

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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TORY BUDGET IS WAR ON WORKERS

Prepare for class war!

The first Budget of the Tory-Liberal government has staked out the ground for an enormous assault on the working class in the period ahead — on our living standards and, maybe, on our remaining trade-union rights.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) dotted the i here by proposing tighter anti-union laws to quell any working-class revolt. The Budget itself began the assault. More will be spelled out in the autumn.

The Budget plan is harsher than the measures of the Thatcher government 30 years ago. £82 billion of cuts in annual public spending. A wage freeze

for six million public-sector workers: with inflation steadily if unspectacularly rising, that is a pay cut.

Two items in this Budget sum up its vicious class character. Corporation tax is to be reduced by 4% over four years. VAT on everything has been raised by 17.5% to 20%.

VAT hits at everyone buying goods and services, and takes a bigger slice from the poorest than from the rich.

The Budget amounts to a big cut in the standards of living of the poorest people in Britain. It is also a job cut. Hundreds of thousands of public sector jobs will go.

None of the window-dressing measures to con people into thinking this is a "fair" Budget, such as

an increase in capital gains tax, change the balance.

It was a grim joke when prime minister Cameron, in the House of Commons, described this Budget as a "progressive budget". It is a "progressive" long-term assault on the working class.

None of this was put to the electorate on 6 May — only the general idea that there would be cuts.

The Tories denied that they would raise VAT. The Lib Dems denounced the Tories for hiding plans to raise VAT, and pledged themselves to fight it when the Tories tried to introduce a VAT rise.

Continued on page 3

**Unite workers across Europe
against bosses' austerity drive** See page 4

BT

Strike for more pay from this big-profit company!

BY A CWU ACTIVIST

The result of the ballot for strike action over pay in BT will be announced on 5 July. If Communication Workers members vote yes, the first strike under the Lib Con government could be in the private sector.

The current offer from BT bosses is more than 2% less than the current rate of inflation, cuts the link with pensionable pay, and includes a profit related element. The issues are being discussed at a series of union meetings for BT members being held up and down the country. But management are also busy.

In call centres, and on repair and maintenance teams, staff (who rarely have team meetings) have been removed from front office and customer service functions to have "huddles". There managers are spreading misinformation about the union's ballot, putting individuals under pressure, and removing union literature. Senior Mangers are touring around large sites, and junior and middle managers are being prepared to reacquaint themselves with life "back on the tools".

BT have threatened to use contractors from Carillion and Telnet during any period of strike action. They are particularly worried about service on Next Generation Access (the future superfast broadband network), the massive NHS IT contract, and services provided to Other Licenced Operators (OLOs) being affected during any strike action, and the penalty payments that they may subsequently incur.

Whilst the telecom sector has been liberalised since the mid 80s and there are many other firms active, BT is a giant in the market and provides many of the network services that the other firms (including mobile operators) rely on to provide their services.

Workers in one of the most profitable companies in a highly profitable sector should not be denied a pay rise. BT's profits announced in April were 6%, costs were down £1.7 billion, the pension deficit was down, cash flow is up, and the dividend paid to shareholders is now 6%. Our claim is only for 5%! The fact that the BT Board are all getting between 5-7% pay rises and bonuses on top really rattles. The current "Effective Left" majority leadership on the Telecom's executive (a rightward split from the Broad Left) is leading the pay negotiations and proposed the strike action. Previous industrial deals done by them, on pensions (where retirement age was increased and benefits decreased) and most recently on changes to attendance patterns in BT OpenReach, have eroded the credibility of the union among the membership.

Despite much appropriate criticism there is still overwhelming support for taking action.

KYRGYZSTAN

Economic crisis breeds communal violence

BY DALE STREET

At the time of writing, the Kyrgyzstan government estimates the death toll from the ethnic violence which broke out in the Kyrgyz cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad in the night of 11/12 June to be as high as 2,000.

Some 400,000 Uzbeks, the ethnic minority which has been the target of the violence, fled from their homes. Around 300,000 are internally displaced within Kyrgyzstan, and the other 100,000 have fled across the border into Uzbekistan. Around 5,000 returned to Kyrgyzstan on 22 June, but there were also reports of fresh violence in Osh.

There are contradictory reports about the immediate "trigger" for the violence — fighting between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in a casino in Osh, or an attack by a rival gang on a gym run by criminals in the same city, with the initial clash quickly escalating into street fighting between gangs of Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth, and from there into full-scale pogroms.

Some eye-witnesses reported three "waves" to the attacks: firstly, military personnel in personnel carriers (although this may have been civilians who had plundered uniforms and carriers from military depots), then armed youths, and finally looters, who included women and young boys.

From Osh the clashes spread to the neighbouring city of Jalal-Abad, where an Uzbek university and the local TV station were burnt down, police stations attacked, and weapons and an armoured carrier seized from a local military unit. 5,000 Kyrgyz youth rallied in the city centre, demanding transport to Osh.

The interim Kyrgyz government, headed by interim President Roza Otunbayeva, responded to the bloodshed by declaring a curfew and a state of emergency in Osh and Jalal-Abad until 20 June.

Extra army and police units were sent to the cities, with orders to shoot rioters on sight. The government appealed, unsuccessfully, to the Russian government to send troops to restore order.

Otunbayeva has blamed her presidential predecessor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who fled the country after a popular uprising in April of this year, for the outbreak of violence. She says Bakiyev's supporters instigated the violence in order to make impossible a referendum on a new constitution (due on 27 June) and parliamentary and presidential elections in October.

Otunbayeva's claim has been backed up by the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights.

Bakiyev may have been behind the violence — support for Bakiyev among Kyrgyz in and around Osh and Jalal-Abad has always been stronger than in the rest of the country. But there is not, at least as yet, any "hard evidence" that Bakiyev's hand is behind the violence. In fact, Bakiyev's response to the violence was also to call for Russian intervention.

And even if Bakiyev did play a role in triggering the initial violence, this cannot explain the speed with which the violence spread nor the level of intensi-

ty which the violence reached.

The violence was able to take root so quickly and so brutally because of a long-standing socio-economic differentiation along ethnic lines, made worse by an ongoing economic and political crisis, which had already resulted in increasingly antagonistic communal relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.

BACKGROUND

Uzbeks constitute about 15% of the population of Kyrgyzstan. But in the south of the country, where the pogroms took place, they make up about half of the population.

Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan are more likely than Kyrgyz to be farmers, landowners, traders and (small) business owners. 89% of workers in manufacturing are Uzbeks, as are 79% of taxi drivers. By contrast, Uzbeks account for only 5.5% of police officers in the region, and only eight out of 128 tax collectors. In large businesses dependent on state aid — in contrast to smaller private businesses — Uzbeks are also a small minority of the workforce.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union all Kyrgyz governments have publicly supported the idea of a multi-ethnic Kyrgyzstan. But their actions have generally fallen well short of their words.

A recent poll conducted by an Uzbek community organisation in Osh found that 60% of Uzbeks polled did not find the government's policies towards them adequate, 79% felt that Uzbeks needed a political party of their own, and 78% wanted Uzbek to be given the status of an official state language.

Bakiyev did nothing to deal with Kyrgyz grievances and allowed patterns of discrimination to continue. Kyrgyz in the south of the country have generally remained loyal to Bakiyev, whereas Uzbeks are more likely to support Otunbayeva's interim government.

This political and socio-economic differentiation along ethnic lines has become all the more volatile under the impact of economic stagnation and political instability.

The country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) went into decline last year, as too did its industrial output — by 20%. Compared with 2008, the value

400,000 Uzbeks fled from their homes

of Kyrgyz exports last year fell by a third. Kyrgyz GDP per capita now ranks 135th out of 152 in the world. Unemployment is currently running at well over 20%.

Government corruption has been an added drain on the economy: Bakiyev's son, who recently claimed asylum in Britain, is wanted for prosecution in Kyrgyzstan, to answer charges that he avoided \$80 millions worth of tax payments on aviation fuel which he sold to companies supplying it to a US airbase in Kyrgyzstan.

Popular anger over government corruption, its pro-privatisation policies, and its failure to restore economic growth resulted in the overthrow of Bakiyev earlier this year.

However the interim government lacks any real authority and is essentially an unstable coalition of competing political parties and personalities, with the leading figures in the coalition frequently contradicting each other as they position themselves for the elections scheduled for later this year.

It is unclear what political and social forces exist to prevent further such outbursts, and to prevent a further breakdown in communal relations under the impact of economic crisis.

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BUDGET

Prepare for class war

From front page

In the House of Commons Tory Chancellor Osborne was flanked on both sides by smug-looking Lib Dems. Cameron, invisible for the TV camera most of the time, sat directly behind Osborne.

The TV picture of Osborne and the people round him — of rich, privileged, smug ex public schoolboys, at least three of whom are millionaires — sums up the state of things in Britain now. This is government by the rich, for the rich!

It is a government without a mandate to do what it is doing and going to do. The Tories won more parliamentary seats than any other party, but they did not win a majority. They did not, except by default, win the general election.

It was an example of the hollowness of British bourgeois democracy that in the general election all parties talked of the necessity of big cuts, and no party spelled out even the outline of where they would cut.

The Lib Dems campaigned in the election against what they are now helping the Tories to push through. The Labour Party campaigned in the election on a policy of cuts, but less severe cuts, more tax rises, and a slower tempo of cutting the deficit than the Tories demanded.

Between them Labour and the Lib Dems won the majority of votes against what the Government is now doing. The fact that in return for 22 government jobs the Lib Dems are now helping the Tories does not and cannot give electoral legitimacy to what the government is doing.

The government says that the cuts are “unavoidable”, that they act under compulsion of the gravity of the economic situation. The Lib Dems give that as a reason for rattling on the electorate.

In fact, as Harriet Harman said in the House of Commons, the cuts plan is what the Tories want to do. They are driven by ideology, not economics.

Resistance to this government is not only necessary for the working class, but also entirely democratic.

The labour movement must respond in kind to the gathering assault by this government of millionaires which, above all, serves the interests of the rich. The labour movement must do what workers in Greece have done: mobilise, agitate, demonstrate, refuse to let the Tory-Liberal coalition do what it wants to do.

The proper answer to the atrocity of raising VAT by two and a half per cent is to fight for wage rises.

All talk of “fairness” is lying propaganda. Wages and benefits lost, through wage freezes or benefit cuts, are gone forever. Time spent unemployed, in absolute or relative poverty, is gouged out of the lives of those on whom it is inflicted. The lives of young people unable to get a job after leaving school or college are warped by the experience.

Even if capital gains tax were very severe — and, even with the increase, it is far from that — what would be lost by the rich through capital gains tax is simply not equivalent to what working-class households will lose. In fact, of course, the rich have “creative” accountants to help them evade taxes. All taxes, this capital gains tax increase too.

But is the labour movement in any state to resist the government? Yes, it is!

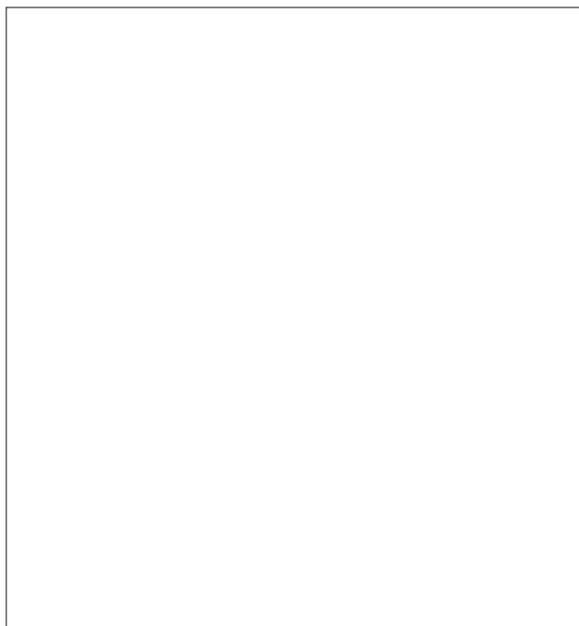
The unions in the TUC organise over six million trade unionists. The French labour movement has confronted governments and organised successful general strikes when it has had two million or fewer workers organised in unions.

The CBI expects and fears labour movement resistance. That is why it urged the government to tighten the laws against effective trade-unionism, demanding that industrial action ballots must win 40% of the balloted workforce as well as a majority of those voting.

The government has said no to this; but no serious trade-unionist will rely on the government to keep its word.

The working-class resistance that the CBI fears is what class-conscious workers should hope for, and do everything we can to foment and organise. Defeatism here would be a crime against the working class.

The working-class movement will not know what is possible until it mobilises for resistance. The old



We need to prepare the labour movement to fight

labour-movement guideline applies here: “get stuck in and then we’ll see!”

In any case, what is imperative for socialists now is to help prepare the labour movement to fight back, not immobilise ourselves with defeatism rooted in platonic speculation.

Of course it is true that the labour movement is not in the best shape as we face the challenge of the most militantly class-struggle government since Thatcher came to power in 1979.

For the thirteen years of New Labour government the labour movement was largely paralysed. One reason for that was that those were mostly years of general prosperity and capitalist boom, especially a “boom” in the public sector where the unions have most members. The labour movement did not then feel the pressure it will now feel to fight the government.

Another reason for paralysis was the wretched quality of trade-union leadership. Now the Lib-Tory assault, codified in the Budget and with cuts to be spelled out in the autumn, leaves the labour movement a lot less wriggle-room.

For thirteen years the government of New Labour, a party still largely financed by the trade unions, was a neo-Thatcherite government.

Even so, in the general election the Labour Party was the only governmental alternative to Tory or Lib-Tory government. It is the only governmental alternative now.

One of the surprising things in the general election was that prime minister Brown rallied some of Labour’s lost support by warning against the Tory cuts that are now under way. Brown, the rich-worshipping New Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer for ten years!

Labour is now opposing the “Tory cuts”. Acting Labour leader Harriet Harman made what was — considering who and what she is, and has been for the last 13 years — a good-ish speech in the House of Commons in response to the Budget.

Labour had already proposed, and if in power now would carry out, severe cuts — cuts to the extent of 60% of the Tory cuts. (Labour planned smaller, slower deficit reductions, with tax rises doing more of the reduction). There is, and cannot but be, a great measure of hypocrisy when former New Labour ministers oppose cuts.

Yet it is the speeches in opposition to the Tories and Lib Dems that the labour movement will hear, and may be encouraged to resist by. Enough old Labour voters heard and believed Brown’s warnings against the Tory cuts plans — and remembered what the Tories had done in the 1980s, or what they had heard of those days — to prevent the crushing defeat or even electoral meltdown to which Labour seemed to be doomed only a few months earlier.

Labour and TUC condemnations of the cuts — whether or not people like Harman are hypocrites — will help rouse labour movement opposition and resistance.

In fact it is not just a matter of hypocrisy. Before and

especially during the general election, a real distinction emerged between Labour and Tory policy. The difference between Labour and Tory on the severity and tempo of cuts has enormous practical implications, not only in the lives of working-class people, but on the whole economic situation.

The *Financial Times* page one headline on the Budget — “Kill-or-cure Budget” — summed that up. The Tory cuts may trigger or give extra force to a new instalment of slump.

What does the labour movement need to do? The unions must prepare to fight back, and prepare also to fight in defence of those workers, in the public sector, targeted first by the government. Big public meetings should be organised all over the country to explain the significance of the Lib-Tory assault.

The Lib-Tory plan is a gradual one. The cuts will escalate from year to year, reaching a peak only in 2015. We do not and cannot know in advance how soon we will reach the point where those cuts trigger mass resistance. But we know that the quicker that happens, the better; and the energy and effort of activists now will make a difference.

Politically, the trade unions need to break with the Blair-Brown gang of ex-ministers. These people — all of them without exception — have dirty hands. Nobody should have any confidence in them.

All the candidates for Labour leader, save Diane Abbott, were in the Blair-Brown governments. They were complicit in everything Blair and Brown did. They supported the Iraq war. They actively backed Blair and Brown when they reduced the Labour Party to a more or less empty shell. None of them raised even a squeak of protest about New Labour keeping the Tory anti-union laws — the laws on which the Lib-Tory government may now erect further restrictions of trade unionism.

The unions should move now to restore or create the structures that will help make the Labour Party a living party of rank and file activists once again. In the review of Labour Party structure opening this October, this must mean, above all, winning the right for Labour Party conference to debate democratically and decide Labour policy. The rank and file of unions and the Labour Party alike must demand that.

Labour-controlled councils will be tasked with implementing many of the Tory-Liberal cuts. They should refuse to do that. The unions should insist that they refuse.

The labour movement is now faced with the need to fight against the Tory-Lib-Dem government. What should it fight for?

The labour movement needs to set itself the task of creating, not a new New Labour government, but a workers’ government! A government that, minimally at least, serves the working people as this government is serving, and the New Labour government served, the bourgeoisie.

A government that confronts the capitalists and the capitalist system, and that aims to replace capitalism with a working-class social and economic system.

We are a long way from that? Indeed. Right now it is a matter of educational work in the labour movement for these aims.

Faced with what we are now faced with, from the coalition government, many workers will begin to question the capitalist system. It is the job of socialists to help them understand what is wrong with the system and what can, if enough people want it, replace it — socialism.

It falls to the Marxist left to educate a new layer of working-class socialists in the fire of the class struggle that may now ignite.

The Marxist left itself is in a bad condition for doing that. It is split up into sects. Much of the would-be Marxist left is seriously disoriented.

Yet turnings in the road such as that made at the general election can create the conditions for political regroupment. The new dividing line on the Marxist left now is drawn by the need to prepare the broad labour movement for the fightback and to help it in the fightback.

Dialogue on the present situation, and on prospects and perspectives for the class struggle, is now both possible and necessary, on the left and the would-be left.

Unite workers across Europe!

The cuts programme is Europe-wide. Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Greece are all making big cuts in social provision.

This is a social and political choice by the ruling classes. In the tumult of 2008, many mainstream writers said that neo-liberalism was dead, and capitalist governments would have to seek a new programme, possibly conceding more social provision.

Yet the EU governments are gambling on a push for a strongly neo-liberal way forward from the crisis.

That means gearing government policy to making the eurozone an attractive site for footloose global capital to perch in:

- Having frantic financial markets, seamlessly integrated into global financial flows, central to the economy;
- Open borders for capital and commodities (not necessarily people);
- Low taxes on the rich and corporations;
- Privatisation;
- Union-bashing.

Although state governments in the USA (all bar Vermont tied by balanced-budget laws) are pushing through big cuts, the US federal government is still unapologetic about continuing large deficit spending, and so is the Japanese government. That difference is not really about a break with neo-liberalism, but the different ways that the USA and Japan are inserted into the global economy.

The Europe-wide cuts drive calls for a cross-European workers' fightback. The top-level European Trade Union

Confederation has called a Europe-wide day of action on the theme "no cuts, more growth" — for 29 September! More urgency is needed.

The first demand should be for the cancellation of the crippling debts owed by many European governments to European banks, and the taking over of all the big banks and financial institutions across Europe, to be run as an integrated, publicly-owned, democratically-controlled banking, pension, and mortgage service.

The second should be for social guarantees across Europe — minimum wages, job protection, welfare benefits, pensions — levelled up to the best current standards, and funded on a European level.

The third, a Europe-wide emergency programme of public works to tackle unemployment and pauperisation. Workers' control of the big multinationals, to steer production toward need and to guarantee every worker the right to a decent job.

Those demands require a campaign for a democratic republican United States of Europe. The existing bureaucratic structures should be replaced by a sovereign elected European Parliament with full control over all EU affairs.

The European Union (carbon) Emissions Trading Scheme should be replaced by a programme to reconvert energy-generation, industry, transport, and city planning, under workers' control, on sustainable lines.

Socialists and trade unionists in Britain should make the best and closest links they can for this battle with our comrades across Europe.

"We need national action to meet this threat"

By PAT MURPHY, NUT EXECUTIVE, PERSONAL CAPACITY

The government has announced that all schools will be able to become Academies; schools which have been judged to be "outstanding" by Ofsted will be automatically approved and fast-tracked to that status.

The coalition is rushing through legislation to allow schools to make decisions about becoming an Academy before the end of term. And Education Minister Michael Gove has written to all "outstanding" schools inviting them to do this. The Academies programme is also being extended to primary schools.

At the moment there are only 203 Academies, but there are 600 "outstanding" secondary schools and 2,000 "outstanding" primary schools.

The government also plans to create a new type of "free" school. Similar to Academies, "free schools" will be founded in response to parents, or other groups, who want a new school in their area. Gove claims to have received interest from over 700 groups including some from teachers.

Whereas Labour claimed to be tackling underachievement and social disadvantage with Academies, the coalition's plans explicitly target the more affluent and academically successful schools. They are also ending any requirement whatsoever to consult parents or staff on plans. The major local campaigns to oppose Academies were built around the consultation process but that will now not exist.

The "free schools" policy promises utter chaos in the school system. Well-resourced and organised local groups will be able to demand the right to set up their own school regardless of the effect on other local schools. Free schools will be Academies run, not by parents or teachers, but by private organisations with no guarantee that they will not be able to make a profit from the school.

One of the most high profile groups Gove has promoted is a group of parents in Dewsbury, but the organisation which will run the school is SERCO, a multinational service company.

Gove also wants to see at least 30 schools run by Kunskaappskolom, a Swedish outfit that runs schools for profit.

These schools will be run by a combination of central government control and private sector management.

The effect of these proposals on local school provision for all children will be devastating. The extra money available

for schools that opt to become Academies will be taken from money the local authority holds centrally for support services. Each new academy will get its share of this money and the central fund reduced accordingly.

Under current arrangements the local authority holds a central fund used to provide a range of services such as support for special educational needs, school transport, and school admissions.

Academies will have to buy these services from somewhere else or buy them back from the Local Authority. If enough schools opt out of these arrangements the ability of local authorities to provide basic services to the rest of their (generally less well-off) schools will be massively reduced.

The money to fund free schools will come from freezing plans to refurbish existing school buildings through the Building Schools for the Future programme. Worse than that: the government plans to end free school meals for low income families (*Observer* 20 June) and use that money for these schools.

The destruction of local authorities is one of the key aims of this legislation. The other key target, are the trade unions that represent teachers and the national pay and conditions arrangements that they have won and defended for years. In place of a more or else unified set of pay and conditions, we could be faced within a few years with thousands of different bargaining units and different rates of pay and different conditions.

