

An injury to one is an injury to all

Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY

Volume 3
No. 123
3 December
2007
30p/80p

**Don't let capitalism
destroy the planet**

**END THE
RULE OF
PROFIT!**

See page 3

What if "teddy" teacher were Sudanese?

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

GILLIAN Gibbons, the teacher who was locked up by the Sudanese authorities for allowing her class to call a teddy bear Muhammad, said of her experience: "The Sudanese people I found to be extremely kind and generous and until this happened I only had a good experience."

She also expressed hope that news of her experience would not stop westerners from going to Sudan.

She's certainly right on the first account, and not being too unrealistic on the second. After all it's the Sudanese people — the vast majority not fundamentalist bigots, not rich and not powerful — who have the most to fear from the fascist Sudanese dictatorship.

If Gillian Gibbons had been a Sudanese teacher, informed on by some stooge of the government or religious authorities, he or she would have not been locked up for a few days but for months or years; would have been whipped; may now be dead. The Sudanese government do not always take prisoners.

It is good news that Gillian Gibbons has been freed and is in such good spirits, especially as she did not make a "mistake" or "misjudgment" but committed no crime at all. But remember exactly what her jailers have done to Sudan!

- Demolished all political democracy since 1989, when military ruler Omar Hassan al Bashir came to power, backed by the Islamist National Islamic Front (a Sudanese offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood).

- Continued to wage a horrific civil war in the south of the country which, in the course of two decades, has killed two million people and displaced three million.

- Systematically plundered the natural resources in order to bolster their own military-Islamist state.

- Most recently, overseen and perpetuated horrific violence and repression in the Darfur region which has killed 400,000, displaced 2 million and left 3.5 million dependent on international aid.

In Darfur violence is on the increase. Allies of the state regularly attack refugees in the camps of the region. The government is moving its allies into the region and integrating its state-sponsored militia, the janjaweed, into official security structures. They are trying to force refugees to go back to areas that are not safe.

It was easy for UK parliamentarians to secure the release of Gillian Gibbons. It would take vastly more political pressure to help the people of Darfur. Yet there are very many ways in which the UK government and other governments could do that. They choose not to.

They choose to put their faith in a very small UN peace keeping operation which will have to act as protector in many refugee camps over a vast area and an arbitrator among the many groups and militias (some government allies) now struggling for control in the region. Tragically, they will fail.

Don't let cash row silence union politics

BY GERRY BATES

AFTER the "cash for peerages" row, the New Labour party of Gordon Brown and Tony Blair is now deep in another scandal about dodgy funding from millionaires, one which has already brought a police investigation and forced the resignation of Labour Party general secretary Peter Watt.

As in the previous scandal, Labour Party treasurer (and TGWU deputy general secretary) Jack Dromey says he was kept in the dark about the donations made to the party through stooge intermediaries by businessman David Abrahams. According to BBC News, Peter Watt consulted the "officers of the National Executive Committee" before resigning, but the Executive as such has had no say in the matter.

The unions should certainly demand a thorough review. But by now it is like polishing a pigsty. The shady millionaire-funding connections date back to John Smith's period as

Labour leader (1992-1994), and grew enormously in Tony Blair's first years, 1994-7, when millions of pounds in murky business donations were pumped into making the "private offices" of Blair and other New Labour leaders into more lavishly-staffed outfits than the Labour Party's own headquarters.

Those millionaire connections are now a way of life, not an aberration, for New Labour's top people.

The scandal has been used by the Tories and Gordon Brown to initiate a debate on party funding and reintroduce the idea of state funding of political parties. A government sponsored review on the issue — the Hayden-Phillips report — has been stalled. A report in 2006 recommended a £50,000 limit on political donations; which implied banning union affiliations to political parties.

Brown has been able to effectively break the link by banning unions from putting political motions to Labour Party conference. But it

looks as if proposals may come forward now which allow union affiliation money over the £50,000 limit, but ban any *extra* union donations. Such extra money may be "taxation without representation", but such a ban would block union funding of a future, better workers' party too.

Any idea that the New Labour gang can be straightened out by pressure and lobbying is an illusion. That is why socialists, and those unions which are prepared to make some political stand for working-class interests, and want to create a healthier political culture in this country, must now work to unite the left to build a new movement for working-class representation, drawing in local Labour Parties where they can.

Scotland won't play second fiddle to England yet again!

BY DALE STREET

DON'T let revelations about Paul Abrahams' £664,000 donations to the Labour Party overshadow Scottish Labour Party leader Wendy Alexander's own outstanding contribution to the Labour Party sleaze scandal!

For our readers' benefit, we attempt to answer the outstanding questions.

Isn't the amount involved a paltry £950?

Yes — but that's the point! When Alexander stood for Scottish Labour Party leader in the summer, her campaign team had the brilliant idea of soliciting donations a fraction under £1,000. (The sources of donations beneath that figure do not need to be publicly disclosed.) Ten donations to Alexander's leadership campaign were for the not-really-mathematically-round figure of precisely £995.

But don't the sources of all donations need to be disclosed to the Electoral Commission?

Yes, but that's where Alexander's problems really start to get serious. The £950 donation from Jersey-based property developer Paul Green was recorded for the purpose of disclosure to the Electoral Commission as a donation from the Glasgow-based company Combined Property Services. But Green is a client of that company, not its owner. And the £950 was paid by Green as a personal cheque. Concealing the source of a donation is a criminal offence.

But isn't Jersey part of Great Britain? As in the statement: "During the Second World War the only British territory occupied by the Nazis was Jersey and the Channel Isles."

Yes and no. As any tax-avoidance expert or adviser on party-political donations can tell you, Jersey is not really "British". Its inhabitants (aka: tax exiles) cannot go on the electoral register. That's why, under Labour's own legislation, it's a criminal offence for political parties to accept donations from them.

Perhaps Alexander didn't know anything about this donation?

That's what Alexander is claiming. One slight problem, though, is the letter signed and sent by Alexander thanking Paul Green (not Combined Property Services) for his donation. And the letter from Alexander was sent to Green's Jersey address (not Combined

Property Services' Glasgow address).

But hasn't Alexander's campaign manager claimed that the first Alexander knew that the donation came from Green personally was on Thursday 29 November?

Yes indeed! Last week's *Sunday Herald* detailed a document compiled by someone in Alexander's office, apparently on 5 November, which shows that at that time it was already known that the source of the donation was Paul Green, and that he lived in Jersey. "Permissible?" has been entered against his name and the donation. A few days later the Electoral Commission was informed that the donation in question had come from Combined Property Services.

Any other problems for Alexander from that document?

Only that it lists a £995 donation from the First Group Chief Executive Moir Lockhead, but then lists the same donation, for the purposes of disclosure to the Electoral Commission, as having been made by John Lyons, a former Labour MP who became a First Group consultant after losing his seat. Lockhead denies having made any donation, and Lyons says that he never asked Lockhead for a donation.

But, irrespective of where Green lives, isn't he a respected businessman who has even been proposed for a knighthood?

Oh, yes... Labour MSP Charlie Gordon backed Green for recognition in the Queen's honours list. And that's the same Charlie Gordon whose Holyrood election campaign received a £950 donation from Green, drawn on his personal bank account. The same Charlie Gordon who approached Green for a donation for Alexander's leadership election campaign, likewise drawn on his personal bank account.

Wasn't Alexander's status so high that only eleven weeks ago she was elected unopposed as the Scottish Labour Party leader?

Yes — but all that that tells you is that Labour's MSPs are a bunch of tossers, who couldn't even muster enough signatures to mount a challenge to Alexander. They just don't make social-democrats like they used to.

Will Alexander be resigning?

Not if she can get away with it. Without wishing to stereotype lame ducks, she's the

Wendy Alexander: "Ooh, noo, I've been a bit of a chump"

ultimate lame-duck leader. But the Labour Party national leadership is afraid of a "domino effect".

You mean that if Alexander falls, then Scotland will go Communist, and after that so too will Lapland, Iceland, Greenland, and the whole of Scandinavia?

No, that's the SSP you're thinking of. The "domino effect" is that if Alexander resigns because of £950, then Harman will have to resign because of £5,000, and then how many will end up having to resign because of £664,000?

Alexander has to stay put in order to save the skin of London-based Labour MPs and Labour apparatchiks. In the absence of more revelations, Scotland is expected to put up with Alexander because of the knock-on effect which her resignation would have in Westminster. If that's not proof of Scotland's second-class colonial status, then what is?

Bashir: not generally known for mercy

What the UN climate change conference won't say: End the rule of profit!

THE United Nations Climate Change Conference meets in Bali from 3 to 14 December. There will be a flurry of greenwash. But the problem will remain: the economy does not need to be tweaked a little bit to include a carbon emissions. It needs a complete overhaul to produce for human need and to prepare for the climate chaos that is inevitably coming our way.

Capitalism needs to grow in order to survive. Its core operation is the one that turns a billion dollars into two billion dollars and then into four billion - and so on without limit...

No amount of international emissions trading or carbon offsetting will tame this relentless drive to accumulate. Capitalism's growth is based on the consumption of resources in order to produce riches and wealth for the few.

The wheels of the capitalist economy do not turn for human need but for the sake of profit — and more profit, and yet more profit.

Capitalism is an enemy of the working class and an enemy of the world. Its insatiable appetite for the world's resources and its degradation of the majority of the world's people will not be stopped until the working class seizes power and places the economy under its own democratic control.

That means: take industry out of the hands of the profiteers and place it under workers' control where it can be used for the satisfaction of human need and to construct a sustainable relationship between humanity and the natural resources of the planet.

Who, given conscious collective control, would push for more gadgets today at the cost of ecological disaster tomorrow? The global economy is not some abstract principle, it is the product of our daily work. A society run by democratic economic planning can decide consciously to cut back some areas of consumption and to limit others — because it would have guarantees of a decent living standard for all. It would understand that the real measure of human wealth is cultured, leisured, sociable free time, not the accumulation of material tokens.

We are a very long way from the level of working class self-determination needed to achieve that, but we must build for it with urgency. In countries such as Iran, Nigeria or Venezuela, oil workers have shown their power. We must imagine a revolutionary worldwide workers' democracy linking up with those workers, controlling major oil fields, and deciding rationally on the use of those resources.

In Bali, the talks are designed to develop a new framework for the period beyond the Kyoto protocol of 1997, which runs out in 2012. Kyoto was already very limited. It asked for only a 5% reduction in emissions, and key countries, including the US, opted out. It was blighted by the fact that a number

of powerful multi-nationals lobbied hard against it with aggressive anti-environmental propaganda. And it has produced very little.

The annual growth rate of emissions over the last ten years has been not slower, but 30% faster, than the average for the past 40 years.

CAPITAL is nothing if not adaptable. In the run-up to Bali, big sections of the capitalist class have signalled that they accept climate change is a danger, and want to do something about it. Only, all their proposals are about extending the remit of capitalism and opening up new markets.

The report put out by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in the run-up to Bali says that "Global GHG [greenhouse gas] emissions due to human activities have grown... 70% between 1970 and 2004".

Carbon dioxide is the most important GHG. The use of fossil fuels (oil, coal, gas) and the destruction of forests (which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere) have driven its rise.

Some writers suggested that the problem could be solved painlessly by boosting the long-term trend for carbon dioxide emissions per unit of output to decline. In fact that trend has stalled since 2000.

Without any further measures or controls, GHG emissions would grow by between 25% and 90% by 2030. That will send us well on the way to the level of increase in global temperatures when possibly catastrophic "feedback" effects are triggered which make global warming self-accelerating: ice sheets go into irreversible meltdown, ecosystems collapse, and billions suffer water and food shortages.

The IPCC reckons we need to cut

global emissions by 85%, to 15% of their 2000 level. As George Monbiot points out, that means the UK cutting by 94%.

A group of multi-national corporations including Nike, British Airways, Shell and Rolls Royce, has signed up to a statement calling for a tough framework from Bali. What have we here? An unholy alliance of capitalists who have gone to enormous lengths to crush workers' organisations, obscure environmental debate and perpetuate war and disease, led by Prince Charles. The names of these companies are associated with massive human rights abuses in Colombia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, China as they prop up vicious regimes that crush workers movements and the forces for

The annual growth rate of emissions over the last ten years has been not slower, but 30% faster, than the average for the past 40 years.

democratic change.

Their "Bali Communiqué" argues that a shift to a low-carbon economy is not only "an environmental imperative but also an unprecedented economic and social opportunity."

"Unprecedented economic opportunity" sounds very much like a threat. And the group emphasises that it wants "an enhanced and extended carbon market" — that is, an extension of what the European Union already has, where quotas for carbon emissions are handed out to corporations and can then be advantageously "traded".

The Confederation of British Industry

has issued a long report "Climate Change: Everyone's Business". It "calls for a shift to a world where carbon becomes a new currency — so that consumers and businesses are rewarded for making the right choices. Carbon has to be priced according to supply and demand, under a system which leads to lower emissions, crosses national borders, and rewards good behaviour".

It wants the government to establish a stable regime so that the UK (i.e. UK capital) does not "miss out on the commercial opportunities that will emerge on the pathway to a low carbon economy".

But so sober a source as the *Financial Times* (26 April 2007) has already shown that "carbon markets leave much room for unverifiable manipulation".

"The vaunted European emissions trading system has been more a way of transferring quota rent to a few big emitters than an effective means of emissions control. The UK government has, for example, been honest enough to admit that large electricity generators gained £1.2 billion in quota rent for 2005 alone" (*FT*, 5 Dec 2007)..

The government, which has always tried to foster a close relationship with the CBI, has bought this logic and set up the "Commission on Environmental Markets and Economic Performance". This body sees the threat of world destruction as an "investment opportunity" in which "profit-seeking firms will respond to the early adoption of demanding, flexible environmental policies by innovating to reduce environmental impacts at less cost, in order to gain a competitive advantage."

• Bali Communiqué: <http://www.bali-communicque.com/communiqu.html>

• CBI report: <http://www.avtclient.co.uk/climate-report/>

www.workersliberty.org
solidarity@workersliberty.org

Editor: Cathy Nugent

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Cleaners win

TUBE cleaners working for contractors to Metronet are to receive substantial pay rises when Transport for London takes over the failed privateer's contracts, marking a huge victory for the RMT on London Underground.

A minimum of £7.20 an hour (London Living Wage) will now go to 900 cleaners on former Metronet contracts.

For some cleaners paid only the minimum legal wage of £5.85 it will mean an increase of at least £1.35 an hour.

The RMT continues to campaign for higher wages from all the cleaning contractors working on the Tube.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Edinburgh job cuts

ON 29 November Edinburgh City Council's SNP/Lib-Dem coalition administration announced plans to axe a thousand jobs. The announcement was e-mailed to staff even before the City Council unions had been informed.

Seven areas have been targeted for cutbacks, but home care services and home-helps are to bear the brunt. Other areas targeted by the Council include administration, call-centres, procurement, trading standards, and strategy.

Given that a large number of the posts are part-time — the one thousand posts translate into 882 full-time equivalents — and also involve a high proportion of agency staff, a disproportionately large number of posts at risk will be held by women.

The Council say the cuts will save £57 millions over three years. But the cost of implementing the cutbacks will amount to £27 millions (for redundancy payments, re-training, and new technology).

The background to the cutbacks is the Holyrood government's so-called "Shared Services Pathfinder" project. Initiated by the previous Labour/Lib-Dem administration, but now being pursued by the SNP, the project defines its goal as "the simplification, standardisation, and sharing of council processes and services."

Central is the idea that Councils should "share" service-provision and pool their resources wherever possible. Thus, for example, some staffing cutbacks are also planned by the Borders and Fife councils in conjunction with the Edinburgh cuts.

In reality, however, the Pathfinder project simply amounts to job losses and, inevitably, a worse level of service for the public.

The Council claims that half the posts to be axed are held by agency staff (i.e. technically not employees of the City Council itself), and the remaining job losses can be achieved through voluntary redundancy and natural wastage. But it has refused to rule out compulsory redundancies.

According to the chair of the Council's Finance Committee, the job losses will even be a boost for the rest of the Council's workforce: "It's good for staff, as they will be able to do their job more effectively and, hopefully, find it more rewarding."

The Tories have already declared their support for the cuts ("The Council is here to provide services, not to guarantee jobs.") And while Labour will probably quibble about the details of their implementation, they too also support the cuts in principle ("It was us that started this process and we want to make sure it works.")

Unison has pledged that it will take strike action in the event of any compulsory redundancies. UNISON meetings scheduled to be held as we go to press are due to discuss the proposed cuts and the union's response in more detail.

After the defeat: rank-and-file postal workers discuss how to launch organisation

BY SACHA ISMAIL

A SMALL group of postal workers met on Sunday 2 December to assess the result of the ballot which has now ended the CWU's long-running dispute over pay and working practices, and discuss the way forward for militants who opposed the deal. The meeting was organised by the same people who led the "No" campaign under the name "CWU Rank and File", though unsurprisingly it was considerably smaller than the launch meeting they organised at the start of the ballot.

Under pressure from management, the union leadership and their bank balances, postal workers voted 64%, on a 64% turn out, to accept the deal. After a brief post mortem of this result, discussion quickly passed onto how to move forward, including plans for dealing with victimisations resulting from the dispute, campaigns against mail centre closures in Coventry, Reading and Oxford and the issue of pensions — which is separate from the balloted agreement but on which the CWU leadership has already conceded changes such as a later retirement age and the closure of the final salary scheme.

The most contentious, and lengthy, part of the discussion was about how to create an ongoing rank-and-file organisation. The relatively small number of people present at the meeting highlighted the problems with simply declaring a new organisation which in fact

might not represent much. In addition, however, there is the problem of *Post Worker*, the self-styled rank-and-file paper associated with the SWP.

Post Worker is well-known and has a very wide circulation. As one might expect with a paper run essentially by the SWP, however, it is not produced in an open or democratic fashion: its editorial board is not open and does not meet regularly. Moreover, in order to maintain its links with left-talking officials such as Norman Candy, David Ward and even Billy Hayes, the paper runs no serious campaigns and has repeatedly equivocated on important industrial issues. This was the case even in the recent round of strikes, with *Post Worker*'s last issue published in early August and the paper playing absolutely no role in either the dispute or the "No" campaign.

Comrades from a number of backgrounds and groups asked the only SWP member present for his view on this — and also on other aspects of his organisation's conduct during the dispute, most crucially the fact that SWPer and CWU president Jane Loftus had not taken a public position against the deal or participated in the campaign against it. The comrade's replies were typically nonsensical and opportunistic: he argued that vocally opposing the deal would have meant Loftus losing positions in the union, squirming when asked what was more important to the SWP, union positions or the class struggle.

Since, unfortunately, no one from the *Post Worker* editorial board had attended the meet-

ing, those present agreed to send representatives to the next PW meeting (2pm, Sunday 9 December at the Exmouth Arms in Euston) with a series of proposals/demands.

1. The paper should take positions and organise independently of the leadership: with them when they act progressively, against them when they betray the membership, always remaining independent.

2. A bigger editorial board should be created; meetings should be regular, open to observers and scheduled well in advance to maximise attendance.

3. The paper should be produced regularly. 4. *Post Worker* should work with branches who opposed the deal to call a rank-and-file postal workers' representatives as the basis for a permanent rank-and-file network.

The SWP comrade, again, opposed these demands with some really shocking arguments (the "best" one was that it would be too expensive to call a conference!) Nonetheless, everyone else agreed that they should be taken forward to the upcoming meeting.

The meeting ended with a short discussion about next year's Postal Executive elections, including the possibility of anti-deal Postal Exec member Dave Warren (who sent his apologies to the meeting) standing against Dave Ward for deputy general secretary. It remains to be seen if it will succeed, but the defeat of the postal workers' strike shows that the project of creating a rank-and-file network on the post is absolutely the correct one.

Just say no!

BY A LOCAL GOVERNMENT WORKER

WORK in a social services department, where we are constantly fighting to provide the best service we can to their service users, with very scarce resources.

Like most councils our department is plagued by "performance indicators" (PIs) and the "star" system. The PIs work like targets in the NHS and league tables in schools. They put forward laudable aims — giving timely services, in a flexible and appropriate way — and that is what we all want. But in practice they skew the work done so that the limited resources are put into getting the appropriate box ticked, rather than prioritising, on the basis of assessment, areas of greatest need.

In council departments the reward for gaining stars (maximum of four, minimum of zero) has supposedly increased freedom, and meant less scrutiny. Most workers think all departments should be equally accountable! Four star councils find it much easier to recruit, whilst zero star councils spend vast amounts of their resources jumping through extra hoops.

The PIs that get measured change every year, and year on year the bar is raised while resources stay the same or decrease. This year, our department was struggling to meet its targets (the previous year the figures were successfully fiddled), and noticed they had "overspent" on staffing. So management thought they'd crank up the pressure, get rid of some temporary staff and reallocate the work the temps had been doing to the remaining staff.

We're a small team, and quite overworked already. We saw this looming impossible workload and felt a mixture of disbelief and

horror. But our management were quite clear the extra workload was compulsory, there was to be no negotiation; morale fell, and nervous breakdowns were widely predicted.

But both management and the workers underestimated the power of numbers. After a couple of weeks, the few people who hadn't been in it, signed up to the union, and the members unanimously instructed their reps to tell management the newly "allocated" work was not going to be accepted.

Management then agreed to meet with union reps. The reps did not accept the extra work, and made clear their intention to escalate the dispute as necessary. With no sign of a sell out management gave up after a week, and did a complete u-turn on every point, offering extra resources that had never been asked for... but were very welcome!

Management are now considering how they will regain the upper hand. We have learnt our lesson however — when everyone's in the union, and united in their aims, our voice is powerful. Now our reps are spreading the word to neighbouring departments. If you stand up to management, you can get them to back down — sometimes just by saying no!

Glasgow daycare

AT the time of writing, Glasgow City Council daycare strikers are about to begin their eighth week on strike. All the signs are that they will still be on strike over Christmas and the New Year.

The indefinite strike action is in response to the City Council's implementation of "Single Status", which is meant to end sexually discriminatory rates of pay in local authorities.

But here "equality" is being financed by levelling downwards rather than upwards. Under the proposed regrading of the care-workers' jobs, workers stand to lose up to £3,000 a year and managers stand to lose up to £6,000 a year.

At the same time, the Council has proposed a major re-organisation of daycare care, which, if implemented, would result in major job losses and the closure of half the daycentres in Glasgow.

The daycare strikers — who provide assistance to people with learning and physical difficulties, and also to their families and carers — have continued their high profile campaigning to achieve their demands for no pay cuts and proper regrading.

Weekly meetings for the carers of the strikers' client group have been taking place, in order to clarify the reasons for the strike and where the blame for it lies.

• Send donations to: UNISON, 18 Albion Street, Glasgow G1.

SCHOOLS

Pay fight on?

AS we go to press the publication of the School Teachers' Review Body recommendation on teachers' pay for 2008 is imminent. The STRB passed their

report on to the government at the end of October but there has been no announcement yet. Meanwhile the Government has reaffirmed its intention to restrict teachers' pay increases to no more than its 2 per cent public sector pay target.

Teachers' pay increases for 2005, 2006 and 2007 were all below inflation, and the union is committed to ballot its members if the 2008 pay award is also below inflation.

Department of Work and Pensions New tactics needed

BY A PCS MEMBER

A TWO day strike has called for 6 and 7 December in the Department of Work and Pensions by the civil service union, PCS. The PCS leadership in DWP have rightly called for all members to receive at least the rate of inflation (currently 4.2%) as an increase in year 1 and want talks about years 2 and 3. Under current arrangements 40% of DWP staff will get no consolidated increase in year 2 and 74% will 1% in the final year.

Unfortunately the necessary preparatory work for the dispute has not happened. Two days before the strike started branches learnt there was to be a two week overtime ban! This is not good enough: branches need time to talk to those thinking of working overtime and they have to arrange pickets.

Of course the ban is welcome but it should be indefinite. Benefit centres are only meeting their targets through extensive use of overtime.

The background to the dispute is important. Massive discrepancies in pay rates have opened up between workers in different government departments. For instance in 2010 DWP workers will be paid less than what HM Revenue and Customs counterparts are now getting! The PCS should systematically issue the pay differentials to members on a regular basis. This has not happened.

Given the national pay dispute has now been effectively suspended by the National Executive, and that they are not publishing wage differentials, the time has come to reconstitute the Branch Campaign for National Pay.

The Executive are we should undertake departmental action. But that way groups with disputes are being effectively left to fight on their own with nominal promises of "co-ordination" from the Executive.

For the past three years the union has had a tactic of calling a one or two day strike every six months or so. But this has not helped us stem the jobs massacre (25,000 posts have been deleted in DWP alone) or achieve a no compulsory redundancy agreement. It has not brought us further closer to national pay bargaining.

So will this tactic work in the DWP pay dispute?

Unless the frequency at which the strikes are called is greatly increased, the national strikes are protest strikes. They need to be augmented with further action.

Postal workers recently had sectional action where one part of the business was called out on one day, another part of the business was called out the following day etc. The impact of this was to prolong the disruption. Why can't we call out Benefit Centres one day, Jobcentres the next and contact centres the

following? Or call out groups of key workers for longer periods of action and support them with a levy across the union? We don't know whether these tactics will be successful as they have not been tried.

The Independent Left faction has been advocating these tactics for the past few years. They have been dismissed out of hand by the (dominant) Left Unity leaders, saying the tactic didn't work in a Jobcentre Plus safety dispute 27 years ago. Then the union was nearly bankrupted supporting isolated offices for months on end. But we are talking about bringing key workers out for weeks rather than months.

Another problem has been so-called confidentiality in pay talks. There have been in total 26 days of talks over months. Yet no communication has come out from the union apart from bland statement about progress being slow. Surely we should expect a weekly report, to keep members engaged. The membership are not a stage army that can be called upon at will. The union also say that management would refuse to negotiate unless we sign up to confidentiality. But this assertion has never been put to the test.

Management have been clever about the current offer and talks, dragging talks out until November and then imposing their offer just before Christmas.

The timing of this two day strike has caused us problems. And the imposed pay deal rewards those at the bottom in favour of those at the top - classic divide and rule.

The union needs to name further dates. They should also actively consider whether rolling, regional and/or selective action can be used, and immediately ballot for an indefinite overtime ban.

Remploy closures

REMPLOY workers have vowed to fight the government's plan to close 28 out of 83 factories in the publicly-subsidised network employing disabled workers. A few weeks ago government minister Peter Hain was promising sincerely to look seriously at the trade unions' plan to improve the running of the factories in order to stay within their £111 million subsidy.

But at the end of November Hain took out his axe and brought it down on a third of Remploy's factories and the jobs of 2,000 workers.

The government say the workers should find jobs in mainstream employment. They dress this up in anti-discrimination rhetoric: disabled workers should not be ghettoised. Shouldn't the government have made an assessment about whether or not the 2,000 unlucky workers will be able to get jobs, and whether those jobs will be as satisfying, well paid etc as those they have at Remploy? The choice of factories closed is said by the unions to have been entirely arbitrary.

The workers are been told they are not being realistic; Remploy has to make a profit. Perhaps the government was particularly horrified by the workers' proposal to get work from the public sector! That would be too easy and too "socialistic".

The government clearly resents paying the piddling amount of £111 million annually to keep 6,000 people in work - even if they are people who will find it very difficult to find jobs in a labour market which actively discriminates against disabled people. We don't do subsidy, says the government. Except when it comes to mismanaged banks when they're prepared to splash out billions in loans, that is.

Originally the government planned to close 42 factories. No doubt when the dust settles on these closures they will come back for more. The scrapping of Remploy is a scandalous, short-sighted, mean-spirited piece of butchery. We should help the Remploy workers fight back.

www.gmbemployworkers.info

INSIDE THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

NUS: everything to play for

BY MIKE WOOD, YORK UNIVERSITY DELEGATE

AT the Extraordinary NUS Conference on 4 December, the NUS leadership narrowly managed to pass its wide-ranging Governance Review. The Review will seriously damage NUS as a democratic institution that represents and campaigns for students, replacing its already bureaucratic structures with layer upon layer of inaccessible conferences and committees.

Throughout the day the right wing steadfastly refused to actually discuss the proposals contained in the review, preferring instead to focus on general calls for "change". This was just one example of the Newspeak that was so noticeable throughout the day. Proposals that will make NUS almost impossible to change were described as revolutionary, the revolutionary left were described as conservative, a review conducted over the summer holidays and therefore involving few normal students was described as far reaching.

When pressed on the actual content of the review the leadership resorted to barefaced lying and good old fashioned Trot-bashing. It was claimed that the left wanted to have Executive meetings on Christmas Day, and that the new "Board" proposed by the review would only have the most basic financial powers when it in fact has a loosely worded power of veto over large areas of union policy.

To rewrite the constitution requires a two thirds majority, which didn't seem that tall an order for them as the day began. There was no requirement for union delegations to be elected, let alone elected in a cross campus ballot, and sabbatical officers overwhelmingly dominated the conference.

Nevertheless the final vote was close. Several votes had been taken throughout the day on amendments and procedural motions that effectively functioned as indicators of the numbers on either side of the argument. The anti-review vote moved from around 28% to around 32% (165 voted to 'delete all' with 425 against). The right wing rushed through the final vote, cutting off the debate on the main motion and refusing calls for a card count.

We were almost certainly very close to overturning the review, and may actually have been successful if the vote had been counted. Regardless, the campaign to save and extend NUS democracy now has a strong platform to build from to defeat these proposals at Annual Conference, which is much more democratic in its makeup (the constitutional amendments have to pass through two conferences to be valid).

The right wing want NUS to function as more of a lobby group in terms of its campaigns, focusing more of the leaderships energies on the financial side of the union, such as NUS Extra. They have no desire to see NUS functioning as a union in the sense of a collective representative and campaigning body controlled by its members.

We need to put forward our vision for the future of NUS as a radically democratic campaigning body controlled from below - and go on to win.

Will the SWP scupper left unity?

FROM AWL STUDENTS

IF different sections of the left can work together to defend NUS democracy, why can't we work together to present a united challenge to those who are attacking democracy in the elections at the next NUS conference? That was a question that members of

Workers' Liberty were among the many people asking SWP and Respect students at the NUS Extraordinary Conference on 4 December. The response was universally positive - with a crucial exception.

In the first left/pro-democracy caucus held that day, NUS executive and SWP national committee member Rob Owen chose to ignore the question. When challenged again in the caucuses at the end of the day, he declared that the differences which exist on the left would make such a slate impossible, and that raising the idea could only divide pro-democracy campaigners.

When an AWL member asked some SWPers who had earlier expressed a positive opinion what they thought about this, Rob started to get angry. We were told we should have approached the SWP directly (in fact, Education Not for Sale and others have written to Student Respect, SWSS and Rob himself: so far no reply), and that this was not the place for it to be discussed. When we responded that what we wanted was not a secretive lash-up between two left groups, but a genuinely united left slate involving various different groups, broader campaigns and unaffiliated activists, and that an open caucus of the left was exactly the place to discuss it, Rob exploded.

The AWL "supported the invasion of Iraq," he shouted. We "supported Zionist aggression against Lebanon". When we pointed out that these accusations were blatantly untrue (for instance, ENS, on our instigation, was for some reason the only group to put a motion to NUS executive calling for immediate Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon), he continued to rant about Iraq.

Comrades of the SWP and Student Respect: we think your support for the clerical-fascist Hamas and Iraqi "resistance" is utterly wrong. When one of your leading representatives in the student movement can only respond to the case for a united slate by shouting lies about what we think, doesn't it suggest that your position is not very well-founded?

In Unison the SWP-led group United Left last year (successfully) stood two AWL members on its slate for the Health section of the executive. So shouldn't both our groups be involved in a united left slate for NUS's full-time sabbatical elections, uniting broader forces on the left than either of us can muster?

Why can't we unite the left around basic themes such as defence and extension of NUS democracy; a fighting union that organises mass action on issues like free education; and an orientation to the labour movement and other struggles against exploitation and oppression?

Between 1998 and 2001, the SWP and AWL were both represented on united slates, which won several full-time elections and in 1998 and 1999 came close to winning the presidency. For the last few years, in contrast, the SWP has concluded electoral pacts with Student Broad Left. Why is it that the SWP can work with these not-very-left-wing Stalinists and courtiers to Ken Livingstone, but not with other Marxists and forces from the radical left?

Is it that the leadership of the SWP doesn't want to be part of something it can't totally dominate?

Comrades of the SWP and Respect: hold your leaders to account! Don't let them scupper the possibility of a united left at next year's NUS conference!

Support the workers' movement in Iran!

Statement by the International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran

THE recent extended wave of oppression against the well-known activists of workers' organisations in Iran and other social movements is not a new incident but a routine practice of the Islamic Republic of Iran. This wave of repression nevertheless exhibits particular characteristics, including the radicalisation and development of class-based labour protests, advancing social movements within the specific socio-economic context and pressures from both within the country and internationally.

These conditions have jeopardized the entirety of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Social and economic crises are rapidly escalating. It is a proven fact that the promises of the capitalist regime of Iran are false and that this regime has brought nothing but the continuous oppression of working people. This regime has caused ever-increasing poverty and misery for the working class.

In an international context, the threat of military action and the economic sanctions imposed by the warmongering, US-led capitalist states pose a serious threat to the people of Iran, especially the poor and the deprived masses. At the same time, these threats have been used by the Islamic Republic to severely suppress and silent the workers' movement and all other social struggles.

The Islamic Republic uses the existing crisis against the people of Iran to its advantage. It deceitfully acts as if the pressures from the imperialist countries are the cause of protests inside Iran, and attempts to depict the protesters as the agents of "foreigners". That is why false accusations such as "acting against national security" have been declared against activists and detainees throughout the last few months.

The capitalist regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran combines fear mongering and intimidation with arrests and imprisonment to crush all the collective struggles for independent organisations of workers, women, students, teachers, writers and oppressed ethnic communities, as well as the struggles of other social and legal rights' advocates. The regime is determined to stop the development of grassroots organisations and to impose on the Iranian people a feeling of hopelessness.

Given such a context, we, the activists of the Iranian workers' movement abroad, wish not only to expose the inhuman and reactionary nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran, but also to strongly condemn any war, militarist policy or economic sanctions imposed by the capitalist states of the world, which would have catastrophic consequences for the workers and the disadvantaged people of Iran.

We further emphasize that the claims made by the capitalist and the imperialist states that they intend to support progressive movements such as the Iranian labour movement are totally false and that we will strive to expose their true intentions.

We condemn the assassination of Majid Hamidi. We condemn the arrest of the labour activists of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company and all charges against them, as well as the arrests of Sanandaj workers and all other incarcerated students, women, teachers, writers and ethnic minorities. We demand the unconditional release of Mahmoud Salehi, Mansour Osanloo, Ebrahim Madadi and the immediate release of the incarcerated workers of the Haft Tapeh Sugar Cane Company.

We demand annulment of all jail time and the lash sentences against workers in

Kurdistan and an end to the harassment and legal persecution of workers' activists. We call for equal rights for all migrant workers in Iran, including workers from Afghanistan. We believe refugee workers should be legally accepted in all countries.

We believe that solidarity with the imprisoned workers and the struggle to free all political prisoners who are jailed because they have been striving towards workers' liberation is an ongoing responsibility of all genuine defenders of progressive social movements around the world.

We encourage all labour and trade union activists as we all as all labour, socialist and progressive organisations and parties around the world to participate actively in solidarity with the Iranian workers' movement, especially with the workers behind bars.

• www.workers-iran.org

Coverage on Iraq

www.workersliberty.org/iraq

Pakistani socialists launch financial appeal

PERVEZ Musharraf has stood down as head of the armed forces and been sworn in a civilian President. Thus he has achieved what he set out to do by imposing a state of emergency on 3 November and sacking the judges who ruled his continuance as President was unconstitutional. Many opponents of his regime remain in jail. Although Musharraf has called elections for 8 January, he has not ended the state of emergency.

Before the state of emergency the socialist party, the Labour Party Pakistan, wanted to stand as part of a loose coalition, the Awami Jamhoori Tehreek (the People's Democratic Movement).

The program of the AJT was described by the LPP's General Secretary Farooq Tariq as "mainly an anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist and anti-feudal program [calling for] the abolition of all discriminatory laws against women and minorities".

From the outside, the alliance seems to include some not very promising political groups — the NWP for instance is not a socialist organisation, the PMKP is an ex-Maoist party, the AT is was a radical nationalist party, that has reportedly, "moved left".

That all said, the Labour Party Pakistan need and deserve the support of socialists and trade unionists internationally. They have launched a financial appeal.

"The funds will help develop the under-

ground work of political and social activists to continue their efforts to build the movement. The donations will enable us to develop the printing material needed for the movement. It will help develop literature and information material for the movement. It will help to coordinate the different activities against the military regime. It will develop more coordinated information spreading to all those interested in the movement."

Send cheques written to Labour Party Pakistan to: Labour Party Pakistan, 40 Abbot Road, Lahore, Pakistan

Or this account: Account name: Labour Party Pakistan, Account number 2679-3 Muslim Commercial Bank Beadon Road, Lahore, Pakistan

Help Pakistani socialists fight Musharraf's dictatorship

"Zionists" scapegoated for Sarkozy's crimes

THE left-wing website Indymedia seems to have allowed itself to be manipulated by the anti-semitic right again. A recent report on the site, citing the Iranian-government-sponsored Press TV (for which Yvonne Ridley works) as source, claims that French president Nicolas Sarkozy is a former agent of the Israeli secret police Mossad.

The Indymedia posting adds: "This would explain the country's new alignment with the 'Neo-Cons'."

So if Sarkozy were a proper French bourgeois politician, he couldn't be "neo-con" inclined, or friendly to the US administration? Only the secret intrigues of "the Zionists" can explain why bourgeois politicians of second-rank countries might want to keep "in" with the world's superpower?

Presumably the person posting on Indymedia would want to blame Sarkozy's attacks on union rights and on pensions on the hidden hand of "the Zionists", too.

A quick check on Google reveals that the story has gone round the web like wildfire.

The Indymedia version is: *Sarkozy was ex-Mossad secret agent. A report reveals that French President Nicolas Sarkozy worked for Israeli intelligence for a long time before he was elected president.*

French daily Le Figaro has revealed the French leader once worked for the Zionist regime as a sayan, Hebrew for 'collaborator'...

"Sarko the Sayan" has also followed in the footsteps of the White House by choosing a hostile approach toward Iran and its peaceful nuclear activities.

There was a report in *Le Figaro*, on 12 October 2007. *Le Figaro*, a conservative paper, far from crediting what it called "the strange accusations" against Sarkozy, quoted a French state official as saying that the anonymous accusations looked like a gambit by some far-right group.

Venezuelan workers balk at Chávez's plan

BY PABLO VELASCO

HUGO Chávez, president of Venezuela, lost his referendum on constitutional reform by a tiny margin, with 4.5m votes against (50.7%) and 4.4m (49.3%) in favour. Chávez has accepted the results, saying that the proposals had not been approved "for now", but that he would continue to struggle for his version of "socialism".

The right-wing opposition are of course cock-a-hoop, although they have not in fact made much ground. Compared with the 2006 presidential elections, the opposition vote only increased by about 100,000 votes. However Chávez has been knocked back, losing 2.8 million votes compared with last year.

In fact 45% of voters abstained. Despite promises including a shorter working week, many workers who have previously voted for Chávez did not turn out this time to support

plans to increase his powers. The proposals to extend the presidential term and to allow Chávez himself to stand over and over again were not democratic moves.

The attitude of independent socialists around Orlando Chirino and the JIR was to call for spoilt ballot papers. I think once again they were right, representing an independent working class politics between the two (albeit different) blocs.

My assessment is that this vote will push Chávez back towards his former allies, to reconcile with some elements that opposed him this time. He may well drop some of "socialist" rhetoric and some of the "participatory" schemes, aiming to have a quieter, more stable period of rule, using his new party to dampen things down.

In such circumstances, the independent socialist left outside of Chavez's PSUV will have opportunities to agitate in workplaces and to organise themselves politically in a new workers' party. We should support these comrades in this important work.

This will be the last issue of Solidarity to appear in 2007. The next issue will come out on Thursday 10 January 2008.

Putin's party consolidates power

BY STAN CROOKE

“UNITED Russia” (UR) — the political party which backs Russia's President, Vladimir Putin — won an easy victory in the elections held on 1 December for the Duma (the lower chamber of the Russian parliament). At the time of writing, early results indicate that UR won 63% of votes cast.

The pro-Kremlin and ultra-nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia picked up nearly 10% of the votes, and the equally pro-Kremlin “Just Russia” party scored just over 7%. The only opposition party to win seats in the Duma — the nationalist, conservative and clerical Communist Party — won just over 11% of the votes.

Other participating political parties did not, it appears, win enough votes to secure even a single seat in the Duma.

UR's victory owed much to the various “reforms” of the electoral system implemented since the last Duma elections, held in 2003. Those “reforms” were designed to maintain the grip on power exercised by Putin, appointed President by Boris Yeltsin at the close of 1999, and winner of the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections.

The number of members needed to secure registration for a political party was increased from 10,000 to 50,000. First-past-the-post seats in individual constituencies were scrapped, in order to prevent popular local “maverick” candidates from winning seats.

The share of the votes needed by a party to secure representation in the Duma was also increased from 5% to 7%. And coalitions between parties, to enable them to jointly reach that threshold, are not allowed.

Given that such measures were likely to reduce voter turnout — voters are hardly going to vote if their party has been prevented from standing candidates — a further “reform” scrapped the previous requirement for a minimum voter turnout for an election to be valid.

The replacement of elected regional governors by appointed governors — with all the appointments in Putin's hands — was another “reform” which contributed to UR's success.

All 85 governors knew that they owed their position to Putin, and that they were expected to return the favour by mobilising for a vote for UR in the elections. In fact, 75% of governors are themselves members of UR and were the main candidates for UR in their region.

Electoral manipulation was backed by up a blatant pro-UR and pro-Putin bias in the — directly or indirectly — state-controlled media, especially television.

The Channel One and Rossiya television stations are both state-owned, while NTV is owned by the state-controlled Gazprom energy giant (the world's largest gas producer and exporter). For 80% of the Russian population these three channels are the main source of news.

In the month preceding the elections Putin and UR were given 60% of prime-time political news coverage which was often more akin to a party-political broadcast than news. But real news about such things as bans and police attacks on the political opposition was not carried by television stations.

The media, it is true, did carry political debates. But UR refused to take part in them, in order to avoid having to defend its policies and record from attacks by its political opponents. And the debates were broadcast either at seven o'clock in the morning or after midnight. They attracted just 1.5% of television viewers.

In many parts of the country workers and students were pressurised into voting for UR. Workplace “briefings” were held, at which managers stressed the importance of voting for UR. The principle of “one to ten” was applied: each worker or student was

required to provide a list of ten other people whom he/she would guarantee to vote for UR.

In a practice harking back to the Soviet period, local government officials in one region ordered schools and workplaces to send contingents to a UR rally. Some government and local government employees were also instructed to obtain absentee ballots — the number of which issued in these elections was 54 times higher in some regions than in the 2003 Duma elections — and fill them in at work.

Workers were threatened with the sack or loss of bonus pay if they failed to support UR. Students were similarly threatened with loss of dormitory accommodation or even expulsion from university if they failed to back UR.

UR's political opponents were subject to sustained and state-sanctioned harassment. They were refused the use of halls for rallies. Their offices were raided. Their demonstrations were banned, and then broken up by the police if they went ahead. In some regions their election material was confiscated. In Siberia, for example, a million leaflets printed by the “Union of Right Forces” were seized, for supposedly breaching electoral regulations.

In the weekend before the elections opposition demonstrations in Moscow and St. Petersburg were broken up by the police. Those arrested included the “Union of Right Forces” leader Boris Nemtsov and the “Other Russia” leader Garry Kasparov.

Various electoral malpractices were also reported on election day. These included: multiple voting; the detention of election observers belonging to opposition political parties; the distribution of ballot papers already marked with a vote for UR; and elections officials going door-to-door with ballot boxes, to encourage people to vote UR.

In his election speeches — although Putin is not an actual UR member, in October he was declared UR's top candidate in the elections — Putin whipped up nationalist fervour, and then unleashed it against UR's opponents.

“We have no right to allow the State Duma to become a gathering of populists, paralysed with corruption and demagoguery, we cannot allow the repeat of the situation that has already taken place in our country,” declared Putin, speaking at a pre-election rally in the Luzhnikakh Stadium in Moscow.

“There are still people in our country who scavenge near foreign embassies like jackals, who beg at the doors of diplomats' offices, who count on the support of foreign funds and governments but not on the support of their own people,” he continued.

Without referring to the Communist Party and the “Union of Right Forces” by name, Putin divided UR's opponents into two groups: “Those who ruled Russia for decades and left the people without basic goods and services in the late eighties, and those who took key positions in the government in the nineties and served the oligarchs, harming the state and the society.”

The latter, claimed Putin, were “planning their revenge and a return to power through street protests, using the technologies learned from the Western specialists.” They “want to take revenge, return to power, return to influence on events, and gradually restore the oligarchic regime, built on corruption and lies. And they are lying today as well.”

However hypocritical Putin's criticisms of his political opponents may have been — given his own regime's record of oligarchism, corruption and lies — they

Those who already ruled the country determined the outcome of the Russian elections.

were essentially accurate and hit home.

A return to late-Soviet economic stagnation or the “wild West” capitalism of the 1990s, which is what the opposition parties were seen to stand for, held little attraction for the bulk of the Russian electorate.

Putin, on the other hand, is credited by a significant proportion of the electorate with “turning Russia around” — achieving economic stability, cracking down on the oligarchs, re-establishing law and order, and restoring Russia's status as a world power.

The Russian economy has grown by nearly 7% a year since Putin was first elected President in 2000. The value of Russian stocks has increased by a trillion dollars over the same period. According to one opinion taken last month, 57% of Russians have confidence in Putin.

And this was certainly an image which UR played on during the election campaign. After Putin was declared UR's lead candidate in October, UR changed its slogan from “Putin's Plan is Russia's Triumph” to the even more explicit “Putin's Triumph is Russia's Triumph”.

In almost Stalinist fashion, UR television campaign adverts interspersed shots of Putin with footage of ships being launched, combine harvesters bringing in the crops, missiles being fired, rockets being launched,

fighter planes criss-crossing the skies, marching soldiers, and high-tech factories.

It was not enough, however, for UR simply to win the elections. UR needed to win them with an overwhelming majority. The reasons for this relate to the Russian presidential elections due to be held in March of 2008.

Having already served two terms of office as President, Putin is constitutionally barred from standing for re-election. Even so, he wants to continue to “exercise political influence” after the March elections. As Putin himself put in the run-up to the elections, a big vote for UR would provide him with the “moral right” to remain a key political figure.

BUT more was at stake than Putin's personal ambitions and political future. For the bureaucratic and oligarchic elite which surrounds Putin, a political upheaval next March and the election of an anti-Putin candidate (unlikely as it is) could signal the demise of their political influence and financial power.

From their point of view, the smoother the handover to a new pro-Putin President next March, the lower the risk to their positions. The elections were therefore simultaneously a referendum on Putin's terms of office as President and an attempt to guarantee political stability next March.

Even though Putin, as the governing President, could not take up a seat in the Duma until after the end of his term of office, Putin ended up heading the UR list of candidates in order to blur the distinction between parliamentary elections and a referendum on his terms of office: a vote for UR was simultaneously a vote of confidence in Putin, and vice versa.

Hence the sudden appearance of the supposedly non-party-political “For Putin” movement, which claimed to have collected 30 million signatures in support of Putin continuing to act as a political leader after next March. Self-evidently, the best way to ensure this goal was achieved — and this “non-party-political” movement did not need to spell it out — was to vote UR in last Sunday's elections.

Putin, however, was careful to keep a certain distance between himself and UR. Announcing his role as the party's lead candidate, Putin stated:

“What is United Russia, then? Is it an ideal political organisation? Of course it isn't. The party has no stable political ideology or principles for which the overwhelming majority of members are ready to fight. And, as a rule, being close to those in power, as United Russia is, all kind of crooks try to latch on to it, often with success.”

Underlining its total servility to Putin, UR described such criticism as “well-deserved”. According to UR leader Oleg Kovalyov: “As usual, the President said the right thing. I'm one of the founders of United Russia and I know that the party is not perfect, but this is not a disaster. We are developing together with Russian society.”

At a general level, the rigged electoral “reforms”, the role played by the state-controlled media, and the repression of oppositional political campaigning were all evidence of the limitations of even bourgeois democracy in Russia. The approaching end of Putin's spell as President merely added a more specific reason for such electoral malpractices.

The Russian elections were not a travesty of democracy because of ballot-box stuffing (although there may well have been instances of that). They were a travesty of democracy because they were an empty charade in which the outcome had been rigged in advance.

The outcome of the elections did not determine who would rule the country. On the contrary, those who already ruled the country determined the outcome of the elec-

LETTER

"Third Camp" means politics

IN response to David Broder's letter (*Solidarity* 3/122), I should first make my position clear on the kitchen sink. I'm for it. Definitely. As to other things raised about or as spin-offs from my little letter in *Solidarity* 3/120...

I mentioned the WAC's opposition to "two states" in Israel/Palestine because Daniel's article had been about resolving the national question there, not about trade-union struggles or elementary worker organisation.

Daniel described WAC as "politically sharp", and gave no such credit to the Histadrut or the Fatah-linked Palestinian unions.

Just "two states" isn't sufficient. To have a hope of uniting Jewish and Arab workers round a mutually-agreed democratic formula, it must be clear support for self-determination for both nations.

But a group which opposes "two states" outright can't lead on the national question, however useful its efforts in economic struggles.

Neither Mark Osborn's letter on the Gaza civil war, nor our earlier editorial, suggested political endorsement for Fatah. In fact, the opposite.

In Gaza you had a civil war between a more-or-less secular bourgeois-nationalist party and Hamas, which I think David agrees is clerical-fascist. There are small independent workers' committees in Gaza (see below) which, understandably, disavow links with either side in the civil war.

We support those workers' committees against both Hamas and Fatah; but, in circumstances where there is absolutely no chance of those committees triumphing against both Hamas and Fatah, is that all we have to say?

The "Third Camp" does not mean saying that all cows are black in the night of politics short of working class triumph - "they're all bad! Workers, workers, workers!"

To build "independent working-class forces", in the sense of organising workers independent of bosses, governments, and bourgeois parties, is indeed vital bedrock. But it is not yet the "Third Camp", in the sense of independent working class politics.

I cited the example of Northern Ireland. There is a fairly strong, united, and organisationally independent trade-union movement there. For the last 40 years it has been unable even to influence the communal conflict, because of the lack of a workers' political party within it able to win it to a consistently democratic and socialist programme.

We support those unions as unions. We opposed the moves on the British left in the late 1980s to disrupt the Northern Ireland union movement by demanding "British unions out of Ireland" (and the Paisleyites' long but pleasingly ineffective campaign for "Irish unions out of Northern Ireland").

But praise of the Northern Ireland unions is no positive help in resolving the communal conflict. Political ideas may be.

Of course we should try to give practical assistance to workers organising everywhere, on however limited a level. But AWL is not a vast resource centre full of kit to guarantee success in worker-organising in Gaza or Kabul, Nablus or Tel Aviv, Basra or Baghdad, whose task is just to deploy that kit. If only!

Our prime task is organising where we have activists, "saying what is" in politics national and international, and educating ourselves and those we can reach in consistent Marxist ideas.

Rhodri Evans

David's letter:
www.workersliberty.org/node/9623

My letter:
www.workersliberty.org/node/9435

Daniel's article:
www.workersliberty.org/node/9346

Workers' Liberty 3/15:
www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/650

Mark's letter:
www.workersliberty.org/node/9004

Editorial on Gaza civil war:
www.workersliberty.org/node/8784

Workers' committees in Gaza: www.workersliberty.org/node/4862

Capitalism is the problem, but what is the solution?

Paul Hampton critically examines Joel Kovel's eco-socialism as set out in his book *The Enemy of Nature*. That book has recently been updated and republished to include more emphasis on the effects of global warming, which Kovel argues has "become the defining issue of the ecological crisis as a whole".

JOEL Kovel is probably the world's best known eco-socialist. In 1998, he was a Green Party candidate for US Senator from New York and in 2000 sought their presidential nomination, losing to Ralph Nader. He is the editor of *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* — a leading journal of green socialist politics — and a member of the US socialist organisation *Solidarity*, which publishes *Against the Current* magazine.

Kovel's starting point is basically sound: that capitalism is the cause of the ecological problems we face in the 21st century and that an eco-friendly socialist society offers the only way out. However the problem with Kovel's writings, as I shall elaborate is he fails to identify the social agency that will carry through this revolution. In this respect it represents the kind of unanchored classless anti-capitalism that has come to dominate much of the left over the past decade.

THE NATURE-SOCIETY NEXUS

IN Chapter 5 Kovel states: "the natural world has been substantially rearranged by human influence, to the extent that one would be hard-pressed to find any configuration of matter on the surface of the earth, and a good ways above and below it, that has not been altered by our species-activity."

Later he argues in similar vein: "What we call 'nature' is to some degree a human product itself, so that ecology and history have a common root. If evolution is mediated by the activity of creatures through ecosystems, should not the consciously transformative activity that is the human trademark, also be an evolutionary force?"

He argues that the "environment" is marked everywhere by human hands, and what we call nature has a history. Therefore "if nature has a history, then it is not 'out there' disconnected from humanity. It is not, in other words, an "environment" surrounding human habitation and useful to us". He goes to argue that, "our 'human nature' is to be both part of the whole

of nature and also distinguished from it by what we do to it. This boundary is called production; it is the species-specific activity that defines us".

This conception of the production of nature, which originated in Marx but was developed by the Marxist geographer Neil Smith in the 1980s, seems to me to be the best way to express the nature-human relationship at the most abstract level. Although Kovel does not refer to Smith's interpretation, he represents it well enough in the book.

This stance also allows him to avoid anti-humanist arguments used by some deep ecologists. He says "far from being a congenital enemy of nature, the human can be a part of nature that catalyses nature's own exuberance".

THE ENEMY OF NATURE IS CAPITALISM AND POLITICAL CONCLUSIONS

KOVEL argues that capital is "the culmination of an ancient lesion between humanity and nature", similar to what Marx described in *Capital* as the "metabolic rift". Again, I think this grounds the fundamental relations correctly.

Kovel describes capitalism as generalised commodity production and that one feature defines it above all else, "the commodification of labour power". He says that capital represents a regime in which exchange value predominates over use value and that under such a regime, "the economic dimension consumes all else, nature is continually devalued in the search for profit along an expanded frontier, and the ecological crisis follows inevitably".

Kovel argues that "the really inconvenient truth" about climate change is that "capitalism has led us into this nightmare and does not have the least clue as to how to free us from it."

Kovel is sharply critical of most forms of existing green politics. He says, correctly, that however capital may restructure and reform itself to secure accumulation it is incapable of mending the ecological crisis it provokes: "There is no compromising with capital, no scheme of reformism that will clean up its act by making it behave more greenly or efficiently".

As such, Kovel is dismissive of the various forms of eco-gradualism. He is scathing about Al Gore's record as vice-president, especially for his close links with industry. Gore oversaw over a period of rising carbon emissions when he was in a position to do something about it.

Kovel rejects individual lifestyle voluntarism as well as the obsession with technofixes. He is contemptuous of the pretensions of ecological economics, stuck within the boundaries of private property, which proposes market mechanisms such as emissions trading rather than tackling ecological problems directly. Kovel has zero time for mainstream green lobby groups who legitimate capital, nor for the localist, small capital project or anarcho-cooperatives that dominate green discourse.

Kovel critiques deep ecology, eco-feminism, progressive populism, the social ecology of Murray Bookchin as well as right-wing and proto-fascist ideologies which incorporate some ecological arguments, such as the German green Herbert Gruhl, who invented the expression that greens were "neither left nor right but ahead".

Probably the best polemic in the book concerns the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Kovel rightly argues that, "the purpose of the regime [is] to turn over the control of global warming to none other than the capitalist class... This immense super-

structure, with its ramifications all over the world rests on two guiding assumptions: give the corporate sector and the capitalist state the leading role in containing global warming; and do so only by making the control of atmospheric carbon the site of new markets and new modes of accumulation. These are two sides of the same coin: to keep capital in control of a process that would otherwise by its inherent logic bring it down; and in doing so make money out of reducing emissions".

The Enemy of Nature is therefore useful in terms of its materialist premises, its attack on capital as the root of ecological problems and for its political hostility to market-based political economy. However the shortcomings somewhat overshadow these qualities. In particular, its conception of ecological crisis, its critique of earlier revolutionary socialists and the hiatus of a revolutionary agent make the book at best lopsided and at worst incoherent.

WHAT KIND OF CRISIS?

KOVEL starts by arguing that capital is the cause of the ecological crisis: "The ecological crisis is the name for the global eco-stabilisation accompanying global accumulation... Capital cannot recuperate the ecological crisis because its essential being, manifest in the 'grow or die' syndrome, is to produce such a crisis and the only thing it really knows how to do, which is to produce according to exchange value, is exactly the source of the crisis".

This is fine, but Kovel subscribes to the formulation of the ecological crisis associated with James O'Connor, that it is principally a crisis of the conditions of production.

In *Natural Causes* (1998) and in earlier essays, O'Connor argued that previous discussions of capitalist crisis focused on what he called the "first contradiction", namely accumulation crises are due to the failure to realise the surplus value objectified in commodities through commodity sales. O'Connor then argued that capital accumulation suffers from a second contradiction that is manifested in profitability problems due to rising costs. In this view, the second contradiction more directly involves the natural and social conditions of production.

Paul Burkett has written extensively on the problems with O'Connor's conception of crisis. In his book *Marx and Nature*, Burkett argued that by treating the conditions of production as "external" to capital's exploitation of labour, O'Connor's "two contradictions" dichotomy tends to soften the distinction between the conditions required by capitalist production and the conditions required for human development. The effect of this softening is to artificially divide labour and ecological struggles — with the latter still basically defined as "non-class" struggles.

A similar objection would apply to Kovel's book. Having removed the dualism between nature and humanity and having understood the common root of human exploitation and ecological destruction under capitalism in the cell-form of the commodity — namely the distinction between use value and exchange value, Kovel reintroduces it at the level of capitalist crisis.

A second problem lies with Kovel's appreciation of the nature of the threat posed by dangerous climate change. Although he is not a complete catastrophist, i.e. arguing that global warming will not bring about human extinction, he nevertheless says that "global warming is an objective reminder that it is either the end of capitalism or the end of the world".

Kovel quotes Luxemburg from the *Junius pamphlet* (1915) — that it will be "socialism or barbarism" — but he does not conceptually

Relief work for Hurricane Katrina: shows the way forward for eco-socialism?

when the equilibrium between the animal, vegetable and geographical factors is upset, epochs of geo-biological crises when the laws of natural selection assert themselves with all their fierceness and lead the development over the corpses of vegetable and animal species. In this gigantic perspective Darwin's theory stands before us above all as the theory of critical epochs in the development of the vegetable and animal world." (Karl Kautsky 24 April 1922, in *Portraits: Political and Personal*)

Trotsky was also cognisant of the harmful power of humanity, writing: "while increasing the power of man over nature and while arming man with new technological methods and means, natural science makes man himself all the more powerful and consequently, all the more destructive, in the arena of war between nations and classes". He added that chemistry might help preserve life, it would also serve "the task of the mutual extermination of man by man". (Science in the task of socialist construction, in *Problems of everyday life*)

In a speech in February 1926 (*Culture and socialism*) he also highlighted the division between town and countryside promoted by capitalism and argued that socialism would overcome this antithesis.

Kovel also ignores the fact that Trotsky and his supporters such as Rakovsky developed the first adequate Marxist critique of Stalinism as it smashed the workers' state and developed as a new exploiting society from 1928. This critique pointing to the tremendous waste and on how industrial development was taking place, but at triple the cost as under capitalism.

At the same time Kovel praises Maoist China for "certain remarkable and brilliant advances, especially in the countryside" and Cuba and Nicaragua in the 1980s for the "inestimable value" of its policies. He says his book "should not be interpreted as blanket rejection of the accomplishments of these regimes".

These comments suggest he has not understood the real history of the socialist movement, nor has he adequately grasped the (polluted) river of blood that separates real socialism from the Stalinist abortion.

In fact Kovel sets up a caricatured history of socialism in order to claim that his version represents its "logical successor". According to Kovel, in Marx, nature "is so to speak subjected to labour from the start" and there remains "a foreshortening of the intrinsic value of nature". Marxism he says is "incomplete" and "flawed" when "grappling with a society such as ours, in advanced ecosystemic decay".

He accuses what he calls "first epoch socialists", i.e. those without the "eco" prefix of being "unwilling to follow the radical changes that an ecological point of view implies as to the character of human needs, the fate of industry and the question of nature's intrinsic value".

There are hard ecological questions for socialists — such as about the limits of economic growth and on consumption. Kovel raises these only in passing, without showing how a socialist society might adequately deal with them equitably. He believes that the precondition of an ecologically rational attitude towards nature is "the recognition that nature far surpasses us and has its own intrinsic value, irreducible to our practice".

What "intrinsic value" means is not spelt out in the book. On a trivial level, there is little doubt that classical Marxists personally "valued" nature, as Lenin's long walks in the countryside, Luxemburg's concern for birds and buffalo and Trotsky's rabbits testify. But it is unreasonable to expect them to appreciate the scale of ecological problems like global warming at a time when it was scarcely visible.

As Paul Burkett has pointed out, "the critics who fault Marx for not ascribing value to nature should redirect their criticism to capitalism itself... value as a specifically capitalist form of wealth does not represent Marx's normative valuation of nature's intrinsic worth."

Marxists of course agree that nature contributes to the production of use values; it is capitalism which represents wealth by purely quantitative socio-formal abstraction - labour time in general. Kovel would have been better off identifying the real shortcomings of Marxists on ecology rather than setting up false and misleading amalgams to buttress his own, flawed political shortcomings.

THE ECOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM — OR OF STALINISM?

KOVEL is rightly critical of Stalinism. He argues that "actually existing socialism" never made workers central to the key production decisions. He says Stalinism was essentially a system of slavery, though he also describes it as state capitalism, with a special enmity towards nature "beyond what obtains under market capitalism".

However Kovel makes some extremely loose and inaccurate comments about Bolshevik rule, effectively establishing the continuity between Leninism and Stalinism. He accuses Lenin and Trotsky of "specifically blocking the free development of labour" and goes on to ask: "is it any wonder then that socialism failed to take hold — or that the stage was set for Stalin's barbarism".

Trotsky in particular is accused of a "worship of technology [of] messianic prophecies", based on his comments in his book *Literature and Revolution* (1924) and charged with preparing the ground for Stalin to give these views "official imprimatur".

Trotsky did write about "re-registering mountains and rivers", and about rebuilding the earth, "if not in his own image, at least according to his own taste". He wrote that, "Through the machine, man [sic] in Socialist society will command nature in its entirety, with its grouse and its sturgeons. He will point out places for mountains and for passes. He will change the course of the rivers, and he will lay down rules for the oceans..." However he added that, "Of course this does not mean that the entire globe will be marked off into boxes, that the forests will be turned into

Kovel sets up a caricatured history of socialism in order to claim that his version represents its "logical successor".

parks and gardens. Most likely, thickets and forests and grouse and tigers will remain, but only where man commands them to remain".

No doubt this could read as an anathema to ecologists. But had Kovel read a bit further in the same work, he would find Trotsky discussing the role of human beings as an evolutionary force in terms similar to his own. But the context of Trotsky's comments is also important: in backward Russia just recovering from years of conflict and civil war, and with an isolated workers' government hanging on, it was a rhetorical flourish rather than a statement of policy. After all Trotsky was also a leading member of a government that established a nature reserve in 1920 in the southern Urals — the first reserve anywhere by a government exclusively aimed at the scientific study of nature.

During the same period, Trotsky also expressed his admiration for the power of nature. He wrote: "But there are also epochs

Capitalism and commodity production = pollution and environmental destruction

alise the nature of barbarism.

As such barbarism could still mean a functioning capitalist social formation, even in restricted thermal conditions and with limited growth. No doubt capitalists could buy up the temperate lands least affected by flood and drought — and no doubt construct states to enforce their rule against the millions displaced by climate change. If so, the task is still to overthrow bourgeois rule, all the quicker to prevent further ecological damage.

If capitalism is the problem, what is the solution?

Kovel understands that capitalism is essentially a class society, arising from the ownership of the means of production but also encompassing states organised to represent the interests of capitalist ruling classes. He accepts that class divisions are the most basic feature of capitalist societies and that class structure conditions other splits and divisions such as gender and race.

He also wants a revolution to overthrow capitalism and replace it with eco-socialism. Eco-socialism is "that society in which production is carried out by freely associated labour and with consciously ecocentric means and ends"

However Kovel is quite explicit that the working class is not the revolutionary agent, as it was for Marx, Engels, Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and other classical Marxists. He writes that the agency of eco-socialism "can be found almost anywhere" and that there is "no privileged agent of ecocentralist transformation".

Kovel argues against Marxists like the AWL: "One at times hears complaints from this quarter that the argument advanced in this work undercuts the 'privileged' role to be played by the international proletariat in socialist revolution. Well yes, it is true that the imminence of planetary eco-collapse reconfigures the project of resistance to capital. That is simply a manifestation of the need for Marxists to keep in

touch with reality".

This is completely disingenuous. If capitalism is essentially a system in which waged labour is exploited by capital, then the working class remains, however much it has evolved, the revolutionary force for change. If the root of the degradation of nature is also the root of exploitation, then the working class has a material interest in both ending its own exploitation and in mending the rift with nature i.e. in creating an ecologically sound society in which its needs are met.

Kovel cites a number of examples of prefigurative eco-socialist struggles in the present. The book contains a strange description of "communism" of the Bruderhof sect [Christian religious communities], despite the patriarchal and homophobic relations that place it far from any emancipatory project most socialists would recognise.

He points to solidarity provided to New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, the people of the shacks in South Africa, the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Gaviotas in Colombia. These struggles are important, but none of them are centrally about the millions strong working class and its daily battles. Kovel's book is notable for its almost complete disregard of the labour movement, where debates range about incorporating ecological concerns with other, traditional demands.

The closest he gets to the unions is the mention of the idea of "just transition", of making the state rather than workers pay for the costs of environmental changes such as the shift to a lower carbon economy. But here workers are treated as passive recipients of wages or handouts, rather than active agents who can intervene and shape the process.

Instead Kovel calls for an eco-socialist party grounded on communities of resistance. Although he criticises Green Parties for accommodating to capitalism, he also rejects Leninist parties.

Sarkozy pushes hard li riots and student pro

LAST month's railworkers' strike in France, which sought to stop Sarkozy forcing rail employees to work an extra two and a half years before retirement, ended once negotiations were tabled. However, French President Nicholas Sarkozy's attacks on pensions are ongoing, and the struggle is far from over.

According to the left-wing student federations SUD-Etudiant and CNT-FTE, student mobilisation in France (against university privatisation) has remained strong. SUD-Etudiant reported 100 high schools blockaded as of 30 November (the lack of information about this week may indicate some falling-off) and some dozens of universities still blockaded or on strike as of 3 December.

The latest reports in the French press say that the rioting that broke out in the Paris suburb of Villiers-le-Bel on 25, 26, and 27 November has died down without spreading across the country as the riots of 2005 did.

The rioting was set off by two youths on a motorbike being killed by a police car.

The riots included more organised attacks this time on the police, with rifle shots, but also the same sort of thing as the 2005 riots —

cars set on fire, shop windows smashed, etc. The government responded by sending in huge numbers of police.

Yves Coleman writes from Paris:

A friend went to Villiers-le-Bel to get some contacts with the local population and feel the mood. Unfortunately he got only very pro-repression and anti-youth comments.

The government's thesis is that the rioters are petty criminals. But criminals, specially if they are local drug dealers, have no interest in shooting cops in response to a bike accident (which is for the moment the official thesis, though an eyewitness has testified that the "accident" was in fact an attempt by the cops to corner the two youths).

But nobody has a better idea about who shot the cops.

Yves also reports: As journalists have problems working in the suburbs, a new company has been formed since 2005, from people who live in the suburbs and know them well. They ask the journalist to pay them 30 euros per hour and for a minimum of 4 hours, so they go with the journalist and tell him whom he can photograph or interview, which streets he can walk or drive down, etc. They are both body-

guards and informers for the press. A strange consequence of the 2005 riots...

Yves also reports on the student protests.

In my son's Paris highschool, with a leftwing (Socialist Party) administration, the strike was co-organised between the head teacher and the delegates of the classrooms (these delegates are a "conquest" of 1968.) There was a blockade for four days, and on the last day, Friday, a sit-in at the Education Department headquarters.

The strike was voted for everyday, the first day with a "secret ballot", the other days by raising hands). But some students say that there were very few explanations about what was wrong in the new law about the universities, and the majority just did not want to go to class...

In some universities, the management has taken a very hard line. Yves reports:

At one university (Clignancourt, on the edge of Paris), the management is quite right wing. They blackmailed the students, saying, after a few days of blockade: if you strike no problem; if you block the entrances we'll bring in the cops.

When the students voted again for a block-

ade, the management called the cops and for the rest of the week the strikers were banned from the university. The administration had made lists of names and gave them to cops who were controlling the entrances and stopping the strikers coming in for a week. Despite efforts, the strikers were unable to get action to push the cops out of the university.

At another university (Saint-Denis), with a leftwing management, the president of the university co-managed the occupation with the strikers, giving them the right of occupying, but limiting access to the university at night.

The students organised a demonstration in the suburb but got no support or participation from the local population, except from the sans-papiers (illegal immigrants), who are quite well organised.

In the student coordinations, I think there is a tendency that the weaker the strike is, the more radical the leaflets and speeches are. It shows a lack of reflection about the relation of forces and the fact that we face a long-term struggle against a tough right-wing government.

ED Maltby met with Natacha, a member of the Trotskyist organisation Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and a worker in the Austerlitz train station in Paris. She told him about the difficulties faced by the workers.

"It's tough. The unions are calling for a return to work during negotiations." These negotiations will go on for three weeks (until 18 December), and "the government is offering nothing. They see that the union leaders have got the strike movement back under control. They've even withdrawn some of the offers of concessions they made us during the strike! We're looking at a 20-30% cut in our pensions, and the government is trying to keep us calm by offering us a one-off Christmas bonus of 80 euros (about £50) to keep us quiet. It's ridiculous. But it'll be difficult for workers to go out on strike over Christmas."

The financial situation for some rail workers

is tough too: "Two weeks of strikes and that can start to weigh heavily on your wallet. Colleagues of mine have lost between 500 and 750 euros (around £300-500). There has been no strike fund organised by the CGT, but a lot of people had been saving up since the summer. Now people at Austerlitz station are talking about setting up our own strike fund in

preparation for the next strike."

"The role of the CGT is crucial in the campaign. They have major sway in the rails, much more than anyone else. If they don't call a strike, then there is no strike."

But the CGT is trying to sidle out of a fight. "They're changing the tone of the leaflets and statements they're putting out. They're not

arguing against the politics of Sarkozy's reforms any more; they're not arguing for us to keep our 37.5 year pension plans. They've

"We want complete withdrawal of the reforms"

More and more on the shop floor you hear, "Next time, we'll elect strike committees like in the metro"...

given up hope on that, they're just looking for smaller concessions. They're acting like the student unions in that respect, just trying to stay on side with the government, as mediators."

Unions have also been reticent in fixing a date for strike action. They have organised pickets and demonstrations, knowing that these would fail, as it is very difficult to mobilise workers during the week when they're not on strike. They keep claiming to be preparing a call for a strike at some point in the future, but "perhaps it's got lost in the post. Honestly, waiting for the CGT to call a strike is like waiting for Godot!"

"Throughout, they've been calling for 'negotiations', as if they only problem with the reforms was that they hadn't been negotiated! But if the membership isn't in control of negotiations, you get nothing, they go nowhere. You need to be able to bring great industrial strength to the negotiating table to get what

ne on tests

Sarkozy: not just a "neo-liberal"

BY DAVID BRODER

UPON the election of Nicolas Sarkozy there was a strong current in the media — both in France and internationally — claiming that “things had changed”. Sarkozy, it was said, was the man who would cut back the “gluttonous” French state, “modernising” the economy by curbing the power of the unions and replacing the France of the 35-hour-week with a new more “flexible” culture that valued “hard work”. French workers had to prepare for Sarkozy’s onslaught. As we have seen with November’s rail strikes, university occupations and rioting in the suburbs, resistance to Sarkozy is deep-rooted.

Some activists have used the catch-cry “Sarko-facho” (“Sarkozy-fascist”); portrayed him as nothing but a lickspittle of George Bush; or, as the Iranian media now have it, a Mossad agent. Yet most of the French President’s pronouncements seem to be in tune with the anti-working class, conservative and authoritarian political tradition of General de Gaulle.

We only have to think back to spring 2006 when the previous UMP [Gaullist] government attempted to introduce the CPE law to undermine young workers’ job stability, or 2005 when it backed the EU Constitution. The continuity in the history of the French right is examined in some detail in the latest issue of the *Ni Patrie ni Frontières* journal*, which devotes some 62 pages to assessing the character of so-called “Sarkozysm”.

Sarkozy has taken on great personal power, setting great store by his own image and casting himself as somewhat of a national saviour, in the mould of de Gaulle or a Napoleon. But NPNF argues that the frivolous labelling of Sarkozy as some sort of ‘fascist’ — who thereby ought to be excluded from ‘normal’ politics — is to ignore the real threat he poses in common with any bourgeois government:

Rather than concentrating on his economic and social programme, strongly opposed to the interests of the working class, much of the anti-Sarkozy propaganda makes out that he is more than just an enemy of the working class. A monster.

The assertion that Sarkozy represents an “Anglo-Saxon neo-liberal” current can also be misleading. True his anti-trade union and privatisation agenda echoes Margaret Thatcher (hence the nickname “Monsieur Thatcher”, a characterisation which he does not seem particularly keen to dispel). Yet the claim that he is not a normal French bourgeois politician, but really just a lackey of George Bush, seems just to reflect the myth of a “republican collective” of “traditional” political debate, counterposed to “outsider” elements not native to French politics:

Most discussion of the alleged Atlanticism of the right has just one goal: reintroducing the age-old threats of the Foreign Party, or even Fifth Column (using chauvinist themes to silence opponents) and, as a result,

embolden Gaullist myths. This idea is spouted by a united front running from the [liberal monthly] Monde diplomatique to the PCF [Communist Party] passing via the PS [Socialist Party] and a decent chunk of the UMP [Gaullists]. Ultimately these people want to exalt the “national fabric” of St. Louis, Joan of Arc and General de Gaulle. All of them gargle about the “French mindset”, “French exception”, “French tradition” and other red herrings.

The once million-strong Communist Party’s history is indicative here. After participating in the 1936-38 anti-fascist “Popular Front” government of socialists and bourgeois liberals, Communist Party leader Maurice Thorez called upon “patriotic” French far-right goons to join a “French front” against Nazism, and himself joined the French army.

After World War Two the Communists served in a national unity government with Charles de Gaulle for two years, yet after 1958’s military coup in Algiers, which provoked the downfall of the Fourth Republic and a new administration headed by de Gaulle, he was himself termed a “fascist”. Throughout these episodes the rhetoric of “anti-fascism” could be used to justify cross-class alliances, since it represented politics as a battle where “anti-fascist” and “republican” parties fought against “fascists” rather than as a struggle between classes.

Indeed, nowadays crying “fascist” in the face of Sarkozy’s attacks on the working class tends to imply support the opposition Socialist Party — a party with a limited base in the working class and no organic links to the labour movement — instead. Yet, as NPNF points out:

What Sarkozy said in his election campaign pushed the same buttons as Ségolène Royal, his rival in the presidential contest. Both played on the theme of “security”, both are opposed to open borders and free migration, both vaunted the merits of those who “work hard” and “get up early”, and both condemned May 1968, even if for marginally different reasons.

The PS and Royal herself have supported Sarkozy’s “modernisation” agenda, only making the vaguest criticisms. Royal opposed the rail workers’ strike, excusing pensions cuts in much the same way as her British counterpart in Number Ten might. The students’ union UNEF, dominated by the PS, was consulted in the elaboration of Sarkozy’s university privatisation plan, and since then has done nothing to organise opposition.

Royal like Sarkozy backs the riot cops in the suburbs, although no doubt she could suggest a more “touchy-feely” way of bating down the unemployed black youth. Such is the consensus among the capitalist class that Sarkozy was even able to persuade Bernard Kouchner, a leading figure in the PS, to serve as foreign minister in the UMP government, and French-Arab feminist Fadéla Amara (of Ni Putes Ni Soumisés) to serve as a minister for the suburbs. The parallels between Sarkozy’s fishing for ministers outside the UMP and Gordon Brown’s courting of Digby Jones, Tory MPs and Paddy Ashdown for his “government of all the talents” are clear.

Sarkozy’s individual “reforms” are part

of a general agenda of privatisation and casualisation of employment so that France can compete on the world stage, one inherited from his predecessors. There is no solace to be found in supporting liberals and right-wing “social democrats” here, since they share these essential perspectives. But neither does capitalism run by the bourgeois state represent an alternative to the kind of economy that Nicolas Sarkozy and the soft-Gaullist “Socialist Party” alike wish to achieve. NPNF cuts sharply against those who respond to Sarkozy by harking back to the days when the French state had greater penetration in economic life:

What exactly does the word “neo-liberal” mean in a society where most of the means of production rest in private hands and yet the state is the largest employer and has for a long time planned the economy? Have people forgotten that de Gaulle, after 1946, launched an “economic recovery plan” and that from 1958 he used Three-Year Plans?

“Neo-liberalism” is a vague notion even among its supporters, never mind its confused opponents. On the right, it is used to criticise the state’s “redistributive” actions (which in fact consist of taxing single and healthy workers and those who have a fixed job and then giving the money to the unemployed, the ill and people with kids) except when they are in favour of the bosses (you’ve never seen a boss complain about getting a subsidy or an anti-working class law).

On the left and far left it is a means of demanding state control (full or partial) of Capital, without at all calling for the overthrow of capitalism, getting rid of hierarchy, money, wage-slavery and the division of labour. In both cases, the word “neo-liberalism” stops us seeing the possibility of getting rid of wage-labour, as a mode of exploitation, or of the state.

And, much as the PS-PCF government in the early years of Francois Mitterrand’s presidency nationalised certain major industries and infrastructure in order to free up Capital, Sarkozy supports state intervention in the economy where needed:

In Sarkozy’s books and the programme of the UMP it is explicitly said that the state must play a greater role in technological innovation. Sarkozy emphasises that the American state finances innovation via military and space-programme research and via various federal interventions in the private sector, contrary to the official ‘neo-liberal’ ideology.

Hoping that the Socialist Party might take over the reins of government and implement this anti-working class offensive instead, or propagandising for the bourgeois state to run the economy without talking about workers’ management, is a feeble response to a government which wants to attack job stability, benefits and the right of workers to organise. It is a top down answer which makes no reference to workers’ independent political activity or their ability to control and run society.

Sarkozy’s attacks are very real and are contrived to emasculate the working class — but to respond with variants of liberal bourgeois republicanism or nostalgic French nationalism rather than positive agitation for working-class power means relegating socialist politics to the rank of abstract theory.

you want. And ordinary workers want the complete withdrawal of these reforms.”

Union bureaucrats have made themselves unpopular in the membership: “Colleagues in the stations are following the negotiations, they’re keeping their ears open, even though they see that there’s very little coming of them. When Thibault [the leader of the CGT] called for negotiations, that was widely regarded as a betrayal”.

At a demonstration on 20 November, Thibault was booed by an angry crowd of rail workers; and leader of the union CFDT François Chérèque was chased by demonstrators, having to run some distance through the streets to escape them.

Yet in the face of these attacks, the rail workers are not losing heart. “The enthusiasm for the strike was so great that the movement cannot but erupt again.”

Workers have learnt a great deal from the last round of strikes: “Last time, the rail workers didn’t elect strike committees. Bus and metro workers did, they elected bodies to carry out the decisions of the daily general assemblies in the workplaces, and so they could control their struggle better, and do what they wanted to, not just what the union tops told them to.”

But rail worker general assemblies didn’t organise action independent of the unions or elect strike committees; they just sent motions to the union bureaucrats, condemning or praising the statements of the leadership. “More and more on the shop floor, you hear people saying, ‘Next time, we’ll elect strike committees like in the metro. Next time, we’ll control our strike.’ People have learned. It’s going to be impossible for the government to stave off a strike in January.”

The experience of inter-industry general assemblies, and meetings between shop-floor activists from different sectors had a great impact upon young workers in this struggle. “It was mostly young workers who went to talk to people from other stations, to teachers, to students and to energy workers in the inter-industry meetings. That experience taught a lot of young militants a lot about how workers have to fight. Everyone in the union has the will for a big industrial fight on pensions, everyone’s ready for that.”

“But the young colleagues who talked to other sectors in struggle really understand the politics behind the fight. That’s what’s new, young people talking about the politics of it, understanding that Sarkozy’s attacks are part of a much broader political project. The LCR has received a lot of requests for membership from rail workers, and people are approaching our activists in the stations to talk politics with us.”

* *Ni Patrie Ni Frontières*
www.mondialisme.org

PARABLES FOR SOCIALISTS 10

When Margaret Thatcher turned on the Tory right

Paddy Dollard reported from the 1985 Tory Party conference.*

THEY said she was past it. The polls say her party can't win the next election. Newspapers that have fawned on her for years have openly speculated about how long Mrs Thatcher could continue before the party replaced her.

But they have all been proved wrong. Margaret Thatcher grew by a head at this year's Tory party conference.

In an astounding speech which led right wing Tory Party Chair Norman Tebbit to storm off the platform in protest, she turned on the "fascist" right wing of her own party and tore them apart. She stood up for the decent caring Tory rank and file in the shires and thereby gave them the courage to stand up for themselves.

Mrs Thatcher has emerged as a new woman. She's still tough but Maggie now has a new tender and caring ingredient to her persona.

The Tebbit-MacGregor faction of the Tory Party tried to move a composite motion proposing that the jailed miners should be left to the normal review procedures of the courts, that the sacked miners should remain sacked, and that the illegal action taken by the government to penalise local councils should be left unpunished and uncorrected, its victims unrecompensed.

Stung to the quick by the sheer injustice of it all, Mrs Thatcher, who has long been thought to be a prisoner of the Tebbit-MacGregor faction, rose in magnificent form and met them head on. They hadn't a chance.

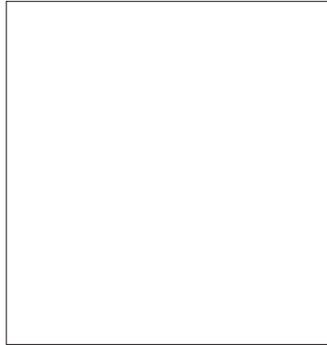
She bitterly denounced the "divisive and disruptive" class justice of the MacGregor-Tebbit Tendency — what she memorably described as "the Trotskyist-Toryism of tough guy Tebbit" and its vote-losing advocates of a class struggle doctrine alien to the Conservative Party.

She called them "the mindless, money-mad neo-Marxist militant monetarists on the fringe of this great party", "these MacGregorite gorgons of a never-before-seen Conservatism, vicious of visage, vile, vindictive and violent, comatose of conscience. A Conservatism faced with electoral elimination if it does not change".

The wonderful phrases rang on and on and on in a great torrent. Willie Whitelaw, in the Chair, interrupted Mrs. Thatcher's speech to describe her as a "historic masterpiece". He said she was in with a chance for a Nobel Prize, if not for peace then for literature.

