

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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

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No to war and sanctions! No to the Islamic Republic!

Last week, the UN watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, said Iran was not co-operating in talks over the potential military aspects of its nuclear programme.

Iran has recently stepped up uranium enrichment at its nuclear plants. This has led to further words of alarm and threat by western politicians.

We print a statement by the *International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran*, a campaign set up by Iranian socialists.

The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI) strongly condemns the militaristic policies of capitalism.

IASWI is a part of the anti-capitalist movement, of the working class global front and the 99% of the world's population, for a real and enduring peace based on freedom, equality, social and economic justice and the abolition of exploitation.

IASWI strongly con-

demns the US and its allies' threat of military intervention and war against Iran. It also condemns the Islamic Republic of Iran's militaristic method of governance as a cause for intensifying the repression of workers and other toiling sectors in society struggling for their human rights.

INDEPENDENCE

Based on a position of working-class independence and autonomy, IASWI considers the conflict between US, its allies and the ruling government in Iran capitalistic, repressive and anti-worker in nature.

We resolutely oppose all militaristic, destructive, inhuman policies of the US and its allies and seek to continue gathering progressive and working class international support against the totality of the capitalist and anti-worker Islamic Republic of Iran.

IASWI is strongly opposed to the economic sanctions against Iran.

These sanctions will result in further expansion of poverty, destitution and unemployment throughout the country. As a result of this policy, there has already been a drastic rise in the prices of goods, scarcity of basic food items and a rise in unemployment.

SANCTIONS

The economic sanctions are primarily a further burden for the working class and poor in Iran, rather than the regime of Islamic Republic.

The economic sanctions and threats of war are nothing but inhuman instruments in the hands of world capitalism against the workers and poor in Iran. The Islamic Republic continues to use the threat of war and policy of economic sanctions as an excuse to further repress workers and disadvantaged people in Iran and intensify fear and intimidation throughout the country.

IASWI calls on all workers' and progressive move-

ments throughout the world to raise the banner of class solidarity and:

- Condemn the threats of war and militarization and the economic sanctions pursued by the US and its allies against the people of Iran.

- Support the class-based movement and struggles of workers and toilers in Iran to create their own independent organizations, and achieve freedom of expression, assembly, protest and strike.

To initiate and support international solidarity campaigns by:

- Condemning the threats of war and economic sanctions against Iran;

- Opposing the Islamic Republic's repression of workers and people's struggles in Iran;

- Supporting workers and progressive movements of Iran.

Long live international working class solidarity!

- info@workers-iran.org
- www.workers-iran.org

Stop the treason trial! Drop all charges against the Zimbabwean socialists!

Protest Friday, March 2, 2012, 7-8 pm at Zimbabwe House, 429 The Strand, London WC2R 0JR

A group of Zimbabwean socialist, trade-union, student and human rights activists — many of them members of the International Socialist Organisation — are being prosecuted for treason. Their trial resumed on 27 February. If convicted, they face years in prison. Please join the protest to demand the charges are dropped and the comrades freed.

For more information, ring 07796 690 874.

Cops won't be able to evict ideas

By Rhodri Evans

As of Tuesday morning, 28 February, "Occupy London" protesters were gathering at the movement's last remaining site, Finsbury Square, to talk about next steps.

At about 4am, cops, given the go-ahead by St Paul's Cathedral authorities, cleared away campers around the cathedral, giving them just five minutes to retrieve their belongings. The same morning, cops also evicted people at the "Bank of Ideas" linked to the Occupy movement, which in recent weeks has been at the disused Moorfields School, at the corner of Bunhill Row and Featherstone St in central London.

As of 8am, dozen of police were still shutting off Bunhill Row and Featherstone St to traffic, while a few evicted campaigners told Solidarity that the cops were refusing to let

them retrieve laptops and other stuff from the school and that Southern Housing Group was demolishing the school buildings that very day after leaving them idle and intact for four years.

The "Occupy" site at Finsbury Square is owned by Islington Council, which so far has made no moves to evict the camp.

Despite everything, the "Occupy" movement in London kept its sites longer than in almost any other city.

Its four months of operation have seen a shift in which even the blandest mainstream politicians have started talking about making capitalism "responsible", "moral", "co-operative".

In other words: all attempts at reform over centuries have left capitalism fundamentally irresponsible, immoral, and destructively competitive.

G4S to run police station

By Bill Holmes

Security firm G4S has been given a contract to design, build and run a police station.

Lincolnshire Police agreed the deal in a bid to save £20 million in what is thought to be the largest move of its kind in Britain.

The 540 civilian workers at the force — two-thirds — will be transferred to the private company in April.

The £200 million deal over ten years will see G4S run IT, human resources and finance.

G4S is the biggest global security company in the world with a £1 billion turnover in the UK, showing its interests clearly lie in big business and profit, not acting to protect the vulnerable.

The Police Federation condemned the move say-

ing private sector workers may not have an "enshrined sense of public duty".

Socialists should also condemn the move, but for our own reasons. We mistrust the police as part of the iron fist of the bourgeois state. Nonetheless, government institutions while they remain in the hands of the state, can be, potentially, held to greater account. We oppose privately-run police stations just as we oppose privately-run prisons, even though we are opposed to the existence of prisons and the police force on principle.

Ultimately we want to see the abolition of the police, but in the meantime we should fight for greater accountability over the police and other state machinery, and the full unionisation of civilian workers.

Greece: threat from the right

By Theodora Polenta

On 17 February left-wingers and radicals in Greece were shocked by video clips of a visit by activists of the Greek neo-Nazi group Xrisi Aygi (Golden Dawn) to the workers at Greek Steel in Athens who have been on strike since 31 October.

The neo-Nazis were given the microphone to declare their “support” for the workers (four months late, and after Xrisi Aygi people in Volos, where Greek Steel’s other factory is located, have actively supported the employer).

The president of the union, Giorgios Sifonios, welcomed the Xrisi Aygi representatives, stating that “All Greece is supporting Greek Steel!” He spoke after Xrisi Aygi, effectively endorsing them by vaguely talking about the corruption of the mainstream political establishment. Xrisi Aygi was allowed to distribute stickers calling Greek workers to “Vote for Xrisi Aygi — to clean the dirt from Greece”.

FLAGSHIP

The Greek Steel strike is a flagship campaign for the diehard-Stalinist Greek Communist Party KKE and its union front, PAME. Sifonios is politically affiliated to KKE-PAME.

Instead of kicking the Xrisi Aygi representatives out of the occupation, he accepted their donation of milk and chocolates and he handed them the microphone.

Over previous months, the union at Greek Steel has refused access to speak to the workers to all the revolutionary left groups that have provided unconditional support to the workers.

Only after a video clip was released on YouTube, and striking Greek Steel workers complained to their union, did the union leadership at Greek Steel issue a statement.

“The trade union of Greek Steel workers denounces the attempt by Xrisi Aygi and other groups to provoke our heroic struggle... After they had taken photos of their speech and of the food they offered, labelled with their despicable Nazi slogans, which we did not see until they left, they started their usual tactics of provoking our struggle...”

The union leadership statement took a swipe at the revolutionary left too: “Greek Steel workers are much bigger than Xrisi Aygi and any other supposedly revolutionary forces. Greek Steel workers are part of the organised workers’ class movement, which is the basic support



Xrisi Aygi

for their struggle. It is not by chance that all these forces are against PAME”.

Not a word of self-criticism of the Greek Steel union leaders’ “political mistake” (to say the least) in welcoming Xrisi Aygi into the occupation.

The least to be expected from the central KKE leaders was that they make a public apology and a firm political critique of the Xrisi Aygi visit. However, the political and ideological profile of KKE excluded that.

KKE is a Stalinist party and one of the fundamental characteristics of Stalinism is that the leadership never makes mistakes. The KKE paper *Rizospastis* wrote:

“Xrisi Aygi exploited the opportunity to perform a provocative action against KKE, the class-conscious organized working-class movement, and the strikers of Greek Steel, by visiting the workplace of Greek Steel and faking support for the Greek Steel workers strike”.

But the statement distancing from Xrisi Aygi was followed by an equally hostile tone towards left-wing groups.

“Supposedly self-defined left-wing forces such as Xekinima, Antarsya, Sek, joined Xrisi Aygi in provoking KKE and Greek Steel workers. These supposedly left-wing forces are united in their hatred against KKE and PAME, trying to undermine the organised working-class trade-union movement, offering services to the employers and the capitalist class. The workers’ contempt is waiting for them...”

Instead of KKE/PAME and *Rizospastis* recognizing their mistake, they imply that left-wing revolutionary organisations play the same role as Xrisi Aygi.

KKE’s stance should be seen in historical continuity with the political and ideological tendency that it represents.

Before Hitler gained power in Germany in 1933, the line handed down by Stalin to the Communist Party of Germany was: do not be afraid of Hitler, let him gain power, the people will then realise that he is a con-man, they will overthrow him, and the Communist party will gain power. The Stalinist party refused to form a united front with the social democratic party, referring to them as “social-fascists”.

The Stalinist leadership replied to the Left Opposition and Trotsky by accusing them of being agents of Hitler!

Back in December, the Xrisi Aygi branch in Volos made its stance on the Greek Steel workers’ strike clear:

“Nobody denies the fact that the Greek Steel bosses pocketed massive profits in recent years due to the Olympic Games and the big construction projects, which we do not condemn, as every investor invests money in order to make profits and not in order to count losses...”

“The proposal of the employer of Greek Steel to the workers was a sensible proposal within the difficult economic context. Of course it is unfortunate that the employer had to reduce the workers’ wages. However, the fact that the employer is offering to reduce the working hours is proof that he does not wish to sack the workers...”

“Unfortunately the workers of Greek Steel have carried on their strike despite the fact that the employer offered to re-hire the sacked workers; the workers are placing more demands, accusing the employer of trying to dismantle collective bargaining agreements and trying to enforce individual agreements”

NATIONALISTIC

“It is of paramount importance to build a nationalistic trade-union movement which will support workers’ right in a responsible way and aim at a reconciliation of the employers and workers”.

The increase in the poll score of Xrisi Aygi is a warning. In some recent polls Xrisi Aygi gets around 3%, threatening to enter parliament and scoring higher than the left alliance Antarsya.

We are living in a period of big industrial struggles, of the resurgence of a combative working-class movement, but the left has underestimated Xrisi Aygi, and failed sufficiently to offer answers to deal with the poverty and social deprivation in areas where Xrisi Aygi has won support.

KKE and Syriza, the coalition formed around the ex-Eurocommunist Synaspismos, have refused to form a united front to confront fascism. A turning point which empowered Xrisi Aygi was May 2011 when the intensification of the fascist violence at the centre of Athens led to the murder of an immigrant worker but remained unanswered by the left.

It is a big mistake when some on the left argue to ignore the fascists so we do

not advertise them. The fascists will get advertised anyway by mainstream journalists and media which portray them as respectable politicians and invite them to panels as respectable representatives that have valid opinions (albeit a bit extreme) on “rescuing Greece” from the crisis.

The revolutionary left needs to lead the struggle to organise massive anti-fascist mobilisations. If the fascists get space to silence the majority of the society that opposes them by the force of terrorism, then they appear as all powerful and invincible and they become a pole of attraction for ruined petty bourgeois and marginal sections of society.

But the heroic teams of anarchists who regard it as their personal and ethical responsibility to deal with the fascists of Xrisi Aygi in isolated “military-type” actions, detached from the majority of the Greek society, are ineffective and counterproductive. We can only defeat fascism if we form a robust united front of all working class organisations, of all left parties, of all trade unions and organizations and youth movements independent of their leaderships.

SELF-DEFENCE

We support the right of immigrants and workers to self-defence against the fascist thugs.