The academies and free schools project can be frustrated and even stopped if we organise and demonstrate powerful opposition from the start.

Gove is overstating his support when he refers to over 1,000 schools interested as this only means they have asked for more information.

He has blundered in promising hundreds of new Academies by September as the legislation is extremely unlikely to be in place by then.

Early feedback from schools, and parents and governors' organisations shows little interest in Academy status and some strong opposition. Parents and governors can be persuaded by the arguments against.

The school trade unions, in particular the NUT, are also starting to talk seriously about industrial action as a response to this threat. Already they have a policy of supporting members fully in opposing Academy status, up to and including with industrial action.

But we will need a strategy for developing national joint action to meet the

Financial Times calls Budget "this bloodbath"

By COLIN FOSTER

The 22 June Budget means public spending cut by 25% almost everywhere except health by 2014-5.

The details will not be spelled out until the autumn spending review, but the certainty is (as the *Financial Times* headline put it): "huge jobs cull looms as services hit".

Public sector workers also face a two-year pay freeze (with a tiny exception for some lower-paid) and increased pension contributions, i.e. a cash cut in take-home pay at a time when inflation is running over 5%.

VAT will rise from 17.5% to 20% from January 2011, in effect raising the prices of most goods and services by a further 2.1%.

Child benefit will be frozen for two years, and benefits and pensions will rise only in line with the consumer price index (which excludes housing costs, and thus usually rises less than the retail price index).

Housing benefit will be cut 7%, by tightening the limits on rent levels it will cover.

Disability benefit changes are "intended to strip 600,000 beneficiaries of about £70 a week" (FT).

And the rich? The FT summed it up well there too: "Well paid breathe collective sigh of relief".

At the same time as spending is chopped, the government will cut taxes for the rich. Corporation tax will go down, bit by bit, from 28% now to 24% in 2014-5. Employers' national insurance payments will be adjusted to rise much less than the Labour government planned.

The capital gains tax increase and the levy on banks' balance sheets are only minor offsets here.

In sum, the plans will cost the average household £5000 a year by 2015-6, in lost services, reduced benefits, reduced pay, and increased VAT.

As Martin Wolf put it in the FT: "Nothing in the election campaign prepared the British public for this bloodbath".

The Labour government was already planning cuts, but Osborne has increased the cuts-plan total from £52 billion to £84 billion per year (by 2014-5).

UNISON

Left must organise beyond conference

BY A CONFERENCE DELEGATE

With the background of huge cuts in public services around the corner, Unison's local government and national delegate conferences met last week in Bournemouth.

Detailed discussion on the way forward were restricted by the fact that motion deadlines fell before the general election. However, a united emergency motion between the leadership and left-led branches laid out strategy against cuts.

The union supported a national ballot if final salary pensions are attacked, campaigns in defence of jobs and services, and organising local demonstrations on September 29 as part of a European-wide day of action.

Dave Prentis made a further commitment to ballot for action on pensions in his speech. Unison has much good policy on fighting privatisation, cuts and job losses. The question has always been whether the current leadership are prepared to lead an effective campaign and particularly whether they will back branches who do go into dispute.

Their record is poor, but the left must organise at branch and regional level to push the union nationally to hold to its own policy.

This job is made more difficult in Unison by the clamping down on democracy and witch-hunts of individual activists. At conference, this was debated in the form of a rule amendment restricting suspensions from the union and from holding office to 24 months.

In the recent past, activists have been arbitrarily suspended for long periods, including Caroline Bedale from Manchester Community Health branch,

who was suspended beyond her retirement age for her involvement in Karen Reissman's campaign. The rule change received a big majority on conference floor, but failed in the required two-thirds vote. The majority was a sign that even amongst those attending conference there is a discomfort with the severity of the individual witch-hunting.

Other controversial debates included an emergency motion strengthening Unison's policy on a boycott of Israel, which was included in the context of a condemnation of the attack on the aid flotilla. Those opposing the boycott did not get a motion on the agenda, so spoke against the emergency motion and were heavily defeated.

A motion submitted by the Women's Committee in favour of the banning the buying of sex and supporting the 'Nordic model' for addressing prostitution also caused debate. The AWL hosted a well-attended fringe meeting with Thierry Schaufhauser speaking for the GMB-IUSW sex workers' branch. However, the debate was restricted on conference floor and, with the support of the platform, the motion was strongly carried.

A Unison United Left meeting addressed by John McDonnell MP (amongst others) drew broad support and had a good debate on the way forward, showing that the left organises relatively well at conference itself. We need to recognise, however, that the lack of good motions to conference and the disappointing result in the recent general secretary elections shows that this needs to be continued away from conference.

Most importantly, we have to find a way of developing rank-and-file organisation across branches to link up those opposing the cuts.

Debating the "Swedish model"

BY JADE BAKER

Delegates at Unison conference earlier this month voted in favour of the "Swedish model" of criminalising those who purchase sex, and in effect, to put the safety of sex workers in further jeopardy.

Typically, debate on the subject was shut down at the conference, leaving the case against the "Swedish model" under-represented. However, a hunger to grapple with the arguments "for and against" was played out in an encouraging and well attended fringe meeting on the issue, sponsored jointly by the Labour Representation Committee and the AWL, before the vote on the motion.

Over fifty union members attended and heard from Thierry Schaffauser from the International Union of Sex Workers/ GMB sex workers' branch.

The meeting heard a mix of opinions from the floor and teased out many intricate issues like how the country's racist and punitive border regulations pave the way for sex trafficking to occur. A general consensus was reached that passing the motion would not protect voluntary or forced sex workers, and would push the industry further underground making the appearance of exploitative third party agents, like pimps, a regularity.

The motion (117) which was proposed by "Unison Women", supposedly representing 1,000,000 members, follows the retrogressive policy which took effect in April this year under the Police and Crime Act and which now deems any purchase of sex from a "vulnerable" person an arrestable offence.

This law makes the vetting of clients

increasingly difficult for sex workers on the street with time restraints forcing them to dive into clients' cars in fear of being caught by the police. It not only makes the life of a sex worker more precarious and dangerous, forcing them to carry out their work covertly, but also takes what power or control they had, over choosing clients at least, away.

This idea was even confirmed by a policewoman, who despite this view, was still puzzlingly unsure of how to vote on the motion! "Confusion" on the issue seems to be endemic. Maybe it's down to the decades of damning stigma attached to sex workers and those who use their services.

Criminalising clients in this manner is only going to exacerbate the "moral stigma" and in turn add to the vicious cycle which sees sex workers represented in a derogatory way throughout society.

Thierry, from the GMB's sex worker branch, highlighted how in France, even though it is prohibited by law to advertise sexual services, it happens anyway. Capitalism reaps the benefits of this by raking in the extra money sex workers spend on constantly uploading or printing new advertisements.

In times of economic crisis, women will be the first group targeted and will find themselves metaphorically and literally thrown down to the curb.

Sex work is going to become a convenient source of income for many women who find themselves jobless. Instead of criminalising the industry even further, we should be looking to provide sex workers with much more support, to make other economic choices if they want, and provide them with the freedom to organise around their work and the wider conditions of their lives as they see fit.

MY LIFE AT WORK

Divide and rule in the construction industry

David is a construction in Jersey

Tell us a bit about the work you do.

I am a manual labourer who is currently working on a large roadwork project. The work involves mainly digging holes and doing the jobs that the tradesmen won't.

There are three types of people who work on this job. Those who work for the main contractor, whose name I will not mention, and those who are contracted through various agencies.

What are your pay and conditions like?

I am, unfortunately, an agency employee, meaning that instead of the £10.50 employees from the contractor enjoy I get only £8. This means losing a total amount of £112.50 per week for doing the exact same job as everyone else.

We work come rain or shine and are not always provided with the correct equipment. For example, at the time of writing the weather is 26°C, yet we were expected to work without proper sun protection i.e. sun screen or protective hoods. We are not provided with water, yet are penalised and chastised for going to the nearest shop (a five minute walk at most) to purchase our own.

On the flipside of that, last week there was torrential rain, yet more than half of

the men were not provided with waterproof clothing as they were employed via an agency.

This is due in large part to the structure of the employment hierarchy. It can often be found on any given day that there are more "bosses" than employees. Above the humble labourers such as me there are gangers, foremen, supervisors, site supervisors, project managers and company directors — all of whom supersede each others' authority on areas of the job. This leads to lack of proper equipment and tools, but on a more important level an atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty.

It is not uncommon for a man to be sacked by one "boss" for following the instructions of another "boss". Or for one person to be loaded with all the work of his gang because of serious cronyism amongst the bosses.

One of the biggest problems I see is the xenophobic racism instilled in people by the lack of employment caused by the recession. This in its own turn creates a certain tribalism in which different nationalities will not work with others, or a certain animosity will occur when they do.

This is a great tool used by the bosses as they play one ethnicity against another, extracting extra man hours at a cut



rate because they threaten to give the job to X if Y won't do it.

What do people talk about at your work?

When we get our breaks, two half hour breaks for nine and a half hours, the talk is of usually whatever the tabloids tell my colleagues to think about — women, beer, football. And then we complain about the job and the bosses. However when you mention socialism you are more often than not met with a mix of ridicule, racism and fear.

Ridicule comes from the older guys who still believe that Labour is staunch left and that any other leftist party just wants to turn us into Stalin's Russia.

The racism and fear comes from the new breed of nationalist who thinks that everything should be blamed on "those bloody immigrants coming here and

working for a pittance". And when you point out that surely the employer who offers these desperate people substandard pay and conditions should be blamed, a barrage of "bollix, they shunt be ere in the first place" "and you don't see me going over der du ya" soon follows.

There are some of the older generation on the job who are in agreement with me, but for them it's just been too long a fight so they decide to fight no more.

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

If I were to be given a magic wand and the ability to change the job I would make the workforce a united and unionised force because, as Connolly said, "Without the power of the Industrial Union behind it, Democracy can only enter the State as the victim enters the gullet of the Serpent".

There are unions available, e.g. UCATT and Unite, but there are only two members on site. Still this is not a grandiose fantasy but an achievable reality and I believe that the entire socialist struggle should be viewed as such — whether you work on a building site, or in a building society.

Workers of the world unite!

Bribery, corruption and union busting at Glasgow City Council

By ANN FIELD

Set up as an “arms length” company by Labour-controlled Glasgow City Council in 2006, City Building (Glasgow) LLP (formerly the council’s Building Services Department) has enjoyed a large amount of salacious press coverage in recent months.

It began with the revelation that since 2006 City Building had awarded £10 millions worth of contracts to City Refrigeration Holdings Ltd whose founder and boss, Willie Haughey, has donated over £1 million to Labour since 2003 — the biggest donor to Labour in Scotland.

In the same period City Refrigeration won just one other public contract — a slightly more modest £15,000 contract with South Lanarkshire Council.

City Building had also awarded contracts of unknown values to AS Scaffolding, whose boss, Andrew Smillie, has donated over £1,000 to Glasgow Central Labour Party. The company donated nearly £3,500 to the campaign by Andy Kerr MSP to become

Labour Group leader at Holyrood, and paid around £1,500 for Kerr’s trip to the 2008 UEFA Cup Final in Manchester.

City Building — which has three Labour councillors on its Board, and the husband of another Labour councillor as its Managing Director — has donated £4,000 to the Labour Party by “buying” tables at Labour Party fund-raising dinners, and had also paid £50,000 for hiring exhibition space at Labour Party conferences.

Then the spotlight turned on City Building’s appointment of Lesley Quinn as Business Development Manager, on a salary of around £50,000 a year. Quinn used to be the Scottish Labour Party’s General Secretary. The post had not been advertised prior to her appointment. She is not known to have any previous experience in the field of business development.

More recently, attention has switched to City Building’s hospitality bill: £50,000 over the past two years, spent mainly to the benefit of senior managers, their spouses, and Labour councillors.

What has been given a lot less attention in the media, however, are the

attacks on trade union organisation in the City Building workforce.

In May 2009 City Building signed a union recognition agreement which confirmed five days a week facility time for the Unite and UCATT convenors. But in February 2010, without giving the notice required by the agreement, City Building announced that facility time would be cut to two days a week.

When the Unite convenor refused to accept this, City Building began paying him for just two days a week, on the grounds that he had failed to return to his former job as a plumber for three days, and was therefore “really” only working two days a week.

In April an Employment Tribunal ruled on an outstanding case involving Unite, City Building and Glasgow City Council, dating back to the transfer of staff from the council workforce to City Building. In its judgement the Tribunal stated that it did not believe the evidence put forward by the Unite witnesses, including its City Building convenor.

City Building provided a link on its website to the judgement and issued a letter to its staff claiming that the

Tribunal’s judgement showed that City Building could not have any confidence in the integrity of the Unite convenor. The letter appealed to Unite members to vote the sitting convenor out of office.

In response to the refusal of Unite members to allow City Building to dictate who should, or should not, be their convenor, City Building then banned the Unite convenor from its premises, placed him on “gardening leave”, and cut his pay from two days a week to nothing.

Two very basic questions remain unanswered: Why has the Labour-controlled City Council, which still maintains ultimate responsibility for City Building (as an “arms length” company) done nothing to reverse this attack on trade union rights by the Board of City Building?

And why has Unite not only failed to organise a ballot on industrial action in defence of trade unionism in City Building, but has also done nothing to expel Gerry Leonard — the Unite member who, as chair of the City Building Board, presided over this attack on fellow members of his union?

Win, lose or draw at Middlesex University?

By VICKI MORRIS

For the full version of this article, see <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/mphil>

The inspiring campaign to keep philosophy at Middlesex University has failed. The management has not budged in its decision to close the department.

The postgraduate school, the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy (CRMEP), has been snapped

up by Kingston University, along with four of its six staff. Postgraduate students enrolled with Middlesex philosophy can transfer to Kingston.

Two staff, Christian Kerslake and Mark Kelly, remain at Middlesex, facing an uncertain future, teaching the undergraduate course which will end when the last students leave in two years’ time. Kerslake is one of those members of staff that the college suspended for his part in the campaign (the suspension is now lifted).

There is a lot of debate the outcome. The “official line” on the Save Middlesex

Philosophy blog, signed by the four “rescued” staff members, is that the outcome is a “partial victory.”

Comments on the blog demonstrate people’s anger at this outcome. Christian Kerslake himself that he believes victory was possible, and states his opposition to the move: “Encouraging the production of exclusive postgraduate institutions in the current economic climate will help to reinforce class division, shutting those who don’t have money out of the higher education system....”

Oxford anti-cuts campaign

Around 30 people attended a “Save Our Services” meeting in Oxford on the 20th of June, to discuss how to resist cuts in local public services. Activists from green alter-globalisation activist network People and Planet had provided a lot of the footwork, postering Oxford and leafletting door-to-door.

Trade unionists and local activists spoke. A further meeting is planned for 1st July, 6PM, Cheney Community Centre.

More information: www.odtuc.org.uk

McDonnell to push Bill

John McDonnell MP has won the ballot among MP for the chance to put a “private member’s Bill” and will propose one to stop employers being able to get strikes declared illegal for minor technical errors in the ballot.

If successful, this would put an end to the ridiculous shenanigans that see strikes and ballots delayed and pantomimes such as Unite’s BA cabin crew getting an injunction which was then lifted on appeal. It would reaffirm that it is legal for us to strike for our rights.

So it is very important that we support this Bill — and not just by admiring from the sidelines but by actively mobilising to support it.

Such a campaign would increase its chance of being passed — though probably from negligible to minimal — and more importantly, raise awareness as to the injustice of the current laws and the way that judges almost always interpret them to the benefit of employers and against unions.

It would help to ensure that if and when strikes are injunctioned, we will all understand how unjust it is, and will be more willing and confident to find ways to defy it.

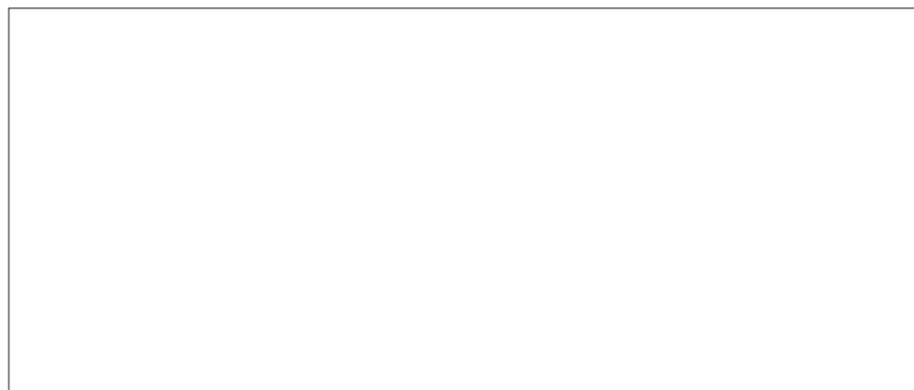
BA strikes latest

By JONNY KEYWORD

Unite is expected to launch a new waves of strikes against British Airways as it prepares to take a fresh ballot. Unite is serving notification of a ballot after further talks at ACAS floundered.

The union is demanding the full reinstatement of the staff travel scheme for strikers as part of any agreement. BA has made almost no concessions on the issue of the concessionary travel ban and other victimisations of strikers. These victimisations are BA’s tactics for punishing staff for exercising their right to strike.

Unite’s general secretaries Tony Woodley and Derek Simpson have referred to the victimisations as “new items of dispute”. While the shift in focus of the dispute onto attacks made during the previous waves of strikes is a reflection of the feelings of many workers who feel these direct assaults more keenly than potential changes in contracts, it will be unfortunate if Unite allows the issues underlying the dispute — Walsh’s attempt to break the union by effectively casualising and de-skilling British Airways’ cabin crew workers — to disappear from the agenda.



Hackney College workers fight back

On Monday 21 June students and staff at Hackney Community College joined others around the country in a protest against public sector cuts. University Colleges Union (UCU) and Unison had asked members to organise lunchtime protests. 70 colleges and universities according to the union took part in the protest against £1.2 billion cuts in University funding and the loss of up to 7,000 jobs in further education.

At Hackney there was banner making, giant games, budget themed twister, tug of war, food and discussion from 12 pm

to 1pm in the college grounds. In February over £1million in cuts were announced at the college. After staff took 2 days of strike action, and following a lot of negotiation, there has been a reduction in the number of compulsory redundancies. However there are still jobs to win back and the teaching time of hourly paid workers is still under threat.

The day of action was a chance to forge greater co-ordination between different unions in education but even more co-ordination will be required before September if concrete cuts and attacks are to be effectively fought.

STADIUM STEWARDS' STRIKE

Workers vs. police at the World Cup

BY JONNY KEYWORTH

Whilst the constant buzz of vuvuzelas and the chirpy pre-match commentary from Adrian Chiles and a rotating line-up of ex-footballers sound throughout the South African stadiums, a more important noise is resonating in the country.

"We are struggling for our country!" came the chants of striking stewards demanding that contractors increase their tiny wages, and as we go to press the pay dispute is spreading to most of the stadiums hosting the World Cup.

The stewards, working for Stallion Security, had started their struggle in Durban with a protest outside the company's office. Strikers later claimed that one of their colleagues died in hospital after she was shot with rubber bullets during the protest.

One thousand police officers were drafted to Ellis Park after the protests ahead of the match between Brazil and North Korea last week.

The police have now assumed control of security in stadiums in Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. Different companies and groups of workers have been involved.

Last year in the build up to the tournament, some 70,000 construction workers went on strike, halting work

on stadiums.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), whose members include construction workers, had rejected the 10% wage increase offer from employers. The dispute ended when the unions and bosses coming to an agreement of a 12% wage increase!

South Africa, with its rich history of political struggle and working-class militancy, also has one of the world's highest per capita protest rates. Over the past several years, the country's largest social movement, Abahlali baseMjondolo (Zulu for "people based in shacks"), the anti-capitalist shackdwellers movement, has been at the heart of this struggle.

Whilst the South African government has been spending millions constructing and refurbishing stadiums for the matches, millions of South Africans remain without access to adequate housing, potable water, and other services.

A branch of AbM in the Western Cape province (AbM WC) recently announced the launch of their "Right to the City" campaign to develop a programme of action for the World Cup. They are demanding that the government provide quality houses for the poor inside the city, rather than tin shacks on the city's outskirts, as has become the norm in the province's capital of Cape Town.

"The police protect the interests of the elite"

Sebabi Thotogelo Dan, the Limpopo Provincial Secretary of South Africa's trade union federation COSATU, spoke to Solidarity about the security guard dispute at the Peter Mokaba stadium in Polokwane

What are the major grievances?

Conditions — it is winter and the security guards are not dressed warmly. Some of the young women have had to collect blankets from their houses.

Secondly, it is frustrating for people who are employed on a temporary basis to receive their wages monthly. In order to pay for food and transport and so on they have to become indebted while they wait for their wages, taking out loans in their villages to get to work.

They were promised their wages on 18 June. This did not happen. Therefore they had no option but to show their dissatisfaction. The company called this a strike, but it was not a strike. They went to the management's reception area, singing freedom songs.

They had been promised R180 a day. But we do not have access to the contract that the local organising committee (LOC) has signed with the company, and we do not know how much money these security guards are supposed to get. Because of their situation, they are almost in conditions of slavery. We see that these workers are only receiving around R100 a day.

But 23 who went on strike were paid all that was due to them - a round figure of around R1,700. We are worried that these workers are being charged for misconduct. But with this payment we feel the dispute is moving forwards.

Clashes with police in recent stewards' strike

Tell us about the companies that provide this security.

Now we are dealing directly with Fidelity, traditionally a white company. It has experience of cash freight. But the guards are limited to the minimum salary. Normally these guards work on fixed term contracts, but they are without assistance in healthcare, in transport to and from work, or other benefits.

Is police violence due to a culture in the force, a policy, or what?

In Limpopo province, in our case, we have not experienced violence or intimidation from the police, because we were able to intervene. We met with officials from the police and the LOC, and we were able to advise the security guards to leave the area before there was any violence.

The police always protect the interests of the elite. If the protesting security guards had hung around the grounds for any length of time, they might have been attacked.

"My name is Ethelina and I am on strike for my human rights"

A striker at Dis-Chem Pharmacies tells of her life. Dis-Chem is a major company in South Africa, and the workers have been on strike since 27 May 2010. From the South Africa Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union.

