

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

Volume 3 No 153 11 June 2009 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

**BARROW
SCHOOL
STUDENTS
STRIKE** PAGE 5

**TUBE
WORKERS'
STRIKE**
CENTRE PAGES

**ASSESSING
OBAMA**
PAGE 10

BNP gains: racist bigots win centre-stage

Build working-class anti-fascist campaigns!

“Back anything but BNP” line is not enough

By CHARLIE SALMON

The election of two fascists, Nick Griffin and Andrew Brons, to the European Parliament is a dangerous development in British politics. If the labour movement and left do not respond with a dramatic, serious and co-ordinated campaign of working-class answers to the British National Party, the fascists' ability to pump out hate-fuelled ideology will grow, and maybe rapidly.

Establishment politicians labelled the victory as “shameful”, “a dark day”, “disastrous”. But all the shamefaced hand-wringing in the world will not undo Griffin's victory, nor will it address why the BNP won and what they might do next.

New Labour, the Tories, and those in the mainstream press who endorse the politicians' hypocritical pronouncements on the BNP, stand politically exposed, disarmed and futile. These are the people who have backed the bankers' bail-out, stood aside when job cuts are made and for many years created

the conditions for the BNP to grow in strength — a society governed by profit, where the poor are punished for being poor, migrants are scapegoated. These people are incapable of assessing and addressing the rise in fascist politics. That task will have to fall to others — the unions, the labour movement, the activist left.

The BNP has already managed to firmly establish itself. It could do much more with the £4 million it can get from the wages and expenses of its MEPs.

- The BNP campaigned energetically in the North West, West Midlands, East Midlands and Yorkshire. They raised and spent hundreds of thousands of pounds, talked to many thousands of people and won the support of close to one million in the polls.

- Their organisational strategy, demonstrated in local elections over a number of years now, is much stronger than its right-wing cousin the UK Independence Party (which has also benefited from “European money”).

- Whilst in the recent election UKIP benefited

most from a deep and unchallenged strain of national-chauvinism in British politics (which is most “acceptably” expressed through anti-European sloganeering), the economic crisis and political sleaze, beating Labour into third place, they have no real “grass-roots” organisation. The BNP works hard to develop groups and structures clustered around localised bases of support

- Where UKIP members live off existing nationalism, xenophobia and racism, the BNP creates specific ideological campaigns and policies around those ideas, the better to build permanent organisation.

- The core of BNP members is a small, educated and coherent unit. Other members are “sympathisers”, financial donors and are relatively inactive. Extra funding will help the BNP expand and solidify its core membership. As the centre grows, the periphery will also expand. That kind of expansion will lead to physical threats to ethnic and sexual minorities and the labour movement.

Continued on page 2

Photo: Paul Hermann/reportdigital.co.uk

**Build a new socialist
alliance** page 3

**Unions should call Labour
to order** back page

BNP GAINS

Build working-class anti-fascist campaigns!

Continued from page 2

Right now the workers' movement is weak and the bosses are strong. History shows us that where there is a strong, militant and dynamic workers movement, fascist opposition can be spurred into action with the support of desperate elements in the capitalist class. Where the workers movement is weak, non-combative and badly led, fascist groups can grow under their own steam and without effective opposition. We live in such times today.

Even without an electoral victory, many opportunities and a political climate — such as the racist riot in Luton reported in the last issue of *Solidarity* — have been created for the fascists. The BNP have harnessed backward-looking ideas rooted in capitalist society, ideas which come to the forefront in times of crisis — such as nationalism and hostility to immigrants — and use them as an alternative explanation for the ever growing ills of modern capitalist society. Right now the fascists' take on events could gain widespread resonance.

This is especially true because the traditional political home of working-class support and votes, the Labour Party, has been hijacked by a clique of neo-liberal ideologues. And our trade unions — even the best of them — are in the hands of people who demonstrate little intention of shaping an adequate response to the economic crisis. The organised left is very weak and much of it has, in the recent past, has through its priorities and actions, made itself an irrelevance to working-class people.

Two recent features of this political impotence show clearly what we mean. In the election the official anti-fascist groups used the slogan "Don't Vote Nazi" indicating that they don't mind if

workers vote for the anti-working class policies of the Tories or even the nationalism of UKIP, just as long as they *don't vote Nazi*. We also saw the abject political bankruptcy of the RMT, Communist Party and Socialist Party's "No2EU" slate which was an attempt to harness national-chauvinism (anti-Europeanism) with an opportunistic "left" spin. Both of these tactics cut across building a strong, class-based anti-fascist movement.

But the labour movement is not the same things as its leaders. Socialist politics and people don't have to be defined by the mistakes and policies of the past. Alternative, working-class based, anti-fascist campaigns *are* possible. Workers can fight back. The idea of socialists and militant combining in an effective campaign is not sterile, nor without support.

A general election must be called within twelve months — maybe sooner. The BNP fascists are already preparing to build on their electoral gains. The economic crisis has yet to reach its most brutal limits. Faced with these facts socialists have a responsibility to act. No other group, no other set of ideas are adequate to the task of routing fascism, explaining how to fight back against the economic crisis and forming political alternatives.

We will not apologise for airing our sharp disagreements with other socialists as we engage with these tasks. But we do need to draw conclusions and make urgent plans for action.

The leaders of Unite Against Fascism and other anti-fascist and anti-racist organisations have issued calls for "unity across the political spectrum". UAF's post-election newsletter carries comments from newly re-appointed cabinet minister Peter Hain and the fake left former mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. Unity — working class unity across race, gender and sexuality — is necessary in the fight against fas-

cism. But this should not mean promoting politicians like Hain and Livingstone or keeping our criticisms of the Labour Party and government under our hats.

If we are to forge strong working-class unity against the BNP we need honest political accounting, democratic structures and a political plan.

A working class campaign against fascism would:

- Seek to mobilise sections of the working class through trade unions and other working-class organisations.
- Work in minority communities to mobilise and organise anti-fascist sentiment on a clear, political basis, seeking to provide answers to economic and social problems and unite all workers.
- Would have an open and accountable democratic structures.
- Would be accountable to the local labour movement and campaigners.

Anti-fascism is not an end in itself. We also need to get the trade unions to organise their memberships and present alternatives to the BNP, and such a campaign can help inspire and organise for that alternative. So we also need a workers' plan, a clearly spelt out programme for the wider issues of the economy and society.

We also need to address the issue of working class representation in politics. The most common question posed to anti-fascist campaigners is "Who do I vote for?"

Solidarity advocates a vote for Labour where no working-class socialist candidates exist. We want far better candidates than the current crop of Labour politicians — candidates based on working-class organisations and socialist politics. We do not want the BNP, UKIP and a renewed right-wing Tory Party to make gains. We advocate the left begin to organise together and stand political-solid socialist candidates; within that

context this is something working-class-based anti-fascist groups could consider doing. We want all trade unions to organise their rank-and-file in a fight for working-class political representation. These things, combined, are what we need to do to begin recomposing a workers' party, a party that provide an overall political alternative to the fascist BNP.

A Workers' Plan for the Crisis

Capitalism's crisis and how the labour movement should respond

32 pages including:

Understanding the crisis • "Bosses' socialism" vs workers' socialism • How the fight for reforms can transform the labour movement • How to fight for jobs, homes and services for all • Organise the unorganised, renew the labour movement • The fight for a workers' government

£3 waged, £1.50 unwaged from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA.

SCOTLAND

Left needs to regroup

By Stan Croke

At 28.6% the turn-out for the Euro-elections in Scotland was lower than last week's overall turn-out at an all-British level (slightly under 33%). But in the weeks leading up to 4 June there was little visible sign that elections were pending.

As elsewhere big loser in the elections was the Labour Party. Its share of the vote declined from over 26% in 2004 to just under 21%. Although this was much better than Labour's national average of 15%, it was an appalling result in the context of Labour's traditional domination of Scottish politics.

The slump in support for Labour did not benefit the Tories, Lib Dems or UKIP. Nor did the BNP — assuming that many BNP voters are alienated Labour voters — capitalise on Labour's losses. They scored 2.5% in the elections (compared with 6% at a national level), representing an increase of less than 1%.

It was the SNP which topped the poll in Scotland as a whole and in most regions within Scotland. Overall, its

share of the vote increased by over 9% to 29%.

In the context of New Labour's record in power at Westminster, New Labour's record out of power at Holyrood, the collapse of Labour's control of local authorities in Scotland after the introduction of proportional representation for council elections, the scandal of Labour MPs milking the expenses system, and the disintegration of the Labour Cabinet in the run-up to polling day, a jump in support for the SNP was only to be expected.

But the jump in support was probably more than the SNP realistically expected. In recent months the SNP has faced increased criticism for its support for public sector pay "restraint" and the ineffectiveness of its Scottish Futures Trust (supposedly an alternative to Private Finance Initiatives). The scandal over MPs has not left the SNP entirely unscathed either.

In Scotland the left vote was split three ways, with the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) standing a full slate of candidates.

The Socialist Labour Party did best, picking up 2% of the vote (22,135 votes).

But the SLP has no more than a handful of members in Scotland. It has no visible profile, and no record of campaigning. (In any case the generally accepted theory is that SLP voters think that they are voting for the Labour Party.)

The SSP and No2EU both scored more or less 0.9% of the vote, but with the SSP slightly ahead (10,404, compared with 9,693 for No2EU). These are very bad scores.

No2EU might try to console itself with the thought that it came from virtually nowhere — although, in fact, it emerged from the fossilised remains of British Stalinism, with nominal support grafted on from the RMT — but still managed to contest the Euro-elections throughout mainland Britain and pick up around 1% of the vote.

Given the nature of its politics, however, it is not even clear whether it picked up support from the left or from the right. If No2EU came from nowhere, it can now return there — and with no loss to the left.

The SSP vote was dismal, slightly up on its 2007 Scottish Parliament elections

(if only from 0.62% to 0.94%). But the number of votes actually cast for the SSP declined from 12,731 in 2007 to 10,404 in 2009.

To its credit, though, the SSP mustered enough resources to contest the elections, and did so as part of the European Anti-Capitalist Left. Unlike No2EU, it did raise some basic socialist ideas in the course of the election campaign. But its limited resources — after the split of 2006, and the loss of all its MSPs the following year — meant that it lacked the profile needed to become a real pole of attraction.

The very poor performance of the left underlines the need for the organisations of the left in Scotland to seriously address the question of left regroupment and left electoral alliances.

And given that the SSP had no problem signing up to the European Anti-Capitalist Left, it would be perverse if it were to boycott a similar initiative in Britain, i.e. a British-wide "alliance of the left" standing a single slate of candidates in the next Westminster elections.

LABOUR MELTDOWN, BNP GAINS

Build a Socialist Alliance to fight back!

AN APPEAL TO SOCIALIST AND WORKING-CLASS ORGANISATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

In the 2009 Euro elections, the fascist British National Party increased its percentage of the vote and won two seats. If UKIP leader Nigel Farage's claim that he reaped £2 million in expenses in his last term as a Euro MP is a model, that means £4 million extra for BNP funds. UKIP polled second with 16 percent. The right-wing nationalist English Democrats won mayor of Doncaster. The Conservatives are heading for power.

After more than a decade of attacking working-class people, Labour's vote collapsed. And yet there was no substantial socialist election campaign to offer an alternative.

Racism and reaction are on the rise — as shown not just by the election results, but by incidents like the recent anti-Muslim rioting in Luton. All this must be serious cause for alarm.

In order to reach workers and young people angry about the crisis and the mainstream parties' pandering to the bankers and bosses, we need to build something like the Socialist Alliance — the coalition of the main activist-left groups and many unaffiliated socialists which in the 2001 general election stood candidates in 98 constituencies — as one step towards a new working-class political party.

Otherwise the right and far right will continue to gain from the anger and despair.

The left should unite in a Socialist Alliance to put forward working-class socialist answers to the crisis: jobs for all workers; open the books; nationalisation under workers' control of firms cutting jobs; full nationalisation and democratic control of the banks and finance system. We should fight for independent working-class representation in politics, and for a workers' government, based on the organisations of the labour movement.

We should unite in day-to-day action in support of struggles like Visteon; the schools actions in Glasgow, London and Barrow; and the Tube battle over jobs, pay and union rights; and to organise the left and the rank and file in the workers' movement.

The working class needs to reject and fight nationalism and racism. Workers can only deal with the crisis by organising together across ethnic backgrounds, across differences of origin and across borders. The crisis is creating huge pressures towards protectionism and the raising of economic barriers between countries. We need a united socialist voice for working-class solidarity and unity across Europe, to take on the bosses and level up towards decent jobs, services and rights for all — fighting for a workers' Europe.

We the undersigned:

- Call on the activist left groups, including the SWP, Socialist Party, and Scottish Socialist Party, to meet to discuss setting up a new Socialist Alliance;
- Pledge to support efforts to create local Socialist

Alliances.

- Add your support to this appeal by emailing unity.2009@yahoo.co.uk. And download a copy of the text as pdf to circulate hand-to-hand.

www.workersliberty.org/newsocialistalliance

SWP changes tack?

The SWP has issued a letter calling for left unity and the organisation of "a conference of all those committed to presenting candidates representing working-class interests".

The letter is a positive development, in that it suggests the SWP may now realise it will have to work with other socialists if the left is to be rebuilt. We have written to the SWP proposing a meeting to discuss collaboration.

At the same time there will have to be some reckoning about what went wrong last time, about why the fledgling unity that existed in the old Socialist Alliance was destroyed in favour of the divisive and opportunistic Respect adventure, which ended with the left in a much weaker state.

Also we have to be clear that we need not just an electoral coalition, but an ongoing alliance that will seek to put down roots in the workplaces, unions and communities.

With all that in mind, the SWP's call should be welcomed. We hope other socialist organisations will respond.

Ideas for Freedom 2009 10-12 July

Friday 10 July: evening film showing and social at the Bread & Roses pub, 68 Clapham Manor Street, London SW4

We will be showing *With Babies and Banners*, the story of women's role in the great sit-down strike against General Motors at Flint in 1936, a strike that helped launch the modern US labour movement.

Visteon worker Debra Narey will also speak about their occupation.

Saturday 11-Sunday 12 July: School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1H

Saturday night social. Cheap food, free creche and accommodation will be provided.

Sessions will include (full agenda online)

How economic crises transform politics / Lessons of the Visteon dispute, with Visteon workers and Visteon support group activists / Women and the crisis: a Marxist-feminist critique of the Fawcett Society's report on women and the recession / How do we stop the BNP? Workers' Liberty debates Sam Tarry from Searchlight / Can we win free education? Where is the student movement going? Workers' Liberty and Education Not for Sale debates NUS President Wes Streeting / Can we build a worker-climate movement alliance? A discussion with Climate Camp activists / Should we boycott Israel? / Why you should read Marx's Capital / What's wrong

with anarchism? / 1959: Who made the Cuban revolution? Is Cuba socialist? Paul Hampton of Workers' Liberty debates Rock Around the Blockade / 1979: Revolution and counter-revolution in Iran, with Iranian socialist activists / 1984-5: Introduction to the miners' strike / 1989: Revolution in Eastern Europe and China / Activists from France's New Anti-Capitalist Party on the rising tide of class struggle in France / Workers' fight against the army and the Taliban in Pakistan / The left, local community struggles and workers' representation: Janine Booth introduces her new book on the Poplar Council struggle / The politics of social work and child protection

Cheap rates for bookings before the end of May: £18 waged, £13 low-waged/students, £7 unwaged for the weekend. (Day tickets are also available.)

Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas or email awl@workersliberty.org

IN BRIEF

COLLEGE WORKERS: The 2009 Congress of the University and College Union, held at the end of May, was dominated, on both the Higher and the Further Education sides, by the UCU Left (itself dominated by the SWP); particularly so on the FE side.

On the other hand, the officials of the union are divided into two camps. On the FE side the officials put in place by the ex-NATFHE general secretary Paul Mackney remain there, and are a pragmatic, cautious centre-left block.

On the HE side, the officials are from AUT, selected by the more traditionally right-wing leadership of the current general secretary, Sally Hunt.

A recipe for a conflict between the leadership and the activists? Actually no. Most votes at conference saw very little conflict.

This is partially a result of defeats. In September 2008 a special rejected the call for strike action in FE over pay. Even before that, the SWP-led UCU left had fallen in with the officials' strategy of building up campaigning, branch and organisational structures in the unions while having selective strike actions in strong branches to win previous pay awards that have not been honoured by some colleges.

The 2009 conference was preceded by the collapse of a ballot on action over pay in HE, probably due to official incompetence over membership lists, but the ballot would probably not have delivered a yes vote anyway.

The UCU Left has developed an approach which on the one hand emphasises non-industrial "radicalism" (which translates into things such as the Israel boycott), while on the other hand accepting the officials' strategy on pay and conditions. We now face attacks on pay (FE lecturers have been offered 1% next year) and worse to come in the public sector, yet the UCU left conference with nothing more than a promise on how to legally boycott Israel. Any proposals to democratise the union by electing officials, any clear plan to build towards national action were entirely absent.

The AWL will be arguing for a democratic fighting rank and file in the UCU in the coming months. Links with other public sector unions need to be built — at branch and rank and file level — if we are to be equipped to face the certain onslaught on the public sector in the coming years.

BOYCOTT DEBATE: the boycott of Israeli academia was debated at UCU conference for the third year running.

UCU does not hold an effective policy of boycott, because that has been ruled illegal, but it has passed numerous motions in support of a boycott of Israeli academics by calling on workers in colleges and universities in the UK "to reflect on the moral and political appropriateness of collaboration" with our peers in Israel etc. There is also "recognition" of Hamas as "the democratically elected Gaza government", which stops deliberately short of any honest political assessment of this Islamist party.

This year only one speech (by me) was taken against a boycott tactic because many of the people who would have opposed the tactic have either stopped engaging with the structures of the union or have resigned.

An amendment to a motion on anti-Semitism at this year's conference proposed an investigation into the number of resignations from Jewish UCU members "apparently in connection with perceptions of institutional anti-Semitism". It was voted down. On what grounds? This was a "wrecking" amendment. And, "we're only talking about a few dozen resignations" so what does it matter?

Our response to the UCU Left and grassroots union activists on the question of the boycott must be to both propose an alternative course of action in solidarity with the Palestinians, and to stay in the

UNISON CONFERENCES

Prepare to defend services!

BY A CONFERENCE DELEGATE

When public sector union Unison meets in Brighton (14-19 June) it should use the opportunity to develop a collective response to the economic and political crisis. The main political parties want to cut public sector spending in order to claw back the billions spent in bailing out the banks. We need to meet this challenge. Unfortunately our union is currently politically and organisationally disarmed.

Local Government conference will see debates around defending services in the face of swingeing cuts. The union needs to have a national campaign to inform and unite local struggles. Local branches should not be left to fight alone.

When that happened over the implementation of "Single Status" it led to inequalities in pay and conditions between authorities. The current round of cuts could lead to an increase in differentials, finally and fatally undermining existing national agreements.

The formal agenda of the National Conference has many pages of worthy words but little that, if passed, could inform and direct an effective campaign in

union to fight for it. The atmosphere of hostility and irrationalism at UCU conference during this debate, for the past three years, makes such a task less than appealing; take the gloating comments written by one delegate from LSE, Michael Cushman, after the vote this year:

"It was brilliant. The Zionists barely showed up. John Pike [of Engage] was totally isolated. On the first vote about investigating institutional anti-semitism in UCU he got about 6 votes out of 350. [...] On the key motion there were only two speakers against Pike and a woman from Workers' Liberty. When the president asked for other speakers against no one put their hand up. The vote was on my estimate about 300-30 (we should have asked for a count to rub salt into the wound). [...] What we must remember this was a victory built not just on hard work but even more on 1400 murders in Gaza".

The crimes of the Israeli state and military are utterly deplorable, but the one thing that taints many on the British Left on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is their emotionally irrational singling-out of Israel and their conflation of the crimes of the ruling class with ordinary workers. Is there any working class in the world that is written-off by the large sections of the British left as intrinsically defunct other than the Israeli working class?

The urge to "do something" to help the dire and enduring plight of the Palestinians is a good political instinct. Arguing for, voting on and carrying out a boycott of Israeli workers might feel good for those of us from afar desperate to progress the Palestinian cause, but it is tactically wrong and driven (for some but not all) by an implicit but real, left-wing anti-Semitism. What UCU needs is a serious and committed "Links not Boycott" campaign.

Camila Bassi

GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL: Street sweepers, parks staff and road workers are set to strike on Friday 12 June in opposition to new contracts.

Last month the Council's £125,000-a-year Director of Land and Environmental Services wrote to over a thousand workers in his Department offering them the "choice" of a new contract or dismissal.

At the core of the new contract is a switch from the current five-day working

defence of jobs and services. Many motions have been ruled out of order to limit debate on more radical options. The leadership seem too tied to New Labour to take advantage of the current political crisis to press for an end to privatisation, PFI etc.

In the elections for the National Executive Committee the left did not make gains which could have changed that stance. The joint "reclaim the union" slate at best maintained the status quo, with only the Socialist Party making definite gains. In the health sector the left failed to win a seat. We need to analyse the results, and the very low turnout.

Workers' Liberty supporters will continue to argue that a narrow focus on elections while the activist base and levels of branch activity decline cannot be the basis for a revival of militancy inside the union.

The current victimisations of left activists are another symptom of the broader democratic deficit inside the union. Officials, both appointed and elected, must be open to challenge and being held accountable. That has to start by building local branches and networks of activist in local areas, thereby creating a force embedded in workplaces that can fight both local struggles and take up the fight to organise politically inside the union for democratic change.

week to a rolling four-day working week — four days on, then four days off. The different working pattern will disrupt employees' social arrangements and family life. Weekend and evening working will now be part of the ordinary working week.

Extra pay for working evenings will disappear (because of the introduction of an eleven-hour working day) and extra pay for weekend working will likewise be scrapped.

Current rates of pay for many of the workers amount to no more than £200 a week take-home. They are dependent on overtime and bonuses for weekend working to achieve even a half-decent wage.

Council employees have been pressurised into accepting the new contract, some staff have even been threatened in one-to-one meetings with dismissal.

The Council claims that over 600 staff have now signed the new contract.

But a ballot of the 766 GMB members among those affected resulted in a two-to-one vote in favour strike action, on a turnout of over 60%. Unite and UNISON members (about 200) have also voted in favour of strike action. The strike is due to start just seven hours before the deadline for signing the new contracts.

The new working patterns are a simply a way of saving money — to the tune of some £5 million.

The main union involved in this dispute, the GMB, is well-known for being a union run by regional barons, with minimal opportunities for assertions of rank-and-file control. This makes it all the more important for this strike to be under the control of an inter-union co-ordinating committee, linking up with other Council employees in dispute with the Council, and also with local campaigns, such as Save Our Schools.

NHS: Leicester hospital cleaners, porters, catering staff and other low paid workers are to ballot for industrial action after bosses claimed they could not afford to meet a national agreement aimed at ending the "two tier workforce".

The national framework agreement was agreed in 2005, and should have led to contracted-out staff receiving the same pay, terms and conditions as those directly employed by the NHS. But since the details were left to local negotiations, actual improvements in pay have been slow to materialise.

This "rank and file perspective" should be at the heart of any talk of left regroupment, and the debate that needs to be had in branches and workplaces in the year to come.

• A number of motions on the "Baby Peter" case have been submitted to the Local Government Conference. The main focus is rightly about the pressures that Social Workers face on the frontline — unmanageably high caseload levels the business model where tick boxes and targets are more important than direct work with children and families.

Unison already has a 10-point plan for protecting vulnerable children. It is very good, and if implemented would do a lot to protect children e.g. joint visits, lower caseload levels which are agreed nationally and independently inspected etc. But the union has no plan for how to fight to get this implemented. Any such plan would have to include a serious recruitment and organising drive within Children's Services. One amendment argues for such a strategy, for supporting branches in fighting for implementation of the plan, supporting social workers in dispute and encouraging branches to link up over these issues.

A social worker

The unions have no clear figures on how widely the agreement has been implemented. While the Government says it should be implemented in full, the contractors claim that many places have seen only partial implementation.

The NHS Trust which runs the Leicester's three hospitals made a £3 million surplus last year but, having delayed implementing the terms and conditions element of the deal for three years, says it cannot afford to backdate the payments. Staff working for Serco, Medirest and ISS at the three hospitals have refused to accept this, and rejected the Trust's proposals.

Where there is a strong union, members are receiving the benefits from the agreement; but where the unions are weak many contractor staff are still barely earning above the national minimum wage, or have been forced into making concessions in order to secure increases.

The Leicester fight is important as it illustrates that even in the midst of the economic crisis workers can be motivated to fight for improvements in their pay and conditions, and because it sets down a marker, even at a late stage, that we should not be accepting any backtracking from the full national framework agreement. Other branches where the full deal has not yet been implemented should be looking to coordinate action with Leicester.

Solidarity messages for the Leicester health workers can go to UNISON at 92 Welford Road, Leicester, LE1 7AB or by email to office@leicestershirehealthunison.org.uk

How do we end immigration controls? Stop deportations. Justice for migrant workers. No one is illegal. Saturday 20 June 1pm-5pm School of Oriental and African Studies (Russell Square). An event to discuss ideas and plan action to tackle racism and work for a society where no one is illegal.

ACADEMIES

Students strike against school sell-off

BY MARTIN THOMAS

On Monday 1 June, the first day back after half-term, hundreds of students at Parkview School in Barrow-in-Furness walked out of their school hall to stage a protest on the school sports fields.

The head teacher, who had previously licensed students expressing opposition to the school being closed to make way for an Academy, told the Year 7 to 10 students in assembly that the protest must not go ahead. But, as year 10 student Megan Rose said, “They tried to talk us down to stop us from protesting. If we didn’t come out it would have shown we had lost, but we are going to win”. Phil Solloway, an anti-academies activist and father of a student at Parkview, told *Solidarity*: “The Year 10s had organised it all, and pulled the whole school together”. Year 11 students joined them after a GCSE exam.

The head teacher decided to close the school on Tuesday morning after students said they would strike. The local *North-West Evening Mail* reported: “On hearing the news that the school was closed in the morning some pupils said they were planning to arrive at school at about 1pm to protest again with banners. Laura Storey, 15, said: ‘We want to show we were not just doing it yesterday to get out of lessons’.”

Students at Thorncliffe School, which also faces closure to be replaced by the Academy, also protested on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Mike Stephenson, an activist in the anti-academies campaign “Our Schools Are Not For Sale” (OSANFS), and father of a student at Thorncliffe, told *Solidarity*: “I went to Parkview on Monday. The kids’ behaviour was impeccable. I’m proud of them. The best thing from this campaign will be if the children come out of it learning that if you protest, then you can make a difference. The shame is that adults are trying to stamp them down”.

25 students at Thorncliffe were suspended for four days (though the head teacher says this is for “disruptive behaviour”, not for protesting).

Mike Stephenson explained some of the background: “We have been campaigning against the closure of the schools for 18 months now. But the action this week has

come purely from the pupils themselves”.

According to the paper, “Pupils decided to organise [the] protest as they broke up for half-term on May 22 [after] they heard some of their teachers did not get jobs in the Academy”.

Mike Stephenson continued, “Unfortunately, on Monday, the teachers were told to stay by the school buildings, and I didn’t see any of them coming down to support the students. Our campaign had some backing from the teachers’ union reps a year ago, but since then they seem to have got cold feet.

“The county council is trying to justify the closures on grounds of falling rolls, but as far as we can see the rolls are not

falling. Three schools are due to close to be replaced by an Academy to be run on two of the existing sites, Parkview and Thorncliffe, while the third site, Alfred Barrow, will be shut completely. New buildings are promised, but not until three years’ time.

“Why fewer teachers, if there are the same number of students?

“Despite the fact that the Academy is supposed to be about raising standards for the students who most need help, it looks as if many of the students from Alfred Barrow, which serves quite deprived areas and has 50% of its student with ‘special educational needs’, won’t necessarily get into the Academy.

“Our campaign ran candidates in several wards in the County Council elections on 4 June. I’m disappointed that I didn’t win in my ward [Mike Stephenson got 724 votes in Hawcoat, beaten by a Tory with 899], but after all, we’re only a group of mums and dads, running against the big parties. Lisa Hammond won in Parkside, the ward covering Parkview School.

“Another independent has been elected, separately from our campaign, who is against the Academy, and the Socialist People’s Party [a local left party] won Ormsgill, the ward covering Thorncliffe School.

“Labour and Conservatives are both for the Academy. [Up to 4 June, Labour was running a minority administration in Cumbria County Council, but for most of the last eight years there has been a Lib Dem-Tory coalition. After 4 June, the Tories are the biggest party, but without a majority].

“Four of us were elected to the borough council last year. There is a group of about a dozen of us, who meet weekly. We ran a petition, and collected six thousand signatures on the streets, up to Christmas 2007. We’ve lobbied councillors, and we’re supporting a legal challenge in the High Court.

“I’m not a big political person myself. But if anything good can come of the present crisis, I’d like to see Labour go back more to the grass roots, to working-class people, to what the unions stand for.

“Otherwise you can get people like the BNP.

“We realise that in the long term you have to have an opinion on the whole range of issues.

“The Socialist People’s Party were upset because we voted with the Tories on the council budget, but then the Tories see us as allied to the Socialist People’s Party.

“Now we have a member in the County Council, we will work to lobby others in the council, and to unite all the strands of opposition to the Academy — students, teachers, parents”.

Jim Hamezein is the leader of the Socialist People’s Party. He spoke to *Solidarity* about the background and perspectives of the SPP.

“I was a member of the Labour Party for many years. In 1993 I recruited a lot of people to my ward in Ormsgill, and we had been campaigning against the poll tax. I stood for the council and was elected, but soon the borough council [then Labour-controlled] dramatically cut many services. Four of us voted against the Labour whip on those cuts. The Labour Party suspended the four councillors from the party and then expelled us, and suspended the whole Ormsgill ward.

“That was in 1995, and we have been going ever since. We still have four councillors.

“Unfortunately we haven’t been able to work together with the anti-Academy independents in the borough council. It seems to me they’ve become a middle-class type of campaign grouping.

“Our party operates only in Barrow-in-Furness. At the peak we had over 120 members. The active core now is about 20. We have monthly meetings, and we’re campaigning, for example, on local hospital services.

“We did have contact with the Socialist Alliance in 2001-4, but we really haven’t had enough time to take things further.

“We are for nationalisation of the public assets and we want NHS services to be expanded.

“The capitalist system is collapsing around us. It hasn’t worked.

“Because we were much more vocal in supporting working-class people, a lot of people in the Labour Party who were on career ladders turned against us. The Labour Party, whether locally or nationally, now just competes with the Tories to see which of them can run the rotten capitalist system. The Labour Party has lost its way. New Labour is completely divorced from its core constituency.

“There are no active Labour Party members here any more. They hardly meet. I can’t see much hope for them. Hopefully we’ll be the people to fill the gap. We feel there should be a big socialist alliance nationwide to combat the Tories.”

• A much longer version of these interviews and more pictures can be found at www.workersliberty.org/node/12531

JOBS FIGHTS

CWU rejects BT deal

On Wednesday 10 June, the telecom sector conference of the post and telecom union CWU heavily defeated the sector Executive on the issue of the “Service Delivery Transformation” deal for BT Openreach engineers.

The Executive majority, the so-called “Effective Left”, had proposed the deal as the only way to avoid compulsory redundancies.

The plan involves:

- A new “foundation grade” which will put all new workers on £4000 lower wages.
- A change in attendance patterns so that workers lose premium pay for Saturdays.
- Working up to 9pm without any premium pay, and being obliged to work up to two hours extra on any shift if management requires it.

The conference also passed a motion instructing the Executive to put the deal to a membership ballot with a recommendation to reject.

The danger now is that the Executive will go back to negotiations, get some marginally changed plan, and then try to slip that through. But the members have given them a warning.

CWU conference delegate

Post: use the ballot!

Postal workers across London recently voted nine-to-one for strike action over jobs and cost savings.

At the postal sector conference of the CWU, on Wednesday 10 June, Dave Ward, union deputy general secretary responsible for the sector, declared that this is “a time of maximum vulnerability for both the government and Royal Mail management”.

Ward’s conclusion was not that CWU should move quickly into industrial action to secure jobs, pay, pensions, and public ownership; he moved a motion offering a three month-moratorium on industrial action in exchange for a similar commitment from the company over executive action.

He described that as “a useful ‘cooling-off’ period, during which both parties can talk seriously over a joint [boss/union]... vision of what modernisation really means and resolution of outstanding industrial issues”.

Ward’s speech suggested an intention to use the ballot result as a bargaining chip rather than as an actual mandate for action.

Probation Service fight

NAPO and Unison members in South Yorkshire Probation Service last week suspended a planned 24 hour strike against jobs cuts which management are trying to impose.

Several staff have already taken voluntary redundancy/voluntary early retirement, but the management plan to restructure the service and cut middle management and admin staff.

The strike was against compulsory redundancies, but the two unions are also opposing the redundancy selection process management have used. By choosing to attack managers and admin workers whilst “preserving frontline services” the management have sought to divide staff the better to push cuts through.

The strike was suspended after Amanda Cullen, the hated “Director of Human Resources and Operational Development”, approached union reps offering to adopt a previously dead-in-the-water policy which would require a six week “period of reflection” and a lot more union scrutiny of redundancy processes. Crucially, she also offered to enter into written agreement extending the two unions’ opportunity to strike without a further ballot by 10 weeks (!)

SYPS bosses are clearly on the back foot and scared of strike action. The run-up to the strike saw huge pressure being put on staff by managers to break the strike, particularly in the Approved Premises Division. These staff, who mainly look after High and Very High Risk offenders in a residential setting, were solid in support of the planned action. They refused to provide “life and limb cover” and insisted that night staff would be walking off the job at midnight on the Thursday night and not returning until midnight the following night.

Hopefully the unions can use the extra time to win this dispute without the need for action, but this is unlikely. They will need to maintain their members’ commitment to action to ensure that when it does need to be taken, it will have maximum impact.

Tube: striking

By a TUBE WORKER

London Underground workers struck for 48 hours from Tuesday 9 June-Thursday 11 June over pay, jobs and management bullying.

- 1000 jobs are at risk on London Underground and up to 3000 in Transport for London as part of a £2.4 billion cuts package. LUL have refused to rule out compulsory redundancies, despite signing up to a “no compulsory redundancies” agreement in 2001.

- London Underground had been offering a five year pay offer that would have amounted to a pay cut.

- LUL management have been breaching disciplinary and attendance procedures and have encouraged aggressive and punitive behaviour by local managers.

The strike got off to a good start on Tuesday with management unable to get services running until well into the morning peak, and then only little token shuttles which were mainly for PR reasons.

Just as the strike began, RMT and management reached a deal at ACAS. Then LUL managers “got a phone call” and pulled out. This could only have been someone high up the chain of command in City Hall — maybe Boris Johnson trying to make the whole thing serve the interests of himself and the Conservative Party?!

Perhaps management hoped that the strike would collapse, thinking that staff will have listened to their anti-strike propaganda and turned up for work thinking that an agreement had been reached. They may also have been banking on the separate ASLEF which organises a number of Tube drivers, delivering them a service, their General Secretary having sent a disgraceful letter to members telling them to break the strike.

Unfortunately for LUL/TfL management, most staff

And at Transport For London....

In TfL [the admin umbrella] the RMT is a minority union so it is very good union members have joined the strike and have taken responsibility for picketing the main admin buildings. While the media has focussed attention on the RMT, there has been very little interest in TfL workers who have not been part of the talks and for whom there is no new pay offer. Having been ignored by the bosses they should not be ignored by the union.

Winning ways

In several ways, this dispute has been run better than previous ones, but there is still room for improvement.

What’s better:

- There has been more involvement of rank-and-file reps and members in running the dispute, especially through the strike committee.

- There has been more and better information from the union.

- The union has not let the fight for pay drag on for months and months past the due date.

- We have not been expected to mess around with a token 24-hour walkout which would achieve nothing, but are taking action which could be part of a serious strategy.

- There has been a bit more effort to win public support.

These are all things that the AWL has consistently argued for, and we are pleased to see them happening. But to win more, Tube workers also need:

- to be all in one union
- full democratic rank-and-file control over our disputes

- to organise hardship payments for those who struggle with losing money during strikes

- stronger organisation in the workplaces on day-to-day issues as well as the big fights

- to act as part of a wider workers’ movement, taking on the politicians as well as the bosses, and taking up community and international solidarity

know when they are being spun a line and not all ASLEF members do as their leaders tell them: some respected picket lines and helped keep the action strong.

What did the abandoned deal amount to? According to Bob Crow, who was negotiating for the union at ACAS, it contained the following:

- Further discussion on the two- or four-year pay offers that management had made a few days earlier.

- ACAS would look at seven cases where management had unfairly sacked or disciplined staff.

- Some moves to rein in management excesses in their implementation of sickness absence policies.

- Some agreement on compulsory redundancies.

There were some advances in this agreement. The “no compulsory redundancies” policy would have covered most staff, but left out those groups who were most immediately threatened with redundancy. The movement on sickness policies also represented a backing down by management. But the deal was far from ideal.

One thing is for sure: this action should put a final nail in the coffin of the 24-hour gesture strikes of the past. By striking for 48 hours, we come across as much more serious, and management found it increasingly difficult to keep the service running as time went on through the two days.

After a good sleep following picket line duties, reps and activists will discuss where we go from here, with many of us keen to see the union declare further action to keep up momentum and bring management back to the table with a better offer. The strike committee, which has played a crucial role in the strength of the campaign so far, meets again on Monday 15 June, and will doubtless discuss the contents of the scuppered deal, the experience of the strike and a review of the issues.

Solidarity with the cleaners!

The Nigerian military has launched a massive assault on the Niger Delta region, the oil-producing region of the country. Around 1,000 people have died in the past two weeks. British oil company, Shell, is the largest investor in the area and has financed this violence in order to protect its interests.

The Delta region is where many Tube cleaners are from, some having fled the military regime. Many cleaners have consistently referred to an experience of struggle back in Nigeria during the struggles on the Tube, saying that they are part of the same fight.

The defence of migrant workers must be central to our fight against the exploitation we face at the hands of the bosses’ class, against the wars they launch and against the way they exploit other nations. We are a global class and our fightback should show that. RMT should object to the violence in Nigeria and link the issue to its efforts to organise and win for cleaners.

Just as we have said about Sri Lanka, about Palestine, about Iraq, we need a workers’ movement that makes concrete working-class solidarity. And when there are people in struggle right now on our railways who were flung here by this conflict, this solidarity begins at home.

Join the RMT protest to call for a living wage for cleaners on the underground, an end to victimisations, pensions rights, 28 days holiday ,a year, sickness pay and papers for all.

Meet 9.30 outside City Hall, nearest station London Bridge, on Wednesday 17 June

- www.workersliberty.org/world/international/africa/nigeria

g for jobs and pay

Liars! The press and the strike

BY SACHA ISMAIL

Predictably the daily newspapers, from London free sheets to “serious” national broadsheets, have portrayed the strike negatively and largely put across management’s case.

Perhaps the most outrageous example was the *London Paper’s* claim that “a deal to stop the planned Tube strike was torpedoed by unions demands for two sacked drivers to be reinstated” — a reference to the two victimised Victoria line drivers whose workmates recently took strike action in protest.

You wouldn’t know from this that Carl Campbell was sacked after opening doors on the wrong side of his train briefly, with no bad consequences; and that the reason it was possible is that the penny-pinching LUL management have refused to install safety equipment to stop it happening on that line though it is installed on all other lines.

The cases of the two Victoria line drivers are part of a separate dispute involving only Victoria line drivers. Management was trying to encourage workers to break the strike by suggesting that their dispute was only about two cases which were not their concern.

The papers also printed letters and comments along the lines of “It’s not fair: people are losing their jobs, I’ve just taken a pay cut, why should these people get to demand better?” This kind of sentiment is very common; unsurprisingly, when the great bulk of the working class is unorganised or not organised enough to resist the bosses’ attacks. As Marx put it, the ideas of society are the ideas of the ruling class, which is why so many workers allow themselves to be incited against strikes like the RMT’s.

Of course the argument is nonsensical: if Tube workers allow management to get away with pay cuts, job cuts etc., then there will be more unemployment and misery, not less. But such sentiments can quickly turn into their opposite: other workers who are pissed off that Tube workers are able to defend themselves, may soon find themselves tempted to try organising too... that will be doubly and triply the case if the RMT wins.

All these papers are owned by big capitalist interests who shape “the news” in the interests of their class. Thus we get a form of censorship, with only facts convenient to the bosses’ case reported and extensive distortion; but in any case most of the journalists probably don’t even realise their bias. They are trained to see the world in a certain way and order “the facts” accordingly.

The kind of “free press” we have is certainly an improvement over the state monopoly that exists in dictatorships, in that the media is not totally closed off from oppositional view points, and we can publish alternative sources of information, for instance socialist newspapers. But nor is it genuine “freedom of the press”, because it is primarily free speech for those who can afford to get their voice heard. That’s why in a socialist society the facilities of the big media corporations would be taken into public ownership, but not state control, with their resources allocated to political parties, unions, community organisations, campaigns and so on the basis of their level of support, with guaranteed rights for minorities.

Here and now, however, we need to rebuild a strong working-class and socialist press, with a wide circulation, as an alternative to the capitalist media and its lies.

Diary of a striker

Wednesday 3rd June: Spent day talking to colleagues about strike. Some don’t support it for various reasons: can’t afford to lose two days’ money; we will look greedy striking for a pay rise during the recession; RMT is unreasonable; some people feel we can’t win.

Chatted to someone about the recession. I said we didn’t cause it and shouldn’t suffer; we need a strong workers’ movement to protect jobs in all industries and our strike will keep the movement strong. He said, “it makes a certain kind of sense”, but wasn’t convinced, like he wanted to believe it but didn’t quite trust his instincts.

But most people I talked to said they were going to strike. A lot of can see the issues straight away. Some said, why should I take a pay cut when our managers earn over £100 grand a year?, etc.

Thursday 4 June: Popped into work. Someone even asked me where picket lines would be and promised to chauffeur people around on the day if we wanted!

Our branch met to plan pickets and how to make a small number of activists stretch over six locations and two days? We will concentrate on the drivers’ depots to have the best chance of stopping the service.

Meeting for campaigners and the general public to support the strike was well-attended.

Friday 5 June: Spent day waiting for update on negotiations. Management have dropped from a five to a two year pay deal, but with no extra money. No word on compulsory redundancies. Without the five year deal will people less willing to strike?

People at work could see we still need to fight. “What’s the point of a two year deal if we have no job in

a few years’ time?”. The pay offer is still not enough to cover costs. People are encouraged that we’re getting somewhere though. It shows strikes really are the only language management understand.

Monday 8 June: Negotiations going on again today. People asking me whether strike will go ahead. Customers asked me too. I told them that we had been left no option but to strike and when their service would be affected. Most people were grateful for the information, polite and supportive.

One colleague told me she is leaving the RMT because we are too militant. Made me angry because she is happy enough to reap the rewards of what we fight for. Apparently RMT loses some members but picks up others every time it fights.

Ten hours of negotiations have produced nothing, only the offer of more talks. They are still refusing to guarantee no compulsory redundancies, even though management signed an agreement on it in 2001. People were pissed off, they can see management are being deliberately uncooperative. Looks almost certain that I will get to go on strike.

Tuesday 9 June: Woke this morning to find management have spun the lie that all our demands have been met but RMT is still striking over two sacked Victoria line drivers. Complete lies! The dispute on the Vic Line is separate to ours.

Went round all the stations trying to convince people. Astonished by how quick people are to believe management’s lies rather than the union — perhaps because it provides them with the excuse they’re looking for to

scab.... Bit of a prevalent attitude that it doesn’t matter if you come to work, others will fight your battle for you.

Went to work. Services on the Bakerloo line were suspended from 6.50pm, then other lines began to go down too. By the end of the day, only the Northern Line was running a full service. Quite exciting to see it all happening, and that our strike is looking solid.

Popped along to Kings Cross picket, where there was a lively bunch of station staff. After work, went up to Chalk Farm to try to spread the strike by stopping some P-way workers booking on. Not very successful.

Apparently, management and the union were ready to sign a deal at ACAS, but at the last minute Boris Johnson phoned up and stopped them. He doesn’t it look as though the union has any power over him. He’s never been told what to do by working-class people in his life and it seems he doesn’t want to start.

Wednesday 10 June: My first strike day. Picketed at Leytonstone, where nobody crossed.

Most of the lines were suspended or part suspended. Traffic was chaos. We have had a big impact, though I was disappointed that some lines were running. They were reporting “Northern Line: Good Service” — that was an exaggeration.

I was even more gutted to see people at work at my own workplace. People I have represented as a union rep and others who are my good friends. No sense of class solidarity. They just see striking as an option.

Media was full of lies and people calling for us to be sacked. We are all selfish and greedy apparently.

Although disappointed by some, I have been proud today. All over London, picket lines have been maintained from 4.30 am to as late as midnight by hundreds of people who have not only lost pay but dedicated months of their energy to this fight. Far from being selfish, we are doing something more noble than those truly selfish bastards writing into the *Evening Standard* could ever understand.

More reports and info: www.workersliberty.org/twblog

Shaping up to face the crisis

By ELAINE JONES

The 2009 Alliance for Workers' Liberty conference (30-31 May) took place as we see the further development of the political crisis following on from the economic crisis of capitalism. Our debates mapped out the tasks we face in the changed political situation and how we need to improve our ability to intervene.

Sean Matgamna opened the conference:

"We are in process of shaping up the AWL to face the biggest crisis since 1930s, a crisis that has shattered mystique of capitalism in the same way that idea of socialism seemed to have been discredited by the collapse of Stalinism in the early 90s.

"For the first time in decades, socialists have an open field to argue for a rational world, a working-class run socialist society. To argue for a workers' government. To point out that blind worship of the market is demonstrably crazy.

"The leaders and experts of capitalist economic policy are clear that the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the previous era is shattered. They do not have a clear alternative. There is much talk about more and better regulation, but it will be regulation designed to make markets work better — with the key economic decisions still left to the markets, rather than regulation in the sense of conscious planning of direct economic deci-

sions.

"The AWL must shape up for the crisis without delay. Even while the dominant reaction to the crisis is one of being stunned or intimidated, there will be a sizeable minority set thinking about broad social issues.

"Millions of young people already morally repelled by modern capitalism are having its crisis ridden nature and the intellectual pretensions of its neo-liberal ideologues exposed to them for the first time. The progress we can make in winning such people over to socialist politics and the fight for a workers' government will depend our capacity to intervene effectively in the bigger convulsions to come."

In the debate Jill Mountford talked about the forthcoming general election (see box). Gemma Short reported on our student work.

Bob Sutton pointed out that we aren't popular on the left if we argue for our ideas, people will listen. We shouldn't be sectarian, but look for left unity. Education of new comrades is essential to help go out and argue for those ideas.

Cathy Nugent reported on the activities of the Feminist Fightback network in which we are involved. It was proposed that we have a women's commission at Summer School to co-ordinate our work and discuss producing literature.

Tom Unterrainer introduced a debate on "The unions and the crisis".

We are witnessing the death of neo-liberalism, Tom reported, but the trade union movement has failed to put forward any alternative. The union leaderships' ties to the bosses have affected class struggle, and hence we have not seen any serious fight to defend jobs or working conditions.

But as the crisis intensifies we will see further action which we need to build support for; at the same time we need to fight for a broader rank and file response within the unions.

The unions must fight to impose their policies, against privatisation, for workers' rights, on the Labour government. We must rally the activists to build — through the trade unions, Trades Councils and other working-class organisations — a movement for independent working-class representation in politics, as the basis for a new workers' party. Its aim should be a workers' government, based on mass working-class mobilisation and accountable to the labour movement — a government which serves our class as the Tories and New Labour in power have served the rich, and reshapes society in the interests of people, not profit.

Janine Booth proposed an amendment on initiating a rank and file campaign against management bullying.

In many workplaces employers have ratcheted up persecution of workers. Their mechanisms include: ever-harsher sickness absence policies; petty discipline clampdowns; de-staffing and increased workload; numerous hard-to-achieve targets; constant pressure and micro-management; direct and indirect harassment and discrimination to emphasise the master-slave relationship between boss and worker. We need a national, cross-industry, rank-and-file-led campaign to resist management bullying, and a Marxist explanation of why this happens and how to fight it.

There was also an amendment on the recent engineering construction strikes. Mark Sandell argued that our very first response to the dispute was correct but that the editorial and leaflet produced a couple of days later downplayed the massive threat of nationalism to our class; we behaved in a similar way to the Socialist Party who fail to adequately challenge racism in the working class.

Rosie Woods spoke about how in disputes like the miners' strike racism and sexism were tackled as the strike progressed — the sexism by the women involved, and by miners seeing they were getting support from black, anti-racist and LGBT groups. It was possible to support the economic demands of the dispute while at the same time as challenging reactionary ideas. The same approach was required here — we are against employers trying to break agreed pay and working conditions by bringing in non-union labour, but we challenge nationalist slogans and the

racism that exists towards migrant workers. Conference did not back Mark's amendment.

At this conference we began a debate on our Approach to the Labour Party, trade union disaffiliations from Labour and voting Labour.

After a debate it was agreed that "Our main focus in elections should be to campaign positively for our own candidates and other socialist and labour movement candidates, but tactically it will still be best for the time being to favour a Labour vote as the default option in contests where there is no positive better option." An amendment calling for us to vote only for left Labour MPs was defeated.

Tom Unterrainer highlighted the discussion in the civil service union, PCS, and other unions over standing candidates, and how we need to respond to that. He said this was clearly a shift in the right direction.

It was also agreed that we hold a further AWL conference later in 2009, focused on reorienting the AWL in the new conditions opened up by the big capitalist crisis. It will vote on further issues as regards the unions' relationship with the Labour Party, but will not be limited to that question.

We agreed the AWL's National Committee policy on this issue will stand as AWL policy in the meantime. This states — among other things — that "we should support Labour-disaffiliation motions in the unions, while (a) explaining that the consequences of disaffiliation are not necessarily positive; (b) seeking to link disaffiliation proposals to positive measures by the union to advance workers' representation."

The debate, which will continue, showed some differences in assessment on what the Labour Party now is and what potential exists, if any, for a revival of the influence of the trade unions within it under the pressure of the crisis.

Sean Matgamna argued that a Labour general election defeat and the pressures of fierce Tory cuts could produce shifts within the Labour Party in which we may see the trade unions assert themselves. There are only fragmented groups outside of the Labour Party; we should hold off on calling for unions to disaffiliate from Labour until we've seen what happens.

Cathy Nugent argued that the trade unions have not used their residual power in Labour for a long time. The structures have been closed down. Even with e.g. a split after the general election, all the signs point away from a Labour revival.

This debate will continue until the November conference. In the meantime we were unanimous about campaigning for our candidate in the next general election, arguing for a new "socialist alliance" and campaigning for the trade unions to assert independent working-class politics.

Our last debate, on "What kind of anti-fascism?", was introduced by Dan Randall, who argued that anti-fascism was inseparable from our fight for working class struggle. He highlighted the dire inadequacy of the mainstream anti-fascist groups and emphasised that comrades have to be prepared to follow through the policy in our unions and in our communities: no class collaboration; direct action against the BNP.

Through lack of time, conference was able only to note a document from the National committee covering Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan. It was positive, however, that, after last year's differences on Iraq, this year's AWL conference had before it no amendments or counter-motions to the National Committee's conclusions on the issue.

Fund update

At our conference a collection for our fund raised a magnificent £2224. Additional donations this month from Sam, Faz, Mike, Dion and Ginny amounted to £266. And we also received £220 in increased and new regular standing orders. Keep sending the donations in!

We have now raised £14,869.

Socialists against New Labour

By DAN KATZ

On 6-7 June members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty were on the streets of south east London campaigning for our candidate in the next general election. Jill Mountford will be standing against New Labour's Harriet Harman in Camberwell and Peckham.

Comrades and supporters ran stalls, leafleted, sold our paper, and canvassed the area around Camberwell. Like many inner London neighbourhoods, Camberwell has some well-off residents, but the big majority are working class. Canvassing and discussing on street corners is a very useful, interesting experience.

Many people walk past without paying enough attention to distinguish us from the man giving out a free magazine or the women working for the Church of Our Lord. Others shrug: all politicians are rubbish, they think. Nevertheless there is now a significant minority who are interested in discussing politics. Having sold our socialist paper in south London for many years, I found the shift in response significant.

One young man stayed in discussion for over an hour. A young woman who has just been sacked from her job as a security guard signed up to help the campaign. One local activist took a pile of Feminist Fightback flyers advertising a action outside Harriet Harman's surgery. One man donated £5, another bought two copies of our paper, lots gave us donations above the cover cost of our paper.

Very few people expressed support for Harman — and when they did, it was grudging backhanded support. One pensioner told me, "She's better than a Tory".

Almost all who were willing to discuss were at least open to our argument that New Labour had betrayed the working class and that the Tories would be even worse. Many could see the sense in socialists standing against New Labour to allow workers a real political choice.

• **Feminist Fightback action: What the Other Feminists Look Like....** On Tuesday 30 June, 5pm paying a visit to Harriet Harman, Southwark Town Hall, Peckham Road, followed by film showing (6.30pm) at Studio 96, The Galleria, Pennack Road, SE15 6PW. All genders welcome!

OSEL HITA TORRES

Protecting children from religion

By ROSIE WOODS

A young child is removed from his family, taken to live in a remote community, made to engage in strange rituals, denied the company of ordinary children, dressed in unusual clothes and surrounded by adults who worship him. Are these scenes from some despotic cult? No, this is the way that new religious leaders are “nurtured” under the auspices of what are widely held to be the enlightened and progressive practices of Tibetan Buddhism.

Osel Hita Torres was identified whilst just a baby as the reincarnation of then recently deceased Lama Yeshe. The Tibetan Buddhist Federation for the Protection of the Mahayana Tradition say on their website that his mother “had a feeling” that he may be said reincarnation whilst he was still in the womb. As a consequence of the beliefs of his Buddhist parents, Osel was denied anything resembling a normal childhood.

Within Tibetan Buddhism selection of new Lamas often follows such a course; the Dalai Lama himself was chosen whilst a baby, segregated from other children, denied freedom and choices, and indoctrinated to believe he was the reincarnation of a previous figure. His wretched childhood was soft-soaped in the film *Seven Years in Tibet*, which passed little or no comment on the insanity and cruelty of this treatment of a child.

But Osel Hita Torres (now 23) began to see through the nonsense he was taught to believe his whole life and in spectacular style. He returned to Spain when he was 18. His experience at university, exploring film, music and mixing with other young people, showed him how to take a different path in life. Now a qualified cinematographer, he describes himself as an agnostic.

But his childhood will have had an indelible impact on his future life. He describes his experience: “at 14 months I was recognized and taken to India. They dressed me in a yellow hat, they sat me on a throne, people worshipped me ... They took me away from my family and put me in a medieval situation in which I suffered a lot. It was like living a lie”. This is just horrible.

If adults choose to entertain fantastic beliefs, that is their choice. If adults choose to live their lives according to a set of religious doctrines that is up to them. In fact socialists defend peoples’ right to freedom of religious expression. Any other policy would oppress and serve to more deeply entrench religious belief. However, there must be limits. Children should be protected from religious strictures and given choices about how to live and what to believe.

This is the value of a secular education system — to provide an environment in which children and young people have freedom from religious indoctrination and which enables them, even if only in a limited way, to question and have faith in their own choices.

It could be said that Osel’s case is an extreme example of the treatment of children by organised religion, and it is true we are looking at a broad spectrum. At one end we have faith schools and at the other the deification of babies. However, it seems to me that the indoctrination of children and abusive control of their lives in the name of multiple sets of religious beliefs is all too common.

Most children aren’t told they are gods or fabled leaders, but that doesn’t make the forms of control any less harmful — from my neighbour who I witnessed when I was ten striking her five year old daughter with a fish slice because she was questioning how god could live in the sky, to the girl who is forced to cover her head or whole body as soon as she reaches puberty. We must raise the demand for secularism, for an abolition of faith schools, and for the rights of children to make up their own minds.

TV

Reality TV?

Ira Berkovic takes another look at *The Wire*, now being shown on BBC 2

Wading through the superlatives that are lavished on *The Wire*, the five-season HBO drama exploring the social politics of Baltimore, Maryland, and the police department’s Sisyphean attempts to deal with the city’s drug trade and the near-uncontrollable crime it generates, can be an exhausting business.

It’s been variously described as “Shakespearean”, “Dickensian”, and indeed “the greatest television programme ever made.” Its depictions of working-class life in Baltimore (which, when written about, invariably have the words “grittily realistic” stuck on the front) have sent the liberal media crit-erati into a proper tizzy — practically wetting themselves in a clamour to applaud the show’s realism. But you really shouldn’t let that put you off.

While I’ve never been to Baltimore, and my years as a street-corner drug-dealer are well behind me now, I have it on better authority than some smug, middle-class Guardianista that *The Wire* actually is pretty true to life. You probably should believe the hype.

Felicia Pearson, for example, who plays chillingly violent gangster Snoop, asserted in an interview that “my life is like *The Wire*”. Like many of the show’s cast, she had no background in acting and quite a substantial background in street crime, facing manslaughter charges at the age of fourteen. The producers’ deci-

sion to cast unknowns like Pearson, and to eschew genre conventions like “previously on...” segments and cross-cutting narrative techniques prevented the show from ever gaining the mass audience or mainstream popularity of a show like *The Sopranos*, but it did ensure that plot and character — rather than stars and clever techniques — were foregrounded.

There’s plenty to get stuck into politically, too. The show’s creator David Simon says that the second season, which focuses on dockworkers and their union, is “a meditation on the death of work and the betrayal of the American working class....[I]t is a deliberate argument that unencumbered capitalism is not a substitute for social policy; that on its own, without a social compact, raw capitalism is destined to serve the few at the expense of the many.”

That’s not say that the show is, as some have argued, implicitly Marxist, but it is, if nothing else, an honest attempt to depict urban life in a modern city, with all the struggles and tectonic frictions that this entails. There are no cookie-cutter goodies or baddies, just a staggering array of genuinely human characters compelled by socio-economic interests that they are sometimes able to resist and fight against, but which sometimes sweep them along, often despite their better judgement and conscience.

And when a show is driven along by nothing more than a practically unadulterated focus on these struggles, it’s hard for an audience not to get totally and utterly swept up with them too.

ically, flirting with Scargill, Castro and latterly, Gordon Brown.

The work Edwards left behind has been described as more like poetry than lyrics, and this creates a problem on the new album — without Richey around to give them shape, the songs lack coherence and seem like a series of abstract images. The excellent “She Bathed Herself in a Bath of Bleach” is an exception.

Musically, the band became more melodic, with bigger production values, after their comeback in 1996. This remains true on *Journal...* and feels bizarre counterposed to Richey’s clipped, neat, brutal lyrics. The tracks labelled as “demo” versions are noticeably better than the studio versions — the jaunty piano on “V.S.E.C.” is the worst example of the latter. The stripped down guitars on “Marlon J.D.” are a model of what would have been appropriate throughout.

There is no real sense of urgency on the album — what is this *for*? Once upon a time the Manics had a purpose. They sought to antagonise, scandalise, spew bile and beauty, wear lipstick and incite revolution. They were muddleheads, but our muddleheads — a working-class band. If this album gets more people interested in Richey Edwards and the band’s early work, then well and good. But in and of itself, it doesn’t feel like a particularly worthwhile exercise.

MUSIC

What is it all for?

Joe Flynn reviews *Journal for Plague Lovers* by the Manic Street Preachers.

The Manics’ new album has been hyped in the press as a return to their 1994 peak. All the lyrics are taken from notes left by Richey Edwards, a former band member who disappeared in February 1995. Since then the Manics have gone from relative obscurity as dark iconoclasts, to mainstream success as dad-rockers with occasional moments of weird, sub-Stalinite political rhetoric.

Edwards never contributed musically to the Manics. He was their self-styled “Minister of Propaganda” back in the days when the band had the absurd idea of fomenting revolution through “cultural entryism”. They would play music like Guns n’ Roses but with “revolutionary” lyrics. Becoming the biggest band in history, they would release one LP in a sandpaper sleeve, so it partially disintegrated every time you played it; then they would play Wembley Stadium for three nights and announce their split. This action would effectively, they said, destroy rock n’ roll and undermine the power of “The Spectacle” (capitalism).

This bizarre mixture of Guy Debord and Bill and Ted was utterly incoherent but rather endearing. Since Edwards disappeared the band has degenerated polit-

THE UNITED STATES

Politics in the New Depression

BY BARRY FINGER

America is a centre-right nation. Or so the pundit class in America tirelessly insists. The Obama administration is ubiquitously warned, from quarters both friendly and hostile, that failure to adhere to this truism augers political calamity. At first glance it might seem very curious that a President, who ran as a moderate and who made no secret of his desire to reach across the political aisle to create a new political center, should require such constant and persistent admonishments.

The problem is that not only did the Democrats win in the last election, they won big. They control both houses of Congress as well as the Presidency. This simply should not be. Americans are famously celebrated for favouring divided government, the better to paralyse the bureaucracy so that markets can be given free sway. Yet fueled by an economic debacle unseen since the Great Depression, the electorate soundly repudiated two and half decades of Republican political and free-market ideological domination and the idiotic nostrums that rationalise this.

Their experiences with massive layoffs, housing foreclosures, declining living standards and lack of access to medical coverage rendered the electorate no longer able to swallow the belief that capitalism suffers from too much regulation. The American cultural drama — in which the universal “acquisitiveness” overpowers “class envy” — seemed to suddenly play itself out. No longer were Wall Street’s masters of the universe acclaimed as America’s “most productive class” entitled to every last nickel they could squeeze from the system. Overnight, as it were, the problem of successful governance could no longer be defined — as the Reaganites long had it — as one of getting government off “our” backs.

Rather the electorate clearly sought a government to “watch” our backs against a privileged class increasingly regarded as both insatiably predatory and monumentally inept. The electorate began to see itself as an “us” — not yet a fully distinct class perhaps, but as an entity separate from “them,” with divergent, if not opposed, interests and aspirations.

Suddenly “socialism”, a term typically invoked to scare American children and adults with weak constitutions, began to creep into respectable political discourse.

Of course, John McCain and his everyman nitwit, “Joe the Plumber,” were quick to denounce Obama and the Democrats during the campaign as socialists, conveniently ignoring the fact that the Bush administration had not only vastly expanded the federal government’s economic footprint, but effectively nationalised the banking and mortgage industries as well. This continuing trend led the middle of the road *Newsweek* to proclaim in February that “we are all socialists now,” before reassuring its readership that “our instincts” will “naturally” redirect the economy towards a more free market style capitalism once the crisis passes. Before that occurs however, the federal government will have added 60% of General Motors and 80% of AIG to its expanding portfolio.

Forget for the moment that what the establishment means by “socialism” is the placing of large swaths of the economy under the temporary trusteeship of a state wholly beholden to elite interests. Or that the terms of these receiverships are exclusively determined by the

same rolodex of financial wizards that just yesterday were champions of deregulation, strikebreaking, outsourcing and downsizing; that this entire process is the antithesis of socialism insofar as all decisions are made outside the arena of democracy with no meaningful input, let alone control, from below.

Forget too, that far from empowering working people and the oppressed, the recovery program will effectively burden them with the cost of the crisis in the form of future tax obligations required to indemnify the state’s creditors — America’s own economic royalists and Chinese Stalinists.

For all this, the shifting loyalties of the white working class away from the party of outright reaction to the Democrats is, from a subjective viewpoint, a progressive development. This underlying trend is further affirmed by polling data regarding a wide range of issues — including the role of big business, health care reform, gay marriage, stimulus spending, international trade, Social Security and military intervention — all of which tentatively indicate that working class Americans as a whole are increasingly receptive to and may even be comfortable with a liberal agenda considerably to the left of what the Obama administration actually has to offer.

REPUBLICAN AGENDA

But if the liberals, intoxicated by Obama’s current popularity, are heralding him as the second coming of Franklin Roosevelt, they are blinded to an obvious distinction. Roosevelt was seen, and demanded to be seen, as having saved capitalism from the financiers, whereas Obama runs the risk of being seen as saving capitalism for the financiers.

And it is this distinction that provides the potential opening for the flagging Republican Party to redefine the class struggle between the haves and have-nots in populist terms as one between Wall Street and Main Street, with all the reactionary social wedge implications that struggle along such lines would entail.

The so-called “teabag” protests, orchestrated by the right (and corporately underwritten) against the banking bailout must be seen as the opening salvo in the Republican offensive. Should the midterm elections be held under circumstances in which the banking sector seems to be revived with its outrageous bonus system again revving shamelessly out of control — with a new credit bubble in the offing — while employment, housing foreclosures, health care coverage and pension security continue to deteriorate, the Republican message may will begin to resonate.

The Republican slime machine, after all, has had ample opportunity to perfect its message. Let’s not forget their thinly veiled racist explanation for the collapse of the housing market — coercion by the “liberal federal bureaucracy” to encourage banks to extend loans to unqualified Blacks and Hispanics. This supposedly required the use of new and ultimately unsecurable financial instruments that were then diffused throughout the system to minimise risk to individual lenders unintentionally shifting the risk upwards to imperil the system as a whole.

Never mind that fully qualified Blacks and Hispanics were offered sub prime mortgages with the promise that they could refinance to their advantage as the housing market bubble continued to inflate. Never mind that white people of every economic class took the same bait

and accounted for a much larger share of the problematic assets. Never mind that deregulation — which the Republicans long championed — created the business context for this toxic bubble by freeing the system to generate a host of novel, untested lending products which the banking sector then marketed with gleeful abandon. It is simply enough for the Republicans to resort to their familiar trope and “expose” how hard working — read “white” — people of every stratum suffer at the expense of a triumvirate of liberals, acquiescent bankers and blacks.

This continuous assault against rationality is magnified by the unending rightwing characterisation of the Administration as “radical”, “Marxist”, “racist,” most of which has little traction at this time. Worse, it is being summarily — and all too prematurely — dismissed by liberals and the labour movement as the shrill screeches of Republican desperation rather than as the preparatory ideological groundwork for the midterm elections that it actually is.

The labour movement has invested an inordinate amount of political capital in the Employee Free Choice Act, believing it to be the key to its future (it will make union recognition easier). This has had the effect of tying the labor movement ever more securely to the Democratic line, lest any criticism undermine the Administration and cause it to waver in its “shared” devotion to this pro-labour legislation. Meanwhile, the Democrats — an uneasy coalition of mildly working class oriented progressives and pro-business centrists — is stringing the labour movement along either to bury the bill entirely or to water it down to the point where it is acceptable to both wings, thereby rendering it of minimal use for trade union organising.

As this transpires, the United Auto Workers have been decimated by the GM bankruptcy, with its once vaunted pension and health care benefit system in shambles, its contracts ripped up, huge swathes of its membership without realistic prospects for reemployment and its future tethered to being a team player in corporate restructuring. Another Democratic victory no doubt: reducing the UAW, once the labour movement’s vanguard, into a company union of a new type.

The Achilles heel of the labour movement is the frailty of the entire progressive movement. It remains self-disciplined in its quiescence on a multiplicity of issues of concern to it: the deepening of the conflict in Afghanistan, the abandonment of single payer as the preferred medical insurance option, the rewriting of trade legislation to include trade union and ecological standards all for fear of fracturing the Democratic coalition. This continued method of deriving a political orientation from the tactical opportunity offered by a Democratic victory has long exhausted itself.

Should the anaemic stimulus package prove a failure, the Republican right will come roaring back by channeling social resentments straight down the road to reaction. Standing with the Democrats presents a risky gambit. Even if the Democratic program is temporarily successful, the problem is just kicked down the line. A Democratic victory in the context of economic collapse is just a softer defeat for working class prospects.

It is the duty of radicals and socialists to marshal their forces in the labour, peace, ecological and civil rights movements to explain unequivocally what is at stake with continued adherence to the Democrats and to make our case for a class struggle program with class struggle candidates.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with “social

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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

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

CWU CONFERENCE

Which way for the unions and Labour?

What should socialists conclude from the debate at the Communication Workers' Union conference on the union's political relationship to the Labour Party (where no policy was passed)? The AWL's National Committee favours disaffiliation moves where they are linked to positive moves for independent working class politics. We are also conducting a debate on this issue in the AWL (see conference report on page 8). Two responses.

Activists should back working-class candidates

By JOHN BLOXAM

Events at the CWU Conference on Monday 8 June says much about the wretched state of the union leadership and the urgency of pushing the fight for independent working class politics.

The resolution seeking to deny financial and physical assistance at the General Election to any Labour MP not opposing Royal Mail (RM) privatisation was lost after the union leadership did a volte-face, recommending opposition if it was not remitted.

General secretary Billy Hayes is reported to have led this move. The only credible explanation of the sudden change was pressure not to embarrass New Labour, including ex CWU general Secretary Alan Johnson.

Opposing RM privatisation was a main plank of the Warwick Agreement, between the Blair/Brownites and the leadership of the main union affiliates. It is Labour Party Conference policy. Nevertheless, RM privatisation remains the clear policy of the New Labour Brown/Mandelson government.

The CWU leadership had said that RM privatisation is their "line in the sand". Now, instead of committing the union to using one of the limited points of pressure still available within the hollowed out New Labour structures, they have backed off using left posturing.

Hayes is quoted as saying: "If the Government is foolish enough to go ahead with this plan we will ballot our members on whether we continue to finance the party at the next election". This has a hollow ring, coming immediately after defeating a proposal on targeted action against MPs supporting RM privatisation.

Resolutions not reached included a "Reclaim the Labour Party" resolution, focused on regaining the limited right to put "contemporary" political resolutions to Labour Party conference, given up at Bournemouth in 2007; and a number of disaffiliation resolutions.

That there was little or no chance for union members to discuss the political alternatives is par for the course in the affiliated unions, but it is especially damning a day after the European election results.

Two of the disaffiliation resolutions linked the break from New Labour with fighting for a working class political alternative. For example, from the large Coventry branch: "Conference instructs the NEC to begin talks with other Trade Unions and Socialists in an endeavour to work towards the creation of a new political framework in order to provide genuine political representation for working people at the next election and provide an electoral alternative to the racist BNP."

The AWL National Committee's policy is that CWU disaffiliation now offered an opportunity for strengthening the urgent fight for independent working class political representation and a recomposition in the socialist and labour movement. Comrades opposing this have argued for "wait and see", based on the possibility and even expectation of a big bang via the affiliated unions in the aftermath of the general election, seeing little chance of progress outside that.

The CWU leadership would have tried to bureaucratically squash any disaffiliation resolution had it been carried; nonetheless it would have allowed CWU branches room to participate or initiate broad Workers' Representation Committees or to back independent working class candidacies in the general election.

What happened beyond that would depend on a

political struggle; we would argue for generalising the perspective of broad Workers' Representation Committees, linking up with other non-Labour Party-affiliated unions and fighting for a class struggle programme linked to a workers' government.

Given the urgency of the political situation and the need for a clear working-class, socialist voice in the forthcoming election, CWU activists should still argue for their branches to support such candidates and socialists should actively seek their support. The fact that CWU remains affiliated to New Labour removes a "free rein" in doing this; it cannot and should not override the political necessity.

Disaffiliation is no magic trampoline

By MARTIN THOMAS

The bad news from the CWU conference session on Monday 8 June is that the union leadership got the delegates to go along with a line of "leave it to the leadership to do a deal with the Government".

A motion to withhold CWU financial and physical support from Labour MPs who won't back the union on Royal Mail privatisation was defeated. The conference reached neither the proposal for a drive to restore the right of unions and local Labour Parties to put political motions to Labour Party conference nor the proposals for CWU to disaffiliate from the Labour Party.

The rumoured pro-disaffiliation emergency motion from CWU postal sector leaders didn't appear: they were too busy persuading delegates to offer Royal Mail a "freeze" on industrial action for three months.

The smaller-scale good news is that the "hot" issue of CWU disaffiliation now being off the agenda means the AWL has leisure for debate on the broader issue: should we reckon with a possibility of revival around the Labour Party and the affiliated unions after the heavy Labour general election defeat which is almost certain within the next year? Or should we rule that out, as something as improbable as winning the lottery? Or, at least, insist that any revival *must* be so *slow* that it cannot affect calculations now?

The Labour Party and the unions will be mechanically rammed together by common opposition to a fiercely-cutting Tory government. There will be recriminations and post-mortems about the record of Blair and Brown.

For socialists, an intervention, activity, is better than passive withdrawal. To get unions to fight in the Labour structures (even on limited issues), rally forces that way, and face expulsion or split if the struggle demands it, is better than having them just quit.

That is why the AWL has until very recently opposed disaffiliation; why we opposed disaffiliation when the Socialist Alliance was at its height in 2001. CWU branches have often backed independent socialist candidates, with the CWU affiliated, and we should push for more of that. Disaffiliation is a different question.

Disaffiliation becomes a lesser evil only if all *active* possibilities are rigidly shut off. We should not base our tactics on insisting in advance that the big unions are *certain* not to stir against the Tories.

Some disaffiliationists have argued that CWU remaining affiliated will "trap" it. The pressures of crisis will not be able to radicalise it. If it disaffiliates, however, kaboom! The mechanical pressures of the crisis will transform negative disaffiliationist disillusion into a trampoline so taut with positive socialist class-consciousness that it will bounce CWU, with RMT, over the head of Labourism and into launching a big new workers' party or quasi-party — "a substantial working-class political project".

But the vote to "leave it to the leadership" to haggle tells you that disaffiliation now would mean the CWU becoming *less* political, not *more*.

There is no such magic trampoline. Only our own muscles will raise us politically.

Unions should step in

From back page

Tory Shadow Chancellor George Osborne tells his friends: "After three months in power, we will be the most unpopular government since the war" (*Financial Times*, 8 June). The Tories themselves expect that their cuts will make them even more unpopular than the Brown government is now! But the Tories still have good cause to expect an election victory.

For the left to try to deal with this by going along half-way with the backwash will not win us greater support, and will only compromise our message.

In the Euro-elections the Socialist Party and the Executive of the rail union RMT backed a "No2EU" slate designed by people round the Communist Party of Britain - not on a socialist or working-class platform, but on one of blaming "Europe" and "the so-called free movement of labour". "No2EU" got just 1% of the vote, a bit less than Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party, which has been practically defunct as an active party for many years but still had the cash to put names on the ballot papers.

The unions need to find a way to move on from New Labour in the opposite direction - towards restoring working-class political representation and towards a real campaign for a workers' plan to deal with the capitalist crisis, based on public ownership and workers' control.

Paul Kenny, general secretary of the GMB union, called for the Labour Party Executive to allow reselection of candidates in every constituency where Labour MPs have abused expenses, even if technically within the rules. He has said that he expects at least 50 sitting Labour MPs to quit.

Derek Simpson, joint general secretary of the general union Unite (Amicus-TGWU), responded to the resignations by ministers by saying: "The resignation of Blairites gives Gordon Brown the opportunity to bring in some real Labour people to the government which could give it a new progressive impetus to tackle the real economic and social problems concerning working people. I hope he takes the chance."

Unite has (in 2007) launched a campaign to get its members to join local Labour Parties and take up the union-delegate positions they are entitled to there. But unions like Unite and GMB have not used the positions they already have in the Labour structures — at the conference, in the Policy Forum, on the Executive — to fight.

Union activists should press for the affiliated unions to make a clear break from the morass of the New Labour machine, and to use their positions to launch a battle in the Labour Party for labour-movement policies, starting with an end to plans to privatise Royal Mail, an end to cuts in local government funding, and democratic control over and use of the effectively-nationalised banks. The unions should fight to rally forces in the Labour structures. If necessary — and with a serious fight, almost certainly it would be necessary — they should push it to the point of a split which separates out a genuine union-based political party from the New Labour machine.

WORKERS' LIBERTY LONDON FORUM

Was Ireland's 1916 Easter Rising justified?

Yes: Sean Matgamna, Workers' Liberty

No: Ruth Dudley Edwards, historian and author

7.30pm, Thursday 18 June, The Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, Kings Cross

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

Labour crisis: Unions should step in

BY MARTIN THOMAS

The fascist BNP has won two Euro-MPs. Labour has hit a record low in the Euro-elections. New Labour is crumbling — to the advantage of the fascist BNP, of the right-wing and xenophobic UKIP, and of the Tories.

The affiliated unions should call the Labour Party to order. John McDonnell, who ran as a left candidate against Gordon Brown for leader in 2007, has called for “a recall Labour party conference — one that is properly open to all our members, supporters and progressives — at which we can debate the policies, democratically agree a new way forward and motivate our supporters once again with the high ideals that our party was founded upon”.

The Labour Party's crisis is not one to be resolved by Gordon Brown being deft about reshuffling. The unions which form the essential underpinning of the Labour Party have the right and duty to intervene.

Socialists should fight for the unions to move - for the labour movement to transform itself. We can not wait for the big battalions to move before we ourselves, as a pioneering minority, take initiative. The political crisis, the gains for the BNP, and the looming threat of a Tory government elected with a big right-wing mandate, call for socialists to unite in a new Socialist Alliance, campaigning on the streets, in the workplaces and unions and Trades Councils, and promoting working-class political representation at the ballot box. But we must also come forward with proposals for the mainstream unions affiliated to the Labour Party.

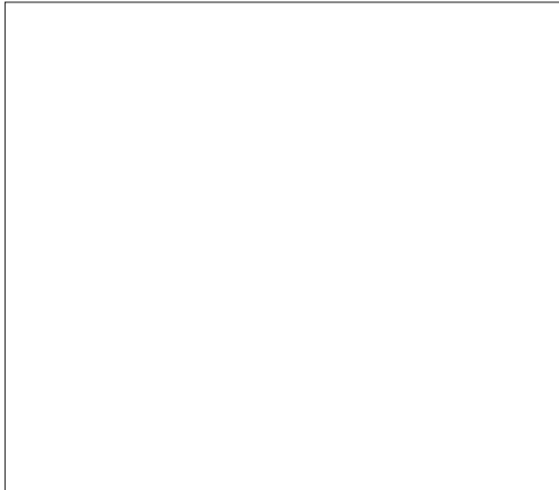
Peter Kenyon and Ann Black, representatives on Labour's Executive elected from the local Labour Parties, have called for a special meeting of the Executive.

The unions should demand, not just a conference, but a conference that is “properly open”, which means that it can debate political motions from unions and local Labour Parties, and take decisions on them which bind the leadership. The unions should insist on rescinding the Bournemouth conference decision of 2007 which banned such motions. That decision is due for review this year. So far most union leaders are tacitly agreeing not to challenge it.

Union activists should also demand the opening-up of their unions' political decisions to rank-and-file discussion and control. In the unions not affiliated to the Labour Party, activists should push debate on working-class representation (of the sort the RMT has done only tentatively, by calling two conferences), and work to remove barriers to union political activity.

The unions affiliated to the Labour Party have an umbrella body, called TULO or “Unions Together”. It operates only as a cabal of top leaders. Shouldn't TULO cease being just a cabal and call a properly representative emergency conference?

John McDonnell says that he will stand as a left candidate when there is a new Labour leadership



contest. This time, unions which on paper support left policies should endorse McDonnell and press their sponsored MPs to give nominations to make sure McDonnell gets on the ballot paper.

The MPs' expenses scandal has hit Labour especially hard because it is, as it were, a human-scale picture of New Labour's global orientation. Peter Mandelson declared in 1998: “We are intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich as long as they pay their taxes” (taxes which Mandelson and his friends were meanwhile keeping low!). Little wonder that New Labour MPs themselves have been “relaxed” about playing the expenses system to the limit.

Now several Labour ministers have resigned, coming out against their prime minister in a way not seen in living memory. Brown has seen off demands to quit, but only for now.

New Labour deserves to crumble. For 15 years it has told us that it has found a new way of managing capitalism, resolutely “pro-business” but shinier and smoother and eventually (it promised) more “social” than Thatcherism.

Now it finds itself floundering in a huge capitalist crisis. Piecemeal it resorts to state economic intervention, but always in as free-market-biased a way as it can. So the banks get huge hand-outs, credits, and guarantees; they are effectively nationalised; but then they are left to operate just as the bankers think will suit their future profits, not used as an instrument to finance public ownership under workers' control of enterprises that will otherwise close and cut jobs.

Figures published at the start of May showed that inequality has increased steadily under New Labour.

Now, over the past nine months, 27% of UK workers have had their pay cut, 24% have had their hours reduced and 24% have lost benefits. 54% of workers have suffered at least one of those cutbacks. Hundreds of thousands have lost jobs.

New Labour offers neither its once-promised smooth, shiny, new capitalism, nor the crude “old-capitalist” line which the Tories are falling back on. Gordon Brown appoints Alan Sugar, who was one of Thatcher's favourite business people, as “enterprise tsar”, and, macabrely, reshuffles administration so that universities are now to be run by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (what, in the days when governments labelled their activities in plain words, was called the Board of Trade).

Although a poll published in the *Independent* on 9 June suggested that with Alan Johnson as leader Labour could improve enough to deny the Tories a general election majority, the most probable danger is that the Tories will win a general election mandate for an old-style market-capitalist platform of “budget responsibility” and “hard choices”, meaning huge public service and welfare cuts.

The shift is to more and more people becoming disengaged from politics or drifting to parochialism and resignation to what will always be the “default” political recourse in a capitalist society — unashamed rule by the wealthy.

LINAMAR

A victory for militancy!

BY ROB HOPE

Rob Williams, Unite convenor at the Linamar car plant in Swansea, has been re-instated following his sacking by the company last month. Rob was sacked for his record of defending members' interests and building solidarity with the Visteon struggle.

The company's capitulation is a huge victory for Rob and for the workers at Linamar who voted overwhelmingly for industrial action to save Rob's job.

The threat of strike action over the victimisation, due to begin on Thursday 11 June, forced

the company to back down. The workers at Linamar have succeeded where direct talks between Brian Wade of Linamar and Tony Woodley, leader of the Unite union, have failed.

Rob's reinstatement sends out a powerful message across the labour movement that militant trade unionism, when workers refuse to accept and bow down to management tyranny by taking decisive industrial action, can succeed. The universal and eternal values of industrial solidarity and an injury to one is an injury to all have been embodied by the stance of the Linamar workers in Swansea.

Individuals: £20 per year (22 issues) waged, £10 unwaged.

Organisations: £50 large, £22 smaller (5 copies)

European rate: £20 or 32 euros in cash.

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

WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG

Name

Address.....

.....

Organisation

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY