

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

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# WIND TURBINE WORKERS OCCUPY TO DEMAND GORDON BROWN: NATIONALISE THIS!

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Photo: Darren Toogood/BWI

## DIAGEO, KILMARNOCK

# Thousands march to defend jobs

BY STAN CROOKE

**O**n Sunday 26 July, up to 20,000 according to press reports, marched against the threatened closure of the Diageo bottling plant in Kilmarnock.

It was a massive display of opposition to the company's plans.

Diageo is the world's biggest drinks company, with a worldwide workforce of 22,000. Its brands include Johnnie Walker, Guinness, Smirnoff and Captain Morgan. Its profits over the last decade have averaged £2 billion a year. In the twelve months to July of this year, its pre-tax profits amounted to £2.093 billion.

Diageo's Chief Executive, Paul Walsh, was paid a total package of over £3.6 million last year. He also owns 720,000 shares in Diageo, and has a pension fund with the company amounting to over £8 million.

Yet the company pays just £43 million a year in corporation tax in Britain, where around 30% of its production is based. Diageo dodges around £100 million of corporation tax each year by having transferred ownership of its brands to a Dutch "subsidiary", effectively a shell company, where it can pay a lower rate of tax.

Despite it all, Diageo announced in early July that it would be shutting down its bottling plant in Kilmarnock, at a cost of 700 jobs, and its distillery and co-operation in Glasgow, at a cost of another 140

jobs. 30 jobs are also to be axed at the company's bottling plant in Glasgow.

Diageo say the closures and job losses would make the company "more sustainable" and would be partially offset by the creation of 400 jobs in a new packaging plant in Fife — too far away to be a realistic alternative for any of the workers threatened by loss of employment.

If the closure goes ahead, Kilmarnock's local unemployment rate, would increase to around 7%, nearly double the Scottish average.

The campaign against the plant's closure — "Keep Johnnie Walker in Kilmarnock" — is very much a cross-party community campaign, as was the demonstration organised by East Ayrshire Council and backed by the local newspaper.

There were just eight trade union banners on the demonstration — UCATT, NUM, EIS, GMB, PCS, Unite, Glacier

Metal Shop Stewards Committee, and two UNISON banners — but many demonstrators were carrying Unite-GMB placards.

The tone of the closing rally was set by its compere, the comedian Hardeep Singh Kohli, when he said, "this is not a war between workers and business, it's about everyone together," and introduced what he called "the Rainbow Coalition of Ayrshire politics."

Other speakers represented all the main political parties — SNP, Labour, Lib Dems and Tories. The existence of this cross-party alliance was praised by all speakers, including the Unite Assistant General Secretary Len McCluskey, because, he said, the campaign was "not about making political points but about defending jobs and communities."

Unite, said McCluskey, was working with the Scottish Executive and Scottish Enterprise to create an alternative business plan for Diageo. But, said, Unite Scottish Regional Secretary John Quigley, that plan should focus on saving jobs rather than on Diageo's balances.

According to press reports, however, Diageo's profit margin is exactly the focus of the alternative business plan. The purpose of the plan, probably backed up by some kind of subsidy from the SNP Scottish government, is to demonstrate to Diageo that they can stay in Kilmarnock and still make an indelibly large profit.

Is such a broad campaign the most

effective vehicle for pressurising Diageo into changing its mind?

There are two objections to that approach.

One is that the campaign, by creating an alternative business plan, is based on showing Diageo, how they can still rake in money if they stay in Kilmarnock. In other words, it makes the right to work of Diageo's employees dependent on Diageo's profit margins.

Also such a campaign cuts across the idea of building links between different workers threatened with job losses, and of building an alliance between those workers and the unions to which they belong.

A socialist response to a threat to jobs is not alliance with the SNP and the Tories, but solidarity by fellow workers. Working-class action — in the form of strikes and occupations — counts for more than the weight of public opinion.

There are no guarantees that the alternative business plan will not accept some job losses as part of its "rescue package" for Diageo, and that the pressure to accept the plan will then be on the workers rather than on Diageo.

Socialist and trade union activists need to combine raising ideas about a working-class response to the threatened job losses in Diageo — in Glasgow as much as in Kilmarnock — while also avoiding coming across as finger-wagging lecturers standing on the sidelines of a major and important campaign.

## KOREA

## "Will workers continue to live as the slaves of the capitalists?"

BY DAN KATZ

**6**00 workers have been occupying the paint shop at the Ssangyong Motor plant in Pyeongtaek, south of Seoul, for over two months to protest over massive job cuts that are part of a restructuring plan.

The company had planned to sack 36% of the workforce.

Gas, water and food supplies to the paint shop were cut off ten days ago and riot police have surrounded the plant and are threatening a massive raid on the factory to evict the workers.

The police have dropped tear-gas using helicopters and are working alongside company-hired thugs armed with baseball bats and martial arts weapons.

The workers have used large catapults to fire nuts and bolts at police attempting to evict them.

Last weekend 7000 supporters marched to the plant in an attempt to force through police lines and deliver water to the workers inside the factory. That attempt failed in the face of police violence. Thirty workers were arrested as workers used bamboo sticks and metal bars to defend themselves from the police.

The workers' union is part of the militant Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU). The KCTU has responded to the threat to the occupa-

### Inside the Ssangyong occupation — workers' families in support

tion by calling a two-day general strike: "the strike must continue strongly and indefatigably, despite whatever sacrifice and pain that may come in our way, because this July battle will decide the fate of workers — will all workers continue to live as slaves of capitalists or will workers be guaranteed their livelihoods and full basic labour rights?"

## FRANCE

## Turning the tables on the bosses

BY IRA BERKOVIC

**T**he mainstream press has reported French workers' adoption of radical tactics (such as "boss-napping") in recent struggles with a note of amused disdain, as if the issues were unserious and the whole thing was an ostentatious piece of Gallic theatrics.

But workers at the New Fabris car-parts factory near Poitiers, who recently threatened to destroy their bankrupt employer's industrial machinery if they were not granted decent redundancy pay, are not playing games.

Workers are used to threats from management — "come in five minutes late one more time, and you're fired." "Meet these targets or you're not getting your Christmas bonus." "Attend the union meeting and we'll make life very unpleasant for you."...

All New Fabris workers have done is turn the tables on their bosses — "guarantee us decent redundancy pay, or lose your machinery". Given that it's the New Fabris workers themselves — and not their bosses — who have sweated and toiled to make that machinery function, is it so outrageous that they should stake a claim in deciding its fate? No!

New Fabris workers have occupied the plant and have given bosses a 31 July deadline to come up with the goods. As with Visteon, where a 24-hour rolling picket was maintained to prevent management from sneaking machinery out of

the plant, the New Fabris workers know that maintaining physical control of the machinery inside the plant is central to successful struggle.

Yvan Lemaitre, of the revolutionary New Anti-Capitalist Party, provides a passionate critique of the hypocritical bourgeois hue-and-cry against the workers' "violent" threats, entitled "Legitimate defence!", in which he argues that the real perpetrators of social violence are the bosses and their government who have forced the workers into such a desperate position in the first place. ([www.npa2009.org](http://www.npa2009.org)).

An appeal written by New Fabris workers calls on "all workers who, like us, are facing the closure of their workplace and redundancies [...] to contact us to coordinate our struggles and form a collective against the bosses."

Like so many of the workers' struggles around the world, the New Fabris dispute directly and immediately poses the question of who really makes a workplace function. As Leon Trotsky put it, "every sit-down strike [i.e. occupation] poses in a practical manner the question of who is the boss in the factory: the capitalist or the workers?"

The job of revolutionary socialists in workplaces like New Fabris, Visteon and Vestas (and those supporting them) is to make sure that seizing control of machinery is a step in a wider struggle for workers' control of the whole of society.

## VESTAS

# The centre of both jobs and environment battles

**T**he workers' occupation at the Vestas wind turbine blade factory at Newport, Isle of Wight, is the centre of three great battles: on jobs, on the environment, and on renovating the labour movement.

Workers occupied the factory on Monday 20 July to stop the bosses' plans to shut the factory. Vestas bosses and police have been able to stop all but a few extra workers entering the factory to join the occupation, but hundreds of other workers and supporters have gathered outside the factory entrance to support the occupiers and demand the nationalisation of the factory to save jobs.

Vestas bosses have told workers at its other Isle of Wight plant, in East Cowes, to stay away on full pay, for fear that if let into the building they would occupy that too.

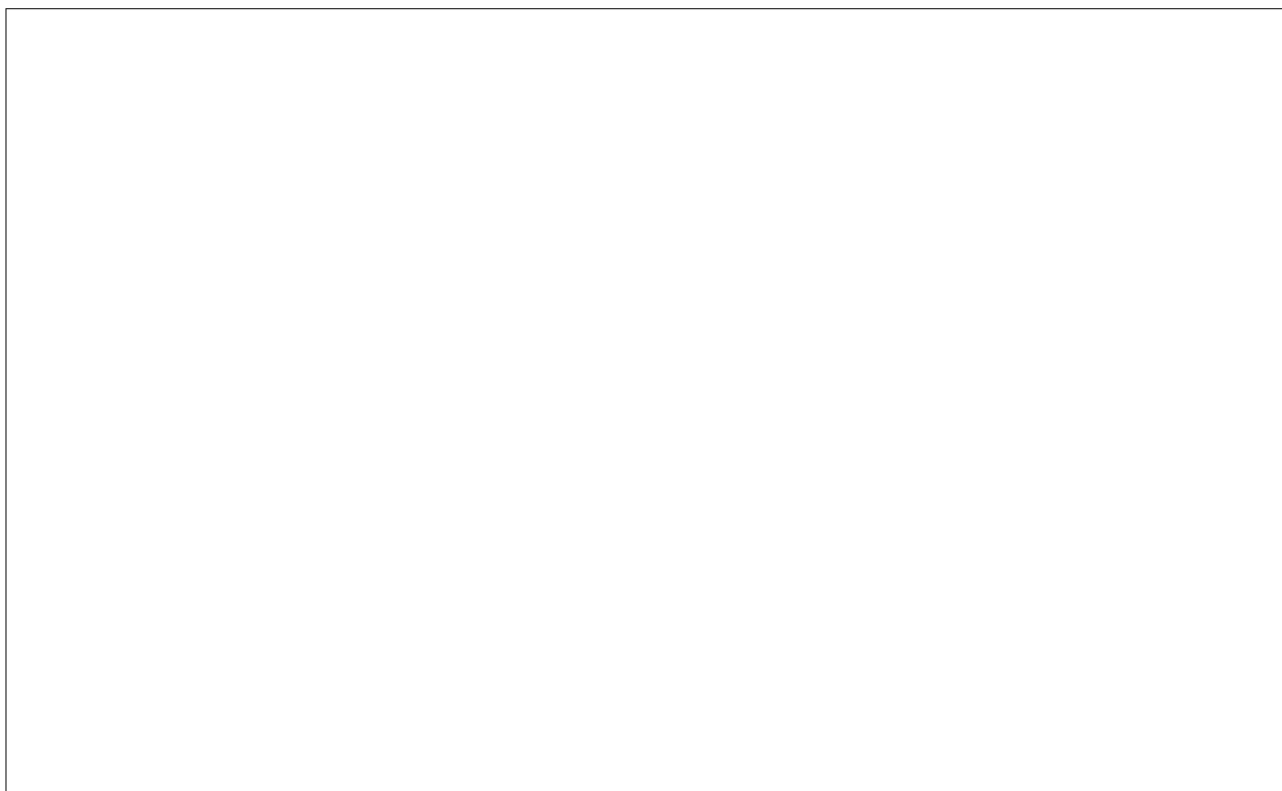
On Wednesday 29 July Newport Crown Court refused the Vestas bosses' claim for a "possession order" to make the occupiers leave, remitting the case to a new hearing on 4 August.

The workers are determined. Both Vestas bosses and the Government - which says it wants 7000 more wind turbines in Britain in the coming years, to add to only 3000 already in operation or under construction - are under pressure. Vestas is the only wind turbine blade manufacturer in Britain, and 600 jobs are at stake.

Vestas workers are not just demanding better redundancy pay, though they want that, too, for those workers who choose to leave. They are not just demanding government hand-outs to assist the bosses and soft-soap them into cutting not quite so many jobs.

They are putting the responsibility fair and square on the Government, demanding that it nationalise the factories to re-equip them, save jobs, and continue socially-useful production.

They are demanding that the Government intervene



Members of the AWL pledge support to Vestas at our Ideas for Freedom event on Sunday 12 July (Vestas worker Mark Smith is pictured in the foreground)

against the crazy capitalist logic which says that because "too much" of one thing — dodgy financial dealings — has been produced, and the economy is consequently in crisis, then workers should be thrown on the scrap-heap instead of doing socially-needed

productive work for which they are trained and ready.

That makes Vestas the centre of the jobs fight.

Our planet will not be saved from climate change unless low-emission energy technologies, like wind power, are expanded very fast. In words, in dozens of reports and documents, governments accept that. But wind turbine blades cannot be installed unless they are first produced!

Vestas workers are at the centre of struggle to make transition to a sustainable way of life an immediate guide to action, rather than an ideal to pay lip-service too. They are the very embodiment of the motto of the Workers' Climate Action network - "a worker-led just transition".

Vestas is also the centre of the struggle to renovate the labour movement. For too long unions have concerned themselves mainly with supplying damage-limitation to the minority of the workforce which they have in membership, leaving vast unorganised sectors in the "too hard" basket.

The Vestas workers were un-unionised before this battle began. With the help, primarily, of some lay activists from the RMT union, they have organised themselves. They have shown how organisation can grow out of their initiative and struggle, rather than being something to be brought to workers by benevolent union officials.

Workers' strength always depends on three things: numbers, organisation, and awareness. Within a matter of a couple of days, at the beginning of the occupation, a previously weak, atomised workforce was turned into a powerful collective force, simply by virtue of getting organised. Organise, organise, organise! is the slogan which can win this battle.

In the coming years, many other groups of workers - including in the public sector, now the unions' heartland — are likely to face job cuts similar to those at Vestas. Either the workers will organise and fight back as at Vestas, or the unions' "damage-limitation" strategy will turn into a disorderly retreat. The labour movement cannot stand still.

A lot hangs on the Vestas struggle. Every socialist and trade unionist should help the Vestas workers — if possible, by going to the Isle of Wight to join them; if not, by raising money, organising meetings and demonstrations, sending messages of support.

## ISSUES

## The police at Vestas

**F**rom Monday evening (20th) to Wednesday (22nd), the police were aggressive and very markedly on the side of Vestas bosses. They were especially hostile on Monday evening, but the aggressiveness continued for a couple of days.

In one stand-off, they confronted Vestas worker Doug Green and told him that if he took one step further towards his own workplace, they would arrest him for "breach of the peace" and confiscate the food he was trying to take to the occupiers. Doug stayed put where he was, defying the police, for four hours.

Some supporters were arrested for "breach of the peace", the charge sheet saying that bringing food might "prolong the protest" and thus created a danger of disturbances.

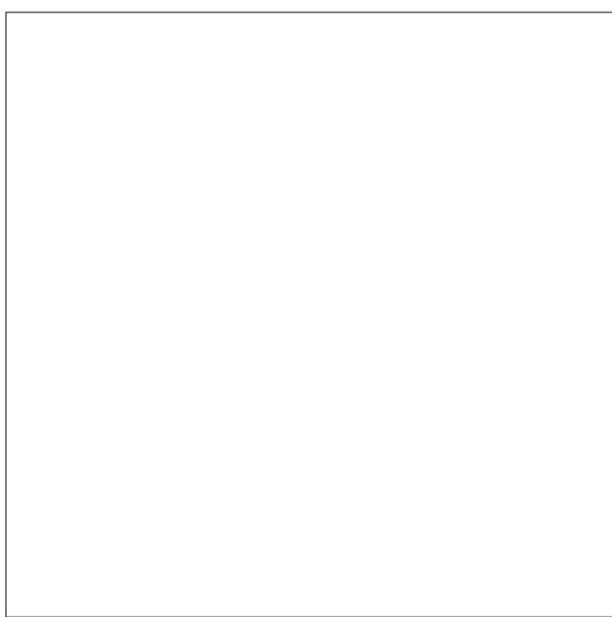
Especially after a mass "walk-in" on the Wednesday got some food to the occupiers, the police have switched tactics, making an effort to seem calm and even-handed.

The strength and the organisation of the workers and their supporters have forced that change.

Police from outside the Isle of Wight were used in the aggressive period. Since then, it's been Island police.

It's a general rule that when police are being used heavily against workers, they are brought in from other areas. Local police are influenced by the community they live in, and may have friends or family among the workers. So the police used against the miners in their great strike in 1984-5 were always deployed outside their home areas.

Democratic accountability of the police — stopping the Government, or police commanders, deploying force at will — is the answer to that.



The courts, like the police, generally side with employers against workers. They are a bit more accountable than the police. But they operate within a framework of law which is set by the wealthy and tends to value property above life. Judges and magistrates are drawn from the well-off.

But the courts, too, can be budged by pressure. If they see that workers are sufficiently determined, they can find quirks and footnotes in the law which allow them to respond to the pressure.

INTERVIEWS

# Workers and supporters speak out

Doug Green is a locked-out worker from the stores department at the Vestas St Cross factory

**I**nitially, we had our doubts it was going to work. The further we go into this, the more the confidence is going to be built.

What's built my confidence? Public support; support from my family; the press coverage; and the number of people we're getting down here to support us.

This week has reinforced our view on what sort of people we're dealing with in the Vestas management. We knew they were bastards before, but this has reinforced it.

I have been in a union before. I was in Amicus when I worked at British American Tobacco in Southampton. The union was absolutely cracking.

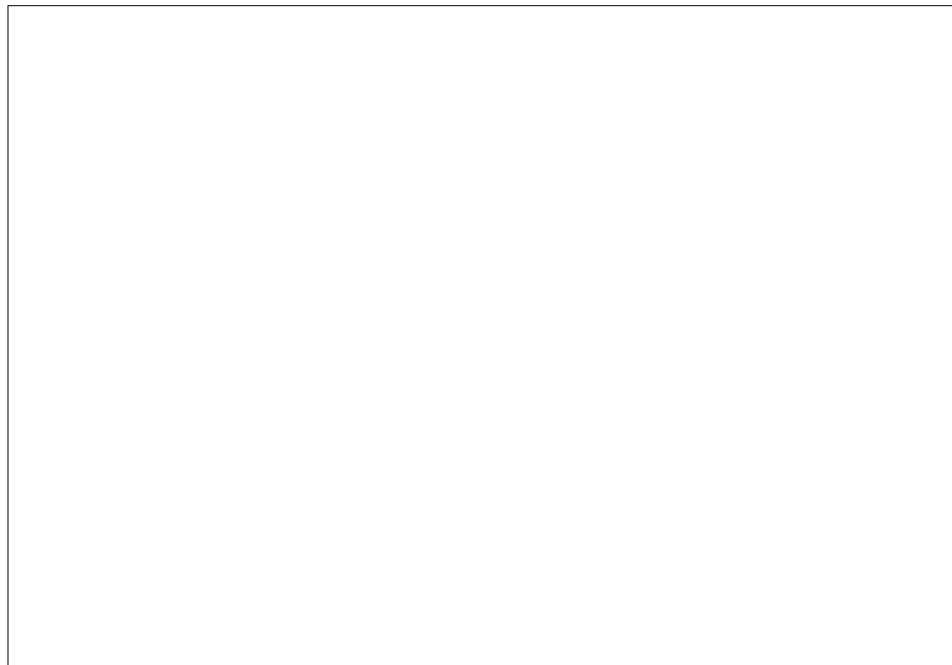
Here there was no union. But I took the job. I decided to bite the bullet. It's a job.

You can't fault the RMT for their support for us. You could ask: did any union need to get involved? They could have said that they had their own members to deal with, and couldn't stretch to help us too.

As it's turned out, they've helped inspire us — to convince us that common people can organise and can fight for themselves.

The main thing now is to get the Vestas management and the Government into negotiations. If the Government crack, we can get them into negotiations.

The occupation has united the workforce as nothing else has been able to do. Before now, the different departments — stores, finishing, moulding — would all keep to themselves. If we were to get back into the factory now, it would be fantastic.



What sort of management would we want? I don't know. We certainly can't have the management we've got now. I suppose I'd say, any sort of management as long as it treats us fairly.

A management elected by the workforce? Would that work? I don't know. Maybe it could work.

**Phil Blair is a member of the RMT stewards' committee for the locked-out workers at Vestas.**

**I don't know, to be honest, what sort of management we'd want if we can get the factory nationalised.**

When we had three months to go, people were working more or less normally. It wasn't until it became close to the end that people started to realise the scale of that, and then, I think, most people thought it was too late, there was nothing we could do.

I hadn't even thought about nationalisation until someone suggested it. I hadn't thought of it as an option for us to keep going.

As for management — the line managers we deal with on a day to day basis are good people, as a rule. My manager from the East Cowes plant is really good.

It's only the top management, the overbearing big-brother management, that we have a problem with. Right up to just below Paddy's level [Paddy Weir, the chief works manager], the managers were all recruited from the shop floor.

I've been with the company for three years. For the first two years or so I was under the impression that it was Vestas head office in Denmark that said that we couldn't have a union. It was only when the talk of redundancies came up that I realised that Vestas workers in Denmark

have a really good union.

People who have tried to organise unions here have been penalised, basically — put under pressure, pulled up under other pretexts.

I didn't really understand unions and what they could do for you.

The last few days have been really positive. Until two days ago I didn't realise that Ed Miliband wants 5,000 more blades in this country — which is five years' work for us. I now think it is possible to convert the factory into one that produces the blades we need.

A management elected by the workforce, and paid no more than other workers? Yes, that could be a good thing. I think you get a better workforce with a happier workforce.

**Jackie Hawkins is an environmental and peace activist, and an Independent councillor on Newport Parish Council.**

**What's surprised me most over the last week is the solidarity from the residents of the Isle of Wight.**

What made it happen? I suppose it was you guys coming over and convincing the Vestas workers that this was possible.

If this factory stays, and the people can keep their jobs, then that's great. If at the very least they can win a decent redundancy package, then at least they will have options.

The island is a poor economy, and 600 jobs is a lot to lose.

Yes, some ongoing collective organisation could come out of this. There are lots of environmental issues on the island. I suppose, ultimately, idealistically, it would be great if this kind of community-minded action could prevent the [county] council from making decisions on behalf of the residents without con-

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

# The workers united will never be defeated

BY GERRY BATES

**C**limate change is a global issue and the international workers' movement has responded with messages of solidarity.

One of the workers from Vestas is currently visiting Denmark, meeting trade unionists from the Danish parent company. Attempts are being made to get solidarity from the United Steelworkers Union which is trying to organise the workers at the US plant where Vestas plan to move production.

At Ssangyong Motors, in Pyeongtaek near Seoul, South Korea, a workers occupation is now in its eighth week (see page 2). They sent this message to Vestas workers:

"Ssangyong Motor workers are in struggle and rightly against the Lee Myung-bak government's flexible labor policy. At the centre of flexible labor policy is the 'gate to hell' — it consists of dismissal, early retirement, dividing the company, outsourcing, and reshuffling. All to destroy workers' right to live.

"The reason we are fighting hard is simple. Dismissal is murder and we are

struggling to stop this murderous act. Our confidence and commitment are soaring high like a rocket because everyone knows we are doing the right thing. We will never be defeated.

"Ssangyong Motor workers will continue to struggle until there is no such thing as redundancy or dismissal. We would like to comradely thank for your solidarity and wish you all victory."

Workers at Stella D'Oro bakery in New York, who have been embattled in a year long dispute with their private equity employers sent solidarity. Last year management sacked 134 workers for taking strike action over pay and conditions. A court ruling ordered the workers be reinstated but management responded by announcing closure of the factory. The workers are gearing up for further action before the planned closure in October. Joyce Alston from the BCTGM Local 50 sent the following message:

"It is an honour for us to support you through your struggle for dignity and fairness in your workplace. We must all stand together in this struggle to regain our ability to maintain a decent standard of living for all people wherever they

may be. Please stay strong and remain committed to show solidarity even in the most difficult of times."

In Peru, Lucha Indigena, an organisation of indigenous Peruvians fighting to defend the rainforest, have recently been subject to severe state repression. Hugo Blanco, one-time revolutionary leader of the landless peasant movement in Peru and director of Lucha Indigena:

"Recently, in Peru, indigenous ecologists were massacred by the government, which was acting in support of large multinational companies devastating the Amazon rain forest. This has shaken us and made us more aware of any act of environmental destruction.

"We are in solidarity with those, in whatever part of the world, who defend the well being of the planet. For that reason we totally support the workers of Vestas Wind Turbines on the Isle of Wight who have occupied their factory.

"From the other side of the world, we ask those who are closer than us to support these workers by all necessary means. We hope that all the inhabitants of the planet will express to them the gratitude that they deserve."

French energy workers from the Pour

la Fédération SUD Energie sent this message:

"We totally support your struggle against the offshoring of your factory and for its nationalisation. Sectors which serve basic needs, like energy, should belong to the community and not to private interests.

"In France, as elsewhere, the privatisation and marketisation of the energy sector is a catastrophe which expresses itself in job losses, the development of contracting-out, the worsening of work conditions, price rises on the deregulated market, the deterioration of the services provided (for example, an increase in delays for fixing problems, and the progressive closure of almost all local offices), a de-optimisation of the system. That is why we fight for the renationalisation of this sector and for European cooperation on the basis of respect for the environment."

Many more solidarity messages have poured in from around the globe, from Canada, West Bengal, Egypt and Belgium to name a few. Any response to the economic crisis and climate change must build in this spirit to create a fighting global workers' movement.

# What you can do

• Come to the protest outside the Vestas factory — Monks Brook, St Cross Industrial Estate, Newport, Isle of Wight.

• Send messages of support from yourself or your organisation to [savevestas@googlemail.com](mailto:savevestas@googlemail.com).

• Send a donation from your trade union or other organisation, or make a personal donation: cheques payable to Ryde and East Wight Trades Union Council, 22 Church Lane, Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 2NB, or donate online at <http://savevestas.wordpress.com>

• Contact energy minister Ed Miliband. His phone number in his Doncaster constituency is 01302 875 462, and at Westminster, 020 7219 4778. Flood him with calls for the Government to take over the Vestas factory and keep it producing, under new management.

• Organise a visible demonstration of solidarity. Take a photo with a placard that reads "Save Vestas Jobs" and email the photo to [savevestas@gmail.com](mailto:savevestas@gmail.com).

• Sign the petitions on the No.10 site and on the Friends of the Earth website

• If you are a member or sympathiser of the AWL please send some money to finance the work of our comrades in the Isle of Wight — for their travel and food, and also to help us produce leaflets and other materials to help the struggle. Many thanks!

was that it's combined with cleaning work. The bin work is paid less, and they've used this to keep my wages down.

Women are only about ten percent of the workforce, and the company's attitude is very tokenistic. They employ a woman now and then to look good, to the government or whoever.

The lads on the shop floor are fine though. They don't treat you differently at all. On the other hand, there's not been many women involved in the occupation. There were a few at the early meetings, but it's been mainly men since then.

## "Vestas should be run by the workers"

Cohan Tyler is a 14 year old school student from Wootton, near Newport.

**This is the first struggle I've been involved in, and I'm amazed how many people have mobilised to support it, and come down to the Island. We had 300 people at the rally on Friday, which was brilliant.**

Vestas should be run by the workers — so that they have rights like good sick pay. How it should be run hasn't been discussed much, but it's very important.

A lot of people don't really believe we can save the factories, get them nationalised — they think the best we'll get is more redundancy.

Hopefully that view is changing though, as the campaign goes on.

It's not been that easy mobilising young people, particularly since school term has ended, but a lot of people realise the implications for jobs here. If Vestas closes, it will increase unemployment 20 percent — from 3,000 to 3,600. With the credit crunch, it's hard enough for young people to get jobs on the Island already. We have hundreds of people applying for one job, sometimes. All that's available is shops, paper rounds, perhaps cafes or hotels if you're lucky.

