

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

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STUDENTS

Against fees, debts and marketisation

Student union officers and student activists involved in the Education Not for Sale group have launched the following statement calling for a national student demonstration next year — the year that could see university fees completely deregulated, but in which the National Union of Students is planning no demonstration or serious campaign.

*Education — a right not a privilege:
No to fees — A living grant for every student —
Tax the rich to fund education
For a national demonstration at the start of 2009*

This academic year could see the lifting of the £3,000 cap on tuition fees in higher education. Meanwhile, student debt and poverty are already spiralling, students face soaring costs of living, and the market dominates our education system from school to college to university.

After years of underfunding for post-16 education, the Government brought in tuition fees and then top-up fees. Worsening the already existing inequalities in higher education, fees are greatly accelerating the development of a competitive market between universities, with a tier of well-funded and prestigious institutions and another of less prestigious, underfunded ones. Along with the absence of decent student grants, they rule out the possibility of seriously expanding access, force most students who do get to university into debt and push many into casualised, low-paid jobs. Lifting the cap will, of course, make all this worse. Meanwhile most further education students have always paid fees and never had grants.

Top-up fees will be in the headlines this year, but fees are not the only issue. Though Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish university students studying in their own nation, and FE students under 19, do not

have to pay fees, they do not receive a living grant and are also forced into poverty and debt. Nursing, midwifery and other students who have to work as a large part of their course receive a bursary as an on-the-cheap substitute for a living wage.

International students are exploited to subsidise higher education institutions through higher and higher fees, while post-graduate study is limited to a small elite through a more and more restrictive funding system.

Women, black, LGBT and disabled students are affected and disadvantaged disproportionately by the growth in student poverty and debt.

As our education is commodified and most institutions are run more and more for profit, the wages, conditions and rights of our teachers and other education workers are also coming under attack.

We believe that NUS is allowing the Government to get away with these deeply unpopular policies. This year, despite the review of the cap on fees, NUS is not organising a national demonstration — not even one for its needlessly bureaucratic “alternative funding model”, let alone the abolition of fees and living grants that students need. Its planned “day of action” — scheduled for 5 November, the day after the US presidential election, hardly the best time to get attention — is a start, but inadequate.

That is why we, students’ union officers and student activists, are seeking to organise a national demonstration in the first three months of 2009, around the following demands:

- No raising of the cap on top-up fees; halt and reverse the growth in international students’ fees; abolish all fees in HE and FE — free education for all;
- A living grant for every student over 16 — at least £150 a week; and a living wage

for nursing and other students who have to work as part of their course;

- Stop and reverse marketisation in our schools, colleges and universities — tax the rich and corporations to fund education.

We are seeking to organise this demonstration in alliance with trade union activists fighting back against wage freezes, job cuts and privatisation; with other anti-cuts and privatisation campaigns; with young people’s and children’s organisations; and with others who believe that education should be open to all as a

human right, not a privilege open to a minority based on wealth.

We call on NUS and autonomous campaigns within NUS to support the demonstration.

For updates and a full list of signatories see www.free-education.org.uk/?p=555

For the Facebook group, search for “For a national demonstration over fees, grants and marketisation in 2009”

- To sign the statement or for more information, email: education.not.for.sale@gmail.com

What kind of student movement?

BY DAN RANDALL

Student Respect, or in other words Socialist Workers’ Party students, are organising a conference for a “democratic, campaigning student movement” at the School of Oriental and African Studies on Saturday 1 November.

Entitled “Another education is possible”, it will have sessions on education, NUS democracy, war, racism, climate change and solidarity with workers’ struggles, as well as on building a united student left. The event has the backing of SOAS, Coventry, Goldsmith’s and Essex student union, and seems to be attracting quite widespread support from the beyond the ranks of Respect/SWP. Fair enough.

Unfortunately, the conference is being organised semi-secretly; the founding meeting for it was invitation only, with no invitation, for instance, to AWL or Education Not for Sale students. There is no email list and no Facebook group for

those who want to get involved; and when Essex president and SWP member Dominic Kavakeb came to the ENS steering committee to discuss the event, he basically said that decisions were being made by him, and that if anyone had any ideas for the conference they should contact him.

ENS is supporting the event, but — particularly given the record of the SWP, who only last year tried to exclude left-wing oppositionists from the steering committee of the Defend NUS Democracy campaign — we have concerns that the event will be undemocratic and exclusive in the extreme, completely dominated by Respect. The fact that there is no mechanism for those outside the inner circle to get involved does not bode well. Nonetheless, we will be there, arguing for the kind of democratic, open united left the student movement needs.

- For more information, see the ENS website: www.free-education.org.uk

HUMAN EMBRYOLOGY BILL

Trade unionists for choice

BY REBECCA GALBRAITH

Next month we will have the first chance in 18 years to extend abortion rights when the House of Commons debates pro-choice amendments to the Human Embryology Bill.

Every day recently I have removed anti-choice leaflets from the entrance sign to the hospital where I work at and numerous friends have told me about receiving pro-life propaganda through their door, urging them to contact their MP and ask them to vote against all of the pro-choice amendments.

The anti-choicers are getting their arguments out and once again the focus of the main pro-choice group Abortion Rights will be a public meeting in the House of Commons. Yet it is vital that a wave of public opinion is built up supporting reproductive freedom so that we have some chance of liberalising the law and finally extending abortion rights to Northern Ireland.

This October may be the last chance to extend rights to women in the north of Ireland, as abortion will become a fully devolved issue in the next few months.

We also need to start building a mass campaign capable of fighting the attacks that will undoubtedly come if the Tories win the next general election.

Feminist Fightback are prioritising this

issue in the next month. We have three main critiques of the national Abortion Rights campaign to defend and extend abortion rights:

- the fight for reproductive freedom is not put at the centre of the argument so debates are about viability and scientific development dominate;

• secondly, a right to choose is only possible for all women if we change the material conditions of women’s lives — this means fighting for demands that would alienate the cross-party MPs that Abortion Rights works so closely with;

• thirdly, we need to move away from lobbying MPs and organising meetings in the House of Commons to organising a campaign of mass action. While we support the campaign and will continue to encourage trade union affiliation to it, we think that the campaign needs to change, and change quickly.

Feminist Fightback’s initiative is Trade Unionists for Choice — a network for organising the fight for reproductive freedom within the labour movement. The anti-choicers may have the church, we should have the unions!

We want to speak in as many unions as possible before the vote (before 5 November), and after the vote. In November Feminist Fightback and the RMT women’s advisory committee are organising a joint speaker training event with the aim of getting more women confident about speaking at branches. We are

also organising some direct action.

If you can help with Trade Unionists for Choice, either as a speaker or by getting a speaker to your branch meeting please get in touch as soon as possible.

From the Trade Unionists for Choice Statement

As trade union activists and organisations, we want to create a strong labour movement voice in favour of a woman’s right to choose — whether to have, or not to have, a child.

We support the Abortion Rights campaign, and will continue to work for trade union affiliations to and funding for it. At the same, we want to establish a network that exists specifically to organise pro-choice activity in the labour movement and from a working-class perspective. We also believe that Abortion Rights as a whole should adopt such a perspective...

The right to choose is an issue for all women, central to the struggle for women’s equality and liberation, but it affects working-class women with particular sharpness...

We take inspiration from the British labour movement’s history of pro-choice campaigning...

- No reduction in the 24-week time limit for access to abortion;
- The right to abortion on demand, without having to get the consent of a doctor, up to the legal time limit;
- The extension of abortion rights to

women in Northern Ireland;

- Integration of abortion into the NHS as a service that can be performed by trained nurse practitioners;

• An end to privatisation, marketisation and fragmentation in the NHS; increased public funding through taxation of the rich and business to guarantee free and equal access to abortion;

- An end to forced sterilisation
- Publicly-funded access to IVF for all couples, including same sex ones;
- Improved access to and increased choice of publicly-funded contraception;
- Clear, honest, comprehensive and confidential sexuality and relationship education for all children which addresses issues of consent and domestic violence;

• A real right to choose, which also means the right to have a child free from economic and social pressure. This requires a real living wage for all workers, benefits which can be lived on and rise with earnings, universal publicly-funded childcare and an end to the stigmatisation of single mothers.

We will also seek to make solidarity with women, and particularly labour movement women, fighting for abortion rights across the world, from Ireland to Poland, from the US to Iran.

- To get involved, for a full copy of the statement, contact either Rebecca (07971719797) or Laura (07890209479). feminist.fightback@gmail.com

THE “BOSSSES’ SOCIALISM”

We say workers’ socialism!

“For us the bourgeoisie is not a stone dropping into an abyss, but a living historical force which struggles, manoeuvres, advances now on its right flank, now on its left. And only provided we learn to grasp politically all the means and methods of bourgeois society so as to each time react to them without hesitation or delay, shall we succeed in bringing closer that moment when we can, with a single confident stroke, actually hurl the bourgeoisie into the abyss” Leon Trotsky, 1922

1 968 went down in history as the year of tremendous shifts in world politics that led to an enormous upsurge of the left all over the world. 2008 will go down as the year in which world capitalism, and the bourgeoisie which embodies it, received a tremendous blow to its credibility.

For twenty years, since the collapse of European Stalinism and the enthusiastic acceptance of market economics by the Stalinist rulers of China, capitalism has gone through “globalisation” and tremendous growth.

It has been seen by its direct beneficiaries, their college professors, hired journalists and pigs-wallowing-in-mud politicians, as impregnable and, in its fundamentals, unquestionable.

Working-class socialist alternatives had, they said, been left for dead by history long ago — buried in the same grave as Stalinism and the once-vigorous social reformism of parties like the old Labour Party. They were the property only of unteachable individuals and stupid groupuscules.

Capitalism has been seen as the Only Possible System even by many of those who dislike or detest it — the only system there is, or ever can be.

Now, all across the media, the idea has erupted that capitalism is not only a grotesque, wasteful, savagely unjust system; it is also unstable; and it may not, after all, be permanent.

Writers in the ultra-Tory *Daily Telegraph* (20 September) feel compelled by events to admit that the capitalist “cycle” has been “more accurately predicted by Karl Marx” than by bourgeois economists.

Capitalism is a system which works by way of periodic economic and social tsunamis that leave in their wake tremendous destruction in many millions of lives. A manic-depressive system which, like its equivalent in individual psychologies, plunges from crazy heights to destructive, paralysing depths.

“The Market” has been elevated to the place in the social and economic theology of the ruling class occupied in religion by God. It is a harsh and relentless, and sometimes a very cruel and destructive, God, to be sure; but also one who essentially looks out for human beings and continuously bestows a tremendous stream of gifts on us.

A professor, a one-time Maoist, David Marsland, speaking in a debate at a Workers’ Liberty event in 1991, put it with arresting crassness: “The better part of intelligence is to marvel at the market’s gifts to mankind”.

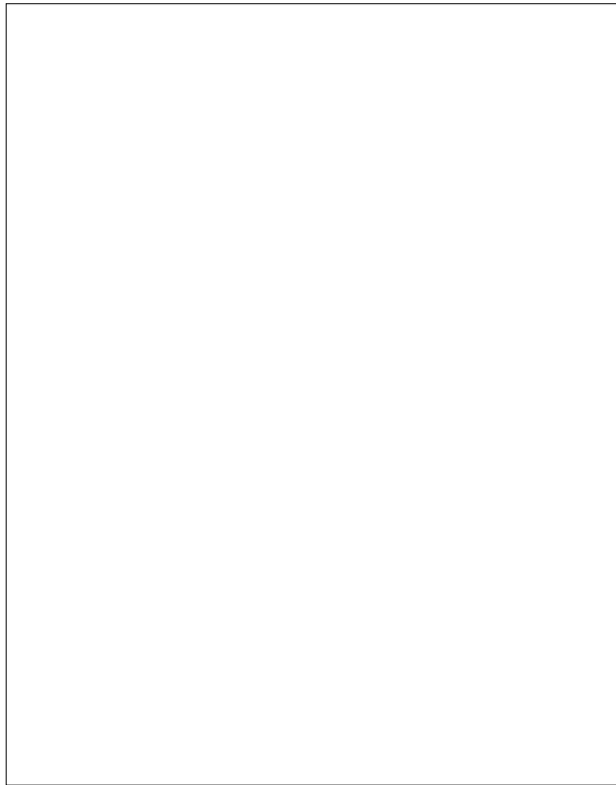
This became the ritual formula under which immense numbers of former socialists, some with a numbed sense of horror and tragedy, and some with relief, simply gave up, committed moral and political suicide, and made their peace with the system which, in their braver youth, they had vowed to fight to the death.

An old early-19th meaning of “social-ism”, as any sort of social or government intervention to correct, shape, or supplement dog-eat-dog market “individualism” regained some of its meaning and relevance in the ultra-confident bourgeois era of “let the markets decide”. It was a feeble caveat, by believers in the “social market”, a “reformed” version of the dominant capitalist “religion”, to the extremes of the market-is-God ideologising.

Now, eighteen months after the opening of the credit crisis — the collapse of immense inverted pyramids of usurious money-lending constructed by greedy bankers — the leading bourgeois governments have themselves been driven to find, if not alternatives to the market, then non-market ways to supplement and supplant the normal workings of the market.

The British government nationalised Northern Rock. The right-wing bourgeois government of the USA has nationalised the country’s two biggest mortgage companies and its biggest insurance company. And now it proposes, using taxpayers’ money to the tune of \$700 billion — that is, seven hundred thousand million dollars — to buy up the bad debts of the bankers!

The US rulers feel and recognise an urgent need to stop the capitalist system working according to its own rules and its own deepest logic. If not, it will just seize up — like it did in March 1933, when US banks closed their doors and the normal workings of the system simply ceased for four days!



Profiteering for too long

They are “all socialists now”? Yes, in the primitive, historically long-outmoded sense of “society-ists”, people who recognise the need for some sort of government intervention.

But, of course, no, in the sense that “socialism” has had for 150 years — the regulation of society by, and in the interests of, the working class and other working people.

BOSSSES’ SOCIALISM

Of course what the US and British governments have done and propose to do has nothing in common with that socialism. Bush’s proposed \$700 billion bail-out is a proposal to avert the consequence of capitalism’s workings by way of looting the public treasury for the benefit of the very rich.

- The crisis, which may yet spiral down into something resembling the crisis of the 1930s;
- The panicked resort by right-wing bourgeois governments to “social-ist” emergency measures;
- The governments’ rescue measures for the capitalist victims of their own system;
- The manifold demonstrations that this is a system that can go on privatising gains only if obliging governments are prepared at a pinch to step in and help by socialising losses.

These events show, or with the help of socialists seizing our chances can be made to show:

- Capital, by its own processes, has concentrated and centralised itself so much that, for instance, the two mortgage companies now nationalised in the USA control three-quarters of all new mortgages in that enormous country of 300 million inhabitants. It has created concentrations so gigantic that governments can aspire to control the economy by way of controlling some of the conglomerates, almost as one takes hold of the steering, braking, and accelerating controls of a car.
- These gigantic enterprises have already to a very great extent been *socialised* — organised on a society-wide basis. Within states and internationally, they control very large areas of society. But they are “social-ised” by capitalist profiteers and run on their behalf, by their governments. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, it is socialisation of the very rich, by the very rich, for the very rich.
- Government intervention to regulate, administer, and sometimes rescue those gigantic enterprises is necessary if society is not to break down. Even the most right-wing bourgeois government ideologists proclaim this loudly! Even froth-at-the-mouth advocates of big business and “the free market” like George W Bush and Gordon Brown — yes, Brown! — understand that and act on it.
- In so far as governments intervene, they do it as governments of the big bourgeoisie, to preserve this system, run for private profit. Even when they are forced in the interests of the capitalist class as a whole to nationalise enterprises, everything is done for, or mainly for, the big bourgeoisie. These governments rule for the bourgeoisie.
- The working class, and working people in general, need

a government of our own, a *workers’ government* that will serve our interests as Brown and Bush and Berlusconi and Merkel and Sarkozy serve the bourgeoisie. That government will organise the already-socialised economy in the common interest, not in the bourgeois interest.

It will expropriate the bourgeoisie and substitute proper, continuous, planning for the gyrations of the market. It will organise the economy for human need, and for the preservation of the environment on which humankind depends — not for the greed of those who now run the economy and society in their own private interests. It will socialise *the gains*.

Society moves spontaneously, in its normal capitalist workings, towards the socialisation of the economy. Frederick Engels called that “the invading socialist society”. Like a human pregnancy, this “socialisation” needs to be delivered from its integument before it is a viable independent organism.

“Socialism” needs to be delivered from the rule, and the highly structured anarchy, of the capitalist profiteers and the governments prepared to loot society on their behalf.

The job of socialists now is to seize the chance to explain to our class the craziness of the system under which we live and the possibility of something better. To explain that a working-class democratic socialist alternative is necessary, urgently necessary, and that it can be won. To explain that democracy is more than the very shallow, merely political thing which, at best, it is now, under the bourgeoisie. That real democracy, democracy worthy of the name, must be democratic control of the economy on which society and humanity depend, as well as a greatly expanded and deepened political democracy. That a socialist revolution of the working class is necessary. And that it is, now as in Russian in 1917, when the working class seized power, possible.

The extant left has been battered out of shape so much by the events and the despair of decades that it is in no shape to do the work of socialist education and organisation now becoming possible. It is simply not “fit for purpose”. Therefore, we must make it fit.

Here, there is a certain parallel with 1968. Then too the left was not in good shape. Decades of defeat and massacre lay on us like a giant crypt-stone. Stalinism was vigorous and still expanding.

When the French general strike of May-June 1968 erupted, many socialists had half given up on the European working class. They thought it had been corrupted by prosperity, coming after the enormous historical defeats of the 1930s and 40s; and they looked to “Third World” revolutions, led by Stalinists, as the leading “front of the World Revolution”.

Today the working-class movement has not yet recovered from the defeats and setbacks of the 1980s and 90s. Much of the ostensible left is delirious with incoherent and often reactionary “anti-imperialism” that looks to Islamist clerical-fascists as “the best fighters against imperialism” now.

As so much of the left in 1968 looked to “Third World” totalitarian-Stalinist movements? Yes, but worse. Much of the left in 1968 thought of Stalinism as either the socialist revolution or an intermediary first stage of that revolution. It was, of course, nonsensical; but even the most pixillated fantasists and allies of clerical-fascist “anti-imperialism” today do not have any comparable positive expectations from it. That testifies to realism? No — it testifies to a relapse into pure negativism towards advanced capitalism, utter political demoralisation, and disabling loss of self-identity.

The left is not ready for the situation we are now entering; we must make it ready.

One of the great lessons of the 20th century is that there is no such thing as an insoluble crisis for capitalism. Given time, given the chance to hold on tight, given the lack of a politically coherent alternative to itself, it recovers. Economic devastations, immensely tragic for vast numbers of people and even for individual capitalists, can, paradoxically, clear the way for capitalist economic revival. The manic-depressive system climbs out of the trough and begins a rise to peaks from which it will again, in time, plunge down. The cycle goes on.

Capitalism will not jump into history’s abyss; it has to be knocked on the head and resolutely pushed!

That requires an adequate socialist movement. It requires that socialists put our affairs in better order than they are now. It requires honest and free discussion of our political differences and difficulties, and study of the lessons of our own history, recent and distant.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty will take the working-class socialist message out to as many of those newly alerted to the realities of capitalism as we can; and we will educate, discuss, and debate to get ourselves and the broader left in condition to do that work better.

IN BRIEF

LOCAL GOVERNMENT: The decision by members of Unison's Local Government National Joint Council to agree to binding arbitration effectively brings this year's pay dispute to an end. It is a failure for the union and the leftists who lead the sector and will be a bitter disappointment to the members who supported action but wanted a better deal.

Arbitration is unlikely to lead to any offer that meets the union's demands (6%) and may actually include small victories for the bosses — further increases in productivity for perhaps one half of a percentage point increase in this year's offer. All this has been clearly signalled in the framework for talks already agreed by the unions and the employers.

Under binding arbitration the union will have to accept *any* offer made and members will have no say on the final deal.

How have we got to this point? On a very narrow vote in favour in 2007 the leadership decided not to press ahead with strike action because, in their view, support was not strong enough to launch a successful campaign. It was hard for serious trade unionists to disagree with such a practical judgement, based on a calculation of the balance of forces. A poor turnout that failed to move the employers would only demoralise members and activists already disappointed by the failures of the pension dispute.

"Keeping your powder dry" until the situation changes is sometimes reasonable. But it does imply some care in maintaining what you've got and building something more. This was not done. Instead an initial plan of two days action with no firm follow up or ideas of how to build the action went ahead on a narrow vote in favour of action.

That vote nevertheless was positive and it's the duty of a leadership to build and bolster support. This meant paying attention to what were the obvious inequalities between branches and across regions. Workers' Liberty supporters in particular argued for the use of selective action to maintain momentum over the summer.

Instead it all went quiet and the next members heard was that the union was in "talks about talks" but that there was no better offer.

The recent branch based consultation has now persuaded the NJC that the members are no longer willing to take action. And as far as the members are concerned the two day strike did not achieve anything. It's not surprising the members did not want to take further action.

But going to ACAS is a real act of despair. By doing this the NJC have almost admitted defeat. They are accepting some responsibility for that — in their press release they say that a "review of this year's action and negotiations and our bargaining power will kick off at the next NJC Committee."

But this should be a matter for the whole sector to learn from, not just the NJC. For a start isn't the fact that the NJC is not directly elected and accountable to the members a cause for concern in itself, especially given their power over decisions on pay. The review must include how the high expectations that some on the left, particularly the SWP, had about how the "mood to fight" substituted for the necessary detailed work of building support in the branches. The idea that the economic crisis would automatically mean the members were willing to fight, that having a left leadership meant the dispute was safe from a sell out, and the failure to have a strategy that went beyond two days of initial action... all of this need accounting for.

