

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 138 11 September 2008 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

**IMMIGRATION
RAIDS —
FIGHTING
BACK PAGE 7**



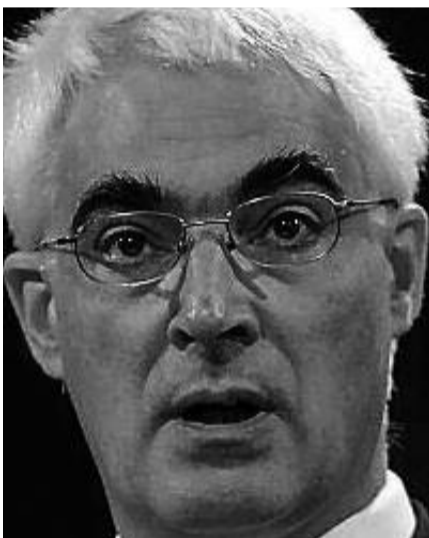
**ISRAEL AND IRAN
DEBATED
PAGES 15-19**



**THE LEFT CONVENTION:
FOR DEMOCRACY NOT
"CONSENSUS"**

PAGE 8

Bush nationalises mortgage giants



**Darling says economy
worst for sixty years**



A WORKERS' PLAN FOR THE CRISIS

By GERRY BATES

In moments of desperation, capitalist governments reveal themselves. Take these two examples: Alistair Darling's prognosis for the British economy and the recent bail-outs of US mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

Darling's admission that the economic crisis will be worse than most people thought, his slashing of growth forecasts and comments about voters being "pissed off" with New Labour paint a pretty picture of the turmoil at the heart of government. Couple this with his intransigent stand at the TUC and we're reminded that the concerns of this government lie not

with the working class but with the interests of capital. The Brown government is panicked not because millions of us face spiralling costs and lower pay but because the profits and bank accounts of those who control the British economy are in a precarious state.

Continued on page 2

Left unions' political alliance

From back page

The event nearly began with a rare defeat for the TUC's leading General Council, when an amendment they opposed from the Prison Officers' Association (which argued for further strikes — rather than just "days of action" — against the government's public sector pay freeze) looked to have won a majority following rousing speeches from the RMT's Bob Crow and shock last-minute support from Unite and the GMB.

It looked like a clear majority on the show of hands. A card vote was called. Unite's officials mysteriously forgot to vote — removing close to 2,000,000 votes from the floor and ensuring that the POA amendment fell. Shamefully, Unite officers claimed to have "lost" their voting credentials for the duration of the card vote.

The more telling lesson from this vote is just how out of touch the TUC Congress is with actual developments in the labour movement. Both the PCS and NUT have further strike action planned.

This time, the whole of the civil service will be balloted for action and the NUT is balloting for more than one day of strike action, including selective action if appropriate. Public sector workers in Scotland also look likely to strike. Given these developments, you'd expect other union leaders to pledge themselves to more than a day of "action".

A further POA motion calling for general strikes to break the anti-union laws was defeated heavily, with the CWU and the PCS weighing in against the POA. CWU General Secretary Billy Hayes had the audacity to quote Lenin in his speech, arguing that the policies of the unions needed to be "one step ahead of the class, and the POA motion is ten steps ahead."

If leftists like Billy Hayes and the Socialist Party leaders of the PCS have built so little political consciousness and assertiveness amongst their members that they do not feel capable of winning them to a programme of industrial action to smash the most damaging set of legislation facing our movement, one has to wonder what they've been doing with themselves during their time in office. The other political lowlight of official Congress business was the speech from Chancellor Alistair Darling, in which he used the language of "fairness" and "social justice" to dress up a statement that the government wasn't going to change anything it was doing and doesn't really care what anyone thinks. A worthy but rather hand-dog-looking protest from the RCU delegation (in which they held up hand-made placards saying "food and heating are not optional extras", mirroring Darling's refrain that "a stable economy is not an optional extra") was the only attempt by Congress delegates to register any real opposition to either Darling's presence at the event or the political content of his speech.

Should the left support Obama?

A debate between Workers' Liberty and Eric Lee, a socialist, founder of www.labourstart.org and member of Democrats Abroad

7.30pm Tuesday 23 September, The Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road

THE REAL COST OF LIVING

Nationalise gas and electricity

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

You don't have to be a financial genius to understand the following rule: increase your prices and you increase your profits. Even better if your competitors do the same, then there's no risk of you losing business. And so it is with the big three energy companies. Shell, BP and British Gas all employ legions of economists to maximise their profits but in this instance the PR people play a more important role.

Shell made £4 billion in the first quarter of 2008, up 4.6%. BP made £3.4 billion, up 6%. Centrica, the company that owns British Gas, reported profits of £992 million in the first half of 2008 after raising prices by 35%. Between 2007 and 2008 the biggest eight energy companies made profits in excess of £29 billion between them — around £500 for every person living in the UK.

So, how do the energy company's public

relations spin-doctors explain this 'phenomenon'? How to explain away the massive increase in prices and the corresponding increase in profits? Well, you blame it all on international oil prices: "it's out of our hands, we can't be held responsible for the prices imposed by some foreign oil consortium". They pass on the blame, pass on the costs and continue to increase profits whilst the low waged, unemployed and pensioners feel the pain. So extreme are the increases in the cost of gas and electricity that most workers now feel the pinch.

In response up to eighty Labour MPs have signed a petition calling for a windfall tax on energy companies initiated by Compass, the not very left-wing "left-of-centre" think tank. Tony Woodley, joint General Secretary of the new Unite union, has appeared in the press and on radio calling for such a tax. All of this is positive, but if this issue is so important why did Woodley and the Labour MPs sit on their hands over this issue at the National Policy Forum?

In any case, the response to the proposed

£4.5 billion windfall tax from the energy producers has been predictably hostile. A spokesman for the Association of Electricity Producers labelled the proposal a "legalised raid" on the energy companies bank accounts. What he fails to 'justify' are the repeated raids on the bank accounts of those who have to buy the electricity.

The massive increases in energy prices, the enormous profits of the energy companies and their wining over a one-off windfall tax exposes these people as money-grabbing, bandit-profiteers. It looks unlikely that the government will immediately jump to the tune of Compass's petition but even if they did, such one-off measures will do nothing to alleviate the financial crises faced by many workers, will not restrict further such super-profits or go any way to reforming the energy market and those who run it. Gas and electricity are necessities, nobody should be making a profit from them: only a workers government can solve the energy crisis by nationalising the energy companies and putting them under democratic control.

STUDENT YEAR START

Universities move towards higher fees

This academic year will see a review of the £3,000 cap on top-up fees, most likely resulting in new government policy of allowing universities to set much higher variable fees. Much more than anything New Labour has done so far, this will mean a move towards a US-style system of pretty much unrestricted free markets in higher education.

Yet the Blairite-led National Union of Students plans, pretty much, to do nothing.

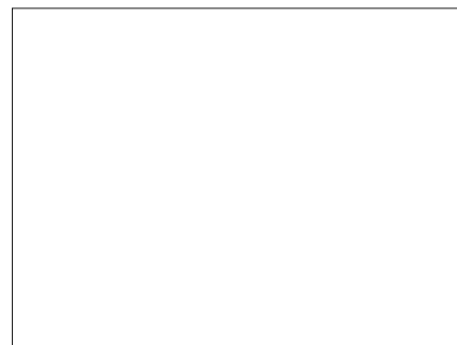
In 2005, the year that the original proposal for variable fees up to £3,000 passed through Parliament, by a majority of just five votes, NUS cancelled its national demonstration. It has only held one since then, mobilising less than ten thousand people. This is a multi-million organisation, yet its campaigning activity is, in meaningful terms, zero.

This year NUS, which continues to promote the timid demand and limp slogan "Keep the cap" [on tuition fees], plans only a day of action on 5 November. Even if this was not the day after the US presidential election, when it is guaranteed to get no attention whatsoever, "days of action" are student bureaucrats' favourite way of avoiding organising a national demo — and in any case, NUS is not building seriously for it.

Wes Streeting, the Labour Students president of NUS, has also promised to bring back the anti-democratic "Governance Review" reforms which were defeated by NUS conference in April. Astonishingly given their claims to be concerned about democracy and value for money, the NUS leadership plans to get their pet student unions to call for two emergency conferences, so that they do not have to wait for and risk defeat at the 2009 conference next Easter. Delegates to extraordinary conferences do not have to be elected!

The two issues are linked: the aim of these reforms is to "lock in" NUS's current bureaucratisation and lack of campaigning activity, in order to ward off the possibility of it being used to seriously take on the government.

In these circumstances, there is an urgent



Less and less working class people are going to University

need for a united, non-sectarian student left that can mobilise, inside and outside of NUS and student union structures, both to resist the bureaucrats attempts to close down democracy and to take on the government.

That is what the Education Not for Sale network exists to do. We will be working with those student unions who want to resist NUS's disastrous course to organise the action NUS won't — including a national demonstration in the second term.

ENS is only one part of the left. We are very much in favour of left unity, and of the left working together — with SWSS/Student Respect, Socialist Students and others. But we also believe in building ENS as a non-sectarian, democratic united front of student activists from different points of view who share the perspective of achieving fighting student unions and NUS. That is an essential part of the fight for unity.

ENS activists have been central to a number of student campaigns — from young workers' rights activism to action on climate change to the hugely successful Feminist Fightback initiative.

Get involved! Help us build for a national demonstration! Support Education Not for Sale!

• For more information, ENS campaign materials or a speaker for your campus, get in touch: education.not.for.sale@gmail.com / www.free-education.org.uk

From front page

The US governments decision to bail out the nation's two largest mortgage firms — Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac — illustrates this point more clearly. With repossession rates more than doubling since 2007 and set to get worse, the government steps in not with an aid package to help those at risk of losing their homes but a massive bail-out for the mortgage companies. Government agencies have taken control of the firms, replaced both chief executives and lined up a \$200 billion package of state investment. The motivating factor and immediate result of this move was to boost an ailing Wall Street. The Dow Jones and NASDAQ indexes both surged in the days after the takeover.

The bottom line for all capitalist governments is to defend the interests of capital. Reforms — sometimes significant, life changing reforms — are possible but when faced with a choice between the needs of the vast majority of workers and the profits of a small bandit crew of capitalists, the profits win out every time.

We need another kind of government, a workers' government. Such a government does not just sit at the top of society, deciding what is best for those below it. No, it is a government of, for and democratically accountable to the working class. It acts independently of and aims to overturn the interests of capital, it acts in the interests of the vast majority against elite interests. A workers government isn't simply elected in a ballot-box contest but is the product of class struggle, of a labour movement that recognises the need for independent class politics and is willing to fight for it.

The struggle to transform the labour movement, to turn it into a tool for consistent class struggle is posed more sharply by the unfolding economic and related social crises. If we cannot respond, others will: the growth of the fascist BNP and the likelihood of a Tory government indicate this.

• A workers' response to the crisis, fight for a workers government: www.workersliberty.org/plan

BUSH AND THE MORTGAGE GIANTS: PRIVATISING GAINS AND SOCIALISING LOSSES

Socialise the gains!

The nationalisation by the conservative George Bush administration of the two giant US financial corporations known as Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae has made the case for working-class socialism more forcefully, unanswerably, and urgently than for a long time.

In Britain recently, the same case for socialism was made in the nationalisation of the Northern Rock bank by the Brown government.

The unfolding capitalist crisis, following a long boom, makes the case too.

The US "nationalisation" of the two corporations which account for 50% of all mortgages in the USA indicates what the solution to capitalist crisis is and must be.

Not that this takeover by a bourgeois government of the two great housing-mortgage conglomerates of US capitalism is in any way a working-class or a socialist measure. That it is not.

It is the US government, a government of capitalists, by capitalists, mainly for capitalists, engaging in a piece of state-capitalist social engineering in order to maintain the conditions that the capitalist system needs to go on functioning.

There is nothing socialist or working-class about it. But it brilliantly illuminates why the belief of Marxists in the necessity and possibility of socialism is entirely rational, and the denial of that case deeply irrational and indeed "anti-social".

Capitalism itself, in its natural course of development and growth, has already turned the economy into a sort of "social-ism" — but "social-ism" under the control of, and worked primarily in the interests of, a minority, of the capitalist class who exploit society and (the root exploitation) exploit the working class which creates and recreates the economy.

In the normal course of its development, capital becomes concentrated into great companies and corporations, first national and then global. It creates gigantic concentrations of industry and finance owned privately, and operated as giant engines of class and social exploitation regulated by what is profitable for the owners, not by what is best for society or those who they employ.

Frederick Engels described this process of capitalist "social-ism", at a very early stage, as "the invading socialist society". He meant that capitalism was organising the economy so as to subordinate market mechanisms to a sort of social planning, a strict limitation on the scope and function of markets. It was social planning, and action to eliminate some of the financially and socially destructive consequences of market operations — but operated in the interests of the capitalists, whose interests the governments, in the last reckoning, exist to serve.

Engels believed, and we too believe that "social-ism" in the interests of the capitalist class can be turned into socialism proper. That would happen by the working class and its social allies winning of power in society and establishing a workers' government.

The importance of the nationalisation of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae by the very right-wing and very bourgeois US government needs to be understood by socialists as indicative of the tendencies within capitalism explained above. What follows is an expansion of that explanation much of it in the words of Marx and Engels: it is the case for socialism.

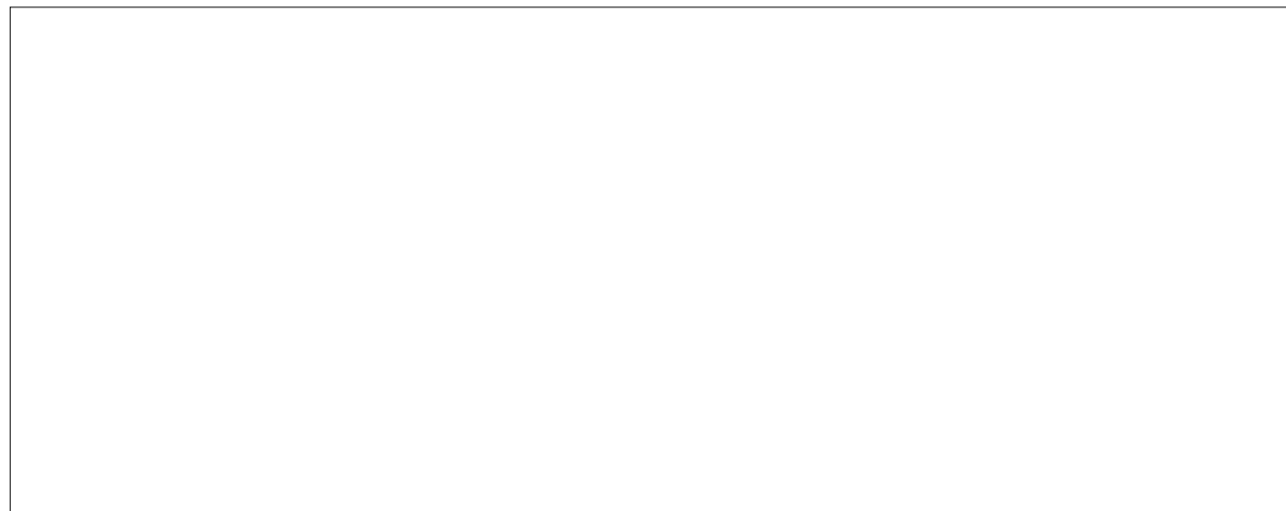
THE BASIS

Capitalism creates the basis of socialism. Capitals grow by the eating up of the smaller by the bigger capitals, in a progression that has led in our time to global companies richer than many governments. Today, world-wide, the capitalist classes are dominant in a way less than ever before alloyed by old customs and compromises, and they are more closely intermeshed across national frontiers. Simultaneously, the old measures of social provision implemented by Western welfare states and Third World bureaucratic regimes are being stripped away. Inequality between rich and poor is enormous and increasing world-wide, and within most individual countries.

In his book *Socialism, Utopian and Scientific* educated generations of socialists in the basics of their creed Engels drew a comprehensive picture of the capitalist system and its contradictions as it developed in history.

The fundamental fault line in capitalism is the contradiction between social production and private ownership, individual or corporate.

Before capitalism, the instruments of labour — land,



Socialised production but not in the interests of the whole of society

agricultural implements, the workshop, the tool — were instruments of the labour of single individuals, adapted for the use of one worker: they belonged as a rule to the producer himself: in the countryside, the small peasant (freeman, or serf), in the towns, of the handicraft workers.

Socialised production revolutionised all the old methods of production and soon all the old human relations within production. In the industrial revolution, the spinning wheel, the hand loom, the blacksmith's hammer, were replaced by the spinning-machine, the power-loom; the individual workshop, by the factory, in which hundreds and thousands of workers co-operated. The articles that now came out of the factory were the joint product of many workers, through whose hands they had successively to pass before they were ready.

Here, at the start, the root contradiction, anomaly, disjunction, of capitalism had emerged. This socialised production was a new form of the production of commodities. The old forms of appropriation of the product rooted in the old single-work tool and small workshop period remained in full swing, and were applied to the products of socialised production as well.

Under capitalism, the socialised means of production and the products continued to be the property of individuals.

The product, now created by social labour, was no longer appropriated by those who produced the commodities, but by the capitalists. Where before everyone owned his own product and consumed it, brought it to market, or paid it in open tribute to an overlord, now the owner of the instruments of labour, the organiser of the new social labour, appropriated the product of the labour of others.

Engels: "This contradiction, which gives to the new mode of production its capitalistic character, contains the germ of the whole of the social antagonisms of capitalist society: the incompatibility of socialized production with private, capitalistic appropriation."

WAGE-LABOUR

Before capitalism, wage-labour was exceptional, complementary, accessory, transitory wage-labour. The agricultural labourer, though, upon occasion, he hired himself out by the day, had a patch of his own land on which he could live. The journeyman of today became the self-employed master craftsman of tomorrow. All this changed, as soon as the means of production became socialised and concentrated in the hands of capitalists.

Wage-labour, hitherto the exception and accessory, now became the rule and basis of all production. The wage-worker for a time became a wage-worker for life. There was a complete separation between the means of production concentrated in the hands of the capitalists who owned them and the producers, possessing nothing but their labour-power. The contradiction between socialised production and capitalistic appropriation manifested itself as the antagonism of worker and capitalist.

The capitalist bought workers' labour power, set them to work with his equipment on his raw materials, appropriated what their labour-power in action produced. What they produced was more value than he had paid out for wages and raw material — because it embodied the new, additional human labour of his wage-hired workers. Capital took society a giant step forward, but it would for-

ever remain incompatible with the civilised society its coming into existence made possible for humankind.

Engels: "Every society based upon the production of commodities has this peculiarity: that the producers have lost control over their own social inter-relations. No one knows how much of his particular article is coming on the market, nor how much of it will be wanted..."

"It is the Darwinian struggle of the individual for existence transferred from Nature to society with intensified violence. The conditions of existence natural to the animal appear as the final stage of human development."

In our own time we see the glorification of "The Market" as the God to which everything else is ultimately subordinate.

By the end of the 19th century a gigantic development and concentration of the means of production had come about. Whole industries within each country had come under the control of a few, or one, joint-stock companies.

Engels: "Freedom of competition changes into its very opposite — into monopoly; and the production without any definite plan of capitalistic society capitulates to the production upon a definite plan of the invading socialistic society."

Frederick Engels spotlighted in advance what would be the dominant trend of much of the twentieth century: "The official representative of capitalist society — the state — will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into state property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication — the post office, the telegraphs, the railways.

Today, with "globalisation", giant international capitalist enterprises have outgrown states and taken over the role of governments as Engels described things before the 20th century, undoing much stratification. And yet, the nationalisations in the USA show that the government is the safety net of the bourgeoisie.

THE STATE

"The transformation — either into joint-stock companies and trusts, or into State-ownership — does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces. In the joint-stock companies and trusts, this is obvious. And the modern State, again, is only the organization that bourgeois society takes on in order to support the external conditions of the capitalist mode of production against the encroachments as well of the workers as of individual capitalists. The modern state, no matter what its form, is essentially a capitalist machine — the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking over of productive forces, the more does it actually become the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers — proletarians. The capitalist relation is not done away with."

Engels thought that this situation must quickly lead to revolution. "The exploitation is so palpable, that it must break down. No nation will put up with production conducted by trusts [conglomerates], with so barefaced an exploitation of the community by a small band of dividend-mongers."

Continued on page 18

IN BRIEF

UNISON: activists in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are angered by news from the national office on progress on pay negotiations.

Scottish Unison stated they are preparing for further action; they oppose multi-year deals, and state that "talks are welcome but not a means in themselves", Unison in England and Wales thinks differently.

Members are told that Unison wants to resolve this dispute as soon as possible, but that the framework for talks is until end of December

We have gone into open ended discussions, calling off all action for negotiations, with the employers putting nothing on the table in advance.