If Vestas win there'll be less unemployment — and it will be harder for other companies to lay people off. It will help the economy, but more than that I think it will encourage other people to fight. They won't be able to say "It didn't work at Vestas".

It's been really great how people have come down here to support us, the AWL and other socialists and the trade unions.

Left, Martine Warris, right, Kelly Dalchin

ing. Outside support has been brilliant. We wouldn't have got this far without it. The Isle of Wight is very conservative; this has started to challenge that, but it's reassuring that this is now a national and worldwide issue too.

**Martine:** I joined Unite just a week before the occupation. But we're both in the RMT now. So are the occupiers. Unite has been totally unsupportive — why should people join if it's going to do nothing? There's no point in unions if they're not prepared to fight and back you up.

Before the occupation, Unite was criticising the workers for not joining, saying we weren't willing to fight to save our jobs. It was a real kick in the teeth, but we've shown them now.

The RMT has been excellent; Richard [Howard, RMT Portsmouth branch secretary] has been fantastic, and Bob Crow is the kind of person you need, giving us a lot of confidence.

If the factory is nationalised it should be run with a lot more feedback from the shopfloor; listening, instead of bullying. We need a management who support workers and listen to us.

They always says it's "our" company, but it's not true at the moment.

No one has to be forced to work hard; most people like working hard, but not when you've got a manager bullying you.

I suppose the managers have to have higher wages, but not that much higher. The key thing is they should be accountable and listen.

To give an important example, they've pushed us onto shifts we don't want. The current shift patterns at Newport mean you hardly ever get enough rest. People objected but they just wouldn't listen.

The workforce is mainly male. I [Martine] used to work in waste management, but I got tired of sorting the rubbish; I wanted to work in production. I kept getting turned down, until I got a job in the resin bay. But the catch

Martine Warris is a technician in the resin bay in the Vestas factory at Venture Quays, East Cowes; Kelly Dalchin is an office worker at the same site, and was previously a finisher.

**I've been really encouraged by the amount of support we've got from outside the company. But there still aren't enough Vestas workers involved. There should be more down here at the occupation. Everyone's sympathetic, but they're afraid of losing their redundancy money.**

They're scared because normally Vestas never negotiate. It's like when you apply for internal vacancies; you get turned down but don't really know why, they do what they like and provide some feeble excuse. We have a very secretive HR department. When we complain about "jobs for the boys", it's not just a gender issue.

**What's your reaction to the occupiers being sacked?**

It's disgusting. [Martine and Kelly said this in unison!] [Managing Director] Paddy Weir has no guts — he's a traitor to the workers. We heard he was going to open a bistro on the Island, or move over the the R&D side. He's definitely got some deal, the way he's been behav-

## Youth campaign for jobs

**On Sunday 26 July Workers' Liberty organised a showing in a church hall near the Vestas occupation of the film "With Babies and Banners". It tells the story of the 1936 workers' occupation at the General Motors factories in Flint, USA, which was decisive in winning union recognition in the US car industry.**

As the discussion developed after the film among the 20-odd people present, it turned to the idea of organising a campaign for jobs for young people on the Isle of Wight.

Local young people who had come to the meeting told us of their anger at the lack of opportunities for them, unless they go to university or otherwise move to the mainland. All they get is little bits of jobs, in fast-food shops, in the tourist trade, and so on. They have no chance of a job in which they can develop skills and make a contribution to be proud of.

The lack of opportunities is not new. The will among young people to campaign against it is.

Discussions are now under way about getting a campaign set up, with (we hope) the endorsement of the Vestas workers and the help of local unions.

## What kind of management?

**In conversations about what management they would like to see in the wind-turbine factories if they win nationalisation to keep them open, some Vestas workers say "workers' control", some say "any management, as long as it is fair".**

No-one has a good word for the existing top management at Vestas. Many of the workers who didn't want to fight the closure explained their attitude as one of being glad to get out from under an oppressive management, however poor their prospects of a new job might be.

In other words, in apparently peaceful, conflict-free factories there was a huge underground well of resentment against unfair treatment.

There must be thousands of other workplaces, with no unions or with very weak unions, where the same is true: where workers seem submissive, but in fact smoulder with anger against their treatment. That is a legacy of thirty years of de-unionisation and increasing inequality and insecurity.

The anger can work its way through into demoralisation, depression, and reactionary rages. Or it can fuel ways to build collective organisation and a new sense of solidarity and dignity, as it has done at Vestas.

It up to the left and the labour movement to make the difference here.



Steve Stotesbury is the main spokesperson for the RMT stewards' committee for the locked-out workers at Vestas

**I**nitially, after Vestas announced the closure, a lot of people were disgruntled workers, but no more.

After having a talk between ourselves as things came to a close, a lot of us came to think that we could do something positive.

So public meetings were held. We got enough support. And the factory was occupied.

The attitude to the occupation of the workers outside the gates is: "Yes, stick to them! Go and screw them as they've been screwing us!" They're all up for it.

## Come to the Camp for Climate Action 2009!

27 August – 2 September,  
Somewhere inside the M25

**P**reparations are under way for this year's climate camp. Workers' Climate Action invite all activists, militants, trade unionists and young people to come and help build a movement to fight the destruction of our planet.

The camp will be held on a site in London in order to target the City of London. This year's economic crisis has demonstrated more sharply than ever that the capitalist system offers no solution to the ecological disaster that faces us.

Come both to discuss how we link up the fight against the bosses who would throw millions into unemployment and trash the planet for the sake of preserving their power and wealth.

Attend practical workshops and learn the skills that we will need in all arenas of struggle as everywhere the fightback steps up, from how to build a bicycle sound system to how to climb over a barbed wire fence.

Come and take part in mass decision making, meet people, experience living, cooking, building, washing and organising as part of a demonstration of collective sustainability.

Workshop sessions include:

- Women and the miners' strike — how ideas change through struggle
- Occupy the Factories! The lessons of Visteon and Vestas
- Migrant workers, ecology and the Lindsey oil refinery walkouts.
- Climate change is a class issue!
- [climatecamp.org.uk](http://climatecamp.org.uk)

Workers' Climate Action

They appreciate what everyone inside the factory is doing, and show it by turning up at the gates to give support.

We didn't have a union before. But, with help from the RMT, who have provided a great deal of guidance, we have been able to organise. They've taught us how to protest in a peaceful and orderly manner, but one that is strong enough to achieve our goals.

I've never been in a union before. Before Vestas, I worked at Gurit [a factory just across the road from the Vestas St Cross site which produces resins and composite materials]. Before that I served an apprenticeship in engineering, and was a groundsman in a nursery. None of those places had a union.

I've grown up in a generation that has been de-unionised. Before this, I never really had an opinion about trade unions one way or the other.

Now I'm convinced that unions are really important. They can unite the workforce, galvanise everyone's feelings, and turn them into action. They can make your workplace better and your working conditions suitable.

The Government pays £3,000 [special redeployment]. When the redundancies were announced on the island, that kicked in, and the government waived the six months' unemployed qualification period because the island is known as an unemployment blackspot. But the criteria are still too hard. For example, you get up to £3,000 funding for a course that lasts eight weeks, no more; you can only follow one job choice, you can't train for six weeks as a HGV driver and two weeks as a chef; the onus is on the individual to find the course, and apply, to show that there is likely to be a job at the end of it, etc.

We want more flexibility in the way this is applied. The government has suggested they will look at this.

The management don't speak to the unions. They told the network representatives [people used to volunteer for this from the departments] that they were dissolved, but got them back in later to talk to them again. How it worked was not that they would get information from the reps, but they would just give them information to pass on to the workers.

Our call for nationalisation: just mentioning this makes the government nervous.

If we reopened negotiations on redundancy pay, more of the people who support us but are not active — perhaps through anxiety that they jeopardise the little that they have been offered — would be drawn in. Vestas Blades UK is a satellite operation — they had a lot of local flexibility in the way they managed. They were not nice; people learned to keep their heads down. Still people don't want to put their heads above the parapet, although they can see that nothing bad has happened to us.

About Miliband's announcement of £6 million for research and development on the island: that is nothing new, that was announced ages ago. It doesn't have anything to do with us here.

They were happy to nationalise the banks, but when a private company announces it is moving production elsewhere because they can make more money elsewhere, the government does nothing.

It's a curious coincidence that a few weeks ago the government announced £526 million for investment in carbon capture and offshore wind technology. Vestas here is involved only in the onshore wind business. When Vestas heard that there wasn't money for their line of business it was basically toys out of the pram. That seems to be a large part of why they have decided to go.

They have gone off in a sulk. In fact, this place could be up and running again

**Sean McDonagh is a member of the RMT stewards' committee for the locked-out workers at Vestas**

**"If we can win the nationalisation of the factory, I would like to see it run as a workers' cooperative, with elected managers paid the same as the other workers."**

in a couple of weeks, we've got the skilled labour here.

We are the spokespeople for the guys inside. Whatever they decide to do, we will go with it. If they tell us to jump up and down on one leg out here we will do it.

**At Visteon, after the court case when the company had got its possession order, the union played on the fears of the workers to persuade them to leave. You must have discussed how you are going to handle this situation.**

We have had some discussions; basically, we've told the guys inside, you are all mature adults, it's up to you to decide what you want to do. We won't do anything that will threaten your safety. You have to decide what you want to do.

David is one of the occupying worker.

**Nothing that Vestas has done has surprised any of us. We stopped being surprised by anything that they do a long time ago.**

It's become more about fighting for what you believe in, no matter the cost, and less about the money side of keeping the jobs.

It's not about winning or losing now, it's about standing up and showing that you can stand up and people will support you.

We are surviving day by day. The situation is so fluid its not worth us worrying about what might happen. We just

keep calm and get ready every time something does happen to get together and organise ourselves with the right response.

We can be a model for other workers by talking them about doing something when they feel strongly about things and that it's right to do something. Other workers should know that whatever you have been offered or not offered in terms of money, that that doesn't need be the big worry. The support is out there if you make a stand.

This occupation has been a huge learning curve with us being trapped inside. The first few days were pretty intense, and we can pass on lessons to others. Mostly I think we can show it is possible to do this despite the difficulties we have faced, which have been different to other occupations.

**There has been some talk outside about Vestas being a British factory and the jobs should be for British workers. How do you feel about that?**

I think it should be kept in context and not twisted. Yes we are fighting not to have these jobs moved elsewhere in the world when the government said it wanted to create more jobs of this type, but we believe strongly that a British worker is any worker who works in Britain regardless of where they have come from or if they were born here or not.

If they work in Britain then they are a British worker. It is as simple as that.

Trying to get food to the occupying workers. Photo: Ben, London Indymedia  
<https://london.indymedia.org.uk>

## Can the Government be budgeted?

**M**any Vestas workers are becoming confident that Vestas bosses can be budgeted, to some degree at least. Many are less confident about budgeting the Government.

But the Government was already shaky a month ago. It had already been forced to abandon its taboos against nationalisation and against higher taxes on the rich.

Since then it has been forced to retreat on Royal Mail privatisation and on ID cards, to concede the long-demanded "Fourth Option" on council housing, and to renationalise East Coast mainline railways.

The growing public storm about the Vestas closure puts pressure on a Government about to face a general election and anxious to rally its diminished support.

Energy minister Ed Miliband feels he has to write excuses in the *Guardian*. That tells you that he is under pressure. He knows it makes no sense to project 7000 new wind turbines in Britain and simultaneously to allow the closure of the country's only wind turbine blade factories.

It makes no sense to hand out Government money to Vestas bosses, and simultaneously to say that nothing can be done to save the Vestas jobs.

His excuses are wretched? What else do you expect? They will continue to be wretched, until finally he is forced to give way.

The Government can be budgeted!

AN ACTIVIST'S DIARY

# How the Vestas campaign started

BY DAN RAWNSLEY

**I** remember first hearing about a wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight being shut down at the Workers' Liberty conference back in May.

We decided that someone should go down there. Why did I volunteer? We'd been talking about "voluntarism" — the necessary element in socialist politics of making things happen by will-power and initiative.

I travelled to the island on 15 June with two other AWL members, Ed Maltby and Pat Rolfe, and stayed for a couple of days to make contact with local labour movement activists.

Members of the local Trades Councils had been campaigning around Vestas, but without making much headway. Local Labour councillor Geoff Lumley offered his support, but was unwilling to get involved in very militant action. We met the local Unite full-time official, Brian Kent. When we raised the idea of holding a public meeting he told us we were "pissing in the wind".

We also stood at the factory gates trying to figure out what the shift times were and talking to anyone we could find. Eventually went back to London to work from the AWL office to mobilise activists to bring to the Isle of Wight to build for the public meeting which we had decided on despite Brian Kent's advice.

We all had very little experience building industrial campaigns, but it was good to know that we could phone the

office for practical advice from older comrades.

We returned to the island again with a list of people who would join us over the coming days. I think there were as many as eight people at one point and we managed to cover a lot of space, leafleting in towns and at both factories in Newport and Cowes.

As we stood outside factories, I began to learn how to talk to people about their work and that it's most important firstly to listen. In many cases you start just by repeating back to people what they've already told you, and convincing them that it's important and useful to be angry about mistreatment.

Our initial activism had already put management ill at ease. Paddy Weir, the boss at Vestas, had come out one day to try to intimidate me and another activist, Benny. I think he was honestly surprised to see someone standing up to him, and he had absolutely no reply to the fact that he hadn't provided adequate health and safety gear for the workers, some of whom were suffering from skin disorders because of the resin they worked with.

The day of the meeting approached, and I began sleeping less and less. I didn't know what to expect.

In fact, over a hundred people came and the majority were workers. Four

police officers came to stand outside the meeting; they had been warned to expect a "breach of the peace". Management had put extra security on at the plants over the weekend after the meeting.

But in some way the meeting was very disheartening. It was overly weighted with union bureaucrat speakers who went on for too long about joining a union... so that the workers could be helped to find other jobs.

Ron Clarke, former convenor at Visteon Enfield, and Ed Maltby spoke from the platform and offered a straightforward message on the importance of an occupation. When a discussion at the back amongst the workers began, independently of the chair, it was quickly quashed.

We attempted to speak to as many people as possible, but we ran in to the same perspective time and again; "I'm up for it, but no one else will do anything, it's not possible".

We managed to get contact details for a few workers, mostly young people who were getting very low redundancy payments. Eventually a small group of five workers began to meet and discuss tactics — and to grow.

At the AWL summer school on 10-12 July Pat Rolfe said he thought there was a twenty percent chance of an occupation. Only eight days later, the occupation was on. I returned to the island hours before the occupation began. I rushed down to the factory to see what was going on and found a group of people milling around outside and banners hanging from windows inside.

THE UNIONS

## The RMT and Unite

BY RHODRI EVANS

**A** ctivists from the RMT union, which mainly covers rail, bus, and sea workers, joined the Vestas workers outside the factory from very early on.

These were not full-time officials, but branch representatives from the RMT Portsmouth branch which organises the Portsmouth-Ryde ferry workers, especially Richard Howard, branch secretary, and Mick Tosh, branch chair.

One way or another, they managed to work their union facility time and leave from work so as to be at the site almost 24/7, providing help and advice. It was a model of what good trade unionists should do: going to the aid of other workers and helping them organise, rather than seeing their job as only to look after the sectional interests of the workers already signed up to their union.

The RMT activists were crucial in helping the workers outside to elect a committee and get organised. As maybe a couple of hundred workers milled around on the Tuesday [21st], AWL member Ed Maltby tried to gather them together in a meeting to elect a committee. He couldn't hold the crowd. We approached Richard Howard and asked him to make another attempt. He agreed, and, with his experience and the authority of his RMT union insignia, was able to get a committee elected (and identified to the other workers by its

members wearing RMT hi-vis vests!)

It took a while more to get the committee operating effectively, but that was the decisive step.

On Thursday RMT general secretary Bob Crow came to Vestas. He announced that the RMT would supply lawyers for the workers and would seek to represent them in negotiations.

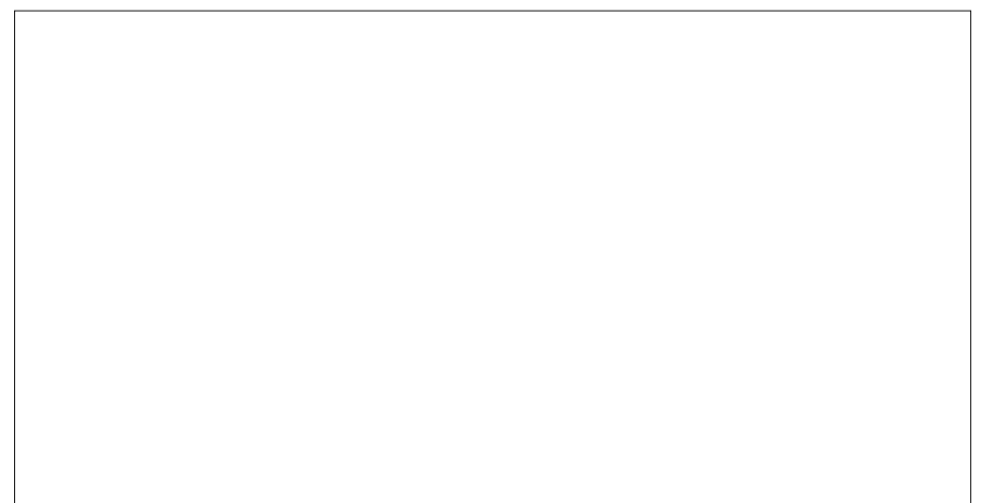
On Friday, the RMT brought membership forms to the factory gates, and many workers signed up. From the weekend [25th-26th], full-time organisers from the RMT head office were at the factory.

Yet those few workers who were in a union before 20 July were in Unite, the big general union formed by the merger of TGWU and Amicus. Some had joined in the last few weeks, hoping for the help of a union in the battle to stop the factory closing.

Should RMT have butted out and let Unite organise the workers instead? You could make a case for that — if Unite had shown any interest in doing the job.

In fact, almost every major union has brought support to the workers at one level or another — local branch or national leadership or both — with the exception of Unite!

Unite joint general secretary Tony Woodley told the *Guardian* (24 July): "I think it is absolutely understandable and justified for workers to fight back where they feel there are no other alternatives and employers act badly". But no Unite representative has visited the workers.



We hear that Unite officials from Southampton who wanted to come and give support have been instructed by higher-ups in the union not to do so.

Unite Executive member Tom Cashman visited the protest on Saturday 25th — not, sadly, as a representative of the Executive, but to show his support as an individual trade unionist. He told workers who had quit Unite to join RMT: "The important thing is that you have a union, not an argument about which union it should be".

Unite is a notoriously bureaucratic union, but even for Unite, the union's performance here is exceptionally bad. Exactly why is still unclear.

The basic difference between Unite and RMT here is that RMT has a better level of democracy; branches which are

much more likely to have secretaries and other activists ready to look beyond their narrow concerns, and full-time officials more responsive to the rank and file.

Not that even the RMT is perfect! The Vestas workers need to keep control over their own dispute and their own negotiations, using help from full-time officials, but never letting them substitute for the workers' own representatives.

Throughout the trade union movement, the big problem is the role of full-time trade union officials, paid much more than the members they represent, and subject to little accountability (often not even elected). Unite members in other workplaces will need our help to democratise their union, to demand officials paid a worker's wage and account-

THE LEFT

# The rules of revolutionary socialism

BY COLIN FOSTER

**T**he AWL's motto and guideline is what Leon Trotsky called "the rules" for revolutionary socialists: "To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one's program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives".

We see other would-be revolutionary-socialist groups, like the SWP and the Socialist Party, as abandoning those rules in favour of what we call "Apparatus Marxism". This means that they look at issues short-sightedly in terms of how they can use them to build their "apparatus" — their membership, their influence, their network of allies.

"Marxism" — the body of ideas and theories worked out over 160 years or more by Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and many others — serves them mainly as a storehouse of arguments and rationalisations which can be deployed to make whatever tactic they decide on *seem* to fit in with an overall strategy of socialist revolution.

We do not criticise the SWP and the SP for seeking to promote themselves and to recruit, as such. AWL seeks to recruit. We are not just a "think-tank" or behind-the-scenes assistant to working-class struggle. We are an up-front activist organisation. Like any such organisation, what we can do depends critically on how many members we can organise.

We criticise SWP and SP for seeking to recruit on a basis that can only lead to weak, floppy, jumbled politics.

The particular pools they choose to



What's the difference?

recruit from or seek influence in, and the consequent tactical judgements, differ from SWP to SP, but the basic method is the same.

In a way, then, we criticise the SWP and the Socialist Party for making the "party" (the organisation; although both SWP and SP call themselves parties, actually both are fairly small groups) into something autonomous from working-class development, into a value over and above the needs of class struggle.

Paradoxically, however, that "autonomy" — the idea, in the SWP and the SP, that the "party" can strike stances, manufacture campaigns, and so on, as best seems to "fit the mood" of the desired audience, without too much concern for

how that relates to the basic class struggle — also leads the SWP and SP to be much less likely to take the sort of "autonomous" initiative that AWL members took in first going to the Isle of Wight to try to provide means for the Vestas workers to discuss collectively whether and how to resist the closures.

After all, in the Isle of Wight, at the start we had to reckon with a serious probability that our efforts would produce nothing. The workers would not respond, or not enough of them would. There was no pool of activists already in place from whom we could recruit to AWL (as you can sometimes recruit even on the basis of an effort which flops). The whole thing was a gamble on working-class organisation and struggle, with no guarantee of even limited success.

We were pushed towards the "gamble" by two ideas which we have discussed in recent years. First, that climate change is a central issue, and that it is vital to develop a specifically working-class strategy on it. (Thus our initiatives with "Workers' Climate Action"). Second, that organising the unorganised is now a life-and-death matter for the labour movement, and can best be done helping workers organise themselves on their own issues rather than just by having the union leaders pay ever-larger numbers of professional organisers and make more and more speeches about "the organising agenda".

The SWP and the SP prefer to go where they can find an audience ready-made, to create a "front" or other gambit to attract people, or to jump into a campaign and distinguish themselves by loose but good-sounding left-wing rhetoric.

The SWP and SP contribution to the Vestas campaign, since they arrived, has generally been positive. But even there you have examples of the typical approach.

Take, for example, the first leaflet put out by the SWP at Vestas. Referring to the court hearing on 29 July for Vestas to seek a "possession order" against the occupying workers, it called for "every bus worker, every council worker, every worker on the ferries [to] show up at that courtroom instead of going to work".

In other words, a general strike on the Isle of Wight. The thought was softened by being introduced with the words: "Think of the impact if...", as if the SWP were just saying "wouldn't it be nice?"

Yes: but then why limit yourself to a call for the courtroom day? Why not call for the general strike immediately the occupation started, and to continue until the Government nationalises Vestas?

It seems, in fact, that all the SWP meant (and all most people read the leaflet as saying) was that workers should be encouraged to take sick days, or days of annual leave, or flexible breaks in their working day, to get to the courtroom, or come if they were off shift. The SWP made no move in any relevant union branch to defy the law by calling a one-day strike.

The trouble with loose talk like that is that it fills the space that should be taken by serious discussion about "facing reality squarely", about what action is feasible, about what is the next step in the "logic of the class struggle" or the next "link in the chain". It serves only to promote the SWP as "sounding left-wing" — not to help workers' discussions about what we can really do, but rather to drown them out.

Unfortunately, it is not just a matter of one hastily-written leaflet. The approach is endemic in SWP politics. You also find it in SP politics — in the way that they are militant-sounding in unions where they are a safe minority, like the National Union of Teachers, but cautious in the union where they can actually decide

## We will build the sustainable society!

BY PAT ROLFE

**T**he action taken at the Vestas wind turbine plant demonstrates the emergence not of a "red and green coalition" (as the *Guardian* would have it) but a realisation on the part of two social movements that they are inextricably linked.

The environmental movement has realised that the only system capable of making the economic changes required to achieve sustainability is one of democratically controlled, social production.

In parallel, the socialist movement has realised the imminence of environmental destruction — we cannot wait until the democratisation of production before we build a sustainable economy. The seeds of a new society — socially and environmentally sustainable — must be germinated in the rotting corpse of the old.

Capitalism can't save the climate — it couldn't even eradicate poverty, provide decent education for all, or make the trains run on time.

We may have only a few years to transition to a low-carbon economy. We have an ageing population, and persistent levels of poverty here and all over the globe.

Yet, at a time when there is so much work to be done in society, factories, offices, shops and other workplaces are closing. Unemployment is on course to hit three million next year. Debates in the mainstream press only consider how many social programmes and research programmes will have to be cut in order to pay for wasteful PFI schemes, bankers' bailouts and inflated military spending.

The government are handing money to those who have been destroying the planet and exploiting its people for the last three decades, while taking from those who have the capacity to save both from oblivion. The logic behind this is simple: the state will seek to maintain the rule of capital at all costs.

Shareholders and company bosses, who can pay to protect themselves from the effects of climate change will take whatever they want from the state, will squeeze whatever they can from the worker and the ordinary consumer, and will oppose any productive technology that challenges centralised capitalism, high profit margins, and easy exploitation of labour. The recent CBI report, which supported "clean" coal and nuclear power, using outdated assumptions that a National Grid report released a week earlier had thoroughly

debunked, confirms this.

From Vestas to Total, corporations seek the highest profit margin — there is no necessary link between this aim and sustainable production for social need.

We, the workers, can and should decide what is socially useful, and only we can build a sustainable economy.

We have to use our own social power to change the way production occurs. The source of all power lies ultimately in production — products are just as often used as tools of oppression as they are "goods" for consumption, and the profits made in production are split between ensuring on the one hand the luxury, and on the other hand the power, of individual capitalists. Profits not are not only used to buy ivory backscratchers and cocaine, they are also used to rearrange workplaces and society to make social change more difficult, and to devise complex strategies and systems to squeeze the most out of every individual worker.

It is only by seizing control over production — by deciding what is produced, and how it is produced that we can take back control of society, and defeat the destructive logic of profit.

The Vestas workers have taken the first step towards this — when their jobs were threatened by management, they

answered "why do you get to decide who is useful and who is not?" The workers occupying their plant, all the people on the picket lines, and everyone demonstrating and supporting the campaign have taken action that questions the right of a private owner to determine what society produces.

Workplaces are closing all over the country — on the say-so of bosses, bank managers, or the government — workplaces that could be doing some of the vital work that needs to be done over the coming decades. Corus faces closure when steel will be needed for turbines and tidal power stations, Nortel closes when thousands of call centre workers are needed to give medical advice about the flu virus, car-plants at Visteon close when they could be converted to producing wheelie bins and recycling technologies.

"Green jobs" are not just jobs in wind energy or conservation — a green job is any job that we, as the vast mass of ordinary, rational, working-class people decide is useful to society. The only way we will obtain such jobs is by occupying our workplaces, and by planning with each other to build a sustainable future, fighting the boss, the bureaucrat and the capitalist every step of the way.



## LESSONS FROM THE USA, 2001

# How to win a sit-in

Although a student sit-in is different from a workplace takeover, there is much to learn from the successful occupation by the Harvard University students' campaign for a living wage for campus workers in 2001. These are excerpts from an article by Amy Offner on the lessons of that sit-in.

**O**n the inside, the major task of the first few days was just holding the space. The police did not try to drag everyone out, but made it very difficult for us to stay inside and function.

For instance, they prevented people from leaving the room they were in to go to the bathroom, and they forced their way into a room that the inside team had staked out as a cop-free room for meetings.

