

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 143 4 December 2008 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

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Eric Daniels, Chief Executive
Lloyds TSB



Marcus Agius, Chair Barclays

Bring finance under democratic social control

By GERRY BATES

Bank of England and government support for the banks so far totals something like the equivalent of £18,000 for every child, woman, and man in the UK.

The Bank of England's Financial Stability Report of 27 October 2008 gives the figures: a total of £1107 billion.

It can't be right? After all, the average household in the UK is about 2.4 people. That average household doesn't have £43,000 (£18,000 times 2.4) to give to the banks, even if it wanted to.

Indeed, the Government and the Bank of

England have not been packing up £1107 billion in banknotes to hand over to the banks. The entire total of bank notes and coins in the UK is much less than that, about £50 billion.

The Government has been extending credit and guarantees to the banks. Across the system, a lot of the dodgy assets "cancel out", so not all the £1107 billion in guarantees can be called in.

That is why the figures for Government guarantees to banks are so huge; yet still may be not enough. But there is more to it all than the huge notional figures.

As Anatole Kaletsky put it in *The Times*: "The provision of £100 billion of state guarantees to a gross-

ly mismanaged and insolvent mortgage bank [is] a gross insult to the hundreds of thousands of workers in businesses from coal, steel and textiles to performance cars and advanced electronics whose jobs could have been saved with Government guarantees or 'temporary' nationalisations costing one-tenth or even one-hundredth of the £100 billion".

Also, in real money the bail-out policies mean a much increased total debt from Government to the public, and therefore, as Marx put it in another context, "with it, pressure of taxes, the rise of the vilest financial aristocracy..."

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THE FIGHTBACK

Irish students fight fees

Ed Maltby spoke to Paul Murphy, a left student activist in Dublin in the group Free Education for Everyone.

EM: Describe the general political situation in Ireland at the moment.

PM: We're fighting a defensive battle, not yet an offensive one. The government's attacks on Higher Education are part of a broader agenda to decrease the role of the state, and to cut or privatisate large parts of the public sector. The same offensive includes the privatisation of Aer Lingus and the attempted privatisation of the Dublin public transport service.

The government is attempting to reintroduce tuition fees, capped at a level fairly similar to what fees are now in the UK. These fees were abolished in the 1990s, but the government has been trying to bring them back for some years. It last tried in 2002-3, but divisions within the coalition government coupled with a lively student campaign meant that bill fell. But now the government is very serious about getting this bill through.

Because of the recession they are trying to shift the cost of higher education onto the shoulders of students. The economic crisis has made the whole political situation much sharper. The government has already succeeded in raising registration fees for students.

EM: What has been the official student movement response to the government's attacks?

PM: USI [the major student union in Ireland, organised along the same lines as the NUS] has organised a series of relatively well-attended regional demonstrations. This term we've had demos with 10,000 in Dublin, 3,000 in Galway and 5,000 in Cork. The strategy is that these regional demos are going to culminate with a big national one in Dublin in early February 2009.

But the USI leaders don't have any real plan for what should happen after the big final demo. Their whole conception of how to stage a political fight is wrong. They've seen these demonstrations as media stunts which are designed to back up their negotiations and lobbying. They're not serious about direct action or creating a bottom-up, grassroots-led movement. They pay lip-service to the

idea of a democratic campaign, but really they're all about these top-down stage-managed set-piece demonstrations.

EM: Describe the political character.

PM: USI is smaller than the NUS, so it's less autonomous of local students' unions than the NUS is. It relies on them more, and often it is local student unions who take the initiative in things like this. It doesn't provide leadership in the way NUS does. On the other hand, thanks to the legacy of the 2002-3 student movement, USI and local student unions are quite political and active. Elections for union positions are contested on an explicitly political basis. Although the leadership of USI is a bit soft, it's not wedded to one governmental party, or as dominated by out-and-out careerism as the NUS is.

EM: Is there a grassroots, leftwing tendency in the students' movement?

PM: FEE [Free Education for Everyone] is a broad grassroots left tendency that has recently been set up. It was set up in University College Dublin. A section of the student union, the "Campaigns Group", broke from the union and set itself up as an independent campaigning body, following a series of mass meetings organised by socialist activists. It decided to constitute itself as the FEE campaign and has spread from Dublin to Cork, Galway and Limerick.

There are activists from the Socialist Party, the Workers' Solidarity Movement [platformist anarchists], Sinn Fein and Labour Youth in FEE. The SWP are also active in the Galway section of FEE — but it's not a left-lash-up. It's a broad campaign in which independent activists and left groups operate, but our activities draw in a lot of ordinary students who are just really worked up about the fees issue and recognise that a more militant campaign is required.

EM: What does FEE do? What is your strategy, and how do you work?

PM: We have weekly open meetings on campus, where we report back on the campaign and decide how we're going to take it forward.

In what we write, we try to strike a balance between delivering the necessary criticisms of the students' unions, and

not being seen as anti-union. We're not trying to set ourselves up as an alternative Student Union, but we see ourselves as pushing them to act, and taking up the slack ourselves where the official structures don't work.

We do a lot of direct action on campus. For example, in Dublin, under the slogan "if they block our access, we'll block theirs", students have prevented four separate visits by government ministers to the campuses. Only one of them made it in — Brian Lenihan, the Finance Minister, and he had to come in laid down in the back of a security van, then make a run for the service entrance! And last week in Galway, 60 people came to occupy the office of a Fianna Fáil MEP: there have been a series of actions like that.

We want the student movement to take up these militant tactics. It's important to make it clear to students that the government is serious about these attacks, and we will have to create a serious political crisis to force them to back down. Through actions like these, we want to give people a sense of what could be done to bring about a crisis like that.

To really win, after February, we'd need to lead student and school student strikes, major occupations, that kind of thing. That sort of movement won't come about automatically, but it's expected that the climate will change when the government formally announces the bill; and we'll be working to take the momentum of the recent campaign, and ratchet it up in the new year.

EM: What sort of links are there between the students' movement and the workers' movement?

PM: The official students' movement has been very reticent about approaching other trade unions for support. In FEE we have been arguing for student-worker unity. We'll be leading students onto next week's teachers' demonstration, which is being organised by the teaching union INTO — there are about 50,000 people expected. The last budget by this government was savage, and workers are fighting back against cuts across the public sector. The task now is to link these fights up, and for activists in FEE that'll be our challenge in the campaign against fees.

And who else do they jail?

When the police raid the office of Tory front-bencher Damien Green and take him into custody for some hours, it is tempting to laugh out loud. One of the habitual biters bit!

That response would however be a mistake. If a Damien Green can be so treated, think what that says about civil liberties in society as a whole.

Listen to Home Secretary Jacqui Smith when she says that the gob-shite Tory leader, David Cameron, is not fit for office because, instead of backing her, he protests at the raid. That is the psychology that has governed the giant steps taken by the New Labour government over the last decade to turn Britain into a surveillance state, if not into a small-p police state.

Of course the Tories are playing politics with the affair. For instance, their denunciation of Michael Martin, the Speaker of the House of Commons, whom the Tory snobs call "Gorbals Mick" though he has no connection with Glasgow's Gorbals slums, is part of an ongoing campaign to get rid of him.

Even so, the outcry that has greeted the arrest of Damien Green highlights the growth of Britain's "security state", whose architects in this case felt strong enough to try to repress the activities of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Still "New" Labour

From back page

New Labour's war on even the most mildly social-democratic of principles, and its belligerent assertion that the needs and interests of capital must reign supreme everywhere, have now gone beyond even Thatcher. Her government failed to push through as many privatisation projects as New Labour.

Again grotesque, anti-human capitalism, revolutionaries must counterpose a vision of a society managed from below by the working-class majority and run in our interests. Although workers hold the ultimate power to remake society along democratic, collective lines, the fight to win that society must necessarily mobilise those members of our class — such as incapacity benefit claimants and single parents — who face struggles outside of the workplace. Asserting the principles of human need against government welfare policy must form a key part of the fightback now needed.

Sack the bank bosses!

From front page

£200 billion increase in the national debt looks likely. Assume the rate of interest the Government pays on that debt is about 5%. That is £10 billion a year extra in interest payments — equal, for example, to one-quarter of the Government's total schools budget.

Meanwhile Government-supported or even Government-owned banks are run in just the same way, by the same people or the same sort of people, as the pre-crash privately-owned banks.

Ron Sandler, put in by the Government to run Northern Rock, gets

£90,000 per month — £1,080,000 per year — more than the £690,000 basic salary of Northern Rock's previous chief executive, Adam Applegarth.

Northern Rock workers are losing their jobs, and Northern Rock mortgage-holders are being evicted from their homes.

The Government does no more than plead and cajole with the banks to continue lending and to hold off on evictions.

The vast guarantees for the bank bosses, without anything in return, are indeed an insult; and, with jobs bleeding

away and evictions mounting, an insult we can't afford.

The labour movement should demand that the Government:

- nationalise all the big banks and high finance, without compensation for the big shareholders;
- sack the bank bosses;
- reorganise high finance as a public banking, mortgage, and pension service, under democratic and workers' control;
- organise the allocation of credit, under democratic control, to safeguard jobs and homes, and to expand public services.

BNP growth: how should we respond?

The publication of the BNP membership list online shows an enormous growth in the strength of the BNP. There is serious cause for alarm here.

According to Nick Lowles of the anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight*, the party had 600 members in 1997 and 3000, 1500 of them active, in 2000. Even if we assumed that the new figure of 13,500 is a two-to-one over-estimate, that would represent a ten-fold growth in a decade.

The growth of BNP membership should act as a wake up call for the urgent need to mobilise the labour movement. We need to confront the far right; we need also to step up the struggle against the social decay on which it has fed. As we enter a deep economic crisis, with the return of mass unemployment, intensified social exclusion, and poverty, the BNP will continue to grow — unless we stop them.

The publication of the list has caused some discomfort for the fascists. But the media furore has also gained them a huge amount of free publicity (the BNP website has reportedly crashed as a result of an unprecedented number of visits).

In 1997, the BNP was much smaller than the organised far left; today, after ten years of a New Labour government acting with blatant contempt for the working class, a labour movement which will not fight and a far left failing to get its act together, it is much stronger.

Worse: the biggest component of that “far left”, the SWP, has spent years preaching and practising its own pseudo-Muslim variant of communal politics. As well as the hobnobbing which this involved with clerical fascists such as the Muslim Association of Britain, it ruled out the very possibility of fighting racism and communalism by way of the working-class politics that used to be expressed in the slogan: “Black and white, unite and fight”.

These antics have made things easier than they need have been for BNP race-hate merchants.

What do we say about vigilante acts against BNP members?

We do not “defend” BNP members — not in any sense or dimension. However, we oppose vigilantism against individuals.

It will not actually achieve anything in terms of organising and mobilising the working class against the BNP. It lays open left and labour movement activists to state repression. It lays us open to retaliation by the fascists. It will help rally the far right and allow them to present themselves as victims.

Some anarchists have already blown up an innocent person’s car, thinking that it belonged to a BNP member. Such things are an inevitable part of this sort of vigilantism.

Local leafleting, demonstrations etc. which organises people against the far right while seeking to create a hostile and uncomfortable atmosphere for BNP members in a particular locality are a far better option. So are mass actions against BNP meetings, activities, etc.

Should we support a state ban on the BNP?

No. Socialists oppose calling on the government to ban fascist organisations, because we refuse to peddle the illusion that the working class can rely on the capitalist state when it comes to the crunch. We work to educate the working class to a sharp understanding that we can rely only on our own strength to defeat the fascists.

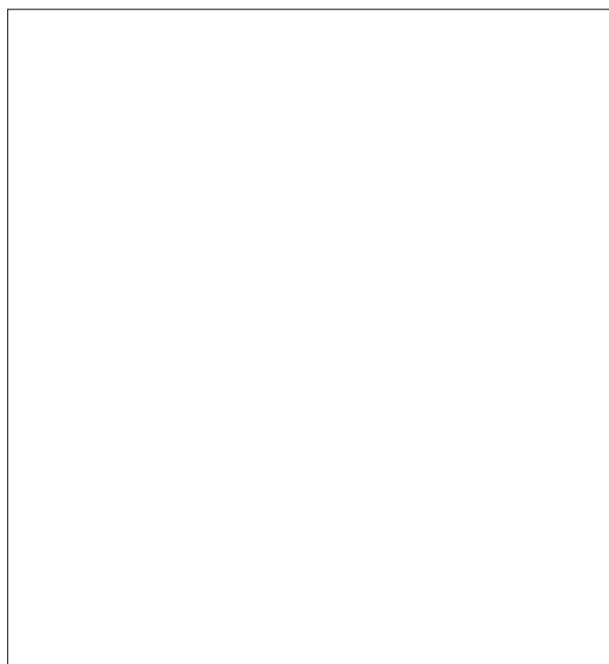
Laws cracking down on the far right do cause some unpleasantness for the fascists, but simultaneously they strengthen the power of the state to act against left-wing opponents when the time comes. They may be directly used against the left and the labour movement. That is what happened in the 1930s and after with the Public Order Act.

If the government did ban the BNP, we would not shed any tears or rush to their defence; but we oppose either calling for such bans or putting any trust in them.

What about BNP members getting sacked?

The question of BNP members losing their jobs is a different one, on three counts.

Firstly, we should support the laws and regulations



The rapid growth of Nick Griffin’s party should act as a wake-up call for the left

which make it illegal for BNP members to work in the police, prison service, as teachers, etc. as a basic matter of equality and decency. We cannot accept BNP-supporting prison officers “working with” young black prisoners (this is true independently of our more general critique of the prison system). The idea that a BNP teacher would be able to treat black and Asian children the same as the rest is simply silly.

Secondly, we support the right of unions to expel members of the BNP and other far right organisations. We demand this as an urgent matter of labour movement self-defence and defence of the oppressed (ethnic minorities, migrants, LGBT people).

Generally speaking, we want trade unions to organise all workers, regardless of political views. We oppose political bans in the unions.

In the case of fascists, it is not mainly a matter of their political views as such. Fascism is a current which seeks, by its very nature, to destroy the labour movement. When a fascist gets up to speak, he or she is not simply putting forward objectionable views, but inevitably inciting small-scale (for now!) terrorism against black people, Muslims, etc.

For these reasons, the presence of fascists in the organisations of the working class should not be tolerated. We should not tolerate the presence of BNP members in our workplaces. Workers should shun BNP members at work, and should refuse to work with them. The unions should seek to force them out, if necessary by demanding that they are sacked.

Wouldn’t calling for the sacking of BNP members imply also demanding the sacking of, for instance, Christians, or Muslims, or others with reactionary views on, say, women’s and gay rights?

This argument has been raised in a number of discussions in the media. It misses the point spectacularly. Not all Christians, Muslims, etc. hold even mildly reactionary views; many people continue to subscribe loosely, and sometimes quite actively, to a particular religion, while holding progressive or even radical views that are in contradiction with the leaderships of their religions. For example, many Catholics support abortion rights.

Hundreds of thousands, maybe millions, of religious workers are key activists and loyal citizens of the labour movement in Britain.

Even those religious workers who do hold reactionary views are not, in the great majority, part of tightly organised groups seeking to initiate civil war against the workers’ movement and against immigrants and their children. Religions are generally, by their very nature, diffuse. This is true even of right-wing evangelical religion as compared to fascism.

The BNP is a tightly organised sect which not only requires a full spectrum of ultra-reactionary views on the

part of its members but, where it can, organises violent action against black and brown British people and against the labour movement. Everyone should be held to the same standards of decency in the workplace and in the labour movement, regardless of religious views they may hold; but members of a fascist party are a different case altogether.

What about “no platform for fascists”?

To expel BNP members from the labour movement is plainly to deny them a platform. We also advocate working-class direct action to prevent the publication and dissemination of BNP material, e.g. by printers, postal workers, media workers; and mass direct action by the labour movement, oppressed groups and the left to disrupt and prevent fascist meetings, activities and demonstrations.

We do not think that free speech is the issue at stake in such situations.

The “no platform” question often arises in the student movement. Many student unions, as well as NUS, have “no platform policies”.

On the same basis as in the trade unions, we support denying a platform, the use of student union facilities and so on to the BNP and similar groups, as a matter of self-defence and of the defence of the oppressed.

Any union officer discovered to have links to the BNP should be removed from office. In so far as it is possible without protracted legal entanglement, BNP members should be stripped of student union membership.

However, we differ with many “no platformers”, liberal and socialist, on three grounds.

Firstly, we see “no platform” as a tactical question, and not a principle.

Secondly, we do not believe that this tactic can reasonably be extended from fascists to sexists, racists, homophobes etc., as it is for instance in the NUS “no platform” policy. While student union structures and proceedings must uphold basic standards of behaviour, as in the labour movement, a more general ban on those with reactionary views is simply incompatible with free speech.

Are the Tories, many of whom hold racist and sexist views, to be denied the right to organise campus meetings, for example? If we support that, how can we effectively oppose student union bureaucrats seeking to deny meetings rooms to the far left, as is now the case on many campuses (to say nothing of NUS’s Stalinoid culture of suppressing political debate)?

In general we should fight reactionary views through sharp, aggressive argument and debate. With fascism – we say it again – it is not primarily a matter of reactionary views, as explained above, so the issue of free speech is not central there.

We want student unions to run activist, political, ongoing mass campaigns against the BNP, as the labour movement should. Just putting in place a “no platform” policy and then imagining everything is fine is no substitute for that.

More generally, what should socialists do?

In the first instance, we should use this opportunity to educate those around us on the nature of fascism and how to fight it. This is an opportunity for political discussion with our workmates, fellow union members, fellow activists etc.

Beyond that, the rapid growth of the BNP should act as a wake up call to the left. British fascism still lags behind its cousins in France, Germany, Austria and some other European countries; but it has taken a big step forward. There is no comparison with the huge leap the Nazis took in the German elections of 1930, for instance, but even so we should be highly alarmed.

We need to build a different kind of anti-fascist movement from the one we have: one which mobilises the working class and its movement to fight for answers to the real issues (housing, jobs, services) which the fascists exploit, and one which poses a viable alternative.

That means arguing for a workers’ plan to respond to the crisis, for independent working-class political representation and for a workers’ government. It means anti-fascist campaigning shaped by these basic goals.

IN BRIEF

CIVIL SERVICE: PCS has, for all practical purposes, announced the end of its national pay campaign. In a union circular, general secretary Mark Serwotka and union president Janice Godrich claim that the union has won major concessions.

In fact the so-called deal is not a deal at all. It does not materially change the circumstances on the ground. It does not revisit the below-inflation pay awards of 2007. It does not reduce the number of different bargaining units into which the civil service is divided for pay negotiations (currently about 200).

The announced concession is that the Government has said that "efficiency savings" in different departments can be adduced in bargaining as reasons to raise the pay increase above the Government's two per cent norm. But:

- This will be applicable only in certain circumstances, not as a norm.

- The only "efficiency savings" happening in the civil service are through job cuts. It is not like manufacturing industry, where you might have savings through new technology being introduced.

- Under present guidelines, there is already provision to negotiate for management in a particular department to present a "business case" to the Treasury for extra funding.

- In fact every department has got an increase of over 2% in its pay budget anyway.

- If there are any positive outcomes from the concession, they will be gained only bargaining unit by bargaining unit. Everything is put back into unit-by-unit bargaining. There is no further national pay campaign.

The next big pay settlement dates are the Department of Work and Pensions in July, and HMRC in August. Ironically, there is now a moratorium on front-line job cuts in the DWP, because of rising unemployment, so DWP workers won't be able to claim any "efficiency savings".

We won't know whether there is any positive outcome from the Government's claimed concession until October or November 2009, when bargaining on those big department pay settlements has run its course. And then if we discover that the claimed concession hasn't given us anything much - as I think we will - what do we do?

The claim that the Government has made an important concession is in fact just a way of getting out of the dispute.

It would be a different matter if the PCS leadership had given an honest accounting. They could say that PCS is on its own now that the NUT teachers' union has decided not to strike on pay; that the turnout and the "yes" majority in the PCS's own ballot over strike action in the national pay campaign were poor; that report-backs from union activists are pessimistic; and therefore that action now cannot win.

We could discuss that. It would be a reasonable case. But in fact the union leadership is claiming a win. Instead of honest accounting, we get dishonest Enron-type spin.

PUBLIC SECTOR PENSIONS: Following on from the Lib Dems Tory leader David Cameron has gone on the offensive over public sector pensions. Describing the current differentials between the public and private sector as "apartheid in pensions" he wants to see an end to existing schemes.

UNISON

Democracy conference: the start of something!

BY MIKE FENWICK

Over 100 Unison activists attended a day conference in Birmingham on "What's going wrong in Unison?" on 22 November.

Workers' Liberty activists went to the conference in the hope that it would see the launch of a campaign to change root and branch the current structures of the union and attempt to engage with the broader questions of organising beyond the existing left.

Unfortunately that did not happen. On the positive side, the meeting included representatives of most of the left, including both the SP and SWP, who in recent years have been reluctant to work together inside the union. The witch-hunts against members of both organisations seem to have drawn them together at least on the issue of self-defence.

The other motivation is the forthcoming National Executive Committee election and the opportunity for the left to present a united and full slate in an attempt to win the leadership of the union. That effort is likely to be better organised than ever before with a decision made to have regional meetings and

committees to get the left vote out. Workers' Liberty supporters will be supporting and represented on that slate.

Unfortunately the original problem, the question of democracy, was barely touched upon. WL speakers and a few 'independent' individuals did try to raise the question of rank and file organisation and the need to put forward demands for basic democratic rights inside the union: particularly the idea that branches should have the right to organise their own campaigns and strikes and to work with other trade union branches both inside and outside Unison.

The decay of branches and the low union density in workplaces mean we have to rebuild the union from the bottom up, creating a base in each branch of rank and file militants to deliver action.

The challenge to the left remains to understand that a left leadership in charge of the bureaucracy still leaves it as a bureaucracy, unless a left Executive uses its positions to create new forms of accountability and membership control over decision making. That's why we call for a rank and file movement inside the trade unions as a necessity, not as option.

The other problem left largely unad-

dressed was the role of the unelected bureaucracy of full time officers within the union. They support the elected leadership and would work to undermine and disrupt the work of a left Executive. Again the demand is simple: we are for these posts to be elected and the officials to be accountable and paid a worker's wage. This was raised from the floor but not taken up as a common demand for the slate.

Positively some speakers talked of organising groups of Unison activists in their regions through the Shop Stewards' Network. This idea was approved by the platform, and WL members will try to ensure that whatever regional groups are convened around the elections continue past the elections to organise around pay disputes, anti-privatisation campaigns, and delivering solidarity to branches in dispute.

The conference was a start to healing some of the wounds that have afflicted the left in Unison in recent years. But the left remains isolated inside the union, and to get beyond its current limits must take up more seriously the broader issues of democracy and opening up debate in the union.

Instead he wants to see the public sector transferring to defined contributions schemes, meaning that the final pay-off is tied to the stock market, not your final salary as in existing schemes. It won't be long until New Labour and Alastair Darling pick up on the issue as they seek ways to reduce the massive rates of public debt caused by their bail out of the banking system.

When the government last "reviewed" public sector pensions the unions failed to maintain a meaningful campaign in opposition despite a very well supported one day strike. This has already meant public sector workers paying more in contributions for less money on retirement, and employer contributions reduced. In fact most of the final settlements included a opt-out for the employers to cut their contributions further in the future.

With a further attack so well signalled there is no excuse for the unions not to start preparing for a campaign now. It would have to not just defend the current arrangements but include a campaign for the restoration of defined benefit schemes in the private sector and address the current low rates of state pensions and system of pension credits. One way or another it seems that all the main parties are lined up to make workers and pensioners pay for the capitalist crisis.

BT PENSIONS: CWU and Connect unions are conducting a consultative ballot of their members from 27 November to 18 December. The leaderships want members to accept a pension review they have negotiated with BT. BT employees should reject this deal.

CWU and Connect members opposing the pension deal are campaigning for a "no" vote in the ballot, pointing

out that the deal will mean:

- increasing normal retirement age from 60 to 65;
- moving to a scheme based on career average earnings rather than final salary;
- increasing contributions from workers themselves.