The lack of a rank and file movement inside Unison is a key weakness. Such a movement could have effectively pressed the leadership to keep the struggle going over the summer and provide the network of contacts necessary to keep ordinary members informed and engaged. Unfortunately the focus of both the United Left and Socialist Party members has been on securing positions in the bureaucracy without having an organised base of support outside of a few left branches.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Acid test for RMT as key activist victimised

Andy Littlechild, a well-known local rep at Lillie Bridge and activist on the "company council" — the top relevant union body — was suspended by the infrastructure company Metronet on Tuesday 16 September, on trumped-up charges.

The London Underground Engineering and Fleet branches, and the RMT union executive, have voted to ballot Metronet workers for strike action. If Metronet is allowed to get away with this, every union rep across the network will be in danger.

The workers whom Andy directly works with are reported as being very solid in their determination to stop the victimisation. Success will depend on making sure all workers across Metronet know the issues. Leaflets are already being distributed to workplaces by reps and activists.

The spark was a local manager's arbitrary insistence on workers wearing hard hats at all times. Andy was working on a job with an agreed risk assessment not calling for hard hats.

The manager wrote a new risk assessment, deliberately shortcutting proper procedures and choosing to exclude the union. Andy wrote to the manager saying that he would stick with the established risk assessment.

Management then staged an "audit" and suspended Andy. Now higher-level management has seized on the case as a means to bash the unions.

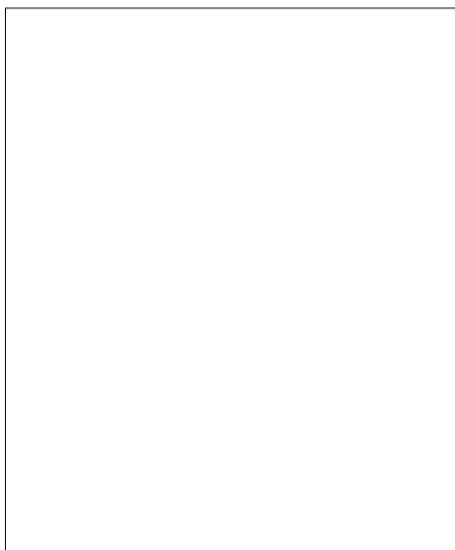
The RMT needs to look at how to fight victimisations. It has two others on its hands now, apart from Andy — Karl Niles

Some have argued that the key factor in failing to engage members was the inability to coordinate with other unions. The possibility of unity may have increased the likelihood of more action but it was not decisive. Certainly it could not have been made the sole reason for taking action. Let's remember that Unison is a massive union, unlike say NAPO who have to seek allies before contemplating action. Unity would have enhanced action but it was always dependent on UNISON organising action itself.

The TUC has passed a motion calling for coordinated action and yes, Unison did support it. But the leadership in Health and now Local Government had ensured that Unison has no action to coordinate. The best that can come out of the TUC motion is that Unison will find it harder to attack branches who have taken a lead in organising local Public Sector Alliances. These at least can still provide the basis for Unison branches to provide solidarity to the unions who will be taking action.

The union had a year and more to prepare for action on pay, but failed to develop the arguments and support the branches in engaging the members. That in turn is a result in a decline in organisation particularly outside of the metropolitan areas and big towns that cannot be ignored.

Local activists and branches should challenge the NJC and their decision and use the opportunity of the review to start organising now for an emergency sector conference to debate a serious industrial strategy, and learn lessons from our own recent experience and more positively that of the ongoing dispute in Scotland. Left leadership is not enough without being linked to a developed rank and file network that can deliver the action in the branches.



Tubeworkers: under pressure

and Sarah Hutchins — and there have been several recently, with mixed outcomes.

While station staff took two days of strike action to demand Jerome Bowes' reinstatement, Elephant & Castle drivers voted not to join the action after a dirty tricks campaign by management. Jerome now awaits his Employment Tribunal, but remains sacked.

Several cleaners have been sacked or suspended following this year's successful strike action.

Mo Makhboul's workmates voted by a large majority to strike against his sacking,

but in insufficient numbers to make strike action viable.

RMT was unable to successfully defend its London Bridge rep, Gyles Henry, after his workmates were divided as to whether to take strike action.

Earlier this year, RMT abandoned planned strikes in defence of sacked Morden DMT Sarah Appleby.

There have been RMT successes, too. This year, RMT won the reinstatement of Mukesh Mahatma, after his Canary Wharf colleagues voted to strike.

Last year, the union overturned the sacking of a DLR Train Captain. And two years ago, RMT's successful fight to defend drivers Raj Nathvani and Les Bruty was a model of how to fight victimisation.

Until about five years ago, it seemed that RMT could defend its LUL members' jobs at will. The turning point seems to have been the case of Chris Barrett, the famous "squash-playing driver" from Edgware Road. His fellow drivers took two days' strike action in his defence around Christmas 2003, but LUL would not back down, and even though Chris went on to win his Unfair Dismissal claim at Employment Tribunal, he did not get his job back.

What had changed? LUL management. They had become more belligerent, and had a boss — Ken Livingstone — who was determined to look tough against Tube workers.

LUL bosses' new aggression needs to be matched by new determination from the unions.

COUNCIL WORKERS: Something like 150,000 Scottish council workers, organized in Unison, the GMB and Unite, struck over pay on September 24.

After a previous day of strike action, Coalition of Scottish Local Authorities withdrew its three year pay deal of 2.5 percent each year in favour of one year at 2.5 percent. While multi-year pay deals, particularly sub-inflation ones, are crap, this is hardly an improvement — representing, obviously, not an extra penny. The unions are demanding 5 percent, which would just about keep up with notional inflation.

Many schools were also shut due to action by teaching assistants, caretakers and other ancillary staff — and to teachers' refusing to cross picket lines.

The lesson, in Scotland as in England: keep up the action to win. And yet with de facto capitulation in England, Scottish workers have been left to fight alone.

USDAW: Socialist Party member Robbie Segal has taken 40% in the election for general secretary of the shopworkers' union USDAW. As the SP's press release put it: "Robbie is a Tesco worker who on shoe-string resources with a tiny band of activists in a David and Goliath battle faced the entire USDAW official machine."

The union bureaucracy was, it seems, mobilised on a huge scale to defend the Blairite incumbent John Hannett — who had the additional advantage of appearing in union publications every month, while Segal was a relative unknown. But her demand for an £8 minimum wage, her opposition to social partnership — which in Tesco, for instance, has made USDAW virtually a company union — and her pledge to remain on her current wage and

not take Hannett's 100,000 salary obviously struck a cord with members.

Solidarity has made many very serious criticisms of the Socialist Party's record in the unions. We have not changed our minds. But we would like to congratulate comrade Segal on an excellent result.

There are plans to create a campaign for a fighting, democratic USDAW. Future issues of *Solidarity* will carry more information.

ADULT EDUCATION: The Campaigning Alliance for Lifelong Learning is a new campaign aimed at stopping the decline of Adult Education 1.5 million course places have been lost over the last two years.

The launch meeting will be held at 5 pm on Tuesday 30 September at 27 Britannia Street WC1X 9JP.

<http://www.callcampaign.org.uk>

New Off The Rails — a bulletin for railworkers produced by Workers' Liberty — now available.

Covering issues from the economic crisis to Network Rail harmonisation, East Midlands Trains to improving union websites, plus the history of the OILC organising offshore, and much more.

<http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/09/22/rails-autumn-2008>

Or get copies for your branch: 10 for £1.50, 20 for £2, from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.

TEACHERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS BALLOT TO STRIKE

Public sector pay: how to win

BY CHRIS HICKEY

If anything sums up New Labour as a Government for the rich, a cuckoo in the labour movement nest, it has to be their year-on-year drive to keep public sector wages below the rate of inflation.

According to a report on the Joseph Rowntree website, and based on 2007 statistics, "the public sector is a large employer of workers earning less than £7 per hour, accounting for a quarter of all such employees... the public sector employs relatively few adults of the age group where low pay is most prevalent, namely those under the age of 25. If this age group is excluded then the share of low paid workers who are in the public sector rises to 30%. Just about all of these are women." (The £7 per hour low pay threshold is commonly used; it was, until recently, roughly two-thirds of median hourly earnings in Great Britain.)

But the Joseph Rowntree figures exclude those employed by contractors in the state sector — including tens of thousands of cleaners, catering and security staff, messengers and others on very low pay and denied the occupational pension schemes, sick pay rights and annual leave granted to directly-employed public sector workers. When these workers are included New Labour's responsibility for low pay rises even more.

PCS, the largest civil service union, points out that "...a quarter of the civil service [earn] less than £16,500 and thousands earning just above the minimum wage... Forty percent of staff in the Department for Work and Pensions, which includes Jobcentres, will have no pay rise whatsoever this year, 30% of staff in the Identity and Passport Service are in the same situation, whilst coastguard watch assistants received a special pay rise to keep their pay above the minimum wage."

Even amongst relatively better paid public sector workers in the civil service, local government, education and the NHS, the picture is one of increasing hardship. For instance teachers' pay increases for 2008-2011 do not match the current rate of inflation. And teachers' pay increases have already been below inflation every year from 2005 onwards. Teachers have had real-terms pay cuts of up to £2000.

While the Government charges interest on student debt at the rate of RPI (the inflation rate measurement which includes mortgages), it bases its pay policy for teachers, including newly qualified teachers trying to pay off their student debt, on CPI (an inflation measurement which excludes mortgages). The hypocrisy is astounding. The fact is that New Labour is consciously cutting the real living standards of hundreds of thousands of workers.

In any case the official rate of inflation does not properly measure the inflation actually experienced by millions of workers. Most of the tabloids are now running "alternative rates of inflation" based on shopping basket essentials. The *Daily Mail* calculates, "...someone spending £100 a week on food last year will have to find another £712 this year to put the same items on the table."

Against this backdrop the decisions of the PCS and the teachers' union, NUT, to ballot their members for national industrial action over pay is the best labour movement news in a long while — in terms of sheer numbers of trade unionists involved, the potential for the dispute to widen to other unions such as UCU (college lecturers) and the potential for



The labour movement needs to respond to the economic crisis

activists to link up across the unions.

PCS will ballot 270-280,000 members between 24 September and 17 October for three days of strike action (two days of national action and an additional programme of rolling civil service sectoral action), to take place between November and the end of January. The NUT ballot of its 250,000 members will start on Monday 6 October. It now looks certain that PCS and NUT will coordinate at least one day of strike action in November, but if we are to shift Brown, both unions will need to plan for more strike action.

GEARING UP TO WIN

Every PCS and NUT member who doesn't want to accept years of real pay cuts should be putting all their energy into securing a high turnout and a massive majority for the planned action.

However, the unions belong to their members, and members should be seeking to exercise democratic control over their leaders. And activists and branches also need to draw conclusions from the experience of recent public sector strikes:

- a public-sector-wide fight back must be focussed on a few key demands that unite the unions and can be won by all unions — such as the demand for pay rises exceeding RPI.

- The demand for a public sector wide fight back to defeat a public sector wide pay policy is absolutely right but it should not be on the basis, increasingly argued on much of the left, that major public sector unions *cannot win in their own right* against the government. Such a lack of confidence and drive is wrong. It ties each union to the least reliable and the least confident of the union leaderships and enabling each union leadership to blame another for any settlement on less than adequate terms.

Each union must therefore work out what it needs to do to win and to be determined to do so irrespective of any back-

sliding amongst union leaders elsewhere. For example, the PCS rolling strike strategy is a considerable step up from the Executive's previous flawed, and much criticised, strategy of one-day strikes separated by months. Its new strategy reflects the pressure of activists who wanted more, and the ongoing criticism of the PCS Independent Left, who have repeatedly warned that sporadic one day strikes would not force New Labour to retreat on pay.

Unfortunately, the PCS leadership is not indicating whether, if need be, it will call any further action after the second national strike in January. This is a mistake. The Executive should be clear that it is planning national, sectoral, rolling, and selective strike action. Both PCS and NUT members — and for that matter the Government — need to know that the PCS are fighting to win.

Levies should be collected to build up an additional war chest as quickly as possible. The PCS leadership has resisted this call for years but in a union with many low paid members, and where the industrial muscle varies enormously, a levy can play a vital role in supporting members and action.

PCS and NUT activists and branches should be demanding that their national unions set up joint local coordinating committees, inviting representatives of other public sector unions to attend in an effort to build up the pressure for action elsewhere. Better organised PCS and NUT branches can of course just get on with the job of establishing local committees which can build support, hold their leaders to account, and win the dispute.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We need to counter the "spin" of the PCS would-be left leadership. A few years ago they claimed that they had been promised a "fair pay system" by the head of the civil service (he made no such

promise) and earlier this year they claimed to have "achieved the first national pay negotiations in 15 years to address massive inequalities in pay." (Left Unity National Executive election leaflet on its website).

They were not the first talks in 15 years (the NEC had already spent five years in fruitless talks) and there was little or no likelihood of those talks resulting in real pay improvements for members — hence the current ballot!

We need to insist on straight and prompt reporting of all national negotiations so that we are not suddenly presented with a fait accompli deal that does not deliver on our demands. The old CPSSA Broad Left (the old left grouping of a forerunner union) always argued for special pay conferences in an effort to prevent the old right wing leadership from just doing what it wanted. The need for democratic control does not disappear when would-be left-wingers control the union.

Implementation of the TUC's decision to call days of "action", including a national demonstration against the government's pay policy, has to be fought for, and built, at the rank and file level. The TUC's national pension demonstrations of a few years ago were woefully ill-prepared, resulting in small turnouts relative to a major threat to hundreds of thousands of workers. The day of the first coordinated PCS-NUT strike should see joint lunchtime marches and demonstrations taking place in every town and city.

Those demonstrations and marches should be the beginning of the labour movement's political response to the present economic crisis, and the attempt to dump its effects onto workers' shoulders. Calling for "fairness" is pitiful — as if ministers, the Tories, big business, and the press will not play divide and rule by dishonestly comparing public sector workers (as if they are pulling down a fortune) to private sector workers. Private sector workers, including those working for contractors in the state sector, are *also* sharing the misery of job cuts, low pay, and below-inflation pay increases.

We need a workers' alternative plan that can be fought for in the labour movement, that will answer the most immediate concerns of workers (repossession, mortgage costs, job loss, maintenance of living standards). The unions need to link these issues clearly in their publicity, emphasising that the fight for pay is the fight for decent services. And that means raising the demand for more funding through taxation of the wealthiest who have done very well under New Labour.

It is all very well the PCS General Secretary saying, "If the Tories win the election and industrial strife breaks out, the fault lies with Gordon Brown and the government."

We understand what he means — don't tell us to not to rock the boat when you're cutting our living standards — but it sums up the predicament of the labour movement. The New Labour cuckoos took over the Labour Party and sectarians stood aside from the fight to stop them. The leaders of the affiliated unions were complicit in that takeover. Now all we are left with is "don't blame us if the Tories win" when a triumphant Tory Party will simply renew the attacks.

The unions urgently need to consider a political response to the current crisis — a programme to be positively fought for, industrially and politically, on the governmental terrain. Our aim should be to defeat Brown industrially and to assert the labour movement on the governmental level as an alternative to both New Labour and Cameron.

The unions and the crisis

From the back page

Submissions to the Forum are restricted to amendments to six documents from the leadership. That restriction encourages timidity, but does not absolutely compel it.

The unions submitted hundreds of amendments. This year, for the first time, the local Labour Parties (CLPs) also had the right to put amendments, and submitted four thousand.

However, those CLP amendments had to be filtered through regional meetings of Forum delegates. The Forum delegates supposedly representing CLPs are not elected directly by the parties, but by CLP delegates at Labour's annual conference, and show a political balance quite different from the CLPs. *Campaign Briefing* categorises only one of those delegates as "Centre Left", whereas four (half) of the CLP reps on Labour's national executive (elected directly by CLP members) are "Centre Left".

Those regional meetings were under no obligation to send the CLP amendments on to the Forum. They did send on about 1500 of them.

At the Forum, ministers and officials laboured over two days through "group meetings", "seminars", and "side meetings", to beat down the CLPs and unions to "consensus wording".

On the final day, still behind closed doors, just a few dozen amendments remained to be actually voted on. By then the union delegates had agreed to abstain, as a block, on anything controversial, in order to "save" whatever feeble behind-closed-door concessions they had got from ministers.

The unions as such have only about 30 out of 190 delegates at the Forum. But, for example, union members of Labour's national executive can also attend; so, if the unions mobilise their forces, compel their national executive members to vote with union rather than executive policy, and mobilise a few CLP delegates, they have a big enough minority to get their policies to go forward as "minority positions".

They didn't do that. Only two out of the over 4000 amendments eventually went forward as "minority positions", and those were minor proposals coming from Sir Jeremy Beecham, an extremely respectable New Labour local government dignitary.

The windfall tax went down with only five votes in favour (the four "Centre Left" executive members, and the one "Centre Left" CLP rep). The union leaders who now make speeches in favour of it sat on their hands.

Most other leftist proposals got only the same five votes. Outright opposition to Academies, for example, didn't even get to the table; a proposal for "independent research" to be done into their worth got just six votes; one for at least one-third of the governors at Academies to be parent-governors was the most successful left proposition, getting 33 votes, still not enough for a "minority position".

Now the union leaders have done their deal with Brown (at that July Forum); even if they feel a bit more militant next year, they are unlikely to unpick the deal only a few months before a general election. And it all happens behind closed doors; the vast majority of union activists do not even know that the Forum is taking place, let alone how their representatives vote there.

Working-class activists need to re-establish a form of political representation open to scrutiny by, and democratically controllable by, the rank and file.

THE REAL COST OF LIVING

Jobless figure is rising

By TOM UNTERRAINER

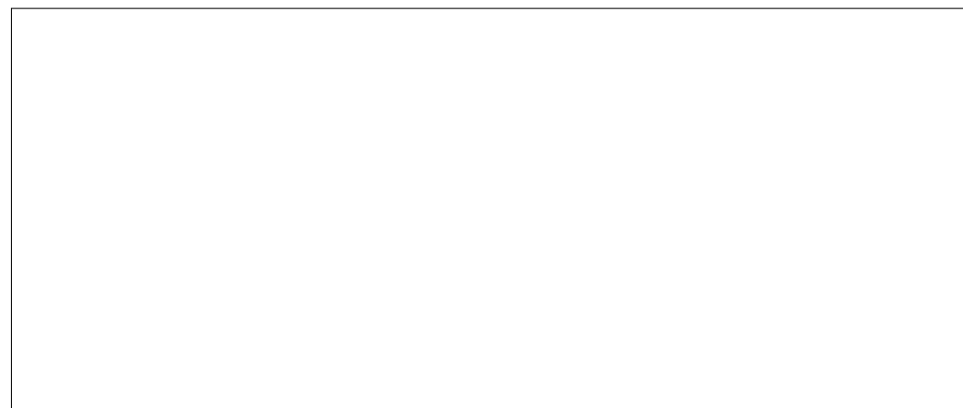
As the economic crisis generalises — creeping out of the financial markets and into the productive economy — material effects on working-class lives begin to hit home. Along with rocketing costs of living and house repossessions, unemployment looks set to increase.

According to predictions from the TUC, the number of people out of work for more than one year will double by the end of 2009. Long-term unemployment (as measured by the government) could increase to 700,000 and the total unemployment levels will increase to over two million.

Official figures show that in the three months up to June unemployment rose by 5.4% to 1.67 million, 5.5% of the total working population. According to the Office for National Statistics, in the three months up to July nearly 140,000 people lost their jobs.

These newly unemployed workers face one of the harshest benefit regimes since the foundation of the welfare state. The "Job Seeker Allowance" scheme involves a series of interviews, a six-month "trial" and then re-assessment. Those between the ages of eighteen and twenty four receive lower payments. If you happen to have savings — as many workers do, after years of being told by Tory then Labour governments that this is the "responsible" thing to do — you may not be entitled to benefits at all. And if you haven't been paying National Insurance contributions for long enough, you are penalised further.

At the same time, the employment rate is



Jobs are getting more difficult to keep and more difficult to find

falling: down 0.2% to 74.7%. Although this is still a fraction of a percent above the employment rate at this point last year, there is every reason to believe it will dip further.

In the previous period, the overall number of job vacancies was high — meaning that those out of work had a reasonable chance of finding a job. That many of these jobs are low paid, in poor working conditions and, of course, with no union representation didn't bother the government. But the effects of the economic crisis have a dual effect.

As workers are being laid-off, shrinking the workforce, the pool of available jobs also starts to shrink. Employers are recruiting fewer and fewer workers as the prospects for the economy continues to darken.

Both of these factors contribute to a

growing pool of unemployed labour and intensified competition of the job market. Those in work will feel less secure about their jobs and the bosses will put the pressure on — intensifying work and attempting to worsen pay and conditions.

This situation is not inevitable. A combative labour movement can ensure that jobs are saved and that those in work continue to win improvements in pay and conditions. The labour movement should fight all threats of redundancies, demand that firms "open their books", subjected their finances to the scrutiny of the workers and their unions and oppose massive pay-off's to the bosses.

At the same time, there should be a campaign against the current stringent benefits system, a simplification of the processes, decent education and retraining and a living wage for the unemployed.

WORKERS' LIBERTY TRADE UNION SCHOOL

Rebuilding the movement

By STUART JORDAN

A brief look at the current industrial news is enough to make any socialist's eyes water. We have seen the GMB (with one eye to the sinking ship of New Labour) seek talks with the Tories, and Unison scuppering any possibility of a united public sector pay fight. Even in the unions, such as PCS and NUT, where the "left" control the leadership, there is little industrial strategy to win the pay fight, and scant effort is going into the most basic task of building a fighting, militant union movement.