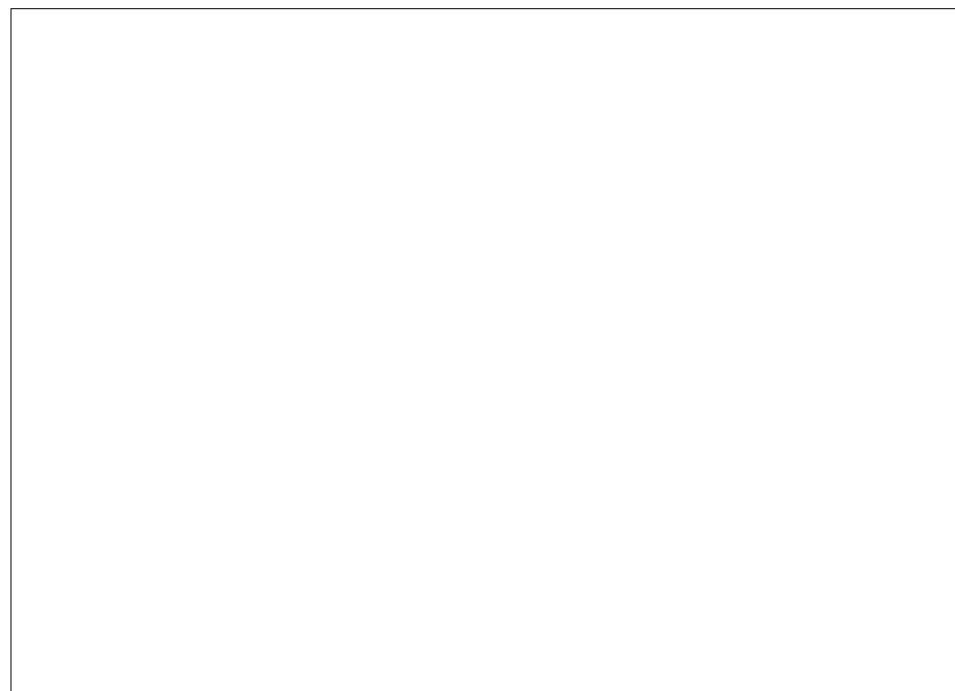
The inside team eventually got the police to back down by threatening to go to the bathroom in wastebaskets if they couldn't use the bathroom, and by having the outside team make a huge amount of noise in the middle of the night to get the cops to leave the meeting room. The noise produced so many angry calls to the police department from students trying to sleep that the cops decided it wasn't worth staying in the room. For the remainder of the sit-in, however, the outside team was careful not to make noise at night because we didn't want to alienate students.

On the inside, we also worked to keep the cops from being thugs by videotaping them: at least four people on the inside brought in video cameras and recorded everything...

Filming on the inside was also a central part of our media strategy. The inside team tossed tapes of footage out the windows to the outside team, where a member with filmmaking experience quickly produced a highlights tape which we copied and gave to TV news crews...

Another early concern was food: we needed to get it inside. The campus dining hall workers solved this problem for us. On the first night of the sit-in, a group of workers marched to the building with a stack of pizzas and essentially browbeat the police until they were allowed to deliver the food. From that point on, the police let food in, and every day, the outside team arranged for donations from unions, community groups, and restaurants.

On the outside, the goal from the start was to bring as many people as possible to the building, to isolate the administra-



The Harvard sit-in

tion by eliciting active support from as many constituencies as possible, and to generate positive publicity about the campaign.

A first step was to see that, every day, the noon rally and 8pm vigil were well-run. We made sure the speakers list was diverse, including workers, union reps, faculty, representatives from other student organisations and community groups, politicians, alumni, parents, and big-name speakers. We included musicians, spoken-word artists, and comedians. And we had a good group of drummers who backed up the chants.

We spent a lot of time making phone calls and canvassing to increase our turnout every day. Over the course of the sit-in, we chose three of our daily rallies to pump up into huge affairs: one after we'd been inside for a week, another about a week later when we got members of the AFL-CIO executive board to come and speak, and one on the day we left the building...

We scheduled other events all day long so that people could always come by the building and find something happening. Events ranged from a teach-in on race and poverty by the Black Students' Association to salsa dancing lessons in front of the building... Every morning, we would plaster the campus with posters announcing that day's schedule, and we included the schedule in our daily e-mail updates and on our website.

After the first few days, when it was clear that our support was growing, the police stopped fighting over space inside the building. At that point, members of the inside team split into work groups, and for the remainder of the sit-in, they spent all day making phone calls to turn people out to events, solicit endorsements from national figures, and speak to reporters.

Workers and unions took part in all the events outside the building, and also organized their own. Janitors held their own rally, and off-campus unions sponsored a solidarity night. For many people, the highlights of the sit-in were two explosive night-time demonstrations with the campus dining hall workers. The sit-in coincided with the dining hall workers' contract negotiations, and the two developments fed each other...

The outside team found unique ways to involve every possible constituency. We attended meetings of student groups to answer questions about the sit-in, and those meetings generated new endorsements. We then got supportive student organisations to co-sponsor our noon rallies...

A few days into the sit-in, our most supportive faculty members organized the Faculty Committee for a Living Wage. They wrote an open letter in support of the campaign, collected over 400 signatures in a few days, and published it in the *Boston Globe*. Some professors

held their classes outside the building...

On campus, we worked to constantly escalate the pressure on the administration: we didn't want them to think they'd seen everything we could do. For instance, we arranged... to run a mass civil disobedience training on campus during the sit-in, and had people role-play getting arrested on the steps of other administrative buildings. The implication was clear: we were ready to spread the sit-in if necessary, and many new people were willing to risk arrest.

Our most important escalation was the sprawling tent city that we built outside the occupied building. The university actually has rules banning anyone from camping out in Harvard Yard, so campus police could have arrested the entire outside team for doing this. To prevent arrests, we assembled a large crowd to launch the tent city. Over the next few days, the city grew to 100 tents and physically transformed Harvard Yard.

We put tremendous effort into media work, and this more than anything was what won the sit-in for us. Many off-campus supporters assumed that we got a lot of media coverage because Harvard was an irresistible draw. In fact, we got almost no media coverage for the first week of the sit-in, most likely because Harvard was using its connections to black out the story. We broke the blackout by being creative and unremitting. We had supporters call and write to papers and networks to ask why they weren't covering us.

We also understood that once the sit-in started, reporters would not consider it newsworthy in itself: we had to constantly create new angles for reporters. New endorsements from national figures could create stories that our support was growing. When janitors held a rally, we placed stories about workers getting involved. We turned the dining hall workers' strike authorisation vote into a story about a swelling labor crisis on campus... In addition to our press team on the outside, several members of the inside team did nothing but call media outlets and plan stories for three weeks.

By the end of the sit-in, about eight very creative and persistent campaign members working with no budget had secured coverage in every major newspaper in the country and every major TV news show.

*Extract from The Troublemaker's Handbook, a publication from Labor Notes in the USA, [www.troublemakershandbook.org](http://www.troublemakershandbook.org)*

## How to negotiate

### More tips from *The Troublemakers' Handbook*

- Negotiating committees that are not sufficiently linked to members often make the mistake of thinking the force of their arguments alone will help them win... Member solidarity is the most important element in successful bargaining.

- In almost every negotiation there is a moment when the boss gets up and yells. Committee members should be told to anticipate that moment, and when it actually happens they will not be intimi-

dated.

- The company must trust the negotiating committee. They don't have to like you, but they do have to respect you. Sneakiness is not good; your word has to be good at all times. You can, however, surprise them.

- The people who are negotiating for the company often do not have a real understanding of how the company operates on the ground. Bringing people in to testify can have a large impact.

- The most common mistake [novice] negotiators make is to bargain against themselves. For example, the negotiator

will say, "We'll take 50 cents". When the company says no, the negotiator will then say, "Okay, we'll take 25 cents". A better strategy is to make an offer and leave it on the table. Wait for the company to make a counter-offer.

- Communicating with the membership about the process of negotiations is crucial, but the committee should not make the company's arguments for it. Report what the company says, but don't make their arguments for them.

- If you cannot recommend the contract, do not recommend it.

- Negotiators who've sweated

through bargaining sessions have a natural tendency to put the best possible face on the... offer... [But] members should get a true picture of the contract, warts and all, and have plenty of time to discuss it... Negotiators should provide members the entire proposed contract... This is easily done online, but make enough paper copies for those who want them too.

- If you recommend rejection... you'll need a clear alternative plan: keep striking... go on strike, keep negotiating, inside strategy [i.e. work-to-rule or similar tactics]...

## NEW LABOUR POLICY

# Climate change as business opportunity

By **STUART JORDAN**

**T**he government's White Paper, "Low Carbon Transition Plan" sets out the first legally binding carbon targets and a plan for a transition to a low carbon economy. As 600 Vestas workers struggle to keep their factories open, the government has been embarrassed by its claim that 1.2 million workers will be in the green energy sector by 2020.

The paper was released in advance of international talks on these issues taking place in Copenhagen this December. The government is trying to position itself at the green end of the capitalist consensus that dominates establishment environmentalism. But remaining within the limits set by capitalism, involves a contradiction.

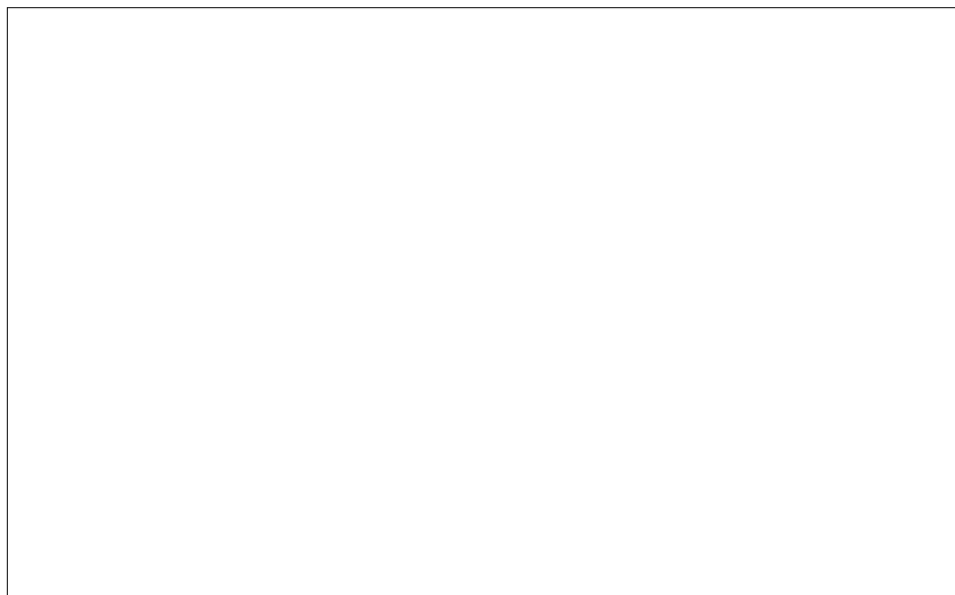
The plan sets out an 18% reduction of carbon emissions from 2008 levels by 2020, and an 80% reduction by 2050. It concentrates on five key sectors, Energy and Heavy Industry, Homes and Communities, Workplaces and Jobs, Transport, and Farming and Waste Management. It has developed five-year plans for carbon targets, which will come into force up until 2022.

The targets are to be set in law and there are various market mechanisms and reactionary taxes (that will disproportionately penalise the poorest in society) supposed to help achieve the targets. Any government money that is made available quickly finds its way into private hands, and the government's role is creating a favourable market environment for green capital.

The targets are wholly inadequate. According to George Monbiot, the latest figures from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change suggest the UK needs a 95.9% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> by 2050 if we are to avoid irreversible climate change.

The government's plans rely on "clean coal" technology that hasn't been fully developed and nuclear power stations with associated radioactive waste. It makes no mention of the Heathrow third runway project. Apart from some soft words about aviation, it has no proposals for dealing with that industry.

Again, Monbiot demonstrates from the government's own projections that aviation alone will account for 184% of our



Pollution in countries like China grew as global trade expanded.

carbon quota in 2050. The targets ignore the science in order to accommodate the demands of capital.

The report leaves room for 50% of the "reduction" to be achieved via the EU carbon emission trading schemes (ETS). Here a company can continue to produce emissions but must buy some "carbon credits" from another company that is making carbon savings. Governments are responsible for dishing out the initial credits and they also trade in their own right.

The scheme effectively involves the commodification of the atmosphere and has been proved useless in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In Germany, for example, the new wind turbines and solar cells haven't prohibited the emission of even a single gram of CO<sub>2</sub>. Germany has just sold its carbon credits to Poland, Slovakia and other heavy polluters who have been able to increase their output. So the UK can maintain high levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and still meet its targets by playing the carbon emissions market.

In this scheme, climate change is seen as a great "business opportunity" and the government's role is to subsidise capital investment and create favourable markets. As the Vestas dispute continues, the government binds itself to this doctrine and refuses to answer the calls for nationalisation.

In the government's world, the 400,000

jobs that will be created in the green energy sector will come into being through the dynamics of the free market.

Yet, at a time when we need to massively expand green technology, the free market is imposing a regime of forced idleness on nearly three million people.

On the green jobs issue, the government has again fiddled the figures. An investigation by *The Times* revealed that the 880,000 "green sector jobs" currently in existence included petrol station attendants, people who make wooden pallets, carpet manufacturers and long list of random jobs which will do nothing to saving the planet. Another 400,000 jobs like these would make no difference to the climate.

The government substitutes its responsibility for the development of a green energy sector for blind faith in markets. For New Labour, state intervention amounts to nothing but an opportunity to hand over money to capitalists. This is exactly what was going on when Miliband offered Vestas bosses £6 million on 28 July. If the free market fails, their main concern is to keep the bosses sweet with bribes, perks and cash payments. Even when billions of pounds of taxpayers' money is used to bailout the banks, still the profit and control remain in private hands.

Another example. The White Paper sets out to invest £405 million in Research and Development projects, but the direction of these projects will be determined by private enterprise. It is hoped that the government will be able to "facilitate access" to £4 billion in new capital from the European Investment Bank. Much of this R&D will be done at our universities, with companies funding and controlling the research of academics.

Over the past 15 years, higher education has been slowly privatised so that most research and development has been determined by the interests of private profit. Most universities will have engineering departments that are given over to developing weapons systems for arms manufacturers or researching extraction techniques for Big Oil. In this time of global crisis, we have enormous intellectual resources that are being misdirected into socially useless, environmentally destructive technology. A proper response to climate change would involve a publicly owned, democratically controlled university system, not a few ring-fenced handouts to private business.

From a trade union perspective, chapter five of the document may be of use in fighting for a greener workplace. It states that workplaces should cut their emis-

sions by 13% from 2008 levels by 2020. It does not spell out a role for trade union reps, yet this is an area of direct interest. Union reps should demand their employer "open the books" on their carbon footprint and discuss emissions reductions with workers. They should ensure that the financial benefits from energy efficiency are not swallowed into profits and dividends, and that workers do not bear the costs of cutting emissions.

The White Paper claims the UK has reduced its CO<sub>2</sub> output by 21% since 1990. There is significant disagreement about this figure; a previous government report claimed an 8.5% reduction in the period 1990-2007. But whatever the correct figure, the main cause of this reduction was the destruction of the British coal industry by the Thatcher government. Since 1990 there has been a massive shift from coal to gas-fired power stations. Simultaneously, Thatcher's neo-liberal policies saw the collapse of British manufacturing. Globalised capital found cheaper labour markets in the global south where repressive regimes were able to keep trade union activity to a minimum.

The decline in British manufacturing corresponded with a massive increase in global trade and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from the rest of the world (especially China) while UK manufacturing emissions dropped slightly. The increase in global trade has also meant a massive increase in international shipping and aviation (which all governments keep off the carbon balance sheet). Oxford University economist and government adviser Dieter Helm has claimed that if global trade and aviation are taken into account, the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have actually risen by 19% in the period 1990-2007.

We live in a world where where commodities are transported all over the place for no other reason than short-term profiteering, exploiting global inequalities at great environmental cost.

As Ed Miliband celebrates this 21% reduction, he reveals the politics behind the White Paper. Any honest account shows that the last two decades have seen the exponential growth of both carbon emissions and economic inequality on a global scale. The UK's drop in emissions is nothing but a by-product of a vicious class war initiated by the Tories and continued by New Labour.

Twenty-five years on, power over the world's resources is ever more tightly concentrated in the hands of a few super-rich individuals driven solely by the desire for profit. It seems unlikely that the technological fixes, market mechanisms and regressive taxations will be sufficient to achieve the government's new targets. But even if targets are met, they will not avert irreversible climate change.

The White Paper shows how capital's influence has completely distorted the scientific reality of climate change. The government is stuck in a contradiction between what is objectively necessary to avert climate change and its desire to serve the capitalist class. In this struggle, capital wins every time.

As climate disaster gets closer, the contradictory aims, saving the planet and saving capitalism, will become ever more obvious. Our role is to resolve this contradiction — by building a working-class movement that can wrest control of the economy from the bourgeoisie and champion the needs of people and planet. Vestas is a good start in that fight.

## And for Vestas?

**Ed Miliband's statement on Vestas blames NIMBYism for the failure of Vestas. The NIMBYs in question are no doubt well-off people who can afford expensive lawyers.**

Certainly, there wasn't this problem when the government evicted the East London working-class communities to make way for the deeply unpopular Olympics site. But fundamentally Miliband is saying that there is no market for onshore wind farms at the moment.

The supporting documents to the White Paper suggest that Miliband might be contradicting his own policy. The Renewable Energy Strategy document states:

"Our lead scenario suggests that by 2020 about 30% or more of all our electricity (about 117 TWh) — both centralised and small-scale generation — could come from renewable sources,

compared to around 5.5% today. We expect the majority of this growth to come from wind power, through the deployment of more onshore and offshore wind turbines."

A bar graph on renewable electricity technologies compares 2008 with projections to 2020. It shows that onshore wind accounted for about 3GW in 2008; it is expected to produce about 15GW by 2020, i.e. five-fold increase.

Other reports suggest a target of 4000 new onshore wind turbines by (12,000 blades) 2020. Vestas factory produces around 1,000 blades per year (enough for over 3000 new turbines). If the government refuses to nationalise at Vestas, it is setting up a much larger problem for reaching its targets in the future.

• Workers Climate Action replies to Ed Miliband. Debate from the *Guardian*: [www.workersliberty.org/node/12789](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/12789)

## ENERGY

# Arguments for wind power

By PAUL VERNADSKY

**T**he government's UK Renewable Energy Strategy, published on 15 July along with its UK Low Carbon Transition Plan, makes a number of arguments for wind power.

It stated: "Wind power is currently one of the most developed and cost-effective renewable electricity technologies. The UK has the largest potential wind energy resource in Europe. While offshore wind is more technologically challenging and more expensive than onshore wind, it has a larger potential due to a stronger and more consistent wind resource out to sea, leading to higher power outputs per turbine and more hours spent generating each year."

The Strategy says that wind power has grown rapidly in the last few years in the UK, with onshore wind generation increasing four-fold between 2002 and 2008. It states that, "the Government is committed to achieving the UK's 15% renewable energy target by 2020." Its lead scenario suggests that by 2020 about 30% or more of all electricity could come from renewable sources, compared to around 5% today. It says: "We expect the majority of this growth to come from wind power, through the deployment of more onshore and offshore wind turbines."

A chart in the Strategy compares renewable electricity technologies between 2008 and projected to 2020. In 2008 only around 6GW of electricity were generated by renewables, with about half (3GW) from onshore wind. However by 2020 the government estimates are 15GW will come from onshore wind, around 12GW from offshore wind, 4GW from small-scale, 3GW from bioenergy and about 1GW from tidal.

The main arguments for wind power in the Strategy include: climate change, energy security, jobs and costs of electricity.

The argument on global warming is the most straightforward. The world economy as a whole has to drastically reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to

avert dangerous climate change. The UK and other developed capitalist states will have to reduce emissions more drastically, because of their historic responsibility for current climate change, their current capacity to reduce emissions and in order to allow for the future growth of emissions from other parts of the world.

Generating electricity from wind produces far less CO<sub>2</sub> than other sources. Colin Challen MP, writing for the Socialist Environmental Resources Association (SERA) has estimated that over the life cycle of electricity generation (i.e. including the extraction of raw materials, transportation, plant building, energy generation and waste, as well as decommissioning) wind power produces 8 grams of CO<sub>2</sub> per kWh of electricity, compared to 430gCO<sub>2</sub>/kWh for gas and 955gCO<sub>2</sub>/kWh for coal. Nuclear is estimated at between 34gCO<sub>2</sub>/kWh and 230gCO<sub>2</sub>/kWh.

The government says its Strategy will provide important benefits for energy security. It estimates that expanded renewable energy sources — including mainly onshore and offshore wind, will reduce UK use of fossil fuels by around 10% in 2020, and reduce gas imports by around 20-30% against forecast use in 2020.

The Renewable Energy Strategy estimates that a UK expansion of renewable energy, combined with a growing market across Europe and globally, "would increase UK employment in the renewable energy sector by up to 500,000 people by 2020".

Earlier this year the Department for Business estimated that the UK's overall low carbon and environmental economy currently employs around 881,000 people, with the potential to create a further 400,000 jobs by 2015. However the researchers who produced the figures, Innovas Solutions Ltd admitted earlier this month that the list of green jobs includes manufacturers of skylights and noise insulation materials on the basis that they use recycled materials.

In terms of future projections, the figures are overblown. The British Wind Energy Association (BWEA) suggested last year that approximately 4,800 people were currently employed in the UK wind industry, which includes wind, wave and tidal energy. Reports by consultants Bain and company and SQW Energy for the BWEA predict that by 2020 there will be at least 23,000 jobs in the sector, and in the best scenario around 57,000 jobs.

Wind power is also significantly

cheaper than other renewable sources of electricity. In 2002, the government's Performance and Innovation Unit estimated the costs of electricity generated by different sources in 2020. The figures were:

Large Combined Heat and Power (CHP) = under 2 pence per kWh  
 Micro CHP = 2.5 – 3.5p per kWh  
 PV (solar) = 10-16p per kWh  
 Onshore wind = 1.5-2.5p per kWh  
 Offshore wind = 2.0-3.0p per kWh  
 Wave 3.0-6.0p per kWh  
 Fossil fuels with carbon capture and storage = 3.0-4.5p per kWh  
 Nuclear = 3.0-4.0p per kWh  
 Gas = 2.0-2.3p per kWh  
 Coal = 3.0-3.5p per kWh

These figures are estimates and are likely to change. However it is clear that wind power is likely to be among the cheapest forms of electricity generation by 2020.

There are of course some negatives associated with wind power — as there are with all forms of power generation. Earlier this year Vestas Blades was fined £10,000 after it failed to prevent workers from being exposed to hazardous substances. Between 2005 and 2007, 13 workers suffered dermatitis after exposure to epoxy resin.

Renewal energy is clearly a huge potential growth area for capital. However it is currently being expanded in neoliberal terms, with private capital developing the technologies for profit. For workers, the climate change arguments for wind power are vital and make its development historically progressive, although of course the bourgeoisie will do it in its own way, in its own interests. Whilst some green renewable jobs will be created, the numbers are not great — particularly in the context of the current economic downturn or with previous energy jobs such as mining.

The issue of health and safety illustrates that workers' control and self-organisation are necessary if wind power is to really develop in the right direction.

## CAMPAIGN

## Who are Workers' Climate Action?

By BOB SUTTON

**W**orkers Climate Action is a network of socialists, anarchists, environmentalists and trade unionists seeking to build a mass working-class response to climate change.

We don't believe that climate change can be averted by a bit of green consumerism, whether that is individuals buying organic veg or multinationals buying "carbon credits". We respect, but see the inadequacy, of the direct action environmentalists, like Greenpeace — elitist bands of brave individuals pulling off media stunts.

Climate change requires an urgent and appropriate response — we believe the working-class needs to stand united against the bosses, struggle for control of production and run the economy for human need. Leaving the decisions

about what we produce and how we produce them in the hands of the profit-hungry capitalist class is no solution to climate change.

We direct our energy at the workplace, going to the factory gates and agitating for struggle against the bosses, for the environment. We argue for a "worker-led just transition", with production placed under democratic control of the workforce. In polluting industries, the skills of the workforce and the resources of the community should be put to use creating a sustainable alternatives.

We studied working-class history and found examples of workers' struggles that have raised environmental demands. For instance, the first ever hybrid car was produced in the Lucas factory in the, 1970s when it was taken under workers control. They also drew up plans to harness the tidal energy on

the Severn Estuary. The Builders Labourers Federation in Australia saved many acres of natural wilderness and became champions of the oppressed with their incredibly militant rank-and-file led union.

With these examples and more, we argued outside Kingsnorth power station that the workers take control of their plant and make a just transition, using their skills for socially useful work. We argued at Heathrow that the workers should join the protests against the Third Runway in solidarity with the international working class.

We gave our solidarity to the carworkers and engineering construction workers fighting for jobs, on the basis that any strengthening of working-class confidence, any escalation in the struggle, is a step forward. And in the last few weeks, we camped on the Isle of Wight and agi-

tated day and night for the workers meet and discuss action.

The Vestas occupation shows the necessity of this work and should give us confidence in the possibility of building a working-class fight against the bosses to save the planet. As the economic crisis deepens we need to be at every workplace under threat of closure and job cuts, at the steelworks, the car factories, on public transport and at the airports.

We need to reclaim the universities, push out the multinationals and direct our intellectual resources towards developing green technologies. We need the workers' movement to take up the cause of ecology and do what is necessary. To help build this movement, get in touch.

•<http://workersclimateaction.wordpress.com>

## BRITAIN

# Occupations in the 1970s

The following text is taken from a pamphlet produced by the North East Trade Union Studies Information Unit in June 1976.

## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

**I**n post-war Britain, before 1970, there were a number of short stay-in strikes, or “downers” in the car industry. One of the first occupations of any length occurred in Belfast in April 1958 when 6,000 shipyard workers staged a “24 hour stay-in strike” in protest against the sacking of over 1,000 workers.

From the mid-60s to the mid-70s the occupation tactic became a European phenomenon, spreading through Belgium, Holland, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Britain and in Portugal, where the tactic was used in a wider struggle against the fascist regime.

From around 1962 successive governments began to move towards legal constraints on wages and of legislation to curb the activities of the unions. From the beginning of a Labour government in 1964, through to its re-election in 1966, to its defeat in 1970 a number of policies on these issues were put in place that came to fruition during the 1970-74 Conservative Government.

That government’s plan to introduce stringent curbs on the unions was met with massive labour movement protest strikes — on 8 December 1970 and in the following year on 1 March when two million struck, and on 18 March when three million struck.

The Act was killed off in the following year when five dockers — acting in defence of their jobs — were arrested under the terms of the Act. One million workers throughout the country downed tools and thousands demonstrated outside Pentonville prison where the five were locked up. Within a few days the TUC had given an ultimatum of a general strike failing the men’s release.

Using the face-saving device of the intervention of the Official Solicitor, the government had the men released. It was a tremendous victory.

A similar fate was to befall the government’s pay policy less than two years later, when the National Union of Miners went on strike. The NUM refused to be bound by the Government’s wage norms.

So it was not a huge leap for workers to embark on an occupation if they had had to take on the law to defend their living standards.

**F**rom the early 1960s Britain was facing a deepening economic crisis.

The Labour government decided it had to “modernise” British industry. The policy was to place the major burden on working people while offering financial inducements to industry to improve its efficiency and profitability.

From 1966 on, mergers and productivity deals went on at a tremendous rate. Well over 8,000 companies were involved in mergers over the period 1964-72. Productivity deals, which had covered less than half a million workers prior to 1966, added another 1,145,000 workers in 1967, with a further three and a quarter million added in 1968 and three and three-quarters more in 1969.

The practical effect of mergers for workers was a threat to their jobs and working conditions.

The merger of the General Electrical Company and English Electric (to form GEC-EE) had been one of the record mergers of 1968. 12,000 of their workers were thrown out of work up to the end of 1969.

Arnold Weinstock, the company managing director, had a firm policy: “If it doesn’t pay then it doesn’t stay.”