She rounded on those who have illegally penalised councils and told them to stop breaking the law. She told the hard right wing law-and-order brigade not to be stupid: it was right-wing policy that had created the riots of mainly young black people in Tottenham and Brixton.

The gist of what she said was this: "What kind of people do you think we Conservatives are? What kind of a party do you



Thatcher: always caring and sharing?!

think this party is — the once great party, which has shaped the Britain we grew up in and gave us everything we have had in life.

"Some of you think this party is a party of the class struggle!" she said, glaring at National Coal Board Chairman and leader of the drive to smash the National Union of Mineworkers, Ian MacGregor, who sat near the exit at the back of the hall, looking shifty and cowardly at the same time.

"Well you are W-R-O-NG! Of course we know that class struggle sometimes breaks out, and we recognise the class struggle as a fact of life.

"But the true democratic Tory never foments, stimulates, prosecutes or fights the class struggle. We believe" — she teased out the syllables of the word for emphasis — "in one nation — pass-ion-ate-ly".

Ignoring the angry chorus of "Liar! liar!" from the nasty trash-novelist spiv Jeffrey Archer, a large section of the audience rose to its feet at this point, led by the Director-General of the CBI. Some of them spat at those who didn't rise. Scuffles broke out.

Central to everything Mrs. Thatcher said was the need to win the next election. "I have a vision", she said, inspired and inspiring.

Denouncing the politics which led to the savage police violence against picketing miners and the waste of the inner cities, she astonished delegates by the sheer breadth and audacity of her non-partisanship and statesmanship. She talked bitterly, glaring at people in the hall, of the casualties of Tory Party policy. "They are to be found among the people whose jobs and services have been lost and social services beaten down.

"Elections are won in years, not weeks. Do you think people will so easily forget what has been done to them in the last six years?

"They won't easily forgive or forget the Tebbit Trotskyists whose politics over six years have led to the grotesque chaos of Tottenham and Brixton."

Decent bedrock people of the Tory Party, she said, don't want to play politics with people's homes and jobs.

"WE must win the next election. Some of you think that's class treachery, huh?", she sneered like Humphrey Bogart, raising herself to her maximum height in a moving way that made you forget how small she really is.

"Some of you think that this party is no longer the party of Churchill and Gaitskell and Macmillan and er, dare I say it, Mr. Chairman, of Edward Heath. But let me say this to you: There are some of us left in this once-great party who will fight and fight and fight again to save the party we love.

"Tebbit and MacGregor want to punish criminal miners? Then prosecute the police too! Dismiss the Chief Constables! Make a full investigation of their tactics! A free pardon for jailed miners!" shouted Mrs. Thatcher, as half

the Tory conference rose to applaud her. She knew how to talk their language.

"And what about the sacked miners?" asked Mrs Thatcher. "The overwhelming majority of those sacked committed no crime except that they had the guts to fight back against industrial autocracy and tyranny backed up on the picket line by the bully-boy tactics of a semi-militarised national police force which our government organised and put at the service of MacGregor.

"Only think, Mr Chairman what a falling-off was there in that single act of creating a national police force, what a grotesque departure was that from all that our party has worked for over 3000 years of unbroken British history.

"Those miners were fighting back against nationally-organised brutality deployed wholesale to back up alien, American gangster style methods of industrial relations. They were fighting for industrial democracy. Yes, Mr. Chairman, for de-mocra-cy. Resisting the brutal destruction of mining communities and the economic devastation of whole areas of our wonderful country by an autocratic power over which they had no control, Mr. Chairman, those miners and their wives were exercising their God-given inalienable rights of free-born British men and women to resist tyranny.

"TO resist", she said with a pause. "To resist the lawless economic tyranny of a MacGregor over the miners even if that tyranny is backed up by the forms of legality which, to its eternal disgrace, this democratic party of ours gives to industrial dictatorship.

"You say the law should be impartial and that the law has spoken already and cannot be contradicted? Those who get the worst of the law in the strike should suffer the forfeit?"

"But that is to deeply undermine the rule of law by branding it irrevocably as class law. It is not to defend the idea of impartial law — it is to destroy the belief of large parts of our population in the existence of impartial law and in the ideal of impartial law." She paused and turned to Douglas Hurd, the Humphrey Bogart sneer in place again. "Where have you been lately, Hurd? Dixon of Dock Green is dead. Everyone knows that the police lie through their teeth in court, routinely."

Part of the conference shuffled uneasily, and there were a few shouts of "Shame" and "Pinko liberal".

"You want this Tory government to pick up the tab for MacGregor and the Chief Constables" she said, "to endorse crying injustice, to turn ourselves into fawning curs around brutal class warriors. Well, this democratic party of ours has more self-respect than that."

HER face became cold with indignation. "Too many people in this party think that the Tory Party is a bosses' party and I want to tell them they have got the wrong idea entirely — the wrong idea entirely", she repeated for emphasis.

"There must be no Tory class warriors. Even if we are being battered into the ground we will go down rather than fight back.

"That's always been the Tory way: that's what is so unforgivable about the Chief Constables. They wouldn't let the miners stop the scabs. They fought back using all the necessary physical power of the police and ignoring the law when expedient".

Thatcher's ovation was long and stormy, though many delegates went home that evening bewildered. A few muttered, dazed: "Is this the Tory Party, our Tory Party? What party does she think she is in?"

The newspapers the following morning announced that Mrs. Thatcher had been committed a hospital by Dennis Thatcher, suffering from "profound nervous exhaustion".

Originally published in *Socialist Organiser* 247, 10-10-1985

The fut
US

Bruce Robinson reviews *Imaginary futures — from thinking machines to the global village* by Richard Barbrook, Pluto Press, 2007.

THIS book is a history of the future, the history of an ideology, which, over the last 60 years, has sought to colonise our conceptions of the way the world is going. The book starts in 2005 with Richard Barbrook returning to the scene of the New York World's Fair, which he had first visited as a seven year old in 1964. Some of the original exhibition remains and he is struck that "for decades, the shape of things to come has remained the same. The hi-tech utopia is just around the corner but we never get there... the future is what it used to be."

While some parts of the techno-political ideology of the 50s and 60s have disappeared (nuclear energy too cheap to meter, space travel for the masses), some have remained remarkably persistent. Barbrook asks how belief in the advent of thinking machines and artificial intelligence and analyses of how capitalism is morphing into the post-industrial or information society, could remain important up to today. Where did these ideas come from and how have they remained so influential?

The Cold War and the growth of post-war consumerism in the US provided fertile ground for their emergence. The Cold War posed the challenge of both moderating the ravages of unrestrained free market capitalism that had culminated in the Depression and of showing that the "American way" could provide a superior path of historical development to that mapped out by Stalinism. Plus the state spent vast amounts on defence-related scientific and technical research. The post-war boom made it plausible that the majority of Americans could share the benefits of technological development (such as the invention of TV) and that other nations could follow by creating the conditions that had enabled the USA to develop.

Barbrook traces three strands that came together to create a distinctive set of ideas of thinking machines and the information society: cybernetics; the media theory of Marshall McLuhan; and the work of a group of social scientists he chooses to call the "Cold War Left".

Cybernetics was the work of scientists and technologists who had worked on computing and ballistics during World War Two. It aimed to provide a unified theory of natural, social and machine behaviour based around concepts such as control and feedback. Cybernetic theorists were not politically homogeneous. The founder of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener, saw the idea of artificial intelligence as the epitome of technological domination, publishing a book on *The Human Use of Human Beings*. Wiener was marginalised by Cold War cyberneticists led by John von Neumann and by the mid-50s, a research programme leading to "thinking machines" had been codified.

Subsequent developments led to the quip that "Artificial intelligence is what hasn't been done yet", referring both to the fact that achievement of the goal was consistently pushed into the future as computer technology developed, and that once one knows how to write a computer program to perform a task it is no longer seen as necessarily requiring intelligence. Accordingly, as Barbrook points out, as computers have become more easily available, it has become more difficult to sustain the idea of AI as more than a set of computing techniques that give the appearance of intelligence to a public more familiar with using computer software.

The second strand came from the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, whose writings became very popular in the 1960s. McLuhan added a robust technological determinism to the mix, arguing that "human history was a succession of cybernetic systems created by feedback from different kinds of media... every leap in social evolution was identified with the advent of a new type of media." By the 60s, the print media which had superseded the spoken word were

* During the great miners' strike of 1984-5, the Labour Party leaders threw their weight against the miners. Party leader, Neil Kinnock (who has now, in the natural course of these things, become Lord Kinnock) wind-bagged and waffled platitudes and generalities against violence. He did not denounce the police for breaking miners' heads or for acting like soldiers of occupation in some of the mining villages. He focused most of his fire against the Labour left. When the Militant Tendency (now the Socialist Party and Socialist Appeal) who led the Liverpool Council, behaved idiotically, sending a fleet of taxis around Liverpool with redundancy notices for the Council's workers, Kinnock seized the chance and denounced them — and the serious Labour Party left — for "playing politics with people's livelihoods". The honest left wing MP, Eric Heffer, stormed off the platform in protest at one of Kinnock's speeches. Ian MacGregor was Chairman of the National Coal Board, and leader of their side in the biggest industrial battle in Britain for 60 years.

ture is what it sed to be

themselves giving way to electronic media such as TV, satellite communication and computers. These in turn would cause social change, resulting in the creation of a "global village" where everyone could talk to everyone else, thus overcoming national barriers and "bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness and responsibility to an intense degree." Barbrook comments that its analysis "could be reinterpreted as an enthusiastic celebration of the imaginary future of the information society. Best of all, [it] identified America as the prototype of the emerging global village."

The third influence, for Barbrook the most important, is what he misleadingly calls the "Cold War Left", a group of ex-Marxist social scientists, who came to see the USA as the lesser evil to be supported in the Cold War. Their training enabled them to fulfil a particular ideological function in the US of the 50s and 60s: namely to create a "Marxism without Marx", a historical materialist account of economic and social development that would show why the future lay with the "American way" rather than Stalinism. They did so by suggesting that society was of its own accord developing towards something different from what existed but which was still fundamentally capitalist.

The book focuses on three thinkers: James Burnham, whose 1940 writing on *The Managerial Revolution* predicted the convergence of Stalinism, fascism and liberal capitalism towards a distinct managerial society; Walt Rostow, an economist whose *Stages of Economic Growth* showed a "non-ideological" path whereby underdeveloped countries could reach "take off" by following the path laid down historically by the US; and the sociologist Daniel Bell, who brought together economics and politics in a vision of a post-industrial liberal Keynesian capitalism in which both the class struggle and ideological conflict had been superceded.

While some ex-Marxists who did contribute to this ideology using their training, Barbrook goes overboard both by making statements like "the Trotskyist left had grown up and become the Cold War Left" and in tying the views of these ideologues to some Leninist original sin.

Firstly, the Trotskyist left did not just give up and disappear, so repelled by Stalinism that it ran into the arms of the US state. The by

then conservative Burnham faced his erstwhile comrade Shachtman across a McCarthyite courtroom, testifying that Shachtman's organisation should go on a list of subversive groups. (Interestingly, Daniel Bell also defended the Socialist Party against the state).

Of Barbrook's three theorists, only Burnham had ever been a Trotskyist and he had broken with Marxism in 1940. Bell, by his own account, had identified with the right wing of the Socialist Party in the 30s: "Knowledge [of Kronstadt], combined with my temperament had made me a lifelong Menshevik, the chooser, almost always of the lesser evil", which, ironically brings him closer to Barbrook's own position than to Trotskyism. It can also be questioned whether an attachment to Keynesian state intervention serves to define anyone as "left", particularly in this period.

In attempting to explain why the "Cold War Left" took on a particular American form, Barbrook identifies with a Kautskyan social democratic position, which he calls "orthodox Marxism" (defending parliamentary democracy!) He counterposes it to Lenin and the tradition of Bolshevism, which is in turn identified with Stalinism. The argument between the Kautskyan and the Leninist positions have often been rehearsed in other contexts and are largely irrelevant to Barbrook's main theme so I won't cover that ground here, except to say Kautsky's evolutionism and the Menshevik idea of rigid historical stages corresponding to different levels of social development are rather closer to Bell and Rostow than were Lenin and Trotsky.

By the early 60s the "Cold War Left" had become an important influence over the policies of the Kennedy administration in the US. "Cybernetics without Wiener had been successfully combined with Marxism without Marx." At the same time the reformers of Stalinism under Khrushchev focused on technological competition with the US and both sides saw the potential of computers in a cybernetic model of development within their respective economic systems.

In the USSR this ended with the ousting of Khrushchev in 1964, while, in the US, the first glimmerings of "The Net" began to emerge from the military-scientific complex with the development of computer systems that could multi-task and packet switching communications. Barbrook argues that the

When compassion disappears

CHRIS LEARY REVIEWS *BOY A (CHANNEL 4)*

WHO could forget the murder of James Bulger by two teenage boys, Jon Venables and Roger Thompson? That was Liverpool 1993.

After they were released from jail, Venables and Thompson were given new identities and injunctions were taken out to protect them from reprisals. Blake Morrison wrote a fantastic and scrupulously objective book about the case. *As If*, told the story of the media and public hysteria of the time. *Boy A*, shown on Channel 4 (2 November), goes over the same social and emotional ground.

Boy A tells the story of Jack, who was imprisoned for aiding and abetting the murder of a young girl (although Jack's actual involvement in the murder is ambiguous). Terry, Jack's social worker, helps him to build a new identity and a new life in Manchester.

Jack's flashbacks tell a history of abuse and neglect at home, and a difficult childhood at the hands of bullies at school. The adjustment from an institutional life to one in the outside world is difficult, and Jack's new life is unravelled when Terry's jealous son exposes Jack to his workmates and his girl-

friend, as well as to the press.

While the story asked questions of whether people with traumatic lives can put their inner demons to rest, and whether people can really move on from their pasts, it also raises questions about the contradictory nature of media morality.

Newspapers like the *Sun* are quick to jump on bandwagons after horrific child murders like that of Sarah Payne and James Bulger; they make hypocritical demands on organisations like the BBC to make media more family friendly, but their "page 3" portrays women as no more than mere sex objects.

British justice is, in theory, based on systems of rehabilitation and compassion. We are told that people who break the law repay their debt to society, and are then helped back into the fold. However, if the case of Venables/Thompson and that of Mary Bell, who was granted anonymity for herself and her daughter under assumed identities for life in 2003 show anything, it is that such values go out of the window when there are newspapers to be sold. Profit comes before justice.

There is a chance that *Boy A* might be shown again on More4; if you haven't got a digibox yet (and you'll need one soon anyway), get one, and keep an eye out for it.

motivation for packet switching was less the military one of being able to create networks that would survive a nuclear war but rather to facilitate communication between scientists working on defence research. This then formed the model of the free interchange of information in an open academic community that was embodied in their computer network ARPANET, which eventually morphed into the Internet.

Accordingly, despite their own intentions, the US military gave birth to what Barbrook calls "cybernetic communism". "The builders of the Net were allowed to hard-wire the academic gift economy into its social mores and technical architecture... the university became the prototype of the post-capitalist information society."

The development of the net was both shaped by and in its turn boosted the ideology of the information society and the global village. Though the dominance of the technocrats of the Kennedy-Johnson years — Chomsky's "New Mandarins" — waned with their failure to win the Vietnam war against a vastly technologically inferior enemy, their ideas persisted in the 70s, though in a modified form. In this they were aided by elements of the New Left and late 60s counter culture, who expressed an enthusiasm for the democratic possibilities of new media, creating what Barbrook calls "Marxism-McLuhanism". This in turn was subverted by the right — some members of the "Cold War Left" having become neo-cons by the 80s — so that the freedom of the Net became identified with the free market.

Unfortunately, Barbrook squeezes the whole of the last 30 years into the last chapter, presumably for reasons of space. Since 1990 the ideology and predictions of Information

Society theorists has come up against the reality of the Net as a mass social phenomenon. The results have been mixed. As Barbrook points out, while many of the technological predictions of the 60s have been realised, the social utopias supposed to accompany them have failed to materialise. But his own response is also somewhat contradictory. He writes:

"Within the Net, cybernetic communism is here and now. Yet, at the same time, the arrival of the information society hasn't precipitated a wider social transformation. Cybernetic communism is quite compatible with dotcom capitalism..."

Yet, despite this realism, Barbrook still holds that net-based activities, the "gift economy", are prefigurations of future emancipation. It is true, for example, that open source software is produced in a voluntary and cooperative manner. However over the last few years, it has also been commodified — in part, in order to convince business that it is safe to use it. Perhaps then cybernetic communism is a mirage — not fundamentally different from McLuhan's utopia. Barbrook ends by saying that: "Our utopias provide the direction for the path of human progress." Perhaps that's all that's left for a self-confessed social democrat these days?

Where I have taken issue with *Imaginary Futures*, it has largely been with the underlying political positions it puts across. Yet it is possible to accept and value much of the main narrative without accepting them. The book tells an important story well. The left should neither forget the history and ideology of the Net in a blaze of techno-enthusiasm, nor simply retreat into "neo-Luddism". Telling the story of the past of the future is a useful aid to orienting ourselves in the "Information Age".

Whatever happened to "thinking machines"?

Where are the SWP going?

The SWP have broken with their ally in Respect, George Galloway. But have they learnt the lessons? Two recent examples of the SWP's political behaviour suggest otherwise.

Barred from Student Respect conference

BY SACHA ISMAIL

GALLOWAY and his fanclub having departed, I recently joined Respect, in order to see what was going on and make the arguments to as many people as possible for a turn towards independent working-class politics. I haven't had time to go to a branch meeting yet; my first foray was an attempt to attend the Student Respect conference on 2 December.

Since £26 had disappeared from my debit card (no concessionary rate!) I assumed that I was now a member of Respect. To be sure, however, I emailed Student Respect in order to explain why I joined and ask about attending the conference (on 2 December).

There was no subterfuge intended here. To start with, it wouldn't work.

The British left is a pretty small place, and I am known to enough SWPers to mean that sneaking in wasn't ever an option. More fundamentally, however, there would be no point in doing so. Workers' Liberty has nothing to hide. We are not changing or downplaying any of our criticisms of Respect.

On Saturday morning, the day before the conference, I received an email from SWP student organiser Colin Smith, who is apparently also a member of the Student Respect committee, saying that I wouldn't be allowed to attend.

Why?

"The AWL have been consistently hostile to Respect throughout its existence, and your organisation has never been part of the coalition..."

"If there has been a serious change in approach and operation, then I think it would be best for discussions to be held between the leadership of Student Respect and your student leadership at some point in the future to discuss the possibility of your membership... There will not be time for such discussions to take place before tomorrow's conference, and AWL members will therefore be unable to attend."

I replied pointing out the rather obvious thing that has changed, reminding him that the AWL did attend the founding conference of Respect, withdrawing only when it adopted an

alliance with Galloway, and citing the section of the recently amended Respect constitution (3.2), which states that "Other progressive political affiliations (i.e. membership of another left party or organisation) or religious belief (or affiliation) is no barrier to membership. Members of other parties, organisations, or faith groups who join Respect are entitled to keep their identity as members of these organisations or groups whilst participating fully within the structures and activities of Respect."

Why, I asked Colin, was I therefore not allowed to join? So far I have not received a reply.

When I turned up to the conference the next morning, Colin and SWP NUS executive member Rob Owen appeared to tell me that I could not come in. They came up with all kinds of legalistic justifications for this, and insisted that a "top-level" meeting between "our leaderships" would be necessary before I was allowed to become a member of Student Respect.

Clearly, I am not just another person wanting to join Respect; clearly, and in fact quite openly, I have joined to make a fuss; clearly there are interesting political issues here, such as the relationship between membership in Respect and eg my support for Education Not for Sale (who, for instance, stand against each other in NUS elections). Equally clearly, however, their refusal to let me in was motivated entirely by political cowardice and an unwillingness to allow any serious debate. This is a pretty sad state of affairs, but not surprising given the weakness of the SWP's narrative of what has happened recently.

I've just received my first members' bulletin from the national office, so it seems I am a Respect member! As for Student Respect, we'll see... perhaps the group at SOAS will be more welcoming than the SWP's national leadership was.

Calling off action

A KEY factor in trashing the possibility of a united public-sector fightback this year against Gordon Brown's 2% limit has been the decision by the civil service union PCS, although it already had a live ballot mandate for action, to withdraw into prolonged "consultations" of its membership while the POA and CWU strikes and the Unison health and local government ballots came and went. Having "consulted" and announced that PCS members supported further national strike action, the PCS leadership then... decided to call off any further national action, at least for the time being.

The main force driving that decision was the

Socialist Party, but the three SWP members on the PCS Executive, Sue Bond, Paul Williams, and Andy Reid, also voted to call off action.

In the postal workers' critical dispute, SWP member Jane Loftus did vote on the CWU's Postal Executive against the shoddy deal eventually recommended to CWU members by their leadership and ratified in a ballot which closed on 27 November.

But she did not campaign for a no vote. Dave Warren, another Postal Exec member who voted against the deal on the Exec, did campaign, and was quoted extensively in *Socialist Worker* as well as in *Solidarity*. But there were no quotes, or appeals to vote no, from Jane Loftus in *Socialist Worker*.

