to 10.7 million. The workless household rate was highest for lone parents at 40.4%, followed by one-person households at 30.1%, with the worst figures recorded in the North-East at 23.2%. The lowest rate was in the East of England at 12.2%. Figures showed that the biggest fall in the employment rate over the past year was for married fathers, down 2.1% to 88.8%. The number of children in workless households was 1.9 million in June, up by 170,000 from a year ago. There is clearly again a need for a movement that fights for the unemployed.

The meeting in Birkenhead was open to all unemployed people and is a local attempt to create a voice and representation for unemployed people, a campaign for free training and jobs at a proper rate of pay. PCS reps have also been invited to future meetings.

A Charter for the Unemployed was also discussed. Demands raised so far:

- Right to work for all
- National Minimum Wage of £8 per hour
- Unemployment benefit to be 70% of the National Minimum Wage
- Free Transport for the unemployed
- Free prescriptions
- Free Legal Aid
- Free Childcare
- Free Education for students (including tuition fees as in Scotland)
- Apprenticeships for young people.

An Unemployed Workers Union has also been established by the Unemployed Workers Centre in Salford, an appeal sent out for support and a call for the establishment of a national campaign.

The need obviously exists for a movement of the unemployed. Even now when it is clear that it is capitalism that causes unemployment, unemployed people, especially single parents and those who are disabled, are scapegoated and blamed for a whole host of society’s problems, are expected to live on next to nothing, and are pressurised to do ‘work trials’, i.e., work for nothing.

Organising such a campaign will be difficult but with large numbers of young people out of work and large numbers of people losing their jobs in a short space of time the trade union and socialist movement has a responsibility to help organise the unemployed.

* From *Class struggle and Social Welfare*, by Michael Lavalette and Gerry Mooney

ROYAL MAIL

Vote “yes” in national ballot

PETE FIRMIN, A LONDON POSTAL WORKER, SPOKE TO SOLIDARITY ABOUT THE POST AND TELECOM UNION CWU'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST JOB CUTS IN ROYAL MAIL

As far as I can tell, the strikes across the country in recent weeks have been pretty solid. In London, they are certainly having an effect on the mail. Understandably, many workers are now impatient for the national ballot.

The national ballot on action starts on 16 September. The union has put it back a week because, it says, some branch records were not sufficiently up to date to withstand legal challenge. That may be true, but surely the national union should have addressed that problem earlier.

Something like one third of the postal membership of the CWU has been involved in the action to date. I'd be reasonably confident of a big yes vote in the ballot.

The ballot will run for two weeks, from 16 to 30 September. I've heard no detailed discussion of what action will follow from a yes vote. It is not clear yet whether local action will be suspended during the balloting or not. London postal workers are out again on Wednesday 9 September, “network” drivers in many areas on 12-14 September, and a few delivery offices on 12 or 14 September. We can expect that the union leadership will initially use the national ballot result, assuming that it's a strong yes, to try to get concessions from Royal Mail, before calling any action.

It is not clearly exactly what the union's demands are for the strike action. The general line is that while the CWU accepts that job losses are necessary, they should be agreed rather than

imposed, and workers should share in the savings made.

The London division leadership, which is generally more militant, has been pushing the national leadership to move to a national ballot, but doesn't have a different position from the national leadership on the strike's demands.

The demands I'd want to see would be more like: no job losses; a shorter working week; and reversal of the changes made by Royal Mail in the last few months to cut jobs and increase workload.

The Royal Mail bosses' view is that the only way to compete with private firms like DHL is to cut labour costs. I think they were hoping that Mandelson's plan to part-privatise Royal Mail would bring that with it, but they've had the objective in mind since before Mandelson proposed privatisation.

Their talk of new technology is mainly just back-up to the drive to cut labour costs. There are new mail-sorting machines, and they have been tested, but they don't seem to cut costs much. Royal Mail will bring in more mechanised sorting, to some extent, but not as much as they say.

Bringing in part-time delivery workers is certainly part of their plan. In many areas of the country they have already brought in a lot of part-timers.

The union leaders' strategy to deal with this? I wish they had one. They do not really have a strategy to deal with Royal Mail's assault on jobs and conditions.

At the end of last year the national union leadership asked branches not to agree to any job cuts without an overall national agreement being made first. Branches have done that. But it's taken until now to get a national ballot on what is really, now, a national issue.

What's left in Unite?

BY DAVID KIRK

United Left, the new united “broad left” in Unite, held its hustings to decide who should be its candidate for the post of General Secretary in Manchester on 5 September.

When TGWU and Amicus merged to form Unite, T&G general secretary Tony Woodley and Amicus general secretary Derek Simpson became “joint general secretaries”. The merger terms say that Simpson must retire on 23 December 2010 and Woodley before 23 December 2011.

The first proper Unite general secretary is to be elected some time in 2010, and will take office when Woodley retires, on 24 December 2011 or earlier.

Les Bayliss, an official close to Simpson, is said to be the leading right-wing candidate for the job.

The 5 September meeting voted by a majority of about three to one — with about 300 present — to back Len McCluskey as United Left candidate. It was not, however, straightforward or harmonious.

This was never going to be an easy process; history and personal feuds, impenetrable to the uninitiated, seem to divide some members more than the huge political differences in the organisation.

An elaborate weighted voting mechanism was planned for the hustings (but, thankfully, never used) and to gain entrance to the hustings you were meant to be verified as a bona-fide supporter of United Left by a “regional coordinator”.

Sadly, the regional organisation of the United Left is not lively enough to make that unproblematic.

Some 20 people were excluded from the meeting on the grounds that they had never turned up to meetings before. Others were excluded who were just late. Jerry Hicks walked out, citing the exclusions. The meeting narrowly voted to let everyone in, so he came back. Then the chair moved that only those who had been given a voting slip could vote, and Hicks walked out again, along with 20 of his supporters.

According to people who walked out

with Hicks, they had a meeting in another room at which they voted unanimously for Hicks to stand. Hicks did not confirm he would stand but it is probable he will.

It does look as if the United Left shot themselves in the foot. Hicks supporters can paint the hustings decision as illegitimate, though Hicks would never have got more than 40-50 votes out of 300, even with the excluded votes.

Rob Williams condemned the exclusions and refused to confirm if he would stand down if he didn't win. Williams is the convenor at Linamar in Swansea who was dismissed by his bosses for daring to stand up for his members but was reinstated when the workers voted for strike action. He also played a key role in the Visteon dispute.

Because he represents the kind of rank-and-file militancy we fight for, our bulletin called for a vote for Rob. However, there were problems with his platform. There was a pledge to take an average worker's wage but nothing to tackle the perks and pay of the other officers. The question and answer session also mainly revolved around disaffiliation from the Labour Party. Williams pushed the Socialist Party's line on disaffiliation — as the only way of reclaiming the union.

While we do not oppose disaffiliation moves, this alone will not turn Unite into the genuine class-struggle organisation needed; that requires the building of a mass rank-and-file movement.

Len McCluskey is currently Assistant General Secretary. In his youth he was a Militant Tendency supporter, but there was nothing in McCluskey's speech or answers that current joint General Secretary Tony Woodley would not have said.

The fact that the left in Unite supports a candidate whose main appeal seems to be that he will continue the policies of Woodley shows the vast task ahead in the union facing revolutionary socialists.

In the coming election (and in the run up to the first Unite Rules Revision conference in 2010) Workers' Liberty Unite activists will seek to constantly raise the issue of what kind of union the left must fight for, and what kind of left we need.

Strike plan in Jersey

BY MARY BURGESS

A meeting on 7 September for public sector workers in Jersey to discuss the pay freeze announced by the Jersey Government drew 1,000 workers and has resulted in plans for strike action across the public sector in Jersey.

The meeting was hosted by the public sector unions, mainly the teachers' unions and Unite. 6,000 workers are affected by the freeze. The public sector on Jersey consists of manual workers, teachers, airport workers, transport workers and health workers. A strike by all these workers would shut down the island.

The Government has refused to negotiate and even bypassed its own negotiating bodies to impose the pay freeze. Last year saw low pay awards with the excuse that the cash was needed to fund initiatives to support the island and it workers in the current crisis. This year the money

for the pay award is simply being sat on, “just in case” of further “economic pressure”.

Chief Minister Terry Le Sueur has repeatedly said there will be no reversal of the pay decision.

Strength of feeling is high and has been for some time. The gap between rich and poor on Jersey is huge, with a high level of poverty and a higher cost of living than the UK. The laws on Jersey are also very much behind the times. There are no real equality rights there. It is still legal to discriminate on grounds of race!

There are no political parties on Jersey barring the slightly left of centre and very small Jersey Democratic Alliance.

Last year saw threats of action which resulted in the unions coming together to co-ordinate. Now there is a 24 strong committee of representatives from the unions and the different sectors within the unions. Perhaps this could be the beginning of a real workers' party on Jersey?

Construction ballot: don't waste the potential!

BY GERRY BATES

There is another dispute looming in engineering construction.

A national ballot of workers on seven major sites, organised by both the GMB and Unite ran from 11 August to 1 September, taking up the employers' refusal to make a pay offer or give any guarantees of employment security in the review of the NAECI agreement for 2010.

The unions have not published the ballot result. They are putting new proposals from the employers to a national shop stewards' meeting on 17 September.

The two waves of wildcat strikes earlier this year showed that solidarity, all-

out action and workplace democracy win. In workplace meetings it was also possible to tackle the nationalism and even racism of some members by opposing the use of slogans like “British jobs for British workers”. (A process not helped by Derek Simpson posing with this slogan for the *Daily Star*!)

Power stations can be shut down by legal strike action. The plan is to target several power stations and completely shut them down.

Compromise and sluggishness will not only risk losing the confidence of these militant workers, but open the trade union movement up to more attacks from employers and government.

CLIMATE CAMP

Where now?

BY JORDAN SAVAGE

Climate Camp 2009. Location: Blackheath. Target: Global Capitalism. The site for this year's Climate Camp was chosen because there have been proposals for part of Blackheath to be adapted into a horse-racing track for the 2012 Olympics.

This would mean permanent loss of common land and destruction of one of London's few green spaces. At the top of Lewisham Hill, Blackheath has a view of the City of London, always on the horizon, supposedly as a reminder to campers that the enemy, big business, is never far away.

Climate Camp has always been an anti-capitalist, largely anarchist, movement and the choice of this location was part of an attempt to move away from liberal, NGO-centred approaches to stopping climate change, and to reiterate the sentiment that as long as capitalism is buying and selling us and our land in the endless pursuit of profit, climate change cannot be effectively stopped.

There is no fault in that sentiment per se. Capitalism is indeed the enemy and, if climate change is to be stopped, if it can be stopped, it will be stopped by radical social change, by workers banding together and refusing to go on working in industries that are killing the planet, and developing new sustainable industries — that is a worker-led transition to a zero-carbon economy.

What this year's Climate Camp was missing was any real way into the local community, any connection to grass-roots struggle. The day of action, as lively and colourful as ever, was focussed around six climate change targets with centres in the city. All that activists were really able to achieve through their actions were a series of dynamic publicity stunts.

Anything that makes the general public more aware of the impact that our capitalist economy has on the environment is important, indeed necessary. But this kind of stunt is necessarily a flash in the pan. To give it the name "direct action" is even a misuse of a term that originally meant providing a direct solution to a problem; standing naked in the window of E.On Spin company Edelman PR, for example, is a good way to attract attention, but it does not actually solve anything.

Even within the camp this year, activists were beginning to grumble that there was "too much of a festival atmosphere". There was a tendency to ascribe this to the absence of police — without the siege mentality that they brought out last year, it was harder to keep up an aggressive energy. Just being able to run the camp in the open felt like a victory — and never mind the politics of climate change. In fact, the unfocussed atmosphere of the camp owed more to the fact that there was no real target here, no opportunity for a sustainable, ongoing struggle embedded in the local community.

At Heathrow and at Kingsnorth, both sites of previous camps, there were real battles to be fought, against airport expansion and against the development of a new generation of coal-fired power stations. If Climate Camp is to become

more than a festival of skill-sharing for activists and a media awareness week, it needs this kind of grounding in reality. More than that, Climate Camp needs to focus itself around practical means to change; linking up with local struggles for a brief time only leaves local activists feeling abandoned when a new target emerges. Careful groundwork must be done within communities to make certain that the fight for a green economy really takes hold, and is led by the community.

It must not become the case that the general public think that Climate Camp activists will save the world for them. Rather, we must see the dissemination of ecological politics, mass democratic organising and imaginative action into local communities and the labour movement, so that long after the fair has left town, a real fight, to defeat climate change and to take back the power from capitalism, is left behind it gathering strength. This way, a spirit of solidarity will be engendered, at home and internationally. Climate Camp has got the heart, it has got the energy; with a real effort to engage systematically with local communities, we will find the means to win real social change on an ecological agenda.

Bob Sutton comments:

I've read the above article and had many conversations with people post climate camp and at Vestas on this topic. I think the answer as to "where next for the climate camp?" boils down the answer; root your fight to change the world in a politics of solidarity.

I felt the Workers' Climate Action workshops and the contribution to discussions made by WCA activists at the camp were successful in raising such a politics, fighting class politics, and have been very important in shaping the ongoing debate as to where things are going.

However I am also writing as member of Workers' Liberty. How a tendency like the AWL relates to wider networks like WCA is a question that remains very much to be resolved. There is some apprehension within the climate change movement of WCA and that it is being used as a front. Amongst some, this can be attributed to what is essentially animosity towards working-class politics, indeed any politics, and a defensiveness of some fairly effete forms of activism. However there are many who are keen that [something like] WCA grow and develop who remain wary of getting involved, often informed by a history of being burned by unilateralist sectarian behaviour on the part of Trotskyist groups.

It is undeniably true that over this summer period many of the people who have been most active and visible in WCA, at Vestas and at the camp, have been AWL members. However at times we have been taken up for using WCA as a flag of convenience.

The WCA Conference is an opportunity to build on the work already done in developing a cohesive network and set of ideas to fight class struggle ecology. AWL members should participate in this on the understanding that we have a lot to learn from as well as a lot to contribute to this network.

• www.workersclimateaction.wordpress.com

"The strength of standing together"

IAN TERRY, ONE OF THE WORKERS WHO OCCUPIED THE VESTAS FACTORY, NEWPORT, ISLE OF WIGHT, FROM 20 JULY TO 7 AUGUST, SPOKE TO SOLIDARITY ON 9 SEPTEMBER.

We're stopping the blades from going out from the St Cross factory because we believe they're our blades, from our factory, and we would like to see them put up in our country.

