

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 137 21 August 2008 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

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We challenged the BNP. Next time we must stop them!

By CHARLIE SALMON

700 protesters gathered in the village of Codnor, in Derbyshire, on 16 August and put down an important marker for anti-fascism. For the second year running the fascist British National Party held their 'Red, White and Blue Festival' on a farm owned by BNP supporter Alan Warner. Last year the festival was opposed by a single protester – a local resident who felt compelled to show his disgust for the gathering fascists and their racist politics. Things were very different this year.

This demonstration – called by Notts Stop the BNP, trade unions and local activists – was a significant

departure from what had become the standard 'strategy' of anti-fascists. For too long, anti-fascist activity has been restricted to parades through city centres and emergency leafleting at election time. The demonstration against the RWB festival was the result of sustained local activity, attempts to mobilise the labour movement and the production of campaign materials that focussed on the political terrain contested by the BNP.

A number of factors, not least the sectarian behaviour of the SWP's 'Unite Against Fascism' front group and restrictions placed on demonstrators by the police, meant that attempts to disrupt the BNP festival directly had to be abandoned. With larger numbers,

more unity and some consistent political work within anti-fascist campaigns we should hope to build a militant, working class campaign against the BNP and other fascist organisations.

The demonstration against the RWB festival was an important first step on this road. Nick Griffin and the BNP call the current period – a time when they're building their ranks, making electoral gains, training a core of hardened fascists – the 'quiet revolution'. Anti-fascists need to make something clear: there is no such thing as a 'quiet revolution'. We are in a battle with the forces of reaction – our class enemies – and intend to organise ourselves accordingly.

PAKISTAN

A dictator gone, but not his policies

BY FAROOQ TARIQ, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE LABOUR PARTY PAKISTAN

As General Pervez Musharraf announced his resignation — in an unscheduled nationally televised speech of one hour — private television channels showed an instant response of jubilation, welcoming the decision, in all four provinces.

Musharraf resigned as president of Pakistan as he was facing an impeachment move by the Pakistan Peoples Party-led ruling alliance of four parties. For the first time, not a single political party defended General Musharraf. Even Mutihida Qaumi Party (MQM) was not ready to defend him publicly, this, a party that he was associated with for long time.

There have been numerous occasions during the last year alone when General Musharraf could have lost power.

General Musharraf must thank the PPP leadership for providing him nearly eight more months in power after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007. He could have lost power then, if the PPP leadership had decided to demand his immediate resignation. For five days after the assassination, Pakistan was under siege by the masses. Unfortunately, the PPP leadership decided not to do this and to

take part in general elections.

And after the elections the PPP opted to work with Musharraf.

After implementing highly unpopular economic policies, the PPP leadership lost popularity. Had they not taken a decision to impeach Musharraf, the General could have decided to remove the PPP-led coalition government. The PPP took

Farooq Tariq

this popular decision to change gears and reverse its unpopularity. This has paid off for the time being.

The departure of General Musharraf is some of the best news for a long time in Pakistan. It was defeat of the military generals and for those political trends always seeking refuge with the generals.

There have been many important struggles against the military rule during the last nine years of General Musharraf. The peasant struggle for land rights at Okara Military Farms during 2001-2005 set the tone among the most exploited strata of society. The ten-day national strike by the telecommunication workers against privatisation in June 2005 was another manifestation of workers' consciousness against

the military dictatorship.

The successful revolt of the Sindh masses against the building of the controversial Kala Bagh Dam and the three day general strike in Sindh and Baluchistan province against the killings of [Baluchi nationalist politician] Nawab Akbar Bhugti were the two other important struggles.

However, these revolts remained isolated in one or other part of Pakistan.

It was the militant lawyer's movement after the removal of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on 9 March 2007 that was mainly responsible for the departure of the dictatorship.

Musharraf should not leave Pakistan without being called to account. It seems that the dictator Musharraf has been offered a safe passage and a luxurious retirement after his forced resignation.

A very popular demand has been to arrest Musharraf to face charges of murder and other crimes. General Musharraf must be arrested.

"Military out of politics" must be the main slogan for the future. 32 out of the 62 year independence of Pakistan have been under the direct military rule. However, no military general has yet been tried for the crime of breaking the constitution.

A new wave of class struggle will explode in Pakistan. The PPP government would have no excuse of not solving the main question of price hikes. The imple-

mentation of a neo-liberal agenda will be challenged by all sections of the working class. The PPP-led coalition has no other economic plan except to go the Musharraf way. They want to privatize the remaining public sector institutions. They want to remain partners with American imperialism in their so-called war on terror.

The implementation of a neo-liberal agenda will clear some of the dust from the real face of the PPP. An extreme right-wing party of the rich cannot base itself on the past reform agenda for long time.

A new era of class struggle will be a challenge for the forces of the left and social movements. The religious fundamentalist forces are in the field. Most of them have been seen wrongly as anti-imperialist forces. They have no solution the problems facing the masses. The left forces have to fight against the pro-imperialist forces and those who are wrongly seen as anti-imperialists. It is a difficult objective condition for the forces of the left, however, what other options are there for the left apart from fighting back?

A dictator gone but not his policies. That is a real challenge that Labour Party Pakistan and other left forces are facing at present.

• www.laborpakistan.org

SCOTTISH WORKERS

Public pay strikes

As we go to press (20 August) a 24-hour strike action by local government workers, members of UNISON, UNITE, and the GMB is taking place.

The same day PCS members employed by the Scottish Government and Registers of Scotland, are staging a follow-up 24-hour strike.

Both strikes are about below-inflation pay offers for workers in the public sector.

The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has offered local authority workers a three-year pay-deal, with pay going up by just 2.5% each year.

Scottish Ministers have offered for Scottish government employees just 2%.

These pay offers represent a cut in real pay and standards of living — according to the Retail Price Index, inflation is now at 5% for the first time in 20 years.

But the real rate of inflation — especially for low paid workers, who spend a disproportionately large share of their income on consumer basics such as food and fuel — is far higher.

Gas prices are up by 35%, mortgage repayments are up by 8%, transport costs are up by 7%, and food is up by 6%, with the price of basic foodstuffs having increased by an even larger margin: bread and milk by 14%, butter by 31%, and eggs by 39%.

Hardly surprisingly, therefore, the industrial action ballots conducted among local government trade unionists produced overwhelming majorities in favour of strike action: 68% in UNITE, 70% in UNISON, and 74% in the GMB.

The local government trade unions are demanding 5% or £1,000 (whichever is the greater), another three days annual leave, and an additional public holiday. The PCS is demanding a 6% pay rise, and a bigger

rise for the lowest paid.

But even the pay rises proposed by the unions themselves, which were drawn up at the turn of the year, would not protect members from pay cuts in real terms.

This Wednesday's strike action will see joint-union rallies and demonstrations across Scotland and will mark the start of further industrial action in support of a pay rise for public sector workers which is not a pay cut.

PCS members are already staging an overtime ban and a work-to-rule. The 20 August strike will be followed by successive three-day strikes by different groups of workers, and further 24-hour all-out strikes.

The rank-and-file of the local government unions and the PCS need to ensure that further campaigning and industrial action is organised and co-ordinated at a local level by grassroots public sector alliances, consisting of workplace reps from the unions involved in the disputes. The National Shop Stewards Network in Scotland could play a pivotal role in initiating such local public sector alliances.

The pay campaign must be under the members' control. Not only should any further pay offer be subject to a members' ballot, so too should any proposal to call off the industrial action on the basis of an offer of further talks by the employers.

Where possible, action should also be co-ordinated with campaigning by public sector workers in the rest of the country. On one level, these disputes are specifically Scottish — given that the employers involved are COSLA and the Scottish Ministers. At the same time, they are also directed against the pay-cut policies which the Westminster Labour government wants to see imposed.

WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

A real plan for crisis

The TUC has responded to the economic crisis by demanding, "action to stop unemployment growing further still... Unions are looking for action to boost demand; we urge the Bank to cut interest rates and the Government to take the cap off public sector wage increases."

As a programme to deal with the problems workers face this is pitifully inadequate. Workers do not just need "action to stop unemployment growing further", but full employment. This is an immediate pressing concern for millions of workers.

We need a leadership in the labour movement which puts forward a coherent case for jobs — from our class standpoint — and fights for full employment aggressively, with conviction.

Of course the question arises, how can full employment be guaranteed? We say that the state must guarantee all workers a useful, well-paid job. How can such a policy be paid for? By taxing the rich.

Bank of England action to cut interest rates might benefit some workers facing repossession of their homes or astronomical credit card bills, but will do nothing to address the underlying problem: financial institutions chasing profits, without concern for the human consequences of their activities.

In order to prevent financial crises rooted in the drive for profit, guarantee pensions and provide a basis for rational planning of the economy in the interest of the working class majority, we advocate the nationalisation of the banks and financial sector.

The TUC are right that the cap should be taken off public sector wage increases. But this, by itself will not guarantee wages will not be cut by under-inflation wage rises.

In public and private sectors we need

powerful, militant union organisations willing to organise campaigns to defend and improve workers' living standards. One key demand is for the abolition of the anti-union laws that stifle union strike activity. Another is to guarantee workers, in law, wage increases which automatically compensate for inflation.

We need a government based on our own class and fighting for our class interests. We need a Workers' Government.

To read more about the case for an Emergency Workers' Plan:

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/07/25/workers-response-crisis-fight-workers-government>

The trade union movement, New Labour and workers' representation

By John Bloxam and Sean Matgamna
What do Marxists do in the labour movement?
Leon Trotsky on class and party
Debate: the trade unions in politics
£3 including p&p from AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques to "AWL".

GEORGIA, SOUTH OSSETIA AND ABKHAZIA

The issue is self-determination

To date Russian troops remain in Georgia very close to the capital Tbilisi. As western diplomatic pressure on Russia gets stronger, Russia appears to want a semi-permanent presence in the de facto mini-states within Georgia's borders — South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The Russian war aims went far beyond any "defence" of, or "justice" for, the South Ossetian people. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili claimed Russia wanted to overthrow his government and annex South Ossetia; despite the hypocrisy of someone who vowed to re-establish Georgian control in the de facto states, this statement has the ring of truth.

Russia says it wants a referendum for the people of South Ossetia on their future. This from the government of Vladimir Putin, which has gutted the (weak) bourgeois democratic institutions Russia gained after the fall of the Stalinist system. Putin is an autocratic cynical thug. Contrast his lying rhetoric over "self-determination" for South Ossetia with his extraordinary brutality towards the Chechen peoples' drive for independence. What kind of result would the Russians accept in a referendum? One which called for complete independence for South Ossetia, united with North Ossetia? Russia might allow that, but only if it enjoyed complete informal control over the a new Ossetia.

The Russian invasion shows us a resurgent imperialist Russia which still regards the Caucasus as its own backyard. Whatever happens, the newly independent states of Georgia and others in the region — long held captive in the Tsarist Empire and then the Stalinist USSR, both a "prison house of nations" — will continue to come under threat.

The Georgian government's 7-8 August attempt to reclaim territorial sovereignty in South Ossetia was a bloody and politically reckless adventure. It was also, whatever the Georgians feared about Russian control in the disputed territories, wrong.

The South Ossetians are a people with a distinct history who have the right to self-determination. While Georgian action may have been about justifiable fear for the many Georgians who live within the territory, it was also the action of a nationalistic government resolved to "reintegrate" Ossetia into Georgia. *If the people of South Ossetia want independence that is their right.* On the other hand, the democratic aspirations of the people are not synonymous with the ambitions of their proto-government, run as it is by a former Soviet official in the pay of the Russians.

The build up of force and the militarization of territories inside NATO; the future plan to bring Georgia into NATO, has all helped to exacerbate the hostility between Russian imperialism and the smaller state. Russian action has been a proxy for its larger rivalry with the USA that is the basic framework here. The US wants to prise away the countries on Russia's western borders. And Russia wants to reverse losses in prestige and influence that have occurred since the end of the Cold War.

But, much as the big western powers want strategically important Georgia tied into their military network, they were not prepared to go out on a limb for little Georgia, and risk a wider war with Russia. Support from the US was very minimal.

Where do socialists stand? We stand for the self-determination of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We oppose the Russian threat to Georgian self-determination.

We don't defer to the existing borders of Georgia or Russia. We don't care about the big powers' territorial claims. We care about the rights of distinct peoples where they are the majority to decide their own future. We are consistent democrats; where there is a local minority — as in South Ossetia, which has a large percentage of ethnic Georgians — their democratic rights also should be upheld. Ultimately, we stand for the unity of different peoples, in the first place of the working classes. We stand for a socialist federation in the Caucasus.

The prospects for the self-determination of the oppressed peoples of Georgia being achieved in a consistently democratic way, that is, taking into account the wishes of the minorities within the disputed territories, looks gloomy. There is a terrible chance of long-term ethnic conflict and ethnic cleansing in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This short war has already caused a huge displacement of people.

The responsibility for that lies with the various bourgeois forces currently occupying the political, as well as the territorial, space in the region.

UK socialists should make contact and where we can

solidarise with the different socialist, left and labour movement organisations in the region.

THE PRO-RUSSIAN LEFT

Seamus Milne writing in the *Guardian* (Thursday 14 August) under the headline, "This is a tale of US expansion not Russian aggression," began: "The outcome of six grim days of bloodshed in the Caucasus has triggered an outpouring of the most nauseating hypocrisy from western politicians and their captive media." While it is not quite clear what he means by western "captive media" — we would have to travel to Putin's Russia to find real "captive media" — the hypocrisy of western politicians is not in dispute. Milne mentions Iraq. Yes, Washington does have double standards.

Therefore? Therefore Russia is off the hook: "By any sensible reckoning, this is not a story of Russian aggression, but of US imperial expansion."

We can't have two factors, both Russian aggression and US imperial expansion? Apparently not, we must choose from one or the other.

No mention then of Chechen democracy, drowned in blood by the Kremlin. No mention of Putin's "nauseating hypocrisy" in claiming to defend smaller, oppressed peoples after having destroyed Grozny and having political responsibility for the deaths of thousands of Chechen civilians.

Milne goes on, "The long-running dispute over South Ossetia ... is the inevitable consequence of the breakup of the Soviet Union. As in the case of Yugoslavia, minorities who were happy enough to live on either side of an internal boundary that made little difference to their lives feel quite differently when they find themselves on the wrong side of an international state border."

Milne is an old Stalinist, and too embarrassed to state his conclusion clearly (better that the old USSR and Yugoslavia still exist). But we are brave enough to state our position, contrasting ourselves to Milne by rewording his text: The long-running dispute over South Ossetia is

THE SWP AND THE HOLOCAUST

The missing six million

The Socialist Workers Party's behaviour at last Saturday's protest against the British National Party's Red White and Blue festival was spectacularly crass (see page 9). But nothing they did was odder than the text of the petition they were circulating to gather contact names.

Using Love Music Hate Racism as a party front, their petition's second bullet point reads: "[The BNP] deny the holocaust where thousands of LGBT people, trade unionists and disabled people were slaughtered."

No mention of the main victims of the Holocaust, the Jews.

How could such an omission be accounted for? Perhaps, it could be argued, the Jews were simply forgotten, left off the list of victims through casual error. Perhaps we should regard this as a stupid mistake, but not a malicious or politically significant one. Perhaps a young, new SWP member should take the blame.

Let us assume that a young member did write this. Don't more experienced comrades in the SWP check political material before it is circulated? We know they do.

But let us also assume that the youngest, newest SWP

the inevitable consequence of the unwillingness of the big powers and the Georgian government to accept the right to self determination of nations and respect the rights of national minorities.

But Milne cares passionately about Georgia (under certain conditions): "Georgia proper's independence [should be] respected — best protected by opting for neutrality." In other words Georgia can be independent by doing the minimum its powerful northern neighbour demands of it. It can have independence... if it chooses to reject its independence!

Milne repeats a Russian threat here which would be more candidly worded: "Georgia's independence will not be respected by the Russian government unless it breaks with the US." Or more honestly still, "Georgia must tow Moscow's line or there will be trouble."

And Milne rejoices in the rise of a new Russian imperialism, "Unipolar domination of the world has squeezed the space for genuine self-determination and the return of some counterweight has to be welcome." The answer to American imperialism, it seems, is not the abolition of imperialism but support for a "balancing" imperialism!

But when the Soviet Union last stood head-to-head with the US, wasn't the Soviet bloc a prison for oppressed nationalities? Wasn't the USSR itself an imperialist monstrosity?

Having passed on Putin's threat to Georgia, Milne ends by passing on his threat against the Baltic states and Ukraine to the rest of us, "If Georgia had been a member of Nato, this week's conflict would have risked a far sharper escalation. That would be even more obvious in the case of Ukraine."

Of course we should oppose Georgia's entry into NATO. But we should be clear why. Not because we want to help Putin's imperialism, but in the name of international socialism, in opposition to all the contending ruling classes and the wars they wage.

member produced this material, which was then circulated, unchecked by anyone else within the SWP. Why would this hypothetical new member "forget" the Jews?

To say something has been "forgotten" is a description, not an explanation. For example, one of us might forget our office keys — a description of an event. But the explanation may well be that somewhere in our brain, perhaps semi- or sub-consciously we don't really want to go to work.

Political people, writing political documents, make such glaring omissions for identifiable political reasons.

Our charge against the SWP is not that they hate Jews — not as individuals. Our charge is not that they are Hitlerites — of course they are not. Our charge against the SWP is that their hostility to "Zionism" (i.e. to most Jews in the world) is now so deep-running, so pernicious, so unthinking, blinkered and automatic, that such an "accident" or "mistake" is possible. By creating an organisation with such a default setting, the SWP's leaders are building a group which will "forget" the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Shame on you!

The Nazi Red, White and Blue 'festival' in Codnor Derbyshire is a gathering of Nazi's from around Europe, who will want to spread their hate and lies. Anybody who hates racism and wants to defend democracy should oppose this Nazi BNP rally.

- The BNP is a fascist organisation that uses racism, and myths about asylum and immigration to divide society.
- They deny the holocaust where thousands of LGBT people, trade unionists and disabled people were slaughtered. They use myths and lies around Immigration and Asylum and Islamophobia to whip up race hatred.
- The BNP seek to destroy our freedoms and our rights as workers and trade unionists to organise, they seek to divide and destroy our communities.
- They are not a legitimate political party or interested in democracy, and need to be opposed. Everyone

The SWP's text in Codnor



IN BRIEF

• **CIVIL SERVICE JOB SECURITY:** PCS members are currently being balloted on a job security agreement struck with the Civil Service. This agreement, called the protocols, is the result of long running union agitation over job security. Members should vote in favour, but be clear as to limitations and weaknesses.

The original union campaign was for a no compulsory redundancy guarantee; the protocols fall short of that. The guarantee would not have saved jobs; it just would have guaranteed that the jobs run down (which still continues) was achieved without overt compulsion. This agreement means that departments should consider offering an alternative job to those faced with compulsory redundancy (which is in ACAS guidance anyway).

The protocols place certain other obligations on Government departments but these are not enforceable by law; neither is there a specific disputes resolution mechanism put in place to handle problems. Weakness on the enforcement side means the union will have to vigorously police the protocols; there have already been many violations of their terms.

In many ways the protocols are more interesting for what they say about the PCS leadership. Of course there is the normal PCS spin on the deal — though compared to past “agreements” it has been relatively restrained. Then there is the ballot itself. The union agreed the deal earlier in the year and it came into effect in April, yet members are voting on a “done” deal in August. The ballot is in fact designed to head off criticisms of the agreement (“you lefties complain, but the members have voted for it!”)

At the end of one PCS circular it states (we paraphrase) that we have an agreement over pensions – job done, now we have one over jobs – job done, now to pay. This ticking of the boxes is a prevalent attitude among the leadership; prevalent, but completely wrong. Pensions are not settled; we accepted a defeat on new starters, and the Tories will reopen the whole can of worms if they get into office; the jobs rundown continues; the protocols do nothing to fundamentally address this problem. Members should vote for the agreement, but the union must continue to fight for a proper jobs agreement.

• **DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS:** Not content with cutting 30,000 jobs in the past three years and spending on average £1 million per Jobcentre on refurbishment, DWP bosses have announced a further 12,000 job losses over the next three years and the closing of 200 offices. All this will waste £200 million pounds of taxpayers’ money — easily enough to have ensured every member of staff got an RPI proof pay rise this year.

Presumably to help achieve the job cuts, the latest wheeze DWP bosses have come up with is to import Human Resource Management techniques, known as Lean, from Japanese car production lines into benefit offices and jobcentres. Lean was first used by Toyota in the 1950s.