Anyone with common sense would realise that as every week passes without action, the employers know our resolve will weaken, and their ability to force us to accept an under-inflation deal will strengthen.

We in Unison allowed this to happen. The left allowed this to happen. The majority of the left did not debate how to hold the leadership to account, or how to win this dispute. Just calling for more all-out action, or saying "wait until October when we can unite with others", isn't a strategy. The lack of a real rank and file mechanism for bringing together local government activists across unions, branches and regions has helped the "leadership" get away with this.

Some of us in Workers' Liberty, and with support from other activists helped initiate a local government activists' email group (See tinyurl.com/6ku36x to join), but this is still very small. This and other attempts to share reports from branches, not just of action, but issues linked to single status results or negotiations, can influence how we fight over pay.

The consultations over pay show that the leadership has little understanding of what's going on in branches. Meanwhile the response in Scotland — on paper at least — shows a very different story.

Arguing for and mobilising for joint action is our best strategy. Ensuring we challenge the leadership, and using this to build a cross-branch, cross-region rank and file is vital.

We should challenge the leadership to:

- pull out of negotiations and call action, selective or otherwise, alongside other unions;

- this should include: closing schools alongside the NUT, depots and street cleaning alongside the GMB;

- meet now in a high profile manner with other unions in dispute with the message that we will coordinate action;

- call open activists' meetings in regions to build local protests and lobbies of MPs;

- reject multi-year deals.

We need a bit of imagination about what we could practically contribute to joint public action. Unison is still one of the biggest unions in Britain, and local government is a significant workforce. We shouldn't allow the mis-leadership to continue.

UNISON local government worker

FIRST CENTREWEST BUS DRIVERS are set to take a further 48 hours strike action starting 3am this Friday, 12 September, following a solid strike day two weeks ago. An overwhelming vote by Metrobus drivers will see garages in Croydon, Orpington and Crawley join the action.

Unite the union, which represents London's 28,000 bus drivers, submitted a London-wide pay claim of £30,000 in March, to redress discrepancies in pay of up to £6000 between different companies. This is understood as a strategic step towards a fight for re-nationalisation.

However it seems that First Capital East drivers, who took action last time, are no longer in the picture! And the prospect of

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Back Steve Hedley!

Steve Hedley is a candidate in the election for RMT London Regional Organiser. As the RMT in London is facing a big political and industrial fight against Tory mayor Boris Johnson and a potential Tory government intent on breaking the union and imposing pay cuts, this an important election. Steve spoke to *Tubeworker*, the bulletin produced by AWL tubeworkers.

Q: How do you see the role of Regional Organiser?

A: The London Transport region of the RMT covers everybody that was once employed by "London Transport". The organiser should set up organisations of workers in the region to strengthen the union. The Organiser conducts talks over pay and conditions and does high level disciplinaries. But if I take on this job people should vote for me on the basis that it is fundamentally an organising role. The role is to build the RMT as a formidable fighting force in the region.

Wage negotiations are a reflection of the balance of forces on the ground. If a union's strong, well-organised and militant, a better pay rise and better conditions are more likely.

Q: What are the RMT's key tasks to prepare for and win the fights ahead?

A: We need an industrial strategy in the short, medium and long term and we need a political strategy in parallel to it. We need to build up local, regional and national all-grades committees to co-ordinate effective action. These would be local committees of reps that meet to discuss strategy, but not official bodies. They would meet regularly, whether there was a dispute or not. Currently, the union is very reactive; we've got to build a position where we're going on the offensive. To start these committees will be defensive but they should have an inherent offensive capacity.

Q: What would you do to bring about effective solidarity between grades so that even the most vulnerable workers win?

A: We are the only all-grades union on the railway. But too often recently we've acted like a single grades union, where each grade only wants to fight for itself.

Metroline, Arriva North and South joining this week seems unlikely, potentially squandering another year of opportunity, when drivers seem convinced of the need to go on the offensive at a time of economic hardship.

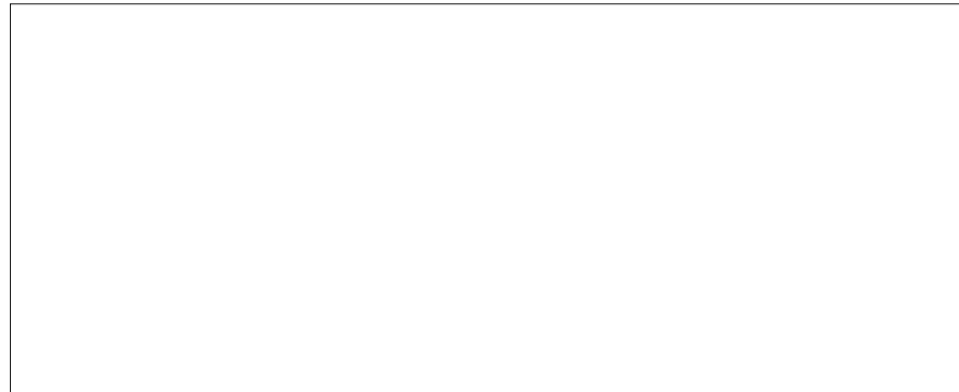
The union may have turned a corner from its overtly corrupt conduct in recent years, but a democratic union culture is some way off. These percentage point pay disputes are set by officials, and drivers are expected to rally behind them with no input into the planning of the dispute.

Active rank-and-file participation over a range of local demands on rosters and conditions, combined with a unifying London-wide strategy, with proper co-ordination among accountable and recallable reps, is the way forward, in what has the potential to be one the most significant fronts in the class struggle.

Robin Sivapalan

DEFEND KAREN REISSMAN: Karen Reissman, the trade unionist and nurse sacked by Manchester Mental Health trust for speaking to the press about privatisation of services, has had her tribunal postponed until December.

On the eve of the date due for the ET and following developments in the nego-



RMT needs a better industrial strategy on the Underground

This is a result of the anti-union laws, which prevent workers in different companies taking action to support each other. The laws were part of capital's deliberate, thought-out process of sowing division between workers. In addition to the all-grades committees mentioned above, and cross-grades meetings that all reps would be expected to attend, our task is to rebuild working class consciousness, not just as a grade or as a union, but as a class.

Q: The RMT is no longer affiliated to the Labour Party. What should the RMT in London concretely do to build working class political representation?

A: RMT policy is that the region should identify candidates that are worthy of working class support in elections. We need to implement this vigorously in the region. We should have a list of demands that are a minimum platform for anyone we would agree to support. As a union, we need to develop working class politicians. Today politics is almost entirely a middle class or upper middle class occupation, whereas years ago train drivers would become politicians.

Q: The number of members who are active in their workplace or attend their local branches is quite small. What would you do to build a culture of active involvement in the RMT?

A: RMT members are not all getting the same representation. This unofficial hierarchy needs to be broken down. If people aren't going to branches, we need to go to

workplaces to build the union. We need to have a two-way discussion, rather than reps turning up and delivering a speech and disappearing. We need to ask what would get people involved in the union — as the young members have been doing.

Q: How do you think democratic decision-making should work in the RMT?

A: I have a bottom-up philosophy. The leadership and reps cannot just reflect the opinion of members. They must be educational and opinion-formers. The union must engender the highest level of debate. But when a decision is voted upon, the union must stand by that decision. It is a problem when the leadership decides on strategies without consulting the members.

Q: Within the union, there is sometimes a dismissive attitude to women's campaigns, LGBT campaigns, etc. How do these campaigns relate to building a strong union?

A: The major oppression in our society is economic oppression of the working class but we can't ignore that within the working class some groups are oppressed. In the rail industry women are on 70% of men's salaries. Non-whites suffer discrimination. LGBT people suffer harassment at work. Any call for equality is subversive because it is an impossible demand that the system we live under cannot fulfil. If all our campaigns can keep a class perspective then they're well worth supporting and should be encouraged.

their support before the next tribunal date and to support Karen through the rest of her case.

Any support to Manchester Community and Mental Health UNISON, c/o staff side office, Chorlton House, 70 Manchester Rd, Manchester M21 9UN.

A Unison health worker

Save Bancroft Library

Bancroft Library in Tower Hamlets is to be sold to Queen Mary University for £1 million. Its collection — an invaluable sure of records of working-class history in east London — is to be scrapped.

Get involved in the campaign to save it as a public service. Contact: Tom Ridge stepney.history@live.co.uk.

Write to the council protesting: Martin Smith, Chief Executive, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG, Email: martin.smith@towerhamlets.gov.uk, with a copy to his PA carol.marchant@towerhamlets.gov.uk. Also send copies to the campaign.

SCHOOLS TESTING

Stop SATS in 2009!

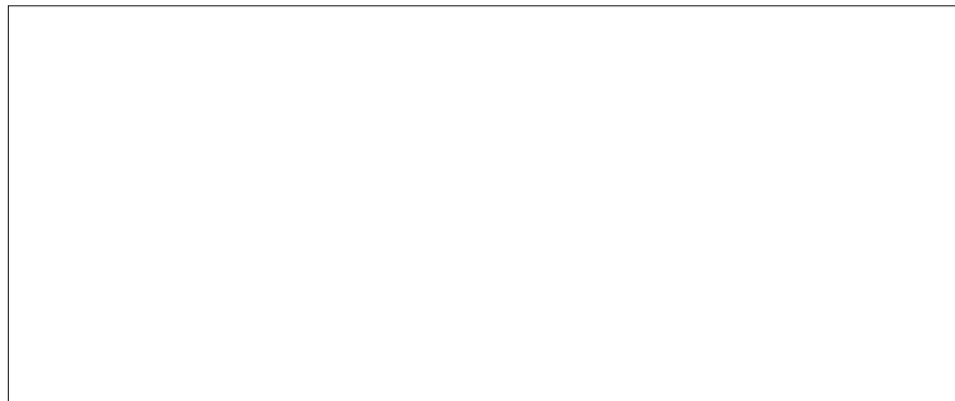
BY PATRICK YARKER, (FROM BACK PAGE)

It is likely that there will be a huge rise in SATs appeals, for test scores dictate a school's League Table position and so affect the recruitment of students. Such is the craziness of a state education system hamstrung by Labour's capitulation to market forces. Government reads a rise in test scores as a rise in standards. Everyone else understands that education suffers because high-stakes testing requires intense teaching-to-the-test.

In 2004 a smaller-scale version of this summer's farcical events occurred with the English tests taken by fourteen year olds. Then heads of government agencies made public apologies, saying such a thing must never happen again. This year's breakdown enveloped the entire system, and casts doubt on the ability of government to ensure testing in England even takes place next year. But no-one in government has yet resigned or been sacked. And ETS, the private firm employed by government agencies and responsible for the fiasco, has not had to repay all the public money it received, although its five-year contract has been annulled.

Instead, two inquiries into the debacle have been announced. Both will be led by crossbench peer Lord Sutherland, who as Stewart Sutherland was Chief Inspector for Schools from 1992-94. His inquiries will *not* consider the merits of testing but will scrutinise the extent to which government agencies such as the Qualification and Curriculum Authority and the National Assessment Agency met their own success criteria in contracting and overseeing ETS.

There is some danger for the Secretary of State for Education in this process, but it is more likely that those running one or other of the agencies directly involved will face the harshest criticism. Ed Balls may signal the likelihood that a revised system of testing will be available for England's state



All year spent preparing for this

schools in 2010, following trials currently being carried out in several hundred schools.

A new tendering process for the contract for next year's tests has also begun. The privatised awarding body or exam board Edexcel has indicated an interest, while the other two awarding bodies have declined to be involved. They disagree with the government over the educational rationale of the tests and the uses made of the test data. A tendering process involving just one bidder is absurd, which might explain why Capita, with no experience of administering school exams, is also being spoken of as a contender!

The government is likely to have to pay over the odds if it wants tests run in 2009. And there are serious doubts about whether in the nine months or so remaining a new contractor can do what is necessary to ensure next year's tests run smoothly.

The activities and debates that have begun over SATS in the unions are welcome. They will help reveal the extent of opposition to school-testing felt by teachers, students and parents/carers. They will focus debate and generate calls for further action. But the failed boycott attempt by the NUT in 2003 serves to remind that popular support and the energetic militancy of the few will not be enough.

Many teachers continue to mark the tests. League Tables and Ofsted judgements exercise a powerful discipline. Many, perhaps a majority of classroom teachers now, have no experience of a school system without National Curriculum testing. There has been little widespread discussion of alternative ways of assessing students. The case for such alternatives must again be made.

Most problematic of all, teachers are not required now for the administration of tests. Non-teaching staff and/or members of school Leadership Teams can oversee tests and fulfil the accompanying bureaucratic requirements. A testing boycott by teachers means a refusal by teachers to teach-to-the-test in their own classrooms. This in turn will require that unions declare clearly their support for such a refusal.

Since the bulk of test preparation takes place from January, teaching unions will have to decide this term whether or not to back teachers in this way. That requires unions to challenge the government on policy grounds, not on grounds to do with workload. Such a challenge is long overdue, but will unions be prepared to make it?

It has major implications for the current pay-campaign. It would require agreement about the assessment procedures to be

implemented in place of high-stakes testing. Teacher assessment could replace such testing, but would need to be subject to credible external moderation, and would probably mean additional work for teachers of affected classes.

After the failure of the original SATs boycott in 1993 to prevent the introduction of high-stakes testing in the "core" subjects at secondary school, and the failure of the 2003 boycott to secure adequate backing inside the NUT, activists need to come up with an inventive strategy which can bring successful anti-testing action in 09.

It may be that action directed against *some* tests rather than *all* tests, or action which is focused in one region or area, offers the best chance of success. Ideally, unionised non-teaching staff would come out soon with a commitment not to administer the tests, allowing teachers to declare they will not test-ready students, and enabling classes affected to receive a proper education across the year, rather than one interrupted by the burden of test-readying. But action short of this all-out challenge must also be considered.

A third failure by the forces opposed to testing would boost the government as it moves towards its "test-when-ready" system. That system will shackle many more students and teachers to a round of test-readying in each school year, rather than, as currently, towards the end of each Key Stage.

In the first few weeks of the new term, subject associations for English, Maths and Science, the main teaching unions, and unions which organise non-teaching staff, should find out what their members think about taking some form of action, up to and including complete non-compliance with the 2009 tests. The possibilities for different kinds of action should be discussed. Unions need to be in a position to respond immediately to the publication of the Sutherland inquiries. If the Secretary of State does not suspend testing in 2009, the campaign against testing will need to broaden and deepen. We need some form of successful anti-testing action next year.

PAY DISPUTE

Teachers: strike in November, go on to win!

BY PATRICK MURPHY, NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS EXECUTIVE (PC)

On Friday 5 September the NUT Executive voted unanimously for a new strike ballot to continue our campaign for decent levels of pay. The ballot will open on 6 October and close on 3 November. Our last ballot sought support for only a one day strike, despite an earlier decision by the Executive to go for discontinuous action. This time union members will be asked to support discontinuous action so we will not be restricted to a one-off protest strike. That is very good, though a lot of time and momentum has now been lost.

The strike on 24 April was a tremendous demonstration of what is possible when even a minority of public sector trade unionists make a united stand. The chances of building the kind of movement necessary to defeat the government's policy of making workers pay for the economic crisis would have been stronger by now, however, if that first action had been immediately built on.

As it is, civil servants in PCS and Unison local government members have taken

action in isolation since then, while the NUT delayed, needing to ballot for further action.

The NUT's strike will have to take place between 19-27 November. PCS have announced plans to ballot 250,000 members for action (which will be co-ordinated) and UCU will decide later this month whether to join this action. The possibility of an effective joint public sector fight on pay is, therefore, back on, and it is important to make it a reality.

The previous NUT ballot saw 75% of members vote for strike action on a 32% turnout. To be absolutely sure of a strong campaign we will need to match those figures. That will not be easy, but the basic arguments for action have only got stronger.

Inflation was 3.8% back in April — now it is 5%. The government's argument was that the real measure of inflation (consumer prices) was 2.2% and therefore we were getting a rise! They lost that argument then but in any case the CPI is now 4.4% so, even by their skewed measure, we are facing a pay cut. Finally there was a possibility that the teachers pay review body would look again at last year's pay deal (2.5%) under a trigger mechanism which the NUT invoked in

June. When the union used this trigger last year the review body asked the Secretary of state for permission to review teachers' pay and he rejected the idea. This year the review body decided to cut to the chase and save Ed Balls the time. They simply turned down the request for a review. It is clearer than ever that teachers face a simple choice — collective action or continuing pay cuts.

Teachers will see our pay increase by 2.45% this month at a time when inflation is 5%, fuel prices are going up by 40% and the price of basic foods is rising at twice the overall rate. That situation won't end this year. The current rise is part of a three-year pay deal which will see below-inflation rises for 2009 and 2010 (2.3% each year). The chances of turning that around will be very small if the current campaign fizzles out or fails.

On 16 September NUT branch secretaries will meet at the union's office in London to discuss the pay campaign. The focus of the meeting will be getting the vote out, with practical strategies for communicating the arguments. That focus is a reasonable one and all that will need doing effectively. But activists need to start discussing something else. The NUT urgently needs to develop a strategy which can win.

A series of one-day strikes with large gaps in the middle where nothing much happens will *not* shift the government. It will also be seen by members as tokenistic.

It doesn't have to be that way. Further days of action can be named in advance. Half-days of action can be called and tied to specific events which put pressure on the government such as lobbies of MPs and government offices or regional demonstrations. As long as it is tied to, and not a substitute for national action, members could be called out selectively in particular areas. School closures always hit the news because of the effect on industries and services which depend on working parents. The government may feel they can take the occasional bad news day and the union may feel unable to call extensive national action but regular selective action can keep the focus on education in ways that cause much more trouble to Ministers.

Whatever the answers it is certainly time to start asking the questions. The ballot decision is good and all NUT members should work as hard as they can to get a good turnout and a huge yes vote. But at the same time we need to develop a strategy which can win and persuade people it can be delivered as soon as possible.

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

SWP to the right of the TUC?

BY JACK YATES

The new ten point People Before Profit "charter" sheds more than a little light on how the Socialist Workers Party views its role in the growing economic crisis and the role it expects the wider labour movement to play.

The "charter" is, in fact, a "minimum programme" of the sort put forward by pre-1914 Second International social democrats. Socialists used to operate with a "minimum" and "maximum" programmes — "minimum" being an everyday list of practical demands, "maximum" the full-blooded but far-off revolution. The party and its relationship with the trade unions provided the link between the two.

This parallel system of programme's was based on a mechanical, evolutionary

view of working class struggle. Rather than making the links between demands in the here and now and the possibility of revolutionary struggle — that is, educating and mobilising the labour movement, linking everyday struggles to the goal of socialist revolution — the social democrats related to the working class on a fairly conservative basis.

And "conservative" pretty much describes the People Before Profit charter. Even the name suggests political timidity. "People" — don't you mean workers, comrades? "Before Profit" — what about "Not Profit"? But the name is only the start of the problem.

Wages: The charter demands wage increases no lower than the rate of inflation, opposes the two percent pay limit and demands an £8 minimum wage. But even the Retail Price Index fails to reflect

the real increase in costs — food is up 10.6%, road-fuel is up 24% and the massive increase in gas and electricity bills. Simple calculations tell us that inflation is closer to 10% in real terms. Wages should be linked to inflation as a minimum, but the labour movement needs an enquiry into the real figure. The demand for wages linked to inflation will lift many workers out of poverty pay, but many unions already have pay demands well in excess of inflation.

Big Business: The SWP demands: "Increase tax ... windfall tax on ... super-profits" but fails to (a) explain how we get Alistair Darling to take these measures and (b) doesn't even hint at renationalisation. Even the TUC has policy calling for re-nationalisation of the energy and other industries — the SWP place themselves to the right of Brendan Barber!

On other issues, the SWP offer a series of timid demands without linking them to any practical strategy for advancing the class struggle, without any concrete connection to the labour movement and without linking demands to their self-professed politics. The closest they get — and this is perhaps the most revealing aspect of the charter — is to ask trade union branches to support SWP front organisations from UAF to the Stop the War Coalition.

People Before Profit exposes the SWP as sectarian to the labour movement, as an organisation with no real understanding of how to organise and agitate for socialist ideas. They see themselves as above and apart from the working class as it exists, they see themselves as the solution to the current and future crises. "Join the SWP", who needs the working class and the labour movement?

CONVENTION OF THE LEFT

For democracy not "consensus"

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

The fragmented left faces a new situation in the light of the blocking off of any possible challenge to Brown through the Labour Party; the failure of Respect; and the Socialist Alliance and the rise of the BNP. The Convention of the Left is an attempt to bring together those on the left opposed to the Labour government's attacks on the working class and to debate and formulate alternative anti-capitalist strategies. Initially there will be a five day event in Manchester from 20-24 September running in parallel with Labour's own conference.