My name is Ethelina and I am fifty-eight years old. I work as a cleaner. I've been working for Dis-Chem since January 1996 and I still only earn R3600 per month. I live in a shack in Orange Farm [a very poor Johannesburg township].

Every morning I get out of bed at 3.30 am and leave the house before 4am, when my family is still asleep, to make sure I get to work on time at 7am. When I get home in the evening it is already dark, after 7pm, sometimes even after 8 pm.

Then I must still cook, iron and wash clothes, feed and wash the little-ones before I can go to bed at after 10 pm.

Many times when the train is full I have to stand all the way. Sometimes I am so tired, I don't even have energy to cook, and I just give the children bread

and tea and put them to bed.

My train fare is R150 per month and I spend a further R15 per day on taxi-fares [R1 is about 1p].

Every second week I work over weekends and get one day-off during the week.

I am the sole bread-winner in the family and have four dependents to take care of, two of my own children — young men who are still unemployed and looking for work — and two grandchildren.

In Orange Farm I stay in a one-bedroom shack. I want to extend it and later build a proper brick house for my family, but with my income and given my age it will not happen.

In 2003 I had an accident and my leg was broken; my leg was in a cast and I was in a wheelchair, but my bosses insisted I must come to work. I had to sit in a wheelchair and mop the floors, or I was going to lose my job. This was degrading and humiliating and I felt very angry and insulted by this.

My daughter Mavis also worked at Dis-Chem for seven years until she got too sick and passed away. Now I'm tak-

ing care of one of her children as well. While Mavis was sick, and with no-one to take care of her I asked my bosses to give me a few days off to make arrangements to send her to my sister in Cape Town who is at home and will be able to take care of her, but the bosses did not believe me.

They insisted I must first bring my sick daughter to work so that they can see if she really is sick. Even when she came back from Cape Town later they told me to bring her to work to see if she is still sick, they did not believe me.

Shortly after that my daughter passed away. When I went to the company about funeral benefits, they told me my daughter was out of work for too long and I received no funeral benefits, despite the fact that they deduct funeral benefits.

Provident Fund only gave me R5000 and told me the rest of the money must go towards paying tax. I had to depend on donations from family and friends and still had to borrow money from the loan sharks to arrange the funeral and bury my daughter. Today I'm still paying that loans, that's why I don't think

I'll ever extend my shack or build a house for me and my family

All this make me very angry. I'm not the only one who suffers like this. There are many of my fellow-workers who suffer like this at Dis-Chem. This company does not care about us workers, that is why I have joined SACCAWU and that is why we are determined to strike until Dis-Chem meet with our union.

Workers' demands: meaningful engagement with our union aimed at meeting the following fair and reasonable demands:

- A minimum wage of R 3,500 per month;
- An across the board increase of 15%;
- All casual employees should be converted to permanent full-time employees after three months of employment;
- Parental rights; a subsidized Medical Aid Scheme; a housing subsidy and meaningful long service awards.
- An immediate end to all forms of harassment and intimidation of workers who are currently on strike and are exercising their right to picket;
- That the Company should practice cordial industrial relations.

CLIMATE CHANGE 2010

Working-class environmentalism after Copenhagen and Bonn

By PAUL VERNADSKY

If the Copenhagen climate gathering last year was an utter failure, then the talks in Bonn earlier this month were a complete irrelevance.

After two weeks of parleying, no text was agreed for the negotiations due to take place in Cancun in December. After a fortnight of wrangling, involving 5,000 officials from 185 governments, a 22-page text was produced by the UN, but was dismissed, on the grounds that it favoured developing countries.

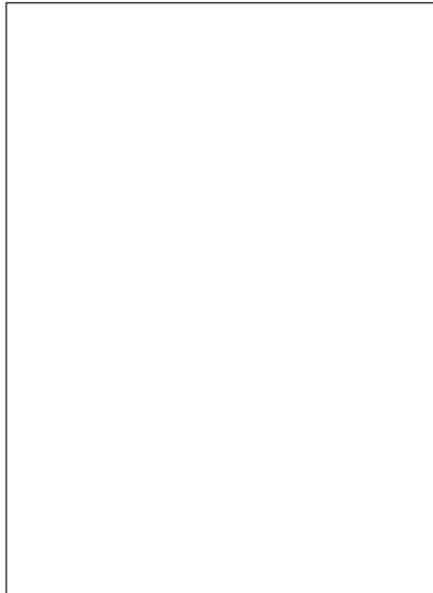
The basic ambiguity remains from Copenhagen. The UN process, which involved at least the semblance of a commitment to reduce emissions, was sidelined by the Accord, parachuted in at the last minute by the big players, but with less ambition and far fewer real emissions reductions. Since Copenhagen, around 130 states have signed the Accord. In Bonn, a new text for negotiation, attempting to bring the Accord into the UN process was produced. It was rejected. Two more weeks of discussion, but the new text was still not acceptable.

The log-jam is geopolitical. The Chinese state will not sign up to external targets; the US will almost certainly be unable even to set its own internal targets. Without these two largest emitters, any global agreement will have no real impact. But with them, as presently constituted, any agreement will be so minimal as to barely slow the rise in emissions expected over the coming decades.

THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT IN 2010

The answer to this paralysis is to build an international climate movement capable of challenging governments and ultimately, forcing them to make an agreement.

At Copenhagen, after a big demonstration of 100,000 people, many on the left consoled themselves that at least the beginnings of a movement had been



Copenhagen, despite the best efforts of the protesters, was a failure

born.

The truth is that there is no real climate movement yet. It is necessary to state what is, if we are to build such a movement to tackle climate change.

The mobilisations around climate change up until now have generally been small. The organisations involved are fragmented, often uncoordinated, and frequently politically incoherent. The NGO lobby has been completely outmanoeuvred by big business and finance in terms of their influence with states.

In Britain the momentum of the last few years has largely dissipated. The successes around Kingsnorth and Heathrow can't disguise the weaknesses. The Wave demo in December last year was larger than previous efforts, but still tiny, even by comparison with the more recent anti-war demos. It was very middle class, sedate and unobtrusive, failing even to muster a final rally to send people home with a message.

And since then the main organiser, Stop Climate Chaos has shed most of its staff and wound down.

The Campaign against Climate Change (CCC) has had more life to it, at least in London, and has sustained some local groups. It has at least attempted to engage with unions, though in reality the main industrial unions have not engaged with it – mainly because it is hostile to all energy sources other than renewables. The main CCC also has a strong whiff of lifestylism about it – so its demands appear as prohibitions and instructions for living a chastened life.

Climate camp, though it is more participatory and more open, suffers from the same malaise, only worse. It came across as proposing a future of vegetarianism and composted toilets. Its direct action tactics have been high-profile, but are often disconnected, leaving little organisation in place for the long-term. There is a succulent temptation to turn inwards – to build an alternative community island away from the sea of modern capitalism. The problem is that by cutting off from the world, you also disconnect from the forces within it that have the power to affect a more radical change.

In short, the various climate campaigns lack the vision of what they are for, failing even to spell out what a low carbon society might look like, never mind how it might be brought about. They lack a coherent strategy for bringing about radical social change – not least because the role of workers is forgotten or bolted on, rather than at the centre of things.

And the climate campaigns have not worked out a positive, united, political basis for collaboration or the kind of democratic structures that would allow a climate collation to function, whilst acknowledging differences.

To break the impasse, a reassessment is needed. An international working class based climate movement is required if big business and its states are

to be confronted. This means serious engagement with the labour movement, alongside efforts to take serious climate politics into workplaces and trade unions. It means linking climate issues to workers' everyday life, including the fight for jobs, for public services, around working hours and control of the job, through to housing and urban life, to the fight for democracy.

To adapt Plekhanov, the climate movement will triumph only as a working-class movement, or else it will never triumph!

Vestas: one year on

12 months ago, following a campaign by members of Workers' Liberty and Workers' Climate Action, workers at the Vestas wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight occupied the plant against closure. The campaign became a focus for the left and the environmental movement, and showed how a working-class struggle for decent jobs could be combined with a perspective for environmentally-sustainable and socially-useful production.

Former Vestas workers and their supporters on the island and elsewhere are still campaigning for jobs and justice. An AWL pamphlet telling the story of the dispute is available to buy at £3.50 from www.workersliberty.org/pamphlets

Capitalism's new grave-diggers

From back page

Anita Chan, an academic expert on recent Chinese workers' struggles, has described the new, fourth wave as a "a remarkable development". She said: "Most strikes in China tend to be about not being paid or being mistreated. This was different. The workers were demanding very high salaries. And they want to elect union leaders democratically."

The fact that the strikes are taking place in modern industries and involving recent migrant workers is highly significant. It is no accident that the car industry is the locus of the new struggles.

Car workers have often been at the sharp end of the capitalist labour process, producing the iconic symbol of capitalist freedom, yet they are super-exploited by modern technology organ-

ised around vicious management. Just as North American auto workers struck and sat-in from the 1930s, so did South European car workers from the 1960s, followed by South Africa, Brazilian and South Korean car workers in the 1970s and 1980s. Now Chinese auto workers are adding their own stamp to this great tradition.

The strikes overwhelmingly involve the new Chinese working class, sucked into the cities from the hinterland by the primitive accumulation of capital. Many are migrant workers – raw, first-generation industrial workers – drawn away from rural poverty and expecting a better life, only to be drawn into the super-exploitation rhythms of the sweatshop of global capitalism.

The process of combined and uneven development has worked out in other ways too. Workers have used new technology such as the internet and mobile

phones to communicate with each other. They have also used limited openings offered by the law – particularly a 2008 employment law – to assert their rights.

One reason suggested for the current outbreak of strikes is the "end of surplus labour" in China. However, according to *The Economist* (10 June), China's labour supply is still growing. Its working-age population will increase from almost 977m in 2010 to about 993m in 2015. But the number of young people entering the labour force will fall by almost 30% over the next ten years.

There are other reasons to dispute the demographic argument, at least for now. The pay increases follow a period of wage freezes during the financial crisis. The pay rises mostly make up for ground lost last year. About 40% of the country's labour force remain in agriculture, and the OECD think it will take another decade for it to drop to 25%.

A simpler explanation is that the very processes of capitalist exploitation have driven workers into struggle. As Marx predicted in the *Communist Manifesto*, the development of industry drives workers to organise and fight. The latest strikes are not the first to involve the new working class in the most modern industries, but they are the most widespread to date. They are the harbingers of a great future.

Socialists will hope that the movement will develop along class lines – towards independent unions and a working class party. Solidarity with the Chinese working class must be a basic task for the coming period. So far the Stalinist state has not completely repressed the strikes. That it will repress an independent movement is almost certain. Socialists must do everything possible to help Chinese workers, for they are the new gravediggers of global capitalism.

How Bloody Sunday changed Ireland

By JOHN O'MAHONY

On 10 February 1972 thousands of workers, acting in solidarity with the miners who were then on strike, surrounded the coke depot at Saltley in Birmingham.

The enormous mass picket stopped all traffic in and out until the bosses gave up and closed the gates of the depot.

As well as being the turning point of the strike, which the miners won, Saltley was a great symbol of what working-class solidarity could do.

Afterwards, when asked why he had not sent in the army to disperse the workers, Tory prime minister Edward Heath responded (so he wrote somewhere) with a question of his own: did the advocates of sending in the army, he asked, think that the troops should have had live ammunition in their guns?

If not, then they couldn't do the job. For Heath and those around him, it was unthinkable in Britain in 1972 for the army to shoot down mass-picketing workers.

But British troops with live ammunition in their rifles could be sent, and were sent, against peaceful demonstrators in the Irish — but UK — city of Derry. There, the British army officers felt themselves to be pitted against alien, rebellious "natives".

What happened in Derry may well have influenced Heath when it came to Saltley. There, on the afternoon of Sunday 30 January 1972 — one of a number of "Bloody Sundays" in modern Irish history, ten days before the working-class victory at Saltley Gates — the soldiers of the British Army Parachute Regiment were unleashed against unarmed demonstrators.

The people were demonstrating against internment — indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial — which had been introduced the previous August.

The troops fired at the unarmed demonstrators, and kept on firing until thirteen — many of them teenage boys — were dead, and another so badly wounded that he died soon afterwards. 17 demonstrators were wounded. At least one of the dead was killed going to the aid of the wounded.

According to the verdict of the Saville Inquiry, one of the soldiers killed four or five people. In plain words, he was a psychopathic killer, someone like the taxi driver Derrick Bird, operating with an Army licence to kill with impunity.

The marchers felt themselves to be the victims of a murderous, unprovoked assault. And they were. Simon Winchester, then the *Guardian's* correspondent in Northern Ireland, recently described his experience in Derry that afternoon.

"Then, incredibly, [the troops] starting firing, firing, firing in our direction. I was too stunned to wonder why: all I knew was that I had to get out of the lines of fire, and quickly.

"I ran and then, as bullets whizzed above me, dropped face down into a puddle of broken glass. A man fell beside me, blood gushing from his leg.

"I could see the soldiers taking up new firing positions, moving in a fan towards the crowd. I got up, raced toward a row

of rubbish bins and dropped behind them, heart pounding. There was more firing. People were sobbing, cursing...

"A youngster of 16 or so was with me, terrified. At one point, the two of us managed to crawl on hands and knees up a slight rise, to a point below the city walls. I remain convinced that at this point a soldier fired at the two of us: I saw a soldier on the ground suddenly point his rifle at me, and his arms jerked, twice. I dived, and skittered up the laneway to a church..."

The soldiers of the Parachute Regiment were the British Army's equivalent of Rottweiler attack dogs. They had a deserved reputation for reckless brutality.

How they came to be loosed on the peaceful march in Derry was one of the mysteries of the whole affair. It is now revealed, four decades later, in the Saville report, that in giving them their head, their officer disobeyed orders.

After Bloody Sunday, the propaganda machinery of the British government went into overdrive. The British soldiers had been returning the fire of Provisional IRA men among the marchers, they said. Some of those who had been killed were armed IRA men.

The blame was entirely theirs.

A government commission under Lord Widgery was quickly set up to establish what had happened. Widgery, a man of the Establishment, did what was expected of him. He concluded that the army's account was the truth.

Now the verdict of the Saville Inquiry, which sat in Derry for 12 years hearing testimony, brands Widgery and the British army liars.

The Derry massacre sent shock waves through Ireland. In Dublin, the British embassy was burned down.

The Belfast Home Rule parliament, which for 50 years had legitimised Protestant-sectarian government in Northern Ireland, was abolished two months later, and Britain assumed direct rule.

In Britain, Irish workers on a number of building sites struck in protest.

In London, the Saturday after Bloody Sunday, there was an enormous protest march in Whitehall which erupted into serious fighting with the police, including police cavalry. A sizeable part of the march consisted of previously non-political Irish immigrants.

I saw one group of six or seven young men take off their belts, wrap the leather

round their hands with the buckles dangling, and waded into the police. That is what they had come for. So had an enormous number of others.

The military campaign of the Provisional IRA (and of the other IRA, the Stalinist-led "Officials"), was ten months old by Bloody Sunday. Though the Official IRA would go on a permanent ceasefire within a few months, support for the Provisional IRA increased enormously.

The introduction of internment in August 1971 — exclusively against Catholics, at first — had already thrown a large proportion of Northern Ireland's Catholics into the arms of the Republican militarists. "Bloody Sunday" redoubled the effect. The Provisionals would keep the support of about one-third of Northern Ireland's Catholics all through the subsequent 23-year war.

Workers' Fight, a predecessor of *Solidarity*, had not been wrong when it commented: "The 13 dead men shot down in cold blood on January 30th in Derry City will have as powerful a posthumous effect on Irish politics as did the 16 dead men killed in cold blood after the 1916 Rising". So they did.

As we were saying

This is what *Workers' Fight*, forerunner of *Solidarity*, wrote at the time. The full text can be found at www.workersliberty.org/node/14428.

Already the upsurge of the people of the whole of Ireland has reached a level not seen since 1920-21. Already the final layers of indifference in the people of the 26 County "Republic" have been penetrated by the shock and horror of the mass murder in Derry.

Strikes and demonstrations have mushroomed all over the 32 counties of Ireland and even in London, involving both British and Irish workers.

Peaceful men attending a peaceful march were picked off like toy figures in a shooting gallery. Many were shot in the back. Even the wounded and those who tried to tend to them were shot at — some died going to the aid of the wounded. Eye witness reports all contradict the Army version that they were returning fire, and so do the circumstances. Even those few who say they remember hearing gunfire other than that of the Army say it was 10 minutes or so later than the paratroopers, without any provocation, loosed their bullets at the Civil Rights meeting.

One of the Paisleyite leaders, the Rev. James McClelland, speaking before the march, said: "We were approached by the Government and given assurance that the Civil Rights march will be halted — by force if necessary." That promise was kept — with a vengeance...

The Civil Rights demonstration was seen as the "peaceful" wing of the general Republican mobilisation. The butchering of the demonstrators is the measure of the desperate panic of both Army and Government in face of the strength of the Republican movement. The extreme violence used on peaceful demonstrators against the newly-opened internment camp at Magilligan a week previously was only a foretaste. Somewhere along the line between Magilligan and Derry the death sentence, on a lottery basis, was imposed for breaches of the ban on demonstrations.

That must have been a political decision. Any Army indiscipline or excess of zeal occurred within the confines of Government policy. The Government is responsible. Heath and his Cabinet are war criminals in Northern Ireland, as they are City-of-London hatchet men against the British working

class...

In all the liberal and humanitarian outrage at the slaughter there is a danger that the main point will be missed. The point is that there are only two possible alternatives in Northern Ireland now. Either the Republicans will win, and Ireland be reunited according to the wishes of the vast majority of her people, with as much autonomy for the Orange people as is compatible with the rights of the majority. Or the British Government will be allowed to bludgeon the Northern Irish Catholics into submission to Westminster and Stormont...

There can be neither peace nor freedom while the puppet Stormont state exists. That state imprisons against their will a Catholic minority bigger as a proportion of the Six County population than would be all the Protestants in a united Ireland. The Northern Ireland state is totally artificial, the result of manipulation by Britain of divisions amongst the Irish people for her own ends. The argument that Northern Ireland must remain in existence until a majority of its people want otherwise is cod "democracy". It is preposterous because the state is artificial and the majority completely arbitrary. Ireland, 32 counties, is the unit for majorities and minorities, not an artificially-chosen six counties set up and protected as a British puppet state.

Some of the substance of what we say about Ireland has changed. The AWL's current ideas on Ireland can be found on our website, e.g. www.workersliberty.org/ireland and www.workersliberty.org/record

ANTI-FASCISM IN EAST LONDON

Under whose banner?

By TODD HAMER & DARREN BEDFORD

Several weeks ago, the English Defence League announced they were organising a protest against an Islamist conference in the Troxy conference centre in Limehouse, East London, which was backed by the Islamic Forum of Europe (IFE) and the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS).

Predictably for this sort of religious fundamentalist event, the speakers at the conference included all sorts of reactionary bigots.

The Tower Hamlets council, led by Helal Abbas, pressured the Troxy to cancel the conference. When the Troxy did indeed pull the booking, the EDL claimed this as a victory and cancelled their demonstration. The local anti-fascist coalition, United East End, decided that it would continue to mobilise for its counter-demonstration anyway.

Thousands of people turned out for what was effectively a rally followed by a small march, with member of the SWP and local Asian youth the two biggest identifiable contingents amongst those demonstrating. Workers' Liberty members attended and gave out leaflets arguing for a working-class approach to anti-fascism and promoting the newly-founded Stop Racism & Fascism Network.

The demonstration was not without its critics. The old guard of the Bangladeshi community, grouped around the Brick Lane mosque and in various Bengali secular organisations, issued a statement against both the EDL and the Islamic Forum of Europe called the "Unity Platform Against Racism and Fascism."

This "platform" has substantial political problems of its own, but it does at least make clear that the idea of the

Bengali community being a homogeneous political bloc under the leadership of religious zealots is essentially a racist fantasy. Unfortunately the organised secularist elements decided to effectively boycott the United East End demonstration. Without such an intervention, Islamists were able to retain hegemony of the demonstration, supported by their sycophantic "left-wing" fans in Respect and the SWP.

Consequently, and unfortunately, the demonstration had a distinctly religious character. The SWP-led chants of "black and white, unite and fight" proved less popular than "Allahu Akbar". Councillor Helal Abbas, who publicly called for the Islamist conference to be cancelled, was booed off the stage at the rally. Every other speaker (including George Galloway) said that it was a disgrace that the conference had been cancelled.

While AWL does not call for state bans against fascists or other reactionaries (just as we would not support a police ban on the EDL, which was repeatedly called for by Galloway and others), we will not shed a tear that a load of wife-beaters, anti-Semites and homophobes were denied a platform.

More seriously, an AWL member was physically threatened during a confrontation about the Danish cartoons of Muhammad, which we reproduced on the AWL website in 2006 in response to the international campaign for religious censorship which met them. Around 20 young Muslims took a copy of *Solidarity* from him and started to look through to find the offending cartoons. Realising that they were misinformed (by whom we wonder?) and that the cartoons did not appear in this (or indeed any other) edition of *Solidarity*, the main antagonist disappeared and the rest stayed for a fruitful and interesting discussion about political Islam. In the end the exchange

was positive, but it is alarming that an anti-fascist demonstration includes organised elements attempting to police their political opponents.

With the Islamists dictating the terms of "unity", people with criticisms of the IFE were either absent or silenced. Incidentally organising alongside Islamists or other organised religious forces to defend a particular community against a specific fascist threat is one thing; building ongoing political unity with right-wing, clerical "community leaders" is quite another.

In Tower Hamlets, the logic of the SWP's "united front" with organised religion reached new levels of lunacy when an SWP sympathiser and Unison member suggested that Tower Hamlets Unison affiliates to the IFE. At the anti-EDL mobilisation in Bolton, an SWP speaker argued that non-Muslims should join in with chants of "Allahu Akbar" in order to show "solidarity". As the EDL racists attempt to claim political territory from the left on women's rights, gay rights and opposition to Sharia law, it is political suicide to bury our beliefs under the banner of this fake unity with religious reactionaries.