But self-defence can only be effective if it has political back-up and support from the majority of the working class, including those who are influenced or support reformist and social-democratic ideas.

The last words of how to deal with the fascist threat and destroy it from its infancy belongs to the trade union of refugees and immigrant workers of Greece:

“The visits of the neo-Nazi thugs of Xrisi Aygi to Greek Steel is a provocation and a below-the-belt attack for the whole of the working class and the solidarity movement for the industrial struggle against redundancies and the shutting down of factories.

“The neo-Nazis of Xrisi Aygi are dangerous. They are a threat to our freedom. They should not be given any platform or space in our trade unions, our collective organisations, our councils, the parliament. They aim at a brutal dictatorship at concentration camps and the extermination of left-wingers, communists, trade unionists and the immigrants...”

“Let’s all join our forces to build the anti-Nazi demo on 17 March! Let’s close every road to the fascists and open the road of the unification of the working class”.

No democracy at UAF conference

By Sacha Ismail

With maybe 350 attending, this year’s Unite Against Fascism (UAF) conference was smaller than previous years. The SWP and Socialist Action continue to dominate the leadership of the campaign.

There has been fuss, including inside the SWP, about the lack of democracy in UAF. This year — for the first time — there were elections for the national committee. However even this small step was a fake.

Rather than a proper open election for a multi-member committee, candidates had to be nominated for a variety of individual positions — a discouragement from standing. There was only one candidate for each position.

EXCLUDING

This was achieved by excluding, on a technicality, Justin Baidoo — a young socialist and trade unionist from South London wishing to challenge SWP full-timer Martin Smith for assistant secretary.

Given there were no other contested elections, you might think something could be done — it would have been positive to have a real election? But no.

In the event the “candidates” were simply declared elected.

The reason Justin Baidoo was excluded is because he was standing to raise *political* criticisms of UAF and its failures in fighting fascism.

It was not possible to submit motions to the conference.

There was a quite heated discussion on whether to call for state bans of EDL and other fascist marches, led by Socialist Action (for) and the SWP (against). A number of SWP speakers, including UAF leaders Weyman Bennett and Martin Smith, stressed that they are for class demands which undercut the base of fascism.

So why shouldn’t this be included in the politics and demands of the campaign — it was something we were there demanding?

Weyman Bennett got a lot of applause for demagogically declaring that David Cameron was a racist and should be sacked as prime minister — yet the SWP opposes the demand to kick Cameron and other Tory politicians out of UAF!

As a logical conclusion of all this, UAF is still saying “Don’t vote Nazi”, i.e. vote for anyone who isn’t the BNP.

Meanwhile the alliance with right-wing political Islam continues; Azad Ali from the East London-based Islamic Forum of Europe was “elected” UAF vice chair.

No one on the left, as far as I know, suggests the IFE and its like are terrorists or that we should refuse to stand even with Islamists to physically defeat fascist violence. But the idea that the left should be building a *political alliance* with a group that has established a bigoted, reactionary and repressive political climate in the Bengali community of Tower Hamlets is astonishing.

It should go without saying that mobilising to confront the EDL and challenge the BNP and other fascists must remain a top priority. The conditions for them to grow remain, and we should not be complacent. But to counterpose all this to the need for democracy and political debate within the anti-fascist movement is utterly false. To fight effectively, we need open debate over politics, strategy and tactics.

SWP members, trade unions and other affiliates and supporters of UAF should start asking questions and exerting pressure about the way the organisations is run.

• Abridged from: workersliberty.org/node/18375

Democratic deficit

Fighting the EDL

About 600 people gathered in Hyde town centre for a demonstration organised by the English Defence League (EDL), on Saturday 25 February. A small Scottish Defence League demonstration in Glasgow on the same day was boosted by splinters from the EDL.

• Report here: workersliberty.org/node/18389

• Article discussing recent developments inside the EDL: workersliberty.org/node/18300

Faith in the class struggle



Dave Osler

I've always been a bit uncomfortable with the expression "faith in the working class", largely on account of the unavoidable connotation of belief without proof.

Yet the phrase does figure relatively frequently in far left discourse, and surely there have been times in recent decades when some degree of faith has probably been indispensable.

Marxists start from the idea that the proletariat has the capacity to remake society. This is the central concept of socialism from below, from which pretty much everything else flows, including the rejection of Stalinism and social democracy alike.

Yet we are so far in history from its most dramatic flowerings that the vision of an organised working class, confidently making socialist revolution, can seem like something confined to the pages of history books.

Inspiring as it is to read about Russia in 1917 or Spain in 1936 or France in 1968, it is often difficult to make the connection between these upsurges and the defensive campaigning that makes up the bulk of day-to-day political activism in Britain in 2012.

The actually existing working class is the only working class we have got; if a substantial proportion of it is constituted by apathetic, atomised, depoliticised, celebrity-obsessed softcore racists who no longer reach even the level of trade union consciousness, we are not going to witness those barricades going up any time soon, are we?

So Marxist activists not only have to convince themselves that working people do have the potential to one day come to a revolutionary socialist understanding, but have to continue to convince themselves of this proposition year after year after year, despite ongoing lack of evidence to this effect.

BELOW

I don't know how best to describe the thought process by which we achieve this, but perhaps faith is as good a word as any. Needless to say, there are dangers attached to the recitation of any creed.

One consequent fault of the Trotskyist tradition has been the notion that seething discontent lies just below surface appearances, and can readily be unleashed and tapped by the correct application of the transitional method.

So it is that sensible reservations to crazily voluntaristic plans of action are airily dismissed by putting down the questioner as "lacking faith in the working class", as if all the left needed to do was believe that bit harder so that things will come to pass just the way we want them to do.

The notion is also freely invoked in written polemic. A few recent examples will suffice. The Spartacist League insists that it has it, the Socialist Party Scotland argues that an unidentified state capitalist tendency north of the border does not, and one writer in the *Weekly Worker* recently maintained that the AWL is reduced to a mere cheerleader for democratic imperialism, precisely because it doesn't have it either.

While it is easy enough for any grouping to proclaim its faith and to slate its opponents for lacking it, there seems to be no objective yardstick to decide the matter.

In any case, decisions are best reached on the basis of making an objective assessment of the balance of class forces and acting accordingly. Relegating them to a faith position is always going to be a mistake.

What has been decisive for me personally is my boyhood and teenage recollections of a period of intense class struggle, especially the rail strikes in which my own father took part and the three-day week of 1974.

I do remember that things were different once. I do have faith that they can be different again.



Militant car workers, 1970s

And on the seventh day...



Press Watch
By Pat Murphy

Sunday 26 February was, according to the producers of the biggest-selling paper in Britain, the day "a new Sun rises" and the beginning of "a new era for Britain's No 1 paper".

It was the day the *Sun* appeared on a Sunday for the first time in its history. A grandiose editorial promised a fresh start. In fact the most noticeable thing about the latest Murdoch project was how predictably similar it was to the daily rag produced under the same title. If we expected a thinly-disguised *News of the World*, the paper shut down under the pressure of revelations about its role in the phone-hacking scandal, what we got was just thin.

As its old nickname suggested, the *News of the Screws* as a brand depended on scandalous revelations about the private lives of the rich, famous and (occasionally) powerful. Now that the most obvious means of obtaining such stories has been, at least temporarily, cut off, the Murdoch press has to manage on scraps of fairly low-level celebrity tedium.

Hence the front page of the first edition of the *Sunday Sun* went with a splash about a "Britain's Got Talent" judge, Amanda Holden, and her "nightmare birth ordeal". This "Sun exclusive" dominated four of the first seven pages of the paper. The rest of those pages dealt with the heart attack of Adele's "doting gran" and a topless picture of an "X Factor" judge. Far from offering anything "fresh" this was no better than could be found in any of the celebrity glossies.

The new *Sun's* leader article also insisted that "our readers' interests, fears, hopes and aspirations are at the centre of everything we do". There was little sign of any commitment to its overwhelmingly working-class readers' interests or hopes but, as always with the Murdoch press, there was plenty of effort to exploit the "fears". The first news story in the paper praised Theresa May for new measures to make it harder for migrant workers to settle in the UK and readers were reminded how much it is costing the taxpayer to keep "hate preacher Abu Qatada" free.

For all that, the politics and the prejudice were low-level. The overwhelming impression you get from the *Sunday Sun* is of being swamped by celebrities, and mostly those who have long ago had their best days: David Beckham, Gary Barlow, Katie Price and Amy Winehouse's ex-hubby.



Letters

Hungary: rise of Jobbik

Stan Crooke's article on Hungary's Fidesz government (Solidarity 235) outlined its right-wing, anti-democratic programme. It is worth also noting the rising popularity of Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary).

In the 2010 election Jobbik won 17% of the vote. Fidesz's spell in government has done nothing to undermine that support. Though the ruling alliance of Fidesz and Christian Democrats leads opposition parties, at the end of 2011 polls put Jobbik on 21%, just behind the Socialists on 22%.

Moreover, Jobbik is very popular with young voters, enjoying 30% among the 18-37 age group.

Jobbik has a sophisticated, slick image: as well as highlighting "traditional" anti-semitic and anti-Roma themes, it poses as being anti-globalisation, and for renewing "Hungarian culture". But it also has links to fascist elements including Nazis of the paramilitary, uniformed type.

One such group, Vederó (Defensive Strength) was involved in disturbing events in the northern Hungarian town of Gyöngyöspata, which has a large Roma population, in spring 2011. There the group tried to organise a training camp. Patrolling around as vigilantes they made much of "gypsy crime" — a racist slur of wide popularity. Such was the level of intimidation the Roma community called on the Red Cross to evacuate women and children.

In July Jobbik 2011 won the local election. According to *L'Humanité*, they have since been forcing the unemployed to take part in public works or forfeit their benefits. The requirement is being applied far more strictly when it comes to unemployed Roma.

For years right-wing vigilantes have been marching into and intimidating towns with large Roma populations. Since 2008 there have been 37 racially motivated hate crimes

I am always disappointed when anyone who should know better agrees to become a columnist for the *Sun* and for certain it diminishes them forever. Ken Livingstone and Alastair Campbell have taken the Murdoch coin and, since last Sunday, I will never look at Roy Keane in the same light again. What struck me about the newly launched Sunday edition, however, is that they found a celebrity columnist so shallow and dull that he diminishes the paper rather than the other way around.

It is not a promising augury of the paper's pledge to be "the most lively, interesting, informative and entertaining news source in the business" that they have signed up Toby Young as a regular columnist. The repellent Young led his first column with the claim that "Labour made the NHS sick... not Lansley". So far, so predictable. What defines him though is a shorter piece which attacked the award-winning movie *The Artist*. In fact the paper's editor thought highly enough of this to introduce Young to his readers on page 2 as "the only person brave enough to say *The Artist* is a load of pretentious rubbish".

The *Sun's* conception of bravery in its columnists amounts to a willingness to say things even though they reveal the writer to be a moron. The entire content of Young's criticism (I don't caricature here) is that it is "a French, black and white, silent movie". It's very likely that those criticisms have been placed in order of sinfulness. Judging by his career so far this will set the tone for Toby Young's particular contribution to the *Sun*. A man who has made it his mission to set up a free school where children are taught Latin and the classics uses the space afforded to him in the paper read by the masses to sneer at culture of any quality and insist (as he did in this column) that the best film Oscar should go to "big-budget summer blockbusters".

I doubt that the first edition of the *Sunday Sun* will prove typical of its future direction. Its leader article, "A new Sun rises today" acknowledges the difficult circumstances of its birth and promises to be different and atone for past sins. There are promises to abide by the Press Complaints Commission's Editors' Code and the company's own News Corporation Standards of Business Conduct.