Apparently the procedure in the CWU is that if an Exec member wants to campaign against an Exec majority decision, they must formally register their intention to do so. Dave Warren did. Jane Loftus didn't.

According to CWU insiders, her explanation was that her position as President of the CWU made it "inappropriate" for her to campaign for a no vote.

In the first place, CWU insiders say that it would have been perfectly possible within normal CWU procedures for Jane Loftus to campaign for a no vote while being union president, once she had registered she would do so. In the second place, suppose it would have caused trouble, and cost Jane Loftus her presidential position: wouldn't it still have been right to come out publicly for a no vote when the issues were so important?

Neither episode is a one-off.

In October 2005, the two members of the SWP then on the Executive of PCS, Martin John and Sue Bond, voted to approve the Government-TUC pensions deal. An article in *Socialist Worker* that same week, personally signed by SW editor Chris Bambery, had already denounced the deal - rightly, though in exaggeratedly strident terms - as an "abject capitulation".

In March the same year, Martin John and Sue Bond had voted on the PCS Executive to support calling off the union's planned strike action that spring on pensions, jobs, and pay. *Socialist Worker* (rightly) condemned the calling-off of the strike (without mentioning that SWP votes helped to bring it about), and (ridiculously) claimed that if the strike had gone ahead it would have brought instant and complete trade-union victory against the Government.

After the October 2005 episode, the SWP Central Committee tried to call the PCS Exec members to book. Sue Bond "apologised" (how much that was worth, we can now see) and was "pardoned"; Martin John refused to apologise, and resigned from the SWP.

On the CWU Executive, early in 2003, in the

political crisis created by the US/UK drive to invade Iraq, SWPer Jane Loftus blocked a proposal from a *Solidarity* supporter for the CWU to declare no confidence in Blair. The proposal would probably have passed, but Loftus withdrew the (uncontentious) motion it was an amendment to.

Why, when the SWP had "Blair out!" on its posters and placards? Loftus said that she had consulted with leading SWPers and been told to "maintain the unity of the left". In other words, not to embarrass CWU general secretary Billy Hayes, who was then speaking with the SWP on Stop The War platforms.

In early 2004, on the CWU Postal Executive, Jane Loftus voted for the job-cutting "Major Change" deal. Her explanation, again, was the need to "maintain left unity".

In the CWU case, it does not seem that Jane Loftus was "freelancing", but rather that she voted the wrong way under instructions from the SWP leadership where, left to herself, she might well have voted the right way.

The common thread seems to be the SWP's drive in recent years to subordinate its trade union work to securing "political" alliances with leftist trade union leaders in Stop The War, Unite Against Fascism, and (so the SWP hoped, but it was not to be) Respect.

Strident articles in *Socialist Worker* about "abject capitulations" are no substitute for educating, training, and organising activists in the unions, when they hold positions where they can make a difference, to withstand the bureaucratic pressures and make a bold stand for rank-and-file interests.

Evidently the SWP's new efforts to present itself as "the left" in contrast to the "right-wing" section of the old Respect around George Galloway have not yet extended as far as a solid left-wing alignment in the unions.

Blessed?

George Galloway was addressing a Whitechapel Respect Renewal rally on Sunday 2 December. According to the *East London Advertiser* it was "Muslim-dominated". In that case a socialist message to such an audience could have been anything from fighting low pay to issues about council housing or fighting racism. But according to the *Advertiser*, and perhaps predictably, Galloway chose to spread a little religious fervour and to highlight the sanctity of his new organisation: "There's one God, there's one Respect", he said.

An axis for unifying the left

Extracts from an AWL leaflet distributed at a regional meeting of the National Shop Stewards Network, held in Glasgow on 1 December.

IN backing the Labour Party rule changes (to ban unions and CLPs from submitting motions to annual Labour Party conference), union leaders have effectively disenfranchised millions of trade unionists who remain organisationally affiliated to the Labour Party.

The issue here is not just one of union democracy - i.e. the fact that none of the union leaders had a mandate from their membership to back the rule changes. The much more fundamental issue is that the union leaders share the Labour Party leadership's goal of fundamentally recasting Labour-union links.

The shared aim is to reduce the unions' role in politics to that of lobbying behind the scenes.

... In place of a negative - and ultimately apolitical - campaign for trade union dis-affiliation from the Labour Party, socialists need to focus on the issue of re-establishing a political voice for the trade union movement.

Socialists in the unions need to campaign for a reversal of the Labour Party rule changes - if only to highlight their significance, and also the undemocratic role played by union leaders in supporting those changes.

But this needs to be linked to a positive campaign to prevent the labour movement from being driven out of politics, and to re-found a political party based on the trade union movement.

... At the moment, however, the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) represents the most serious and significant step in that direction.

... After a limited period of (apparent) unity under the umbrella of the Scottish Socialist Party, the organised left in Scotland is now

more divided than it has been for over a decade.

The decision of the SWP and the Scottish section of the Socialist Party to pull out of the SSP not only divided the left. It also demoralised many activists and, as shown by the results of the Holyrood elections, undermined the credibility of the left in general.

Within the Labour Party there still exist the Scottish Campaign for Socialism, and Socialist Appeal. But, in general, the Labour Left is now only a shadow of its former self.

In the short term at least, there is no sign of a possible (re-)unification of the organised left. But that should not stop the different organisations of the left from working together in specific initiatives...

The different organisations of the left in Scotland should help build support for the LRC, in particular by encouraging affiliations by all levels of the trade union movement in Scotland, and by being actively involved in

the setting up of local LRCs.

This is not a proposal for the left in Scotland to dissolve itself into the LRC. Well over a century ago - and the Blairite counter-revolution has thrown back the labour movement that far - the Independent Labour Party (ILP) recognised the need to build a new political party based on the trade unions.

The ILP maintained its own existence, but combined this with organised campaigning for the creation of a much broader union-based party.

For all the ILP's political limitations, its general political orientation made sense: combining campaigning for the ILP's understanding of socialism with campaigning to win trade unions over to the idea of independent working-class political representation.

More than a century later, a similar approach now needs to be taken by today's organisations of the socialist left."

SWP (IS) and Northern Ireland in 1968-9 Advocating civil war — until it started!

THIS article reviews the way that the biggest activist-left group of the last 35 years or so in Britain — the SWP, then called IS — dealt with the biggest internal crisis the British state has seen since the early 1920s, the breakdown of Northern Ireland into civil war in 1969.

It continues a series by Sean Matgamna about the British left and the decisive early stages of the nearly 40 years of “Troubles” in Northern Ireland.

Previous articles have sketched the main events from the beginning of timid reform from above, to the emergence of a mass civil rights movement of the long-downtrodden Catholic minority in 1968, and the explosion into bloody communal conflict in 1969.

They have also introduced the main political forces surveyed: the IS (forerunner of the SWP); the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS (forerunner of the AWL); and People’s Democracy (a loose left grouping set up in Belfast in 1968, where sympathisers of IS, especially Michael Farrell, were influential).

Read previous instalments at www.workersliberty.org/node/9607

TWO important discussions on Ireland were held by IS at its Executive Committee in December 1968 and its National Committee in January. A campaign, of sorts, on Northern Ireland, arose out of those meetings’ decisions to focus on “Irish work”.

For example, the Manchester branch (led by the Trotskyist Tendency) organised a march. In those days Orangeism was still a power in Liverpool (as in Glasgow even now) and there were threats that the Orangeists would come and break up the demonstration.

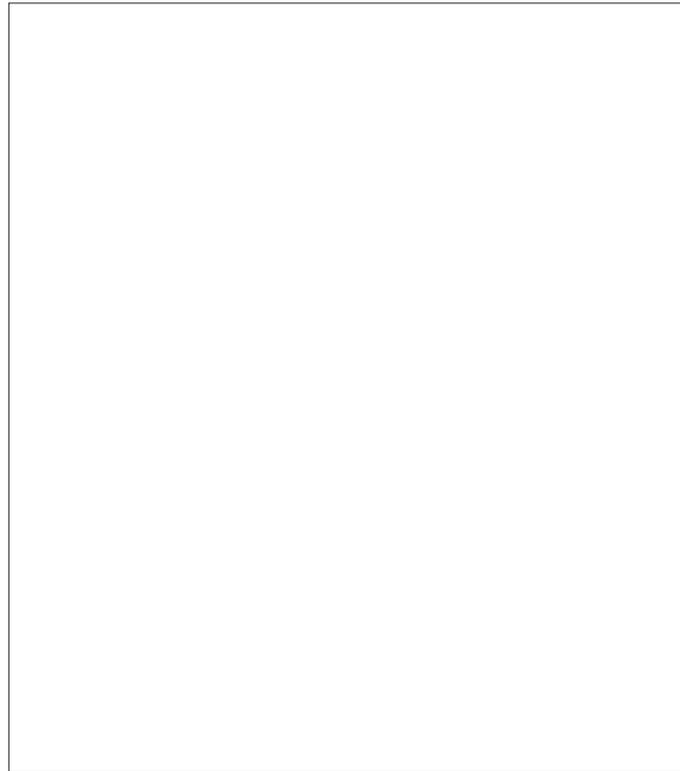
Nothing came of it. The march was moderately successful. Peter Graham of the Dublin Young Socialists and Michael Farrell were advertised as speakers, though memory suggests that Farrell was too busy to come.

Overall, the IS leaders were disappointed by the results of the campaign. There was, in fact, a great quickening of interest in Ireland then, on the left as well as in the mainstream press. The Connolly Association, the Communist Party’s Irish front group, run by Desmond Greaves, and its paper, campaigned on Northern Ireland. The *Morning Star* and the then-influential left-Labour paper *Tribune* gave Ireland much attention.

IS was a late-come interloper here, linked to people in Northern Ireland detested by the political friends of the Stalinists and of *Tribune*. *Tribune*’s correspondent on Ireland was Andrew Boyd, an old and politically by no means ex Stalinist who uttered insinuations about PD’s role in the Northern Ireland general election of February 1969 that they were really out to help the Unionists. *Tribune* was calling for the threat of the withdrawal of British subsidies to Northern Ireland to be used to pressure O’Neill. But IS also called for “withdrawing subsidies”; from *Tribune* and the Stalinists, IS was distinguished primarily not by politics but by PD’s reckless militancy.

Those who had their own campaigns on “Ulster” didn’t see any reason to involve themselves in IS’s initiative. IS’s membership was still very heavily student-based. Tony Cliff reported to the National Committee in May that the Irish campaign had been a disappointing experience. The failure of the campaign to “take off” may be the reason why the pamphlet written in January by Chris Gray and John Palmer (and discussed in the last instalment of this series of articles) was not published until April, and then as an article in the magazine.

In Northern Ireland, People’s Democracy was moving towards what would prove to be its peak period. In the Northern Ireland general election of 24 February, PD fielded eight candidates, with the proclaimed intention of challenging the so-called liberal Unionists



around Northern Ireland prime minister Terence O’Neill.

Michael Farrell stood against O’Neill in his Bannside constituency. So did Ian Paisley. Most of PD’s candidates did relatively well. One of them, the 22-year old Bernadette Devlin, did very well, getting 5812 votes in South Londonderry against 9195 for James Chichester-Clark, who would a couple of months later succeed O’Neill as Northern Ireland prime minister.

Devlin would soon be selected as the “Unity” candidate for a Westminster by-election in Mid Ulster, a seat which the Catholic majority in the electorate could win if it had “unity”, that is, one Catholic candidate.

PD proposed the following programme to the electorate:

- One man, one vote [i.e. for local government elections]
- Repeal the Special Powers and Public Order Acts
- Disband the B-Specials
- A points system for housing, and a crash programme of housebuilding, linked to the demand that the Housing Trust debt to the central bank be cancelled
- The direct intervention of the state in industry
- Workers’ control in the factories
- The break-up of large estates to enable small farmers to form co-operatives.

This was far from radical in terms of policy. “State intervention” was simply left-Labour reformism. In Unionist Northern Ireland, too, state intervention was very important, including subsidies to industry. In principle it was supported by all political groupings. All PD was calling for was more of the same, and a “direct” state role in organising industry.

PD did not go beyond the mainstream civil rights leaders, except for the “workers’ control” demand, which for the initiated was a pseudonym for socialism and qualified the call for “state intervention”. (Vagueness in that area had been typical of IS/Socialist Review for the previous 15 or so

years). It might also be argued that the break-up of large estates — as distinct from a socialist society using them as a large agricultural production units — was socially regressive.

In any case, all this was quite a way from *Socialist Worker*’s call for an end to British subsidies for Northern Ireland.

It might also be argued that the break-up of large estates — as distinct from a socialist society using them as a large agricultural production units — was socially regressive.

Not only was PD dismissive of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Its stated objective in the general election was to use it to strike a mortal blow against the reform Unionists.

Simultaneously with focusing all effort on the election, PD denounced parliamentarism and electoral politics in the ultra-left fashion common on the revolutionary left then. A number of PD’s prominent people were avowed anarchists. “The forthcoming general election, like all elections in Northern Ireland”, wrote *Socialist Worker* on 15 February, reporting on PD’s activity and attitudes, “is essentially undemocratic. This is the main point which we [PD] want to highlight and change”.

It needs to be remembered here that Northern Ireland’s by then notorious electoral frauds against the Catholics — Derry City was the most blatant example — were in local government, and not in elections to the Northern Ireland parliament. PD’s denunciations were a repudiation of parliamentary democracy as such. This was an era when Tony Cliff could propose to the Easter 1969 IS conference that it need not answer the question of whether IS would back Labour in the next election because, instead of the election, it would demand a general strike!

In fact PD did comparatively well. The eight PD candidates got 23,645 votes between them, an average of about 27% in the seats where they stood. In five they were the only candidates standing against the Unionists; in two, the only candidates standing against the official Nationalists; in one they stood against both Unionists and the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

AMONN McCann, who was allied to PD but more Trotskyist-minded, got 1,993 votes as the Northern Ireland Labour Party candidate against the middle class civil rights leader John Hume and Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer in Foyle (Derry).

The big shift of workers’ votes was to Paisleyism and to SDLPism. In 1965, the official Unionists had won 38 seats and 59% of the vote. In 1969, they were reduced to 48%, and dissident Unionists won 19% of the vote. Critics of O’Neill’s reform policy, to whom he had refused official endorsement, were elected. The Northern Ireland Labour Party went down from 20% to 8% of the vote. Six of the MPs elected in February on various platforms — Nationalist, Independent, and Republican Labour — would come together to found the SDLP in August 1970.

What did SW make of the election results? It was delirious with joy! On 1 March 1969 *Socialist Worker* had a page one picture of placard-carrying PD members “picketing a police barracks in Armagh during the election”, and the headline: “PD election fight shakes Ulster Tories”. The PD vote had been a vote “to return the civil rights campaign to the streets”, wrote “Sean Reed” (Gery Lawless), overstating it somewhat.

Reed’s (SW’s) account was demagogic and political gobbledegook. “A massive attempt to sway the ‘white negroes’ on John Bull’s Other Island behind the half-a-loaf policy of Tory prime minister O’Neill failed”, wrote Reed. “Catholic workers refused to follow the lead of the Catholic upper class. Not only has O’Neill-style Tory Unionism failed to win the Catholic vote, but the beginning of the end for the Green Tory Nationalists is in sight — with the start of a swing to the left, the real left”.

Who expected the faltering O’Neill, or any conceivable Unionist Party, to win more than a few Catholic votes? Reed was here celebrating the strength of communal separateness. If lots of Catholics had voted for reform Unionism, its socio-political significance would have been immense — and progressive even if we would have preferred them to vote for one of the left groups!

When Reed deigned even to notice the Protestant-Unionists, he didn’t think about what was happening and what the troubles of O’Neill with his party must mean.

Not only was PD dismissive of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Its stated objective in the general election was to use it to strike a mortal blow against, specifically, the reform — or, as McCann called them, the “half-a-loaf” — Unionists.

Socialists should not and cannot let calculations about the effects on other parties determine whether or not we stand in elections. That would be to boycott ourselves. PD had every right to stand against O’Neill, for example, even if that let Ian Paisley win the seat.

But PD’s avowed intention was to undermine the reform Unionists. That was something else again.

Ian Paisley would allege on US television that before the election Bernadette Devlin came to his house and proposed to him collaboration to bring down O’Neill. I don’t know that this was ever denied. It does fit in with the logic of what PD said it was doing in the election.

MOST of the leaders of the broad civil rights movement were hostile to PD's militancy (though Michael Farrell would soon win election to the executive of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association). NICRA was a very broad campaign coalition. PD's militancy naturally attracted criticism from some figures in NICRA. PD's involvement in NICRA, that is, in the broadest cross-class coalition, which included Catholic bourgeois and Catholic communalists, was a vexed question for the left. Eamonn McCann, for instance, questioned it. At a rally involving bourgeois politicians on the eve of the August eruption in Derry, McCann — who was always willing to discuss what he was doing that he shouldn't and what he wasn't doing that he should, but rarely drew practical conclusions from it — vowed publicly from the platform that it was the last cross-political, cross-class platform he would appear on. It wasn't.

Where did IS stand on PD and the broad civil rights movement? *Socialist Worker* headlined conflicts within NICRA on 22 March: "Free Speech" — Moderates Move to Split Ulster Rights Campaign". PD had announced plans to march to the Belfast Parliament on 29 March to protest against the Public Order Bill. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had agreed to jointly sponsor it, and some right-wingers had resigned from NICRA in protest.

Here, in the guise of defending free speech within NICRA, *Socialist Worker* actually championed PD's involvement in the cross-class civil rights popular front.

SW of 29 March reported a day of protest with no violence, in six major centres. It was a triumph for PD, so SW believed. In Derry, over five thousand had joined the protest.

"Sean Reed" quoted Eamonn McCann on the Unionist divisions. "We have been told that there are now two types of Unionist. One section want to walk over us with hob-nailed boots and the other section, led by O'Neill, want to walk over us in carpet slippers... The people of Derry are not going to allow anyone to walk over them ever again".

McCann, of course, meant the whole of what the rulers do to workers in class society, as well as the additional oppression in Northern Ireland by anti-Catholic discrimination. But in fact, on the immediate issues, the difference between the feeble reformist O'Neill and the anti-reformists was very important. The consequences of Paisleyite victory and the break-up of Unionism would be of enormous and, all in all, regressive consequence.

This image of the slippers and the hobnailed boots echoed and re-echoed, and was used by others, including Bernadette Devlin, to whom it came to be attributed. In fact it epitomised the ultra-left nonsense at the centre of the thinking of PD, and, following after them, IS.

To the Third Period Stalinist proclamation that in Germany there was no difference between the Social Democrats — "the murderers of Rosa Luxemburg" — and Hitler's fascism, Trotsky once replied that the difference was that between slow poison or a bullet to the head. Actually, the difference in practice was between certain death and the chance to defend yourself.

The difference between hobnailed boots and slippers as weapons is immense. Hobnailed boots can kick you to death. The image conflated the grievances of the Catholics that were remediable by reform (local government gerrymandering, for example) and hostility to Unionist rule of any sort.

Hostility to Unionist rule was the beginning of wisdom, of course; but, within the Northern Ireland framework — which PD tacitly accepted — that just meant hostility to the rule of the majority. To make other than entirely communalist sense it had to be translated into opposition to the Northern Ireland state.

Agitation like that stoked up grievances which no civil rights movement could satisfy which did not include the "civil right" to self-determination.

Yet McCann, who coined the boots-and-slippers image, represented the left wing of the very amorphous PD, the best and clearest-minded of the PD leaders. He was also, importantly, the face of the Derry Labour Party and Young Socialists.

And what about the "other Ireland", the part of the island ruled by the "Green Tories"? As a natural expression of its political opposition to both Orange and Green "Tories", PD turned some of its attention to the 26 Counties. There too it tried to couch its politics as "civil rights", championing the right of divorce, free-

dom from narrow Catholic censorship of literature, and the right to contraception (contraceptives were then illegal in the 26 Counties). PD now saw "civil rights" as an all-purpose political crowbar.

SW of 12 April had a big front page picture of young women in Dublin behind a banner proclaiming "People's Democracy", and the headline: "Tories out, North and South". A PD march from Belfast had arrived in Dublin. The article was by Eamonn McCann.

The marchers had crossed the border chanting that slogan, "Tories out, North and South". "The purpose of the march", McCann wrote, "was to assert the fact that civil rights and social justice are denied to the working class of southern Ireland as much as to the workings in the North".

Divorce and censorship and birth control were indeed big issues in the South, but the statement was not true, other than in the sense that the basic socialist criticism of bourgeois society applied equally to South and North. McCann was using "civil rights" as an encoded synonym for all class oppression. It was an attempt to talk indirectly to the Northern Protestant workers.

In fact it was to talk to them in gabbled whispers. What it *shouted* at the Protestants was that Catholic majority rule was indeed "Rome Rule", and something to be feared and resisted.

Like everything PD did, except the actions which sharpened communal polarisation, it was politically inept, with no real grip on what it tried to grapple with. At best the issues PD raised, in their appeal, were middle-class and intelligentsia issues. The egregious Cyril Toman was variously reported marching across the Border waving illegal condoms at the Gardaí, or, on another account, waving a copy of an American novel, J P Donleavy's *The Ginger Man*, which had been but no longer was banned in the 26 Counties.