The union leaderships claim that making these changes safeguards the scheme as a whole, but what it is really about is BT safeguarding profits at employees' expense.

There is substantial opposition to the changes at branch level.

Campaign against it! More details from: cwblsecretary@btinternet.com

SUSSEX UNIVERSITY TECHNICIANS: Technicians at Sussex University have held four days of strike action in opposition to attempts by the university management to close their final salary pension scheme for new workers, replacing it with a "defined contribution" scheme more vulnerable to market fluctuations.

The University Council predictably rubber-stamped the changes at the end of November, ignoring the three thou-

sand signatures from staff and students which the workers' campaign has collected, and refusing to meet representatives of their Unite branch.

The technicians' battle continues. It has won full support from both the student union and the Sussex Not for Sale campaign (Sussex ENS). As the ENS newsletter put it:

"It speaks volumes about the priorities of the university that they are trying to make savings by attacking the conditions of the lowest paid members of staff."

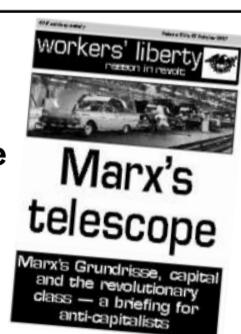
"Staff have stood up for students in the past over tuition fees. Now it is the time to return the favour. And not only is it right that students support the striking staff, it is in our interests. After all, students are the workers of tomorrow..."

"It is possible that management will try to break the strike by dividing staff against students, blaming the striking workers for the disruption of our education. In such a circumstances we must be absolutely clear that we place responsibility for the disruption entirely at the feet of management."

Please send messages of solidarity via Sussex Not for Sale: sussexens@gmail.com

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.

UK CAR INDUSTRY

Don't pay for the bosses' crisis!

BY DANIEL RANDALL

The sharp increase in oil prices, and now the credit crunch, has led to sales of large cars and people-carriers falling by 30% in Europe. SUV sales have fallen by 45%.

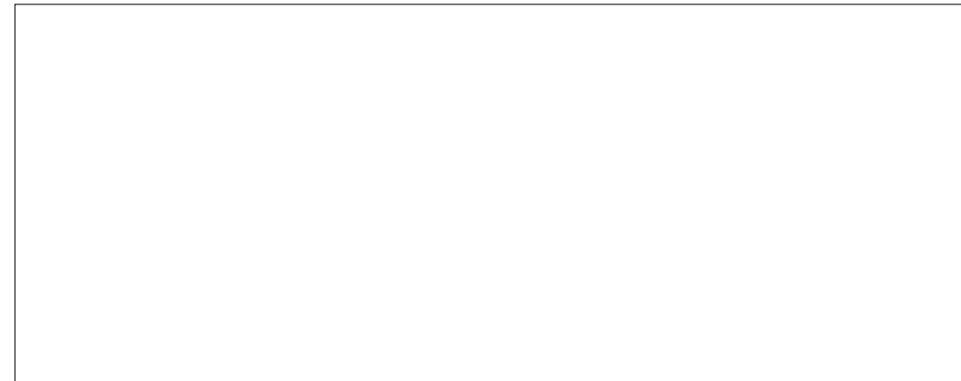
The industry giants have responded to the crisis with massive layoffs. Volkswagen, for example, has announced 25,000 job losses; Rolls Royce, Peugeot and Chrysler are also making sweeping cuts. The first instinct of most socialists will be to defend workers' jobs; that instinct is correct, but the situation calls for a far more thoroughgoing response that isn't limited to defending the pre-crisis status quo.

ATTACKS ON WORKERS

Job cuts are not the only means by which car industry bosses are forcing workers to bear the brunt of the crisis. Some car workers in Britain are facing a four-day week as bosses scale down production to cut costs, and pension schemes have also been attacked.

Management are using the tried-and-tested capitalist tool of threatening to outsource production abroad in order to 'persuade' workers to accept these attacks.

The cuts packages proposed (and in many places, such as Nissan's Sunderland plant and Ford plants in Dagenham, Halewood and Southampton, already implemented) illustrate how capitalist bosses force



Derelict car factory

workers to pay for an industrial crisis that the bosses themselves have created. In the car industry they over-produced vehicles whose sales would clearly be hit by rising oil prices.

Here is a basic lesson about capitalist economic functioning: workers both create profits for bosses, and are forced to pay the price for their bosses' profligacy. The obscenity of this situation is illustrated by the fact that the 2007 salary of the top seven executives at Ford would have been enough to retool the entire Southampton plant.

There has already been some resistance to these measures: in July, workers at the Visteon plant at Swansea forced a company buying out the plant to back down on their plans to cut terms and conditions following the takeover. In Southampton workers walked out over pay and the threatened outsourcing of Ford Transit production from the city.

Unite, the main union organising in

the industry, has been fairly consistent in opposing cuts and outsourcing. However, it has failed to provide anything approaching a comprehensive strategy of resistance or an alternative vision for the future of the industry. Their perspective is firmly rooted in a concession/bargaining model of trade unionism – that is, they accept capitalist control over how the industry is organised and merely attempt to mitigate the impact of the bosses' plans on the workforce.

WIDER POLITICAL ANSWERS

Rank-and-file militants, some linked to the Socialist Party, have articulated a different perspective. They have rightly identified that unions must be prepared to use any means necessary to resist cuts and closures, including occupations of threatened workplaces. They have also raised the key question of

control of the industry, demanding the nationalisation of companies like Ford, under workers' control.

This demand is correct, but it is obvious that no government that could conceivably come to power under current conditions (that is, a government of one or several of the pro-capitalist parties) would ever implement any of these measures.

In our agitation around the capitalist crisis, the AWL has emphasised the need for the labour movement not only to fight for reactive demands but to organise itself to bid for power and form a workers' government.

In situations like that currently taking place in the car industry, we need a programme that deals with the question not just of how individual industries are managed, but of how the whole of society is managed. We need a strategy for mobilising workers to resist attempts by bosses to make workers pay for the crisis.

10 January 2009 RMT conference: the crisis in working class political representation

11am-3pm, Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London NW1
Open to all. Please register in advance at info@rmt.org.uk, or write to RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, London, NW1 1JD

US CAR INDUSTRY

US workers seek their own plan

BY DAN LA BOTZ

The crisis in the auto industry is about many things: the possible collapse of General Motors, Detroit gas guzzlers, auto emission standards, the environment, and the need for mass transportation, among others. At the centre of it all, however, is the struggle between management and the workers, that is, between capital and labour...

New York Times columnist Joe Nocera argued that bankruptcy would be too long and slow a process to save the industry. He suggested that President-Elect Barack Obama create an auto Tsar... to negotiate a new deal in auto. What would that deal look like? "It needs to dramatically reduce its legacy benefits, perhaps even eliminating health care benefits for union retirees. It needs to close plants. It needs to pay its workers what Toyota workers are paid in the United States — and not a penny more."

Nocera points back to the Chrysler Bailout of 1979 when the Federal government succeeded in pressuring the United Auto Workers (UAW) union to accept concessions. President Jimmy Carter and the US Congress, working with GM and the UAW, negotiated the downsizing of the company from almost 100,000 to just 57,000 jobs. Black workers were particularly hard hit because so many Chrysler plants were in Detroit. The agreement broke the Big Three contract, leaving

Chrysler workers \$3.00 an hour behind workers at the other two. The Chrysler Bailout is a kind of a model for what the business class has in mind this time, only now they want to drive the workers much further back.

The Big Three have gone to Washington to ask the government for a bailout to save the industry. Ron Gettelfinger, President of the UAW, has gone along with the CEOs... But he must understand that when automakers talk about saving the industry they mean plant closings, wage cuts, and slashing of benefits.

The US government, as the highest political expression of capital's power, will come to the aid of the auto industry — meaning aiding the auto companies to break one of the last strongholds of the old industrial unionism. To America's rich and powerful, to save the auto industry means to save its profitability. It has nothing to do with saving jobs, workers or their communities.

What's needed at this point are: First, a plan that saves auto workers' jobs and communities. Second, a movement to fight for that plan.

Frank Hammer, a past president and chairperson of UAW Local 909 in Warren, Michigan, has suggested an action plan. He calls for an emergency protest. "The leadership should organize a car caravan around the headquarters of the Detroit Three or, with the help of the AFL-CIO, organize a caravan to

Washington, DC or even Wall Street.

"There's no guarantee to what we could achieve, but we should nevertheless proclaim, 'Not without a fight!'"

UAW members need to go to Washington with more than their hands out; they need to put forward an alternative plan for the industry. Some longtime UAW activists have begun to put forward ...an alternative to the notion that the bailout should be a bludgeon to be used against workers. Jerry Tucker, for example, has argued that the auto crisis demonstrates the necessity and opportunity to create a national health care program such as Canada has had for some time. Retired auto worker activist Dianne Feeley argues that we could "convert the excess plants in the auto parts sector to useful green jobs. We need to create solar, wind and geothermal energy. Axle plants, for example, can be converted to produce wind turbines, a product not currently made in the United States." These suggestions represent the beginning of a program for the auto industry that could save workers' jobs and communities.

A PLAN FOR ALL

President-Elect Barack Obama said in his press conference on 24 November that the auto industry executive should come back to the new Congress and his administration with a plan. But shouldn't the UAW and the

auto workers – unions and workers who worked for Obama – come back with their own plan as well?

Shouldn't the American people come back to Congress with their plan too?

And if we did appear in Congress, wouldn't we say, "Yes, of course, you can use some of my tax money to save these jobs. But if we put up the money, then we want ownership in these companies, and a voice, and a vote. If 'We the People' put up the money and take ownership of these companies, then we want a citizens advisory council made up of auto workers – engineers, technicians, skilled and unskilled workers – as well as consumers, and environmentalists to run the company."

What's happening to autoworkers today happened to steelworkers a few decades ago, and even groups as apparently secure as health and hospital workers can expect to see similar industrial challenges – and the demand that workers pay for the problems – coming in the future.

If the auto companies and the government negotiate a bailout that drives the UAW and its members back into the past, we will be going back with them.

Everyone's job, everyone's wages, everyone's health care and pension is at stake in this. We need to begin to fight back and there isn't a moment to lose.

This article has been abridged from a longer article at www.solidarity-us.org/autocrisis

BOB CARNEGIE

Comrade Hand Grenade

The Builders Labourer, the journal of the Builders Labourers Federation of Queensland, carried this tribute to Bob Carnegie when he decided to step down as a full-time organiser with the BLF to return to worker on the sites. Bob is a supporter of Workers' Liberty Australia. The article is by Bill Hunt.

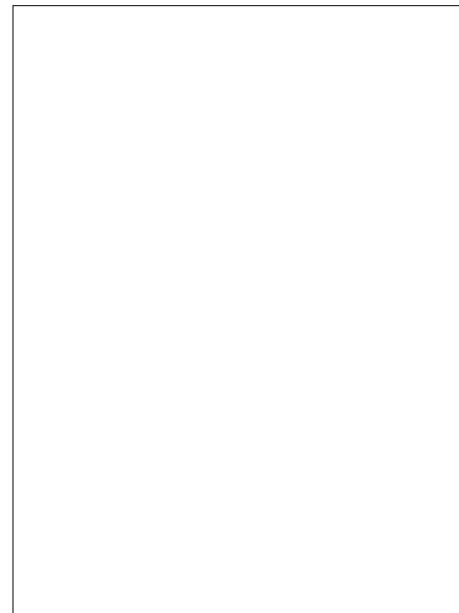
Bob Carnegie was born to unionism. His father was a seaman who brooked no bullshit from anyone and was affectionately known by one and all as "Fuck-'em", as this was his response to any demand or requirement that he thought was unfair or unreasonable.

With that sort of heritage Bobby was always going to go somewhere but he had the intelligence, the nous and the drive to go much further.

He threw his heart and soul into the support and defence of the working class. He was a firebrand within the Seaman's Union and in society generally.

Bob was an inspiration throughout many disputes and social upheavals. He was the first person jailed during the infamous SEQEB [power workers'] dispute [of 1985] when Joh Bjelke Petersen [right-wing premier of Queensland] declared war on workers, and was instrumental and inspirational in many other disputes.

Bob played a major role in the MUA [dockworkers'] dispute when the fledg-



ling Howard government unleashed the dogs of war against workers under the Bastard Peter Reith.

He gained a lot of notoriety in normal society and a lot of support for the dispute when he chained himself to the rail tracks and then had the chains welded to the rails.

Bob has been a rallying point around which supporters gather, in most of the pivotal fights for justice and freedom in Queensland in the past 30 years.

I was a painter and docker when I first came into contact with Bob but I only really got to know him when we were

locked up together at some time, I think it was during the Right to March dispute.

Many years of friendship and many shared watch house cells were to follow.

The Painters and Dockers were decimated by Australian ships being docked overseas, and I returned to the building and construction industry as a member of the BLF in the late Seventies.

Bob suffered a long and debilitating time with depression after the MUA dispute, but in 2003 he returned to the workforce as a construction worker and proud member of the BLFQ. Secretary Greg Simcoe offered him a job as an organiser and Bob grabbed it with both hands. He has acquitted himself well in the role and left a legacy especially for the new young organisers coming through. Bob has always supported the advancement of youth and the renewal of the union through new blood.

He asked me particularly to remind each and every member to support their delegates, but most importantly to encourage and aid the new organisers.

There are thousands of working class men who) looked up to him as an organiser and will support his decision to go back to his roots among the rank and file.

It would be easy to over simplify Bob. You know what they say: "Look up unionist in the dictionary and there's a picture of him." But Bob is a bit like those Russian dolls. You think you know him but there is more inside.

Everyone knows Bob supports the working class and their struggle but Bob is much deeper than that. Take off one layer of the unionist and you will find a humanist who works for the homeless for no kudos or reward.

Take off another and you find a person whose commitment is much greater than just to the working class. Bob has a deep and abiding belief in the Brotherhood of Man.

Look even deeper and you find a lover of philosophy who actually has a Camus quote tattooed on his forearm.

At another level is the perennial student. Bob is studying for a law degree and the Grocon job is near the campus.

And ever deeper in is the Bob who earned the nickname Comrade Hand Grenade. A bloke that still dares to dream of a "Glorious Socialist Future" where on May Day the parade in Brisbane will be led by a Soviet tank being driven by Leon Trotsky.

One of my favourite quotes of all time comes from Elie Wiesel an American writer born in Romania in 1928, winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1986:

"I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

Many of us have read this quote, some of us even believe it, Bob Carnegie lives it.

FAREPACK SCANDAL TWO YEARS ON

They one they won't bail out

By DALE STREET

Two years ago the Christmas savings club Farepak went bust. Its 150,000 customers — predominantly low-income and female — have still not received a penny of compensation for the £40 millions which they lost.

Farepak customers deposited money with the savings club from January to October each year. In November they would be issued with the equivalent value in the forms of vouchers, provided by Choice Gift Vouchers (CGV).

The retailers in whose shops the vouchers were used would return the vouchers to CGV. The latter, in turn, would send the vouchers on to Farepak and reclaim their value in cash from Farepak. Once received by CGV, the money would then be paid to the retailers.

Farepak, in other words, accumulated substantial amounts of money from its customers in the period January to October — and with no legal restrictions on what it could do with that money.

In February of 2006 Family Hampers, another Christmas club, went bankrupt, leaving unpaid debts of £7 millions to CGV. The latter then went bankrupt itself. As a result, retailers lost £55 mil-

lions in unpaid debts for vouchers which had been used the preceding Christmas.

Retailers responded by cutting the credit line to Farepak. But Farepack's parent company, European Home Retail (EHR), was heavily in debt.

EHR had bought another company in 2000 for £35 millions. In 2003 it had sold the same company for just £4 millions. In order to subsidise the massive overdraft charges it was incurring as a result of this major loss, EHR had already used around £20 millions of the money deposited by savers with Farepak.

By July of 2006 EHR was in trouble. It announced that it needed to "substantially" increase its borrowing requirements. At the same time, Farepak continued to accept deposits from customers, and also encouraged its agents to sign up new customers for the company.

The following month EHR's shares were suspended on the Stock Exchange. But even then Farepak continued to accept deposits from customers and assure them that there was no reason for alarm. And EHR likewise continued to use money deposited with Farepak to pay off its overdraft with HBOS.

But HBOS was not satisfied that EHR was a viable concern. When EHR presented a new borrowing and business plan for Farepak to HBOS, the bank rejected it. When EHR asked HBOS for

an extension of its credit facilities, the bank refused to grant one.

And when EHR informed HBOS of a possible takeover of Farepak by Park Foods, another Christmas club, HBOS dismissed such a takeover as "unrealistic".

In October Farepak, along with EHR, went bankrupt. By that time an estimated £28 millions of Farepak customers' money had been used by EHR to pay off the bulk of its £31 millions debt to HBOS.

In the final weeks of the existence of Farepak and EHR HBOS had been clawing back around £1 million a week from EHR — with the bulk of that money coming from unwitting Farepak customers.

At the time Farepak and EHR went bust, the average deposit with Farepak was £400. Some savers had around £2,000 deposited with the savings club. Measured against the income of the average Farepak customer, this was a lot of money.

The non-Farepak rump of EHR was quickly sold off to Findel, the catalogue retailer, for £34 millions. Not a penny of that money was used to reimburse the Farepak customers who had lost their Christmas savings.

A year after Farepak had gone bankrupt, in October of 2007, the Joint Liquidators published their first report. It stated that it was still "early days" as

far as the possibility of Farepak customers receiving compensation for their losses was concerned. And if or when they did receive compensation, it would be no more than 5p for every pound lost.

The same month a report by the UNISON found that many of the saving club's customers had been forced into a cycle of debt after Farepak's collapse, by taking out loans at high interest rates in order to cover the expense of the 2006 Christmas.

Now the Joint Liquidators have confirmed that 121,800 Farepak customers had lodged claims for compensation for losses amounting to £37.6 millions. But it was still "not yet possible" to say when compensation would be paid to Farepak customers.

In the two years since EHR and Farepak went bankrupt a lot of things have happened, including the government pouring billion after billion after billion into the banking system to avoid banks collapsing.

But all of this only confirms the only adage that it's one rule for the poor, and another for the rich.

Despite the fact that only £40 million was deposited with Farepak the government refused point blank to compensate Farepak customers. Most of them were not looking for £50,000, or even £30,000. Most of them were looking for just £400.

CAPITALIST "SOLUTIONS"

Can the economists fix the crisis?

By COLIN FOSTER

Economists, and the governments advised by them, are pulling all they can out of the books and research papers in order to tame the current economic crisis. What have they learned, and what are its limits?

BAIL-OUTS, NATIONALISATIONS

The most spectacular bit of recent crisis policies, the huge nationalisations and bail-outs of banks and other financial firms, is the least new, and the one owing least to economic theory.

It goes back to the lessons from the collapse of Overend and Gurney's bank, in 1866. The collapse brought much else down with it. Walter Bagehot argued that the Bank of England should avoid further such collapses by acting as "the lender of last resort" — the outfit that could and would extend credit to a failing bank when no-one else would.

The doctrine was put into effect to save Barings Bank in 1890. But it was more a matter of instinctive reflex than of theory. The same sort of thought made the USA, which had previously abolished its central bank, set up a new one (the Federal Reserve) after its crisis of 1907.

The current spate of bail-outs and nationalisations is vastly bigger than the Barings rescue, or for example Richard Nixon's nationalisation of the USA's passenger railways in 1971. But it is the same sort of thing.

1930s

Despite the downturn from 1873 to the mid 1890s, the crisis of 1907, and the huge economic dislocations in the years immediately following World War One, there was no real attempt at a theory of crises in academic economics until the 1930s.

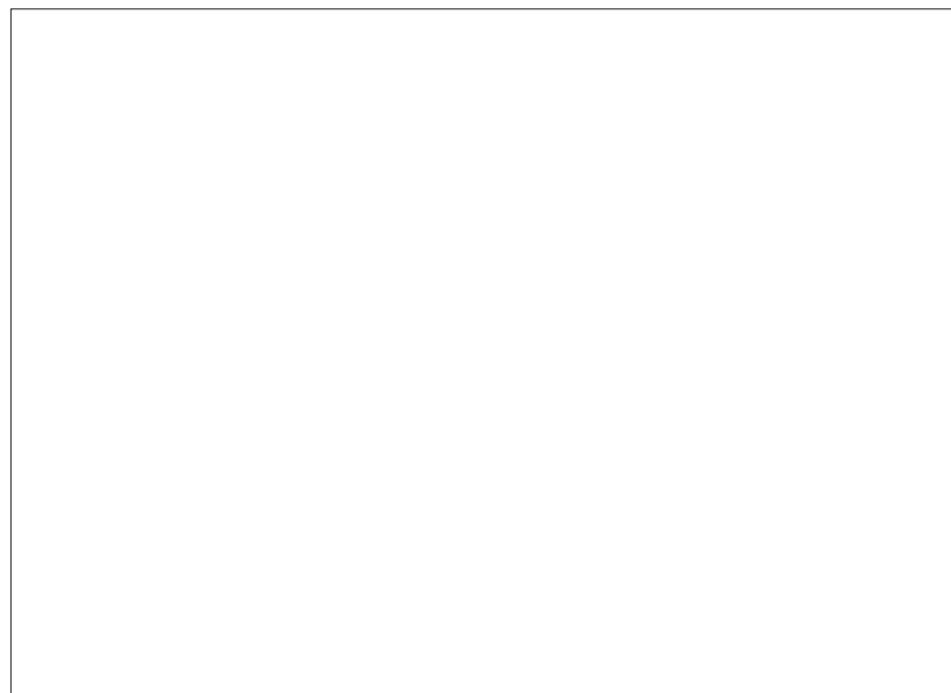
John Maynard Keynes wrote the first such attempt, *The General Theory*, in 1936. He commented that since the gloomy musings of Thomas Malthus in the early 19th century: "The great puzzle of Effective Demand [i.e. of capitalists not being able to sell their stuff profitably, i.e. of crises] vanished from economic literature... It could only live on furtively, below the surface, in the underworlds of Karl Marx" (and of a couple of crank writers with whom Keynes snottily bracketed Marx).

After Keynes's work, two main palliatives became current. In a crisis, central banks should seek to increase, or at least maintain, the money supply; and governments should spend more on public projects.

MONEY SUPPLY

In everyday life people think of the total amount of money in the economy as a fixed pot. If B buys something from A — or A swindles or robs B, or B makes a money gift to A — then A's share of the pot increases, and B decreases; but nothing the ordinary individual can do in everyday life raises or lowers the total size of the pot.

On an economy-wide level, however, the total amount of the economy is an extremely fluid quantity. The government can print more notes. Even with a fixed supply of notes and coins, banks



John Maynard Keynes (right) and Henry Morgenthau at the Bretton Woods conference to plan post-war recovery, including idea of the World Bank

can and do "create" money. If A has £1000 and deposits it in a bank; then the bank lends out 90% of that £1000 to B, who in turn deposits it in another bank, which in turn lends out 90% of it, etc., then the banks have turned £1000 in notes or coin into £10,000 in bank balances.

When a crisis strikes, and lending dries up, then the total amount of money in the economy tends to shrink. That sharpens the general "dash for cash" and tends to push down prices.

ANTI-DEFLATIONISM

Falling prices make crises worse. That happened in the early 1930s, when prices in the USA fell at about 10% a year. It also happened in Japan in the 1990s.

When prices are falling, the burden of debt on firms and households becomes ever-heavier, because of the ratio of the debts (at yesteryear's higher prices) to income (at today's lower prices) always increases.

Business investment and consumer spending are depressed: there is always a good argument for postponing any expenditure which can be postponed, because tomorrow it can be done cheaper.

The main concern behind the big reductions in official interest rates and the vast flow of government loans and credit-guarantees to banks is to keep up the supply of money and avoid deflation.

COUNTER-CYCICAL PUBLIC SPENDING

Official interest rates cannot, however, fall below zero. (They have been zero for long periods in Japan recently). Even if the official interest rate (at which the central bank lends to commercial banks) is very low, commercial interest rates may stay high. (That is happening now).

In sharp crises, pumping up the money supply may not work. The government needs to get to grips with the snowballing chain of cancelled investment projects, company bankruptcies,

and so on, and boost "effective demand" more directly.