The day ended with Luftur Ali making a speech calling for "strong political leadership" and for those who cancelled the Islamist conference to be held to account. Ali recently resigned as Tower Hamlets council's assistant chief executive under suspicion of corruption. He is thought to have links with the IFE and is manoeuvring himself for a run at the position of Tower Hamlets mayor.

As the rally ended, around a thousand mainly Muslim men stayed on throughout the evening to protect the mosque. The EDL were nowhere in sight; they will be chalking this up as a victory, as will the IFE and their supporters. The forces of secular, working-class politics must intervene against both sides.

"We need a working-class movement against deportations."

As the Tory-Liberal coalition government steps up its deportation policies, Dashti Jamal of the Campaign to Stop Deportations to Iraq and the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees spoke to *Solidarity*

"We will see an increase in deportations to Iraq under the new government, but we have to remember that it's a policy which the Labour government started."

The Iraqi and Afghan people are victims of the Labour Party's wars, but neither their government nor this one wants to take responsibility for the problems those wars have created.

Sending people back to Iraq is an abuse of human rights. There's no security there; the country is torn apart by sectarianism and Islamism. There are millions of displaced people within the country; deporting people to Iraq contravenes international human rights laws and conventions.

Refugees and migrant workers are part of the working class; we need a working class-led movement against deportations and racist immigration laws on the same scale as the movement that opposed the Iraq war."

Refugees need more legal services to fight the system

Defend refugee legal services!

From back page

However, LSC funding began to paid only when an individual's case had been closed. Since many asylum cases can take months, or even years, to complete the RMJ was doing an increasing amount of work without receiving any funding — in the short or medium term.

(One inevitable side-effect of this change in the LSC's funding regime was to open up a treasure trove for bent solicitors: provide an asylum seeker with minimal assistance, charge the full amount for doing so, shut down the case without giving it proper consideration — and the money just pours in.)

This was not a case of an organisation running into financial difficulties because other bodies (the LSC and, by extension, the government) were not paying off their debts to it — a sum of around £2 millions.

The RMJ LSC refused to pay the money it owed. The RMJ appealed to the government to back an interest-free loan in order to overcome the cash-flow problems. It refused as well.

The RMJ appealed to the LSC for help with rent payments, so that it would have more time to close files and help clients find new representation. That was refused as well.

(Since the RMJ actually wins cases there was never really any doubt that the Tories would be only too happy to see the organisation go to the wall.)

The organisation's management cannot escape blame however.

Was the rapid expansion of the RLC/RMJ into a national network a rational strategy, or was it more akin to a form of pyramid-selling: as long as you continued to expand, no-one noticed that what is being created is financially unviable?

And how could the RMJ's financial difficulties have been allowed to deteriorate so far before the RMJ began running a public campaign to stave off the impending disaster?

Unite has issued a press statement and staged a lobby at the Ministry of Justice, which attracted around 500 people.

This is a pathetic level of campaigning for what is at stake. Unite still has time — though not much — to mount a campaign which secures a future for the organisation.

Government deports children

By JADE BAKER

In a double blow for some of Britain's most vulnerable, it's been revealed that almost two thousand Afghan immigrants, including 150 unaccompanied children and adolescents, face unwarranted deportation in the coming year.

Meanwhile the government is standing aside while the Refugee and Migrant Justice legal charity is set to close this month due to cuts and unsustainable methods of funding.

Plans circulating about the £4 million "reintegration centre" to be set up in Kabul, Afghanistan, by the UK Border Agency have shed light on the government's criminal plans to send 12 boys aged under 18 back to their "birth place" every month... until presumably, not a single vestige of Afghan adolescence will be found in the UK.

All of these youth entered the country as orphans or estranged from their families. Many did not grow up in Afghanistan but as refugees in Iran or

Pakistan, where their families continue to live today. It would be a serious indictment on the government to cull these defenceless youths and send them to a war stricken environment, separated from their families.

Up until now child protection concerns have blocked deportations. Setting up a "reintegration centre" is nothing but a corrupt loophole to get around the regulations and should be declared as such. This move by the government is a harbinger of more inhumane anti-immigrant policy onslaughts to come.

The rest of Europe is joining the UK's bandwagon, with plans announced by Norway to open a reception centre in Kabul. Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands are also said to be on the case.

The future for Britain's immigrant population is looking precarious and bleak.

The dire state of refugee legal aid, a vital lifeline in times of crisis makes it much worse.

LABOUR PARTY LEADERSHIP

Why socialists should vote for Diane Abbott

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Socialists in the Labour Party and the affiliated trade unions should vote for Diane Abbott in the Labour leadership election, while saying that she cannot be trusted and that the leader-election system should be changed to allow a wider choice.

Over the last 20-odd years Abbott has generally voted and spoken against the Iraq invasion and for trade union rights, for migrant rights, for expanded council housing, for scrapping British nuclear weapons, for fighting cuts, against privatisation, for free higher education, and for civil liberties.

The bigger the vote for Abbott, the greater the boost to the will and confidence of the trade unionists and Labour Party members who are for those things.

The other candidates have been Cabinet ministers and backroom boys for Blair and Brown. They now say they want to move on from New Labour, but with almost no specifics except the foul

talk by Burnham and Balls on immigration.

Abbott is conducting her campaign by playing down her "leftism", and being vague even when she does say leftish things.

Her background includes not only her votes in Parliament, but a poor record on the misdeeds of Labour councils in her own patch in Hackney, and a marked lack of the energy in supporting workers' struggles, and in promoting rank-and-file campaigns in the labour movement, that John McDonnell has shown.

She herself has said that her decision to send her son to a private school was "indefensible". By saying that, she tells us that under pressure she would take "indefensible" stances again.

She has refused to support the campaign, backed by many Labour MPs, against the privatisation of the East London line of the Underground.

Voting Abbott is nevertheless the way that trade-union and Labour Party members can and will, in the leadership ballot, express their hostility to the New

Labour line and their identification with the trade unionists and Labour Party members who opposed Blair and Brown in government from the left.

Inside the labour movement, in union elections for example, often we can't get a candidate whom we can support whole-heartedly. We generally vote for left candidates, even inadequate ones, against the standard-issue right, where that is the choice.

We do it because we are concerned for the movement as a whole, and concerned for boosting the will and confidence of the broader left.

Doing it makes us better-placed to get a hearing for our criticisms and our ideas than would standing aside with a declaration that we see no difference between the former Cabinet ministers and someone who often voted against the New Labour government on big issues.

Abbott's campaign is not likely to be run in the way John McDonnell would have run a campaign, building a left-wing network in the labour movement.

But the hustings and the debates in

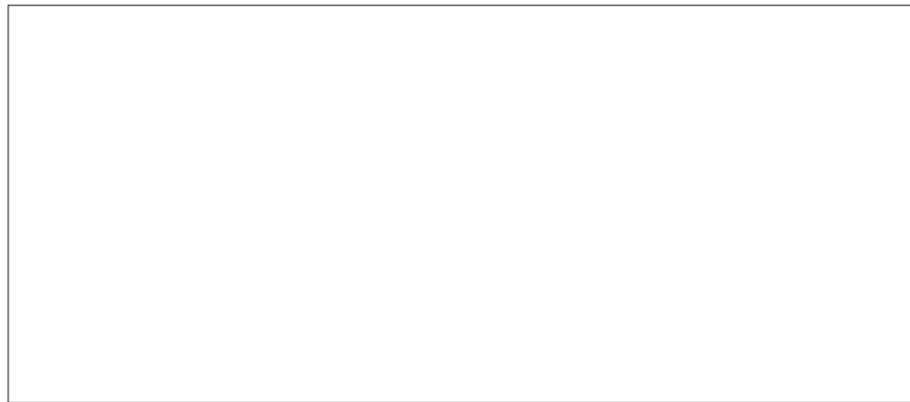
union and Labour meetings can be used by socialists to do that, so long as we both show our solidarity with the broader left against the ex-Cabinet candidates, and advance our own ideas, giving bite and specifics to the general leftish talk about Labour Party democracy, union rights, migrant rights, fighting cuts, etc. which comes from Abbott.

A "plague on all houses" position would only function as a back-handed way of easing support to Ed Balls or Ed Miliband, whichever manages to get the "respectable left candidate" slot with trade union leaders. CWU, for example, is formally committed to back only candidates who support the main lines of CWU policy. That mandates it to recommend Abbott.

If left-wingers just sit on their hands — "it's all rubbish, no choice" — they will not get any union to recommend spoiled ballots, but they may ease the way for top officials to get unions to back the ex-Cabinet candidate making the most plausible vague promises.

COMPASS CONFERENCE HUSTINGS

Not a lot of hope here



Left faking going on

BY SACHA ISMAIL

Something like a thousand people heard the five candidates for Labour leader speak at the "A new hope" conference organised by the soft left pressure group Compass on 12 June.

The four Blairite-Brownite candidates (David and Ed Miliband, Ed Balls, Andy Burnham) were, as you'd expect, very similar. All, unsurprising given the audience but also the prevailing wind, were pitching distinctly to the left — on council housing, workers' rights, Labour Party democracy. The only surprise was that some of the boldest (using that term very relatively) phrases came from Andy Burnham, generally regarded as the most Blairite, who nonetheless argued that New Labour lost the election because in power it "courted elites" and instead needs to "put people before business".

Compass being what it is, such populist phrases received rapturous applause. So did the fifth candidate, Diane Abbott — despite not really saying much of anything.

I wasn't expecting a lot from Abbott, but her complete lack of radicalism caught me off guard. Aside from references to the fact that she voted against

the invasion of Iraq and tuition fees, she said literally nothing that distinguished her from the rest. To cap it off, she declared that New Labour's record in office was "magnificent".

I put my hand up to ask a question about the candidates' attitude to the British Airways workers' strike and the anti-trade union laws. Unfortunately I wasn't called and all the questions asked were very bland.

Compass conference is a large event, but it combines political tameness with social elitism — being made up largely of professional politicians, researchers and advisers, NGO officials and the like. (One measure of this is that even unwaged tickets cost £25!) The labour movement as such, and certainly class struggle, was largely absent from the discussions — with the exception of a session organised by the Labour Representation Committee, at which John McDonnell addressed a small room packed to overflowing.

What sort of opportunities the Labour Party hierarchy's left-faking will open up remains to be seen. But the need to organise a broad, united campaign to reorient the labour movement on basic issues such as cuts, the anti-union laws and Labour Party democracy is obvious and pressing.

Union leaders promise action, make them deliver!

Dave Prentis, general secretary of the public service workers' union Unison, promised the Unison conference in Bournemouth on 15 June:

"We will only support a candidate for the leadership of the Labour Party who is ready to stand with us to fight with us against cuts and privatisation, and we will be looking to Labour councillors and Labour groups to do the same."

He continued:

"We will have one priority to make sure our branches have the resources, the training, the advice, the support that they need to recruit, organise, represent and defend our members..."

"We will organise. We will organise public meetings and street demonstrations, in towns and cities, up and down the country. We will build lasting community alliances, to defend our public services."

"We will use our national campaign funds to raise public awareness about the consequences of cuts, we will give practical support those who are fighting to defend their schools, hospitals, care homes, libraries, we will build alliances with other public sector unions, including the PCS..."

"We will give our full support to any branch that is forced to resort to industrial action to defend jobs. We will build an alliance of all public service unions - a united campaign, to break the pay freeze, and if we find ourselves faced with a concerted attack on our pensions, and if Nick Clegg, who claimed expenses for a biscuit tin, comes for our pensions, as he boasted only yesterday, then we will ballot for national industrial action."

Prentis has just been re-elected general secretary — but on an incredibly low turn out, just 14%.

Unison activists should keep a record of these promises, and fight to make Prentis carry them out.

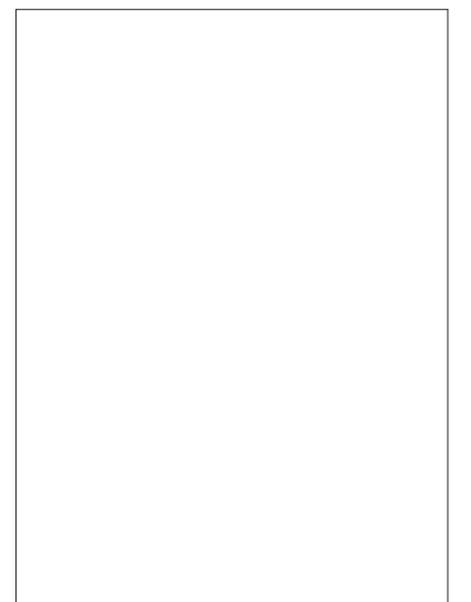
Bob Crow, General Secretary of the transport workers union, RMT, has

responded to the cuts by issuing a call for an emergency meeting of the Trade Union Congress to "map out a co-ordinated campaign of industrial and political action to fightback against plans to attack jobs, pay and pensions" in the Budget.

Crow promised to lead a walkout from the TUC Congress in September if David Cameron is invited to speak.

"This weekend David Cameron has launched a full-frontal assault on the trade union movement... When someone's winding up to give you a kicking you have a clear choice — you can either take them on right from the off or you can roll over and hope that they go away."

With any number of industrial struggles threatening and in progress in the railway industry, it is important that Crow is also held to his word.



Prentis talks, make him deliver!

Are cuts inevitable?

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Q. Are cuts in public services, welfare benefits, and public sector pay, jobs, and pensions unavoidable?

A. No. In the first place, there is nothing impossible about the government continuing with a large budget deficit for a while.

In the second place, the Trident replacement (maybe £30 billion) could be cut. Military spending (total £37 billion a year) could be reduced. The vast administrative costs of the internal market in the health service and the payments to private contractors under PFI schemes (up to £10 billion a year) could be axed.

In the third place, the deficit could be reduced by taxing or confiscating the huge wealth of the rich. Remember, inequality of wealth and after-tax incomes has spiralled since 1979, and continued to increase under New Labour.

Q. But none of those options will convince the Lib-Tory government.

A. The only thing that will convince the government is fear. Governments run huge budget deficits during and after wars because they fear military defeat or post-war upheaval more than the economic difficulties of budget deficits.

Q. How do we frighten the government?

A. Nick Clegg has already told us, when before the election he announced his fear of "Greek-style unrest".

Q. One-day strikes, then?

A. And more. The Lib Dems and Tories take Canada in the 1990s as a model of how to cut. Canadian workers organised a series of one-day local general strikes in protest, culminating in a strike which stopped Toronto in 1998. But the union leaders stopped there. We will need open-ended strikes, strikes where workers take action until the government backs down.

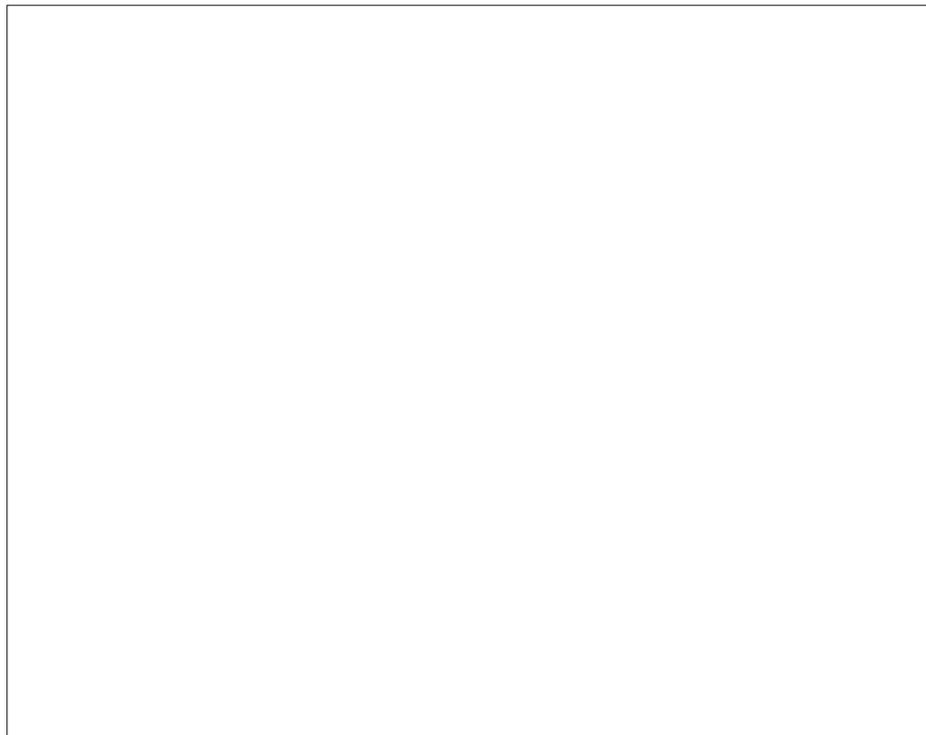
Q. That's impossible because of the anti-union laws.

A. The engineering construction strikes of 2009 broke the anti-union laws, but neither the bosses nor the government dared use the laws. Action on a sufficient scale can defy the laws. We can't do that tomorrow. We can start mobilising, agitating, and organising in local anti-cuts committees. There are already strikes and demonstrations against cuts in Greece, Italy, Spain, Germany and other countries. Those actions will encourage mobilisation in Britain, and mobilisation in Britain will help mobilisation in other countries.

Q. If the government doesn't make cuts, it will lose credit in the international financial markets. It will have to pay higher interest rates to sell the bonds with which it finances its week-to-week spending. It will end up like Greece.

A. It won't do that straight away. And if workers all across Europe force governments all across Europe to back off from cuts, then the exchange-rate of the euro and the pound against the dollar may fall, but the international financiers are unlikely to desert European bond sales. But, yes, in the longer term, a government flouting neo-liberal norms would see a spiralling crisis where international financiers demanded higher and higher interest rates to buy its bonds, or would not buy them at all.

Q. And then what?



The only way the government will listen to us is if we fight back. Greek protests earlier this year

A. Take over the whole of high finance, and put it under public ownership and democratic control! The free movement of finance across borders would have to be blocked, not in order to create a walled-off national economy but in order to seek new forms of cross-border collaboration governed by cooperation and solidarity between workers' movements in different countries.

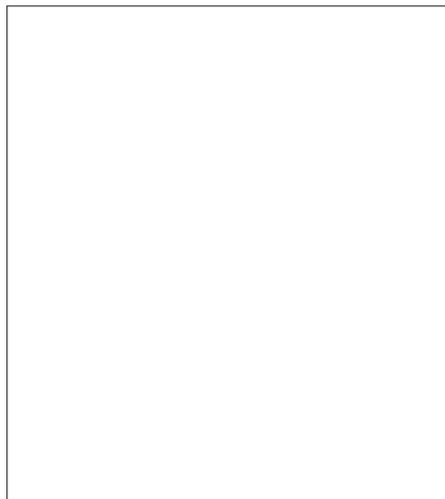
Q. This Lib-Tory government won't do that.

A. As well as resisting the government and its cuts, we need to fight for a *workers' government* — a government based on, accountable to, and serving the labour movement.

Q. You mean another Labour government?

A. Not another Labour government like the Blair-Brown one! Immediately, the battle is to win unions to working-class policies, to a commitment to fight politically for their policies, and to the principle of working-class political representation.

That includes a fight in the Labour-affiliated unions to win — in the review of Labour Party structure due to open in October 2010 — democratic control over the Labour Party leadership by the union and local Labour Party delegates at Labour conference.



Andrea Merkel — leading the way on the austerity drive in Europe

To what extent that battle can force changes in the Labour Party, and make a future Labour government carry out measures which serve working-class interests, and at what point it might force a break, where the Blair-Brown New-Labourites split away rather than accept accountability, we will see.

But the political battle for the aim of a workers' government, and for the working-class policies it should carry out, starts now.

Q. Why is the Lib-Tory government so keen to pay off the government debt?

A. The government is not paying off the debt. On its projections, government debt will be bigger in 2015 than it is now. What they plan to do by 2015 is to squeeze out the "structural deficit".

Q. "Structural" means what?

A. It means the part of the gap between government income and spending which is "structural" in the sense that it would exist even in relative boom times. The other part of the gap is temporary deficits which more or less automatically heal with economic recovery. Those are caused by incomes and sales, and therefore tax revenue, being temporarily lowered in recession.

Q. All mainstream economists reckon it's necessary to squeeze out the "structural" deficit, don't they?

A. Yes and no. No government in a money economy could run a big permanent budget deficit, year in year out, slump-time or boom, unless it enjoyed a constant flow of foreign wealth-holders lending it more and more money, as in effect the USA does. If a British government tried to run a big permanent budget deficit, it would suffer serious inflation and a collapse of the exchange rate of the pound. But the Lib-Tory government plans go way beyond recognising that constraint.

Q. How?

A. First, it's guesswork how much of the government budget deficit is "structural" and how much is temporary. More optimistic figures for future growth would give you a smaller figure for the "structural deficit".

Second, governments can narrow budget deficits by cutting spending or by raising taxes. This government plans to do it almost entirely by cutting spending. It plans to cut some taxes, while raising others.

Third, the government plans to cut the deficit quickly, in the midst of recession. It could instead wait, let growth reduce the deficit, and leave government budget adjustments to be calculated later.

Q. So the quick cuts are just a political choice by the government? There is no real economic constraint on the government to do them?

A. The Tories subscribe to an economic theory — advocated by writers like Jeffrey Sachs — which says that quick cuts will work better for capitalism.

Week to week, governments get cash for their spending by selling bonds — that is, bits of paper which entitle the owner to receive the face-value at a fixed future date, say in ten years' time, and meanwhile an interest payment every six months. They also sell bills, which are similar things, but shorter-term: they entitle the owner to receive final payment in a shorter time (usually three months), but no interim interest payments.

Of course the government constantly has to sell new bonds and bills, if only to make the final payouts on the old bonds and bills falling due each month. If it sells more new bonds than it pays off old ones, then it increases its debt; if it sells fewer, then it decreases it.

The Tories concede that they have to run deficits — sell more bonds than they pay off — for several years ahead. But they reckon that if they sell fewer new bonds than previously planned, then the interest rate they have to offer on bonds will be kept low. That will help keep down interest rates generally. Capitalist businesses will be able to get money to expand at a lower interest and more easily (because wealth-holders who would otherwise buy government bonds will buy corporate bonds or shares instead).