I think it's difficult to stop them getting out, but people are motivated to do it. We're getting more and more people each day willing to help us, as local people walk past the picket [which is on the cycle path from Newport to Cowes] and talk to us about it.

I also want to see an overall fight for jobs on the island, and for building a strong trade union movement here.

We want Vestas to be forced to give up the St Cross site to another employer if they want to get their new site for R&D. We've got a meeting today with the South East England Development Agency, and we're in contact with green manufacturers across the country. We want to get the council and the Government to bring new jobs to the island.

After experiencing the solidarity that we got, we realised the strength of being able to stand together. So we now think it's important to support all workers' struggles, especially as workers in dispute often don't have a lot of people on their side. We've gone along to support the local post workers' and bus drivers' picket lines in the last couple of weeks.

For the day of action on 17 September, we want to see lots of creative ideas. We have a few ideas of our own in the pipeline, but we want to see more. We hope people will do flyering and banner

drops. A green teaching pack has been put together for schools, so that teachers can show solidarity by teaching a green topic for the day, or even for one lesson.

RMT [the union Vestas workers joined after starting the occupation] are trying to build a trade union movement of fighting unions rather than of those union leaders that are in the Government's pocket. They are also trying to do all they can to get reinstatement for the 11 of us who were sacked by Vestas and so lost our redundancy money.

I spoke to the Executive of the Fire Brigades Union on Tuesday [8 September]. There was a lot of interest in the 17th there, and they asked what they could do to help promote our cause at the TUC Congress starting 14

Vestas workers and supporters joined Newport postal workers on their picket line 28 August

VESTAS

Vestas workers keeping up factory blockade

FROM BACK PAGE

We do not know exactly when Vestas will try to move the blades. There is good reason to suppose it will be soon.

These blades, after all, were due to be out of the factory before 20 July, and the nine are worth about £700,000. There is also other stuff — including a mould — that Vestas are likely to want to move from St Cross by barge. Probably Vestas are delaying in the hope that the picket line will wither away.

Workers and supporters are now keeping up a 24-hour picket both at the roundabout at the factory's main gate and at the "marine gate". Many workers unable to be regularly at the pickets are ready to turn out to the marine gate when we have notice of the barges moving, but supporters are urgently needed to keep up the 24-hour coverage at both sites.

Over the period since about 31 August, when the workers first learned that Vestas bosses had the blades ready to move, the necessary support has come mainly from a few dedicated local activists, climate-campers who responded to efforts by Workers' Climate Action and AWL at Climate Camp, and AWL members. The SWP has also had a small

presence there, and mobilised a number from Portsmouth on 4 September, but regrettably SWPers say that they consider the blockade only a "gesture".

Although the RMT — the union that many Vestas workers joined after the occupation started — for some time had full-time organisers stationed in the Isle of Wight to help with the dispute, it does not now have organisers there, and, sadly, has not helped mobilise for the pickets.

Support is urgently needed.

Pressure on Vestas via the blades is unlikely to be enough to win the original demands of the occupation. But it could win some concessions. Vestas boss Ditlev Engel has already said that he would consider reinstating the redundancy pay for the 11 men among the occupiers whom Vestas sacked for occupying, thus depriving them of redundancy pay.

Unfortunately, at a Campaign Against Climate Change meeting in London on 7 September, RMT general secretary Bob Crow called for people to donate to the Vestas campaign fund on the basis that donations can make up the money the occupiers are missing, not on the basis that donations can help a militant campaign to force the Vestas bosses to "consider" further.

On the island, Vestas workers and supporters have shown that they understand solidarity by marching to join the picket lines of Newport Royal Mail delivery office workers, and of drivers in the island bus company Southern Vectis on 3 September.

Workers and supporters are also beginning to discuss the next steps for activists and the local labour movement after the industrial action at Vestas ends, one way or another.

Mapping practical plans can help maximise the number of Vestas workers who will take the flame lit by the occupation forward into continued campaigning, and minimise the number who sink back into individual efforts to cope with unemployment or scraps of casual or part-time work.

The Vestas dispute has stirred up the island's labour movement as not for many years. Almost every union that

organises on the island has become active in support at some level or another.

A relaunched county Trades Council could take forward those revived contacts into a permanent organisation, stronger than the current Trades Councils (Cowes, Newport, Ryde) maintained by the brave efforts of a small number of retired trade unionists.

It would be in line with TUC rules, which state: "counties which have unitary [local government] authorities [as the Isle of Wight does] usually have county trades union councils. These are not county associations, but trades union councils which represent union branches throughout the county. County trades union councils operate as normal trades union councils..."

That Trades Council could start by launching a general campaign for jobs — for green jobs, for unionised jobs, for jobs on decent wages and conditions, and for jobs with openings for young people — on the island.

The postal workers' dispute is about job cuts. 45 jobs are due to be cut soon at a tax office close to the St Cross factory, and several more at the Gurit factory just across the road from it. Jobs in schools are under threat from a big reorganisation. The Isle of Wight's Tory council is likely to follow other councils by cutting jobs in its 2010–11 budget.

Meanwhile, the South East England Development Agency has piles of money in the bank, will have the Venture Quays site (rented out to Vestas) empty and back in its hands soon, and has land earmarked for a tech-

nology park just outside Cowes. The local labour movement should campaign for decent jobs to be brought there.

Workers' Liberty organised a public meeting in Newport on 6 September about "how to fight for socialism, and win", in which we discussed the lessons of past defeats of the British labour movement and the ways to make sure that the next big political stirring-up of the British working class — which may well be triggered in the coming years by the huge economic crisis — ends in victory rather than defeat.

Learning the lessons of past struggles is the essential preparation for future struggles. But those lessons are never fixed once and for all. At the time, hundreds of thousands or millions of people learned inspiring lessons from the 1984–5 miners' strike. Some retain those lessons. But, 25 years of working-class defeats and disorientation on the left later, many young people know nothing of the miners' strike, and many older people now have "the lesson" in their heads as "don't try to take on the Government, or you will be crushed".

We need to work to make sure that the best lessons are learned from Vestas, and retained. To help with that, Workers' Liberty will be sponsoring a socialist discussion group in the Isle of Wight, open to all, to study British working-class history and its lessons.

- If you are willing to go to the Isle of Wight to help with the pickets, even for a couple of days, phone Ed Maltby on 07775 763 750.

- If you are interested in the socialist discussion group, contact Duncan

DIRECT ACTION, RATCLIFFE-ON-SOAR POWER STATION,

Climate Camp, Climate Rush and Plane Stupid are organising direct action at Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal fired power station on 17–18 October.

They say: "Nothing has done more to cause climate change than burning coal. To survive we have to stop burning it! We owe coal a lot — coal has powered history. But it's been over two hundred years, and we've figured out how to do things better. The next revolution will bring about a fairer, cleaner society."

Visit the website for more details: www.thegreatclimateswoop.org

WORKERS' CLIMATE ACTION CONFERENCE

SATURDAY, 10 OCTOBER 2009
11.45AM-6PM, CENTRAL LONDON, VENUE TBC
DETAILS FROM BOB ON 07843 945005
WORKERSCLIMATEACTION.WORDPRESS.COM

Workers' Climate Action have played a vital role in the Vestas dispute. They are holding their conference on 10 October.

The conference is being supported by the London Transport Region of the RMT, the union involved in strikes on London Underground and in the Vestas workers' struggle.

There will be a planning meeting for the conference on Saturday 12 September, at 6.30pm at the Institute of Education Bar, a few minutes from Russell Square tube.

Support the day of action, 17 September

Vestas workers are calling for solidarity across the country on 17 September, a follow-up to a first national day of action on 12 August. On the Isle of Wight, there will be a demonstration at 12.30 on 17 September from Church Litten Park, next to the library in the middle of Newport; in London, the Campaign Against Climate Change has called a protest at 5.30pm at the Department of Energy and Climate Change in Whitehall Place.

Other actions will be advertised at savevestas.wordpress.com

Students organise for new school year

Tali Janner-Klausner an activist in the London School Students' Union spoke to Solidarity

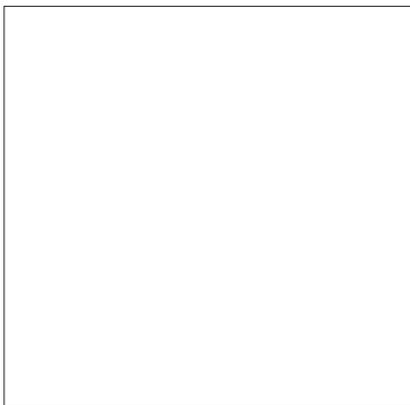
How did the London School Students' Union start?

LSSU was founded in February this year, at a meeting where it was agreed that we [school and FE students] needed a structure to defend our rights and work to improve education. School student activists in Edinburgh had already set up a union group, and we were inspired and encouraged by looking at the successes of the mass student unions in the rest of Europe. At the meeting, we discussed the issues that we needed to campaign on, such as privatisation and tuition fees, and agreed that a fighting union for school and FE students will have an increasingly urgent job in the coming years. As the recession deepens, the government is likely to make cuts in education, especially if the Conservatives get in next year. We need education to be a well funded, publically owned national priority, and we understand that this will only happen if teachers and students stand up for it.

What are the main things you've done so far?

LSSU activity has had three main focal points. We have supported local campaigns, such as the recent strikes in Tower Hamlets college, the school occupation in Lewisham and the "Keep it Park" campaign against the merger of Park Downs college. We have also been involved in national campaigns relating to education. LSSU members joined the protest against tuition fees earlier this year and have worked with Education Not for Sale and the Student Coordination conference. We have also had discussions on matters such as EMA (Education Maintenance Allowance) and private schools. Furthermore, we understand that our struggles in education are linked to issues worldwide, and so concern ourselves with broader political matters both in Britain and internationally. We have discussed issues such as the war in Afghanistan, the elections and subsequent uprisings in Iran, and on the BNP and how to counter them.

What are your current plans for the new school year?



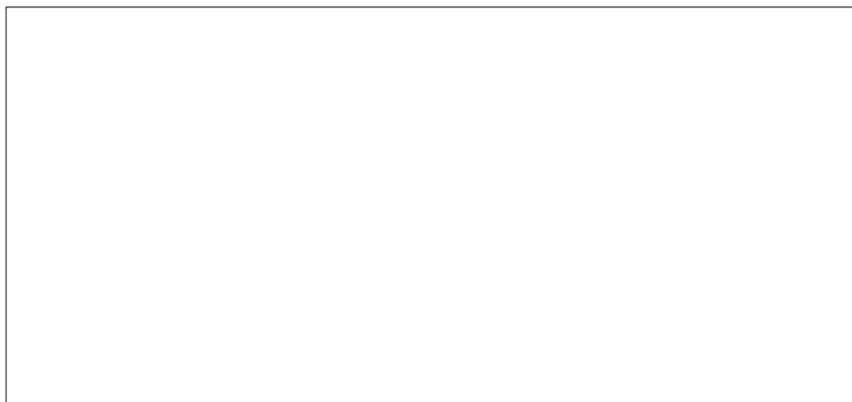
Setting up groups in schools will be a priority for us. At first these may simply be political discussion groups, but we hope that as our membership and resolve strengthens, we will be able to have official recognition from school managements as union groups representing the students. As well as this, and generally to expand our membership, we are aiming to set up a regular LSSU newssheet.

We hope to work on different things affecting school and FE students, not just those directly linked to education — knifecrime, higher youth minimum wage, free school meals etc. We will also look to work more with teaching unions both on a local level, for example over redundancy or pay disputes; and nationally, on issues such as class sizes.

What have you found to be the best way of drawing in new members?

I haven't found it difficult at all to get people interested in the union, you just need to talk about things that relate to students' lives — which anyway is what LSSU is about. Whether it's that you can't study the subject you'd planned as it's been dropped by your college due to cuts; your teachers could be stressed because of poor treatment by the management; you can't afford to go university because of tuition fees; your school is being sold off to become an academy or your time is wasted by alienating exams and detentions — most school students have no choice in coming across the issues facing education.

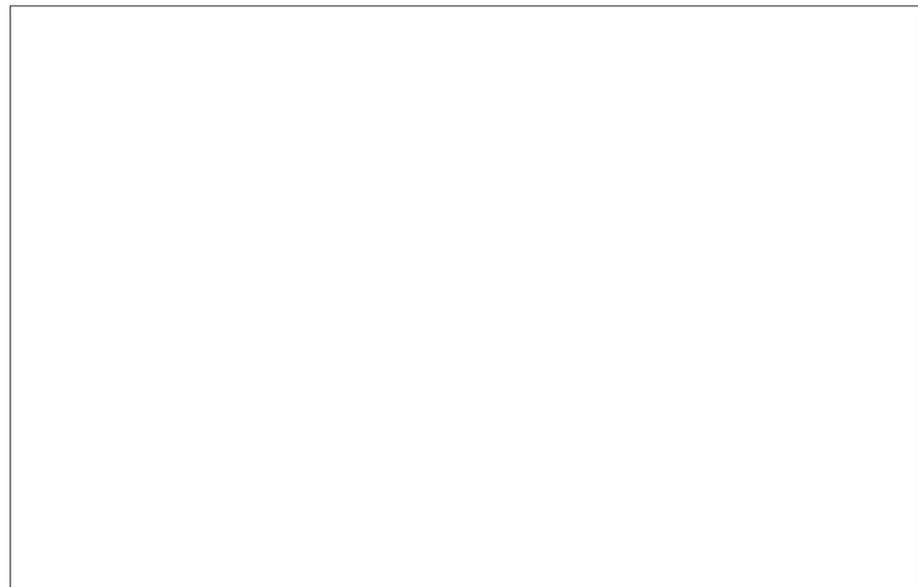
Moving from a positive response to LSSU's work to active involvement in the union is of course less straightforward. But as we have become a more solid organisation, it has been easier for people to see that LSSU is impor-



LSSU support the Vestas workers

TOWER HAMLETS COLLEGE

Striking to stop cuts and courses



FROM FRONT PAGE

These cuts disproportionately affect black, Asian and female students for whom ESOL education can be, literally, a life line — a way to fully participate in society.

How can you cope with everyday bureaucracy, with finding a job, or a place to live, if you speak little or no English? How can you talk to the teacher of your child about your concerns? How can you talk to your GP about your health? How can you think about further educating yourself if you cannot learn to speak and write English?

For other working class adult students these cuts will affect their "second chance" education. Working-class people who may have missed out on formal education earlier in life can study at an college like Tower Hamlets, get top quality education and potentially get themselves out of the rut of low pay or unemployment more and more workers are now stuck in.