After 1967 levels of unemployment rose sharply (half a million in that year, up from around 300,000 in previous few years). By 1969 the rate was 600,000 nationally.

The occupation tactic arose at shop floor level and only later became accepted as a normal practice at national trade union level. Those trade unions with a strong shop steward tradition the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers (AUEW) [later



absorbed into Amicus and finally Unite], and the Transport and General Workers’ Union [also now absorbed into Unite], were instrumental in backing the tactic. Sometimes politically left activists (broadly speaking, Labour Party, Communist Party members and Trotskyists) were to the fore. A number of occupations were developed and supported by other occupations.

The AUEW had a specially long tradition of shop floor representation through its forerunners. Shop stewards from the AUEW were involved in 133 of the 200 plus occupations that occurred up to 1976, including UCS, Plessey, River Don Works and Snow Engineering.

Most the occupations occurred in the major industrial areas. Occupations such as that at Sextons [leatherworks] in Fakenham and Gainsborough Cornford in Great Yarmouth were rare. Almost three quarters of all occupations occurred in and around only five cities — Manchester, Liverpool, London, Glasgow and Sheffield in that order.

Much more than half the occupations were confined to only three major industries — Vehicles, Mechanical Engineering and Electrical Engineering. A further quarter of all occupations occurred in Construction, Metal Manufacture, Paper with Printing and Publishing, Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering and Metal Goods.

Fewer occupations were in those industries which, although subject to high unemployment, were weakly organised. Thus less than 10 occupations occurred in the combined service and textile industries of Food with Drink and Tobacco, Textiles, Leather, Cloth, Timber and Furniture and Bricks with pottery and glass etc.

## THE OCCUPATIONS

**O**n 13 August 1969 a mass meeting of workers from the Liverpool factories of GEC-EE voted “to take any further steps necessary, including sit-ins and other measures” to prevent threatened large scale redundancies. An occupation was planned to take place at the three factories.

The idea stimulated discussion at various levels. However it appeared that the idea never had the full backing of the shop stewards’ Action Committee, nor was more than a token work-in planned. The idea was put to a mass meeting of the workforce but only

as part of a seven point list of demands and commitments to action.

A number of weaknesses combined to stop implementation of the plan.

There were different levels of organisation within the three plants combined with the way the redundancies were to be spread.

The best organised and more militant plant — Netherton — was to be closed down with the exception of the aircraft section. At the least organised — East Lancs Road — about 300 redundancies were planned out of a workforce of 8,000.

When the workforce reversed their initial decision to occupy it was those at the East Lancs Road factory who decided first and by a substantial majority.

The work necessary to win support in the company was to a large extent not done. No further mass meetings were arranged after 13 August. No regular information bulletin was produced.

Eventually, a bullying management letter was sent to each one of the workforce and the commitment to an occupation began to crack.

Two days before the planned occupation, the Action Committee called a meeting at the East Lancs Road plant, but soon found it taken over by a group of workers from a section not under threat of closure. This group gained access to the platform and successfully moved a resolution calling for the abandonment of the occupation; an end to an overtime ban which was in progress and a vote of no confidence in the Action Committee.

The damage was now done at the largest of the plants, where, ironically, only days previously the workers had staged a successful sit-in in response to a management attempt to break the overtime ban. At the other plants roughly 60% now voted to call off the occupation.

In April 1971 the first occupation of any substantial success occurred — at the tiny printing works of Briants in London’s Old Kent Road. The occupation was over the sacking 60 out of a total workforce of 190. After just 24 hours the management agreed to postpone the redundancies until further discussions had taken place, and the workers had won (a temporary) victory. [A further occupation was held later].

**U**pper Clyde Shipbuilders. The UCS occupation when it came in July 1971 was an example and inspiration to very many other occupations. It was waged over a period of months.

The workers made redundant continued to work. Those sacked were retained in their jobs by the rest of the workforce who were now, in many ways, in effective control of the day to day running of the yards.

The UCS consortium had been established in 1968 out of five yards on the upper reaches of the Clyde. The merger was part of a government drive for the amalgamation of shipyards.

However, by late 1969, the Opposition Tory spokesman for Technology, Nicolas Ridley, was recommending that UCS be carved up with one yard, Yarrow, being hived off and the remainder sold off cheaply to private companies. A similar plan was implemented when the Tories came to power the following year. Something like 6,000 out of 8,500 jobs were to go. Some 10-20,000 workers on the upper Clyde were dependent on shipbuilding — including the families, some 50,000 were dependent.

On 13 June 1971 a meeting of stop stewards from all four yards was convened. Sam Barr [a Communist Party member] proposed a “work-in”. After initial scepticism the idea was adopted.

A traditional strike action had been proposed but this was rejected. A sit-in strike was also proposed on the basis that the struggle would probably be a long one and would be difficult to maintain, given the geographical spread of the workforce. A work-in, it was argued, would allow the workers to exercise control over the yards without the problems involved in picketing or maintaining a long sit-down strike. The work-in proposal was put to mass meetings in the yards and was voted for.

On 29 July the government declared that its decision was irreversible. The following day the takeover of the yards occurred. All those entering or leaving the yards were to be under the supervision of the shop stewards. The police had agreed in advance that they would not intervene.

A Co-ordinating Committee united the convenors from all four yards, from the boilermakers, finishing trade and the general workers along with representatives from the staff and middle management. The Committee met daily throughout the work-in and decisions were conveyed to the workforce in a series of weekly meetings through the yard convenors and departmental shop stewards. Decisions regarding the overall direction of the struggle and other major decisions were taken at the mass meetings of the workforce. [The process left a lot of decisions in the hands of a small group of people, who would meet every morning, and this reflected the strong influence of Communist Party members].

Workers who were made redundant by the liquidator were to continue working at the yards but under the responsibility of the shop stewards.

The work-in had been facilitated by the fact that there were still ships in the process of being built. As the work progressed the liquidator began to lay off workers. Wages for these workers were based on average earnings immediately prior to dismissal by the liquidator. The whole financial operation was placed in the hands of a Finance Committee.

Trade unionists from all over Britain sent in donations, and within the yards the workforce donated 50p each per week. In fact, a considerable sum was left in the fighting fund at the end of the struggle, much of which was passed on to other workers engaged in occupations.

[At the time revolutionary socialists were highly critical of the work-in tactic, and the Communist Party's approach to seeking a broad "Popular Front" of public opinion rather than victory through class struggle. The "work-in" meant that workers were working their way out of their jobs, by completing the ships, and doing it at other workers' expenses. Despite the CP's claims, for much of the time a more or less normal management regime continued in the "work-in". Nevertheless, in the conditions of 1971-2, the UCS battle won some gains and helped spark some more radical struggles.]

**Plessey (Alexandria).** Just over a month into the UCS work-in, a second occupation occurred, a few miles away at the marine engineering factory of Plessey's. Here 200 engineering workers staged an occupation to prevent the removal of plant, stock and machinery and the planned closure of the factory.

**River Don Steel Workers (Sheffield).** In November 1971, with upwards of 4,500 jobs under threat, the workers at River Don staged a "work-in". Redundant workers were employed on campaigning work and their wages came from a hardship fund drawn from a 50p per week levy on the still-employed workforce.

**Snow Engineering.** Within two days of the announcement of the River Don work-in, another Sheffield occupation took place — at a small engineering works, in defence of jobs. After only two days the workers started going home at night, just occupying the factory during the day. Inevitably after only 9 days of the occupation the workers turned up one morning to find they had been locked out.

**Co-operative Insurance Society.** At the end of November 1971 white collar workers at the CIS office in Manchester threatened sit-in action as part of a campaign over pay and conditions. In the event, at least a half-day sit in was staged. The occupation had now begun to be directed to other trade union ends.

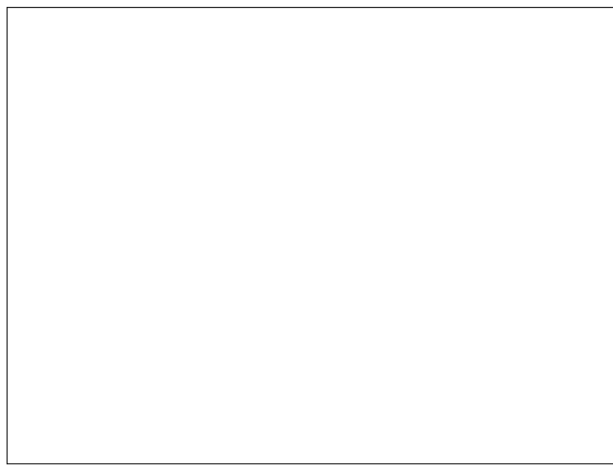
On 3 January 1972 150 engineers of the Allis Chalmers engineering works in Flintshire staged the first of over 100 occupations that were to occur in 1972.

Occupations now began to mushroom, spreading from industry to industry and from town to town, and across a range of trade unions and different sections of workers.

In January alone the tactic was used by engineering workers in Liverpool (Fisher Bendix) and Manchester (Dawson-Barfos/William Crosland); by chemical industry workers in Stockport (Sim-Chem); and by textile workers in Flintshire (Courtlands).

In February, a second pay occupation occurred when 28 members of SLADE, the print union, sat-in their print firm (Leicester Photograph & Lithos Services) in pursuit of a wage claim.

By the end of 1972 more than 69,000 workers had taken part in occupations (16,000 in 1971 and 53,000 in 1972). In 1973 over 22,000 workers took part in more than 31 occupations, with roughly the same



Poster produced by Briant's occupiers in support of the "Pentonville Five"

number taking part in around 24 occupations the following year. In 1975 there were at least 44 occupations, involving 21,500 workers, bringing the total for the period July 1971 to December 1975 to nearly 150,000 workers taking part in over 200 occupations.

## ISSUES AND EXPERIENCES

**The measure of the success of any occupation to survive more than a few days was closely tied to its ability to win broad support.**

In this respect the Propytex occupation in Hartlepool [although the workers in the end did not save their jobs] was remarkable. Whole sections of the community were behind the work-in and from trade union branches around the country. The occupation did things such as organise a family day. Time off from school was arranged for the children and the families were brought to an open day at the factory.

There was a wide variance in the age and experience of the shop stewards playing any major role. For instance, at the Bainbridge (clothing company) sit-in, thirty women machinists were led by two women shop stewards, new trade union members, one in her mid-20s, the other in her mid-30s. On the other hand the Coles Cranes (Sunderland) occupation was led by men with years of experience in the trade union movement.

There are 14 major examples where companies had a number of their plants occupied. In all of these cases, initial occupations in one of the plants could hope to draw on support and experience from workers at other plants. Occupations were also able to draw on support from other sections of the town, union or industry. At the height of the sit-ins in Manchester, the AEUW's own head office was occupied by their clerical workers who were angry over a procedural agreement issue!

Within the construction industry there were a number of occupations both before and after the successful building workers' strike of July 1972.

In May 1972 women engineers at Plessey's Gerrard plant in Swindon sat-in, demanding that they be allowed to take their holiday week at the same time as their husbands, many of whom worked for British Rail. This was conceded. A few weeks later, encouraged by the success of this sit-in, British Rail Workshop engineers sat-in to prevent work from being diverted.

There were of course many threats to the general picture of unity. At Imperial Typewriters, workers at the Hull factory occupied to stop job losses. Earlier, Asian workers at the Leicester plant had faced racist abuse from their fellow workers when they struck. The same reactionary elements denounced the Hull workers when they occupied.

Apart from the Manchester pay sit-ins involving a number of women, women were reported to have been involved in at least 33 other occupations, playing substantial or leading roles in two-thirds of them. Six of these involved women alone.

Christine Brazil was a steward at Briants. She said, "Most people are under the impression that women are conservative in their attitudes and are not interested in unions and militant struggle. There has never been any problem here. All the women are active union members. They are not the sort to grouse when others go on strike."

All the pay disputes were sit-ins. Among the perceived benefits of this kind of action were that it was warmer being inside the workplace, than picketing outside. It was a more effective method of involving large number of the workforce and a way of preventing scab labour. In many cases the choice was forced on the workers as a way of preventing a threatened lock-out.

At Warsley, Wigan (September 1972) the police

took a hand. They were demanding a reduction in the numbers on the picket line, so the workers decided a sit-in would avoid any confrontation.

In a few cases pay sit-ins lasted a matter of hours. The majority of pay sit-ins lasted at least 24 hours.

There were a number of sit-ins in response to management disciplinary action. At Cubitt's building site, Chelsea (February 1973) shop stewards were victimised and the workforce locked out. A UCATT member occupied a crane in response.

Briants and the Sextons leatherworks in Fakenham were probably the only two fully fledged work-ins as they took on a substantial amount of new work. Work-ins were not possible unless essential supplies were available.

Workers' Cooperatives were the end result of about six sit-ins.

All the occupations were supported by the union involved to one degree or another, apart from Sextons. At Briant's, the print union NATSOPA did not recognise the dispute for the first three months, and then paid out £20 a week dispute benefit to its members for the next three months. Then it stopped, in order to put the members under pressure.

The print unions involved then found a buyer for Briants. Although the workers did not trust the buyer, they felt obliged to their union to accept the deal. Within six months the works was closed again, and the workers locked out.

[Under pressure even very right wing union leaders backed the occupations]. Clive Jeninks of ASTMS gave his full support to the NVT occupation in Wolverhampton, riding around on one of the new bikes produced during the occupation, to publicise the potential of the factory!

In 1975 [rather late] the TUC voted for legal immunity for occupations.

Legal action was taken by employers in only a few cases. This reflected widespread sympathy with the actions of occupiers.

On the other hand the eviction of large groups of workers would have sparked off large confrontations with the police.

With the defeat of the Conservatives in 1974, the new Labour Government took a different approach — up to a point. This took the form of financing workers' co-operatives, but not all.

Occupations then occurred at plants where the government held partial or majority ownership — at British Leyland and Cammell Laird shipyard. At Cammell Laird the government did not intervene when in August 1975 a mass picket of the yard was forcibly broken up by 80 police.

Apart from the more obvious material gains obtained in occupations there were a number of other gains for workers, in their confidence, in their ability and willingness to tackle various organisational tasks and changes in political thinking.

In the words of one woman carton worker at Tillotsons, "In the old days, before the union, you were afraid to open your mouth because you were afraid of losing your job. But now we are much more confident. We've got the union."

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# How Vestas workers b

By MARTIN THOMAS

**I**t all started on 15 June, when a small group of young members of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty set off for the Isle of Wight. They had read in the press about the planned closure of Britain's only wind turbine blade factories, operated by the Danish-based multinational Vestas at Venture Quays, East Cowes, and St Cross, Newport, on the Isle of Wight.

They had discussed it among themselves and with other AWL members. They had cast around for contacts to give them a first foothold on the Isle of Wight.

It wasn't easy. The Isle of Wight — both a local-government county and a parliamentary constituency — is a safe Tory seat, and has been nothing but Tory or Liberal or Lib-Dem back to 1945. Even in 1997, Labour got only 13% of the vote there. The towns are small (Ryde, the biggest by a slight margin over Newport, has 26,000 people). There has been no recent activist-left presence. There is no active local Green Party.

The island has many advantages as a base for industrial production. The wind turbine blades from the bigger Vestas factory at St Cross — 40 metres long, difficult to transport by road — can be loaded straight from the factory onto barges to go up the River Medina and over to Southampton docks for shipment all over the world. But prisons are among the island's biggest employers; an unusually large proportion of the population is retired; unemployment is high; a lot of local jobs are seasonal in the tourist trade; and many enterprising young people leave to seek wider opportunities on the mainland.

The young AWL members pitched their tents on a campsite. They made contact with some elderly activists who kept the Ryde and Cowes Trades Councils ticking over, and with the island's one Labour county councillor.

They began visiting the factories at the shift changes, handed out leaflets, talked to the workers. They found a lot of anger against the Vestas bosses, but as yet little confidence that any fightback against the

closure was possible.

The AWL members made it clear that they were not there to substitute for the workers' own action, or to push workers into doing anything that they did not want to do. But they did want the workers to have a chance to discuss collectively what they might do, with all the options before them — rather than each one, individually, feeling helpless in face of the collective, organised power of the bosses.

With a wider circle of Workers' Climate Action activists mobilised to come to the island, they leafleted in the main towns as well as at the factories for a public meeting on 3 July, co-sponsored by Cowes Trades Council and Workers' Climate Action.

A hundred people came. Ron Clarke, a former convenor of the Visteon Enfield plant, spoke about the gains made by the workers' occupation there. But many of the other speakers, established labour movement officials, thought workers could do no more than join the Unite union — there was a handful of members in the factories, though Vestas had stamped on all attempts to unionise seriously — and write letters to the Government.

The campaign still hung in the balance. About half a dozen workers gave contact details to the AWL members saying they were interested in further discussion about how the closure should be thought. Over the weekend 4-5 July AWL member Ed Maltby emailed and phoned them. Only one replied. He agreed to meet and talk, and then pulled back, saying he wasn't ready for that yet.

By Tuesday 7 July Ed was phoning the AWL office to say that he was returning home for a bit to recoup his energies. The half-dozen workers had his contact details, and messages from him, and he would return to the island if they showed interest.

As his train approached Waterloo station in London, Ed got a phone call from a worker asking for a meeting that evening between him and a number of workers from his shop. Ed got off the train at Waterloo and took the first train back to the Isle of Wight in order to make the meeting. A group of workers who wanted to discuss active resistance to the closure had been formed, and gradually grew by passing the word on individually.

Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) members came to the island to join the campaign against closure. On Saturday 11 July some workers joined a session of leafletting and petitioning in the centre of Newport. After AWL summer school on 11-12 July, where Vestas was a big theme, more AWL members came to the island.

By now the Vestas bosses knew that something was afoot, but not what.

More and more workers got involved. But the dominant reaction at the factory gates to our leafletting was still — and would continue to be, right up to the day before the St Cross factory was occupied — that it was "too late" to do anything about the closure; or, putting a brave face on the big blow to Island jobs that the Vestas closure would be, that they were glad no longer to have to work under the Vestas regime, and just wanted to take their redundancy money and go; or that in principle some action might be a good idea, but they didn't want to risk losing their redundancy money.

Already the rumour was widespread that the Vestas bosses' plan is really just to mothball the St Cross factory for maybe two or three years, until demand for wind turbine blades in Europe picks up again after the current economic crisis.

Vestas has blamed the closure plan on the crisis, and government responses to it,

rather than any long-term lack of wind-turbine demand. They own the St Cross factory, rather than leasing it. It is one of the larger factories on the island, so the short-term chances of a lucrative alternative use seem poor. Thus the "mothballing" story seems plausible.

And even sensible, if Vestas profits are your main or only priority! Only, you can't "mothball" people for two or three years!

On 15 July Energy and Climate Change minister Ed Miliband published a White Paper about renewable energy, and calling for 7,000 more wind turbines to be built in the coming years. (Britain currently has about 3,000 in operation or under construction). The Vestas closure looked even more absurd and unscrupulous.

The redundancy money was poor — twice the statutory minimum. The St Cross factory has only been open nine years, and only a handful of workers have been there since the start, so most workers have had only a short time with the company and stand to get only a few hundred pounds in redundancy pay. But, at that stage, even that small pay-out seemed a lot to risk.

A positive, but still uncertain, gathering of workers on 19 July got closer to discussing definite plans. We brought in AWL members with experience of working as trade-union organisers to give workers information on the legalities and logistics of different tactics.

That meeting also formulated demands. Although leaflets had been headlined "Save Vestas", that was not really what the workers wanted. They were glad to be rid of the Vestas bosses. The demand was formulated for Vestas to hand over the plant to the Government, and for the Government to continue production by nationalising the plant under new management. Workers who still wanted to leave should get better redundancy pay.

That meeting also featured a bizarre cross-purposes argument. Someone seemed to suggest hanging a huge Union Jack over a factory building. Socialists immediately responded that it would not be good to repeat the "British Jobs For British Workers" stuff that marred the engineering construction strikes. Workers shook their heads. No, no. The East Cowes factory has a huge Union Jack painted on its waterfront wall, and the discussion was about hanging a banner against the closure over it, to cover it.

On Monday Vestas's top boss, Paddy Weir, got wind of the plans for occupying at least one of the factories, as eventually he was bound to. Evidently he didn't feel sure of himself, so he did not do what a confident boss would have done, and immediately sack the workers whom he suspected of organising action (shrugging at the thought that Vestas would eventually have to pay them money for unfair dismissal, after an industrial tribunal). He just bawled them out, perhaps thinking on the basis of previous experience that would be enough to intimidate them.

However, there was now a clear risk that Vestas bosses would make new security moves to block an occupation. In preparation for the factory closing down the bosses had already changed the normal shift patterns as from Monday 20 July, telling both night shift and day shift to come in days and then sending out a lot of workers to do courses or job-search while the remainder worked on finishing the remaining blades and on clear-up.

They might tell more workers to stay away. There was already talk of the bosses bringing in new, extra security guards from 20 July. They might change the locks and security codes.

So on Monday evening, 20 July, a group

of workers started the occupation, entering the St Cross factory between shifts and taking control of the management offices. There was no extra security to block them. Because the occupation started earlier than the workers had expected, some who had wanted to take part were unable to join in. In the event, that wasn't so bad, because it left a group of more determined and confident workers to organise the majority of the workforce outside the plant.

On Monday evening, Paddy Weir soon turned up at the factory, in a rage. Very quickly there were masses of police there. Weir spoke of getting the police to throw the workers out, and had to be convinced that legally he couldn't do that.

From then until the Wednesday the bosses tried one hoax threat or ultimatum after another to try to throw the workers off balance. Time and again the workers were told that they had "one hour" or "two hours" to leave, or else they would suffer terrible reprisals.

The occupying workers stood firm. At 7.45am on Tuesday morning, the rest of the workforce turned up for the start of the shift. Some had been phoned and told to stay away. Those who arrived — at the Venture Quays (East Cowes) plant as well as at St Cross — were told by managers standing on the police line to take the day off (paid) and come back "as normal" on Wednesday. The bosses were scared that if they let the workers into their workplaces, they would face another occupation in the East Cowes plant, and a bigger one at St Cross.

At that point the managers thought they could end the occupation within one day. They did not have the measure of their workforce at all. In disarray, Vestas bosses would say nothing to the media until the end of the week. One reporter, from the *Times*, had the phone put down on him when he tried to get a comment.

Some workers arriving on Tuesday did just go home, saying that they did not believe that the occupation could achieve anything, and that their only concern was to keep their redundancy money. But a large number gathered outside the front entrance at St Cross.

The mood there was sympathetic to the occupying workers, but also, at that stage, uncertain about what could happen next. Although AWL people had never sought to push workers into doing anything they didn't want, only to create opportunities for them to discuss collectively and to have all the options before them, one worker told us: "I'm just here to see that no harm comes to my mates inside as a result of them being riled up by people like you".

Over the next day or so, the mood changed. Eventually, on the Tuesday morning, we were able to get a meeting of the workers outside the factory entrance to elect a committee. We tried to help the workers to organise a rota — so that each worker would have set times to be outside the factory — though at that stage it didn't

Ed Maltby gets stopped by the police

# became a power

## As it happened

*28 April:* Vestas bosses announce that they are ditching previous plans to re-fit the Isle of Wight plants for more advanced production methods, and will close them instead. They blame “a lack of political initiatives to support the wind industry” and say that “orders have ground to a halt” in Northern Europe. At this stage, however, they also say that it is “too early to say whether orders will pick up enough to rescue the plant”.

*15 June:* Workers’ Liberty activists arrive in the Isle of Wight to start leafleting and talking to workers about the Vestas factory closure and ways to resist it. They receive help from local Trades Council activists and the one local Labour councillor. Later other activists from Workers’ Climate Action join them.

*3 July:* Workers’ Climate Action and Cowes Trades Council call a public meeting to discuss campaigning against the closure. One hundred attend.

*Two weeks starting 6 July:* a minority of workers begin to discuss action. As the conversations spread, the idea grows that there are alternatives. Meanwhile public campaigning against the closure continues on the streets of the Isle of Wight.

*Monday 20 July:* Vestas management hear about the conversations and try to forestall action by threatening workers. 7.30pm: workers decide that they should move before the management try further pre-emptive action, and occupy the St Cross factory in Newport.

*From Tuesday 21 July:* Vestas bosses tells all other workers, at the smaller Venture Quays factory (East Cowes) as well as St Cross, to stay home (on full pay) instead of working, although there are blades to the value of three quarters of a million pounds yet to be finished within the factories. Workers outside the St Cross plant elect a committee to organise their campaign. Management make repeated empty threats against the occupiers. They also refuse to let in food. Support comes in from RMT, FBU, Unison, CWU, GMB, PCS, and many other groups.

*Wednesday 22 July:* a Families and Community Campaign is set up to back the Vestas workers.

*Thursday 23 July:* the Vestas story reaches the front page of the national press (*The Independent*). Vestas bosses start supplying food to the workers, but serve summonses for a court hearing on 29 July for a possession order. Police tactics change. RMT leader Bob Crow comes to Vestas and offers RMT lawyers to help the workers.

*Friday 24 July:* many Vestas workers join RMT so that it can represent them with the Vestas bosses. 300 people march from Newport town centre to the factory.

*Saturday 25 July:* Vestas bosses start giving the occupiers hot food.

*Tuesday 28 July:* Vestas bosses issue notices of dismissal to eleven workers.

*Wednesday 29 July:* Court hearing on Vestas bosses’ claim for a possession order. Case adjourned to 4 August.

*Thursday 30 July:* Was scheduled to be the last day of normal operation at the Vestas factories on the Isle of Wight, though not their physical closure (a “clean-up team” was already booked to work in August).

has been at the factory entrance all hours of the day and night, usually with some of his six young children with him, helping to clear up and cook, wearing an RMT hi-vis vest...

Local RMT activists had been there since the start, and other unions were quick with support. The local FBU arrived on Tuesday morning with an immediate donation of £150. On Thursday, RMT general secretary Bob Crow came down; on Friday, the RMT started recruiting Vestas workers; by the weekend, a number of full-time organisers from the RMT national office had been posted to Vestas.

The workers’ committee got more organised. Increasing numbers of people went out from the factory entrance to leaflet and visit workplaces and campaign in the towns. Increasing numbers turned up to the 6pm rallies. Confidence grew.

Up and down the country, solidarity meetings and protests have been organised by supporters, including giving Ed Miliband a hard time wherever he appears. This work is being co-ordinated in part by the [savevestas.wordpress.com](http://savevestas.wordpress.com) blog.

On Wednesday 29 July Vestas went to court to get a “possession order” against the occupiers, but were knocked back until 4 August.

On the eve of the court appearance Vestas sent in notice of sacking to 11 named workers with their evening meal.

The next big date is 31 July, when the factories are scheduled to cease operation and the workers to be made redundant. The factories can hardly be physically closed down then, since they still contain about three-quarters of a million pounds worth of blades yet to be finished, and anyway a “clean-up” team was due to work through August.

Some workers may accept their redundancy money, spend it, and then distance themselves from the struggle. But at present a large number of workers are determined to continue, and time is, on the whole, on the workers’ side, not the bosses.

It will be crucial not to allow the occupation and the demonstrations outside the factory entrance to become “routinised”, so that media interest fades and workers drift away under the usual pressures of everyday life. We need discussion on creative and imaginative tactics to keep the Vestas bosses and the Government off-bal-

pying workers, and from Thursday morning the food came through.

The Wednesday evening rally also organised a “Families and Community” committee to support the workers.

On Thursday morning, 23 July, the dispute reached the national press front-page headlines (the *Independent*). That same day, Ed Miliband felt under sufficient pressure to write a letter to the *Guardian* making excuses. The police and the Vestas security guards changed tactics, becoming much more low-profile.

The gathering in front of the the factory entrance was settling down. The roundabout opposite the factory entrance filled up with tents. The Socialist Party was arriving to join the AWL and the SWP in supporting the workers. Climate activists, and a miscellany of other people, turned up too.