Q. Will it actually work like that?

A. It may to some degree. No-one knows. Obviously leftish economists are predisposed to highlight the mechanisms by which public-spending cuts depress the whole economy, and right-wingers are predisposed to highlight the chance of government restraint making better openings for private enterprise. But some right-wing economists, too, question the government's story. The *Financial Times* backed the Tories on election day, but its main economic writers, Martin Wolf and Samuel Brittan, are furious about the government's plans. They think that by cutting public spending now the government will also pull down private capitalist business, by way of reducing market demand for goods and services bought by the public sector, by public-sector workers, and by people on benefits. The US government also thinks the cuts policies of European governments are excessive.

Q. Why should the government go for something so unpopular when they have no basis for it but guesswork?

A. There are at least four reasons. One: the Tories have an inbred inclination to believe the "right-wing" story and to relish a chance to squeeze public sector workers and unions.

Two: Angela Merkel's government has pushed through a £66 billion cuts plan on 7 June, and is pushing other eurozone governments to make similar cuts and

French cuts will hit women workers hardest

The first part of the austerity measures that the French government plans to introduce will be a major attack on pension rights for both public and private sector workers. French unions have called for strikes and demonstrations on Thursday 24 June. Olivier Delbeke from *Le Militant* spoke to *Solidarity* about the issues.

There are two ages that are important when understanding the pension reform. Firstly — you currently have a right to retirement at 60. But if you retire between 60 and 65 and you haven't paid enough contributions into your pension, you have to pay a charge until the age of 65, when any charge is annulled.

The government is intending to raise the minimum age of retirement to 62; and the age at which you stop paying charges to 67. Currently, you pay 40 years of pension contributions. But under the 2003 Fillon Law, this will go up to 41.5 years in 2011-2012, for everyone, public and private sector. This will happen rapidly.

This is worst for women workers, because women tend to change jobs more often, their working lives are often interrupted, and so they will have the greatest difficulty making up the 41.5 years of pension payments.

There is widespread speculation in the media that public sector salaries will be frozen for three years. I suspect that the government will base its decision on this policy in part on the strength of the strike on the 24th.

There used to be a right to early retirement for working mothers. You used to have the right, if you had paid 15 years' worth of pension contributions, if you were over 45 and had over three kids, to take early retirement. That right is set to be taken away.

There are certain groups, like firemen and policemen, train drivers etc. who have the right to retire at 55 on account of the strenuous, physically demanding nature of their jobs. This collective right will be replaced by an individual physical assessment.

Three quarters of workers are no longer at work by the age of 60, because after the age of 50 the bosses try to sack you. Partially because older workers tend to be more expensive, but also because more experienced workers know best how to resist the boss. New managements often try to systematically remove these people. People at 60 tend to be unemployed or in early retirement.

This tends to impact on how much pension they are able to get.

The government is making other cuts. There is already a policy of only replacing one worker for every two who retire in the public sector. This is applied systematically. In three years, between 100,000 and 150,000 jobs have been eliminated in this way, even in the police. The struggles against this have only taken place on a ministry-by-ministry level, there has not yet been a big show of force, or a general strike, on this particular issue. The response has been very reactive.

Why is the government making these cuts now? It's because of the question of national debt and the international situation. They say the coffers of the government are empty. That's because of fiscal policies which favour the rich. At the beginning of this year the official pretext for this policy was to do with demographics and France's ageing society. They ignored the fact that along with demographic change, there had been an unbroken rise in productivity. But that argument has been thrown into the oubliette, and now they are talking about debt as the main reason.

In capitalism, public debt is normal. But with the crisis and the hikes in interest rates, the capitalists are tempted not only to reclaim the interest on what they have lent the government, but also the principal — and getting money from pensions by means of greater state intervention in the pension system achieved via the "plan Juppe" of 1995.

With the austerity measures the debt will be paid but the economy will be pushed into recession and consumption will be depressed.

The problem of the French workers' movement today is that no union leadership wants to go too far. They are guaranteeing the stability of the government. They are all prisoners of social partnership. The law is expected to pass in September. The argument of the unions is that they will "make a big splash on Thursday and then get ready for September".

One problem is the question of what demands. All the leaderships say that they want to negotiate a "good reform". The problem is you can't have a good reform. Serious people should be demanding the withdrawal of this bill. No-one is demanding this. The national congress of the FSU voted for a good list of demands, but the FSU leadership is not applying these demands in practice.

The issue on Thursday 24th June will be the battle to have the movement say clearly, "withdraw this bill".

The cuts are not inevitable

commit themselves (as Germany did in May 2009) to constitutional amendments banning budget deficits except in emergencies.

Germany has no real problem of excessive deficits or difficulties in selling bonds at low interest rates. Merkel's choice is a political choice, for a neo-liberal rather than a state-funded way forward from the crisis. It prioritises sustaining the international exchange rate of the euro and making the eurozone a "disciplined" economic environment to attract footloose global capital. Merkel is anxious to "offset" the 750 billion euro rescue package agreed in May for debt-laden south European states (or, more to the point, for the German, French, and other banks to which south European governments and businesses owe debts).

The French government is demurring a bit, and possibly within a year or so the debt crisis of the south European states will force the eurozone into new "bail-out" policies; but for now Merkel is setting the tune for the eurozone. That puts competitive pressure on the British government.

Three: the fact that the government is a coalition puts pressure on its leaders to be quick about getting all the unpopular measures agreed and under way (some cuts will take years to produce large savings in government cashflow).

Once the Lib Dems have been "bloodied" by supporting the Tory cuts plans, there is strong pressure on them to stick with the coalition government for several years. By the next election they can hope that anger at the cuts will have faded and the coalition parties can claim credit as people who did what was painful but necessary. If they break from the coalition earlier on some secondary matter, they face double censure as having collaborated in unpopular measures but lacking the fortitude to see them through.

Four: the Tories' talk before the election about "restoring responsibility" (as they put it) to government finances tie them now.

A government which repeated soberly that it saw no immediate problem and it would adjust in due course might be ok. A governing party which raised an alarm about budget deficits, then made no cuts, would alarm the international financiers to whom the government sells bonds.

Merryn Somersett Webb put it bluntly in the *Financial Times* just before polling day, advising capitalists: "If you don't see the slash-and-burn coming within weeks of the election, you might want to move spare cash out of pounds".

Once the international financiers are alarmed, then it is harder for the government to sell bonds. The interest rates it has to offer rise. Its future financial projections look worse. A vicious spiral of alarm damaging the government's credit, and

the damage to the government's credit in turn generating more alarm, can develop, as it did for Greece after its October 2009 election.

Q. So governments are at the mercy of international financiers?

A. Today's huge, fast-moving, global financial markets, where trillions flow across borders every day, can cripple governments very quickly.

Q. So we can't do anything against the cuts short of defeating the whole of global finance capital?

A. Even this government could be pushed to cut military spending rather than social provision. At present the military machine, and industries dependent on military contracts, are a more powerful lobby against cuts in their area than the labour movement is against cuts in ours. We could change that.

Q. And we could push the government to tax the rich rather than cutting social provision?

A. Up to a point. It would be demagogic to say that "tax the rich" is a sufficient alternative to the government's plans. We want to tax the rich. In fact we want to confiscate their wealth for the common good. But a government heavily taxing the rich would suffer a flight of capital as much as or more than one running an excessive budget deficit. The only answer to the power of global finance is to get workers' governments which will take over high finance, put it under public ownership and democratic control, stop the free flow of capital across borders, and create new forms of cross-border economic ties based on working-class cooperation and solidarity.

Q. Why do governments run debts? Why do they sell bonds? Why don't they just print money when they're short?

A. It is true that governments can't "run out of money" in the same way that households or businesses can. In the last analysis the question "where can the government get the money from?" can be answered simply: from the Bank of England printworks.

But constantly printing money whenever spending runs ahead of tax receipts would lead to uncontrollable inflation.

Selling bills and bonds from week to week — and having the Bank of England buy back some bills and bonds if it wants to get more cash into the economy — is the standard way of regulating money supply.

The system of government bills and bonds offers many advantages for the fine-tuning of government budget and

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French unions protest against raising of retirement age

TORY IDEAS

The crisis and the lies they tell

By Ed Maltby

The Tories don't just intend to hammer workers and the poor with cuts — they want to make us believe in their austerity programme as well. The Tories and the Tory press have been relentlessly "on message" since the election, pumping out pro-cuts, class-war propaganda. Let's take a look at some choice bits of doublethink from the Liberal-Tory press:

1. As he announced the budget in the Commons on Tuesday, to boos from Labour MPs, George Osborne screeched above the racket, **"The years of debt and overspending have made this unavoidable"**.

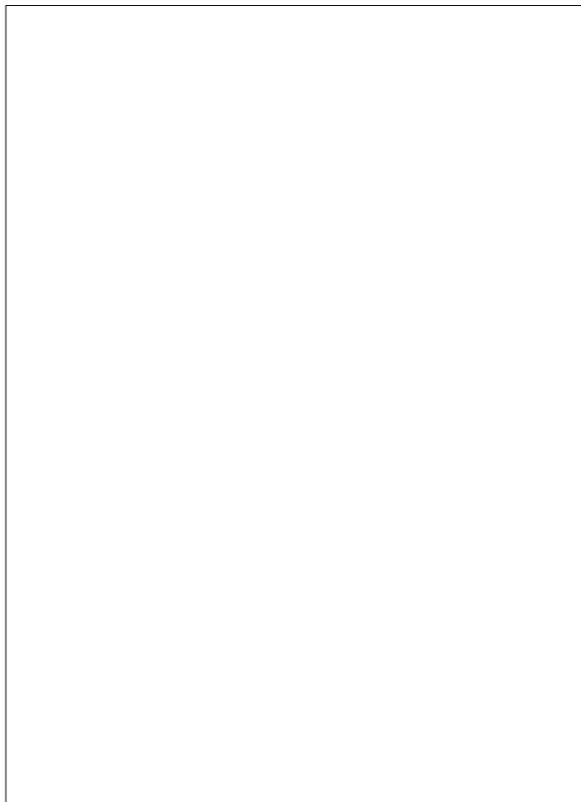
But the responsibility for the recession and the deficit lies with the banks and high finance — with the economic system that puts the highest levels of the economy under the control of gamblers and profiteers. Now these same profiteers in international finance — having been bailed out at huge public cost in 2008, but still jittery — demand big public spending cuts from all European countries.

2. **"This is the necessary budget"** is the catch-phrase that Osborne has chosen for this particular assault. It has the same ominous ring to it as "Operation Iraqi Freedom". This budget is not "necessary" — it is political. The Tories have chosen this budget on ideological grounds. The intention is to shrink the state and humiliate and break the trade unions.

Even by the standards of many dyed-in-the-wool capitalists, this is a bad budget economically. Cutting public sector pay and benefits will cut demand for goods and services. Cutting the goods and services that the public sector buys from the private sector will hurt private sector jobs. The Tories have made a political choice to ravage services and attack benefit claimants. Insofar as this budget is "necessary", it is because the Tories have promised these cuts to international financiers, who will be disappointed and may punish the UK if the cuts fail to materialise.

3. **This is a fair budget; the rich will pay more than the poor** — bullshit. To quote the *Financial Times* on Wednesday 23 June, "Higher earners... were breathing a collective sigh of relief today, having been spared major increases to capital gains tax and income tax".

Rather than raising tax on the rich, the Liberal-Tory Budget has raised the most regressive tax, VAT, to 20%. Corporation tax will remain low, while Child Tax Credit will be frozen for three years, and baby and toddler supplements will be withdrawn, along with Sure



Isn't it time you went for a medical test? What do you mean you can't afford the bus fare? What do you mean you can't find a job?

Start maternity grants after the first child. Housing benefit will be cut. Cuts to public services will hurt the working-class people who depend upon and staff those services, while the rich will emerge unscathed.

4. **Hard choices, difficult decisions** — the Tories refer to the austerity measures euphemistically as "difficult decisions".

There is nothing difficult about it — they are doing exactly what they want to do. The only difficulty will arise if the victims of the cuts resist. The decision to make the cuts is in fact the fulfilment of a decades-long Tory ambition, and it marks an ideological victory for those who champion Victorian attitudes to the poor — a mixture of brutal physical compulsion, systematic criminalisation and saccharine, hypocrite philanthropy.

5. **Pensioners are the winners.** Pensions have been linked to the Consumer Price Index rather than the Retail Price Index; and also to average earnings. The linking of pensions to the CPI is effectively a cut in pensions. The CPI does not rise as fast as the RPI, because it does not take house prices into account. The link to average earnings is good in the long term, as wages tend to rise faster than prices. But in the short term that may not help, as the government has frozen public sector pay and expects private sector wages to fall due to unemployment and the bosses' offensive.

6. **Benefit cheats are the real villains** — the attempt to divide the working class up into the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor is especially pernicious. It is an attempt to divide the working class against itself — turning those in work against those out of work; turning those who rely more on benefits, such as the long-term unemployed, the elderly, the disabled and the vulnerable, against those who are less reliant on the welfare state; and turning British-born workers against migrant workers.

All workers depend upon the welfare state, collectively, and should fight collectively to defend it. The Tories are attempting to break down the greatest conquest of the workers' movement of the last century. They want to turn back the clock to a time when poverty was a question of individual morality and responsibility, rather than a question of social responsibility.

Through methods like a humiliating extra medical check for those attempting to claim Disability Living Allowance, the Liberal-Tory government shows that its political starting point is a mistrust of the poor. It is a work-house mentality that seeks to punish the victims of capitalist society. Hand-in-hand with this approach is the return to philanthropy that the Old Etonian millionaires of the Cameron cabinet are trumpeting — the idea that the provision of vital services should be reduced to a hobby for the idle rich.

Intentional benefit fraud is guessed at around £1.1bn a year (Guardian). But £16 billion of means-tested benefits go unclaimed each year! Tax avoidance costs £25 billion a year (TUC, 2009). Accountant Richard Murphy (using TUC data) argues that tax evasion within the UK costs around £70 billion a year — a problem which has been exacerbated by the decision of HM Revenue and Customs to cut 25,000 jobs.

7. **The coalition government has a mandate for these cuts.** It hasn't. The Tories would not have won on 6 May if they had spelled out these plans before polling day.

Questions and answers on the cuts

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monetary policy. But it wasn't invented for that. It started with governments scrabbling to raise cash for wars, and evolved into an organic and central part of the financial system.

As Doug Henwood explains: "A large, liquid market in government debt with a central bank at its core is the base of modern financial systems". "Liquid" means that the bonds can be bought and sold easily: there are so many in circulation that you can always find buyers and sellers. According to Henwood, in the USA and Britain, financiers hold on to government bonds for an average of only one month before selling them again.

Who exactly holds all the £900-plus billion of UK government bonds currently outstanding is hard to say, because they change hands daily. And, monthly if not daily, old bonds come up to their final pay-out dates, and new bonds are sold.

Once the system is going, a government is obliged constantly to sell new bonds, if only in order to make the payouts on the old bonds.

As Henwood notes: "Public paper... provides rich

underwriting and trading profits for investment bankers and interest income for individual and institutional rentiers... Government debt not only promotes the development of a central national capital market, it promotes the development of a world capital market as well... Public debt is a powerful way of assuring that the state remains safely in capital's hands. The higher a government's debts, the more it must please the bankers". ("Wall Street", p.22-3).

Q. Why doesn't the government solve its deficit problem now just by taking back from the banks, bit by bit, the money it handed out to them in 2008?

A. In 2008 the government helped the banks to the extent of £1100 billion — £18,000 for every child, woman, and man in the UK.

But that does not mean that there is £1100 billion sitting in bank vaults and the government could solve its problems, or alleged problems, about selling its bonds on the global financial markets by "taking back" bits of that stash instead.

A lot of the £1100 billion consisted of guarantees and credits designed to get the banks trading with each

other again by saying that if a trade went bad, then the government would help out. Those guarantees and credits do not exist as a lump of cash that can be "taken back".

Some of the money was spent on buying out banks — Northern Rock and Bradford & Bingley completely, and Lloyds, RBS, and HBOS partially. The government could sell the shares it holds in those banks. But it wants them to be healthier before it does that.

Some of the government deficit is due to the 2008 bail-out, but that is essentially, for now, money which has disappeared into a black hole. Another part is due to tax income having shrunk in 2008-10, without public spending having shrunk.

The whole of high finance should be taken into public ownership, and without compensation to the big shareholders. Pending that, banks and bankers should be taxed more highly.

But neither of those measures is an easy, short-cut way for the government to improve its position in the global financial markets. On the contrary, they are measures towards defying and breaking the power of those global financial markets.

BOOK

Engineered identities

Tom Unterrainer reviews *From Fatwa to Jihad*, by Kenan Malik

"It hurts to be misrepresented, but there is no representation without misrepresentation... Bangladeshi Britons would be better off not reading — or, when it comes out, seeing the film of — Brick Lane." Germaine Greer, 'Reality Bites', the *Guardian*, 24 July 2006

The furore that accompanied plans to film Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane* in the eponymous east London neighborhood were just the latest in a long-running series of incidents that have come to signify — if not define — the deterioration of the left, its understanding of race and identity.

Hanif Kureishi's 1985 screenplay *My Beautiful Laundrette* sparked another such incident. Centering around the love between Omar and Johnny, the film prompted protests where demonstrators carried "No homosexuals in Pakistan" placards. A bigger surprise than the protests, according to Kureishi, was that "this was the first time I remember the left and Muslim fundamentalists joining hands"... "Islamic critics would say, 'You're saying we're all homosexuals' ... the left would say, 'you should be standing up for your community' and 'you should not attack minority groups'" (*From Fatwa to Jihad*).

So how did it come about that Ali, Kureishi, Rushdie and scores of other writers and artists should be faced with opprobrium from left and right, death threats and the rest? How did we arrive at the point where Greer's questioning of a writer's "authenticity" is accepted as justification for questioning or stifling free expression? How is it that Greer can comfortably express the reactionary impulses of self-appointed Bengali leaders as truly authentic whilst at the same time questioning the right of others to represent that same community? Why do most of the left buy into the idea of a homogenous "Muslim community" and embrace without questioning the pronouncements of "community leaders"?

The short answer, according to Malik, is that the credit for the emergence of these "communities" as homogenous cultural and political facts and "leaders" as "authentic" resides firmly with the left.

CULTURAL ENGINEERING

"The GLC [Greater London Assembly] strategy of the 1980s combined the distribution of council largesse with the celebration of cultural distinctiveness.

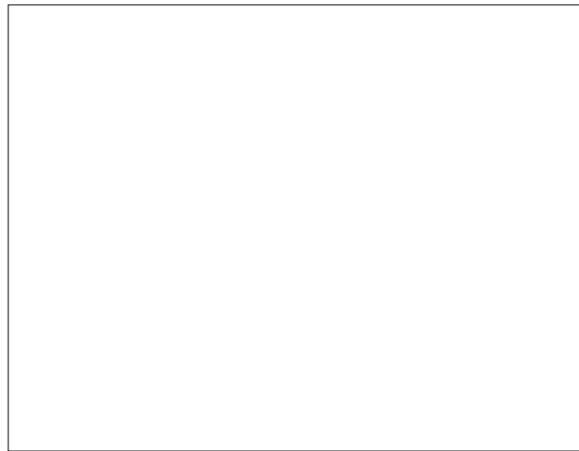
'Here's the cash now go off and do your own cultural thing. Just don't cause commotion on the streets.' That was the essence of municipal anti-racism." (From *Fatwa to Jihad*)

As Mark Lilla notes in his analysis of the "Tea Party" movement in the US (*The Tea Party Jacobins*, *New York Review of Books*, May-June 2010), the impulses of the new social movements of the 60s and 70s have now become largely uncontested: politically, the aims of those movements met with defeat, but culturally their categories achieved a fixed position in social discourse.

The problem — for Lilla, Malik and most socialists, I would argue — is that once divorced from a clear political imperative, the categories and "concerns" themselves become essentially devalued: "Americans saw no contradiction in holding down day jobs in the unfettered global marketplace... and spending weekends immersed in a moral and cultural universe shaped by the Sixties", writes Lilla.

In general society, we can view such developments with a measured sense of disappointment. Disappointment because the re-discovery and re-coupling of class politics with issues around gender, sex, race and basic freedoms opened significant opportunities for the left — and still does. Disappointment, because the promise was not fulfilled. Measured only because it is surely preferable to experience some degree of freedom and unrestrained pleasure — however contained, manufactured or illusory — than to return to a buttoned up, church attending, stultifying existence like the 50s.

But the organised left, though being of general society, remains distinct from it because of our politics. For this reason, we should feel more than just a bit put out



Kenan Malik

by the contradictions of a watered-down permeation of these ideas. We should be sharply critical of the methods and motives of those who enabled it and the consequences of their actions.

The way in which distorted notions of "difference" became embedded in society can be traced to the way in which the decline in politics of the new social movements was managed.

Ideas about the role of self-organisation in minority groups were distorted to the point where, rather than being seen as a constructive and basically democratic method to mobilise for action in solidarity with others, "self-organisation" — or in its new form "difference" — became an end in itself. In the relative abeyance of class militancy, this trend achieved a greater hold.

As large sections of the left in the UK moved away from organising and participating in militant action, towards increasingly uncritical municipal politics through Labour Party structures, they carried with them these corrupted cultural-political premises.

When in power and when faced with the very real social and racial conflicts that resulted from the onslaught of Thatcherism, how did the new municipal socialists respond?

Kenan Malik describes the "response" — or real lack thereof — through contrast: "On 17 April 1976 the far right National Front (NF) organised a march through the centre of Manningham, the main Asian area of Bradford... In response to the NF march... local politicians and activists organised a counter-rally in the centre of Bradford.

"Frustrated by the fact that while racist brutes were marching past their home in Manningham, the opposition was rallying several miles away in the safety of the city centre, hundreds of young Asians broke away from the main demonstration, fought their way through police lines and attacked the NF marchers...

"About a year after the anti-NF riot, a group of young Asians met in a pub to form the Indian Progressive Youth Association. Why did men and women whose origins lay in Pakistan or Bangladesh call themselves Indian?"

Why indeed, and why does any similar response to the equally despicable English Defence League seem a remote possibility today?

The young men and women of 1976 chose the name Indian Progressive Youth Association in recognition of the work of the Indian Workers Association, which had been involved in a number of industrial struggles and political efforts in conjunction with and where necessary against existing unions and organisations. The creation of the IPYA was the precursor to the creation of the Asian Youth Movement, which played a major role in self-defensive actions against the fascists in years to come. At this time, very few second generation Pakistani and Bangladeshi families identified as "Muslim". There were no large and visible "Muslim" organisations. There were no national organisations claiming to represent "all Muslims".

So what changed? Here's the contrast: "Between 1981, when Labour regained control of the council, and 1986, when it was abolished, the GLC pioneered a new strategy of making minority communities feel part of British society. It arranged consultations with them... On average, fewer than forty people attended each consultation meeting... Yet these came to be seen as the authentic voice of each community."

Malik argues that the GLC's strategy worked against

the traditional left wing conceptions of common values, instead promoting the remnants of "new social movement" politics. Only, rather than the free flow and creative "grass roots" version of these ideas the GLC constructed a small and rigid, undemocratic bureaucracy with tens of millions of pounds at its disposal.

If you needed "Muslims" to be represented in such a structure then you went looking for someone who claimed to represent "Muslims". A militant collective of second generation Pakistanis and Bangladeshis calling themselves "Asian" or whatever wouldn't fit the mark. So who did Mayor Livingstone pick and what sort of characters were chosen in other areas where the policy was replicated?

The answer to this question lies with the characters who came to be embraced as representative of "Muslims" by not only governments and councils but by the most prominent organisations of the socialist left: characters like the gay-hater Iqbal Sacranie, organisations, like the Islamist inspired Muslim Council of Britain and the clerical-fascists of the Muslim Brotherhood offshoot, the Muslim Association of Britain.

Malik traces the rise to prominence of these groupings, their role in the Rushdie affair, the internecine conflicts between them and the way in which the left helped shape the creation — in some cases fundamentally engineering the contours of — "Muslim" identity.

STALINIST LEGACY

Can we straightforwardly blame the transformation and bureaucratization of "identity" politics on the relative degeneration of the left within municipal Labour Party organisations and local government?

To do so, we would have to credit characters like Livingstone and a myriad of other, lesser known, political figures with a specific, inherent, natural idiocy. But the politics of the Livingstones of this world were not born in a vacuum.

If we are to understand the actions and motives of the left during this period, we need to understand the extent to which most of it — even the apparently avowedly anti-Stalinist — was formed and informed by the legacy of Stalinism. This aspect of the story is almost totally overlooked or perhaps omitted in Malik's narrative.

Questions of race have a muddled history in our movement. Perhaps the most obvious example of ill-conceived theory and even more ill-conceived and executed practice comes from the experience of American communists, Trotskyists and socialists.

The first American Trotskyists, working closely with Trotsky himself, described the situation of the significant and bloodily oppressed black minority in the USA as a specific racial question (and even discussed the possibility of that black minority wanting self-determination). Their conclusions were based on the material and economic political history of the country from Civil War, reconstruction and onwards (see the writings of Arne Swabeck, Max Shachtman, CLR James and other on this question for a fuller description).

Their materialist analysis and its developments saw the issue of black oppression as a question for the entire American working class. It demanded a class mobilisation against the entrenched racism of American society and up to the 1960s outlined the possible roads of development should the Jim Crow laws, segregation and structural racism in the southern states not be challenged.

During the same period, the totally Stalinised Communist Party of the United States developed a theory of the "race question" in America based on the idea that the black minority within America constituted a national minority and that a solution to the endemic racism in the country could be solved through the creation of a separate state for blacks on American soil.

The Stalinists opportunistically developed a theory of the "black American nation" in response to the demands of a small number of vocal, generally unrepresentative "black leaders" in the hope of gaining political traction and some level of support amongst black workers. They traced the routes of their theory back to

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Engineered identities

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the methods employed by the Bolsheviks to resolve national issues in the post-revolutionary period.

The main consequence of this theory — and this is by no means a thorough outline of it — was an increasingly uncritical attitude towards the politics and motives of these self-appointed “leaders”: contemporary and historic (i.e. the elevation of Marcus Garvey, who was an undoubtedly important figure, to some sort of mythic status).

This sort of thinking was not contained to the Stalinist parties themselves. In a thrilling polemical exchange between Richard Fraser and George Breitman of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP Discussion Bulletin, August 1955), Fraser rightly condemns Breitman for advocating a similar shift. Fraser spells out the materialist conception of the major questions involved and critiques Breitman’s seemingly innovative reconceptualisation of the “black question” as a national question with reference to the Stalinists’ previous work.

The Breitman side of the debate — the majority — prevailed: the political consequences of this slump into quasi-Stalinism is evidenced by the eventual fate of the SWP-US. This organisation is now a political bag-carrier for the Cuban regime. Breitman himself, in old age, fought against this trend, and got expelled.

What has this got to do with the question of the engineering of the “Muslim community” as a political fact? The major political forces involved in the creation of this myth would all concede that the “Muslim question” in the UK is a question of race — not a question of self-determination. Yet the self-appointed leaders of the “community” are treated as if they are leaders of a national liberation struggle.

The Socialist Workers Party in Britain goes one further: in defence of their conceptualisation of “Islamophobia” and their alliances with clerical-fascists in the anti-war movement and elsewhere, they resurrect examples of how Lenin and the Bolsheviks approached and accommodated the leaders of majority-Muslim national minorities.

PERMEATION OF AN IDEA

Only if we understand the potential political origins of their ideas in the context of the theoretical history and development of our movement can we hope to overcome the problems that face us.

Just as the unsystematically challenged ideas of Stalinism have helped to shape what passes for official anti-racism, these same ideas now have traction within larger parts of society and are taken as “law” by the majority of the organised socialist left.

So when faced with the threat of an organisation like the English Defence League — whose ideas do amount to a specific “anti-Muslim racism” — our movement has one of two choices. The first is to accommodate ourselves to the essentially Stalinist strategy that calls on us to uncritically support the “Muslim community” en masse and support the demands of their “leaders” To confuse the politics of anti-racist struggle with the question of self-determination for an artificial, bureaucratically engineered, self-selected “community”.

The second choice, the one advocated by the AWL and others, is to conceive of “Muslims” and their struggle in the context of a wider class struggle and to act and organise accordingly. To act in such a way, we have to accept that although not truly represented by “Muslim leaders” that a growing number — perhaps the majority — of people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin now identify as Muslim.

FROM FATWA TO JIHAD

There’s an awful lot more that can be said about Malik’s book, specifically about the growth and inter-sect rivalry between contending Islamic factions and the links between such organisations and organised terror. The main issue in his investigative analysis is the room it leaves for greater and more in depth analysis.

Malik’s book is an important one for the way it spells out the role of the left in the creation of Muslim identity, the way it facilitated the promotion of right-wing, clerical-fascist organisations and the cultural and political consequences of such a course.

His work provides many essential insights into the history of this questions but leaves a number of theoretical holes that need to be filled — something socialists such as ourselves must address.

TORONTO CONFERENCE

Debating the crisis and socialist answers

Vasilis Grollios a PhD reports on the Toronto conference of the academic journal *Historical Materialism*, held on 13-16 May.

Some of the most well known socialist researchers participated in this conference, just like the other conferences the journal organises in New York and in London. Here are the lectures that aroused my interest most.

In his welcome speech, the organiser of the conference, Toronto-based Professor of Political Economy David MacNally, stressed some of the main ideas he analyses in his new book: *Global Slump: The Economics and Politics of Crisis and Resistance*. According to him crisis changes its form and this leads mainstream commentators to think that it is over.

The recent crisis started as a house debt crisis, then transformed into a bank crisis and now a public budget one. For MacNally we are experiencing the most systematic attack on public services possible, probably leading to austerity measures for the next ten years. Cuts in public spending will be even more in the future. It is not easy to get out of the crisis. Japan has not yet gotten out of the crisis of the 1990s. We can expect every form of neo-liberal discipline to be intensified. Thus, class struggle must also be intensified to meet the neo-liberal measures.

In a packed room, political economists Greg Albo, Sam Gindin and Leo Panitch presented their ideas on the crisis which are explained in their new book: *In and Out of Crisis. The Global Financial Meltdown and Left Alternatives*. The three writers focused their lecture on wrong interpretations of the crisis.

They reject the social-democratic interpretations that tend to accuse the state for not properly regulating the financial sector, and that what should be now done is that the state should apply the right kind of regulations. This view is fettered by the logic of the idea of a separation between the markets and the state. The authors believe that the market and the state form an inseparable relationship in the capitalist mode of production. The contemporary form of the capitalist system needs the state to buttress the functioning of the markets. And because of the role it plays, the state perpetuates the volatile character of the capitalist system.

For Albo, Gindin and Panitch the contradictions in the financial sector are contradictions inside the core of the capitalist mode of production, are intrinsic to it. The question is if they can be contained to some extent. At the end of their presentation they said that those who want to be realists today must propose new ideas.

The left must move away from the logic of the proper regulations and of “technical” solutions. We must put on the agenda, instead, proposals that will question the right to private property. The foundation of these kind of proposals will come from the political theory of democratic and social rights. Thus, the efforts of the democratic camp must focus on how we can outstrip the capitalist system and the state. The realisation of this course of action requires the existence of class consciousness and the unity of the workers in the private and the public sector in their fight against capital.

A third presentation that got my attention was Kevin Anderson’s *Marx at the Margins. On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies*. The writer is part of the team editing Marx’s unpublished notes on the subject.

Anderson notes that although most commentators on Marx see in his thinking a unilinear model of social development for capitalism, but this is not accurate. The common view is that Marx leaves out of his analysis the variety of nations and the races.

For Anderson, these critics have a point as far as the young Marx is concerned. From 1848 to 1853 European colonialism was indeed depicted in Marx’s work as a necessary stage.

However, from 1879, to his death, Marx had a multi-linear approach. Russia’s near future, for example, was not unavoidably tied to capitalism. Thus, the theory of revolution in Marx was not exclusively based on the

Marx’s ideas — set to make a comeback?

classes, but on a dialectical relationship of interaction between nation, race and class.

The sense that I got from attending the conference is that which any careful reader of Marx cannot but notice: that the reason for phenomena of social disintegration such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, is not the behavior of individuals such as politicians, stockbrokers, capitalists, CEOs, as the mainstream ideas propound, but the existence of capital itself, that is, the logic of the system.

In my lecture on democracy and materialism in Marx and Engels, I attempted to bring to light the philosophical background of their theory on democracy, meaning the method that enabled them to consider the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production, a presupposition for democracy.

Democracy in their thinking presupposes a change not only in appearance but also in form. A change in the form of the government is not enough. A serious change must take place in the content, in the essence of the social relations, in the way human beings come to terms with nature and cooperate with each other in order to satisfy their basic human needs.

In “bourgeois democracy” this relationship takes a perverted, inverted form, dictated by capital. It is perverted because instead of using wealth in order to satisfy their needs, people are transformed in personifications of economic categories. Therefore, their needs are satisfied only to the extent that they help wealth to be accumulated. Those who constitute the world, the workers, appear as derivatives of it.

According to Marxist philosophy, in order to understand the true nature of the social forms (such as state, “democratic government”, wealth) we must decipher them on a human basis. The eighth thesis on Feuerbach summarises Marx’s materialism. “All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.” In this materialist framework the content of the social forms depend on the development of the class struggle at each moment

Autonomy acquires a materialistic character in Marx and Engels because its existence presupposes the abolition of the current form of labour, that of capital, and thus the overthrow of the capitalist system.

THE ORIGINS OF THE PLEBS LEAGUE PART 1

Taking the university to the workers?

In October 1908 students and former students at Ruskin College in Oxford founded the League of the "Plebs". From 26 March to 6 April 1909 they took strike action in the college.

The Plebs League eventually became a national movement, providing what was called independent working-class education (IWCE). Later it was called the National Council of Labour Colleges.

Through this movement, which was still functioning in 1964, tens of thousands of working-class people both taught and learnt. The basic aim behind IWCE was that the working class should produce its own thinkers and organisers.

The autobiographies and reminiscences of many labour movement leaders in the 1930s, 40s and 50s refer to the Plebs League and the Ruskin strike. In contrast, few academic historians have paid attention to these initiatives. Most histories of adult education, for example, assume that what counts is the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). They either ignore IWCE altogether or see it as an obstacle that briefly hampered the WEA.

In this issue of *Solidarity* we begin a serialisation of an account of the origins of the Plebs League by Colin Waugh. The article will focus on the 1909 strike at Ruskin, and the beginnings of the movement. It does not deal with what happened in later periods. But it does inform us about why independent working class education is still very relevant today.

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION TO 1899

Following the collapse of the Chartist movement in 1848, some sections of the ruling class thought that they could forestall future threats to their power by creating within the working class a compliant layer of articulate spokespersons who would blunt the edge of class struggle. One way they tried to do this was by infiltrating the Cooperative Movement. Another was by initiatives in the field of adult education.

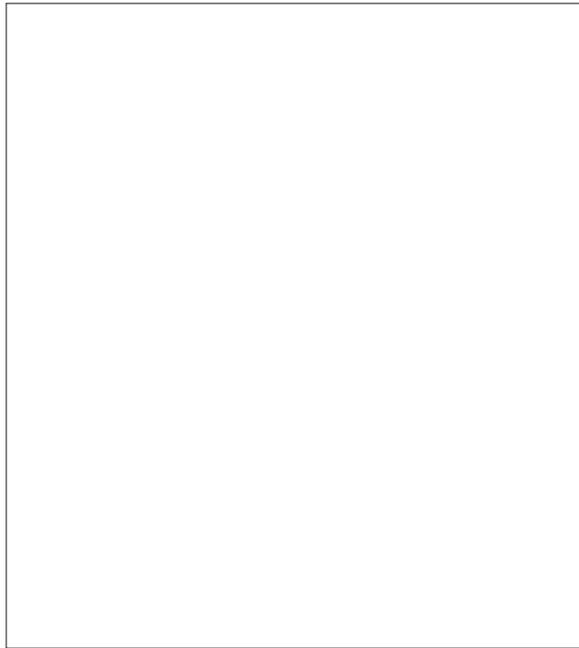
In the mid 1800s Oxford University was dominated by its constituent colleges. Many of these were like gentlemen's clubs, in which "fellows" waited to be given livings in the Anglican church. There arose, especially in Oxford, a movement which aimed to reform this situation. One strand wanted Oxford to do something for working people.

Not everyone who thought this was simply a hypocrite. For example, in 1872, reacting in a personal letter to the death of some nuns during the Paris Commune, the poet and Jesuit priest Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote: "I am afraid some great revolution is not far off. Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist. Their ideal bating some things is nobler than that professed by any secular statesman I know of ... Besides it is just... it is a dreadful thing for the greatest and most necessary part of a very rich nation to live a hard life without dignity, knowledge, comforts, delight, or hopes in the midst of plenty — which plenty they make.

"They profess that they do not care what they wreck and burn, the old civilisation and order must be destroyed. This is a dreadful outlook but what has the old civilisation done for them? As it at present stands in England it is itself in great measure founded on wrecking. But they got none of the spoils, they came in for nothing but harm from it then and thereafter. England has grown hugely wealthy but this wealth has not reached the working classes; I expect it has made their condition worse.

"Besides this iniquitous order the old civilisation embodies another order mostly old and what is new in direct entail from the old, the old religion, learning, law, art, etc and all the history that is preserved in standing monuments. But as the working classes have not been educated they know next to nothing of all this and cannot be expected to care if they destroy it ..."

By "wrecking" here, Hopkins meant people enriching themselves when Henry VIII closed the monasteries. His standpoint was close to the "feudal socialism" ridiculed by Karl Marx in the *Communist Manifesto*. But it was also close to the impulse which made William Morris [slightly later] become a socialist. Christian socialists who thought like Hopkins were to play a key



John Ruskin

role on the ruling-class side in the Ruskin struggle.

The growth of such views among the intelligentsia had led to the foundation in 1854 of the Workingmen's College in London. The person mainly responsible for this was the Cambridge graduate, London and Cambridge professor and Christian Socialist, Frederick Denison Maurice, who in turn based his approach on measures pioneered by another Christian socialist, Thomas Hughes, author of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and *Tom Brown at Oxford*.

Maurice wrote: "The question is, how to eliminate Owenism and Chartism? Repression has proved powerless; but the Queen, in a conversation with Lord Melbourne, has indicated the proper way, to wit, education. But what sort of education will be capable of doing away with Chartism? The one that will point out to him [ie the worker] his unjust claims and will satisfy his just demands".

Also involved in the Workingmen's College was the Oxford professor John Ruskin, who taught art there for a time.

In 1860 Ruskin had published, originally as articles in the prestigious *Cornhill Magazine*, a book on political economy called *Unto This Last*. One section of this was called "The veins of wealth". Here Ruskin said: "Since the essence of wealth consists in power over men, will it not follow that the nobler and the more in number the persons are over whom it has power, the greater the wealth?

"Perhaps it may even appear, after some consideration, that the persons themselves are the wealth, that these pieces of gold with which we are in the habit of guiding them are, in fact, nothing more than a kind of Byzantine harness or trappings . . . wherewith we bridle the creatures; but that if these same living creatures could be guided without the fretting and jingling of the Byzants in their mouths and ears, they might themselves be more valuable than their bridles" Ruskin wanted to value workers as human beings but also to educate them out of fighting for a better life.

In the 1870s another approach emerged. This was university extension, where academics travelled around the country lecturing to people who could not go to university. Cambridge University introduced extension provision in 1873, London in 1876 and Oxford in 1878.

In the 1880s, after starving people from the East End of London invaded the affluent West End, another tactic was attempted: the settlement movement.

People from universities went to live in areas like the East End, where they provided, among other things, adult education. The most well known settlement, Toynbee Hall, was opened in Whitechapel in 1885, by people from Oxford, mainly on the initiative of Canon Samuel Barnett. Here again we find two conflicting impulses — on the one hand, a genuine concern for the poor, and, on the other, a desire to block the spread of leftwing ideas. Toynbee Hall, for example, was named after Arnold Toynbee, an Oxford graduate who died at

an early age from an illness he caught while lecturing in the East End. His lectures were intended to counter the influence of Henry George's anti-capitalist economics book *Progress and Poverty*.

However, by the 1890s it was clear that the majority of those participating as students in the extension and settlement movements were not workers but fairly well-off people, especially middle class women who, for the most part, could not go to university. Overall, 50-60,000 people were attending extension courses, but only where organisations like the Cooperative Society backed the lectures were workers involved. Classes in political economy had initially attracted thousands of Northumberland and Durham miners, but this interest melted away after the big strike in 1887, as these workers turned instead to socialist lectures given by people such as William Morris.

Workers, then, were rejecting extension, and as a result it was failing to create a class-collaborationist layer amongst them.

RUSKIN TO 1902

Ruskin Hall in Oxford, set up in 1899, grew partly out of the same impulses as the extension and settlement movements. But, because of the way in which it was founded, as part of a broader project by three people from the United States, it existed alongside these movements without a formal link.

Ruskin Hall was both a labour college (that is, an institution controlled by trade unions and providing courses for their members) and a utopian colony. In its first two years some of the students were workers sponsored by their unions, but others were short-term, non-working-class visitors from overseas, or well-heeled cranks.

Two of its founders Charles Beard and Walter Vrooman (who was influenced by the US Knights of Labour movement), did try to organise a movement for working class education. They did this by founding colleges, by teaching classes themselves, by lobbying labour movement organisations, by travelling round England promoting their version of socialist education, by creating a network of correspondence tuition, and by setting up the Ruskin College Education League "for the purpose of making Ruskin College known in London and the provincial centres". Beard founded another Ruskin Hall in Manchester, and others existed briefly in Birmingham, Liverpool, Birkenhead and Stockport.

Vrooman was a sort of socialist. He declared, for example, that "knowledge must be used to emancipate humanity, not to gratify curiosity, blind instincts and desire for respectability". Vrooman and Beard appointed a fairly high profile left-wing socialist, Dennis Hird, as the warden/principal of Ruskin, and another, Alfred Hacking, as lecturer in charge of correspondence courses. (There were only four full time staff in the beginning.)

Hird was an Oxford graduate (1875). In 1878 he was ordained as an Anglican priest and appointed as a tutor and lecturer to students of Oxford University who were not attached to individual colleges. Later (1888) he joined the (Marxist) Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and also became secretary of the Church of England Temperance Society for the London diocese. Forced to resign from this Temperance Society position, and later to renounce his orders, because of his socialist activities, by the time of the 1908-09 events at Ruskin Hird had renounced formal Christianity itself.

As principal of Ruskin, Hird wrote to the British Steel Smelters Association to say that: "Many unions would be glad of an opportunity to send one of their most promising younger members for a year's education in social questions". This gives us an important clue about what he thought the college was for.

By deciding to name their project after John Ruskin, Beard and the Vroomans showed that they wanted it to challenge the existing order, but also that, like the Guild of St George founded by Ruskin himself, its focus would be ethical as much as economic. They timed the inaugural meeting for Ruskin Hall in Oxford to coincide with John Ruskin's 80th birthday. At this

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LETTER

The wrong kind of feminism

I'm surprised to see "Pregnancy is not an illness!" (*Solidarity* 3-175) in a rational newspaper like *Solidarity*.

Surely the author realises hospital obstetrics is geared up for worst case scenarios and the intervention that flows from that? All hospitals feel alienating to patients, as every device there is almost completely foreign and they have no control over when they eat, sleep or see their relatives. But if the author had ever seen a delivery go wrong and how quickly it goes downhill and how in less than a minute a hypoxic brain injury can occur, she'd presumably revise her views.

I also don't agree at all with making a virtue of the pain of labour: that's what an epidural is for. There's nothing virtuous about not using all the accumulated products of human knowledge available as they are manifested in modern medicine. This article is typical of people who are essentially well: they believe in the "natural way", which is great because it lessens the unnecessary burden on GPs, but doctors will be seeing them when there's something really wrong.

And, really, what a load of rubbish at the end saying women are physically assaulted through the surgical procedure affording easier repair provided by an episiotomy. Where are these facts that this process is "often carried out without the woman's knowledge or consent"? Of course there will be cases where this has happened under anaesthesia, but this presents it as a routine occurrence. I know the hospital system in the UK is different to Australia, but I find that hard to believe these days.

I appreciate the feminist sentiment behind the article, but it's entirely the wrong type of feminism for socialists.

It irritates me that an anti-medical article like this make an appearance in this newspaper. I could cop it on the chin with the anti-psychiatry article presented in an earlier edition "Mad cabbie protest", as psychiatry is obviously a lot more contentious, being about fitting into this society for maximal psychic functioning, but this new article is going too far.