But that is not the kind of education Tower Hamlets College boss, Miichael Farley wants. In his post for less than six months, he wants to focus what the col-

lege does around the needs of business.

At a time when the government is cutting benefits, increasing rhetoric around the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor, and demanding migrants "fit in" with a "British way of life" (whatever that means) it smacks of obscene hypocrisy to allow education sector bosses to cut one of the only means many working-class people have of improving their opportunities.

This type of education has been hit not just by compulsory redundancies and cuts but also by the raising of entry requirements. Because of government targets, more resources are being put into targeting 14-19 year olds and taken away from older learners. Alison Lord, a UCU member from the college's Poplar site, said "if they don't have Level 2 [literacy or numeracy] by 19, they've got no chance!"

A senior manager joined the strike on Monday September 7, boosting the chances of victory. Unison members, who are currently being balloted, and have refused to cover the strikers' work, including induction and enrolment.

Support this strike!
(Thanks to Alice for additional information.)

What you can do

1. Visit picket lines all day
Poplar E14 0AF
Arbour Square E1 0PT
Bethnal Green E2 6AB
2. Take a collection at work:
Strike fund: c/o Keith Priddle UCU
THC Treasurer, Tower Hamlets
College, Arbour Square Site, E1 0PT.
Sort code 089299
Account number 65252262
3. Send urgent messages of support to:
Richard McEwan (Branch Sec)
07532364638 richmcewan@hotmail.com
Alison Lord (Branch Chair) 07805819605
lallylord@hotmail.com
John Budis (Branch Sec) 07967893664
johnbudis@gmail.com
4. Write to the Principal
Michael.farley@tower.ac.uk
5. Sign the petition:
<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/TH/Collegefunding>
6. Get uptodate info, video and photos
join the Facebook group: "Tower Hamlets, Stop the Cuts!"
7. Write to your MP:
www.theyworkforyou.com
8. Demand Jobs and Educations for All.
Join UCU sponsored lobby of the Labour party conference September 27 in Brighton.

save jobs

S

Students show solidarity!

Rebecca Galbraith spoke to two of the students at Arbour Square on enrollment day.

Jan Ducky was coming to enrol on the Access to Higher Education — social science and humanities. Jan is from the Czech Republic and is currently working as a hospital cleaner part time. He decided not to cross the picket line and instead joined the protest.

Why did you decide not to cross the picket line?

Because of my solidarity to the teachers. Because education is the most important thing. I attended some meetings in SOAS, "Ideas for Freedom", about strikes, unions, things like that. I heard some good ideas, and some unrealistic ones. But I decided that I want to support people, struggling not just for themselves, but for others. These teachers work for all of us, not just for themselves.

What are the reasons for the education cuts?

The excuse is the recession, the Ministry of Defence is over budget because of war and the MPs have spent the money on their expenses. So now they need to get the money from somewhere, they get it from poor people so that they can continue to support rich people.

How do you think we can win this strike?

It cannot be stopped with a small amount of people. Anyone asked not to go into college should not go in. We should show solidarity with those losing their jobs. Students in other colleges, all through the UK should support this. The unions need to support all the colleges. It should not be about whether a college is "profitable".

A lot of these cuts are directed at ESOL provision. Is ESOL important?

My English used to be bad, I'm still trying. I did ESOL in Waltham Forest and then in the Idea Store in Whitechapel. It is

very important for me, it is very important for everybody. Some people think they speak good English but they don't, the grammar is difficult. English is a useful language, if you want a job then you need to learn English. They cut the classes because they think it is for the poor class. People have good ideas, but they need support and education.

Dawn Guilfoyle was meant to be enrolling on the Pathways to Nursing Course, but she didn't and spent her morning persuading other students not to enrol. Last year she took the Literacy Level 2 course at Tower Hamlets.

Why haven't you enrolled today?

I did it in support of our staff. It is appalling how they have been treated. And to try and stop all the cuts. They just spent £40,000 at Tower Hamlets College on an air stewarding course, on buying a model aeroplane! That was £40,000 for nothing. It could have been spent on jobs. Mr Farley (the college principal) is trying to make students pay for courses. The likes of us on benefits can't pay fees; that is why we come to this college.

Why are the cuts happening?

Mr Farley says it is a lack of funding. This is complete rubbish, we need to keep the staff in jobs.

What would you say to other students to persuade them to do what you have?

Support the staff, if we work together there is nothing they can do. We need to defend the college for the future. This is one of very few colleges in Tower Hamlets. I have an 11 year old daughter and in five years she will be looking for a college. This is a good college, the staff are lovely, we need it.

What message would you like to give Mr Farley?

You are wrong in what you are doing! Re-think. Listen to the students and the staff, you need to keep the staff and stop what you are doing.

Teachers are not city bankers!

An education worker gives her thoughts on the strike and discussions with workers on the picket line

These cuts fall in line with a tide of xenophobic government reforms around ESOL provision; part of the big fuzzy picture of "integration" that they like to contradict.

Here's a struggle to be had out in the midst of tightening immigration controls, rising popularity of the extreme racist-right and let's not forget the big "excuse", this bastard recession.

But the compulsory redundancies at Tower Hamlets College were not directly implemented by local government, but they were carried out by the college principal in the interest of budget and "performance". At the very end of term all teachers were told there would be compulsory redundancies made on the basis of "performance management." "Why not voluntary redundancies at least?" a teacher at the college said to me (on Friday 28 August). Why not?

So they warned staff that they were going to be scored and the lowest scorers would be axed. You can imagine how the

staff felt. They were measured against such variables as student attendance (since when is it anything to do with your teaching if a student contracts swine flu?), sickness (you're kidding right?) and flexibility... Flexibility! So the key to scoring high on flexibility is making sure you have no commitments outside (or inside) of working hours, especially any that might concern trade union organising.

One teacher who lost her job had apparently had her class split into two in the first term, but the computer registration system had not been updated. So her class came up as consistently half full. This data was enough to prove her ineptitude, apparently.

To add insult to injury staff were told they had to go to a compulsory Professional Development training session after they had been warned of the cuts but not yet told who had been affected. This session was on "differentiation" (a buzz word in education for "making lessons accessible to a range of learners with differing language and cognitive abilities" — ironic?) and it was to be facilitated by an external agency despite the fact that there were plenty of skilled staff within the college who would have been able to run it.

This showed staff that management were more interested in buying in external consultants than in retaining their staff and treating them with the respect they deserved. Apparently hell was raised in the session. Good.

It is the way management handled the announcement of the cuts that really sticks in the throat. They told the workers that if they were being made redundant they would receive a letter by courier at some point during the first Wednesday of the holidays. People waited all day for these letters. One worker thought she was safe when a courier arrived with the news at 10.30pm! They were presented with their score-sheets; they had a low score and this was their "punishment". I don't think the teachers who were kept on were ever able to view their own score-sheet.

Funny that they didn't give them all out at the end of term so they could have compared? I guess the holidays are a good time to hit exhausted demoralised workers alone in their homes.

Isn't fair? Precisely. Call me a conspiracy theorist, but the mere fact that the cuts were largely made within the ESOL department suggests that the "score-sheet" tactic was all a ruse to make out that this was for the good of the students;

to project an image which might mean that people revere management and keep tabs on their score. This is all part of the changing face of education work where surveillance and performance are used as ways to scare and to divide workers and it runs in tandem with privatisation; it's all part of a programme to loosen the control that workers might have over their own workplace.

Well thankfully these workers will be not be divided on grounds of "performance" like the city boys and girls. They know what they're worth and they're putting up a strong fight. If only Unison [nationally] had got its act together to ballot a bit sooner than two weeks after the strike began, the whole college would have been brought to a standstill during these first enrolment days... but never mind, we should be used to unions slowing each other down by now.

Everybody should support this strike. Education workers in particular, who've been swallowing the Ofsted pill for long enough, should stand united against bully-boy tactics like the ones displayed at Tower Hamlets College and say: "We know what we're doing, we know what you're doing and we won't be intimidated by you!"

LGBTQ

Smash the pink pound!

BY GEMMA SHORT

“We’re here, we’re queer, we can’t afford the beer... the ticket price, or the time off work... Bank holiday weekend in Manchester, and Pride rolls in to fence off the “village”, colour everything (even the Union Jack) various shades of pink, and rake in ridiculous amounts of money.

In fact Manchester Pride deals in staggering amounts of money, with ticket prices at £15, making an income of £803,000 in 2007, and that’s not even to mention the millions made by the bars and venues inside of the barriers (for more detailed numbers see www.prideisaprotest.org).

Manchester Pride has long prided (no pun intended) itself on being a charitable, not-for-profit organisation, with a history of raising money for charities such as the George House Trust. However, closer examination raises some questions. In 2000, when the event was free, some £105,000 was given to charity. In 2007, when tickets cost up to £18, only £95,000 was given to charity. Why? This “discrepancy” has sparked a growing wave of discontent with Manchester Pride.

But that’s not the only source of discontent. The whole set up is unaccountable, undemocratic and business-like.

For many years Pride was run by a company called Marketing Manchester (essentially the Manchester tourist board) under various different names and guises but always handing the money over to Marketing Manchester. Since then, Manchester Pride has become

Make Pride political

a registered charity and organisation of its own. But dig deeper and what do you find — that the current chair of Manchester Pride is in fact the Chief Executive of Marketing Manchester!

All this could lead anyone to believe that Pride is not indeed anything to do with LGBTQ politics, yet the history of Pride around the world is that of fighting prejudice and for rights. Stonewall was a riot, the reaction of a community continually repressed by brutal policing and explicitly discriminatory laws. It seems to be wishful thinking to see this reflected in events in

Manchester over bank holiday weekend.

Yet a group of activists around the Queer Youth Network, Manchester University Student Union LGBTQ group and Pride is a Protest amongst others have consistently been trying to inject politics into Pride — with varying receptions. Last year activists were faced with organisers trying to remove their placards, making it quite clear the message of “pride not profit” was not welcome on the parade.

This year the NUS LGBT campaign/Manchester Student Union entry of “Pride not Profit” into the parade was accepted and, let’s say, tolerated. Activists also organised a “Reclaim the Scene” post-parade free picnic with an open mike, political stalls and discussions. This event attracted a fairly large number and made it clear that there are people unhappy with both the financial tangle and apolitical nature of Pride. It seems that this year’s Pride has taken into account this feeling, even if only to spare the embarrassment suffered last year when activists widely publicised Pride’s attitude to them.

In post-picnic discussions Manchester activists were rightly keen to avoid Pride neutralising their message by incorporating their events into the Pride weekend as an “alternative curiosity”. They planned to ensure that next year Pride should be free and inclusive of all of the LGBTQ community, not just those most profitable to the city’s businesses and tourist board, with LGBTQ rights at the top of the agenda.

• For more information and future events in Manchester see <http://www.reclaimthescene.com/> and www.prideisaprotest.org

FEMINISM

Reclaim the night for whom?

A number of Reclaim the Night marches against violence against women will take place in the next year. The London march is planned for November. Jordan Savage reflects on her own experience of these marches and asks how socialist feminists can contribute to this important campaign.

Since its inception in the late 1970s, the “Reclaim the Night” movement has taken the form of evening marches, usually (but not always) for self-defining women only, in opposition to male violence against women.

So far, so good: the women’s movement needs autonomous, women-only organisation to build solidarity, to build confidence and to establish a force fighting from the bottom up.

The demonstrations are intended to welcome all sections of the women’s movement, and as a result the over-arching politics tends to be bourgeois liberal feminism.

At the 2008 London march, this began to crystallise into a problem when sex workers and their allies formed the “red umbrella contingent”. Violence against women has a disproportionate effect on sex workers, and people on the contingent were there on their own behalf as victims and potential victims of violence, and to agitate within the women’s movement for changes to a policing and legal system that makes them vulnerable.

The route of the demonstration took protestors past a Spearmint Rhino club, where the Red Umbrella Contingent stopped to express solidarity with the workers at this club. But the contingent did not have the full support of the Reclaim the Night march in taking this action.

In Cambridge on 3 May 2009, Cambridge University Student’s Union (CUSU) Women’s Officer Natalie Szarek organised a re-launch of Reclaim the Night after a three year hiatus. The 60-strong demonstration took the shape of a women-only march through town to a mixed-gender vigil at King’s College Chapel.

An opening speech was given by former CUSU Women’s Officer Jo Reed. Like most of the demonstration, the focus of her speech was on the CUSU women’s community, but she did stress the need to

link up Reclaim the Night with the gay rights and anti-racist movements, making it clear that the fight for emancipation must be fought on all fronts and cannot be locked down to a single issue. Following her lead, the march left the starting blocks to the chant, “Sexist, racist, anti-gay, you can’t take our night away”.

But it was downhill from there (metaphorically speaking). The chants Szarek circulated included: “no means no, it don’t mean maybe, you can’t touch me, I’m not your baby” and “whatever we wear, wherever we go, yes means yes and no means no”. The slogans rankled with me because they assume blanket aggression on the part of all men on all streets.

This might be seen as pedantic over-interpretation were it not for the attitude of the radical feminist marshals on the march, who turned slightly cheeky, boisterous shouts of support from a young man, aged around 14, to embarrassed aggression by standing in front of him and freezing him out after he had shouted: “Stop violence against women? Cool! I’ll call my mum”.

The march culminated in a 100-strong vigil for people of all genders in King’s College Chapel. A minute’s silent reflection was broken by members of Robinson College Choir singing “Gloria in Excelsis Deo”, which lent a melancholic and worryingly religious and sanctimonious aspect to proceedings.

As the first speaker after the choir, I addressed the question of the relationship between the Reclaim the Night movement and the Red Umbrella Contingent, before moving on to talk about the negative impact that the introduction of “Swedish Model” legislation regarding sex work would have on a group of workers who are already so much at risk. I went on to explain to a baffled-looking crowd the perspective of working-class feminism more generally.

I focussed on the fact that much domestic abuse is exacerbated by economic conditions, and that the women’s struggle is worsened by the fact that a vast majority of low-paid and part-time jobs, particularly in the service industries, are occupied by women, leaving them on the back foot socially and financially even before you consider the stresses of what are considered “women’s issues” in society, and in particular by the bourgeois women’s movement.

There were two further speeches, one on the endemic violence caused by socially constructed gender roles, by an anarchist, and another by Szarek, who kept largely to the facts, and revealed some shocking truths about the way that the reporting of sexual violence is managed by government initiatives. One report she cited had claimed that incidence of rape in the UK have gone down significantly over the last five years; this was directly contradicted by the figures in the report. When Szarek questioned this, she was told that the reports had to “keep certain people happy”.

The a-political, bourgeois “tradition” of the Reclaim the Night movement risk endangering it. The movement will inevitably take on the shape of the loudest political voices in any city or town. In Cambridge a pseudo-anarchist modus operandi meant it was easy for a “tyranny of structurelessness” to emerge in the planning stages.

Voting procedures were outrageously un-transparent, and Szarek was allowed to manipulate email lists so that members of her coterie who had not attended any discussions were given a vote on crucial issues, such as the composition of the march and what role men would play in the demonstration as a whole. This allowed militant anti-male feeling to come to the fore during the march, under the guise of defending the “democratically” decided shape of the march.

My speech was received with a mixture of confusion and encouragement and, in some cases, embarrassment: the ideas of socialist feminism are still alien to a majority of people, particularly in the overwhelmingly affluent University of Cambridge.

The growth of the Reclaim the Night movement should be encouraged, but the rallying cry of the movement should be issued to working class women. We are not fighting for a neo-Amazonian women’s protectorate and we will not let workers be excluded from our campaigns because members of the middle class find their occupation unsavoury, or think that voicing working-class demands may retract from their own small victories. Reclaim the Night, but know that you are reclaiming it not from men, but from a system that forces women down as part of its multi-faceted “divide and rule” attacks.

• www.reclaimthenight.org

BOOK

“Terrorised” on all sides

TOM UNTERRAINER REVIEWS *IN THE SHADOW OF NO TOWERS* BY ART SPIEGELMAN

“I remember my father trying to describe what the smoke at Auschwitz smelled like ... The closest he got was telling me it was ‘indescribable’ ... That’s exactly what the air in Lower Manhattan smelled like after Sept. 11.”

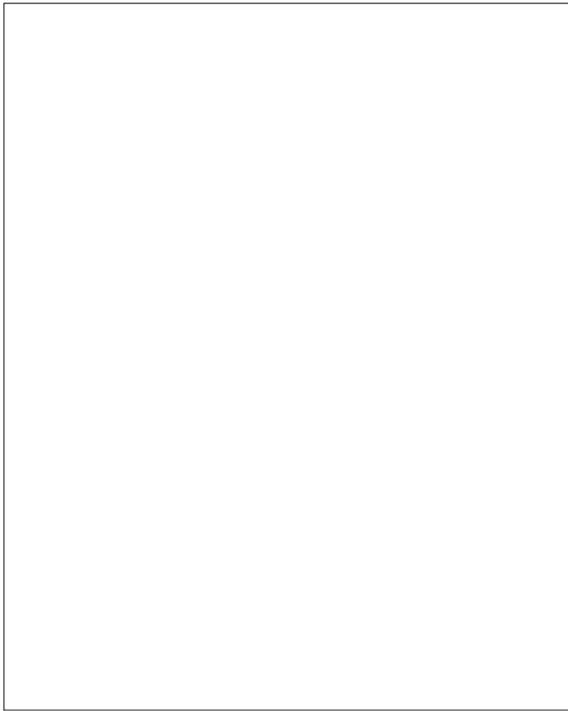
Art Spiegelman was heading north, away from the Twin Towers on the morning of September 11 2001. He didn’t see the first plane crash into the North Tower but he knew that disaster had struck. The noise and the expressions on the faces of those walking south told him that he needed to panic, that he needed to rush from where he’d come, back to his daughter’s school. A school in the shadow of the World Trade Centre.

Spiegelman, who took thirteen years to complete the graphic novel *Maus* — a story of the Holocaust, his father’s experiences and his own reaction to it — doesn’t think of himself as a “political” artist. His slow pace of work, attention to detail and the level of self-reflection embodied in his words and pictures rules out running political commentaries. After *Maus* he stopped producing extended graphic pieces and concentrated on work as an essayist and cover designer for the *New Yorker*.

9/11 changed all this: “after all, disaster is my muse!” says Spiegelman. This isn’t as flippant a remark as it sounds. The ten broadsheet pages of *In the Shadow of No Towers* capture the individual responses of a self-confessedly “fragile” personality. This is in essence an autobiographical work.

But these responses are not merely self-regarding pieces, there is no over indulgence, no grab for individual sympathy. When Spiegelman depicts the chaotic scene at his daughter’s school that morning he writes: “It was hard for puny human brains to assimilate genuinely new information ... and it remains just as hard now, these many months later”. But the context of the page — the pictures, the blank expressions, the commentary and complementary graphics — build a more general landscape of panic, despair and paranoia.

Spiegelman’s fundamental response to 9/11, one essentially shared by those on the left who resisted the slump into kitsch anti-imperialism and simple-minded



America bashing, is of being “terrorised” on all sides. A small graphic in the second instalment of *In the Shadow of No Towers* titled “Equally Terrorised by Al-Qaeda and by His Own Government...” shows Spiegelman in the form of the “maus” familiar from his best known work, sandwiched between caricatures of an Al-Qaeda terrorist and George Bush — one holding a bloody sword, the other a pistol and the Stars and Stripes. This graphic horrified Spiegelman’s editors in the mainstream US press, but many on the British left will be equally “horrified” by not only the equation of these two evils but by the caricatured depiction.

Bleak responses to Bush’s “War on Terror” occur throughout the work. But Spiegelman’s commentary on the cultural aspects of the post-9/11 “recovery” are bleaker still: “I can still vividly remember the horrors of Ground Zero on September 11... 2002. I was an eyewitness to the bombardment of kitsch on sale that day... and I almost became a participant. On 9/11/01

time stopped. By 9/11/02 clocks began to tick again... but everyone knew it was the ticking of a giant time bomb.”

Other writers, some in similar proximity to the epicentre that morning, have commented on how quickly sections of New York society “normalised” themselves; from the speed at which Ground Zero became a tourist attraction to the “Osama bin Laden Toilet Paper” and “Voodoo dolls” on sale. Very quickly, the disaster became a new market opportunity. Very quickly, the horrors of that day were displaced.

In “Weapons of Mass Displacement”, Spiegelman sketches the way in which the government and mass media exploited the displacement “craze”: “Remember how we demolished Iraq instead of Al-Qaeda ... the *New York Times* displaces its guilt for printing the Pentagon’s lethal fictions about Iraqi nukes as fact ... then beats itself up in a 7,000 word apology for some minor journalist’s pattern of inconsequential lies! ... Shit! This gang in power gets me so damn mad I could scream!”

Each of the ten pages of *In the Shadow of No Towers*, some of which took up to five weeks to complete, paints a complex of personal, social and political despair. From the terror of 9/11 itself, the beginning of the assaults on Afghanistan and Iraq, Bush’s re-election and the party-style commemorations we see Spiegelman sink further and further. He ends “The Towers have come to loom far larger than life ... but they seem to get smaller every day ... Happy Anniversary”.

That epoch-defining, horror-filled event has come to dominate Spiegelman’s and by extension America’s psyche. Eight years on, the whole world is still “dealing” with the actions of those nineteen killers and the clerical-fascists who inspired them. We are left “dealing” with the political fall-out over the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. For the rational left, as for Spiegelman, the “Towers” loom as large as ever. For others, they have become an inconsequential banality in the same way as the Holocaust itself.

In the Shadow of No Towers will not fill your heart with hope. That is not its function. It will help you to remember how you felt that morning, analyse how you reacted and what political choices you made in the years that followed. It will make for an uncomfortable read for many on the British left.

Whose Robin Hood?

FILM

DARREN BEDFORD REVIEWS *MESRINE: PUBLIC ENEMY No. 1*

Mesrine is slick. Very slick. The film looks great, and successfully evokes its time and place (France in the late 1970s). Vincent Cassell brings his inimitable and indefinable cool — which is as off-kilter as his almost impossibly crooked nose — to the title role and make the character jump off the screen.

There’s a good balance of action and non-action scenes and the script is engaging. It’s a good film. Go and watch it. But you probably want a bit more from this review, particularly given that it’s in a revolutionary socialist newspaper. So here goes...

This is the second instalment of two films that chronicle the life of Jacques Mesrine, France’s most famous bank robber, who was basically really, really good at shooting people and nicking stuff. This film focuses on his exploits in the late 70s exploits, when he was arrested and imprisoned (and then escaped) three times. Because of his experiences in the brutal and soul-destroying high-security facilities he is sent to, Mesrine appears to develop strong ideological opposition to the French state and its prison system in particular, and we soon find him colluding with the “far left” of the criminal fraternity (people who aspire to a French version of the German and Italian “Red Brigades”) to “smash

the system”.

Mesrine has several speeches in which he claims his crimes are victimless — he only robs “exploiters” — and in which he paints himself as a latter day Robin Hood. The film’s central question, if it has one, is whether the stance was a wily PR job on Mesrine’s part or whether it had any sincerity.

Mesrine is critiqued by his “comrades” for his opulent lifestyle and love of material goods — “you don’t threaten capital, you flatter it” he is told. His more pragmatic partner, Francois Besse, tries to convince him that the role of criminals is to feed off the system, not overthrow it. When we see Mesrine at his most passionate, dealing with his press coverage and public image (the “Public Enemy No. 1” label was apparently an immense source of pride for him), it’s pretty clear that image and perception was everything and that his appropriation of the language and style of the Red Army Brigade was merely the work of a clever publicist utilising the shocking romance and dark glamour that such groups possessed at the time.

That’s the problem. The actual politics involved are a poisonous mixture of terroristic, Third-Worldist Stalinism and an inchoate middle-class hostility to the western working class. They are is sadly alive (if not well) today in the politics of groups like the Revolutionary Communist Group (*Fight Racism, Fight Imperialism*). And as the politics are never really dis-

cussed, the film’s casual tossing around of terms like “far left” are a bit frustrating.

But only a bit; after all, the film never sets out to explore in any detail the ideas of the 1970s French left. What is more deeply disconcerting is the fact that, despite the film’s attempts to convince us that the Robin Hood act was a posture, you can’t help liking Mesrine, even though he’s patently a self-interested, brutal criminal whose actual politics were probably incredibly right-wing. (He served in the French army of colonial occupation in Algeria, at one point attempting to replicate its notoriously brutal methods on a journalist he’s in the process of murdering for giving him negative press coverage. It’s also alleged that he colluded with the French fascist paramilitaries, the OAS — a relationship apparently dealt with in the first film, *Mesrine: Killer Instinct*).

If you were inclined to give the film the benefit of the doubt, you’d conclude that Mesrine’s on-screen likeability is a comment on the ease with which people can be taken in by the PR work of utterly odious individuals. If you were inclined to be cynical, however, you might think that the film whitewashed Mesrine in order to not force paying audiences to spend two hours watching the exploits of a complete and utter shit.

Go see the film and draw your own conclusions. Just don’t let it give you any ideas; robbing a bank is not a revolutionary act.

US HEALTHCARE REFORM

Killing Grandma: how the Democrats lost the political initiative

BY BARRY FINGER

In 1954, President Truman called for the creation of a national health insurance fund to be run by the federal government. This fund would have been open to all Americans, but would have remained optional.

Participants would have paid monthly fees into the plan, which would cover the cost of any and all medical expenses that arose in a time of need. The government would pay for the cost of services rendered by any doctor who chose to join the program. In addition, the insurance plan would give a cash balance to the policy holder to replace wages lost due to illness or injury.

Since then this and every other step towards universal coverage has been — with the very notable and honorary exception of Medicare coverage for the elderly and Medicaid coverage for the poor, passed in 1964 — an elusive promise.

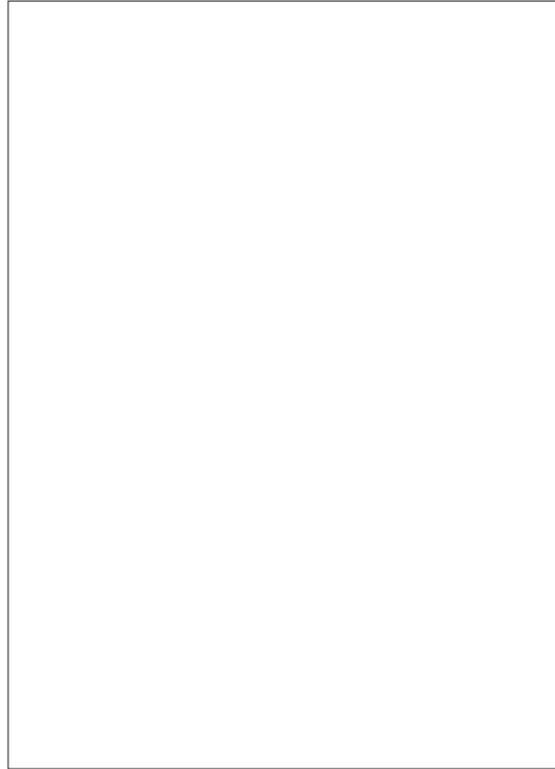
Federal law ensures public access to emergency services regardless of ability to pay. However, this unfunded mandate has contributed to a health care safety net that is increasingly strained, in no small part because routine preventative care is not similarly covered. For sixty years the Democrats have failed to deliver on this promise and Truman's program — a single payer system — is essentially off the table. Americans to this day cannot claim to have a recognised right to health care, the very notion being an anathema to the American right and its impressive propaganda machine.

Over 46 million Americans are without insurance and millions more are under-insured. This includes individuals and families denied affordable coverage, in the first place, due to pre-existing medical conditions. It has resulted in, on average, 20,000 people a year who die in the United States due to lack of adequate coverage, including those who die due to caps on lifetime treatment for chronic and debilitating conditions, which causes them to delay or avoid seeking care until they become medically untreatable. And this is a conservative estimate; others have it an even more scandalous 40,000 figure.

A lack of health insurance is the third-leading cause of premature death following heart disease and cancer for people between the ages of 55 and Medicare eligibility at age 65. Even when insured, 2-5 percent of documented claims are routinely denied through a variety of bureaucratic ruses by private insurance companies' "death panels," all designed to postpone or avoid costly procedures that might eat into profits. And this figure is surely an understatement, since no law exists requiring insurance companies to keep records of denied claims from doctors. It also fails to measure the impact of self-rationing with respect to health care practiced by one-fifth of insured Americans, because they cannot afford to bridge the gap between covered costs and the actual price of tests and treatments.