This will consist of a number of themed meetings around peace, planet, politics, public services and trade unions. There will be sessions on women, international trade union solidarity, anti-fascism, climate

change, Iraq and Iran. The Convention will provide a framework within which the left will, hopefully, be able to do more than just listen to platform speakers but also to have the kind of open debate that is all too rare on the left. It is also intended that sessions should put together a brief statement of policy on their particular area that will feed into a recall conference to be held in November, though it is as yet unclear how that conference will be structured or what its aims are.

The initial aim of the Convention was: "to start defining a new way of working... so that we can work together in practical campaigns, regardless of the organisations we may belong to... Diverse but not divisive, we want participation in debate and unity in action." In practice, this has meant the central organisers sidelining or opposing anything that they consider likely to provoke controversy, regardless of its importance for working out a strategy for

the left. Thus a debate on the Union-Labour link was rejected on the grounds that this would be "looking backwards".

On the Sunday, the discussion under the title: "Unity in action – Probable? Possible? Potential?" will be around a resolution to which no amendments or additions will be allowed. While the resolution is relatively uncontroversial and includes a useful proposal for the development of local left forums, it shies away from giving any perspective for the November conference or the more long-term development of the left.

The Convention should be supported as giving a much-needed opportunity for the far left to debate politics and strategy. But serious differences do exist, and ignoring these cannot in the long run contribute to building a stable framework for working together. We need the most democratic framework possible, not a manipulated consensus.

STUDENT STOP THE WAR CONFERENCE

No class politics

BY SACHA ISMAIL

About one hundred student activists attended the Student Stop the War meeting on 6 September — not a bad turn out, but unfortunately that was the best thing about the meeting.

Most of those present were from various socialist groups with the SWP — who organised the event — in abundance. The politics promoted by the SWP were very far from socialist, and the meeting failed to develop any real strategy for action.

Of a two hour meeting, seventy minutes were taken up by speeches from the top table — not much time for discussing anything.

Tony Benn delivered a version of the speech he always makes. The only deviation was his false claim that Stop the War is not a single issue movement, but one which puts forward a vision for a "different kind of society". Immediately after he cited positively the fact that Tory MP Michael Ancram had spoken from a STW platform!

Benn's speech was, to be honest, almost totally incoherent.

Lindsey German's speech was the usual mix of platitudes and nonsense. In discussing the crisis in the Caucasus, she fixed the blame entirely on NATO expansion, downplaying the role of Russian aggression against Georgia. This soft-Stalinist position was warmly applauded by an old supporter of the USSR in the audience.

George Solomou from Military Families Against the War made a pretty bland speech focussing on the "illegality" of the war and looked to liberal reform of the British state's military institutions. There's no principle against having such views on a platform, but no objections were raised!

Neither German nor Solomou said anything about the workers' movement or class struggle — whether in the Middle East or the big imperialist states. Tony Benn — for all his incoherence, substantially to the left of the SWP! — referred to the possibility of working-class action against the crisis.

Two contributions from the floor are

worthy of mention.

The CPGB's Ben Lewis asked why, when STW is "inclusive" enough for Ancram, Charles Kennedy and the like, the CPGB-sponsored Hands Off the People of Iran campaign had been excluded from affiliation to the coalition. Lindsey Germany dodged the question with a series of truly shocking, Stalinist-style evasions and lies.

SWP member and Essex University SU president Dominic Kavakeb, who is of Iranian descent, claimed that it would be wrong for STW activists to support workers, students and other democratic movements in Iran, since the Iranian people are "good" and capable of liberating themselves! (Difficult to know where to begin...)

The forty minute "planning session" at the end of the meeting was pretty desultory. It is clear that wide layers of students retain quite a bit of enthusiasm for the Stop the War movement — but the coalition has no political answers or practical proposals to channel that enthusiasm into meaningful activity. "On to the next demo" is still the gist of what the SWP advocate.

NOTTINGHAM UNI

Ditch this racist!

At a recent NUS training event held at York University, Craig Cox, the newly elected education officer at the University of Nottingham, claims his sign reading "Bring back slavery" was simply a wind up.

Cox, a Conservative Party activist, was responding to remarks made by a fellow Tory, who suggested that African-Caribbean students might increase knife and gun crime on campus. Cox was presumably suggesting the re-introduction of the enslavement of black people as a solution to this.

The Nottingham University Black and Minority Ethnic Students (BME) Committee is determined to campaign for Cox's removal as Education Officer. Bayo Randle, President of the BME Committee, commented: "It is difficult to think of any excuse for such behaviour. I feel uneasy about the prospect of working with Mr Cox — a man who clearly shows both a level of ignorance and a lack of respect not befitting somebody who is representing any establishment, let alone one as culturally diverse as University of Nottingham".

There is already a climate of unrest at the University of Nottingham, after the University wrongly accused a Muslim student and staff member of viewing illegal terrorist material. These accusations led to arrests and the incarceration of two innocent people.

But the university had no issue with right-wing students inviting a BNP member to write for a student paper and a holocaust denier to speak at an SU event.

Cox describes the allegations against him as a "witch-hunt". He is quoted in the Daily Mail as saying that "it's about time the NUS started representing ordinary students again and stopped acting as a front for left-wing zealots". He describes those who find jokes about the slavery of Africans distasteful and racist as "zealots", and anyone who doesn't as an "ordinary student". If academic freedom is curbed under suspicions of terror but freedom of speech is used to defend public bigotry, then serious questions need to be asked.

Adam Elliott-Cooper

UNIONS IN POLITICS

Australian Labor brings down leaders who defied conference

BY JANET BURSTALL

Treasurer Michael Costa and Premier Morris Iemma resigned from the New South Wales Labor government on Friday 5 September. Fundamentally, it was a victory for the huge vote at the New South Wales Labor State Conference in May against their plans to privatise electricity.

Iemma and Costa tried to push ahead with the plans, defying the conference vote, but eventually they were brought down. No NSW Labor Government will defy State Conference in a hurry again.

For the first time in living memory New South Wales has a Labor Premier and Deputy Premier both from the "left" faction, although Nathan Rees formally declared himself "unaligned" in order to take up his new position as Premier.

On Friday and over the weekend it seemed to be a good moment for supporters of public ownership, union rights and public services to press on and intensify all campaigns for improvements from NSW Labor.

But will they? How will Unions NSW, under the leadership of John Robertson, react? Unions NSW can claim a lot of credit for the defeat of privatisation of electricity generation, and of the Howard Government at the last federal election. How will they react to Rees's declaration of intent to cut the public sector and cap pay rises below the rate of inflation?

For, by Monday 8th, the new Premier was labelling government departments "absolutely ripe for reform". "Mr Rees's new cabinet team will tomorrow be briefed on the grim economic outlook that has put the state's triple-A credit rating at risk", reported the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

MIGRANT WORKERS

Campaigning in the unions

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

The second meeting of the "Checks and Raids" strategy group of the Campaign Against Immigration Controls met on Sunday 7 September. Activists, many new, discussed the situation facing migrant workers in London, with 150 workplace raids happening a week, where hundreds of workers are harassed by immigration officers and the police. Many have been detained and deported. Thousands more are now fearful of these raids.

This is the outcome of the introduction in February of employer fines of up to £10,000 for every "illegal worker", and a concerted campaign by government and the media to scapegoat migrants for all social problems. Simultaneously they create conditions where tax money and national insurance contributions can be quietly pocketed by employers, migrants can be denied services, and be exploited without any acknowledged workers' rights.

Landlords are being asked to conduct paper checks as well; migrants are being driven not only from work, but also from housing.

The meeting made arrangements to follow-up earlier solidarity with Latin American cleaners at the National Physical Laboratories, where immigration controls have not only been used to undermine workers organising, but also as a way of cutting the workforce by half! Actions will be planned with workers there to target the "Big Bang" celebrations.

This follows three actions over the summer initiated by CAIC and tube cleaner activists that have stormed the ISS and GBM cleaning company offices and have stopped the Bakerloo line, protesting that

100 cleaners were threatened over national insurance numbers, the collusion between GBM and immigration to deport three workers, and the sacking of the RMT rep at Stonebridge.

CAIC activists will be attending the TUC fringe to discuss migrant workers, and the Croydon Trades Council to meet with trade unionists from the Border Agency (including PCS members who work there). CAIC will do a workshop at the Convention of the Left.

We continue to plan actions with others around the London Underground cleaners' dispute; we will be distributing information sheets around the whole tube network to make sure cleaners know about the checks and to make the case that it is better to stay and fight these conditions on the tube in the unions than in more isolated workplaces.

CAIC believes cleaners and their unions need to go on the offensive and launch a determined campaign for regularisation. We are critical of the RMT and Unite unions for not doing more to fight for victimised cleaners and for failing to fight the immigration laws. Cleaners are not second grade members and that the fight on the underground is of importance to all migrant workers and the whole labour movement.

We will be working with Trades Councils throughout London and renewing links with local communities to help them prepare for and resist these raids and to deal with the aftermath where we can't prevent them. We are working on a political strategy in the unions and among communities to reverse these racist and persecutory policies once and for all.

To get involved, to donate to the campaign, or for more information e-mail mail.caic@gmail.com.

IRAN

Save Farzad Kamangar!

An appeal from Education International (the international confederation of teacher trade unions) and the Swedish teachers' union.

Farzad Kamangar, a 33-year old teacher and former trade unionist from the Kurdistan Province of Iran, is at risk of execution following the ruling issued at an unfair trial.

In spite of joint efforts from various national and international organisations to have death sentence of Farzad Kamangar commuted, it was upheld by the Supreme Court on 11 July 2008. Iranian trade union and human rights activists who show solidarity with Farzad are being subjected to intimidation by the Iranian authorities.

Kamangar, who worked as a teacher in rural areas and was a human rights activist, is accused of being a terrorist through his alleged affiliation to the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK. His lawyer, who was not permitted to defend him, says Farzad's trial was not in accordance with article 168 of the Iranian Constitution: "Political and press offences will be tried openly and in the presence of a jury, in courts of justice." In this case, only one judge reviewed the case within five minutes and the defendant was not allowed to speak.

A support committee has been established to defend the civil rights of Farzad Kamangar. Following the first meeting of the Committee, three teachers were arrested and taken to the Intelligence Detention Centre in Sanandaj, in the Iranian province of Kurdistan. Two — Hassan Ghorbani and Kaveh Rostami — are still in detention, while the third, Ahmad Ghorbani, was released on bail after two weeks. Farzad's supporters and their family members are regularly intimidated by police.

EI also condemns the torture of Farzad Kamangar while in detention and the subsequent denial of medical treatment. When

Farzad Kamangar

his family was last allowed to visit him in prison, his injuries were such that he was unable to walk.

What can you do?

Write to the Iranian authorities calling for a review of the case, the stopping and of the death sentence and torture and free association for trade unions.

Address: President Islamic Republic of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Palestine Avenue, Azerbaijan Intersection, Tehran 13168-43311, Islamic Republic of Iran

E-mail: dr-ahmadinejad@president.ir

Copy your letter to the Iranian embassy in your country.

Defend Anooosheh Azadbar!

Earlier this year, NUS conference elected Iranian socialist student activist Anooosheh Azadbar Honorary Vice-President of NUS, a proposal of Education Not for Sale activists. On 4 September, Anooosheh was brought before a court in Iran.

She faces charges of: plotting against the Islamic regime; plotting against the Islamic order; and acting against Iranian national interests with a left wing group.

The charges are connected to her involvement in a student anti-war demonstration in December last year — one of a series of demonstrations that sparked the widespread arrest of student activists at the start of 2008.

If Anooosheh is convicted she could be jailed for years. Anooosheh will return to court for further questioning; no date has yet been set. Several other student leaders are facing similar charges.

More information about solidarity with Anooosheh and her comrades soon.

- The politics of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty
- Why the working class is key
- Can the labour movement be transformed?
- Imperialism, national and war
- Marxism and oppression
- The AWL's history... and much more

£2.50/€1 including postage from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques to "AWL".

AL-BANNA TO AHMADINEJAD

Political Islam as clerical fascism

Martin Thomas examines Gilles Kepel's comprehensive history, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (Harvard University Press).

"Left-leaning Arab intellectuals have traditionally regarded the [Muslim] Brothers as a populist movement... [with] similarities to the workings of European fascism during... the 1930s...

"In the eyes of leftist intellectuals, both among Muslims and in the West, Islamist groups represented a religious variety of fascism..."

"But gradually, as Islamist numbers increased... the left discovered that Islamism had a popular base; consequently Marxist thinkers of every stripe, casting around for the mass support so critical to their ideology, began to credit Islamist activists with socialist virtues..."

Kepel reports this shift of attitudes in a dispassionate way. But the facts assembled in his book give a verdict. The recent granting of political credit to political Islam by would-be Marxists reflects those leftists' loss of self-confidence, in an era of bourgeois triumphalism, rather than any shift to the left by the Islamists.

Political Islam, or "Islamism", as a political movement or congeries of movements, is distinct from Islam as a religion. Before the late 70s, in modern times, if a government called itself "Islamic" or "Muslim", that was a vague gesture rather than a ferocious commitment. The only large exception was Saudi Arabia, a peculiarly archaic state.

Modern political movements, using modern political mechanics to convert society to an Islamic state, absolutely governed and permeated by revivalistically-rigorous Islamic doctrine, were levered into life and prominence in a sequence of three big turning points, 1967, 1973, and 1979.

The theory had been prepared before then. Hassan al-Banna and Mawlana Mawdudi, the founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jamaat e-Islami in India (later Pakistan) began activity in the late 1920s. Sayyid Qutb, a Muslim Brotherhood ideologist who has become the main literary inspiration for "harder" Sunni political Islam, wrote his books in the 1960s and was hanged by Egypt's secular government in 1966. Ruhollah Khomeiny formulated his thesis of direct political rule by senior clergy in 1970.

But the movements were weak. In Iraq, for example, the Shia-Islamist movements which now dominate politics there had originated in 1958-63, but until the 1970s were small circles of clerics and theological students, concerned mostly with pious discussion among themselves. They kept a low profile as much because they knew their ideas would seem uncongenial to the wider population as for fear of repression.

"The first Islamist onslaught", writes Kepel, "was against nationalism. The 1967 defeat [of the Arab states by Israel, in the war of that year] seriously undermined the ideological edifice of nationalism and created a vacuum to be filled... by Qutb's Islamist philosophy".

The rise of political Islam was also (so it seems to me, though Kepel does not spell this out) based in part, paradoxically, on the relative successes of Arab nationalism. Over the two decades before 1967 the Arab states had won political independence, and legislated land reforms and nationalisation.

Many of the cadres of political Islam would be young men from rural backgrounds who — thanks to the "successes" of nationalism — had become the first generation from their families to go to university, to live in big cities, and, often, to travel the world as migrant workers, especially in the Gulf.

Paradoxically, the cadres of consciously backward-looking political Islam would come from among the most "modernised" or "Westernised" people in their countries. They had been roused up and tantalised by nationalism and its promises — but also dashed down by them. "Qutb spoke to the young, born after independence, who had come along too late to benefit from the vast redistribution of spoils that followed the departure of the colonial occupiers".

Bourgeois nationalism must always create disappointments. What led to special tumult in the Arab world, rather than a "moderate" disillusion and "settling-down", was the peculiar attachment of Arab nationalism to an unrealistic (indeed, reactionary) objective, the destruction of "Zionism" (the Israeli Jews), and the peculiarly extreme conjunction, created by the oil economies, of seething poverty with vast wealth controlled by various species of bureaucratic "crony capitalism".

In 1973 the Arab states warred with Israel again, coming out of it a bit better, but not well enough to rehabilitate the nationalists. Oil prices and oil revenues increased hugely. The Saudi regime started pouring funds into promoting Islamic rigorism internationally.

"Prior to 1973, Islam was everywhere dominated by national or local traditions rooted in the piety of the com-

mon people", with a "motley establishment" of clerics who "held Saudi-inspired puritanism in great suspicion".

Now, "for the first time in 14 centuries, the same books (as well as cassettes) could be found from one end of the [Muslim world] to another... This mass distribution by the conservative Riyadh regime did not... prevent more radical elements from using the texts... to further their own objectives".

In the 1970s, and into the 1980s, "conservative governments on the Saudi model [and often with US approval] encouraged Islamism as a counterweight to the Marxists on university campuses whom they feared". There was "re-Islamisation" from above, even in countries where grassroots Islamist movements were weak or repressed.

World-wide, far beyond the Arab domain, "all Muslims were offered [and many, not just political Islamists, accepted] a new identity that emphasised their religious commonality while downplaying differences of language, ethnicity, and nationality". The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (an alliance of states) was set up in 1969; the Islamic Development Bank, in 1975.

In 1979, political Islam took power in non-Arab Iran, and became the banner of a long war, with popular support, in non-Arab Afghanistan, against the USSR's attempt to subjugate that country militarily.

The Shah's brutal modernisation "from above" in Iran had created mass discontent. While in most Sunni countries, the religious establishment was diffuse and heavily controlled at its higher levels by the state, in Shia Iran the clerics had an organised hierarchy outside state control.

In Sunni political Islam, the main leaders had been (and would continue to be) laymen. Khomeiny created the first political-Islamist movement using clerics as cadres, and proposing not just an Islamic state, but a state ruled by clerics.

He also introduced social demagoguery, otherwise a thinner seam in political Islam than in the European fascism, or even clerical-fascism, of the 1930s. "Neither Mawdudi nor Qutb gave any explicit social content to their theorising".

The Iraqi ayatollah Baqi as-Sadr, uncle and father-in-law of the current Mahdi Army leader Muqtada al-Sadr, had in 1961 published a book on "Islamic economics"; but the main distinctive upshot has been the rise of "Islamic banking", now a reputable sideline in the City of London.

All Islamists thought that "the coming reign of the sharia... would be built upon the ashes of socialism and of a Western world completely devoid of moral standards"; but it was Khomeiny who introduced a specific appeal for an "Islam of the people" and to the "disinherited" (mustafaeen).

Still, for Khomeiny, as Kepel notes, "the disinherited" was "so vague a term that it encompassed just about everyone in Iran except the shah and the imperial court... includ[ed] the bazaar merchants opposed to the shah". The main actual measure for the poor of Khomeiny's Iran would be distribution of state subsidies to the families of Islamist "martyrs".

Socially, Kepel sees political Islam as resting on two distinct groups — the "devout middle class", both traditional-mercantile and modern-professional, who feel mistreated by corrupt secular-nationalist state bureaucracies; and the young urban poor such as the Algerian "hittistes" (from the word hit, meaning wall: young unemployed men leaning against walls).

Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood

That small-bourgeois/ lumpenproletarian alliance has also generally been the social base of fascism.

Political Islam, however, has a vast range of variants, from middle-class movements confining themselves to mild pressure-group politics (Kepel cites the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, friendly to the monarchy) to plebeian "takfiris" for whom all outside their own ranks, even pious Muslims who deviate slightly, deserve terrorist chastisement.

Kepel sees the search for a middle way and a broad alliance, necessary to any successful political-Islamist movement, as ultimately unviable. He concludes that political Islam reached its high point around 1989 — with the USSR's retreat from Afghanistan, the temporary triumph of an Islamist regime in Sudan, the rise of Hamas and Islamic Jihad among the Palestinians, and Khomeiny's death-decree against Salman Rushdie — and has mostly declined since. He cites the defeat of the Islamist-terrorist "ultras" in Algeria and Egypt as evidence.

The trend, he argues, must be for the devout middle class to be co-opted and pulled towards parliamentary democracy, on the lines of the Turkish Islamists, and for the "ultras" to be isolated.

In 2008, eight years after Kepel published the first edition of his book, his conclusion looks implausible. Political Islam has had some defeats, but its success in Iraq shows it still has great vitality.

Kepel's error, I would guess, is shaped by a certain disdain: he just cannot believe that many people, in the Arabic and Muslim cultures which he loves, can be lastingly seduced by such crudities and brutalities.

What is true, surely, is that those cultures contain many strands utterly alien to political Islam. The assertion, common on the left, that hostility to political Islam implies de facto hostility to most Muslims, is untrue.

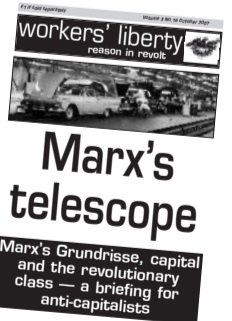
On those strands, a working-class socialist movement can build, answering the social questions which political Islam so obscures, on condition that the socialists acquire the self-confidence to brand the clerical-fascists for what they really are.

Marx's telescope

This Workers Liberty pamphlet looks at the light that a little-known but major work of Marx, the *Grundrisse*, can bring to

understanding 21st century capitalism. By Martin Thomas.

£1 including post and packaging from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.



SCOTTISH SOCIALIST PARTY

Socialism or Scottishism?

Dale Street discusses the political direction of the Scottish Socialist Party

Consider the recent Glasgow East by-election. According to the SSP's principal election broadsheet, its candidate "has no expensive possessions. She doesn't own a house, but lives in a top-floor rented housing association tenement. She has no car, no expensive furniture, no loot stashed away in a personal bank account. You may not agree with everything Frances Curran says. But even her opponents admit she's one of that rare breed of politicians who has never been seduced by glitz, wealth, and celebrity."

Nothing wrong with that in principle, even if it's pretty grossly overdone. (So anyone who lives on a worker's wage cannot expect to own a car, own a house, or have even the odd expensive possession?) But what about the politics of the campaign?

"Do you support independence for Scotland?" reads one question." Answer: "Yes, I do, totally. I don't believe Scotland is too weak, too small or too poor to go it alone. Exactly the opposite. We have oil reserves in the North Sea worth half a million. Where I disagree with the SNP is that I believe in a socialist Scotland."

From the final side of the election broadsheet the reader discovers that "Scotland is a fabulously rich country, with oil, gas, land, forestry, fish, coal, thousands of miles of coastline, wind and tidal power. Yet too many of our people are living on low pay and poverty benefits."

A smaller election leaflet ("An East-ender Who'll Fight for the East End") had a page headed: "Scotland's Oil Wealth Plundered — Did You Know?"

"Scotland has enough oil under the North Sea to give every man, woman and child in the land £500,000. ... Most of our oil is plundered by foreign multinationals. And what's left over is squandered by Westminster on wars and weapons of mass destruction. Frances Curran and the SSP want to take the wealth of the North Sea oil into public ownership. The black gold under our coastal waters doesn't belong to the tycoons or the London politicians. It belongs to the people of Scotland — and it's the people of Scotland who should benefit."

And all the policies put forward in the election material were for implementation ... the other side of Scottish independence!

In other words: If you wanted to see any of the specific policies implemented (e.g. higher taxes for the rich, free school meals, publicly owned public services), then the way to see them implemented would be to support independence for Scotland.

This was not an election campaign run on basic class politics ("class" was absent from the election material, and is largely absent from SSP publications in general) with a bit of Scottish populism grafted on here and there.

Scottish populism was the very basis. The material did not actually raise the slogan "It's Scotland's Oil", but everything in it to do with oil amounted to that slogan (with a slightly left-wing gloss on it — it's the oil of the people of Scotland).

What is the ideological foundation of all this?

The Scottish Socialist Party's support for an independent Scotland is not to be confused with support for Scotland's right to self-determination. Since somewhere around the middle of the eighteenth century, and arguably even earlier than that, independence for Scotland has had only

minority support (and sometimes an extremely small minority).

Right now, support for an independent Scotland continues to have only minority support (albeit a minority that continues to grow). Currently, independence is not the form of self-determination which most people in Scotland want.

Recognising Scotland's right to self-determination is one thing. Advocating that that self-determination must take a particular form (i.e. independence) is quite another. The former is the recognition of a basic democratic right. The latter is an element of a political programme.

There are three basic reasons — or so it seems to me — why the SSP sees independence for Scotland as being "a good thing" in and of itself. And they are all wrong.

Firstly, the creation of an independent Scotland would be an act of anti-imperialism. As issue 216 of the SSP's paper put it: "Being British means being a mercenary for President Bush, dispatching our youth to colonial frontlines in Afghanistan and Iraq and rendering ourselves the most dangerous and aggressive state in Europe today. If there was only one argument for independence, surely it is this: we must disengage ourselves from the UK/US war machine, through breaking up the British state."

This is fundamentally flawed. Scotland has been an integral part of the imperial centre throughout the history of the British Empire. If the creation of an independent Scotland really was an act of "anti-imperialism", then this would make the staid bourgeois leadership of the SNP ... the "anti-imperialist" vanguard!

In fact, the reason for the growth in support for independence for Scotland is the disappearance of the British Empire and the decline or disappearance of institutions directly or indirectly linked to the existence of the British Empire. It was the existence of that Empire and its associated institu-

North Sea oil: enriching Scotland?

tions which helped "hold together" the British state.

The second reason why the SSP sees independence for Scotland as being "a good thing" per se is that inherent in the SSP's overall conception of socialism is the notion that socialism is not something that arises out of capitalist development, but something to be achieved by undoing capitalist development and turning back the clock of history.

Thus, it is not just Scottish withdrawal from the UK which the SSP advocates. It also advocates Scottish withdrawal from the European Union, plus also the creation of a separate Scottish currency. Indeed, one of the SSP's main lines of attack against the SNP is: "Nor could the SNP's alternative to devolution — independence in Europe within a single European currency — offer genuine independence."

A third reason why the SSP backs independence for Scotland is the idea that Scotland is more left-wing, more militant, more socialist in its values than England. An independent Scotland would therefore allow this more left-wing, more militant, more socialistically-minded Scotland to come to the fore.

To be sure, the low level of support for the Tories in Scotland contrasts with the much higher level of support for the Tories in England. But anti-Toryism in Scotland is not the result of some inherently Scottish quality. It is the result of the fact that the Thatcherite policies pursued by successive Tory governments were felt more brutally in Scotland than in England (because the public spending, the industrial subsidies, and the role of local authorities which the Tories targeted played a more significant role in Scottish economic and social life than they did in England).

It is difficult to see any evidence that working-class organisation (e.g. levels of union membership, levels of strike activity,

effectiveness of union organisation in the workplace, vitality or otherwise of branch life in different unions) is substantially better in Scotland than in England.

And even if the Scottish working class was more militant, left-wing and combative than its English counterpart, there is surely no particular logic which requires the more militant section of the working class to be hived off into a separate state. Why, instead, should the more militant sections of a currently unified trade union movement not campaign and organise to revitalise, in this case, the UK-wide trade union movement?

The SSP's support for "an independent Scottish socialist republic", in the here and now, translates into support for an independent capitalist Scotland. It also relates, in a very convenient manner for the SSP, to the question of socialist political organisation in Scotland.

The SSP says that Scotland should be independent. Therefore (?) socialists in Scotland must organise independently of socialist organisations in England. The only socialist organisations outside of Scotland with which the SSP could have any kind of relationship are those which endorse the SSP's policy of independence for Scotland, and which, consequently respect the SSP's right to maintain its own organisational independence.

To put it more bluntly: the SSP has declared Scotland a no-go area for any political organisation not based solely in Scotland.

But Scotland is a small country. This means, according to the SSP, that there is no space in Scotland for two socialist parties. (It's strange that the bourgeoisie can have four political parties in Scotland, but the working class can have only one. Still...

Given that there is already a socialist party in Scotland — the SSP, as Sheridan-Solidarity does not count — the SSP finds itself in the happy situation of being the only socialist organisation in a region which can accommodate only one socialist party.

Inside the SSP, its policy for Scottish independence is considered so axiomatic that if you do not agree with it, you must be from the planet Zog.

The SSP's support for independence is not simply a single self-contained policy which can be isolated from its broader political programme. It is a policy which shapes and defines that programme. Putting it crudely: we talk about class, they talk about Scotland.

Workers' Liberty pamphlet
The 1707 Act
of Union and
the rise of the
Scottish
working
class.

£1 from PO Box 823,
 London, SE15 4NA

Iraq: moving against Maliki

Nadia Mahmood of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq discussed current developments in Iraq with Martin Thomas from *Solidarity*

Martin: The USA and the Maliki government in Iraq are negotiating an agreement. It looks as if it will say that US troops have to be out of Iraqi cities by June next year, and combat forces out of Iraq altogether by 2011.

The background here seems to be that the Maliki government is becoming more confident. Until recently, they felt they had to agree to almost anything the Americans wanted, because without American military support their government would collapse, but now they seem to feel they can hold.

It's a big shift from the State Of Forces Agreement which the Americans were trying to push through a few months ago, which would essentially have made the American military a sort of parallel government in Iraq, with an indefinite mandate.

Of course there will probably be all sorts of let-out clauses. But it will be difficult for both the USA and the Maliki government to pull back from a June 2009 date for withdrawing troops from the cities, once they have announced it.

Nadia: Recently the Americans said that they were handing over the city of Khanaqin to local forces; but at the same time they announced that American troops would still be there!

The Americans are going to stay around, even if they say that they are going to leave the cities. Our aim is not just to get them out of the cities, but to get them out of the whole country.

But the al-Maliki government is more in control of the cities of Iraq. They have a better situation than, say, two years ago. Now they can say that they will not allow any militias apart from their army. They don't allow the Mahdi Army to be a military power any more.

Iran backing al-Maliki, and Iran not wanting al-Maliki to be close to America, are also factors here. Al-Maliki would not sign the State Of Forces Agreement because Iran didn't want it.

M: In some ways the government being stronger is a good thing, making them reject the State Of Forces Agreement. It also brings dangers.

This government still has Saddam Hussein's anti-union laws. It has Decree 8750 from 2005, empowering it to seize all union funds. It has the decree it made which said that the oil industry management should not talk to the union. If it gets stronger, it may be in a position to implement these measures more strongly.

N: There have recently been strikes in Iraq, against the finance ministry, to demand the restoration of the pay increase granted in July to people employed by the government.

When the strikers were demonstrating outside the ministry, the Badr Corps [militia of the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council, SIIC, one of the parties in the government coalition] attacked them. The government is using terror through militias under the name of the Iraqi army.

Yes, the government is controlling more. There is a conflict between the trade unions and the government. There is also

a conflict between the government and the Kurdish parties over control of the cities of Khanaqin and Kirkuk. This conflict between Arab and Kurd is very dangerous.

M: What should we be saying about the Iraqi government? For example, Iraq has a constitution, but it's a terrible constitution. Should we be agitating for a new, democratic constitution? New elections? A new constituent assembly?

Could the Americans' longer-term policy be that, once they have got the Iraqi government and the Iraqi army sticking together a bit, and themselves a little bit more into the background, they get a military coup which they can deny involvement with but which gives them a stable regime to deal with in Iraq? They don't want parties close to Iran running Iraq.

N: It used to be that we were always talking against the occupation. Now, if you look at how people are talking in the labour movement, it's not against the occupation in the first place, it's against the government.

We have to be against this government. The workers' movement has to stand up and elect its own representatives — fight for its own workers' government.

This government is obeying the International Monetary Fund. The IMF is imposing conditions on the Iraqi government to restrict wages.

Three months ago the government increased wages for people employed by the government, which is a lot of people in Iraq. I was in Iraq at the time: everybody was happy about this wage rise.

Then in late August they said they had made a mistake and would take back the wage rise. That put people in trouble: they had used the wage rise to buy things. Two trade unions organised demonstrations, but the government still stopped the wage rise.

This government is representing the interests of the big companies and of the International Monetary Fund. It is not representing the workers. The workers ask why the government objects to them having a wage rise, when there is no problem about the MPs having a pay rise.

Once this government is settled, it will start further attacks, on wages, on privatisation, on making people pay for education and health. Once they have established a bit of security, they will turn to other issues.

They want to have just one trade union organisation in Iraq, but appointed by the government. The workers say that the government should not intervene in their right to organise themselves.

The government has also said that no trade union in Iraq is allowed to have a bank account, apart from what is approved by the government.

One of the demands the unemployed union is raising is that unemployed people should have jobs or social security from the government.

If we get a stable government, then the workers' movement is going to have the same tasks as the workers in any other country with a stable government which represents the interests of the big companies, not the workers.

The workers are fed up with the government parties. People are now talking publicly against the Islamic parties and against Islamic figures like Sistani. They don't have the same authority and respect they used to have.

The labour movement has suffered from the threats of the Islamic militias. In Basra, for example, Hassan Jumaa, who is the leader of the oil union, can't say a word against the Islamic parties for fear of being assassinated. And the militias and the Islamic parties are trying to organise their own unions.

But we are involved in two trade union federations, the General Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions with Subhi Albadri, and the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions with Falah Alwan, which are clearly and publicly against the government.

WORKERS' DEMANDS

M: What are the main issues around which the workers and the people in Iraq and should be mobilised?

N: Economic demands, not political demands as yet. For example, wage rises, social security or jobs, opposition to privatisation, trade union rights.

There have also been some actions against the draft oil law, but the main thing that will bring people into action and onto the streets is wages.

The housing situation is very bad. But I don't think there is space for a campaign for the government to build more houses. The first thing people want is electricity.

In Basra the electricity is two hours on, four hours off. But

they can cut it at any time.

In June and July I was in Iraq: in Basra, Nasiriyah, Baghdad, Kirkuk, Sulaimaniya. In Baghdad, the social situation is different from one suburb to another. In one suburb, it may be like Afghanistan: women can't walk on the streets without veils. You go to another suburb, and you see boys and girls together, and women wearing whatever they like and staying out late at night.

It's the same city. But it depends on who is in power in each suburb.

In some you have the Sahwa militia [the "Awakening Councils", Sunni militias co-opted by the Americans] in power. I spoke to some of them, young men: they said, before we got our salaries from Al Qaeda, now we get them from the Americans.

In the south, the Shia Islamic groups control whole cities. Women cannot go on the streets without veils. There are no shops selling alcohol.

If you go to Sulaimaniya, you see an economic boom. The city is becoming bigger and bigger. There are lots of new buildings, hotels, supermarkets, apartments. But the electricity doesn't work.

If there's all that money for the new buildings, why isn't there electricity? The new buildings belong to private owners, and they have their own electricity generators, so they don't care about the public supply.

You get small companies running generators and selling electricity, but it's so expensive.

In Kurdistan, women have a better situation than in the south, but the male chauvinism is horrible. In my generation, there was a sense of respect for women, and some kind of equality; but now the new generation, girls aged 16, 17, 18, find themselves not allowed to mix with boys, or walk the streets alone.

And, across most of Iraq, there is no fun! Forget about swimming pools. Forget about night clubs. When I was a teenager living in Iraq, we used to go to night clubs, but not now.

I found that people just sit at home and watch the TV. Song and dance shows - and horrible songs. It's depressing.

People are fed up with the Islamic parties, and with what their leaders do. For example, the Iraqi Hezbollah group - its leaders rape women, they kill them, and then they drink whisky, and pictures of that are sent on mobile phones. They are gangsters. Their support is based on families, or tribes. The Fadila party is based round a family that smuggles oil.

M: What is the view of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq on Kirkuk and Khanaqin?

N: The party says that these cities should be run by elected representatives of the people. We call on the people to elect their representatives. How to do it, that is the problem.

M: So you're saying that the future of each of those cities should be decided by the people living there now? [Both cities suffered forced "Arabisation" under Saddam, and have seen re-"Kurdisation" since 2003].

N: Yes, absolutely.

ELECTIONS

M: Provincial elections in Iraq were due to happen in October. It now looks as if they won't happen until early next year. What's your assessment of the likely outcome, and has your party discussed participating in these elections?

N: No, we haven't discussed participating. The elections are a business between the Islamic militias. For example, when the government attacked the Mahdi Army in Basra, in March 2008, that was all about preparing for the elections.

The elections are about how to share the cake among the Islamists, and they don't hesitate to kill their competitors, or each other. There is no people's involvement. It is among themselves. So we are not taking part.

The whole process that they call democracy - it has nothing to do with democracy, they are just deceiving people.

That's why we say that people should organise themselves. That is why we contributed by organising the Iraqi Freedom Congress, to be a mass political party and an alternative.

With the Iraqi Freedom Congress, we could possibly go and participate.

M: The Iraqi Freedom Congress has some of the political slogans of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq, but none of the economic slogans. But you said that the economic and

Solidarity

• A call has been made for an International Labour Conference in Iraq. The conference, which is supported by the Australian equivalent of the TUC and by American union organisations, as well as Iraqi trade unions, is scheduled to be held in February 2009 in Erbil, in Kurdish northern Iraq.

For more information about supporting this conference, details about financial help and a copy of the initial statement:

<http://www.workerstoday.com/english/>

• The US government wants the Iraqi government to pass an oil law which would effectively hand over Iraq's oil to foreign companies such as BP and Shell for a generation. Hands Off Iraqi Oil are demonstrating on Saturday 11 October

Time: 12 noon. Assemble: Shell House, SE1 7NA (Opposite Waterloo train station.) Route: through central Lond onto BP's Head Quarters, Grosvenor Sq.

US deal to pull out troops?

BY MARTIN THOMAS

The USA's attempt to get a "State of Forces Agreement" that would give the US military open-ended powers as a virtual parallel government in Iraq has failed. Negotiations between the USA and the Iraqi government are now around formulas which call for US troops to be out of Iraq's cities by June next year — there are currently 16,000 within Baghdad, for example — and all US combat forces to be out of Iraq by 2011.

This shift indicates that Nouri al-Maliki's Iraqi government is more confident and assertive. The social situation in Iraq is still hellish by the standards of any stable civil society, but calmer than it was.

Civilian deaths from violence are now about 500 a month, as against over 3500 a month in late 2006. About 10,000 people a month are fleeing their homes, rather than about 90,000.

US military deaths were down to eight a month in July-August, from a peak of 120-odd. The number of Iraqi civilians killed by US troops has declined from over one a day in 2005 to almost none.

Attacks on oil pipelines and installations have decreased from almost one a day to one a month. Crude oil production has risen from about two million barrels a day to 2.5; with oil prices high, this brings the Iraqi government large revenues.

Baghdad still has an average of only 11 hours electricity a day, but that is up from six hours last summer. Inflation has slackened. Unemployment remains high — about 25 to 40% — but Baghdad university reports that student attendance is up from 50% in 2006-7 to 80% in 2007-8.

In short, the Iraqi army, the state administration, and the Maliki government have begun to congeal into something solid.

Socialist Worker claims that the USA's climbdown on the State of Forces Agreement was due to "growing opposition... widespread anger... Iraqi rebellion... huge anger... Iraqis took to the streets in protest" (*Socialist Worker*, 26 August). But that is not what has happened.

The "resistance" hailed by *Socialist Worker* has got weaker. It is the wearing-down of the more militant sectarian militias that has allowed the skeletal framework of the Iraqi government to begin to acquire a little bit of sinew and muscle, and to become more assertive with the USA.

All of this is unstable. Arab-Kurdish disputes over Khanaqin and Kirkuk; the forthcoming provincial elections; and the integration into the Iraqi army of Sunni-sectarian militias who eventually decided they could do a better deal with the USA than with Al-Qaeda, are just three possible flashpoints.

But the basic trend, for now, is that of the Iraqi government — once little more than a disparate collection of careerists sitting in Green Zone offices, with little coordination among themselves and little control over anything outside the Zone — becoming stronger.

Will the semi-demi-stabilisation allow the other key force in the situation, the Iraqi workers' movement, to assert itself more?

Unions should be able to rally their forces, and win wider support, on economic issues — automatic cost-of-living protection for wages; social security for the jobless; public works, under public control (new housing, for example), creating new jobs; better rations; worker control over reconstruction plans; opposition to privatisation, especially of oil.

Working-class political activists can link those issues with political demands: democratic control over local security, backed up by union militias; a new constituent assembly to formulate a democratic constitution including workers' rights; repeal of anti-union laws and decrees; self-determination for Kurdistan and for Arab Iraq...

The openings may be short-lived, and the Iraqi workers' movement has to recover from much battering. But the more that socialists internationally focus our attention on helping the Iraqi workers' movement, rather than applauding that movement's bitter enemies in the sectarian militias, the greater the chances of that movement being able to lead the peoples of Iraq to full democratic self-determination, free from both occupation troops and sectarian militias.

Maliki: becoming more confident

nationalities in the Empire, even though their view was that oppressed nations should have the right to separate.

N: The Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan is not a nationalist party. It is a party for an area which has not been under the central Iraqi government since 1991. The party says that it wants a vote in Kurdistan on its future, and it is for independence for Kurdistan. And now the Baghdad government is threatening to attack Kurdistan.

M: Quite a lot of Arabs have moved to Iraqi Kurdistan to find work, and a lot of Kurds live in Arab Iraq. Which party should they join?

N: It's optional. If you are a Kurd and you live in Basra, and you want to support the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan, it is your right to choose. But with common sense, you would join the Iraqi party.

M: Tell us about the international labour conference, to take place in Erbil in February 2009...

N: Some leaders of unions in Iraq have signed to support the conference, and there is interest in it from trade unionists in the USA. I know that in Iraq the organisers have been negotiating with other unions.

M: What are the differences between the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq and the General Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq?

N: The leaders of both federations — Subhi Albadri of GFWCUI and Falah Alwan of FWCUI — are both members of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq.

Three years ago Falah was a member of the political bureau of the WPIraq. We told him: there are some members of your union, who are not members of the party, who have complaints about your policies. They say that you are dictating and not listening to them. Please take their complaints into consideration and try to compromise with them.

Falah said it was nothing. There were no problems. The people who were complaining were only talking about very small issues.

The problem grew and grew, until some of the members left. They established a new organisation — no, at first, they said they were *the* Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions, they claimed ownership of the trade union.