Until the 1930s governments thought that crises, when money was "short", demanded government spending cutbacks rather than expansion.

But as Keynes wrote: "If the Treasury were to fill old bottles with banknotes, bury them at suitable depths in disused coalmines which are then filled up to the surface with town rubbish, and leave it to private enterprise on well-tried principles of laissez-faire to dig the notes up again (the right to do so being obtained, of course, by tendering for leases of the note-bearing territory), there need be no more unemployment and, with the help of the repercussions, the real income of the community, and its capital wealth also, would probably become a good deal greater than it actually is."

"It would, indeed, be more sensible to build houses and the like; but if there are political and practical difficulties in the way of this, the above would be better than nothing".

KEYNESIAN AND MONETARIST

More "Keynesian" economists tend to emphasise the effectiveness of direct public spending ("fiscal policy") and the limits of monetary policy; more "monetarist" economists push the effectiveness of monetary policy and stress the limits of direct public spending. The argument has a left/right political dimension, since it makes "Keynesians" more favourable to government welfare spending. But both sides make telling points about the limits of the other.

The "Keynesians" cite the limits of monetary policy already mentioned above. They also cite "Goodhart's Law", that once the government resolves to control a measure of money supply (there are many, and very widely varying), it ceases to be the economically relevant one. A slump can shrink the economically-relevant measure of money supply even when the government is boosting another measure.

The "monetarists" allege the impossibility of selecting public-spending boosts with sufficient accuracy to counter

crises. By the time the public construction projects supposed to palliate the crisis are well under way, the economy is turning up anyway, so the intervention designed to counter the boom-slump cycle actually worsens it. Or if not, the public investment may just "crowd out" private investment. (If public investment comes to dominate permanently, then — so it has been plausibly argued — a stop-go cycle will reappear in the form of a constant drift to inflation of investment credits acquired by particular public enterprises, followed by an emergency credit freeze, followed in turn by a new inflationary drift...)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Another counter-crisis measure came out of the recent G20 summit, but in the form of a decision not to do something, rather than a positive action. It was a pledge by the governments not to increase tariffs and trade restrictions, at least over the next 12 months.

The idea in theory that free trade is generally best goes back to David Ricardo in the early 19th century. All economists would agree on the destructiveness of a cycle in which each government successively erects barriers or adjusts exchange rates to save its international financial position, thus making things more difficult for the next government.

In the 1930s governments could see no choice but to do that. After World War Two Keynes proposed the setting-up of an international "lender of last resort" which would enable governments to escape that cycle.

The IMF as actually established was a much-reduced version of his idea. In fact, for most of the 60 years since then, the US government, and then the governments running big trade surpluses with the USA, have de facto acted as a sort of "lender of last resort" by pumping billions of dollars out into the world.

THE LIMITS

All the economists' lessons from crises are lessons from the crises of yesteryear. In the meantime capitalism, always dynamic, has changed.

Is an international "lender of last resort" possible now? It would need creditworthiness higher than that of any state. But all the money in the world now is pure "fiat money", deriving its worth only from the guarantee of this or that state. The system has grown beyond the point where gold can underpin an ultimate fallback source of credit.

And all the existing techniques for avoiding or limiting an implosion of credit were theorised before the enormous expansion in recent decades of "derivatives" (financial bits of paper which "derive" their value from yet other bits of paper), so enormous that the latest figure for the total value of derivatives outstanding is \$600 trillion — \$100,000 for every child, woman, and man in the world.

Can capitalist techniques for limiting implosions of credit ever catch up with the constantly-proliferating capitalist boom-time techniques for the expansion of credit?

- A longer version of this article is at www.workersliberty.org/anticrisis

US signs deal to withdraw from Iraq

BY MARTIN THOMAS

According to its title, the deal with the USA approved by the Iraqi parliament at the end of November is the "Agreement On the Withdrawal of United States Forces from Iraq".

And that is what it is — though it cannot be relied on, and there are a dozen reasons why it may go wrong.

It is a big shift. Back in June the USA, in negotiations with the Baghdad government, was demanding:

- Complete freedom of movement in Iraq for the US military;
- Powers to launch military operations without seeking Iraqi government permission;
- Control over Iraqi air space;
- Authority to arrest and detain Iraqis without reference to Iraqi courts;
- Immunity from prosecution in Iraqi courts for American troops, contractors and corporations in Iraq;
- And 58 long-term bases in the country.

The USA offered no promise to defend Iraq from outside attack or to defend democratic institutions in Iraq (www.workersliberty.org/sofa1).

Now the USA has promised:

- US combat forces will withdraw from cities, towns, and villages by 30 June 2009;
- All US forces will withdraw from Iraq by 31 December 2011. (As Leila Fadel of the McClatchy news agency points out, "President-elect Barack Obama's campaign plan to leave a residual force of some 30,000 American troops in Iraq would be impossible under the pact").

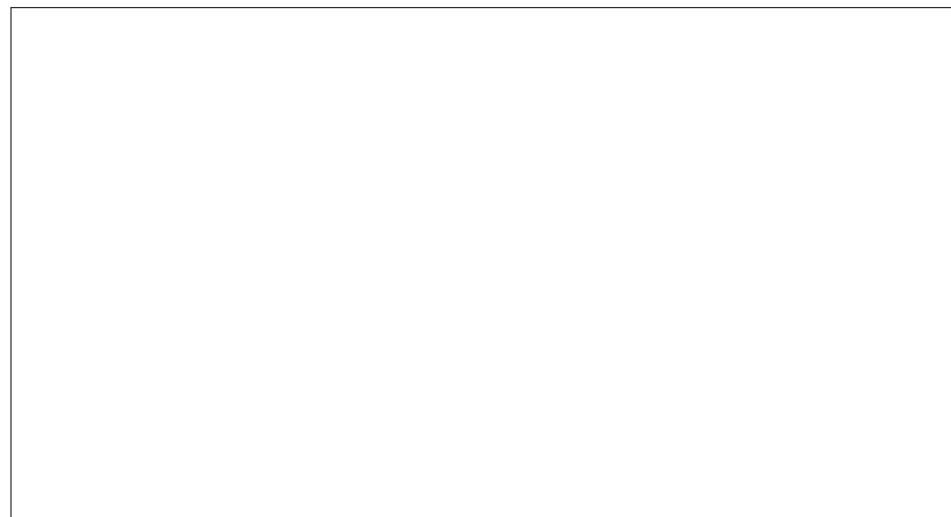
And immediately on the agreement going into effect:

- All US operations require Iraqi government agreement;
- Baghdad gets control of Iraqi airspace;
- "No detention of arrest may be carried out by the US forces... except through an Iraqi decision issued in accordance with Iraqi law". The US must turn over detainees it currently holds to the Iraqi government, or release them.
- The Iraqi government gets control of the Green Zone;
- The USA pledges itself to "support Iraq to obtain forgiveness of international debt... from.. the former regime" and to get Iraq out of the UN supervision dating from 1990.

Behind the shift since June lies the increased strength and confidence of the Iraqi government. For the first two years after Nouri al-Maliki became prime minister in April 2006 (after five months of haggling, following the December 2005 elections), it "governed" little more than its own meeting room within the US-controlled Green Zone. The US government openly despised it and speculated about trying to find a new parliamentary combination to replace it.

From about August 2007, the sectarian civil war in Iraq which had rumbled on since the Samarra mosque bombing in February 2006 simmered down. After long negotiations, the USA had succeeded in splitting some of the Sunni sectarian militias off from Al Qaeda, and reorganising them as US-paid militias (Sahwa). Other militias had reached a stand-off.

Following that, from about the middle of this year the Maliki government has



Irqi trade unionists march on ministry of finance

shown signs of "solidifying". It has made only little progress in basic civil administration (water, electricity, etc.), but it has felt confident enough to start making deals with multinationals about Iraq's oil and gas — most recently, a secret deal with Shell which gives a joint venture a virtual monopoly on developing Iraqi gas production.

It has survived (so far) the transfer of the Sahwa militias from the US payroll to Iraqi control, and Arab-Kurdish tensions around Khanaqin and Kirkuk.

The US withdrawal deal has got the support of Ayatollah Sistani, Iraq's top Shia cleric, and tacit endorsement from Iran. The mainstream Sunni Islamists (though not the Al Qaeda types) backed the deal. The largest force in Iraq to oppose the deal has been the Shia clerical-fascist movement led by Moqtada al-Sadr. The other main Shia-Islamist group outside the government coalition, Fadila, has "abstained", staying away from the parliamentary vote.

Sadr can hope to build on a strong fund of popular distrust of the government and of the USA — a poll suggests 35% of Iraqis opposing the deal, with 46% supporting. But his opposition to the deal is tactical, and the deal is likely to give the government parties a political boost for the provincial elections due in Iraq in January.

The deal is still not to be trusted. The Maliki government may well trip up through over-confidence, and plunge Iraq back into outright civil war. There is plausible talk of secret side-deals.

The USA is not happy with the prospect of a pro-Iranian government stabilising in Baghdad, and may look out for chances over the next three years of toppling the government and replacing it by the rule of some suitably US-trained Iraqi generals.

The deal requires the US to "take appropriate measures... diplomatic, economic, or military, to deter... any external or internal threat [to Iraq's] democratic system or its elected institutions". If it comes to it, the USA will find ways to flout such requirements. But for now the USA is in retreat.

That Iraq has acquired a government with enough confidence and political weight to demand Iraqi self-determination is good. That this particular government has acquired that weight is bad.

It is a government dominated by pro-Iranian Shia clerical-fascist parties. It keeps Saddam Hussein's 1987 anti-union law on the books, as well as Decree 8750 from 2005, giving it powers to seize all union funds at any time. As

the government feels stronger against the USA, it is also likely to feel stronger against the Iraqi labour movement.

The Iraqi labour movement, long hard-pressed, has been more active in recent months. Socialists internationally should focus our efforts on supporting that labour movement, including against the threat from the stronger Maliki government.

Self-determination for Iraq can only be a botched affair unless it is secular (Shia and Sunni cannot be united under a clericalist regime) and democratic (so that it is the people who have self-determination, not just a clique acting in their name).

THE DEBATE ON THE LEFT NOW

What are the implications of these developments for the debates on the left (including within the AWL) over the last five years? The AWL majority has argued for a focus on solidarity with the Iraqi labour movement against both the US/UK occupation and the sectarian militias, and we have been reproached by other left groups, and by some inside the AWL, for not raising (instead, or in addition) the slogans "Troops Out" or "Troops Out Now".

We opposed the 2003 invasion. We "preach no political trust or confidence in the American, British, or any ruling class, in their states, their politicians, or their armies. We... solidarise with the new Iraqi labour movement wherever it clashes with the occupiers; indict US/UK misdeeds unsparingly; say [we] cannot rely on the US and UK to bring democracy..."

"We say that the peoples of Iraq must have self-determination. We maintain a stance of hostility to the troops and we do not call on the British and Americans to stay."

"What we refuse to do, and it is the crux of [the] dispute with Barry Finger, is raise a 'demand', Troops Out Now, whose likely, calculable, practical consequences we do not want" — i.e. the tipping of Iraq into all-out sectarian civil war between rival clerical-fascist militias (*Solidarity* 3/84).

Even today, almost certainly an overnight US withdrawal would tip Iraq into a fight-out between the militias. To oppose the US military is one thing: to make a point of the practical recommendation to the USA that it withdraw from Iraq in such a way as to maximise the risk of destruction of the labour movement is another.

How do these arguments stand now?

Even in cases of straightforward colonial war, once a deal like this for withdrawal had been signed, socialists would switch focus from "Troops Out Now" towards the tasks of working-class and democratic struggle against the new independent regime. They would not positively demand that the colonial power withdraw with maximum abruptness, as France did from Guinea in October 1958, with punitive intention and destructive effect.

When the British government signed the Good Friday Agreement for Northern Ireland in 1998, paving the way for British troops to return to barracks in 2007 after 38 years on the streets, some of us — the majority in the AWL eventually, after some argument — argued that socialists should not endorse or vote for the Agreement. The Socialist Party advocated a vote to endorse the Agreement; the SWP was evasive as always. No-one on the left responded to the Agreement by counterposing "Troops Out Now".

It would be equally senseless to counterpose "Troops Out Now" to the US-Maliki deal. And in fact *Socialist Worker* has pointedly refrained from "Troops Out Now". It agrees that the plan shows the US as in retreat. But:

- SW explains it all as a result of "the Iraqi rebellion" and "huge anger" (SW's catch-all description for pretty much everything, from 9/11 to grumbles in the works canteen). Actually the deal is a result of the Iraqi government acquiring a tad of solidity and managing to damp down "the rebellion" (i.e. the sectarian ultras).

- It claims that the deal "grants the US some permanent military bases". In fact the deal requires the US to withdraw all troops and to hand all "facilities" over to the Iraqi government. The USA may find ways round those clauses, but that is what the deal says.

The main arguments over the last five years for advancing the "Troops Out" slogan have been:

- The US presence in Iraq is in fact a colonial occupation. The choices are either Troops Out or US rule over Iraq for the indefinite future. Even if Troops Out would mean civil war in the short term, it is the only demand allowing a free development of Iraqi politics.

- All-out civil war is as certain to come with a continued US presence as with a sudden withdrawal. (Or, sometimes: all-out civil war had already come. Whatever the results of sudden withdrawal, they could not be worse than the status quo).

The fact that this withdrawal deal has come from the Iraqi "resistance" subsidising rather than increasing indicates that the "colonialism" argument was false. It also indicates that if agitation like that of the SWP over the last five years had made any difference in Iraq, it would have been in the direction of making it more difficult and longer to get the US troops out.

Neither the US government, nor the Maliki government, nor the deal between them, is to be trusted. Bad things are to be expected from the Maliki government. But it is not certain or even probable that they will be as bad as all-out sectarian civil war.

It would be wrong to endorse the apparent "lesser evil" of the Maliki-US deal; but even more wrong positively to demand the greater evil.

MUMBAI TERROR ATTACK

Indian left fights communalism

Achin Vanaik is professor of politics at the University of Delhi. He spoke to Martin Thomas from *Solidarity* about the recent terrorist attacks in Mumbai (26-29 November). First we asked about the background to the attacks, and how they fit into the pattern since the demolition by Hindu chauvinists of the Babri mosque in 1992, and the attacks on Indian Muslims in the following months.

The destruction of the Babri mosque was obviously a landmark event in terms of the communalisation of the Indian polity, but this particular attack — given the fact that the targets were foreigners, and it was very likely an offshoot of Al Qaeda, in collaboration with Lashkar-e-Taiba [an Islamist group based in Pakistan], that carried it out — is rather different from the 1992-3 blasts.

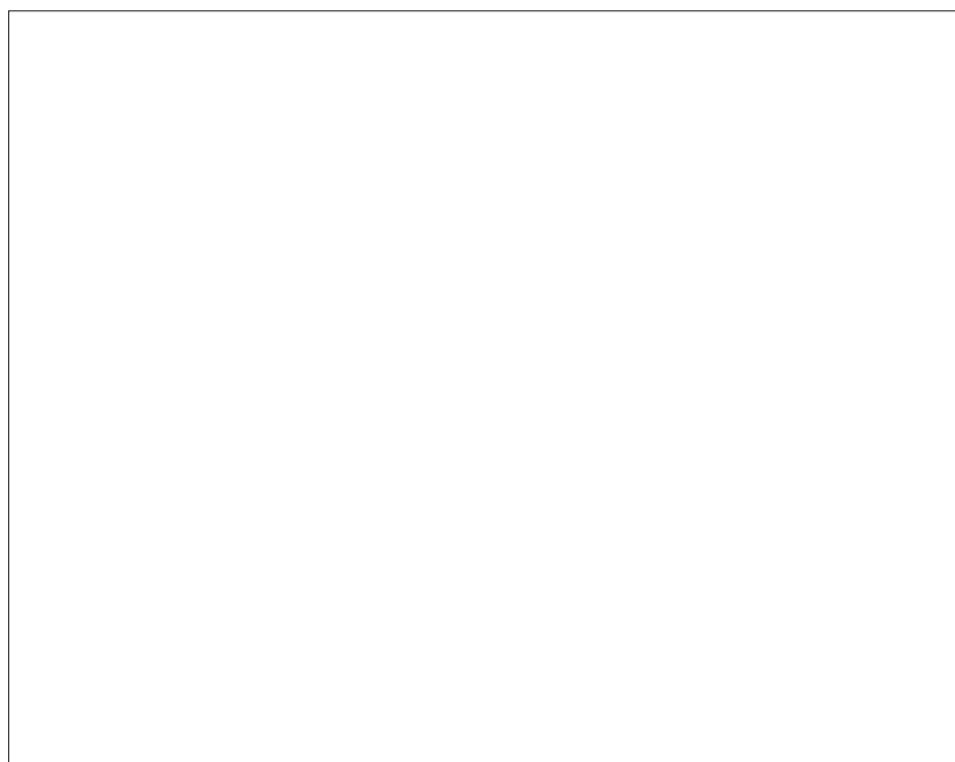
If one was trying to find a marker in Indian politics for the background to this, the more relevant marker would not be 1992-3 but the February 2002 Gujarat pogrom [in which up to 2000 Muslims were killed].

That was the most extraordinary and devastating pogrom since Partition. Its implications were even greater than those of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

Since then, those who responsible for it, such as Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat, have not only got away with it in terms of criminal law. They have got away it politically. Modi is now seen as a potential prime minister.

The significance of that is enormous. Since 2002, and the way in which the perpetrators got away with it, Muslims in India feel more besieged than ever before.

A new development has taken place in the last two years. Small groups of Indian Muslims are now involved in terrorist activities, in a way they were not before. Before, any Muslim element



Ordinary commuters at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus (railway station in Mumbai) were targeted by the terrorists

in terrorism in India was always external.

But this particular event was more connected, I would say, to the consolidation of the strategic alliance between India and the United States. There was probably a mixture of motives in those who carried out the attack. Foreigners were targeted to send a message to the United States and the UK and Israel. In the second place, it may have involved a reaction to the bitter communalism and demonisation of Muslims in India as well as the issue of Kashmir.

Of course, none of that justifies the horror and stupidity of the attack. The horror is obvious — it is a moral horror at something terrible. The stupidity is that what such an attack is kind of gift from the lower levels of the international reactionary Right — Al Qaeda and others — to the higher rungs of the

international reactionary Right.

The United States and others are going to utilise this to rationalise and justify their global "war of terror", and the Indian state is going to back them.

About 20 Muslims were among the people killed in Mumbai. There is so far no evidence that the attack was connected to Muslim elements in India. There were about ten terrorists. They were trained; they had familiarity with the targets. One captured terrorist under police interrogation has pointed to the Lashkar-e-Taiba as a directing force with which they were in telephonic contact in Karachi.

After the bombings in Mumbai in 2006, there were mass raids on Muslims by the police. That hasn't happened again. But the events have diverted attention from the recent uncovering of the fact that a number of blasts in Malegaon and elsewhere which had been attributed to Muslims were actually the handiwork of people connected to the Hindu communal forces.

In fact, one of the people killed in the recent events, who was the chief of the police anti-terror squad in Mumbai, was also the chief investigating officer who had just uncovered the fact that there was a strong connection between various Hindu communal groups and the blast in Malegaon in 2006.

The fact that he was killed led to rumours that maybe there were Hindu communal forces involved in the recent attack. I think it is probably more of a coincidence. Certainly they will be happy that he is dead and he cannot continue the investigation of Malegaon. Certainly what has happened as a result of this is a complete diversion from the atrocities carried out by the Hindu communal forces, not just in Malegaon but very recently against Christians in Orissa.

In the crowds in Mumbai there were a number of slogans like "Pakistan murdabad" — "death to Pakistan". That is unfortunate, though it may well

be true that there was some connection to forces in the ISI [the Pakistani secret police].

Anti-Muslim feeling, though widespread, is not as widespread in India as anti-Pakistan sentiment and slogans. There are 140 million Muslims in India, and many people understand the implications of such a large minority.

However, a number of people have said that we must not allow this to disrupt efforts to get peace with Pakistan. They have pointed out that terrorist forces have also attacked Pakistan — attempt to assassinate Musharraf, assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the attack on the Marriott hotel in Pakistan very similar to the attack on the hotels here.

The Pakistani government is not in control. The only way to defeat this sort of thing is not to pander to anti-Pakistani sentiment, but to move towards rapprochement and peace at the broadest possible level and to undercut the support for terrorists.

People have also pointed out that it is one thing to talk about tightening security measures. You can do that at the level of intelligence, border security, rapid reaction, and so on. It is another thing altogether to use such events to justify anti-democratic measures of surveillance and monitoring which violate civil rights.

Despite all these terrible events which we oppose, the single biggest dimension of the problem of terrorism in the world is the terrorism carried out by states. That has a much larger scope and scale.

This kind of "terrorism of the weak" helps to rationalise, justify, and divert attention from the "terrorism of the strong", which is what states do.

You have 180-plus killed in the Mumbai events, you have three thousand killed in 9/11, but you have 10,000-plus civilians killed in Afghanistan, hundreds of thousands killed in Iraq after the invasion of 2003.

We will now find more people in India talking about how we must connect to the global "war on terror" and ally with the United States and Israel.

But Israel and the United States — and India, and Russia, and China, all of them — carry out brutal terrorist activities.

Terrorism is basically a technique. You cannot wage war against a technique. The more intelligent people on the Right recognise that, like Zbigniew Brzezinski, only they won't go on from that to say that the United States is guilty of the worst kind of brutality against innocent civilians.

There will be further demonisation of Islam and Muslims. Already any number of people are pushing forward the slogan — and it will get more resonance now — that "all Muslims are not terrorists. But all terrorists are Muslims". That is completely wrong. It's much more widespread.

In Mumbai, for the last 15 years, since 1993, we have not had a repetition of large-scale communal attacks on Muslims. But what we're likely to see is the emergence of a generalised sentiment that "these Muslims are not to be trusted", and so on.

The unsung victims

The maintenance worker at the Oberoi who shielded guests and took the bullets in his stomach will remain unsung. The hospital orderlies who ran in and out with stretchers carrying the wounded — each time not knowing if they would make it back themselves to the ambulance — will not be noted.

The several trainee chefs at the Taj who feel to bullets even as other kitchen workers escorted guests away from the firing line and hid them will not be written up in the book of heroes. The two young men who dragged an Australian tourist shot in the leg away from the Leopold entrance and carried her to a taxi will not even identify themselves so that she can thank them".

Biju Matthew, in *Samar* 31

The news channels simply did not bother about the icon that faced the first attack from terrorists — the Chatrapathi Shivaji Terminus (CST) railway station. CST is the true icon of Mumbai. It is through this railway station that Indians from Utter Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, West Bengal, and Tamilnadu have poured into Mumbai over the years, transforming themselves into Mumbaikars...

Mumbai and India were built by the Aam Aadmis [ordinary joes] who passed through CST, and Taj was the oasis of peace and privacy for those who wielded power over these labouring classes".

Gnani Sankaran,
www.openspace.org.in

MUMBAI

No to war on Pakistan!

By KALPANA WILSON

Mainstream politicians in India have been claiming that it's basically Pakistan behind it. There's an escalation of tension, very much in line with the usual thing — whenever there's anything like this, the blame is focused on Pakistan as the main enemy.

Congress has been trying to outdo the BJP in this. Although the BJP has led the way, Congress always tries to be as anti-Pakistan and as communalist as the BJP, particularly now with elections soon.

In September there were the bombings in Malegaon, in Maharashtra. Recent investigation had revealed the role of Hindu communalists in those bombings. The head of the anti-terrorist squad Hemant Karkare who was killed in the recent Mumbai events had been leading that investigation, and had been targeted by the BJP as anti-national because of that. There are a lot of things that need explanation.

The naming of the Mumbai events as India's 9/11 is very problematic, because it is being used as a way of saying that India must do the sort of things that the US did post-9/11. Already there is a huge level of persecution of the Muslim community in India, and not only in terms of the Hindutva outfits. That has really increased over the last year or so.

Mumbai is a Shiv Sena [Hindu-communalist] ruled city, and they can mobilise on a huge scale. Whenever anything like these events happens, it is routine for there to be anti-Pakistani demonstrations, as there seem to have been this time. That doesn't mean there has been a spontaneous outburst of anti-Pakistan feeling.

There's a subtext there — when they talk about Pakistan, there's an assumption that Indian Muslims are with Pakistan, they are the internal enemy. And there's a refusal to admit that the policies which India is pursuing, in terms of its total alignment with US foreign policy as well as internal policies, are alienating the Muslim community. Not only have there been the pre-planned genocidal attacks organised by the Hindu fascist forces, such as that in Gujarat in 2002, but there is also incarceration and torture of Muslim youth on a mass scale, in Uttar Pradesh for example, and then there is the ongoing military occupation of Kashmir.

It is also important to realise that the organisations based in Pakistan that are being identified as possibly involved are not now within the control of the Pakistani government. Many were initiated via the ISI (Pakistani intelligence) by the CIA and still have those connections. There is a lot of concern in South Asia that this may be part of a build-up to an attack on Pakistan by the US.

In Mumbai there is also a counter-tradition of anti-communalism and working-class solidarity. A lot of groups have been active for a long period against communalism and in bringing people together. Many left groups have come out with statements calling for unity, condemning the whipping up of tension with Pakistan, and supporting, for example, the demand by the family of the anti-terrorism squad chief who has been killed for an inquiry into the events.

For more info on the Malegaon blasts (carried out by Sangh Parivar forces): <http://tinyurl.com/5k8qn1>

• Kalpana Wilson is a member of the South Asia Solidarity Group

India: history, politics, terror

India has a population of 1.1 billion, reckoned to be 80% Hindu, 14% Muslim, and the rest Christian, Sikh, and others. Since independence from Britain in 1947, Indian politics has mostly been dominated by the avowedly secular Congress party, now in government; but the last decade or more has seen the rise of the Hindu-chauvinist BJP, based mainly on upper-caste Hindus, and linked to openly-fascistic Hindu militias. The BJP led governments in 1996 and 1998-2004. Both BJP and Congress, since the early 1990s, have been pushing policies of deregulation, privatisation, and engagement in world markets.

There have been a series of terrorist or communalist attacks in India since December 1992, when a mob of 150,000 Hindu communalists destroyed the ancient Babri mosque on the grounds that it had allegedly been built, in the 16th century, on the site of a previous Hindu temple.

The destruction of the mosque was followed by anti-Muslim riots across India in December 1992 and January 1993 in which about 900 people were killed.

There were bombings in Mumbai, in March 1993, killing 257 people, attributed to a Muslim criminal-syndicate boss.

In pogroms in Gujarat in early 2002, up to 2000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

In July 2006, 209 people were killed when bombs were set off in commuter trains in Mumbai, apparently by an Islamist group.

Mumbai is the biggest city in India, with a population of 19 million. Mumbai's port handles over half of India's maritime cargo; the city accounts for 25% of India's industrial output and 70% of capital transactions.

BJP: communalist and reactionary. A demonstration against the Congress party and inflation

It has attracted workers from all over India, and natives of the state in which it is located, Maharashtra, are only 50% of the city's population. The balance of religions among Mumbai's population is similar to that among India's population as a whole.

It is governed by Shiv Sena, an extreme right-wing Hindu-communalist organisation.

What is now India and Pakistan was ruled as a single country by Britain from the 18th century. Partly because of British policies of divide-and-rule, tension between Hindus and Muslims in India rose as the movement for Indian independence progressed.

When Britain granted India independence in 1947, it simultaneously divided the country into two — present-day India, and a Muslim state in the north, Pakistan (which then included what is now the separate state of Bangladesh). Up to one million people were killed as people frantically migrated to one side or another of the partition line.

India and Pakistan have since fought wars in 1965 and 1971. A major issue between them is the status of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority province which is nonetheless within India.

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

IRAN

In late November, Education International (international federation of teaching unions) received information from contacts inside Iran that Kurdish teacher activist Farzad Kamangar was being prepared for execution in the notorious Evin Prison. There was a flurry of activity, with many thousands of people around the world responding to the request to email Iranian president Ahmedinejad against Kamangar's execution. Latest reports suggest that Kamangar is still alive, but he remains in imminent danger.

Kamangar has been convicted of involvement with the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) but his lawyer says that "nothing in Kamangar's judicial files and records demonstrates any links to the charges brought against him", and he was cleared of all charges during the investigation process. Despite this, he has been in prison for nearly a year, with witnesses testifying that he has been beaten and prevented from seeing visitors.

Unfortunately, many socialists internationally — the very people upon whom Kamangar should be able to rely for solidarity — believe that the regime threatening to kill him is a progressive, "anti-imperialist" force in world politics. They are wrong. Socialists should act to save

the life of Farzad Kamangar and other worker and human rights activists persecuted by the Iranian regime; visit www.labourstart.org for more details.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

According to much bourgeois political commentary on Israel/Palestine, the situation there is merely one of endless and inescapable inter-ethnic conflict. But through the conflict based on the brutalisation of one national group by the state of another runs a seam of conflict of a different kind — that of worker against boss.

Within both Israel and occupied Palestine, workers are organising on a class basis. In Palestine, the Palestinian Journalists' Syndicate has recently announced plans to hold a conference in 2009, with its President Naim Toubasi emphasising the need for journalists to organise against the threats posed by the Israeli occupation, Hamas, and the corrupt Fatah-led Palestinian Authority.

The International Federation of Journalists plans to send a delegation to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to support the conference.

In Israel, the Middle and High School Teachers' Association is threatening strike action over the government's new proposed education reforms. Although

we would criticise the political perspectives and structures of these unions, their activities prove that the struggle between labour and capital is not suspended in situations of national conflict. Activists who believe in a working-class, socialist solution to the Israeli colonisation of Palestine should look to organised labour on both sides as the only agency capable of creating a just and democratic outcome.

SOUTH KOREA

More than 30,000 Korean trade unionists demonstrated on 29 November to protest against government plans to revise legislation protecting part-time and agency workers. The state responded heavy-handedly, deploying nearly one riot cop to every 10 demonstrators.

VENEZUELA

Richard Gallardo, Luis Hernández and Carlos Requena, members of the Unidad Socialista de Izquierda (USI, United Socialist Left) and of the UNT trade union federation in Venezuela, have been assassinated.

According to reports on the Aporrea website, the three men were killed in the early hours of 27 November in a drive-by shooting. The day before, they had

BY IRA BERKOVIC

been supporting workers at the Colombian owned Alpina plant in the state of Aragua; earlier in the week the men were campaigning in the local elections, standing as socialist candidates.

Gallardo and Hernández were long-time revolutionary socialists who, together with Requena, were also associated with the rank and file current C-CURA, led by Orlando Chirino. There are reports of assemblies of workers discussing strike action in protest at the killings, and calling for a transparent investigation into the deaths.

The day before the killings, the three had denounced the repression of the Alpina workers by Aragua state police. The outgoing opposition governor Didalco Bolívar has frequently deployed police against workers in disputes. Bolívar was an ally of President Hugo Chávez until last year, when he defected to the right-wing opposition during the constitutional referendum.

There is speculation that the attack was carried out by paramilitaries hired by Alpina. Drive-by shootings on motorbikes, known as *sicariato*, are a method of assassination commonly used against trade unionists and social movement activists in Colombia where the firm is based.

We salute these brave socialist fighters, and call for a labour movement investigation into the killings.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

Making High Street clothes at 14p an hour

BY STUART JORDAN

Between 3 and 11 December the anti-sweatshop campaign, No Sweat, will be touring with members of the National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh.

This grassroots union federation has been at the frontline of a recent wave of strikes and riots. Like the shopworkers in this country, the garment workers of Bangladesh have never felt any benefit from the bumper profits made by the high-street giants. From garment workers being paid 14p an hour through to checkout staff in London on £6 an hour, surplus value is extracted at every opportunity, with each hour of sweated labour contributing to Tesco's £2.8 billion, Primark's £111 million, H&M's £1.07 billion profits last year.

Global recession hitting sweatshop workers in Bangladesh highlights the problems with the middle-class boycott approach to sweatshop labour. The logic of the boycott movement is to run "unethical" corporations out of business and replace them with something nicer. Even if these campaigns were successful and it were possible to get everyone to buy (often expensive) homespun, organic, "fair" trade clothing, the first to suffer would be the sweatshop workers who would go from being exploited to being unemployed.

No Sweat's approach is to create links of international solidarity to strengthen the workers' movement here and abroad. This approach leads to much more favourable, progressive outcomes for the sweatshop workers involved.

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry accounts for 75% of Bangladesh's exports and last year pocketed \$10.7 billion. Britain is its third largest export market

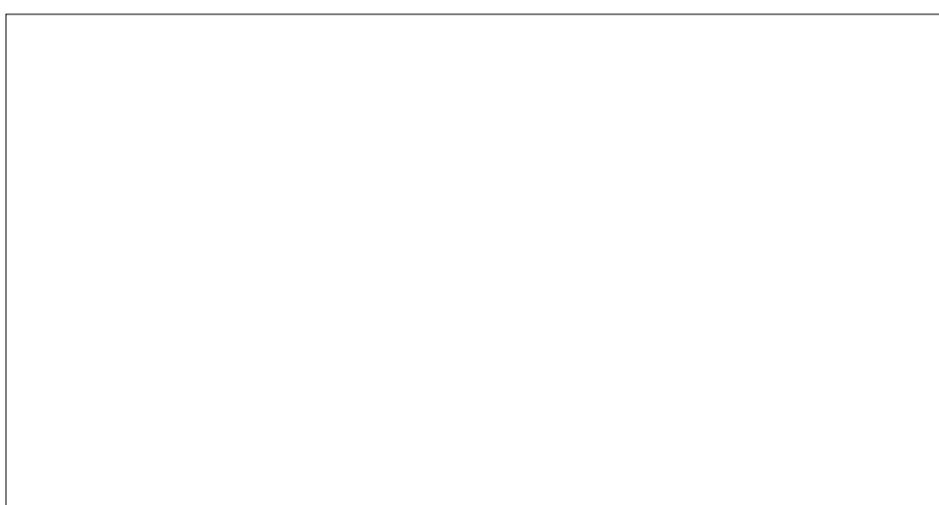
Some commentators predict that Bangladesh may survive a global recession because it produces for the low-end of the market. However, competition is increasing. The European Union ended its restrictions on Chinese export quotas last year and the US will do the same at the end of 2008. As China and India are more technologically advanced, Bangladesh can only maintain its competitive edge through driving down wages.

The RMG industry employs 2.2 million workers, with a further 10 million working in dependent industries. In this 90% female workforce, there are workers who are paid as little as 14p an hour and are forced to work up to 18 hours a day; some are as young as 12. As food prices continue to rise and RMG capitalists maintain wage restraint, workers are being pushed to the brink of exhaustion.

Sweatshop bosses are being forced to sell cheap food to their own workforce just to keep them going. However, in order to qualify for the food the workers must produce an ID card, a legal requirement that the bosses are unwilling to issue because it also allows workers to claim unpaid back pay.

The bosses' solution is to simply replace the exhausted with the "reserve army of labour" from the countryside and keep going.

Despite recent political turmoil that



2006: thousands of garment workers marched in Dhaka on the anniversary of the deaths of 74 of their co-workers in a fire at the Spectrum factory. Their slogan was: "Safe workplaces for the garment workers in Bangladesh"

saw a military-backed caretaker government usurp power from the two large bourgeois parties, the RMG capitalists have maintained their share of political power through their organisation the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). There are strong links between the police, army and BGMEA. The BGMEA have made repeated calls for a permanent industrial police force to police the garment industry and crush workers' organisation and revolt.

Libcom reports that the most militant garment factories are now under military occupation: "[there is] a permanent presence of huge numbers of police and paramilitary forces deployed to keep workers in the workplace and to force them to do unpaid overtime. This prevents workers leaving when disputes arise and, as normally happens, going to other factories to call out fellow workers."

In spite of the ferocity of these attacks and the fact that the caretaker government has banned all political and trade union activity, workers continue to organise. The strikes and riots have caused millions of pounds worth of damage to the industry. Many workers have been killed, imprisoned and injured in clashes with the police and army but many factories have been burnt down or partially destroyed and the disputes spread very quickly from one factory to the next. Some partial demands have been met but the spontaneous and explosive nature of the demonstrations suggest that there is little organisation to formulate demands.

At the end of August 2008 more than 60 garment workers were injured after clashes with police in Gazipur and Savar. In Savar around 8,000 workers of a garment factory of the Biswas group blocked the Dhaka-Aricha highway for three hours demanding two months' back pay. Police fired around 30 rounds of teargas shells and over 100 rubber bullets in Gazipur at workers demonstrating against the sacking of 18 workers from the Standard Garments factory. A fierce battle between the workers and police took place after demonstrators set up barricades on the Gazipur-Tangail road.

In early September this year, garment workers staged a mass hunger strike

demanding a minimum wage of Tk 4500 and the lifting of anti-trade union laws. Other workers employed in three factories at the Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) have shut factories for two weeks, demanding longer holidays for Eid-ul-Fitr, higher wages, and better conditions.

An Indian-owned GB Garments factory was closed after 400 workers agitated for an eight-day Eid holiday instead of six days.

Two thousand workers at the Korean-owned Softex Garments and three thousand workers at the Taiwanese-owned A-One Garments closed for similar reasons.

Many of the official trade unions are nothing but bureaucratised extortion rackets with ties to various nationalist or Islamist bourgeois political parties. However the National Garment Workers' Federation and its associates retain their independence and rank-and-file character. The NGWF has been at the forefront of the struggles that started in autumn 2006 and has continued to organise in spite of state repression. It claims 22,000 members in 1,000 factories and organised strikes for a paid Mayday holiday.

In the current climate, workers are largely organising autonomously and according to Amirul Haque Amin from the NGWF, the recent disputes in Gazipur were "nothing but the result of their desperation brought about by hunger and suffering." In many cases the struggles seem to continue independently of any of the main union federations.

In this context that the caretaker government has announced that it is relaxing its hostility to official unionism so that "collective bargaining agents may hold their stalled elections". The government claims that it is taking these steps to normalise industrial relations with a thick layer of union bureaucracy. The NGWF, which has traditionally organised industrially and not waited for legal union recognition before starting disputes, will hopefully provide an alternative to the bureaucratised unions and a focus for the ongoing struggles.

With new elections coming up in December, Bangladesh is at a crucial juncture. The class struggle has raged on with little let up out of necessity for

over two years. The threat of global recession and the changing nature of relations within the Bangladeshi state suggest a new opportunities are opening up for the sweatshop workers of Bangladesh.

The British labour movement must use this speaker tour to strengthen our international links so that we can lend our solidarity in the struggles ahead. We must concentrate our efforts on creating solidarity throughout the supply chain, from the factory to the shopfloor. As globalised capitalism lurches into its first (and hopefully last) crisis, we must learn the lessons from the comrades and sisters who have been at the frontline of the struggle for the past few decades.

Another great threat facing the world, and particularly its working class and poor — the threat of global climate change — is particularly pressing concern in Bangladesh where a one metre rise in sea level will inundate more than 15% of the land mass, displacing over 13 million and destroying large parts of the rice crop. Bangladesh is likely to experience one of the largest mass migrations in history, making the construction of a heavily policed border fence by the Indian government, all the more sinister.

The economic crisis coupled with the threat of global climate change demands that we assert a vision of a united international working class against the nightmare scenarios of the bourgeoisie. This tour is a good place to start.

• Tour details: www.nosweat.org.uk

TUC shame

The TUC is hosting the AGM of Associated British Foods at its headquarters, Congress House on Friday 5 December.

The TUC is a body headed by general secretary for life who has never had a job, let alone participated in a strike. Its main role today is to help the Labour government put down industrial disputes and union criticism of Brown.

Now it has welcomed one of the most vicious exploiters of the proletariat in the developing world, and by whitewashing its crimes and positively singing its praises. A TUC spokesperson responded to the trade union protest against the AGM initiated by No Sweat as follows:

"ABF is a unionised company with good relations with UK unions... We believe in constructive engagement with companies. We welcome ABF's membership of the Ethical Trading Initiative and have used that opportunity press concerns about supply chains issues".

The left must fight for the labour movement to call the TUC to account — and this issue is not a bad place to start!

What Green?

BY PAUL VERNADSKY

In recent months the idea of a "Green New Deal" has become an ubiquitous answer to the current economic and environmental crises. Barack Obama has alluded to it. The TUC has backed the idea. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has come out for it, endorsed by UK Environment Minister Hilary Benn.

A self-selected Green New Deal Group includes Caroline Lucas MEP, Guardian economics editor Larry Elliott, Friends of the Earth director Tony Juniper and others. In July this year the group published its first report.

According to its proponents, the Green New Deal consists of two main strands: "First, it outlines a structural transformation of the regulation of national and international financial systems, and major changes to taxation systems. And, second, it calls for a sustained programme to invest in and deploy energy conservation and renewable energies, coupled with effective demand management."

The publicity for the report stated that such a policy was "designed to power a renewables revolution, create thousands of green-collar jobs and rein in the distorting power of the finance sector while making more low-cost capital available for pressing priorities".

FINANCE

The Green New Deal says: "Finance will have to be returned to its role as servant, not master, of the global economy." Elsewhere they suggest that the cause of the last Great Depression (and by implication this one) was "a greedy and feckless financial sector".

This implies that the financial sector is merely an aberration, an epiphenomenon that can be detached, rearranged and reinserted without disrupting the system. But in the modern capitalist economy finance is central; it is a necessary and integral part of modern capitalism.

The globally hypertrophied credit system was only one aspect of the globalised system of production and trade that has burgeoned over the era of neoliberalism, built up over thirty years. And a century ago finance capital was recognised by Marxists and others as occupying a pivotal position within capitalism.

The authors not only err in detaching finance from capital; they compound their mistake by the demand to break up of financial institutions. The Green New Deal report calls for "the forced demerger of large banking and finance groups". It says that the demerged units "should then be split into smaller banks. Mega banks make mega mistakes that affect us all. Instead of institutions that are 'too big to fail', we need institutions that are small enough to fail without creating problems for depositors and the wider public".

New Deal work programme

The Roosevelt New Deal myth

The choice of expression "New Deal" is of course not accidental. It is quite explicit in the report. The authors state: "Drawing our inspiration from Franklin D. Roosevelt's courageous programme launched in the wake of the Great Crash of 1929, we believe that a positive course of action can pull the world back from economic and environmental meltdown." They also draw on "a succession of left leaning politicians" as well as Roosevelt, Leon Blum and Clement Attlee. "But the instigator and genius behind this radical re-ordering of society was the British economist, John Maynard Keynes".

The Roosevelt myth — that he was a great progressive or some sort of friend of labour — remains one of the most pernicious in history. Yet it hardly stands up to a cursory examination of the evidence. Anyone interested in discovering the reality of Roosevelt's New Deal should read *Labor's Giant Step* by Art Preis (1964). The book charts the rise of industrial unionism in the US from 1933 to 1955, and in doing so sets the record straight on Roosevelt's hostility to workers' self organisation.

Roosevelt did not adequately tackle the scourge of unemployment. The jobless figure never fell below 8 million during the New Deal, and was still above 10 million in 1940. When industrial production fell in 1937, Roosevelt still cut relief.

Of the welfare schemes Roosevelt introduced, the Civil Works Administration lasted three months and paid a wage of 60c an hour. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration ran from the summer of 1934 to the spring of 1935, but less than two million benefited, earning \$12 a week. As the Unemployed League put it at the time, this was "not enough to live on, just too much to die on".

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) lasted a bit longer, but still paid less than \$50 a month, and ended in ignominy when 1.5 million workers were fired from in the spring of 1939 for taking strike action. Roosevelt told them, "You can't strike against the government".

Nor did Roosevelt give workers the legal "right" to organise. This came about before his term of office, through the Norris-LaGuardia Anti-Injunction Act 1932. Section 7(A) of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) was passed by Congress in June 1933 only after protests from AFL's William Green. It was an "incidental afterthought" in the words of one Roosevelt insider. The National Recovery Administration (NRA) suspended anti-trust laws, in return for voluntary agreements on fair competition, mini-

mum wage and maximum hours. This did provide openings for union organising, with the mineworkers union (UMW) signing up 300,000 members in two months. However company union membership grew faster than the AFL unions.

More significantly as Preis explained, what followed the signing of the NRA was the most ferocious assault on American labour in its history, a "virtual civil war". Hundreds of striking workers were killed, thousands wounded, tens of thousands arrested, mass victimisations, with the use of troops, private goons, spies and vigilantes during the 1930s.

In 1933 the National Guard intervened in a dispute at the Saline Company in Illinois; nine strikers were shot on a picket line in Ambridge after a charge of 200 deputy-sheriffs; and strikers fought a pitched battle in Pittsburgh and barricaded highways. The London Times (10 October 1933) reported that "strikers representing three different labour unions attempted to march in a succession of parades to the local NRA headquarters [in New York] to present their grievances". They kept shouting "Down with NRA". In September 1933 alone, there were nearly 200 disputes, involving 250,000 workers with over 3 million working days lost. (Emile Burns, *The Roosevelt Illusion*)

Workers fought and won the right to organise through their own efforts. The 1934 strikes at Toledo Auto-Lite, Minneapolis teamster drivers and San Francisco docks were won with the blood of mass picketing. The textile strike in 1934, which involved 400,000 workers including from the South, saw 15,000 militants barred from the industry in the aftermath.

The great sit down strikes, beginning with the Akron rubber tyre workers strike November 1935 and reaching a highpoint at the Flint GM plant in November 1936, were the reason why some workers won shorter hours. During the Little Steel strike in 1937, Roosevelt publicly rebuked workers and management by declaring "a plague on both your houses".

Roosevelt attacked the right to strike and threatened to use the National Guard against strikers even before the US entered World War Two. The Allis-Chalmers strike was the first use of an armoured car firing tear gas at strikers, on 13 March 1941. The North American Aviation strike witnessed a "day of infamy" (9 June 1941), when troops were used to suppress the strike.

The Minneapolis labour case, beginning in 1941 and aimed at Trotskyists and the Teamster local 544, saw the trial and imprisonment of revolutionary

socialists and worker-militants for opposing the war.

Roosevelt imposed arbitration and then a wage freeze in 1942, while prices, taxes and profits all went up. Profits doubled between 1940 and 1943. Profits in third quarter of 1943 were the highest in US history, generating more "war millionaires". Roosevelt went on to threaten labour conscription and in the Montgomery Ward mail order strike (1944) had the building seized.

Writing in 1937, Trotsky described the New Deal as a "blood transfusion" for capitalism. He described Rooseveltism as the form of the People's Front in US conditions. Trotsky's supporters in the US, the Communist League of America, wrote in October 1933:

"In the absence of a proletarian revolution, a breathing space for American capitalism is possible. It still has very powerful resources at its disposal. It is now attempting to consolidate its position by a process of sweeping reorganizations.

"This reorganization finds its popular expression in the NRA section of the New Deal program, which is presented as a vehicle of recovery. On the one hand it aims ostensibly at the restoration and stabilization of the purchasing power of the broad masses, though distinctly on the lowest possible level, together with an upturn in commodity prices to re-establish the profit inducement for capital investments.

"On the other hand — and this is far more fundamental — it aims at greater concentration of industry and centralization of capital, the strengthening of monopoly capital under governmental regulation and support, to prepare the basis for new imperialist expansions. This will facilitate the quick transformation of industry to a war footing when deemed necessary.

"In a word, the reorganization of American economy aims at the restoration of capitalist profits and has nothing in common with planned economy.

"Flowing from the fundamental aim of strengthening of monopoly capitalism the NRA is designed as a means of regulating social relations, that is, class relations. Its whole pattern is interwoven with attempts to elevate the system of class collaboration to the status of a permanent institution."

(Quoted in George Novack, *Ten Years of the New Deal*, Fourth International, March 1943)

That verdict still stands. The New Deal rapidly became the War Deal. It was officially buried in December 1943. At every stage it was a Raw Deal for working class Americans. Giving a green gloss to an updated version is a long way away from what is needed in the current crisis.

What's wrong with the Green "New Deal"?

Big capitalist businesses are the biggest barrier to tackling climate change. But does that mean "small is beautiful"?

This is the fetish of small is beautiful. It seeks to wind the clock back to the early days of banking, a bygone period superseded by the concentration and centralisation of banking capital. It implies that somehow lots of small banks competing (no doubt for "ethical" investments) will restore sanity and stability to the market. It won't.

Small business is just as anarchic, perhaps more so than oligopoly. And in the current banking crisis, what is required is more centralisation, not less. A state-owned national bank, responsible for savings, mortgages and pensions, and run by the workers who operate it and community representatives for savers is what is needed.

This applies across the whole of the economy. The Green New Deal doesn't raise the issue of public ownership, or the idea of a democratic, centrally planned economy. It doesn't raise the issue of workers' democratic control over production, as a transition step towards workers' self management. As such it is a puny reform programme, leaving most of the key levers of the capitalist economy intact.

The Green New Deal also calls for "Re-regulating and restricting the international finance sector to transform national economies and the global economy". However it says nothing about the character of the state (or states) that would carry out such "re-regulation". Presumably they mean the existing neoliberal states will do the job, though it is difficult to see how with the current global governance architecture and with existing circuits of capital.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The second aspect of the manifesto is derived from the problems of climate change and from peak oil.

On one level, the demands seem little different from most governments around the globe.

The Green New Deal report states that: "Our Government's objectives"

should include "setting a formal international target for atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations that keeps future temperature rises as far below 2°C as possible" and "delivering a fair and equitable international climate agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2012."

The extent of their conception of "fair and equitable" is measured by demands that ignore class. The worst is the call to ensure "more realistic fossil fuel prices that include the cost to the environment, and are high enough to tackle climate change effectively by creating the economic incentive to drive efficiency and bring alternative fuels to market." Who will "ensure" this? And to what end? Have these authors forgotten about fuel poverty, or merely that the dramatic rise in fuel prices this year will hit working class people hardest? Higher prices are the market "solution"; not the progressive, working class solution to crises.

The only sop towards workers is the promise of "Creating and training a 'carbon army' of workers to provide the human resources for a vast environmental reconstruction programme. We want to see hundreds of thousands of these new high- and lower-skilled jobs created in the UK. It will be part of a wider shift from an economy narrowly focused on financial services and shopping to one that is an engine of environmental transformation."

Of course new jobs in renewables would be a boon. The government said over the summer that 160,000 new jobs would be created to meeting its targets and obligations on the environment. And state-funded retrofitting of homes, successfully implemented in recent years in Germany, would be better than the current pick and mix approach in the UK.

However some sober realism is needed. Last month the British Wind Energy Association estimated that the UK would have at least 23,000 new jobs in the wind, wave and tidal sector by 2020,

and at best might have around 57,000. This is nowhere near enough jobs to account for the additional unemployment in the last few months, never mind for what is expected over the next year.

The Green New Deal report also begs many questions which simply do not get answered. Who will invest, and what profit margin will they expect? Will be it be left to the privatised utilities and to their more ethical competitors to invest the necessary funds? How will safety standards and pay and conditions be guaranteed in these sectors? How will these jobs be unionised?

Both transport and energy in the UK are effectively private oligopolies. The UK waste industry, which includes recycling, currently has low rates of pay and accident rates ten times the national average. The advocates of the Green New Deal cannot even bring themselves to advocate public ownership of these vital sectors, never mind any reference to workers' control. Their demands are so limited that workplace environmental reps, and certainly unionised eco-reps, don't even warrant a mention. Yet any really radical strategy would put the labour movement at the centre of its concerns, not tagged on as an afterthought.

MANIFESTO FOR GREEN CAPITALISM

The politics of the Green New Deal are little more than a mild, reformed green capitalism on the model of... Norway. The only other model is a wacky reference to "the Cuban experiment" as perhaps holding "many of the keys to the future survival of civilisation". A shame then that it's not possible to organise a free labour movement or even publish a socialist newspaper on the island, which make a big difference if you want workers to organise themselves.

The perspective is clear from the foreword, which points to previous "over-

sights". These include "the ways in which environmentalists have tended to neglect the role of the finance sector and economic policy; how those involved in industry, broadly defined, have failed to grasp the malign effects of the finance sector on the overall economy; and how trade unionists have for too long ignored financial and environmental concerns".

Not to be put off, the authors hope that the publication of this report "will help bring these diverse social and industrial forces together, leading to a new progressive movement. We believe that our joint signatories point to an exciting possibility of a new political alliance: an alliance between the labour movement and the green movement, between those engaged in manufacturing and the public sector, between civil society and academia, industry, agriculture and those working productively in the service industries."

Such an alliance is not new: it is precisely the kind of "popular", cross-class (better class collaborationist) "front" that first received its articulation in the 1930s, promoted by Stalinist Parties on the orders of Moscow. It was the politics that led the French labour movement into disarray, and helped bring about the defeat of the Spanish workers revolution. It led directly into the wartime "allied" alliance that tied workers to their own imperialist states.

The courage of Bobby Sands

STUART JORDAN REVIEWS HUNGER

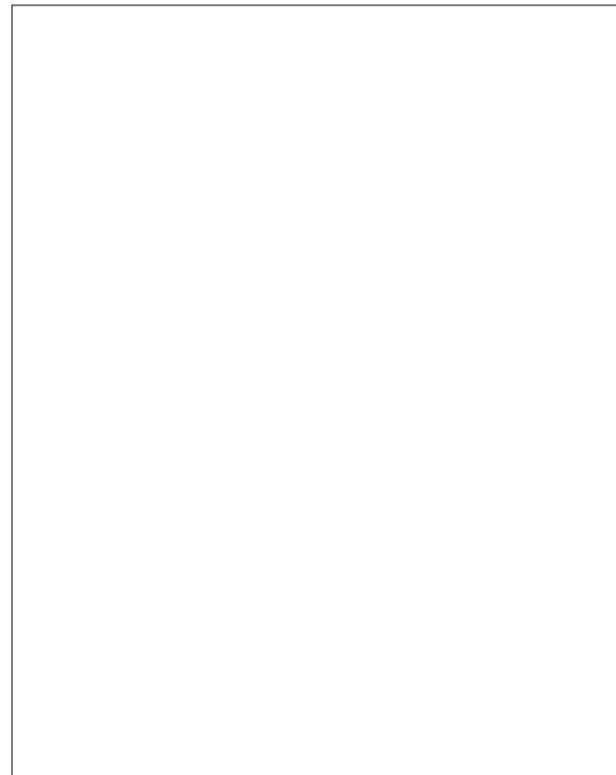
Whatever your opinion of the Irish Republican movement, and we have criticised it over many years, the events that took place inside the Maze Prison remain an incredible display of political courage. The film *Hunger*, coming eighteen months after the famous "Chuckle Brothers" scene of Ian Paisley sitting beside Martin McGuinness, gives some historical context to the cozy bourgeois relations now enjoyed by the leaders of the IRA and DUP.

The film starts in rural Northern Ireland. We follow a prison warden with bloodied knuckles on his way to work at the Maze prison outside Belfast. On arrival, his first task of the day is to book in a recently convicted IRA man. The IRA man refuses to wear prison clothes, strips off naked, is handed a blanket and is taken to a shit smeared cell. The long silences of the cell are interspersed with scenes of bloody torture coupled with footage of Thatcher screaming from the podium that she will not grant these "terrorists" the status of political prisoners.

When I was taught this history in school, the dirty protesters were presented as a load of madmen for whom confinement had stripped them of their capacity to reason. Perhaps this was standard practice in Thatcher's schools. This film puts a lot of things straight.

In 1972 Billy McKee went on hunger strike in order to secure "prisoner of war" status. This was granted by the Tory administration in all but name and republican and loyalist paramilitaries were imprisoned with "special category status".

In 1976 Wilson's Labour government took away the "special category status" and started a propaganda campaign against the "terrorists and criminals" — a campaign that got all the more vicious under Thatcher's government. Little by little, prisoners were



stripped of their "political" status and put in the newly built Maze prison where they were denied the right to wear their own clothes, the right to free association, the right to organise their own educational and leisure activities.

The "dirty protest" started because Thatcher's government would only allow prisoners access to proper toilets if they wore prison fatigues. The prisoners, who were "on the blanket", going naked rather than wearing prison issue clothes, responded by smearing their

shit on the walls and by contructing a drainage system out of food that could take their piss out into the corridor. The film shows how the struggle taken up in the Maze prison was a microcosm of a broader struggle against the British state. At such close quarters with their enemy, the leading members of the republican movement took every petty injustice and indignity as a reason for raising the stakes.

The violence with which Thatcher's words are translated into life within the prison is almost unbearable to watch. The film depicts naked bodies being dragged out of their cells to be battered by rows of riot cops and haircuts that leave gaping wounds in their heads. And yet for all this violence and hopelessness, the "dirty protesters" kept fighting eventually to the point of death. The film ends with a long drawn out discussion between Bobby Sands and a priest where he describes what they are about to undertake, followed by a harrowing depiction of his starvation unto death.

After the relatively benign decade of bland consumerism and even blander neo-liberal politics, *Hunger* challenges us to think about real political conflict and what it involves. For Sands and his eight comrades that died on the hunger strike, the purpose of their protest was not necessarily to win, but rather to take a stand.

They drew a line in the sand and sent a message to the future — "this is what we fought for, this is what we believed in, this is why we died." And what their stand entailed was not just repeated batterings, the humiliation of living in your own shit or even death. But more than that, it involved those they left behind and sacrificed for their own political convictions and the nagging doubt that their stand might just be bloody-minded hubris, an attempt at self-aggrandisement. *Hunger* deals with all these issues with incredible insight and stands as a tribute to political conviction in a political world marked by spin, marketing and the Chuckle Brothers.

The lessons of the "Baby P" case

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

Whoever is to be blamed, and however the degrees of blame are to be portioned out, the bottom line is that "Baby P" was killed after a horrific 18 month life, during all or most of which he was repeatedly beaten and physically injured by his mother, and her partner, and, perhaps, the lodger.

This happened while the family was being supervised by the social services and "Baby P" was known to be at risk. Everyone involved from the social services must share some of the blame.

A narrow trade-unionist response to this terrible event — rallying round to defend the social workers involved — is ruled out by the nature of the work they did, in which (to repeat, however the blame should finally be apportioned) they failed utterly. Here, a narrow trade-unionist response would be the opposite of a socialist response.

What happened is beyond excusing or excuse-making. Those responsible should be called to account and removed from such work. Everyone, from the case workers, to their supervisors, to the medical doctor who, examining "Baby P" a few days before he died, did not notice that he had a broken back.

That said, however, the press outcry against Haringey social services department should not be allowed to determine what is done now. Already it is determining it. The minister responsible, Ed Balls, publicly acknowledges that his response has been influenced by the agitation of the *Sun* newspaper.

The one million people who have put their names to the *Sun*'s petition for the social workers, managers, and doctors to be sacked evidently needed to find an outlet for their proper sense of outrage. But in its day-to-day attitudes, the *Sun*, in relation to society, is the near equivalent of the wretches who tortured and finally killed "Baby P".

The *Sun* and the rest of the "red-top" press and their owners are unashamed supporters of all the things in this society that make the ill-treatment of children inevitable. The *Sun* and its rivals hounding social workers here are the Devil campaigning against the sin he devotes his time to encouraging!

An authoritative report in the *Lancet* estimates that at any given time upwards of ten per cent of children in Britain — one million! — are victims of ongoing physical abuse from parents and guardians. Everybody interested knows that this is true, and that if the estimate errs, it errs by underestimation.

You can see aspects of it in the streets and the supermarkets, where parents routinely shout at, threaten, bully, or slap a distressed small child, adding to the distress. Within the family — whether old-fashioned nuclear family, or families where the mother's or father's partners are not directly related to the children — the children are the easy scapegoats, the safe targets, for the stronger adults' anger, frustration, and for their sense of helplessness in society. They are the safe targets to whom the abuse — physical, verbal, social — which the adults themselves experience (and most likely experienced as children) can be passed on.

The young partner of "Baby P"'s mother is reported

to be illiterate. He is therefore someone most grievously wronged and injured by the education system, and thus someone condemned to a pretty miserable existence. Such people are themselves scapegoats; and children like "Baby P" and one million others in Britain are the "scapegoats of the scapegoats".

None of this diminishes the monstrous behaviour of "Baby P"'s murderers — that is what they are, whatever they were charged with — or lessens their personal responsibility. None of it is meant to imply that they they should not be held fully accounted and properly punished.

The point is to try to understand the social preconditions of the terrible things done to "Baby P" and the terrible things being done now to vast numbers of other children. Poverty, social degradation and exclusion, ignorance, ill-treatment when the ill-treaters were themselves children, the sense of their own social helplessness — all this is the reason why people capable of better behaviour wind up venting their distress and compensating for it by ill-treating and sometimes killing small children in their care.

The conditions that foster such behaviour are produced by the social regime of which the *Sun* and the other vigilante would-be avengers of "Baby P" are both champions and by-products.

A narrow trade-unionist response is no way for socialists to respond now; but neither is the approach of that press which exults in hypocritical outrage against the inevitable results of the social conditions of which they are the inveterate champions and defenders.

The myth of Baader-Meinhof

STAN CROOKE REVIEWS THE BAADER MEINHOF COMPLEX

This film traces the history of the German "Red Army Fraction" (RAF) from its origins in the predominantly student protest movement of the late 1960s through to the prison suicides of its remaining leaders in 1977.

In total, the RAF had 39 members, but never more than 20 at any one time. It was the most famous — or infamous — of a flurry of similarly-sized groups which emerged in Germany in the 1970s and which equated "anti-imperialist struggle" with armed struggle: bombings, kidnappings, hostage-taking, and killings, all financed by armed bank robberies.

The film is not a documentary. But it is historically accurate. Not just the general "storyline" but also the specific incidents portrayed in the film, much of the dialogue spoken by the RAF members, and also the way in which the personalities of the leading RAF members are portrayed.

Andreas Baader is a domineering, loud-mouthed, cynical, macho misogynist, with a penchant for violence as an end in itself. Just as he was in real life. Unlike other RAF members, Baader had little involvement in the political upheavals of the 1960s. For a young person living in West Berlin at the time, this was no small achievement.

His partner, Gudrun Ensslin, despite having a character of her own, provides Baader with the hero-worship which he craved. This too is the real-life Ensslin. On more than one occasion she wrote of Baader in terms such as: "The absolute enemy, the enemy of the state; the collective consciousness and the morality of the oppressed and of the downtrodden, of the metropolitan proletariat — that is Andreas."

Ulrike Meinhof, a well-known left-wing journalist at the time, is portrayed as a more complex character, which indeed she was. At one point in the film she says that she could never join a group like the RAF as it would mean abandoning her children. And yet she did join the RAF — and then tried to arrange to have her children brought up in a Palestinian refugee camp.

The other members of the "core group" of the RAF have, at most, only an episodic role in the film. They shoot, they bomb, and they get arrested or killed. But their appearances are too fleeting for their personalities to be fleshed out.

This too reflects the real-life RAF: Baader, backed up by his high-priestess, made the decisions, with all other members reduced to mere supporting roles.

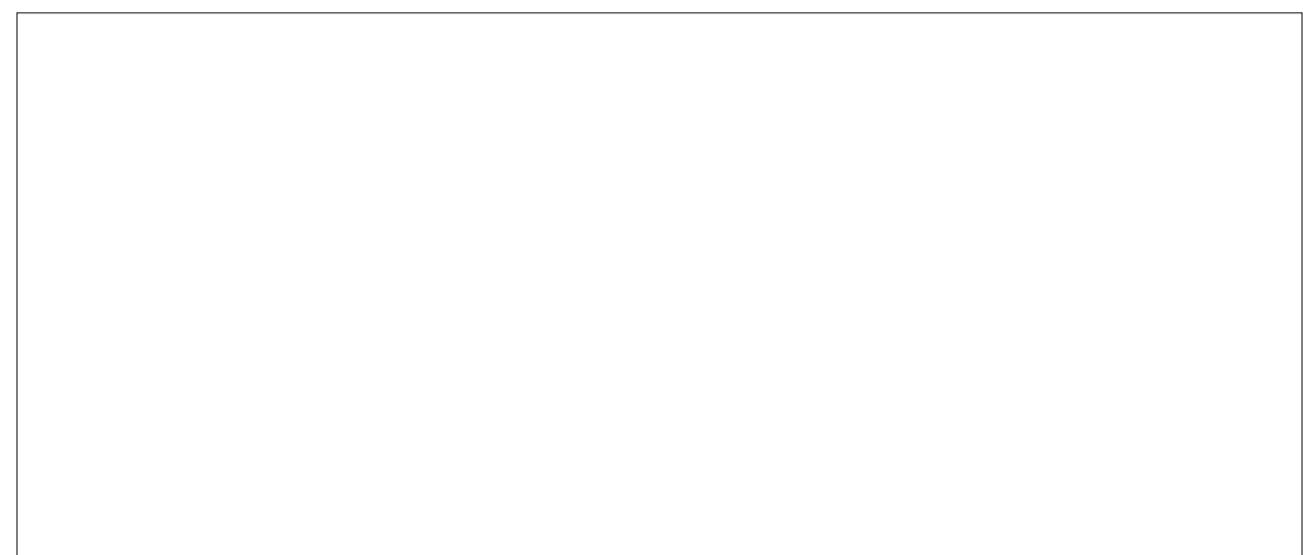
Based on Stefan Aust's book of the same name, the film has been meticulously researched and incorporates material from a variety of other sources as well. But where the film falls down, as many of its critics have pointed out, is that it tries to cover too much in too limited a space of time.

The political context in which the RAF emerged is represented by scenes of protests against a visit to Germany by the Shah of Iran, demonstrations and rallies against the war in Vietnam, the attempted murder of Rudi Dutschke, the campaign to attempt to stop distribution of the right-wing *Bildzeitung* newspaper, protests against the "Notstandsgesetze" (emergency legislation), news reports about the Six Day War in the Middle East and the following year's General Strike in France, and the decline of the student protest movement in the closing years of the 1960s.

And that's all just in the first half hour or so of the film!

All this certainly helps recreate the "atmosphere" of the period. But, especially in the case of non-German audiences, how many people can make sense of all this and recognise that the RAF was not so much the product of a movement of radical political protest but rather an expression of its decline and disintegration?

The history of the RAF in the early 1970s is dealt with in the same kind of rapid-fire style: the arson attack on a Frankfurt department store, the arrest and trial of Baader and Ensslin, Baader's escape from imprisonment, military training with Fatah in Jordan, a series of bank robberies, and a succession of bombings of US military bases, police headquarters, and the offices of the *Bildzeitung* — interspersed with policemen being



shot, and RAF members being shot.

This is followed by another succession of similar events, but more brutal and on a larger scale, carried out by the "second generation" of the RAF, with Brigitte Mohnhaupt duly anointed as commander-in-chief by the now imprisoned Baader.

All this provides little more than a glimpse into the political "logic" behind such events.

The RAF did not so much elevate "anti-imperialist struggle" over class struggle as reject the latter entirely in favour of "anti-imperialist struggle". (The working class had been corrupted by material possessions. It was therefore no longer a force for social change.) And, beginning a tradition which has carried on to today, it found the ultimate expression of anti-imperialist struggle" in an armed Palestinian.

The RAF was contemptuous of theory and glorified "action". The ultimate form of "action" and of "anti-imperialist struggle" was armed struggle (no matter how few people were involved in it).

Insofar as the RAF had what might be termed a strategy, it was one of carrying out provocative actions in order to force the state to reveal its true but concealed repressive nature. The RAF — and large sections of the organised German left in those years — adhered to the view that Germany was either a fascist society already, or at a minimum, was well on its way to becoming one.

Another criticism levelled at the film, especially in Germany, is that it glorifies the RAF and its violence. "The ultimate idealisation of the idiots of the Revolution," according to one critic. This is a particularly perverse criticism: the film is a sustained attack on what one of its characters calls the "myth" of the RAF. In fact, the declared goal of the film's author and producer is to destroy the mythology which, over three decades later, still surrounds the RAF.

The film shows the remorseless escalation of violence inherent in the RAF's notion of "urban guerillaism". It begins with an arson attack on a department store after opening hours. It moves on to bank robberies. Then bombings and murders. And from there to mass hostage-taking in the German Embassy in Stockholm and participation in plane hi-jackings.

By the time of the kidnapping of Hanns Martin Schleyer, head of the German equivalent of the German CBI, the violence has become obsessive: even after his bodyguards are dead, the kidnappers continue to empty their machine-guns into their corpses.

In the prison scenes following the arrests of Baader, Ensslin and Meinhof, the film focuses on the systematic humiliation and mental bullying of Meinhof by her fellow RAF prisoners. "You're the knife in the back of the RAF," says Ensslin to Meinhof at one point. Eventually, their behaviour drives Meinhof to suicide.

Similarly, the death of fellow RAF member Holger Meins while on hunger-strike in prison is portrayed as a price which Baader and Ensslin are happy to see someone else pay in order to maintain the momentum of the campaign for their release from prison.

In contrast to the ruthlessness of the RAF, the police chief in charge of the hunt for RAF members is portrayed as a fatherly Mr Wise Owl figure. He does not support terrorism — not many police chiefs do — but, he explains, terrorism will be ended only when politicians find solutions for the political conflicts which

lead to terrorism. If only politicians could be as sensible as police chiefs!

The closing words of the film are spoken by Brigitte Mohnhaupt, the daemonic and ruthless leader of the "second generation" of the RAF. She explains to her comrades that Baader, Ensslin and fellow-RAF-member Jan-Carl Raspe, whose deaths in prison have just been announced, were not murdered by the state but committed suicide, like Meins and Meinhof before them.

Her statement is met with bewilderment by the other RAF members in the room. They genuinely believed that Meins and Meinhof had been murdered. And their group has just taken part in a plane hi-jacking and the Schleyer kidnapping to prevent the other RAF prisoners from being murdered as well. But now Mohnhaupt disabuses them of their illusions.

"Stop seeing them (the RAF) as people they weren't" says Mohnhaupt in the closing words of the film. The words have a broader meaning for the film's audience.

To underline how the RAF should really be remembered, the film immediately switches to its final scene: the murder of Schleyer in a Belgian forest, probably the most senseless of all the RAF's killings. (Schleyer had been taken hostage to secure the release of the imprisoned RAF members. But by this time they were no longer alive.)

The film's attitude to the RAF could not really be stated much more clearly than that.

As I walked out one autumn day

A poem about the capitalist crisis, by Joshua Wade. Joshua is 12 and lives in Cambridge

As I walked out one Autumn day,
I saw a banker and did say;
"How fare you my noble man
Is it going all to plan?
For I doth spy yonder youths robbing your armoured van!"

"Oh Calamity, calu-calay I must pelt those pesky kids away!
For they will surely see!"

Quoth he, "All that glitters is not gold,
And all that armoured van doth hold is lost.

"Your hopes and dreams I built on sand,
But I have nothing in my hand;
My suit is cold.

"Though I grow old and rich I stay,
In gold, you my debt must pay for greed.

"But when you age, and death comes near,
I shall forget my Friend, I fear,
The debt you paid oh long ago,
And to the poor house you shall go for me!"

SUSSEX UNIVERSITY VICTIMISATION

Activist banned from campus

By Koos COUVÉE

On Wednesday 1 October, I, a third year anthropology student at the University of Sussex and former Communications Officer at the University of Sussex Students' Union, was involved in an anti-recruitment action against the Universities Royal Navy Unit (URNU) at USSU Freshers' Fair. I have now been punished for my involvement in this action — I have been banned from campus outside the hours of 8.45am and 6.15pm, and if I am found on campus outside of these hours I will be expelled for the rest of the academic year. I have also been told to write a letter of apology to URNU.

The URNU is an organisation funded by the Ministry of Defence and has a presence on 14 campuses across the UK. Their self-professed aim is as follows:

"The aim of the URNU organisation is to educate a wide spectrum of high calibre undergraduates who show potential as society's future leaders and opinion formers in the role and need for the Royal Navy."

I was part of a group that took direct action against this organisation to highlight a number of issues:

1. URNU's links to the military;
2. The fact that they are directly funded by the Ministry of Defence;
3. The reasons for and horrors of the wars in the Middle East — why there's a need for military recruitment, and why this is political;
4. URNU's problematic representation of war (as a necessary evil but essentially with humanitarian ends);
5. The institutionalised racism, sexism and homophobia within the British armed forces.

We dressed up as clowns and walked through the fair handing out leaflets, as I spoke through a megaphone about the above mentioned issues. We ended up at the URNU stall where some of us covered it in paint (which was aimed only at publicity material, but unfortunately also partially covered a closed laptop and a URNU member's clothing), whilst we continued to hand out leaflets. We made our exit from campus and fifteen minutes later some of us, including myself, returned to the fair, having taken off our clown outfits.

A few weeks later, during the first week of

November, I received a letter from Sussex University, calling me in for a disciplinary hearing. It was alleged that my conduct at the Freshers' Fair, as part of the group that undertook the clown action, contravened the University's standards of behaviour and that I was involved in an episode that constituted:

"violent, threatening, intimidating, harassing or abusive conduct towards a member or employee of the University"; and

"violent, threatening, intimidating, harassing or abusive conduct towards any person where such conduct is seriously detrimental to the good order or good name of the University."

The hearing took place on 12 November, with a panel constituted of a pro-vice chancellor, a member of faculty and the president of our students' union. I partially admitted to the allegations, simply because I wanted to avoid a discussion on the semantics of "intimidation", or "harassment", and instead chose to justify my actions politically.

Last week, I received another letter from the University outlining my punishment. The lived reality of this measure is one of stress, powerlessness and frustration. It is also unfair because I was not the only one involved in this action, and this punishment applies only to me. This punishment is completely disproportionate considering what I did on that day, considering that I am the only one of our group identified, considering I was not a "ringleader", as the University likes to see it, and considering the fact that the University has not convinced me, nor many others, that these kind of actions are politically unsound.

Neither am I convinced of the implication that the "harm" that was done to URNU members is in any way comparable to the punishment.

I am going to appeal this decision. I would like to ask for statements of support in order to strengthen my case for appeal. Obviously this case does not affect just me but the general political climate here at Sussex University. If this would be set as a precedent it would be a very bad one.

- Please send statements of support to me at kc69@sussex.ac.uk
- Longer article: www.workersliberty.org/node/11666

WORKERS' LIBERTY FUND DRIVE

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty has launched a drive to raise £18,000, and we've had a great boost to the drive in the last two weeks. Some of our readers and members have clearly decided that the best way to beat the credit crunch blues is not, as they are saying, by reading romantic novels and staying at home with the DVD player. Of if they do, they also think that giving a little cash to your favour socialist group is a good idea too.

Please help us in any way you can.

1. Support us by taking a few copies of our paper to circulate (contact our office for details);

2. Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or download a form from our website. Or donate via our members or online.

Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA;

3. Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

In the last fortnight we have received £7 from Alan, £30 from Sue, £30 from John B-J, £250 from Les, and £1000 from John B. Sympathisers and members have increased their standing orders by £72. New members have given us standing orders totalling £33. Readers of the paper have taken out standing orders totalling £63. Finally AWL comrades in Cambridge raised £127 by organising a benefit gig with folk band Revolutionary Discipline and Marxist hip-hop from the Ruby Kid. That gives an accumulated total of £2632 for this month. Thank you to everyone!

Fund total £5,162

EVENTS, DATES, PUBLIC MEETINGS

For more information and downloadable leaflets see www.workersliberty.org/whatson

AWL London study group on Marx's Capital: 6pm, second and fourth Mondays of the month, Camera Cafe, Museum Street (Tottenham Court Road tube)

AWL London study group on the history of British Trotskyism: 7.30pm, first and third Thursdays of the month. The Plough, Museum Street

AWL London forum: 7.30-9.30pm, Thursday 11 December. Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, nr King's Cross. Capitalist crisis: how should the working

class respond? Speakers: Maria Exall (CWU NEC, pc), Steve Hedley (RMT London Transport Region secretary, pc), Sacha Ismail (AWL)

AWL dayschool on workers' government: 10am-2.30pm, Saturday 13 December. SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1

Feminism and the student movement: 11am-5pm, Saturday 13 December. University of Manchester Students' Union, Oxford Road. Dayschool organised by Feminist Fightback, ENS Women, The Riveters

No witch-hunt in Unison!: 7pm, Friday 19 December.

MIGRANT WORKERS

Defend the cleaners, protest against Amey plc!

By VICKI MORRIS

On 2 December, 20 protestors entered the offices of Amey plc in High Holborn to protest at the sacking of five Colombian cleaners and the rejection of their appeal. The protestors attempted to present a petition to an Amey representative, but were prevented.

The cleaners had been employed by Amey at the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) and were suspended then sacked for daring to criticise Amey for putting an excessive workload onto ever fewer staff, for unilaterally changing terms and conditions, and for failing to respect grievance procedures. The workers are all members of the Prospect union and some of Unite-T&G as well.

To intimidate workers at the NPL, most of them from Latin America, Amey have resorted to calling in immigration authorities. Last year the company invited workers to a "training session", bolted the doors behind them and left them in the care of the Home Office, which deported three of them, one to Colombia and two to Brazil, for not having official documents.

Amey is a majority shareholder in Tubelines, which cleans parts of London Underground. Tube cleaners who went on strike for a living wage this summer were also faced with a corporate response consisting of paper checks, immigration raids and deportations to Sierra Leone and the Congo.

The campaign against Amey is being coordinated among others by the Campaign Against Immigration Controls (CAIC): www.caic.org.uk.

The next protest is on Monday 8 December at Amey's HQ in Oxford.

11am, Monday 8 December, Amey HQ, Sherard Building, Oxford Science Park, Edmund Halley Road, OX4 4DQ

Regular buses run to the Science Park (no 106, which leave the train station at 37 miles past every hour and stop at St Aldates around 45 miles past), and it's cyclable from the town centre. Bring instruments and noise making equipment!

National demonstration for free education

Wednesday 25 February 2009, London

Next planning meeting: 12 noon till 4pm, Sunday 14 December, Manchester University

Next year could see the lifting of the £3,000 cap on top-up fees. Yet NUS is not planning to organise a national demonstration. Student union officers and activists have launched a call to organise a demo. To add your name, email studentdemo2009@gmail.com

Facebook group: For a national demonstration over fees, grants and marketisation in 2009 www.studentdemo2009.org.uk

WILLIAM MORRIS

Romantic or revolutionary?

THE FOURTH PART OF A SERIES BY PAUL HAMPTON

Morris has been claimed by a wide spectrum of socialists — often without careful reference to his views. However a comprehensive study of writings indicates that he was not a utopian socialist, nor an anarchist, nor a Fabian state socialist nor a sentimental socialist, as some have characterised him.

Morris was never enamoured by the socialist colonies and experiments organised by Robert Owen, Etienne Cabet and others. He argued that it was not possible "to establish a real Socialistic community in the midst of Capitalistic Society, a social island amidst an individual sea; because all its external dealings would have to be arranged on a basis of capitalistic exchange and would so far support the system of profits and unpaid labour." (*Answers to Previous Inquiries*, *Commonweal*, September 1885)

In a review of Annie Besant's *Modern Socialism* (10 July 1886), Morris argued that "although these [Owenite] communities were experiments in association, from one point of view they were anti-Socialistic, as they withdrew themselves from general society — from political society — and let it take care of itself. They were rather modern and more extended forms of monasticism". (Nicholas Salmon *William Morris' Journalism*)

Towards the end of his life he was still describing Owen's experiments as "of their nature non-progressive" because even "at their best they are but another form of the mediaeval monastery". (*Why I am a Communist*, *Liberty*, February, 1894)

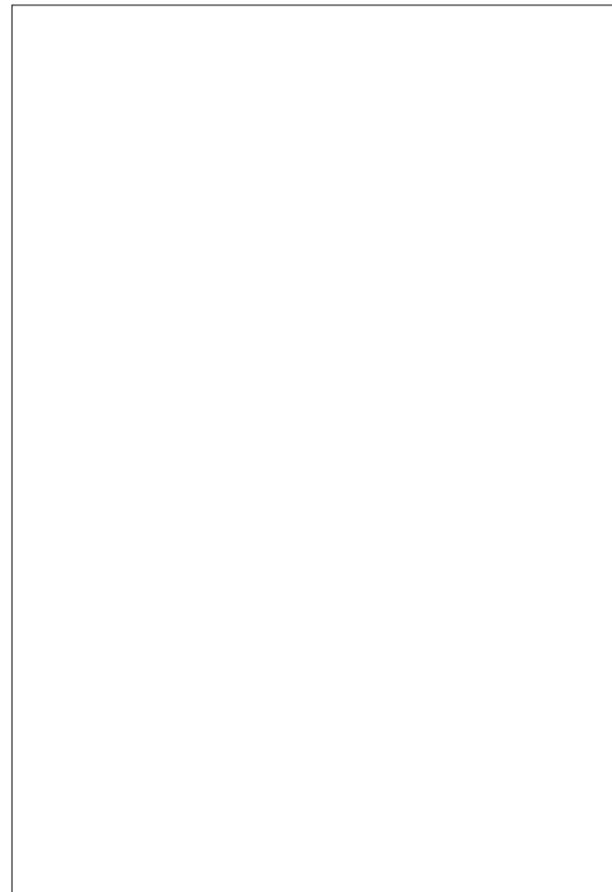
Morris was an opponent of the gradualist, reformist Fabian current that grew up during his socialist years — and opposed the broader state-socialist trends that affected even the revolutionary left.

In *Fabian Essays in Socialism*, Morris criticised the reformism of Webb, Bernard Shaw and their co-thinkers (*Commonweal*, 25 January 1890). He wrote: "The result is, that the clear exposition of the first principles of Socialism, and the criticism of the present false society... is set aside for the sake of pushing a theory of tactics, which could not be carried out in practice; and which, if it could be, would still leave us in a position from which we should have to begin our attack on capitalism over again; a position, it may be said, which might be better or might be worse for us than our present one, as far as the actual struggle for the new society is concerned." (Nicholas Salmon, *William Morris: Political Writings*)

Nor was Morris ever an anarchist, despite his friendship with Peter Kropotkin and his joint work with some anarchists on *Commonweal*. In a debate on socialism and anarchism in the paper in 1889, he took issue with "our Anarchist-Communist friends, who are somewhat authoritative on the matter of authority, and not a little vague also. For if freedom from authority means the assertion of the advisability or possibility of an individual man doing what he pleases always and under all circumstances, this is an absolute negation of society, and makes Communism as the highest expression of society impossible; and when you begin to qualify this assertion of the right to do as you please by adding 'as long as you don't interfere with other people's rights to do the same', the exercise of some kind of authority becomes necessary. If individuals are not to coerce others, there must somewhere be an authority which is prepared to coerce them not to coerce; and that authority must clearly be collective." (Salmon)

Morris also rejected the terrorism of some anarchists, who were inspired by the example of the Narodniks in Russia and American anarchism. In May 1892 he wrote in the *Hammersmith Socialist Record*: "It is difficult to express in words strong enough the perversity of the idea that it is possible for a minority to carry on a war of violence against an overwhelming majority without being utterly crushed."

On 26 May 1895, Morris wrote a letter to Henry Joseph Wilson MP giving his support to the campaign to get the Walsall Anarchists released. In this he wrote: "I should mention, to show that I am not biased in this



matter, that I am not an anarchist, but disagree both with the theory and tactics of Anarchists." The appeal for clemency was unsuccessful.

Some Marxists have characterised Morris as a sentimental socialist. The designation seems to have originated with the German Marxist Karl Kautsky and was taken up by Engels.

Kautsky wrote an article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in early 1884 characterising Morris as, "in strong antithesis to Hyndman, a sentimental socialist". Bax translated the comment and it was published in *Justice* on 1 March 1884, along with the comment, "that Mr Morris though a poet and an artist is no 'sentimental Socialist' but a robust disciple of Marx."

Kautsky wrote to Engels on 12 March 1884: "Morris is supposed to be furious about my article in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* because I stamped him as a sentimental socialist [Gefühlssozialist]. I must have misunderstood Miss [Eleanor] Marx whom I contacted about Morris. To my mind, she said to me that Morris had read *Capital* but whether he had understood it was a different question. Morris was more a sentimental socialist. As Morris denies that so strongly, I must have understood Miss Marx wrongly." (*Engels Briefwechsel mit Kautsky*, 1935. Thanks to Bruce Robinson for the translation)

Engels replied on 24 March 1884, reassuring Kautsky that "the Morris affair is of no significance, they are a muddle-headed lot". (*Marx-Engels Collected Works*)

Engels first described Morris as a "sentimental socialist" to Sorge in April 1886. He described Morris as a "sentimental dreamer" to Bebel in a letter in August 1886 and as a "settled sentimental socialist" to Laura Lafargue in September 1886. (MECW 47) However Engels' main political criticism was aimed at Morris' hostility to parliamentary action.

Engels took a more conciliatory tone two years later, sending Morris a copy of the first English edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (February 1888). Engels noted that in the dispute over the founding of the Second International in 1889, "Morris has come out openly in support of our congress". In March 1894 Engels recommended Morris and Bax's *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (originally published as 'Socialism from the Root Up' in *Commonweal*) to August Momberger and two months later sent Sorge a copy.

Was there any substance in the view that Morris harked back to some previous golden age for his socialism? He never denied the influence of Thomas

Carlyle and John Ruskin on the formation of his ideas, but he broke with their reactionary feudal socialism in 1883.

In an early lecture, *Art and Labour* (1 April 1884): "I must explain that I do not mean that we should turn back to the system of the middle ages, but that the workmen should own these things that is the means of labour collectively, and should regulate labour in their own interests."

Morris was no "back to nature" rural socialist. He rejected the old Chartist back to the land scheme as "a kind of half co-operative half peasant-proprietorship land scheme, which of course proved utterly abortive". ('Socialism from the Root Up', 28 August 1886)

Perhaps a better approach is to accept what Morris said about himself and look at what he wrote and did for the last thirteen years of his life. To do so is to conclude that Morris was a revolutionary socialist, and one who built on and developed Marxist politics.

In an article in Cassell's *Saturday Journal* on 18 October 1890, Morris wrote: "It was Karl Marx, you know, who originated the present socialist movement; at least it is pretty certain that that movement would not have gathered the force it has done if there had been no Karl Marx to start it on scientific lines." (Edward Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*)

In his debate with anarchists in *Commonweal*, (18 May 1889), he wrote: "I will begin by saying that I call myself a Communist, and have no wish to qualify that word by joining any other to it. The aim of Communism seems to me to be the complete equality of condition for all people; and anything in a Socialist direction which stops short of this is merely a compromise with the present condition of society, a halting-place on the road to the goal." (Salmon)

His conception of socialism was working class self-rule — and he even hinted at soviet-type bodies. In a lecture on 'What Socialists Want' (6 November 1887) he wrote: "In the Society which we Socialists wish to see realised labour will be free: no man will have to find a master before he sets to work to produce wealth, a master who will not employ him unless he can take from him a portion of what he has produced: every man will be able to keep himself by his labour, and the combination of all these workers will supply those things which can only be used by the public, such as baths, libraries, schools, great public buildings, railways, roads, bridges, and the like. There will be no political parties squabbling incessantly as to who shall govern the country and doing nothing else; for the country will govern itself, and the village, municipal, and county councils will send delegates to meetings for dealing with matters common to all. The trades also will have councils which will organise each the labour which they understand and these again will meet when necessary to discuss matters common to all the trades: in short life and labour [will be organised] in the least wasteful manner, and the ordinary citizen will learn to understand at least some part of this organisation."

Beyond a short-lived workers' state, Morris also had his own conception of life under Communism. In 'The Policy of the Socialist League' (*Commonweal*, 9 June 1888), he wrote that: "The League holds that the necessary step to the realisation of this society is the abolition of monopoly in the means of production, which should be owned by no individual, but by the whole community, in order that the use of them may be free to all according to their capacity: this we believe would necessarily lead to the equality of condition above-mentioned, and the recognition of the maxim 'from each according to his capacity, to each according to his needs'. (Salmon)

In his novel *News from Nowhere* (1890) Morris recorded his own, idiosyncratic vision of the future after the abolition of classes. Whatever the details of his description — and he can certainly be criticised for his representation of women, for example — there is little doubt that he envisaged a society of freedom and equality. Such a vision — a rational grounded utopia, apparently so distant for us — is precisely what is needed today.

Trotsky's programme

By ANNIE O'KEEFE

So far in this series we have looked at how Marxist socialists developed their ideas about how a political programme should look. We have also seen, by looking at programmes for the current economic crisis, a little of how the left relates to this task today. But what about the tradition on which the Alliance for Workers' Liberty bases itself — the politics personified by the activity and writings of Leon Trotsky?

When in 1938 Trotsky wrote the document which became known as "The Transitional Programme", the founding statement of the international group he helped set up, what was he trying to do? What did that group, the Fourth International, stand for?

First, we need to summarise again the story of the Marxist socialists, bringing it up to 1938.

The First International, the International Working Men's Association (1864-72), had organised the working-class movements of a handful of European countries. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were active within it and helped establish the fundamentals of socialist politics and theory.

The Second International (the Socialist International, 1889-1914) organised the burgeoning labour movements of Europe, and a few countries outside Europe. Formally its leaders were revolutionary, but as they became absorbed in the capitalist parliamentary system and in routine trade unionism they drifted towards "reformism". Reform became their goal, the full socialist transformation was seen as being a long way off. The Second International collapsed when many of its leaders supported the drive for war in August 1914.

The Third, Communist, International (1919-1933) was set up by those who had led the Russian Revolution of October 1917. It rallied workers all over the world and bound them together in a deep commitment to fighting for revolution.

But further revolutions in the west (such as in Germany) were defeated by the bourgeoisie, aided by the old reformist working-class parties. The Russian workers were left isolated, with immense problems, in conditions where building socialism was impossible.

A new bureaucratic ruling elite grew up, led by Joseph Stalin which seized power in Russia. Still proclaiming themselves communists, they took control of the Communist International. In defiance of the ABCs of Marxism, they declared that it was possible to build socialism in one country, and that country was backward, war-ravaged Russia.

The Stalinists transformed the Communist International from being a movement of revolutionary parties and people into one based on serving Stalinist Russia's political ambitions abroad.

A whole series of revolutionary possibilities in Europe and Asia were destroyed because of the bunglings of this so-called "Communist" International.

Finally in 1933 the powerful German labour move-

ment — the reformist Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party — surrendered peacefully to Hitler's Nazis. When the people and parties of Communist International did not rise in revolt against those responsible for what had happened in Germany, Leon Trotsky concluded that the Communist International was dead for the socialist revolution.

By that time Trotsky had already spent ten years fighting the Stalinist bureaucracy, inside Russia and, from 1929, in exile. The people he organised together to make that fight were known as the Left Opposition.

In the USSR, the bureaucracy was strengthened by the defeats of the European labour movement. By 1928-30 it was the sole master of society, exploiting and enslaving the working class. It was against this background of defeat and gross corruption of the communist movement that Trotsky broke definitively with the Communist International and called for a "Fourth International".

But Trotsky did not declare the existing "Trotskyst movement" to be the new International. The International should come about by left and labour movement groups working together and discussing the politics they needed for the times in which they lived.

So the Trotskyists set about seeking new alliances. They joined bigger socialist groups moving to the left in France, America, and other countries. But the reformist and Stalinist parties survived and grew and brought new defeats on the working class, defeats which weighed down on the whole international working-class movement. The movement for the Fourth International remained essentially the "Trotskysts", though the latter did make substantial gains in some places.

THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

In 1938, on the very eve of war, the Trotskyists finally decided to proclaim themselves the Fourth International. Trotsky summed it up:

"Sceptics ask: but has the moment for the creation of the Fourth International yet arrived? It is impossible, they say, to create an international 'artificially'; it can arise only out of great events... The Fourth International has already risen out of great events: the greatest defeats of the proletariat in history. The cause for these defeats is to be found in the degeneration and perfidy of the old leadership. The class struggle does not tolerate an interruption... The Fourth International... has no need of being 'proclaimed'. It exists and it fights..."

Trotsky's programme, written for the founding conference, was a profound document, one which had to address all the problems the labour and socialist movement faced, above all the degeneration of the revolutionary international, and point a way out of defeat for the labour movements of the future. It was a programme for a specific moment in history, not something that was in all its specific proposals relevant for all times. Some Trotskyists in the future would make the mistake of seeing it that way, but that is another story.

The new International was organisationally feeble. The

30 delegates representing groups from 11 countries met in a village outside Paris on 3 September and deliberated for that day only. The only groups with significant numbers were the Belgian and US organisations.

Implicit in the declaration of the Fourth International, and reflected in its programme, was a shift from the ideas of the previous period of trying to switch over mass communist working-class parties to revolutionary ideas. The Trotskyists now stressed the element of mass spontaneous working-class upsurge, bringing new layers of militants. They saw a highly volatile political situation.

"Democratic regimes, as well as fascist, stagger on from one bankruptcy to another. The bourgeoisie itself sees no way out. In countries where it has already been forced to stake everything upon the card of fascism, it now toboggans with closed eyes toward an economic and military catastrophe. In the historically privileged countries... all of capital's traditional parties are in a state of perplexity bordering on paralysis of will. The New Deal, despite its initial pretentious resoluteness, represents but a special form of political perplexity, possible only in a country where the bourgeoisie succeeded in accumulating incalculable wealth..." (*The Transitional Programme*).

The Trotskyists' perspective on what was going to happen was fundamentally correct. There was a mass working-class upsurge at the end of World War Two.

What the Trotskyists did not predict, could not predict, and would not predict, was their own defeat in their task of fusing their revolutionary programme and understanding with the organic class struggles of the labour movement.

For this period, one of economic and political instability, taking his cue from the living class struggle, Trotsky in the *Transitional Programme* codified a number of demands and types of struggle for the labour and socialist movement. The programme discusses the sliding scale of wages and sliding scale of hours; sit down strikes; workers' control of industry; expropriation of capitalist industry, including the banks; a workers' and farmers' government; the struggle against war...

In writing the programme Trotsky took it for granted that the seasoned socialists would understand the basic thinking behind such ideas as a "workers' government" and that this programme, like those of the Communist International before Stalin, was directed at preparing the working-class movement for revolutionary struggle, for overthrowing the bourgeois regime.

Every new socialist should read the Transitional Programme, not as a recipe or something from which we can copy out a quick fix programme for our own political situation, but as a rich source of ideas — a way to illuminate the *how*, the *method* of building a socialist movement.

- *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International* (*The Transitional Programme*)
<http://www.workersliberty.org/howsolidarity>

A WORKERS' PLAN FOR THE CRISIS

1 Nationalise the entire system of banks and financial institutions, without compensation for the bosses and under democratic control.

2. Reverse cuts and privatisation; tax the rich to rebuild the NHS, education etc. as public services under workers' and service-users' control.

3. Resist the job cuts. Jobs for all: a shorter working week, maximum 35 hours, without loss of pay; expand public services; nationalise firms declaring mass redundancies.

4. The labour movement should calculate its own, realistic, inflation figure and demand, as a minimum, that wages, pensions and benefits are inflation-proofed; benefits that are enough to live on; a minimum wage of £8.80 an hour without exemptions. Phase out VAT etc; cut taxes for the least well off; tax the rich.

5. No evictions. A big programme of council house building and confiscation of empty/unused properties to provide cheap, quality housing for all.

6. Open the books of the corporations! Fight for work-

ers' control at every level of the economy. Nationalise the giant industrial and service companies

7. Nationalise energy and transport; use their profits to bring down energy bills; make local transport free and reduce other fares; invest in public transport and renewables and convert polluting industries as part of a worker-led transition to a sustainable, low-carbon economy.

8. Scrap the anti-union laws; a positive charter of workers' rights. Support workers defying the law. Fight for civil liberties and democracy: abolish the monarchy and the House of Lords, all representatives should be recallable and paid a worker's wage.

9. Organise workers regardless of immigration status, as part of the fight for open borders. Mass mobilisation against the far right and the social decay on which it feeds.

10. Fight for women's liberation: demand equal pay without compromise; expanded abortion rights; free, universal childcare, well-funded services and other

demands to make equality real.

11. Unite with workers across Europe and the world to fight for a levelling up of wages, conditions and rights; for a Workers' United Europe.

12. Organise the unorganised, including young, contracted out and precarious workers. Organise the unemployed. Union officials should be elected annually and paid a worker's wage; decisions on industrial action made by elected strike committees. Rebuild Trades Councils.

The unions must fight to impose their demands on the Labour government — not advise or lobby Brown, but confront him politically! Rally the activists to build a movement for independent working-class representation, as the basis for a new workers' party. Its aim should be a workers' government — a government based on mass working-class mobilisation and accountable to the labour movement, which serves our class as the Tories and New Labour have served the rich, and reshapes society in the interests of people, not profit.

THE GERMAN REVOLUTION 1918-19

How the reformists saved capitalism

BY STAN CROOKE (SECOND PART OF THE STORY)*

The pact between Ebert and Groener had been sealed on the evening of 10 November. Thereafter, with the full support of the SPD leadership, the General Army Command recruited, organised and trained new military detachments (the Iron Division, the Freikorps and the Republican Soldiers' Defence Corps) for the purpose of crushing the revolution.

The working-class military forces — for which the “revolutionary government” of the SPD provided no support — were much weaker: a trade union-based security force which had been set up by Emil Eichhorn (a USPD member), the 3,000 strong People's Naval Division, a small Red Soldiers' League (set up by Spartakus) and several thousand armed workers who had kept their weapons on returning from the front.

On 24 November the SPD appointed a Commission for Socialization, chaired by the USPD leader Karl Kautsky. Its purpose was to thwart any direct initiative by the workers in their own workplaces. In early 1919 the Commission dissolved itself, demoralised by the government's lack of interest in its recommendations.

As Massimo Salvadori (*Karl Kautsky and the Socialist Revolution*) wrote: “The majority Social Democrats... had no intention of promoting any action that could jeopardise the conservative coalition between the SPD, the trade unions, the high state bureaucracy, and the General Staff. The principal concern of the SPD was to restore internal order and to revive production.”

From the earliest days of the German Revolution the SPD leadership had called for the creation of a National Assembly. Just as the enemies of the Russian Revolution had backed the convening of a Constituent Assembly in order to undermine and replace the proletarian democracy of soviet power, so too the counter-revolutionary forces in Germany looked to a National Assembly to play the same role in relation to the workers' and soldiers' councils.

Luxemburg warned of the looming danger: “The National Assembly is an obsolete heirloom of bourgeois revolutions, a husk without content, a stage-prop from the period of petit-bourgeois illusions about a ‘united people’, about the ‘freedom, equality and brotherhood’ of the bourgeois state.”

“Whoever reaches for the idea of a National Assembly is consciously or unconsciously pushing the revolution back to the historical level of a bourgeois revolution.”

Whilst the SPD leadership prepared for elections to the National Assembly to undermine the revolution, Luxemburg looked to the councils to take forward the revolution: “All power in the hands of the working masses, in the hands of the workers' and soldiers'

Workers' demonstration January 1919

councils, and the safeguarding of the revolutionary work from lurking enemies....”

In the closing weeks of November there were unplanned bloody clashes between armed workers and soldiers returning from the front. But by the early weeks of December, as the demobilising policies of the SPD-USPD coalition government began to douse the flames of revolution, the forces of the counter-revolution prepared for organised confrontation.

Groener ordered 10 army divisions which had been stationed on the Western Front to march on Berlin. Their task, as he explained to an enquiry conducted in 1925, was to “tear power away from the workers' and soldiers' councils.” The plan of action drawn up by Groener made clear how this was to be done: “Whoever is still in possession of weapons but has no arms permit is to be shot; whoever has kept possession of military materials, including lorries, is to be summarily executed... Whoever declares themselves to occupy an official position without any right to do so [i.e., the membership of the workers' and soldiers' councils] is to be shot.”

Meanwhile a witch-hunting atmosphere was whipped up against Spartakus, and against Luxemburg and Liebknecht in particular. From the “Anti-Bolshevik League” and the old pro-imperial Heimatdienst a flood of slanderous anti-Spartakus propaganda poured forth. The killing of the Spartakus leaders was advocated in public and in the press.

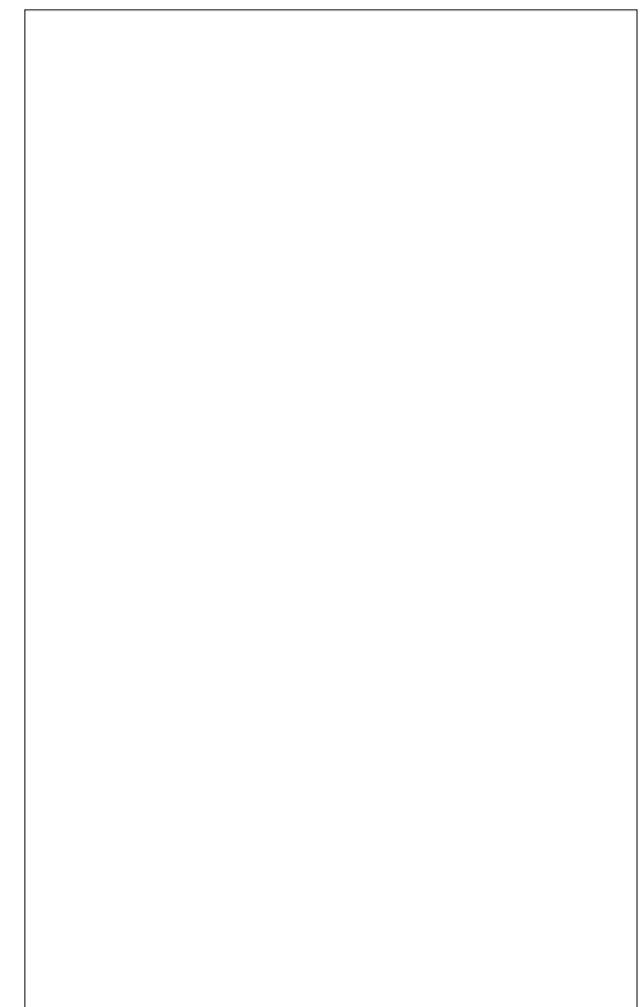
GROENER'S OFFENSIVE

According to Groener's plans the 10 divisions would arrive in Berlin on 10 December and would complete their task of destroying the workers' and soldiers' councils by 15 December, one day before the first all-German Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils was due to convene in Berlin. But some sections of the Berlin garrison who had remained loyal to the old order preferred to act sooner.

On 6 December troops occupied the Prussian parliamentary buildings in Berlin and arrested the Berlin Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils. A second detachment occupied the editorial offices of Spartakus' newspaper. A third opened fire on a Red Soldiers' League demonstration, killing 18 and wounding 30. A fourth detachment marched on Ebert's offices and proclaimed him President of Germany.

By evening the mini-putsch had fizzled out. Ebert rejected the proclamation. The editorial offices and the Prussian parliamentary buildings were vacated. The Executive Committee of the Councils was released and informed that their arrest had been a mistake. No action was taken against the counter-revolutionary troops by the SPD-USPD government.

On 10 December Groener's troops reached Berlin. Ebert greeted the troops in front of the Brandenburg Gate: “No enemy has defeated you! Now Germany's unity lies in your hands!” But Groener's plans for the troops quickly came to grief. Waves of mass desertions



Bombed out headquarters of the Freikorps

swept through their ranks from the day of their arrival. By the end of December only 800 of the 75,000 soldiers had not deserted.

On 16 December the National Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils opened in Berlin. In the days leading up to the congress a new wave of strikes had begun to spread across Germany, throwing up new leaderships in the industrialised centres. But this new militancy found no expression at the congress. Delegates attending the congress were elected by the workers' and soldiers' committees in the first days of the revolution, when illusions about the SPD's promise of a “revolutionary government” were still rife. Of the 489 delegates, 288 belonged to the SPD, 80 to the USPD, and just 10 to Spartakus. Many of the remainder were bourgeois liberals in political outlook.

By 344 votes to 98 the congress rejected a proposal for the creation of a republic based on workers' and soldiers' councils. By 400 votes to 50 the congress then voted in favour of elections for a National Assembly on 19 January. The congress further agreed to “transfer legislative and executive power to the Council of Peoples' Deputies until such time as the National Assembly may make other arrangements.” The congress had effectively committed political suicide.

The only radical resolution adopted by the congress was submitted by delegates from Hamburg. By an overwhelming majority the congress voted for: “Election of army officers; abolition of insignia of rank; subordination of the military to civilian government; and the transfer of disciplinary powers from officers to the soldiers' councils”. Naturally, Ebert ignored that resolution.

In the Spartakus paper *Red Flag*, Luxemburg pointed to the central role played yet again by Social Democracy in stemming the revolutionary tide: “This is an expression not merely of the general inadequacy of the first unripe stage of the revolution but also of the particular difficulties attending this proletarian revolution and the peculiarities of its historical situation.”

“In all former revolutions the combatants entered the lists with their visors up: class against class, programme against programme, shield against shield. In

* The first part of this article can be found at www.workersliberty.org/germany1918

the present revolution the defenders of the old order enter the lists not with the shields and coats-of-arms of the ruling classes, but under the banner of a 'Social Democratic Party'."

ATTACK ON REVOLUTIONARY SAILORS

The SPD was now making fresh efforts to disarm the revolution. Otto Wels, who had played a central role in securing the election of a "reliable" (pro-SPD) soldiers' council on 10 November, announced that the People's Naval Division was to be reduced to 600 men and transferred away from the centre of Berlin.

The People's Naval Division had been loyal to the revolution from the outset. Its core consisted of sailors from Kiel who had mutinied in early November and then participated in the Berlin uprising of 9 November. Stationed in the Imperial Palace in the city centre, they were subsequently joined by another 2,000 sailors from Kiel.

To add pressure to his demands Wels reduced the level of pay to the Division to that appropriate to a force of 600. Opposition to Wels' proposals by the sailors was misrepresented in SPD propaganda as a selfish pay demand which threatened the unity of purpose of the labour movement. After a week of fruitless negotiations the Division went onto the offensive.

On 23 December the sailors occupied the nearby government buildings, placing members of the Council of People's Deputies under arrest, and taking Wels prisoner. Ebert persuaded the sailors to return to the Imperial Palace, promising that a cabinet meeting the following day would settle the dispute.

At eight o'clock the following morning troops loyal to Groener and Ebert who had been drafted in front of Babelsberg and Potsdam opened artillery fire on the Imperial Palace. As news of the fighting spread, tens of thousands of workers and their families marched on the Palace to demonstrate their support for the sailors. By midday the attack had been defeated. The troops were forced to leave Berlin.

In protest at the use of force against the People's Naval Division the three non-SPD members of the Council of People's Deputies resigned their posts on 29 December. Ebert replaced them with three SPD members, including Gustav Noske.

KPD FOUNDED

The year 1918 closed with the founding of the German Communist Party (KPD) under the leadership of Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Spartacus, hitherto a fraction within the USPD, formed the core of the new organisation. Spartacus itself was a loose federation of local groups. Despite the intellectual profundity of its leading figures, especially Luxemburg, it lacked a Marxist-educated, experienced membership. Many of the members held overly romantic ideas about revolution. Above all, Spartacus lacked a serious presence in the workplace.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards, whom Liebknecht tried to persuade to join the KPD, boycotted the founding conference of the new party. The more political elements among them backed the USPD. The majority were syndicalists and saw no need for a political party. They conceived of revolution as a conspiratorial insurrection. The North German Left Radicals, who had renamed themselves the International Communists of Germany (IKD) in late November, after some wavering joined the KPD conference on 31 December, the day after the founding of the KPD.

The conference voted by 62 to 23 to boycott the elections to a National Assembly. This was a mistake, because it confused opposition to the National Assembly itself with the tactical question of how to use the elections to mobilise opposition against the Assembly. There were clear majorities at the conference for withdrawing from the trade unions (on the grounds of their reformism) and for establishing the KPD as a loose, decentralised organisation. Those issues were left to party commissions to decide upon.

In late December and early January Ebert and Groener pressed ahead with the organisation of military units which could be relied upon to succeed where Groener had failed on 10 December, including the Hülsen Freikorps. Ebert appointed Noske commander-in-chief of the Freikorps troops.

The witchhunting atmosphere against the Spartacists — as the members of the KPD continued to be known — intensified from day to day, whipped up both by the extreme right and also by sections of the SPD.

This from the SPD: "The masses cannot afford to wait a minute longer and quietly look on while these brutes and their hangers-on cripple the activity of the republican authorities, incite the people deeper and

deeper into a civil war, and strangle the right of free speech with their dirty hands."

The troops had been assembled. The atmosphere had been raised to fever pitch. Now all that was needed was the pretext to "justify" armed intervention by the counter-revolution. It was provided by events triggered by the sacking of Emil Eichhorn.

On 1 January an SPD publication unjustly accused Eichhorn — a USPD member and Police President of Berlin — of embezzling public funds. At the same time military commanders accused Eichhorn of preparing to launch a civil war. Again the accusations were unfounded. On 3 January Eichhorn was summoned to the Ministry of the Interior and asked to resign. He refused, and asked for 24 hours to prepare a written reply to the accusations. Although he was granted this reprieve, he was sacked the following morning. Eichhorn refused to accept this dismissal, declaring himself to be accountable to the Berlin Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, not to the Ministry of the Interior. That evening the Berlin Executive Committee of the USPD met delegates from the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and two members of the KPD (Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck) in the Berlin Police HQ. The meeting agreed to call a protest demonstration the following day, 5 January.

Tens of thousands poured into the city centre during the morning. By midday up to 300,000 people were in the city centre. As the demonstration drew to a close, armed groups broke away and staged a series of occupations: the headquarters of the SPD, the offices of the SPD's paper, the Reich Printing Office, news agencies, telegraph offices, and the main railway stations.

In the evening another meeting was held in the Berlin Police HQ, attended by 10 representatives of the Berlin USPD Executive, 70 delegates from the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, the leaders of the People's Naval Division, some delegates from the soldiers' councils in Berlin, and Liebknecht and Pieck from the KPD. Carried away by the size of the demonstration and the series of occupations underway, the meeting declared the government to be overthrown and elected a Revolutionary Committee consisting of Ledebour (USPD), Scholze (RSS) and Liebknecht (KPD). However the meeting proposed no other action than another mass demonstration the following day.

On 6 January the city centre was again taken over by mass demonstrations. This time far more workers arrived with weapons than the previous day. But there was no fighting and no leadership from the Revolutionary Committee. Instead, the Revolutionary Committee opened negotiations with Ebert, using USPD members as intermediaries. The demonstrations began to break up. By the evening the city centre was empty.

But the occupations were still underway. And now the SPD-military alliance had their pretext for armed intervention: the Spartacus uprising which the black propaganda of conservatism and the SPD had repeatedly warned was imminent. On 9 January reaction launched its counter-offensive.

SPARTAKUS UPRISE

But, as Paul Frölich wrote: "The truth is: there was no Spartakus uprising... the truth is that the January fighting was cautiously and deliberately prepared and cunningly provoked by the leaders of the counter-revolution."

For all its political weaknesses the KPD recognised the futility of such a young — and numerically weak — organisation attempting to initiate an armed uprising. When Liebknecht reported back to the KPD Executive on 8 January he was censured for his unauthorised involvement in the Revolutionary Committee. "Karl, is that our programme?" asked Luxemburg.

According to Richard Müller, one of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, the KPD was of the opinion that it was "senseless to attempt to declare a (revolutionary) government. In their opinion, a government based on the proletariat would not have survived longer than a fortnight."

The KPD subsequently expelled some of its members who had been involved in the wave of occupations. Frölich even went so far as to claim that the occupations had been instigated by agents provocateurs: "All these newspaper occupations had been carried out under the leadership of agents in the pay of the Berlin Commandants' office, or by highly dubious elements."

Shortly before his death Liebknecht recognised that the uprising had been a mistake: "It was a demand of History that they [the workers] were defeated. For the time was not yet ripe. And yet, the struggle was unavoidable... to have surrendered the police headquarters without a struggle [i.e., to have allowed Eichhorn's dismissal to go unchallenged] would have been a shameless defeat. The struggle was forced upon

the proletariat by the Ebert band, and with an elementary force it surged up from the Berlin masses."

On 9 January Ebert ordered troops to recapture the occupied buildings. But it was not only the buildings under occupation that were attacked. An attempt to storm the editorial offices of the *Red Flag* was made the same day. Two days later the offices of the KPD were seized and destroyed.

On 11 January the first battalions of Freikorps marched into Berlin, headed by General Maercker and Noske. On 15 January more Freikorps flooded into Berlin, occupying the south and west of Berlin and the entire city centre. A wave of terror was now unleashed by the counter-revolution. Suspects were arrested in the streets and arbitrarily executed. Militants were murdered and then declared to have been shot while resisting arrest. Others simply disappeared after having been taken into custody. Workers' delegations sent to negotiate with the Freikorps were murdered.

On 15 January the wave of terror engulfed Luxemburg and Liebknecht. Captured by counter-revolutionary troops, they were beaten unconscious with rifle-butts and finished off by revolver shots. Liebknecht's body was delivered to a first-aid station as that of an "unknown man" whilst Luxemburg's corpse was dumped in the Landwehr Canal. The officer in charge of the murderers, Captain Pabst, issued a press statement claiming that Liebknecht had been shot while trying to escape, and that Luxemburg had been murdered by an angry mob.

Three days later the elections to the National Assembly were held. Despite the betrayals and the counter-revolutionary plotting of its leaders, the SPD still commanded broad electoral support among the working class. The SPD won 164 seats to the USPD's 22, and formed a coalition government with the bourgeois Centre and German Democratic Party.

Two days later, at the first Cabinet meeting of the new government, Noske announced plans for restoring the rule of "law and order" throughout Germany: "The government must be able to back up its authority with might. We have raised 22,000 men in a military unit during the course of the week. In two or three weeks we will be able to restore a certain amount of order. Dealings with the Soldiers' Councils has therefore taken on a different character. Hitherto the Soldiers' Councils have had force on their side; now this is in our favour."

As Noske spoke, street fighting was raging in Bremen. On 10 January the Bremen Workers' and Soldiers' Council had declared the city to be a Workers' Republic. Noske despatched the Gerstenberg Freikorps to crush the uprising, and by the time of the new government's first Cabinet meeting the Freikorps controlled the city.

In early May the Munich Workers' Republic, declared two months earlier, was suppressed by pro-government troops and Prussian Freikorps. A wave of terror even more bloody than that unleashed on Berlin in mid-January swept through the city. More than 700 people were massacred in the first week of May alone. Violence was also used to put down working-class unrest in Thuringia, Saxony, Halle, the Ruhr District and Berlin.

Both before and after the murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht the SPD leaders claimed that their resort to force was justified by the need to maintain law and order, rather than motivated by the desire to eliminate political opponents and defeat working-class insurrection. In one sense they were right. They were defending law and order — the law of capitalist exploitation and the order of social inequality. And it was precisely this law and order that was under threat from the socialist ideas of Luxemburg and Liebknecht that found expression in the workers' councils.

Despite Liebknecht's involvement in the Revolutionary Committee elected on 5 January, neither he nor Luxemburg were killed for leading an armed uprising. There was no Spartakus uprising in Berlin in January 1919. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered because they were the leaders of a revolutionary movement which Social Democracy in alliance with German militarism wanted to destroy at birth.

SPD leaders such as Ebert and Noske sought to cloak their actions behind the stale clichés of maintaining law and order, but their allies in the military were more forthright. As General Maercker later put it: "In the struggle of the Reich government against the left radicals it was exclusively a matter of maintaining political power. Troops were used for this purely political purpose... using force to consolidate domestic policies."

"But the weakness of the government did not allow it to say this openly. It was afraid of showing its colours and of explaining that the role of the Freikorps troops was to put an end to the rule of workers' councils wherever it still existed. At the end of the day, this was what was at stake."

ANTI-FASCISM

Lessons from Antifa and UAF

BY CHARLIE SALMON

The closest thing many of us will have seen to "militant anti-fascism" in recent times is an entirely or partly staged scuffle with the police at the front of a demonstration. These altercations are more often than not born out of frustration with the police for "protecting the Nazis" than any coherent tactical considerations. They have very little long-term impact on the ability of the fascists to organise.

The stories of the 43 Group and of the Teamsters' "Union Defense Guard", featured in previous issues of *Solidarity*, illustrate the place of mass, confrontational mobilisations against fascist groups in a context not wholly dissimilar to the present. The fascists are not on the brink of taking power. They are, however, building their forces, growing in confidence and staging ever more ambitious public activities.

The Jewish ex-service men and women of the 43 Group and the trade union militants of the UDG developed their organisations as a necessary reaction to the physical threat posed by fascist groups. Whilst physical threat always exists and violent acts are carried out sporadically, there is no large-scale campaign of violence to contend with at present.

In a situation where the major fascist organisation, the BNP, steers away from open street confrontation and where the thuggish periphery of the far-right is at best ramshackle, what role should militant tactics play in the battle against fascism? This is a question of some controversy resulting from very different approaches to and understandings of the labour movement, the "No Platform" policy and basic democratic principles.

ANTIFA

"Anarchism is basically a solipsism, whether or not anarchists recognize this consciously in their philosophic outlook. It does not mean freedom through democracy, or freedom in society, but, rather, freedom from any democratic authority whatsoever or any social constraint" Hal Draper (*Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: Critique of other socialisms*)

The activities of the Antifa group appear, on first inspection, to be based on wholly honourable impulses. The only tears shed when reading a report of their activities are produced by fits of laughter at the fate of various fascists and their attempts to meet.

Antifa is a group of "anti-authoritarian" and "anti-capitalist" (basically anarchist) activists of indeterminate size who prioritise small-scale physical actions against the fascists. This can range from picking off known fascists for a bit of rough justice to more coordinated efforts to disrupt larger events. Much of their work resembles the early phase of 43 Group activity; but beyond the act of physical confrontation, Antifa — at least in its British manifestation — diverges considerably from a rounded, political approach to anti-fascism.

Whilst some Antifa activists will argue that small-scale, elite actions are necessitated by the imperative of security, there is a political basis for their mode of operation. Antifa is, in the main, the descendant of an organisation known as Anti Fascist Action which itself grew from the Anti Nazi League/SWP's Stewards Group.

The Stewards Group was organised to protect left-wing meetings and events from attack in the 1970s, the early days of the Anti Nazi League. When the SWP attempted to legitimise its anti-fascist activity with the help of Liberal politicians, Labour right-wingers, soap stars and footballers, the group became something of an embarrassment.

When the Stewards refused to disband, the SWP members involved were expelled and derided as "squaddists" by the SWP leadership. This produced some understandable bitterness from those who'd put themselves on the line to protect one-time comrades who now wanted nothing to do with them. No doubt, the SWP handled the expulsions with their usual light-touch approach. So, in short, Antifa is the bastard-grandchild of the SWP.

This genetic SWP-phobia, once combined with a rigid understanding of No Platform and the "individual-solipsistic" approach that lingers in even the best of contemporary anarchism, produces quite a mix.

The SWP-phobia extends to an ingrained mistrust of all "Trots". With some exceptions, notably in the early days of anti-fascist work in Nottingham, this means

immediately cutting yourself off from potential allies in the early stages of building a movement. Taking No Platform as a matter of principle rather than a tactic demands that all organisational energies are focussed upon a fairly narrow set of concerns rather than a rounded political response. The anarchistic kernel of rigid individualism means a refusal to work within the democratic structures of a broad movement and ultimately results in an inability to work consistently in the labour movement or with anyone who refuses to submit themselves to anarchist methods.

This combination crystallises into the sort of adventurism on display on the 16 August 2008 demonstration against the BNP's Red, White and Blue Festival. For reasons already documented the demonstration did not take place as originally conceived. That is, mass disruption of the festival itself. So rather than rally with several hundred anti-fascists and attempt, where possible, to breach police restrictions the Antifa comrades attempted to stage an elitist escapade of tragicomic dimensions.

Reports on the Indymedia website indicate that forty or so Antifa members were arrested, and we assume the others spent the rest of the day scrabbling back through fields to civilisation. Antifa staged an elitist stunt that had no impact on the fascists and contributed nothing towards building a movement. How much more useful would it have been to have an extra fifty organised anti-fascists on the main demonstration, we'll never know.

UAF

The form and function of Unite Against Fascism makes for a chameleon-like entity. In an attempt to be all things to all people, UAF presents a potentially bewildering variation of stances best characterised by the Tweedle Dum and Tweedle Dee of Martin Smith and Weyman Bennett.

Martin Smith is quite often to be found speaking on behalf of UAF and/or "Love Music Hate Racism" at left-wing events. In his speeches, Martin likes to emphasise the need to "fight the BNP". Martin also likes to remind everyone that the BNP are "Nazis". His speciality, however, is staging little stunts to prove how militant the organisation he leads, the SWP, really is.

Weyman, on the other hand, has the job of convincing trade union bureaucrats, celebrities and worthy individuals that the best way to fight fascism is to give UAF money and a bit of legitimacy by lending their name to it. Weyman is also a leading member of the SWP, and as with all employees, his boss doesn't make his life easy for him.

When Martin talks about "fighting the Nazis" he's talking to growing layer of young and politically inexperienced people who really do want to fight them off. When Weyman talks to trade union officials he's after the endorsements necessary to make UAF appear like a legitimate outfit. Neither of these things is wrong in and of themselves, unless you understand that the first and foremost priority of Martin and Weyman is to recruit people to the SWP. This imperative has all sorts of negative consequences already considered.

But it's Martin Smith's penchant for "fighting" that interests us most here. Apart from offering the BNP's GLA member Richard Barnbrook outside for a fight — via a megaphone directed at the London Assembly with Barnbrook nowhere in sight — there is very little evidence that Martin is serious about taking militant direct action against the BNP.

If you educate the membership of a revolutionary group by sending them into tedious stand-offs with the police and telling them this is what serious anti-fascism is about, then you have no hope of organising the sorts of responses exemplified by the 43 Group and UDG. Smith's little stunts are more like a recruitment exercise than anything else.

"NOW IS NOT THE TIME FOR VIOLENCE"

If the fascists grow and fight the unions, the unions must inevitably counter that movement by developing their defense guards, and if the defense guards are overpowered by fascist gangsters and hoodlums and thugs, the only answer of the unions can be to strengthen the guards, and in the course of that struggle between the fascist gangs and the workers' defense guards, we hope the workers' defense guards will grow strong and eventually become a very effec-



Antifa poster

tive power." James P. Cannon, (*Socialism on Trial*)

So what of the BNP itself? Does the fact that, at present, the BNP has made an organisational turn away from street fighting and provocation towards electoralism and community campaigning mean that a militant response can play no part in anti-fascist activity? The answer to this question depends on what you conceive militant anti-fascism to be.

Almost immediately after a successful mass blockade of a BNP meeting in Kimberley, Nottinghamshire — the first of its kind for some considerable time — Nick Griffin spoke at a meeting warning his members that no matter how frustrating the actions of the anti-fascists became, "now is not the time for violence". The word "now" is most relevant here.

The sort of action carried out in Kimberley should be categorised as a militant response to fascism. The logic of such an action has nothing to do with the "principle" of denying fascists freedom of speech — such a "principle" can have no consistency for socialists. Nick Griffin and the BNP were "No Platformed" but not because this is a guiding idea for anti-fascism. No, such militant actions are a form of *self-defence* against the prospect of a renewed, large-scale fascist organisation. They play a complementary role to a mass, working class political campaign in communities and our class against the growth of the fascist BNP.

Nick Griffin's "now" should give pause for thought to anyone who considers the BNP to be a legitimate — if that phrase has any meaning — political party. What Griffin was telling his members is that "we all understand that our enemies — the socialists, trade unionists, feminists, Jews, black people, gays and the others — will not stand down without a fight. But we must first prepare ourselves for that fight by swelling our ranks and building support". It seems that Griffin and the BNP learned something from the fall-out of the 1970s (and from the immediate post-War period before that).

The BNP leader conceives of the current period as one of "quiet revolution" where his support will grow from those communities — including working class areas — discontented with the manifold failures of New Labour and suffering from the growing economic storm. There can be no doubt that, given the resources, personnel and confidence, the BNP will start to make some noise. The whole organisation and its periphery will be set the task of attacking — physically and ideologically — the labour movement, socialist organisations and minority communities. We must be prepared for this.

Preparation means neither sitting around waiting for the worst nor staging small, elitist and ineffective actions against individual fascists.

We must build a movement that reminds the BNP that there is no such thing as a "quiet" or one-sided revolution, that in such situations there is more than one side. Our movement must be based on working-class politics, built from working-class organisations and must be prepared to take militant defensive and offensive action. No such organisation exists, but the history of militant anti-fascism can us in building it.

KEN LIVINGSTONE

Popular Front, London-style

BY SACHA ISMAIL

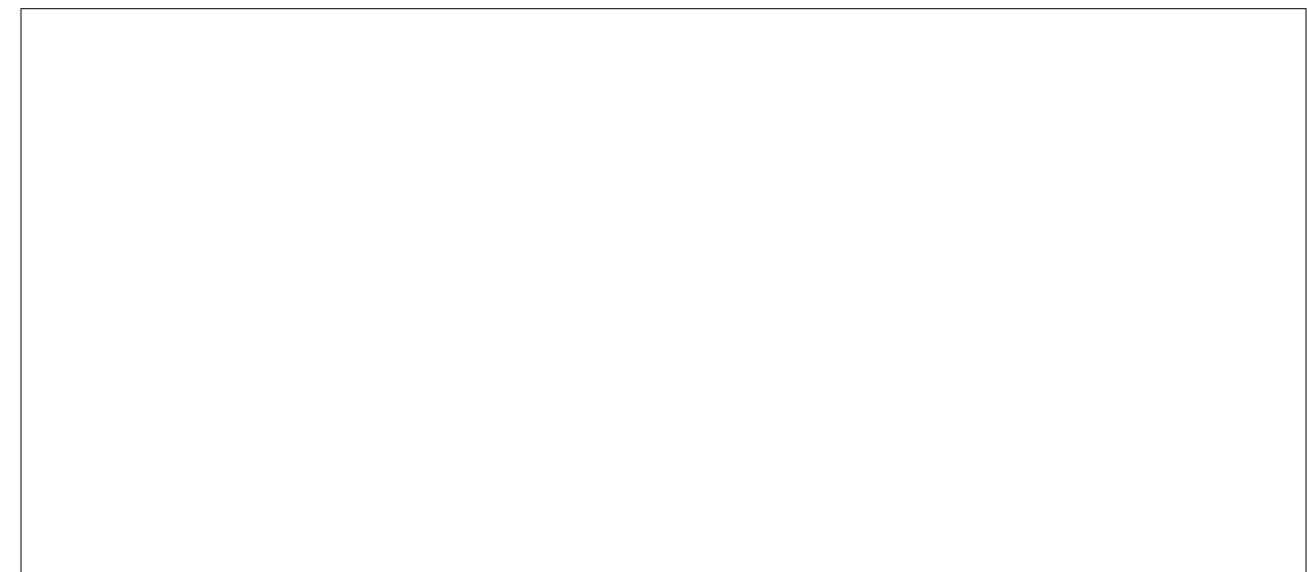
Ken Livingstone has launched an organisation called "Progressive London" (www.progressivelondon.org.uk), backed by a "broad alliance of individuals, campaigns, communities, artists, trade unions, environmentalists, political parties and groups". It is for "all those who believe in social justice, environmental protection, good community relations, cultural innovation and the many other areas in which London has made a contribution recognised throughout the world."

The CWU, GMB, Unison and Unite — or at least senior figures from these unions — seem to be backing this "campaign", and it is starting to be raised in trade union branches. The AWL will be opposing support for it wherever we can.

In the first instance, this is quite transparently a vehicle for Ken Livingstone to return to City Hall in 2012. In this year's election we called for a second preference vote for Livingstone on the grounds of Labour's residual links to the trade unions; but that is no reason for us to positively support the electoral ambitions of this fake left careerist. Particularly not when his fake left coat of paint is such a pale one, as the politics of "Progressive London" demonstrate.

This is a classic — though rather weedy! — example of what Marxists have called a "popular front": an alliance which ties the labour movement to sections of the ruling class in the name of "progressive", non-working class, ie capitalist goals. By doing so such alliances stifle the development of the class struggle and independent working-class politics. In some cases (eg France in 1936, Spain in 1936-7) this has meant saving capitalism's skin from the threat of working-class revolution; in Britain today it means a roadblock to the labour movement rebuilding itself after a long period of defeat.

Who could be against "social justice", "cultural innovation" and so on? The question is from what standpoint, with what class perspective, such abstractions are approached. Thus, for instance, the founding statement talks about "investment in good public services", but says nothing about the cuts and privatisation that not only Boris Johnson's administration but the Labour government are liberally doling out; it talks about anti-racism, but will criticise neither the immigration laws nor the racist brutality of London's police (who, remember, Livingstone has sought to defend from



By their friends shall you know them. Livingstone and Hugo Chavez

Johnson's criticism). It talks about "employment rights", but naturally says nothing about Livingstone's union-busting on London Underground.

The organisation's first "campaign" is against Boris Johnson's above-inflation increases in Tube and bus fares; no mention of the fact that Livingstone did the same thing while he was in office.

Of course, "Progressive London" cannot and has no wish to raise substantive working-class demands, being made up as it is of mildly dissident New Labour loyalists, Lib Dems, the right wing of the Green Party and other respectables.

Shortly after his defeat in May, Livingstone wrote an article in the *Guardian* that reveals the underlying character of his new organisation:

Following May 1 some people are posing the choice as between moving "to the left" or "to the right". This is not the right question. Labour must place itself at the centre of a progressive alliance that can solve the problems facing the country.

What are the key elements of this? There are three tasks for a government and a mayor — to ensure the country and London are an economic success; to ensure everyone shares in that success; and to ensure that success is sustainable in the long run through improving the environment.

Labour's campaign in London gained major support from

business. The Financial Times concluded that the majority of big business in London supported my re-election. There is no way to check that, but I know from meetings that very large sections of big business supported my campaign.

No surprise, given Livingstone's record, his love in with the City and property developers etc.

"Progressive London" is the organisational expression of this "progressive" business-based alliance. Livingstone must be hoping that in a few years enough London capitalists will have tired of Boris Johnson's quirkiness and unpredictability to swing a substantial section of business behind his campaign. He can then return to power on the same basis that he held it from 2000 to 2008: an unabashedly pro-business and anti-working class politician.

All genuine socialists must oppose labour movement involvement in this scheme. Instead we should fight for a labour movement alliance which campaigns to defend and extend the rights of working-class Londoners in the current crisis, and uses the 2012 elections as a platform to rebuild working-class political representation. For some ideas see the motion calling for independent working-class candidates passed by the RMT's London Transport Region in September 2007, reprinted at www.workersliberty.org/node/9270

How not to fight the BNP

ONE

Some on the left seem to have decided that the size of the leaked BNP membership list is bad news for the fascists.

"A weak divided party exposed", the Socialist Party headline tells us: the list "makes it clear that the BNP is a relatively small party... with just over 3,000 members classed as activists, it is welcome news that the BNP has capitalised so little on the enormous anger against New Labour, Tories and Lib Dems that exists."

The coverage in *Socialist Worker* has been more ambiguous on this point, but SWP members have also been using the argument that the BNP is still a very small party.

This misses the point spectacularly. Yes, compared to the main bourgeois parties, and in historical perspective, the BNP is very small. But it has grown spectacularly in the last ten years, and is now bigger than the organised far left.

In 1997, according to Nick Lowles of *Searchlight*, the party had 600 members; in 2000 this figure had risen to 3000; the new list is 13,500. Even if the number classed as activists in the strict sense is significantly lower, this is still a huge leap. As for having only 3,000 activists,

that is probably about three times bigger than the Socialist Party's entire membership!

We should not allow ourselves to be paralysed by the strength of the BNP, or imagine that the far right is an unstoppable juggernaut. But the danger seems to be rather that the left will lull itself to sleep, convinced that the news is not so bad after all.

TWO

SWP/Unite Against Fascism "leader" Weyman Bennett has undermined an anti-fascist protest again.

Having learnt nothing from the SWP's sectarian fiasco in Derbyshire in August, Bennett worked with the police to prevent anti-fascists from sweeping the BNP off Liverpool's streets on 29 November.

The BNP had announced it would be organising a national leafleting drive in the city at 11am. 250 activists, the majority local to Liverpool and with a strong labour movement presence, gathered that morning to oppose them.

A week before, 12 BNP members had been arrested and charged with distributing literature designed to incite racial hatred. In the event, however, the Attorney

General over-ruled the Merseyside police to insist that the fascists' racist propaganda derby was legitimate; the cops spent their day defending the fascists.

They had help from help from Bennett, who, advised by the police, announced that the BNP were not going to turn up. As a result, when 100 BNP members arrived at about 11.30am, the protest had shrunk to less than 100. The protest was swelled by passing locals disgusted at the presence of the BNP on the streets of their city, but prevented from fully confronting the fascists by overwhelming police force.

Then the police decided to move the demonstration on. Bennett, acting as their representative inside the anti-fascist movement, declared that the protest would have to retreat, but he had negotiated "five more minutes" of chanting. When the majority refused, he abandoned the protest, leaving it to be pushed away by the police.

This is getting seriously worrying. Twice in less than six months, the SWP has been so determined to undermine any anti-fascist protest it does not control that it has worked with the police to effectively protect the fascists from mass mobilisations. We need to make sure every labour movement activist, and every SWP member, knows what happened in Liverpool

CRISIS AND THE UNIONS

Programme needs a political voice

By PAT MURPHY

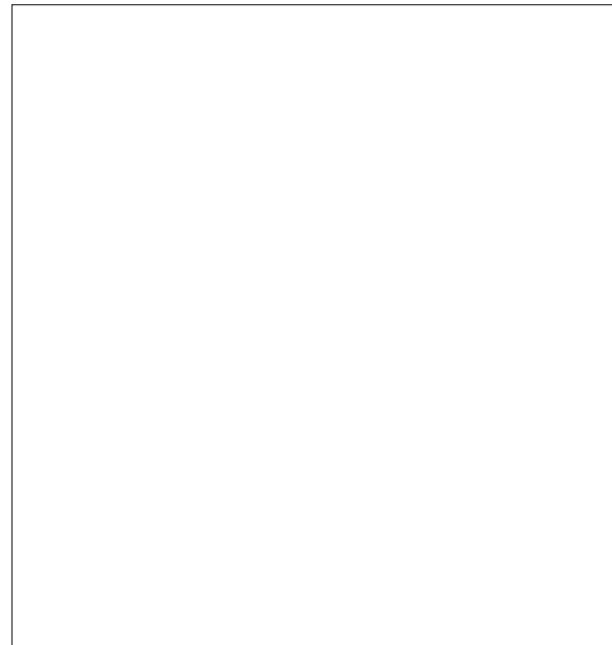
The November National Executive of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) carried a motion on the "Impact of the Economic Crisis". The motion was written and submitted by two left-wing Executive members, Ian Murch of the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union (CDFU) and Kevin Courtney of the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA).

The central idea behind the motion is a positive one — a call for the development of demands to be debated in each trades union and then decided on at a recalled TUC Conference and this to form a labour movement response to the economic crisis. It's an attempt to generate a debate across the trade union movement about a generalised workers response rather than a narrower focus on schools and education. More of an immediate problem is that the organisation being called upon to "develop and promulgate a set of demands" is the TUC and its affiliated unions.

The motion agreed that the demands under discussion should include:

- a progressive taxation system and the closure of tax loopholes exploited by the richest individuals and corporations who avoided, according to the TUC, £25 billion in tax avoidance in 2006
- a windfall tax on the super-profits of the energy companies
- pay rises no lower than inflation as measured by the RPI
- an end to house repossession "where the mortgage holder is in default through no fault of their own"
- a significant programme of house building
- a significant increase in public spending in particular on health and education and the ending of privatisation
- protection of employment and job creation
- commitments to increase state pensions and protect workers' pensions
- the removal of the anti-union laws
- a requirement for companies to open their books to scrutiny by trade unions.

There are plenty of gaps in the list of demands here as well as questions begged (who decides whether a mortgage holder has defaulted 'through no fault of their own?'). Opposition to privatisation is entirely uncontroversial in the trade union movement but nevertheless good and worth restating — not least by unions organising in the public services. But at a time when even the US and New Labour governments are taking

**We need a programme of house building**

over failing banks it is surely time to put the nationalisation of the banks and financial institutions, without compensation, at the heart of any workers' programme for the crisis. Maybe most important would be the addition of a demand on reduced working hours without loss of pay. This would relate both to the urgent need in teaching to tackle workload — the problem that is the single biggest reason for people leaving the job — and to the need to create additional jobs as a response to the threat of mass unemployment.

A distinctly positive aspect of the NUT motion, however, is that it seeks to encourage action across the trade union movement in support of these demands. Part of the call on the TUC and affiliated unions is to "take the demands that are agreed to their members and to ballot where appropriate for co-ordinated industrial action aimed at getting the government to adopt them".

Pursuing this policy will, of course, come up against the conservative behemoth that is the TUC, but there is no easy way round that problem, and it is surely right for socialists in affiliated unions to demand that the TUC adopts policies that defend workers and fights for them. In any case the NUT motion doesn't rely only on that — it commits the Union Executive to "work to

achieve the above demands through the TUC and through co-operation with other unions willing to engage in joint campaigns".

The most significant gap in the NUT motion is likely to exist in any current trade union response to the crisis. Note that the call to action sets the aim of "getting the government to agree to adopt them". As long as we have the choice only of a rampantly free-market New Labour government or an equally neo-liberal Tory government trade unions will, of course, have to rely on industrial action to impose our interests and policies on them. That is to say to impose policies with which they flatly disagree, which fly in the face of the powerful interests they represent and serve.

This is always possible but it sets us the task of persistently organising the sort of mass co-ordinated action not seen in Britain since the 1970s. Any half-way adequate economic programme for the trade union movement during the present crisis, the NUT motion seriously fought for included, is in fact a programme for government. It is a programme for a very different kind of government — a government arising from and accountable to the trade union and labour movement itself. Neither the NUT, which has a very limited political fund which does not allow it to support election candidates, nor any other union, has seriously grasped this nettle.

It is a very positive thing that the NUT has adopted a generalised statement on the economic crisis and that it calls on the TUC and affiliated unions to debate and develop a programme of demands and to act on them by public campaigning and co-ordinated industrial action. It is critical, however, that the development of any such programme brings the trade union movement back on to the political stage as an independent force — independent, that is, from capitalist politics and irreconcilably for the workers.

Whether affiliated to Labour or not, trade union activists now urgently need to consider what candidates they will support in future elections to advance the chances that demands like those in the NUT motion are adopted by government — the best and most left-wing of Labour, our own trade-union and community based candidates, a combination of both? It would make sense for this to be decided collectively across unions, perhaps through revived, re-energised local trades' councils.

Ultimately, however, this will raise again the need for a workers voice in politics at a national level. We cannot hope to implement a workers programme for the crisis without fighting for a workers' government.

WORKERS' REPRESENTATION

Support the 10 January conference!

By RHODRI EVANS

The rail union RMT has called a workers' representation conference for 10 January 2009 at Friends House on Euston Road, London (11:00-15:00).

There are rumours that the PCS civil service union may also sponsor the conference. Matt Wrack, general secretary of the firefighters' union FBU, has told Solidarity that he will be asking RMT to approach FBU to co-sponsor the conference.

But in any case it is an important initiative, one originating from a motion originating from AWL which got passed at the RMT's Annual General Meeting this year.

Though confidence on the issue is not yet high, many activists feel the need for the labour movement to recover a political voice now that the Brown-Blair Labour Party has definitely stifled any say for the organised working class.

A conference on the same issue called by RMT in January 2006 was so full that over 100 people were turned away, unable to fit into the hall.

The 2006 conference took no motions, and it is not clear whether the 2009 one will. But AWL members

will be pushing motions in their union branches, for debate at the conference if that is feasible, and if not to go up through the usual structures of the unions.

We propose: *"This branch believes that the working class needs our own independent political representation."*

We resolve to send delegates to the conference on working-class political representation which the RMT has called for 10 January.

Our delegates should support moves at that conference to set up a Workers' Representation Movement, based on affiliations from working-class organisations.

That could be done by the RMT calling a delegate meeting for this Workers' Representation Movement, to establish a committee, basic rules and procedures. All unions and socialist groups should be invited to send delegates.

The Workers' Representation Movement should campaign to revive trades councils to form the basis of local workers' representation committees - campaigning bodies of trade unionists, socialists and working class campaigns.

The Workers' Representation Movement will help to identify and build support for socialist candidates in elections who deserve working-class support, recognising that some may be socialist Labour candidates, others non-Labour socialist candidates".

We will also be arguing for RMT in London to approach other unions to set up a cross-London committee with the aim of supporting Trades Councils or other representative working-class bodies in standing socialist candidates in the London borough elections of 2010.

Initiatives may also be possible in other areas. Nottinghamshire Trades Council is already organising a workers' representation conference for its area, to take place in February 2009.

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WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

City greed may cost you your health!

BY ALISON BROWN

Alistair Darling is seeking £5 billion spending cuts in the public sector, and he seems to have the National Health Service in sight to provide the majority of these cuts.

Despite saying that the bail out of the banks would not be at the cost of public services, Darling is pressing ahead with a programme of "cost savings". That means the NHS must prepare for a substantial cut in planned funding from 2010.

It means cost-cutting in clinical areas, cheap-

er procedures, and that will mean cutting back on the safety of patients by cutting corners. It will also mean cuts in staffing as the quickest way for the parts of the health service to cut costs to meet their targets.

With the private sector seen as the model for "efficiency", there will be a greater role for "consultants" and the rush toward "lean production methods". All of that comes with big fees and increasing the workload of already pressed staff.

The cost of bankers' greed may ultimately be the health of the nation – and in the first instance of the working class.

Bangladeshi textile workers tour Britain

Between 3 and 11 December the anti-sweatshop campaign, No Sweat, will be touring with members of the National Garment Workers Federation of Bangladesh.

This grassroots union federation has been at the frontline of a recent wave of strikes and riots. Like the shopworkers in this country, the garment workers of Bangladesh have never felt any benefit from the bumper profits made by the high-street giants. From garment workers being paid 14p an hour through to checkout staff in London on £6 an hour, surplus value is extracted at every opportunity, with each hour of sweated labour contributing to Tesco's £2.8 billion, Primark's £111 million, H&M's £1.07 billion profits last year...

More on page 11

Tour details: www.nosweat.org.uk

Squeeze on single parents

Still very
“New”
Labour

BY DARREN BEDFORD.

New Labour Work and Pensions Secretary James Purnell is redoubling his efforts to be crowned most vicious bastard in Parliament by unveiling new plans to force single parents into work once their child reaches the age of one.

In the context of other New Labour welfare policies, the move reaffirms the government's utter contempt for some of the most vulnerable and exploited people in British society. Last year, the government "reformed" incapacity benefit along similar lines to tie it much more closely to claimants' ability (or "readiness") to work.

A government report from economist Professor Paul Gregg calls for a comprehensive extension of "conditionality" in the benefits system — that is, making people's ability to claim benefits conditional on them proving their potential usefulness, to the capitalist labour market. A government source, gleefully reported in the *Daily Mail*, promised that "there would be sanctions applied to those who refused to take up the support offered."

The message is clear; agree to be herded into work, or get kicked off benefits.

The proposals are particularly obscene in the context of job losses and sharply increasing unemployment. The jobs that are available in today's climate are invariably low-paid, highly exploited and incredibly precarious. The government doesn't care what kind of work single parents and disabled people are forced into, as long as capital can get its hands on their labour power.

Capitalism is based on the subordination of human society to the needs of profit. The logic of a welfare system, even within a capitalist state, cuts against that and points to a different set of interests — those of human need — above the interests of capital. The idea that human beings deserve to live decent lives regardless of their usefulness as determined and assessed by bosses and the state is hardly even a radical one.

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