The local Labour parliamentary candidate (and Unison local government branch secretary), Mark Chiverton, was there a lot of the time. The Lib-Dem parliamentary candidate, Jill Wareham, also turned up briefly to offer support. The Tory MP, Andrew Turner, turned up, was roasted in front of TV cameras by workers’ committee member Steve Stotesbury, went in to the factory to talk to the bosses, and came out unwilling to say more than a few whispered words to the media.

One local Lib-Dem councillor, Adrian Whitaker, a recent convert from the Tories,

really work.

Workers went off to buy food to take in to the occupiers, and a gazebo to provide some protection from the rain to workers and supporters outside. (It rained a lot from Monday evening onwards, and throughout the week!) After some thrashing around to find an office for the workers’ committee, one of the committee members brought his camper van to the site, and de facto that became the committee office.

Gradually, the minority action of the occupying workers generated an active majority among the workers outside, a collective will to resist. On Wednesday evening, at what became the regular 6pm rally at the factory entrance, we heard of yet another ultimatum to the occupiers. The speaker asked the rally: “What do we want to say to the lads inside? Stay, or go?” All the workers, including those who the previous day might have said that their only real concern was to get the occupying workers out safe and sound, yelled: “Stay!”

On the Tuesday, a rush at the police lines had got a few extra workers into the occupation. After that, the police were even more vigilant, and stopped food being taken in to the occupiers.

That police blockade was eventually broken on the Wednesday, on the initiative of some Climate Camp activists who organised a large number of people to walk calmly through the lines of police and security guards to below the balcony of the management offices and throw the food up.

The police knew that when it came down to it they had no legal authority to use violence against people peacefully walking across the factory forecourt, and there were not enough of them to block everyone by just standing in the way.

After that, the police put up fences around the front entrance. Ironically, they were fencing the management in as well as us out. In disarray, the Vestas bosses were paying their own workers to picket them and erecting fences to reinforce the picket lines!

It might take only a bit of further protest to push the police into erecting similar fences at the back entrance; and then the only way for the bosses to get stuff in or out will be through the “marine gate” through which blades are usually taken to be loaded onto barges for transit to Southampton, across a cycle path which is a public right of way and not Vestas property.

The Vestas bosses knew that they could not get away with starving the workers out, so on Wednesday evening they said they would now supply food to the occu-

Support grows daily

THE GM FLINT OCCUPATION, 1936-7

# Education made us strong

Excerpts from an account by Genora Johnson Dollinger, who was a leader of the Women's Auxiliary. The occupation was decisive in winning union recognition in the US car industry. Genora Johnson Dollinger was a left-wing member of the Socialist Party USA who became a Trotskyist.

- **What happened.** The car industry in the USA (and elsewhere) had been a bastion of non-unionism. The car firms paid relatively high wages but policed their workers fiercely. Ford had an internal police force, and also monitored workers' lives outside work. Henry Ford sympathised with fascism. GM was not much different. The union movement was relatively weak and only looked after better-paid, white, male workers in more skilled trades. The Great Crash in 1929 was followed immediately by a further lull in the labour movement. With a slight temporary economic recovery in 1933-34, workers' struggles began to erupt. Some unions split off from the main American Federation of Labor (AFL) and started (November 1935) building a new union centre, the CIO, based on organising the mass workforces in the big industries. The Flint occupation was a high point of the CIO organising drive, and opened the way for union organisation across the car industry.

- **Preparation.** Genora Johnson stresses that lots of talks on labour history and socialist theory helped educate and train the leaders for the mass struggle. What is done in the "dull" period before big struggles is important as well as what happens in the struggles.

- **Politics.** What she doesn't mention in these particular excerpts is that it made a difference which left party did the preparation and recruited from the struggle. The Communist Party played a big role. But at the same time the CP was justifying the Moscow Trials and the Great Terror in the USSR: it was progressively demoralising its militants. In the USA, it blocked moves to form a workers' party based on the unions and instead pushed workers to back Roosevelt. In World War Two it would oppose strikes. As for the Socialist Party — Genora Johnson was part of a revolutionary minority in it who were eventually forced out, forming the Trotskyist Socialist Workers' Party. It made a big difference which of the various left parties predominated.

- **Defying the bosses.** In Flint as elsewhere, the US bosses used much harsher tactics than we are used to in Britain — beatings, shootings, etc. Yet the workers, with sufficient organisation and confidence, were able to defeat them.

- **Women's organisation.** The women played a crucial role, including in breaking the violent threats. They spoke and organised as well as helping with food and the like. Women are a majority of the working class, and that they become confident and assertive is vital to working-class strength.

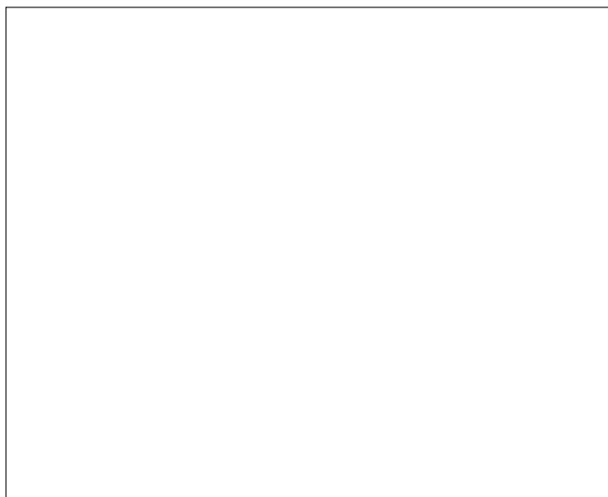
A considerable amount of preparatory work was done before the strike. That preparatory work was done by radical parties.

We had several very active organisations in Flint and Detroit: the Communist Party, the Proletarian Party, the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party and the International Workers of the World (IWW). And, with the exception of the Communist Party, we all had our headquarters in the Pengelly Building, a very old building that became the major strike headquarters of the whole United Automobile Workers Union of Flint. Even as the strike was going on, we still had our rooms on the second floor, while the main activities in the auditorium were on the third floor.

Two years before the strike broke out, the Socialist Party in Flint organised the League for Industrial Democracy, (LID). We held meetings in garages and in basements, secret meetings, so the people wouldn't get caught and beaten up.

As we got bigger, the Socialist Party started sending us their speakers from New York. Many of them were from the Brookwood Labor College. We put out leaflets and sold tickets for these meetings, which were held in the basement of the biggest Methodist church and in the Masonic Temple.

We held lectures in socialism mainly, plus labor his-



Genora Johnson

tory and current events, focusing on what was happening politically. Those were very popular meetings. We would get three and four hundred people at some of our meetings.

This was all before the strike, in preparation for when the struggle actually broke out, when the workers couldn't take any more and rebelled. A core of socialists understood that this would eventually happen. I was busy organising the LID and the Socialist Party during this time before the strike. I was well known in Flint.

Our Socialist Party was the next biggest organisation to the Communist Party. The Socialist Party held on-going classes in labor history, public speaking, and parliamentary procedure. These classes were very important and produced many capable people.

One of the Reuther brothers, Roy, was a member of the Socialist Party. Roy had organised several workers' education projects and was sent into Flint to organise the UAW early in 1936.

Our newspaper, *The Socialist Call*, was distributed widely as an aid to our recruitment of GM workers into the Socialist Party. We laid a solid groundwork so that some of the first people who took the initial brave actions in the shop were Socialist Party workers.

The Communist Party met at the north end of Flint because that's where most of the immigrants from Russia, Poland and Hungary lived. They were mainly Buick workers. They had a lot of social activities, dances, and political meetings. They also had an insurance organisation, the International Workers Order. Robert Travis, the top UAW organiser in Flint, was in the Communist Party, and he selected Roy Reuther to work as his second-in-command during the strike.

But, in my opinion, the main leaders of that strike, the ones who were able to organise, to speak in public meetings and so on, came out of the Socialist Party.

Workers were receptive to the idea of a union, but so much fear came along with it. When we started signing people up to be in the union, General Motors organised a huge rival organisation called the Flint Alliance that cost nothing to join, but you signed a card so that they had a record of you. A great deal of anti-union propaganda was disseminated into the homes of workers through the Flint Alliance. The workers knew conditions were horrible, but they were in fear of losing their jobs if they refused to join the Alliance. They also saw what happened to some of their buddies who would go to a union meeting and get beaten up and come to work the next day with black eyes or a busted head.

So workers didn't all rush to join the union. In fact, if General Motors had known the real number of union members at the time those plants went down, a successful strike wouldn't have been possible. We had to keep the actual membership figures as secret as we could.

As I said, a fermentation was taking place for a couple of years before the first sit-down. No question about it. Many revolutionaries, so-called, talk about "spontaneous combustion of the workers." I can't see that at all, because it took time for the organisers in various plants of this whole General Motors empire to talk to the workers and to bring them to classes-to make some contact-create a bond.

You had to trust your fellow worker if you were

going to be an active union member because we had an awful lot of spies in there, a lot of people who would get special favor for squealing on somebody else.

I should add that the one big daily newspaper, the *Flint Journal*, was controlled completely by General Motors. They wrote things like, "You don't bite the hand that feeds you," and "These people coming in are all imports from Soviet Russia, and they want communism." So everybody was labelled a Communist who joined the union. The radio stations (we didn't have television then) and every avenue of information was controlled by GM.

The only thing the union had at first was mimeographed sheets. Finally, we were able to put out a weekly, the *Flint Auto Worker*, with reports of what the union was doing and what we were working for - what kind of a society we wanted. We handed these out at the plant gates after work. And the distributors often got beaten up by the company's paid agents. They had Pinkerton [private security] men in there, two or three different spy agencies, plus the people that they would pull out of their own ranks, General Motors protection police. It was a dangerous period — no question about it.

And we had our sound car, an ordinary car fitted with loudspeakers on top with large batteries. During the strike we would send it around to the various plants that were still operating — AC Sparkplug and Buick. As the workers were going in, we would taunt them with the conditions that they had to face, and we'd give them a little pep talk, "As an individual you are only one, but the union gives us strength." Many of the workers in those plants came down and walked the picket lines in sympathy, but there was not enough preparation done in those plants and not enough leadership, for them to take the chance to shut their plants down.

"They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn.  
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.  
We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn,  
That the union makes us strong."  
Verse from the song, *Solidarity Forever*, written by Ralph Chaplin.

**The first sit-down was on 30 December 1936 in the small Fisher Body Plant 2 over a particularly big grievance that had occurred. The workers were at the point where they had just had enough, and under a militant leadership, they sat down.**

When the UAW leaders in the big Fisher Body Plant 1 heard about the sit-down in Fisher 2, they sat down, also. That took real guts, and it took political leadership. The leaders of the political parties knew what they had to do because they'd studied labour history and the ruthlessness of the corporations.

Picket lines were established and also a big kitchen in the south end of Flint, across from the large Fisher 1 plant. Every day, gallons and gallons of food were prepared, and anybody who was on the picket lines would get a ticket with notification that they had served on the line so they'd be able to get a good hot meal.

The strike kitchen was primarily organised by the Communist Party women. They brought a restaurant man from Detroit to help organise this huge kitchen. They were the ones who made all of those good meals.

We also had what we called scavengers, groups of people who would go to the local farmers and ask for donations of food for the strikers. Many people in these small towns surrounding Flint were factory workers who would also raise potatoes, cabbages, tomatoes, corn or whatever. So great quantities of food were sent down to be made into dishes for the strikers. People were very generous.

John L. Lewis and the United Mine Workers helped us financially so that if there was somebody in serious difficulty we could help them out a little bit. Later on, the garment workers sent money. But with thousands of workers, you couldn't help everybody, so many families were taken care of by committees forming in plants, whether they were on strike or not. Committees in Buick, Chevrolet, and Fisher Body took care of some of the urgent cases so nobody starved or got into real-



ly major medical difficulties.

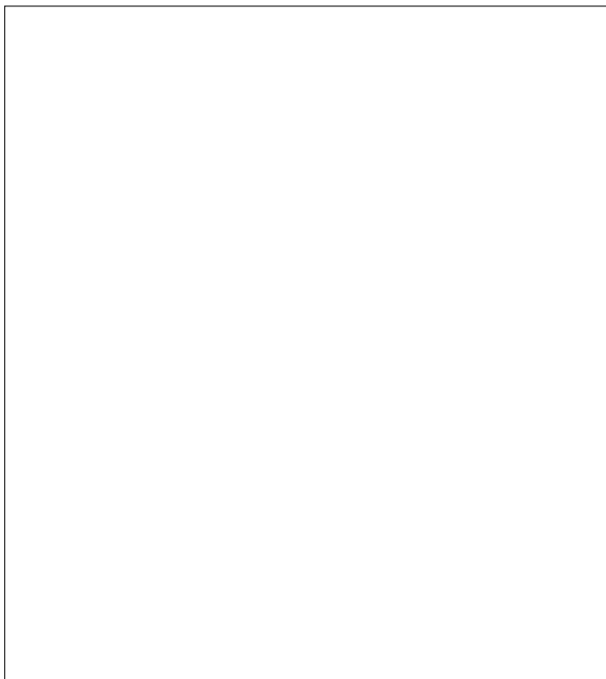
After the first sit-down started, I went down to see what I could do to help. I was either on the picket lines or up at the Pengelly Building all the time, but some of the strike leaders didn't know who I was and didn't know that I had been teaching classes in unionism and so on. So they said, "Go to the kitchen. We need a lot of help out there." They didn't know what else to tell a woman to do.

I said, "You've got a lot of little, skinny men around here who can't stand to be out on the cold picket lines for very long. They can peel potatoes as well as women can." I turned down the idea of kitchen duty.

Instead, I organised a children's picket line. I got Bristol board and paints, and I was painting signs for this children's picket line. One of my socialist comrades came up and said, "Hey, Genora, what are you doing here?" I said, "I'm doing your job". Since he was a professional sign painter, I turned the sign-painting project over to him and that was the beginning of the sign-painting department.

We could only do the children's picket line once because it was too dangerous, but we got an awful lot of favorable publicity from it, much of it international. The picture of my two-year-old son, Jarvis, holding a picket sign saying, "My daddy strikes for us little tykes," went all over the nation, and people sent me articles from French newspapers and from Germany and from other European countries. I thought it was remarkable that the news travelled so far...

Now remember, the UAW was still in the process of getting organised. It didn't have elected officers or by-laws or any of the rest of it. So we were free to organise our Women's Auxiliary, to elect our president, vice-president, recording secretary and heads of committees, all on our own... We set up public speaking classes for women... We trained them in how to get up in



The children's picket line

union meetings and what appeals to make. We gave them an outline of a speech and they practiced in the classes...

The successful occupation of Plant 4, which joined the occupations at Fisher 1 and 2, broke the resistance of General Motors and negotiations began in Detroit. We still maintained the picket lines and the security of the plants. The areas that weren't controlled by the union were controlled by the National Guard.

The National Guard kept everyone away from the Chevrolet embankment. If you came down Chevrolet Avenue and you looked up at the buildings there, you'd see guardsmen with their machine guns pointed right down the street.

The Brigade went to help the women from the kitchen get food into Plant 4 the first night, but we couldn't get by those guards. I started talking to one of these young boys and his finger was actually trembling on that trigger. We didn't fool around with them because they were all excited. They thought this was a big adventure — what the hell, shooting a couple of people. It was war. But the [State] governor declared that the strikers were to be fed.

However, General Motors had turned off the heat in Plant 4 and they had no cushions. Fisher Body plants have cushions and materials for seating and so they were much easier to hold. Not only that, the huge motorised picket lines at Fisher Body 1 meant we were strong enough so that the picketers and sit-downers could get out if they wanted to and go across to the union restaurant to contact people. They could even have their families come into the plant for a little while and get them back out again through the big front windows, because they were guarded by the union.

At Chevrolet you couldn't get out. GM used all kinds of tactics to break that sit-down. They sent in notes that some members of the strikers' families were very sick. One man was told his father was dying, and so he left. They had doctors come in saying that some little cough was very dangerous — a contagious disease. But Kermit was a very strong leader and he managed to keep the men together.

This time it was General Motors that was stymied. On 11 February they signed a peace agreement recognising the UAW as representative for the auto workers. And on 12 March the first labour contract was signed.

EXCERPTS FROM 'THE TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMME' BY LEON TROTSKY

# Twentieth century experiences

OCCUPATIONS AND WORKERS' CONTROL

**"T**he Transitional Programme" was written in 1938 by Leon Trotsky. Trotsky was a leader of the workers' revolution in Russia in 1917, and then of the working-class opposition to the Stalinist bureaucracy. His words sum up a vast experience of working-class struggles in many countries in the 20th century.

- What happened. Italy 1920 was the first big wave of factory occupations, and it was followed by another wave in the USA in the 1930s. Later waves of workplace occupations include France in 1968, Britain in the 1970s, and Poland in 1980.

- The ruling class. We describe the owners of the big corporations, their top managers (who are usually big shareholders themselves), and their friends in top positions in the government machine (who often move over to top positions in business) as the ruling class. How do they rule? The power of wealth — the "dull compulsion of economic relations". The force of habit (helped by the power of the media and so on). And the power of the state machine — top civil service, armed forces, police, judges.

- Shaking the power of the ruling class. The power of the ruling class seems solid, and is solid, as long as workers are atomised as individuals or in relatively small groups. When workers organise collectively and confidently, the power of the ruling class begins to shake. Their wealth is no longer the same source of power if workers occupy the workplaces. If workers say that the fact that the workers produce all new value, that all the bosses' wealth is simply the accumulation of the proceeds of previous exploitation, means that the workplace is "theirs" more than it is the bosses'. Trotsky calls this "dual power" — there are two rival centres of power in the workplace, and one or another must prevail.

- Business secrecy. Who knew what the banks were doing in the run-up to the financial crisis? Not many people. Who knows what Vestas's real financial calculations are about their Isle of Wight sites? The ruling class also rules by limiting information. If the workers begin to get information, then that in itself begins to shake the power of the ruling class.

- Workers' control. Workers' control extends, through a process of struggle, from simple rights to information through a situation of strong union

organisation in workplaces through to full "dual power" in an occupation to "direct workers' management". It is always dependent on struggle. It is difficult to sustain isolated pockets of workers' control — generally, over a period of time, workers' control is either spread or defeated. Big example: Catalonia 1936, where the workers had fairly full control in the factories but got defeated because they left political power in the hands of the Popular Front government.

Sit-down strikes

**O**n guard against routine handling of a situation as against a plague, the leadership should respond sensitively to the initiative of the masses.

Sit-down strikes, the latest expression of this kind of initiative, go beyond the limits of "normal" capitalist procedure. Independently of the demands of the strikers, the temporary seizure of factories deals a blow to the idol, capitalist property. Every sit-down strike poses in a practical manner the question of who is boss of the factory: the capitalist or the workers?

If the sit-down strike raises this question episodically, the factory committee gives it organized expression. Elected by all the factory employees, the factory committee immediately creates a counterweight to the will of the administration...

Trade union bureaucrats will, as a general rule, resist the creation of factory committees, just as they resist every bold step along the road of mobilizing the masses.

However, the wider the sweep of the movement, the easier will it be to break this resistance. Where the closed shop has already been instituted in "peaceful" times, the committee will formally coincide with the usual organ of the trade union, but will renew its personnel and widen its functions. The prime significance of the committee, however, lies in the fact that it becomes the militant staff for such working class layers, as the trade union is usually incapable of moving to action. It is precisely from these more oppressed layers that the most self-sacrificing battalions of the revolution will come.

From the moment that the committee makes its appearance, a factual dual power is established in the factory. By its very essence it represents the transitional state, because it includes in itself two irreconcilable regimes: the capitalist and the proletarian. The fundamental significance of factory committees is precisely

contained in the fact that they open the doors, if not to a direct revolutionary, then to a pre-revolutionary period — between the bourgeois and the proletarian regimes. That the propagation of the factory committee idea is neither premature nor artificial is amply attested to by the waves of sit-down strikes spreading through several countries. New waves of this type will be inevitable in the immediate future. It is necessary to begin a campaign in favor of factory committees in time in order not to be caught unawares.

"Business Secrets" and Workers' Control of Industry

... The necessity of "controlling" economy, of placing state "guidance" over industry and of "planning" is today recognised — at least in words — by almost all current bourgeois and petty bourgeois tendencies, from fascist to Social Democratic. With the fascists, it is mainly a question of "planned" plundering of the people for military purposes. The Social Democrats prepare to drain the ocean of anarchy with spoonfuls of bureaucratic "planning." Engineers and professors write articles about "technocracy." In their cowardly experiments in "regulation," democratic governments run head-on into the invincible sabotage of big capital.

The actual relationship existing between the exploiters and the democratic "controllers" is best characterised by the fact that the gentlemen "reformers" stop short in pious trepidation before the threshold of the trusts and their business "secrets"...

Workers no less than capitalists have the right to know the "secrets" of the factory, of the trust, of the whole branch of industry, of the national economy as a whole. First and foremost, banks, heavy industry and centralized transport should be placed under an observation glass.

The immediate tasks of workers' control should be to explain the debits and credits of society, beginning with individual business undertakings; to determine the actual share of the national income appropriated by individual capitalists and by the exploiters as a whole; to expose the behind-the-scenes deals and swindles of banks and trusts; finally, to reveal to all members of society that unconscionable squandering of human labour which is the result of capitalist anarchy and the naked pursuit of profits.

No office holder of the bourgeois state is in a position to carry out this work, no matter with how great authority one would wish to endow him... Only facto-

**I**mperialism means the domination of finance capital. Side by side with the trusts and syndicates, and very frequently rising above them, the banks concentrate in their hands the actual command over the economy.

In their structure the banks express in a concentrated form the entire structure of modern capital: they combine tendencies of monopoly with tendencies of anarchy. They organize the miracles of technology, giant enterprises, mighty trusts; and they also organise high prices, crises and unemployment. It is impossible to take a single serious step in the struggle against monopolistic despotism and capitalistic anarchy — which supplement one another in their work of destruction — if the commanding posts of banks are left in the hands of predatory capitalists.

In order to create a unified system of investments and credits, along a rational plan corresponding to the interests of the entire people, it is necessary to merge all the banks into a single national institution. Only the expropriation of the private banks and the concentration of the entire credit system in the hands of the state will provide the latter with the necessary actual, i.e., material resources — and not merely paper and bureaucratic resources — for economic planning.

The expropriation of the banks in no case implies the expropriation of bank deposits. On the contrary, the single state bank will be able to create much more favourable conditions for the small depositors than could the private banks. In the same way, only the state bank can establish for farmers, tradesmen and small merchants conditions of favourable, that is, cheap credit. Even more important, however, is the circumstance that the entire economy — first and foremost large-scale industry and transport directed by a single financial staff, will serve the vital interests of the workers and all other toilers.

However, the state-isation of the banks will produce these favorable results only if the state power itself passes completely from the hands of the exploiters into the hands of the toilers.

**WORKERS' GOVERNMENT**

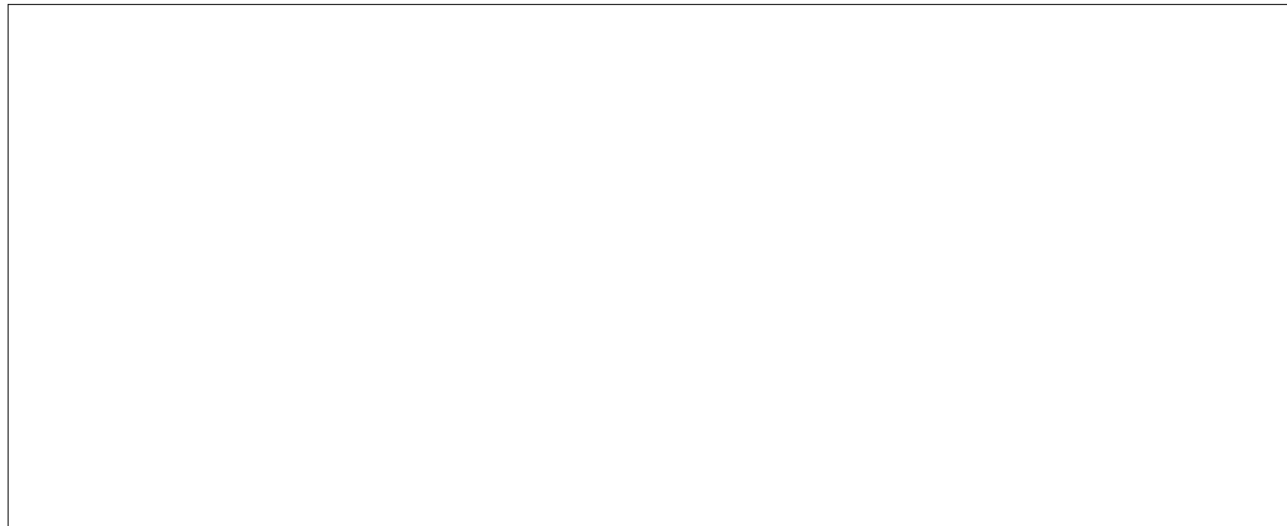
**F**urther excerpt from Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*.

• **Why Labour governments aren't socialist.** Ever since its foundation the Labour Party has been dominated by a combination — in varying proportions — of trade-union officials and middle-class parliamentary politicians. Their political horizon has never stretched further than reforms within the system in tune with the left end of the spectrum of established bourgeois opinion. At some times — the 1945-51 Labour government — that has meant serious reforms, though coupled with anti-working-class measures. At other times, especially those of capitalist crisis, it has meant scarcely any reforms at all.

• **This New Labour government: it is something worse than previous Labour governments.** The old Labour Party, from 1900 to 1997, never had a democracy sufficient to overcome the inertia of the Labour and trade union leaders who were oriented to working within "safe" capitalist limits, but it had a relatively open structure allowing real working-class input at least at the level of protest and pressure on government and local government. Since 1997 Tony Blair and Gordon Brown have largely blocked off and cemented over those channels of democratic input; they have "hijacked" the Labour Party on behalf of a crew of unashamedly "pro-business" politicians.

• **Labour is still not the same as the Tories.** New Labour is not the same as old Labour, but it is still not the same as the Tories. The unions do still have 50% of the vote at Labour conference, the effective right to change Labour's internal rules when they want, a big vote in the selection of Labour leaders, the right to send large numbers of delegates to local Labour Parties, and leverage as important sources of finance for the party. It has been made harder for unions to use their potential public political input, and on the whole the union leaders have chosen to go the easier way of lobbying behind the scenes for small concessions; but the lid is not yet quite nailed down.

• **Workers' government?** In the 1920s revolutionaries called on the reformist workers' parties to unite with them in fighting for immediate working-class interests, and at certain points to take that unity forward into forming a joint "workers' government" to enforce those interests. It was a tactical demand. Either the reformists would refuse, and the revolutionaries could use the fact to enlighten radical-minded workers who believed in the reformists; or they would accept, and the ensuing "workers' government" would be an unstable formation, but possi-



**Dunstan miners 1920. The nationalisation of the mines, even under capitalist conditions, meant a lot to miners and their families. The job was difficult and often dangerous.**

ry committees can bring about real control of production, calling in — as consultants but not as "technocrats" — specialists sincerely devoted to the people: accountants, statisticians, engineers, scientists, etc.

**The struggle against unemployment is not to be considered without the calling for a broad and bold organisation of public works.**

But public works can have a continuous and progressive significance for society, as for the unemployed themselves, only when they are made part of a general plan worked out to cover a considerable number of years. Within the framework of this plan, the workers would demand resumption, as public utilities, of work in private businesses closed as a result of the crisis. Workers' control in such cases: would be replaced by direct workers' management.