Falah had refused to hold a congress to elect a new leadership. We asked Falah why he didn't listen to them.

So you had two groups claiming the same name. The party tried to intervene to get them to talk to each other. We got them to agree to have different names, GFWCUI and FWCUI.

Political differences between FWCUI and GFWCUI? I would say that there are no political differences whatsoever.

On the Erbil conference, however, because they see it as the GFWCUI's conference, Falah won't support it. He may change his mind in the future.

The party said that it will support any union that defends workers' rights and organise movements. If it's Falah, we will support Falah; if it's Subhi, we will support Subhi; if it's Hassan Jumaa, we will support him. The party will support any union that defends workers.

social questions are the ones that are most likely to mobilise workers at the moment. If you're going to contest the elections - maybe in the same way that the socialists in Germany ran in elections in the late 19th century, even though their party, their meetings, and their newspapers were illegal, and built themselves by doing that - then surely you want to put forward the economic policies?

N: Our issue is a political issue, rather than a security issue. Some of our people have been killed by the Islamic militias, but now our members are walking the streets fairly openly. It is not because of security that we are not taking part. It is a political problem.

Our position is that the system was set up under the occupation, and it is not valid. Any government is going to be linked to and supervised by the occupiers.

Also, it may be that we would not get votes, and if we don't get votes, then standing in elections is just exposing our weakness. Does it push our movement forward if we take part? If it does, then we do it. If it doesn't, we won't.

M: The governing parties seem to be worried that the Sadr movement will do well in the provincial elections.

N: I don't think so. They are so exposed now. Nobody will trust them. They are based on gangsters.

REORGANISING

M: Earlier in 2008, the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan was set up as a separate party from the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. Can you explain this?

N: It's a very old story. Historically, the Worker-communist Party of Iraq was established in Iraqi Kurdistan. About 95% of our members were Kurdish. They used the Kurdish language.

In 2002 I, as an Arabic-speaker and maybe five others, got tired of the situation where this was supposed to be an Iraqi party but in fact it was a Kurdish party. We went to a conference of the party in Germany. I told them that if someone was passing the conference and listened, they would say it was a conference of a Kurdish party. We, the Arabic-speakers, were like ambassadors in the party. I said we needed to establish a Worker-communist Party of Iraq.

When the war started, we said we would put the subject on hold. In 2003, the party leadership went to Baghdad and they started work.

But we saw that Kurdistan and Iraq were developing really clear differences. We need two parties to respond to two different situations.

At our conference in 2006, we voted for two parties, but we didn't do it. Eventually, in 2008, some of our comrades in Iraqi Kurdistan said they would establish the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan and continue to work in a comradely way with the Worker-communist Party of Iraq.

We said we would leave it to our members to decide individually in which party they would work.

M: Historically, the view of the socialist movement has been that you organise political parties based on states and not nationalities. For example, in the Tsarist Empire, the Marxists organised a party uniting workers from all the

WILLIAM BLAKE

Paradise the hard way

BY PETER BURTON

Born in London in 1757, William Blake lived through both the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, and witnessed the vicious repression in Britain after these events by the ruling class. Although a deeply spiritual, religious, man, he was nevertheless appalled by the condition of his fellow human beings and laid the blame squarely on the twin evils of Church and state.

Blake was part of a group of close-knit skilled artisans who placed more weight on the moral value of their products than the market value. The fierce independence Blake sought throughout his life manifested itself in trying to obtain total control over the labour process. He published his own illuminated books, in which the text and illustrations could be printed from a single plate, etched in relief before being sold direct to the buyers for a fair price. But the process was so time consuming Blake never gained materially and he never escaped the hated, but much needed, patronage of patrons.

Blake's independent spirit was evident in his involvement in a dispute in the Swedenborgians at the end of the 18th century. Emmanuel Swedenborg was a Swedish spiritual philosopher and the Swedenborgians stood for a millenarian proclamation of a New Age, hostility to priest craft, a positive view of human sexuality and a visionary reading of the material world. Their split was over the movement's aim of creating a New Church and Emmanuel Swedenborg's attitudes to sexuality. (Swedenborg had a vision of an overtly sexual heaven and tolerated concubinage).

Blake identified with the expelled minority who opposed this vision but he also had differences with it. Opposition to Swedenborg was grouped around his publisher Jacob Johnson and his journal the *Analytical Review*. But Blake was not a joiner of organisations. He always stood with the oppressed as an individual.

Although like all dissenters Blake identified with the French Revolution and defended Thomas Paine's republicanism from reactionary attacks, he also had a lifelong enthusiasm for visionary experiences which gave him a correlative scepticism about the power of reason. This marked him out from both the Painite Republican Deists and the Johnson circle.

Blake's poem *French Revolution* was not printed. There is a proof copy of the first of seven intended poems. Unlike all other poems the intention was to print it rather than engrave it and use language that was far more direct. Blake's hope was to break out of the circle of 50 or so admirers in a way that Tom Paine was doing with his *Common Sense* and *Rights of Man*. However Blake's publisher Joseph Johnson (also publisher of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792 and Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* in 1793) saw the reaction to the publication of Paine's *Rights of Man* in 1791 and this ceased printing the further six books of poems. Blake himself packed Paine off to France from Joseph Johnson's twenty minutes before a warrant arrived under the Royal Proclamation against Divers Wicked Seditious Writings in May 1792.

*'Let the Brothels of Paris be opened
'With many an alluring dance,
'To awake the Physicians thro' the city,
Said the beautiful Queen of France.*

*The King awoke on his couch of gold,
As soon as he heard these tidings told:
"Arise and come, both fife and drum,
And the Famine shall eat both crust and crumb."
Then he swore a great and solemn oath:
To kill the people I am loth,
But if they rebel, they must go to hell:
They shall have a Priest and a passing bell.*

French Revolution

Central to Blake's differences with others in his circle were his ideas about selfhood and his attitudes to sexuality. Blake was willing to put "the self" into hazard in the interests of his prophetic vision: "Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life" he declared. This contrasted with the Painite idea of the autonomous individual. The modern day equivalent might be a kind of idealist self-help New Ager, working on oneself in order to liberate humanity.

For instance, Blake's *Newton* (1795) demonstrates his opposition to the "single-vision" of scientific materialism.

And Blake saw sexuality as unruly and depicted sexual difference as an unstable rather than a fixed part of human nature (see his *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*).

Blake's image of Newton. Blake did not wholeheartedly embrace "reason"

What Blake shared with Paine however was a rough handling of the Bible. In Paine's *Age of Reason* the Bible was dismissed as a priestly distortion of Hebrew folk tradition. And Blake wrote in his *Notebook*:

*The Hebrew nation did not write it,
Avarice and Chastity did shite it.*

Notebook, E 516.

Blake supported Paine for the latter's attacks on the Bible's "perversions of Christ's words and acts".

But if radical politics abstracted the individual from the sum of human brotherhood, in its stress on the autonomy of human reasoning power, then it would perpetuate, in Blake's view, a mystery as destructive of human potential as the "state religion" it wished to replace.

Visions of the Daughter of Albion (1793) contains Blake's critique of Judeo-Christian values of marriage. Oothoon and Bromion are chained together, as Bromion has raped Oothoon and she now carries his baby. Theotormon and Oothoon are in love, but Theotormon is unable to act, considering her polluted, and ties himself into knots of indecision.

Many of Blake's most angry poems were published in the collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience*.

In the *Chimney Sweeper* Blake contrasts the drudgery and shocking lives of a child chimney sweep with the intoxicating image of a promised afterlife in Tom's dream of an Angel — a thinly disguised attack on the Church. If you submit to misery and don't resist oppression we will give you a dream. The form and language of the poem give a sense of fate for the life of the child slave. It's a poem that still matters today, given the scale of child and sweatshop labour that still exists in the 21st century.

*When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue.
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.
There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said
'Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.' —
And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight! —
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.
And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run
And wash in a river, and shine in the Sun.
Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father, & never want joy.
And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.
A little black thing among the snow:
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.
Because I was happy upon the heath,*

*And smil'd among the winters snow:
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.
And because I am happy & dance & sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.*

The Chimney Sweeper

In *Holy Thursday* Blake describes an annual procession, when thousands of the poorest children in London were marched from charity schools to St Pauls. There they demonstrate their piety while their patrons look on. There is an ironic attack on the "wise guardians of the poor".

*Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two and two in red and blue and green,
Grey headed beadles walking before with wands as white as snow;
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames waters flow.*

Oh what a multitude they seemed, those flowers of London town.

*Seated in companies they sit, with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs:*

*Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.
Now like a mighty wind they raise to Heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven among.
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor.
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.*

Holy Thursday

In *Holy Thursday of Experience* Blake contrasts the bounty of nature in a rich and bountiful land with the poverty and misery of the children. The disbelief of the speaker serves to emphasise the absurdity of plentiful nature and poverty existing side by side reinforcing its unnaturalness. But the children are also seen as a force and the poem uses plainer imagery to suggest that both anger and nature will end this oppression.

In the *Garden of Love* the innocence and natural development of childhood that took place in the past is distorted in the present by priests and their draconian church laws. Every element of the poem — its form, language, repetition and syllables contribute to the portrayal of a world that is full of despair and oppression; the poem becoming darker and darker with each line. The *Garden* reveals a loss of innocence and a denial of natural sexuality with the graves representing the death of pleasure and beauty — namely his complete opposition to chastity, shame and marriage.

*And saw what I never had seen;
A Chapel was built in the midst,
Where I used to play on the green.
And the gates of this Chapel were shut
And "Thou shalt not," writ over the door;
So I turned to the Garden of Love
That so many sweet flowers bore.
And I saw it was filled with graves,
And tombstones where flowers should be;
And priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
And binding with briars my joys and desires.*

The Garden Of Love

London is also full of anger at the state of society.

*I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear
How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every blackning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldier's sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls.
But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born Infants' tear,
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.*

London

The poems' power lies in the juxtaposition of powerful images as Blake wanders through the streets of London — its key words are "Mind forg'd Manacles" — Blake's equivalent of Marx's false consciousness.

People are imprisoned by their fears and false beliefs, "the cop in all our heads" — this leads to fatalism and false

The missing woman

RACHAEL FERGUSON REVIEWS *HER NAKED SKIN*

This is the first play written by a living woman to be staged at the Olivier (National Theatre). It is a love story set against the backdrop of the suffragist struggle of the early 20th century.

The scene is set with the appropriate props — the sash, the placard, the banner, and shocking original footage of Emily Davison's fatal leap in front of the King's horse — before the characters are introduced to us one by one. Each have been imprisoned for crimes associated with their involvement in the Women's Social and Political Union.

At this point the play is both funny and atmospheric (thanks to an impressive set design), while the prison scenes portray the dedication of the suffragists to the cause of women's emancipation. It's not long, however, until the high drama of the politics of the time is ditched in favour of lesbian melodrama.

Now I don't disapprove of a bit of lesbian melodrama, in fact the romance between the main characters I found moving at times. But what is frustrating is that there appears to be little real insight into how the politics of liberation and class struggle would have been entwined in the personal lives and relationships of the women depicted in the play. Perhaps I should say the lives of working-class women.

The lovers of the tale are a married, upper class lady and an East-End factory girl. While we come to understand the upper-class woman's desire for freedom, and her sense of isolation and deep sadness caused by the constraints of her gender, the factory girl has barely any personality at all. Her motivations for joining the WSPU, where she came from, how her life and relationships might be affected by not only her dedication to the struggle for the vote but her consuming love for a comrade, are left untouched.

The class dynamics only make an appearance as the upper-class woman's paternalism towards her lover — she orders her food at a restaurant, and speaks for her and so on. One hunger strike and one suicide attempt later, still the factory girl appears to have little inner life.

Overall, the play was enjoyable and not devoid of political commentary — the scenes depicting the debates of male parliamentarians of the time were discerning and believable — but why the playwright chose this period for her tale of love between two women is not obvious. There is a massive missed opportunity in this tale as, disappointingly, working-class people are made the object of someone else's story.

FILM

A dark tale, prettified

ROSALIND ROBSON REVIEWS *THE DUCHESS*

The reviewers said it would be pants (bloomers?) and so it was in the main. I went to see it because I'm a sucker for costume-drama feminism. And really, if the story had been told as it should have been, I would have been appalled, moved... something other than bored and slightly irritated.

Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, is married at 17 to the most powerful aristocrat in England at the end of the 18th century. Her husband is a complete prick, albeit one with half a dozen gigantic houses (which in the film seems to make life worth living for Georgiana). Multiple pregnancies ending in stillbirth and miscarriage follow. Then two girls come along. Not good enough, the Duke must have his male heir. Finally a boy, conceived after Georgiana's husband rapes her, arrives.

Georgiana has an affair with a young Lord Charles Grey, then a Radical (and more or less Republican) Whig, but later to be Prime Minister with very different politics. The Duke, who has installed his mistress at the family's home-stead, threatens Georgiana with divorce and permanent separation from her children. Her daughter by Charles Grey is taken away from her to be brought up by his fam-

ily. She dies at the age of 49 (although we don't see that bit because Keira Knightley, playing Georgiana, is not allowed to grow older).

What should have been a dark, violent and basically racist story of Georgian upper-class social life was turned into something slick and gorgeous to look at, and more or less insipid in content. So much so that the censors managed to give it a 12a certificate — although this is illegitimacy, sexual intrigue, scandal! Everything about this film was false and contrived.

The director said he wasn't trying to draw parallels between Georgiana's life and Princess Di's. Come off it! Georgiana is portrayed, in an annoyingly modern way, as "a fashion queen". As someone who wants everyone to love her. Ralph Fiennes plays the Duke as an emotionally-constipated, dim man. Remind you of someone?

Then, having been fairly upfront about the rape, affairs, illegitimacy, etc, the film goes all coy when we see Georgiana trying to abort her conceived-by-rape son (at least I think that was what was going on).

This was a life of an upper class women and you could be forgiven for thinking, why care? Except her story of sexual slavery has a lot of resonance today. A shame then that it was so badly mistold.

despair. In other words mental imprisonment, manipulation and psychological oppression were not abstract concepts for Blake but as much a prison as bars and steel doors. If you couldn't imagine a society without oppression and exploitation, you really were in a prison. He attacks the monarchy, militarism and imperialism and their hypocrisy and in the last stanza also has a pop at marriage and its corollary — prostitution.

In the *Prophetic Books* Blake continues with these themes. *America — a Prophecy* dramatises the revolutionary war in America. Blake seeing the war as a step forward for world wide liberty and an opportunity for the British ruling class to see the futility of militaristic policy. Blake's *Europe — a Prophecy* progresses onwards from *America* describing war and revolution in Europe, but with plates of Blake's illustrations illuminated in code because of the fierce political repression of those who identified with the French Revolution. The poem tells the British establishment to head the warning of a failed militaristic policy in America.

The *Book of Urizen* is one of the major prophetic books of Blake, taking its name from the character Urizen in Blake's mythology, who represents alienated reason as the source of oppression. The book describes Urizen as the "primeval priest", and describes how he became separated from the other Eternals to create his own alienated and enslaving realm of religious dogma. Los and Enitharmon create a space within Urizen's fallen universe to give birth to their son Orc, the spirit of revolution and freedom. He is symbolic of the French and American revolutions. In form the book is a parody of the Book of Genesis.

Blake moves on from specific instances of oppression and injustice in the *Songs* to talk about underlying causes. It's the ruling class that has invented heaven and Church

laws with its "Thou shall not" bans, policed by black gowned priests, economic power and slavery in London's "charter'd street", cemented by personal fear and self imposed limitations in a corrupt world. Fear corrupts the powerful, the individual and society which, in turn, lead to a hardening of the individual and society when the repression is not honestly addressed and fought against by us all.

"Prisons are built with stones of law, brothels with bricks of Religion". Charity is a crime as it reinforces an unequal status quo and ignores the cause — we would say, capitalism.

"As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys"; "Shame is Pride's cloak"; "A dead body revenges not injuries"; "Prudence is a rich ugly old maid courted by incapacity". *Proverbs of Hell*.

Religion, Patriotism, Commerce and War are all hypocritical excuses for a status quo that exploits the poorest and weakest. Its cause, for Blake, was a lack of vision and imagination and an over-emphasis on Reason at the expense of the former.

The *Prophetic Books* present a vision of a dynamic, dialectical process in society, Blake seeing oppression and division followed by revolution as cyclical.

He gives the different energies, forces and desires that exist within societies at different stages of development coded symbolic names, characteristics and stories and saw change occurring as a product of the unfolding of "contraries". In doing so he revealed eternal truths about humanity through the specific injustices of his time making Blake a revolutionary. "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction".

Blake's vision of *Jerusalem* was not just rational govern-

ment for the people by the people, as it was for his radical contemporaries. He wanted the liberation of all the unrealised potential he saw in his fellow man — sexual, artistic and creative. But he believed that political change alone could not bring about this liberation. While he always bitterly opposed repressive institutions and inequalities, and wanted them destroyed, Blake also thought that humanity would need to experience some kind of spiritual leap in order to be truly liberated. So in Blake's work there is the collision of revolutionary inspiration with the rational radicalism of Paine and Wollstonecraft, and the older traditions of Antinomian dissent.

*And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountain green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?*

*And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic mills?*

*Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!*

*I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.*

Preface to Milton

SEAN MATGAMNA REPLIES TO MOSHE MACHOVER*

Israel, Iran and socialism

COMRADE MACHOVER,

You are someone for whom I have long had a certain regard and even affection. I regret that you have chosen to join in the bizarre heresy-hunt, entirely Stalinist in conception, purpose, and execution, around my discussion article "What If Israel Bombs Iran?", *Solidarity* 3/136.

I would have said that your chief trait, and sometimes fault, is an obstreperous pedantry rather than the sloppy-mindedness of those with whom you now run in a pack. I would also have expected from you an instinctive resistance to mob hysteria.

Most — not all — of your contribution is a perfectly legitimate piece of polemic against what I actually wrote. But if you lie down with dogs, you get fleas; and if you frolic with pigs, you get splattered with mud. You too, comrade Machover!

You radically misrepresent me as saying: "While an attack on Iran 'will most likely lead to great carnage in the Middle East, and beyond', it would be wrong to object to it if it is undertaken by Israel".

This is simply a lie! Something that I would not have expected from you, but everyday fare for the *Weekly Worker*.

Four weeks before your article, the *Weekly Worker* had a front page picturing the mushroom cloud of a nuclear explosion and the words: "AWL's Sean Matgamna: excusing an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran".

There is no ambiguity there, and therefore no legitimate resort to attempts to "explain" the headline by way of tricky wording inside the paper. The headline was plain invention about me. It was also a piece of extra-malignant demonisation of Israel. ("Threat of Israeli nuclear attack on Iran horribly real" was the next issue's headline). It is not good that Israel has nuclear weapons; but the idea that Israel would use nuclear bombs in any situation other than a perceived immediate threat of being overwhelmed by Arab or Islamist forces is, I suggest, on the same plane as what the *Weekly Worker*'s front-page text and picture attributed to me.

Your own cited cases when Israeli leaders supposedly discussed using nuclear weapons, or the threat of nuclear weapons — "it is known to have seriously considered using it against its Arab neighbours in 1967 and 1973" — were situations of such perceived immediate threat (and it is not at all certain that Israel had a nuclear option in 1967).

I don't know whether you have even read recent issues of the *Weekly Worker*, though your text suggests that you have. But, coming into such a discussion late, you have, I think, a responsibility to read everything important that is in play in it. Don't you?

Unless you explicitly dissociate, the implication is that you associate with and endorse the loony-tunes politics of the libelling paper in which you publish, and of the not-quite-reconstructed Stalinist clique who control it.

Where do you stand on the Stalinist hysteria? Do you want to assert that I "excused" an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran? Or be associated by implication with that assertion? If that claim was in your view true to any extent at all, then why does your comprehensive article ignore it?

Your article has the merit that it is an attempt to discuss systematically what I wrote; and you bring a startling new formulation into the discussion: "the USA is the main enemy of mankind".

WHAT I WROTE

But before discussing your article it will be worth while establishing what I did and did not say.

I was discussing something over which the left could have no influence. Talk of the working class in the area reshaping the situation within the time span in which an Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear installations is likely — between the US presidential election on 4 November and 20 January 2009, when a new US president takes office — is simply childish, and I notice you do not engage in such talk.

The thing that concerned me was the response of the would-be left. We can be sure that everyone within earshot of us, including the British government, will oppose an Israeli strike. That is not the difficult bit. The difficulties start elsewhere. Most leftists will measure how "left" they are by how much they manage to raise the pitch and tone

of the condemnations of Israel that will appear in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, etc.

Because of the dominance on the British left of what someone aptly named "absolute anti-Zionism", they will go in for wild root and branch condemnation of Israel and everything Israeli. The action will be depicted as a function of the basic nature of "Zionism" or "Zionist imperialism", or as a matter of Israel acting only as a tool of the USA, as something without any other sense and no possible upfront reason.