With the economic crisis threatening spiralling inflation and mass unemployment, the working class and poor need a fighting labour movement to make sure that the bosses pay for the failures of their system. We need the industrial strength and confidence to take on the fight for decent wages and jobs if we are to weather the economic storm ahead.

We need to organise from the ground up, rebuild the rank-and-file movements, and wrest the leadership of our unions out of the hands of the fat-cat bureaucrats and place them under the control of thoroughgoing working-class democracy.

The new generation of workers and young anti-capitalists have not lived through a period of economic crisis and do not know what a fighting labour movement looks like. They do not see the trade unions as a fighting force against the grey

logic of capitalism, and do not see the militants within the movement who in spite of the bureaucracy are still fighting and organising on the ground. Instead they see an enormous bureaucratic machine, a parasite on their wages that sells them out every time there is a need for a fight.

The defeat of the miners in the mid-1980s and the victory of Thatcher, followed by the successive Thatcherite governments of Blair and Brown, has taken its toll on the union movement.

During this period of capitalist triumphalism, the union leaderships have fallen in line, declaring the doctrine of social partnership. Social partnership unionism argues that the class war is over and the workers and the bosses have to work in harmony for the benefit of society. The fact that my boss wants me to work longer for less money and I want to work less for more money is a logic that is lost on union leaders whose class loyalties and lifestyles predispose them to the luxuries of the bourgeoisie.

As the banks are now dropping like flies and the financial system is falling apart, in hindsight social partnership unionism looks naive. Spineless union leaders who subscribed to social partnership are still in positions of power, protected by a strengthened bureaucracy and low levels of activism.

Fortunately there are also signs that things are changing. The recent dispute of the Tube cleaners highlighted the immense experience, courage and determination of a

highly exploited group of mainly female migrant workers. There is now an opportunity that this group of workers who have been traditionally viewed as "too hard to organise" will be at the forefront of challenging New Labour's racist immigration controls.

Last year we saw the first national industrial action in the charity sector as Shelter workers fought back against their bosses. And there are the beginnings of a rank-and-file movement developing in USDAW — the traditionally useless shopworkers' union.

Against this backdrop, the Alliance for Workers' Liberty is hosting its third Trade Union Day School to organise and develop strategies to build on these successes and rebuild the movement as a fighting force. The day school is an opportunity to learn from the rank-and-file trade unionists who have kept the flag of industrial militancy flying during this long 25 year retreat.

The day will focus on how to build rank-and-file movements within the unions, the Marxist understanding of the bureaucracy and the role of Marxists in the workplace. There will be a follow-up on previous work on producing workplace bulletins.

More than anything, this will be an opportunity to meet with other militants in your union and organise for the struggles ahead.

• Saturday 25 October 2008, 12-5pm, London. For more details email: thomas.unterrainer@talk21.com

BEHIND THE BANKING CRISIS

US announces “bankers’ socialism”

BY COLIN FOSTER

For decades now we’ve been told that the only way to a dynamic and efficient economy is privatisation and fiercer free-market competition. Now the same capitalist governments say that the only escape from economic disaster is to nationalise and regulate.

That is how capital is. When things are going well for capital, it wants a free hand to grab what it can. But that free-fire zone for capital necessarily, sooner or later, leads to economic bubbles bursting, and the state stepping in to shore up capital.

The bigger banks and insurance companies get bailed out. The working class that produced the wealth from which huge profits were grabbed in the boom does not get bailed out. Working-class households lose their homes, their jobs, the buying-power of their wages, and for capital that is all “necessary correction”.

At least, that is what happens if workers do not fight back. But fight back we must: to impose measures like automatic inflation-protection for wages, and a crash programme of publicly-funded house construction and conversion, and to mobilise towards replacing this “bankers’ socialism” with workers’ socialism, an economic system based on social provision for human need rather than on maximum profits for a small minority.

In the most drastic move yet, on 18 September the US government announced plans to make \$700 billion available for the US government to buy up dodgy mortgage-related paper from US financial institutions and thus restore those institutions to health.

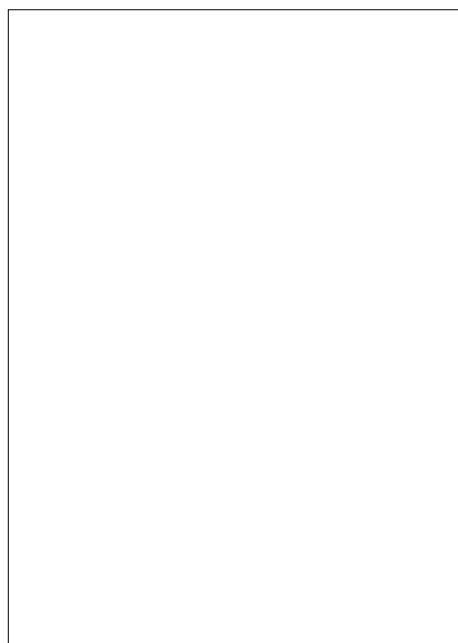
The details of this scheme are yet to be worked out. Then, when it is finalised, how will be prices be set at which the government buys up the dodgy assets? Could setting those prices push banks into bankruptcy when at present they are staving it off by pretending that dodgy assets are still worth the price they used to bring a while ago?

What if the scheme works well in its own terms? Martin Wolf in the *Financial Times* asked: “Is the worst now over?”; and answered his own question.

“Certainly not. Unwinding of excesses on such a scale involves four giant processes:

- the fall of inflated asset prices [i.e. prices of the bits of paper than circulate in the financial markets, and also of houses and other property] to a sustainable level;
- de-leveraging of the private sector [i.e. a reduction of the currently blown-out proportions of the debts which companies and households carry to “harder” underlying assets];
- recognition of resulting financial sector losses;
- and recapitalisation of the financial system [i.e. restoring its relatively “hard” core of basic assets].

“Making all this worse will be the collapse in private sector demand, as credit shrinks and wealth falls. None of these processes is even close to completion. Some have barely begun. In particular, property prices are still falling, even in the US. Similarly, the adjustment in the real economy, particularly the inevitable rises in household savings rates in the US and UK, are at an early stage...”



Not going so well now

Nouriel Roubini, the US academic economist who first predicted and identified this financial crisis, puts it like this: “a severe US recession... recession in the euro-zone, the UK, and most advanced economies”. The only question now, he thinks, is between a relatively short recession (he guesses 18 months) and a long deflationary depression like the one that hit Japan in the 1990s.

These scenarios omit some of the worse possibilities — a dramatic decline of the US dollar, or an industrial slump in China - which could be triggered by further development of the crisis.

What is it all about? The theorist most quoted now is the maverick Keynesian Hyman Minsky. Martin Wolf summarises Minsky: “A long period of rapid growth, low inflation, low interest rates and macro-economic stability [in capitalism breeds]... increased willingness to take risk. Stability

[leads] to instability”.

Minsky argues that capitalist enterprise always involves making payments committed to a while ago from income now, and depends on income and wealth outpacing the commitments. As Marx had put it long before Minsky: “The comparison of value in one period with... value... in a later period is no scholastic illusion... but rather forms the fundamental principle of the circulation process of capital”.

The financial “posture” of a company can be “hedge, speculative, or Ponzi”. Hedge means that future cash flows will be enough to cover all the future debt payments and interest repayments that the company is committed to. Speculative means that those cash flows will be enough to cover interest payments, but not the principal of the debt; the company can keep going so long as it can make fresh borrowings to the same amount.

Ponzi means that the future cash flows are not even enough to cover the interest payments; the company has to increase its borrowings in order to keep going.

A boom leads to more and more companies shifting from hedge, to speculative, to Ponzi positions — for, in a boom, the more you can borrow, the quicker you can expand, the better your chances of being first to new profit-making opportunities. “Over a run of good times the financial structure evolves from being robust to being fragile”.

The fragility is unstable because, so Minsky argues, “in a capitalist economy there are two sets of markets... prices”. The first set is the market and prices for current labour-power and current goods — what most of us deal with day to day.

The second set is for “capital assets” - buildings, firms, bits of financial paper. Their prices are shaped by future income expected to flow from those assets, rather than just by static supply and demand.

Once the “Ponzi” pyramid of one company borrowing from another borrowing

from another starts to totter, asset prices shrink, and what was “speculative” or even “hedge” becomes “Ponzi”.

Karl Marx developed similar ideas, writing about economies in which the credit system was much less developed.

“Since the circulation process of capital is not completed in one day but extends over a fairly long period... it is quite clear that between the starting-point... and... the end... elements of crisis must have gathered and develop” If all capitalist decisions to order or commission buildings, equipment, etc. had instantaneous effect and were “tested” against the market immediately, there would hardly be crises. But they are not.

In fact the credit system intervenes, trying to link present and future.

“The credit system appears as the main lever of over-production and over-speculation in commerce... the reproduction process, which is elastic by nature, is here forced to its extreme limits... The credit system accelerates the material development of the productive forces and the establishment of the world-market... At the same time credit accelerates the violent eruptions of this contradiction - crises - and thereby the elements of disintegration of the old mode of production”.

“An easy money-market calls [risky] enterprises into being en masse, thus creating the very circumstances which later give rise to pressure on the money-market”.

Or, Minsky again: capitalism generates periods when “the financial structure [is] very good at financing inept investments”, inevitably followed by periods of “financing insufficient investment to create... full employment”.

The way out is to use the social control, now invoked only to bail out disaster, for the general running of the economy; and to make it democratic, working-class control, rather than social control by the bankers’ friends in government, on behalf of the collective body of bankers and bosses.

Timeline

Late 2006: After a huge boom in “sub-prime” mortgages in the US, more households begin to default on payments, and house prices begin to fall.

2 April 2007: New Century Financial, a big US mortgage firm, goes bankrupt.

Summer 2007: Federal Reserve and other central banks start trying to ease the crisis by pumping more credit into economies and (the Fed, at least) cutting interest rates.

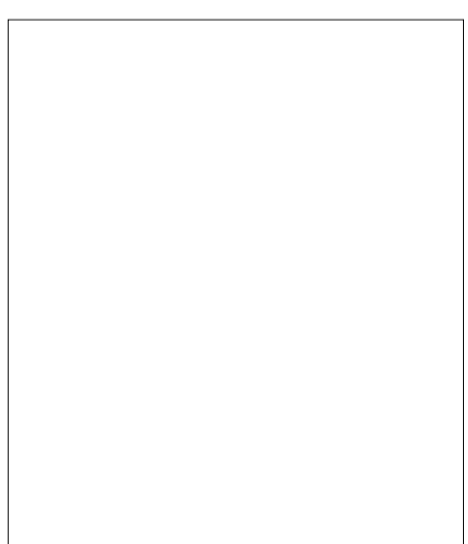
28 August: German regional bank Sachsen Landesbank is “rescued” by being bought up by a larger bank, Landesbank Baden-Wuerttemberg. Many other big banks announce probable large losses.

14 September: People queue up to get their money out of Northern Rock bank. Government stems panic by announcing that it will guarantee all the deposits.

October: Bosses of Citigroup and Merrill Lynch resign (with large payouts) after announcing huge losses.

22 February 2008: Northern Rock nationalised.

15 March: Bear Stearns investment



bank collapses, taken over by J P Morgan with a \$29 billion Federal Reserve bailout.

13 July: IndyMac collapses — the second-biggest bank in US history to fail.

7 September: US government nationalises Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, the two big “government-sponsored” (but up then, privately-owned) firms which have been issuing 75% of all new US

mortgages.

14 September: Lehman Brothers investment bank goes bankrupt.

16 September: Merrill Lynch investment bank seeks rescue by being taken over by Bank of America (a commercial bank).

16 September: US nationalises AIG, the USA’s biggest insurance company. The Federal Reserve announces it will lend AIG up to \$85bn in emergency funds in return for a government stake of 79.9% and effective control of the company.

17 September: British government brokers deal (including waiving law) for Lloyds TSB to rescue HBOS by taking it over.

18 September: US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson announces plans to make \$700 billion available for the US government to buy up dodgy mortgage-related paper from US financial institutions and thus restore those institutions to health.

21 September: Federal Reserve announces that the two remaining big US investment banks, Morgan Stanley and Goldman Sachs, will be helped to change their legal status to “bank holding companies” (with more government regulation, and more access to credit from the Federal Reserve).

IRAQ

“We need a third front”

Aso Kamal of the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan spoke to Martin Thomas about recent developments in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Martin: You've recently set up the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan as well as the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. Why?

Aso: We are the same party in Iraq and in Kurdistan. We believe in the same principles: socialism, workers' state. But in the last 17 years Kurdistan has been practically separated from Iraq. There is a different economic, political, and social situation. Because of the different situations of struggle, we have to have different parties.

In Iraq the working class is pitted against the Sunni and Shia Arab nationalists. In Kurdistan we are confronting the Kurdish nationalist parties, the ruling parties in Kurdistan [KDP and PUK].

M: The situations have been different for 17 years. In some ways they were more different before 2003. So why set up separate parties now?

A: From 1991 we didn't have a clear view of the future for Kurdistan. From 1995 we said that Kurdistan was separate. But because we were weak in Iraq, and the Ba'th government had such strict control, a separate Worker-communist Party of Iraq would not have been feasible.

In 2003 we said that maybe, because of the collapse of the Ba'th regime, there was a chance of a secular system in Iraq, and that we would not need two parties. Unfortunately it hasn't happened like that. Militia forces are ruling Iraq, and Kurdistan is separated from Iraq. The people of Kurdistan do not want to go back under the central government and rule by the Islamists and the Arab nationalist parties.

For that reason, we insist now on a separate party for Kurdistan.

M: There are many Arab workers in Iraqi Kurdistan now, because there are more jobs there than in the south; and there are many Kurds living in the Arab areas of Iraq. Which party should they join?

A: The workers coming from the other parts of Iraq to Sulaimaniya and other cities in Kurdistan are not staying there for long. They come, get some money, and go back home. We support them, but for establishing a party you can't depend on transient workers.

In the rest of Iraq, the workers are organised by the Worker-communist Party of Iraq. But there are not many Kurdish workers left in Arab Iraq. They have moved to Kurdistan.

M: What about Iraqi and Iraqi-Kurdish

activists living outside Iraq, in Britain for example?

A: Which party they join does not depend on nationality. We are against nationalism. We said everyone should make his or her choice depending on what type of activity they are doing.

M: What are the main campaigns and activities of the Worker-communist Party in Kurdistan?

A: Independence for Kurdistan is the main issue now. The Maliki government has brought military forces to Kirkuk and Khanaqin [Kurdish cities]. It has said it wants all of Iraq controlled by the army. We want a referendum on independence.

Also, the working class is struggling for wages, for better electricity supplies, for health provision, for clean water.

The other main issue is the women's issue. We've been campaigning for many years against "honour killings" of women. About 30,000 women have been killed in "honour killings" in the last 17 years. In law, "honour killing" is a crime. But in reality the system protects that crime. In Sulaimaniya or in Erbil, beside the courthouse, you have a social office for the party [PUK or KDP]. If someone kills a woman, they go to that social office and make a deal involving the leader of the tribe.

We are struggling for freedom of speech. Now, after the collapse of Saddam Hussein, there is no reason why the people of Kurdistan have to shut their mouths. The PUK and KDP in Kurdistan are not spending any money on improving people's living conditions. Just one month ago, they killed a journalist in Kirkuk, Soran Mama Hama, because he criticised the PUK and KDP.

But it's not a situation where there is authority, there is law, and where, if you demand something, you can campaign and change the law. In Kurdistan it is militia authority. They have power; they don't listen to you. They may shoot you. It's not really a state. It is un-civil authority.

We've had demonstrations in Sulaimaniya, demanding 24 hour electricity for the people. At present you have sometimes eight hours or ten hours of electricity, sometimes six.

M: In Iraqi Kurdistan, you are able to organise demonstrations and publish newspapers openly?

A: It depends. It depends on the balance of power at the moment. It's not easy for the ruling parties to shut down our newspapers.

M: An independent Iraqi Kurdistan would be a landlocked state dependent for all its economic links and communications on a deal with at least one of the neigh-

bouring states — Turkey, Syria, Iran, or Iraq. Turkey would probably be very hostile to an independent Iraqi Kurdistan, and there would be a threat of the Turkish army intervening. The people of Iraqi Kurdistan have a right to independence if they wish it, but would formal independence actually give a better deal than the existing de facto autonomy?

A: There is a changing situation in the Middle East. The US is no longer able to dictate the politics of the region. Turkey wants to be in the European Union; it doesn't want to lose its chance to join over the Kurdistan issue.

If Iraqi Kurdistan remains with the present situation, it is not safe. The Iranians want to consolidate Maliki in power. They have a strategy to control the whole of Iraq. Maybe in three or four years they can do that, though not now.

If we get an independent state in Iraqi Kurdistan now, recognised by the UN, we will be safer. Now is the best time to solve the Kurdistan problem.

M: The major recent change in Iraq as a whole is the strengthening of the Maliki government. For a while it was just a collection of people in offices in the Green Zone embezzling what they could, but it is now becoming more like a government. What difference do you think that makes to the tactics and strategy of the left in Iraq?

A: The workers in Iraq have to struggle for better wages and so on. But everything is controlled by militias. The strategy of the Iranians and Maliki is to have an Islamic republic in Iraq and not let the left have any space. I think they are going to establish a sort of military government in Iraq. You have to have trade unions and demonstrations and so on, but the left also needs military self-defence. Like in Lebanon, if you're living under Hezbollah, you have to have a force to get rid of Hezbollah, you can't just demand this or that measure from Hezbollah.

M: The Maliki government has started being more assertive with the Americans. It rejected the "State Of Forces Agreement" which the USA wanted, and is now insisting on time lines for US withdrawal. But at the same time as becoming more assertive with the Americans, it may also get harsher against the labour movement. It still has the old Saddam Hussein labour laws, and need only enforce them to suppress the unions.

A: Yes. They want to get rid of the Americans, but they can't do it now, suddenly. At the same time they want to get power within Iraq, and not have any opposition from the left, from communists. They can see how to do it from Iran. The

Iranian regime was against America. At the same time they killed thousands of communists in Iran. The labour movement has to have its own say about the US occupation and about Maliki as well. We have to have a third front. We want to get rid of the Americans, and we want to get rid of Maliki and the Islamic government. It's a very difficult situation for the left in Iraq.

M: There's an international labour conference, called by some Iraqi union organisations, scheduled in Erbil in February next year.

A: It's important to get support for Iraqi trade unions now. They organised demonstrations outside the finance ministry in Baghdad last month, about wages. They need international support against the Maliki government and against the militias.

M: It's strange that since 2003 independent unions have grown more in Arab Iraq than in Iraqi Kurdistan.

A: After 1991 in Iraqi Kurdistan, we had councils, and we had an unemployed organisation which organised a big demonstration in 1993. We organised trade unions in hospitals and factories and schools.

Today there are many unions in Kurdistan. But they are not the sort of unions that attack the government and demand things. In the rest of Iraq, I don't think it is like 2003. The unions are weaker than before. The militias make a very difficult situation for the unions.

Two weeks ago there was a big demonstration of cement workers in Sulaimaniya, demanding many things. There are many movements like that. But the unions are controlled by the PUK and KDP.

Three years ago I was in a demonstration with a teachers' union which had split from PUK and KDP. They have radical demands and are struggling for them. But it's a group, not like a union which has a regular organisation.

M: What percentage of the population in Iraqi Kurdistan lives in the cities?

A: About 70%. The Ba'th government displaced people from the villages.

M: So there's a big housing problem in the cities?

A: Yes. There are many new buildings in Sulaimaniya and Erbil now, but if you don't have money you can't get a place to live. The raising of the income of the capitalist class there is unbelievable.

M: Exports and imports go predominantly through Turkey, or through Iraq?

A: Before 2003 it was through Turkey. Now there is more through Iraq and Iran.

Help Iraqi workers win a labour law

From the back page

Even if the US manages to persuade Maliki to be more conciliatory to the Sahwa militias, there remains the problem of the character of the Maliki government itself, dominated by Shia clerical-fascist parties in uneasy coalition with Kurdish warlord parties whose main concern is to keep autonomy for Kurdistan.

The *Los Angeles Times* of 16 September painted Maliki's increased strength in bold colours. "Once dependent on American support to keep his job, Prime Minister Nouri Maliki has consolidated power and

is asserting his independence, sharply reducing Washington's influence over the future of Iraq... Iraq's police and army now operate virtually on their own..."

Maliki has refused to sign the State Of Forces Agreement which the US wanted for its troops in Iraq; he is negotiating hard over a short-term replacement agreement, insisting on US promises to withdraw from Iraq's cities by June 2009 and from Iraq altogether by December 2011.

The *Los Angeles Times* attributes much of Maliki's strengthening to his "military victory against the radical Mahdi Army militia in Basra" in March. At the time it didn't

look like much of a victory. Thousands of Iraqi army troops deserted.

The ceasefire in Basra was arranged not by the Americans, but by the Iranian government and in Iran. And it seems that is a factor in strengthening Maliki. It looks like Iran has told Moqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Mahdi Army, to scale down his military ambitions, let the Maliki government consolidate, and focus on political agitation.

Maliki's government has now promised to put a new labour law before parliament. Amjad Al-Jawhary, an international representative of the Iraqi Freedom Congress,

told *Solidarity*: "We do not expect the government to keep this promise".

Instead, if the government continues to consolidate power, it may well enforce the Saddam-era laws still on the statute book, and Decree 8750 from 2005 (authorising the government to seize all union funds), thus crushing workers' organisation.

The situation hangs in the balance. The outcome depends on which proceeds quicker, the strengthening of workers' organisation or the consolidation of Maliki's power. Support from trade unionists and socialists outside Iraq could help tip the balance in the workers' favour.

LEFT CONVENTION

Matt Wrack: we need a workers' party

BRUCE ROBINSON REPORTS

The Convention of the Left, meeting in Manchester in parallel to Labour's conference (20-24 September).