The working out of even the most elementary economic plan — from the point of view of the exploited, not the exploiters — is impossible without workers' control, that is, without the penetration of the workers' eye into all open and concealed springs of capitalist economy. Committees representing individual business enterprises should meet at conference to choose corresponding committees of trusts, whole branches of industry, economic regions and finally, of national industry as a whole. Thus, workers' control becomes a school for planned economy. On the basis of the experience of control, the working class will prepare itself for direct management of nationalised industry when the hour for that eventuality strikes.

To those capitalists, mainly of the lower and middle strata, who of their own accord sometimes offer to throw open their books to the workers — usually to demonstrate the necessity of lowering wages — the workers answer that they are not interested in the bookkeeping of individual bankrupts or semi-bankrupts but in the account ledgers of all exploiters as a whole. The workers cannot and do not wish to accommodate the level of their living conditions to the exigencies of individual capitalists, themselves victims of their own regime.

The task is one of reorganising the whole system of production and distribution on a more dignified and workable basis. If the abolition of business secrets be a necessary condition to workers' control, then control is the first step along the road to the socialist guidance of economy.

**NATIONALISATION**

**F**urther excerpts from Trotsky's *Transitional Programme*.

• **What's happened.** More or less extensive state ownership has often been a feature of capitalism from early days. From the late 19th century up to the end of the 1970s it looked as if state ownership was growing gradually and inexorably within capitalism as it advanced. Then came the era of privatisation.

• **Socialist nationalisation and capitalist nationalisation.** It is possible for an "ordinary" capitalist country to have a high level of nationalisation without becoming any less capitalist. Austria, for example, had state ownership of the electric and electronics, chemical, iron and steel, machinery and most other big industries until the 1990s. In some poorer capitalist countries, high levels of state ownership have gone hand in hand with political despotism: Burma, or Saddam Hussein's Iraq, are examples. Trotsky indicates the critical issue here: nationalisation is socialistic only if linked with "the question... of seizure of power by the workers and farmers" and the "political overthrow of the bourgeoisie". State ownership is socialistic only if the state is a workers'

state.

• **Why we advocate nationalisations of particular industries or enterprises.** Trotsky argues that even under capitalism we can "demand resumption, as public utilities, of work in [individual] private businesses closed as a result of the crisis" with "workers' management", and also demand nationalisation of individual key branches of industry or of banks. The general background to such specific demands is a political regime of parliamentary democracy, under which state-owned industries, though still capitalist, can have their running seriously influenced by public pressure. Thus in Britain nationalisation of the coal and rail industries did not stop them being capitalist, but did allow a serious improvement in workers' conditions there. Union membership is much higher in publicly-owned enterprises. A nationalised wind turbine industry would find it harder to trash jobs than Vestas does.

• **The banks.** Trotsky advocates a specific demand for public ownership of the banks, to create a single public financial service. This is a precondition for serious economic planning and crisis-avoidance; even under capitalist parliamentary democracy it opens space for public pressure to influence economic decisions; if linked to a political struggle for workers' rule, it can allow planning in the interests of the working class.

**Expropriation of Separate Groups of Capitalists**

**T**he socialist program of expropriation, i.e., of political overthrow of the bourgeoisie and liquidation of its economic domination, should in no case during the present transitional period hinder us from advancing, when the occasion warrants, the demand for the expropriation of several key branches of industry vital for national existence or of the most parasitic group of the bourgeoisie.

Thus, in answer to the pathetic jeremiads of the gentlemen democrats anent the dictatorship of the "60 Families" of the United States or the "200 Families" of France, we counterpose the demand for the expropriation of those 60 or 200 feudalistic capitalist overlords.

In precisely the same way, we demand the expropriation of the corporations holding monopolies on war industries, railroads, the most important sources of raw materials, etc.

The difference between these demands and the muddleheaded reformist slogan of "nationalisation" lies in the following: (1) we reject indemnification [i.e. compensation to the previous owners]; (2) we warn the masses against demagogues of the People's Front who, giving lip service to nationalisation, remain in reality agents of capital; (3) we call upon the masses to rely only upon their own revolutionary strength; (4) we link up the question of expropriation with that of seizure of power by the workers and farmers.

The necessity of advancing the slogan of expropriation in the course of daily agitation in partial form, and not only in our propaganda in its more comprehensive aspects, is dictated by the fact that different branches of industry are on different levels of development, occupy a different place in the life of society, and pass through different stages of the class struggle. Only a general revolutionary upsurge of the working class can place the complete expropriation of the bourgeoisie on the order of the day. The task of transitional demands is to prepare the working class to solve this problem.

**Expropriation of the Private Banks and State-isation of the Credit System**

bly a stepping stone to full workers' rule. Today we call on the labour movement — essentially, the unions — to unite to fight for a government accountable to the unions and as loyal to the working class as Thatcher, Blair, and Brown have been loyal to the bosses. The fight for that "workers' government" proceeds both through agitating in the affiliated unions for them to combat Brown within the Labour Party and through independent socialist politics.

The Workers' Government

The central task... consists in freeing the working class from the old leadership, whose conservatism is in complete contradiction to the catastrophic eruptions of disintegrating capitalism and represents the chief obstacle to historical progress.

The chief accusation which the Fourth International advances against the traditional organisations of the working class is the fact that they do not wish to tear themselves away from the political semi-corpse of the bourgeoisie.

Under these conditions the demand, systematically addressed to the old leadership: "Break with the bourgeoisie, take the power!" is an extremely important

weapon for exposing the treacherous character of the parties and organizations of the Second, Third and Amsterdam Internationals. The slogan, "workers' government," is thus acceptable to us only in the sense that it had in 1917 with the Bolsheviks, i.e., as an anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist slogan. but in no case in that "democratic" sense which later the epigones gave it, transforming it from a bridge to Socialist revolution into the chief barrier upon its path.

Of all parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers and speak in their name, we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for the workers' government. On this road we promise them full support against capitalist reaction. At the same time, we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the program of the "workers' government."

Is the creation of such a government by the traditional workers' organisations possible? Past experience shows, as has already been stated, that this is, to say the least, highly improbable. However, one cannot categorically deny in advance the theoretical possibility that, under the influence of completely exceptional circumstances (war, defeat, financial crash, mass revolu-

tionary pressure, etc.), the petty bourgeois parties... may go further than they wish along the road to a break with the bourgeoisie. In any case one thing is not to be doubted: even if this highly improbable variant somewhere at some time becomes a reality and the "workers' and farmers' government" in the above-mentioned sense is established in fact, it would represent merely a short episode on the road to the actual rule of the working class.

However, there is no need to indulge in guesswork. The agitation around the slogan of a workers'-farmers' government preserves under all conditions a tremendous educational value. And not accidentally. This generalized slogan proceeds entirely along the line of the political development of our epoch (the bankruptcy and decomposition of the old bourgeois parties, the downfall of democracy, the growth of fascism, the accelerated drive of the workers toward more active and aggressive politics).

Each of the transitional demands should, therefore, lead to one and the same political conclusion: the workers need to break with all traditional parties of the bourgeoisie in order, jointly with the farmers, to establish their own power.

ITALY 1920

# All power to the Workshop Committees!

Excerpts from two articles written by Antonio Gramsci, one at the start of the great wave of factory occupations, the other at the end. Gramsci was an Italian socialist, later jailed by Mussolini's fascist regime.

- What happened: After the Russian Revolution of 1917 there was a strong revolutionary mood among workers in Italy. In August 1920 Alfa Romeo in Milan locked its workers out as a gambit in contract negotiations. Workers occupied the plant and 280 others around Milan. In September workers in Turin and other cities joined the occupation movement. Production continued under the supervision of the workers' factory councils. Prime minister Giovanni Giolitti said there should be compromise. The Socialist Party leadership referred a decision to the union confederation, the CGL, which in turn called a referendum of its membership on the rigged choice, "negotiations or revolution". A small majority voted for "negotiations". The movement wound down. The bosses quickly sought revenge. Mussolini formed a fascist government in October 1922.

- "Dual power". Without using the same words, Gramsci expresses the same idea as Trotsky: occupations create a "dual power" in industry.

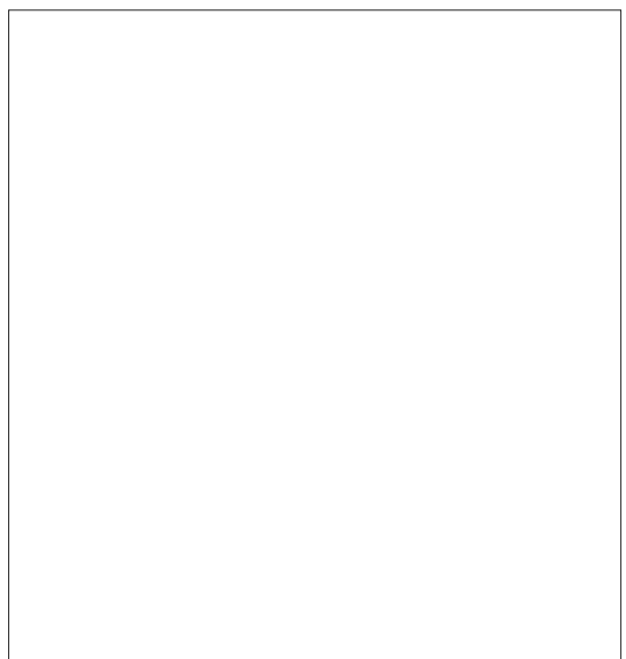
- Gramsci's initial attitude. Gramsci's first article reads as if to suggest that a socialist revolution could be made just by extending workplace occupations. But factories are not the whole of society. Workers also need to deal with the bourgeois machinery of government. If that is left intact, then workers' control in the factories will eventually die. (Also, Gramsci offers little answer to the problem that peasants were at that time more numerous in Italy than industrial workers; a socialist revolution could not have been made without the workers first winning over the peasants). The problem was that the Socialist Party in Italy was revolutionary in words but passive in practice.

- Gramsci's self-correction. By the time Gramsci wrote the second article excerpted here, he had come to focus much more on the issue of building a revolutionary socialist party which could lead a struggle across the whole of society and not just in the factories. The second article shifts the emphasis so much towards the necessary role of an activist minority that it can read as "elitist". But the essential point is that majorities are not just to be counted. They have to be made. And sometimes only bold initiative by a minority can create the confidence necessary to gain a majority for resistance.

Workers' Democracy

An urgent problem today faces every socialist with a lively sense of the historical responsibility that rests on the working class and on the party which represents the critical and active consciousness of the mission of this class.

How are the immense social forces unleashed by the War to be harnessed? How are they to be disciplined



Antonio Gramsci

and given a political form which has the potential to develop and grow continuously into the basis of the socialist state in which the dictatorship of the proletariat is embodied [i.e. workers' rule: Gramsci means a "dictatorship" by workers against the small capitalist minority. Proletariat means "working class"]? How is the present to be welded to the future, satisfying the urgent necessities of the one and working effectively to create and "anticipate" the other?

The aim of this article is to stimulate thought and action. It is an invitation to the best and most conscious workers to reflect on the problem and collaborate — each in the sphere of his own competence and activity — towards its solution, by focusing the attention of their comrades and associations on it. Only common solidarity in a work of clarification, persuasion and mutual education will produce concrete, constructive action.

The socialist state already exists potentially in the institutions of social life characteristic of the exploited working class. To link these institutions together, co-ordinating and ordering them in a highly centralised hierarchy of instances and powers, while respecting the indispensable autonomy and articulation of each, means creating a true and representative workers' democracy here and now. Such a democracy should be effectively and actively opposed to the bourgeois state, and already prepared to replace it in all its essential functions of administration and control of the national heritage.

Today, the workers' movement is led by the Socialist Party and the Confederation of Labour. But for the great mass of workers, the exercise of the social power of the party and the confederation is only achieved

indirectly, by prestige and enthusiasm, authoritarian pressure and even inertia. The scope of the party's prestige widens daily, spreading to previously unexplored popular strata; it wins consent and a desire to work effectively for the advent of Communism among groups and individuals which have never previously participated in political struggle.

These disorderly and chaotic energies must be given permanent form and discipline. They must be organised and strengthened, making the proletarian and semi-proletarian class an organised society that can educate itself, gain experience and acquire a responsible consciousness of the duties that fall to a class that achieves State power.

Only many decades of work will enable the Socialist Party and the trade unions to absorb the whole of the working class. These two institutions cannot be identified immediately with the proletarian State. In fact, in the Communist Republics, they have continued to survive independently of the state, as institutions of propulsion (the Party) or of control and partial implementation (the unions). The party must continue as the organ of Communist education, the dynamo of faith, the depository of doctrine, the supreme power harmonising and leading towards their goal the organised and disciplined forces of the working class and the peasantry. Precisely because it must strictly carry out this task, the party cannot throw open its doors to an invasion of new members, unused to the exercise of responsibility and discipline.

*Founded at Genoa in 1892, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) represented the Second International in Italy. Unlike its French and German equivalents, it did not support the entry of Italy into the War in May 1915, but neither did it adopt a revolutionary attitude. The result was that it survived the War with the three wings characteristic of pre-War Socialist Parties: a reformist wing on the right; a "maximalist" (orthodox) centre; and a revolutionary wing on the left. The General Confederation of Labour (CGL) was the socialist federation of trade unions. Founded in 1906, its pre-war membership rose to 384,000, about half the organized workers in Italy. After the War, the CGL membership rose rapidly to 2,000,000; its Catholic (CIL) and syndicalist (USI) counterparts claimed 1,160,000 and 800,000 members respectively. The CGL was dominated by reformists like its post-War secretary, D'Aragona.*

But the social life of the working class is rich in institutions, is articulated by a multiplicity of activities. These precisely demand development, co-ordination, and interconnection in a broad and flexible system that will include and order the entire working class.

The workshop with its internal commissions, the socialist circles and the peasant communities are the centres of proletarian life in which we must work directly.

The internal commissions are organs of workers' democracy which must be freed from the limitations imposed on them by the management, and infused with new life and energy. [Roughly equivalent to the shop steward committees set up in Britain during the First World

*War. The internal commissions had long been demanded by the engineering workers' union (FIOM) in Turin before they were acknowledged by the government (but not fully by the employers) in 1915. Most were dominated by revolutionary workers, though a few were tools of the management.] Today, the internal commissions limit the power of the capitalist in the factory and perform functions of arbitration and discipline. Tomorrow, developed and enriched, they must be the organs of proletarian power, replacing the capitalist in all his useful functions of management and administration.*

The workers should proceed forthwith to the election of vast delegate assemblies, chosen from their best and most conscious comrades, under the slogan: "All Power in the Workshop to the Workshop Committee", co-ordinating this slogan with another: "All State Power to the Workers' and Peasants' Councils".

A vast field of concrete revolutionary propaganda would open up before the Communists organised in the Party and in the ward circles.

In accord with the urban sections, the ward circles should make a survey of the workers' forces in their zone, and become the seat of the ward council of workshop delegates, the ganglion that knits together and centralizes all the proletarian energies of the ward. The system of elections could be varied according to the size of the ward, but the aim should be to get one delegate elected for every 15 workers, divided into categories (as in English factories), arriving by electoral stages at a committee of factory delegates which included representatives of the whole work process (manual workers, clerical workers, technicians).

The ward committee should also try to include delegates from the other categories of workers living in the ward: servants, coachmen, tram-drivers, railway workers, road-sweepers, private employees, clerks, and others.

The ward committee should be an expression of the whole working class living in the ward, a legitimate and authoritative expression that commands respect for a discipline invested with spontaneously delegated power, and that can order the immediate, integral cessation of all work throughout the ward.

The ward committees should be enlarged into urban commissions, controlled and disciplined by the Socialist Party and the craft federations.

Such a system of workers' democracy (integrated with the corresponding peasant organisations) would give a permanent form and discipline to the masses. It would be a magnificent school of political and administrative experience, and it would incorporate the masses into its framework down to the last man, so that tenacity and perseverance become habitual for them, and they get used to regarding themselves as an army in the field which needs a strict cohesion if it is not to be destroyed and reduced to slavery. [Gramsci, in line with his times sometimes uses "man" where he means "man or woman".]

### Political Capacity

**Today, the engineering workers are to approve or reject, by referendum, the motion voted by the congress of their Federation** [to call off the occupations and negotiate with management]. The result of this consultation of factory guilds is not difficult to predict... [they voted by a narrow majority to call off the action].

So the vanguard of the proletariat should not be demoralised or disorganised by this outcome of the revolutionary movement. Its quality as a vanguard will be verified by the strength of mind and political capacity it succeeds in demonstrating.

Have the groups of workers which have been at the head of the movement in the last few days taken the exact measure of their powers to act and the forces of passive resistance that exist within the masses? Have they acquired a consciousness of their historical mission? Have they acquired a consciousness of the inner weaknesses which members of the working class have revealed, weaknesses which are not individual, that do not lower our assessment of the revolutionary spirit of the proletariat in the present historical phase, but which can be traced to the general relations of a trade organization? Have they transformed their experiences into an active and operative consciousness? Are they skilled in identifying the deepest hidden feelings that move the popular mind, and the negative feelings, the inhibiting impulses that fatigue, and immobilise the most generous and daring impulses?

The political capacity of the proletarian vanguard (and hence the real revolutionary capacity of the Italian working class) will depend on the attitudes that emerge from today's referendum. Many perils threaten the working class; these perils are not external, they are primarily internal. The greatest danger is the lack of a "spirit of adaptation" to higher circumstances, a spirit of critical, conscious and deliberate adaptation, which cannot and must not be confused with opportunism.

Rather, it is their lack of this spirit of adaptation that leads the working class into opportunism, or, what comes to the same thing, to the triumph of the opportunists among the masses, to the maintenance of the leadership that has brought the revolutionary movement to its present pass.

The revolutionary vanguard needs to consider and analyse the events that have just taken place, not according to its own wishes, passions and will, but objectively, as external data to be subjected to political judgment, and as a historical movement susceptible to conscious extension and development.

From a merely objective point of view, the working class can register a great step forward. As a mass guided and disciplined in the factory by its direct representatives, it has proved itself capable of industrial and political self-government. This fact, which should be elementary for revolutionary Communists, has consequences of incalculable social importance.

The middle classes of the population have compared the strength of the proletariat with the inadequacy of the entrepreneurial class. Half a century ago, the proletariat was still, as Marx put it, a sack of potatoes, a generic imponderable, an amorphous conglomeration of individuals without ideas, without will, and without a unitary perspective. Today it is the entrepreneurial class that has become a sack of potatoes, an aggregate of the inept and the imbecile, without political capacity, without internal power.

The revolutionary events of the past few days have illuminated this position of the two classes competing for the government of society's production. The prejudices and follies that the capitalist-owned press had disseminated in public opinion have collapsed; the middle classes are lining up with the proletariat, convinced that this young and energetic class holds the key to civilization and human progress. From the test that both classes have had to undergo, the proletariat has emerged higher in public estimation, while capitalism has revealed even further its deficiencies and incapacity. This new political situation has definitely put forward the proletariat as a ruling class; it is a spring that drives it irresistibly towards the conquest of power.

Why, then, did this not happen immediately? Or at

least, why has no attempt been made to reach this goal? The answer to this question must be sought in the tactics pursued until today, culminating in the referendum.

The leadership of the proletarian movement bases itself on the "masses", that is, it asks the masses for prior permission to act, consulting them in the forms and at the time it chooses. But a revolutionary movement can only be based on the proletarian vanguard, and must be led without prior consultation, without the apparatus of representative assemblies.

Revolution is like war; it must be minutely prepared by a working-class general staff, just as a war is by the Army's general staff. Assemblies can only ratify what has already taken place, exalt the successful and implacably punish the unsuccessful. It is the task of the proletarian vanguard to keep the revolutionary spirit constantly awake in the masses, to create the conditions which keep them ready for action, in which the proletariat will respond immediately to the call for revolution.

In the same way, the nationalists and imperialists, with their frantic preaching of patriotic vanities and hatred against foreigners, are trying to create the conditions in which the crowd will approve a war that has already been agreed on by the general staff of the Army and the diplomatic service. No war would ever break out if prior permission had to be obtained from the masses to declare it; parliaments approve wars because they know they have already been inexorably decided, because they know that they will be thrust inexorably aside if they oppose them.

Similarly, no revolutionary movement can be decreed by a workers' national assembly. To call for such an assembly is to confess one's disbelief in it beforehand; it amounts to exercising a prejudicial pressure against it.

The proletarian vanguard, which today is disillusioned and threatened with dissolution, must ask itself whether it is not itself responsible for this situation. It is a fact that in the General Confederation of Labour, there is no organized revolutionary opposition, centralized enough to exercise control over the leading offices and capable not only of replacing one man by another, but one method by another, one aim by another and one will by another.

This is the real situation, which lamentations, reproaches and oaths will not change, only tenacious and patient organisation and preparation. It is thus essential that the groups of workers which have been at the head of the masses accept the facts as they are, in order to alter them effectively.

The masses must be kept firm and united behind their programmes and slogans; it must be made possible for an energetic general staff to emerge from among them which is able to conduct wide-scale collective action with intelligence and daring. Today, we have the referendum; its result must not be the occasion for dismay and dissolution, but rather a call for tighter, more disciplined and better organised action.

The emancipation of the proletariat is not a labour of small account and of little men; only he who can keep his heart strong and his will as sharp as a sword when the general disillusionment is at its worst can be regarded as a fighter for the working class, or called a revolutionary.

## 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.

JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER

# Marxism, metabolism and ecology

BY PAUL HAMPTON

**O**ver the past decade or so, John Bellamy Foster has been one of the principal architects of the revival of Marxist ecology, arguing that the relationship between nature and human society is best conceptualised in terms of metabolism.

Foster's new book, *The Ecological Revolution* (2009) brings together many of his essays on the subject and together with his earlier book *Marx's Ecology* (2000), makes a significant contribution to historical materialism.

Metabolism (*stoffwechsel*) was widely used in Marx's main published work, *Capital* volume I, and it can be found in successive drafts of his mature economic works up to his death. *Stoffwechsel* was translated as "material interchange", "material reaction" and "exchange of matter" in the first English edition of *Capital* and other works, and has been reproduced ever since. These expressions fail to capture the wider meaning of metabolism. However metabolism appears throughout the Penguin editions of *Capital* published in the 1970s.

The earliest use of *stoffwechsel* in this sense was in the first, rough draft of *Capital*, known as the *Grundrisse* (1857-58). For example Marx wrote: "It is not the unity of living and active humanity with the natural, inorganic conditions of their metabolic exchange with nature, and hence their appropriation of nature, which requires explanation or is the result of a historic process, but rather the separation between these inorganic conditions of human existence and this active existence, a separation which is completely posited only in the relation of wage labour and capital."

However Marx used metabolism distinctively with respect to human-nature relations in his first major published economic work, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). He wrote: "Different use-values contain very different proportions of labour and natural products, but use-value always comprises a natural element. As useful activity directed to the appropriation of natural factors in one form or another, labour is a natural condition of human existence, a condition of material interchange [metabolism] between man and nature, quite independent of the form of society."

Marx made this use more explicit in the second draft of *Capital*, known as the *Economic Manuscripts* 1861-63, where he gave it a distinctive ecological meaning. Marx argued that, "Actual labour is the appropriation of nature for the satisfaction of human needs, the activity through which the metabolism between man and nature is mediated", and that labour was a "universal condition for the metabolic interaction between nature and man... a natural condition of human life [that] is independent of, equally common to, all particular social forms of human life." Besides the published volumes of *Capital*, Marx also referred to *stoffwechsel* in his last economic works, the *Notes on Adolph Wagner's Lehrbuch der politischen Ökonomie* in 1881.

The concept of metabolism has many attractions, suggesting a dialectical interaction between nature and society and not least because it posits both human beings and the non-human world as active, indeed interactive agencies. Marx summed this up with his reference to William Petty in *Capital* I, who argued (in a rather unfortunate patriarchal metaphor) that, "labour is the father of material wealth, the earth is its mother".

Analytically, Marx used metabolism in three important senses in *Capital*: as a means of formulating the nature-society nexus; as a way of expressing the ecological crisis created by capitalism; and as a means of expressing the more progressive relationship between climate and humanity under socialism.

## METABOLISM

**M**arx first used the concept of metabolism in *Capital* volume I when discussing the role of labour in history. For Marx, labour "is a condition of human existence which is independent of all forms of human society; it is an eternal natural necessity which mediates the metabolism between man and nature, and therefore human life itself".

He elaborated on the point further in the discussion

of the labour process: "Labour is first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He confronts the materials of nature as a force of nature. He sets in motion the natural forces that belong to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his own needs.

"Through this movement he acts upon external nature and changes it, and in this way he simultaneously changes his own nature... [The labour process] is purposeful activity aimed at the production of use-values. It is an appropriation of what exists in nature for the requirements of man. It is the universal condition for the metabolic interaction [*Stoffwechsel*] between man and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence."

## METABOLIC RIFT

**T**he second sense in which metabolism appears in *Capital* is as a means of conceptualising the breakdown in humanity's relationship with nature.

Marx lent heavily on the insights of the chemist Justus Liebig, whose treatment of the soil nutrient cycle and the waste problem in the large cities was well-regarded by contemporaries. Marx regarded one of Liebig's "immortal merits" as having "developed from the point of view of natural science the negative i.e. destructive side of modern agriculture".

Marx summed up the breakdown of human-nature nexus in the following terms: "Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance. This has two results. On the one hand it concentrates the historical motive power of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and nature, i.e., prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil.

"Thus it destroys at the same time the health of the urban worker and the intellectual life of the rural worker. But by destroying the circumstances surrounding that metabolism, which originated in a merely natural and spontaneous fashion, it compels its systematic restoration as a regulative law of social production, and in a form adequate to the full development of the human race."

Marx would express a similar sentiment in his unfinished *Capital*, volume III. He wrote that capitalism "produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself. The results of this is a squandering of the vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single country."

## METABOLISM AND SOCIALISM

**T**he final meaning ascribed to metabolism by Marx was in terms of restoring the relationship between humanity and nature under socialism.

Under a system of mass, democratic control over production, "Freedom in this sphere can only consist only in this, that socialised man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control, instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature."

This aspect of metabolism has been recognised by Foster's co-thinker Paul Burkett. He argued that the socialisation of labour, "by socialising the people-nature metabolism, creates a valid stake for all society, the producers and the communities on a global scale, in the transformation of this metabolism into one that supports a less restricted but sustainable development for themselves and their children". (*Marx and Nature: A Red and Green Perspective*). Similarly Foster argued that "metabolic restoration" was an essential feature of the Marxist conception of socialism.

The centrality of metabolism was recognised by other classical Marxists such as Bukharin and

Wittfogel, before it fell out of use at the time of Stalin's rule. Bukharin, in his textbook *Historical Materialism* (1921) noted that, "This material process of "metabolism" between society and nature is the fundamental relation between environment and system, between 'external conditions' and human society". He went on to argue: "We therefore regard the metabolism between society and nature as a material process, for it deals with material things (objects of labour, instruments of labour, and products obtained as a consequence—all are material things); on the other hand, the process of labour itself is an expenditure of physiological energy, nerve energy, muscular energy, whose material expression is in the physical motions of those engaged at work."

Wittfogel made a similar point in his *Geopolitics, geographical materialism and Marxism* (1929), writing that, "According to Marx, the stuff of nature required by man — this metabolism of man with nature — 'enters' into the use of society through the process of labour". (1985) Or as he put it in 1932, "According to Marx and Engels, one has to start from 'true production processes', from the metabolism of the socially labouring human with nature." (*Die natürlichen Ursachen der Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, thanks to Bruce Robinson for translation)

The importance of metabolism to Marx's conception of nature was revived by Alfred Schmidt in his book *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1962/1971). More recently Paul Burkett has applied the concept of metabolism to political economy and ecology, while in similar vein John Bellamy Foster has produced highly readable accounts of the historical origins and development of Marx's concept. In many ways, as Peter Dickens has put it, Burkett and Foster have "permanently changed the landscape for those attempting to view the relation between society and nature through a historical materialist perspective".

## THE LIMITS OF METABOLISM

**M**etabolism is an important methodological starting point for integrating ecological questions into historical materialism and Foster should take much of the credit for its revival in recent years.

As he put it in *Marx's Ecology*, "beginning in the 1840s down to the present day, the concept of metabolism has been used as a key category in the systems theory approach to the interaction of organisms to their environment... the concept of metabolism is used to refer to the specific regulatory processes that govern this complex interchange between organisms and their environment". More recently, the concept has also begun to be applied to particular ecological problems, such as climate change, marine systems and water.

However its very generality is also the source of its limitations. This was recognised by Engels, who wrote in *Anti-Dühring* (1876-78): "That organic exchange of matter is the most general and most characteristic phenomenon of life has been said times out of number during the last thirty years by physiological chemists and chemical physiologists, and it is here merely translated by Herr Dühring into his own elegant and clear language." He added: "But to define life as organic metabolism is to define life as — life; for organic exchange of matter or metabolism with plastically creating schematisation is in fact a phrase which itself needs explanation through life, explanation through the distinction between the organic and the inorganic, that is, that which lives and that which does not live."

To avoid "plastically creating schematisation", more conceptual development is required. In my view the way to go is with the Marxist geographer Neil Smith's idea of the "production of nature", which more adequately emphasises the manner in which human action makes and remakes every aspect of nature. Climate change is but one example of how no part of nature as we know it on planet earth is pristine, or remains untouched by human action. Smith has also suggested some fertile lines of enquiry, such as the process of real subsumption of nature to capital, in conjunction with the real subsumption of labour to capital. Bringing "metabolism" down to earth, i.e. making it more concrete, requires a great deal more Marxist underlabouring.

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The ambiguities of metabolism are more brought out more clearly by looking at the politics that can be accommodated beneath it. Foster himself is far too soft on some existing “socialist” models, arguing that “Latin America is reawakening to the revolutionary spirit of Bolivar and Che”.

For example he claims that Hugo Chavez has articulated, “A new socialism for the twenty-first century in the context of Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution”, which “closely follows Marx’s notion of a society of associated producers”. The problem is that Chavez has neither led a revolution to overthrow capitalism, nor moved away from a fossil-fuel-based political economy, nor has he come close to articulating a vision of socialism based on Marx — namely the self-emancipation of the working class. Similarly the greening of Cuba is exalted, despite its terrible record of ecological degradation for the first 30 years after the revolution, and the fact that the government has become more environmentally-conscious mainly out of necessity, rather than from conviction.

Foster is critical of the old model of the USSR, though less so of the Chinese Stalinist variant under Mao. In his previous book, *Ecology against Capitalism*, he wrote: “The history of the non-capitalist world offers a few glimpses of other possibilities. The Soviet model, followed by most other countries in Eastern Europe, offers no help on this issue because it closely copied many of the methods used in the United States... However in China under Mao things were different... Mao’s emphasis on local food self-sufficiency in each region helped to reinforce these practices [cycling nutrients to maintain soil fertility] and together with the encouragement of local industry, slowed down urbanisation at the same time as impressive advances were made in agricultural production.”

Foster also overstates the connection between classical Marxism and subsequent ecological discussions, seeking to establish an uninterrupted tradition where none exists. He states: “If an unbroken continuity is to be found, nonetheless, in the development of socialist nature-science discussions and ecological thought, its path has to be traced primarily to Britain.”

I think it is better to acknowledge that there was a rupture in the Marxist tradition, both ecologically and in much else — and to squarely face the consequences of this breach. Foster is right that classical Marxism, including Marx and Engels, Bebel, Kautsky, Morris, Luxemburg, Lenin, Bukharin and others contributed to the development of a coherent socialist ecology for their time. I think he is also correct to argue that the classical Marxists “tended to view ecological problems that they perceived as having more bearing on the future of communist than capitalist society”. (2009)

However the rise of Stalinism and the defeat of the labour movement across the globe decimated this ecological strand within Marxism — even among the best of those, such as the Trotskyists, who kept other elements of it alive. Foster appears to be grasping at straws with many of the dissident Stalinists and others he commends for keeping things going after 1930.

The reality is that the revival of interest in ecology from the 1960s took place largely outside the labour movement and mostly outside the ranks of genuine Marxism. One of the task today is to reconnect the classical Marxist tradition with ecology, and also to integrate ecological concerns back into the heart of historical materialism.

Foster calls for “ecological revolution” and argues that this differs from the technocratic, top-down green industrial revolution proposed by Obama and by the UK government, because it requires a “popular uprising”. Social agency is indeed an important dividing line for Marxists. Foster provides a sharp critique of the neoliberal climate thinkers such as Nordhaus and Stern, as well as a critique of ecological modernisation, the view that underpins New Labour’s environmentalism.

But Foster does not articulate a specifically working-class political strategy for tackling the ecological crisis. He recognises the core mistake of Joel Kovel, who does not regard the working class as the privileged agent in a socialist transformation and argues that “class revolt is not necessarily the key”.

However ecological revolution is nebulous without developing a programme of demands to mobilise the working class, it is vacuous without answers to workers’ real concerns about jobs and conditions, and it is impractical without a strategy to link existing workers’ struggles with the wider socialist and ecological transformation. Foster’s work has been valuable in clearing some of the ground for this discussion, but has been less fertile in mapping the path ahead.

## BNP, TORIES, AND EUROPE

# Why people become revolutionaries

Elaine Jones discusses what it means to be an active revolutionary socialist.

**O**ver the last year I’ve been able to get back to political activity. I’ve been reading a lot of books and asking myself why people become revolutionaries and what keeps you being a revolutionary.

To start off with, it’s quite obvious why. You look at the world around you and see the horrors of capitalism.

You see how capitalism leads to recession and slumps which result in working-class people being thrown out of their jobs and out of their homes — not because it makes any logical sense about how society should produce things, but because the ruling class and the market says so.

We see the hypocrisy in the way the working class are treated. While the MPs can fiddle their expenses and decide to give billions to the banks so that they can keep their million pound bonuses, a working-class woman on the Wirral with three children who is in a low paid job is put in prison for six months for defrauding the Child Tax Credit system.

We see how capitalism creates poverty, inequality, destroys the environment and creates wars.

Its workings also shape the way people treat each other. It distorts relationships between people — it causes violence and it lets down children, meaning many children are left in violent families with no way out. It affects the roles we take and our ability to develop as individuals.

We can also see internationally the horrors that capitalism causes. For instance in Africa we are seeing mortality rates rise — in some places, the average age of death dropping below 40. Yet at the same time we see the Chinese, Saudi and other states buying up huge tracts of arable land to grow food for world markets rather than feed the hungry in Africa

We see that capitalism is a horrific, cruel and illogical system.

But we need more than that to become a revolutionary. We need to come across active revolutionary politics.

For me as a student in Kent 20 years ago, that meant being hassled by one of our comrades to read obscure books on the French Revolution and English Civil War when all I wanted was another pint of cider. It meant going to an anti-apartheid meeting at Kent University and seeing an AWL member getting up to criticise the ANC and expose the actions of the South African Communist Party.

I thought: “What did he do that for? No-one agrees with him, and he’s made himself very unpopular”. But afterwards I realised that it’s necessary to stand up and speak the truth even if you’re in a minority of one.

I realised that even if you are a working class woman with not much self confidence, you have to make yourself get up and speak at meetings and conferences, because that’s the only way to convince people to get involved in political action.

Then I got involved in our national campaigns and particularly our intervention in the National Union of Students. That meant was going to NUS conferences, where AWL organisers demanded superhuman feats of endurance — writing speeches, organising debates and fringe meetings, intervening in other groups’ meetings, and fighting witch-hunts, all on a packet of pro-plus, diet coke and lots of cigarettes.

We learnt to organise and build campaigns for left unity and around demands that mobilised broader layers of people. We learnt that a group of revolutionaries can be a small cog that turns a bigger wheel.

But we also learnt how to fight. We learnt how the right wing in Labour Students, people like Derek Draper and Jim Murphy, cheated, bullied, threatened and lied in order to suppress their opponents. As well as putting forward the correct arguments, you had to expose them for what they really were — as people who supported the massacre in Tiananmen Square,

who allowed asylum seekers to be used as scapegoats, who supported the violence of the police being used against strikes and protests. We fought them and exposed their hypocrisy.

Then I learnt about history and about the working class struggles that have taken place across the world.

Recently I have read a book called *The Female Incendiaries* about the women of the Paris Commune and Paul Mason’s book *Live Working Die Fighting*. In those books you learn how the working class has fought from the early days of capitalism — the Peterloo massacre in 1819, the Paris Commune in 1871, the early trade union organising in the USA, the Spanish Civil War, May 1968, the Iranian revolution and counter-revolution.

You learn that in the short history of capitalism there have been many battles. That often seemingly spontaneous movements have really come about as a result of long term political activism. That where the political activists organise, the working class fight for longer, are better organised, and know what to do next.

Despite being told that people won’t fight — they have mortgages and are too selfish — you learn that the working class will fight, and they will fight when they’ve got more to lose than just a mortgage.

People who are barely earning enough money to feed themselves will take strike action, will organise rebellion, and will stand up against tyranny and violence as the students and workers in Tiananmen Square did 20 years ago.

They will risk their lives in the knowledge that they aren’t just fighting for themselves. They are fighting for their children, families and future generations.

But knowing all that still doesn’t make you a revolutionary, either — because what you get from Paul Mason’s book is that all these deeds are very heroic and militant, but what’s the point? They all end in massacre.

You need more than that. What you need is the ideas of Marxism and a revolutionary party that can put those ideas into practice. It is that that will make the difference between whether future militant class struggles are victorious or whether they are defeated.

The only time in history when the working class won and held on to political power was the Russian Revolution — and that only happened because of the existence of the Bolshevik party.

The Bolshevik party had fused the ideas of revolutionary Marxism with a democratic organisation that could put those ideas into practice. They built an organisation that agitated, educated itself, discussed ideas democratically, and then fought for those ideas in the working class.

In the here and now the only organisation on the British left with the ideas of revolutionary Marxism is us. We uphold the ideas of Bolshevism and Third Camp independent working-class politics.

Over this weekend we have developed our ideas further. We will continue to argue about our orientation. But we have to make more revolutionaries, find more people, and build an organisation that is able to put our ideas into practice.

With our ideas the struggles to come can lead to the overthrow of capitalism and the start of a new era of human history. Without them the struggles will become just another chapter of heroic, militant action in a history book.

I will end with a quote from Louise Michel, one of the women revolutionaries of the Paris Commune.

“We revolutionaries aren’t just chasing a scarlet flag. What we pursue is an awakening liberty, old or new. It is the ancient communes of France, it is 1793; it is June 1848; it is 1871. Most especially it is the next revolution that is advancing under this dawn”.

She died in 1905. A few days later revolution broke out in Russia.

We follow in the tradition of revolutionaries who have fought against capitalism since its inception. By building the AWL we can attempt to ensure the next revolution is victorious.

# Know them by their Euro-friends

BY JACK YATES

**W**ith the votes counted, results declared and MEPs both new and old sworn in, the immediate concern of the comfortably salaried parliamentarians turns to the nitty-gritty of bourgeois politics: power.

But in politics, as in everyday life, power — the question of who has it and what they do with it — is not an uncomplicated matter. Things are complicated further still by the convoluted procedures and mechanisms of the European Parliament.

To gain access to important committees, the real powerhouses of Brussels and Strasbourg, and avoid containment in the basically meaningless hand-raising chambers, individual parties from across Europe must band together.

Most often the banding together appears an entirely logical affair. The “Social Democrats” form a group; “Liberals” stick together; “Greens” plough their own field.

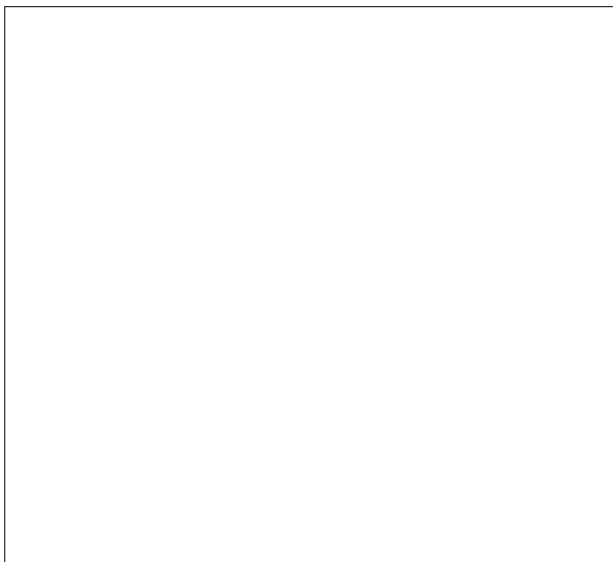
This time round there are some instructive developments on the right and extreme right that give indication of the strengths and weaknesses of conservative, nationalist and fascistic groups in Europe and provides a glimpse at the underbelly of those who present themselves as the “respectable” right.

The British National Party and their two elected MEPs have naturally made alliances with the other fascist organisations, but not all of them. Although the extreme-right gained enough seats to form their own group in parliament, they have not done so.

Why? Because not surprisingly British fascists — who spend a large portion of the energies whipping up hatred against, say, Slovaks and Romanians — don’t exactly see eye-to-eye with Slovakian and Romanian fascists. The Slovaks and Romanian fascists in turn have some unpleasant things to say about the Hungarians, whose fascists want little to do with them. It’s a rather pleasing mess.

Fascist groups unable to form a coalition with others on the right, like the BNP, France’s Front National and Hungary’s Jobbik party — which organises as a militia, complete with uniforms and traditional fascist symbols — have found themselves lumped together in the “non-inscrits” or “non-attached” group. This grouping has no concrete ideological unity and includes individual electoral outliers with no connection to fascism. The “non-inscrits” will not have easy access to positions of influence or to the extra funding that comes with a united ideological group. This is good news.

When you add to the mix the deeply anti-Muslim but strongly pro-Israel Geert Wilders from the Dutch “Party of Freedom”, things get even more complex. Wilders’, a racist extremist towards certain minorities, would seem natural company for fascist organisations looking for friends. But Wilders would prefer to



Geert Wilders

remain isolated and powerless within the European Parliament rather than ally himself with anti-semites.

The same cannot be said for David Cameron’s Conservatives.

Cameron announced before the elections that the Tories would be leaving their traditional home, a centre-right group including the parties of government in France and Germany, in opposition to Sarkozy’s and Merkel’s philo-Europeanism and their support for the Lisbon Treaty. He announced that he’d be looking for new friends in Europe.

He’s found them, but they’re not quite what you’d expect of a party that’s been working hard to reposition itself away from a “Nasty Party” image towards a cuddlier, eco-friendly, more socially liberal one.

The Tories’ new friends include the Dutch Reformed Political Party, which cites the Bible in its arguments against women standing for public office; the Lijst Dedecker, a Flemish nationalist group whose leader has called for “global chemotherapy against Islam”; and the Czech Civic Democrats, who describe global warming as a myth.

The icing on the cake of this rag-bag clutch of extremists is the Polish Law and Justice Party. Representatives of this group have called homosexuality a “pathology” and greeted the election of Barack Obama as marking “an impending catastrophe — the end of the civilisation of the white man”.

The Law and Justice Party, when in power in Poland, wielded classical nationalistic devices to smear and undermine critics. The party utilised the considerable power of the Catholic Church to bolster its support, suggesting that any person or group opposed to their policy was engaged in a conspiracy against the dominant religion.

Critics were accused of being national traitors and leading supporters and figures in national government took to the airwaves on a rabid Catholic station to promulgate their homophobia, sexism, national chauvinism and anti-semitism. Where the racist Wilders fears to tread, Cameron has waded in up to his neck.

The most high profile of Cameron’s long list of embarrassments is the record of Michal Kaminski, the Law and Justice Party’s leader in the European Parliament. Kaminski has campaigned vociferously against national commemorations and apologies for anti-semitic atrocities carried out by Poles during and after the Second World War. The most notorious of these was the Jedwabne pogrom in July 1941 where up to 400 local Jews were rounded up by their Polish neighbours, taken to a barn and burnt alive. Kaminski the anti-semite is now the Tories friend in Europe.

These developments are all pretty repulsive in and of themselves, but what do they tell us about the near political future? All indications point towards a considerable Tory victory in the 2010 general elections. On the economic front we have been forewarned that the new Chancellor and his team will make huge cuts across the public services and reduce taxation. Out of the ashes of the economic crisis, the Tory free-marketters must hope for a renewed wave of capitalist expansion. They will use their governmental power to support this regardless of the costs to workers.

What about the social front? We have seen that Cameron is prepared to risk political influence across Europe on ideological grounds, for almost certainly the Tories will wield less power in Europe now they’ve unhitched themselves from French and German leaders. The ideological shift chosen by Cameron can only signal a national offensive once he’s installed as Prime Minister.

The Tories may have calculated that given the palpable shift to the right in Britain — the increased support for UKIP and the BNP, a spike in racist incidents, the renewed appeal of nationalist tropes — that a sympathetic re-shifting to the right is possible. This means a return to the social conservatism of the old “Nasty Party”.

The specifics of what this could mean are unclear but our movement, the workers movement, should prepare itself to face perhaps a barrage, maybe a drip-drip, of nationalism, sexism, homophobia and fundamentally racist legal measures from the Tories in power.

## Tyneside debates: “Can the left unite?”

BY ED WHITBY

**A**bout 60 socialists, activists and trade unionists attended a Tyneside Socialist Forum open meeting about left unity on 15 July.

The timing of the meeting wasn’t ideal, as most students had left for the summer, but still the organised left turned out (Socialist Workers Party, Revolutionary Communist Group, Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, Labour Representation Committee, as well as Green Party). Trade unions were also represented including PCS, Unison, and Unite. Although the Socialist Party could not attend No2EU was represented by the RMT Regional Organiser.

The lead off by two older comrades, Dave Ayers and Dave Harker, about the 1972 builders strike and the Shrewsbury trials, was not linked to left unity and possibly a bit too long, although interesting.

But the meeting was well chaired, and most people spoke. People wanted unity and were sick of the wast-

ed opportunities of the last few years. Many spoke of the crisis and the environment as the big threat. Others felt we needed to look at standing candidates straight away. There was discussion of support from PCS, standing Keep Metro Public candidates in a by-election soon, and the next local elections.

The majority were individual campaigners or non-aligned. The meeting felt positive. The work which has been doing to support the Vestas workers went down well. A couple of people bought *Solidarity* specifically to read about the Vestas campaign. We got a group photo of us shouting “occupy” for the Vestas campaign.

Most of the people from different currents went to the same pub afterwards, which again is a sign that people are starting to engage more on the left.

A follow up meeting is planned for August. We will continue to support campaigns such as Keep Metro Public; the Welfare Rights Campaign; anti-BNP campaigning, including a coach to Codnor; and support for Vestas workers.

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## POPLAR COUNCIL

# Guilty and proud of it!

Janine Booth's recently published book *"Guilty and Proud Of It!"* is a story about how a group of socialist Labour councillors in Poplar, East London, refused to bow to the "norms" of capitalist economics and politics, and stood up for the working-class people who voted them in. They went to prison rather than accepting inequitable taxes.

Newly-enfranchised working-class voters elected Labour to run the Council in 1919. For the next two years, it improved life for Poplar residents, coming into ever-increasing conflict with the central author-

ities and the local government funding system.

The crisis came in 1921. With unemployment rising, Poplar Borough Council could not provide relief drawing only on the limited wealth of one poor London borough. Poplar councillors, including future Labour leader George Lansbury, demanded that rates from richer areas should help. Rich Kensington had a hugely greater rateable value and far fewer jobless people: it could afford to pay more. So Poplar refused to pay over rates to the London County Council, and thus began the Poplar Revolt.

Poplar's fight took its Councillors to prison in September 1921. After six weeks, the courts released them from prison and the government changed the law to redistribute funding from richer to poorer boroughs: they had won! Over the following years, they continued to battle, but lost momentum.

The following extracts from Janine's book are a summary of this tremendous of the story. Janine is a member of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, a London Underground worker and an activist in the RMT union. She lives in Hackney, East London.

## STORM CLOUDS GATHERING

Labour's appeal to Poplar voters in November 1919 found shocking success. The local press announced "Great Labour Victories". On a 28% turnout, Labour had won 39 of the 42 Council seats.

A riverside area in East London, Poplar ranked tenth in size and population of the 28 Metropolitan London boroughs... One of its new Labour Councillors, Edgar Lansbury, described it as "a place where money is made and lives destroyed." ...

Labour had hoisted its own flag, and George Lansbury explained that "all the muddle-headed Fabian intellectualism which caused the old Poplar Labour League to unite itself with Liberalism masquerading as Progressivism, has been swept away... We are all clear class-conscious socialists working together." November 1919 was a new dawn for working-class politics in Poplar and elsewhere...

In 1919, for the first time ever, Poplar's Council looked like its electorate. It included railworkers, dockers, labourers, postmen, a road engineer, a toolmaker, a lead worker and a farrier. ...

Having established the principle of contesting elections independently for working-class interests, Poplar's socialists now turned their attention to governing independently in working-class interests. Now Labour had power in Poplar Council, what was it to do? Make small improvements here and there? No. These Councillors made a clear and bold choice: they would use all their powers to dramatically improve the lives of Poplar's working class.

## DEFYING THE SYSTEM

The five poor areas of East London had a rateable value of just over £4 million, with 86,500 poor to support. The East End carried 17 times the burden of the West End but with only a quarter of the capacity to pay. If Westminster increased its rate by 1d, it would raise £29,000; in Poplar, a 1d rise would raise

just £3,200. Poplar Council issued a leaflet to residents denouncing a system that it called "robbery of the poor in poor Boroughs to save the purses of the rich in the rich Boroughs" ...

By March 1921, the precepts were overdue. Poplar Council owed the LCC £30,000, the Metropolitan Police £25,000 and the Metropolitan Water Board £40,000. ... Poplar could not, and would not, pay...

The Poplar Councillors knew that their action was illegal and that they could not win in court. They understood, as Sam March put it, that "The master class has made the laws", and took the stance that if the law makes you choose between breaking it and attacking the people you represent, then you break it...

On the morning of their court appearance, 29 July, the Councillors assembled outside Poplar Town Hall. George Lansbury told the crowd of supporters: "If we have to choose between contempt of the poor and contempt of court, it will be contempt of court." Two thousand people, including 3-400 dock trade unionists carrying banners, marched with their Councillors the five miles from Poplar to the Court.

## IN AND OUT OF PRISON

Arrests began on 1 September. The *Daily Herald's* headline that day was "Over The Top for the Workless", stirring working-class people to fight for those betrayed by the government that had sent them to a bloody war in the trenches. The *Herald* would give its prime front-page slot to the Councillors for the next seven issues too.

Thousands of local people were willing to physically prevent the arrests, but that was not part of the Councillors' strategy. Minnie Lansbury wrote to *The Times*, explaining that they had no wish to be martyrs, but had they so desired, "nothing short of a machine gun detachment' could have got them to prison. So the thousands gathered at the Councillors' homes to show their support..."

Edgar Lansbury recalls that:

## One of Poplar's councillors, Julia Scurr, arguing the case

"Enormous processions marched with bands and banners round the prison walls. Leather-lunged orators addressed the crowds from the upper windows of houses facing the prison. We could see them plainly over the prison wall, and they could see us peering between the bars of our cell windows. We all sang the Red Flag, the Internationale, and other socialist songs, shouted greetings to each other over the wall, and as a rule father would wind up the demonstrations with one of his rousing speeches which could be heard throughout the prison.' ...

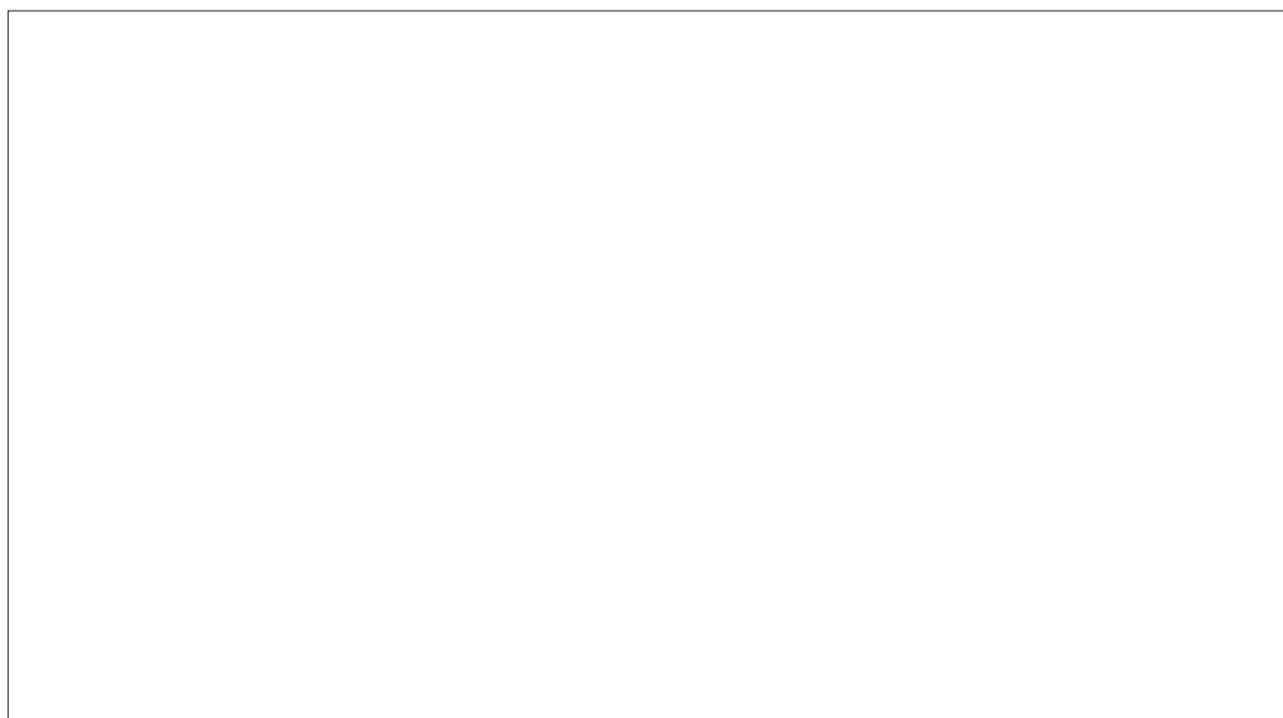
[Minster of Health Sir Alfred] Mond was looking for a way out, forced to do so by the Councillors' determination, the mass mobilisations in their support, and the moves by other Councils to follow their lead. The result of Poplar's choices was that the Minister of Health had no choice but to meet their demands...

They returned to Poplar as heroes, welcomed by a huge crowd, with brass band and red flags. They went first to Sam March's house, "and from there the Irish band took them home, one by one, with pipes and drums playing Irish music." The *Daily Herald* reported:

"Joyful reunions inside their houses and joyful demonstrations without, the Councillors must have felt a sense of triumph that compensated for the bitterness of the past few weeks. In the crowd that followed the band round the streets faces were smiling as they seldom smile ordinarily in that poor borough. Men took off their caps and waved them in the air, women shouted and laughed, and the children made sympathetic noises. The whole babel was a spontaneous outburst of working-class sympathy for its self-sacrificing champions."

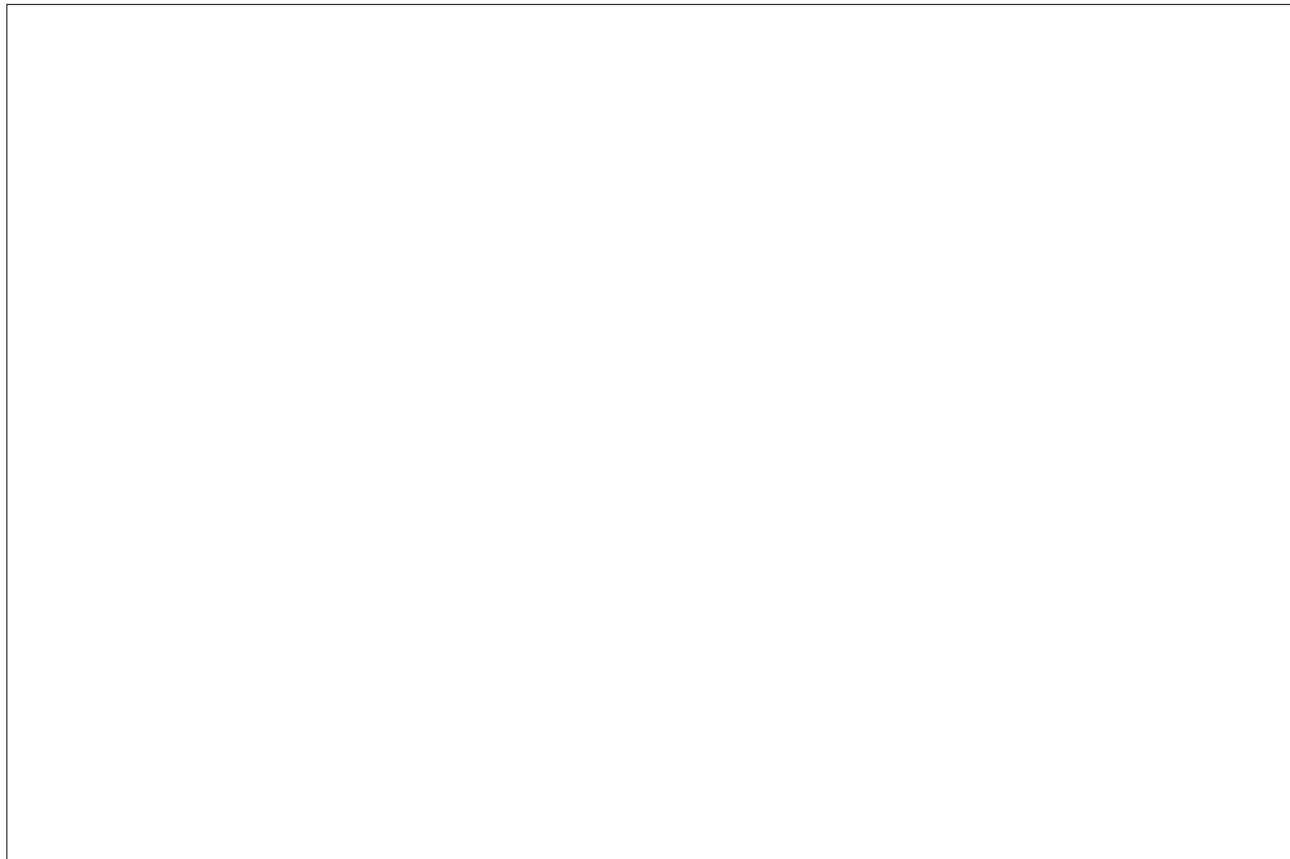
## THE YEARS AFTER

Mond appointed as his inquisitor Mr. H.I. Cooper, Clerk to the Bolton Guardians and a stern defender of the Poor Law's oppressive principles. ...



Marching on 29 July 1921 to Poplar Town Hall to back the councillors' defiance of the law





Minnie Lansbury, on her way to prison

Poplar's opponents who anticipated an exposé of corruption were disappointed, as there was none to expose. Instead, Cooper's report, finished on 10 May, condemned the Guardians' policies as "foreign to the

**Women councillors being arrested, crowds gather round**

spirit and intention of the Poor Law Statutes". They did not discriminate between the deserving and undeserving poor! They thought that parents should not have to live off their kids! They served butter in the

workhouse! And sent 140 poor children on a summer holiday! And handed out a couple of shillings extra at Christmas! Workhouse staff were in a trade union! These Guardians even gave dole money to people who were not on the very edge of starvation!...

The Poplar Guardians responded to the Cooper Report with a pamphlet, *Guilty And Proud Of It*. Their duty, they wrote, was "to be Guardians of the *poor* and not the Guardians of the interests of property ... the poor are poor because they are robbed, and are robbed because they are poor." ...

Several Labour Councils, including Poplar, had introduced a minimum wage of £4 per week in 1920. [Conservatives] attacked the minimum wage from day one, and the further that industrial wages fell, the more hysterical the employers' demands that municipal wages should fall too....

£4 per week, said the judges, was "unreasonable". A bitter George Lansbury pointed out afterwards that four of the five Lords received over £120 per week. The exception was "poor Wrenbury who drags out a hungry existence on about £55 per week — often when I see a man shivering at a street corner, I say 'That may be poor Wrenbury'... It needed high moral courage to announce to the world your profound conviction that any one of you was worth thirty ordinary men. Except of course poor Wrenbury, who is worth only fourteen ordinary men." Lord Atkinson reserved particular outrage for the suggestion that charwomen might deserve £4 per week, a sum so high that it could not be considered wages at all, but "gifts and gratuities disguised as wages and therefore illegal"....

Over the next three years, Chamberlain introduced new legislation to: disqualify rebel Councillors from office; place the Metropolitan Common Poor Fund under the control of Ministry of Health nominees; and abolish Boards of Guardians... One of his biographers recognised that the "roots of Chamberlain's battle for control of the Poor Law can be traced back to the 'Revolt of Poplar' in the autumn of 1921". He had completed a long and ultimately successful counter-offensive.

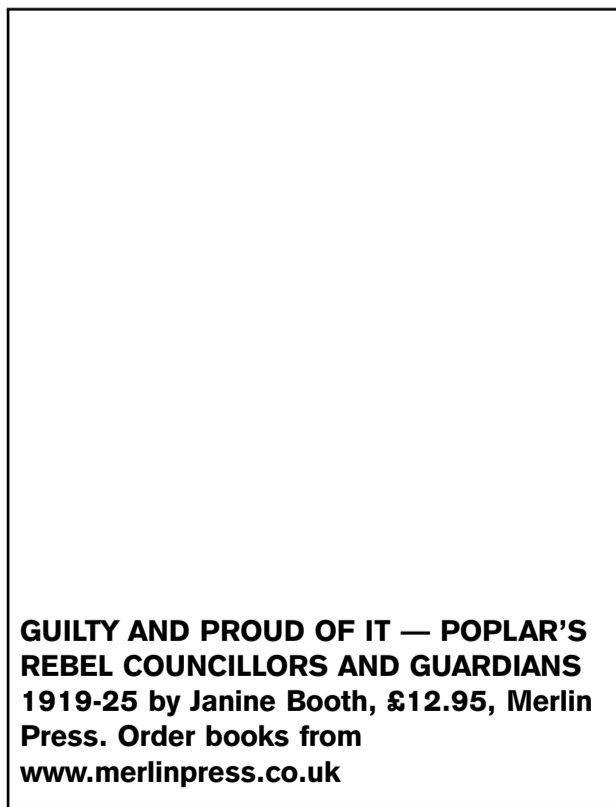
**OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Why did Poplar win in 1921? I suggest five key reasons: it was a labour movement fight; based on popular mobilisation; acting in unity and solidarity; with a clear understanding of the political issues; and prepared to defy unjust laws....**

Poplar's Councillors knew that their people already suffered poverty and ruin, and the idea of abandoning them was fantasy of the horrific kind. Their choice was between two prisons: the literal one; and political imprisonment, caged by unfair laws.

Many Labour Councils today choose to cut and privatise services. They may feel uncomfortable at first but soon move from apologetically justifying these policies on the basis of "no choice" to positively advocating them. And some choose policies that should be anathema to socialists – such as fat-cat salaries for Chief Executives – without any law or budget forcing them to....

In the 1920s, Poplar's Councillors and Guardians chose to fight. Had they chosen differently, we would not even remember them.



**GUILTY AND PROUD OF IT — POPLAR'S REBEL COUNCILLORS AND GUARDIANS 1919-25** by Janine Booth, £12.95, Merlin Press. Order books from [www.merlinpress.co.uk](http://www.merlinpress.co.uk)

Victory!

# Defend Rape Crisis centres

BY GEMMA SHORT

**Rape Crisis centres offer essential support and services to survivors of sexual abuse, yet around half of the 32 remaining centres could face closure or severe cutbacks due to lack of funding.**

Rape crisis centres form part of the growing voluntary sector which relies in part on charity funding and in part on a small pot of government money for voluntary sector organisations. These organisations often provide essential frontline services, from services such as Rape Crisis to Shelter. The whole setup amounts to a semi-privatisation of what was once public sector territory.

Rape Crisis reports that a large shortfall in budgets will come from the government not renewing grants from the Victims' Fund, which many charities, voluntary sector organisations and partly public sector organisations had to compete for.

Rape Crisis centres are a crucial service: it is estimated only 93% of rape is reported, most women understandably would not turn to the police for help.

Once again we see the government failing to provide on the basis of need. While it makes massive cuts to public services such as social care, it also does not provide adequate funding for the voluntary sector organisations that pick up the pieces. We need to fight back, not only to save services such as Rape Crisis centres, but also to fight for re-nationalisation where services have been sold to the private sector, and the creation of public services, where they are wanting, to meet need.

\* Rape Crisis campaign: email london-studentfeminists@googlegmail.com.

# First Group: put drivers first!

BY ROSIE HUIZZARD

**On Friday 10 July drivers for First South Yorkshire (part of the multinational First Group) struck for the first time on a ballot over pay.**

Nationally First Group has offered all workers a 0% pay increase, yet the union has demanded a 10% increase to £10 an hour (outside of London). Although the ballot had a low turnout, 77% were in favour of strike action, and the strike appeared solid with very few buses leaving, and no drivers crossing the picket. Workers' Liberty activists visited the picket line in Sheffield to show our solidarity and find out more.

In an interview with Unite branch secretary Martin Mayer, Workers' Liberty discussed how the strike came about, and how it might progress:

"This [ballot] was over pay... involving First South Yorkshire (Sheffield, Rotherham and Doncaster depots). But right across First Group we're in the same position where the company is saying 0% [pay rise]."

This was a bitter enough pill to swallow, but with the announcement that week that First were planning to put in a bid for National Express, workers became even more insensed.

"[This is] a company that's actually

recording record profits, paying out dividends on its shares... the anger here at a company that probably has the resources but is not prepared to put any kind of offer at all to the drivers — it's just unacceptable."

Angry union members have been told that profit details for the South Yorkshire area are "not available", which further complicates the union's fight with First management. Workers' Liberty argued that the union should demand that First Group open up the books, to which branch secretary Martin Mayer responded:

"They should, but that's not the point, because it's one big multinational company that's recorded the profits, and we say whether one subsidiary is making a lot of profits or not, a 0% pay increase is simply not acceptable."

The only buses that ran throughout the day were two where First used inspectors, rather than drivers, to operate. Workers other than drivers, such as engineers, inspectors, and cleaners, crossed the picket line, as their part of the union did not ballot for industrial action at the same time.

"The inspectors are in the union but they're in a different branch and negotiating unit, and will be balloting shortly

themselves over their 0% pay increase. Most of the engineers and cleaners are again in a separate bargaining unit, and we're waiting for their ballot to come through as well. So at the moment it's just the drivers who are out, who obviously are the majority. It's us that make sure the buses go out and we won't be getting any buses out today."

Workers' Liberty argues for cross grade coordination, which reinforces that this is not the fight of individual sections of the workforce but a fight that involves all of them. Hopefully joint action will happen soon.

Workers seem ready for a fight with management, with other ballots coming over dignity at work, management bullying and disciplinary procedures (which are the bigger issue in South Yorkshire, hence the lower turnout on the pay ballot). As with many sectors, bullying is becoming a big issue, Workers' Liberty supports an initiative for a cross-union, anti-bullying campaign.

On going to press Unite had not announced any further strike action, yet had not met with First Group. In order to win, the struggle must be stepped up and action taken to unite all grades on the buses.

# Edinburgh refuse workers' strike

BY KATHERINE McMAHON

**Refuse collectors in Edinburgh are on an unofficial work-to-rule, and Unite are balloting for strike action.**

As the rubbish piles up and the Festival looms, the council have employed private contractors to clean up certain tourist-attracting streets, whilst refusing to take their proposals off the table and negotiate meaningfully.

The dispute is over the "modernisation" of the wage structure, which, in real terms, would equate to a loss of up to £6000pa for some workers, on top of a

pay freeze announced previously. The justification for these changes is to equalise pay along gender lines: there is a "bonus" system which applies to jobs which are mainly done by men (for instance, refuse collection), and which most female-dominated jobs are not eligible for.

This system was originally implemented because refuse collectors earn a paltry base rate of £12,000pa, and designed to bring their wages up to just under £19,000pa. Workers in sectors dominated by women, such as cleaners, did not get such concessions.

The Council is playing off rhetoric about gender equality against workers' rights, claiming that 80% of workers will not lose out or be better off, and that women will particularly benefit.

Council workers are unconvinced by this figure, and, anyway, since when has it been OK for 20% of the workforce to lose out, regardless of gender?

Gender equality should mean decent wages for all: women should join the fight for their own wages and for the wages of their male co-workers, so that no worker — male or female — loses out.

# Pensions battle

BY VICKI MORRIS

**When sacked Visteon workers accepted the deal offered to them in May — a lot more redundancy pay — they continued campaigning.**

Their union Unite promised to campaign on the workers' reduced pensions, an issue left out of the deal. It is not clear that the union has done enough on that front, but the Visteon ex-workers themselves, now organised as Visteon pensioners, have picketed Ford car showrooms and the Dunton research facility, and lobbied meetings of the pension trustees.

When Visteon UK went bust in March, workers' pensions were transferred to the Pension Protection Fund (PPF), entailing delays in pay-outs (whereas Ford mirror contract workers can draw pension from age 57), and about 10 per cent cut from the pension. A fresh threat has emerged: the Visteon pension fund is in deficit; three thousand pensioners, current and future, could lose much more.

The workers' resolve has been stiffened by news of the greed of the Visteon corporation, Visteon UK's parent company,

which went into bankruptcy protection in the US in May. Reports appeared like this, in the Dow Jones *Daily Bankruptcy Review*:

"Visteon Corp., which moved last week to cut off retiree health-care benefits, has asked a bankruptcy judge to authorize up to \$80 million in management and insider bonuses..."

"In the first of three bonus programs, Visteon is asking authorization to spread up to \$30 million around to 100 senior managers. That's slightly less than what it would cost Visteon to continue retiree medical benefits this year for 6,650 former workers..."

The company explained:

"The demands placed upon... senior management... have never been greater... The bonus programs are designed to get 'a great deal of work' out of the recipients..."

The Visteon workers' experience of struggle and solidarity has made them more political. Several Visteon activists joined socialist groups. Former Visteon convenor Ron Clarke responded quickly to the Vestas campaign and met them to discuss the possibility of occupation.

RYAN AIR

# Stop this insult to pilots!

**Attempts to unionise the pilots of Ryan Air are meeting with stiff opposition from the owners of the company. According to one organiser, "every time one joins the union they get the sack. One pilot even got the sack just for handing out a leaflet on the tarmac as they were going out to their plane". A number of tribunal cases for unfair dismissal have been lodged.**

The pilot told us, "The owner of the company has been very blatant about his attitude to the union, telling organisers that, if they succeed in unionising the firm, he will close it down and open up elsewhere".

According to the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITWF), the cabin crew are particularly badly

treated by the company. They have to pay £1400 up front before they start working to pay for their training and £25 a month for the right to wear the uniform. Our source told us, "They are often sacked before they earn this money back. They are also told that, if they do not sell enough teas, coffees and gin and tonics on their flights, they will be disciplined. Therefore, it is very easy for the company to punish workers who show a bit of union spirit. They just put them on flights that never sell well".

The pilots' campaign is for Dignity and Respect

More details: [www.balpa.org](http://www.balpa.org) or [www.itfglobal.org/campaigns/ryan-be-fair.cfm](http://www.itfglobal.org/campaigns/ryan-be-fair.cfm)

## TUBE

## Waiting game

The RMT on London Underground is playing a waiting game at the moment.

Following the disruptive strike action in June, drawn-out negotiations have produced an extra 0.5% on pay, minor commitments to end abuses to the sickness procedure but, crucially, no guarantees on job security. Reps met to decide to give London Underground a deadline of 29 July to talk to the union again and come up with more. Reps will meet again on 30 July to decide whether to go ahead and name more strike dates.

Since the first strikes, reps in well-organised areas have been arguing to go ahead straight away, in case we lose momentum. Others were concerned that members were not fully aware of why we were striking, the importance of the no compulsory redundancies agreement we are defending and the argument that we should not sacrifice pay during a recession. Intensive campaigning around the region over the last weeks, including a mailout to all members, should have put this right.

There are talks scheduled on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> as this paper goes to press.

We can't be too hopeful, as London Underground don't tend to talk seriously without the pressure of more strikes. Thursday's meeting will probably have to vote to name more dates. We hope the RMT's executive listens to this meeting and responds promptly, as further foot-dragging could begin to drain away the confidence we have worked hard to build up.

### TOWER HAMLETS SCHOOLS

## St Paul's Way battle lost, but more ahead

BY A TOWER HAMLETS EDUCATION WORKER

**Despite a 100% vote for strike action with a very high turnout of NUT members at St Pauls Way (STPW) school last term, the union failed to pull the teachers out in a bid to fight against compulsory redundancies.**

Instead, the union negotiators persuaded the school management and the Local Education Authority (LEA) to agree to push back the date by which compulsory redundancies would have to happen until after January next year. Teachers at the school felt that this was just delaying the inevitable and saw the threat of the redundancies as an attack on the union rather than just a restructure.

They have a point. The unions, both NUT and Unison, in STPW have been very strong and have a history of taking action, including unofficial. They have fought to defend the service they provide to students in one of the most deprived areas of London. The school was put on the government's list of failing schools last year and was given notice to improve. The board of governors was sacked and an Interim Board imposed. The head was replaced by an

## CWU: Royal Mail dispute

Postal workers in the Communication Workers Union (CWU) are taking selective action in a dispute with Royal Mail over the company's "modernisation" plans.

The company says it has to respond to reduced demand for letter post. The union says Royal Mail are introducing the plans without consulting the workforce, reneging on a modernisation agreement made previously between the union and the company. The company wants to forge ahead with job cuts and reducing services.

**The Sorting Office at Bow, East London was picketed on Tuesday 28 July as part of the rolling strike in London. The strike for the section was solid and the picket line was visited by deliverers and cleaners on their way into or out of work. Morale seemed very high, although some said they would rather have a national, all-out strike and be done with it. Discussions had on the picket line were wide-ranging, from bullying management and the effect of privatisation on the service to the legacy of the miners' strike in 1984-5.**

The union had offered the company and government a three-month no-strike deal in return for serious talks on how modernisation might be done with more union involvement. The latest

strikes took place on Saturday 25 July and are due to continue throughout the week at different offices around the country.

### MANUFACTURING

## Teesside march to save Corus steel

ALAN THEASBY REPORTS FROM TEESSIDE

**On Saturday 18 July around 3,000 people marched through Redcar under the banner "Save our Steel".**

Earlier this year the steel maker Corus announced plans to shut its Teesside plant with the loss of 2,000 jobs and hundreds more in companies who supply or rely on Corus.

The unions Community and Unite called the protest and the formal call "Save our Steel" was somewhat limited,

with no clear proposals from unions or campaign of how to achieve this or strategies for the fight, other than a broad coalition of unions, local politicians, media and businesses.

Although hand made banners on the march, including "Gordon Brown — you've bailed out the banks. Why not save our jobs" — showed that many workers would support calls for nationalisation and workers' control, neither the left nor the unions turned these into chants on the march or raised them from the platform.

The recent occupations, including the present Vestas dispute, show the way,

but it seemed these links weren't made and this has to be the next step.

Vera Baird, local MP, was booed and heckled by the crowd and she made no commitments for government support.

The following weekend the North East Shop Stewards network organised a meeting in Teesside to bring together the struggles of Visteon, Lindsey and Corus. Hopefully a solidarity committee will be set up by the activist left that can mobilise to link the lessons of the Vestas occupation and the future of Corus and a campaign independent from labour movement bureaucracy and local businesses.

interim head.

As soon as they were installed the board began attacks on the unions; sacking teacher Adrian Swain for wearing trainers and Pat Abboh (Unison member) for failing to carry out a duty during her unpaid lunch break.

A brand new school is being built next door with Building Schools for the Future (BSF) money and it is clear that, when it is up and the old school knocked down, the intention is to take St Paul's Way out of the hands of the community — probably as a National Challenge Trust school. It is also clear that management do not want the strong unions in there.

The new headteacher immediately declared a restructure of both teaching and support staff. We were told right from the start it would lead to redundancies unless enough employees left of their own volition. The restructure was to happen in two parts, teachers first. Unison members were supposed to sit and watch the carnage and wait for their turn.

The teachers' high ballot result was therefore a very important part of the battle for STPW school and for the union organisation inside. The failure by the NUT to act on it left school staff demor-

alised and angry. Under the negotiated deal for the teachers, the head had got what he wanted, though it was going to take him quite a lot longer to achieve it. But the principle of no compulsory redundancies was lost.

In our (*Solidarity's*) view, it was very important that the NUT hold on to what little they had managed to get and continue to organise in the school. There will certainly be more battles to fight for the teachers in a trust school, and now that the teachers' restructure is over, the head intends to turn his attention on the support staff.

The two unions in STPW have a strong history of sticking together. When Adrian Swain was disciplined for wearing trainers, 20 Unison members wore trainers to school the next day, receiving threatening letters from management.

Unfortunately, after the NUT pulled the plug on action, the teachers who were most prominent in the fight against redundancies have handed in their notices or taken voluntary redundancy, leaving the Union even further weakened than the restructure would have done, and exposing the Unison members to attack.

With such a high ballot result, the NUT should not have failed to act, leav-

ing the teachers in STPW demoralised. Once NUT nationally had done that, the school's NUT branch should not have given up the ghost and left the school. Between them, the union and the members have handed the head an under-organised new school on a plate.

Unison will be preparing to take action should their part of the restructure threaten redundancies in the next academic year. To do so, they will have to fight against the demoralisation of the teachers' debacle and also their own union leadership which has proved over recent years very unwilling to put up a fight.

However, their battle against redundancies will be part of a much wider fight inside Tower Hamlets for education and jobs. The unions in Metropolitan University are fighting job cuts and slashing of courses. And Tower Hamlets college unions are fighting against the cuts in ESOL provision and against redundancies.

We will be arguing to link up the battles into a campaign to defend education and jobs and to spread the action, wherever redundancies and cuts threaten education workers and students in one of the poorest and most ethnically diverse boroughs in the country.

## Fight the BNP with working-class politics

BY DAN KATZ

**T**he fascist British National Party continues to grow, expand its influence and extend its ambitions. In June BNP leader Nick Griffin was elected to the European parliament.

Griffin is a racist and anti-semitic. He believes "non-Whites have no place here at all and [we] will not rest until every last one has left our land", and has described the Holocaust as "the hoax of the 20th century".

Fellow BNP'er Andrew Brons was also elected polling 120,139 votes in Yorkshire and Humberside. Across the country the BNP took 6.2%, as Labour's vote slumped.

In June the BNP won their first County Council seats, fielding a record 459 candidates. The fascists now have dozens of local councillors, from the north of England to the South East.

Together with UKIP, which took 16.5% of the vote in the Euro-election, and a resurgent Tory party, the broad right in Britain is on the move.

However, unlike the Tories, the BNP poses a real, immediate physical threat to its opponents. For example, on 5 August Liverpool BNP member Peter Tierney is appearing in court on assault charges, after an attack on an anti-fascist protester in April.

Last year Chesterfield BNP member Martin Glasgow was jailed for 12 months for a racist assault against an Asian man.

Those that march against the BNP's Red White and Blue festival will be aware of the need to defend themselves, if necessary, from BNP thugs.

The BNP targets areas like Stoke-on-Trent. Stoke came bottom in a quality of life survey of British cities, and is a town where two out of every five houses are unfit for human habitation. The chances of surviving cancer in Stoke are the lowest in the country.

And in Barking and Dagenham, where 13,000 children live in poverty and 25% of the working population are on incapacity benefit, the BNP has also built a base.

Desperate poor whites — many of whom feel

abandoned by the mainstream parties, and betrayed by Labour — are vulnerable to propaganda scapegoating immigrants and promising a fight for "white rights".

However the BNP also has influence in some traditional Tory areas.

On the left there is debate about how to stop the BNP. Workers' Liberty believes that the labour movement needs to unite to confront the BNP. The purely verbal, tokenistic opposition from the mainstream leaders of the labour movement must give way to active mobilisation.

We must be prepared to confront the BNP — politically, and in physical self-defence, if necessary.

The "Don't vote Nazi" campaigns which have been run by Searchlight and Unite Against Fascism (UAF) are right-wing and ineffective. "Don't vote Nazi" campaigning leaves open the question of who workers should vote for. We are against a BNP vote, but we also oppose workers voting Tory or Liberal. Workers should vote for socialist candidates if possible and for Labour candidates otherwise.

Working class anti-fascism also means presenting clear working class solutions to unemployment, poverty and housing shortages. We advocate black and white workers' unity in a fight for jobs and homes for all. Who should pay for what workers need? Tax the rich to fund public services properly.

If we fail to address these issues in a way in which persuades workers — reducing all our propaganda to the exposure of the BNP as racists, which most voters know already — we will fail to win the arguments (by failing to even address key concerns).

We can not fight the BNP alongside Alan Sugar (who appears prominently on *Searchlight* material) or David Cameron (who appears with other Tory MPs on UAF's supporters list), because they are opposed to a working-class fight for homes and jobs for all! They certainly do not want the rich to pay for the economic crisis! Linking up with such people limits our ability to say what needs to be said.

## Solidarity with Iranian political prisoners and workers! Oppose Iranian state lies and censorship!

**D**uring recent protests against the blatantly rigged Iranian Presidential election result, the Islamist regime detained thousands of demonstrators.

Amnesty International suggests that at least four protesters have died while in custody. According to opposition groups protesters have been kept in underground cells and have been doused with water before being beaten with cables.

Many people — perhaps as many as 100, and certainly more than the recently revised official figure of 30 — were killed during the protests. Some students and other young people have disappeared. Their families do not know where they are.

Journalists have been forced to say on Iranian state-run television that they were supported by foreign powers, that they are guilty of "treason".

In Iran protests and workers' organisations are suppressed. In the recent past people organising for Iran's minority populations, women's rights, student activists and trade union leaders have been arrested and imprisoned.

Press TV is an Iranian state-funded English language station with offices in West London. On Sunday 2 August British and Iranian socialists will hold a protest outside it (2pm, Westgate House, Westgate). Why? It makes propaganda for the Iranian state.

For example, when one Canadian journalist was dragged onto Iranian state television Press TV reported it as "detained Newsweek reporter comes clean", as if his "confession" could be taken at face value.

In June, when millions of Iranians demonstrated for democracy and when the crack-down began, Press TV refrained from criticising the government and was credulous about its actions. Neda Soltani's death was said to be "hyped and dramatised by western media outlets."

Those featured by the station include Tariq Ramadan and George Galloway, who has a regular show, *The Real Deal*.

While the Iranian people's human rights are suppressed, journalists and commentators should have nothing to do with such a media outlet.

Let us send a message to the Iranian regime:

- We will not forget the prisoners — release all political prisoners now!
- For the right to organise against oppression, to demonstrate!
- For a democratic, secular Iran!
- For the right to join and organise in trade unions for workers' rights!

### March Against the BNP's Red White and Blue festival

Saturday 15 August, Codnor, Derbyshire (10 mins drive from Junction 26 of the M1). Rally Codnor centre from 11am March at 12 noon

More information nobnpfestival@riseup.net, <http://nobnpfestival.wordpress.com/>

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

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