Moving outside the explosive communalism of the North, PD revealed itself, despite its leaders' socialism, as a liberal student group. The figure of Toman, a future Sinn Féin parliamentary candidate, sums it up. Even the left-wing students in Dublin did not respond to PD's call for a civil rights movement in the South.

All things Irish were now "in" for IS. For the first time in its 19 year history (under various titles), *Socialist Worker* celebrated the anniversary of the Easter Rising in April 1969, with an article by Gery Lawless and Chris Gray (SW, 12 April). It was a feeble pseudo-nationalist piece whose main element was an ignorant attack on Trotsky's alleged attitude of 1916. It reshaped the nonsensical account of Trotsky's ideas on 1916 which the Stalinists had purveyed for 40 years. SW would publish a letter by me in response, in which I quoted (courtesy of a translation by Sandra Milligan) a lot of Trotsky's main article on 1916, which then had not yet been published in English.

Yet SW's coverage was not all trivialising nonsense. On 19 April *Socialist Worker* reprinted an important thinkpiece by Eamonn McCann from *Ramparts*, the journal of "the Londonderry Labour Party". "The civil rights campaign focused around specific reformist demands such as 'one man, one vote' and 'abolish the Special Powers Act'. But it was at bottom an elementary expression of discontent arising from a society which could not provide decent housing for its people nor provide any solution to the unemployment problem".

McCann quoted the Unionist MP Robin Baillie as saying that "one family, one house" and "one man, one job" were in Northern Ireland not reformist "but revolutionary" demands.

All that was true. But the civil rights movement was a Catholic movement. To deepen civil rights to a social meaning and to a movement uniting Protestants and Catholics simply could not be done, however abstractly "logical" such a development from civil rights might be. From the starting point of civil rights and demands on jobs and housing posed as *Catholic grievances* a united working-class movement simply could not be built by them. It was already preposterous to imagine that it could. The socialists were trapped in the civil rights movement, and, whether they liked it or not, defined by it.

No social reforms were possible, McCann believed. The government could not deal with unemployment, he wrote, because "the lack of investment in Northern Ireland in this period is linked to the general crisis in Britain which... is also having a catastrophic effect in

the South".

On this the eclectic McCann was repeating the line of the main "Trotskyist" organisation at the time in Britain, the Socialist Labour League (later WRP) of Gerry Healy. (SLL leader Cliff Slaughter had recently visited Northern Ireland). Here "the crisis" was used to impose a false frame on Northern Ireland politics. In fact much in the way of reform was possible; and anyway, the implication that "crisis" meant that civil rights demands were socialist demands simply did not follow. If "the crisis" were squeezing Northern Ireland that hard, it would have meant greatly increased communal polarisation, as the working-class Protestants desperately held on to their relative advantages.

Neither the premiss ("the crisis") nor the conclusion (workers will be forced to unite) had any basis in reality. The "crisis" argument was only an additional element in the ultra-left phrasemongering.

Derry was the storm centre of the real "crisis" affecting Northern Ireland. On 19-20 April Derry erupted again into serious fighting. Barricades were erected. The people of the Bogside moved en masse up to the nearby Catholic Creggan estate and gave the RUC an ultimatum to leave the Bogside in two hours. They won an important victory over the RUC. It was the dress rehearsal for what would happen in August.

And "Troops Out" reached the front page of *Socialist Worker* for the first time. British troops had been sent to guard power stations after an Ulster Volunteer Force bomb attack on one. They were there, said SW, to free the RUC to be able to beat down the Catholics.

IS's evaluation of the role of British troops — that they could only be an auxiliary to help the hard-line Unionists beat down the Catholics in revolt — was bizarrely divorced from the reality of what was going on between the London and Belfast governments. They would repeat that analysis again and again until they turned round 180 degrees in August. The false evaluation, shaped by the needs of demagogic agitation more than by any analysis, prepared the sudden political collapse IS would experience in August, when the troops would visibly play a very different role from the scenario IS had written for them.

The false evaluation of the troops as tied to the Orange hardliners prepared the way for IS's political collapse in August.

SW, 26 April: the troop deployment "is an ominous threat to the embattled people of the Six Counties fighting for their basic civil rights". Troops "will free the brutal RUC and the even more thuggish B-Specials to attack demonstrators. There is little doubt that the acts of sabotage were carried out by extreme Paisleyites in order to bring in British troops who could be used to put down the people if civil war should break out. *Socialist Worker* demands the immediate withdrawal of British troops and expresses its complete solidarity with the heroic workers of beleaguered Derry".

The idea that the British Army, the tool of the government whose pressure — by now, open and explicit pressure — for reforms in Northern Ireland had destabilised the old system, would be an auxiliary to the RUC and B-Specials in crushing the Catholics as they had been crushed in 1920-22, at the birth of the Six Counties state, was politically idiotic. Talk of "the people", without reference to the fact that there was communalism — in fact, two "peoples" — was an enormous ideological and social lie.

THE "troops out" piece was a sort of editorial, preceding the main article, entitled "Police Terror in Bogside, by Eamonn McCann and Sean Reed". The article is important in showing what IS was saying before August, but we will see that it was *not* written by McCann and Reed, but by Reed.

A demonstration which had taken place on 19 April was described as insurrectionary and an attempt by Derry to secede from the Northern Ireland state.

"The moderate leadership of the civil rights

movement was swamped last weekend as the people of Bogside fought to defend their area against the RUC". They fought off riot police were "sticks, stones, and petrol bombs". Appeals to "go home in peace" from John Hume and the Citizens' Action Committee were ignored and "howled down".

The government had banned a proposed march from Burntollet to Derry. Baton charges, water cannon, and armoured cars were deployed. One armoured car was set on fire. The RUC fired five or six shots at random. After several hours fighting, the riot squad took the Bogside.

On Sunday morning, the Bogside evacuated the area. "Men, women, and children moved to the Creggan Heights". There was a mass meeting, with ten thousand people from the Creggan Estate. The RUC were given two hours to leave the Bogside. They withdrew, in return for an assurance that barricades would not be re-erected, and there was a brittle truce.

The street resistance committees of January were reactivated. Any "future attack will be met with organised and disciplined resistance". Because the police used guns, there were now calls, from Bernadette Devlin (a PD member elected as Westminster MP for Mid-Ulster in a by-election on 17 April) and others, for a "Citizens' Army".

The picture painted by SW had important elements of what happened, and of Northern Ireland politics, missing; notably, the role of John Hume, who suggested the withdrawal to Creggan and negotiated the RUC withdrawal from the Bogside. Hume would be one of the architects of the Catholic constitutional party, the SDLP.

"In the long term", the article said, British prime minister Harold Wilson's decision to send the troops to guard the power stations was "an assertion that British capitalism will intervene more and more directly if O'Neill fails to maintain 'law and order'." That is, on SW's reading, the troops would intervene in alliance with the hard Unionists to repress the Catholics.

What must be done in Britain? "British socialists must organise to struggle for the withdrawal of British troops... which are being used to release RUC and B-Specials to suppress Derry. Only a major and immediate mobilisation to this end can have any real meaning..."

The perspective was of Britain reinforcing an Orange regime more repressive than any since 1921. No wonder the IS leaders were bowled over by the reality of British troops after 14 August, and the initial Catholic welcome for them.

"Socialists and civil rights supporters in the Six Counties must mount a campaign to lift the pressure on Derry by drawing off as many police as possible..."

How? By demonstrating, rioting, attacking police stations: what else? Whether one thinks this call necessary or not, it is a call for generalised civil war.

"Comrades in the South should raise the demand that the Green Tory government arms Derry. Their refusal to do so can be used to expose their complicity in the oppression and their role as commission agents for British imperialism".

THE situation in Derry on 19-20 April was one of low-level civil war in one city. It was quietened by the efforts of the "moderates" like John Hume, and the decision of the RUC to vacate the Bogside. What if it had not been quietened?

The events of mid-August showed what that would have meant. Fighting would have spread beyond Derry, as it did in August, most importantly to Belfast. If the British Army would not "intervene" in such a situation, that would mean that the communal civil war would take its course. (*Socialist Worker's* way of putting it — "British capitalism will intervene" — is an example of the mind-rotting demagoguery in which SW dealt).

The call for opening the arsenals in the South to Northern Catholics was a call adapted to a situation of civil war. In August, the 26 Counties army would set up camps on the Border where Catholics from the Six Counties would be given military training. Money would be provided. Some government ministers, including future Taoiseach Charles Haughey, would set out importing guns — and find themselves dismissed from government and put on trial in Dublin for it.

But the call for arms from Dublin would "expose" the Southern government, so SW explained. As not nationalist enough? To do what? Attack the Six Counties? Move to take

Protestant votes. The Unionists would not, they could not, allow this process to go on".

"You mean that the government will provoke civil war?" "We want civil rights not civil war. It is the Tory landlords and bosses who will be responsible".

What had she meant by her call in Derry for a Citizen Army? "I mean that the people of Bogside should prepare to organise and resist any attempt at repression. Street defence committees should be formed, missiles stacked..." IS was now running a campaign of

"Every mention of James Connolly and the workers' republic brought sustained applause"

Bernadette Devlin meetings and setting up its own Irish "front", the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign, on the strength of Devlin's pulling power at meetings. The brave and clever "little girl" with her not too well defined "idealism" caught the imagination of people who would not have responded to *Socialist Worker* — as she had caught the imagination of the popular press in Britain and southern Ireland, which paid great attention to her.

SW of 8 May carried a page one picture of Bernadette Devlin, "the 22 year old civil rights MP", at a hospital building site in London, and at CAV Lucas in Acton. (After August, IS would lose its "base" and its leading militant at CAV Lucas, Tom Hillier, because of its change of line on the troops. Hillier would rejoin the Healy organisation).

A boxed announcement in *SW* declared that CAV Lucas "readers of *Socialist Worker*" "congratulate Bernadette Devlin on her historic victory over the Unionists in mid-Ulster. Towards the people's democracy and civil rights — down with Tories, Orange and Green — for a united socialist Ireland under workers' control". In January 1969, the IS leadership had fought hard and successfully to stop the IS National Committee adopting the Workers' Republic as a campaign slogan on Ireland, but now socialism and the Workers' Republic were to the fore. On 22 May *Socialist Worker* reported: "Big meeting rallies to Bernadette". The "*Socialist Worker* reporter" (it reads like John Palmer, the recent scourge of the Workers' Republic as an IS slogan) acclaimed the Fulham Town Hall meeting.

"Westminster doesn't like publicity for their dirty backyard... To questions about the Border, [Devlin] said that she believed ultimately in the need for a united Irish socialist republic in the James Connolly tradition. But the privileged position of the Catholic Church in the south was an obstacle to such unity. She understood the reluctance of Northern Protestant workers to domination by the Church."

"The audience was lively and militant. Every mention of James Connolly and an Irish workers' republic brought sustained applause". A *Socialist Worker* lead article (12 June) by John Palmer called on readers to "Build the Irish Civil Rights Solidarity Campaign".

The civil rights movement had granted a truce to the new Northern Ireland prime minister, James Chichester-Clark.

"The Unionists have little interest in meeting the basic demands of the civil rights movement". "Hardliner" Brian Faulkner had been appointed to preside over an examination of electoral boundary changes (to remedy the gerrymandered boundaries). Palmer thought no change was possible.

In fact, by that time, the "political" demands of civil rights had more or less carried the day in official Northern Ireland politics. But Palmer insisted that the Unionists would never lessen the sectarian grip on many local councils, for fear of splitting their own ranks.

"Even less has been done to provide jobs for 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' areas alike. Not that much could be done within the paralysing grip of the crisis of declining capitalism in Northern Ireland". This is Palmer as demagogue, reaching out for the Third Period Stalinist nonsense of the SLL. (Notice that the "withdraw subsidies" demand has long been dropped).

The Unionists won't disband the

The Bogside, Belfast

over Derry, incorporating the Catholic majority city on the border into the 26 Counties state? Arm the Northern Catholics to do that? This was an incipient Provisional-IRA idea. (The Provisionals would emerge as a split from the Stalinist-controlled IRA in December 1969).

"If it comes to civil war", the article continued, "then only the united action of all the British working people and their allies can provide the material base to resist Orange reaction and their Westminster supporters". That could mean anything from collecting money to gun-running, to opening a "second front" in Britain by bomb attacks on police stations, which is what was in effect advocated for Northern Ireland outside Derry.

Whether one thinks such calls necessary or foolish — what were they if not a plain perspective, and more or less open advocacy, of civil war?

In such a conflict as the article advocated, or at the very least saw as the logical and necessary development of the existing Northern Ireland Catholic movement, what should be the objective, politically, of the Catholics, or of the socialists on their side? To conquer the Protestants? To have Dublin replace Britain in control? To bring in UN troops (the Dublin government would propose that, in August and after)? To divide the territory of Northern Ireland?

The politics here were undilutedly the poli-

tics of the Haughey-Boland wing of the party in power in the South — the "Green Tories".

Eamonn McCann did not co-author this article with Gery Lawless. He would repudiate its article for the South to provide arms.

Whatever the reasons for the delay, five issues of *Socialist Worker* later, on 5 June, Eamonn McCann had a letter in *SW*: "Derry: the wrong demand". McCann said that the 26 April article "by Eamonn McCann and Sean Reed", had in fact been two separate articles amalgamated into one.

"Mr Reed contributed the demand that the Southern government arm the Derry workers. It was not a demand that I would raise". Coincidentally or not, there would be a lot less of "Sean Reed" in *SW* from now on.

But now Bernadette Devlin's election as Westminster MP for Mid Ulster, on 17 April, changed everything for IS. She made a big impact in the House of Commons with her "maiden speech". She was feted by the bourgeois press, and even by *Tribune*, whose correspondent Andrew Boyd had recently thrown Stalinoid aspersions at PD's leaders for standing in the Northern Ireland general election. For a while Bernadette Devlin behaved as an IS MP — a "Trotskyist" MP elected as a communal-nationalist candidate!

ON 1 May the back page of *SW* carried an interview, by "Sean Reed", with Bernadette Devlin. It showed the

naivety of even the best of the young people in PD.

Projecting the appeal of a small, pert, clever, questioning schoolgirl, Devlin was in fact a canny university student of psychology. At 22 she looked like Tenniel's drawing of Lewis Carroll's Alice, slightly raddled. And she could talk! She seemed, and, politically, probably was, sincere and earnest.

She would later, all too quickly, turn into a cynical communalist, but not for a while yet. Politically, she echoed McCann, openly berated sectarianism on the Catholic side, and proclaimed herself on the side of the workers, Protestant as well as Catholic.

There was a ring of genuineness about her, and her actions matched her words. She would get a six month jail sentence for her part in defending the Bogside in August 1969.

After her election, Devlin worked with IS in London, speaking at meetings and drumming up press interest. She was a major asset to IS for a while after her election in April. She opened new prospects for IS's Irish campaign.

Her dilemma was that she was, like McCann, part of a Catholic civil rights movement that could not transcend its base, and whose left wing could not transcend it either, whatever talk it talked about Protestant workers and socialism. She was an MP as the "unity" candidate of the Catholics in Mid Ulster. She claimed that some Protestants had voted for her, and that may have been true, but it wasn't fundamental. It changed nothing.

HER interview with "Sean Reed" in *Socialist Worker* was a portrait of the politics which IS was now purveying. Was she a revolutionary socialist, asked Reed. "I have never read Marx, but I have read James Connolly, and if James Connolly was a revolutionary socialist, then so am I". (This mix of disarming naivety, evasion, and keeping options open with the "if" was typical of Devlin).

Was she a Catholic, and if so, how did she square that with her socialism? "Connolly did. I believe in the separation of Church and State. I take my religion from Rome, not my politics..." That is what Daniel O'Connell had said when organising the Catholics of Ireland for "civil rights" in the early 19th century. Was Connolly her hero? "Connolly and Countess Markievicz. Don't forget that I'm a woman".

A united Ireland? No, she was not for a united Ireland short of socialism. "I stand for a socialist workers' republic. That is what we mean by the slogan 'Tories Out North and South'."

Did she see a need for a revolutionary socialist organisation? "There is no real socialist outfit in Ireland, and I believe there is a need for one, but I can't see how I could go about building one..."

What other than Ireland would she raise at Westminster? "The tinkers and the woman question. I support equal rights for women. That is why the slogan 'one man, one vote' has worried me".

"You said last week that you thought civil war was beginning in Ulster. Do you still think so?" "I thought it was coming when I saw the voting results in mid-Ulster. We did not get a pan-Popish vote". Devlin had got, she said, more votes than there were Catholics on the electoral register. "We know that the Catholic upper class voted Tory, so we got about 1500

Workers' Liberty pamphlets

50p per issue unless otherwise stated, post free. £8 for all sixteen issues.

- A workers' guide to Ireland £1
- Marxism and religion (Jan 2006)
- Taking socialism onto the shop floor Communist Party factory bulletins (March 2006)
- Nine days that shook Britain — The 1926 General Strike (May 2006)
- Iran — revolution and counter revolution 1978-9 (June 2006)
- The betrayal of the Spanish workers' revolution 1936-7 (Sept 2006)
- What is the Third Camp? (Oct 2006)
- The other history of American Trotskyism (Nov 2006)
- For a workers' voice in politics — John McDonnell for Labour leader (Dec 2006)
- The 1707 Act of Union and the rise of the

- Scottish working class (Feb 2007)
- What Trotsky on Mexico can tell us about Venezuela and Chávez (March 2007)
- 1917: Revolution for freedom and equality (April 2007) £1
- Solidarity, yes! Boycott, no! Why supporters of "two states" should not join the "smash Israel" boycotters (June 2007)
- Trotskyists and the creation of Israel (July 2007)
- Leon Trotsky: a Spartacus of the 20th century (August 2007) £1
- How can we best help the Palestinians (October 2007)
- Marx's Telescope: the Grundrisse, capitalism, the revolutionary class — a briefing for anti-capitalists

Write to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to "AWL".

Continued on page 18

"Paisleyite" B-Specials, wrote Palmer. One direction in which this picture of Unionist obduracy pointed was towards calling for British direct rule, which was now the "demand" of the Labour left around Tribune. But Palmer did not make that call. He was blocked from it by the repeated assertion that the British troops could only be used to help Orange diehards repress the Catholics — that is, by a piece of concocted "agitational" nonsense.

Typically, Palmer was still misrepresenting what was happening as a conflict between "the people" in general and "Tories". "The working people of Northern Ireland have been remarkably patient. But there can be no doubt that the civil rights movement, spearheaded by its militant wing, People's Democracy, will take to the streets". They will meet "ferocious repression from the B-Specials and Paisleyite bully-boys. Thus the need for a mass solidarity movement in Britain".

Politically, that meant what? A movement to do what? Collect money? Send volunteers to defend the civil rights people? Press the British government to intervene more? It could mean any or all of those things. Despite the eternal demagogic playing with feelings and hopes, IS kept its political options open. This shilly-shallying was quintessential IS (or, as the Trotskyist Tendency insisted, "centrist").

The too-subtle Palmer may well at that point not have known quite what he wanted. But by June 1969 the idea that civil rights activists "taking to the streets" could mean anything but sharpened polarisation and communal clashes was preposterous, if not simply demented.

Plainly Palmer knew that; he disguised the reality by talking of "Paisleyites". The Paisleyites would be in the forefront, but by now they headed a large constituency, and one that would grow with "the politics of the street".

Palmer reported that the ICRSC now planned meetings with Bernadette Devlin in other major cities. Membership was open to all who supported "the six demands of the militant civil rights movement":

1. One person, one equal vote
2. One family, one house
3. One man, one job
4. Disarm and disband the B-Specials
5. Disarm and disband the RUC
6. For the right of the whole Irish people to national self-determination.

And the Workers' Republic? It had vanished again! "Of course socialists within this campaign will not abandon their advocacy of the Irish workers' republic as the only viable path for Catholic and Protestant workers in Ireland". The meaning of this setting-aside of the call for a workers' republic, though talk of it was now a central part of the meetings IS was organising with Bernadette Devlin, was that IS hoped for a more nationalist civil rights movement.

THE campaign, wrote Palmer, would also attack "abuses" in the Southern state. The main emphasis would be on the North. ICRSC was supporting the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association rally in Trafalgar Square on 22 June.

Irish nationalism was explicitly now central to IS's politics in Ireland. "The need now is for every section of the revolutionary left in Britain to practise what it preaches about solidarity with workers fighting in countries dominated by imperialism. Ireland is on our doorstep. The outcome of the struggle there is bound to have a profound impact on the development of the struggle in Britain itself".

The mental slipping and sliding, the sleight of hand, and the demagogic is there still: the solidarity was actually with the oppressed Catholics, not with "workers" as such.

SW of 26 June reported, with a picture of Michael Foot speaking at the Trafalgar Square "1500 back Irish civil rights rally".

1500 was in fact a miserable turnout given the prominence of the issue and the organisations backing the demonstration: NICRA, the Connolly Association, the Tribune left (including its MPs, such as Foot), and IS's front, the ICRSC.