Though the organisers had successfully argued against a debate on links between the unions and Labour, the question of political perspectives for the unions ran through many of the contributions to the trade union session.

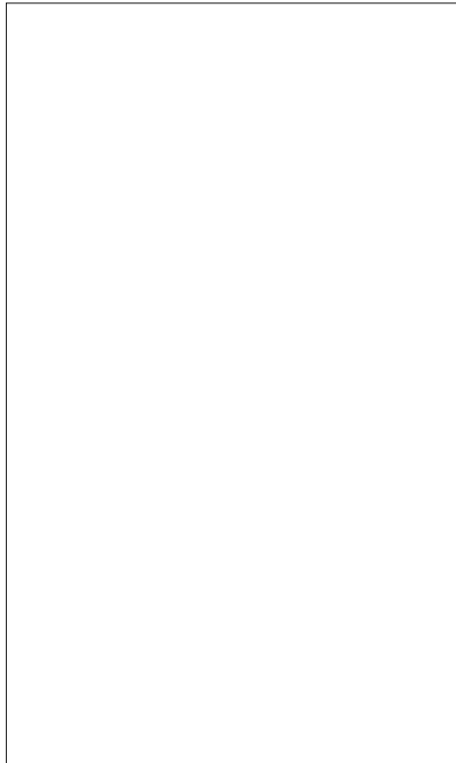
Matt Wrack of the FBU said trade unionists needed a political party and that he was worried by a drift towards the North American system where unions just backed whoever promised to do the best for them on specific issues (an approach supported by Mark Serwotka of the PCS at the LRC rally).

Maria Exall from the CWU talked about the need for campaigns to make the bosses pay and for public ownership in the face of the economic crisis. For affiliated unions, the best way to undertake political trade unionism was to "use the link in the proper way" while non-affiliated unions had to use the situation to make the strong case for political involvement.

Pat Sikorski from the RMT made a contribution largely praising everything the RMT had done, while interestingly the SWP speakers had little to say about a political perspective for the unions.

Generally, the Convention aimed to bring together the far left by emphasising "what unites us" and avoiding controversial questions that might disrupt what the central organisers see as the way to overcome the political divisions that have fragmented the left.

The Convention was successful in that the largest weekend plenaries attracted over 200 people. The age distribution and contributions suggested that many had been around the left for a long time. Many sessions seemed to be quite flat, either just campaigns presenting themselves or organised around well worn themes.



The unions and politics was a recurring theme

However the Convention's success lays a basis for the continuation of the initiative.

A session on international union solidarity heard Wilson Boja talk about the history and campaigns of the left in Colombia, while Nadia Mahmood of the Iraqi Freedom Congress talked about recent workers' struggles in Iraq, moves towards unity among trade unions there and the Erbil Conference they will be holding early in 2009, which she urged British trade unionists to support actively.

The key question facing the Convention - what it is for and where it is going - was discussed at the last weekend session in the light of a "Statement of Intent" accepted by the Organising Committee. The

statement said little practical beyond "resolving to find ways that the left as a whole can co-ordinate action both nationally and locally wherever we can", "encouraging the development of local left forums, where appropriate" - which is welcome and should be acted on - and holding a "'Recall Event' on Saturday 29 November at which we will seek agreement to ideas and demands emerging from the Convention."

The statement was introduced in a knockabout speech by John McDonnell who said "there's always one tosser who wants to move an amendment" (no amendments were allowed by the organisers), that he admired "the manoeuvres" used by the organisers to get us this far and that given the history of left unity projects, we shouldn't "fuck it up this time".

But what is the "it" John McDonnell referred to? Nobody knows including, by their own admission, the central organisers. Trying to avoid controversy means in practice a "live and let live" policy towards existing left organisations and campaigns regardless of their adequacy - something explicit in the Statement of Intent. What is necessary to achieve any lasting advance is to assess and debate the ideas that currently divide us within democratic structures that also allow unity in action.

If the Convention of the Left is to develop into anything more than a few days of discussion, it needs to address the question of how such a framework can come about. This should not be dismissed as a threat to the existing unity of the Convention but rather as the only way a lasting unity can develop. It demands a true democracy rather than "manoeuvres" through which "ideas and demands emerge" from the Convention through a series of filters and exclusions by the organisers.

It is as yet unclear how the 29 November conference will be organised and whether it will be open to organisations and individuals to make proposals to it.

To be effective in developing left unity

and to offer a project that can appeal to those in the labour movement looking for an alternative to New Labour, the Recall Conference must:

- Be organised on the most open and democratic basis, allowing input from all supporting individuals and organisations;
- Have a preliminary discussion on differing perspectives for left unity and the role of the Convention.

Equality debate

The main hall at the Left Convention was full for the meeting on how to fight for women's equality, with speakers from Abortion Rights, Feminist Fightback, the Labour Party and the Women's Charter. Almost all speakers and contributors agreed on the need for a feminist politics that fought on class issues and Feminist Fightback stressed the need for socialist feminists to participate in the various feminist initiatives that have been emerging in the last few years.

The meeting also discussed the need for socialist and labour movement men to look to sexism in their own movement and not to see women's rights as a side issue.

Many men did attend this meeting and we hope that at future meetings of the Convention "women's issues" such as childcare and housing will be incorporated more fully into the agenda. We also hope that all the different groups represented will take part in the "Gender-Race-Class: An Anti-Capitalist Feminist Event" in which Feminist Fightback and a number of other groups are organising in London on 14 February 2009.

Email anticapitalistfeminists@riseup.net for more information.

Laura Schwartz

Celia Hart: a Trotskyist icon?

BY SACHA ISMAIL

Celia Hart Santamaria, the well-known Cuban Communist Party activist who died in a traffic accident in Havana at the start of September, was feted on the international left as a representative of Trotskyism in Cuba.

Both the Fourth International centred on the French LCR and the International Marxist Tendency centred on the British Socialist Appeal group have promoted Hart, had her to speak at their events, and so on. (You can read tributes at the FI-linked liammaccuaid.wordpress.com and at the IMT's www.marxist.com.) But even the generally more critical Permanent Revolution group, for instance, has printed an obituary in which it describes her as a "critical voice who supported genuine socialism".

Hart learnt about Trotskyism from her father, a leading member of Fidel Castro's inner circle, who, after she returned from studying as a physicist in East Germany in the 1980s, responded to her disillusionment with the regime there by lending her *Revolution Betrayed* and Isaac Deutscher's biography of Trotsky. As the Cuban-American Third Camp Marxist Samuel Farber put it in a recent interview:

"First, what Celia Hart Santamaria has

written is overwhelmingly for the foreign left. Very few people in Cuba know about it. That aside, her 'Trotskyism' is a peculiar sort that says nothing about workers' democracy. It's a 'Trotskyism' that worships Fidel Castro and talks about the expansion of the revolution without talking about the question of democracy in the revolution...

"I would submit that Trotskyism minus workers' democracy is very, very close to Third-Period, left-wing Stalinism. In other words, she's projecting the line of a more militant Stalinism as opposed to the Popular Front kind."

It is worth mentioning that the actual Cuban Trotskyist movement was suppressed and its members imprisoned by Castro in the early 60s.

Hart talked about the "nightmare" of capitalist restoration, China-style, in Cuba - a process which, under the leadership of Raul Castro, now seems under way. She also believed that there was a Stalinist faction in the Cuban CP - but that Fidel Castro was not part of it! She looked to self-reform by the bureaucratic regime, not to mass action to overthrow it in a workers' revolution from below.

For more, including a link to the interview with Sam Farber, see www.workersliberty.org/cuba2007.

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Stoke BNP rally sounds the alarm

BY PETE RADCLIFF

On Saturday 20 September three or four hundred BNP activists leafleted and rallied in Stoke on Trent. Their activity was trying to capitalise on the killing of one of their most unpleasant members, Keith Brown, by an Asian neighbour whom he had provoked for many years.

The BNP had a national mobilisation and brought their members in for mass leafleting at what was claimed were ten separate rendezvous points. After some hours leafleting the BNP concluded with a rally that was apparently barred from using a public hall and was held instead publicly in Victoria Road, Fenton, visible to many passing motorists on a busy road.

This is the closest the BNP have come to holding a march in many years and is probably a "feeler" for them to see what the response would be that if they were to go ahead with such a venture.

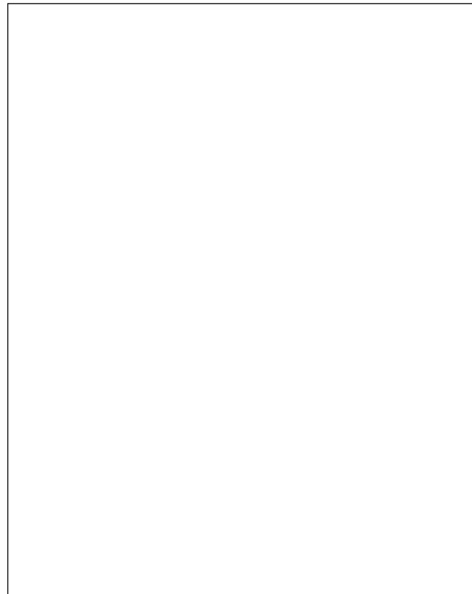
The counter mobilisation does not give much reason for anti-fascist confidence. The fact that the local campaign NORSCARF and Unite Against Fascism (UAF) held a protest was at least something. However, the mobilisation was only about three or four hundred. It came nowhere near the BNP event. It was heavily dominated by Labour Party loyalists who at no time acknowledged the reasons for the BNP's dramatic rise in Stoke, i.e. the policies of the Labour government that has led to such massive political demoralisation of Labour's electoral base.

UAF's Martin Smith made some points about the fact that the BNP were capitalising on Labour's political legacy. But the UAF-organised platform made sure that few other working-class opponents of the government were heard, although one speaker, seemingly reading from some Notts Stop the BNP placards, called for "Jobs and Homes Not Racism".

The march's slogan, however, gave no indication that anyone was critical of the government — it was "Smash the BNP", though the marchers hadn't a clue about how such a slogan could be realised on that day.

The march that followed the long rally had a brief and artificially engineered confrontation with the police over access to the city centre but otherwise passed off quietly.

It is good that there was a protest. However the weakness of the Stoke campaign was shown by the fact that the BNP



Time to sort out strategy

could be organising in sizeable groups in several areas of the town without any effective intelligence coming in about where they were and what they were doing. The only thing that was reported to the protest at any time was that there were only 80 BNPers, a significant underestimate.

News came in after many of the protesters had started dispersing about the location of the BNP rally, but it was too late, inaccurately relayed and too far for on-foot protesters to get to in any case.

A powerful ongoing campaign needs to be built in Stoke. That campaign needs to be active outside of elections, politically independent and critical of the Labour Government. It must take up the social issues that the BNP exploits.

That campaign needs to develop links into the working class community as well as build up the numbers of people on the ground able to identify what the BNP is doing and act against it.

Stoke will undoubtedly be a major target for the BNP.

• Nick Griffin spoke to a large BNP meeting in Derby at a pub on the evening of Wednesday 24 September. Around 30 anti-fascist activists from Derby UAF and Notts Stop the BNP were joined by 10 local youths in a protest outside the meeting. Needless to say the police were also out in force.

Two nations, two states Socialists and Israel/Palestine

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The Mosleyites in the 1930s

Fighting f

Physical confrontation with fascist organisations is a controversial matter for the main strands of anti-fascism. For groups like Unite Against Fascism, on the deliberate calculation of the dominant left force within it, the SWP, such tactics are likely to scare off their media, religious and mainstream political supporters. Searchlight has a similar problem.

On the other hand, groups like Antifa appear, at least judging by their website and reported actions, to have elevated the idea of physically confronting the BNP and parties like them to a guiding principle.

There is a substantial degree of mistrust between these three groups — some of it based on the SWP/UAF's sectarianism, some of it on antagonism towards the perceived recklessness of Antifa — which makes any honest accounting of militant anti-fascism problematic.

But historical examples of militant anti-fascism should aid us in understanding the place of physical confrontation in a working class, political anti-fascism. One example is that of the 43 Group, who campaigned against British fascists after the Second World war. In this issue we publish an interview with Morris Beckman from the 43 Group. In a future issue we will examine the record of the US Teamsters and their fight against fascist, union-busting gangs in Minneapolis. Interview by Charlie Salmon.

The notion that World War Two was a "war against fascism" is a popular myth used in the mainstream media and historical accounts as the ultimate justification for taking on Hitler's Germany. This notion was held by a good many servicemen and women. Little could have done more to explode this idea than returning to post-war Britain and finding a resurgent fascist movement. Morris Beckman

experienced just this after six years at sea as a merchant seaman.

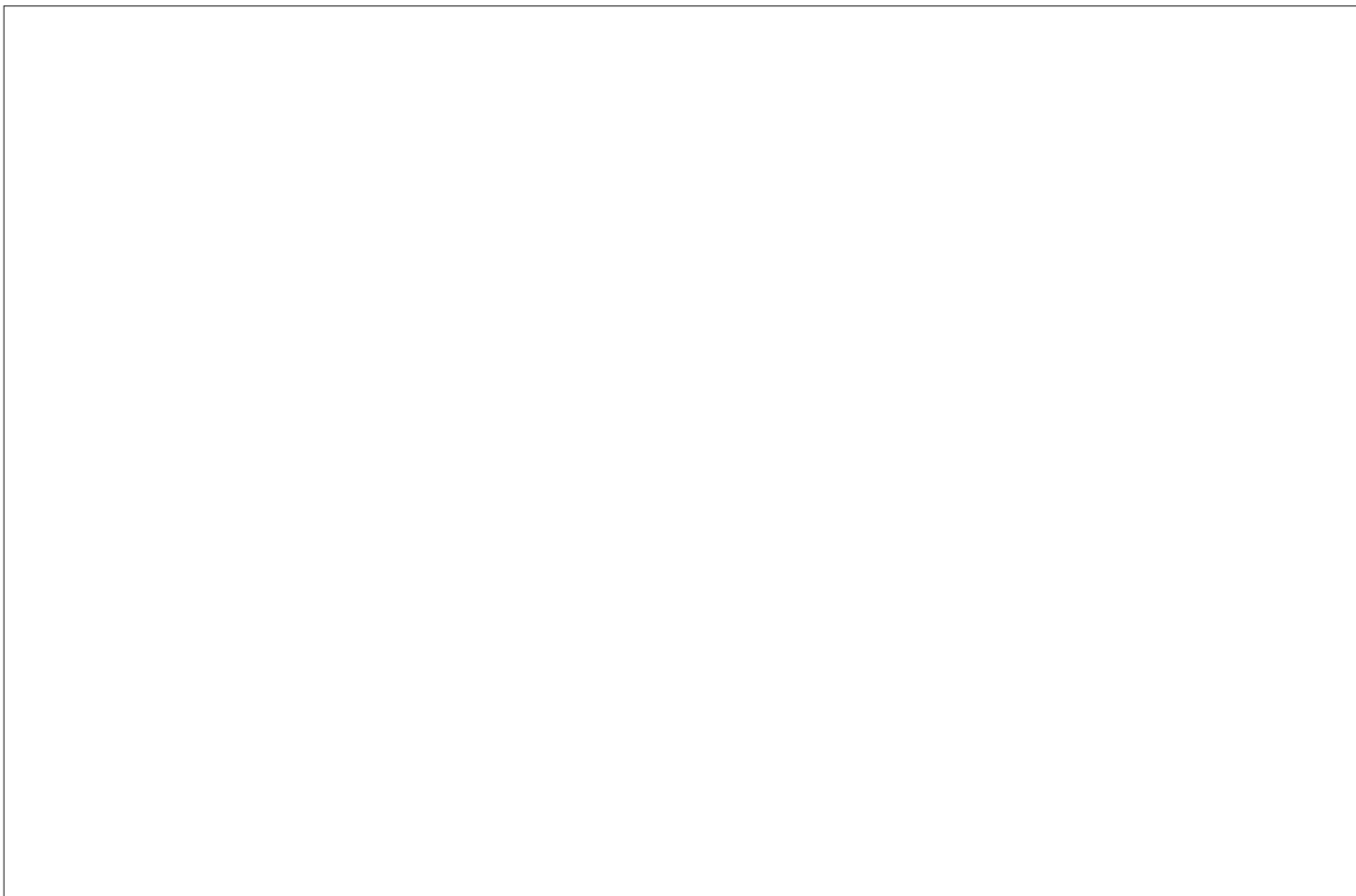
"I'd been away for six years. On my return, I got the train to Paddington and a taxi to Hackney. My father and mother still lived in the same place." Returning home, Morris sensed that something was wrong: "What's the matter?", I asked my father. 'The Black Shirts are back, the fascists are back'. They'd been marching down the streets, chanting 'we're going to get rid of the yids', they attacked synagogues. My mother and the neighbours were afraid to go out at night".

For the Beckman family and the rest of the Jewish community in East London, the nightmare of the pre-war fascist movement was repeating itself. If World War Two was really a "war against fascism", how could fascists still be marching through London?

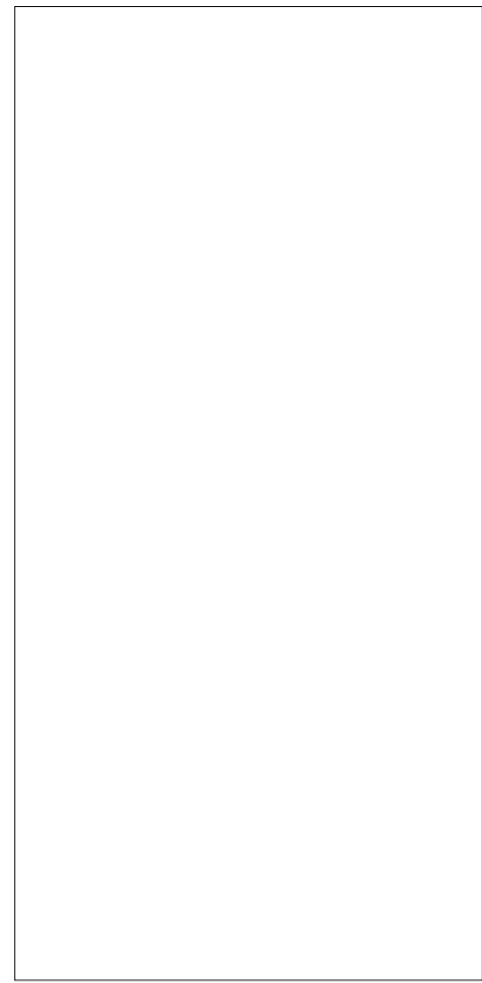
"In the post-war period only two countries had large, organised fascist groups: Spain, where the fascists were in power; and Britain, where Oswald Mosley was attempting to re-start his British Union of Fascists. By this time everyone knew about the Holocaust." The newsreels of concentration camp survivors, the horrific detail of the Holocaust and its consequences filled the newspapers but still, anti-semitism played a significant role in the post-war fascist revival.

For Morris and his friends there were just two topics of conversation: the fate of the Jews in Palestine and the threat to the Jewish community posed by Mosley's re-constituted fascist group. The plight of the Palestinian Jews and those Holocaust survivors attempting to reach Palestine were influential factors in the 43 Group's decision to fight back.

"Three years after the war thousands of Jews were still incarcerated in displaced persons camps. They could see Germans walking about free. This created an enormous amount of anger. The suicide rate in these camps was very high." Those sur-

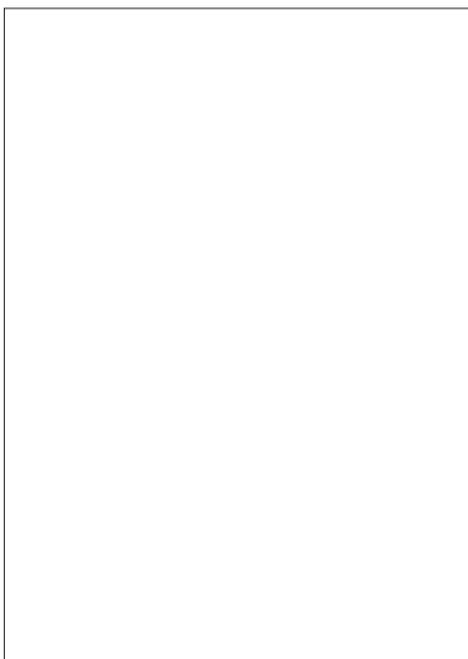


The crowded — and illegal — immigration ship Exodus, carrying Jewish refugees from Europe, docks in 1947 in the British-run Haifa port. The plight of the refugees helped create the 43 Group.



Vidal Sassoon was a member of the 43 Group!

fascists after 1945



Morris Beckman

vivors who sought refuge in Palestine were continually blocked and harassed by Britain's colonial forces. At the same time, the Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine suffered under a brutal colonial regime.

"The British had a habit in Palestine of flogging... one schoolboy, putting up political posters in Tel Aviv was caught by a British patrol. He was flogged". In response, the Irgun (an underground, Zionist para-military organisation) captured and flogged four British soldiers.

On another occasion four Jewish students were sentenced to death by hanging. There was international uproar: "The French and Italians urged the British not to hang. Some MPs came out against the hanging. But Atlee ordered their hanging before the set date of execution". In

response, the Irgun captured three British soldiers and hung them.

The Irgun were certainly far, far removed from the politics of socialism — but their actions inspired Beckman and his friends to begin a fightback against fascism in Britain.

"We went up to the pub for sandwiches and saw an outdoor fascist meeting next to the Maccabi Sports Club. Jerry Hamm was on the platform. *Britain Awake* [by Oswald Moseley] was being sold. Instead of going to the pub we walked nine abreast through the crowd, walked up to the speaker and said: 'You're doing a good job, I'd like to buy a couple of magazines'. Two fascists came towards us, we grabbed their heads and cracked them together. We dragged down the platform and smashed everything up."