Nearly 62% of bankruptcies stem from medical bills, and this also encompasses people with health insurance who face financial disaster if they experience a serious illness, according to a recent study published by the *American Journal of Medicine*. Between 2001 and 2007, the proportion of all bankruptcies attributable to medical problems rose by about 50 percent. Strikingly, this study does not take into account the additional effects of the current economic crisis. Moreover, about 1.5 million families lose their homes to foreclosure every year due to unaffordable medical costs.

That aside, it is the uncontrolled growth of health coverage itself that is a looming disaster for capital accumulation. The cumulative increase in employer-sponsored health insurance premiums has grown at four times the combined rate of inflation and wage increases during the last decade. This increase has made it much more difficult for businesses to continue to provide coverage to their employees and for those workers to afford coverage themselves. The pharmaceutical, health insurance and medical products and equipment sectors rank within the top 10 profit earners in the American economy according to *Fortune* magazine. Health insurance costs alone are the fastest grow-



US neo-conservative poster against Obama's policies

ing expense for employers, to the point that employer-based health insurance costs overtook profits in 2008, and the gap, absent remediation, will continue to grow unchecked. It is a tribute to the lemming-like idiocy of American business, increasingly held hostage to the health care industry, that it has not demanded government relief from the stranglehold of the health insurance sector.

By international comparison, the United States spends more than twice per capita on health care than the British; as a percentage of GDP (2006) 15.3% vs. 8.2%. Americans, in fact, spend twice the cost per capita compared with most other developed nations, yet are ranked 37th in overall quality, according to the World Health Organisation. Americans face higher infant and maternal mortality rates and a shorter life span than our counterparts in other industrialised nations that offer comprehensive health coverage for all their residents. On a class basis, the gap between the lifespan of America's wealthiest and its poorest has doubled since 1980. Overall the lifespan of the average American has plummeted from 13th in world ranking in 1960 to 50th today, below Portugal and above Albania according to the CIA World Factbook.

Yet, conservatives constantly dance out examples of celebrities and other elites who come from abroad for treatment in the US as "proof" of the superiority of American health care, deliberately confusing the state of the medical arts with the comprehensiveness of a health delivery system, which is what is actually at stake here. That this nonsense continues to be taken seriously among sections of the working class is testament to the low level of political culture in a socialist-free America.

REPUBLICAN RESPONSE

The Republican method of operation is as simple as it is ubiquitously applicable: all social problems, insofar as their reality cannot simply be denied, are to be divided and reduced to those that require individual solutions and those which require state repression.

Where Republican political representation is weak, individuals are encouraged to organise in the streets on an ad hoc basis in the form of mobs or near mobs solely for the purpose of counteracting all collective, and social programs that seek to address inequalities. Those who cannot solve their own problems, who suc-

cumb to poverty, disease and discrimination, are simply slandered as morally irresponsible.

Republican leaders parade themselves, thumbs smugly snapping their suspenders, the stout champions of the individual uniquely proud of their success in sabotaging the aspirations and pretensions of the American rank and file for a democratic say in its own affairs against the free market of corporate domination.

The conservative wing of corporate America will ride the Republican mob in order to defuse the cause of universal health care, which they fear may be revisited to their detriment in the future should Obama's solution prove unworkable. The Republicans, for their part, simply seek partisan gain by the defeat of a major initiative upon which much of this administration's prestige resides. Still, only a party uniquely devoid of scruples, utterly demagogic, without an alternative, an argument or a clue would resort to ginning up hostility to Obama's health program by raising the specter of Nazi eugenics boards ready to pull the plug on grandma; the opening gamut in a diabolical plot to turn the United States into an amalgam of the Soviet Union and fascist Germany.

The "town hall" disruptions are the intersection of the tea baggers, the birthers (those who believe Obama to be a non-American-born Manchurian candidate planted by evil one-worlders, possibly with roots in the Illuminati) and those for whom the election of a Black president, the selection of a female head of the state department and a Latina supreme court judge is simply a world gone mad.

Make no mistake, this Saint Vitas dance was well funded by Rupert Murdoch's publishing and broadcasting empires, and a huge raft of the insurance companies, for-profit hospitals, pharmaceutical and medical groups, who are spending close to \$1.4 million a day to influence the outcome. They lit the fire, but the economic crisis seasoned the timber. In an age of mass insecurity — of disappearing jobs, homes, savings, pensions; of collapsing industries, cities and financial institutions — how hard would it have been to spook a trembling public into believing that those who still have health care might lose that as well; that those who suffered at the blind mercy of economic forces, will be prematurely buried by unelected, indifferent government bureaucrats?

Still the Democrats essentially conceded the debate at the outset by preemptively removing the single payer option and deciding, as they habitually do, to "govern from the centre." The case for universal health care should not have been difficult to make, and would not have been, if the Democrats were simply answerable to their base. But being a corporate entity—an integral part of the ruling machine — they have institutionally split loyalties, seeking always to find the type of hybrid solution that nominally addresses the needs of their base, while appeasing the interests of their corporate masters.

Had the Democrats proposed a Medicare for All program, they might have won the public over to their side and taken command of the issue. It is simple, has a proven track record, contains realistic cost control — by eliminating the quest for profits, vastly reducing administrative overheads and obscene CEO compensation packages — and it could have been easily explained. Medicare, along with social security, is a hugely popular program.

But Obama was only able to make the case for universal health coverage by promising a boondoggle of additional enrolment for private insurers, in effect, mandating what will be, in the context of unchecked premium growth, a regressive tax on wage earners. It is true that the Obama plan will prevent coverage from being withheld for pre-existing conditions, or caps being placed on lifetime coverage, or portability of insurance being tied to employment. These would be real advances. But comprehensive coverage under a hybrid plan will, down the line, prove to be unaffordable, which is why an additional federal tax on the health care benefits of covered workers is still not off the administration's agenda. *Continued on page 18*

WORKERS OR A VAGUE ALLIANCE

Who will win green socialism?

Melting polar ice cap. Climate change is the problem, but what is the answer? Is it working-class socialism, or something else? This book fails to give a clear answer

PAUL HAMPTON REVIEWS "THE GLOBAL FIGHT FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE" (ED. IAN ANGUS)

I knew this book was going to be a mish-mash after Derek Wall wrote in his foreword that he was pleased it included a contribution from Hugo Blanco, "who was one of Che Guevara's contemporaries".

Blanco led a peasant uprising in 1961 as a Trotskyist. Guevara was at the time a leading member of a government that was locking up Trotskyists. Perhaps Wall missed Guevara's comment, made in December 1964: "The Trotskyists have contributed nothing to the revolutionary movement and where they did most, which was in Peru, they ultimately failed because their methods were bad. That comrade Hugo Blanco, personally a man of great sacrifice, based [his position] on a set of erroneous ideas and will necessarily fail."

Such confusion is particularly obtuse. The book, *The Global Fight for Climate Justice: Anticapitalist Responses to Global Warming and Environmental Destruction* (2009) is edited by the Canadian Trotskyist Ian Angus and published by Socialist Resistance, the erstwhile British section of the Trotskyist Fourth International (USFI).

The USFI has long permitted substitutes or locums for the workers' movement to infect its political theory. Witness their view that "workers' states" could be created by Stalinists in Eastern Europe (and China and Cuba) without the active intervention of the working class. The book contains four contributions from members of the Cuban state, a piece by the president of Bolivia and a statement by Hugo Chávez's Latin American alliance ALBA. It carries over an approach that failed to account for post-war Stalinism into the emerging socialist ecology movement. Such a method will only poison the well.

ECOSOCIALIST ARGUMENTS

The book is not entirely a waste of trees. The collection has a genuine international flavour, bringing together voices from all over the planet. It includes important declarations from campaigns in the South and a piece by Tony Kearns making the case for climate change as a trade union issue.

Angus himself contributes at least two important articles. The most impressive is "The Myth of the Tragedy of the Commons", a comprehensive demolition of Garrett Hardin, who provided the intellectual underpinnings for neoliberal free market environmentalism. Angus rightly argues that, "The tragedy of the commons is a useful political myth — a scientific-sounding way of saying that there is no alternative to the dominant world order".

In "World Hunger, Agribusiness and the Food Sovereignty Alternative", Angus explains the recent spike in food prices as the result of the end of the "green revolution" (in new agricultural techniques from the 1960s); climate change; agrofuels and oil prices. He also summarises the range of class struggles around food last year in Haiti, Burkina Faso, Bangladesh, Egypt and elsewhere. Angus argues convincingly that there is no shortage of food in the world today, but that the global food industry fails to feed the hungry because it is organised to generate corporate

profits.

The book is probably most useful as a negative critique of what passes for climate policy at present. It examines the ethanol scam, where food has been substituted for fuel. Several articles debunk trading in carbon permits, well satirised by the Website cheatneutral.com:

"When you cheat on your partner you add to the heartbreak, pain and jealousy in the atmosphere. Cheatneutral offsets your cheating by funding someone else to be faithful and NOT cheat. This neutralises the pain and unhappy emotion and leaves you with a clear conscience...When you use Cheatneutral, we'll email you a Cheatneutral Offset Certificate, so you can prove to your loved one that your playing away has been successfully offset. Then you and your partner are both happy, a broken heart is mended, and you can feel good about yourself again, all thanks to Cheatneutral."

THE RATIONALE FOR ECOSOCIALISM

The most substantial contribution in the book is an essay by Daniel Tanuro of the Belgian LCR-SAP, which was adopted by the USFI in February this year. The document has considerable merits.

First, it is sharply critical of the old Stalinist states for their carbon emissions. He refers to the specific responsibility of "really existing socialism" for the disruption of the climate: "Just before the fall of the Berlin Wall, for example, Czechoslovakia was emitting 20.7 tons of CO₂ per capita per annum and the GDR 22 tons per capita per annum. By way of comparison, the USA, Canada and Australia — the biggest emitters of CO₂ in the developed capitalist world — were at that time emitting respectively 18.9, 16.2 and 15 tons of CO₂ per capita per annum, for a considerably higher per capita GNP."

Second, he outlines some of the Marxist political economy necessary to get a grip on climate change. He writes: "Competition pushes each owner of capital to replace workers by machines which, by increasing labour productivity, make it possible to obtain a super profit over and above the average profit, and thus to gain a competitive advantage. This race for technological rent, which accelerates with further development, accentuates the tendency of the system to overproduction, and consequently to overconsumption.

"Overproduction and overconsumption inevitably imply an increase in the volume of material production. This in its turn requires increased appropriation of resources (in particular energy), on the one hand, and more extensive dumping of waste, on the other hand. The tendency to dematerialisation, to efficiency in the use of resources and to the transformation of waste into raw materials can slow down this overall movement, but not prevent it.

"A stationary capitalism is a contradiction in terms: since capitalist economy has as its goal the production of value, i.e. in a general and abstract form of exchange values, it flows from this that capitalism, according to Marx's formula, knows no limit other than capital itself."

However, I think Tanuro concedes too much in his critique of Marxist ecology. He argues that, "The saturation of the carbon cycle and the exhaustion of non-renewable resources signifies that, unlike in the past,

the emancipation of the working class can no longer be conceived without taking into account the principal natural constraints." He adds, "The major ecological error of Marx is thus not to have regarded nature as an unlimited reserve of resources to be exploited, but not to have applied his own concept of 'rational management of exchanges' to the particular domain of energy, whereas he had applied it to the domain of land... The successors of Marx bear an important responsibility for the fact that the concept of 'rational management of the exchanges of matter between humanity and nature' and the related problems of separation between town and country were forgotten in the 20th century."

Classical Marxism did not explicitly connect the use of fossil fuels with climate change. This is not surprising, given that the scientific hypothesis was not verified as an immediate problem until the 1950s. However, early classical Marxists did recognise the possibility of resource depletion and did acknowledge natural limits.

Discussing the attempts by Podolinsky to base the labour theory of value on energetics, Engels drew attention to the way capitalist production is "a squanderer of past, solar heat". He told Marx on 19 December 1882: "As to what we have done in the way of squandering our reserves of energy, our coal, ore, forests, etc., you are better informed than I am. From this point of view, hunting and fishing may also be seen not as stabilisers of fresh solar heat but as exhausters and even incipient squanderers of the solar energy that has accumulated from the past." (*MECW* 46 1992)

On 9 June 1881, Paul Lafargue wrote to Jules Guesde about a new battery which by storing electricity. Lafargue asserted "might enable us to change the movement of the wind, rivers, and tides into electricity which could be carried anywhere one wished to be turned back into light, warmth and movement? What revolutionary times we live in! The least revolutionary are the revolutionaries". (Derfler, *Paul Lafargue and the Founding of French Marxism, 1842-1882*, 1991)

In *Women and Socialism*, first published in 1879 and reprinted and updated over the next thirty years, August Bebel expressed a similar view of electricity. He also recognised the potential of solar energy, quoting the optimism of scientists of his day and expressed the hope that "a few square miles in Northern Africa would suffice for the requirements of a country like the German Empire". He wrote:

"According to this, our anxiety that we might at some time lack fuel, is removed. The inventions of the accumulators would make it possible to store a large quantity of force away for future use at any time and place; so that, besides the power furnished by sun and tide, the power furnished by the wind and by mountain torrents, which can be obtained only periodically, might be stored and applied. So there may finally be no human task for which motor power cannot be supplied if necessary. Only by the assistance of electricity has it become possible to employ water-power on a large scale." (1910)

Bebel speculated that by the year 2000, "there would be no coal-mines and, accordingly, no miners' strikes. Fuel would be replaced by chemical and physical processes". He argued that "The problem of industry consists in finding sources of power that are inexhaustible and can be renewed with the least possible amount of labour".

He recognised the dependence on coal, and that "the coal is difficult to obtain, and the supply is diminishing daily". Instead, "it becomes necessary to utilise the heat of the sun and the heat inside the earth. There is good reason to hope that both these sources will find unlimited application. Thereby the source of all heat and of all industry would be made accessible. If water-power were also applied, all imaginable machines might be run on the earth". (1910)

The communist movement that coalesced after the 1917 Russian revolution also articulated similar views. In 1923 the Communist International published a primer. *A Short Course of Economic Science* had been written by Bogdanov in 1897 and was revised with Dvolaitzky in 1919. In the final chapter it argued that the "exhaustion of the main sources of steam power, coal and oil" was "inevitable". This led to "the necessity for the transition to electricity", and this will "create the possibility of making use of all waterfalls, all flow-

ing water (even the tides of the oceans), and the intermittent of the wind which can be collected with the aid of accumulators, etc". It added that: "A new and immeasurably rich source of electrical energy, infinitely superior to all other sources of electrical energy, has also been indicated, viz., atomic energy, which is contained in all matter." (1923)

We can agree that Lenin's formula for socialism ("Soviets plus electricity") is inadequate today, unless the power comes from renewable sources. But for all the rhetoric about the need for a "cultural revolution", Tanuro becomes vague and incoherent on what exactly revolutionary socialists should be flagellating ourselves for. He argues that, "it is not enough to affirm that socialism must integrate ecological questions, in other words that socialists must better include the ecological dimension, develop ecological demands and take part in mobilizations in defence of the environment". Instead, he says cryptically, "the real challenge lies rather in integrating the socialist project into the global ecology of the terrestrial super-ecosystem".

Tanuro partially answers his own criticism. As he puts it: "From the end of the 19th century, the invention of synthetic fertilisers seemed to have solved the problem of the fertility of soils, a key component of the ecological reflexion conducted in Capital". Similarly, given that climate change was not considered widely as a significant global crisis with massive effects until the 1950s (Arrhenius and Callender both saw it as positive) and peak oil not conceived until the 1960s, it is no wonder that "the authors of the *Communist Manifesto* did not see that the capitalist rush to exhaustible fossil sources would inevitably lead humanity into an energy path with no way out".

The other element missing is a sense of historical perspective. Classical Marxists saw energy problems as something way off in the future, and something which socialist societies would have the democratic and technological means to tackle. Few revolutionary socialists in 1909 would have foreseen another century of capitalism, never mind its persistence into the 21st century. Such a perspective was rational for the time. We however have to deal with the consequences of the longevity of capitalism and with the effects of Stalinism, which uncoupled ecology from socialism.

Where Tanuro has a point is that socialists today have to live in current realities — and hence why we cannot simply read off our answers from our predecessors. I think it is true that most socialists did not foresee the significance of climate change for 21st century politics until relatively recently. Uncertainties with the science, other battles to fight but more importantly the weakness of the left since the 1970s have been the major reasons for this. Self criticism on this front is fine — but it is not necessary to throw out much that is pos-

itive in the Marxist tradition, or to adopt the facile self-definition of eco-socialists.

THE LIMITS OF ECOSOCIALISM

The book also contains the Belem eco-socialist declaration, formally launched at the World Social Forum in Belem, Brazil earlier this year. It was commissioned by the Paris Ecosocialist Conference of 2007, and written by Ian Angus, Joel Kovel, Michael Löwy and Danielle Follett.

A manifesto by four more or less Trotskyist-influenced long-time leftists might be expected to produce something special. The truth is that the product is poor. The declaration attributes the causes of climate change to capitalism and makes a very general case for socialism. But there is not even a superficial analysis of the basic political-economic drives of capitalism that give rise to climate change. It contains many errors of fact and many dubious interpretations. It is no literary inspiration. It has glaring silences and omissions.

The declaration panders to kitsch-leftism without adding clarity. It starts with a quote from Evo Morales, president of Bolivia. It is decidedly odd for a socialist manifesto to begin with a quote from the head of state of a bourgeois government, albeit one in conflict with sections of the bourgeoisie. The declaration also states: "The impact of the ecological crisis is felt most severely by those whose lives have already been ravaged by imperialism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and indigenous peoples everywhere are especially vulnerable." Climate change has already hit people hard in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, though not uniformly so (e.g. Brazilian biofuel farmers). But climate change also affects the "North" — witness the heat wave in Europe in 2003 — or the floods in New Orleans.

Perhaps the greatest problem with the declaration is the absence of agency. The whole point of Marxist analysis of class societies and the positing of socialism as the rational alternative that grows out of capitalism, is to find within the system the social force with the power and interest to free itself and through that struggle, the whole of humanity. Marx argued that the working class was that force — his entire lifework and those of his most ardent followers are simply inexplicable without the axis of class struggle and the organisation of a labour movement.

The best the declaration can do is to state that "The most oppressed elements of human society, the poor and indigenous peoples, must take full part in the ecosocialist revolution". There is a token mention of "Other potential agents of ecosocialist revolutionary change [which] exist in all societies" and that: "The struggle of labour — workers, farmers, the landless and the unemployed — for social justice is inseparable

from the struggle for environmental justice." This is hardly an advance over utopian socialism; implicitly it rejects the claim the working class is the agent of socialism (Kovel is quite explicit about this in his book, *The Enemy of Nature*). Although the editor and publishers of the book believe that the working class is one of the three social forces that can stop climate change, the book has no industrial strategy — for example around workers' control of emissions. Their pursuit of youth is largely rhetorical, and their preference is clear from the statement, "The indigenous peoples are at the cutting edge of this struggle. Ecosocialists must now follow their lead".

Finally, the demands around which to mobilise are disjointed. The Belem declaration rightly states that "To theorise and to work toward realising the goal of green socialism does not mean that we should not also fight for concrete and urgent reforms right now." However few of its demands are transitional in the sense of seeking to mobilise the working class to fight for reforms that also begin to challenge the basis of capital's rule. Thus there is no demand for cutting working time, nor for workers' control. There are also some less coherent calls, such as the "progressive replacement of trucks by trains" and some reactionary ones, such as the call for "local food sovereignty".

The Belem declaration, like the book itself, is imbued with catastrophism: "Quantitative change is giving way to qualitative transformation, bringing the world to a tipping point, to the edge of disaster"; "At worst, human life may not survive". The central slogan of *Climate and Capitalism*, the website run by Angus and on which some of these articles have appeared, is: "Ecosocialism or Barbarism: there is no third way".

Angus states that the slogan "Socialism or Barbarism" originated with the great German revolutionary socialist leader Rosa Luxemburg. In fact it was a conception with a long history in German social democracy — it can be found in Engels (1887, *MECW* 26) and in Kautsky's commentary on the Erfurt Program, (1892): "As things stand today capitalist civilisation cannot continue; we must either move forward into socialism or fall back into barbarism." (*The Class Struggle*, 1910)

In fact the book is characterised by an overwhelming catastrophism, an apocalyptic foreboding that is, to my taste, more paralysing than motivating. The talk of disaster merely betrays the frustration experienced by many campaigners that so little has been achieved relative to the enormity of the tasks we face. Fear might scare people and change some attitudes, but it will not necessarily increase active engagement or change the world. There is widespread agreement about the dire consequences of climate change; extrapolating this to the end of the world — without any substantial argument — is unlikely to motivate a great fight back. Left in the air, this is more likely to demoralise.

Derek Wall lauds the book's apparent "non-sectarian approach" in his foreword. But this masks a deeply divisive "consensus". Apart from large hangovers from the Stalinist tradition, the book is premised on the disjuncture of "anti-capitalist" and socialist responses. Thus apparently all the contributors consider capitalism to be the problem, while they can happily disagree on whether socialism, eco-socialism, Cuban Stalinism, Bolivarian Bonapartist "socialism" or reformed capitalism is the answer. Such theoretical confusion actually offers little to the millions worldwide who care about climate change and are beginning to mobilise around the issue.

Rosa Luxemburg was fond of another metaphor that is appropriate for ecological critique, describing her centrist opponents as "the swamp". In 1913, in "After the Jena congress", she quoted this passage by August Bebel from 1903, which makes the point rather well as a verdict on this book:

"It is forever the same old struggle — the left here, the right there, and between them the swamp. These are the elements who never know what they want, or rather, never say what they want. They are the 'wise guys' who always ask: what's going on here, what's happening there? They always feel where the majority is, and then go with them.

"We have these types in our party too. In these proceedings, a whole number of them has come into the light of day. We have to denounce these comrades. Yes! Denounce them, I say, so that the comrades know what semi-people they are. At least I can struggle with the man who defends his position openly — I know where I am with him. Either he wins or I do, but the lazy elements who always suppress themselves and go out of the way of every clear decision, and always say that we are all united and are all brothers — these elements are the worst of all! These are the ones I combat the most." (Rosa Luxemburg: *Selected Political and Literary Writings, Revolutionary History*, 10, 1, 2009).

Cuba is not a model for ecology

Fidel Castro: "Thus has been the story of mankind; to struggle to overcome the laws of nature; to struggle to dominate nature and have it serve mankind." (1966)

"Unless we conquer nature, nature will conquer us." (1970)

The AWL characterises Cuba as a Stalinist state, where workers do not hold power and cannot organise independently. Apologies for Castroism today — like this book — cite its environmental policies as proof it is historically progressive, even a model for climate activists. This is a mistake.

The regime inherited a disastrous legacy from capitalism in 1959. But in *Conquering Nature — The Environmental Legacy of Socialism in Cuba*, (2000) Díaz-Briquets and Pérez-López describe how during its first thirty years, the Castroites degraded the environment in much the same way as their Stalinist counterparts in Eastern Europe.

Castro admitted at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit that Cuba suffered from pollution of bays; soil erosion and degradation, particularly in mining areas; pollution of surface waters from the waste of the sugar industry; and erosion of beaches and coastal areas and salinization of low-lying coastal lands. The drive to produce 10 million tonnes of sugar deforested huge amounts of land, while mining left a lunar landscape. Desertification reached 14% of the land.

Then there was Castro's nuclear energy programme. Castro expressed enthusiasm for nuclear at his trial in 1953. In the 1970s the regime announced ambitious plans to build nuclear power plants based on Russian designs. Construction of reactors at Juraguá began in the early 1980s, overseen by Castro's son. Around three-quarters of the construc-

tion was completed and some equipment installed, before the programme was suspended in 1992 because of the withdrawal of credit and expertise by Russia. Although attempts were made to revive the programme, it was abandoned in 1997.

The Cuban "special period", after the collapse of the USSR and the tightened US embargo, forced the regime to take an ecological turn. Unable to import food and other raw materials, austerity forced the regime to buy millions of bikes and use more renewable energy sources. It broke up large state farms, ran down the sugar industry and continued with reforestation and clean up. Of necessity, Cuba became more green as it became more impoverished.

However since the mid-1990s the regime also signed joint ventures with foreign investors to exploit Cuba's mineral resources, such as the nickel ore processing plant at Moa and the oil industry. The expansion of tourism has meant the construction of causeways bridging islands. These block the movement of water, exacerbating contamination and destroying marine habitats. Most significantly, it remains impossible to organise independently of the Cuban state around ecological issues, as on other matters such as workers' rights.

It would be churlish to argue that Cuba has made no progress on ecology. No doubt there may be things to learn from it experience, as there is from some bourgeois states. Many of the ecological improvements made by Cuban Stalinism in recent years are the result of necessity, some externally imposed, while others are the unintended consequences of other economic changes. None of them are sufficient to make Cuba a model for environmentalists or for socialists.

LEON TROTSKY

A step towards social patriotism

For the AWL, promoting and fighting for the political independence of the workers' movement from ruling class ideology is what revolutionary socialism is all about. This is never more true than in times of war and conflict between groups of big capitalist powers.

We argue for working-class political independence from the ruling class of our "own" country and also the ruling class of the "enemy" country. We should recall that as September 2009 marks the 60th anniversary of the start of the Second World War.

The longstanding Marxist policy on war which involve clashes between big powers could be summarised in very simple terms as "my enemy's enemy is not my friend". But to that idea we have to add another. We also say "we do not suspend the class struggle against the ruling class while a war is on", "the main enemy is at home". If that means difficulties, or even defeat in war, for "our" ruling class, so be it; our job is to overturn the system which creates wars.

The Marxist policy on big-power "imperialist" wars is often called "defeatism". Whether that is the right term is another question*. Trotsky uses it in this article, while rejecting the (common) definition of it as "actions aimed to bring about defeat". It is the opposite of "social-patriotism": being "patriotic" for your own country's ruling class, but using socialistic language to do it.

Trotsky recognises the huge difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism but argues that there is no reason to be sure that the war line-up would be "democracies against fascism"; or that democracies would remain democracies in the war; or that fascism would better be overthrown by foreign conquest than by internal revolt.

On the face of it, history gave Trotsky the lie.

The victory of the "democracies", Britain and the US, did in western Europe lead to the restoration or installation of bourgeois democratic systems. But democracy was not restored without mass working-class struggles in Italy, Belgium and France. And the western democracies were allied with Stalinist Russia which, ruling through puppet states, was to crush the working class in Eastern Europe, as thoroughly as fascism did, for another half century.

Above all: could the Trotskyists possibly have been right to bank on that outcome in advance? Democratic France would vote full powers to the fascistic regime of Philippe Pétain in June 1940: were the Trotskyists wrong to warn against the danger of similar moves in Britain?

In fact, the policy of most Trotskyists in the war — developed by James P Cannon, basing himself on some ideas from Trotsky — was not even-handed. In Britain and the USA, they argued for workers' control and a workers' government as the best way to beat Hitler and fascism.

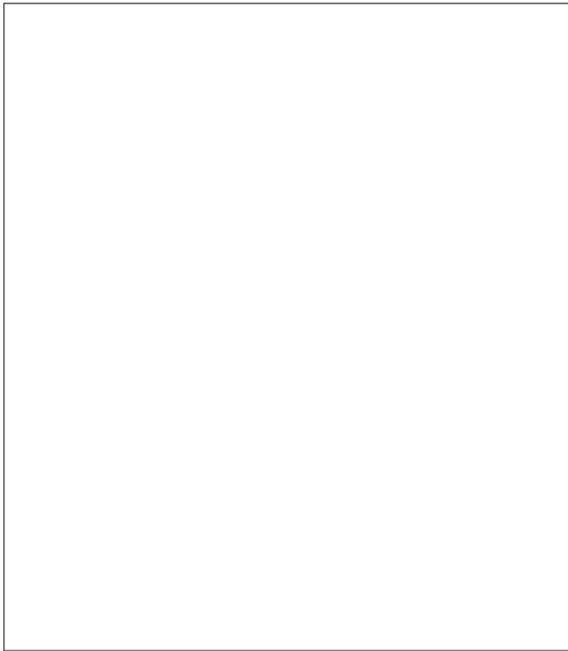
But they opposed imperialism on all sides. They argued for militant continuation of the working-class struggle. They gave no political support to the lesser-evil capitalist governments of Britain and the USA.

Their explanations were skewed by mistaken expectations.

They thought Britain and the USA were sure to move to police state regimes during the war. They discounted the possibility of any stable bourgeois democracy after the war. But their principles were right.

Would victory for the allies free the workers of the British and French colonies? No. Only the struggles of the oppressed peoples of Asia and Africa could do that.

By the time the Second World War began Hitler had been in power for six years, nationalist China was at war with the militaristic Japanese Empire, fascist Italy had invaded Albania, General Franco had won a civil war in Spain against the "Popular Front" government, which in turn had crushed a workers' revolution. Hitler had already begun an expansionist drive for



Invasion of western Poland by Hitler's troops, September 1939

German capitalism. In March 1938 Germany annexed Austria. In March 1939 the German army invaded Czechoslovakia (Hitler had already been "allowed" to take the Sudetenland where there was a majority ethnic German population). When in May 1939 France and Britain pledged support for Poland, should German invade, it was only a matter of time before a "world war" would begin. On 1 September Hitler invaded western Poland.

Leon Trotsky and the revolutionary socialists who identified as "Trotskyists" had been writing about the prospect of world war for years, since Hitler had taken power. The main article we publish here was written in March 1939, i.e., before the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland. It was also before Stalin reversed his diplomatic orientation towards France and Britain and signed a pact with Hitler (23 August 1939). Trotsky flags up a Hitler-Stalin pact as a possibility in the article.

Against Palestinian Trotskyists who suggest that revolutionaries should side with Britain, France and the USA against Germany and Italy, Trotsky replies:

"If there were any grounds for believing that a new victory of the familiar and slightly senile Entente (minus Italy) can work miraculous results, i.e. those counter to social-historical laws, then it is necessary not only to 'desire' this victory but to do everything in our power to bring it about. Then the Anglo-French social patriots would be correct."

The Palestinian socialists also assumed that the USSR would oppose Germany in the war (as it did from June 1941). For them, the Soviet Union, having been the historical product of the Bolshevik-led workers' revolution, and retaining the nationalised property, was still a "workers' state", albeit one which had largely "degenerated".

Trotsky himself still adhered to that formula, though he was reshaping his views. Under the terms of the Stalin-Hitler pact, Stalin invaded eastern Poland. On the back of fascist Germany's invasions and expansions into Europe, the USSR also annexed a number of territories: parts of Finland (November 1939), Romanian territory, and the Baltic states (1940). There was a debate among Trotskyists about what attitude to take to those moves, but that is another story.**

BY LEON TROTSKY

Our Palestinian friends have made an obvious and extremely dangerous concession to the social-patriots, even though their point of departure is opposed to that of social-patriotism.

We maintain that in the quarter of a century that has elapsed since the outbreak of the last war, imperialism has come to rule even more despotically over the world; its hand weighs more heavily on events during peacetime as well as wartime; and finally, that under all of its political masks, it has assumed an even more

reactionary character. In consequence, all the fundamental rules of proletarian "defeatist" policy in relation to imperialist war retain their full force today. This is our point of departure, and all the conclusions that follow are determined by it.

As regards this point of departure, the authors of the document hold a different position. They differentiate qualitatively between the coming war and the last war and, what is more, in two respects. In the last war only imperialist countries presumably participated: the role of Serbia, they say, was far too insignificant to place its stamp on the war (they forget about the colonies and China). In the coming war, they write, one of the participants will certainly be the USSR, a magnitude far greater than Serbia. On reading these lines, the reader tends to conclude that the subsequent reasoning of the authors of the letter will revolve precisely around the participation of the USSR in the war. But the authors drop this idea very quickly, or to put it more correctly, it is relegated to the background by another, namely, the world menace of fascism.

Monarchist reaction in the last war, they state, was not of an aggressive historical character, it was rather a survival, whereas fascism nowadays represents a direct and immediate threat to the whole civilized world. The struggle is therefore the task of the international proletariat as a whole in peacetime as well as wartime. It is only natural if we become suspiciously wary: such a narrowing down of revolutionary tasks — replacing imperialism by one of its political masks, that of fascism — is a patent concession to [Stalinist international front] the Comintern, a patent indulgence of social-patriots of the "democratic" countries.

THE TWO NEW HISTORICAL FACTORS

Let us first of all establish that the two new historical factors which presumably dictate a change in policy during wartime — namely, the USSR and fascism — need not necessarily operate in one and the same direction.

The possibility is not at all excluded that Stalin and Hitler, or Stalin and Mussolini may be found in one and the same camp during a war, or, at all events, that Stalin may buy a brief, unstable neutrality at the price of an agreement with the fascist governments, or one of them. For some unknown reason, this variant drops out completely from the field of vision of our authors. Yet they state justly that our principled position must arm us for any possible variant.

However, as we have already stated, the question of the USSR does not play any real role in the entire trend of reasoning of our Palestine comrades. They focus their attention on fascism, as the immediate threat to the world working class and the oppressed nationalities. They hold that a "defeatist" policy is not applicable in those countries which may be at war with fascist countries.

Again, such reasoning over-simplifies the problem, for it depicts the case as if the fascist countries will necessarily be found on one side of the trenches while the democratic or semi-democratic are on the other. In point of fact, there is absolutely no guarantee for this "convenient" grouping. Italy and Germany may, in the coming war as in the last, be found in opposing camps. This is by no means excluded. What are we to do in that case? Indeed, it is becoming increasingly difficult to classify countries in accordance with purely political features: where would we assign Poland, Rumania, present-day Czechoslovakia, and a number of other second-rate and third-rate powers?

The main tendency of the authors of this document is apparently the following: to hold that "defeatism" is obligatory for the leading fascist countries (Germany, Italy), whereas it is necessary to renounce defeatism in countries even of doubtful democratic virtue, but which are at war with the leading fascist countries. That is approximately how the main idea of the document may be worded. In this form, too, it remains false, and an obvious lapse into social-patriotism.

Let us recall that all the leaders of the German social democracy in emigration are "defeatists" in their own fashion. Hitler has deprived them of their sources of influence and income. The progressive nature of this "democratic", "anti-fascist" defeatism is exactly zero. It is bound up not with revolutionary struggle but with

* For a discussion on the terminology and debates on "defeatism" see the article *Lenin and the Myth of Revolutionary Defeatism* by Hal Draper <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/4509>.

** For a full discussion of this debate and Trotsky's views see the introduction to the *Fate of the Russian Revolution, Lost texts of Critical Marxism* edited by Sean Matgamna. <http://www.workersliberty.org/fate>

Killing Grandma

From page 14

Obama has backtracked even further in the direction of corporate America, and away from cost control, by negotiating a truly repulsive deal with the pharmaceutical industry — a promise not to use government bargaining power to bring down drug prices.

Obama's hybrid plan foregoes hundreds of billions in administrative savings, because the multiplicity of insurers requires a corresponding army of administrators and billing clerks to negotiate between doctors, hospitals, pharmacies and insurance companies. Even the modified public option, which at this time may be sacrificed in the further interests of feckless bipartisanship, would quickly fail to control health care costs. It would not stimulate competition and cost containment as the Obama administration would have it and the Republicans fear, but most likely succumb to it.

As the Physicians for a National Health Plan have explained: "Insurers compete by not paying for care. Competition in health insurance is a race to the bottom, not the top. A public plan that did no marketing would soon be saddled with the sickest patients, whose high costs would overwhelm any administrative efficiencies and drive premiums to uncompetitive levels. Similarly, eschewing private insurers' schemes that shift costs to patients and other payers would be a crippling competitive disadvantage. To survive, a public plan would have to initiate private plans' bad behaviours." This is, of course, an application of the most basic case that socialists routinely make against the viability of co-ops within a capitalist context.

Single payer, on the other hand, would have been integrated with Social Security allowing automatic enrolment and eliminating the cost of marketing, and automatic premium paying. It would save \$400 billion on bureaucracy and the \$10 billion in yearly profits now required by the health insurance sector. It would eliminate, in other words, the 30 cents of every health-care dollar now diverted to CEO salaries, profits and paper work. These would be essential to covering the uninsured in a way that would not burden one section of the working class at the expense of another.

The American trade union movement, for its part, has acquiesced to this pale version of reform for risk of ruining Obama's presidency by calling him out on this. They have, in effect, already lost the Employee Free Choice Act by the same tactic of self-intimidation. If enacted at all, it, like EFCA, will be done in diluted fashion, hardly suitable for advancing the cause of American workers. The Democrats, on the other hand, are so timid at being identified with their base, that they risk near lynch mob venom, rather than holding their townhall meetings in union halls or black churches, where such behaviour would be overwhelmed from the floor.

If the AFL-CIO shows some militancy in the end to preserve the public option as left-leaning Democratic representatives are now threatening to do, it will simply be too little, too late. Real health care reform that also provides true economic security for the American worker will again have to wait for another day.

pinning hopes on the "liberating" role of French or some other imperialism. The authors of the document, obviously against their own will, have taken, alas, a step in this very direction.

In the first place, they have in our opinion given far too nebulous, and especially far too equivocal a definition of "defeatism" as of some special and independent system of actions aimed to bring about defeat. That is not so.

Defeatism is the class policy of the proletariat, which even during a war sees the main enemy at home, within its particular imperialist country.

Patriotism, on the other hand, is a policy which locates the main enemy outside one's own country.

The idea of defeatism signifies in reality the following: conducting an irreconcilable revolutionary struggle against one's own bourgeoisie as the main enemy, without being deterred by the fact that this struggle may result in the defeat of one's own government; given a revolutionary movement, the defeat of one's own government is a lesser evil. Lenin did not say nor did he wish to say anything else. There cannot even be talk of any other kind of "aid" to defeat. Should revolutionary defeatism be renounced in relation to non-fascist countries? Herein is the crux of the question; upon this issue, revolutionary internationalism stands or falls.

For instance, should the 360,000,000 Hindus renounce any attempt to utilize the war for their own liberation? The uprising of Hindus in the midst of a war would undoubtedly aid strongly in the defeat of Great Britain. Furthermore, in the event of a Hindu uprising (despite all "theses") should the British workers support them? Or, on the contrary, are they duty-bound to pacify the Hindus, and lull them to sleep — for the sake of a victorious struggle of British imperialism "against fascism"? Which way for us?

"Victory over Germany or Italy is at present (on the morrow the case may be different) tantamount to the downfall of fascism." Our attention is first of all struck by the qualification "at present (on the morrow the case may be different)". The authors do not elucidate just what they mean to say by this. But they do in any case indicate that — even from their own viewpoint — their position is episodic, unstable and uncertain in character; it may already prove useless on the "morrow". They do not take sufficiently into account the fact that in the epoch of decaying capitalism shifts and semi-shifts of political regimes occur quite suddenly and frequently without altering the social foundation, without checking capitalist decline.

On which of these two processes must our policy be based in such a fundamental question as war: on the shifts of political regimes, or on the social foundation of imperialism, common to all political regimes and unflinchingly uniting them against the revolutionary proletariat? The fundamental strategic question is our attitude toward war, which it is impermissible to subordinate to episodic tactical considerations and speculations.

MILITARY DEFEAT AND COLLAPSE OF FASCISM

But even from the purely episodic standpoint, the above-cited idea of the document is incorrect. A victory over the armies of Hitler and Mussolini implies in itself only the military defeat of Germany and Italy, and not at all the collapse of fascism.

Our authors admit that fascism is the inevitable product of decaying capitalism, in so far as the proletariat does not replace bourgeois democracy in time.

Just how is a military victory of decaying democracies over Germany and Italy capable of liquidating fascism, even if only for a limited period? If there were any grounds for believing that a new victory of the familiar and slightly senile Entente (minus Italy) can work such miraculous results, i.e., those counter to socio-historical laws, then it is necessary not only to "desire" this victory but to do everything in our power to bring it about.

Then the Anglo-French social-patriots would be correct. As a matter of fact they are far less correct today than they were 25 years ago, or to put it more correctly, they are playing today an infinitely more reactionary and infamous role.

If there are chances (and there indubitably are) that the defeat of Germany and Italy — provided there is a revolutionary movement — may lead to the collapse of fascism, then, on the other hand, there are more proximate and immediate chances that the victory of France may deal the final blow to corroded democracy, especially if this victory is gained with the political support of the French proletariat.

The entrenchment of French and British imperialism, the victory of French military-fascist reaction, the strengthening of the rule of Great Britain over India and other colonies, will in turn provide support for blackest reaction in Germany and Italy. In the event of victory, France and England will do everything to save Hitler and Mussolini, and stave off "chaos". The proletarian revolution can of course rectify all this. But the revolution must be helped and not hindered. It is impossible to help revolution in Germany otherwise than by applying in action the principles of revolutionary internationalism in the countries warring against her.

The authors of the document come out flatly against abstract pacifism, and in this they are of course correct. But they are absolutely wrong in thinking that the proletariat can solve great historical tasks by means of wars which are led not by themselves but by their mortal enemies, the imperialist government.

One may construe the document as follows: during the crisis over Czechoslovakia our French or English comrades should have demanded the military intervention of their own bourgeoisie, and thereby assumed responsibility for the war — not for war in general, and of course not for a revolutionary war, but for the given imperialist war. The document cites Trotsky's words to the effect that Moscow should have taken the initiative in crushing Hitler as far back as 1933, before he became a terrible danger (*Bulletin of the Russian Opposition*, March 21, 1933). But these words merely mean that such should have been the behaviour of a real revolutionary government of a workers' state. But is it permissible to issue the same demand to a government of an imperialist state?

Assuredly, we do not assume any responsibility for the regime they call the regime of peace. The slogan "Everything For Peace!" is not our slogan, and none of our sections raises it. But we can no more assume responsibility for their war than we assume for their peace. The more resolute, firm and irreconcilable our position is on this question all the better will the masses understand us, if not at the beginning then during the war.

"Could the proletariat of Czechoslovakia have struggled against its government and the latter's capitulatory policy by slogans of peace and defeatism?" A very concrete question is posed here in a very abstract form. There was no room for "defeatism" because there was no war (and it is not accidental that no war ensued). In the critical twenty-four hours of universal confusion and indignation, the Czechoslovak proletariat had the

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.

full opportunity of overthrowing the "capitulatory" government and seizing power. For this only a revolutionary leadership was required.

Naturally, after seizing power, the proletariat would have offered desperate resistance to Hitler and would have indubitably evoked a mighty reaction in the working masses of France and other countries. Let us not speculate on what the further course of events might have been. In any case the situation today would have been infinitely more favourable to the world working class.

Yes, we are not pacifists; we are for revolutionary war. But the Czech working class did not have the slightest right to entrust the leadership of a war "against fascism" to Messrs. Capitalists who, within a few days so safely changed their coloration and became themselves fascists and sub-fascists. Transformations and recolorations of this kind on the part of the ruling classes will be on the order of the day in wartime in all "democracies". That is why the proletariat would ruin itself if it were to determine its main line of policy by the formal and unstable labels of "for fascism" and "against fascism".