Bernadette Devlin, speaking at the rally, was both messianic and obtusely "economic". She said the problems of Northern Ireland were "economic, not religious".

Devlin was beginning to talk of herself now very grandly indeed. "We have forsaken the politicians at Westminster who don't care a damn, and we have come to you, who make

up the working people of this country. If you don't stand by us, we stand alone". The implication here was that "Westminster" was not a factor or a force in events in Northern Ireland.

It was the "Catholic economic" of IS rendered nonsensically explicit: politics, the state, were faded out. But like so much else, it was just talk. When the fighting started in Derry in August, Devlin and Eamonn McCann would issue a statement calling for British government intervention. Politics and the state did exist, after all.

In Northern Ireland, things were moving inexorably to the eruption of August. In Strabane, a Catholic town in Tyrone, near the Border, at the end of June, five thousand people attended a civil rights rally on whose platform stood all the right-wing and left-wing civil rights leaders, including McCann, Devlin, and Farrell.

Both McCann and, more so, Devlin denounced nationalists and others there on the

Right up to 14 August, Socialist Worker clung to the idea that it was just a matter of "the people" against a "Tory police state"

same platform, as exploiters and Catholic sectarians.

SW'S coverage of events was skimpy and selective, and you would not from it be able to form a lucid picture of what was going on in Northern Ireland. But it did report on some of the gathering elements of civil war, as in a round-up of events in SW of 17 July.

It purveyed the usual stale anti-Orangeist demagogic stuff which obscured what was going on: 12 July would be the date of the "annual marches of the beer-swilling boys of the quasi-secret, drum-beating, Catholic-baiting Orange Order, which rules Ulster in partnership with Northern Ireland big business and British imperialism".

The equation of Protestant communalism with "big business" and "imperialism" missed all the very important differences and nuances of difference in Northern Ireland politics. It was of a piece with the identification of Britain, and British capitalism, and capitalism, with Orange reaction. To accept this picture was to be utterly surprised by what would happen in August, when the British army initially defended the Catholics and began to disarm the B-Specials.

But the article also, in its way, took stock of the results of Derry's experience since 5 October. It was a sort of summary of the results of the activities of PD and the broader civil rights movement.

On 12 July there had been an attempt at a "pogrom" "against a Catholic working-class housing estate in Lurgan".

There had been "full-scale fighting in Derry City", Catholic youth facing the RUC with its guns and armoured cars.

In Lurgan barricades had been erected. In Dungiven the Orange Parade was attacked, and "townspeople" fired the Orange hall with half a dozen police inside it. There were many such incidents. (Here, though you have to work at it a little — translate it, so to speak — was a picture showing that Catholic sectarianism existed, too).

In Derry, a Union Jack over the civic bathhouse started it. "This, with stones thrown by Paisleyites and the knowledge of what was happening in ghettos elsewhere, brought Catholic youths, with some small Protestant support, out on the streets in some of the toughest and best organised fighting that this city has seen", with stones and Molotov cocktails.

The statement about "with some small Protestant support" either refers to an odd left wing Protestant, or is straight invention — in either case a substantive lie.

The RUC fired and wounded two youths, reported SW. A big "blitz of petrol bombs" followed. An armoured car and a troop carrier were destroyed.

Charges drove the police back from Guildhall Square to the doors of the RUC barracks. Helmeted, riot-shield-carrying police attacked again in Guildhall Square. Younger kids carried petrol bombs and stones for the

older ones.

"One of the most significant facts of the weekend's incidents in Derry has been the fighting ability of the youngsters. The people of Derry are getting up off their knees and learning their own strength and self-respect after 50 years of despair and degradation... [The young] are able to bypass half a century of passivity brought on by the betrayals of the national struggle in 1921-2.

"The moderate agitation of the older people mobilises the youngsters in a much more militant fashion. This militancy will in turn have its effect on their elders, and Derry may pass through a similar process to that in Dublin in the years 1910-20...

"The young workers were leaderless in precisely the same way as were the black youngsters who raised hell in Detroit in 1967. As in Detroit, so in Derry [there had been looting of shops by Catholic youngsters], the 'looting' was aimed at a class which held the kids' families in thrall through hire purchase debts and credit".

The article was unsigned, but reads like John Palmer, or John Palmer and Michael Farrell (who was in London for the NICRA Trafalgar Square meeting), and maybe Gery Lawless. By this time no-one could think that the events described could do anything but sharpen the communal polarisation. Yet the author(s) made no attempt to assess the overall political situation, and where events were heading. He, or they, wrote as if he thought that the current situation could continue indefinitely.

"If the courage and determination of the young workers is to be transformed into a serious challenge", the article said, "it must develop a sense of discipline and socialist objectives". How, without a revolutionary socialist organisation? One that actually existed as an organisation: PD scarcely existed as an organisation, and its politics were still vague and liberal.

"A campaign must be mounted to build a bridge to young Protestant workers. This unity, more than anything, spells disaster for the Tory police state". Indeed. Except that that unity was a million political miles away. Creating it was a programme for a whole period, and not a short one either. Astonishingly absent from the article was any notion of political time, and of the real tempo of events in Northern Ireland. Its working assumption was that there was plenty of time. By that stage it was a preposterous assessment.

"There is a strong possibility that the [Belfast] Stormont government will take the opportunity to put the boot in on the civil rights movement. The British troops in the Six Counties may be used to release the RUC and B-Specials to crush the youth of Derry.

"British socialists must extend the campaign of solidarity with the struggle for civil rights in the terrorist state maintained by British imperialism".

The article, in fact, painted a picture of incipient civil war, but its only demand, printed in bold type, was: "Demand that British troops be withdrawn now". Local branches of the ICRSC were called upon to come to a demonstration outside the "Ulster Office" in London.

A picture of the crowd outside the Ulster Office in London appeared on page one of the 24 July *Socialist Worker*. A banner read: "Workers' Unity Must Be Built At All Costs". The headline said "Disband Ulster Gestapo", demand Irish civil rights marchers". There had been 800 at the demonstration, called by the ICRSC. The Starry Plough flag was carried at its head, and posters read: "Unionist thugs butcher innocent people in Northern Ireland" and "Civil Rights Now".

GERY Lawless, speaking for the ICRSC, told the marchers (according to SW):

"We want civil rights not civil war, but if the government of Northern Ireland blocks the road to full civil rights now, if they face us with the threat of civil war, then I say to them that the fighting youth of Derry gave them their answer last week".

John Palmer, for IS, "angrily denounced those who condemn 'the violence' of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. It was the economic violence of unemployment, slum housing, and police thuggery that were to blame for the situation in the Six Counties police state, he said. He called for the Irish workers to realise Connolly and Larkin's dream of a united Irish workers' republic".

The perennial and perennially self-confusing demagogic sleight of mind!

Unemployment is a sort of violence: ergo, the reality and looming threat of violent "violence" (so to speak) is disposed of as a political problem demanding answers!

"Civil rights" had now become a code, a would-be "transitional demand", for socialist politics.

The truth was that the original civil rights programme, not the tacked-on demands for jobs and so on, had proved to be "transitional", but not to socialist politics. Transitional demands are not, as is often said, demands that can't be met (which was the way that the demands for jobs and housing in Northern Ireland were said to be "transitional"). They are linked demands which mobilise workers and whose possibilities expand and escalate to the degree that such mobilisation occurs.

The Catholic mobilisation evoked by the basic civil rights demands opened up broader and deep political vistas: civil rights led to the idea of self-determination, to challenging the existence of the Six Counties entity. The "impossibilist" demands for jobs and so on that implied socialist revolution had no such mobilising power — and none at all, in 1969, to mobilise Protestant workers and unite them with Catholic workers.

THE first issue of *Socialist Worker* after a two week summer break appeared on 14 August. Northern Ireland was in the early stage of sectarian civil war.

"Sean Reed" reappeared in SW for the first time in a while (it would also be his last appearance), under the headline, "Derry fights police state".

SW readers were told that large riots had erupted around the Apprentice Boys march on 12 August. "The fighting started as 15,000 of the Orange bullyboys of Derry marched, beating their drums in their annual master-race reminder to the majority of Derry's citizens of their historic humiliation..."

In a paper dated 14 August, the night on which Protestant West Belfast erupted in a ferocious assault on the Catholic Falls Road, Reed clung stubbornly to the fantasy that it was a matter of "the citizens" against a mere Orange-Unionist "state machine".

"Although some Paisleyites joined the cops in their attack, this was a straightforward fight between the heroic citizens of Bogside and the armed forces of the state..."

"It is no exaggeration to say that Derry may be at the brink of pogrom or civil war... If the police attacks continue, the alternative is no longer between civil war and peace. It is between a pogrom and a civil war. The whole working class of Ireland must not, at any cost, allow a pogrom".

The nonsensical SW line that the British government was not able to deliver "civil rights" reforms was repeated in a paper appearing on the day that the British troops took control of Derry City.

"To expect the Wilson government to support the people of Derry in their demands for civil rights is to sow illusions... British imperialism can no more aid the struggle of the Irish people than petrol can quench fire" (emphasis added).

What did the SW article suggest British socialists should do? "The British and international labour movement, in alliance with the majority of Irish people everywhere, must rally to bring real aid to the beleaguered people". Meaning? In London, support the ICRSC rally at Shepherds Bush Green, the following Sunday...

And even now, the thoughtless talk of "the people" continued. "Collect money and other material aid to help the struggling people of Ulster".

That article was the end of a whole phase for *Socialist Worker* and IS. The next *Socialist Worker* would change direction radically, in response to the events in Northern Ireland.

The nonsensical "ultra-left" analysis that Britain and the Orange hardliners were politically identical would be abandoned. The fact that Britain wanted reforms, and would no longer let the Unionists do what they liked in its "dirty back yard", was now taken on board — and exaggerated wildly, and in terms of working-class politics, as stupidly as the opposite had been proclaimed before.

IS's leaders would be gripped by a political hysteria — it would dominate the upcoming September 1969 IS conference — which was essentially a hysterical recoil from their own civil-war-mongering, vicarious Green-nationalist politics of the previous months.

Anti-BNP conference called for 19 January

BY JACK YATES

THE last few years have seen the British National Party make creeping electoral gains in local government. The foothold they now enjoy in borough, town and parish councils is directly related to two factors: their turn away from confrontational street politics to agitation around community concerns and the inability of existing anti-fascist campaign groups (Searchlight and the SWP-dominated Unite Against Fascism) to counter this new strategy.

The situation in Nottinghamshire is a case in point.

In May 2007 Sadie Graham, a leading figure in the BNP and arguably a very able political organiser, was elected to Broxtowe Borough Council for Brinsley; a small, former mining community.

What factors allowed the BNP to pull off this victory in a previously solid Labour seat? Has Sadie Graham and her colleagues managed to turn a majority of villagers to fascist ideology? No.

Most people have never heard of Brinsley, let alone visited it. Like many such communities it's last in the queue when it comes to public services, health and transportation. A one post-box, one bus stop, three pub village. Such places have felt the sharp end of New Labour's manifold betrayal of workers and the BNP have invested considerable resources in relating to and organising around the issues. They've visited every door at least once, spent time listening to and recording people's concerns and

produced regular propaganda giving their own take on events.

In the absence of other political organisations, the BNP filled the gap. The situation in Brinsley was so desperate in May that the Labour Party struggled to find a candidate willing to stand against Graham until anti-fascists started to organise. There was a major risk of an untested election.

By elevating themselves to the position of would-be community shop stewards, relating to the material situation and providing "answers" the BNP have built their own organisation, developed a base of support and achieved electoral "legitimacy".

The bitter fruits of the BNP's success came thick and fast. Within weeks of being elected, Graham's Sri Lankan neighbours were forced from their home after a sustained series of attacks on their property. A group of travellers — having the misfortune to park up opposite Graham's house — were held captive until police intervened. An Indian restaurant, other local councillors and Labour Party meetings have all been targeted. All the time, the BNP continues to grow.

What should anti-fascists say and do in such a situation? Some in the Labour Party insist that the BNP must be ignored — deprived of the oxygen of publicity. Searchlight often appears to think that eulogising Labour's "triumphs" does the job. Unite Against Fascism insist that people simply "vote against the BNP". None of these strategies goes any way towards addressing the problem in places like Brinsley. Ignoring the BNP allows them to grow unhindered. Pretending that Blair and Brown have done

wonderful things for all of us ignores the material conditions that the BNP feed off. Calling on people to "vote against the BNP" with a single leaflet through the door a week before an election will not undo the hard work put in by the fascists.

Anti-fascists need to build organisations that focus on working class politics, expose the true nature of the BNP, demonstrate the role of the wider labour movement and develop an ability to mobilise considerable numbers against the fascists.

In many places like Brinsley the Labour Party is the only even quarter-way left political organisation with any life. We have to work with its members against the BNP. We should point to the work done by some Labour members of parliament — people like John McDonnell — in exposing the betrayals of New Labour and posing an alternative. Most importantly, we should argue for collective working class action as a means to stop the BNP and address other social issues.

For several years the BNP has held an annual "Red, White and Blue Festival" (RWB) without significant opposition. This year they moved the event from a relatively isolated location to the village of Codnor, fifteen minutes from central Nottingham. Clearly the BNP considers the Midlands and Nottinghamshire in particular as a political base. They use such events to widen their support, solidify the politics of their existing members and build their organisation. Such an event cannot be allowed to take place untested.

Anti-fascists in Nottinghamshire have called a regional conference on 19 January 2008 to

prepare opposition to the RWB and discuss the way ahead for anti-fascist organising. West Midlands Unison, East Midlands FBU, Nottinghamshire Trades Council, Derby NASUWT and Nottingham NUT are supporting the conference along with a long list of individuals. We expect many more trade union organisations and campaigning groups to add their support.

This is an important opportunity to build a meaningful, labour movement based initiative against the BNP.

For more information, contact Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP at nottm-stopbnp@yahoo.co.uk

No Sweat plans action

BY JACK STAUNTON

OVER 100 anti-sweatshop and workers' rights activists gathered in London on the weekend of 1-2 December for this year's No Sweat conference. The theme chosen for this year's conference by the campaign — which works within the anti-capitalist movement to argue for solidarity with workers' movements at home and abroad — was "Beating Big Brand Exploitation".

Activists from across the UK discussed the campaigns they had been involved in through the past year, and furthermore how our activity might find expression in new arenas and link up with other campaigns. For example, the question of water privatisation in India is of direct relevance to the burgeoning environmentalist movement.

Similarly the RMT union's attempts to organise cleaners on the London Underground are clearly an important focus for those involved in migrants' rights campaigns, since most cleaners are immigrants; all are badly paid with few

employment rights; and some are even at risk of deportation.

Sessions at the conference also displayed the importance of international solidarity. After a showing of the film *Black Gold*, which portrayed the injustice suffered by coffee farmers in Ethiopia who earn just pennies for a kilo of coffee which costs dozens of times more in the United States, the Industrial Workers of the World's Adam Lincoln spoke of his efforts to organise coffee shop workers in the UK into a "Baristas' Union", paralleling similar fast-food workers' campaigns in Europe, the USA and the Antipodes.

The fight of the farmers exploited by companies like Starbucks in Africa and Central America is the same as that of the largely casual workers who sell coffee for crap wages in their stores.

The No Sweat event was not all talk however — on Saturday evening twenty-five activists staged a demonstration outside Topshop on Oxford Street, in protest at plutocrat Philip Green's use of sweatshop labour to produce clothes for his stores. With some dressed up as

Father Christmas, others as the Fashion Police, and a clothes line set up to "hang out TopShop's dirty laundry", we had a vibrant picket, shouting "TopShop, sweatshop!" and singing Christmas carols with anti-sweatshop lyrics, all whilst handing out well over a thousand leaflets to Christmas shoppers. The police took a dim view of our "obstruction" — matching us for numbers almost one-for-one, they told us that it was too busy for us to stand on the pavement.

One of our number had already been arrested by a Topshop security guard who, having pushed our man hard up against a locked door, detained him in a special cell within Topshop!

The conference provided a good basis for further campaigning, particularly since the closing plenary featured a speech by an activist engaged in the French student struggles. Some of us will be visiting striking French students on 11-14 December, while No Sweat also arranged actions against Topshop on 6 December and G Star on 17 December, along with a benefit gig with Alabama 3 on 21 December.

• See www.nosweat.org.uk for more details.

FIGHTING IMMIGRATION CONTROLS IN THE WORKPLACE AND THE COMMUNITY

SUNDAY 9 DECEMBER 10AM-12.30PM AT T&G (UNITE) OFFICES, 128 THEOBALDS ROAD, LONDON WC1 (5 MINUTES FROM HOLBORN TUBE)

SPEAKERS
JABEZ LAM, ORGANISING CHINESE WORKERS IN SOHO
JAVIER RUIZ, T&G ORGANISER, JUSTICE FOR CLEANERS

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social

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

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

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

WE STAND FOR:

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

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

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

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

workers' liberty & Solidarity

One in eight work 48-plus hours

CUT THE WORKING WEEK!

BY ROBERT BOOTH

LONG working hours are on the increase again in the UK, after a gradual ten-year decline in people working more than 48 hours a week, according to new TUC figures.

More than one in eight workers now work more than 48 hours each week, with as many as one in six in London putting in more than 48 hours a week.

The TUC figures, taken from the Labour Force Survey, show that over three million workers or 13% of the work force now work

more than 48 hours a week. The figures probably underestimate the real scale of excessive hours, as migrant workers and others, such as some hotel and care staff, are not all counted.

Under the working time regulations, workers are supposed to be protected from working more than an average 48-hour week. But in the UK - unlike other European countries - workers can "opt out" of this protection. The TUC says that the "opt out" is widely abused, with two-thirds never asked before they are expected to work in excess of 48 hours and a quarter of those who sign given no real choice.

Longer hours have terrible long term effects on workers' health. Workers risk getting heart attacks, mental health disorders, sleep disorders, substance abuse and relationship problems. Back problems and even sudden death from overwork have been found by researchers. And for night and shift working, there are well documented risks of stomach complaints, neurological disorders and menstrual disorders.

Capitalism continuously forces workers to work long hours. Working longer hours means more exploitation of workers. It means bigger profits for bosses.

We need shorter working hours so that we can have a decent life outside work. We have friends, families, hobbies and responsibilities. We want to rest and play as well as work.

All workers should be on a maximum 35-hour week - and be pushing for a 4-day, 32-hour week. Reduced working time is the great historic demand of the labour movement. It is basic matter of freedom. It will improve our health and quality of life. And it will be better for the environment too.

When we get our reduced hours, it should be without strings: no loss of pay or jobs, no extra duties. We already work hard enough - we don't want our extra time off to be spent recovering from extra stress and exhaustion!

How would it be paid for? By cutting bosses' and senior managers' over-inflated salaries and bonuses. By taxing the rich. By sharing out the work more equally, and including the unemployed. By bringing industries into public ownership under workers' control. Fight to cut the working week.

We need to fight for this:

- industrially - taking strike action to defend and extend our rights
- politically - fighting for a legally-enforced 35-hour week, and to elect people who genuinely represent working-class people's needs and views
- ideologically - understanding and exposing this system for what it is, and working out a better way to do things.

Karen Reissman: Step up the solidarity

BY MIKE FENWICK

OVER a thousand people braved the cold and the rain to support of victimised trade union activist Karen Reissman in Manchester on 24 November. The majority demonstrating were fellow workers, who remain on strike to support Karen as well as and patients and their families who support this important dispute.

The rest were trade unionists from around the country - left activists from the health service but also many from local government and a wide range of other unions and community campaigns. Teachers, civil servants and firefighters were all represented.

Karen is a nurse in Manchester and was basically sacked for being an effective trade union activist. If unchallenged Karen's sacking would open the floodgates to a series of victimisations who dare to speak out. Her specific "crime" was speaking to the press about cuts and job losses in Manchester mental health service.

Karen's union has escalated support action by calling a national day of action on 5 December (as we go to press).

With threats now being made to the strikers about reporting them for unprofessional behaviour the struggle is heating up, and unlike the usual tale in the NHS, there seem to be unlimited budgets available to help bust the strike.

Karen's appeal against her sacking is now underway. Our website (www.workersliberty.org) will cover the dispute over the Christmas period. In the meantime donations and letters of support are vital to maintain the strike at its current level.

Pressure should be put on local Labour councillors in Manchester and MPs. We should demand Union leaders organise the union's parliamentary group of MPs to put pressure on the Health Secretary to intervene and uphold the principle of freedom of speech for trade unionists in the public sector.

- Donations and messages of support can be sent to Manchester Community and Mental Health Union branch, 70 Manchester Road, Manchester, M21 9UN. Phone 07972 120 451 or email union@zen.co.uk. Cheques should be made out to "Unison Manchester Community and Mental Health".
- For more information, visit www.reinstate-karen.org. A petition can be downloaded there.

Subscribe to Solidarity!

Individuals: £15 per year (22 issues) waged, £8 unwaged.

Organisations: £35 large, £22 smaller (5 copies)

Name

Address

Organisation

European rate: £20 or 32 euros in cash.

Send to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to "Solidarity". Or subscribe online at www.workersliberty.org/solidarity