Beckman and friends returned to the Maccabi Sports Club to discuss what had just happened. They concluded: "The government won't stop the fascists. The Board of Deputies won't stop them. Only the communists are trying to stop them. There's nobody else." Thirty eight Jewish ex-servicemen and five women turned up to a subsequent meeting organised by word of mouth. "We had a discussion about what to do. We'd already made one attack, we decided to do it again. The meeting was a success!"

After numerous assaults on Jewish homes, shops and buildings — including a number of attacks where elderly Jews were thrown through plate-glass windows — an opposition organised itself. "The fascists didn't expect the Jews to attack them. They didn't expect Jews to be more violent than them. We deliberately went so hard at them that we filled A&E with very badly damaged fascists."

Soon the original forty-three were joined by over one thousand others. "We were turning people away. We wanted seven to eight hundred who'd be an elite fighting

unit. We had about 60 gentiles in our ranks. We had some contact with the Communist Party of Great Britain. Of our members, we had more than eighty different trades and professions, including doctors... We published a broadsheet called 'On Guard' for eighteen months. Non-Jews wrote for it including Douglas Hyde, editor of the *Daily Worker*... *On Guard* was sent out to trade unionists and some MPs."

The 43 Group didn't rely on stumbling into fascist activity. Their activities were very well planned and coordinated: "We infiltrated nineteen small fascist units by 1946. We had moles inside of them... We had about one hundred women who'd been in the war. They collected all the information that came in. By this time, the 43 Group wasn't just based in London, we had branches in Newcastle and Derby." Information came in from across the country. When the Group heard of some planned fascist activity, the organising committee met to discuss a response. Everything was planned, risks assessed and preparations made well in advance.

"When decisions were made we had six to seven hundred people ready to act. We never walked towards the fascists, we ran at them! This unhinged them. When we received information and decided a plan, we'd dish it out to our commandos who'd assemble a team. We never let up on the fascists."

This consistent approach took its toll on the fascists: "Basically, what beat them was the fact that we were very disciplined and very flexible. We could put out ten teams of commandos all together, at the same time. We had loads of information. It worked out very well!"

As the momentum of the 43 Group grew, conditions around them changed: "By 1947 there was a tremendous surge of support from the grass-roots Jewish community. We had regular contributions coming in. At the same time, the first fascists started to

come up to us, they said 'no more fighting, we've finished with Mosley, can we talk?' Sometimes we'd talk to them and they'd ask to join! We always replied 'you've got to be convinced first'."

One of the most prominent successes was the defection of Michael McClean, who left Mosley and started to speak on 43 Group platforms. "The fascists became afraid of us, they knew they couldn't stop us. When I interviewed some of the fascists in the 1950s they told me 'if you hadn't destroyed us, nobody else could have'. We were the only consistent opposition, we took the only way possible to destroy them."

The 43 Group was not founded with working class politics and was not rooted in the trade unions and political organisations of the working class; but it was a grass-roots — mainly communal — response to the regrouping fascist movement in Britain.

Its actions severely disrupted the unity and strength of Mosley's supporters, destabilising their activities and driving a wedge between competing fascist leaders. It played a defining role in snuffing out the embers of pre-war fascism.

Although the main thrust of its efforts was the physical protection of the Jewish community and retribution for attacks on that community, none of the work would have been possible without sophisticated organisation, intelligence gathering and coordinated action.

Beckman and his colleagues started out with just forty three, and managed to build an organisation over one thousand strong. They responded to physical threats, intimidation and murder in the most effective way open to them. They met like with like.

• For more information see: *The 43 Group*, by Morris Beckman, Centreprise (1993). The Spiro Ark community group will hold a celebration of the 43 group early next year. www.spiroark.org

JACK LONDON

The man who wrote “The Iron Heel”

BY PAUL HAMPTON

Jack London is remembered today mainly for children’s fictional stories — *Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1905) remain his best-known works. It is often forgotten that London was a socialist. A recently published collection of his writings edited by Jonah Raskin, *The Radical Jack London: Writings on War and Revolution* (University of California Press) goes a long way towards restoring his place in the history of the international labour movement.

Jack London was born in 1876 on the cusp of American industrialisation, and this is reflected in his writing. He would spend much of his early life in California, but in the course of his literary career he travelled widely to Alaska, England, Mexico, Korea and Australia.

London became an active socialist in the 1890s. Already notorious before the age of 20, he had written an article “What Socialism is” for the *San Francisco Examiner* at the end of 1895. In 1896, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a story about the “Boy Socialist”. In 1896 he joined the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), led by Daniel De Leon, and later that year had a letter published in the *Oakland Times* urging readers to study Marx’s *Capital*.

London left the SLP to join the breakaway socialists around Eugene Debs. He ran as the Social Democratic Party candidate for mayor of Oakland in 1901 and as the Socialist Party candidate for the same post in 1905. During the early years of the twentieth century, he wrote and spoke up for the burgeoning socialist movement.

In “The Scab” (1903) London provided a fitting epithet for those who ignore workers’ solidarity. He wrote that workers apply “the opprobrious epithet ‘scab’ to the labourer who takes from him food and shelter by being more generous in the disposal of his labour-power. The sentimental connotation of scab is as terrific as that of ‘traitor’ or ‘Judas’, and a sentimental definition would be as deep and varied as the human heart... The labourer who gives more time, or strength, or skill, for the same wage, than another, or equal time, or strength, or skill, for a less wage, is a scab. This generosity on his part is hurtful to his fellow labourers, for it compels them to an equal generosity which is not to their liking, and which gives them less of food and shelter...”

In 1905, London founded the Intercollegiate Socialist Society to propagate socialism among students. London spoke at Harvard, Yale and other Ivy League universities, spreading the message of class struggle. In “Something Rotten in Idaho” (1906) he defended the miners’ union leaders Bill Haywood and Charles Moyer, who had been arrested and fitted up for murder.

London dropped out of active socialist politics by the end of the 1910s. In 1914 he supported the allied side in World War One. He resigned from the Socialist Party in early 1916. He wrote that he had left “because of its lack of fire and fight, and its loss of emphasis on the class struggle”. The criticism was right, but he too had withdrawn from agitation to the comfort of his ranch.

London died when he was forty, after writing 50 books in 17 years.

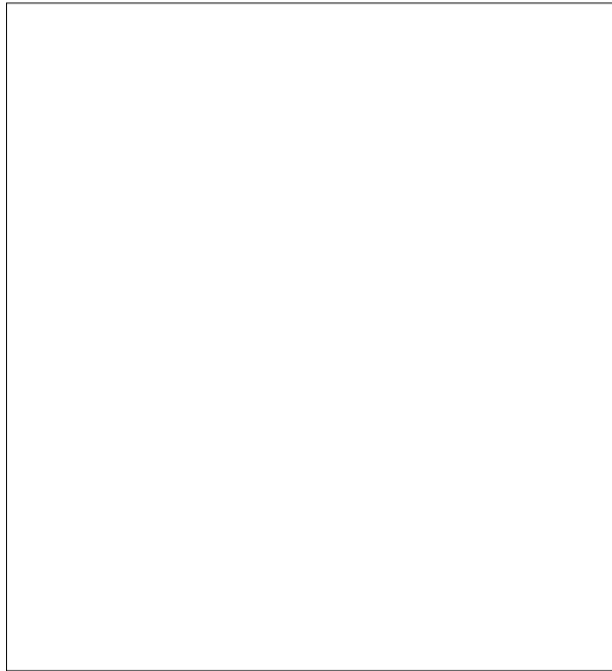
INFLUENCE

The younger generation of American socialists were raised on his prose. James P Cannon learned his early socialism from London’s books, especially *The People of the Abyss* (1903), London’s account of the East End of London sweatshop workers, and *The Iron Heel* (1908).

And his significance extended into the international socialist movement. According to Krupskaya’s memoirs, she read London’s fiction to Lenin in the days before his death.

It was probably *The Iron Heel* that made London’s reputation politically, although it was not well received at the time. Trotsky received a copy of the book from London’s daughter Joan while he was living in Mexico. He wrote a fitting eulogy on 16 October 1937, first published in *New Internationalist*, April 1945. “The book produced upon me — I speak without exaggeration — a deep impression... The book surprised me with the audacity and independence of its historical foresight. The world workers’ movement at the end of the last and the beginning of the present century stood under the sign of reformism. The perspective of peaceful and uninterrupted world progress, of the prosperity of democracy and social reforms, seemed to be assured once and for all...”

Jack London not only absorbed creatively the impetus given by the first [1905] Russian Revolution but also coura-



geously thought over again in its light the fate of capitalist society as a whole. Precisely those problems which the official socialism of this time considered to be definitely buried: the growth of wealth and power at one pole, of misery and destitution at the other pole; the accumulation of social bitterness and hatred; the unalterable preparation of bloody cataclysms — all those questions Jack London felt with an intrepidity which forces one to ask himself again and again with astonishment: when was this written? Really before the war? One must accentuate especially the role which Jack London attributes to the labour bureaucracy and to the labour aristocracy in the further fate of mankind...

“However, it is not a question of Jack London’s pessimism, but of his passionate effort to shake those who are lulled by routine, to force them to open their eyes and to see what is and what approaches. The artist is audaciously utilising the methods of hyperbole. He is bringing the tendencies rooted in capitalism: of oppression, cruelty, bestiality, betrayal, to their extreme expression. He is operating with centuries in order to measure the tyrannical will of the exploiters and the treacherous role of the labour bureaucracy. But his most ‘romantic’ hyperboles are finally much more realistic than the bookkeeper-like calculations of the so-called sober politicians. It is easy to imagine with what a condescending perplexity the official socialist thinking of that time met Jack London’s menacing prophecies.

London saw the tendencies to the concentration and stasis of capital, which gave birth to a powerful, international working class. He wrote:

“This change of direction must be either toward industrial oligarchies or socialism... Should an old manufacturing nation lose its foreign trade, it is safe to predict that a strong effort would be made to build a socialistic government, but it does not follow that this effort would be successful. With the moneyed class controlling the State and its revenues and all the means of subsistence, and guarding its own interests with jealous care, it is not at all impossible that a strong curb could be put upon the masses till the crisis were past. It has been done before. There is no reason why it should not be done again. At the close of the last century, such a movement was crushed by its own folly and immaturity. In 1871 the soldiers of the economic rulers stamped out, root and branch, a whole generation of militant socialists.

“In other words, the oligarchy would mean the capitalisation of labour and the enslavement of the whole population. But it would be a fairer, juster form of slavery than any the world has yet seen. The per capita wage and consumption would be increased, and, with a stringent control of the birth rate, there is no reason why such a country should not be so ruled through many generations.

“When capitalistic production has attained its maximum development, it must confront a dividing of the ways; and the strength of capital on the one hand, and the education and wisdom of the workers on the other, will determine which path society is to travel.”

SOCIALISM

London did not believe that socialism was inevitable. In fact he foresaw a long period of rule by the bourgeoisie. But he expressed the hope that workers would win out in the struggle:

“It is possible, considering the inertia of the masses, that the whole world might in time come to be dominated by a group of industrial oligarchies, or by one great oligarchy, but it is not probable. That sporadic oligarchies may flourish for definite periods of time is highly possible; that they may continue to do so is as highly improbable. The procession of the ages has marked not only the rise of man, but the rise of the common man. From the chattel slave, or the serf chained to the soil, to the highest seats in modern society, he has risen, rung by rung, amid the crumbling of the divine right of kings and the crash of falling sceptres. That he has done this, only in the end to pass into the perpetual slavery of the industrial oligarch, is something at which his whole past cries in protest. The common man is worthy of a better future, or else he is not worthy of his past.”

London’s article 1908 “Revolution” was straightforward. Inspired by events in Russia, he argued that there had never been anything like the workers’ revolution in the history of the world, and that it was not analogous to the bourgeois American and French revolutions. He summed up the essential solidarity of socialism:

“They call themselves ‘comrades’, these men, comrades in the socialist revolution. Nor is the word empty and meaningless, coined of mere lip service. It knits men together as brothers, as men should be knit together who stand shoulder to shoulder under the red banner of revolt. This red banner, by the way, symbolises the brotherhood of man, and does not symbolise the incendiaryism that instantly connects itself with the red banner in the affrighted bourgeois mind. The comradeship of the revolutionists is alive and warm. It passes over geographical lines, transcends race prejudice.”

“We are revolutionists”, London wrote, warning that socialism meant the expropriation of capital by the workers.

“The cry of this army is, ‘No quarter! We want all that you possess. We will be content with nothing less than all that you possess. We want in our hands the reins of power and the destiny of mankind. Here are our hands. They are strong hands. We are going to take your governments, your palaces, and all your purpled ease away from you, and in that day you shall work for your bread even as the peasant in the field or the starved and runty clerk in your metropolises. Here are our hands. They are strong hands.’”

The idea of working-class socialism was central to this revolution. London wrote:

“Another thing must be clearly understood. In spite of the fact that middle-class men and professional men are interested in the movement, it is nevertheless a distinctly working-class revolt. The world over, it is a working-class revolt. The workers of the world, as a class, are fighting the capitalists of the world, as a class. The so-called great middle class is a growing anomaly in the social struggle. It is a perishing class (wily statisticians to the contrary), and its historic mission of buffer between the capitalist and working-classes has just about been fulfilled. Little remains for it but to wail as it passes into oblivion, as it has already begun to wail in accents Populistic and Jeffersonian-Democratic. The fight is on. The revolution is here now, and it is the world’s workers that are in revolt.”

He also warned again that the capitalist class would resist:

“The revolution is a revolution of the working-class. How can the capitalist class, in the minority, stem this tide of revolution? What has it to offer? What does it offer? Employers’ associations, injunctions, civil suits for plundering of the treasuries of the labour unions, clamour and combination for the open shop, bitter and shameless opposition to the eight-hour day, strong efforts to defeat all reform child-labor bills, graft in every municipal council, strong lobbies and bribery in every legislature for the purchase of capitalist legislation, bayonets, machine-guns, policemen’s clubs, professional strike-breakers, and armed Pinkertons — these are the things the capitalist class is dumping in front of the tide of revolution, as though, forsooth, to hold it back.”

To read London today is to recall the great tradition of the American labour movement a century ago. As Raskin points out, London “often uncritically reflected the received notions of his time” — notably on race, gender and empire. But socialism was central to London’s life. Raskin gets it right with his verdict: “socialism gave him life, infused him with passion, and he poured all his passion into socialism, too, until nothing remained”.

• Many of London’s writings are at <http://www.jacklondon.net> <http://london.sonoma.edu>

FILM

Iraq's (not quite) lost generation

FARYAL VELMI REVIEWS HEAVY METAL IN BAGHDAD

Acrassicaduda (Latin for black scorpion) is a heavy metal band in the world's most "heavy metal city" — Baghdad. After writing about them in US counter culture magazine *Vice* in 2003, two metal head journos make the ultimate groupie pilgrimage to the world's most dangerous city to track down the young Iraqis who make up the band.

The filmmakers, Eddy Moretti and Suroosh Alvi, introduce us to each member of the band — all young Iraqi men, who speak with terror and a glint of hopelessness in their eyes about the violence that has ripped apart their home city. Firas, the goatee-bearded bass player, speaks candidly of how wearing a slipknot T-shirt or speaking in English on the street is enough to make him a target for snipers. He describes how ordinary people feel "stuck between the Americans and the terrorists" — and as the curfew kicks in at 9pm it is hard to tell whose rockets, sniper fire and machine guns light up the night sky.

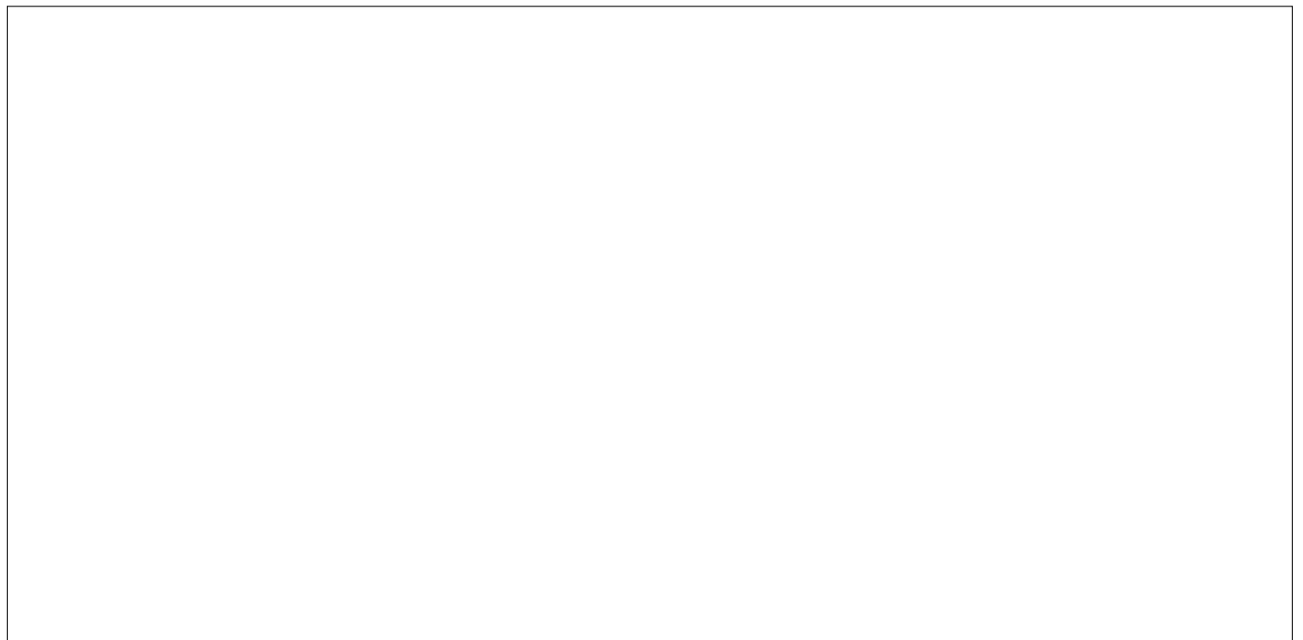
But in their bunker-like rehearsal space (the basement of a chemist's shop) these guys just live for the music they make, jamming for hours and learning their American English drawl from listening to bands like Metallica and Slipknot!

Marwan, the band's drummer, declares that Acrassicaduda are not a political band but their lyrics, musical style, clothes and attitude all constitute a sub culture — a rebel music — that has always challenged mainstream Iraqi culture. During Saddam's era the band describe how they were told by a Ba'ath party aparachik in the Ministry of Culture that the only way they could play a gig was if they wrote a song for Saddam. Cue an hilarious clip of a heavy metal ode to "great leader" Saddam, complete with obligatory head banging.

But now Saddam has been toppled, it seems the band's music has new enemies. "They took Ali Baba and left us the forty thieves". This is how Firas describes the US occupation and its consequences — trigger happy US troops as well as Shia and Sunni militias trying to carve out their respective world views with AK-47s and bombs.

The band themselves have been threatened by groups who have accused them of devil worship and promoting the infidel American way of life. Head banging has been equated with the motion made by Jewish people during prayers — and so is equally not appreciated by the fundamentalists.

As a timely reminder of the hostility they face, the venue of the band's last gig in Baghdad is shot at while they pre-



Caught between the occupation and the terrorists

pare for the show. It doesn't put them off. Acrassicaduda rock on, sending their metal heads fans into a frenzy as they belt out a set of covers and some of their own tunes. One fan describes how the gig is a both a refuge and a release from the world outside.

As the film makers tour Baghdad we see a concussed cityscape where the grand monuments and relics of the Saddam era are partnered by the bombed out shells of buildings and cars — representing another chapter in the life of this once great city.

When the band's beloved practice space — and their instruments — are reduced to rubble by a bomb, Firas videos the destruction and watches it everyday to keep himself angry.

At this point, like millions of other Iraqis, the band members decide to leave Iraq, and one by one they flee to Syria. Syria has taken 1.2 million Iraq refugees (the US, we are informed, has taken 466). But the life that they lead is hard and basic.

"In Iraq we are zero, here we are below zero" says Marwan. These "heavy metal refugees" can now wear their death metal t-shirts in peace, but working seven days a week for a pittance wage has left them yearning to make music again.

So with the filmmaker's help they put on a gig to a small

but enthusiastic crowd of other Iraqi refugees. Playing again together after a long time we watch the band fill with rapture, all their pain, anger and frustration channelled through their instruments and voices to create a death metal roar that is the perfect soundtrack to their lives.

We leave the band much as we found them — uncertain of their future, pining for their old lives but still dreaming in heavy metal guitar riffs. But as they watch the documentary footage that has been shot about their lives, they become emotional and angry.

Marwan, only 23 but wise beyond his years, looks directly into the camera and speaks out to all of us watching them from the other side of the world. He wants us to know that what we have seen is a glimpse of the real Iraq, the one they have lived through, the one that burns long after we have switched over the channel.

And there is no doubt that this fierce and passionate documentary is a testimony to the fact that although the occupation has near enough destroyed the lives of an entire generation of young Iraqis, it hasn't quite yet broken their spirit. Rock on.

• Update: the band's website www.heavymetalinbaghdad.com says the ban are now in Istanbul and have applied to the UNHCR for refugee status. Their money is running out fast.

ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN

From rebel to zealot

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

"In lawlessness, in the committing of crimes, the point must be remembered at which a man becomes a cannibal!" *Statement of A. I. Solzhenitsyn in defence of Zhores Medvedev, June 1970*

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn died of heart failure on 3 August 2008. Born in 1918 to a widowed mother, Solzhenitsyn served in the Red Army during World War II. He studied mathematics at university and took correspondence courses in literature and philosophy. The content of these courses, highly ideological and more like basic training courses in Stalinism than a course in free enquiry, defined many of his later views. These Stalinist ideas were to become the "Marxism" that he later renounced. Solzhenitsyn himself admits that he did not question the validity of the Stalinist state ideology at the time. Events turned his view of the world upside down.