Finally, they bring their readers' attentions to the establishment of a new post of "Sun Readers' Champion" whose remit is to accept feedback and correct significant errors. I predict that once the paper becomes more established and the phone-hacking scandal is a more distant memory the Sunday edition will take on a more familiar xenophobic, anti-working class and reactionary identity.

When it does you can email your complaints to SunChampion@the-sun.co.uk.

against Roma people in Hungary. Nine of these 37 attacks were by serial killers who shot 11 and killed six Roma, including a five-year-old boy. No paramilitary member has ever been charged.

The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union have said: "We fear that Gyöngyöspata was a choreographed trial-run or 'dress rehearsal' for future extreme right campaigns in our country." More: <http://alturl.com/zbmiz> and <http://tasz.hu/en>.

Cathy Nugent, Catford

NHS private patients

When I started work in the NHS in 2003 I was surprised at the number of private patients who were being treated on the children's ward I was working on.

I knew that the NHS hospital had private wards and had assumed that private patients would be treated there and that I, as an NHS nurse, would not be looking after them. In fact private patients literally queue-jumped to use the same hospital facilities and be treated by the same staff as NHS patients. The result of this is that NHS patients had to wait longer for care. Not only this but they were often prioritised for private rooms, not on the basis of need or infection control — the purpose of the rooms — but because they demanded it as a right. It was a two-tier health service in operation.

A lot has been made of the opening up in Lansley's Bill of health service contracting to the private sector. Just as dangerous is the lifting of the cap on private patients in the NHS. If this goes ahead NHS waiting lists will go up and people will be encouraged to take the private route to obtain quicker treatment. The private treatment obtained is by NHS doctors in an NHS hospital! Private hospitals often cannot provide the same standards — just nicer wards.

There is a concerted effort by the Tory government to make the NHS like US Medicare: a safety net with minimum standards of care while those who can afford to obtain higher quality care through insurance or top-up payments.

Doctors should not be able to prioritise treatment of private patients in outside practice or in the NHS. We need one properly funded, state-of-the-art health service for all!

Rosie Woods, north London

NHS sell-off bill can be stopped

Lib Dems are scurrying to tweak the Government's Health and Social Care Bill with last-minute amendments in the House of Lords before it comes back to the Commons after Easter.

Their aim is to head off an emergency motion, opposing the Bill outright, which rank-and-file Lib-Dems want debated at their party's spring conference in Gateshead on the weekend of 10 March.

The Tories have spoiled the Lib-Dem leaders' efforts by shrugging and saying that the amendments are "not significant".

The latest opinion poll, published on 20 February, showed 52% saying that the Health and Social Care Bill should be dropped, and only 33% backing it.

So far, however, street mobilisation against the Bill has lagged behind broad public opinion, perhaps because activist energies have been channelled off into other issues like the public-sector pensions campaign.

Activity is beginning to pick up, with a string of protests in the two weeks or so following the Health Alarm protest at the "Winning Business in the New NHS" conference on 29 February (see back page).

Among the groups organising protests are the Labour

Party (in the north west) and the Unite union (at Westminster). As yet, however, Labour Party effort is mostly limited to press releases and an e-petition, and other unions have not come in with Unite's effort on 7 March.

The new Health Alarm mobilising committee aims to turn things round by:

- organising its own activities;
- helping and publicising other protests; and
- working with people in the unions and the Labour Party to demand that the official labour movement musters its whole weight for this campaign.

The Bill builds on "marketisation" initiated in the NHS by the Thatcher regime and continued (after an initial return to public-service operation) by the Blair-Brown Labour administrations. If it is defeated, that will not be enough. Campaigners will have to follow up by pushing for the reversal of the large chunks of the Bill which have already been implemented by administrative decree without the Bill becoming law, for the full reconversion of the NHS to public-service operation, and for the restoration of cuts to NHS spending.

If the Bill goes through, however, that will be a drastic lurch towards the NHS operating not as a public service but as a "health market", only with most of the purchasing

power, for now, coming from Government funds channelled through "clinical commissioning groups" (service companies) run by groups of GP practices.

Each NHS unit will be driven to find the most "profitable" way to operate, rather than the best way for health. The path will be cleared for a further shift to a "social insurance" model, openly recommended by many Tories, in which health care is basically a market but patients can claim back the cost of treatments, or some of the cost of some treatments.

The move of the Hinchingbrooke NHS hospital, in Cambridgeshire, into private management, and the move by St George's Hospital in Tooting, London, to spend £100,000 to hire a manager to tout for private patients, show the way the Bill points.

Solidarity calls on all our readers:

- to back the Health Alarm mobilising committee;
- to win support for it from their union branches, etc.;
- to back all the other protests across the country;
- **and to work urgently to turn the mass public discontent on this issue into mass public mobilisation on the streets.**

● healthalarm1159.wordpress.com

Help the AWL to raise £20,000

Last year Barclays paid just £113 million tax on its profits (globally £5 billion, of which around half was made in the UK). Barclays, an enormous multinational bank, paid about 5% tax, much less than the workers who clean its corporate offices or staff the desks in its high-street branches.

The government has been shamed into introducing legislation to close some of the loopholes that have allowed banks and other multinationals to carry out this kind of tax avoidance, but the figures speak for themselves. The Tory mantra that cuts are necessary because "there's no money" is simply a lie. There is money. The problem lies with who controls it.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty fights for a world where the vast wealth evident in a grotesque tax dodge such as that of Barclays is collectively owned and democratically managed to meet human need. Our paper *Solidarity* is our essential tool for agitating, educating and organising for that idea. To continue that work, we need your help.

None of Barclays' reclaimed taxes are coming our way. We rely on you for financial support. We need money to continue publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly, improve our website, organise events such as our Ideas for Freedom summer school, and for a host of other costs.

Please consider:

- Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at www.workersliberty.org/resources and on this page. Even a few pounds a month really does help.

- Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.
- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.
- Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us:
tel. 07796 690 874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL,
20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG.

Total raised so far: £9,333

We raised £860 this week, mostly from new and increased standing orders. (Thanks to Tim, Ben, Ed, Rebecca, Eric and Paul)



Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

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Account no.

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Please make payments to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date Signature

The Treason of the Intellectuals

The introduction to a new volume of verse. All proceeds from sales will go to the AWL fund drive.

"I have, I suppose, a sneaky hope for a few of these pieces, but in general I make no claim that this is poetry. That belongs to an altogether higher order of things. This is workaday political verse — politics understood in its broader social sense, to include the politics of such things as religion and emigration from Ireland. It is the sort of verse that was once very common in socialist and other publications and is now rare.

"Political verse nowadays tends to be dismissed as a contradiction in terms. Of course, it was not always so. Politics, the overall running of society, shapes and reshapes all our lives. Politics, and to the point here, the emotional or private experience of political events, is a perfectly proper subject for verse (and, if one could

manage that, for poetry). All questions of quality aside, these pieces belong to the sort of verse I encountered as a child in Ireland.

"The politics here is working-class revolutionary socialism, in the tradition of the 'thin red line' of international socialist resistance to both Stalinism and the bourgeoisie. That line runs through all the catastrophes of defeat and self-transformation that engulfed 20th century socialism.

"Some of these pieces explore feeling and political nuance; some are self-questioning. People of my politics had ardently wanted that, but now Stalinism gave way not, as we had hoped and believed it would, to a new working class socialism but to a re-born capitalism.

"The same sort of perplexed and bitter self-questioning, edged in painful disappointment and sometimes in guilt, went through the minds of many socialists then. For those of us who had fought Stalinism in the labour movement and advocated a working class revolution against the ruling bureaucrats in the Stalinist states, it was mysterious guilt. A few were written as political self-interrogation after Russian Stalinism. They were a by-product of a spiritual-political crisis. One of the advantages of verse is that it can deal in such things. But bits of one-sided insomniac's verse are not rounded political statements. My straightforward, political response to these events appeared in articles, of which there were quite a few, in the weekly *Socialist Organiser*, the magazine *Workers Liberty* and *Solidarity*."

Sean Matgamma

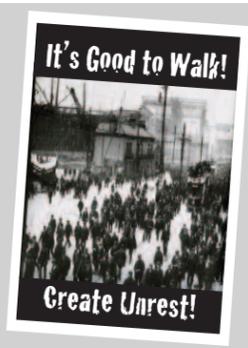
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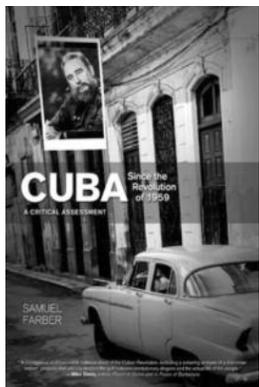
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Posters will be sent in a cardboard roll to arrive in pristine condition.



Cuba as a class society



Pablo Velasco and Sacha Ismail review *Cuba since the revolution of 1959: A Critical Assessment*, by Sam Farber

The 1959 revolution that brought Fidel Castro and his 26 July Movement to power was a bourgeois revolution which smashed Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship, but replaced it with their own Bonapartist regime.

Half driven by US hostility and half by choice, this government opted to become a Stalinist state in 1961, adopting the model of the USSR and similar states.

Farber calls this a "bureaucratic system of state collectivism", in which society's economic surplus "is not extracted in the form of profits from individual enterprise, nor is it realised through the market. Instead, it is obtained as a surplus product of the nation as a whole. The surplus is appropriated directly, through the state's control of the economy". Cuban workers and peasants received their means of subsistence in the form of largely non-monetary rations — low cost or free food, housing, education, health and other welfare facilities. However the surplus product pumped out of the direct producers is controlled and allocated by the ruling bureaucracy — "without any institutional constraints by unions or any other independent popular organisations".

Cuba's achievements and failures "resemble those of the Soviet Union, China and Vietnam before these countries took the capitalist road". Part of this was Cuba's receipt of "massive Soviet aid from the early sixties to the end of the eighties... even the most conservative estimates would place it well above Cuba's calculated losses from US economic aggression during that period". Between 1960 and 1990, Cuba received about 65 billion dollars of Soviet aid on very favourable terms.

The "systematic repressive nature of the Soviet-type regimes made it politically difficult to build enduring oppositions within those societies". In Cuba there was "certainly no lack of physical brutality... particularly during the first twenty years of their rule. There were thousands of executions, and there was large-scale imprisonment, throughout the revolutionary period, of tens of thousands of people under typically very poor living conditions and physical mistreatment."

WHO RULES CUBA?

The state bureaucracy that developed out of the revolution is still in power.

The state owns the means of production and the bureaucracy "owns" and controls the state. The "one-party state" is in fact a no-party state, since the bureaucracy rules directly through the myriad of state and state-sponsored "mass" organisations.

The bureaucracy has privileged access to consumer goods through special stores, separate hospitals, recreational villas, and trips abroad. The armed forces and security services have their own medical facilities. Since the two-tier economy of hard currency and pesos was legally established in 1993, more conventional inequality has been unleashed.

The political ideal of the Cuban elite has been summed up by current head of state Raúl Castro as "monolithic unity" (2009). Although there is enforced mass participation in Cuba's polity, there is a complete absence of democratic control. Cuba has had a variety of ruling institutions, but none function democratically. The Communist Party was formed in 1965 and has only had six congresses in over 50 years. The Popular Power assemblies were not established until 1976 and allow only vetted candidates to stand on their biography, with those "elected" able only to rubber stamp decisions taken elsewhere by the bureaucrats.

Cuba does not have the kind of impersonal rule of law and citizens' rights against the arbitrariness and capriciousness of the state which exist in some bourgeois societies. This is evident in the crimes of "social dangerousness", and "antisocial behaviour", and the use of imprisonment, electric shock treatment and psychiatric institutions for opponents. Fidel Castro has admitted that there have been 15-20,000 political prisoners in Cuba and Cuba currently has 531 prisoners per 100,000 people, the fifth highest rate worldwide.

The idea that Cuba is ruled by its workers is laughable. In 1959, the Cuban working class "was not socialist in any meaningful sense of the term, nor did it lend its own distinctive character to the Cuban revolution". Fidel Castro himself

has admitted as much on numerous occasions.

The working class was certainly not passive during Batista's dictatorship. Despite the shackles of the state and business-gangster trade unionism, sugar workers, rail workers and bank workers fought militant reformist struggles around pay and conditions. The 26 July Movement had its own trade unionists which did organise successful strikes on a number of occasions after the rebel leadership landed in Cuba in 1956. But the general strike they called in April 1958 was a failure and workers' action only an adjunct to the main, guerrilla warfare strategy for taking power.

In 1959 there was an explosion of workers' struggles and organising, but one the Castroites moved to bring under control: "Soon after, a huge wave of labour conflicts and strikes erupted throughout the country, expressing the pent-up economic and political frustrations of the Cuban working class during the Batista years, as well as the great expectations aroused by the revolution..."

"Union halls throughout the island were occupied by revolutionary trade unionists of various stripes, with those associated with the 26th of July Movement most numerous and influential. These new leaders quickly proceeded to purge all the supporters of Eusebio Mujal... bureaucrats who had collaborated with the Batista dictatorship. A vigorous organising campaign was quickly launched that greatly enlarged the already sizable, although bureaucratic and corrupt, union movement. In the spring, every single local union in the country held elections, and these were followed by elections at the regional and national level. This turned out to be the most important exercise in autonomous grassroots democracy during the revolutionary period. The candidates associated with the 26th of July Movement emerged as the overwhelming winners, and the Communists (PSP) managed to obtain only some 10 percent".

At the Tenth Congress of the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC, Confederation of Cuban Workers) in November 1959, Castro intervened and a different leadership slate was approved. After the congress concluded, the Labour Ministry assisted by the Communist union leaders and their allies, began to purge a large number of trade union leaders who had resisted Communist influence, accusing them of being "Mujalistas". There were no new elections, as this would have maintained union autonomy. About 50 percent of elected leaders, most of whom belonged to Castro's movement, were removed; many were persecuted and jailed as well.

In August 1961, "the government approved new legislation that brought the nature and function of Cuban trade unions into alignment with those of the Soviet bloc". At the Eleventh CTC Congress, which took place in November 1961, unanimity replaced controversy. With no contest allowed for the leading positions, all leaders were elected by acclamation. Old Stalinist leader Lázaro Peña regained the position of secretary general that he had last held in the forties under Batista. And: "in order to save production costs, the Eleventh Congress also agreed to give up gains that many unions had won before the revolution".

FRONTS

The unions became state labour fronts. In 1961, Ernesto "Che" Guevara put forward the notion that "the Cuban workers have to get used to living in a collectivist regime and therefore cannot strike".

New labour laws in 1964 were designed to strengthen labour discipline and increase productivity. The law "singled out for punishment not only those workers who committed economic crimes like fraud but also those who displayed signs of laziness, vagrancy, absenteeism, tardiness, foot-dragging, or lack of respect for superiors, and who damaged equipment". Punishments ranged from wage cuts of various sizes to job transfers to sacking.

In 1969, the minister of labour announced that the government every Cuban workers would have to carry a "labour file". A further resolution in October 1970 called for the placement of nonproductive workers in labour camps. This law also lengthened the incarceration period and even authorised the use of capital punishment for "economic sabotage".

The atomisation and control of Cuban workers by the CTC "trade union" has not gone completely unchallenged. A short-lived dissidence also took place in the early nineties among union activists in the port of Havana. But the policing role of the CTC remains today. For example, the official announcement of the half-million lay-offs from the state sector in August 2010 was made not by the government employers, but by the CTC "union"! Farber is right that only an independent workers' movement can serve Cuban workers' interests and lay the basis for real workers' power.

Few scholars writing about Cuba believe that only 35% of contemporary Cuba is composed of blacks and mulattoes (mixed race people) as the official figures state; rather black Cubans are probably the majority.

Before the revolution, there was a network of self-organised black social clubs (*sociedades de color*) with branches all over the country. Members of the black Abakúa religious organisation were persecuted until the early nineties, with many of their members confined to military production camps. Meanwhile, black and mixed-race Cubans are under-represented in leading positions and over-represented among the poor and in prison. Black youth face harassment by the regime's police.

Farber points out that spokespersons and apologists for the regime have historically claimed that the realities of racism in Cuba "are leftovers or remnants of the capitalist past". This type of explanation tends to emphasise the role of individual prejudice and minimise the role of ongoing institutional discrimination on the island. An alternative approach starts by dealing with racism as a system of power and social-structural relations. One racially defined group — black Cubans — has been historically deprived of power and access to resources as the result of being the object of discriminatory conduct by primarily (but not only) the white ruling and upper-middle classes.

RACISM

The regime carried out important reforms in race relations, such as the desegregation of beaches and provincial parks, and class-based reforms, for instance in education and health, that disproportionately benefited black Cubans.

But only a long-lasting vigorous campaign of affirmative action and authentic antiracism could have brought about a clear break with the past — a revolution, and not just a reform, of race relations. Institutional racism continued to exist in post-revolutionary Cuba and has significantly worsened since Cuba began to move towards capitalism in the 1990s.

Farber concludes that Cuban blacks need to develop their own political perspectives and organisations to respond to a worsening of conditions and growth of racial inequality. There are some causes for optimism. Some black professionals and intellectuals announced in 2009 that they would attempt to revive the *Cofradía de la Negritud*, loosely Brotherhood of Negritude, and they have made links with dissident leftist intellectual groupings.

Cuba's Stalinist system brought about new systemic problems that especially affected women and helped perpetrate their oppression.

On coming to power the regime set up the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), disbanding and subsuming 920 pre-existing independent women's organisations. The FMC "functioned first and foremost as an instrument for the mobilisation of Cuban women". The FMC was not an independent women's organisation and had little to do with women's liberation or feminism.

Its leader Vilma Espin said at the 1974 FMC congress that the organisation was "feminine, not feminist". Its magazine *Mujeres* includes many features on toys, knitting, and sewing, connected with traditional, patriarchal roles for women. The FMC has also taken reactionary and moralistic positions on prostitution.

The majority of Cuban women have ended up with a "double burden": working many hours outside as well as inside their homes. For many years Cuban law denied the legal concept of "marital rape". For the first few years after the revolution, the Cuban government strictly enforced the existing anti-abortion legislation, though this was later liberalised. Since 1979 abortion has been freely available up to 10 weeks, but later term abortion requires authorisation by a hospital director.

Challenges to the FMC have been smothered. The Association of Women Communicators (*Magin*) was set up to change women's image in the media. It was not oppositional, but took some positions that differed from the FMC. The regime disbanded *Magin* and replaced it with a state-controlled organisation. As with black Cubans, Farber argues that Cuban women need their own independent self-organisation.

Cuban LGBT people have suffered greatly, particularly during the first 30 years of the revolutionary period. As early as 1962, the government conducted a massive raid on gay men as well as prostitutes.

In a March 1963 speech at the University of Havana attacking "children of the bourgeoisie" who imitated Elvis Presley and organised "effeminate" shows, Fidel Castro explained that it was not so easy to straighten out an adult homosexual, or as he put it, "a tree that had grown twisted." In 1965, the

Fidel Castro (far left) and Che Guevara (centre) in 1959

Cuban state also established the Centre for Special Education for boys considered to be “effeminate” and those raised by single mothers who were considered “at risk” of becoming homosexuals.

The same year, Castro announced that homosexuals were to be banned from positions with a direct influence on young people, particularly in education. He held that “a homosexual could [never] embody the conditions and requirements of conduct that would enable us to consider him a true Revolutionary... A deviation of that nature clashes with the concept we have of what a militant Communist should be”. Similar attitudes led Che Guevara to contemptuously refer to a prominent gay Cuban playwright as a maricón (faggot).

The University of Havana inaugurated a three-year-long campaign in the mid-sixties distributing homophobic literature. There were public trials of hundreds of students. Interestingly the “charge” of homosexuality was linked by the regime’s student supporters to Trotskyism.

In 1965 the government erected the UMAP camps, where for some three years gays, along with Jehovah’s Witnesses, some Catholics, members of Abakúa and other black secret societies, and other “deviants”, were forced to provide cheap, regimented labour. In spring 1980 the Mariel exodus of many Cubans from the country was used by the government as another opportunity not only to ridicule and attack gays but also to force their departure from the country.

Mandatory screening for HIV infection began in 1986. HIV-positive people (902 cases in early 1993) were quarantined in sanatoriums and once they developed full-blown AIDS transferred to hospitals. The quarantine policy was used as a substitute for a serious educational program on AIDS. Since 1993 the Cuban government has been treating HIV-positive Cubans on an outpatient basis, although it continues to retain admission into sanatoriums as an option.

Despite a degree of liberalisation, lower-level government harassment of LGBT people continues. This includes the harassment of male transvestites who are arrested when they are found dressed in women’s clothes and the government’s attempt in 2009 to disrupt the Mr Gay Havana competition, a gay beauty pageant.

Farber dismisses “explanations” of Cuban government homophobia that attribute it to European or Soviet influences, pointing out that while homophobia is indeed a characteristic feature of most Stalinist regimes, the drive for it in Cuba came specifically from the Castroites, not the old Communist Party. His remedy, as with other oppressed people, is independent self-organisation.

INTERNATIONALIST?

Cuba may have opposed the imperialism of the United States and its allies, but “it has not followed that policy toward other imperialist aggressors. In fact, the Cuban government had taken the side of oppressor states on various occasions”.

Two stages of Cuban foreign policy can be discerned. The first stage (1959-68) included “open and aggressive support for guerrilla movements and harsh denunciation of the traditional Communist Parties”. This was “inter-nationalism”, not Marxist internationalism, since it primarily served the Cuban government’s relations with particular governments (or would-be governments) rather than workers’ movements in those countries. Cuba supported Algeria’s independence

struggle, and stationed tanks in Syria for two years after Israel’s victory in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Cubans fought in the Congo, Guinea, Cape Verde, Nicaragua and Grenada, and Cuba also supported revolutionary outbreaks in a wide variety of Latin American countries.

The second stage brought Cuba more closely into line with Russian foreign policy. Thus Castro supported the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan from 1979 and the Tiananmen Square massacre. In the initial months of Cuba’s longstanding intervention in Angola, the USSR supplied weapons for the Cuban troops; after that it also took over transportation of them.

Cuba’s indiscriminate alliance with African nationalism involved support for the bloody regimes of Idi Amin in Uganda and Nguema Macias in Equatorial Guinea. After the Stalinoid Mengistu regime came to power in Ethiopia, Castro dropped his support for Eritrean independence and condemned the Eritrean liberation movement as “secessionists”. The Cuban government trained and armed the Ethiopian forces and provided logistical support and supplies.

One of the most peculiar but little-known aspects of Cuba’s foreign policy relations is the lasting friendly relationship it established with Franco’s fascist regime in Spain.

Farber stresses that Cuba was more independent from the USSR than it had been from the US under Batista. But its support for opposition movements in other countries has been defined by what benefits it can obtain from relations with the government of that country. This is the foreign policy of a Stalinist bureaucracy, not working-class internationalism.

WHERE IS CUBA GOING?

The Cuban Stalinist model was able to obtain and solidify massive working-class support in the early years of the revolution, when redistributive policies and social legislation improved working-class living standards.

For at least two decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union the Cuban government maintained a commitment to the country’s welfare state throughout severe economic crises.

However, the country has still not become industrialised as the revolutionary leaders promised. The economic performance of the Castro regime has been mediocre, with a per capita annual growth rate of only 0.92 percent up to 2006 (two percent in the seventies and eighties). Cuba’s material achievements, taken as a whole, have been poor, particularly since the collapse of the Eastern bloc in the early nineties. In 1950, Cuba was 10th in per capita GDP among 47 countries of Latin America. By 2006, it was seventh from bottom.

The ration card has for years since the collapse of the USSR amounted to less than two weeks of people’s monthly needs. Many Cubans have been reduced to buceo (diving) or tanqueo (tanking) through rubbish to meet their basic needs.

There have been a number of steps in the direction of a Cuban version of the Sino-Vietnamese model (that is, political dictatorship combined with a state-directed capitalism). In particular the army-led joint ventures with foreign capital in tourism and nickel production stand out.

In 2010 the government took a further step in this direction. For some time Raúl Castro had been talking about how an estimated one million people, one-fifth of all jobs on the is-

land, would need to be sacked from state employment. In September 2010 the “compromise” position of half a million layoffs was announced.

The Sixth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, in 2011, consolidated Raúl Castro’s power. It decreed the legalisation of self-employment, greater enterprise autonomy, the abolition of basic subsidies and the running down of the welfare system. A new development is the creation of more than a hundred joint ventures with foreign capitalists abroad. These include medical industries in Asia, hydraulic projects in the Sahara, an ice-cream factory in Angola, and a five-star hotel in China. We may also see the constitution of a legal petty bourgeoisie on the island, able to become junior economic partners with the central bureaucracy while denied political power unless they assimilate into the ruling group.

The massive layoffs of 2010 were accompanied by a further withdrawal of subsidies to the population, including far less generous unemployment compensation for those who have lost their state jobs. Moreover, the items covered by the ration card continue to be reduced. Products including potatoes, peas, beans, coffee, gasoline, electricity, soap, toothpaste and detergents have been taken off the list completely or partially, with big increases in prices.

DISSIDENTS

Farber has no truck with the right-wing Cuban exiles in the Cuban American National Foundation and its offshoots, who openly and explicitly want US intervention to enforce a neoliberal capitalist replacement for the current regime; and he is highly critical of more “moderate” dissidents, such as the Christian Liberation Movement (CLM) founded in 1988 by Oswaldo Payá.

He is dismissive of the Generación Y blog associated with Yoani Sanchez.

Farber points out that by the 1950s, no significant socialist or Marxist political tradition had survived on Cuba besides the old pro-Moscow Communists. However, some critical currents have emerged around the ruling party, through think tanks and journals. The book cites the Centre for the Study of the Americas and publications including *Temas*, *La Gaceta de Cuba* and *Criterios*, as well as the Havana Times website for which Farber himself now writes.

He cites the work of young revolutionary socialist scholars such as Hiram Hernandez Castro on Rosa Luxemburg and Ariel Dacal Díaz on Trotsky. At the 2010 May Day parade, groups of young critical intellectuals marched together with banners proclaiming “Down with Bureaucracy/Long Live the Workers/More Socialism” and “Socialism Is Democracy/Dump the Bureaucracy”. However, such groups have suffered bans, pressure, exclusions, firings, and arrests.

In 2007, about 500 students at the University of Havana showed up to discuss what went wrong with the Russian revolution. There have been some acts of collective resistance in recent years, including protests by government workers and by various groups of students on immediate material issues.

Farber comments that “the development of a body of left critical opinion of a democratic bent inside Cuba is very recent; it is too early to tell whether it will grow into a significant force”. Nevertheless it is highly encouraging to read of these tentative efforts.

POLITICAL CONCLUSIONS

Since 1959 the Cuban people have faced US military assaults, assassination attempts and economic blockade.

Like the AWL, Farber opposes the blockade on principle — the principle of national self-determination. He also points out that its abolition “would completely undermine the Cuban government’s remaining justification of repression in the eyes of substantial numbers of Cubans who still support the government for nationalist and anti-imperialist reasons”.

At the same time “abolition of the repressive machinery of the one-party state in Cuba would radically destabilise the false American political justification for it and make the blockade of Cuba politically untenable”. For Farber, just as the US blockade is about US capitalist interests and not really about democracy in Cuba, so the Cuban government’s repression is general and systemic and not merely a justified response to specific threats to security.

In terms of assessing the Cuban regime, Farber dismisses the approach of assessing “progressiveness” by totting up gains and losses. He counterposes a Marxist, class-based approach, which puts the freedom of workers and other oppressed groups to organise independently at the centre of any political assessment.

This notion of workers’ democracy is also central to Farber’s alternative to both Cuba’s existing bureaucratic economy and any variant of market capitalist alternative. He argues that “advocating the democratic self-management of the Cuban economy, polity and society as a whole would be most effective for shaping a compelling resistance... Such a vision would suggest that resistance is not futile, since there is an alternative to both capitalism and the failed ‘communism’ of Cuban history”.

And means and ends are interlinked: “the establishment of democracy in the Cuban economy, polity and society at large will not be handed down as a gift by the people in power but will have to be obtained by struggles from below”.

Socialism in one cell?

Science

By Les Hearn



There are two basic types of cell in the living world: the cells found in bacteria (prokaryotes), and the cells found in plants and animals (eukaryotes). They have characteristic differences in their structures and behaviour.

Prokaryotes have a circular DNA molecule consisting mainly of genes; they multiply by dividing (!) to give identical daughter cells; their protein-making machinery (ribosomes) are of a particular size; their outer membranes have a particular structure; and they are much smaller. Eukaryotes have linear DNA molecules in pairs (chromosomes); the genes come with lots of “junk”; they can divide but also produce sex cells with half of each pair of chromosomes so that, when these fuse, the original amount of DNA is restored; their ribosomes are all larger; their outer membranes have a different structure.

Eukaryotes also have components called organelles, which prokaryotes don't. Two of these have some peculiar similarities with bacteria: mitochondria, which produce energy for cells, and chloroplasts, which use sunlight to make sugar in green plants.

These organelles have an outer membrane similar to that of prokaryotes, circular DNA without junk, ribosomes of the same size as prokaryotes; they are the size of a typical prokaryote and they multiply by dividing.

Coincidence? Lynn Margulis (who died at the end of last year) thought not but, unlike others with similar thoughts, she assembled the evidence and came up with a plausible theory, endosymbiosis.

Symbiosis is co-operation of two different species for mutual benefit so that each is more successful than either would be alone. An example is lichen, a symbiosis of algae and fungi. Both benefit, so genes that allow them to co-operate have predominated over ones that might have harmed the other organism.

Contrary to a persistent (almost wilful) misunderstanding of the concept of the “selfish” gene, there is nothing in evolutionary theory that rules out co-operation between genes. Indeed, no organism could survive for long if its genes were not co-operating.

Margulis' genius lay in the leap of imagination that saw mitochondria and chloroplasts as internal symbionts whose

genes benefited from the protection of a surrounding cell. The genes of the latter benefited from the greater amount of energy available through the activities of the former. Her status as a scientist comes from her determination to gather the necessary evidence to persuade her sceptical fellows.

She first published her views, with great difficulty, in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology**: she said it was rejected by about 15 journals beforehand. In her book, the Origin of Eukaryotic Cells, in 1970, she put forward her theory of endosymbiosis. This said that plant, animal, fungal and protozoal cells are huge colonies of co-operating organisms, whose ancestors were once independent but which are incapable of independent existence now.

SUPPORT

When from the 1980s DNA began to be widely sequenced and compared, her theory gained much more support. The DNA of the organelles was different from that of the cell nucleus (the chromosomes with which we are generally familiar); as Margulis predicted, it was very similar to bacterial DNA.

It was shown more recently that mitochondria share a common ancestor with the Rickettsia genus of bacteria, disease-causing organisms which invade their victims' cells.

They are responsible for diseases carried by ticks and lice, such as typhus. Similarly, chloroplasts have been shown to share a common ancestor with blue-green algae, bacteria which carry out photosynthesis.

Before Margulis' breakthrough, it was assumed that evolution involved a sequential process: genes in descendants

mutated randomly; if the mutation was advantageous to the organism, it spread; the characteristics of living things changed over time, eventually producing organisms so different that they were new species. Now it is clear that different organisms from different lineages can merge and start evolving in step. Even their DNA can merge. Many organelle genes are now to be found in the host's chromosomes, clearly identifiable.

One way this can happen was discovered with the retroviruses, such as HIV. These can embed their genetic material in the host's DNA, emerging at a later stage. They can also pick up genes from one host and implant them in another. Some one twelfth of the human genome consists of gene fragments of viral origin.

The socialist scientist J B S Haldane once described the progress of new ideas to the point of being accepted thus:

- i) this is worthless nonsense;
- ii) this is an interesting, but perverse, point of view;
- iii) this is true, but quite unimportant;
- iv) I always said so.

He might have been talking about endosymbiosis. Not only is it now accepted, but it is being found more and more in nature in various stages. One interesting one is a blue-green alga that can live symbiotically inside the cells of an animal, a sea squirt. It is perhaps on the way to becoming a chloroplast!

• Sagan, L. (1967). "On the origin of mitosing cells". *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 14 (3): 225–193. doi:10.1016/0022-5193(67)90079-3 (she was at the time married to the great science populariser Carl Sagan)

Lynn Margulis: a flawed genius

It is a measure of her intelligence that Lynn Margulis (Alexander) entered Chicago University at the age of 14 or 15. She published her work on endosymbiosis as a factor in evolution as a junior academic in her late twenties.

Genius does not prevent error, though. Margulis found herself lined up with the AIDS denialists when she arrogantly advanced the theory that it was not HIV that caused AIDS but chronic syphilis — and that treatment was pointless.

She tried to extend her theory to encompass more organelles, notably the flagella with which some swim or the cilia that line our wind-pipes and waft out dust. She pro-

posed that these were the remnants of symbiotic spirochaetes, bacteria which include the agents of syphilis. There is no evidence to support this hypothesis. Worse still, she became a “9/11 truth seeker”, something that saddens me deeply as a scientist. Neither of those facts was mentioned by Professor Steven Rose in his *Guardian* obituary.

Lynn Margulis died last November. Richard Dawkins' words from 1995 are a good memorial:

“I greatly admire Lynn Margulis's sheer courage and stamina in sticking by the endosymbiosis theory, and carrying it through from being an unorthodoxy to an orthodoxy. [...]

“This is one of the great achievements of twentieth-century evolutionary biology”.

Jim Riordan, the Spartak spy

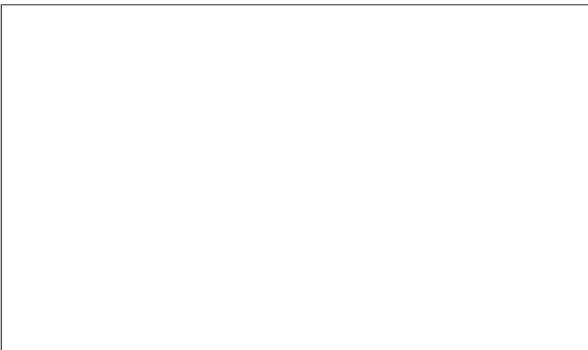
By Martyn Hudson

I knew the writer and academic Jim Riordan, who died last week, briefly in the early 90s when I was researching, and active in politics, at Surrey university where he was professor of Russian.

I had heard rumours of Jim before I ever met him — stories about his kindness and his eccentricity, a political eccentricity that didn't sit well with his academic life in a department that was well known for inducting linguists into a very NATO-oriented “realist” theory of International Relations. The thing that did strike me about him was his disdain for the pettiness of what he saw as Trotskyist politics. Although I was aware of his political roots in Stalinism, it was difficult for me to understand the kind of stoicism (or rank political pessimism) that came from those who had had Gods that had failed — like Soviet Communism.

As I learned more about his life over the years — particularly in his marvellous book *Comrade Jim — the Spy that played for Spartak*, I did get some insight into those several generations of British Communists who supported the USSR and vilified anything that vaguely looked like an emancipatory critique of the Soviet Empire. Unlike socialists like Hillel Ticktin, who went through similar experiences as graduate students in the USSR and went on to understand the system through a lens coloured by Trotskyism, Jim was never attracted to any kind of political critique of the system he so admired and remained a member of the Communist Party of Britain and a reader of the *Morning Star* until his death last week. His story is instructive politically — and it also just a great, great story.

Jim Riordan was born in Portsmouth in 1936 and lived in poverty for most of his childhood. One of his lifelong passions was Portsmouth Football Club (his mum used to send the *Pink* football paper out to him in the USSR). During his



national service he joined the Joint Services School for Linguists alongside people like future governor of the Bank of England Eddie George, and from there was sponsored by the CPGB to join the Higher Party School in Moscow — the secret training college for spies and the cream of international global travellers.

Jim was totally dedicated to the cause but soon came to see the corruption in the regime — finally being expelled for anti-Soviet activities (activities he had no awareness of himself apart from his inability to keep his mouth shut).

FOOTBALL

His love of football (and his academic career as a commentator on Soviet sport) led to intriguing insights into the regime and domestic Russian Cold War politics.

He was friends with other British exiles like Guy Burgess and Donald McLean (being a fellow pall-bearer at Burgess's funeral and hanging out with Ho Chi Minh). He also played football against the British diplomatic legation in Moscow — all of the “Brits” from both sides taking each other on in Sunday football. Playing in the area behind the Spartak Moscow stadium, a friend who was helping Jim with his

PhD and a Spartak player invited Jim to play a couple of games at Spartak itself under the assumed name of Yakov Eeordhanov, making Jim the only British player to play in Soviet football.

Others questioned the truth of this. Jim was a storyteller but in later years was saddened by the fact that old friends from the Spartak days avoided him and wouldn't corroborate his story — records having been destroyed or never made in the climate of suspicion in 1960s Moscow.

Returning to Britain Jim was always very open that a “Soviet” future was unappealing to him, but he refused to surrender the politics of his youth and squandered the chance to be part of the opposition to Soviet dictatorship on the British left. His politics were nostalgic for the optimism of his youth, and much like people like Eric Hobsbawm (a much less honest and honourable person than Jim) he wasn't particularly keen on those who deserted “the Party”.

Much of his work in later days was based around critiques of Russian post-Soviet football. He demanded accountability from a Russian oligarchy which was taking over football and using it as a base for international money-laundering and the creation of new cults of personality. He undertook a passionate campaign.

Jim remained politically active in pensioner campaigns after his retirement, and wrote scurrilous articles on football and local issues in Portsmouth. He was perhaps best-known in some circles as the writer of children's books and was a winner of the Whitbread prize. His children's books displayed his kindness and humanity.

Of course his life was sterile politically and squandered in his abdication of liberatory politics. He was part of a generation corrupted by Stalinism and an inability to think clearly about what other roads and possibilities were open to socialists in the aftermath of the defeats of the twentieth century.

Jim Riordan was a good man fallen amongst scoundrels and thieves.

Gery Lawless and the London Irish left

Lawless in the Irish Workers Group

Letter from Eamonn McCann, 1967

You will be aware that there is a move among some members in London to replace Jerry as secretary at the AGM.

A few days ago a group of us met to discuss the situation. It was agreed that we attempt to make you secretary. I was asked to write to you about this. Since then I have been told that, contrary to our expectations, you are with Jerry in any contest for the secretaryship and, moreover, willing to “to fight the matter to the point of expulsion”. Presumably the expulsion of Liam Dalton and myself.

If my information is correct (1) there would seem to be little point in pursuing that thing any further with you. Nonetheless I have decided to write as planned and to ask you to put our point of view to Rachel and Phil (and Graham if you are in contact. I will write to him myself anyway.)

It is obvious to anyone with half an eye that there are serious differences in the group. These are derived from organisation rather than perspective. (group perspectives is, so far, too vague to permit of precise objection anyway).

Gery is the organisational linchpin of the group. To outsiders the group is largely a reflection of him. This can be traced to the genesis of the group. When it consisted of a dozen or so left wing “loonies” in a fairly unprincipled alliance, meeting weekly in the Lucas Arms, without a single member in Ireland — perhaps a slight exaggeration; maybe one or two intermittently active ones — a dozen or so ill-defined “Marxists” without a perspective, a program, a press, then issues could be and were evolved according to a clash of personalities. There was no real contact with Ireland. It was, using your terminology, a “highland” as opposed to a “lowland” group.

After the split with the Cliffordites (2) and before the publication of the “Militant” (3) there existed, not a group in any real sense, but the possible embryo of a group. There exists the potential to forge a program and expand. Not all members would have called themselves “Trotskyists”, but all were committed to a non-Stalinist revolutionist socialism and willing to accept as leaders those who did evince Trotskyism. The group was still, however, isolated from the struggles — i.e., in Ireland — which it existed to influence, direct and lead. In this situation Gery — admirably active and single-minded — was secretary, and Gery-as-Secretary became the group-in-action. It was this too to many members of the group itself. Indisputably this is the image of the group which was projected to anyone on the “fringe”. This was a dangerous situation.

PERSONAL

I would date the existence of the group as a viable political entity from the publication of the “Militant”. Since then it has expanded in terms of numbers and, more important, in terms of effective activity. And it is now that we see the contradiction between agitation or methods of operation and group methods.

Gery still operated as always. Group approval for a particular idea or action is often sought almost as an afterthought. Gery writes to contacts about the “Militant” as if he were the “Militant”. Every questioning of his activities of the way he carries out his job is interpreted as a personal assault on his honesty, integrity and sincerity.

Any “indiscipline” invites a screaming — I mean that — and often slanderous diatribe. Group members are dismissed as “charlatans”, “cunts”, “wankers”, etc. Gery openly admits attempting, unsuccessfully, to goad a group member into striking him “so that I could do him”. Absolutely insane “criticisms” are made:

“Walter Rainey joined the group so that he could learn to be a writer from Eamonn McCann”. “Nobody understands proper procedure except me”. He is unconsciously but insultingly arrogant to every other member. Gery offering Tony Cliff some Maoist tracts after an education class: “take them away. I don’t want this gang to get at them”, with a nod towards about 12 group members in the room. Can you imagine the reaction of the members involved to that?

Gery however is completely insensitive to group opinion in such things, so he wouldn’t be able to conceive of offence having been given. (If this sounds like a list of sins, well, I suppose it is. Lest there be any doubt, I am trying to turn you against Lawless, in the sense that I want you to oppose him as secretary.)

A few weeks ago Jerry visited Derby and talked to a group of dissident republicans. No report on this has been given to the group. No permission was sought from the

group beforehand. Rumour hath it that the possibility of this dissident element joining the Group and turning over to it a considerable sum which they have in a “political fund”, with a view to bringing out the “Militant” weekly was discussed. I say “rumour” because Gery has not yet seen fit to tell the group anything about it.

The group is all centralism and no democracy and this cannot be changed while Gery remains as secretary. He has thro’ force of circumstances and his own personality, reached such an unchallengeable “supremo” position that given his attitudes and temperament, he is a real political danger if he is not reined in. And anyone who thinks he could be reigned in while remaining as secretary doesn’t know their Gery Lawless.

Extreme sensitivity and volatile emotions are, when found in a “rank-and-file” quite tolerable. When they are found in someone are central to the group as Gery they are in no way tolerable. When they become detrimental to group organisation they must be expunged and no messing.

I have no patience with those in London who say: “all this is true but Jerry is basically a good fellow. He has done a lot for the group. We just couldn’t take the secretaryship away from him now.” This is slobbering nonsense. I understand that at Easter Liam, yourself and a few others talked in the Lucas Arms. The resultant opinion was that “on balance, Jerry should be kept on as at present”. I have never understood this concept of balance.

I am 100% in political solidarity with Gery. But I know on a political level that the group must have a different secretary. We cannot have discipline while the only — or the main — sanction is the loud mouth of Gery Lawless. We cannot have effective diffusion of responsibility while the group secretary is incapable of seeing the group is other than co-extensive with himself. And we cannot have a group consciousness among members as long as their sincerity is questioned, their “failings” berated, their intelligence contemned, their motives questioned.

This is not a liberal plea for an anarchic indiscipline, altho’ Jerry chooses to interpret it as such when I speak along these lines. Quite the opposite. Discipline must spring from inner conviction, from a group consciousness, a commitment to the group.

Howling rages, threats of physical assault, slender, hysterical denunciations are productive of quite the opposite. Someone said a while ago that the SLL (4) “is an organisation for the maiming of militants”. I have seen militants maimed by this organisation. One such is too many.

I’d welcome your reactions, also those of Rachel and Phil.

Fraternally, Eamonn.

Emphases in original. Some paragraphing has been added. Spellings (e.g. variations in the spelling of names) are also in original.

Notes: (1) He was a victim of factional misinformation. I attempted to act as conciliator (workersliberty.org/node/13853). (2) The IWG emerged in September 1965 from a common organisation, the Irish Communist Group, with the Maoists who then became the BICO (“Cliffordites”) (3) *Irish Militant*, paper of the IWG. (4) Socialist Labour League, Gerry Healy’s group.

The Republican sunk to the role of royal tittle-tattler: Gery Lawless, left, then London Editor of the *Sunday World*, (the Irish equivalent of *News of the World*) poses outside a royal palace in London, on the doings of whose owners he would report.

Before the 1969 upheavals

Gery Lawless, once a prominent figure in the Irish émigré left in London, died in January at the age of 75.

A snapshot of his activity at the time when it was most important — when he was secretary of the Irish Workers’ Group (IWG) in 1965-8 — is given by the document from the archives printed left: a letter written in mid-1967 by Eamonn McCann (since 1969-70 a well-known journalist and writer loosely linked to the SWP) to Sean Matgamna.

In the “histories”, the IWG is usually called Trotskyist — indeed, the first Irish Trotskyist group since the 1940s. But it wasn’t. It was a conglomerate ranging from left-wing Irish nationalists through Deutscherites, soft Maoists or quasi-Maoists, Guevarists, and supporters of Ernest Mandel’s Fourth International, to “harder” orthodox Trotskyists.

McCann’s exasperated attempt to displace Lawless was the forerunner to a faction-fight which broke up the IWG in 1967-8.

There was a six-month political battle, essentially between the hard Trotskyists (including Liam Dalton, Matgamna, and a nucleus which was the forerunner of AWL) and a loose alliance around Lawless which contained many sympathisers of the SWP (which then called itself IS, and prided itself on *not* being Trotskyist)... and McCann.

Lawless’s rump IWG collapsed late in 1968. Ex-members would be prominent as individuals in the upheavals in Northern Ireland in 1969, but the concerted intervention that an organised Trotskyist group could have made in those events was not made.

Lawless became the IS/SWP’s “Irish expert” in 1969, and subsequently the “Irish expert” of the then relatively high-profile “Mandelite” IMG. After parting ways with the IMG in the mid-70s, for a while he was impresario of a “Troops Out Movement” which claimed it was about to become a real mass mobilisation around the single demand for withdrawal of British troops from Ireland, but in fact was centrally a sort of surrogate “left group” for some activists round Lawless.

He became a Labour councillor in Hackney in the 1980s, and then faded out of politics.

- Irish Times obituary of Lawless: bit.ly/A50DeG
- More on the Irish Workers’ Group: workersliberty.org/node/14034
workersliberty.org/node/13853
workersliberty.org/node/12476
workersliberty.org/node/14146

McCann and Lawless in 1967

By Sean Matgamna

The history of the IWG (and of its forerunner, the Irish Communist Group) was a history of perpetual personal squabbling, never-ending, never-resolved, and usually only by implication political.

Some time in early mid 1967, McCann resigned as editor of the IWG paper *Irish Militant*. (He would never return to that post).

Continued on page 10

McCann and Lawless in 1967

Continued from page 9

He and Liam Daltun organised an opposition to Lawless, demanding his removal as IWG Secretary.

A considerable part of Lawless's time was always given over to lining people up and keeping people outside London posted on the vagaries, irresponsibilities, and multifarious villainies of whomever he was in conflict with, or feared, or expected to be in conflict with, or thought his correspondent held in too high an esteem.

There is a large chunk of letters in the IWG files from mid-1967 in which Lawless bombarded me with accounts of his critics. Last Sunday evening Liam Daltun had sat downstairs in the Lucas Arms talking with the "has-beens" and "the lump", and didn't come up to the branch meeting. Eamonn McCann had been seen (so Lawless had been told) in Hyde Park with a flower in his hair and possibly another in his mouth during a "hippy" "flower-people" gathering. He had also been seen wearing a Mao badge. That sort of thing. A lot of it.

I had good relations with both Daltun and McCann, and routinely made efforts to get Daltun - whom Lawless wanted to exclude - to write things. At first, and until their enterprise was well under way, I heard nothing from either of them about what was going on in London. This was remarkable because I eventually learned that I was their candidate to replace Lawless as IWG secretary!

I thought at the time that Lawless's role in the Group was, overall, positive and necessary. He was a far better Secretary, with his energetic, thick-skinned, hustling approach, than I'd be. I was heavily involved in the British labour movement, in trade union work in the Port of Manchester and in the work of attempting to create a national portworkers' rank and file committee, in preparation for the big upcoming showdown with the bosses and the government over the decasualisation of dock labour to the advantage of the employers (it led to strikes in London, Liverpool, and Manchester between September and November). And I wanted also to concentrate on the educational work I thought could best be done through producing the IWG magazine *Workers' Republic*.

I thought the politics, and turning the group into an adequate Trotskyist organisation by means of education, was the most important work, as well as the most congenial to me. At the time I saw Lawless as an ally in that. Even if all that had been different, I would still have seen the proposal to convulse the group in a fight over the formal post of secretary as disruptive and unnecessary, a distraction.

I tried to conciliate, urging Lawless to listen to what was just in the criticisms of McCann and Daltun, and McCann and Daltun to take the work of the organisation more seriously. I suggested that the whole group should read and discuss James P Cannon's *The Struggle for a Proletarian Party* as a manual of proper behaviour in a revolutionary socialist group, and Lawless arranged that. It would be a central reference point in the polemics after October 1967.

It didn't help that McCann's indictment of Lawless was obviously, subconsciously perhaps, patterned on Lenin advocating the removal of Stalin as secretary. In fact McCann understated things, though, living away from London, I didn't know it. Like someone who tries to stop a senseless fight in the pub, I antagonised both sides to some extent.

Within a few months Lawless would wreck the IWG by way of an organisational putsch.

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Thousands of jobs on the line as councils prepare new cuts

By Darren Bedford

As local councils begin setting their 2012-2013 budgets, working-class people face another round of attacks as councils across the country put jobs and services back on the chopping block.

Proposed job losses at larger councils figure in the hundreds. Leeds City Council plans "savings" of £55 million, including axing 400 jobs. Swindon Borough Council's draft budget seeks to shed over 100 jobs as part of a £12 million cuts programme, including cutting trade-union facility time. £24 million and 300 jobs could go at Labour-run Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

Nearly 400 jobs are on the line as Salford Council looks to make cuts of £24 million. Town hall workers, already facing increased workload after around 600 job cuts there on 2010/2011, are also facing a pay freeze. The cuts will amount to an overall reduction of the council's workforce by 10% over the last two years.

DEEPER

On the Isle of Wight, the Tory council is proposing even deeper cuts than last year, despite town hall unions identifying significant underspends in many areas of the council's budget.

Councils in the London Borough of Kingston are planning a £30 million cuts programme including the privatisation of care homes and over 100 job losses.

The rhetoric from councillors has not shifted since last year's round of cuts. Tories, such as Leeds's Barry Anderson, blame "Labour's national legacy" for the need to make cuts. Labour councillors, like Mohammed Purvez (the leader of Stoke's council) bleat about attempting to protect the most

vulnerable but resign themselves to making "difficult decisions" in "difficult times". Stoke council also rejected a proposal to cut the pay of highly-paid staff by 5%, preferring to make lower-paid workers balance the books by losing their jobs.

Whatever brand of rhetoric accompanies, the effect is much the same for those on the receiving end. The cuts add up to a gradual chipping-away at the quality of life for working-class people. Two care homes in Stoke will close, and students over 16 will lose their right to free transport to school. Council subsidies for children's swimming lessons will be cut and free bus travel for over 65s will be reduced. Local museums will be transferred out of public ownership or shut down. Labour-led Bradford Council also plans to target community services for savings, as councils across Yorkshire plan huge cuts; nearly 2,000 jobs could go across Bradford, Doncaster, Kirklees and Rotherham Councils.

There are also horror stories of complete profligacy by councils making cuts. Croydon Council in South London spent over £8 million in 2011 paying employment agency Comensura to provide it with short-term managerial staff, far more than it would have spent by hiring workers on permanent contracts. It plans to shed 300 jobs. Scarborough Council bought iPads for all of its 50 councillors, but will cut over £2 million from its budget and cut 37 jobs.

Last year's round of budget cuts saw a flurry of direct actions outside town halls and council chambers, some of which staged occupations and disrupted councils' budget-setting meetings.

This year, so far, opposition has been somewhat more low-key, although local labour-movement groups in Leeds, Kingston, Swindon and elsewhere have organised demonstrations or pickets.

Fighting the Greens's "compassionate" cuts

By a Brighton council worker

The Green administration of Brighton council is proposing £10.5 million cuts for 2012, with an additional £17.7 million for 2013/14.

Most departments are facing 5 to 15% cuts in services. The main cuts over the year 2012/13 will be to adult social care (£3.2m), children's services (£2.78m), housing (£2.09m), communities (£1.1m), city regulation and infrastructure (£4.85m) and resources and finance (£1.85m). Up to 120 council jobs will be lost, although this figure only includes permanent posts, as they are also stopping the usage of agency staff in many areas, which is not included in the figures.

There will be increased parking charges and charges for registering births, deaths and marriages, scrapping mobile libraries, reducing library opening times and closing many public toilets. The cuts in areas such as adult social care and children's services will see day centres, meals on wheels and community care cut, as well as cuts to mental health services, childcare training schemes and children's centres.

In particular, school attendance budgets and assistance to young people not in education, training or employment will face cuts.

There are also little nasty things hidden away in the budget, such as the 100% cut to the Talking Book service, whereby blind people can request that (any) book be audio recorded for them, which is proposed to be abolished.

And, despite their "Green" principles, they are also increasing allotment fees by 67%, pricing out lower income families from growing their own food.

The Greens claim to be a pro-trade union party. Since they got elected in May they have made much of the fact that all Councillors are trade union members. They have given us some concessions; when we struck over the pensions in November, they ordered our HR department to delay the strike deductions until February so we wouldn't lose money before Christmas. They have also introduced a Living Wage for Brighton Council workers (with the minimum hourly rate now being £7.19), which they funded by cutting the salary of senior directors.

They also have lots of anti-austerity policies, campaigning

Green Left leader resigns

Joseph Healy, founder member of Green Left (a left-wing faction in the Green Party) and key activist in the party's Trade Union group, has resigned, citing the Brighton budget amongst his reasons.

For more, see his blog: bit.ly/z2HnOY

for progressive taxation and the abolition of Trident. They even conducted their local election campaign on the basis that they would "fight the cuts", and last year every single Green councillor voted against the Tory cuts budget.

Before they got elected in May, many individual councillors were members of our Brighton Stop the Cuts group, and regularly attended meetings and demonstrations alongside us. Since their election this hasn't been the case.

DEBATE

Our Brighton Stop the Cuts group hosted a public debate with the Greens a few weeks ago, and their essential message is that their "hands are tied".

They say they don't "want" to pass on the Government's cuts, and feeling sorry about having to do so. Their most-used claim is that they're "being compassionate and effective in protecting the vulnerable". But to workers being handed redundancy notices, it doesn't matter if the person who's doing it is smiling or crying crocodile tears.

The Greens were voted onto Brighton Council on an anti-cuts platform, but they had absolutely no strategy for it. They have no roots, or belief in, the organised strength of the working class to be able to effect change.

They can be forced into u-turns on some issues; very recently there was a colourful community-led campaign opposing the cuts to the music service (which would have prevented lower income families accessing subsidies to music lessons), and they bowed under pressure and agreed to save this (although without specifying where the money to save it was going to come from).

The two trade unions organising at the council — GMB and Unison — have a close working relationship, and will be stepping up the fight against cuts, whichever party is making them.

The GMB took strike action against the last administration when they were threatening to cut workers' pay, and won, so will not hesitate in doing so again in future fights over jobs.

Sparks win as contractors cave

By Darren Bedford

The attempt by the UK's major construction contractors to impose a new collective agreement for mechanical and electrical construction workers has collapsed after the remaining six companies followed industry leader Balfour Beatty Engineering Services in performing an embarrassing u-turn.

The "Building Engineering Services National Agreement" (BESNA), the proposed replacement for the existing Joint Industry Board, is now decisively dead-in-the-water after employers' organisation the Heating and Ventilating Contractors Association (HVCA) agreed to negotiations with Unite, the union representing the majority of organised mechanical and electrical construction workers.

Unite had planned a series of direct actions against NG Bailey Building Services, Crown House Technologies, Gratte Brothers, Spie Matthew Hall, Shepherd Engineering Services and Tommy Clarke, the six remaining BESNA firms, which it has now called off.

The rank-and-file committee which has led the campaign against BESNA,

organising an impressive series of pickets, protests and wildcat strikes across the UK, often with little support and occasional hostility from union officialdom, will now have to turn its attention to the negotiations between Unite and the HVCA. Activists must pressure their union to make sure any talks are geared towards improving the JIB (a deal only brought in off the back of a

previous wave of defeats and cuts) or replacing it with something better.

A new deal should guarantee health and safety standards, end blacklisting and move towards a reintroduction of direct (rather than agency) employment and hiring.

Unite must not help HVCA members draft a BESNA-lite or concede to any chipping away of JIB provision.

Strikes off in Newsquest fight

By Bill Holmes

Journalists at newspapers in Essex have called off strike action after giving management one last chance over pay.

National Union of Journalist (NUJ) chapels in Basildon and Colchester called off a three-day and one-day strike respectively after members decided to give Newsquest management until June to come up with a pay offer.

The company had pushed back a January pay review date until June, saying they could not give a pay rise until the first quarter trading performance was known.

However no rise is guaranteed in June, and for members in the north Essex chapel with pay reviews currently later than June will not be eligible for

any rise given until 2013.

The two chapels, who had both returned resounding ballot results calling for industrial action, elected to give the managing director a chance to give a pay award in June.

They had already held mandatory chapel meetings, and in the south a period of work to rule.

However both chapels remained resolute and said they would not hesitate to ballot again if no pay rise was forthcoming.

They have received just one pay rise, of 2%, in the past four years.

It is important both chapels now review their strategy so far, learn from any mistakes they may have made, and continue to build momentum for possible action in June.

Locked-out workers picket factory

By Padraig O'Brien

Workers at the Mayr-Melnhof Packaging (MMP) plant in Bootle, near Liverpool, are maintaining pickets of the factory after bosses locked them out during a dispute over redundancies.

Managers at the plant responded to an official strike over job losses by locking out the entire

workforce. The plant's closure has already hit MMP's customer's supply chains, with production of Kellogg's flagship brand Cornflakes reportedly suffering due to the lack of packaging production.

Unite leader Len McCluskey joined the picket line, saying he was here to demonstrate solidarity and to bring the full support of the Unite executive and send a clear message that they, the company,

better open these gates, let our members back in and then sit down with us and reach a proper settlement.

"Otherwise this dispute will only continue here and will also spread and impact right across Europe because we have made contact with our European colleagues and received solidarity and support from them."

Messages of support can be emailed to p-potter1@sky.com

Heathrow Express workers have struck to defend victimised colleagues Liaquat Ali and Zahid Majid. Liaquat, an RMT rep, has been suspended in connection with his trade union activities and Zahid, also an RMT member, has been dismissed on a technicality. Pickets were mounted at HEX's terminal at London Paddington. An overtime ban will be put in place on the weekend of 3-4 March, and workers will walk out again on Sunday 11 March if the dispute is not resolved.

● STOP PRESS: RMT to ballot TfL members over Olympics working — bit.ly/x6GXkx

RMT solidarity with Israeli rail workers

By Ira Berkovic

British rail union RMT has sent a message of solidarity to their Israeli counterparts, currently taking strike action against the Israeli state's privatisation agenda.

Although such basic solidarity should be an instinctive reflex for any labour movement body, the message is significant because it cuts against a dangerous and growing consensus on the British labour movement left that the Israeli working-class is irredeemably reactionary and that British unions should sever all ties with Israeli workers' organisations.

The Israeli railworkers' strike comes hot on the heels of a general strike organised by the Histadrut, Israel's main trade-union

centre, to win the levelling up of pay and conditions for temporary and agency workers employed in the public sector.

The RMT's statement reads, in part:

"From the point of view of [British] railworkers privatisation has brought greater job insecurity and contracting out of jobs to weaken collective bargaining, while simultaneously we have suffered a series of preventable and foreseeable 'accidents' due to the fragmentation, casualisation and 'profit first' mentality of the market.

"RMT applauds you and all the workers at Israel Railways who stand up to fight against this free market vandalism."

• Full statement: bit.ly/yDYJz1

London Troublemakers' Group

How can we organise to win power in our workplaces and our unions? Come and meet other rank-and-file trade union activists to discuss strategies for fighting back at work – and winning. We'll be using *Labor Notes' Troublemaker's Handbook* and will be joined by *Labor Notes* co-founder Kim Moody. This is our first meeting, and we hope to develop an ongoing programme of workshops and training. Anyone interested in worker organising, from any trade union, is welcome to attend.



Wednesday 28 March, 7-9:30pm, upstairs at the Exmouth Arms (Starcross Street, nr. Euston)

For more information, contact skillz_999@hotmail.com or ring 07961040618

Stagecoach drivers win

By Stewart Ward

A months-long battle between bus drivers and bosses at Stagecoach in South Yorkshire has concluded after workers voted to accept management's latest pay offer.

Workers will receive a pay rise to £9.05 per hour

and £130 back pay. The big concession in the deal is the back pay, which was not included in a previous offer rejected by the workers. Tony Rushforth, Unite secretary at the Barnsley depot, said: "I am very proud of the members who refused to give in and who stood solid to the end."

"All this amounts to some fantastic demonstrations of solidarity."

Stagecoach was initially intransigent in the face of a slightly lower claim from workers (£9 per hour), but 12 days of strike action and well-organised picketing which severely hit its services have seen bosses back down.

Tube union could join Carillion fight

By Stewart Ward

GMB members working for contractor Carillion at Swindon's Great Western Hospital began a further three days of strike action on Monday 27 February as their dispute over bullying bosses continues.

The workers have already taken several days of strike action but are unhappy with Carillion's refusal to even acknowledge that a problem exists. "We are not satisfied that they have taken the appropriate action against the accusations of bullying", said Pablo Fernandez, a support worker at the hospital.

The dispute began in December when the GMB submitted a formal complaint from over 100 workers about bullying and harassment from Carillion managers.

Rail union RMT has declared its support for the Carillion workers after it was revealed that the London Transport Pension Fund, which holds pensions for thousands of RMT members, was a major shareholder in Semperian, Carillion's parent company. GMB leader Paul Kenny said: "No doubt they [the transport unions] will be as shocked as we are that their members' pension funds are being used to prop up a system of bullying and harassment of workers there."

RMT general secretary Bob Crow said:

"At the end of the day it could end up as a dispute with London underground workers - if their money is being used to exploit other groups of workers.

"We want the trustees of the pension fund to tell the company that you don't exploit workers anywhere and if they don't listen to that then we'll get our investment moved.

"And if they don't listen to that then we'll have to consider industrial action because we aren't going to use our money from our members to exploit other workers."

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Activist diary for saving the NHS

Wednesday 29 February, London: Protest at the "Winning Business in the New NHS" conference. 08:00-10:30, 11 Cavendish Square, London W1. Organised by Health Alarm mobilising committee.

Thursday 1 March, south London: "No Queue-Jumping at St George's", demonstration at St George's Hospital, Tooting, which plans to spend £100,000 a year on a "Private Patients Development Manager". 12:30-14:00, outside St George's entrance, Effort St, London SW17. Organised by SW London Keep Our NHS Public: Anne Marie Waters, amwaters@hotmail.com.

Saturday 3 March, south London: Unite London and Eastern Region day of action on Health and Social Care Bill. 10:30, The Blue Market, Southwark Park Road, Bermondsey.

Saturday 3 March, Manchester: "Save our NHS" rally, 11:00, Albert Square. Organised by NWTUC, NW UNISON and the Labour Party.

Saturday 3 March, Liverpool: demonstration against NHS privatisation. 12:00-14:00, in front of the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. Called by a local coalition of campaign groups.

Wednesday 7 March, London: human chain around St Thomas's Hospital. 11.45-14:00, meet outside A&E St Thomas's Hospital, Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 9RT.

Wednesday 7 March, London: lobby of Parliament to oppose Health and Social Care Bill. 13:00-19:30, Houses of Parliament. Organised by Unite.

Wednesday 7 March, London: rally against Health and Social Care Bill. 18:00, Central Hall, Westminster. Organised by TUC.

Saturday 10 March, Gateshead: Clegg Off: march against Lib Dem conference, with NHS contingent. 11:00-15:00, East End Pool and Library, Shields Rd, Byker, Newcastle.

healthalarm1159.wordpress.com

People in Homs try to take shelter as the city is bombarded

Syria: a people under siege

By Dan Katz

On Sunday 26 February the Syrian regime held a referendum on a new constitution. That constitution declares that Syria will be a multi-party democracy.

The opposition called for a boycott, saying that the old constitution bans torture and guarantees civil liberties, but as the government ignores that constitution, so too will it ignore any new one.

The opposition Syrian National Council declared that what is needed is a new government.

The voting took place amid widespread fighting. Homs was shelled by government troops for the 26th consecutive day.

Waleed Fares, an activist in the Khalidiyah district of Homs said, "What should we be voting for, whether to die by bombardment or by bullets? This is the only choice we have."

One hundred people, mostly civilians, were killed across the country on Saturday alone.

Al-Jazeera reported intense fighting around Deraa, where the uprising first began last March and an opposition rising in Aleppo. If the report is accurate it is an important

step: Aleppo is Syria's largest town and is home to the Sunni elite. It has been considered a regime stronghold.

ARMING THE REBELS?

This week Radwan Ziadah of the SNC called for arms for the Free Syrian Army.

Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal stated he thought arming the rebels was "an

excellent idea."

If the Saudis do start to seriously arm the rebels they will promote those they agree with. In Afghanistan, during the war against the Russian occupation, the Saudis funded and armed the most reactionary wing of the mujahedeen.

Now, in Egypt, they are helping the salafists — the most backward wing of the Islamist movement.

What we say

Workers' Liberty supports the brave uprising against Assad's state and advocates democracy, free speech and association, secularism, workers' and women's rights. We oppose Islamism.

We oppose the break-up of Syria through sectarian strife. But we recognise the right of the oppressed Kurdish minority in the north east of Syria to self-determination.

We oppose those powers which are backing the Syrian regime. We condemn the "left" in Britain which is effectively doing the same.

We distrust the motives and calculations of the big powers, and do not make calls on them to sort out the situation in Syria.

But the internal opponents of the Syrian state have a right to ask for help from outside and we would not oppose US, British or other outside support for the Syrian rebels (notwithstanding sectarian moves by e.g. Saudi Arabia). We will not oppose moves by outside powers to provide military aid or a "safe haven" for the uprising.

For liberty and democracy!

Daily Mail defends indefensible workfare

By Dan Rawnsley

On 27 February the Daily Mail issued a front page rallying call to British business to save the government's workfare programme.

Quoting Sir Stuart Rose, former Executive Chairman of Marks & Spencer, the paper ordered firms to "show some backbone".

The *Mail* is responding to a wave of companies and charities refusing to take up the so-called "work experience" scheme. The list grows everyday and now includes TK Maxx, Sainsbury's, Waterstones, Shelter and Oxfam.

In the *Daily Mail* article Rose recounts his humble beginnings, shelf-stacking and sweeping floors. He was however a management trainee! People on that M&S scheme have a starting salary of £18,000 a year, rising to £24,000 with a managerial appointment. Yet Rose feels able to self-righteously contrast his own great work ethic to people on the dole. Does he not imagine that being "employed" on a "wage" of just £53.45-£67.50 and having no prospect of a decent job at the end of the "work experience" might account for a difference in attitude?

We also have to challenge the presentation of the facts about workfare.

The *Daily Mail* claims that half of those who have taken part in the "voluntary" work experience programme have come off benefits. But the Boycott Workfare campaign has shown this statistic falls apart under scrutiny.

People stop receiving

Job Seekers' Allowance for many reasons — if they fall ill for example. Also there is no information on what new jobs might be — are they part-time, short-term, or full-time?

In November 2011 the Centre for Economic and Social Injustice concluded that the youth work experience scheme had no impact on the speed at which young people leave benefits, and even lead to longer periods on benefits.

None of this concerns the *Mail*, who are happy to decry a "tiny cabal of extremists" who are leading a misleading campaign.

In fact workfare has met with a wall of broad resistance and sustained criticism from the left-liberal press to organised activists.

It is important to maintain the pressure. Workfare forces workers to take jobs they don't want for benefits rather than wages. It reduces the number of jobs available at a time of high unemployment. It will push down the conditions of those already employed.

The Boycott Workfare campaign is organising a day of action on 3 March. Many demonstrations are already planned.

• More info: boycottworkfare.org

CWU and workfare

In *Solidarity* 235, we wrote that the Communication Workers' Union was supporting a "workfare" scheme in Royal Mail, its main base of industrial strength.

In fact, the CWU is still negotiating with Royal Mail bosses about the scheme. In a letter to CWU branches, deputy general secretary Dave Ward says the union is insisting any scheme is completely voluntary with the right for participants to leave at any time.

However, the question remains: why is CWU participating in this

process at all, especially when the government is on the back foot on this issue? Instead of negotiating terms for a workfare scheme, the CWU could mount a militant campaign to end the widespread use of casual labour in the postal service and for casuals to be taken on with levelled-up terms and conditions.

Participating in "workfare", even a "good" scheme that treats participants better than, say, Tesco, helps galvanise the scheme and will exacerbate existing problems with casualisation within Royal Mail.