This is not new to the Civil Service. Lean was the subject of a lengthy dispute in the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and is still highly contentious

Lean in DWP involves employees identifying short cuts in business processes that can increase productivity and be used to cut jobs. Staff are required to state at a weekly 15 minute meeting to identify what can be cut. The idea is to cut out waste, defined as anything that doesn’t add value to the service provided. There are ground rules for the meetings. Staff are only allowed to deal with data and facts, not opinions.

Already one measure has led to the loss of 109 executive officer posts and the downgrading of work.

The way PCS in the DWP Group is reacting is problematic. Whilst a recent meeting was held for representatives in the various

LECTURERS

UCU and Israel boycott: stand and fight

BY CAMILA BASSI,
SHEFFIELD HALLAM UCU

Recently Jon Pike, chair of Engage (a group set up to defeat a boycott of Israeli academia), posted a critique of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) to its activist list. Jon is also a member of the UCU NEC. In this critique he assesses the union’s democratic credentials, its ability to stand up for academic freedom, and its willingness to fight all discrimination.

Conclusion one: the union does not fair well. Conclusion two: a number of its Jewish members are resigning. What, of course, is missing is a third conclusion: members who oppose the boycott should instead stay and fight. In this absence, Jon (and more generally Engage) does a disservice to the labour movement.

Jon criticises UCU for its lack of democracy on the issue of the academic boycott of Israel. Any decision on the matter should go directly to its members, he insists, not to an elite group of revolutionary activists. Jon is right to point out a lack of democracy, but for him this can be corrected by a ballot over a single issue.

There’s also a degree of hypocrisy here too, for Engage have come to rely far too often on trying to ban debate over an academic boycott of Israel. For sure, they are right to complain about the oft one-sidedness of the platform, but their response should be to intervene harder and better, and for a political alternative to an academic boycott.

For the AWL, the democracy question is a political one: to reinvigorate the labour movement and win working-class representation. AWL comrades in UCU have argued consistently that a healthy, democratic union can only be realised by galvanising the rank-and-file, which is achievable only through the hard, day-to-day,

week-to-week, slog of building and politicising local branches. The SWP-initiated UCU Left (and its committee) simply reflects a loose collective of union hacks who have made fetishised careers out of the union. So what we also argue for is an alternative kind of left in the union - based solidly on a rejuvenated rank-and-file.

Jon’s point on academic freedom is to highlight the unwillingness of UCU to uphold this ‘thing’ for Israeli academics. In spelling out the political misguidedness of an academic boycott of Israel, the call to defend ‘academic freedom’ is actually a weak one (albeit not altogether incorrect). A pro-boycott supporter would argue: what about academic freedom for someone under siege in the Occupied Territories, spending hours every day trying to get through checkpoint after checkpoint? AWL comrades in UCU are primarily against an academic boycott of Israel because, in effect, it serves to further hamper the plight of the Palestinians.

Why? Because it cuts against the prospect of working class unity between Palestinians and Israelis against both of their ruling classes, and thus also cuts against a long-term resolution to the conflict. A boycott would play into the hands of the right-wing Israeli government; it would be counter-productive. The UCU should be oriented to a campaign of ‘links not boycott’. Concrete solidarity is our alternative to liberal appeals to academic freedom.

Finally, on the matter of the UCU fighting discrimination, Jon states that union is seriously failing to fight against the discrimination faced by its Jewish members, which has spurred dozens of resignations.

On this, he has a point. The UCU has within it a Left which, at best, singles out the Israeli working class for a political litmus test not demanded of any other working class globally and, at worst, doesn’t

even think this class is even worthy of that, and should be outright politically dismissed. It has a Left that thinks of a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict not in terms of a consistently democratic and workable solution — two states for two nations — but through the establishment of ‘justice and redress’, of one democratic secular Palestinian state, effectively meaning the dissolution of Israel. But here’s the crux: the SWP-initiated UCU Left wins support by appealing to a far broader layer of leftists that quite simply, on the issue of the longstanding, brutal repression of the Palestinians, have of the good instinct of wanting to ‘do something’.

Our job is to offer them the better political alternative. Our job is to expose the climate of hostility that has long existed on the revolutionary Left towards both Israel and any Jew refusing to denounce Israel - hostility which fuels anti-semitism.

Jon ends his posting by asserting that it is not the job of UCU to educate its members on the struggle against imperialism or on the moral responsibilities we hold as academics. Who is he appealing to here? Not the broad layer of decent left activists, a majority of whom we want to (and can) win over to a rank-and-file Left in the UCU.

Instead he is appealing to those who (ironically) are not even inclined to be on the union’s activist list that he’s emailed! Engage is bottling out of a serious political fight in UCU over its single issue of the academic boycott of Israel. It’s totally lost its bearings and morale, and it no longer recognises itself in any loose sense whatsoever as on the Left (probably because it never was). So, a final plea: to the Jewish and other members of UCU who are thinking of resigning, or have resigned, join us in an effort to build a serious, rank-and-file Left in the union! Join us in a campaign of ‘links not boycott’!

Lean pilots across the department, non co-operation with the pilots was ruled out.

The PCS in DWP needs to urgently raise the consciousness of the workforce of what Lean is actually about — cutting jobs, deskilling the workforce and raising the rate of exploitation — if workers are to effectively oppose it. A useful report entitled ‘Lean and Job Design’, commissioned by PCS and written by Gregor Gall, draws on some of the lessons of the HMRC dispute and highlights the way forward. It stresses the importance of workplace organisation, the patient explaining to members of the impact of Lean and the importance of countering management propaganda. It is essential reading for trade unionists wishing to oppose Lean.

You can read the report at: http://pcs.live.poptech.coop/shared_asp_files/GFSR.asp?NodeID=912688

• **DEFEND JOHN MCDERMOTT:** Unison members working for East North East Homes Leeds (ENEHL) took a second day of strike action on 14 August in defence of their trade union convenor John McDermott and their right to effective trade union representation.

ENEHL is an arms length management organisation owned by Leeds City Council and the Leeds dispute centres on a new facilities agreement which massively restricts the ability of unions to represent workers. In particular the scheme restricts the activities of the con-

venor, reduces the time available for union duties, reduces the number of stewards that could be elected and introduces in effect a veto on meetings with board members to discuss disputes.

Unison members have been angered by this attack on their trade union and on their convenor. John is a popular, militant and very effective union organiser. He is also a member of Unison’s executive and Local Government Service Group.

Members in ENEHL voted overwhelmingly for strike action and the first day of action took place on 9 July. The management reaction to the strike was to ratchet up the dispute. On 14 July John was effectively suspended on a charge of disobeying management instructions. The relevant instruction was that he spend only one day per week on trade union duties as per the new imposed trade union facilities scheme. With grievances and disciplinary cases to deal with he continued to represent his members as required.

Unison’s position has rightly been that the way to resolve the dispute about facilities is to negotiate collectively not to bully and intimidate the convenor.

The second day of action on 14 August was well supported by workers in the organisation. The day before the strike saw talks between the union and management fail to reach a conclusion and further action is likely to be necessary.

It is important for the wider trade union movement to appreciate that this is

not some localised and technical dispute.

In fact it has huge implications for all public sector unions. As a result of outsourcing and privatisation there is a plethora of arms-length organisations (ALMOs) throughout the public sector in local government, education and the civil service. The Leeds dispute indicates how this new landscape may be used to attack the trade union rights of public sector workers. If workers in ALMOs cannot be part of the wider agreements and facilities won across their sector, they will be left, at best, with the kind of rights which exist in relatively small private sector companies.

Far from rebuilding trade union strength outwards from the comparatively strong public sector to the much weaker private sector, we could see our rights and strength fatally weakened by the spread of the worst pro-business anti-union practices into public services.

That makes it very important to support the Unison members at East North East Leeds Homes and John McDermott in their dispute. *Solidarity* readers can do that in two ways.

1. Send messages of support to John at johntherhino@btinternet.com

2. E mail Steve Hunt, Chief Officer of ENEHL and urge him to withdraw the imposed scheme and negotiate a fair and equitable scheme that protects the rights of workers and their union representatives. steve.j.hunt@enehl.org.uk

HEALTH

Drug companies should be publicly owned

By MARTIN THOMAS

The chair of the Government's official medical drugs-regulating body, has said that “the drugs are so expensive” because of the pharmaceutical companies’ drive for profits.

Michael Rawlins said that such practices as linking the pay of pharmaceutical company bosses to their firm's share price have made the problem even worse.

Kidney cancer drugs, for example, said Rawlins, could be produced for about a tenth of their current cost. Why is the price so high? Part of it is “cushioning” for the companies that several big-earning drugs will come out of their patent period in the next five years, and can then be replaced by a cheaper version. “The other thing, of course, is that the share price is very important to a pharmaceutical company”.

Pharmaceutical companies are hugely profitable — enjoying “double-digit growth year on year”. And “they are out to sustain that, not least because their bosses’ earnings are related to the share price. It's not in their interests to take less profit, personally as well as from the point of view of the business. All these perverse incentives drive the price up.

“The other thing we have to pay for”, added Rawlins, “is the costs of marketing. Marketing costs generally are about twice the spend on research and development”.

These problems are even worse in the USA, where the market orientation which the Tories, Blair, and Brown have gradually shoved onto the Health Service is flamboyant and long-established.

A book by Katherine Greider, *The Big Fix: How the Pharmaceutical Industry Rips Off American Consumers*, has documented some of the facts. For example, 29 percent of Americans failed to fill a prescription in 2000 because they could not afford to.

Meanwhile, over the 1990s, drug firms’ profits represented an 18.5 percent return on revenue or 5.6 times the median return (3.3 percent) of big companies.

Greider lists the profit-chasing gambits used by the pharmaceutical bosses:

- “Tweak” original drug formulas to create a “new” version with a bigger price tag.
- Claim new uses for old drugs and extend patents and monopolies to keep inexpensive generic versions off the market.
- Charge individuals the steepest price, big purchasers the smallest. (As Marcia Angell put it in another investigation of the drug industry, in the *New York Review of Books*: “People without insurance have no bargaining power; and so they pay the highest prices”).
- Set prices higher in the unregulated US market than in countries with price controls.
- Spend more than any other US industry on lobbying Government.
- Spend vast amounts of advertising.

She gives an example of Lipitor, a much-prescribed drug for high cholesterol.



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- 35 percent of the cost is for marketing, advertising and administration.
 - 26 percent is “other,” such as manufacturing, executive pay, worker costs, etc.
 - 24 percent of the cost is pure (net) profit.
 - Just 15 percent of the cost is for research and development.
- While profit-chasing denies poor people the medication they need, it also pushes unnecessary medication on better-off people. A special issue of the journal *PLOS Medicine* says that often minor problems that are a normal part of life are “medicalised” so that expensive drugs can be sold to “treat” them.
- “Disease-mongering turns healthy people into patients, wastes precious resources and causes iatrogenic [medically induced] harm,” say the authors. “Like the marketing strategies that drive it, disease-mongering poses a global challenge to public health...”
- The actual production process in pharmaceuticals is highly socialised. The industry is dominated, world-wide, by maybe a couple of dozen huge companies, with revenues which vary from nearly \$10 billion to over \$50 billion.
- According to Marcia Angell, the pharmaceutical bosses’ standard argument that they have to charge high prices in order to fund research do not hold up. “Drug companies no longer have to rely on their own research for new drugs, and few of the large ones do. Increasingly, they rely on academia, small biotech startup companies, and the NIH [the US National Institutes of Health] for that. At least a

third of drugs marketed by the major drug companies are now licensed from universities or small biotech companies, and these tend to be the most innovative ones”.

In countries with public health insurance, the pharmaceutical bosses are largely dependent on public money for their revenues. Although in those countries, governments usually exercise more restraint on drug prices than in the law-of-the-jungle USA, the companies are compensated for that by large, guaranteed markets.

Even in the allegedly “free-enterprise” USA, the drug companies are utterly dependent on government-granted monopolies, in the form of patents and exclusive marketing rights approvals from the Food and Drugs Administration.

The capitalist rule of profit means that curing illness and saving lives is a mere subsidiary, an incidental, to the main story of boosting the incomes of pharmaceutical company bosses and shareholders. The capitalist state functions as a guarantor of those incomes, and a source of subsidy (through medical research done in universities and public institutions).

Competition between the companies primarily boosts, not innovation, but anti-social drives: to replace cheap medications by more expensive (and often no more efficacious) ones; to sell to even modestly well-off people more medication than is good for them; to make medication more expensive, or even impossibly expensive, for poorer people; to get vastly more spent on “marketing” drugs than on research.

Social ownership, under democratic social control, is the answer.

SCHOOLS

Against the “National Challenge”

The National Challenge scheme, launched in June 2008, is supposed to push up school standards.

Schools have been threatened with being forced to convert into Academies, and could face the loss of specialist status and the removal of funding. The 638 National Challenge schools were selected on the basis that fewer than 30 per cent of their students have achieved five or more A*-C grade GCSEs, including English and maths.

Now, according to the *Times Educational Supplement*, “300 extra schools can expect to be subject to special scrutiny under an extension of the National Challenge scheme.” These 300 secondary schools are deemed by the government to be “coasting”.

Unsurprisingly the first effect has been to drastically cut applications to many of the named schools, making the job of the teachers much harder and stigmatising children.

Abolish SATs!

The recent debacle involving ETS, the company which failed to deliver many SATs results on time, has raised the school testing issue again, from a different angle.

Key Stage 2 and 3 SATs tests were taken by 1.2 million 11 and 14 year olds in England.

ETS is to pay back £19.5m and cancel invoices worth £4.6m. The total contract for 2008 was worth £39.6m.

The government currently spends £165m on the SATs testing regime. That money could be better spent. SATs cause unnecessary stress for teachers and students.

Christine Blower, Acting General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers commented, “No results can be relied upon, particularly in light of the high number of appeals and missing results.

“It is now time to call a halt to the SATs.”



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FIRST PERSON

Shanghai: all that glisters

BY CAMILA BASSI

The contemporary urban landscape of Shanghai very much reflects China's opening up policy since the 1980s. Glistening skyscrapers are juxtaposed with disappearing, working class residential districts. Moreover, yet more skyscrapers are being erected (at ever-higher levels to send an explicit, sky-

line message of capital's might) by impoverished migrant workers using the most basic tools familiar to early twentieth century Britain. Extreme wealth alongside extreme poverty sums up Shanghai. But unlike the major cities of India, for example, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) successfully manages the 'visibility' of such poverty. Western tourists and expatriots in Shanghai are all too easily oblivious to this gross extremity.

In my last visit to Shanghai this year, three major issues were disclosed to me by a few brave Shanghaiese prepared to speak out: one, the lack of affordable housing; two, the increasing cost of health care; three, the crisis of culture. Alas, full-frontal capitalism has truly arrived in China.

Another, more general, challenge has also been articulated: the disjuncture between the "hardware" and the "software". The urban fabric is undergoing tremendous change but, as the hardware develops, little time remains to consider the implications in terms of people, society and culture, i.e. a gap remains in terms of the software. Let us look briefly at the issues of population displacement and cultural imperialism.

Large-scale demolition of (in the main) poor, decrepit, over-populated traditional residential districts paves the way for expansive commercial developments. Former working class residents have, on an awesome scale (like most things in China), been relocated to suburban high

risers, often of a better build quality. So what's the problem? Numerous reports confirm a consequent social problem of increased isolation, and a rapidly eroded community spirit. And, of course, if you do not want to be re-housed and re-located, well, this is China, so you have no choice. That said, some do confront the arm of the state. The "nail houses" movement, for instance, in which residents have barricaded themselves into their homes, exemplifies the will of the ordinary Chinese to fight back. But the arm of the state in China is notoriously heavy.

Somewhat ironically, the gay anthem "Go West" by the Pet Shop Boys was the number one track in Shanghai's night-clubs during the 1990s. Walking down the Nanjing Lu, Shanghai's most famous commercial road, one is confronted by young Shanghaiese — either elevated to a burgeoning consumer "middle class", and subsequently revelling in its Western commercial culture, or desperately desiring such an elevation.

One is also confronted by the Western businessmen who work for the multinationals that have profited from the country's opening up policy.

And, further still, there is the sight of numerous Western businessmen displaying their petite, designer-dolled Chinese wives on their arms.

Not that inter-ethnic encounters, including sexual, are something to be discouraged, far from it; the point here is one of problematic power dynamics within an

emergent social phenomenon. And to mess the picture up further, many of these women are employing their own personal strategy to escape an insecure economic existence. Culture for (what is locally referred to as) the "eighties children" means chasing all that glistens from the West, but a debate is nevertheless simmering away for these Shanghaiese and their older generations — what kind of culture is being uncritically embraced, and with what costs?

A question all the more complicated by another — what does culture mean in China after the Cultural Revolution? However, open debate through public forums is closed off in this country (a remaining legacy from years of Stalinism).

Shanghai acutely sums up the paradox of China, the opening up of the economy versus the ever-closed realm of politics. "Politics is something the government does". "The government knows best". "It is a naïve person who seeks to meddle in political matters". The Stalinist CCP rides on the back of both major economic growth and fervent nationalism. However, unrest continuously simmers and occasionally boils over, particularly since the gap between the rich and the poor has been widening.

The rhetoric and the exceptional heavy-handedness of the CCP have so far been able to co-opt or dull much of the potential dissent, but a second Tiananmen will happen. The remaining question is when and in what form.

AUSTRALIA

Workers plan walk-outs against anti-union law

RIKI LANE REPORTS

Noel Washington, Senior Vice-President in Victoria of Australia's big Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union (CFMEU) faces six months prison for refusing to talk to industrial police about what happened at a union meeting outside work hours.

His court date will be announced in a preliminary hearing on 12 September 2008. Under legislation passed by the conservative coalition government of John Howard which was in office in Australia until last year, the ABCC, a special police force for the construction industry, has powers in industrial matters exceeding what the ordinary police have over the most horrible crimes. Workers or union officials summoned to answer questions by the ABCC have no right to silence, no right to talk to anyone else about what questions they have been asked or what answers they have given, no right to be assisted by the lawyer of their choice.

Kevin Rudd's new Labor government has promised to abolish the ABCC — but only after 2010, and only while replacing it with a new ABCC-lite.

On 30 July, the Victoria Trades Hall Council (VTHC) — the peak trade union body in the state — called a conference of two thousand shop stewards to discuss the threats to Noel Washington.

"Here in Victoria, we are at the pointy end of the struggle against the ABCC" said VTHC secretary Bryan Boyd.

Promises of support came from ACTU (Australian TUC) secretary Jeff Lawrence and leaders of other unions such as teachers and nurses. Paul Howes, national secretary of the AWU, said that construction unions had never before been as united as they are now in their opposition to the ABCC and the threats to jail Noel Washington. This is significant given the long history of hostile relations between the (very right-wing) AWU and the (left-ish) CFMEU.

Noel spoke with some passion about seeing the effects on union members and their families being dragged before the commission for simply "standing up for their mates". In one case a 19 year old apprentice was subjected to ABCC interrogation for daring to report an electrical safety hazard to Work Safe and the union. Noel himself was called in by the ABCC for speaking to a meeting of CFMEU members in their own time and off the employers' premises. For refusing to testify, he faces six months in jail.

Many speakers pointed out that Labor was elected on the back of hostility to Howard's WorkChoices laws, yet little has changed. The ABCC boasts that it has increased their activity by 60% since Labor was elected.

The meeting had a militant feeling, but was kept under tight control by the union leaderships. Two motions were passed, almost unanimously. The first called for the immediate abolition of the ABCC, cancellation of the National Code and Implementation Guidelines (which the

government can do without legislation), supporting Noel Washington, and calling for mass rallies on the day of his court case. The second authorised a general campaign including industrial action against the remains of all Howard's IR laws.

A number of amendments were accepted for the first motion — one about international solidarity, others to tighten up the wording. However, two amendments moved by supporters of Solidarity (a new regroupment in Australia of some of the groups linked to the SWP-UK) — for 24 hour strikes when the court case happens and if Washington is jailed — were ruled out by VTHC President Anne Taylor as opposed to the main thrust of the motion.

The officials probably judged that the motions were likely to be passed if allowed to be put forward, given the militant feeling and large number of experienced activists from the construction industry present. This sort of bureaucratic manoeuvring does the union movement no credit at all — it reminds me of going to such VTHC delegates' meetings 30 years ago, when they were dominated by the right wing under the iron fist of Secretary Ken Stone.

Tim Gooden, Geelong TLC secretary and a member of the DSP (Castroites), made a reasoned case against the amendments, arguing that a 24 hour strike will mean construction (and other) workers staying home for the day, and it is better to call a mass rally in work time which workers will attend by walking off the

sites and out of the factories.