We consider as erroneous to the core the idea of the document that of the three conditions for "defeatist" policy enumerated by Lenin, the third is presumably lacking nowadays, namely, "the possibility of giving mutual support to revolutionary movements in all warring countries". Here the authors are obviously hypnotized by the reported omnipotence of the totalitarian regime. As a matter of fact, the immobility of the German and Italian workers is determined not at all by the omnipotence of the fascist police but by the absence of a program, the loss of faith in old programs and old slogans, and by the prostitution of the Second and Third Internationals. Only in this political atmosphere of disillusionment and decline can the police apparatus work those "miracles" which, sad to say, have produced an excessive impression also on the minds of some of our comrades.

THE MAIN ENEMY IS STILL AT HOME

It is naturally easier to begin the struggle in those countries where the workers' organisations have not yet been destroyed. But the struggle must be begun against the main enemy who remains as hitherto, at home. Is it conceivable that the advanced workers of France will say to the workers of Germany:

"Inasmuch as you are in the toils of fascism and cannot emancipate yourselves we will help our government to smash your Hitler, i.e., strangle Germany with the noose of a new Versailles treaty and then ... then we shall build socialism together with you."

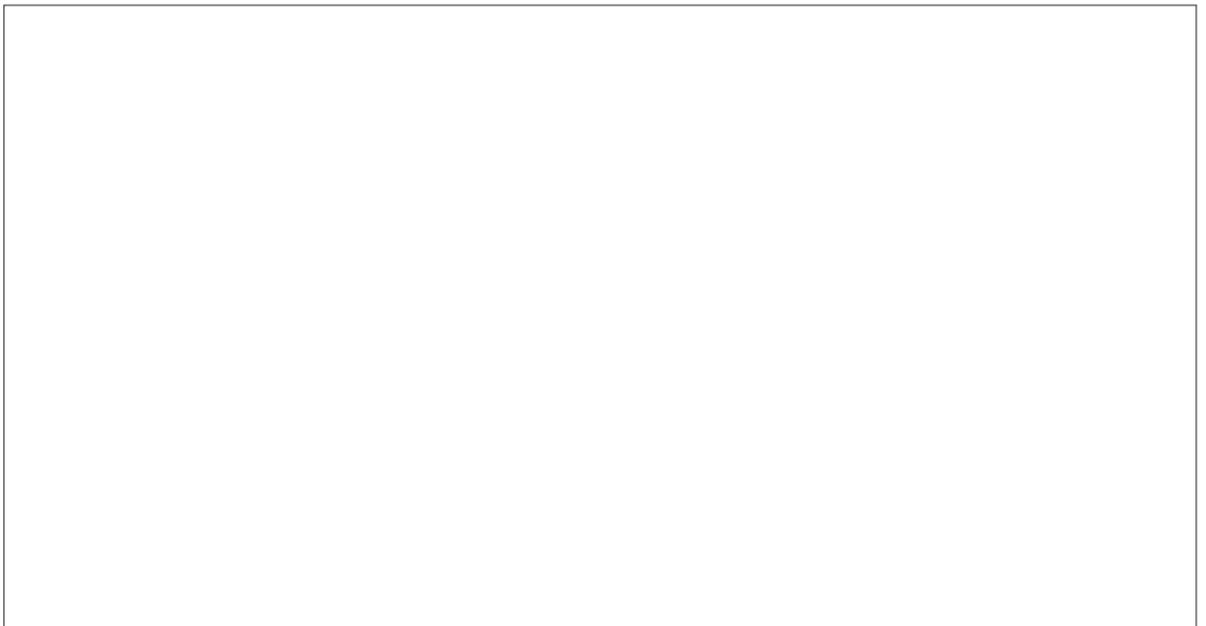
To this the Germans can well reply:

"Pardon us, but we have already heard this song from the social-patriots during the last war and know very well how it all ended ..."

No, in this way we shall not help the German workers to rouse themselves from their stupor. We must show them in action that revolutionary politics consists in a simultaneous struggle against the respective imperialist governments in all the warring countries. This "simultaneity" must not of course be taken mechanically. Revolutionary successes, wherever they may originally erupt, would raise the spirit of protest and uprisings in all countries. Hohenzollern militarism was overthrown completely by the October Revolution. For Hitler and Mussolini the success of a socialist revolution in any one of the advanced countries of the world is infinitely more terrible than the combined armaments of all the imperialist "democracies".

That policy which attempts to place upon the proletariat the unsolvable task of warding off all dangers engendered by the bourgeoisie and its policy of war is vain, false, mortally dangerous. "But fascism might be victorious!" "But the USSR is menaced!" "But Hitler's invasion would signify the slaughter of workers!" And so on, without end. Of course, the dangers are many, very many. It is impossible not only to ward them all off, but even to foresee all of them.

Should the proletariat attempt at the expense of the clarity and irreconcilability of its fundamental policy to chase after each episodic danger separately, it will unfailingly prove itself a bankrupt. In time of war, the frontiers will be altered, military victories and defeats will alternate with each other, political regimes will shift. The workers will be able to profit to the full from this monstrous chaos only if they occupy themselves not with acting as supervisors of the historical process but by engaging in the class struggle. Only the growth of their international offensive will put an end not alone to episodic "dangers" but also to their main



Trotsky: "I do not feel that it is my mission to give advice to imperialist governments, even if they name themselves democratic. I can give counsel only to the workers."

Only revolution can end war

Extracts from an interview with Leon Trotsky by Sybil Vincent, of the *London Daily Herald*, March 18 1939

Question: Is a world war inevitable? If so, will it mean the end of the capitalist system?

Answer: Yes, a world war is inevitable, if the revolution does not forestall it. The inevitability of the war flows, first, from the incurable crisis of the capitalist system; secondly, from the fact that the present partition of our planet, that is to say above all, of the colonies, no longer corresponds to the specific economic weight of the imperialist states. Looking for an escape out of the mortal crisis, the parvenu states aspire, and cannot fail to aspire, to a new partitioning of the world. Only suckling babes and professional "pacifists," to whom even the experience of the unfortunate League of Nations has taught nothing, can suppose that a more "equitable" repartition of the terrestrial surface can be realised around the green tables of diplomacy.

If the Spanish revolution had been victorious, it would have given a powerful impulse to the revolutionary movement in France and in other countries in Europe. In this case it would have been possible to hope confidently that the victorious socialist movement would forestall the imperialist war, making it useless and impossible. But the socialist proletariat of Spain was strangled by the coalition of Stalin-Azana Caballero-Negrin-Garcia Oliver, even before it was definitely crushed by the bands of Franco. The defeat of the Spanish revolution postponed the revolutionary perspective and has hastened the imperialist war. Only the blind can fail to see that!

Of course, the more energetically and the more audaciously the advanced workers will fight in all countries against militarism and imperialism now, in spite of the unfavourable conditions, the more quickly they will be able to stop the war when it has started, the greater will be the hopes for the salvation of our civilization from destruction.

Yes, I do not doubt that the new world war will provoke with an absolute inevitability the world revolution and the collapse of the capitalist system. The imperialist governments of all countries are doing all that is possible to accelerate this collapse. It is only necessary that the world proletariat is not again taken unawares by the great events.

Question: Is not the world too afraid of Hitler?

Answer: The democratic governments consider, with admiration and fear, Hitler, who succeeded in "liquidating" the social question. The working class, which during one and a half centuries periodically shook the civilized countries of Europe by its revolts, is suddenly reduced to complete silence in Italy and Germany. Messrs. the official politicians attribute this "success" to the internal, quasi-mystical properties of fascism and National Socialism.

In reality the strength of Hitler is not in himself, nor in his contemptible philosophy, but in the terrible deception of the working masses, in their confusion

and in their lassitude. During many decades the proletariat of Germany built up a trade union organization and a Social-Democratic party. Abreast of the strong Social Democracy appeared later a powerful Communist party. And all these organisations, which rose upon the shoulders of the proletariat, were in the critical moment a zero, and crumbled away before the offensive of Hitler. They did not find in themselves the courage to call the masses to struggle, as they themselves were completely degenerated, bourgeoisified and had lost the habit of thinking about struggle.

The masses pass through catastrophes heavily and slowly. It is incorrect to say that the German proletariat has reconciled itself with Hitler! But it no longer believes in the old parties, in the old slogans, and at the same time it has not yet found a new way. This and only this explains the strong-arm omnipotence of fascism. It will continue until the masses have dressed their wounds, have regenerated themselves and once more lifted their heads. I think we can expect that in not a long time.

The fear of Great Britain and France before Hitler and Mussolini explains itself by the fact that the world position of these two colony-holding countries, as has already been said, no longer corresponds with their specific economic weight. The war can bring nothing to them, but can take a great deal from them. It is natural that they attempt to postpone the moment of a new partitioning of the world and that they toss a bone, as Spain and Czechoslovakia, to Mussolini and Hitler. The struggle is for the colonial possessions, for the domination of the world. The attempt to represent this brawl of interests and appetites as a struggle between "democracy" and "fascism" can only dupe the working class. Chamberlain will give all the democracies in the world (there are not many left) for a tenth part of India.

The strength of Hitler (at the same time also his weakness) consists in the fact that, under the pressure of the helpless position of German capitalism, he is ready to resort to the more extreme means, using in passing blackmail and bluff, at the risk of leading to war. Hitler has felt well the fear of the old colony-holders before any disturbance and played on this fear, if not with a very great heart, at least with indubitable success.

Question: Should the "democracies" and the USSR unite to crush Hitler?

Answer: I do not feel that it is my mission to give counsel to imperialist governments, even if they name themselves democratic, nor to the Bonapartist clique of the Kremlin, even if it names itself socialist. I can give counsel only to the workers. My counsel to them is not to believe for a single instant that the war of the two imperialist camps can bring anything else but oppression and reaction in both camps. It will be the war of the slave-owners who cover themselves with various masks: "democracy," "civilization," on the one hand, "race," "honour," on the other. Only the overthrow of all slave-owners can once for all end the war and open an epoch of true civilization.

ITALIAN TEACHERS

Occupying to save 25,000 jobs

BY HUGH EDWARDS

While the numbers of workers across the world thrown on the scrapheap of global capitalism's current crisis continues to rise, and those responsible sing along with their house trained professional "canaries" about "green shoots" of recovery, spasms of defiance and resistance continue to be seen everywhere. The latest in Italy?

Following a successful 14 month occupation and work-in by 240 workers in a machine-tool plant outside Milan against closure and removal of the machinery, teachers are occupying education offices in protest against cuts of 65,000 teaching, ancillary and admin jobs. The government wants to cut 130,000 by 2011. Thousands of education workers will retire this year but 25,000 people will remain without jobs.

Teachers have been protesting, organising and occupying in over 100 cities and towns: Palermo and Trapani in Sicily, as well as in Venice, Turin, Napoli, Benevento, Milan...

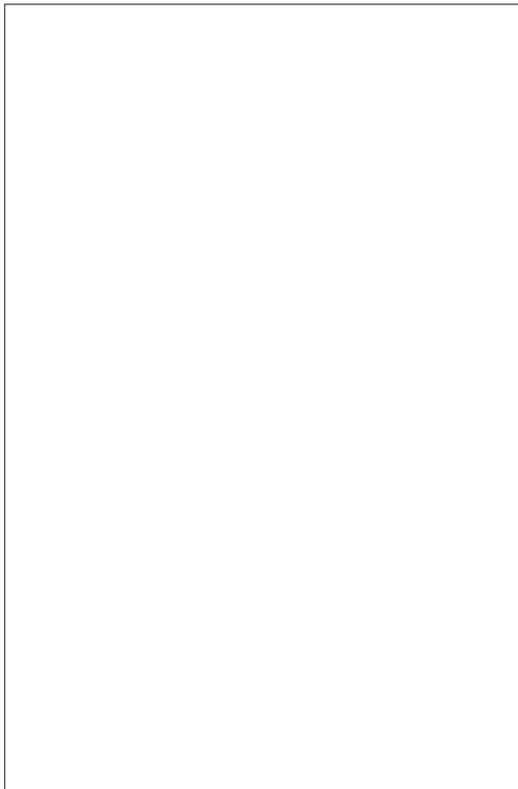
These workers are part of a 300,000-strong temporary workforce in education. Their jobs are permanently precarious, since every September they are forced to subject to a shameful public selection process, a points-based classification system, little better than a hiring-fair. Disgracefully underpaid — they are not paid for the 4-5 month school holidays — the majority of them will work for years in the school system but never obtain a settled and permanent fixed post.

They are forced to move at their own expense across regions, at the capricious whim of a bureaucratic educational establishment.

But this year on hiring and firing day teachers chose to take action. In Napoli teachers interrupted the proceedings for several hours, meeting with a heavy handed response from the local cops, all turned out in their fashionable anti-riot gear.

At Benevento six women teachers have occupied the roof of the local Education office since Saturday 29 August and a local committee of protesting teachers has called for spreading the action. Occupations are also taking place in Milan Bergamo, Sardegna.

In Bari a local committee of teachers along with local parent committees, supported by the governor of Puglia, Nicky Vendola, former leader of Rifondazione Comunista, have announced they will extend the protests and have called for action



On the roof of a local education office, demanding "work"

from workers and their families against the drastically deteriorating conditions of the school system.

Dario Franchesini, leader of the main opposition party in the Italian parliament, the Democratic Party, appeared opportunistically on the roof of one of the protests only to be told unceremoniously that teachers wanted action not empty phrases!

In Rome the "hiring fair" was blocked by protesting teachers until once more a police thug squad intervened

In Turin the three main union confederations (i.e. not COBAS) organised a demonstration along with the local family committees. The local trade union bureaucrats here, unlike anywhere else in Italy are actively involved, largely because their area is less affected and they intend to cut a local deal with the authorities.

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Vestas workers keep up factory blockade

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Vestas bosses moved four wind turbine blades from their Venture Quays factory, in East Cowes, on Friday 4 September, but backed off from moving the nine blades in the St Cross factory, in Newport, after workers and supporters picketed the "marine gate" there.

The blades are those left unfinished when workers occupied the factory on 20 July to oppose Vestas bosses' plans to close the factories - Britain's only wind-turbine blade factories - and to demand that the Government nationalise the factories, upgrade the production processes, and save the jobs.

Since bailiffs evicted the occupiers on 7 August, workers have been picketing the St Cross factory against the movement of those blades and other materials from the site.

The blades are due to go to Denmark - the home base of Vestas, which is a major multinational in the wind-turbine business - to be repaired and finished, and probably from there to the USA. Too big to travel by road, they have to go by barge, within about two hours either side of high tide, out of the "marine gate" at the factory, and across a cycle path which is a public right of way.

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