Melissa White, Brisbane

In the US there was a tradition of utopian colonies. For example Socialist Party member Upton Sinclair used earnings from his novel *The Jungle* to found a socialist colony, Helicon Home Colony, which he intended to function also as a labour college...

From page 18

meeting Vrooman described his aim in this way: 'We shall take men who have been merely condemning our social institutions, and will teach them instead how to transform those institutions, so that in place of talking against the world, they will begin methodically and scientifically to possess the world, to refashion it, and to cooperate with the power behind evolution in making it a joyous abode of, if not a perfected humanity, at least a humanity earnestly and rationally striving towards perfection'.

These words reveal Vrooman's intention that the world should be changed by action from below ("begin methodically and scientifically to possess the world... [and] to refashion it"). But they also reflect his religious feelings (a Christian, from a well-off nonconformist background) ("the power behind evolution", and the suggestion that "humanity" cannot be "perfected") and his wish to prevent discontent getting out of hand.

Both labour colleges and utopian colonies had a higher profile in the US than here. On their return to the US in 1902, Walter Vrooman and his wife Anne, part of whose inheritance financed the Ruskin project, founded a further Ruskin Hall in Trenton, Missouri, which was eventually absorbed into a university in Illinois. Not long afterwards, another US labour college, Brookwood in New York state, was founded, and survived until the 1930s. The most prominent figure in this was another Christian socialist, A.J. Muste.

In the US there was also a tradition of utopian colonies, and where labour colleges suffered from a shortage of union funding the two kinds of institution could overlap, with the college at risk of becoming some wealthy backer's plaything.

For example, just before the First World War the US writer and Socialist Party member Upton Sinclair used

earnings from his novel *The Jungle* to found a socialist colony, Helicon Home Colony, which he intended to function also as a labour college. In the 1920s, in a later novel, *Oil!*, Sinclair dealt with arguments for and against such institutions. By this time he had experienced the collapse both of his own colony and the Llano Del Rio colony set up near Los Angeles by Socialist Party members in 1914. He had also developed a critique of mainstream higher education which he spelled out in a privately printed book, *The Goose Step*.

In *Oil!*, Bunny Ross, the son of an oil tycoon, wants to use some of his money to set up a labour college which will be "a gymnasium where people train for the class struggle". However, his girl-friend's father, Chaim Menzies, a union organiser amongst garment workers, thinks that "you didn't change a colony by calling it a college, and a colony was de vorst trap you could set for de movement", going on to argue that: "You git people to go off and live by demselves, different from de rest of de vorkers . . . all de time dey be tinkin about someting else but de class struggle out in de world. . . . De people vot are going to help de movement has got to be in it every hour". This expresses in fictional form a tension similar to that which arose early on at Ruskin Hall in Oxford.

Students from a working-class and trade union background soon recognised the ambivalent nature of the Ruskin set-up. Thus in the September 1901 issue of *Young Oxford*, a magazine launched with Vrooman's support, JMK MacLachlan, a Scottish student who was a member of the Independent Labour Party (ILP), wrote that: "The present policy of Ruskin College is that of a benevolent trader sailing under a privateer flag. Professing the aims dear to all socialists, she disavows those very principles by repudiating socialism. Let Ruskin College proclaim socialism; let her convert her name from a form of contempt into a canon of respect".

Between 1899 and 1908, about 450 people attended Ruskin in Oxford as full-time residential students. But over the same period about 8,000 enrolled themselves on Ruskin correspondence courses. Some of these correspondence students also participated in the Ruskin Hall Scheme. This was an arrangement by which correspondence students could meet in small, local discussion groups.

By 1902 it had 96 classes running across the country, nearly all of them in industrial areas. It became the main route through which industrial workers progressed to become residential students at Ruskin Hall in Oxford. These students, in turn, came eventually to form the overwhelming majority in the college. Thus by 1903, 15 out of 20 Ruskin Hall students were trade unionists.

In 1907, 53 out of the 54 students were listed by occupations, including 23 mineworkers (thirteen from South Wales, six from Durham, one from Northumberland, one from Nottinghamshire and two from Scotland), seven engineering workers, five railway-workers, four weavers and a variety of other trades. Of these 53, only four did not have a union stated alongside their name. Most were branch officers or district officers of their unions. And again in 1908-09, 45 of the students were sponsored by their unions.

By that stage then, it was clear that Ruskin was doing what the extension movement was failing to do: recruiting and retaining working-class activists as students.

To be continued.

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.

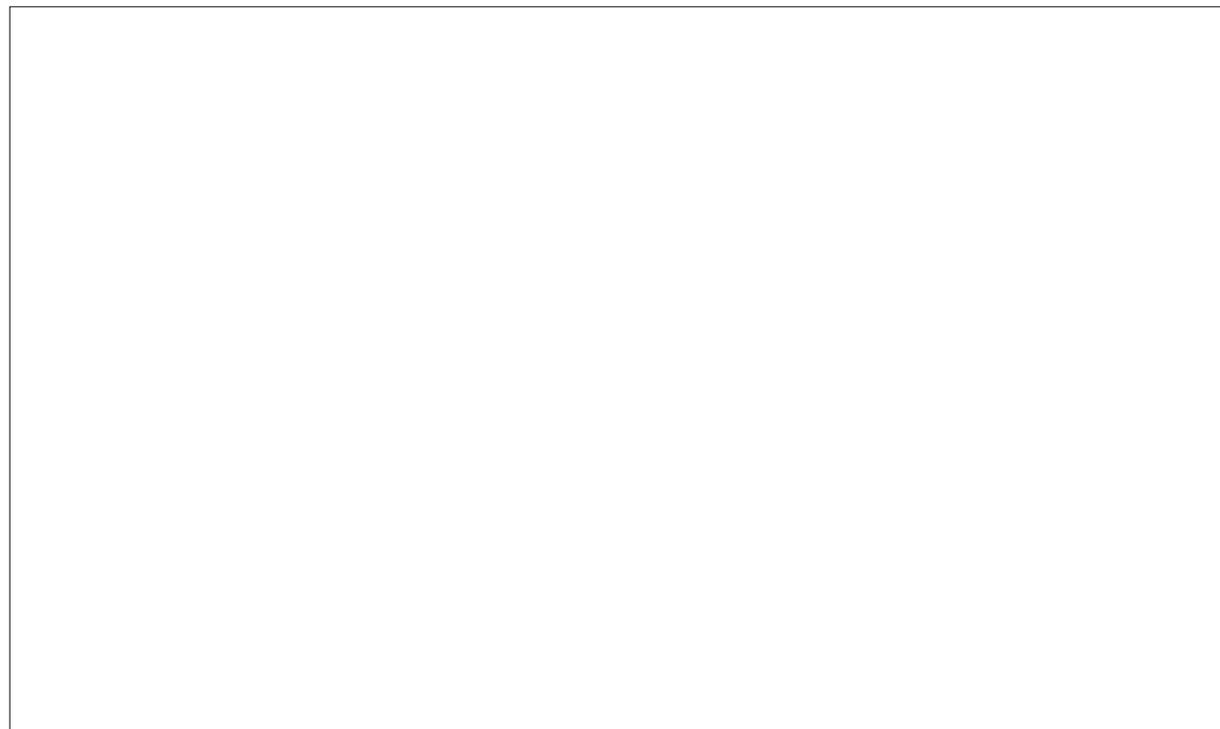
• Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

• 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.

SOCIALISM

Lenin on the Paris Commune



The Communards pose with a toppled statue of Napoleon Bonaparte

On 18 March 1871 the workers of Paris took power in their city. For nine weeks, until they were crushed by the French army after 28 May, they formed the world's first workers' government.

Karl Marx wrote a pamphlet at the time about the Commune, *The Civil War in France*.

In it he focused on defending the Commune against its enemies. He claimed it showed, for the first time, "the political form under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour".

"Its true secret was this. It was essential a working-class government". The standing army had been replaced by the armed people; the legislative and executive power was wielded by workers' representatives, elected, accountable, and recallable; and all official jobs were done at workers' wages.

For decades after, commemorations of the Commune were regular high days of the working-class calendar. Here we print two of the articles which Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, leader of the Russian workers' revolution of 1917, wrote for such commemorations.

In the first article, from 1908, Lenin focused on the relevance of the Commune to the revolutionary upheaval which had happened in Russia shortly before, in 1905 — the "general rehearsal" for 1917.

By 1908 Russia had been plunged deep into post-revolutionary reaction. Some socialists were saying that the workers should never have taken up arms against the Tsarist regime, as they did in the Moscow uprising of December 1905.

Lenin declared that in Russia at the end of 1905, as in Paris in 1917: "The proletariat should not ignore peaceful methods of struggle — they serve its ordinary, day-to-day interests; they are necessary in periods of preparation for revolution — but it must never forget that in certain conditions the class struggle assumes the form of armed conflict..."

"If the workers had allowed themselves to be disarmed without a fight" — in 1871 as in 1905 — "the disastrous effect... would have been far, far greater than the losses suffered by the working class in the battle to defend its arms".

Lenin also stressed the importance of separating out the working class from nationalism. The 1905 revolution had been sparked, in part, by revulsion at the Tsar's war with Japan.

"Let the bourgeoisie bear the responsibility for the national humiliation — the task of the proletariat [is] to fight for the socialist emancipation of labour..."

By 1911 further setbacks had accumulated in Russia. The next year, 1912, the Lena goldfields strike would start a revival, but no-one knew that yet.

Lenin was concerned to combat the danger in the Marxist movement of "liquidationism" — of socialists

wanting to confine themselves to the limited legal activity possible under the Tsar.

Some socialists wanted to replace the Marxist party by a "broad Labour Party", what Lenin called a "Liberal-Labour Party". Lenin thought the formation of the Labour Party in Britain (even dominated by Liberal politics, as it was) had been a step forward from the previous situation of only small socialist groups of a few thousands and a trade union movement standing aside from politics or doing deals with the Liberals. But in Russia — as in Italy around the same time — the formation of a broad, "soft" labour party would have been a step backwards from the Marxist leadership in key sections of the working class which had already been achieved.

Looking back at the Commune in 1911, Lenin highlighted the way it clarified the class relations of bourgeois society. Broad, moderate movements, playing down class divisions, could exist only when the struggle was still weak.

"The Commune sprang up spontaneously... At first this movement was extremely indefinite and confused..." But the classes necessarily separated out in the course of the struggle: "Only the workers remained loyal to the Commune to the end".

The leader of the French bourgeoisie in 1871, Adolphe Thiers, said, like Thatcher over 100 years later: "Now we have finished with socialism". But the courage of the workers proved him false.

Soon "a new socialist generation, enriched by the experience of their predecessors, picked up the flag..."

Lessons of the Commune

After the coup d'état, which marked the end of the revolution of 1848, France fell under the yoke of the Napoleonic regime for a period of 18 years. This regime brought upon the country not only economic ruin but national humiliation.

In rising against the old regime the proletariat under took two tasks—one of them national and the other of a class character—the liberation of France from the German invasion and the socialist emancipation of the workers from capitalism. This union of two tasks forms a unique feature of the Commune.

The bourgeoisie had formed a "government of national defence" and the proletariat had to fight for national independence under its leadership. Actually, it was a government of "national betrayal" which saw

its mission in fighting the Paris proletariat. But the proletariat, blinded by patriotic illusions, did not perceive this. The patriotic idea had its origin in the Great Revolution of the eighteenth century; it swayed the minds of the socialists of the Commune; and Blanqui, for example, undoubtedly a revolutionary and an ardent supporter of socialism, could find no better title for his newspaper than the bourgeois cry: "The country is in danger!"

Combining contradictory tasks—patriotism and socialism—was the fatal mistake of the French socialists. In the Manifesto of the International, issued in September 1870, Marx had warned the French proletariat against being misled by a false national idea; the Great Revolution, class antagonisms had sharpened, and whereas at that time the struggle against the whole of European reaction united the entire revolutionary nation, now the proletariat could no longer combine its interests with the interests of other classes hostile to it; let the bourgeoisie bear the responsibility for the national humiliation—the task of the proletariat was to fight for the socialist emancipation of labour from the yoke of the bourgeoisie.

And indeed the true nature of bourgeois "patriotism" was not long in revealing itself. Having concluded an ignominious peace with the Prussians, the Versailles government proceeded to its immediate task—it launched an attack to wrest the arms that terrified it from the hands of the Paris proletariat. The workers replied by proclaiming the Commune and civil war.

Although the socialist proletariat was split up into numerous sects, the Commune was a splendid example of the unanimity with which the proletariat was able to accomplish the democratic tasks which the bourgeoisie could only proclaim. Without any particularly complex legislation, in a simple, straightforward manner, the proletariat, which had seized power, carried out the democratisation of the social system, abolished the bureaucracy, and made all official posts elective.

But two mistakes destroyed the fruits of the splendid victory. The proletariat stopped half-way: instead of setting about "expropriating the expropriators", it allowed itself to be led astray by dreams of establishing a higher justice in the country united by a common national task; such institutions as the banks, for example, were not taken over, and Proudhonist theories about a "just exchange", etc., still prevailed among the socialists. The second mistake was excessive magnanimity on the part of the proletariat: instead of destroying its enemies it sought to exert moral influence on them; it underestimated the significance of direct military operations in civil war, and instead of launching a resolute offensive against Versailles that would have crowned its victory in Paris, it tarried and gave the Versailles government time to gather the dark forces and prepare for the blood-soaked week of May.

But despite all its mistakes the Commune was a superb example of the great proletarian movement of the nineteenth century. Marx set a high value on the historic significance of the Commune—if, during the treacherous attempt by the Versailles gang to seize the

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THE ESSENTIAL LENIN

An online collection of seminal writings by, and about, Vladimir Lenin:

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arms of the Paris proletariat, the workers had allowed themselves to be disarmed without a fight, the disastrous effect of the demoralisation, that this weakness would have caused in the proletarian movement, would have been far, far greater than the losses suffered by the working class in the battle to defend its arms. The sacrifices of the Commune, heavy as they were, are made up for by its significance for the general struggle of the proletariat: it stirred the socialist movement throughout Europe, it demonstrated the strength of civil war, it dispelled patriotic illusions, and destroyed the naïve belief in any efforts of the bourgeoisie for common national aims. The Commune taught the European proletariat to pose concretely the tasks of the socialist revolution.

The lesson learnt by the proletariat will not be forgotten. The working class will make use of it, as it has already done in Russia during the December uprising.

The period that preceded the Russian revolution and prepared it bears a certain resemblance to the period of the Napoleonic yoke in France. In Russia, too, the autocratic clique has brought upon the country economic ruin and national humiliation. But the outbreak of revolution was held back for a long time, since social development had not yet created the conditions for a mass movement and, notwithstanding all the courage displayed, the isolated actions against the government in the pre-revolutionary period broke against the apathy of the masses. Only the Social-Democrats, by strenuous and systematic work, educated the masses to the level of the higher forms of struggle—mass actions and armed civil war.

The Social-Democrats were able to shatter the “common national” and “patriotic” delusions of the young proletariat and later, when the Manifesto of October 17th [hypocritically promising civil liberties and a constitution] had been wrested from the tsar due to their direct intervention, the proletariat began vigorous preparation for the next, inevitable phase of the revolution—the armed uprising. Having shed “common national” illusions, it concentrated its class forces in its own mass organisations—the Soviets of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, etc. And notwithstanding all the differences in the aims and tasks of the Russian revolution, compared with the French revolution of 1871, the Russian proletariat had to resort to the same method of struggle as that first used by the Paris Commune—civil war. Mindful of the lessons of the Commune, it knew that the proletariat should not ignore peaceful methods of struggle—they serve its ordinary, day-to-day interests, they are necessary in periods of preparation for revolution—but it must never forget that in certain conditions the class struggle assumes the form of armed conflict and civil war; there are times when the interests of the proletariat call for ruthless extermination of its enemies in open armed clashes. This was first demonstrated by the French proletariat in the Commune and brilliantly confirmed by the Russian proletariat in the December uprising.

And although these magnificent uprisings of the working class were crushed, there will be another uprising, in face of which the forces of the enemies of the proletariat will prove ineffective, and from which the socialist proletariat will emerge completely victorious.

In memory of the Commune

Forty years have passed since the proclamation of the Paris Commune. In accordance with tradition, the French workers paid homage to the memory of the men and women of the revolution of March 18, 1871, by meetings and demonstrations.

At the end of May they will again place wreaths on the graves of the Communards who were shot, the victims of the terrible “May Week”, and over their graves they will once more vow to fight untiringly until their ideas have triumphed and the cause they bequeathed has been fully achieved.

Why does the proletariat, not only in France but through out the entire world, honour the men and women of the Paris Commune as their predecessors? And what is the heritage of the Commune?

The Commune sprang up spontaneously. No one consciously prepared it in an organised way. The unsuccessful war with Germany, the privations suf-

fered during the siege, the unemployment among the proletariat and the ruin among the lower middle classes; the indignation of the masses against the upper classes and against authorities who had displayed utter incompetence, the vague unrest among the working class, which was discontented with its lot and was striving for a different social system; the reactionary composition of the National Assembly, which roused apprehensions as to the fate of the republic—all this and many other factors combined to drive the population of Paris to revolution on March 18, which unexpectedly placed power in the hands of the National Guard, in the hands of the working class and the petty bourgeoisie which had sided with it.

It was an event unprecedented in history. Up to that time power had, as a rule, been in the hands of landowners and capitalists, i. e., in the hands of their trusted agents who made up the so-called government. After the revolution of March 18, when M. Thiers’ government had fled from Paris with its troops, its police and its officials, the people became masters of the situation and power passed into the hands of the proletariat. But in modern society, the proletariat, economically enslaved by capital, cannot dominate politically unless it breaks the chains which fetter it to capital. That is why the movement of the Commune was bound to take on a socialist tinge, i. e., to strive to overthrow the rule of the bourgeoisie, the rule of capital, and to destroy the very foundations of the contemporary social order.

At first this movement was extremely indefinite and confused. It was joined by patriots who hoped that the Commune would renew the war with the Germans and bring it to a successful conclusion. It enjoyed the support of the small shopkeepers who were threatened with ruin unless there was a postponement of payments on debts and rent (the government refused to grant this postponement, but they obtained it from the Commune). Finally, it enjoyed, at first, the sympathy of bourgeois republicans who feared that the reactionary National Assembly (the “rustics”, the savage landlords) would restore the monarchy. But it was of course the workers (especially the artisans of Paris), among whom active socialist propaganda had been carried on during the last years of the Second Empire and many of whom even belonged to the International, who played the principal part in this movement.

Only the workers remained loyal to the Commune to the end. The bourgeois republicans and the petty bourgeoisie soon broke away from it: the former were frightened off by the revolutionary-socialist, proletarian character of the movement; the latter broke away when they saw that it was doomed to inevitable defeat. Only the French proletarians supported their government fearlessly and untiringly, they alone fought and died for it—that is to say, for the cause of the emancipation of the working class, for a better future for all toilers.

Deserted by its former allies and left without support, the Commune was doomed to defeat. The entire bourgeoisie of France, all the landlords, stockbrokers, factory owners, all the robbers, great and small, all the exploiters joined forces against it. This bourgeois coalition, supported by Bismarck (who released a hundred thousand French prisoners of war to help crush revolutionary Paris), succeeded in rousing the ignorant peasants and the petty bourgeoisie of the provinces against the proletariat of Paris, and forming a ring of steel around half of Paris (the other half was besieged by the German army). In some of the larger cities in France (Marseilles, Lyons, St. Étienne, Dijon, etc.) the workers also attempted to seize power, to proclaim the Commune and come to the help of Paris; but these attempts were short-lived. Paris, which had first raised the banner of proletarian revolt, was left to its own resources and doomed to certain destruction.

Two conditions, at least, are necessary for a victorious social revolution—highly developed productive forces and a proletariat adequately prepared for it. But in 1871 both of these conditions were lacking. French capitalism was still poorly developed, and France was at that time mainly a petty-bourgeois country (artisans, peasants, shopkeepers, etc). On the other hand, there was no workers’ party; the working class had not gone through a long school of struggle and was unprepared, and for the most part did not even clearly visualise its tasks and the methods of fulfilling them. There was no serious political organisation of the proletariat, nor were there strong trade unions and co-operative societies....

But the chief thing which the Commune lacked was time—an opportunity to take stock of the situation and to embark upon the fulfilment of its programme. It had scarcely had time to start work, when the government entrenched in Versailles and supported by

the entire bourgeoisie began hostilities against Paris. The Commune had to concentrate primarily on self-defence. Right up to the very end, May 21-28, it had no time to think seriously of anything else.

However, in spite of these unfavourable conditions, in spite of its brief existence, the Commune managed to promulgate a few measures which sufficiently characterise its real significance and aims. The Commune did away with the standing army, that blind weapon in the hands of the ruling classes, and armed the whole people. It proclaimed the separation of church and state, abolished state payments to religious bodies (i. e., state salaries for priests), made popular education purely secular, and in this way struck a severe blow at the gendarmes in cassocks. In the purely social sphere the Commune accomplished very little, but this little nevertheless clearly reveals its character as a popular, workers’ government. Night-work in bakeries was forbidden; the system of fines, which represented legalised robbery of the workers, was abolished. Finally, there was the famous decree that all factories and workshops abandoned or shut down by their owners were to be turned over to associations of workers that were to resume production. And, as if to emphasise its character as a truly democratic, proletarian government, the Commune decreed that the salaries of all administrative and government officials, irrespective of rank, should not exceed the normal wages of a worker, and in no case amount to more than 6,000 francs a year (less than 200 rubles a month).

All these measures showed clearly enough that the Commune was a deadly menace to the old world founded on the enslavement and exploitation of the people. That was why bourgeois society could not feel at ease so long as the Red Flag of the proletariat waved over the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. And when the organised forces of the government finally succeeded in gaining the upper hand over the poorly organised forces of the revolution, the Bonapartist generals, who had been beaten by the Germans and who showed courage only in fighting their defeated countrymen, those French *Rennenkampfs* and *Meller-Zakomelskys*, [generals] organised such a slaughter as Paris had never known. About 30,000 Parisians were shot down by the bestial soldiery, and about 45,000 were arrested, many of whom were afterwards executed, while thousands were transported or exiled. In all, Paris lost about 100,000 of its best people, including some of the finest workers in all trades.