In February 1945 Solzhenitsyn was arrested for breaching Article 58, paragraph 10 of the Soviet Criminal Code. His "crime" was to make pedestrian but derogatory remarks about Stalin in a letter home from the Prussian front. Whilst imprisoned in the Lubyanka in Moscow, he was sentenced to eight years in the labour camps followed by permanent exile — a sentence not many people would survive.

His heavy-handed treatment at the hands of the state censors is lampooned in his later work. One memorable

passage from *The Gulag Archipelago* stands out:

"The small hall echoed with 'stormy applause, rising to an ovation.' For three minutes, four minutes, five minutes, the 'stormy applause, rising to an ovation,' continued. But palms were getting sore and raised arms were already aching. And the older people were panting from exhaustion. It was becoming insufferably silly even to those who really adored Stalin. However, who would dare be the first to stop? ...

"With make-believe enthusiasm on their faces, looking at each other with faint hope, the district leaders were just going to go on and on applauding till they fell where they stood, till they were carried out of the hall on stretchers! ... Then, after eleven minutes, the director of the paper factory assumed a businesslike expression and sat down in his seat."

The punishment for being the first to sit down? The Gulag. The lesson? "Don't ever be the first to stop clapping"

His experiences, portrayed in horrific detail in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* and other works, transformed his view of the Stalinist system and the Russian Revolution. The books also provide perhaps the most powerful literary indictments of the crimes and contradictions of Stalinism. Where Orwell experienced the Stalinists during the Spanish Civil War and viewed developments from afar, Solzhenitsyn experienced murderous totalitarianism in the very belly of the beast.

Cancer Ward, a semi-autobiographical novel (after his sentence was commuted in the 1950s, Solzhenitsyn

received treatment for a benign cancer), describes the loss of "faith" in "Marxism" and the stoic acceptance of the traditional, orthodox Christian values of pre-Revolutionary Russia. This new religious/philosophical view of the world meant that upon his eventual exile to the West, Solzhenitsyn was as uncomplimentary about capitalist society as he had been about Stalinist Russia.

Just as he saw a direct, straight-line relationship between the actions of Lenin and Trotsky during the civil war (the "original sin") and the entrenched brutality of bureaucratic collectivism, in his later years Solzhenitsyn attacked the decadence and decay of the West as the result of abandoning patriotism and religion.

Those who hold up Solzhenitsyn's novels, short stories and essays as indisputable proof of the rotten origins of the Bolshevik Revolution would do well to examine the seeds of his other attitudes. He became a reactionary crank who melded Russian mysticism, anti-Semitism, religious orthodoxy, anti-communism and denunciations of Western society with, in his later years, praise for Putin and the other masters of the new Russian oligarchy.

He died an intolerant, nationalistic, religious zealot. He died a great literary figure, a powerful critic of the day-to-day brutality of Stalinism but a compromised critic of Bolshevism and, as these things go, capitalism. His more unpleasant views came to define him. How and when his own intellectual "lawlessness" and "crimes" developed should be clear. His journey to "cannibalism" does not diminish the force of his early work, but certainly weakens his later pronouncements.

CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

Only half an answer

Stuart Jordan weighs up the pros and cons of “consensus decision-making”.

The anti-capitalist movement is a rich and diverse place, encompassing a broad range of ideas and political philosophies. In reaction to what they see as a fractured, sectarian Trotskyist movement, the anti-capitalists focus on building consensus for action.

People come to the anti-capitalist mobilisations united only by their willingness to take part in the organisational strategies of the movement and by their general opposition to capitalism. The failures of “Leninism” are seen as an overemphasis on political argument (as opposed to political activity) coupled with a hierarchy that stifles the creativity, spontaneity and autonomy of the individual. The solution is found in new organisational strategies that militate against hierarchy and allow all participants full freedom of expression.

These strategies have had plenty of success in their own sphere; but there is a tendency within the movement to fetishise organisational process to such an extent that the most important thing becomes not what you do or think, but rather how you do it. If process is held up as the be-all-and-end-all of anti-capitalism, then this places limits on the efficacy and potential of this dynamic new movement.

The fetish of process manifests itself in the consensus decision-making which has become a hallmark of the movement. I will focus on consensus for the purposes of this discussion piece. However, similar criticisms can be levelled at the tactic of non-violence (which in the minds of its proponents quickly evolves into a whole political philosophy). If Marxists are accused of being doctrinaire in the realm of theory, then a similar accusation can be levelled at the anti-capitalists in the realm of strategy.

Consensus decision-making is a method for building unity for an action in a way that every member of the collective feels valued and empowered. A variety of hand signals, a facilitator, and a few basic rules mean that on any number of issues consensus can be formed and decisions taken forward. The process can be quite arduous but it is generally a very positive experience for planning action.

It cuts against the traditional Marxist forms of debate in that contributions are made with the view of getting everyone on board, rather than clarifying the terms and positions of the debate. Dissent is aired but a lot of time is spent creating formulations that people will be happy with.

People can absent themselves from the process; a minority of one could in theory scupper every decision but that never actually happens, as there are no fixed membership.

There are many positive aspects to this approach, not least because there is an expectation that every individual will take personal responsibility for the decisions that are made. The maxim “If not us, who? If not now, when?” is a lived reality in this movement.

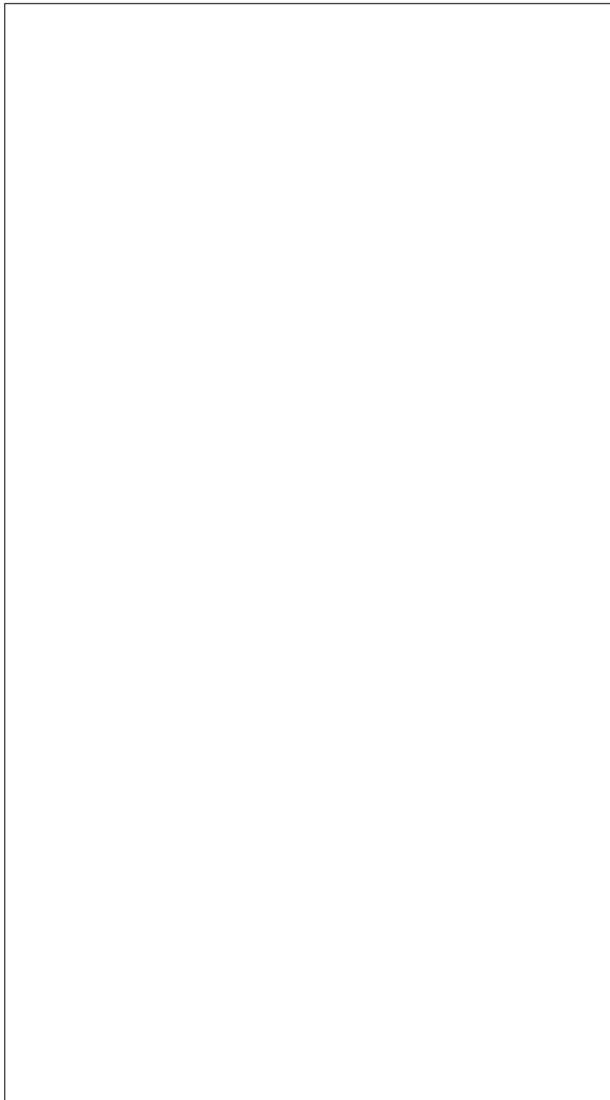
The positive aspects of this method of organising are well-recognised within certain sections of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty as many comrades have become used to this process through work in Feminist Fightback, Workers Climate Action, No Borders, the Campaign Against Immigration Controls and other organisations. However, for all the positive benefits of consensus we cannot treat this method as a universal answer for our times.

Consensus might be a valiant effort at overcoming the problems of hierarchy in a particular circumstance, there is something quite sinister in the idea that it actually achieves this goal in general. When it works, it is only because those who come to the meetings already have a degree of consensus, and those who don’t, stay away, do not want to be there or are busy working on alternatives.

Some people are “in the know” but you are never quite sure who they are or what they know. Even if everyone is entirely committed to non-hierarchical ways of operating, and even with the best of intentions and a great deal of work to “include” newcomers etc. etc., the “tyranny of structureless” allows room for an unaccountable clique to control proceedings behind the backs of those involved.

In this sense there can be echoes of Bakunin’s “secret pilots”, unelected leaders who masquerade as “Joe worker” whilst in fact manipulating the movement to their own scheme. Hierarchy may not be particularly desirable, but better to have a democratically elected and accountable leadership who are open about their ideas and encourage debate, dissent and spontaneous activity, than secret pilots.

A communist society will be marked by a transparency of human relationships that are not mediated by money or



Getting organised at Climate Camp — good stuff, but not the be all and end all

the state — it will be clear why society works the way it does and how decisions are made. Consensus lacks that transparency. If the anti-capitalist movement ever became a mass revolutionary force, then its organisational strategy contains no safeguards against creating a form of socialism-from-above. At the moment everything relies on everyone’s “good will”. It can only work with relatively small groups that already have a degree of consensus and which are focused on more or less one-off actions, rather than ongoing organisation and daily agitation and literature production of the type that, for example, an active trade union does.

The false belief that consensus has successfully abolished hierarchy means that political debate is relegated to the after-meeting drink. As there are no official leaders, there is no need to thrash out political ideas and indeed a pressure not to: it could disrupt the consensus. What matters is that everyone is on-board with the action in hand, not what they think about the state of the world.

Politics is reduced to a private affair for the individual, in a way akin to how secular society treats religious belief. We do action collectively and then scuttle off to read books on our own in our bedrooms, discussing our findings in private conversation. This is a massive limitation on the potential for the movement to grow and develop into a revolutionary force.

LEADERSHIP

From a Marxist perspective it is understood that there is a dynamic relationship between the leadership and the rank-and-file of any political movement. Individuals do not get their ideas from the ether, there is no equality in our education system and no position outside of the world from where we can examine what’s going on and choose a political position accordingly. Political ideas form in the process of political activity and critical reflection of that experience.

We do not come to revolutionary struggle as equals, we come with different levels of class consciousness, different skills, education and personal experiences. The ideas of

any individual will be determined by any number of factors but will be largely dominated by capitalist ideology. This is especially true in our own time when the history of previous class struggle has been largely forgotten; a collective amnesia on a scale not seen for many generations.

In such times mass movements are built by shouting above the cacophony of capitalist propaganda, appealing to the interests of the mass of humanity, the working class and their supporters. We cannot make this happen at will. Economic and political factors beyond our control will mobilise people in a way that our pitifully limited revolutionary media cannot. But even with these economic and political factors there is a need for leadership, direction and someone to issue the rallying call. Or to put it another way: if we as revolutionaries do not organise to issue *our* rallying calls then the rallying calls of *others*, fake-left, or kitsch-left, will prevail by default.

The battle for revolutionaries is to get leaders who mobilise against interests of capital and a rank-and-file movement that fights for such leadership. Anyone with even a little experience of trade unionism will understand this dynamic, which is played out at all levels of the movement from the relationship between inactive members and workplace reps, to the relationship between activists and the national leadership.

The history of challenges to the capitalist world order is one marked by failure, cowardice and betrayal by the leaders of the movement. Look to Germany in the 1920s and 1930s where the strongest workers’ parties in history capitulated in different ways and paved the way for Hitler and the genocide of 6 million Jews.

Look to Spain in 1936-7 where Stalinist forces destroyed the revolution while the anarchist leaders put their faith in the bourgeois government.

Look to Iran in 1979, when the working class reached for power and then, finding no leaders to challenge Khomeini, rallied behind the banner of clerical fascism.

If we want a mass revolutionary movement of millions of workers, then it is inevitable that leaders will emerge who will play large parts in determining events. The task of revolutionaries is not to delegate responsibility to these leaders in the mode of Stalinism, or to pretend leadership can be avoided like the Spanish anarchists, but rather to struggle for an accountable, alert, broadly-based experienced, determined and revolutionary leadership. This requires that we learn the mistakes of the past and educate ourselves in our revolutionary traditions, not shy away from politics as if it is an irrelevance.

The consensus process is a useful tool in the activist toolbox for organising action in a participatory way. Meetings built around consensus often feel good, you leave the meeting buoyant and enthusiastic about the activity ahead. It provides a good introduction for those seeking out anti-capitalist activity as you can hide your ignorance of Marx (or Proudhon) behind a good idea for action.

However, consensus is not the golden pill that is going to cleanse the left and create a mass movement. If the anti-capitalist movement is going to move forward, then it needs to tap into the revolutionary potential of the workers’ movement and in this process it must be open to different forms of organising that have been developed in this movement over centuries of anti-capitalist struggle.

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.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel and the “essence of Zionism”

Sean Matgamna replies to Moshe Machover's second polemic on Israel and Iran (www.workersliberty.org/machover2).

COMRADE MACHOVER,

My understanding of a personal letter is of something private, as distinct from the open letter I wrote you (*Solidarity* 3/138), which is intended, or mainly intended, for other readers. So I'll continue as I started.

My “tediously lengthy” response? “If I were as tedious as a king”, as a famous corrupter of words once put it, I would be happy to bestow it on you, comrade Machover, and on your not-quite-reconstructed-Stalinist close comrades.

Initially, you repeated the libellous nonsense of the *Weekly Worker's* campaign, lying about what I had said. You summed up my position thus: “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”.

“[SM] just refuses 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”. That was flatly untrue — a lamentable fit of demagoguery.

In your second article, you have changed the story. Your complaint is that my “‘objection’ is not really that much of an objection... He will ‘object’, but will not condemn outright”.

That is not quite true either, but it is considerably nearer the truth than what you wrote first time out. Your two different versions — that I thought it “wrong to object”, that I said “go ahead Israel, bomb away!”; and that I “will object” — can't both be true. In which statement are you mistaken, or sloppy, or knowingly repeating *Weekly Worker* lies?

Why waste your time, and mine, on such puerile nonsense?

If what you are doing in your second article is retracting what you said first time round, shouldn't you do it explicitly, and shouldn't you give some account of how you came to perpetrate a gross misrepresentation?

In any case, the new version isn't much of an improvement. You write: “he will ‘object’, but will not ‘condemn outright’...” Will object to but not condemn *what*?

You run together two distinct things. I “objected” to an Israeli (conventional) military attack on Iranian nuclear installations; I refused to “condemn outright” *Israel as such*.

Why, comrade Machover, if you are as sure of your case as you want to appear to be, do you need such a tricky — and, to put it in plain words, dishonest — conflation? Those sentences of yours, as an illustration of literary and political vice, might have been taken out of George Orwell's “Politics and the English Language”!

You were strangely silent about the major *Weekly Worker* lie — the Goebbels-level lie! — that I had “excused” an Israeli nuclear strike on Iran. By ignoring it, you tacitly went along with it. Now you quietly try to sustain and justify it on the ground that Iran's nuclear installations are so well shielded as to be “probably inaccessible to conventional (non-nuclear) bombs”. Therefore, an Israeli nuclear strike is an immediate possibility; therefore, that is what I was writing about; that is what I was (your first version) not objecting to, or (your second version) objecting to only weakly.

And that justifies the *Weekly Worker's* flat page-one charge, accompanied by a full-page picture of a nuclear explosion, that I “excuse” an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran?

ESSENCE OF ZIONISM?

You base most of your argument in the second article on the claim that any Israeli raid on Iran would be yet another manifestation of the workings of “Zionism”, of the evil logic of an idea coined over a century ago.

My “basic” error, you say, is to think “that if Israel attacked Iran that would have nothing much to do with Zionism”. So: any Israeli raid on Iranian nuclear installation would be very much “to do with Zionism”, and with the “essence of what Zionism is in actual reality: a colonising project, structurally and inseparably allied to imperialism”.

“What Israeli leaders and planners find ‘intolerable’ is any threat to Israel's regional hegemony and its privileged status as ‘the superpower in the Middle East’: because it is

Arriving in Tel Aviv 1951. It was not just Zionist ideas but also and crucially the experience of genocide and oppression which lay behind the migration of Jews to Palestine and, later Israel

this status that allows it to proceed with the Zionist project of colonisation without serious let or hindrance”.

Exactly what this means is not clear: that Israel wants to bomb Iran in order to plant Jewish settlements there? Your triumphantly-presented overview of the “essence” of Zionism conflates Israel today, and the history of the Israeli Jewish people and of the European Jewry in the 20th century, with extrapolation from (chosen strands of) an ideology.

You suggest there are goals and aims and objectives, a hidden “essence”, discernible only to those like you who can see through the mere appearance of things to the hidden “real” Zionism. That the true story was not one of many strands in the broad Zionist current — in the thinking, hopes, fantasies, fears of world Jewry — including people and groups who wanted a Jewish state stretching to the Euphrates, or wherever — but instead of a single “Zionism”, with at its core people pursuing such goals, using all the different “Zionists” with lesser ambitions as makeweights, tools, dupes, and “brainwashing” them as you say the Jews of Israel now are brainwashed about the danger from Iran.

I showed in my first reply that you seem to be in the grip of a thinly secularised Muslim eschatology; here you seem to subscribe to some variant of the doctrine of history, or Middle East history anyway, as shaped by a “Zionist” conspiracy.

This may be the result of your confusing a system of ideas, an ideology, Jewish nationalism, Zionism, with a movement of people set in motion by events such as the coming to power of the Nazis.

Your dissertation about Zionism is a piece of sheer obfuscation, erected on the self-evidently erroneous starting point of identifying a nation with an ideology. Nations are formed (and dissolved, if they dissolve) in history by many factors, of which ideology is only one, and one that is varying in its power from case to case, and in each case from point to point.

However big a part Zionist ideas, in their different dialects, played in shaping Israel, they would have achieved nothing without the work of the genocidal, and the lesser, anti-semites of Europe. The masses of Jewish people who went to Palestine in the 1920s and the 30s were mostly not motivated and set in motion by an idea, but by the impossibility of going on as before: that is how the project of a Jewish state came to make sense to large numbers of people. Now Israel exists, a tiny state with an overwhelming Jewish-Hebrew population.

Your logic-chopping sword-dance with definitions — of nations, of Israel, of Zionism — is a fine display of both (irrelevant) mental dexterity and intellectual and political decadence. It all amounts to saying that “common-or-garden” Israeli nationalism is a mere veil for the “essence” of Zionism, an insatiable “colonising project, structurally and inseparably allied to imperialism”.

It is easy enough to construct continuous chains of ideas — like the one I cited last time: from nationalism to chauvinism to racism — or liberalism to anarchism; left liberalism to mild “socialism” to working-class revolutionary socialism; advocacy of female equality to the belief that

normal male-female sex is rape; and so on, and so on.

The conclusion, however, that the less “extreme” are mere tools of the most “advanced” is the stuff of paranoid delusion. In reality, many things intervene to break up the neat, logical continuum. In reality, many things intervene to break up the neat, logical continuum. In reality, those neatly put side by side in your head and growing into one another in the mental construction, often make war on each other. Don't they?

Israel is locked into certain geographical, geopolitical, demographic, military, etc. frameworks. That, not the wishes of the most “extreme” Zionists, shapes what can happen.

That there are strong, even dominant, forces in Israel intent on annexing as much of the West Bank as they can, intent on delaying or preventing any deal with the Palestinians that would put an end to new settlements and uproot at least some of the “facts on the ground” — that is plain and obvious. I oppose that. You oppose that. But you present yourself as seeing, knowing, more than when you talk about Zionism.

DEMONISATION

Task you: don't you know where you are, what's going on around you? Israel's treatment of the Palestinians is detestable; it should be condemned in its detail, and in its totality, by counterposing to it the creation of an independent Palestinian state in contiguous territory.

But the detestation of Israel on the ostensibly revolutionary left, and way beyond it — in the *Guardian* “liberal left”, for instance — is out of all proportion to what Israel does, as compared to other evils in the world.

The bias, the eagerness to condemn, is surely something you don't need pointing out to you.

Consider, for example, the 60th anniversary of Israel's foundation, on 15 May this year. *Tribune*, representing opinion slightly to the left of the *Guardian*, marked the occasion with an article denouncing Israel root and branch, with no suggestion of any element in Israel's foundation other than gratuitous vindictiveness against the Palestinian Arabs.

The *Guardian* had several articles, with the tone set by the following headlines: “Palestinians commemorate Nakba day”; “Palestinians mourn 60th anniversary of ‘the Catastrophe’”; “Expulsion and dispossession can't be cause for celebration”; “Palestinians mourn Israel's 60th anniversary”.

A young person coming in to left-wing politics will naturally, healthily, side with the Palestinians. That young person will “tap into” a culture on the left in which the most vociferous people link all criticism of Israel's action to the idea that Israel has no right to exist, never had and never can acquire such a right.

He and she will be plied with selective, one-sided, grossly biased, and, yes, demonising, accounts of the 20th century history of the Jews of Palestine.

He and she will be educated in “demands” on Israel that amount to requiring that Israel abolish itself, or be utterly condemned for not doing so — such as the

demand for the "return" of four or five million descendants of the 750,000 Palestinians who were expelled or fled during the 1948 war.

That "education" will naturally align the newcomer with any force that is against Israel — the more militantly, murderously, implacably hostile the better — Saddam Hussein's Iraq, Iran, Hamas, Hezbollah...

Into this you bring your "I know the Zionists" nonsense, and its heavy implication that there is some "essence-of-Zionism" conspiratorial grand design, in which the present Israel is only a staging-post for ever-expanding Jewish colonisation of the Middle East.

NATIONAL RIGHTS

Benignly, you let me off the charge, of which you have "heard", that I am "actually... a Zionist". I'm an international socialist, not any kind of nationalist. But, of course, socialists are for the fullest possible national rights for peoples deprived of and claiming them.

On the kitsch-left, "Zionism" is used as a swear-word, not too different from "racist" or "fascist"; the usage is an artefact of ideological terrorism, used to stop people thinking about the issues. One shouldn't be afraid of words. So, comrade Machover, call me a Zionist, if you like. I am for Israel's right to exist and its right to defend itself: for what I understand as the core "Zionism".

Frederick Engels, towards the end of his life, said that there were two peoples, then, who had a "duty" to be nationalist before being internationalist — the Poles and the Irish. I'm less than sure that he was right about the Irish, even then — Engels was a bit of a romantic Irish nationalist — but, in any case, it ceased to be true of us in 1922. It remained true of the Poles up to the collapse of the Stalinist empire.

I'm inclined to think it was true of those who set up the Jewish state in the 1940s. True, the Zionist project did not avert, and could not have averted, the Nazi butcheries. But neither did we, the international socialists, the assimilationists, avert them. Two-thirds of European Jews were killed. The Jews who got to Palestine might have been killed, too, had the Germans occupied Palestine even temporarily; but in fact they survived. A Jewish state would surely have been able to offer refuge to a lot of those who perished in Europe.

Had the proposal of the Peel Commission in 1937 to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs not been blocked by the British government under Arab pressure, a lot more European Jews would have survived. Partition was, I think, the only way forward.

I know of no reason why the 30% Hebrew minority in Palestine — in fact there had been a Jewish minority there before the big migrations — did not have the right to self-determination and the right to "let in" as many of the people whom they considered their own, fleeing for their lives, as they could. Nor do I know of any reason why, in the 1930s and after, Palestinian-Arab rights overrode those of the Jewish population, or why socialists should accept that they did.

What conception of Palestinian Arab rights could lead anybody to say or imply that it would have been better if those Jews who got to Palestine in the 30s and the first half of the 40s had stayed in Europe and died instead? (Though as Tony Cliff implicitly said it 20 years ago, in an interview with the SWP's magazine *Socialist Review*, no.100). The Palestinian Arab chauvinists, such as the Mufti of Jerusalem, who went to Bosnia to raise a Muslim army to fight for Hitler, thought that; but socialists?

Arab or Islamic chauvinism, such as that of the Mufti, does not become any better because it is purveyed by people who call themselves socialists and Marxists and Trotskyists; indeed, if held to with hindsight, it is a great deal worse.

PROGRAMME

The answer, the counter, to the real Israel expansionism is the democratic political programme of two states, a Palestinian state alongside Israel — what was stipulated in the 1947 UN partition resolution. (Jordan and Egypt seized most of the territory designated for the Palestinian state, including the West Bank, which Israel did not occupy until 1967; Israel seized some). An independent Palestinian state with contiguous territory — that is clear, defined, policy, and can conceivably be realised (though, if it is not realised soon, it may well disappear from history as an option).

Poisonously, you combine cloudy hints and half-thoughts and "aha! I know what they are really up to" intimations of something like a hidden "Zionist" conspiracy with rejection of any conceivable solution. You back up the demand for the abolition of Israel with that "aha! I know" conspiracy stuff. ("Give them an inch and they'll take your hand...")

All your proposals to replace Israel (or "anything like" it) pose two alternatives. Either Israel will voluntarily cease to exist. Its citizens will dismantle their state, disarming themselves in face of the bitter enemies of a century or conflict.

Or, they will not do that. No people in comparable circumstances ever has. Then? Then, Israel must be forcibly disarmed and dismantled, and its Hebrew citizens deprived of national rights.

The war to subjugate Israel could not conceivably result in a situation in which the Jewish citizens of Israel would be allowed to merge peacefully into an Arab state, even if they wanted that — because the only conceivable agency for the subjugation of Israel would be an alliance of Arab or Islamic states.

Your prerequisites for a settlement have, in turn, as their prerequisite, the conquest and disarming of the Israeli Jews. Who is going to do that? How? When?

I don't think it should happen, but in any case it is not going to happen. And if it did happen, the last thing you'd get from it would be fair and equal treatment for the Israeli Jews.

I have great difficulty in believing that you really think it is going to happen — and therefore great difficulty in understanding what you think you are doing. The most charitable interpretation I can put on it is that you are being self-indulgently irresponsible: you are stamping your feet at history, shouting utopian slogans.

IRANIAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Second time round, you cite Israeli bigwigs to prove that Israel does not believe that there is any threat of an Iranian nuclear attack. But your quotations show nothing of the sort. What you quote concerns how the bigwigs think, not about the probability of a real Iranian nuclear threat, but about how the Iranian threat should be presented publicly, and what its existence might mean for immigration to Israel.

You quote the *Jerusalem Post* reporting, under the headline "Iranian nukes mean end of Zionism", former deputy defence minister Ephraim Sneh.

Sneh, at a conference of Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, states the opinion that: "Iran's success in obtaining a nuclear capability will deter Jews from immigrating to Israel, cause many Israelis to leave and will be the end of the 'Zionist dream'... A nuclear weapon in Iranian hands will be an intolerable reality for Israel. The decision-making process in Israel will be under constant [Iranian] influence — this will be the end of the Zionist dream".

You also quote, from the *Jerusalem Post*, former Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy, who "slammed Israeli political leaders for calling Iran's nuclear threat 'an existential threat'... There is something wrong with informing our enemy that they can bring about our demise... It is also wrong that we inform the world that the moment the Iranians have a nuclear capability there is a countdown to the destruction of the state of Israel. We are the superpower in the Middle East and it is time that we began behaving like [a] superpower".

"Iran's real goal, Halevy said, was to turn itself into a regional superpower and reach a 'state of equality' with the United States in their diplomatic dealings".

What do you think this proves? You say: "When members of the Israeli 'defence' establishment are engaged in serious discussion — rather than propaganda for the consumption of the [Israeli] deluded masses and willing dupes — they say something quite different" from what I had said "most Israelis" see in the prospect of an Iranian nuclear bomb.

After the quotations, you claim that they contradict: "SM['s] attempt to explain — and excuse — an Israeli attack on Iran as a defensive measure in the face of an existential threat, rather than as motivated by 'the demon-Zionism stuff'." You add: "Both Ephraims... agree that the issue is not the survival of Israel. Unlike SM, they do not

believe Israel faces a real threat of physical destruction... General Sneh... is worried about... not Israel's existence, but the fate of the 'Zionist dream'."

This is an inverted pyramid of large conclusions balanced on a very small space. It is an example of using spuriously "expert", "insider" knowledge as sand to throw in the eyes of the reader.

If, as you seem to say, Iranian nuclear weapons would not be a threat to Israel, why would they do what Sneh says — deter immigrants, and prompt others to leave?

Sneh's talk here of "the Zionist dream" means a vastly expanded Jewish state? So it might, for all I knew on first reading, and for all most of your readers will know.

I discover on checking that in fact Sneh is the leader of a Israeli-Labour split-off, "Israel Hazaka", one of whose four "principles" is: "To pursue with sustained determination the end of the conflict with the Palestinians on the basis of a two-state solution".

Plainly Sneh meant just Israel, the Zionist dream.

From what you cite, Halevy is evidently concerned that talking too much (too candidly) about Israel being wiped out will encourage Iran. He insists that Israel can still do something about the risk, and fatalism and resignation are not called for.

You quote Halevy that "Iran's real goal" is to be a regional superpower, to reach equality in diplomatic dealings with the USA. And you are saying that Iran as a nuclear-armed regional superpower would not be; might not be; could never be, a nuclear threat to Israel?

You say "Both Ephraims... agree that the issue is not the survival of Israel. Unlike SM, they do not believe Israel faces a real threat of physical destruction". Maybe that is so — but it is not what your quotes tell me. If Ephraim Halevy does not think Israel is under threat, it is, according to what you quote, because he thinks Israel doesn't have to let the threat develop.

Halevy is an embattled politician, one of the most vehement opponents in Israel of a strike on Iran.

If your point, with the quotes, is that an Israeli strike would not be a pure act of self-defence, with no other implications or motives, then I agree.

But isn't the real meaning of what you write that you yourself think a nuclear-armed Iran and a regional balance of terror would be a good thing — checking "Israeli expansionism"? When you say that Israel fears an Iranian nuclear bomb because it would checkmate "Zionist expansion", aren't you also saying that it would be all to the good? You expect positive benefits from a nuclear-armed Iran. All you see threatened in Israel is "Zionist expansionism"; and here is the agency to deal with it.

I wrote in my open letter: "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". In fact, I was mistaken: it is not only in your subconscious.

Why is the reader not entitled to conclude:

(1) That, obsessively hostile to Israel and "Zionism", you are now immersed in calculations of regional power politics as the answer to those evils;

(2) That, despite saying you don't, you do actually want Iran to have nuclear weapons (as a way to checkmate "Zionist expansionism");

(3) That you look to power-politics and a nuclear balance of terror to curb an Israel which you can't see being curbed otherwise?

(4) That you have abandoned all concern with working-class politics as the alternative to those regional power politics.

Weekly Worker chickens out of debate

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

Readers may remember that on 3 August I challenged the people who publish the *Weekly Worker* to "debate with me publicly on the Israel-Palestine question, at a meeting presided over by a commonly agreed chair".

That was in response to a ridiculous campaign they were — and are — running around the assertion that I, in *Solidarity* 3/136, "excused an Israeli nuclear attack on Iran". It is a straightforward lie.

After having fulminated in print that we should be "driven out of the labour movement", they meekly agreed to organise a joint meeting and debate with us! But then the squirming and backsliding started.

In the course of the phone and email exchanges with them about arranging such a debate, something strange to behold has happened. The heroes of fierce at-a-distance, envenomed polemic, who snipe from ambush and whose comments on others are often peculiar in their violence and hysterical vindictiveness, have turned shy and bashful on us.

They are now proposing a debate between AWL and a shadowy outfit in which they are the main stake-holders,

called the "Campaign for a Marxist Party". Their side is to be represented by Moshe Machover, a member of the "Campaign".

Machover as the other speaker will certainly make for a better debate. But there is a slight drawback. Although Moshe Machover has implicitly endorsed the WW's libel, he has (pointedly?) not repeated it in so many words — and, most importantly, he and the *Weekly Worker* group have different positions on the Israel-Palestine question!

A reader of WW can be forgiven for not knowing this, but, last time we heard, the *Weekly Worker* group was, like AWL, for a "two-states" settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Moshe Machover is not. Moshe Machover states: "I think that Israel has no right to exist as presently constituted or in anything like its present form..."

WW are not the ones to let this political issue inhibit them when they see an advantage in baying along with the loudest pack, here the "Israel-is-the-source-of-all-evil" reactionary anti-imperialists.

We will debate with Moshe Machover. It's a shame that the unprincipled little scoundrels who run the *Weekly Worker* group — Mark Fischer and Jack Conrad, the Chickenshit Kids, the blowhards' blowhards — are such god-awful wimps.

ZIMBABWE

“We urge working people to reject this elitist deal”

The following assessment of the recent power-sharing deal between Robert Mugabe's Zanu PF and Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change is from the International Socialist Organisation of Zimbabwe

MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai has become the new prime minister and shares executive authority with the president and cabinet. In addition he will chair a Council of Ministers that will oversee the implementation of government policies, although Mugabe will remain chairing cabinet. The opposition has a majority of 16 to 15 in cabinet.

The two Zanu PF deputy presidents remain with two deputy prime ministers reserved for the opposition.

Mugabe remains the head of state and government, although required to consult Tsvangirai before making most appointments.

The deal will last for up to five years although subject to review after the first eighteen months.

The deal mandates a constitutional reform process that will lead to a referendum and new constitution in eighteen months time, overseen by a Parliamentary Select Committee.

Many ordinary people and some civic groups have cautiously welcomed the deal in the hope that it will bring an end to their suffering as well as the beginning of the end of the Mugabe dictatorship. The SADC [Southern African Development Community, a consortium of states] and African Union have endorsed it. The western countries, led by Britain and the USA have only cautiously welcomed it, with the feeling that it still leaves too much power with Mugabe. On the other hand, it has been opposed by a number of major civic groups including the ZCTU [Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions] and NCA [National Constitutional Assembly], who have denounced it as unprincipled capitulation to the dictatorship.

The deal does not surprise us. Three years ago we argued:

“The perspective of a government of national unity between the opposition and Zanu PF is shared by the elites now dominant in the ruling party, in the two main opposition parties and local and international capitalists. Their main efforts, despite current disagreements are driven towards achieving such goal, as an instrument in pre-empting social revolution in an important periphery capitalist state sent into mortal crisis by the failure of neo-liberal capitalism...”

As for the MDC we argued that

“Its primary preoccupation is towards reaching a sell out agreement with the Zanu PF dictatorship that will not benefit the poor and working people ... (that) the opposition is dominated by the petit bourgeois elite, who long ago prostrated themselves before western neo-liberal forces and are now eager to get into state power, even as junior partners, and accumulate as a neo-colonial dependent capitalist class.”

And as for Zanu PF that –

“Zanu PF elites now want the peace to grow and launder the wealth acquired in the last decade but cannot do so in the context of a crisis ridden state under siege from the west... despite his rhetoric, Mugabe is now ready to capitulate and enter into an elitist compromise deal with the MDC, the west and business. But only after the 2008 elections, which he hopes to use to legitimize his party's claim to being the senior partner...”

Whilst for the west, we argued

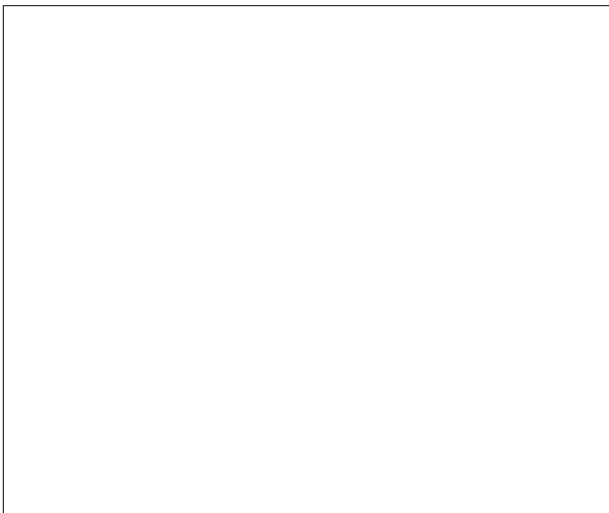
“To ensure that Zanu PF elites do not relapse as they did in 1997, the forces of global neo-liberalism demand a political guarantee in the form of co-option in government of their trusted agents in Zimbabwe, the MDC.”

MIXED BAG

The mixed reaction to the deal lies not only in their desperate economic condition but also in that the deal itself is a mixed bag.

Tsvangirai is more than a ceremonial prime minister if one takes into account his control of the House of Assembly and urban municipalities, the opposition majority in cabinet, the right of MDC to opt out of the deal, that MDC remains a separate political entity unlike ZAPU and that MDC remains the relative gate-keeper of western economic support.

This is why many bourgeois analysts pushed Tsvangirai to sign, arguing MDC's realistic objectives in the talks could not be full power now, but to get a strategic toe-hold in the state, neutralising the most vicious attacks on his party by the regime and thus be better prepared for the next elections, which Mugabe is unlikely to contest. Without defeating Mugabe in the streets, like the Patriotic Front in 1979, this was the best achievable result under the circumstances.



Inflation is still staggeringly out of control

But the comparison with 1979 is misplaced. The Patriotic Front elites conducted negotiations even as they accelerated the war. And even then they were forced to make major concessions, accepting a deal that left the white settlers with legislative veto power, control of the civil service and judiciary and the land, for at least ten years after independence. But they had a fall back position on a mobilized peasantry and armed cadreship whilst they retained substantial control of the armed forces and national treasury.

On the other hand Tsvangirai, supported by a duplicitous and largely cowardly civic society, actively undermined any attempt at serious mass action, solely relying on western sanctions. Not surprising they have been forced into a deal which gives a desperate dictatorship breathing space to renew itself, whilst laying the foundations for massive long term assaults on the living conditions of working people. Make no mistake, despite the above concessions, MDC is the definite junior in this deal with very unclear chances of success whilst the future of the deal itself is very uncertain.

Whilst “humiliating” in form, the deal as Mugabe himself has said, in substance, leaves Zanu PF “in the driving seat”.

Firstly Mugabe remains with most executive authority. He remains the head of state and government, with authority to appoint ministers, chair cabinet, dissolve parliament, declare war, enter into international treaties, assent to legislation and appoint or dismiss key state officials. All he is required to do, in exercise of some but not all of these powers, is to consult the Prime Minister or Parliament, but not necessarily agree with them. This is made worse by the fact that MDC signed a deal without even an agreement on what ministries they would get. Mugabe is now insisting on holding most of the key ministries. The opposition's slight majority in cabinet does not amount to much because its decisions will be made by consensus, giving Zanu PF veto power.

Tsvangirai's much vaunted Council of Ministers is little more than the administrative and implementing sub-committee of Cabinet, as no executive authority vests in it.

Secondly the deal affirms Zanu PF's position that the land reform programme is irreversible and any compensation paid to the white farmers will be from Britain. This allows Zanu PF to protect its crucial rural base ahead of future elections whilst hoping that economic recovery will minimize the opposition's protest vote.

Thirdly the MDC has no real fall back position if the deal collapses. Its only guarantor is a mediator who has now been ousted. Having consistently neutralized the mass action route, the MDC has solely relied on the western sanctions.

SUPPORT WILL WANE

The deal looks very fragile and may unravel sooner rather than later.

Popular acceptance of such an expensive and over bloated coalition government, proportionately the biggest in the world in a country with the world's highest inflation, is likely to wane rapidly if the promised economic recovery fails to take place, with the draft national constitution a possible flash point. At such stage Mugabe's continued control of the security apparatus, the state and treasury will be decisive and the opposition's naked foolishness in signing such deal exposed.

One of the fundamental problems of the deal is that its

success relies on a western-supported economic neoliberal programme, whose efficacy is today being dramatically challenged by the financial melt-down in the USA and globally. Today the worst economic crisis has only been avoided so far by the pouring of hundreds of billions of dollars of public money into the money markets by the western governments.

Yet it is this economic paradigm of austerity for the working people and the third world and subsidies for the rich that is being pushed by the west as a necessary precondition for any support of the deal.

In their election manifestos both MDC and Zanu PF have indicated their willingness to comply. So despite the deal, employers, businesses and capitalists will continue paying workers starvation wages, imposing inhuman price increases of basic goods and services indexed to the \$US dollar and acceleration of privatisation of water, electricity and education. Poverty, deprivation and suffering for the ordinary people is likely to continue, and with it repression as the now united political elites seek to deal with hungry and increasingly angry working people.

The looting of state resources by politicians, now both from Zanu PF and MDC will reach unprecedented levels. This is why we urge working people to reject this elitist deal and continue the fight for a better future.

The possibility of massive mass action is slim. People are exhausted, hungry and weighed down by the long-running crisis as well as the misleadership, duplicity and opportunism of the opposition and civic elites. However... continued poverty will likely trigger small to significant revolts around bread and butter issues, such as we see with the teachers and doctors strikes. The challenge will be to generalise and link such different small actions into broader and bigger campaigns supported by all the various forces still ready to fight, including the newly established regional solidarity campaign led by COSATU [South African unions]. And in doing so always deepening the ideological basis of our struggles and movements to clearly expose the root cause of poverty and dictatorship as capitalism.

We welcome the positions taken by the ZCTU and NCA for continued demand of a genuine people driven constitution and the holding of free and fair elections thereafter. With Mugabe's ally in South Africa, Mbeki, ousted, there will be further scope for expanding regional mobilisation especially involving COSATU, the SACP [South African Community Party] and social movements in South Africa who have all rejected the deal as well.

REGROUPMENT

But to ensure progress it is imperative that there be the urgent regroupment in a united front of the radical, anti-neoliberal and left forces, including organised labour. To avoid the treachery we experienced in the popular frontist Peoples Convention, which was dominated by the imperialist funded and controlled groups, it is essential that there be a serious shake-out and split of civic society between the militant, serious and pro-working people anti-neoliberal movements and the opportunistic, cowardly and imperialist funded and controlled ones.

We hope the coming Zimbabwe Social Forum in October provides a further platform for remobilisation of the radical forces.

The regime cannot last in the medium term because it has no solution to the escalating economic crisis, it is alienated from its capitalist class base and hated by the masses whilst it suffers massive serious internal divisions around the unresolved succession question. This is why the regime made significant concessions to MDC and was so desperate for Tsvangirai's signature.

There therefore remains a possibility of a people-centred resolution of the Zimbabwean crisis that smashes both the dictatorship and elitist plans to replace it with a regime that perpetuates the neo-liberal capitalist agenda. Such solution immediately means: a new people-driven constitution prioritising economic rights of working people, free and fair elections and democratic rights; land-redistribution and support to the peasants; nationalisation of the major sectors of the economy and the general subordination of private property to satisfy society's needs like education, health, transport, housing and food security.

But as history has taught us such reforms cannot be sustained in the long term unless the very system of capitalism which breeds poverty and dictatorship in the first place is uprooted, locally, regionally and internationally, and replaced by collective and democratic ownership and control of the economy and the state by working people, i.e. socialism.

ISRAEL

A right-winger who may go for peace?

Uri Avnery, an Israeli peace activist, gives his assessment of the election of Tzipi Livni to the leadership of the Kadima party, the largest party in the Israeli Knesset (parliament).

This is the victory of a person without a military background over someone with almost nothing apart from a military background. On the advice of his right-wing American political strategist, Stanley Greenberg, Mofaz [Livni's rival] emphasised the word "security" on every occasion, almost in every sentence. A popular talk-show turned this into a parody: Security, security, security, security.

Well, it did not work. The general, the chief of Staff, the Defense Minister, was beaten by a mere woman devoid of any military experience (even if she did serve for 15 years in the Mossad.)

That does not mean that Tzipi Livni may not turn out to be a warmonger, like Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi. But fact is fact: the Kadima voters have preferred a non-general to a general.

Kadima is a party of the center. The very center of the center. Its members are not fervent about anything, neither on the right or the left, they have no strong convictions of any kind. So their decision can be regarded as a reflection of the general mood.

Mofaz presented himself not only as Mr Security, but also as a genuine right-winger, a man who opposes both peace with Syria and peace with the Palestinians, a leader prepared to set up a coalition with the Right, even with the extreme Right. He was the declared exponent of open-ended-war.

Tzipi Livni presented herself as the personification of the peace effort, the woman who conducts the negotiations with the Palestinians, who prefers diplomacy to war, who points the way to the end of the conflict. All this may be sleight of hand, pure deceit. Perhaps there is no difference at all between the two. But even if this is so, that is not the most important aspect. The important fact is that the Kadima voters, the most representative group in the country, accorded victory to the candidate who at least pretended to favour peace.

In his "The Second Coming", the Irish poet W B Yeats describes utter chaos: "Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold". The metaphor is taken from military history: in bygone days, armies drew up for battle with the main force in the center, and lighter forces defending the two flanks. As long as the centre held, everything was fine.

In Israel today, the centre is holding. The centrist party voted for the woman of the centre.

It can also be described otherwise: in Israel, 2008, the forces are divided equally between the "right" and the "left", and the "left" won this time by the smallest possible margin.

In May 1999, Ehud Barak won a decisive victory over the incumbent, Binyamin Netanyahu: 56.08% against 43.92%, a difference of 388,546 votes. The public was just fed up with Netanyahu.

The response was overwhelming. The general feeling in the peace camp was of a release from servitude to freedom, from an era of failure and corruption into an era of peace and well-being. Without any proclamations, without anybody planning it, masses of people streamed into Tel-Aviv's Rabin Square, the place where a Prime Minister had been assassinated four years earlier. I was among them.

In the square, the atmosphere was intoxicating. Delirious people danced, embraced each other, kissed. Tel Aviv had not seen anything like it since November 1947, when the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish a Jewish (and an Arab) state. I experienced a similar scene in April 1948, when I was part of the force that brought a huge relief convoy into beleaguered and starving West Jerusalem. A similar atmosphere was captured by film of Charles de Gaulle entering liberated Paris.

Barak promised to be a second Rabin, only more so. He promised to make peace with the Palestinians within months. A rosy future was warming the horizon, "the dawn of a new day".

A year and a half later, nothing of all this remained. Ehud Barak, the hero of peace, brought on us the greatest disaster in the annals of the struggle for peace. He came back from the Camp David conference, which had taken place on his express demand, with a declaration that was to become a mantra: "I have turned every stone on the way to peace / I have offered the Palestinians unprecedented generous terms / Arafat has rejected everything / We have no partner for peace."

With 20 Hebrew words Barak destroyed the peace camp and brought about a public mood which even Netanyahu could not create: that there is no chance for peace, that we are condemned to live with an everlasting conflict.

Therefore, no one got excited about Tzipi Livni's victory. The masses did not stream into the square, did not dance and did not embrace — and not only because this was just a party-internal election. The general reaction was a sigh of relief and a shrug of the shoulder.

So what to expect after all?

JABOTINSKY

On the eve of the elections, in one of those vapid questionnaires the media are so fond of, she was asked who was her hero. Her answer: Jabotinsky.

That was the most predictable answer there could be. Tzipi Livni grew up in a Revisionist household. She is a Revisionist, model 2008. What does that mean?

Her father, Eitan, who was born in Grodno (a town that has belonged variously to Lithuania, Poland, Russia and now Belarus), came to this country at the age of six and joined the Irgun underground in 1938 (the same year as I did), when he was 19 years old. He lived all his life under the influence of Ze'ev (Vladimir) Jabotinsky and his teachings.

Eitan Livni, as I knew him, was not a brilliant or exceptional person, but rather solid, loyal, as his name suggests. (In Hebrew, "eitan" means strong, steadfast). A person one could rely on. He served in the Irgun as an operational officer, and among other operations he took part in the daring break-out from Acre prison, where he was being held. As a Knesset member for the Herut Party, the predecessor of today's Likud, he was rather inconspicuous and supported Menachem Begin through thick and thin.

In order to understand Tzipi, one has to go back to Jabotinsky. His many enemies have often called him a Fascist, but that is inaccurate. He was born in the 19th century, and was a nationalist in the 19th century mold. Born in Odessa, he lived for some years as a young man in Italy, and his heroes were the leaders of contemporary Italian nationalism: the ideologue Giuseppe Mazzini and the

fighter Giuseppe Garibaldi.

Jabotinsky wanted, of course, all of Palestine to become a Jewish state. When he founded his party in the 1920s, he named it according to this vision: the demand was for a "revision" of the British decision to separate the land west of the Jordan river from the land east of the river, today's Kingdom of Jordan, then called Transjordan. In her youth, Tzipi sang Jabotinsky's most famous song: "Two banks has the Jordan — this one belongs to us and that one, too."

But Jabotinsky was also a real liberal, and a real democrat. He entered the political arena for the first time when he formulated the "Helsingfors (Helsinki) Plan", which demanded human and national rights for the Jews and the other minorities in Czarist Russia.

A person educated according to these values is faced today with a tough dilemma.

Years ago, the Revisionists used to tell this joke: rewarding David Ben-Gurion for founding the state, God promised to grant him one wish. Ben-Gurion asked that every Israeli should be honest, wise and a Labor Party member. "That's too much even for me to grant," God replied, "but every Israeli can choose two of the three." So a Labor member can be wise but not honest, a Labor member can be honest but not wise, and somebody who is wise and honest cannot be a Labor member.

Something like this is now happening to the Revisionists themselves. They ask for three things: a Jewish State, a state that encompasses all of historic Palestine and a democratic state. That is too much even for God. So a Revisionist must choose two of the three: a Jewish and democratic state in only a part of the country, a Jewish state in all the country that will not be democratic, or a democratic state in all the country that will not be Jewish. This dilemma has not changed over the last 41 years.

Tzipi Livni, an honest to goodness Revisionist, has announced her choice: a Jewish and democratic state that will not encompass the whole of the country. (We leave open here the question of whether a "Jewish" state can be democratic.)

In up-to-date Hebrew, we differentiate between "national" and "nationalistic" attitudes. A national view recognizes the importance of the national dimension in today's human society, and therefore respects and recognizes the nationalism of other peoples, too. A nationalistic view says "we and no others", my nation ueber alles.

It seems that Tzipi, like her hero Jabotinsky, adheres to the national view. Hence her emphasis on "two nation-states for two peoples". She speaks about a Jewish nation-state and is ready to sacrifice Greater Israel on this altar.

That may not be an ideal basis for peace (what would be the status of Israel's Arab citizens in this Jewish nation-state?) but it is realistic. If she has the power to implement her ideas, she can make peace. If.

Since Tzipi, short for Tzipora, means bird, one wants to cry out: Fly, Tzipora, fly! Fly to heaven! After your election as Prime Minister, lose no time! Set up a government coalition with the peace forces, use the first few months of your term to achieve peace with the Palestinians, call new elections and submit yourself and the peace agreement to the public test! As Livni herself phrased it in her direct way: "There is no time for bullshitting!"

That is what Ehud Barak should have done in 2000. He did not take the chance, and therefore he lost.

Will Tzipora the bird reach these heights? The heart hopes. The brain has its doubts.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

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

- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

MARXIST TRADITION

The myth of “Luxemburgism”

Rosa Luxemburg, a Polish revolutionary (1871-1919) who spent much of her active life in Germany, is one of the great figures of the revolutionary Marxist tradition.

In the 1930s, long after her death, she received an unasked-for gift: the coining of the term “Luxemburgism” to describe a particular form of socialist politics, supposedly counterposed to “Leninism”.

In fact Luxemburg was a close comrade of Lenin on the left wing of the international socialist movement for decades; a passionate supporter of the Russian Revolution of October 1917; and someone who fought hard to build a Bolshevik-type party in Poland, and in Germany in the midst of the revolution of 1918-19.

In 1904 she wrote a criticism of a pamphlet of Lenin's on internal disputes in the Russian movement. (Lenin replied by saying that Luxemburg's generalities were right, but she had misunderstood the particular situation in Russia). In 1918, in jail, she wrote a criticism of some of the policies of the Bolsheviks after the revolution. (She chose not to publish that manuscript; her political stances between her release from jail on 8 November 1918 and her murder by right-wingers under the wing of Social Democracy on 15 January 1919 suggest that she had concluded that many of the criticisms were mistaken).

On the basis of those two fragments from Luxemburg's rich body of socialist writing, the myth of “Luxemburgism” was erected. It has been influential since the 1960s, too; it was the mainstay of the Independent Labour Party (then a sizeable left force) until the 1960s, and of IS (forerunner of the SWP) in the 1960s, until 1968.

This article by Leon Trotsky, originally titled “Rosa Luxemburg and the Fourth International”, and written in June 1935, sets the record straight about Luxemburg's real contribution. A future issue of *Solidarity* will carry an introductory overview of Luxemburg's life and work.

Efforts are now being made in France and elsewhere to construct a so-called Luxemburgism as an entrenchment for the left centrists against the Bolshevik-Leninists. This question may acquire a considerable significance. It may perhaps be necessary to devote a more extensive article in the near future to real and alleged Luxemburgism. I wish to touch here only upon the essential features of the question.

We have more than once taken up the cudgels of Rosa Luxemburg against the impudent and stupid misrepresentations of Stalin and his bureaucracy. And we shall continue to do so. In doing so we are not prompted by any sentimental considerations, but by demands of historical-materialist criticism. Our defense of Rosa Luxemburg is not, however, unconditional. The weak sides of Rosa Luxemburg's teachings have been laid bare both theoretically and practically.

The SAP people and kindred elements (see, for example, the dilettante intellectual “proletarian cultural”: French Spartacus, the periodical of the socialist students appearing in Belgium, and oftentimes also the Belgian Action Socialiste, etc.) make use only of the weak sides and the inadequacies which were by no means decisive in Rosa; they generalise and exaggerate the weaknesses to the utmost and build up a thoroughly absurd system on that basis. The paradox consist in this, that in their latest

turn the Stalinists, too, without acknowledging or even understanding it, come close in theory to the caricatured negative sides of Luxemburgism, to say nothing of the traditional centrists and left centrists in the social democratic camp.

There is no gainsaying that Rosa Luxemburg impassionately counterposed the spontaneity of mass actions to the “victory-crowned” conservative policy of the German social democracy especially after the Revolution of 1905. This counterposition had a thoroughly revolutionary and progressive character. At a much earlier date than Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg grasped the retarding character of the ossified party and trade-union apparatus and began a struggle against it. Inasmuch as she counted upon the inevitable accentuation of class conflicts, she always predicted the certainty of the independent elemental appearance of the masses against the will and against the line of march of officialdom.

In these broad historical outlines, Rosa was proved right. For the Revolution of 1918 was “spontaneous”, that is, it was accomplished by the masses against all the provisions and all the precautions of the party officialdom. On the other hand, the whole of Germany's subsequent history amply showed that spontaneity alone is far from enough for success; Hitler's regime is a weighty argument against the panacea of spontaneity.

Rosa herself never confined herself to the mere theory of spontaneity, like Parvus, for example, who later bartered his social revolutionary fatalism for the most revolting fatalism. In contrast to Parvus, Rosa Luxemburg exerted herself to educate the revolutionary wing of the proletariat in advance and to bring it together organisationally as far as possible. In Poland, she built up a very rigid independent organisation. The most that can be said is that in her historical-philosophical evaluation of the labour movement, the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin — without consoling himself with the miracles of future actions — took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei, illegally or legally, in the mass organisations or underground, by means of a sharply defined programme.

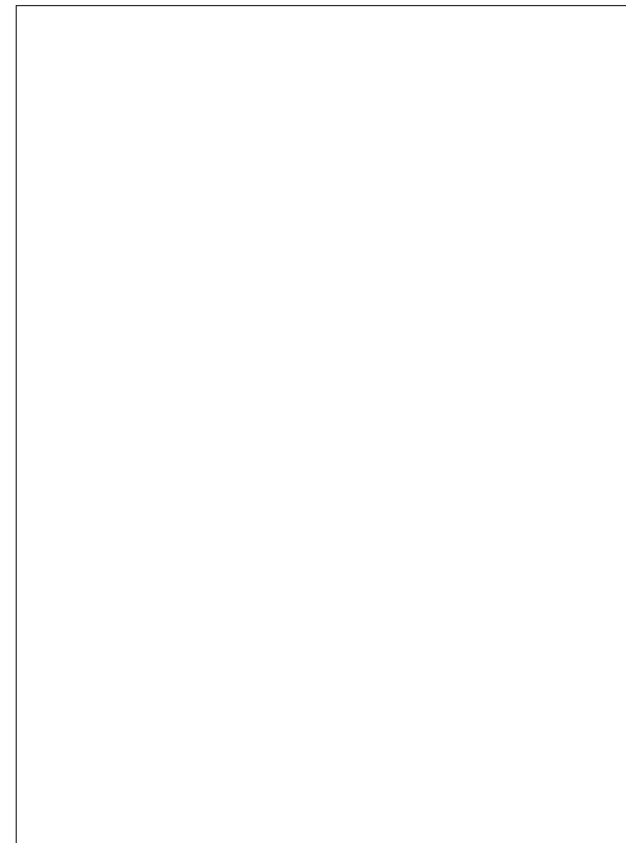
Rosa's theory of spontaneity was a wholesome weapon against the ossified apparatus of reformism. By the fact that it was often directed against Lenin's work of building up a revolutionary apparatus, it revealed — to be sure, only in embryo — its reactionary features. With Rosa herself this occurred only episodically. She was much too realistic in the revolutionary sense to develop the elements of the theory of spontaneity into a consummate metaphysics. In practice, she herself, as has already been said, undermined this theory at every step.

ORGANISING FOR REVOLUTION

After the revolution of November 1918, she began the ardent labor of assembling the proletarian vanguard. Despite her theoretically very weak manuscript of the Soviet Revolution, written in prison but never published by her, Rosa's subsequent work allows the sure conclusion that, day by day, she was moving closer to Lenin's theoretically clearly-delineated conception concerning conscious leadership and spontaneity. (It must surely have been this circumstance that prevented her from making public her manuscript against Bolshevik policy which was later so shamefully abused.)

Let us again attempt to apply the conflict between spontaneous mass actions and purposeful organisational work to the present epoch. What a mighty expenditure of strength and selflessness the tolling masses of all the civilised and half-civilised countries have exerted since the world war! Nothing in the previous history of mankind could compare with it. To this extent Rosa Luxemburg was entirely right as against the philistines, the corporal and the blockheads of straight-marching “victory-crowned” bureaucratic conservatism. But it is just the squandering of these immeasurable energies that forms the basis of the great depression in the proletariat and the successful fascist advance.

Without the slightest exaggeration it may be said: the whole world situation is determined by the crisis of the proletarian leadership. The field of the labour movement is today still encumbered with huge remnants of the old bankrupt organisations. After the countless sacrifices and disappointments, the bulk of the European proletariat, at least, has withdrawn into its shell. The decisive lesson which it has drawn, consciously or half-consciously, from



the bitter experiences, reads: great actions require a great leadership.

For current affairs, the workers still give their votes to the old organisations. Their votes — but by no means their boundless confidence. On the other hand, after the miserable collapse of the Third International, it is much harder to move them to bestow their confidence upon a new revolutionary organisation. That's just where the crisis of the proletarian leadership lies.

To sing a monotonous song about indefinite future mass actions in this situation, in contrast to the purposeful selection of the cadres of a new International, means to carry on a thoroughly reactionary work.

The crisis of the proletarian leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. It is a question of an extremely humdrum process. But not of a purely “historical” process, that is, of the objective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organisational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened — in a word: to restore to the proletariat, under new and highly difficult and onerous conditions, his historical leadership. The latest spontaneity confusionists have just as little right to refer Rosa as for miserable Comintern bureaucrats have to refer to Lenin. Put aside the incidentals which developments have overcome, and we can, with full justification, place our work for the Fourth International under the sign of the “three L's”, that is, not only under the sign of Lenin, but also of Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

Glossary

Centrists: Half-reformists, half-revolutionaries — a political species common in the 1930s, when traditional reformism was discredited.

Bolshevik-Leninists: the name the Trotskyists used for themselves.

SAP: a German group, a merger of a left split from the reformist Social Democratic Party and some “Right Communists”.

Revolution of 1905: In Russia. An eruption including the first great mass strike movement in history, eventually defeated.

Parvus: A figure in the left-wing of the German Social Democratic Party, who later went over to support for World War One.

Liebknecht: Karl Liebknecht, a comrade of Rosa Luxemburg.

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Help Iraqi workers win a labour law!

BY COLIN FOSTER

According to US Labor Against the War and the Iraqi Freedom Congress, a flurry of strikes and demonstrations has scored one of the most important victories for Iraqi workers since 2003, and put the question of a proper labour law on the agenda.

USLAW reports (14 September): "Following days of demonstrations and strikes by thousands of workers, the Iraqi government reversed its order to cut wages by up to 30% and eliminate many industrial labor benefits".

As I understand it, the wage cuts were imposed as a result of IMF pressure to reverse a wage rise granted by the Iraqi government to public sector workers (a large proportion of Iraq's regularly-employed labour force) earlier in the summer.

USLAW continues: "The authorities agreed to direct negotiations with the representatives of the workers..."

"The government agreed to retroactive payment of the wage cuts put into effect and to meet with worker representatives over other issues, such as workplace hazards". The government also agreed to bring to parliament a labour law in conformity with International Labour Organisation standards.

The demand for such a labour law has been a major concern for Iraqi unions ever since 2003. Until now the Iraqi government, and the occupation, have kept on the statute book Saddam Hussein's 1987 law banning unions in the public sector.

A couple of days later, on 16 September, according to the Iraqi Freedom Congress: "Thousands of electricity workers took to the street in Firdaws Square in Baghdad in a demonstration called and led by the General Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq... and the Labor Movement Unifying Bureau, represented by Hassan Jumaa, president..."

The workers demanded the dismissal of the Minister of Electricity and increased security for workers.

A few days before, in the same square in Baghdad, the General Federation of Iraqi Workers reports that: "Hundreds of workers and employees of the Oil Products Distribution Department in Baghdad demonstrated... on 10 September 2008".

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the ruling nationalist parties, PUK and KDP, have generally kept a lid on union activity, but on 28 August a workers' demonstration in Sulaimaniya scored some victories.

According to the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions: "Cement workers and their union were

Iraqi oil workers

demonstrating against the sudden decision to close the Taslooja cement plant and the regional authority's decision to transfer jobs to far-off locations at reduced pay. They also protested the withholding of past salaries that have gone unpaid...

"The regional government agreed to comply with the demands, and approved overtime and a hazard allowance as a first step. The union and authority then also agreed to establish a committee to work out other issues".

The precarious and partial stabilisation of civil administration in Iraq over the last year — shifting conditions from outright civil war to the merely hellish — is the obvious background for these beginnings of a revival of the Iraqi labour movement from the huge pounding it took from sectarian militias in 2005-6. As more workers are able to get work, or demonstrate on the streets, in manageable safety, conditions for labour organisation improve.

The improvement may be temporary. In the first place, the civil stabilisation is very precarious. Any one of a series of flashpoints coming up could tip Iraq back into chaos.

The first comes as early as 1 October. On that day, some 100,000 members of the Sahwa Sunni militias whom the US (after long negotiations) managed to hive off from Al Qaeda last year are to be handed over the control of the Baghdad government.

The militiamen have been getting \$300 a month, a good wage by Iraqi standards, from the US. They want to be integrated into the Iraqi army. Press reports suggest that the Shia-led Maliki government may block that, and instead try to disperse the militiamen and prosecute some of their leaders. That could throw the country straight back into outright Sunni-Shia sectarian civil war.

Continued on page 8

LABOUR CONFERENCE

The unions and the crisis

BY RHODRI EVANS

"If they [the power companies] still don't get the message, this government should consider taking these essential industries — gas, electricity, water — back under public ownership", declared Unite joint general secretary Tony Woodley at the Labour Party conference (22 September).

"If it's good enough for the banks, it's good enough for our utilities".

A sign that the union leaders are being jolted by the economic crisis into a more assertive stand? We can hope so, but so far the evidence compels scepticism.

At the conference the union leaders have also rallied to Gordon Brown, shelving the sometimes sharp criticisms they have made of him over the past 18 months. "There is a real sign now that Gordon Brown will throw off the shackles of New Labour and win back disaffected Labour voters", declared Derek Simpson, Woodley's job-share partner at the top of Unite.

What sign? Simpson didn't say. Instead, he covered up with bluster against the alleged "über Blairites", like Charles Clarke. "The spectacle of the political has-beens and never-weres queuing up to criticise the prime minister over the last few weeks has been pitiful".

At the conference, the union leaders made no protest about the fact they can no longer propose motions there to determine Labour policy. They gave away that right at 2007 Labour Party conference. No union called its leaders to account on that at this year's union conference.

All that Labour conference can do now is vote for "issues" to be discussed by Labour's "National Policy Forum". Union leaders gave the proposal for a windfall tax on power companies enough votes to get that status. Another resolution backed ending Britain's opt-out from the European Union working time directive; but, according to the Guardian, party officials said that vote was overruled by another resolution which accepts that only abuses under the working time directive will be remedied by the government.

What will happen to "issues" when they get to the Policy Forum? What are the leaders of the big unions really up to?

The last Policy Forum was at the end of July. In the run-up to it, the union leaders had briefed the press extensively that this time they would fight. With the Labour Party financially strapped and needing to beg cash from the unions, they were well placed to do that.

In fact they didn't. The story is told in the autumn 2008 edition of *Campaign Briefing*, and worth tracing, both to understand where the union leaders are at, and just how hollow Labour's remaining "democracy" is.

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