The crazy nonsense in which you have enlisted has been licensed by the question, in my article: "in the name of what alternative would we condemn Israel?"

I also said, and more than once in the short article, that "we do not advocate an Israeli attack... nor will we endorse it or take political responsibility for it... [we] should not want it and cannot support it..."

After a discussion in the *Solidarity* office of possible misunderstandings to which my article might give rise, I listed in its first paragraph some likely bad consequences and by-products of such an attack — that is, reasons for being against it. That first paragraph did not end with a sentence saying: "For these reasons we oppose an attack...", but only because neither I nor anyone else in the *Solidarity* office thought our readers would include a sizeable number of idiots.

The approach of asking — "in the name of what alternative would we condemn..." — is not new.

It is, I suggest, an indispensable question for socialists, enemies of the capitalist powers that dominate the world, to ask in every situation. It is the question that stops you backing, in recoil from "imperialism" into de facto support for reactionary forces that find themselves at odds with advanced capitalism. In the Falklands war (1982) we said that the Falkland Islanders had a right to self-determination and the Argentinian invaders should get out — but we did not support the British expeditionary force or the war.

In 1990, AWL's predecessor said Iraq should get out of Kuwait (Iraq's invasion was the cause of the conflict), but we did not back the Americans and British in the war.

In 1999 the AWL said the Serbian army, which was engaged in a giant pogrom against the Albanian population there, should get out of Kosovo, but we did not back NATO's war. Specifically we did not give political confidence or trust to those who controlled the NATO forces. (We did not join in the calls to "stop the bombing" because in the circumstances that call implicitly sided with the Serb would-be genocidalists).

In the case at hand, none of the demon-Zionism stuff is necessary to explain Israel's likely action; there is good reason, from an Israeli point of view, to refuse to stand by and let people who have said that they want to destroy Israel acquire the weapons with which they just might try to do that.

Some of what I wrote was explicitly an account of how Israelis would see nuclear-armed Islamist fanatics in Iran and clearly labelled as that. I used the tone and manner proper to one who thinks that Israel has a right to defend itself, against people on the would-be left whose starting point is that it doesn't, and, because of its origins, never could. To counter the demon-Zionism "explanations", I described how most Israelis see the prospect of an Iranian nuclear bomb.

You, and quite a few others, insist that to do that was to justify, to "excuse", perhaps to advocate an Israeli attack. Never mind that I stated my opposition to an attack, in terms of both principle — my basic viewpoint, which is that not of an Israeli nationalist but of an international socialist — and of the immediate likely consequences in the Middle East.

"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..."

My language expressed my determination not to join in with, or peacefully to tolerate, the outright condemnation of Israel that will most likely follow an Israeli attack, condemnation rooted in the "demon-Zionism" prejudice of the kitsch-left and in the view that Israel has no right to defend itself.

I identified the word "condemn" with the language that the kitsch-left would use against Israel. I used "should not want", "can not support", etc. to indicate rejecting an Israeli nationalist viewpoint and being against an Israeli strike.

Is there a meaningful difference between "not wanting" an attack, and "condemning" Israel root-and-branch? I think there is.

But the difference is not about being for or against an

Israeli strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. It is about how you assess such a strike in relation to the nature of Israel and of Israel's relationship with its near and distant Islamic neighbours.

I reject the settled "condemnation" of Israel which, for example, you express in your article. I will not, in response to an Israeli strike at Iranian nuclear installations, adopt the viewpoint that there is something so incomprehensible in such a strike that Israel as such must be condemned outright.

And for myself, I will use whatever words I choose to express and nuance my own ideas. Nobody — least of all participants in an attempt to mob me and shout me down — will tell me what words I must and must not use.

Of course, the choice of words is to some extent personal, and to some extent arbitrary and a matter of non-conscious selection. In general, I wouldn't choose to quarrel about words. But to express the real arguments now about Israel and Iran by proxy, in the form of an argument about what exact words should be used to express being against an Israeli strike — is "not want" too weak, should we have "oppose" or "condemn" instead? — is a waste of life, foolishness.

Denunciation of me for my choice of words is either a piece of scholastic foolishness, or an attempt at Stalinist bullying, or an obscurantist proxy for the real arguments about the broader issues that led me to my choice of words.

WORKING BACK FROM CONCLUSIONS?

If one tries to spell out the hard realities, and notes such things as "good reason for Israel to make a precipitate strike at Iranian nuclear capacity", then are you *advocating* such a strike? Even if you add immediately: "Socialists should not want that and can not support it..."?

To answer yes is to rule out intelligent exploration and discussion of the world. It is to say that in order to avoid "advocating" the military strike I discussed, one would have to deny some key facts. In fact, the only reason for ruling out such an assessment here is to allow maximum condemnation of Israel, to depict what it does as a product of pure evil, pure "Zionism", pure "imperialism".

Indeed, it is implied in your own and other comments that we have a revolutionary duty to do that; and to deny uncongenial, jarring facts in general; to work backwards, so to speak, and draw one's picture of reality from one's political conclusions.

In this case we would be duty-bound to deny or obscure the large fact that an Islamic-fundamentalist regime, whose leaders openly call for the destruction of Israel, armed with nuclear weapons, would present Israel with a special problem.

Such an approach to politics would rule out anything but the most blinkeredly narrow, partial, one-sided, blindly partisan view of any reality! It is to advocate the politics of the ideological blind-fold, of viewing the world only through ideological spectacles, of only admitting that part of reality that suits you. It is to advocate a medievalist scholasticism — or Stalinism — in the approach to reality. It is one of the great banes and one of the worst diseases of the kitsch left, one of the legacies of Stalinism. It is "apparatus Marxism".

The truth is that unless you are very simple minded — or very stupid — or dealing with straightforward things like workers' strikes for improvements, or resistance to racism, you form your political responses and positions by surveying all the facets of reality and then deciding which aspects are decisive and which not.

The idea that you trim your picture from which you have to form political judgments in advance, selecting it to fit prior conclusions, has as little in common with Marxism as it has with any other rational approach to the world. And it has the drawback that if the closed-eyes self-righteous citizen starts looking at the whole reality, then he or she will go over not to our Third Camp independent working class politics, but to Israeli chauvinism.

MISREPRESENTATION

You, comrade Machover, go through the motions of a reasoned point-by-point discussion of what I wrote; but you start off your reply with a straight lie and a radical distortion, stating that I argue: "while an attack on Iran 'will most likely lead to great carnage in the Middle East, and beyond', it would be wrong to object to it if it is undertaken by Israel". I did and do "object" to it, and said so a number of times in the short article!

* Moshe Machover's article for *Weekly Worker*, to which this is a reply, can be found at www.workersliberty.org/machover

Demonstration in support of Mansour Osanloo, bus workers' leader. Still in jail. Solidarity with Iranian workers, not their rulers!

There is radical distortion in the usage — it is repeated again and again in your piece — “an attack”, without specification. A military strike would surely be “an attack”, but to substitute here the general term “an attack”, which might mean every and any offensive action up to full-scale land invasion, or even a nuclear assault, for a limited, specific bomb raid on nuclear installations, from the air, which is what I discussed, is to radically misrepresent not only what I wrote but also what the discussion should be about.

I bracketed the possible “strike” I was discussing with the September 2007 Israeli attack on nuclear facilities in Syria, and the June 1981 on an Iraqi nuclear installation; there is therefore no reasonable ground for you or anyone else not understanding what sort of attack I was talking about.

You quote me once, in passing, as talking about a bomb-strike on Iranian nuclear installations, but generally you use the portmanteau term “attack”; and you do that after the paper in which you publish your article has accused me, with lunatic abandon, of advocating an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran.

You deliberately get in step with the Stalinist-level liars who run *Weekly Worker*! What else could explain your usage?

You say that I “refuse to say anything against Israeli aggression. Go ahead, Israel — bomb away; feel free to cause ‘large-scale Iranian civilian ‘collateral’ casualties’! SM will look the other way”. The framing of the direct quotation in radically misleading polemical bumph is constructive lying. In political terms, it is simply unserious.

A DUTY TO WHITEWASH THE MULLAHS?

Beginning with your fourth paragraph, you come out as someone who thinks that opposition to an Israeli attack on Iran requires of you that you do public-relations work for the Iranian regime. You criticise that regime once, and in passing, but you say that the Iranian rulers do not “openly declare their desire to destroy Israel”.

You repeat the 2006 declaration from Ahmadinejad which I cited.

“Thanks to people’s wishes and God’s will, the trend for the existence of the Zionist regime is [going] downwards and this is what God has promised and what all nations want. Just as the Soviet Union was wiped out and today does not exist, so will the Zionist regime soon be wiped out”.

But you “interpret” that passage to claim that the cleri-

cal-fascist regime is not as bad as it seems.

You seem to be governed by the belief that to oppose an attack you must defend those likely to be attacked and refute what is said about them — irrespective of what is true.

Your approach here would have led the left — and during the Stalin-Hitler pact did lead the Communist Parties — to insist that Hitler was not all that bad. It led people like Tony Benn and the then editor of *Tribune* to do PR work, side by side with George Galloway, for Saddam Hussein in 2003. It led the SWP to apologetics for the Taliban (*Socialist Worker* 1 October 2001).

Serious socialists tell the truth about both sides.

There is nothing, you say, in Ahmadinejad’s 2006 declaration “about an Iranian ‘desire to destroy Israel’; nor even a wish to see that country destroyed by others”. Your attempts to reassure, on Tehran’s behalf, are obviously heartfelt. God, how they have been misrepresented, these benign Iranian clerical fascists!

Your own assessment of the declaration is wilfully foolish! You write that what Ahmadinejad “expressed here is a wish for the disappearance of the Zionist regime (on another occasion Ahmadinejad spoke about the ‘regime that is occupying the holy city’ of Jerusalem)”. You insist that there is a “difference between destruction of a country and demise of a regime”.

You take Ahmadinejad’s analogy with the demise of the USSR — “just as the Soviet Union was wiped out” — to mean that Ahmadinejad merely wants a change of government in Israel.

You feel obliged, in your opposition to an Israeli “attack”, to go surety for the good intentions of the Iranian mullahs! This, at best, is wishful thinking.

What “regime” — government? state structure? — rooted in the existing Israeli population will, in the foreseeable future, be other than “Zionist” in the broad and basic sense?

For all I can know, you may be using “Zionist” to mean extreme Israeli chauvinism. It is one of the surest things in politics that that is not what the Islamist chauvinists ruling Iran mean by “Zionism”. You get in your own light, comrade Machover!

In fact there is no shortage of quotations making clear Ahmadinejad’s meaning. Take this from August 2006: “this sinister regime is the banner of Satan.... all the people are shouting a single cry... Death to Israel”.

They *really* meant “Death to the Israeli government!”?

ISRAEL “HAS NO RIGHT TO EXIST”?

I suggest you make yourself incapable of understanding what Ahmadinejad might mean because you yourself are against the existence of the Israeli Jewish state.

You say it plainly enough: “I suppose I must belong to what SM so cutely calls the ‘kitsch left’, because I do think that Israel has no right to exist *as presently constituted or in anything like its present form*”. You specify what you mean: “a colonial, expansionist, ethnocentric-racist settler state, a junior partner of imperialism, to which it is structurally and inseparably allied”.

You add that “those who advocate the so-called ‘right’ of the existing, or anything-like-the-existing Israel, to exist, are ‘fake leftists’”. There can be no question of Israel defending itself, because in fact, always, “Israel would be ‘defending’... its indefensible privileges and interests as a colonial settler state and imperialist sub-contractor”.

I would agree that Israel has no “right” to continue occupying the West Bank and building Jewish-colonist settlements there. By that I mean: I don’t want Israel to go on doing that, and I’m on the side of the Palestinians in the post-1967 Occupied Territories and of those Israelis, Jewish and Arab, who want that to stop and fight to stop it.

What do you mean? That Israel does not have a right to exist at all, so long as it does “anything like” those things? That the Israeli Jewish nation has no right to self-determi-

nation unless and until it changes its attitudes and physiognomy beyond recognition?

And? And therefore you back those who want to help Israel “as presently constituted” stop “existing”? It is not clear why you wouldn’t.

IMPERIALISM

Israel, a junior partner of imperialism? Of the USA? To deny the right of a nation to exist because of its international alliances smacks just a little too strongly of the Stalinist policy of assessing nations as good or bad — and, in some instances, worthy of the right to exist or not — according to their “role” in international affairs.

The short answer is that the Israeli nation and its state have a right to exist irrespective of their international alliances. In any case, Israel’s international alignment, like the rest of its history, cannot be understood apart from the attitude to it of its neighbours — five of which greeted its foundation in 1948 with invasion, and some of them (Egypt) under the slogan “Drive the Jews into the sea!”

“Structurally and inseparably allied” to “imperialism”? That Israel has had a heavy economic dependence on the USA since 1967 is fact: that it is inseparable isn’t. How an Israel at peace with its neighbours, including a Palestinian state that had begun to develop economically, would evolve is an open question.

You use the expression “structurally and inseparably allied” illegitimately, to assert that Israel is only an outcrop of US imperialism, and to strengthen, by asserting the impossibility of Israel separating from the USA, the argument that Israel should not be allowed to go on existing. (Elsewhere in the article, you say that in so far as Israel is more than an outcrop of the USA, it is worse: not just “a mere tool, but... a regional colonial power with a malignant agenda of its own”).

IRAN’S “RIGHT” TO NUCLEAR BOMBS?

I asked: “But if the Israeli airforce attempts to stop Iran developing the capacity to wipe it out with a nuclear bomb, in the name of what alternative would we condemn Israel?” I meant: in the name of what alternatives available to an Israel facing the prospect of Iran developing nuclear weapons?

You comment, mysteriously and in terms of my text impermissibly: “Apparently SM believes that Israel, a non-expansionist and non-aggressive state, is not sufficiently ‘god-crazed’ to forfeit its ‘inalienable right’ to a monopoly of nuclear weapons in the Middle East.”

Nothing I wrote depends on such a view of Israel! Many things I’ve written elsewhere (a very large volume of it by now — the AWL’s pamphlet *Two Nations, Two States* is readily available) says the opposite: the AWL demands of Israel that it should vacate the 1967-occupied territories and agree to an independent Palestinian state. I do not advocate an Israeli monopoly of nuclear weapons. I am against Israel having nuclear weapons.

And you? Do you want to replace Israel’s monopoly of nuclear weapons in the region with a duopoly of Iran and Israel having nuclear weapons? So long as Israel still has nuclear weapons, should we acquiesce in the spread of nuclear weapons? In the Iranian mullahs acquiring nuclear bombs? I think that is what you say later. I’ll come back to it.

What is your point here? Either what you write is a trivial, misleading, and irresponsible debating point, and in fact you agree with me that an Iranian nuclear arsenal, moreover one in the hands of an Islamic fundamentalist regime, is undesirable. Or you want the Israeli “monopoly of nuclear weapons” to be broken by the Iranian mullahs.

Which is it, comrade Machover?

Continued on page 16

SWP split?

According to documents leaked on the internet, the SWP is facing a potentially major internal crisis. Central Committee members John Rees and Lindsey German have been stripped of their responsibilities for “electoral work” and forced to resign from the steering committee of the Respect successor “Left Alternative” front. According to reports, they stated the resignations were “against our wishes”.

What does this mean for the SWP? For the first time since the 1970s the SWP Central Committee has publicly split. It’s possible that Rees and German will simply lick their wounds in private, but what if they choose to fight? Rank-and-file SWP members usually just quite or shut up if they disagree, but we presume that Rees and German have their supporters in the organisation — supporters who could organise a fight-back.

As we go to press, nothing is clear. The leaked SWP documents indicate that a National Committee meeting will take place this weekend. Keep an eye on our website for further developments.

Again: do you believe, do you want to say, that Israel is so “god-crazed” that it can be equated with Iran?

You then undertake to champion the case that in “the historical record” Iran has been less “ruthlessly aggressive and destructive” than Israel has.

“The image of Iran’s rulers as religious fanatics, who would not think twice about incinerating their own country for the satisfaction of destroying Israel, is a pure invention of western and Israeli warmongering propaganda, here recycled by SM”.

It is “pure invention”? The regime installed by Iran’s “Islamic Revolution” in 1979, and still in power (even if loosened a little over three decades), is not run by religious fanatics?

I’ll resist the temptations of demagoguery here, though it would be easy enough to list some of the social atrocities and horrors which the regime has inflicted on the peoples in the Iranian state, and especially the women, for three decades now.

Plainly the Iranian regime is an Islamic-fundamentalist one, a “theocracy” as you call it.

Yes, as you say, the leaders, or some of them, are “clever, cautious, calculating bastards”. The point, I think, is that the “clever, cautious calculation” of these “bastards” includes calculations about God and heaven, and the relationship of this world to the other, imaginary, world. They see this world as a mere antechamber to the other.

It may be that here you get in your own light. Being yourself a rationalist (maybe), you can’t grasp that the religious mindset of such people is a major part of them and a regulator of what they do. You want to dismiss their religio-political beliefs as play-acting, stuff that they don’t really believe. A central part of the reality I see is that they do believe in their own religious nonsense.

You are sure that there is no possibility that they — or some of them, or some group emerging within the regime — will never let the attractions of a sudden trip to bordello-paradise overwhelm what you would think of as “clever, cautious calculations” about this world. I’m not.

You’re sure that their “clever” this-world calculations will never lead any of them to calculate that Israel would not survive a nuclear conflict, but the enormously bigger Iran would?

The idea that Israel should be denounced for not trusting and sharing in your confidence about the “clever calculations” of these “bastards” can only be grounded in an unreasoning animosity to Israel, or the sort of reactionary anti-imperialism that sees the Iranian regime (and similar regimes or movements) as automatically “better” than “imperialism” because they are at odds with the USA.

The idea that states always act rationally and according to the economic interests of the ruling class was always childish, barebones, economic-reductionist pseudo-Marxism. Hitler and the Nazis, for example, dragged Germany down to utter destruction. Trotsky in 1938 compared what the bourgeoisie was doing, in entrusting power to the fascists, with “tobogganing with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe”. That can’t happen in Iran?

You accuse me of sleight-of-hand, conjurer-style intellectual trickery, sophism, “rhetorical legerdemain”. You aren’t so bad yourself at such ideological “cloak-work”!

AN ARAB-ISLAMIC NUCLEAR ARMOURY?

Should we condemn Israel “because Israel has nuclear weapons, and therefore the Arab and Islamic states should have them too?”

You “cleverly” turn it round. To object to Iranian nuclear weapons, you suggest, “implies that Israel has some god-given right to a monopoly of nuclear weapons”. Eh? I don’t want the existing situation made worse by a proliferation of nuclear weapons... so that means I think Israel has a “god-given” right to a monopoly!

Turn that thought round once again, and it is the idea that because Israel has no “god-given right to a monopoly”, therefore we should not oppose other states having nuclear weapons, because that would make us “defend” that monopoly. Is that what you are saying?

But you want it both ways. Having waxed demagogic over my “implied” belief that Israel has a “god-given right to a monopoly of nuclear weapons”, you draw back from your own logical conclusion by accusing me of “malign[ing] the leftist opponents of aggression by attributing to them the absurd idea that Arab and Islamic states ‘should’ possess nuclear weapons because Israel does”.

Actually, no. I listed that view — that “the Arab and Islamic states should have [nuclear weapons] too” — as one of the absurdities I was dismissing, as an absurd implication of the sort of outcry against Israel which I anticipated. “Least of all should we back Ahmadinejad, or argue, implicitly or openly, that homicidal religious lunatics have a right to arm themselves with nuclear weapons...”

I dealt there with what I thought was likely to be implicit in the probable outcry — a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*. When I wrote that, I didn’t appreciate to what extent that attitude was already widespread. I knew Workers’ Power explicitly supported the “right” of Iran to have nuclear weapons; for the rest, I thought I was warning against pos-

sible absurd implications in what they would say.

However, you yourself share the attitude, or something approaching it. You express it like this: “The only basis on which we can justly [!] demand that Iran be forbidden to have [nuclear weapons] is to make the entire region free of nuclear weapons. This is the demand we must raise. Of course, Iran should not have nuclear weapons; but neither should Israel. And certainly we must condemn Israeli aggression designed to preserve its nuclear monopoly”. Ah!

Arguing with you here is like waltzing on ice with an india-rubber man! You seem to say that “just” opposition to Iranian nuclear weapons should depend on Israel not having them, and on the creation in the region of a nuclear-free zone. “This is the demand we must raise”.

Of course socialists should be against Israeli nuclear weapons. But to make opposition to Iran acquiring nuclear weapons depend on Israel surrendering those it has — that is to excuse the mullahs’ drive to acquire nuclear weapons. To insist that the only demand we can raise is a regional nuclear-free zone cannot but soften specific opposition to the Iranian regime acquiring nuclear weapons, which would, at best, mean the emergence of a nuclear balance of terror in the region.

ONE-SIDED “PACIFISM”

I asked whether Israel should be condemned “because we are unconditional pacifists? [Because] we think military action is never justified, and therefore Israel has no right to attack Iran, not even to stop it acquiring the nuclear means to mount the ultimate suicide bomb attack on Israel?”

You say this “is a deliberately silly question”. (No, comrade Machover. Believe me, if it is silly, it is inadvertently so).

“Again we must turn it around... should we condone a pre-emptive bombing attack on Israel’s Dimona nuclear installation?”

This is one of the few serious points in your would-be ferocious but light-weight polemic. In reality the situation is not symmetrical. Would such an Iranian strike surgically “take out” Israel’s nuclear-weapons capacity as Israel apparently “took out” Syria’s in 2007 and Iraq’s in 1981? I doubt it.

An Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear installations could be limited to that objective; an Iranian attack on Israel would in practice have to be part of a general Islamist assault.

You are careful to lead up to your question about Israel’s nuclear centre by asserting once again that “Iran has no nuclear weapons” (true); “and it has never threatened to attack Israel by nuclear or conventional means” (not true; or true only on a “benign” interpretation of all the chants about “Death to Israel!”).

“HUMANITY’S WORST ENEMY”

You respond to my question whether we should condemn Israel “because we would prefer to live in a world where such choices would not be posed, where relations between states and peoples are governed by reason, and strictly peaceful means” with the statement that so long as we live in “today’s world”, “we should make the right choice: oppose imperialist attacks — whether direct or by proxy — even when mounted against a detestable regime. Because today US imperialism is humanity’s worst enemy, and its global hegemony poses the greatest danger to humanity’s future”.

First of all, you work a revealing sleight of mind here. I discussed an *Israeli* attack. You seem to say — here, anyway — that such a thing is impossible: Israel will only act as a proxy. Elsewhere in your article you say it very plainly: “Israel cannot possibly take such a step without an American green light... [Over Suez in 1956] Israeli attack served as a prearranged pretext for the intervention of its imperialist senior partner(s). If Israel does indeed attack Iran, we will witness a broadly similar scenario”.

An air attack on Iranian nuclear installations now — which is what we are supposed to be discussing — will be the equivalent of 1956, when Israel’s invasion of Sinai on 29 October was a (prearranged) pretext for French and British invasion of Egypt (on 5 November, after bombing from 31 October)? It can only be the start of a full-scale US invasion of Iran? Just like the September 2007 Israeli attack on a Syrian nuclear installation was part of an American invasion of Syria?

What you do here is substitute a different situation for the situation I discussed.

Is it that Israel has no autonomy at all? It can only act as a catspaw of the USA? That is a point of view; but not one you stick to. Elsewhere you say that Israel can indeed act on its own concerns, and when it does so it is worse than US imperialism. This is just wriggling, comrade Machover!

My argument was not based on generalities about Iran’s regime being “detestable”, but on what its development of nuclear weapons would or might mean for Israel.

What is the formulation about “US imperialism” being “humanity’s worst enemy... the greatest danger to humanity’s future” doing in a supposedly political document? It

has the ring to it of religious denunciation!

It is cut from the same cloth as the a-historical condemnation of Israel. I have not seen anything like such a formulation, about a country or regime being the main enemy of humanity, outside of the early 1950s magazine of the US Communist Party, which I looked at a while back — Stalin’s supporters, stranded on the “wrong” side of the world divide, and hysterically whipping themselves up to back the USA’s enemy in a nuclear war.

Politically, what follows, surely, is that any regime, no matter how “detestable”, no matter how especially dangerous with nuclear weapons, is better than, less of a threat to humanity than, US imperialism the “main enemy is of humanity” — and its proxy, Israel.

And therefore? What appears to follow is that you will line up with any conceivable opponent of the USA — and with the pixillated kitsch-left idiots who see Islamist clerical-fascism as better than the USA. Which is what you are doing.

The “main enemy of humanity” formula is metaphysics, not politics. It is all too reminiscent of Third Period Stalinism, with its arbitrary schematics and subjective definitions.

It is an example of what I have mind in the name-tag “kitsch-left”: inorganic, subjective, arbitrary orientation on the world. And if it is true that “US imperialism” is “humanity’s worst enemy”, then the prospects for humanity are very bleak indeed. Not least of the faults of this formula is that it dismisses the US working class, as this line of thinking usually also dismisses the Israeli working class.

It is a millenarian view of the world tightly sprung, and of an early, if not imminent, showdown between the forces of good and evil. It is a secularisation of the world-view of political Islam, focused on the “Great Satan” of the USA and its allies and “proxies” overseas. Isn’t it?

“PABLOISM”

The post-Trotsky Trotskyist movement was derailed by its Third-Period-Stalinist style belief in a World Revolution that was coming to the final clash, the “lutte finale” of the great song. It was to be a clash between “Imperialism” and the “World Revolution”, which, for now, was embodied in the Stalinist states, the Stalinist movements, and the Stalinist-led revolutions in the Third World.

The would-be Trotskyists were led by their notion of a predetermined World Revolution within a very short time scale, and the identification of Stalinism as its embodiment for now, in the first stage, into a fantastic view of reality, made up of negativism towards capitalism, and of (mistaken) positive identification with the bureaucratically stified economies of the USSR and its allies. (See the introduction to *The Fate of the Russian Revolution*: www.workersliberty.org/fate).

Today the kitsch left is in the grip of analogous politics, but with none of the seeming justification and seeming rationality of those post-Trotsky Trotskyists, the “Pabloites”.

The kitsch left now sees the world as caught up in an apocalyptic battle between good and evil — between the “humanity’s worst enemy” and... the others.

As in 1951, at the Third World Congress of the Fourth International, Stalinism was written into the role of adversary of US imperialism in the “final battle”, so also today the “anti-US” forces are written into the scenario for the climactic battle: the Tehran regime, the Taliban, Al Qaeda. and... whom?...

As in the 1950s, this leads to out-and-out nonsense — identification of black as white and vice versa by a process of arbitrary, negative selection. And without any of the twisted sense which the idea of progressive Stalinism and totally reactionary imperialism had.

Comrade Machover, here you are led to the side of reaction by such notions as “humanity’s worst enemy”, defined in terms of power politics. How do you wind up after six decades as a Marxist articulating a thinly secularised version of Muslim eschatology?

ISRAEL WORSE THAN THE “WORST ENEMY”?

I asked whether Israel should be condemned “because Israel would in attacking Iran be only an American imperialist tool, against a mere regional power; and that cancels out the genuine self-defence element in pre-emptive Israeli military action against Iranian nuclear weapons”.

You comment: “The fact that Israel will not be acting as a mere American imperialist tool makes it even worse, and is all the more reason for condemning and opposing its aggression. Because in addition to acting for its imperialist sponsor, Israel will at the same time be acting to maintain its own regional hegemony, nuclear monopoly and ability to oppress the Palestinian people and colonise their lands.”

Here everything is blended and mixed into a muddy political paste! And the paste is very messy.

Israel is bad when it is the proxy for “humanity’s worst enemy”; and when it is not — you concede it is not, or not entirely, or not always — it is “even worse”! Not only is

there a power that is “humanity’s worst enemy”; there is also a power than is an even worse enemy of humanity than “humanity’s worst enemy”. The US is the worst enemy, but Israel is the worst, worst enemy of humanity.

And why? Israel has “regional hegemony” and “acts to maintain it”. It has a “nuclear monopoly” and (therefore?) “ability to oppress the Palestinian people and colonise their lands.”

This jumble is an example of where reasoning around a fixed demonological view of a state and of a people can lead you! In what “region” does Israel have “hegemony”? In the Occupied Territories, to be sure. But that does not depend on Israel’s nuclear weapons. In the wider region of the Middle East, Israel obviously does not have “hegemony”. And does its nuclear monopoly hand it status in that region.

If Iran or some other power hostile to Israel had nuclear weapons, then Israel’s status or even its ability to stand up to the threat of nuclear annihilation would depend on its having nuclear weapons.

Washing around in your subconscious here seems to be a half-formed notion that it would be good if Israel were faced with another power in the Middle East able to brandish nuclear weapons.

UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR IRAN?

Should we condemn Israel “because the Iranian government, Islamic clerical fascist though it is, is an ‘anti-imperialist’ power and must be unconditionally supported against the US, Nato, Israel?”

Here, you don’t reply at all, though you go through the motions. You say I know “very well” that “opposition to US-Israeli aggression against Iran in no way implies ‘unconditional support’ for the Iranian regime”.

I did not discuss “US-Israeli aggression”. That is your definition, not mine. Why did I write “unconditional”? Because there is something of “on their side, no matter what” in supporting (even by implication) Iran’s “right” to nuclear weapons; and that is your substantive position, comrade Machover!

But you don’t know when to leave well alone, do you? You build further on my rejection of the idea that “the Iranian government, Islamic clerical-fascist though it is, is an ‘anti-imperialist’ power and must be unconditionally supported against the US, Nato, Israel”. You comment: “Inadvertently, SM has given us an illustration of the fact that you cannot consistently be soft on the Israeli state without being also soft on its imperialist sponsor and close senior partner.”

You’d be better engaged, comrade Machover, in sifting through and defining, first for yourself, what is really going on in your *own* mind!

Because I reject the idea that Iran is an “anti-imperialist power” (as distinct from a regional imperialism: isn’t that what you’d say it is?), and reject the argument that for that reason (for supposedly being an “anti-imperialist power”) it should be supported against the US, Nato, and Israel, therefore....?

Therefore... my “rhetorical question”, you say, “provides an argument for *not* opposing an attack by the US or Nato” (emphasis added).

You can’t oppose a US attack without positively supporting Iran? So you seem to say. In fact, Iran is a small imperialist power. Saying that, and rejecting the idea that we should side with it against the bigger imperialist powers, would not hinder us from opposing an attack — any more than defining Iraq for what it is, a regional imperialist power, hindered us from opposing the US-British invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The idea that we should define the smaller and weaker imperialism as “anti-imperialist”, and positively support it, is political and intellectual gibberish. It isn’t new, however. There were many people in Asia, and many black people in the USA, who saw Japan as a progressive anti-imperialist power, a “coloured” power, an “Asian” power, in World War Two. Japan exploited that, for example, in Burma. The US Trotskyists had to make special educational efforts to try to wean black people in the USA from such ideas (in *Labor Action*, for instance).

But the idea that you side with the weaker imperialism, and accept its “anti-imperialist” postures as good coin, would have led to supporting Japan against the USA in 1941, and the USSR against the USA after 1945!

FASCISTS?

You add: “Let me also note in passing that SM is doing here what no serious Marxist should do: for the second time in this article he is using ‘fascist’ as a mere invective rather than as a precise political term. He should know better.”

I wrote not of “fascist”, but of “clerical fascist”. And I did not use it as “mere invective”. Here, once again, we have your irrepressible tendency to let arid pedantry override your sense of reality and of history.

I agree that “fascist” should not be used as mere insult. The Trotskyist movement, and the working class too, paid a high price for the idiotic Stalinist habit of flinging the word “fascist” about in that way.

But in fact there are quite a few different sort of fascism in history. The Francoist movement was an amalgam of smallish fascist organisations, the Spanish army, and the Catholic church: it was a Catholic crusade.

There were clerical fascist movements in many European countries, differing more or less seriously one from another. In Ireland in the early mid 1930s, Blueshirt clerical fascism mushroomed into a mass movement for a while: it had among its peculiarities the fact that most of it (unlike any other clerical-fascism I know, anywhere) was less nationalistic and less narrowly chauvinist than its “mainstream” rivals, the De Valera government and its unofficial IRA supporters.

Clerical fascism, in relation to Iran, means mass mobilisations motivated by religious or religio-social ideas and feelings, for Islamist totalitarian-political goals. The feelings it builds on include feelings of alienation from capitalism which, in more favourable circumstances, could lead some of the people involved to revolutionary communist conclusions: but that is a feature of all fascist movements.

You describe Iran as “theocracy”, but that is a complementary designation, not one that excludes the description “clerical fascism”. There were large elements of theocracy in fascist Spain and Portugal. There were very large elements, perhaps larger than in fascist Spain or Portugal, of theocracy in bourgeois-democratic Ireland for many decades (when the bishops would call a minister and tell him what to do, and often would not even deign to give reasons for it).

Granted that there is imprecision in it, “clerical fascism” will do to be getting on with as a description of authoritarian-totalitarian Islamist politico-religious movements.

MACHOVER’S “THIRD WAY”

You continue: “SM’s penultimate pretext is a real beauty: “[Should we condemn an Israeli attack] because Israel refuses to dismantle the Jewish national state peacefully and agree to an Arab Palestinian state in which Jews would have religious but not Israeli national rights, and therefore socialists, ‘anti-racists’ and anti-imperialists must be on the side of those who would conquer and destroy it, even, in this case, with nuclear weapons?”

“The oh so subtle rhetorical legerdemain here is to smuggle past the reader a false alternative: either you accept Israel as ‘the Jewish national state’ or else you must accept an ‘Arab Palestinian state in which Jews would have religious but not Israeli national rights’. SM implies that there is no other choice. And, moreover, he threatens his reader: if you reject the former — ‘the Jewish national state’ — then (‘and therefore ...’) you must resign yourself to Israel’s destruction ‘even with nuclear weapons’.”

“The false alternative”? You have a third alternative to offer? An Israel that is not a “Jewish national state” (with rights for minorities), but in which nonetheless Jews would have national rights? Or an Arab Palestinian state in which Jews would have national rights?

“SM implies that there is no other choice”? But you have a revelation to offer? The reader perplexed by the complexities of the Jewish-Palestinian conflict will have felt his or her pulse quicken. A Moshe has come to judgement!

Before your revelation, you spend a lot of words rehashing discussions, to my mind largely pedantic, discussions about Israel’s definition of a citizen and so on. Any national state will be to some degree or another nationalist; socialists work against the nationalism, and to win fully equal rights for minority groups in the state; but we are for the right to self-determination of nations as they are, not just of nations as they are in textbook definitions. These considerations apply to all nations, and they apply to Israel too. Socialists in Israel should fight for entirely equal rights for all minorities there; in the foreseeable future, any Israeli state will have some degree of nationalism and discrimination.

Your revelation, when it comes, is less than convincing. It appears to be a singularly undefined version of a binational state. “The alternative supported by true socialists is a settlement based on equal rights: not only equal individual rights for all, but also equal national rights for the two actual national groups of Palestine/Israel.

“Who are these two groups? First, the indigenous people, the Palestinian Arabs, including the refugees ethnically cleansed by Zionist colonisation, who surely must have the right to return to their homeland. Second, the Hebrew-speaking settler nation that has come into existence in that country... This clearly means the rejection of the ‘Jewish national state’ in the present Zionist sense...”

You give no explanation of what sort of Jewish national state could be regarded as an exercise of the legitimate national rights of the “Hebrew-speaking nation”, except of course that it must not be “anything like” Israel. This is what I meant above by defining you as a mere phrasemonger. Your stuff here juggles possibly attractive things that simply have no purchase on reality, and have nothing to offer in the way of what we do to get from the situation in the Middle East now to one in which Jews and Arabs relate to each other in a friendly and cooperative way.

There are three distinct things to be sorted out here. First, there is what we would like — what socialists would prescribe, if we had god-like powers.

Second, there is what can be done politically with what exists, by people (socialists) who lack god-like power. At present, we have the singular lack of power of people with small influence and smaller organised forces, in the Middle East or elsewhere. And it seems to me certain that even if there were a mass revolutionary Marxist movement embracing Jewish and Arab workers, it would still not be able at will to wipe out and reconcile the national antagonisms of generations simply by decreeing the merging of nations. It would still need a democratic national programme, some variant of two states. The Bolsheviks needed such a policy after the workers had taken power in the old Tsarist Empire.

Third, the actual role in politics of the bandying-about of phrases and detached fine sentiments by socialists like you who refuse to seek solutions in the world that exists. You act as a cover for Arab and Islamic reaction!

Few socialists would disagree with the generalities of what you call the policy of “true socialists”: “not only equal individual rights for all, but also equal national rights for the two actual national groups of Palestine/Israel”. But how could it be done?

Jews and Palestinian Arabs should merge into one people? The idea is utterly fantastic that peoples can do that at will, especially peoples with their actual history.

The proposal that over four million Palestinians, the descendants of refugees, should “return” to pre-1967 Israel is a proposal for the abolition of the Jewish nation. So it is seen, and for sixty years has been seen, by both sides. There is no way it can be made acceptable to Israel; and in fact, no way in which its realisation would be compatible with the existence of the Jewish nation.

Talk about “racism” here is ideological blackjacking. Nobody would think that the amalgamation of the Germans and the French in the territory now occupied by one of them could be brought about, even after the old antagonisms have been enormously reduced. There is also a great deal of scapegoating in blaming Israel alone for Arab refugees. Almost as many (600,000) Jewish refugees made their way in the years after 1948 from Arab countries to Israel. The Arab states deliberately refused to try to integrate the Palestinian refugees, ancestors of today’s 4.6 million. They did it in part for political reasons.

ISRAEL: “ETHNOCRATIC-RACIST”?

You say that Israel is an “ethnocratic-racist” settler state. Here you wallow in the political equivalent of fashionable psychobabble! Even if your epithet were justified, it would be irrelevant to what we are talking about. It is not justified.

Israeli nationalism is like any other nationalism, concerned with those it considers its own and downgrading and dismissive of others. Nationalisms loosen up, become less tight in their definings-in, less aggressive to those defined-out, the less pressure they are under, the less opposition they face to their cherished claims.

Israeli nationalism, “Zionism” — as I’m sure you know far better than I do — faced tremendous opposition, and arose in a political world which persecuted Jews and, in its most intense form, denied the right of Jews even to live, anywhere.

Israel’s right to exist is still not recognised by most of its neighbours sixty years after the state’s foundation!

Of course Jewish nationalism under pressure has been and is edgy, aggressive, inclined to ignore or deny competing “claims” that stand in the way of its own. Of course, since the Holocaust it has been seized by a spirit of ruthless determination.

Jewish nationalism, at the time that it gripped most Jews — which was not until the mid 20th century — was and is now, still, the nationalism of a people which had come close to extermination. In your lifetime and mine, two thirds of the Jews in Europe were exterminated.

Of course Jewish nationalism is often bitter, assertive, self-righteous, ruthless, unscrupulous. That is... nationalism. A major feature of the nationalism of oppressed or once-oppressed peoples is that, when demanding their own claimed rights, they are often indifferent to the rights and claims of minorities within their claimed territory. That is the nature of nationalism.

Take Ireland. We have colonised the globe more, probably, than Jews, Chinese, Indians, or Anglo-Saxons, and faced discrimination, prejudice, and inhospitality. In a vile recent example of Irish chauvinism and racism, a referendum voted overwhelmingly to deny Irish passports to Irish-born children of immigrants!

And therefore? Britain should never have left? Britain should reconquer this “racist” society?

Should socialists apply tests of moral worthiness to nations claiming self-determination, and recognise only those who themselves apply the golden rule — do unto others as you would have them do to you — as worthy of our support? I can’t think of any nationalist-minded oppressed or once-oppressed people who would pass such a test.

The truth is that there is everywhere a continuum between nationalism, militant nationalism, chauvinism,

Continued on page 19

ISRAEL-IRAN

Ambiguities in the Third Camp

Bruce Robinson responds to Sean Matgamna's discussion piece in *Solidarity* 3/136, "What if Israel bombs Iran".

Was Sean's article scandalous? No. Was Sean's article badly written? Is it clear exactly what his position is from reading it? Yes and no respectively. Was Sean's article balanced? Is it adequate? Does it give a rounded view of the issues? No, no, no.

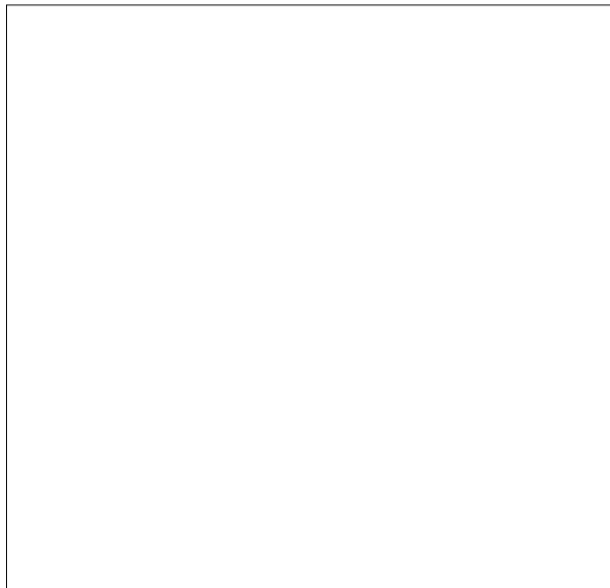
Sean's analysis of the situation is essentially no more than that Israel is threatened by the clerical fascists and "homicidal religious lunatics" that make up the ruling circles of Iran. There is assumed to be no class or political differentiation within either Israel or Iran. Thus there is no recognition that there are "religious" lunatics and hawks in Israel (some represented in the government) who might wish to start a confrontation with Iran for their own reasons nor any opposition expressed to Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. Nor is any account taken of the workers' and anti-war movements in either Israel or Iran, either as a factor in what might happen or as possible victims of a war.