The bourgeoisie were satisfied. “Now we have finished with socialism for a long time,” said their leader, the blood thirsty dwarf, Thiers, after he and his generals had drowned the proletariat of Paris in blood. But these bourgeois crows croaked in vain. Less than six years after the suppression of the Commune, when many of its champions were still pining in prison or in exile, a new working-class movement arose in France. A new socialist generation, enriched by the experience of their predecessors and no whit discouraged by their defeat, picked up the flag which had fallen from the hands of the fighters in the cause of the Commune and bore it boldly and confidently forward. Their battle-cry was: “Long live the social revolution! Long live the Commune!” And in another few years, the new workers’ party and the agitational work launched by it throughout the country compelled the ruling classes to release Communards who were still kept in prison by the government.

The memory of the fighters of the Commune is honoured not only by the workers of France but by the proletariat of the whole world. For the Commune fought, not for some local or narrow national aim, but for the emancipation of all toiling humanity, of all the downtrodden and oppressed. As a foremost fighter for the social revolution, the Commune has won sympathy wherever there is a proletariat suffering and engaged in struggle. The epic of its life and death, the sight of a workers’ government which seized the capital of the world and held it for over two months, the spectacle of the heroic struggle of the proletariat and the torments it underwent after its defeat—all this raised the spirit of millions of workers, aroused their hopes and enlisted their sympathy for the cause of socialism. The thunder of the cannon in Paris awakened the most backward sections of the proletariat from their deep slumber, and everywhere gave impetus to the growth of revolutionary socialist propaganda. That is why the cause of the Commune is not dead. It lives to the present day in every one of us.

The cause of the Commune is the cause of the social revolution, the cause of the complete political and economic emancipation of the toilers. It is the cause of the proletariat of the whole world. And in this sense it is immortal.

Thirty five years after America's war

BY IRA BERKOVIC

America's war in Vietnam, and the international movements that sprung up in opposition to it, are central events in the history of 20th century radical politics. The events of that conflict continue to cast a long shadow over the contemporary left's understanding of imperialist war. Looking back over a distance of 35 years, Vietnam still has a huge amount to teach us in terms of the nature of capitalist imperialism, the nature of Stalinism, and what kind of anti-war politics and movement socialists should aspire to fight for and build.

BACKGROUND

Vietnam's history is inextricably bound up with the history of French and then American colonialism in the far-east.

Following a successful war against French rule (which had been in place from 1887), Vietnam was formally partitioned in 1954, with Ho Chi Minh in control of the "communist" north and the authoritarian Catholic Ngo Dinh Diem ruling the Western-backed south.

Officially partition was a temporary measure, to be followed by internationally-supervised free elections across the country. But that never happened.

The story of Ho Chi Minh's coming to power is a long and complex one, which involves his murderous repression of the once-powerful Vietnamese Trotskyist movement. Those Trotskyists had weakened their defences by seeing Stalinism as somehow historically-progressive rather than a hostile class force. It was a mistake that Trotskyists all over the world would make again and again in the following years (and continue to make to this day); but the stakes were rarely as high as they were for Tha Thu Tau, Ngo Van and the other courageous Vietnamese Trotskyists killed by the Stalinists in 1946.

By the early 1960s, Diem's regime was deeply unpopular and a CP-backed insurgency in the south was growing in support. Wired on Cold War paranoia and ruling-class thinking about "domino effects" (if one country falls to "communist" rule, others will inevitably follow), America increased its presence in south Vietnam so that by 1963 there were 16,000 American military personnel in the region.

The role of US troops was simple — to defend Diem's southern regime (and by extension the interests of American imperialism in the region) against the newly-created National Liberation Front (NLF), backed by the north and, beyond it, the Stalinist bloc — the great imperial counterweight to America's power.

It was becoming increasingly clear that Diem and his

own forces were not capable of defeating the NLF. The American bourgeoisie began to favour greater intervention and a more direct bid for control, rather than maintaining an "arms-length" stake in the region through Diem's client regime. A group of generals and other military leaders, backed by the CIA, overthrew Diem in 1963.

With the American military now in more or less direct control of the war against the NLF, the American military leader Paul Harkin complacently predicted victory "by Christmas" 1963. But the puppet regime installed in late 1963 lasted only until January of the following year, when General Nguyen Khanh staged another coup and took power for himself.

In March 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson began a bombing campaign, and a few days later began a ground war, dispatching 3,500 marines to south Vietnam. By December, this number had been increased to 200,000.

America's military campaign became increasingly brutal, using the deadly and highly flammable chemical napalm to burn the Stalinist fighters out of their jungle terrain. The now-famous photograph of Kim Thuc, the horribly-burned young girl fleeing a napalm raid, shows the ferocity with which America battered

Fleeing a napalm raid

Vietnam and its people.

Despite their superior military prowess, the US were unable to crush the NLF. They had radically misunderstood the NLF's resistance, and how the Vietnamese Stalinists had managed to win hegemony over the aspirations of the people of the whole of Vietnam (north and south) to have genuine national independence and self-determination, free from interference from America (or any other colonial power) and its puppet-regimes.

By the 1970s, after a decade of horrifically bloody conflict, and having failed to beat the NLF, America (now under President Nixon) began to look for ways of scaling back its involvement. By April 1975, the NLF flag was flying above the southern capital of Saigon.

THE AFTERMATH

The new Stalinist regime's consolidation of power was swift and ruthless. It set up "re-education camps" for its opponents in which nearly 200,000 people died.

It is estimated that up to 1,000,000 people were imprisoned without charge or trial by the regime against the backdrop of the social and economic devastation wrought by America's war.

More and more people attempted to flee the country. By 1979, Vietnam was at war again. China invaded. Thousands of ethnically-Chinese Vietnamese citizens now fled, fearing reprisals.

Fleeing Stalinist-run Vietnam was almost as risky as choosing to stay. It involved the bribing of officials and travelling long distances (sometimes thousands of miles) in open waters using dangerously unreliable vessels. Several neighbouring countries, including Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia interned refugees in camps. Conditions in these camps were horrific, with beatings, rape and torture commonplace. Boats arriving at Thailand also faced attacks from the Thai guards. Although the USA made a show of donating aid to the refugee support operations, very little of it ever trickled down to the refugees themselves.

Another key element of the war, and one that had particularly tragic consequences for the region, was the assistance north Vietnam was able to give Pol Pot's "Khmer Rouge" (the Communist Party) in coming to power in Cambodia. Pol Pot's rule (1975-79) resulted in a state-led genocide.

A combination of forcing people out of the cities into agricultural labour camps, the execution of dissidents, suspected dissidents and, eventually, people who simply looked like a dissident might look (glasses-wearing "intellectuals", for example) and food rationing poli-

Will you help the socialist alternative?

Since the general election, Workers' Liberty's fund drive has stalled. But it is still as important as ever that our supporters help out in any way they can so we can continue fighting for socialist ideas within the working-class movement.

With Osborne's cuts budget now out in the open, we need to step up our work to create a socialist voice against the cuts and privatisation agenda of David Cameron and Nick Clegg. We have no rich donors or "captains of industry" to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this year and it can only come from donations from people who agree with our ideas and think our work is valuable.

CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college? Contact our office for details.
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and click on the donate button
- Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank, to directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number as above);
- Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

Continued on page 22

cies that caused food shortages led to the deaths of millions of people, in one of the most anti-human “experiments” in the history of Stalinist rule. For the Khmer Rouge, the urban population (estimated around 3,000,000) were designated as expendable. They were either to be forced (at gunpoint) into the countryside or simply to be disposed of. The regime’s motto on the urban population? “To keep you is of no benefit, to destroy you is no loss.”

The Khmer Rouge was overthrown by its former Vietnamese patrons in 1979.

THE LESSONS

For most of the international left the Vietnam war was a two-sided conflict between a brutalised, colonised people on the one hand and the military might of American imperialism on the other.

The only way to relate to the conflict was to side explicitly with the Vietnamese people and solidarise directly with its military leadership, the NLF.

It is certainly true that the conflict was a great deal more straightforwardly “two-sided” than American invasions in the 2000s of either Iraq or Afghanistan (both of which are compared to Vietnam by many on the left). In those cases the people of both nations were caught in the crossfire between American imperialism and a less-powerful (but no less reactionary) oppressive force — Saddam Hussein’s Ba’ath regime and the Taliban respectively. America’s intervention in Vietnam had much more of the character of historical colonialism, with a direct bid for rule and control, rather than a police operation aimed at keeping the country secure and its markets hospitable and resources open to capitalist exploitation.

The victory of the NLF and the consequent withdrawal of US forces did represent the democratic will of the Vietnamese people — it brought national independence for the entire people. The potential victory of the Taliban of the sectarian Islamist militias in Iraq would not be equivalent, given that those forces are based not on the popular majority but on particular elements within Afghan and Iraqi society, as mortally hostile to other forces within those societies as they are to American imperialism.

It is also true that the enormous and radical anti-war movements which grew up all over the world in opposition to America’s brutality were hugely positive, bringing millions of young people into direct engagement with the ideas of the revolutionary left. And it is also positive that, on the whole, those anti-war movements did not adopt liberal or pacifist perspectives that simply mumbled about “peace” between America and Vietnam but openly proclaimed their support for and solidarity with the Vietnamese people.

But beyond these basic lines, we must also — with the benefit of hindsight — conclude that the left, at best, did not say enough about the true character of Vietnamese Stalinism. In many cases, it got the picture wrong entirely.

The Vietnamese NLF did not conform to the mainstream Trotskyist left’s picture of what Stalinism was. NLF fighters were not overcoat-wearing, cigar-puffing bureaucrats riding around in limos with tinted windows to make visits to state-owned factories churning out millions of tonnes of pig iron.

They were a guerilla army, conducting a heroic struggle against the military might of the USA in defence of their freedom. They had genuine mass support and a real base in the largely still rural population. They appeared to be Vietnamese Robin Hoods. While many Trotskyists openly called the Vietnamese CP “Stalinist”, this often mostly a shorthand way of saying that the CP could not be trusted to prosecute a sufficiently determined and revolutionary struggle against American imperialism. The NLF were in the right field; they were just not playing the game well enough.

The reality was different. The Stalinist leaders of the NLF represented a historically-reactionary force that would, when elevated to the level of state power, preside over a regime that would be characterised by a terrorist hostility towards basic democracy and human rights. The full extent of the Stalinist barbarism in Cambodia or even Vietnam could not necessarily have been entirely foreseen, but a deeper understanding of the reactionary nature of Stalinism was entirely possible.

A clear warning was there in the 1940s when Ho Chi Minh massacred the Vietnamese Trotskyist movement; no-one on the international left, including Workers’ Fight (the organisation that would eventually become the AWL), paid sufficient heed to that warning.

Workers’ Fight said that the post-war regime would be “an enemy rather than an ally” of working-class

democracy. But we were still shackled to a “two-camps” view of the world, in which Stalinist struggles against American imperialism were necessarily on the side of progress and in which the regimes generated by such struggles could also be expected to be somehow progressive (“deformed workers’ states”, as the dogmatic formula had it).

The International Marxist Group, the biggest and most visible “Trotskyist” element in the anti-war movement, described the Vietnamese CP as “empirical revolutionaries” and denied they were Stalinists at all. The International Socialists (today the SWP), had a formally better position on Stalinism (understanding it as a form of class rule which it called “state capitalist”). In a rare moment of political distinction the IS’s Chris Harman dared, at a solidarity rally, to challenge the northern Vietnamese ambassador about the Vietnamese Trotskyists. But even IS essentially saw the Vietnamese CP as being on the side of “progress”, using their “state capitalist” label as a way of saying that nothing better could be expected in Vietnam because it was a small and poor country.

The great blood-drenched lesson of the Vietnam war and its aftermath is that the world was not, and is not, divided up into “imperialist” and “anti-imperialist” camps, wherein the struggles of the latter against the former must always be progressive. There are two great forces in the world, but they are not “imperialism” and “anti-imperialism”; they are labour and capital, workers and bosses. A perspective that took as its starting point the struggles of working-class and other oppressed people for basic freedoms, rather than an abstracted notion of historical progress as carried forward by Stalinist “anti-imperialism”, would have been much more useful. The Vietnamese CP, while very capable of being effectively revolutionary against the US and its sometime regional allies, was also murderously counter-revolutionary against the peasantry and urban workers of Vietnam.

VIETNAM TODAY

Scarcely more than 10 years after the end of the war, the Vietnamese regime abandoned its “socialist” rhetoric and autarkic economic policies. It oriented to the capitalist world market while maintaining the police-state totalitarian features of Stalinism. It has followed a similar road to that of China, facilitating globalised-capitalist development on the basis of merciless exploitation.

Multinational corporations such as Nike, McDonald’s and Disney have all been exposed running sweatshop operations in Vietnam. One factory, making products for McDonald’s and Disney sub-contractors, was found paying its workers as little as six cents an hour. Their 70-hour weeks would see them take home just \$4.20.

How can such hyper-exploitation take place in “socialist” Vietnam? The few remaining ultra-Stalinists delude themselves with fantasy. Writing in the *Morning Star*, Doug Nicholls finds in Vietnam “a strong economy [...] a proud democracy, an assertive trade union

A mass protest movement

movement. Yes there are vast economic zones where transnationals operate, but capital is controlled. It cannot pour away like it does from our country, and the needs of the nation are primary.” He overlooks the sweatshop wages, the lack of free press or independent parties and the fact that the “assertive trade union movement” he mentions is entirely state-controlled.

Alternatively, one might conclude that more recent generations of Vietnamese leaders have simply abandoned the legacy of Ho Chi Minh (who died in 1969) and taken a treacherous new (capitalist) road.

But both conclusions are wrong. The truth is that, from the point of view of the Vietnamese and world working-class, the Vietnamese Stalinists were always a hostile class force and, since the thawing of the Cold War and the collapse of Stalinism in the eastern bloc, have simply chosen more pragmatic means through which to exercise their rule.

Importantly, there is a small but growing independent workers’ movement in Vietnam. 2009 saw wildcat strikes involving tens of thousands of workers, demanding increases in the minimum wage. Two independent trade union centres, the United Worker-Farmers Organization of Vietnam, (UWFO) and the Independent Workers’ Union of Vietnam, (IWUV), were established to challenge the Vietnamese General Confederation of Labour (VGCL), the state-run labour front.

Making active solidarity with that new and developing independent workers’ movement must be the foundation of any attempt to develop a socialist perspective towards Vietnam today.

Speaking at the regime’s own 35th anniversary celebrations, Lieutenant General Le Thanh Tam warned that Vietnam had to be wary of “hostile forces who use democracy and human rights as a pretext to sabotage Vietnam.” While few on the left today would positively defend or support the modern Vietnamese regime as a model of progress or an example to follow, Le Thanh Tam’s logic is one with which many socialists will be all-too familiar.

How easy is it to imagine the same words coming out of the mouth of a Ba’athist, or a representative of Ahmedinejad’s theocracy, or Robert Mugabe? And how easy is it to imagine some leftists, including would-be Trotskyists, making excuses for such a person on the basis that their de facto anti-imperialism (a status gained, more often than not, by mere fact of being incidentally opposed to the current policy of the US ruling-class rather than by any positive programme) makes them in some way progressive or worthy of support?

Against a left that apologises or makes excuses for barbarism, a re-examination of the lessons of Vietnam reaffirms the need to build a revolutionary left that does not see the world as a politico-military game of football in which we can intervene only by cheering on one side or another.

The old “third-camp” slogan — “neither Washington nor Moscow” — might have once been extended to include “nor Hanoi”. The lessons of Vietnam teach us that today it might be adapted: “neither Washington nor Tehran, nor Havana, nor Caracas — but interna-

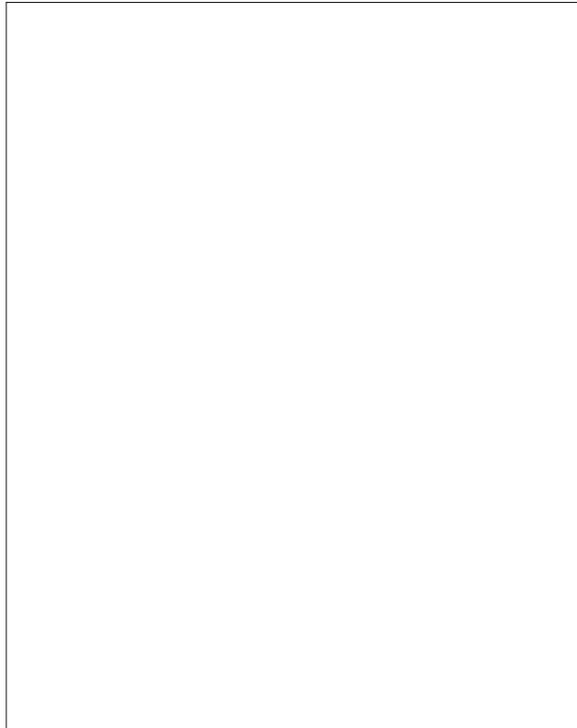
Trotskyism and the capitalist crisis

What kind of politics does the labour movement need to defeat the Tories? This year's Ideas for Freedom will open with a debate between Workers' Liberty and the soft-left Labour Party pressure group Compass about the essence of what it is to be left-wing.

Should we seek broad "progressive" coalitions across social classes, with the labour movement as only one, subordinate element — or is it working-class politics that we need? Is replacing capitalism with socialism a realistic goal? We will be arguing unambiguously yes!

Many of the sessions at IFF 2010 will be about how we gear up to fight the effects of capitalist crisis and Tory cuts. Maria Exall of the CWU, Joe Marino of the Bakers' Union and Paul Holmes, left general secretary candidate in Unison, will be taking part in a panel on how we can make the labour movement fight. Young trade union activists Ruth Cashman and Becky Crocker will be leading a session on being a revolutionary at work.

We will be looking at the economics of the crisis with Alfredo Saad-Filho; at class battles in Greece and across the Eurozone with Marxist economist Costas Lapavitsas; and at how to fight inequality with Becky Shah of the Equality Trust.



There will be historical lessons too — from class struggle under the last Liberal-Tory coalition, in the 1920s, to the origins of today's student left, to the role of women in the Russian revolution.

To rearm the labour movement with the necessary politics to fight and win, we think the left has to take the Marxist tradition seriously. A number of introductory sessions at Ideas for Freedom will look at Trotsky's contribution to Marxism, including his writings on the fight against fascism and his celebrated theory of permanent revolution, which we will argue is much misused on the left.

We will be revisiting Engels' ground-breaking work on the origins of women's oppression, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*. And we will be debating differences within the would-be Marxist left today, taking on Workers Power on Palestine and Socialist Appeal on the Trotskyist tradition more broadly.

All that plus the Lucas Plan, protest songs, working-class self-education and much more... Ideas for Freedom is an event virtually unique on the British left in combining political seriousness with fresh thinking and a welcoming, friendly atmosphere in which questions and debate are encouraged. If you want a socialist movement that takes both ideas and activism seriously, make sure you're there.

Agenda

Friday night

Film showing at the Exmouth Arms, Starcross Street, Euston NW1 2HR, from 7pm

Saturday 10 July

11 Registration

12 Plenary debate: "progressive" politics or class politics? Workers' Liberty debates Compass

1.30 Lunch

2.10 a. What is the Trotskyist tradition today? Paul Hampton (Workers' Liberty) debates Rob Sewell (Socialist Appeal)

b. Alfred Saad-Filho, author of *Marx's Capital* and *Anti-Capitalism: a Marxist introduction on the economics of the crisis*

c. What openings for struggle in the Labour Party? With Pete Willsman (Labour Party National Executive member)

3.30 a. How do we make the labour movement fight the Tories? Maria Exall (CWU), Joe Marino (bakers' union), Paul Holmes (left candidate for Unison general secretary, tbc)

b. Introduction to Marxism: Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, uses and misuses. Duncan Morrison

c. The political economy of Shanghai. Camila Bassi

4.50: a. The origins of today's student left: a history, 1980-2010. Jill Mountford (organiser for the Socialist Students in NOLS group, late 1980s), Ed Maltby (Workers' Liberty and National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts activist)

b. Class-struggle against the Liberal-Tory coalition... in the early 1920s. Janine Booth, author of *Guilty and Proud of It*, on the Poplar council rebellion

c. Is capitalism in decline? Hillel Ticktin (*Critique* magazine) debates Martin Thomas (Workers' Liberty)

Inessa Armand: Women and the Russian revolution

6.10 Dinner

7 a. Working-class environmentalism: the lessons of the Lucas Plan. Dave Elliott (scientist and central figure in the Lucas Plan), Stuart Jordan (Workers' Liberty)

b. Being a revolutionary at work. Ruth Cashman (young activist in Lambeth Unison), Becky Crocker (young activist in London Transport RMT)

8.15 Close

How do we get the labour movement to fight?

Sunday 11 July

11 a. Israel-Palestine: what should the left say? Two states and workers' unity or single state and right of return? Camila Bassi (Workers' Liberty) debates Marcus Halaby (Workers Power)

b. Women and women's liberation in the Russian revolution. Elaine Jones

c. Introduction to Marxism: why Trotsky on fascism is so important. Max Munday

12.20 Lunch

1 a. Protest songs and working-class culture. Jill Mountford

b. Introduction to Marxism: Where does women's oppression come from? Engels' *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Rosie Woods

c. Fighting inequality. Becky Shah (The Equality Trust), John Moloney (Workers' Liberty)

2.15 a. Introduction to Marxism: do revolutionaries need a party? Cathy Nugent

b. Bourgeois education and working-class self-education. Colin Waugh (Editor, *Post-16 Educator*)

c. The working class and the Eurozone crisis, with Greek Marxist economist Costas Lapavitsas

3.30 Closing plenary

4.30 Close

At: Highgate Newtown Community Centre, 25 Bertram St, London N19 5DQ (Archway Tube)

Creche, accommodation and cheap food provided. Speakers' labour movement positions are cited for identification only.

You can book online www.workersliberty.org/ideas

Facebook event www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=294651267497&ref=nf

Weekend tickets bought before 12 June are £20 waged, £12 low-waged/students and £7 unwaged/school students. Day tickets also available: £12, £8, £4.

For more information email awl@workersliberty.org or ring 020 7207 0706.