However, the final resolutions contained no promise of specific actions if Noel Washington is jailed. And when the very first court session on Noel Washington's case took place on 8 August, the only public protests in Australia were apparently those organised by the Worklife campaign group in Brisbane.

Worklife, with some support from local CFMEU officials, organised an early-morning street protest outside Kevin Rudd's electorate office (which stands on a busy commuter route), and a protest stall with petition-signing at the West End Markets the next day. It has also organised a showing of the film "Constructing Fear", made with CFMEU sponsorship to set out the facts about the ABCC.

But, as one of the protesters outside Rudd's office commented, we need a great deal more public agitation to make Noel Washington's case an issue which arouses the whole working class. WorkChoices, Howard's main anti-union legislation, is well-known because of a big ACTU campaign against it. But the ACTU campaign made little mention of the special threat to construction workers through the ABCC. Probably many commuters seeing protesters with "Abolish the ABCC" placards were simply puzzled, or thought we were for some strange reason demanding abolition of the ABC (Australian equivalent of the BBC).

ITALY

Stop scapegoating Roma!

BY CATH FLETCHER

Four months after a decisive election victory, Italy's right-wing government has pushed through a series of racist anti-immigrant measures. The decision to fingerprint Roma people has attracted the greatest international condemnation, but the law-and-order crackdown goes much further. Illegal immigration is now punishable by up to four years in jail, and army patrols have been deployed on city streets.

For many years Italy was a country from which people emigrated. Unlike, say, the UK or France it did not experience a substantial immigration in the second half of the twentieth century. Only now — with the lowest birth rate in Europe and serious labour shortages in some sectors — has Italy become an importer of workers. This year 170,000 migrants will be granted permits to enter Italy legally; over 740,000 have already applied. But with that change have come serious social tensions.

Italy's two right-wing parties have long competed on racist rhetoric — a few years ago Northern League leader Umberto Bossi notoriously called on the coastguard to shoot at boats suspected of carrying illegal immigrants. This year's election campaign was no exception. The new mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno of the supposedly post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale, won on a promise to expel 20,000 'illegal immigrants' from the city. The politicians' focus on foreign criminality helps keep the real issues — soaring prices, low wages and government austerity — off the agenda.

In July 2008 the Berlusconi government legislated for a new "security package".

As well as the new penalty for illegal immigration, any illegal immigrant convicted of crime will face penalties one-third greater than someone with the correct papers, a policy playing on public fear of crime and particularly 'foreign' crime. Landlords who rent to illegal immigrants face penalties of up to three years in jail, plus confiscation of the property, making it even harder for migrant workers to find suitable housing.

Yet while the right has been more openly vicious, it was the previous, centre-left government, under Romano Prodi, that enacted the first anti-immigrant measures of the current crackdown. In the wake of public anger following the arrest of a Romanian man for a particularly vicious sexual assault and murder last November, the Prodi government decreed that immigrants deemed to be a threat to public order could be summarily deported. Other centre-left politicians, like former trade union leader and mayor of Bologna Sergio Cofferati, have sent in bulldozers to evict Roma camps. The former mayor of Rome, Walter Veltroni, now leader of the opposition Democratic Party, claimed that Romanians were to blame for 75% of murders, rapes and robberies in Rome last year.

The equation of foreigners and criminals is a commonplace in Italian politics. More than one-third of prisoners in Italian jails are foreign: not because foreigners commit more crime, but because the police target them, and probably because they are less able to get bail and legal representation than the average Italian. The accusations of criminality levelled against Romanians, and particularly against the Roma, who form a substantial proportion

of the Romanian community in Italy, have fuelled violent attacks on Roma, most recently in Naples after the accusation that a young Roma woman had tried to kidnap a baby. The Berlusconi government's decision to fingerprint all Roma people — beginning with those living around Naples — simply confirms the widespread belief that foreigners are peculiarly to blame for crime.

Of the eight million Roma in Europe, only about two per cent (160,000) live in Italy. Half of them are naturalised; the vast majority, as EU citizens are in any case entitled to live there. For the most

part they exist in miserable conditions — sometimes literally camping, sometimes in shanty towns, mobile homes or overcrowded accommodation on the fringes of cities like Rome, Bologna and Milan. Few have proper access to the education and health care systems, and they live on poverty pay. A Roma worker in the construction sector, for example, might earn 800 euros (£630) a month working 10 hour days. Although most Roma have the right to live in Italy, that doesn't stop them facing regular police harassment. The double-standards that operate in local immigration offices are well-known. It is not unusual to see open racism.

Yet by comparison to immigrants from outside the EU, the Roma at least have some formal protection. Far more precarious is the situation of the thousands of migrants who every year try to reach Italy in crowded fishing boats from the Libyan and Tunisian coasts. Many are refugees from Somalia and Eritrea. In the first six months of this year, 11,000 people have arrived on the tiny island of Lampedusa. Three hundred and eighty are known to have drowned trying to get there in the same period.

After its bruising defeat in the elections, Italy's left is still in a process of regroupment. One of its priorities must be to tackle the vicious anti-immigrant policies of the main parties. That will not be an easy task, but the government's "foreign crime wave" has to be exposed for the myth that it is, and Italian workers — suffering from soaring inflation and falling standards of living — have to be convinced that foreigners are not their enemies.

IRAQI WORKERS

Mobilise for solidarity conference

The "First International Labour Conference in Iraq", called by a range of Iraqi trade-union organisations for February 2009 in Erbil (in Kurdish northern Iraq), has won support from Australian and US union organisations.

The Teachers' Federation, the Fire Brigades Union, and the Construction, Forestry, Mining, and Energy Union in New South Wales have all agreed to donate to the cost of the conference and to consider the possibility of sending delegates. Australia-Asia Worker Links, an influential and active union-sponsored body based in Melbourne, has also agreed to back the conference. Worklife, the union-rights group in Brisbane, has agreed to publicise it.

Apheda, the international arm of the ACTU (Australian equivalent of the TUC), has written a letter to all Australian unions saying:

"Unions, though still in the main illegal in Iraq, are one of the only hopes that the different political, ethnic, and religious groups can come together peaceful to democratically exercise national self-determination..."

"The AusIraq group [an activist group in Sydney initiated by members of Workers' Liberty Australia] has been raising funds for the three larger [union] federations in Iraq... You may have recently met with

Kathy Black from the US Labor Against the War organisation [when she toured Australia]... USLAW are among groups in many countries raising funds for a First International Labour Solidarity Conference in Iraq".

The call for the conference states that unions in Iraq can be bulwarks for the peoples of Iraq against both the US occupation and the "sectarian gangs". "We believe that the workers of Iraq can form a strong front for social justice and peace if supported by our brothers and sisters in the region and around the world".

It is signed by Hassan Juma'a, president of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions; Subhi Albadri, president of the General Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq; and by leaders from dock-worker, engineering, service employee, rail, construction, teacher, and electricity worker unions.

The conference is scheduled to take place in Erbil, in the northern part of Iraq, where conditions are relatively safe and there is no serious sectarian violence; regular scheduled flights are available to Erbil from Dubai.

SOLIDARITY

No deportations to Iraq!

On 9 August thirteen refugees from Iraqi Kurdistan began a hunger strike at Campsfield detention centre with this statement: "[The British state is] trying to deport us to the most dangerous country in the world. We want people to listen to us. It is better to be dead than to return to Iraq."

The protesters were then joined by 50 – 60 other detainees, all demanding refugee status. The hunger strikers were further angered by the news that Hussein Ali had committed suicide on Sunday 10 August after being deported from the UK to Kurdistan.

The strike has since been called off, but supporters plan a solidarity protest outside the Home Office in London.

- More details: d.jamal@ntlworld.com

Israeli appeal against attack on Iran

A group of around one hundred Israeli academics and peace activists have initiated an appeal against the military action by Israel against Iran. This the text of the appeal:

There is no military, political or moral justification to initiate war with Iran

A constant flow of information bears witness to the fact that the Israeli government is seriously considering attacking Iran, in order to disrupt its nuclear plans. We do not disregard irresponsible actions by the Iranian government — we also oppose atomic weapons in principle and support the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from the region. However, it is clear that the main source of the immediate danger of a new, widespread war stems from the policies of the Israeli government and the flow of threats from it, backed by provocative military maneuvers.

After serious consideration, we reiterate our position that all the arguments for such an attack are without any security, political or moral justification. Israel might get caught up in an act of adventurism that could endanger our very existence, and this without any serious effort to exhaust the political and diplomatic alternatives to armed conflict.

We are not certain that such an attack will occur. But the very fact that it is being weighed as a reasonable option, makes it imperative that we warn and caution against the destructive results of an offensive strike against Iran.

- reuven.kaminer@gmail.com

16 AUGUST ANTI-BNP DEMO

Building from the grass roots

A member of the AWL centrally involved in building the anti-RWB demonstration spoke to *Solidarity*.

Q: How did the Nottingham group come together?

A: Anti-fascist work in Nottingham had dwindled to near nothing up to a couple of years ago. A number of meetings were called after the BNP's electoral successes in Barking and Dagenham in 2006. These meetings attracted up to 25 people from most left groups, even the SWP at that stage, as well as some anarchists from or around Nottingham University.

Most meetings were spent with the majority arguing with the SWP over how to counter the BNP. In July 2006 it was decided that the campaign would be a working-class campaign relating to the social issues that the BNP attempt to exploit. The SWP proposal was that it should be "broad and open to all" was rejected. The SWP vowed to go off an form a local UAF group.

In February 2007 we found a focus for anti-fascist work. When attending a campaign meeting for John McDonnell in his Labour Party leadership challenge, AWL members found out about and got an invi-

tation to a meeting called by Broxtowe party activists. The Labour Party could not find a candidate to stand in the BNP stronghold of Brinsley. There was a real risk that the BNP candidate, Sadie Graham, would be totally unopposed!

We persuaded the Labour Party meeting that they should hold a public meeting in Brinsley against the BNP.

The Nottingham campaign was divided about the Brinsley initiative, some thought that there was too close a relationship with the Labour Party, some were uncomfortable with a meeting where the BNP could turn up to speak. That meeting nevertheless took place on 19 February and attracted 40 people — mostly local — out of which a Brinsley Notts Stop the BNP group was formed.

After that success the campaign rapidly reconvened and began leafleting many Nottingham villages and towns in which the BNP were organising and standing in elections.

The only group claiming to be active in anti-fascist work and not getting involved were the SWP/ UAF. They held a couple of very small meetings but from then on generally boycotted our campaign, by now called Notts Stop the BNP.

Q: Why is building local organisation

so important?

A: The staple diet of anti-fascism has been to do nothing apart from leafleting at elections. This, in our view, seriously limits effectiveness. Exploiting the collapse of the mainstream parties the BNP have engaged in a lot of 'community activism'. Often disguising their racist and fascist beliefs.

The BNP exploit the demoralization in some areas at trade unionism and the absence of anti-racist campaigns dealing with the housing crisis, unemployment and low pay. We know that we have to regenerate effective trade unionism and build campaigns with real presence in the working class areas where the BNP are trying to get a base. If we don't, those communities will continue to be exploited by the BNP.

Q: How successful do you think the demonstration was?

A: We were very happy about our protest and rally up to 11:30. We had substantial local involvement and many people on the day joining up with the new Amber Valley campaign which in my view was the major objective of the day, especially as the Public Order Act so heavily limited our protesting options.

We were very unhappy about the UAF and this will be the subject of formal com-

plaints in the near future to the UAF and their sponsors.

Q: Where does the campaign go from here?

A: The Amber Valley campaign is very buoyant and determined to deal with the BNP. They aren't going to wait until election time or another 'festival' to do something.

The BNP have a significant base in Amber Valley borough where they have two councillors elected.

The Notts campaign put an awful lot of work into organising against the 2008 RWB. We have also and will continue to help the Stop the BNP groups that have got off the ground in Derby as well as Amber Valley; we know we need to do more in our home territory of Nottinghamshire.

And if the BNP plan the 2009 RWB festival then we will oppose that every step of the way along with our now much stronger campaign.

We are calling a conference on 27 September. We expect a lot more activists to now get involved to help us do all this. We also hope that what we have done will be spur to anti-BNP campaigners throughout the country.

Details:
<http://nobnppfestival.wordpress.com>

LESSONS FROM THE 1970S

When Brick Lane was abandoned

BY JACK YATES

The mid-to-late 1970s were something of a high point for organised fascists. The National Front could mobilise thousands of members for confrontational demonstrations. Their street stalls and paper sales littered the pavement, Their outspoken racism attracted sympathy, if not outright support. Violence, provocation and intimidation were the order of the day.

It was a time when the fascists must have entertained the notion that they were going places. Maybe soon a desperate and ramshackle ruling class would employ them to throw the final blows against a militant labour movement. It would give them free reign to "sort out" minority communities — to drive Asian, Afro-Caribbean and Jewish people out of Britain. It would rely on them to shore up — or perhaps replace — a rickety, failing government. These delusions ultimately came to nothing.

In some ways, the situation today for the BNP looks better than that for the NF thirty years ago.

In the 1970s the NF failed over and over again to get their members elected to local councils — let alone Parliament. The BNP today has something over fifty borough, district, town and city councillors. It has a member elected to the Greater London Assembly and an electoral base that puts them in a position to win seats in the European Parliament.

For their own reasons, the BNP have moved away from confrontational street politics. But this move does not negate, does not wipe from the record of history the actual aims and intentions of the violent, fascist core of the BNP. For now, their methods appear distinct and far-removed from the tactics of the 1970s but they

remain a real, political and physical threat.

A survey of the anti-fascist movement of the 1970s and that of today tells a similar — dispiriting but not totally disheartening — story. Take the Socialist Workers Party for example. For the SWP, their involvement in anti-fascism is a major point of honour. From the "Battle of Lewisham" to the current organising efforts against the BNP, the SWP has been "at the centre of struggle". This is only part of the truth. The SWP's record on anti-fascism is not as "honourable" as they would paint it.

The story of how UAF's predecessor organisation, the Anti Nazi League, betrayed the local community of Brick Lane in East London is a warning from the past of the consequences of splitting anti-fascist activity:

Two large mobilisations were planned for Saturday 24 September 1978. One an enormous carnival in south London, called by the Anti Nazi League (ANL) — and the other a march through the East End of London by the National Front.

To be sure, both events took a long time to plan, coordinate and organise. Anti-fascists had been busily booking and trying to fill coaches from every part of the country for months. The fascists had been organising themselves for a massive show of force. Stuck between these two groups were the residents of Brick Lane and a small band of supporters from the local labour movement.

A few weeks before the planned fascist demonstration, the 'Hackney and Tower Hamlets Defence Committee' and a number of socialist and other campaign groups received definitive evidence that the NF planned to march through Brick Lane. The fascist march was almost certainly planned to clash with the "Carnival".

Upon receipt of this information, the

Defence Committee issued a wide appeal for a demonstration in opposition. This part of East London was — and remains so today — a predominantly Asian community, with a high concentration of Bengalis. The NF's march was planned to do two things: to "celebrate" the opening of a new NF headquarters close by; and to physically intimidate the local community, to crush their confidence and to claim political territory. The tactic of opening fascist headquarters in or near minority-community areas was not a new phenomena. Before and after World War 2, the British Union of Fascists and its successor organisations opened offices in predominantly Jewish areas.

When the leadership of the ANL were warned of the NF march they responded: "No, there's not much we can do, we've got a concert organised which mustn't be spoiled". This, just a year after the great battle of Lewisham in August 1977.

As *Workers' Action* [forerunner of *Solidarity*] reported: "the National Front celebrated its greatest triumph in years. Unchallenged and unmolested, they marched 1,500 strong through the City of London to Great Eastern Street in Shoreditch, 'within spitting distance of Brick Lane', as the NF leader Richard Verrall gloatingly put it."

Activists from *Workers' Action* (forerunner of the AWL), the Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory, and the Black Socialist Alliance joined the resistance, but, with the big-name anti-fascist organisation off at its carnival, mostly the community was left to organise its own defence.

Mobilised by the Defence Committee, up to 1,000 anti-fascists occupied Redchurch Street making it impossible for the NF to march into the heart of the community. Augmented by a small number of people persuaded to come over from the ANL car-

nival, the anti-fascists held their ground, but the counter-demonstration was nowhere big or organised enough to take the initiative, to widen protection or to halt the fascist march altogether.

Had the ANL called off their carnival, had even a fraction of the 100,000 concert goers in Brockwell Park, south London, made their way to the East End, the National Front would have faced a humiliating defeat. It was not to be so.

The results, as we reported them at the time, were as follows: "Already, the Bengali community in Spitafields is paying the price for this defeat. After the Nazi rally dispersed, groups of fascists began prowling the area. One gang of 50-60 thugs got through to Brick Lane and smashed up an Asian shop before being driven off. In several underground trains and stations, black people and anti-fascists were attacked by cock-a-hoop National Front bullies. The hugely boosted morale of the Front will mean an escalation of racist assaults in the area and a renewed push to control the Sunday market in Brick Lane. That is the price of the fun and games in Brockwell Park..."

What the leaders of the ANL did on that day — the leadership of the SWP in particular — must go down in history as a shameful display of sectarianism.

Too often, the SWP Central Committee put the narrow interests of developing prestige and advantage for their own organisation before the tasks of building, educating and mobilising the labour movement on the basis of working class politics. We should remind the SWP of their real history in the anti-fascist movement and win as many of their members as possible to a militant, working class anti-fascist politics.

16 AUGUST DEMO

The fight for unity

By CHARLIE SALMON

The 16 August demonstration against the BNP's "Red, White and Blue Festival" was an important and politically instructive event. Important because it marked a departure from what has passed for anti-fascism over the last ten years. Instructive because it revealed the severe limitations and sectarian lunacy of the Socialist Workers Party and their "Unite Against Fascism" front group.

Anti-fascists inside the labour movement and elsewhere need to take a good look at what happened in the months preceding the demonstration and on the day itself. We should examine the work done by local campaigners – Notts Stop the BNP and their supporters – and consider how this sort of work can be replicated elsewhere.

Local campaigners spent months mobilising for the demonstration. Notts Stop the BNP called a conference in January, sponsored by local and regional trade unions, that attracted over 100 delegates. Along with setting policy for a local campaign — most importantly, founding the campaign along working-class political lines — the conference issued a call for protests against the RWB. From this point onwards, local anti-fascists distributed thousands upon thousands of leaflets, won support from local and national trade unions, developed a network of supporters and local campaign groups in Nottingham, Derby and the Amber Valley area. Notts Stop the BNP supporters attended the UAF national conference and the national demonstration in response to the electoral successes of the BNP. Throughout this period, SWP members in Nottingham and the national officers of UAF — most of them leading SWPers — either abstained from or attempted to disrupt the organising efforts.

Late in the day, and only after Notts Stop the BNP activists asked PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka to announce the demo from the platform of the national rally, did UAF come on board. But how exactly did this "coming on board" manifest itself? Did they reply to the emails and messages that had trickled into their national office over the last eight months? Did they ask local SWP members to get involved in planning meetings and to throw their organisational weight behind local initiatives? Did they do everything in their power to extend and develop the

trade union support already won by the campaign? Nothing of the sort.

Rather than do any of this the SWP/UAF dashed out a glossy leaflet hijacking the existing sponsors and claiming the demonstration for themselves. Without consulting Notts Stop the BNP they announced a demonstration and rally at a totally different time and began negotiations with the police – presenting themselves, of course, as the 'official organisers' of the demonstration.

Worse was to follow. So entrenched is the SWP's sectarianism and control-freakery that on occasion, their antics have a pantomime quality. Take, for example, the spectacle of UAF/SWP stewards herding their supporters — most of them innocent and honest anti-fascists — into a car park some one hundred metres away from the Notts Stop the BNP rally. Despite repeated appeals from the platform for them to join the rally, stewards apparently told the gathered protesters that "we don't know who these people are, we don't know if it's safe"! When the stewards finally worked out that all the people holding "Notts Stop the BNP" and "Jobs and Homes not Racism" placards were fellow anti-fascists, they joined the rally.

Later, when the UAF truck and speaker

system failed to arrive, Weyman Bennett from UAF asked if he could address the Notts Stop the BNP rally. The organisers immediately agreed — why would they refuse? Weyman spoke for some minutes about the racist BNP and the importance of demonstrations. When the next speaker was getting underway, the UAF contingent — who had positioned themselves near the police-designated "exit" to the rally site — suddenly moved off. One hundred or so demonstrators carrying UAF banners and placards moved off, leaving those listening to rally behind. UAF attempted to split the demonstration!

When members of Amber Valley Stop the BNP — activists who actually live in the local towns and villages — caught up and marched at the front of the demonstration they were told by UAF stewards to "go away, we want the UAF banner at the front for press purposes"!

Why did UAF act in this way? The whole demonstration was heavily policed and therefore very restricted. UAF had an agreement with the police that a delegation of thirty protesters could march to the gate of the RWB festival itself. This small contingent would be the focus of media attention. Obviously, UAF wanted this

delegation to be dominated by their banners and placards. For them, a photograph in a newspaper is more important than actually building an anti-fascist campaign on the ground or even attempting to confront the BNP.

Anti-fascists should draw conclusions from the behaviour on the day. Specifically, it should now be clear that UAF is not serious about building a united, fighting movement against fascism. For all of UAF's much vaunted national trade union "support" (funding), they are incapable of mobilising the labour movement. For all the talk of "Smash the BNP", they are unwilling to organise mass mobilisations against fascist activity. Despite having "Unite" in their name, they are unwilling to unite with campaigns and individuals not dominated by their own brand of politics.

Our class needs a democratic, fighting campaign against the BNP. One that prioritises building local groups in the communities targeted by fascists, one that emphasises the need to build working class politics and organisation, one that sees the task of disrupting fascist organising efforts as key to driving the BNP out. UAF is far from being such a campaign.

THE LEFT

Where is the SWP going?

Something about the SWP's recent behaviour smacks of more than the usual sectarianism. Desperation might be closer to the mark. Over the last year 'the Revolutionary Party' has experienced one setback after another. The split with George Galloway, the collapse of Respect, the more than dismal showing for the "Left List" in the London elections and a raft of resignations must have hit them hard. Further resignations and disputes may well follow.

At this year's 'Marxism' event, one

SWP member was heard to say "John Rees is doing a session on 'Strategy and Tactics' — they must be having a laugh"!

The actions of the SWP in the run-up to and on the day of the demonstration against the BNP's "Red, White and Blue" festival show just how desperate they are. Some comrades with long memories compared their behaviour to the outright paranoia of the Healeyite WRP. The SWP's initial abstention from organising with other socialists was reminiscent of the now famous "Why we are not marching" leaflet distributed by WRP members

on anti-Vietnam War demonstrations. You see, the WRP thought the demonstrations were a conspiracy to sideline their leaders and sabotage 'The Revolutionary Party'! God alone knows what's going through the SWP leaderships minds.

Quite a few SWP members — some of whom looked visibly embarrassed by their leaders antics on the day — must be scratching their heads. The honest ones will have to admit that the SWP's own description of the event is an outright lie.

On the surface, at least, it looks unlikely that the SWP will suddenly collapse but

the steady accumulation of disasters, embarrassments, resignations and increasing paranoia will take their toll. We urge any SWP member reading this to think long and hard about the state of their organisation, to educate themselves about the SWP's traditions and practices and, importantly, to ground themselves in the real traditions of socialism. Only in this way will the left avoid the demoralisation and dispersal of once-committed revolutionaries to the four corners if and when the SWP falls apart.

Before Hitler came to power

In this, the second part of an article by Sherry Mangan, the author traces the history of the German workers’ movement in the decade before Hitler consolidated power. It was published in the US Marxist journal *Fourth International* in February 1943. Sherry Mangan (writing under the name Terence Phelan) was a well-known US journalist and secretly, using his journalistic assignments as cover, a key organiser of the international Trotskyist movement of the time.

THE RISE OF NAZISM

Unlike classic police reaction, fascism builds on a mass base. To obtain this, it offers the disoriented and desperate petty bourgeoisie and lumpenproletariat a violently demagogic anti-capitalist, anti-monopoly program. It is financed, however, precisely by monopoly capital. It thus rests on two main supports: a mass party and capitalist subsidies.

It is expensive, violent and risky. Capital prefers as long as possible to rule through the smoother method of democracy, while keeping fascism in reserve. When the crisis of capitalism, however, reaches the point where it is impossible further to depress the masses’ living standards except by destroying their unions and parties, capital calls in fascism. The destruction of the workers’ resistance enables the capitalist state to prepare for the external “solution”: imperialist war.

Thus for really large-scale growth of fascism, two components are necessary, both stemming from the acuteness of the crisis of democratic capitalism: the despair of large masses, and the decision of an important sector of capital that fascism is the only way out.

The 1923-24 inflation had wiped out the savings of the middle class. The ruthless “rationalisation” of German industry to compete in the world market sped the creation of giant monopolies, which drove small business rapidly to the wall. Big department and chain stores forced small shopkeepers out of business or condemned them to a precarious marginal existence.

Unemployment, always endemic since the war, crept uncheckably up to staggering totals. The government measures to alleviate it were utterly inadequate; and there was created a vast uneasy army of millions of declassed elements, lumpenproletarians, whose ranks were yearly swelled by a dynamic and desperate youth doomed from the very start of life to hopeless idleness. Hitler, bent on saving monopoly capitalism, inveighed demagogically against capitalism and monopoly, promised the small businessmen and shopkeepers the break-up of the industrial combines and the department stores, promised the unemployed full employment and the youth a normal future, promised a resentful nation as a whole freedom from the bonds of Versailles, promised miracles to everyone.

With the missing of the 1923 revolutionary situation, the petty bourgeoisie which by its nature cannot have an independent policy, turned increasingly away from the proletariat. Looking for miracles, the prey of demagogic catchwords, it wandered from party to party: the Nationalists, the Center, the People’s, the National-Socialists, and a score of smaller ones. During the comparative stabilisation of 1925-29, Nazism’s progress was slow. In May and December of 1924, for example, even by combining electoral forces with the German Social, People’s Bloc and National Freedom Parties, it managed respectively only 2,251,000 and 906,000 votes; in May 1928, running independently, 809,000.

But with the world crash of 1929, Hitlerism began a tremendous surge. Important sectors of German capitalism (and certain international capitalist groups), fearing a new and final revolutionary wave, swung behind Hitler with

enormous subsidies; and the petty bourgeoisie, in ultimate despair, with its “readiness to believe in miracles,” its “readiness for violent measures,” responded to his demagoguery. The results showed startlingly in the September 1930 elections: the Nazis polled 6,401,000 votes. It was a shrieking alarm signal.

That same month, from his exile in Prinkipo, Turkey, Trotsky issued a crystal-clear warning in a pamphlet entitled *The Turn in the Communist International and the German Situation*.

He particularly stressed that “The gigantic growth of national-socialism is an expression of two factors: a deep social crisis, throwing the petty bourgeois masses off balance, and the lack of a revolutionary party that would be regarded by the masses as an acknowledged revolutionary leader. If the Communist Party is the Party of revolutionary hope, then Fascism, as as a mass movement, is the party of counter-revolutionary despair...”

“Fascism in Germany has become a real danger. . . . Whoever denies this is either blind or a braggart.”

Trotsky called for immediate practical measures: the genuine united front of the Communists with the social democracy, and particular attention to the unemployed, who were falling prey to Nazi demagoguery. His wise words went unheeded.

Against Hitler were ranked the great Social-Democratic and Communist Parties, millions of workers ready and eager for battle, whose combined forces were powerful enough to have crushed Hitler forever. Yet Hitler marched to power between them practically unchallenged. To understand how this shameful and almost incredible disaster could have happened, we must analyse the roles and policies of the social democracy and Stalinism.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY

Whether they were actually in the cabinet or not, the democratic capitalist republic of Weimar depended on the active support or benevolent neutrality of the social democratic leaders.

These agents of the bourgeoisie within the working class were wont, it is true, to don red sashes on Sunday and deliver terribly revolutionary speeches about socialism at some unspecified future date; but on every occasion in the week-day present when they were threatened with that socialism, they rushed to the support of the capitalist state.

The growth of the pre-war socialist movement in Germany had created an enormous apparatus. The leaders were well entrenched in a powerful bureaucracy; and the 1925-29 stabilisation strengthened and solidified their position. They controlled between 290,000 and 400,000 posts in their own, the trade union and the government apparatuses. They had the provincial government of Prussia, Germany’s largest state; within Prussia they had appointed two-thirds of the chiefs of police and a majority of the police ranks. Theirs was the largest single party in Germany. Its electoral vote ran in 1928 to 9,150,000, or 29.8 per cent of the total; it had nearly a hundred deputies in the Reichstag.

Its “theory” was that capitalism was uninterruptedly advancing in productivity and democracy, and eventually a peaceful transition to socialism would be made by the ballot. The social democratic leadership everywhere bases itself on the maneuver as other groups base themselves on principles. Its value to its masters is the support of the workers; yet it can betray the workers to their enemies only within certain limits or risk losing control over them; it must appear to be getting something for the workers in return. In moments of revolutionary upsurge, it can show limited gains, crumbs from the capitalist table. But in the periods of capitalist decline, its basic policy is that of “the lesser evil.”

The greater the reaction, the more it clings to the “less reactionary” of various groups. In times of ultimate crisis, its despairing grasp slips from one to the other of these, the deadly enemies of yesterday becoming in turn the lesser evils of today, until finally, its utility to the ruling class is exhausted, it drops off the end of this opportunist chain and scurries for safety abroad, leaving the masses to bear the unleashed terror.

Such was the policy of the German social democracy. In the presidential elections of March, 1932, it supported the reactionary Junker General von Hindenburg as a “lesser evil” than the rival candidate Hitler. It supported the reactionary Catholic premier, Bruening, against von Papen, von Papen against von Schleicher, von Schleicher against Hitler. Then its stop-Hitler candidate Hindenburg named Hitler *Reichskanzler* — and the end of the rope ran through its hands. The whole length of rope was then used to hang the German proletariat.

Why, then, did millions of workers — who were no cowards but were ready to block Hitler’s road to power with their own bodies — remain in the Social Democratic Party, especially when Hitler threatened, and these leaders showed no intention of seriously fighting him? Partly because they had themselves built it — and often with great sacrifices; partly because they were themselves victims of the fatally false theories of reformism and the lesser evil; but above all because the Communist Party did not create in them the conviction that it had not only the correct program to lead them from the madhouse of capitalism but also the steadiness and determination to carry through that program. And the Communist Party did not appear as that in their eyes — and with reason.

THE STALINIST POLICY OF CAPITULATION

Of crucial importance for the future of the KPD was its capacity to draw the necessary lessons from the 1923-24 events. But the already Stalinised Comintern leadership, with each disaster that its intervention produced, simply dumped the blame on the leadership of the KPD and bureaucratically replaced it by another. There was no serious self-criticism; no learning from errors. Discussion was stifled, expulsion followed expulsion.

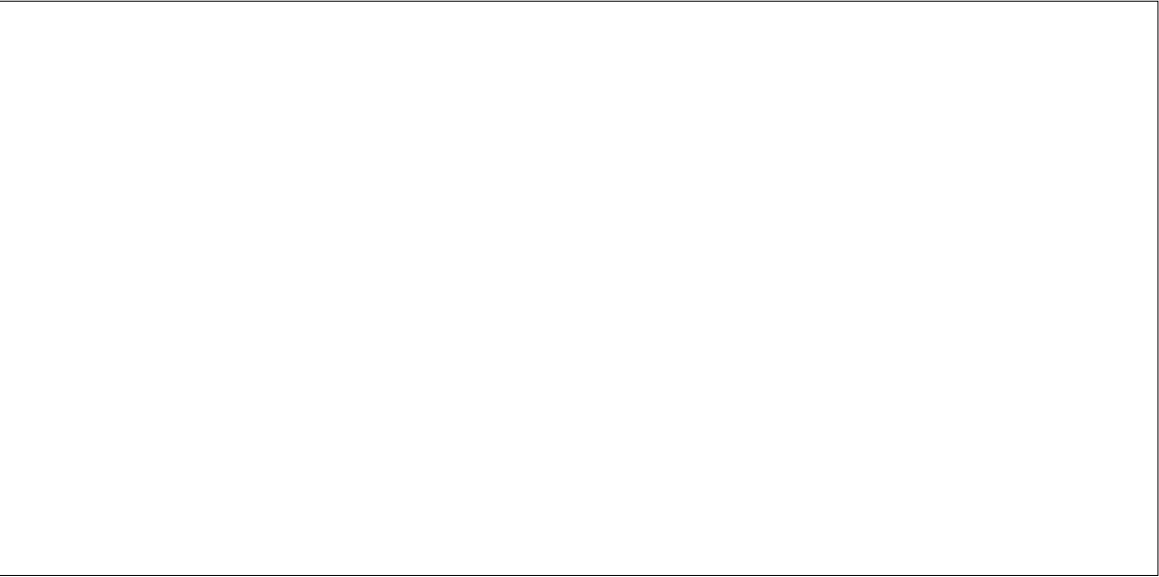
The German party was demoralised. The all-important problem was to win the millions of social democratic workers. But the door to this was barred by the Sixth Congress of the Comintern which met in July 1928, and promulgated the nightmare-theory of “social fascism.” Classifying everything except itself as various forms of fascism, Stalinism proclaimed there was no essential difference between social democracy and Hitler, and declared that fascism in the form of Bruening (the Catholic Center Party) was already triumphant in Germany. All social democrats became “social fascists.” On social democracy and fascism, Stalin’s own formulation was:

“They are not antipodes, but twins.” (*Die Internationale*, February, 1932.) On the basis of this definition, any united front between the KPD and the “social fascist” SPD in defense against fascism was impermissible and absurd: what was the sense of an anti-fascist united front with one brand of fascist against another? It sounds — as it was — the sheerest political nonsense. The only permitted tactic was the “united front from below,” which had nothing to do with a united front, but was a fancy name for an ultimatum to social democratic workers to break with their leaders and follow the KPD.

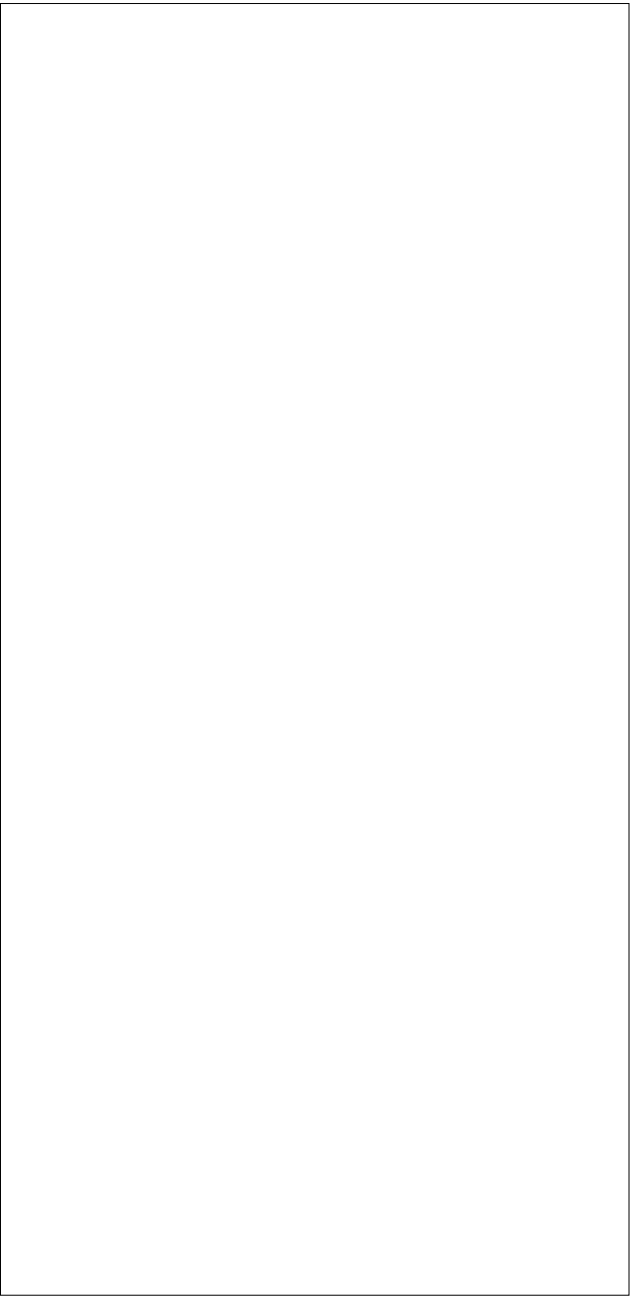
Thus the Stalinist line refused to recognise the indisputable fact that a social democratic worker was — a social democratic worker. If such a worker had been thoroughly disillusioned with his treacherous leaders and in addition had confidence that the KPD leaders would really lead a socialist revolution, he would already have joined the KPD. Toward him — and there were millions like him — the arrogant “united front from below” was not only useless, it was ultimatically insulting and could only harden his prejudices and distrust.

The only possible tactic in such a situation was the genuine united front of organisations which, while achieving the practical effects of defending the workers’ press, headquarters and meetings against nazi and police attack, would simultaneously have enabled the Communists to win the confidence of the social democratic worker and help him test his leaders: the KPD, publicly, before this social democratic worker, could call on his leaders: “You say you want to fight fascism? Good. Here are concrete proposals for a joint struggle.” If his leaders refused or evaded the common task, it would open his eyes. Instead, the KPD adopted the “social fascist” policy thus described by Trotsky:

“Ultimatism is an attempt to rape the working class after failing to convince it: Workers, unless you accept the leadership of Thaelmann-Remmele-Neumann, we will not permit you to establish the united front... We can say with assur-



Stalinist leaders in the 1930s: Albert Kuntz, Walter Ulbrecht, and Erich Weiner



ance that the majority of the Social Democratic workers remain in their party to this day not because they trust the reformist leadership but because they do not as yet trust that of the Communists. But they do want to fight against fascism even now. Were they shown the first step to take in a concurrent struggle, they would insist upon their organisation taking that step. If their organisations balked, they might reach the point of breaking with them.

“Instead of aiding the Social Democratic workers to find their way through experience, the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party abets the leaders of the Social Democracy against the workers. The Welses and the Hilferdings are enabled to screen with flying colors their own unwillingness to fight, their dread of fighting, their inability to fight, by citing the aversion of the Communist Party for participation in a common struggle.”

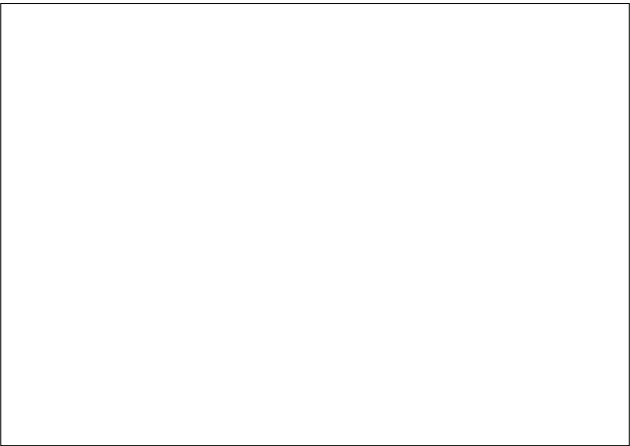
(*What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*, 1932.)

The theory that prevented joint actions with “social fascists” did not preclude common action with Hitlerites. The Nazis in 1931 instituted a referendum in Prussia to drive the provincial social democratic government from power. The KPD campaigned and voted side by side with the Hitlerites, calling it the “red” referendum. That autumn one sector of the social democratic leadership, grouped around Breitscheid, declared itself in favour of a united front with the KPD. The leader of the KPD, Thaelmann, flung the offer back in Breitscheid’s face, and warned party members that the “relics of social democratic thought in our ranks” are “the most serious danger that confronts the Communist Party... Social fascism is ‘threatening’ to form a united front with the Communist Party.” (*Communist International* [English] December 1931.)

The KPD belittled Hitler just when he began to be most dangerous. Its official paper, the day after the 1930 elections that gave the Nazis eight and a half million votes, light-mindedly announced: “Last night was Herr Hitler’s greatest day, but the so-called election victory of the Nazis is the beginning of the end.” The next day it repeated its folly: “The fourteenth of September was the high point of the National-Socialist movement in Germany. What comes after this can only be decline and fall.” (*Rote Fahne*, September 15-16, 1930.)

When succeeding events proved the utter falsity of this prediction, the KPD leadership, far from correcting itself, went on to greater folly: the assertion that Hitler’s accession to power would prove his undoing. Though it was never officially launched as a slogan, the Stalinists operated on the mad idea of “First Hitler; then it is our turn.” This was plainly indicated on October 14, 1931, when Remmele, parliamentary deputy and one of the three top leaders of the KPD, boasted in the Reichstag:

“Herr Bruening has put it very plainly: once they [the nazis] are in power, then the united front of the proletariat will be established and it will make a clean sweep of everything. We are the victors of the coming day; and the question is no longer one of who shall vanquish whom. This question



Clockwise from left: children stacking deutschmark notes in the hyper-inflation of 1923; ruined middle-class people selling household possessions in the streets: Walter Ulbrecht, future Stalinist ruler of East Germany, speaking to Nazi workers

is already answered. The question now reads only, ‘At what moment shall we overthrow the bourgeoisie?’ We are not afraid of the Fascist gentlemen. They will shoot their bolt quicker than any other government.”

At the very moment that Remmele was indulging in this criminally frivolous boasting to the applause of the KPD deputies, Trotsky in Prinkipo was writing a very different evaluation of the perspectives:

“The coming into power of the German ‘National Socialists’ would mean above all the extermination of the flower of the German proletariat, the disruption of all its organisations, the extirpation of its belief in itself and its future. . . . That the Communist party will actually evade the struggle and thus deliver the proletariat to the mercy of its mortal enemy . . . would signify only one thing: the gruesome battles would unfold not before the seizure of power by the Fascists but after it, that is: under conditions ten times more favorable for Fascism than those of today. The struggle of the proletariat, taken unawares, disoriented, disappointed, and betrayed by its own leadership, against the Fascist regime would be transformed into a series of frightful bloody and futile convulsions. . . .” (*Germany: the Key to the International Situation*, 1932.)

THE CATASTROPHE APPROACHES

Encouraged by their successes, the Brownshirts took to the streets. First they began to beat up or murder workers returning from meetings, then to raid the meetings themselves. Protected by the state police, they made provacatory demonstrations in the heart of workers’ quarters. The toll of their murders began to mount. Filled with a profoundly correct instinct, despite the lack of directives from their leaders, the workers fought back courageously for their organisations and their lives. Meeting fire with fire, they stood up to the nazis arms in hand, and the Brownshirts began to fall. But it was only guerrilla fighting, not organised combat.

In January 1932, in his *What Next?—Vital Questions for the German Proletariat*, Trotsky warned that the situation was growing desperate, that the counter-attack against Hitler’s gains must now be launched from a defensive position, but prepared to pass to the immediate offensive. In a masterly analysis of the German situation, he pleaded with the KPD ranks to force a change of line: the abandonment of the delirium of “social fascism” and immediate concrete measures for the genuine united front. But the KPD leadership led the doomed party on the same fatal road.

As the crisis deepened, so did the desperation of the middle classes and the unemployed. While social democracy appealed to the capitalist state to intervene, and Stalinism continued its suicidal policy against the united front, the middle class and lumpenproletariat began, first in driblets, then in a torrent, to pour into the ranks of National Socialism.

In each succeeding election, the nazi votes rose. In the presidential elections of March 1932, Hitler polled 11,338,000 votes to Hindenburg’s 18,661,000, while Thaelmann received 5,000,000. In the run-off the Hindenburg vote rose to 19,000,000, Hitler’s to 13,000,000, while Thaelmann dropped to 3,000,000. In April, Nazism won 162 seats in the Prussian Landtag, the largest of any party. When the social democratic-Catholic Center government of Prussia continued in office, the KPD deputies, true to the “social fascist” theory, joined

with the nazis in a vote of censure. In July, Chancellor von Papen, under the notorious Article 4 of the Weimar Constitution, simply ordered the administration of Prussia out of office. The social democrats went, whimpering, without the semblance of a struggle. The workers were aroused, enraged, ready for action, waiting in the factories for the call to a general strike. But no signal came from the temporising social democratic leaders, while the Stalinists would make no united front except “from below.” At month’s end, the Reichstag elections gave the nazis 13,700,000 votes; the social democrats 7,000,000; the Communists 5,300,000. On a purely electoral plane, the forces were about equal; but the real correlation of forces was infinitely more favorable to the workers. Twenty million strong in all, concentrated in the key industrial centers, the potential masters of transport and industry, they could still have smashed the Nazis.

The rank and file workers were thoroughly aroused to the imminence of the danger. The July election had been signalled by 25 political murders by the confident nazis. The workers, despairing of directives from their leaders, spontaneously multiplied defense squads. The SPD and KPD leaders tried to hold them to party lines, but the workers, with a sure class instinct, often disregarded their efforts. But even so, such united actions were on a limited and temporary scale. In September, sensing that it was the eve of catastrophe, Trotsky in *The Only Road* launched a desperate appeal to the KPD, warning that it was almost too late.

But the KPD paid no heed. They even joined forces with the Nazis in the autumn transport strike in Berlin. Some of the social democratic leaders, who had cynically supposed that they could make deals with no matter what government, began to see the doom approaching: Stampfer published in *Vorwaerts* an appeal to the KPD for a united front. The KPD contemptuously dismissed it.

The crisis had reached its pitch. The November elections showed that Hitler had passed his apogee on the parliamentary plane. It was time for him to make a coup or to jump the last gap by a deal with the government. on January 30, 1933, Hindenburg named him Chancellor.

THE DEBACLE

Trotsky’s terrible predictions were promptly realised. While the Stalinist leadership blandly continued to assure the workers that Hitler’s downfall was just around the corner — and went down without a struggle, Hitler, with the pretext of the Reichstag fire, unleashed his anti-labor terror — but this time with the full armory of governmental weapons. Despite the evidence before their very eyes of Hitler’s smashing of all the workers’ organisations, the KPD leaders parroted on—from exile. As late as April 1933, Fritz Heckert, representative of the KPD, reported to the ECCI:

“As far back as 1924,the leader of the international proletariat, Comrade Stalin, gave an estimate unsurpassed in its exactness and perspicacity of the evolution of Social Democracy toward Fascism—an estimate which lies at the basis of the programme of the Comintern and the policy of the Communist Party of Germany.. . . Everything which has happened in Germany has fully confirmed the correctness of Comrade Stalin’s prognosis.”

One political conclusion was inescapable: Stalinism had destroyed the Comintern as a revolutionary force. It was on the basis of this terrible, unnecessary, disgraceful German defeat that the Trotskyists, the International Left Opposition which had heretofore considered itself, despite all expulsions and persecutions, an oppositional group within the Third International, launched the call for the new, the Fourth, International.

Within Germany, all socialist and communist organisations were destroyed, all trade unions, all workers’ cultural and sports groups. Workers were butchered by the thousands, by the hundreds of thousands beaten to pulp and flung into Hitler’s concentration camps. With the blood purge of 1934, Hitler put an end once and for all to any hopes of the middle class that his “revolutionary” program on their behalf was anything but the sheerest demagogu. Nazism fused with the state apparatus.

Germany became one vast prison. When Hitler’s territorial grabs at last in 1939 so frightened Germany’s imperialist rivals that they plunged into war in an effort to check him, the German workers, atomised, terrorised, with every organisation utterly destroyed, faced with the choice of mobilisation or execution, filed sullenly into the ranks of the Reichswehr.

This, then, was the actual 15-year process which is described by Secretary Hull as Hitler’s ability “overnight almost, to stand... 65 million Germans on their heads... so ... that they arise the next morning and insist on being sent to the front-line trenches without delay.”

Why, then, do the German masses, despite their bitter hatred toward Hitler, fight so desperately that only when they faced the Red Army were they finally checked and rolled back again? Even those Germans who most hate Hitler fear that a repetition of the 1918 defeat will bring an even worse version of Versailles and its terrible consequences. Furthermore, each bloody Gestapo brutality in the occupied countries brings premonitory shudders to the German people that retaliating armies may some day roll vengefully into Germany. The German people are trapped by the cruelest of dilemmas: on the one hand, continued support, even negative, of the accursed Hitler and the unbearable war; on the other, the vengeance of Germany’s imperialist foes, ranging from dismemberment of the Reich up to threats of sterilisation.

CLIMATE CAMP

Workers' Climate Action makes new links

Two of the young AWL members who went to "Climate Camp" earlier in August, report on the week long protest outside the site of a new coal-fired power station at Kingsnorth in Kent.

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

The Workers' Climate Action network was launched in January 2008. Working within the camp, and with activists within the labour movement, WCA has helped this summer's Climate Camp move on a long way.

At the opening night plenary, on capitalism and climate change, Daniel Randall, a young GMB organiser, spoke about the role of the labour movement in fighting climate change and how the labour movement might mobilise around unifying demands such as the shorter working week, longer annual holidays and public ownership of transport. Here the current aims of the labour movement coincide with a need for people to travel differently for rest and leisure.

He also spoke about the Lucas Plan and the Builders' Labourers Federation of New South Wales, both powerful workers' movements of the 70s with inspirational ecological politics.

Clara Osagiede, secretary of the RMT cleaners' grade, spoke about the history of colonialism and oil exploitation in the Niger Delta region where she was an activist; migrant workers from that region now make up a big proportion of the tube cleaners in struggle. For Clara fighting climate change is not about reducing CO₂ emissions in the abstract but about building a mass workers' movement capable of fighting capitalism and capitalist exploitation.

The President of the Medway Trades Council also gave an excellent exposition of capitalism and a vision of working-class socialism and democratic planning by workers and communities.

After debating WCA and the Campaign Against Climate Change, Medway TC agreed to support the camp and to oppose Kingsnorth. They also made sure socialists debated Arthur Scargill when he accepted the WCA invite to come to the Camp.

The session with Scargill was disrupted badly by police attempts to storm the camp, taking most WCA activists away from the meeting that we had organised! It is a shame that Scargill didn't come and show immediate solidarity at the police line, because he felt it would be a diversion to the real debate. However he did express disgust at the police in media interviews afterward. In the event, over three hours, a

meeting built up of about 80 activists and a real debate took place. Scargill believes the climate camp is wrong-headed in its approach to reducing emissions.

He argues that the NUM has fought for the best safety standards for workers in the industry anywhere in the world, and should be supported rather than opposed in preferring a British coal industry rather than coal imported from South Africa, China and elsewhere, which is dirtier, where there are terrible labour and environmental standards, and which has to travel the world to be burnt. Also, there is a massive stock pile in the UK and mining communities in need of employment. He made clear that he was not lining up with the bosses, as some suggested, and still wearing the coal not dole badge reminded people of his union's determined fight against capitalism.

Scargill also argued that by opposing coal we strengthen the hand of the nuclear lobby and criticised the current NUM leadership for supporting the Government's energy white paper; he would never give his support to a strategy that involved nuclear.

Scargill was arguing for British coal as a transitional fuel while developing a 100% renewables capacity. He also said it was reckless to be putting obstacles up to the development of Carbon Capture and Storage technology, as it was clear that India and China would continue to burn coal. We should be trying to clean up that process and reduce emissions — building unity with the NUM and other unions around the world — rather than adopting silly slogans like "leave it in the ground". He strongly emphasised the need for a policy that acknowledged the right of poorer countries to a decent reliable energy supply. There was a good discussion in the end, inconclusive but comradely, with a warm and long applause for Scargill and Dave Douglass from the NUM/IWW for coming.

Later in the week, 50 or so activists turned up to a session by Jill Mountford of the AWL on the 1984-5 great miners'

strike, and discussed a range of important lessons about the power of workers' struggle against the capitalist state, and posed many questions about how the labour movement can pick itself up from the defeat of that strike. This session also talked about the transformative power of struggle, with discussion about the significance of Women Against Pit Closures.

Another highlight was the Campaign Against Climate Change workshop on "just transition", though this fell short of thoroughly taking up the lessons from Lucas and the BLF; that radical workers' democracy based on the idea of workers' control and the willingness to create new union structures and take on the bureaucracy will be necessary in building a trade union movement against climate change. The WCA network resolved to build consensus around a fifth core aim of Climate Camp for the September national meeting, to add "a workers' led just transition" to the existing aims of "movement building", "direct action", "sustainable living" and "education".

WCA activists were able to open up space for left-wing discussion about how the movement should grow, as well as taking part in the life and actions of the camp.

The WCA's twice daily visits to Kingsnorth and the strong working relationship with the local trades council were good in themselves, but also demonstrated a different and probably complementary approach to the direct action tactics of the Camp and its current social basis. Relations locally were more positive on the day of action, with few complaints about the camp; many local people said they would visit. There were proper discussions about workers' organisation, multinationals, government policy and just transition with local energy workers.

WCA has plans to continue its work with the trades council and the local Kingsnorth Climate Action Medway group (which did great work during and in the run-up to the camp).

WCA will continue work with Heathrow workers (against expansion). We have plans for a regular airport bulletin, jointly with the Labour Representation Committee and the Campaign Against Immigration Controls, and hopefully working closely with John McDonnell MP and the soon to be re-founded Hillingdon Trades Council. We expect to mobilise for current strikes at Gatwick and Stanstead. Scottish activists are developing campaigns. We are involved in solidarity actions with the tube cleaners' strike.

The Workers' Climate Action conference to organise, debate and educate ourselves will take place in Sheffield in October. E-mail workersclimateaction@gmail.com

From a little utopia to a bigger struggle?

BY STUART JORDAN

The mixed bag of the anti-capitalist movement is a bewildering place for your average Trotskyist — but beyond all the political arguments it was incredibly impressive, inclusive and participative exercise in collective living, self-organisation and fighting the state.

The organisation of the camp is based around consensus decision making and self-organisation, operating on a formal and informal level and at every level of the camp. The camp is split into geographical areas for ease of pre-camp organisation, and each neighbourhood or barrio is based around a communal kitchen and living space. Each barrio starts the day with a meeting which is fed back to a site-wide meeting by spokespeople.

Anyone who wants to get involved in any area of work can go to the jobs tent and get the job of their choice. There is an emphasis on skills-sharing.

The camp is a hive of leisurely activity, people joining in, offering their help and taking over jobs. This not only brings the camp together and allows people to mix through their work but also smashes up the work-leisure/worker-consumer dichotomy that defines capitalist society. It is perhaps a little taste of how we might organise work in a future communist society.

Also, there is an incredibly effective rumour mill. At one point we thought the water had been turned off by the police and everyone was running around trying to collect water and telling each other to preserve the water they had. This rumour spread to all corners of the camp before

another one started that the water was up and running again (and it turned out to be a kink in the pipe and nothing to do with the police!) It is incredible to be in a situation where people are constantly communicating all the time and there is an unending list of dramas that are told.

The first wave of activists who set the camp up in the week before it started are very experienced in direct action and managed to maintain crucial infrastructure of the camp. It was these activists who were also at the front line when police started a dawn raid on Monday morning. The stand-off got incredibly heated, with hundreds of activists linking arms and holding ground against successive lines of heavily armed riot cops. Several were dragged out behind police lines and beaten up. One activist was held to the ground whilst pepper spray was squirted into his eyes, leaving him blind until the following day.

However, the experienced activists within our blockade not only allowed us to de-escalate the situation when police were losing it, but also ensured that necessary direct action was taken to recover cars and arrestees and strengthen our position. Inch by inch people managed to climb on top of cars and underneath vans to ensure that the police could not drive them away. At one point a riot cop grabbed an activist by the throat and only let go after we started to shout out his number "Three-eight-four! Three-eight-four!" This kind of experience and expertise in fighting the state is vital for our movement as it grows.

Whilst we often talk on a theoretical level about collective living, social control of the economy and smashing the capitalist state, the Climate Camp offered a brief insight into what all this might look like. It was a little utopia

besieged by the violent troops of capitalist hostility. The only problem was that there was no consensus amongst the campers of how to make this utopia a reality.

This difficulty has long been recognised within the anti-capitalist movement. In the analysis that followed the Carnival Against Capitalism, Andrew X in *Give Up Activism* argued that the evolution of the movement from single-issue campaigns to protest against capitalism-in-general had meant their was a rupture between theory and practice. The theory said we need a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist order but the practice remained a reformist tactic of direct action. This tactic was very successful in winning concessions for single-issue campaigns but did not fundamentally change society.

Supporters of Workers' Liberty went to the camp as Marxists with a class analysis of climate change. Some of us also went as a part of the broad network Workers Climate Action which seeks to inject class politics into the environmentalist movement and environmentalist politics into the labour movement. It is our belief that the only way forward is to direct the energy of the anti-capitalist movement towards the revolutionary potential of the labour movement.

We will all come away with criticisms of the camp and especially of some of the ideas and beliefs that we came across. We will feed these criticisms back into the movement and continue to argue for class politics. Whilst there were degrees of sectarianism towards our Trotskyist "intervention", the Camp was overwhelmingly marked by a genuine openness to discuss ideas about how to make the small utopia a living reality.

THE OLYMPICS AND CLASS POLITICS

Excellence or exploitation?

BY PABLO VELASCO

Who could not be impressed by the sight of the Jamaican Usain Bolt running faster than any human being in history? Or other awe-inspiring performances on the track, in the pool, in the veladrome or countless other venues? All that training, the coaching, the commitment, the dedication, the sacrifice, to go “*citius altius fortius*” — faster, higher, stronger.

The humanity of the Olympics, the taking part, pushing yourself to the limits, the striving — and above all the apparent equality of competition, has an undeniable appeal. The veneer of internationalism, the prominence of women and black people, of people from all round the planet, all give the event the tinge of progress and liberty.

But what about the politics of the Olympics?

The Olympics were revived at the end of the nineteenth century by imperial social Darwinists anxious to prepare their nations (and races) for war or at least for social peace. Baron de Coubertin founded the Olympics while searching for answers to the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. These modern concerns fused rather well with the ancient Greek tradition, where the Olympics were part preparation for war, part worship of the gods.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has to rank as one of the most unrepresentative and reactionary organisations in history.

Avery Brundage, President of the IOC from 1952 until 1972 was an open supporter of the Nazi regime whose company got a contract in 1938 to build the German Embassy in the US. Brundage opposed the participation

of women in the Olympics and was responsible for expulsion of US sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos from the 1968 Mexico Olympic after their iconic Black Power salute.

Juan Antonio Samaranch, was a prominent member of Franco's fascist government in Spain of before he became IOC president (1980–2001). He was responsible for the sponsorship and broadcasting deals that have turned the games in an orgy of multinational capital, where McDonalds and Coca Cola associate themselves with health, while Nike and Adidas fumigate their sweated garments.

Apart from the suffocating nationalism, what spoils the Olympics is the big money — the involvement of capitalists and their lackeys in government. The 2012 London Olympics has a budget of around £10 billion, will be built by cheap, agency labour and transfer taxes and entrance fees into the pockets of the rich.

Despite efforts to present the Olympics as apolitical or non-political, the controversy has always been there. The Nazis used the 1936 Berlin Olympics to showcase their regime. The 1956 Melbourne Olympics were boycotted by some countries because of the Russian repression of Hungary and by others because of Suez. Both the Moscow (1980) and Los Angeles (1984) were boycotted by the other side because of the Cold War.

There have been more progressive interventions. The Black Power salute of was perhaps the most significant, but the Olympics were also affected by the anti-apartheid struggle.

The “Play Fair” campaign, in its own limited way, has exposed the exploitative labour conditions under which

the merchandise is produced.

Should socialist favour the reform of the Olympics or its abolition? The Olympic brand is probably too far bound up with business profits, government corruption, geopolitical rivalry and nationalism to be salvageable. Any attempt to democratise the Olympics in the present world would have to take on powerful interests, and would have few powerful levers to change it.

For sure the IOC should be abolished and replaced with an association of sportspeople without national or corporate representation.

It is difficult to see how such a conglomeration of so many different sports at one event could survive the IOC's break up. Perhaps better instead to have a series of competition of the best athletes, based on their performance at the start of the season, representing themselves with no national paraphernalia. Team events could involve random or equally weighted squads.

Of course inequalities would be hard to eradicate, given the financial and technological support provided in some countries. A system of transfers and subsidies to give opportunities to athletes from the poorest parts of the world would probably be necessary.

This is a long way from where we are today. But with the 2012 Olympics ahead, there is an opportunity for socialists to question the Olympics as currently constituted, while preserving the pursuit of sporting excellence. In terms of the construction work, the facilities, the costs of admission, and overall funding costs passed on to working class people, there will be opportunities to struggle in the years ahead.

A boost for Chinese Stalinists

As an excellent article in the French revolutionary weekly *Rouge* (31 July) documents, the Olympics have been a major political self-boosting operation for the Chinese regime.

The Associated Press report for the opening day, 8 August, sums up the line: “China comes of age in stunning style... China commandeered the world stage on Friday, celebrating its first-time role as Olympic host with a stunning display of pageantry and pyrotechnics... Now ascendant as a global power, China welcomed scores of world leaders to an opening ceremony...”

Repression in Tibet? Denial of all democratic and workers' rights? Public executions? No problem. All the world leaders were in Beijing to applaud.

Some, like George Bush, had to placate home opinion with polite words disapproving Chinese totalitarianism...

And for *Socialist Worker*, bizarrely, that is the great evil of the Olympics! Not that the Chinese tyranny has been boosted, but that US opinion made Bush say some words of demur!

SW of 16 August flags up, on its front page, an article by Alex Callinicos denouncing “the West's hypocrisy over human rights”. Callinicos's point is not to demand that the USA should apply more consistently at home the freedoms Bush advocated for China, but to declare that “the orgy of China-bashing surrounding the Beijing Olympics is enough to make one spew”.

China isn't perfect, he conceded. “It is ruled by an authoritarian Stalinist regime”. But that's not the point.

“The democratic credentials of many of China's critics don't stand up to serious examination”. The real story is that China's economic growth is “destabilising the existing global balance of power”. Criticism of Chinese repression is sour grapes from older hegemonic powers like the USA.

Callinicos concludes by suggesting, in rather exultant tones, that if China is challenging the USA, then it must be good. “Things have changed... The West faces challengers increasingly confident of their own strength. If they're pushed too hard... they'll bite back”.

It is the same method the SWP has used on Milosevic, the Taliban, Saddam Hussein, the Mahdi Army in Iraq, Hamas, and the rest: if they fight the USA, they are broadly on the right side, and any sins are secondary. “Anti-imperialism” as a way of deflecting criticism of tyranny.

Standing up for freedom

Rosalind Robson reviews *Black Power Salute* (BBC4)

This fascinating programme told the full story about the “black power” protest by Tommie Smith and John Carlos at a medal ceremony during the 1968 Mexico Olympics. Although the story is well known (and the image even more famous), especially in America, it was worth telling again, in this film, by the athletes themselves.

Smith and Carlos were involved in the Olympic Project for Human Rights, itself an offshoot of civil rights activism at San Jose State University in California. In the years before 1968 a unique group of black track and field athletes, at the University on sport's scholarships, trained to become the best in America, and the best in the world. The best athletes in America, but still second class citizens, both in the world of athletics and in society.

At that time for instance New York City Athletics Club — happy to see world-class black athletes run around their running track — barred blacks — and also Jews — from membership of the club.

As the Olympic trials grew near black activists at San Jose began to talk about a black boycott of their Olympics, knowing full well that their absence would really be felt. They set up the Olympic Project for Human Rights. They wanted true equality on the sports field and in society. Their demands were that the fascist sympathiser Avery Brundage should resign as Olympics boss. That Muhammed Ali should be given back his world title (he had lost it when he refused to fight in Vietnam). That the all-white teams of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa should be barred from attending the games.

Many black athletes were not keen on the boycott and that idea fell to oneside. However the backlash and hate campaign against the OPHR radicalised many. A protest would take place at the Olympics itself, but until it happened nobody knew what it would be.

The salute was not just a salute, but a demonstration carefully choreographed to symbolise many things. Smith (who won the gold medal for 200 metres) wore a black scarf around his neck to represent black pride. Carlos (who won the bronze) had his tracksuit top unzipped to show solidarity with all blue collar workers in America. Carlos, who was from Harlem and the most political of the two

wore beads which he described “were for those individuals that were lynched, or killed that no-one said a prayer for, that were hung and tarred. It was for those thrown off the side of the boats in the middle passage.” The men raised their right arm and their left arm to signify black unity.

Unfortunately the story of the “black power” movement was not one of unity and the lives of the men (sent home by the US after the protest) were not easy. The protest, however, lives on as a simple, powerful demonstration of a fight for freedom.

ARMENIAN GENOCIDE 1915

Ethnic cleansing in World War 1

Dan Katz looks at a horrific episode in history, one which the Turkish government still denies

The Ottoman Empire existed from 1299 until its abolition by Mustafa Kemal's Turkish nationalists in 1923. At the height of its power, during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Empire spread from the Atlantic coast of Morocco to the Persian Gulf and from southeastern Europe down to the Red Sea.

A long period of decline followed, characterised by the loss of territories, fragmenting centralised authority and attempts at reform from above. In the 19th century the backward, stagnant Empire faced the rise of nationalisms inside its European boundaries as the constituent peoples rose to national consciousness. Britain, France, Russia and Austria detached territories.

In response the Ottomans attempted to reform along Western lines. They modernised the army, abolished guilds, and somewhat reformed banking and the legal codes.

But a measure of the Empire's continuing backwardness was that the trade in slaves continued until the early 20th century.

Groups began to emerge amongst the elite demanding more radical change. In 1876 a military coup forced the abdication of the Sultan, Abdulaziz, and the new Sultan was allowed to assume power on condition he declared a constitutional monarchy and convened a parliament.

ROOTS OF GENOCIDE

The genocide of the Armenians, which started in April 1915, was orchestrated by nationalists, but had been prepared by Islamic-Turkish domination within the old Empire.

Modern Islamist groups such as Hizb-ut Tahrir, campaigning for the refounding of the Caliphate (religious authority which existed within the Ottoman state), claim that Jews and Christians were simply obliged to pay a tax to the Ottomans in order to practice their religion freely. In fact non-Muslim religious groups were subjected not only to a special tax but to a range of discriminatory, deliberately humiliating laws:

"[Non-Muslim] men were forbidden from marrying Muslim women. Testimony [from non-Muslims] against Muslims was not accepted in court... [Non-Muslims] were forbidden from conducting their religious observance in a way that would disturb Muslims. The ringing of church bells or the construction of churches of synagogues were forbidden... [Non-Muslims] were forbidden to ride horses or carry arms and were obliged to step aside for approaching Muslims" (Taner Akcam, *A Shameful Act*). In some periods the non-Muslim groups were forced to wear clothes of particular colours (Armenians wore red shoes and head-gear, Greeks wore black, Jews turquoise).

Armenians and others were expected to abide by this religious "agreement", which had been imposed on them. When the Armenians and other nationalities began to demand equality in the 19th century, they were seen as violating Islamic custom.

Although the state was essentially an Islamic state, the nature of law in the Ottoman Empire was complex. Laws concerning finance and administration were normally dictated by orders from the Sultan; Shari'a, or Islamic religious law and courts, governed marriage and inheritance. In addition, and regularised in the 19th century, was the millet system, whereby non-Muslims were organised by religion. A high-ranking religious leader from each group was chosen. The representative was responsible to the Sultan and had wide powers to regulate the affairs of their followers, including the right to collect taxes.

Chronology
1839: Start of Ottoman reform from above (Tanzimat)
1876: First Ottoman constitution
1894-6: Armenian massacres
1908: Young Turk/CUP coup
1909: Armenian massacres
1912-13: Ottoman Empire defeated in Balkan wars
1914: Empire enters WW1 on the side of Germany
1915: Allies land at Gallipoli; genocide and deportations of Armenians start
1918: Defeat in World War One; occupation
1919: Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk) leads war of independence
1923: Internationally recognised Turkish state becomes a republic
1924: Caliphate abolished

Death by starvation: Armenian children

Additionally non-Muslims — mainly the Christians — were subject to treaties that had been forced on the Ottoman Empire by foreign powers. After 1673 France became the "protector" of all Catholics inside the Ottoman Empire. Later Russia claimed a treaty of 1774 gave it similar rights over Orthodox Christians. Within the Empire the Christians began to be seen as privileged benefactors of foreign interference.

Taner Akcam comments, "The millet system might have been progressive compared with medieval Europe, but held up against the principle of equality introduced by the French revolution, it was revealed as utterly backward." After 1839 the elite introduced reforms in an attempt to hold the Empire together and stem the tide of rebellions. The idea of a new patriotism, "Ottomanism", followed. "Ottomanism" — allegiance to the Empire — was an attempt to bind the Christians and other oppressed groups and nationalities to the Turkish, Islamic core.

However "Ottomanism" was artificial and ineffective. By the end of the 19th century the state was promoting a pan-Islamism in an attempt to keep itself together. In the Turks case, at the start of the 20th century, an Islamic Turkish nationalism emerged.

"The Ottoman-Turkish ruling elite identified with Islam and saw themselves as superior to other religious groups... The Young Ottoman organisation that formed in the mid-19th century and its successor, the Young Turks, accepted Turkish domination of the Ottoman Empire as a situation so natural and obvious as not to merit discussion." (*A Shameful Act*)

ARMENIANS REBEL

Rebellions — either against social conditions or for equality — were repressed with great brutality. In the period 1894-6 a revolt begun by Armenian peasantry ended with the murder of at least 80,000 Armenians (the figure may be much higher).

Following the Young Turks coup of 1908, which brought power to the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), and a reactionary counter-coup attempt in 1909, 15-20 000 Armenians were massacred. The killings brought European objections.

The vulnerability of the 2.1 million Armenians within the Empire was in part their geographical location. They were spread through areas south of the Black Sea in the Turkish heartland.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II said, "By taking away Greece and Romania, Europe has cut off the feet of the Turkish state. The loss of Bulgaria, Serbia and Egypt has deprived us of our hands, and now by the means of this Armenian agitation they want to get at our most vital places and tear out our very guts." The Turks were terrified that the Western powers would use the Armenians to partition Turkey.

In the run-up to war France, Britain and Germany were haggling over a partition plan. Simultaneously the Turkish nationalists were discussing plans to destroy the Armenians; the massacres and deportations started with the ethnic cleansing of Greeks in 1914.

THE WAR STARTS

The Ottoman state joined World War One on 29 October 1914 on Germany's side. Its war aims were to win back lost territory and to abrogate treaties it had been forced

into signing by the Allied powers.

At first the war went well for the Turks, but by January 1915 they were loosing ground to the Russians whose forces included small numbers of Armenians (there was an Armenian population inside Tsarist Russia). The Armenians inside the Empire were blamed for the defeats and branded as traitors.

In February 1915 army commanders were issued with a decree directing them to disarm Armenians in all fighting units and regroup them in labour battalions. Disarmed, these soldiers were then massacred.

At the end of April prominent Armenians were rounded up in a coordinated drive across the country to destroy the Armenian people's leadership. In Constantinople over 2000 arrests took place during the last week of April — some prisoners were tortured to death, others were publicly executed and the rest were killed in small batches over the next weeks.

In May the systematic deportation and murder of Armenians began, coordinated by the CUP's Talaat Bey in the Ministry of the Interior, and Enver Pasha in the Ministry of War. Their policy was summed up in a note sent by Talaat, "the Government [has] decided to destroy completely all the Armenians living in Turkey... An end must be put to their existence, however criminal the measures taken may be, and no regard must be paid to either age or sex or conscientious scruples." (16 September 1915)

To achieve their end the CUP extensively used groups of criminals released for the purpose and Muslim Kurdish militia. When clearing Armenian villages those Muslims involved were often rewarded with the property of the Armenians.

In the last seven months of 1915 about one quarter of the 2.1 million Armenians in the Empire were already dead. The majority of the remainder were sent of death marches, south and east, to desert areas where they died from cold, starvation or were butchered.

The German Ambassador reported that "Talaat Bey... openly stated that the [government] wished to take advantage offered by the war to make a clean sweep of their enemies at home without being troubled by foreign diplomatic intervention." When the Turks' German Allies objected to the annihilation of the Armenians, they were told that their Turkish side, "did not consider their allies competent to instruct them in humanity" (AO Sarkissian, *Genocide in Turkey*).

THE LEGACY

Turkey was on the losing side in World War One, and in 1918 Allied forces began an occupation. The Sultan, Mehmed VI, used Allied demands for punishment of those responsible for the Armenian genocide as a political weapon against the CUP.

In 1919 a number of political and military leaders were sentenced to death by a Court Martial. These included, in their absence, Talaat and Enver. Talaat was assassinated in Berlin, in 1921, by members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation who had vowed to find and kill those responsible for the genocide.

However the trials came to a halt. Many of those responsible, who had been removed by the British to Malta to await trial, were exchanged for British hostages seized by the Turkish nationalists who had regrouped under Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). Kemal had been a CUP member and now led a struggle for Turkish independence.

In 1923 the Turks won independence. Kemal declared a republic and, the following year, abolished the Caliphate. The Turkish state refused — and continues to refuse — to allow a proper discussion of the crimes of Turkish nationalism.

Officially, in Turkey, the Armenian genocide is downplayed as mere "deportations".

Many Turks have been prosecuted for characterising the massacres as genocide (the charge is "denigrating Turkishness").

In 2007 the newspaper editor Hrant Dink was murdered by a Turkish nationalist (the murderer was treated as a hero by some of the police who detained him); Dink had been prosecuted three times for criticising the Turkish state's denial of the genocide. It seems that those that organised to murder Dink were involved in a broader conspiracy including a plan to kill the Turkish Nobel laureate, Orhan Pamuk, who has also been the victim of legal persecution for writing "a million Armenians were killed in these lands."

EDITORIAL

No to the “mullahs’ bomb”!

Nuclear bombs are not weapons of “defence”. They are weapons of mass murder, of the threat of mass murder. If they are used it will not be in defence but in murderous “retaliation” against cities and those who live in them — against the civilian population. Their effectiveness rests entirely on that threat.

No socialist can support nuclear weapons, still less, support their use. The drive by the Iranian regime to acquire nuclear weapons is a drive to achieve the power to inflict mass murder. Any socialist who wants them to acquire that power abandons the ground of socialism entirely and becomes a native or vicarious Iranian or Islamic chauvinist.

It is nonsense to say that Iran’s right to have nuclear weapons is an inalienable part of its right to self-determination. In the Iran/Iraq regional imperialist war of 1980-1989, these two powers fought a Middle Eastern equivalent of Europe’s 1914-1918 war. Like the European war, it was a war of attrition in which vast numbers of soldiers were slaughtered. If either Iran or Iraq, or both of them, had nuclear weapons, that might have acted as a deterrent? But atomic weapons might also have been used (as poison gas was, by Iraq).

The proliferation of nuclear weapons poses a threat to the very future of humankind. All socialists must oppose such weapons.

Israel should certainly not have nuclear weapons. But nobody on the left is going to argue that they should. There are a lot of people who argue explicitly or implicitly that Iran should have nuclear weapons, or has a right to nuclear weapons — a right to defend itself “by any means necessary”.

The argument that Israel has nuclear weapons and therefore, in “fairness”, so should the Arab states and Islamic powers like Iran is nonsense — an argument for the establishment in the region of a “nuclear balance of terror” such

as that which existed between the USA and Russia for half a century.

All this would be true whatever the character of the Iranian regime; but it is especially true given the nature of the regime that has ruled in Iran for thirty years. It is a clerical-fascist regime: its leaders are concerned more with their imaginary supernatural world than with this. It is not inconceivable that some of those at the heart of the Iranian state power might come to think of nuclear annihilation in the way that individual homicide bombers think of their own destruction in an explosion they themselves trigger — as a glorious and sure way to reach martyrdom and the martyrs’ special place in Paradise.

Iranian leaders call for the destruction of Israel. It is not inconceivable that they could make a half-rational choice to trade off the full destruction of tiny Israel for a sure nuclear retaliation against large Iran which could not wreak equivalent national destruction there.

But Iran must behave with bourgeois rationality and according to its material best interests, and therefore would not conceivably use a nuclear bomb in an attack on Israel? Governments do not always act according to bourgeois economic rationality.

The German bourgeoisie wanted to end the second world war from about 1943, while it could still negotiate a peace from relative strength, and thus avoid the enormous catastrophe of total defeat. It simply could not control the Nazis; or even assassinate Hitler, as was tried in July 1944.

The madman Hitler decided that the German people had let him down, were unworthy of him, and therefore deserved to perish. He would fight to the last German. And there was no “bourgeois rationality” able to control him there, in the strongest bourgeois state in Europe.

History has many other examples of governments behaving “irrationally” It is not merely vulgar Marxism, but vulgar ignorance, to insist that “economic rationality”

prevails everywhere.

An Iranian nuclear bomb should be opposed by all socialists — if they are socialists, and not vicarious Iranian or Islamic chauvinists.

Yet it isn’t opposed. The SWP has got the Stop The War coalition to instruct local branches that meetings discussing Iran must include no debate about the nature of the Iranian regime, i.e. no criticism of Iranian policy. The Weekly Worker group (CPGB) and its front organisation, Hands Off the People of Iran, claim to be more critical. But HOPI has a statement of purpose that includes: “The tasks of the anti-war movement in Britain and HOPI is threefold. One to fight against any imperialist attack on Iran and support the Iranian people’s right to defend themselves by any means necessary”.

“By any means necessary” in the current political context, plainly means by nuclear weapons if that is their choice.

By talking about the “Iranian people” choosing the “necessary” means to defend themselves, HOPI and the WW group disguise their political capitulation to the clerical fascist regime. The peoples of Iran do not have power. The clerical fascist regime does.

Later, the same statement reads: “Opposition to Israeli, British and American nuclear weapons. For a Middle East free of nuclear weapons as a step towards world-wide nuclear disarmament”.

That’s a statement about Israel’s bomb; it’s also a smart-ass way of deflecting the burning question of whether the Iranian regime develops nuclear weapons onto a general project for a nuclear free Middle East. The implication is that, meanwhile, until there is a nuclear-free zone, it is not at all unreasonable for Iran, which they say should defend itself “by any means necessary”, to have nuclear weapons.

For reason in politics!

The discussion piece in the last *Solidarity* (3/136), “What if Israel bombs Iran?” provoked an explosion of web-site hysteria from a coalition of self-righteous people who, most of them, themselves support the Iranian mullahs having nuclear bombs, and who deny Israel’s right to exist.

The mind of the “Left” on the Middle East is typically the confused mix we have had on the AWL web-site: selective, one-sided, pacifism, deep hostility to Israel and an absolute “anti-imperialism” that leads them to back some of the most regressive political forces on the planet.

In the event of an Israeli strike against Iran’s nuclear facilities, that “left”, some explicitly, some implicitly, will defend the “right” of the clerical-fascist, “absolute anti-Zionist” regime in Iran to have nuclear weapons.

Is there any issue other than Israel that would have generated anything like the outcry which our “discussion piece” triggered for daring to say that Israel has good reason to fear, and react to, an Iranian nuclear bomb?

In face of the political hysteria, it will be worthwhile for us to restate where we stand on the contentious and emotion-loaded issues around Israel, and about debate and discussion on the left.

● Issues such as those raised in the “discussion-piece”, including a candid assessment of the Israeli case for an attack on Iran’s nuclear installations, can, should and will be discussed openly and frankly on the left, and in *Solidarity*, without heresy-baiting and attempts to stifle rational discussion by uproar.

● The serious left should and will stand implacably against Iran having nuclear weapons. “Solidarity” with

Iran has already led the “left” to the idea that Iran’s right to “self-determination” must include a right to develop nuclear weapons. International socialists should have no truck with that. See our statement “No to the mullahs’ bomb”, above.

● We will oppose any response to an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear installations that implicitly defends the “right” of Iran to develop nuclear weapons. We will oppose the duff “anti-imperialism”, pretend, one-sided, pacifism and hysterical appeals to “international law” and “the UN”, which will be the response of the pseudo-left to an Israeli attack.

● Of course, we do not advocate, nor will we endorse or take political responsibility for, an Israeli attack on Iran: we are against such an action.

● Israel has the right to exist and, therefore, the right to defend itself. We condemn the absolute Anti-Zionist “left” which rejects that.

● The only just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is two sovereign states, each in contiguous territory, Palestine side by side with Israel — and, to the point, Israel side by side with Palestine.

● We oppose and fight the demonisation of Israel and “Zionism” on the “left”, and the de-facto anti-semitism that flows from it — comprehensive hostility to the Zionist identity which the terrible events of the twentieth century stamped on Jews. That originates with Stalinism, but is now the special badge of honour of professed “Trotskyists”. It is normally expressed with the special animosity and vehemence spewed out in our website “discussion”.

● The best interests of the Palestinians lie in achieving a peaceful two states settlement with Israel — and as soon as possible.

● The real friends of the Palestinian people are those who want that, not those who try to make the destruction of Israel and its replacement by an Arab state in all of pre-1948 Palestine the pre-condition for a settlement of the Palestinian question.

● Those “anti-imperialists” who pose as friends of the Palestinians while expressing their fixed animosity to Israel and “Zionism” in a rejection of any solution that does not involve Israel’s destruction, who are concerned more to see Israel destroyed than to see the Palestinians able to reconstruct their lives, are no friends of the Palestinian people.

● Most of the kitsch left’s “anti-imperialist” rhetoric, in general and about the Palestinians in particular, is empty and stupid bombast. It lines them up with out-and-out reactionaries — here, with Islamic clerical fascists — and turns them into ventriloquists’ dummies for reactionary right wing politics. They are “reactionary anti-imperialists”. All proportions guarded, and changing what needs to be changed, that “left” has more than a little in common with the “Red-Brown” bloc between “communists” and fascist nationalists that emerged in post-Stalinist Russia. The “anti-imperialists” who think Islamic clerical fascism can be progressive anti-imperialism — the strange socialists (socialists!) who saw progress in the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian elections, and want victory everywhere it is active for “militant” “anti-imperialist” Islamic clerical fascism — have lost the political plot. Theirs, we

think, is an "anti-imperialism of idiots." To believe that the foul ditch-waters of Islamic clerical fascism and reactionary anti-imperialism can turn into the socialist wine of progress and liberation is, we think, self-evident nonsense.

We asked in the last issue of *Solidarity* for a rational discussion of the still probable Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear installations, and what attitude socialists should take to that and to Iran having nuclear weapons. What we got was a chorus of spluttering abuse. (And from the hard-pressed poor loons who control the *Weekly Worker*, the charge that the author of the discussion piece, Sean Matgamna, "excused" — you are meant to read: "justified", "advocated" — an Israeli nuclear strike at Iran!)

We got the concentrated eruption of anti-Israel hysteria that we'd hoped to avoid by discussing it in advance — extravagant loathing, violent abuse and Stalinist-vintage demands that the writer of the "discussion piece" be silenced. In short, we got a noxious stream of the "absolute anti-Zionism" and vicarious Arab and Islamic chauvinism in which the left is drowning; we got an exhibition-bout of the "anti-Zionist" moral, political and emotional black-jacking that for a long time now has made real discussion of these questions on the "left" difficult to the point of impossibility.

And what we "got" was, of course, only what young Jews in the colleges get, and have been getting for a very long time wherever the kitsch-left is strong enough to dish it out (youngsters who, unlike us, have not become hardened to it).

The picture of the Left that emerges from this episode is a true likeness of the political confusion, brute intolerance of dissent, and rampaging moral imbecility of what passes for a revolutionary left in Britain in the first decade of the twenty-first century!

We have also in the outcry had a pretty good ad hoc approximation to the "internal regimes" and the atmosphere inside and "around" the typical kitsch-left group.

So then, we should conclude that it is simply not possible on the "left" to have a rational discussion about Israel and the Middle East, or of specific problems like the Iranian regime's probable or possible drive for nuclear weapons? That, even after 60 years, it is not possible to discuss the proposition that Israel has a right to exist — and therefore an inalienable right to defend itself — without the friends and "anti-imperialist" champions of Islamic clerical-fascism howling down anyone who disagrees with them? Will all such discussion end in such scenes as when, at the European Social Forum in October 2004, such people shouted down Subhi al Mashadani, General Secretary of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, because he wasn't 'anti-imperialist' enough for them?

The howl-fest we have had on the AWL website seems to answer unequivocally: "No!"

But that is not the only answer or the final one. Another answer is given by the AWL's determination to raise such questions as forcefully and as often as necessary: Yes, it is. Yes!

One of the preconditions for the revival of a serious revolutionary socialist left, as distinct from the frequently disgusting comedy of the grotesque that passes for one now, is the restoration of the habit of rational discussion and honest examination of political positions and experiences.

The AWL, within our limitations, will continue to practise and to defend that approach.

WEEKLY WORKER

The Cheshire cat of Stalinism

This lying cover of the fatuous gossip-sheet *Weekly Worker* is only the tip of a small iceberg of hysterical lying about Sean Matgamna, a writer for *Solidarity*, that they have set afloat over the last two weeks. Craziest is the lie that he "excuses" an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran. Lying about the AWL is a staple activity of the CPGB — but its coverage is now reminiscent of 'third period' Stalinism and the Healyite WRP at its lowest, and craziest, point.

An article by Fischer/Turley ends with the ludicrous warning: Sean's position "should — and will, if we have anything to do with it, have political implications for the AWL's position as part of the workers' movement". It is sub-headed: "there should be no place for Sean Matgamna in any principled Marxist organisation".

A young WW parrot writes that "Matgamna's filthy apology should have no place in the workers' movement".

Sean Matgamna watch out? No, the loony tunes who run *Weekly Worker* are seriously — indeed, only our eternal devotion to restraint stops us saying paranoiacally — deluded about their own power and influence. (They had twenty people at the opening day of their summer school, which with typical grandiosity, they call "the Communist University"!)

In the real world their threats are ludicrous, but there is no mistaking their wishes, and the deep-rooted Stalinist fantasies that drive them in politics. The old-style Stalinist smear, and fantasies about the bureaucratic power they don't have — that's the *Weekly Worker* group.

But the deeper explanation for their hysteria is in Fischer/Turley's comment on Matgamna's "bilious Stalinophobia" over Afghanistan. They supported the USSR invasion at the time and the 9-year Russian war of colonial conquest in which, of an estimated 18 million Afghans, six million were driven over the borders as refugees, and at least one and a half million died. They have not reassessed since. They claim to have rejected Stalinism — their behaviour shows they are still Stalinists



to the core, albeit fantasy Stalinists..

They are a feeble-witted parody of the third period Stalinists, complete with the same kind of idiot anti-imperialism, the same kind of sectarianism towards the existing labour movement and the same attitude towards the genuine, third camp left.

They utter threats of dire revenge. It is not the first time they have warned Sean Matgamna that he will suffer dire reprisal for his politics. In their undisguisedly Stalinist heyday, under the name of Ian Mahoney in an article in the *Leninist*, they championed the Afghan Stalinists against their Trotskyist critics.

"So Afghan revolutionaries, according to both the patronising Socialist Worker and Socialist Organiser [forerunner of AWL], should politely refrain from the opportunity to make their revolution..... until the likes of SO or the SWP make the revolution in Britain....

"They would wait forever. ...

"That is why we say that the blood of Afghan's progressives is not only on the hands of the bestial Mujahedin, the imperialists and the traitor Gorbachev... It is on the hands of all those who refused to defend the Afghan Revolution! You are all guilty and we shall make sure that the working class never forgets your crime".

Mahoney had not yet moved away from fantasies of a future British Stalinist revolution that would put people like himself in charge of a British equivalent of the Afghan Stalinist secret police, the Aqsa.

He finishes: "Let us add.... that they never forget, and that they make you pay". That was 19 years ago! (*The Leninist*, 17 February 1989).

Now the fantasies of one day holding police-state power have gone; the threats are a little less blood-thirsty than when they were unreflecting and unashamed tankie Stalinists.

But now they have no tanks. The body of the Cheshire cat of Stalinism has faded, leaving them with only... not the smile, but the snarl, the shriek, the style of exhortation. Yuck.

“Apparatus Marxism”?

The issues involved here are to-be-or-not-to-be for rational politics. The downright irrationality of the outcry is clear from the assessment that Israel has "good reason" was preceded by a paragraph warning of the region-wide evil consequences of an Israeli attack and by the political judgement "We do not advocate an Israeli attack on Iran, nor will we endorse it or take political responsibility for it."

It was immediately followed, in the next sentence, by the *political judgement*: "Socialists should not want that and can not support it. Our point of view is not that of Israeli or any other nationalism. We want Israeli, Palestinian, Iranian and other workers to unite and fight for a socialist Middle East."

The premiss of those who denounced the discussion piece was that if you don't say something is 100% unreasonable, the pure product of the imperialist, or "racist", or US-catspaw, nature of Israel — or if you write anything other than what might serve as an agitational leaflet against a surge of pro-Israeli chauvinism — then you are endorsing what Israel may do, "excusing" it! It is preposterous. It is a recipe for rampant irrationality.

If to "recognise" something — here that Israel has good reason to act against atomic bombs in the hands of the Iranian mullahs — is to endorse and excuse any action

that others may take for the reasons you recognise, and to incur a share of responsibility for it, then the conscientious socialist will be duty bound to behave like the superstitious person who dares not say certain words, or walk under ladders, for fear that will trigger fearful events! You won't dare think certain sorts of thoughts for fear you will unleash what you think about on the world! It is a form of crass, deeply primitive superstition!

If there is no political space between candidly assessing a situation, whether mistakenly or correctly makes no difference in principle — ".... there is good reason for Israel to make a precipitate strike at Iranian nuclear capacity...." — if there is no space between that and endorsing, advocating or "excusing" such an attack, then full and honest analysis, objectivity, reason itself in politics is ruled out. And then?

Then, you are left with some variant of the method in politics that you allow yourself to see or note only those aspects of reality that fit your line, which are pre-selected by your "line" or doctrine — and whatever manipulation you are trying to work on your readers. This is the Stalinist and Catholic Church approach; the "first put out your own eyes" school of "revolutionary" politics. It is no part of a Marxist — or, indeed of any other species of rational approach. Marxists try to tell the truth, without

lopping off the "awkward" bits: we draw our political conclusions from that.

It is the old "Varga" question in the *Communist International*. The Hungarian Eugen Varga was the Comintern's leading economist, notoriously a biddable hack. Asked in a telegram to write "an economic analysis" for a Comintern journal, he wired back: what should the analysis show? Stabilisation or imminent crisis?"

Apocryphal, probably. Yet it is all too accurate a parable about what we have taken to calling "Apparatus Marxism", the derivation of slogans, perspectives and general politics from what the "Party apparatus" thinks will best serve its concerns, such as recruitment.

That "left" is dominated and to a large extent shaped by an approach to most problems that is back-to-front: agitation and the search for issues on which to agitate, comes first, then — maybe — the reality is analysed.

From agitation to agitation, from one thing to another, like the butterfly skimming nectar off flowers, and no chance to think things through, that's the pattern.

Of course, it should be the other way around: programme and analysis first, and then, spun from that, agitation. If it isn't, then rational politics is more or less impossible.

STAND-OFF IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Debating the issues

In *Solidarity* 3/136 we published a back-page article on Iran, Israel, and nuclear weapons, and an inside-page "discussion article" by Sean Matgamna on the same question. The article said that "an [Israeli] attack on Iran will most likely lead to great carnage... strengthen the Iranian regime... throw Iraq back into the worst chaos". "Socialists should not want and cannot support... Israel [making] a precipitate strike at Iranian nuclear capacity".

It also posed questions: in the name of what alternative should we condemn Israel? Not, it argued, "the inalienable right of every state to have nuclear weapons", or "because Israel has no right to exist anyway", or similar.

The article has generated discussion in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty — and, not a discussion, but a sort of literary lynch-mob, on the web.

We publish extracts from the discussion.

DAVID BRODER

The article, which includes only minimal and superficial reference to independent working-class politics and any idea of working-class agency, instead dishonestly zigzags between empathising with Israeli hawks and using figleaf, weasel words to avoid openly "advocating" an Israeli strike against Iran in advance. He says we should "least of all" support Ahmedinejad, as if we were under any compulsion to pick sides and support Olmert a little bit more instead.

Throughout Sean also takes for granted the idea that the Iranian regime is indeed developing nuclear weapons. This claim is highly tendentious...

Sean's focus is not the interests of the labour movement or the tasks of Marxists in the (potential) belligerent countries, but rather hoping for a balance in the world of geopolitics, military manoeuvre and weapons competition. Sean's view is crude and one-sided and he is far from condemning the Israeli government's effort to cling onto its status as the leading regional power by force: if he realises that such a bombing run would hamper the possibility of workers in the region "uniting to fight for a socialist Middle East", he certainly doesn't show it.

Sean confuses what is "rational" in the interests of Israeli imperialism and great-power realpolitik with what is "rational" in the interests of humanity. Sean does not want to "advocate" or "endorse" an attack: but this is just playing with words, and clearly given the tone of the piece and the fact that he is so keen to defend the rationale for an attack which is not yet on the cards the article can only be read as offering justification for Olmert et al.

TOM UNTERRAINER

The point of the original article was not to "excuse" an attack by Israel on Iran but to raise questions in relation to the likely left attitude to such an attack. If you think that Israel has the right to exist then by extension you think it has the right to defend itself from destruction. But no nation has the right to start world war three, no right at all to start a nuclear war. We are opposed to Israel launching an attack on Iran. By recognising the right to defend itself, we do not take responsibility for or encourage any and all Israeli actions. If we fail to address this point in our politics then we risk collapsing into a reactionary anti-imperialism or muddleheadedness.

The accusation that we have nothing to say about the working class in Israel and Iran is simply untrue. The article was not a detailed exposition of a independent working class programme for the Israeli and Iranian proletariat — this much is true. But our paper, magazines and web-site are stuffed full of articles on this matter.

BRUCE ROBINSON

I think Sean's pre-emptive attack on what would undoubtedly be the hypocrisy of the left in such a situation is justified, even if I think the article is badly written and reflects some deeper political problems with the way Sean approaches things.

The mutual incomprehension here has its parallel with the Iraq debate. However, I think the article reflects the fact that Sean seems increasingly to operate in two political spheres with little connection between them.

On the one hand, there is the sphere of principle where

we cannot accept responsibility for an Israeli attack or the Iraq occupation, we are "the party of irreconcilable opposition", etc. etc. On the other, because we cannot influence the events, there is the world of day-to-day bourgeois international politics where we are faced with "difficult decisions", have to take sides e.g. between Fatah and Hamas etc. etc.

And there is a real tension here — which comes across as an incoherence and evasiveness in our politics. It not a totally dishonourable position — it resists the temptation to follow Shachtman's path — but it's not one I agree with, though I struggle to articulate an alternative.

CATHY NUGENT

Our 2008 conference policy says: "We oppose both military action (whether invasion or air strikes, bombing raids, etc.) and economic sanctions against Iran." And: "Our basic slogans for now are 'no to war, no to the Islamic republic, solidarity with Iranian workers'. In the event of war, our line would be similar, i.e. a 'Third Camp' one".

It also recognises that the Iranian regime has grown as a regional power. It states: "We oppose attempts by the Iranian government to develop nuclear weapons. We want the labour movement to fight for unilateral disarmament by all nuclear weapons states. That should not prevent us from acknowledging, however, that the prospect of the Islamic Republic developing a bomb is particularly alarming".

In the event of any military conflict between Iran and Israel, most of the left will back Iran in a particular way and oppose Israel in a particular way. They will be "defencist" of Iran, meaning in practice they will give political support to a greater or lesser extent to the Iranian regime. They will say that Iran has the right to "defend itself by any means necessary". The left will also oppose Israel with arguments about the need to "smash Israel", the "Zionist entity" etc. We in the AWL should prepare ourselves for confronting those arguments

VICKI MORRIS

If I thought Iran were about to nuke Israel would I be in favour of Israel 'taking out' Iran's nuclear capability? I would understand why the Israeli ruling class would try to. Understand? Yes. Condemn? Still, possibly, yes.

Not because I don't in the abstract support Israel's right of self-defence: I do support Israel's right of self-defence. But there is, for example, the question of how many Iranians would be killed by such an Israeli attack. I wouldn't like to try and guess what the balance of suffering might be in such a scenario.

I don't think Iran's anywhere close to nuking Israel. In the foreseeable future I think a strike against facilities where Israel believed Iran was developing nuclear weapons would bolster Ahmedinejad, with all the bad consequences that has, and kill some, possibly many Iranians. Therefore, for the foreseeable future, I'm against Israel bombing Iran and I'd condemn them should they do it.

We should be marching against the madness of nuclear weapons and war, denouncing both sides, and mobilising the workers on all sides against what was happening. The point about Israel's right to defend itself — and, depending on how things were playing out, Iran's right to defend itself — would be in the text of any article but it wouldn't be the headline.

I'm not sure that in the context of sabre-rattling against Iran (though it seems to be calmer from the US side for now) Sean's comments don't add a tiny, tiny bit of grist to the mill for an attack on Iran. At the least, there is the danger that people that would otherwise read the many thousands of excellent words that we have written on Israel-Palestine, for example, won't now take the time because, at first sight, Sean's words could be interpreted as adding grist to the mill of sabre-rattling against Iran.

DAVID KIRK

Sean characterised Iran as "a state whose clerical fascist rulers might see a nuclear armageddon, involving a retaliatory Israeli... strike against Iran, in the way a God-crazed suicide bomber sees blowing himself to pieces".

Too much of what we say about Iran is tainted by this

How seriously should we take what Iranian president Ahmedinejad says?

kind of idea that the Iranian ruling class are just a bunch of nihilistic "mad mullahs" who are perfectly willing to see their own annihilation in the cause of anti-semitism. We often seem to believe every mad word that Ahmedinejad says is actually going to be carried out.

Yet we as Marxists do not judge the Iranian state by its rhetoric or by its propaganda. Instead we analyse its class character. To characterise Iran as "clerical fascist" does not do that.

If the Iranian regime is building nuclear weapons, it is not doing so to annihilate Israel, since it would lead to Iran's own annihilation 10 to 15 minutes later. It is doing so to assert its power as regional sub-imperial power and to ward off attacks by Israel and the USA.

Just as Workers Power are wrong to describe the regime as actually anti-imperialist, so we are wrong to see the regime as absolute anti-Zionists. Any direct conflict between Israel and Iran will not be at root about taking back the holy land for Islam, rather it will be about competing for influence and economic, political and military power.

SACHA ISMAIL

I believe the question is misposed, since the issue is not one of Israel's national survival; and that the reasons for opposing an attack on Iran are clear.

We should oppose an Israeli attack on Iran for the following, interconnected reasons:

1. There is, in so far as we can judge, no imminent threat to Israel. Iran is not close to achieving its nuclear goals.
2. In the absence of an immediate threat, an Israeli attack on Iran would be a blow struck by one imperialist contender against another in their battle for regional dominance — not a question of legitimate national defence.
3. There is a very strong possibility of large-scale Iranian civilian deaths, particularly given that nuclear facilities are involved.
4. There is also a strong possibility of widespread carnage in the Middle East, with retaliatory attacks, suicide bombings etc, as well as other states being drawn in.
5. War between Israel and Iran would almost certainly strengthen chauvinism in both countries and the position of both regimes against working-class and democratic forces. Thus an Israeli attack would undermine the very forces that can derail the disastrous dynamic threatening the working classes and peoples of the region.

Simply appealing to working-class action against both

sides (this is the essence, when the dramatics are stripped away, of David Broder's response to Sean) is however, not enough. It is, clearly, the fundamental basis of an international socialist position. Nonetheless, appeals to workers' action do not automatically solve all problems of international politics — particularly in a region where the workers' movement is very weak.

The fact that we want the working class to disarm, and overthrow, both the Israeli and Iranian regimes does not eliminate the problem of the threat that a nuclear Iran would pose to Israel and other targets of its aggression in the Middle East.

Ed Maltby

Ideas act upon reality, and have a certain amount of autonomy. But not to the extent that the Iranian ruling class would launch a suicidal nuclear war!

Sure, it's not completely unthinkable that Iran would nuke Israel. But, to steal Sean's term, they don't have "good reason" to so do. We should see the difference between Iran (clerical fascist) and Israel (bourgeois-democratic, though highly militarised)... but seeing the difference between them doesn't mean cooking up a view of Iran as a totally irrational entity.

Our discussion should clearly separate the current state of affairs — Iran "may be" developing a bomb, which it "may hope" to use to destroy Israel — from the hypothetical "45 minute" situation in which there definitely is an Iranian nuke which definitely does immediately threaten Israeli self-determination, and in which the only way to get rid of it is an air strike.

Camila Bassi

The intent of Israel is not to establish an imperial base in Iran, and in this instance it is not to act as a pawn to any US imperialist designs on Iran (that the US state has recently joined diplomatic efforts to halt Iran's nuclear development tells us something).

No, in this instance, Israel would be acting alone, and actually with some kind of sincere belief that Iran (if it acquired the nuclear bomb) would possibly at some point use it to destroy Israel. Are those in Israel who think this being irrational — in part yes, in part no. Israel is a paranoid nation for sure. Is it likely that Iran will nuke Israel? Not likely under present conditions, no.

The intent of Israeli air strikes on Iran's nuclear capability will not be to cause maximum bloodshed, but minimum. Why? Not because the Israeli state and military care deeply about Iranian lives. But because the Israeli state cares about (selected) world opinion.

For many reasons, we have ample ground to oppose an Israeli attack. But to morally hammer Israel for it? On what grounds?

Paul Hampton

We would condemn an attack by the US and/or Israel on Iran in the name of working class unity and democratic self-determination, as well as for its humanitarian effects, impact on the rest of the Middle East etc.

I found Sean's article thought-provoking and useful. He is right to pose the question: what if Iran gets a nuclear bomb? Such an outcome is feasible in the near future. An Iranian bomb held by the present theocratic regime would directly pose a threat to Israel's right to self-determination. An Iranian bomb would drastically alter the balance of forces in the region, in favour of Islamists such as Hizbollah and Hamas, who want to destroy Israel.

But I think Sean's article telescopes the situation today with the foreseeable future.

I think his characterisation of the Iranian regime is a poor formulation (clerical fascists or bonapartist theocrats would be better), but he is right to argue that we cannot "defend" the "right" of this regime to have a bomb, just because other states have them.

Two nations, two states

Socialists and Israel/Palestine

- Origins of the conflict
- Marxism and the Jewish question
- The case for a Palestinian state
- Boycott?
- What is Islamism?
- The Stalinist roots of left anti-Zionism
- Mutual respect or religious war?

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Daniel Randall

The workers' movement in Iran is probably not strong enough to put a halt to the nuclear ambitions of its rulers. The Israeli workers' movement certainly isn't. Must we, therefore, with however heavy a heart, abrogate the hope for "a world where the workers of Israel, Iran, Iraq were united in opposition to all their rulers, and strong enough to get rid of them" to another day, hold our noses and pick the least-bad bourgeois option apparently on offer?

This is a perspective of permanent abrogation. If you hold your nose for too long you cease to be able to breathe properly.

Nothing prevents us from saying openly that a given imperialist adventure may have a positive consequence. But we say this in a framework which despite any potential positive outcome or side-effect tells the truth about the interests in which it is carried out and emphasises constantly the only means by which a better future may be carved out of regional and global inter-imperialist fire-fighting; independent working-class struggle.

I believe that revolutionaries in the Israeli labour movement should propagandise vociferously against any Israeli war-effort, explaining clearly Israel's role as a regional imperialist power and explaining how this impacts on the material quality of life for Israeli workers. I believe they should attempt, wherever possible, to actively sabotage any war effort including refusing to move munitions.

I believe they should also be clear about the nature of the Iranian regime and its imperialist aspirations while pointing out to other Israeli workers that class struggle takes place inside Iran just as in any country and that they have more in common with Iranian workers than they do with the Israeli-Jewish bosses attempting to convince them that bombing Iran is in their best interests.

In Iran, I believe revolutionaries in the labour movement should do whatever they can to oppose and sabotage the Iranian government's nuclear programme.

Looking at a potential Israeli strike on an Iranian nuclear facility from the point of view of its impact on class struggle in the region makes it abundantly obvious that we should oppose it, that we should mobilise against it, and that we should counsel workers more capable of immediately effecting the situation to do likewise.

Totally aside from the potential civilian slaughter such an attack would unleash (who's to say that a botched bombing of a nuclear facility wouldn't lead to an Iranian Chernobyl?), I think it's beyond question that the Israeli ruling-class would use such an attack to drag workers behind national chauvinism (undoubtedly invoking the "existential threat" posed to them by Iran's machinations) and that the Iranian ruling-class would do likewise.

Janine Booth

Personally, I think there are grounds to criticise Sean's article, and am inclined to broadly support David Broder's response to it. However, far more shocking and appalling than anything that Sean wrote is the response from some sections of the "left".

All the shrill blusterous denunciation of the AWL because of Sean's article throws up a convenient smoke-screen to avoid answering that question. The attempt to address this question is the strength of Sean's article — the left has for too long settled for being against things without troubling itself about the grounds.

Just as there were bad as well as good grounds for opposing the invasion of Iraq (e.g. the far-right view that Britain shouldn't waste its time and money on foreigners), there are bad as well as good grounds for opposing an Israeli attack on Iran's nuclear capacity — an example of "bad grounds" would include asserting that Iran has the "right" to nuclear weapons, or that Iran nuking Israel wouldn't be so bad.

Anyone who is going to screamingly denounce Sean's article should address these questions: Is it OK for Iran to have nuclear weapons? Does Israel, and do Israelis, have genuine grounds to fear being nuked by Iran? And if so, what are they entitled to do about it?

Bill Jeffries

What Matgamna and all his hangers-on leave out of the equation is oppression. Iran is an oppressed nation, Israel is an oppressor one. Lenin was absolutely unambiguous (and he wasn't one known for his ambiguity) that in a war, socialists support the oppressed nation against the oppressor.

Michael Ezra

The Iranian President has denied that he is trying to obtain a nuclear weapon. However, at the same time Associated Press reports that he has doubled the amount of centrifuges from 3,000 to 6,000. The Associated Press report goes on to state:

"A total of 3,000 centrifuges is the commonly accepted figure for a nuclear enrichment program that is past the

experimental stage and can be used as a platform for a full industrial-scale program that could churn out enough enriched material for dozens of nuclear weapons. Iran says it plans to move toward large-scale uranium enrichment that will ultimately involve 54,000 centrifuges."

Iran is awash with oil. It has no need for nuclear power for domestic consumption at the moment. What if Ahmadinejad or a replacement President suddenly changes their mind and decide that with the nuclear capability they will have a bomb?

The Ayatollah Khomeini who ruled Iran for much of the 1980s said:

"We do not worship Iran, we worship Allah. For patriotism is another name for paganism. I say let this land [Iran] burn. I say let this land go up in smoke, provided Islam emerges triumphant in the rest of the world."

Even the supposedly moderate Iranian President Rafsanjani is quoted to have said:

"If a day comes when the world of Islam is duly equipped with the arms Israel has in possession . . . application of an atomic bomb would not leave anything in Israel, but the same thing would just produce damages in the Muslim world."

These quotes have become quite famous. They were used by the neo-conservative author and commentator Norman Podhoretz and he was accused of using fake quotes. He then backed up his sources and his critics on the quotes went quiet:

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/blogs/index.php/podhoretz/1340>

Andy Bowden

As much as the mullahs may genuinely despise Jews, Israel, and Israelis, they are not averse to discarding their propaganda for real-world material gains for them and their regime.

Iran is an up and coming regional capitalist power, with a lot of ambition in the Middle East; and not as a suicidal nuthouse prepared to throw away decades of work on the basis of a nuclear strike on Israel which would lead Iran to be "wiped off the face of the map" as part of a nuclear retaliation from Israel and/or the US.

Iran's nukes (if it is indeed building nukes) are part of a strategy of the mullahs to enhance their status as a regional power. Having nukes effectively rules out any Israeli or US assault on their country, or at least very strongly deters it.

This is particularly important given Iran's moves to creating the first oil bourse in Euros, a move which if followed by the rest of the oil producing world would cause dramatic damage to the US Dollar — a Dollar whose prime source of strength is its monopoly as a currency for which to buy oil with.

We should oppose the power block Iran aligns itself with (Russia and China) and its capitalist regime. But why should we have any sympathy with the opposing power block of Israel and the US, who wants to overthrow the Iranian regime and replace it with a pliant one for their own interests?

David Hirsh

It is worth listening carefully to what the Ahmadinejad regime says. Don't imagine they mean what you think they mean. Listen to what they actually say.

(1) "Israel is a filthy black germ..."
<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1694.htm>

(2) Jewish conspiracy behind 9/11
<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1674.htm>

(3) Ahmadinejad boasts about operating 3000 centrifuges to enrich uranium —
<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1604.htm>

(4) Ahmadinejad argues for Israel to be moved to Canada or Alaska and he argues for a truth-seeking commission to find out what lay behind 9/11 and to find out whether the Holocaust really happened.
<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1585.htm>

(5) Ahmadinejad: "death to Israel..."
<http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1222.htm>

Plenty more here. <http://tinyurl.com/6xc8ry>.

I know it always sounds a bit mad to compare someone to Hitler, but I'll do it anyway. Hitler said he wanted to kill the Jews and nobody took him seriously. He was a ridiculous little man with a comedy moustache — a clerk who was trying to sit on the shoulders of his boss and stick his heels in.

Hitler's promise to kill the Jews of Europe was too ridiculous. It was against the interests of capital. It was against any kind of conception of German national interest.

But he did it anyway and the adventure ended in the total defeat of Germany. So why wouldn't Jews take Ahmadinejad seriously? At least, how can we be sure that he's not serious?

• All these contributions are edited. For more debate see www.workersliberty.org

LABOUR PARTY

“Draft” John McDonnell!

BY GERRY BATES

An initiative has been launched to “draft” John McDonnell, the left-wing Labour MP who sought to challenge Gordon Brown for the Labour leadership after Tony Blair’s retirement, to contest the leadership again.

McDonnell himself has so far been reluctant to put his name forward, but there seems a real chance that he will go for it as momentum builds up to the TUC and Labour Party conferences.

In 2007, McDonnell did not get on the official ballot paper, because union Executives where the majority said they backed McDonnell would not deliver official union nominations or press union-sponsored MPs to nominate McDonnell. Nevertheless, his challenge had a refreshing effect, generating large campaign meetings in many cities.

Above all, a McDonnell challenge would be the only way of cutting across the limits of the present Labour-leadership talk, which is all about whether Blair-loyalist ultras will oust Brown and replace him with someone more “Blairite”. This does not necessarily mean someone more right-wing — there is no evidence that such differences as there have been between Brown and Blair place Brown to the left of Blair — but certainly not someone more left-wing.

The nearest thing to a “left” input into the leadership talk, without a McDonnell challenge, are rumours about John Cruddas being put up again as deputy.

Meanwhile, the big story in the Labour Party is not the clique battles between “Blairites” and “Brownites”, but issues on which “Blairites” and “Brownites” are united.

On 25-27 July the Labour Party held its National Policy Forum. Now that political motions to Labour’s annual conference are banned, the Forum is the nearest thing the Labour Party has to a democratic discussion of policy.

Nearest, but not very near at all! Of the 184 delegates, only 30 are from the trade unions, and the whole thing takes place behind closed doors, without the open scrutiny from union and local Labour Party members typical of old Labour Party conferences.

But this time the union leaders told the Guardian that they had got their act together, with a list of 130 demands to press at the Forum.

In *Solidarity* 3/136, we were sceptical about how vigor-

ous the union leaders would be, but reckoned that: “The Labour Party’s finances make it very likely that the unions will get something” in the way of concessions.

We overestimated the union leaders’ vigour, and underestimated the New Labour leaders’ obdurate resistance to even the mildest working-class demands.

The *Financial Times* reported (29 July): “Facing a list of 130 union demands, Mr. Brown rejected the vast majority outright and gave little ground on the rest”.

An old-Labour blogger, Peter Kenyon, gives the best available “insider” report from the Forum. “Trade union delegates to Warwick simply sat on their hands as mildly radical proposals that made it on to the agenda were mowed down by the vast majority of National Policy Forum representatives.

“Even a modest suggestion that a third of the governors of academy schools should be parents was shot down. A hand or seven from the brothers and sisters would have at least enabled a debate and vote at conference. But No. 10 had made clear if the trade unions wanted to see any of their policy suggestions agreed, then the price was no concessions to the left of Genghis Khan”.

Since Warwick, the soft-Blairite pressure group Compass has started a campaign for the Government to impose a “windfall tax” on energy companies’ super-profits. It put a letter in the Guardian on 6 August, with signatories including the general secretaries of two of the biggest unions, Dave Prentis of Unison and Tony Woodley of Unite.

It wouldn’t be too daring to push that, would it? After all, Blair and Brown introduced just such a “windfall tax” on privatised utilities in 1997. Even if they dropped all 129 other ideas, Prentis and Woodley would have argued the toss on that one at the Policy Forum?

Not at all. Kenyon reports: “A windfall tax proposal at the NPF attracted a derisory number of votes - less than you can count on the fingers of two hands. And those in favour did not include either Dave Prentis or Tony Woodley...”

The combined effect of the shutting down of democratic processes in the Labour Party, the union leaders’ wretchedness, and increased bureaucratism in the trade unions, is that the organised working class has been politically disenfranchised.

Workers still have a vote. But who can they cast it for?

Socialist candidates, such as those that Workers’ Liberty and our partners in the Socialist Green Unity Coalition run where we can, are few (because we do not have the resources to run more), and face obvious problems in getting themselves seen as credible without support from large and well-established working-class organisations.

But the unions continued to be tied to Labour in a “link” which is now reduced to a process of the union leaders giving Labour money and accepting politically whatever “No.10 makes clear”, without any substantial accountability to the rank and file.

The unions, and in the first place the more active, lively, and democratic unions, must break from Brown, and, through local Trades Councils or similar bodies, re-establish the possibility of working-class candidates in elections, based on and accountable to working-class organisations.

Otherwise we are saying that the only options in politics are different shades of government at the service of the profiteer class, and ruling out the possibility of the working-class majority ever having a real voice in government.

LETTER FROM AN AMERICAN SOCIALIST

Why the left should back Obama

BY ERIC LEE

The latest issue of *Solidarity* contains two articles about the American presidential elections, offering two different perspectives with the aim of stimulating debate. That’s certainly positive, except for one thing. I can’t tell the difference between the two points of view.

In one corner, Malik Miah argues for not voting for Obama and possibly backing Nader or the Greens. In the opposite corner, Sacha Ismail urges socialists to ... not vote for Obama.

I think the only difference between the two articles was that Miah calls on socialists to mingle with Obama supporters, to try to woo them to the left, while patiently explaining to them why real socialists won’t actually be voting for Obama. (I’m sure that will endear those socialists to Obama supporters and will win lots of recruits to the left.)

Meanwhile, back on Earth, progressives, trade unionists and even socialists in the US have welcomed Obama’s candidacy. Obama was not the first choice for most unions — John Edwards was. But once the dust of the primary battles finally settled, every union in the US has thrown its weight behind Obama.

Of course you will all know a socialist here or a radical there who isn’t backing the Democrats in 2008. Some will be voting Green and some for the independent Ralph Nader. Some will vote for the Socialist Party (quick — name that candidate!) and some will find other, even more obscure, micro-parties to vote for.

Collectively, the entire constituency “to the left of Obama” would comfortably fit into a London taxi.

There have been times in the past when the American

left was truly divided about its choice for the presidency. Back in 1932 and even 1936, significant sections of the unions still backed Socialist and Communist candidates, even as the majority swung behind Roosevelt. In 1948, there may still have been some trade unions not in the Truman camp, some remaining under Communist influence and backing Henry Wallace.

But since 1948, there has not been a single election in which the union vote was divided, with some going to the left of the Democrats. Not one.

Part of the reason for the enthusiasm among trade unionists for Obama today is not just the usual liberal stuff, like wanting to end the war in Iraq, provide health care for all, or reduce tax handouts to the super-rich. (As if those are minor things!)

Unions have a very specific reason for hoping for both a Democratic victory in the Presidential election and, equally important, in Congress.

Obama is committed, as is his party, to enacting the Employee Free Choice Act. Not since the 1930s have the Democrats found themselves backing labour law reform that would actually benefit unions. But this time they are. Reforms that were proposed back in the 1970s (but never enacted) may open up the door to union organising drives on a scale not seen since the days of the CIO.

To understand why this will happen, one has to know something about the American working class. The U.S. remains a country — possibly the only Western democracy where this is true — where joining a trade union is an act of personal courage. Employers routinely crush union organising drives, sack organisers and ordinary workers who’ve made the mistake of signing a union card.

Union organising takes place in a climate of terror. The

Employee Free Choice Act aims to put an end to that terror.

Things have gotten so bad for trade unions in the U.S. that well over 90% of the private sector is now union-free. And this in spite of public opinion polls that show most non-union workers would join a union — if there was no danger of being sacked for having done so.

If you want a powerful trade union movement in America (and socialists surely want that), and recognize that the only possible way a future labour party could ever emerge would be from such a movement, then at the very least you want to pass this new law. One would think it would be our top legislative priority. It certainly is for the unions.

When you look back at Roosevelt’s New Deal, much of it is only a fading memory. Many of the federal programs to create work, such as the National Recovery Administration (NRA) are long gone.

But the impact of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), signed into law on 5 July 1935, is still being felt. Before the NLRA, unions had no legal right to exist. The NLRA was a huge step forward and unions seized the initiative. For nearly four decades after the enactment of that law, unions continued to grow with union density peaking in the early 1970s.

And that was in spite of the enactment of other, more anti-union laws, designed to curtail union power, such as the infamous Taft-Hartley law.

The election of Obama to the White House and a Democratic majority in Congress (including a filibuster-proof majority in the Senate) opens up the possibility for a 1930s style resurgence for the organised working class.

The job of socialists is to be part of the movement that is going to bring that about.

Tube cleaners win wage hike

After a campaign of industrial action, cleaners on London Underground have won the London Living Wage of £7.45 an hour. It is a major victory. That a previously unorganised and precarious workforce went into dispute, with 99% voting in favour of action, is a victory in and of itself. To win even one major claim on the employers in the face of racist victimisation and intimidation is a large step forward.

Members of the RMT union working as maintenance engineers for Tube Lines, the company that runs the Jubilee, Piccadilly and Northern lines, together with cleaners employed by ISS and Metronet, were due to take a total of five days of industrial action from 20 August against below-inflation pay deals, working conditions, bullying and harassment.

These actions, along with other ongoing disputes that would have brought most of the Underground to a halt, have been suspended after significant concessions were won from the employers.

In addition to demonstrating the possibility of and necessity for organising workers in contracted-out, super-exploited jobs — in too many industries the unions regard anything beyond organising the “core” workforce as “too difficult” — the cleaners’ dispute inspired a number of solidarity actions from other trade unionists and activists. Activists from Feminist Fightback, anti-immigration control campaigns and other organisations staged occupations, protests and stunts and generalised the politics of the cleaners’ dispute into a wider audience.

Despite the suspension of action, the RMT faces a number of growing issues. Management bullying is on the rise. This bullying takes many forms: seemingly arbitrary transfer of staff from station to station, handling of assaults against staff, and the current attendance crackdown.

Management appear determined to force Tube

workers into work, however ill they are. If their computers spot a “pattern” in staff absences (and what constitutes a pattern seems entirely arbitrary) workers are dragged in to explain themselves.

With the threat of five days of strikes, the RMT responded to the attacks not as isolated incidents but as a generalised attack strategy against Tube workers. The concessions show what even the threat of such wide-scale industrial action can achieve. Could more have been won if the planned action had gone ahead?

At the RMT rally on 19 August, there was much talk of a show-down with Boris Johnson and Transport for London. The new administration in City Hall will want to do two things: (1) demonstrate that a future Tory government will be tough on the unions and (2) ensure that transport links run uninterrupted during the 2012 Olympic games.

The concessions won by the RMT in this dispute show its strength. But to tackle the comprehensive employers’ assault will require not the winning of concessions by short strikes, or the threat of strikes, but a more sustained mobilisation.

If the union believes that an all-out attack from the employers is inevitable — as it surely is — a long term strategy of preparation and organisation must take place.

At the 19 April rally, Steve Hedley from the London Transport Region of RMT, General Secretary Bob Crow and Clara Osagiede, union secretary for the cleaners’ grade, made the following reports.

CLARA OSAGIEDE

It’s been a long journey. When I came out of the ACAS [government arbitration service] meeting, I was a happy woman. Seven years ago it was unimaginable that we would be in this position. The cleaners were not very organised. Last year, when

we started a campaign for the London Living Wage they asked “is it really possible to organise cleaners?” I would like at this stage to thank the Executive of the union, the Finsbury Park branch, and our friends in other unions for all their support.

It’s almost mission accomplished. Hopefully, by the end of today, we will have a result. Sixteen years ago we were paid more than we are today. Some of us couldn’t really understand how this is so. This is pure slavery. There is no mathematical formula to explain this.

I want to say I am proud to belong to a union like the RMT. A union that stands against social injustice. A union that organised for the first time this group of workers. This group of workers “who could not be organised” voted 99% in favour of strike action. The employers took notice.

They knew that the cleaners had had enough. Our first 24 hour strike, then our 48 hour strike showed this. Rather than do the honourable thing they came up with vicious attacks against our members. They used National Insurance numbers to try to shut us up. Suddenly, NI numbers became untraceable. We have reps and activists suspended on this basis.

A if this was not enough, they deceitfully called our members to their offices and used the forces of the state to arrest them. Some of our members are now in custody. This was never an issue before we started asking for the London Living Wage.

The language that the oppressor really understand is aggression. We went for another strike and suddenly, ACAS asked to speak with us.

STEVE HEDLEY

The press has been saying that our disputes are political. Well, all disputes are political. On the one side you have the forces of darkness — the management bullying our members. On the other side, you have the RMT.

The Labour Party has nailed its colours to the mast. They’re anti-worker and anti-union. The emperor is running around naked trying to shaft the workers!

BOB CROW

The cleaners don’t have the same position as other workers on the London Underground. What their campaign has been about is winning respect and dignity.

Now Metronet cleaners will get the LLW from 1 September. GBM from the 25 August. ISS last night offered 60p per hour from 1 September, 60p more from the 1 March and 60p after that. We said that wasn’t acceptable. They changed that to the London Living Wage within seven months...

• See www.workersliberty.org/twblog

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