The article also decontextualises any potential Israeli action against Iran, totally ignoring the US threat of war against Iran.

While the AWL has rightly characterised Iran as sub-imperialist and talked about its regional ambitions, Israel's similar status as a sub-imperialist power is generally downplayed in what we write about the Middle East. It is unclear whether Sean supports what one contributor to the discussion called the "self-defence element" in Israel's possession of nuclear weapons. Perhaps Sean feels he shouldn't need to say that or perhaps he sees that as part of the fake pacifism of the kitsch-left. It is unclear from the article.

Sean's article is seriously skewed by two things. Firstly, it is aimed at countering the majority of the British left, rather than providing a balanced analysis of the issues. Secondly, as Janine Booth put it, "it addresses the issue from the point of view of what the Israeli state does and does not have the right to do" and simply ignores much else that might be relevant in coming to an overall assessment of the likely effects of and our attitude to an Israeli attack.

Mark Osborn in the website discussion wrote: "In the abstract if the Israelis bomb Iranian nuclear sites and prevent them getting bombs, and that's pretty much all that happens — good. Is that so outrageous? Well we had an example last year: Israel bombed what seems to have been a nuclear development plant in Syria. Maybe a few people building it were killed. I'm sorry for them. But



First World War: claims about "self-defence" had to be set in context of the overall nature of the war

politically was I outraged? — was anyone on the left outraged? No."

Now if it was the case that we just had a repeat of the raids on Iraq and Syria to destroy nuclear facilities my emotional response would be to shrug my shoulders and heave a secret sigh of relief. But this would be an emotional response that ignores any possible negative consequences.

We cannot assume that this "best case scenario" would necessarily play itself out. To do so is exactly the same attitude that allows kitsch-leftists to insist that Ahmedinejad does not mean what he says about destroying Israel so we needn't worry about it. Sean does indicate that there would be negative consequences, though he restricts them to suicide bombers. A more likely and serious consequence is that Iran or its proxy Hezbollah would start firing conventional missiles at Israel, there would be retaliation and this could serve as a basis for the US to launch an attack on Iran. The point here is not to trade scenarios but rather the opposite — to argue that one cannot rely on the least worst outcome. Nor can one take the act out of its broader context.

This directly relates to the grounds on which one might wish to condemn Israel for an attack even if it might have "good reason" from its own viewpoint to do it. I would condemn it for recklessness, its likely consequence of

broader war, possible civilian casualties and spread of radioactivity, increasing polarisation and nationalism, increasing internal support for the Iranian regime and the political consequences within Israel and Palestine. These are not the same as the reasons Sean quotes from the kitsch left. Sean mentions some of these things in his article though they rather get lost in the rest of it.

How much these factors weigh in the balance in a given situation is a matter of assessment at the time and cannot be deduced from choosing one or other scenario. Thus some accused me (wrongly) of saying something that implied the "death of scores of Iranians". In some situations that relatively small death toll might, as Mark suggested, be outweighed by other considerations. This needs to be discussed concretely in the situation in which an attack occurs rather than basing ourselves on assumptions about the best or worst that might follow.

THE RIGHT TO SELF-DEFENCE

SOMEONE put to me the idea that if one supports Israel's right to exist, one must also support its right to self-defence and by implication its right to attack Iran if it thought Iran was planning an attack on Israel. Unlike in bourgeois international law (a highly effective institution!), the right to self-defence is not for Marxists an absolute, abstract right that can apply in all circumstances. Rather it is the overall nature of the war that is decisive rather than who fires first. Even where we support a war, we are not neutral on the methods used and whether they advance our own aims. For example, we would generally be against attacks on civilian populations.

There are a number of historical precedents for this. In World War One, the social democrats who supported the war on all sides claimed their countries were only acting in their own self-defence or in support of others' right to self-defence. Though in the abstract Belgium had the right to defend itself against German attack, that right was subordinate to the general imperialist character of the war. Trotsky applied the same arguments to Czechoslovakia in 1938. Lenin wrote in 1915:

"The question of which side dealt the first military blow or first declared war is of no importance for the tactics of socialists. Phrases such as the defence of the fatherland, resistance to enemy invasion, war of defence etc are not, on either side, anything but a means to deceive the people." (*The 'Defence of the Fatherland' slogan*)

This analogy does not necessarily mean that we could never support Israel in any conceivable war it might fight, though Israel is no less a sub-imperialist power than Iran. It does mean however that the right to self defence is not an absolute right and invoking it does not resolve any of the issues we are discussing. (For example, Iran could claim self-defence as grounds for retaliating to an Israeli first strike.) Further even if we did invoke it, it would not necessarily imply support for any or every military action Israel took.

AMBIGUITIES IN THE THIRD CAMP

This debate seems to share a lot of the line-ups, unspoken assumptions and arguments of the one on Iraq. The fundamental reason is not that there are unreconstructed "anti-imperialists" lurking in the AWL or that Sean has followed the path of Shachtman. We live in a period when independent working class forces — let alone the Marxists — are extremely weak and are not the decisive forces in resolving even in a non-revolutionary way all sorts of issues including national conflicts.

The "third camp" tradition — or rather traditions — have never adequately resolved the question of what alliances or programme to put forward in such a period or rather they resolve it in different ways none of which are totally satisfactory. Nor have they been able to agree on an attitude to wars waged by non-"Third Camp" forces. This I think is at the root of this disagreement and the one on Iraq.

You can have a rather abstract propagandist view that what you need to say is that we're against all ruling classes and in favour of working class unity and need for a programme for both Iranian and Israeli working classes. True and certainly the least risky position — but what is this programme and how it would orient us more concretely at the moment?

On the other hand, there is Sean's rather contradictory combination: accepting we have to take sides on many of the choices posed by bourgeois politics (or at least react to

Socialise the gains!

From page 3

In the 20th century, attempts at working-class revolutions were made many times, and defeated for reasons we cannot discuss here.

The solution, however, remains this: practical recognition of the social nature of the modern forces of production, in the only way possible — by society openly and directly taking possession of the productive forces which have outgrown all control, except that of society as a whole. Now, even more emphatically, "society" means world society — the whole of humankind.

Engels: "The capitalist mode of production, by transforming the great majority of the population into proletarians, creates the power which, under penalty of its own destruction, is forced to accomplish this revolution."

"The bourgeoisie broke up the feudal system and built upon its ruins the capitalist order of society, the kingdom of free competition, of personal liberty, of the equality, before the law, of all commodity owners, of all the rest of the capitalist blessings. Since steam, machinery, and the making of machines by machinery transformed the older manufacture into modern industry, the productive forces, evolved under the guidance of the bourgeoisie, developed with a rapidity and in a degree unheard of before.

Now modern industry, in its complete development, comes into collision with the bounds within which the capitalist mode of production holds it confined. The new productive forces have already outgrown the capitalistic mode of using them. And this conflict between productive

forces and modes of production is not a conflict engendered in the mind of man, like that between original sin and divine justice. It exists, in fact, objectively, outside us, independently of the will and actions even of the men that have brought it on.

"Modern socialism is nothing but the reflex, in thought, of this conflict in fact; its ideal reflection in the minds, first, of the class directly suffering under it, the working class."

Engels summed it up:

"The proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the socialised means of production, slipping from the hands of the bourgeoisie, into public property. By this act, the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital they have thus far borne, and gives their socialised character complete freedom to work itself out. Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible. The development of production makes the existence of different classes of society thenceforth an anachronism.... Man, at last the master of his own form of social organisation, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master — free..."

"To accomplish this act of universal emancipation is the historical mission of the modern proletariat. To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions ... to impart to the oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish — this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific socialism."

Israel, Iran and socialism

Continued from page 17

and racism. There is no impassable barrier between the stages in that continuum.

Calling racist in the Israelis what in other peoples is nationalist or chauvinist is a dishonest attempt to damn Israeli nationalism — and the Israeli nation — by equating it in its entirety with the vilest form in the continuum. It is a form of political character-assassination and moral black-jacking.

There is also in it a savage injustice. A large part of the well-deserved odium in which “everyone” today holds “racism” derives from the Jews not as racists but as the supreme victims of racism in recorded history. The moral worth of such blackjacking is summed up in the fact that the attitudes of the implacable enemies of Israel, Arab-chauvinist or Islamist, even the clerical fascists among them, are not denounced as “racist” or even chauvinist, but classified as legitimate nationalism and splendid “anti-imperialism”.

PHRASEMONGER

I don't classify you, comrade Machover, as “kitsch-left”. Old and well-worn terms exist to describe your politics here, pretty exactly. Lenin's term “phrasemonger” is what I have in mind.

You concern yourself with formal classifications (settler state, imperialism, etc.) rather than with the living political questions.

You denounce the existing Israel for not being the opposite of what it actually is — a Jewish state with a Palestinian Arab minority — and you do that in tandem with allies and supporters of Islamist clerical-fascism.

You combine anarchist-utopian severity of judgement on Israel in the same article in which you play the role of understanding “interpreter” of Ahmadinejad, a couple of phrases about the Iranian rulers being “reactionaries” and “bastards” notwithstanding.

You can think yourself thereby a revolutionary politician and a highly moral man.

It is a delusion. You think you are a leftist on the Middle East, but that too is a delusion. The politics you purvey here are right, not left, wing.

Take what you say about Israel. Some of it has some use as a description. Israel is undoubtedly a settler state. It exists as a result of most of its people — or, now, their parents or grandparents — fleeing persecution and settling there over the last hundred years.

But you mean the description as automatic and outright condemnation, and use it as the basis for a denial of Israel's right to go on existing and of the right of the Jewish nation in Israel to self-determination. Don't you?

You use the expression “settler state” to assert that Israel is essentially the same as the old white South Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), or apartheid South Africa, and to brush aside what distinguishes Israel from them — that it was not and is not fundamentally built on the exploited or super-exploited labour of Arabs, and that its Jewish citizens are the very big majority (80%) of its population.

You condemn Israel as expansionist. I believe that the dominant political forces in Israel want to keep as much of the post-1967 Palestinian territory as they can; they allow or encourage expanding Jewish settlements on that territory. If that's what you mean, yes, expansionist.

When you talk ominously of Israel's “own special agenda of annexation and expansion”, what are you talking about here, beyond Israel's domination of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories? If that is what you are talking about, then you should not present it as if you are saying a lot more.

I have no idea what grandiose ideas may be in the head of this or that Israeli politician. But in the world as it is, as distinct from fantasies derived from the Bible, there is no possibility of Israeli expansion beyond the West Bank.

Of course, we (AWL, and the writer) oppose the real Israeli expansionism and condemn it. We are for a fully independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory, side by side with Israel. We back those in Israel, Arabs as well as Jews, and in the Occupied Territories, who oppose the “expansionism” and counterpose to it “two states”.

And you? What do you propose? The abolition of the Jewish national state! You make putting an end to “Israeli expansionism” conditional on and identical with putting an end to Israel! You propose to replace one injustice to the Palestinians, with another to the Israeli Jews, the forcible abolition of Israel. That is what it comes down to.

You don't advocate a just solution, but the reversal in the Palestinian-Jewish relationship of the roles of victors and vanquished.

those choices in their own terms) but which at the same time retains the abstract element — that we take no responsibility for them and remain the party of irreconcilable opposition. The article reflects the fact that Sean seems to operate in these two separate 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. 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 “vulgar practical choices” and have to take positions based on them.

And thirdly, there is the group (not in the AWL) for whom there is only the choice of the supposed lesser evil in the terms immediately posed by the 6 o' clock news. This leads people like the Eustonites to effectively give up Third Camp or more precisely left politics full stop.

Each of these three positions or combinations of them can be found in the history of Third Camp politics in the broadest sense.

There is a real tension between the two elements in the second variant chosen by Sean — which comes across as an incoherence and evasiveness in our politics. Some comrades see only one side of Sean's dual position and not the other. Some see the declarations of principle; some saw only the pragmatic accommodations, and there is no reconciliation of them that makes much sense proposed by either side.

I suspect that the reasoning behind this division in Sean's head is that all we can do at the moment is make propaganda for our ideas and fight the rest of the left and are therefore limited in the extent to which we can avoid making the “difficult choices” posed by day-to-day bourgeois politics at least on the international level. This is not a totally dishonorable position — it resists following Shachtman's path by virtue of the inconsistent way in which it is applied and the attached genuine declarations of abstract principle — but it's one that has major problems.

Firstly, Sean is very selective about when and where to make “vulgar practical choices”. For many on the left whether to support Obama for US President is one such choice. We rightly reject that choice even though no immediate alternative exists and we can only make abstract propaganda about what is needed in the US. Closer to home, Sean's position on the Good Friday Agreement was based precisely on the rejection of the two immediate “practical” alternatives because neither of them was what we wanted. Europe is another example. The point is that invoking the need to make “vulgar practical choices” is done very selectively, based probably on criteria other than the content of the issue itself (like the crap the rest of the left will say about an issue).

Secondly, if applied consistently, this could become a slippery slope towards a politics based on choosing the immediate lesser evil that appears open to us. After all, Shachtman's path emerged from seeing “democratic” US imperialism as a lesser evil to Stalinist totalitarianism. I am not suggesting that we have taken that path and there are many built-in safeguards against it but I do think it is a danger in the sort of method Sean uses.

We should also resist the temptation to see ourselves as geopolitical analysts. Firstly, insofar as we are, our wisdom is second hand from other sources, which we also need to read critically and politically. We have neither the resources nor the expertise to develop such skills ourselves. It is also not our role. One of the things we have long analysed as a problem with post-war Trotskyism is a tendency to speculate abstractly about great social forces sweeping across the globe and to ignore the real political content involved. And we opposed the Thornettites idea that we should support Argentina in 1982 because it would “weaken imperialism”. Clearly we need to base our politics on real information about what is going on in the world. But we should not base our politics on grandiose speculation about what might happen but rather on the logic of the class struggle.

CONCLUSION

The AWL has yet to fully work out what an adequate Third Camp politics for today — one that contains transitional politics but doesn't totally ignore (or conversely adapt to or take for granted) the fact that the working class is often not organised as an independent actor, let alone one that can determine the outcome of these immediate issues or still more distantly make a revolution.

I don't feel I have a magic solution. I am sympathetic to the idea that we need to start from how Third Camp forces (primarily the workers but also, for example, the Israeli peace movement) might begin to change the choices with which we are now faced but sceptical as to how far a programme elaborated from thousands of miles away without links or influence among those forces can be effective in that.

But we do need at least to discuss the gaps in our tradition for dealing with the world we are faced with today.

CONSEQUENCES

The role in actual politics of irresponsible ultra-left phrasemongering like yours — whose good will I do not question — is the opposite of what you think it is.

You invoke socialist and liberal values and aspirations. You criticise Israel, often justly, in the light of those standards. You conclude that only your “maximalist” settlement is tolerable, and, short of fitting in to that, Israel has no right to exist.

You invoke high ideals and “reject” the existing Israel with the disdain of a “historical” snob. In doing so, you are not, though you want to be, a friend of the oppressed Palestinians: you urge them to reject what is possible, a Palestinian state alongside Israel, and to aim for the impossible.

You counterpose to the “two states” policy an ideal rearrangement that will tidy up the history of the last 100 years; but involves self-liquidation of Israel or its conquest by the Arab states. The only conceivable “instrument” able to destroy Israel is the Arab or Islamic states. That is where your anarchoid phrasemongering leads you — now, implicitly at least, to backing or half-backing Iran's drive for nuclear weapons.

You function as an ideological confusionist, an outrider or skirmisher, operating not to help the socialist and left-wing ideas, values, and ideal choices win support and be realised, but as an inadvertent helpmate of the right, of people like the clerical fascists in Iran. You act as an outrider, and unashamedly so for those on the would-be left who are more directly outriders of the Iranian and other clerical fascists.

I suggest that the way forward is two states, and Israelis, Jews and Arabs, working within Israel for change.

SIREN SAYS!

To conclude. You and I are trapped on the fifth story of a building that is burning beneath us, flames coming out of the windows on three sides. I look around and suggest: “Let's tie these two ropes together, put some knots in them for handholds, and climb down. The ropes are not long enough, and we will have to jump the last storey. We may get hurt a bit, or break a leg or two, but we will survive”.

You say: “No! We'll most likely rope-burn our hands on the way down. One sort of burn is as bad as another. There is no difference!”

“You have fallen in love with the fire, haven't you? You want to compromise with fire and smoke and soot by running from it, by accepting its ‘definition’ of you! You are a pyromaniac! A filthy sootist!”

“I know what to do. We should grow wings now and fly out of the window, rise and soar above it all, free of the fire and the soot and the filthy contamination with pyromania”.

I reply: “Moshe, I'd love to grow wings, but genetic engineering hasn't got that far yet. We simply can't grow wings in time. The only solution to our dilemma is to climb down. We must move carefully, a step at a time”.

You reply: “Don't be silly! I know a great Yiddish song about wings. Let's sing that. I know the lessons of Jewish history. We must learn to fly. It's the only thing”. You start to sing:

“On a wagon bound for market/
Sat a calf with a mournful eye./
High above him flew a swallow/
Winging swiftly through the sky”.

I love that song — my son and I used to sing it when he was small — and I'm tempted to join you. But I resist, and go on preparing the ladder.

Then you sing another song:
“If I had the wings of an angel/
Over these walls I would fly”.

I love that too. My father used to sing it when I was small. But I resist. I join in the singing, but I tie the ropes and knot them. I know that singing the song won't help you sprout wings. “Come on, comrade Machover. We can sing about wings as we climb down”. You say: “F*** off, soot-monger”. As I go out of the window, you continue to sing fine songs.

As I descend, I hear you, fainter now. “I shall not, I shall not be moved...” Another song I like.

I don't know when humankind will learn to “fly” — out-grow nationalism and other such things. For sure, “singing” for it — phrasemongering counterposed to real possibilities — won't speed the process.

The AWL advocates working-class unity across national divisions. For that we have more than preaching and fine songs. For sure, Arab and Jewish workers in Israel, and Israeli and Palestinian workers, will not make peace with each other without the “rope ladder” of a democratic programme — two states.



TUC CONGRESS

Left unions form political alliance

BY A GMB DELEGATE

Perhaps the most positive development at the TUC congress was the formation of a new Trade Union Co-ordinating Group, led by left-wing MP John McDonnell and bringing together the RMT, PCS, NUJ and FBU (with the POA, NAPO and BFAWU expected to come on board soon). The group aims to act as a workers' voice in parliament and coordinate the parliamentary work of trade unions.

Its formation is a positive step, and is a clear indication that at least the leaderships of some key unions are thinking practically about the issue of working-class political representation rather than just making platitudes. However, PCS leader Mark Serwotka's speech at the group's founding meeting — in which he argued that unions should support any candidate of whatever party, so long as they agreed with basic union demands — indicates that socialists in the labour movement still have a lot of work to do in terms of winning our unions to the basic idea that the working-class movement needs an organised, independent political wing.

Neither Serwotka's approach (that would see unions backing Plaid Cymru, SNP or even Liberal Democrat candidates), nor the idea that better coordination of a few unions' parliamentary work is an end in itself, is sufficient. A wider debate about the implications this new group has in terms of wider political representation (i.e. beyond parliament), and how it intersects with existing projects such as the Labour Representation Committee, is vital.

Media sensationalism about the congress planning a potential "winter of discontent" like 1978-9 is, perhaps unfortunately, misplaced. Whatever criticisms can be made of the labour movement in 1978-9 (and there are plenty), the unions were stronger organisations that were at least prepared to flex their muscles from time to time. That spirit is sadly lacking from the perspectives of almost all labour movement leaders.

Continued on page 2

SATs fiasco shows folly of "teaching to test"

BY PAT YARKER

As the new term begins, teachers will be discovering the full extent of the chaos and incompetence which plagued this year's SATs tests. They face the arduous task of reviewing returned scripts and considering whether to spend precious time and money on the appeals process.

The SATS debacle has left the government

vulnerable over testing. The Anti-SATs Alliance has begun to re-mobilise. It may soon launch a petition against testing, and plans a conference in the Autumn. Consideration of a new boycott call, or other action against testing, has begun inside some unions.

Why is this action, necessary and important and what will be to build a strategy against SATs?

More on page 5

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

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

European rate: £20 or 32 euros in cash.

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

WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG

Name

Address.....

Organisation

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY