

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a Workers' Government!

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## War on "benefit scroungers" **STOP LIB-CON** **ATTACKS** **ON THE** **POOR AND** **POWERLESS!**

The government  
and the Sun...  
working together to  
scapegoat  
claimants

By TOM UNTERRAINER

**T**he *Sun* has gone into tabloid overdrive in support of a vicious government attack on claimants. *Anyone on benefits — people they say "refuse to work", people they say have had "too many children", people they say are "robbing hardworking Sun readers of their cash".*

The government is backing that campaign — they want the same things. The *Sun* says "scroungers" deserve to be "named and shamed". So do the government. The *Sun* is stirring up a vigilante drive among its readers, asking them to file reports of cases of "benefit cheats". This is just what Cameron

means by a "big society".

This government is proving to be just as nasty as Thatcher's, finding scapegoats among poor, powerless and vulnerable people and doing that despite the "input" of Lib Dem junior coalition partners. They are constructing a long list of people to stir up hate against — it already includes migrants, refugees and gypsies.

Many working-class people gripe about how easy they think life is for benefit claimants. Often this is an expression of sadness and frustration with their own life — their own struggles to stay in work or to earn enough to support themselves. But newspapers are owned by millionaires, and they express

the view of... millionaires — people who want to keep the profit system running to benefit themselves. The *Sun* and other tabloids radically distort the reality for those living on benefits. It is never easy and it is very different from the lives of luxury portrayed in the papers and elsewhere.

Our message has to be clear — working-class people whether we are in work or not, should stick together. We should unite against the real parasites — the bankers, the rich, the people who will not suffer at all from the cutbacks, who will benefit from the low taxes on profits brought in by this government...

*Continued on page 2*

**Mobilise against EDL, Bradford 28 August see page 3**

## LET THEM EAT CAKE

• David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, had an interesting response to the news that thousands of young people will be unable to get into University this year, due to a shortage of places. They should, he said, go on an apprentice scheme... or set up a business!

Giving up on a University education is one thing. Having to endure a lecture by a public school-Oxford educated twit about what "choices" you have in life adds insult to injury. Setting up a business is no problem if your parent's personal wealth is as much as the Willetts — £1.9 million. Not so easy for the rest of us.

• Ivory tower resident Richard Blakeway, the London mayor's director of housing, was shocked to hear how Polish migrants, penniless because they cannot claim benefits, were reduced to eating barbequed rats. After contemplating their plight he said this had confirmed to him that "rough sleeping really is the worst option". Of course he has other "options" in mind for the Poles — going back to Poland!

• So Blair will give the advance on his memoirs to the British Legion. He can afford it. Blair owns five homes, including a £5.7 million country mansion; holds numerous lucrative directorships; earns six figure fees for after-dinner engagements, and gets wads of cash for consultancy in "global strategy" (!). All in all he is estimated to be worth £60 million.

• Southwark council in south London owns and manages one of the largest stocks of council homes in the country — responsible for 39,000 people. As building projects go to the wall Southwark is going to find it hard to accommodate the 15,000 people on its waiting list. To put this issue into perspective... according to Shelter you have to earn £62,695 to afford to buy an average-priced house in Southwark.

## NORTHERN IRELAND BOMBINGS

## A new IRA?

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

**M**inority Republican organisations have planted 49 bombs and been responsible for 32 shootings in Northern Ireland over the last eight months. All that stands between the bombs they set off and a sizeable slaughter of civilians, police or soldiers is pure chance. With each bomb the chances increase that there will be such a slaughter.

Last week three children were slightly injured by a bomb intended to kill policemen planted outside a school. As things are going, it is only a matter of time. One of the three organisations mounting the present campaign, the "Real IRA", a then-recent splinter from the Provisional IRA, set off the 1998 bomb in Omagh which killed 29 people.

These three small Republican militarist groups are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and to the Protestant-Catholic power-sharing Belfast government that came out of it and now rules Northern Ireland.

They denounce the Provisional IRA and its leaders, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, as traitors and see them as the latest in a long parade of such turncoats: who made peace with the British without achieving a united Ireland and collaborate with them now.

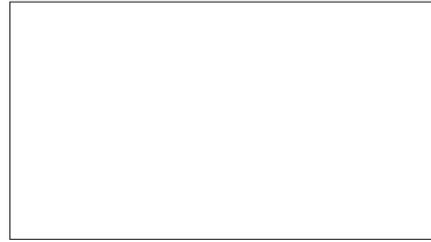
The situation today is superficially reminiscent of the period before the eruption of the Provisional IRA war in 1971

The three groups are: the Real IRA, the "Continuity IRA", the result of a 1986 breakaway, and Oglach na hEireann ("Soldiers of Ireland"), which seems to have taken shape recently. These three groups are a by-product of three things.

One, the military defeat of the Provisional IRA and their acceptance of that defeat. When in the years after the Good Friday Agreement the British and Irish governments were demanding that the Provisional IRA should disband, Gerry Adams responded with: "what's the point of disbanding the IRA, when another IRA will soon take its place?"

Something like that is happening.

Two, the militarist Republicans see



Northern Ireland as "British-occupied Ireland". Politically speaking, they refuse to "see" the Protestant majority in the Six Counties, or recognise that they, not Britain, are the decisive opponents of a united Ireland.

And three, of the fact that Northern Ireland is not only the expression of self-determination by the Protestant minority in Ireland, but also an artificial creation of British imperialism and the Protestant-Unionist majority in the Six County area. A large minority of the population of the Six Counties are Catholic nationalists. Not only in the centre of Belfast, which is in the heartland of the Protestant majority section of north-east Ulster, but also where the Catholic nationalists are the majority — in a large swathe of Six County territory, along the border with the independent Irish state.

Given a free choice they would have been part of the Catholic nationalist state. In 1919-1922, and afterwards, they were kept in the Six County state by the brute force of the British army and the Protestant sectarian militias.

For its first 50 years Northern Ireland was ruled by a Protestant sectarian government which ill-treated the Catholic minority.

The Good Friday Agreement set up an intricate bureaucratic political network of institutions and rules-of-functioning designed to ensure sectarian "fairness" as between Catholic and Protestant by way of compulsory power-sharing in government.

A military campaign, even a strong and effective one, is not enough to trigger a war like the Provo War. The Catholics then were second class citizens and were not prepared to go on peacefully tolerating it.

The Six County Catholics are not alien-

ated from the state. In fact they probably identify with it more than the Protestants do. The old sectarian, very heavily Protestant, Royal Ulster Constabulary has gone and is replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in which there is a large and growing Catholic presence.

There are now two constitutional nationalist parties standing solidly against militarist Republicanism. The Belfast power sharing government includes both of the once extreme poles of the Protestant and Catholic communities — the Paisleyites and Sinn Fein (now effectively incorporating the IRA). On both sides now the extreme opposition to the present arrangement are small minorities.

The decisive thing in the explosion of war in 1971 was that both Protestant and Catholic communities and their extremes bounced off each other like careening billiard balls. The Belfast Unionist government, backed by the British army, was still Protestant sectarian. Internment, indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial, in 1971 was used exclusively against Catholics. It gave the Provisional IRA a tremendous surge of Catholic support. The British army was pitted against the Catholics and alienated them greatly.

Today nothing like that exists. To succeed, the militarists would have to set Protestant and Catholic populations actively against each other. The key thing will be how the Protestants react to the Republican militarists. Yet the Omagh bomb in 1997 helped consolidate the Good Friday Agreement rather than provoking the Protestants, half of whom then opposed the Agreement.

But much is of course unforeseeable. The economic slump and large-scale unemployment is greatly alienating sections of the youth, who are made to feel they have gained very little socially from the Good Friday Agreement. That discontent feeds into the militarist groups.

• A collection of articles, "What's wrong in the Six Counties? Reasons for the developing Northern Ireland crisis": [www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/04/19/whats-wrong-6-counties-northern-ireland](http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2009/04/19/whats-wrong-6-counties-northern-ireland)

# Stop Lib-Con attacks on the poor

From front page

**P**rime Minister David Cameron claims that £5.2 billion is "lost" each year in the benefits system as a result of "fraud" and "error". He does not say that the vast bulk of this amount is "error", he does not mention the vast amount of money "saved" by the state because many people do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

None of that matters in his determination to be "tougher" on those who "exploit the system", to prosecute the "cheats" and send them to jail.

What sort of "fraud" has the *Sun* and its readers uncovered? On Mon 16 August, the paper "exposes" a mother of eleven and her partner. Their crimes are that the father is on incapacity benefits and the mother is unemployed. Add to this the fact that they live in a five bedroom house and claim £30,000 per year

in benefits.

Let's de-construct this story. Thirteen people living in a five bedroom house. That's 2.6 people per bedroom. The family gets £44 per week, per person to pay for food, clothing, travel, rent etc... The only wonder of this story is how this family manages to survive.

The fact a national newspaper is allowed to subject this family — not just the parents but the children too — to such a witch-hunt is a disgrace. Do the *Sun* expect this family to be chucked out onto the streets — the children taken into care perhaps?

What really disgusts the *Sun* and other tabloid papers like the *Mail* and the *Express*, what really scandalises Cameron and his ex-Etonian chums, isn't the money, but the people. Their hatred of working-class people shows through every time.

The Tories claim the £5.2 billion claw-

back from the benefits system will boost the British economy and make all of use "better off". The economic realities of Britain tell a rather different story.

Britain is still the sixth richest nation on earth. Personal wealth exceeds £9000 billion, which averages out to £4 million per household. But not every household has that sort of money! That's because the richest 10% hold £4000 billion (about £1.6 million per richest household), 44%, of the total amount. The poorest 50% of households owns only 9% of the total wealth.

There are clear, stark, disparities in wealth and the economic crisis has done nothing to dampen it. In fact, the gap keeps getting bigger under these conditions. The *Sunday Times* Rich List 2010 showed that the personal wealth of Britain's thousand richest people increased by 30% from last year, an increase of £77 billion.

These are the only people in Britain today who can afford to give some money away for the national good.

A 20% one-off tax on the richest 10% would yield a total of £800 billion — virtually eliminating the government's stated need to tackle the debt. Such a tax would still leave these people filthy-rich. They won't do it of course because such an act would "scare the markets". It would be "bad for British business". And that is code for "bad for our class".

And that is the reason why they have to come after us, after working-class people, whether it is cutting our jobs, taking away our benefits; we, that is, working-class people are all in it together. They make us the scapegoats and lay the blame for the crisis of the economy and government institutions at our door.

Our response should be clear: stop the scapegoating, end the lies, make the rich pay for the crisis.

## ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE IN BRADFORD

# Understanding the EDL threat

**P**lans by the English Defence League to demonstrate in Bradford on 28 August present a huge challenge to the local community, the national labour movement and the socialist left.

After failing to fulfil their promise of a “long, hot summer” of demonstrations, the EDL has now planned a provocation that could have repercussions for wider British society.

But unfortunately the threat posed by this nasty racist street gang has sent some sections of the left and trade unions into a spin. Once again the weakness and wrong-headedness of the “official” movement against racism and fascism has been shown up.

What is at stake and why are the issues so sharply posed?

Over the weekend of 7-9 June 2001, Bradford experienced the worst inner-city rioting since Brixton and Tottenham in 1981. The root-cause of this rioting is disputed in both mainstream and left-wing accounts.

Where reports on the BBC and other news websites painted the events as a high-pitched clash between Muslims, “whites” and the police, commentators like Nick Lowles from *Searchlight* magazine blame the outbreak of violence on the left being provoked by a handful of fascists.

The large numbers of police deployed and injured, the number of arrests and the total cost of damage grabbed the headlines in some media outlets. But the reality of racist and fascist provocation, in an already charged atmosphere of division and bigotry, was largely overlooked.

The events in Bradford followed similar disturbances in Burnley and Oldham. All three cities had, and to a degree retain, similar social problems: poverty, unemployment, poor housing. All three had and have been neglected by successive governments. All three contained communities — white, black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other south Asian communities — which had been set against each other in such circumstances and over a long period of time. In addition, all three areas had become targets for the organised far-right and fascist parties.

The events which sparked the riots in Burnley and Oldham — incidents which in an earlier period would have constituted another police statistic — sparked mass confrontation between white and mainly Asian youth. Bradford's history was similar but the “spark” for the rioting was somewhat different: it was organised.

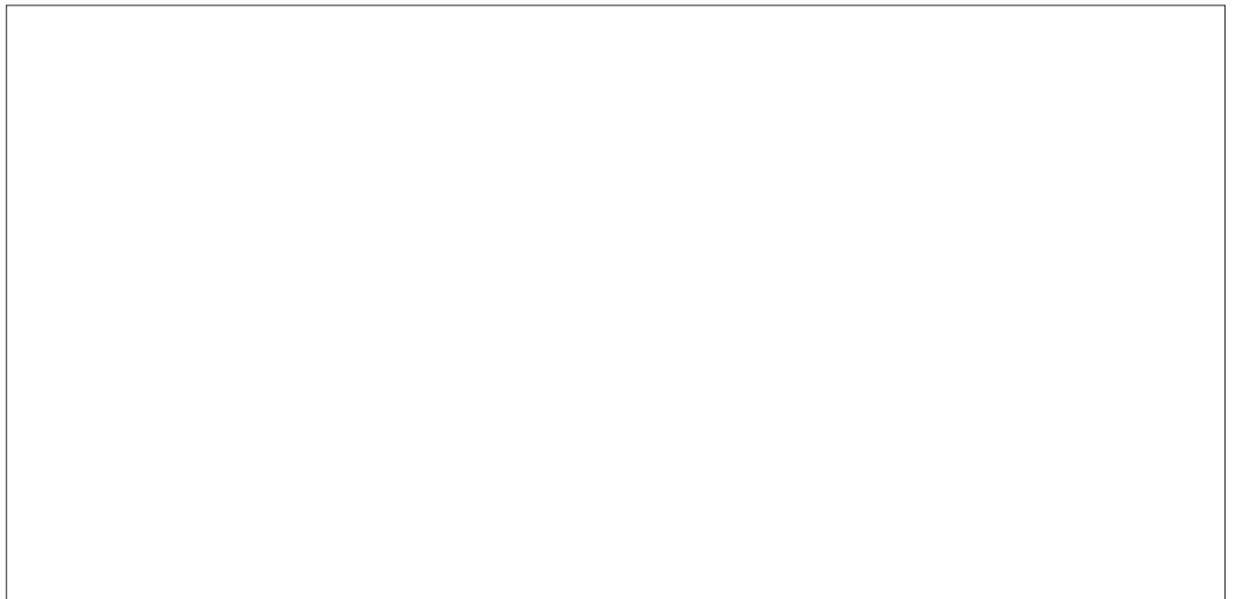
Fascists from the British National Party and the National Front, hoping to sustain and roll-out a wave of race riots across the north of England — which, they said, could result in a “nationalist” revolution allowing them to gain political power — descended on Bradford to attack Muslims. Although a planned march by the NF was banned by then Home Secretary David Blunkett, tension had already been built and the fascists came to the city regardless of the ban.

Those on the left and within the trade unions who are now calling for the EDL's demonstration to be banned and, in addition, call for there to be no counter-demonstration — to “avoid” a confrontation, we are told — miss several important points.

Nick Lowles claims that “Perhaps in some places there might be a case for [a counter-demonstration] but in Bradford we believe there is not.” Why? “No EDL protest has actually been stopped by a counter-demonstration ... In almost every instance the EDL has held a static protest regardless of the actions of anti-fascists. More worryingly, some have led to disorder.”

This is nonsense. The anti-fascist movement has so far failed to stop the EDL not because they can't be stopped, but because the mobilisations against them have been far too small and poorly co-ordinated. The counter-demonstrations have “led to disorder” not because hundreds of drunken anti-fascists have gone out looking for a fight, but because, given the balance of forces in favour of them, the EDL have felt confident enough to use physical violence against their opponents.

Nick Lowles uses a more genuine argument when he states that “[u]nfortunately, much of the media coverage of earlier protests has presented a scene of two



**Bradford, 2001: riots were provoked by the far right**

groups of extremists ... hardly the best way to win hearts and minds.”

However, why has it been possible for the media to portray things in this way? It forms this picture of events in the absence of a mass, labour movement mobilisation. A mobilisation uniting black and white, religious or not, on the basis of class.

In the debate on this issue on the ‘Hope not hate’ website, Dave Matthews from Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP answered Lowles’ argument, writing that those calling for no counter-demonstration — anti-racists, Muslim elders and some local trade unions — “are simply not strong enough to successfully bring about a de facto desertion of Bradford by Muslim people for the whole day. Many Muslim/Asian people will not want to cower in their homes whilst racists go on the rampage in the town. Unless one expects every Muslim to vacate town many will inevitably be out in the town at risk of being isolated, provoked and attacked by the EDL.”

This is absolutely right. In addition to the common sense imperative for the labour movement to stand firm against the threat of the EDL there is an equal imperative to stand side-by-side with those who are threatened and take the initiative to fight back. These are the best traditions of our movement and this is what we should be organising to achieve. Any other course of action will leave people isolated and under threat. It will leave the media free to continue its “clash of cultures” narrative about EDL violence.

Even if the Home Secretary issues a complete ban on all demonstrations in Bradford on the day or if the police issue restrictions on movement and activities, nobody can guarantee that small bands of racists and the organised fascists who operate within the EDL will not come to the city to provoke and attack.

Socialists and the left within the labour movement should be campaigning to win the argument for mass mobilisations against these threats.

**I**t may already be too late to achieve the numbers and strength needed to drive the racists out of Bradford or to challenge restrictions imposed on anti-racists by the state. It is therefore essential that we get ready combat the conclusions that will be drawn by those already calling on us to give a free hand to the racists.

We need to reiterate again that we need working class campaign. But not just to mobilise the thousands necessary to drive the street racists out. Such a campaign is essential because only a working-class campaign with working-class politics can unite the communities in places like Bradford that the racists seek to break apart and set against one another.

And we need a clear analysis of exactly what the EDL represents. It is certain that organised fascists or those with past associations with fascist groups operate at the centre of the EDL.

But the EDL does not mobilise people on the basis of

this kind of politics. Centrally and peripherally involved are old-style football hooligans; the hopeless, disheartened white working class — often young and poorly educated. Activists who have engaged in discussions with people on the margins of the EDL know that many of them genuinely believe themselves to be “not racist” or even “anti-racist”. The EDL has attracted support from small numbers of Sikhs, Jews (there is now a “Jewish Division”) and LGBT people. The dynamic around the EDL is therefore not straightforward.

What unites those who demonstrate with the EDL is acceptance of a form of racism — specifically anti-Muslim racism — that manifests itself in softer and harder forms. The EDL's claim to be “anti-extremist” is capable of covering all forms of this prejudice, after such vigorous and nasty campaigns by the right-wing tabloid press.

So whatever the actual politics of the core members and organisers of the EDL, it is useless and dangerous to label all EDL supporters as Nazis and fascists. Constantly applying these terms — in press releases, leaflets, placards and chants — can only damage efforts to split the vast majority of EDLers from the organisation.

There is currently a split in the leadership of the EDL with rival factions, including people associated with Loyalist terror groups, vying for control. There could be a political hardening of supporters around groups of fascists within the EDL. This prospect seems all the more worrying given the possible splits in and weakening of the British National Party.

Any victory for the EDL — be it the proscription of anti-racist activities; a riot between exclusively Muslim youth and EDLers or even a limited pitch battle with the police — can only aid their growth. Any growth for the EDL can only spell mortal danger for Muslims everywhere and the labour movement more generally.

And a continuation of the confusion, anti-democratic practices and political abstention within the anti-fascist and anti-racist movement can only aid this growth.

The labour movement must mobilise to challenge the English Defence League in Bradford on 28 August. Stop Racism and Fascism Network: <http://srfnetwork.org/>

## Brighton counter mobilisation

**On 30 August the English Nationalist Alliance aim to march through the streets of Brighton. They intend to “protest against the militant students ... and socialist extremists, to support the English people of the region against the constant anti-English activities in the area... no more support of Palestinian terrorists...militant students need to know their place...”**

**For further information email [brightonantifascists@riseup.net](mailto:brightonantifascists@riseup.net)**

## PCS

**Fight this victimisation!**

Following a spate of sackings and victimisations at Hastings Child Support Agency, Public and Commercial Services Union activists are organising a march and rally to protest.

Branch secretary Sam Buckley has become the fifth union activist to be fired since 2007. An industrial tribunal found that former branch chair Eddie Fleming was unfairly dismissed, but has not been reinstated.

Black members activist Winston Resalsingh was also sacked after asking whether he was being discriminated against by being refused facility time to attend PCS Black Members Committee meetings. The then-Chair Chris Brambleby was threatened with disciplinary action when he represented Winston, as managers claimed that in doing so he was "insulting" the bosses who had been questioned by Winston.

A march and rally has been called for 18 September, assembling at Hastings Pier at 1pm for a 1.30pm start before marching to the town centre.

For more information, email Sam Buckley at [swpsam@hotmail.com](mailto:swpsam@hotmail.com)

## LONDON FIREFIGHTERS

**Fighting mass sackings**

Firefighters in London are considering action after a dramatic breakdown in talks with their bosses, the LFEPA.

Despite recent talks apparently ending "harmoniously", LFEPA has begun the process of formal consultation over mass dismissals. Its intention appears to be to sack pretty much every firefighter in London and re-employ them on the new shift pattern it is attempting to introduce.

In a letter to members, the Fire Brigades Union EC member for London Ian Lehair writes:

"For the authority to have thrown the proverbial hand grenade into the talks at such a sensitive stage... is both reckless and dishonourable. It also adds credence to the view that authority politicians and principal managers were never serious about listening to the workforce's views and seeking a collective agreement, but were all along hell-bent on imposing change."

The dispute mirrors the issues faced by firefighters in South Yorkshire in a long-running dispute that saw several

rounds of strikes. In that dispute, too, the insistence of fire authority bosses that firefighters accept poorer terms and conditions contrasted with their own over-large pay packets.

FBU leader Matt Wrack said "Sacking

all of London's firefighters as a way of trying to impose new contracts is the action we would expect from Victorian mill owners – not from a modern public service. I am sure Londoners will be appalled at how their firefighters are being treated. We will fight this disgraceful attack every step of the way.

"We and the principal management of the London Fire Brigade do have a real disagreement about the way forward in difficult economic times, but until yesterday we were talking about it constructively, and I hoped to reach an agreement both sides could live with. The chances of that agreement have diminished dramatically this morning.

"I cannot believe the professional firefighters in charge at the London Fire Brigade would have wanted to do this damage to their service. It may be that this foolish action was forced on them by their political master, Brian Coleman, who seems to have a very personal dislike of firefighters and their trade union."

## MY LIFE AT WORK

**"Schools are going into blind panic mode. They'll take it out on us"**

Frances Streeting works as a teaching assistant in a secondary school.

**Tell us a bit about the work you do.**

I work with students who find it difficult to keep up with their learning. My role is to ensure that they can be included in mainstream class, helping them get their work done or at least achieve something. Teachers always say "if that teaching assistant wasn't in my classroom, I wouldn't be able to teach", so we're pretty central to the needs of students in school, in terms of their learning and their care. Some of the children we work with have got problems in their lives that I as an adult have never had to deal with or encounter on a personal level.

**Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve?**

For what we do, the pay of teaching assistants is abominably low. We're paid term-time only, which means that during the school holidays we don't get any pay at all. Our pay is pro-rata. My contract says I'm paid £17,500 per year, but I'm actually paid far less.

Conditions for teaching assistants vary from school to school. The job can be a delight if you've got a good head of department, and a misery if you've got a bad one. You're at the mercy of whoever's above you. There's a lot of bullying by management. In my union role I've come across a huge amount of that, particularly in primary schools. Kids aren't stupid – they can see it. If they see adults bullying each other, they think it's okay for them to do it.

Because of the nature of the work, it is sometimes hard to say no to certain tasks which leads to a culture of overwork. All workers end up taking work home to cope but that means they're working for free!

**How has the recent political situation, both in terms of the economic crisis and the new government, affected your work?**

The new government are trying to undo a lot of New Labour's projects in terms of inclusion, but they're going to continue to take advantage of low-paid workers in schools. I think we'll see a lot more teaching assistants being used as a cheap way to do work that should be done by qualified teachers.

There's also potentially huge job cuts. In the past there would have been guarantees that restructuring wouldn't involve pay cuts or redundancies – now, all restructuring involves pay cuts or redundancies. As Gove's plans come into play and after the October spending review, schools are going to be in blind panic mode and will take it out on us. They'll either try and sack us or use us to do work that they don't want to pay qualified teachers to do.

**What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to "talk politics on the job"?**

It's increasingly easy to talk politics at work. You can't avoid it. What's happening to education is now "big politics"; it's not just workplace-based trade-union stuff. It's about how we want our kids to be taught and how we want the national education system to be run. It's

a big issue. Because workers everywhere else are suffering cuts and attacks too, it's very easy to argue basic class politics. People are realising that we have to organise together to fight back. Those are easy arguments to have now. Everybody accepts that we have to either fight back or go belly-up.

I've always had lots of political discussions in my workplace. My day starts in our little office where all the teaching assistants gather; we have a quick meeting with our immediate line-manager and then go into that classroom about half-an-hour later, and that slot at the start of the day is always filled with discussion with other workers about what's going on in the news.

**What are your bosses like?**

They vary. But I think even the best individual manager in a given school would feel compelled to make cuts. They wouldn't have the courage to stand up to them. One reason why we don't have any academies in our area is that school heads have a close relationship with the LEA and have resisted the introduction of academies over the years. But if you suggest to heads or the LEA that they refuse to implement cuts, it won't happen.

**Is there a union in your workplace, and does it do a good job?**

I'm in Unison; when I first started there and got elected as a rep we had about five members. We've had a couple of disputes since then and have got that figure up to 78. That's almost 100% density amongst non-teaching staff so we're in a strong position. We work closely with the NUT and they've always backed us up whenever we've been in dispute.

However, we don't have that right across the locality. In some schools we hardly have any members. We need to build up a layer of activists who will do

the work of building up union power across the area – not just in terms of recruiting, but in terms of fighting to win around issues in the workplace.

It's not just about striking; we've done things like occupying a manager's office, we've threatened to hold public meetings during OFSTED inspections... tactics like that help build up people's confidence and make them realise that we can win things from our bosses. That's how we built the union in my school and we need to replicate that elsewhere.

A big barrier is that the regional and national structures of the union are very bureaucratic. It's hard to get the support you need. In Unison, you need the agreement of both the region and the national strike committee to get an officially-sanctioned strike, and my region just won't back strikes. You get members who are really up for strikes but get blocked and let down by the union. Part of my role as a revolutionary in the workplace is about persuading people to join the union to change it and fight that bureaucracy. We did have a ballot for strike action once – we had to fight the region tooth-and-nail to get that sanctioned. There was a 96% vote in favour of all-out indefinite action, but the region unilaterally changed that to a two-day strike. My members were furious. We've got to harness that rank-and-file fury to change the way the union works.

**If you could change one thing about your work, what would it be?**

It's hard to pin down one thing; really it's about developing a whole vision of how education might be organised. I'd want to abolish exams and uniforms and turn learning into something that's done for its own sake. We're currently teaching people how to get through a nonsensical grading system that doesn't relate to anything. Abolishing that would make the job a real pleasure.

## LONDON UNDERGROUND

# Workers hit back over job cuts

**M**embers of the RMT union on the London Underground have voted by 76% in favour of strike action against job cuts, and by 88% in favour of action short of a strike.

As LU bosses seek to cut any corner possible in order to save money, 800 station workers' jobs are on the line. Such workers are vital to maintaining both the safety and quality of the service on the Underground, both of which will suffer massively if bosses succeed in laying the workers off. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said:

"Less than two weeks after the Potters Bar inquest delivered the damning verdict that cuts to maintenance works, staffing and inspection frequencies create the lethal conditions that lead to avoidable loss of life, LU management have clearly learnt nothing and are burning up safety agreements almost by the day in the dash for cuts.

"RMT members have sent a clear message in this ballot that they will not sit by while the tracks are turned into a death trap and our tube stations and platforms

are left unstaffed and at the mercy of muggers, vandals and other criminal elements.

"Boris Johnson cannot wash his hands of the crisis that is unfolding on London Underground on his watch. While his managers are ripping up the safety regulations the Mayor himself is ripping up his promises to Londoners on safe staffing levels and no amount of bluster can get him off that hook. We will now use this mandate for action to build up a campaign of industrial, political and public pressure to block the all out assault on tube jobs and safety."

## Bob Crow: not on a worker's wage!

**T**he recent revelation that RMT leader Bob Crow has taken a 12% pay increase (bringing his pay to well over £100,000) is a gift for the right-wing press and their hate campaign against unions.

But we can't let the Tory papers dictate the terms of this debate; we should be making our own positive case for union officials to be paid the average wage of the workers they were elected by.

Tabloid attacks on Crow are part of a general demonisation of him as a "militant" — a label we should all wear with pride. But his and other union leaders' staggeringly-high levels of pay are scandalous.

# Southampton librarians make Friday 13 unlucky for council bosses

BY DARREN BEDFORD

**L**ibrarians in Southampton struck on 13 August against job cuts de-skilling and casualisation. This followed a first round of action in June.

The council plans to staff libraries with unpaid and untrained volunteers, replacing six full-time trained workers, in order to cut costs. It has said it is dealing with "difficult economic times." Speaking in the *Southern Daily Echo* at the start of the dispute several months ago, Unison's regional organiser Andy Straker said "There is real

anger from our members over this issue. They feel that management and councillors are devaluing their skills and experience. The fact that they believe they can just take people off the street to do our members' work is an insult. Our members have given years of service to Southampton City Council and to be treated in this way is a disgrace. We believe that the inevitable consequences of these actions will be a worsening in service to the public. If the council needs to make savings by cutting wages and employing volunteers then I suggest they start with

councillors."

Council boss John Hannides has denounced the workers for "standing in the way of modernisation". The cuts come off the back of the introduction of a £468,000 roll-out of self-service machines in six libraries. The council claims that the machines will allow them to axe 7.5 full-time equivalent posts and save around £140,000. It seems that Southampton council bosses want librarians' work to be done by anyone — machines, untrained members of the public — as long as it isn't actual (well-unionised) librarians...

## TUC Day of Action

BY DARREN BEDFORD

**M**oving to biennial congresses, inviting senior members of the coalition government to speak at Congress 2010, consistently manouevring years against motions from unions calling for strike action... the TUC — the national federation of almost all of Britain's trade unions — is not taking on the government with the same class-war spirit as the government is employing against workers.

But now the TUC has called a "day of action" for 20 October. Cue sensationalist screeching from the Tory press about an "autumn of discontent". The TUC doesn't have a great record in this department; its April 2010 national demonstration in defence of the welfare state was very badly built for. An under-mobilised "day of action" could do more harm than good.

Unions should organise local action, including, if they can, strikes for October 20, but should pressure the TUC to organise a coordinated national campaign of industrial action around common demands that will really give the bosses something to be discontented about.

## More action in aviation

**O**ver 6,000 aviation workers — including firefighters, security guards and other ground staff — will vote on a 2% pay increase, plus a one-off payment of £500, after resoundingly rejecting the employer's previous, initial pay offer and voting by a big majority to take strike action.

The workers' union, Unite, called off scheduled strikes after talks at ACAS and will now recommend that its members vote to accept the new deal.

BAA (formerly British Airports Authority until its privatisation in 1986) employees at six major UK airports (Heathrow, Stansted, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Southampton), and initially offered a 1% pay rise with a potential further increase of 0.5% depending on whether workers agreed to changes in their sickness agreements. Unite described the offer as "measly".

Given the centrality of these workers to the basic running of airports, it is unlikely that they would be able to function during any potential strikes and

would have to close. Unsurprisingly, the media attention focused entirely on the detrimental effects any strike would have had on passengers rather than asking why workers who are obviously absolutely vital to the running of airports (more vital, certainly, than the likes of Willie Walsh) aren't valued more highly and paid better.

Although the workers involved in this dispute are employed by a central authority rather than by a specific airline, the parallels and crossovers with the ongoing British Airways dispute are clear. Bosses in the aviation sector are using the climate of economic downturn to attack workers' pay and conditions, and their supporters in the tabloid press are running sensationalist rants about "travel chaos" to build public opposition to any action.

Talks between Unite and British Airways over the cabin crew dispute are set to resume, with the dispute still effectively at a standstill (although BA bosses seem to have an upper-hand). If further strikes do take place, the combined pressure of their action with a potential BAA action could bring aviation bosses to the senses and make them realise that if they really want to avoid "travel chaos" then they should give their workers decent pay and conditions.

# Ed Miliband: "escaping the Blairite comfort zone"?

JACK YATES

**E**d Miliband, writing for a Fabian Society round-table of leadership contenders, has called for Labour to "escape" from the "comfort zone" of Blairism.

The motivation for this call comes from Labour's defeat. Although the core vote held up better than expected — especially in the north of England — the data shows a more detailed and worrying picture.

Miliband writes that "Five million votes were lost by Labour between 1997 and 2010, for every one voter that Labour lost from the professional classes ... we lost three voters among the poorest, those on benefits and the low paid ... Add in skilled manual workers, and the differential goes to six to one." Further, he writes that "We can neither win an election with working-class votes alone - New Labour was right about that — nor can we take it for granted."

Miliband is attempting to do two things here: to present himself as capable of making a clean break from the rotten legacy of Blair and Brown and to present himself as a "safe pair of hands" to the party and public at large.

The outcome of the election is a complicated picture that cannot be solved with number crunching alone. The data shows a significant shift in working class support away from Labour and in many cases towards the Tories. But in the north, the "core vote" remained loyal to Labour. Labour — leaderless and defeated — is currently running at 33% in the polls.

The key political question, therefore, isn't just winning or retaining working class votes and support but transforming these into political influence and organisation. On this issue, Miliband writes: "Disconnection from voters, including our working-class base, is not just a product of policy error, it is the result of the hollowing out of the movement and party. The relationship with the trade union movement need to be built from the ground up."

But this is not clear-cut call for renewing and expanding party democracy. Miliband says merely that Labour needs to "make the most" of the union link. Miliband is enamoured with the organising methods of the Obama campaign. Some of these methods are already being employed by the various campaign teams.

However, the Obama model and the community organising models in the US on which they are based, all appear to be ephemeral, completely divorced from the logic and politics of actual class struggle. Much of the "Yes We Can" movement built during the US presidential election has vanished.

Exactly what Ed Miliband would do as Labour leader, what deal he's already struck with trade union leaders (Unison, GMB, and Unite are backing him) or indeed with his older brother remains to be seen. If, as seems likely, his version of "working class representation" is rooted in unrepresentative focus groups, short-term mobilisation and classless "movement building" then the real issues facing our class will not be addressed. We should be ready to push for much more than "soothing words".

# New committees and small victories

## Tower Hamlets

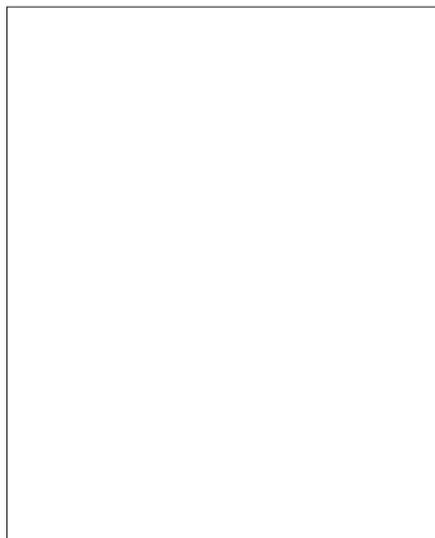
Trade union activists have begun building community and workplace opposition to Academies in the borough as part of the Tower Hamlets Anti-Cuts Coalition.

Unlike neighbouring borough Hackney, Tower Hamlets has never been receptive to Academies (partially because of the strength of union organisation in the borough's schools). Now, under the Tory scheme which allows any school to apply for Academy status, some Tower Hamlets heads are seeing pound signs. Old Ford and Mulberry primary schools have both expressed an interest in applying for Academy status. The financial incentives are, however, negligible; the real motivation behind the proliferation of Academies is to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-expelled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatism of some of the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise petitioning and leafleting on the estates around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet head about the school's plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors' decision to begin the process in the middle of the summer holidays. The response was almost entirely positive, with some residents expressing an interest in getting involved with ongoing campaigning. Activity will continue over the coming weeks and anyone interested in getting involved should contact Laura on 07971842027.

## Hackney

Hackney Alliance to Defend Public Services (HATDPS) was set up on 14 July following a call from Hackney Trade Union Council to all those involved in the public sector, both as workers and as users, to meet in the



The fight against the government's programme of new Academies cannot wait

week after the 50 day budget was announced.

HATDPS is supported by a wide range of elected representatives of Hackney trade unions and community groups including Hackney Unison in health and local government, Hackney PCS, Kurdish/Turkish community groups Day Mer and Gik Der. There have been over 120 delegates at the four organising meetings we have so far held. The meetings are fortnightly and have been somewhat bureaucratic as it has taken time to decide on the organisation's structure and how decisions are made. A constitution based on the one used for Save the Wittington Hospital campaign has been accepted and six joint officers (treasurers, secretaries, chairs) voted in for the first three months. Sub groups have been established for housing, community, education, health, environment, publicity and a decision made for more trade unionists to get involved in the council. A bulletin was written by the time of the second meeting and thousands of copies have been distributed in work places

and community centres and given out door to door.

We are having a public launch meeting on (provisionally) Thursday 23 September, at the Round Chapel, and the HATDPS meeting has agreed to ask Diane Abbott to speak against cuts at this meeting. The local meetings will hopefully grow if we keep up the focus on distributing bulletins and setting up stalls. There are some interesting debates taking place about our attitude to Labour councillors, some members believe we need to be welcoming and inclusive, others believe that these people need to put on the spot and asked to refuse to implement the cuts.

The next open meeting will be held in the Moth Club, Hackney, Tuesday 24 August at 7pm.

[hackneyalliance.wordpress.com](http://hackneyalliance.wordpress.com)

## Barnet

Barnet's senior Tory councillors recently pushed through a big hike in their allowances — the Leader's allowances rose by £20k and Cabinet members doubled their allowances from £17k to £34k. They did not expect much opposition, but in a council that has imposed a pay freeze, and plans to outsource the vast bulk of services, the news has caused uproar.

The local paper, responding to popular feeling, has run a "Reject the Rise" petition; the papers have been filled with letters from residents objecting to what they see as the Tory regime's arrogance and hypocrisy; the trades council has organised a lobby of the council on 14 September. Conservative central office responded with pressure on the council to change their minds, and finally pushed a new councillor, Mark Shooter, a hedge fund manager, to challenge for leadership of the Tory group. The Tories' meeting is on 7 September.

In this febrile atmosphere, the Leader Lynne Hillan has backed down and is reversing the rise, in an attempt to save her own skin. But she knows she has much bigger fish to fry with the privati-

sation programme she wants to push through. The problem for her is that the wide and politically multifarious opposition has scented blood. All manner of small campaigns have taken heart from this climbdown by the Tories, forced by popular protest. Suddenly, the papers, local and national, are filled with the story of Edward Meakins, an 83-year-old man, now living alone, who is going to be moved from the three-bedroom house he has shared with his family since childhood into a flat, because Barnet's waiting list for family homes is so long.

The trades council is linking support for Mr Meakins with a call for more houses to be built: support Mr Meakins! Build homes for all!

## Oxford

It appears that local government job will be first on the chopping block in Oxford.

A number of building and refurbishment contracts — which were already signed — have been cancelled, including the refurbishment of a school and the building of a play-park in Barton, one of Oxford's most economically-deprived areas. Workers at the John Radcliffe Hospital report that management has been told to find £100,000 of saving from each ward, making a mockery of the Tories' paper-thin commitment to "ring-fence" funding for the NHS to protect it from cuts.

An Oxford Save Our Services campaign has been formed, mainly on the initiative of independent activists. It works closely with the existing Trades Council and aims to help both service users and workers in effected areas find a voice in order to develop a collective opposition to the cuts. It will hold a "Mapping Oxford's Cuts" meeting on September 13 to look at both the scale and effect of cuts in the area, and will coordinate joint direct action with the Trades Council on the TUC-called "Day of Action" on October 20. For more info, email [nocutsoxford@gmail.com](mailto:nocutsoxford@gmail.com)

# Huntingdon Trades Council: fighting Tories, bullying bosses and detention centre profiteers

Steve Sweeney of Huntingdon Trades Council spoke to Solidarity about the local campaign against the privatisation of Hitchenbrook hospital

## What shape has the campaign taken?

It's being run by the Huntingdon Trades Council for the most part. We had a demonstration on 10 July.

We speak to a lot of workers at the hospital and they're quite frightened of speaking out for fear of reprisals. We're running a people's ballot and petitioning around Huntingdon and St Ives.

## What is the people's ballot?

We just take a ballot box into a public place and ask people to vote on whether or not they want the hospital to remain public. We're holding a people's ballot because there is no democracy or transparency in the process. They've held consultations, but they are holding them at difficult times and places so people who are in work can't get there.

## How is building the trades council going?

Things are moving quite well now. There have been a few attempts to rejuvenate the trades council over the last few years. There are a lot of things going on: a strike threatened by the FBU at Hitchenbrook Fire Station control room; threatened Academies; and the hospital privatisation. That is all feeding into the trades council.

We're running a meeting on 30 September with the FBU, Hands Off Hitchenbrook and the Anti-Academies Alliance. We're a supporting branch of the Cambridgeshire Against the Cuts campaign. There are £82 million of cuts happening in Cambridge. We've had a day of workshops and we have held protests at the budget and against cuts in library services in Arbury.

## Who controls the council?

It's Tory-Liberal — they're aggressive

against unions. They've cut facility time by 50% for the County Council Unison branch. We've challenged that. Cuts are mounting up and being pushed through: to adult social care and elderly care; to libraries; to all sorts of front line services — all with no consultation.

## Have you had any successes yet?

The cuts have just started to happen — nothing has actually gone yet, so we're still able to campaign against these things before they arrive.

SERCO is bidding to take over the hospital, and it is well known that they make money out of the misery and oppression in Yarl's Wood; where we know that healthcare standards are poor and cases of people being refused access to healthcare are widespread. Why would you want people like that near a hospital?

The idea of the franchise is being sold off the back of a £40million debt which is the result of the creation of the internal market there. But it's looking like in

the course of the privatisation this debt will simply have to be written off by the government. The point, I think, is not making money, but paving the way for the deliberate break-up of the NHS.

## What lessons have you learned?

People are opposed to cuts, people are aware of the politics behind the cuts, they know that they are not a necessity and they will hit the poor the most and benefit the rich. People are coming up to us who were Lib Dem voters and say they'll never vote for them again.

It's been interesting in terms of organising. People are so accustomed to things happening that they don't have a say in that they're consigned to defeat. But there is a new wave of people coming in that are angry and prepared to fight. From a trade unionist point of view the union machines make things quite frustrating. We're looking to the TUC for leadership and it's lacking.

## SCOTLAND

# No to social partnership: fight the Review!

BY DALE STREET

**A**t the end of July the "Independent Budget Review" (IBR) – set up by the SNP minority government as part of its deal with the Scottish Tories to secure their support for this year's government budget – published its findings.

The Review was carried out by Crawford Beveridge (former Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise and also a former Vice-Executive-President of Sun Microsystems), Robert Wilson (a partner in Deloitte Consulting in Edinburgh) and Sir Neil McIntosh (former Chief Executive of Strathclyde Regional Council).

Speaking at the launch of the Review, Scottish government Finance Secretary John Swinney claimed that the three men would "bring a wealth of public and private sector expertise to the Review."

But the Review's findings and recommendations, which will "inform" public and parliamentary debates in advance of this autumn's Comprehensive Spending Review, demonstrate that what they actually brought was years of experience of attacking jobs, wages and services.

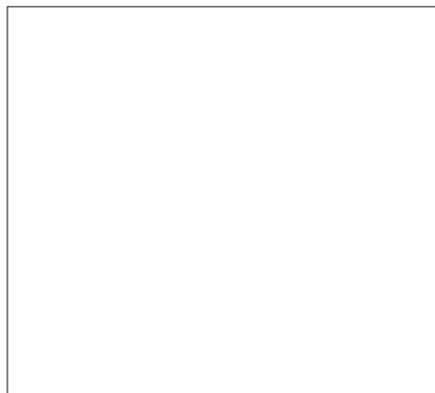
According to the Review, cuts of £2 billion (7%) need to be made in next year's Scottish budget alone. Annual cuts amounting to £3.7 billions (12.5%) need to be made by 2015. Over the next 16 years, says the Review, £42 billion worth of cuts have to be implemented.

By 2015, according to the Review, up to 50,000 jobs will need to be axed (amounting to every tenth job in the public sector workforce in Scotland). Alternatively, "only" 29,000 jobs would need to be cut if a more vicious pay "restraint" policy was adopted.

The Review proposes an immediate recruitment freeze in the public sector and a two-year pay freeze from the 2011/2012 financial year. Unlike in England, there would not necessarily be an exemption for employees on less than £21,500 a year: a total pay freeze would reduce the number of jobs which "need" to be axed.

This pay freeze would be followed by another two years of pay "restraint", with rises limited to between 2% and 3.1% a year. The SNP government's council tax freeze should be scrapped, according to the Review, on the grounds that it is not "sustainable in the long term". And "changes" (i.e. cuts) in public sector pensions are "essential and almost certainly unavoidable".

The private and voluntary sector should play a greater role in delivering service traditionally provided by local



STUC has called a demo for 23 October

authorities. Since the purpose of the exercise is to save money, this can only mean lower-quality services being provided by lower-paid employees (i.e. an intensification of what has already been underway for years).

The government's "recycling of efficiency" programme, which supposedly allows savings made out of efficiencies to be reinvested in the public sector, should also be scrapped. Instead, "efficiency savings" would (supposedly) cushion the impact of cuts in budget allocations.

The Review proposes a wide-ranging cull of public services, including the "flagship" policies of the SNP government, and the creation of another review to look in more detail specifically into cuts in all free universal services.

In order to point any subsequent review in the right direction, the IBR suggests: raising the age limit for concessionary travel from 60 to 65, or restricting the entitlement to free travel to non-rush-hour periods; postponing plans to scrap all prescription charges; scrapping free personal care for the elderly; and reintroducing tuition fees or a graduate tax for students.

Other proposals put forward by the Review for further consideration include: scrapping plans to end tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges; the introduction of road-charging; the effective privatisation of Scottish Water; and a more prominent role for the Scottish Futures Trust (the SNP's equivalent of PFI) and for private borrowing by the government.

In order to avoid the kind of social explosions which have occurred in Greece – of which the Review's members are, in their own words, "cognisant" – the Review urges politicians from all parties to work together in a spirit of consensus, jointly deciding on and sharing responsibility for the cuts.

The SNP has promised to "give con-

sideration" to the Review's findings, whilst also promising not to make any cuts in NHS spending. But given that the SNP shares the Review's starting point (i.e. that cuts are inevitable), ring-fencing NHS spending will only mean even more savage cutbacks in local authority spending.

In turn, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has denounced the SNP for promising to protect NHS spending on the grounds that it will mean that local authority budgets will suffer "disproportionate" cuts. In other words: Cut NHS spending in tandem with local authority spending!

Labour has sidestepped the Review's findings by attacking the SNP for cuts which they have already made in previous years. (Labour is odds-on to win an absolute majority in next year's Holyrood elections. They can hardly denounce the cuts proposed by the Review when, in the absence of a campaign which forces them to do otherwise, they could find themselves in charge of implementing the cuts in a matter of months.)

But the most bland response of all to

the Review has come from the Scottish TUC:

"Whilst the STUC would not wish in any way to challenge the goodwill or integrity of members of this review panel, it is a source of real frustration that bodies established to provide views on, or help to manage, the Scottish economy are increasingly drawn from a very narrow section of society, one largely insulated from the impact of job and spending cuts."

The Review is proposing an across-the-board onslaught on public sector pay, public sector jobs, and public sector services. But the STUC, notwithstanding all its frustrations, is at pains to emphasise the goodwill and integrity of the Review's members!

In terms of organising a campaign against the kind of cuts being proposed by the Review, Unison (which condemned outright the Review's proposals) is holding an open-to-all "Strategy Conference" in Glasgow on 4 September and the STUC has called a demonstration in Edinburgh for 23 October (although the details have yet to appear on the STUC's website).

## Lambeth One O'Clock Clubs Victory

**O**ne of the UNISON activists involved in the successful campaign against the sacking of all of the London Borough of Lambeth's One O'Clock Club workers spoke to *Solidarity*.

"We feel we've won the first battle! It was the first victory because of the nature of what they were trying to do – these cuts were not budget-led. In fact the new set up would have cost more. The council had been planning this attack for some time, and after the election they jumped on the Lib-Con government's bandwagon.

"The council's arguments were totally implausible. They claimed they were replacing unqualified people with better qualified staff... In that case, why not use the existing procedures? Management just ended up looking stupid. It was clear they wanted to attack the union and attack the service we run.

"What we've shown is that if you stick together and fight, and get the support from the wider public, you can win. We can go on from here to fight all

the cuts."

Ana-Marie McFarlane, a parent who uses the One O'Clock Club in Norwood and has been active in the campaign, also spoke to us.

"As a parent and service-user, I was appalled at the underhandedness of how they went about things and at the proposals themselves. As a result, I became quite active in the campaign, as did many other parents. We've got a Facebook group with over a hundred and thirty members, we did petitioning, we lobbied the council.

"I was surprised to win so soon, as we really seemed to be up against the odds. When we lobbied the council we were supposed to given a slot to speak twice, but both times it was left off the agenda. They were very obstructive: we might as well have been issued with gags!

"We've got what we want, but I get the feeling it's only interim – they say they're going to review it, and what I feel is they'll come back with something more watertight. This time there were all kinds of questions they couldn't answer, like the opening times of the new service, and why the unions were not consulted.

"Then there's the broader issues of cuts. I don't know how services will cope with 25

percent cuts. It will affect the life of every young person."

## IN BRIEF

### Social services

**C**hild protection services have been hit by significant cuts in key budget areas.

Social workers tasked with bringing vulnerable and at-risk children into care – re-housing, clothing and feeding them – have already been hit. In Plymouth, a number of individual budgets have been slashed, including a 75% cut in funds used to buy new clothes, bedding and other necessities. The immediate consequences of these cuts equate to a major attack on the

poorest, most vulnerable and abused young people in society. Such cuts are a clear indictment of this Tory-Liberal government and show that the vulnerable will suffer first in their economic onslaught.

### Connexions

**T**he future of the Connexions youth advice service, which provides help and information for young people from 16-25, is under question in a number of areas.

The entire Connexions operation in Northamptonshire – a privately run, state-funded body – is to be wound up. This not only means the redundancies of all Personal Advisors but a sig-

nificant re-modelling of advice services in the area. Under New Labour, a plethora of alternative education and training routes – of varying quality, it must be said – emerged. These will largely be phased out or scrapped and along with expected reductions in funding for youth projects, advice agencies and similar bodies, the role of Connexions will change significantly.

Again, the Tory-Liberal's are making clear that young people are bottom of the list of priorities. All those currently employed by Connexions will be asked to re-apply for roles in a new school-based agency, on much reduced terms and conditions.

### Wealth advice library

**T**he scrapping of Nottinghamshire's NHS Primary Care Trust has had a number of knock-on effects.

One of the first parts of the Trust to be significantly down-graded is the health information and advice resource. Built up over nearly twenty years, this library of printed and electronic data provides an invaluable resource with information and help on a variety of topics. All staff at the library bar one have been issued with redundancy notices, bringing into question the future role of the resource.

## INTERVIEW: CAMPAIGN AGAINST PRISON SLAVERY

# “Prisons are for protecting the rich”

With proposed government privatisation within the British prison service, and with prison officers taking illegal strike action in recent years, issues of what attitude socialists should take to incarceration and capitalist “justice” have come to the fore. Daniel Randall discussed some of these issues with Joe Black of the Campaign Against Prison Slavery, an activist group fighting for prisoners’ rights from an “abolitionist” perspective. This is an edited version of the interview. The full version is at [www.workersliberty.org/node/14838](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14838).

**DR:** What are the aims of your campaign? How do you organise?

**JB:** CAPS was formed in 2002 by ex-prisoners, prisoners’ families and a number of groups involved in prisoner support and solidarity. We campaign against forced labour in prisons generally and the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (IEPS) in particular, the system of rewards and punishments, brought in in the aftermath of the Strangeways prisoner rebellion and the Woolf Report inquiry into it, a system designed to ensure control over and the compliance of the prison population.

Our focus then changed to challenging the firms like Aramark that were directly involved in the exploitation of prisoner labour. The high street hardware shop chain Wilkinsons was chosen as a high profile target, with regular pickets and leafleting outside stores.

**DR:** You see yourself as “abolitionist”... Some people would argue that fighting for reforms around the specific issue of prison slavery cedes ground to the idea that prisons should exist, just operate more humanely/“fairly”. (I don’t agree with this argument myself or think it’s implied by your campaign; I’m playing “devil’s advocate”.) What are your thoughts?

**JB:** CAPS has always argued its case from an explicitly abolitionist standpoint, its supporters have been largely drawn from anti-prison groups and it has mainly worked with abolitionist organisations like No More Prison and CoRe (Communities of Resistance). We of course have had links with prison reform organisations such as the Prison Reform Trust and the Association of Members of Independent Monitoring

Boards, some no doubt because we challenge their positions and reformist organisations always seek to co-opt that which they find challenging.

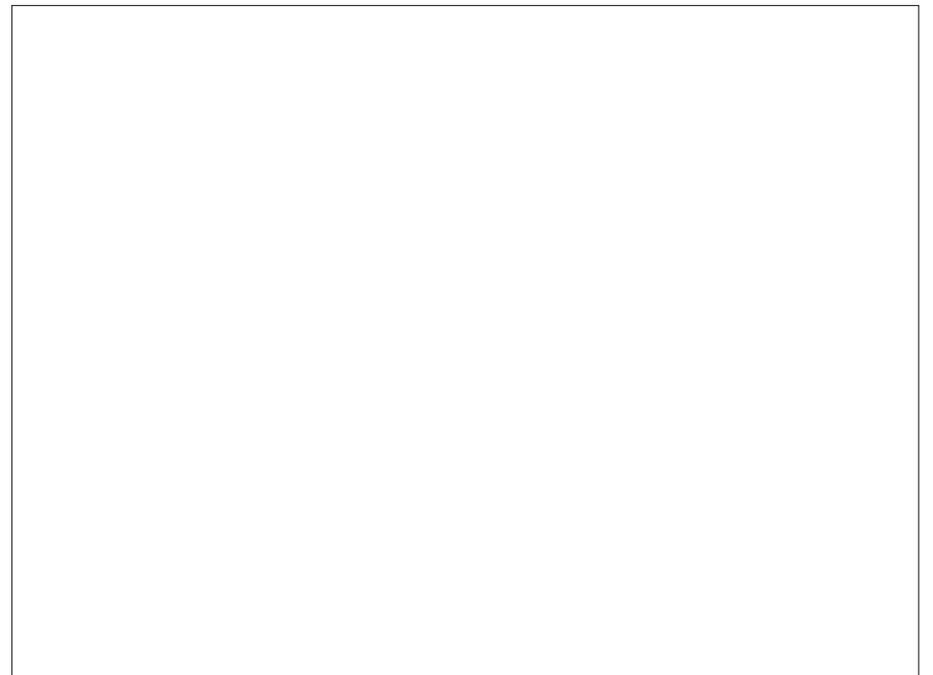
**DR:** It’s clear that there are some anti-capitalist implications to a lot of your arguments; do you think prison abolition is something achievable under capitalism or will it only be possible to eradicate prisons in a post-capitalist society? If the former, what immediate alternative to prisons do you advocate?

**JB:** Crime is essentially a product of capital and the majority of laws ultimately seek to maintain social inequalities, protecting the wealthy and privileged from those who might try to take away their ill-gotten gains. The vast majority of people in prison have always been from the working class and the rich and powerful rarely enter its gates. Therefore it is logical to assume that the abolition of prison is only possible in a post-capitalist society.

Which brings us to the classic question, “What about murder in a post-capitalist society?” There will always be accidental injuries and deaths caused by individuals, just as there will always be conflicts between individuals and, to a lesser extent, groups but surely in a truly healthy post-capitalist society there will be ways to de-escalate such conflicts and prevent potential unwanted outcomes. And in a world without societal inequalities, a world without need, there will be no need to find illicit ways to acquire capital.

**DR:** There’s some debate on the radical left and within the workers’ movement about whether prison officers — whose union has been relatively militant recently and has been led by people who identify very explicitly as socialists (its previous general secretary was a member of a revolutionary group!) — are workers or part of the armed machinery of the state in the same way that police and soldiers are. What’s your view on this?

**JB:** Prisons, as I’ve already stated, are by and large used as a weapon to keep the working class compliant, to protect the rich and help maintain the structural inequalities in our society; to keep a lid on the fermenting unrest within it. And prison officers are an essential part of the



Wakefield Prison. The vast majority of people in prison are working-class

machinery that keeps prisons functioning.

That they and most of the rest of the workers’ movement look upon them as being “workers in uniform” is delusional to say the least. They are obviously a “part of the armed machinery of the state”, and in that, effectively an enemy of the working class. The POA certainly want to lock as many people up as possible to maintain and extend their membership.

**DR:** What do you think are the implications of the government’s current policy on prisons and imprisonment? What demands should activists be fighting for in response?

**JB:** The prison system is in crisis and has been for decades. Now there’s a need to find 25% “savings” in the £2.2 billion HMPS budget. How they are going to find the savings is anyone’s guess. One thing that is sure, with staff costs amounting to 80% of the whole budget, POA members are going to be directly in the firing line.

Obviously, the idea of not jailing people on shorter sentences could save some money. NAPO, the National Association

of Probation Officers, have claimed that the government could save £350 million if they were to end sentences of six months or less but would then need £50-60 million to recruit the necessary probation officers to supervise the replacement community sentences. Yet the ending of sentences of less than 12 months would also be likely to result in a shift towards longer sentences and a negation of the hoped cut in the prison population.

Clearly the big winners in all this will be the outsourcing firms who stand to profit from what is effectively a massive plan to further privatise the criminal justice industry.

This I think is the big threat; the slippery slope towards an ever more American-style Prison Industrial Complex and that people should definitely be campaigning against. Not because I think the state should be the body providing these “services” but because private industry should not be profiting from the misery of prisoners in any form.

## The government’s “alternative” to locking up children

BY DANIEL RANDALL

In a show of acquiescence to the “liberal” spirit of their junior coalition partners, the Tories agreed to end the detention of immigrant children in prison-like centres such as Yarl’s Wood.

But given that they have no intention of ending the racist immigration policies which see hundreds of desperate asylum seekers snatched from their homes and expelled from the country, they were confronted with a problem: how to maintain their deportation-happy policies now that they can’t just cart kids off to jail while they fill the plane with fuel?

A leaked briefing paper on

“Alternatives to Detention for Asylum Seeking Families Subject to Removal” gives us an insight. The “idealised process”, to be piloted in north-west England, involves informing families that they will be deported (or “removed”, as the policy wonks euphemistically have it) “at some point in the next two weeks” if they refuse to leave the UK voluntarily. According to the briefing, “it is still undecided [...] whether a specific date and time [for “removal”] will be given, or a longer period of a couple of days, in which they will have to remain in the property ready.”

If the government’s aim was to develop a policy that maintains all the

demeaning and brutal authoritarianism of detention without involving an actual detention centre, then they may accomplish it with this scheme.

The “idealised process” leaves families due for deportation in a state of desperate, terrified flux in which any night’s sleep could be interrupted by a gang of immigration cops at the door, ready to “remove the family from the property” so that they can be “taken to the airport to board the plane.” And, if the government eventually decides that it will provide specific dates for “removal” (rather than “at some point in the next two weeks”), then the family is expected to “remain in the property ready” until that point — in other words, house arrest. In

other words, detention.

Is this policy “better” than the previous approach of industrialised incarceration of immigrants? The racist fundamentals remain the same.

The briefing warns that “lobbying from voluntary groups [...] is common and can also be expected.”

We need to ensure that this policy is fought not only on the basis of case-by-case lobbying to save individuals from deportation, but through a concerted trade-union campaign that asserts the right of workers to have the same freedom of movement across borders that capital does.

FRANCE

# The problem with the burqa ban

BY YVES COLEMAN, NI PATRIE NI FRONTIÈRES

**M**uch has been said about the proposed law on banning the burqa in France. Partly prepared by a Communist Party MP, André Gérin, who chaired a multi-party parliamentary commission for several months, it will be voted in September.

These are some of the explanations: President Sarkozy is dramatically losing ground in the polls; he wants to keep seducing the voters of the National Front; the French economy has serious problems so the UMP (the main governmental party) is looking for a diversion; the government wants to justify French military intervention in Afghanistan; salafists<sup>1</sup> are trying to infiltrate the working-class districts populated by a majority of Muslim immigrants and French Muslim citizens with North African or African descent; this new law is the continuation of the vicious debate about national identity launched by the UMP; among the 2,000 women who supposedly wear the burqa in France, one can count many young, newly-converted, French women who behave like the members of a sect and don't represent the "average Muslim" woman, etc. etc.

Probably all of these explanations have a bit of truth, but none of them explains the disarray of the left and far-left in the face of this issue, presented by the French government as a "feminist" law.

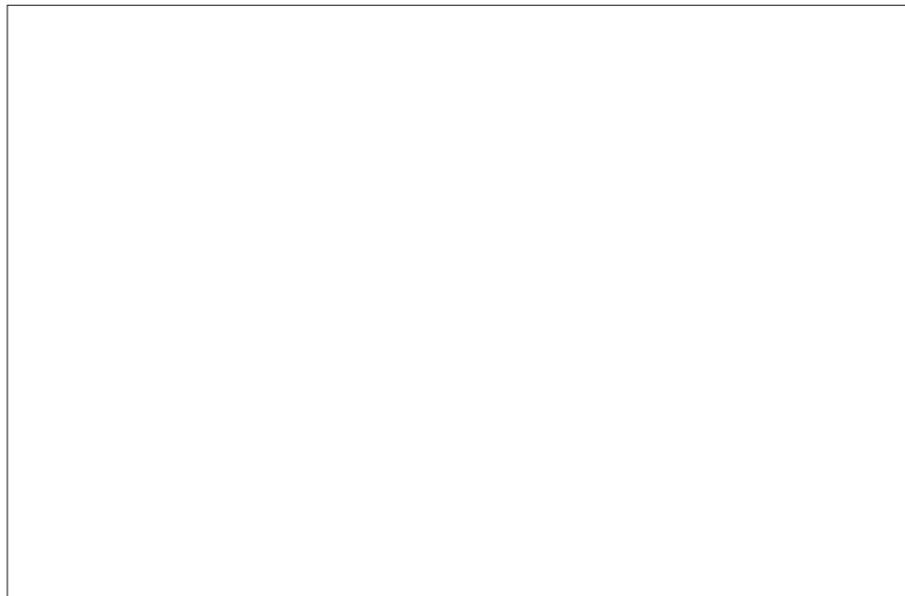
If we consider the two main parties of the reformist left, we can observe a division in their ranks. The Communist Party deputies officially will abstain, but at least André Gérin will vote for it. The Socialist Party wanted to present a different law to unite all parties, but it will finally abstain, even if several "socialist" MPs have already announced they may vote for the UMP law.

As regards the three main far-left groups, the Trotskyist Lutte Ouvrière (Workers' Fight), after having apparently taken a position less critical towards the law, seems to have slightly changed its line and to now denounce the government's manoeuvre while at the same time supporting the "struggle" of the phony Ni Putes, Ni Soumises<sup>2</sup>.

The NPA<sup>3</sup> has published two press releases to denounce the law, but has not engaged a national campaign against "Islamophobia", to the great disappointment of its pro-SWP or anti-Islamophobia militants.

The POI (Independent Workers' Party, heir of the "Lambertist" OCI-PT) has taken a position against the law, underlining, like all its opponents, that this law will oblige women wearing burqas to stay at home, but the denunciation of the future law does not seem central in its press, as they devote their energy to attacking the government's policy about pensions and company closures.

The fact that the reformist left is unable to take an active and united position against the anti-burqa law shows at least the tactical talent of Sarkozy for his (very probable) next presidential campaign. For the last three years, he has been able to use the divisions on the left, its ambiguities towards French nationalism and institutional racism, its unwillingness to defend a critical position towards all religions (including Islam), and its dramatically declining militancy



**The left has not been able to understand and therefore adequately counter Sarkozy's tactics as French President**

in working class districts.

The reformist left has only been able to raise the rather abstract banner of anti-racism, which does not differentiate it from the main right and centre parties, even if some members of the political elite regularly express some form of (unconscious?) racism towards North Africans, Africans, Romas, etc. The far left has talked in a very general way of feminism and women's rights but its presence in working class districts is too weak and too discrete to make the difference.

**When some left-Republicans, feminists, Gaullists, extreme right wingers and fascist militants tried to organize together, on 18 June 2010, a "wine and sausage party" against Muslims in the 18th district of Paris<sup>4</sup>, all the local left and far left militants met and distributed a leaflet.**

As could be expected with such a broad coalition, it only denounced "racism" and "fascism" in a very abstract way, without being able to mobilise the inhabitants of this district against this xenophobic demonstration — which was finally banned by the authorities and took place instead on the Champs Elysees without being disturbed by any protester!

The problem posed by the burqa law is linked to two difficulties.

The first difficulty is in understanding Sarkozy's tactics and strategy (the French President would be probably at pains to explain the coherence of his own policy!). The far left often presents Sarkozy as an evil "neoliberal" who wants to privatise all public services, and even sometimes as a copy of the National Front, an heir of Marshal Pétain who collaborated with the Germans when Hitler's soldiers occupied France during the Second World War.

It's quite obvious Sarkozy is not a friend of the working class, and that he is going to reduce a good part of the services "offered" by the welfare state. But his political strength is to play on the Gaullist-statist tradition (unanimously praised by the reformist left) and to try to make people think the French state is going to save industry, to save the Euro, to prevent the world economic crisis from touching France — a bit like the

Chernobyl cloud was supposed to avoid crossing French territory and go directly to Italy!

As regards Islam, the left and the far left show the same difficulty and inability to explain and understand the UMP's policy when they denounce its so-called "Islamophobia".

It's a nonsense to call Sarkozy "Islamophobic". This is a man who forced the main tendencies of French Islam to unite in a common organisation (the Consultative Council of Muslim Religion) in order to organise the cooperation between the Minister of Interior and the main Muslim associations; who has decided that the French state will finance the secular training of 50 imams every year at... the Catholic Institute of Paris; who took with him to Iraq the leaders of the main French Muslim associations, so that they could send a religious message to the kidnappers when a French journalist was held hostage for months, etc.

In the same vein, the left and far left have denounced André Gérin as "Islamophobic" while this Stalinist MP (re-elected three times since 1985 and a member of the Communist Party Central Committee until 2000) has been cooperating for years in his constituency (Venissieux, a suburb of Lyon) with all Muslim associations, generously helping them, supporting the return to France of several French Muslims detained at Guantanamo, inviting Tariq Ramadan to the parliamentary commission about the anti-burqa law, and referring to all sorts of Muslim religious authorities to prove that the burqa is... anti-Islamic.

The second problem which the left does not want to confront is why Franco-French workers are hostile to the burqa and not indifferent to the hijab in the streets and in classrooms.

It's certainly not because they are more feminist, than, say British or German workers.

But it's probably linked to the fact that the French bourgeois Republic has been built on a very long and intense conflict with the Catholic church. So religion is a very touchy subject, and the development of a recently imported, non-western religion inside France provokes all sorts of xenophobic reactions or at least fear and misunderstanding.

The margin between nationalism,

xenophobia and racism is quite thin, but one should not mix all negative reactions against the hijab or the burqa under the confused and manipulative term of "Islamophobia". One should try to differentiate them, even if one condemns them all as expressions of nasty divisions among the exploited.

As a militant in a network supporting migrants in their fight to get legalised, I can testify that French workers, even when they express negative comments about Muslim "ostensible religious symbols" are at the same time often ready to express their concrete solidarity towards a "Muslim" when he/she is arrested or threatened with deportation from France, at least if they know him/her, if they work in the same company, live in the same district, if their children attend the same school.

In France, both the right and the left are taking a more "multiculturalist" political orientation, which should normally lead to a change in the 1905 law regulating the relationships between the State and the "cults", i.e. religions. This legal change would probably have negative effects and give more power to religious authorities over their respective sheep.

But even if there are a lot of debates about a more "open" form of "laïcité" (often translated in English as secularism, although it has a different meaning in French), no important political party is ready to call for a referendum about the place of religions in France today or to seriously launch a national debate about this subject.

This is why this debate is both permanent (sometimes in tiny intellectual circles, sometimes in the mass media) and never finished. Obviously it's manipulated by all political parties but it touches identity problems for which the far left (or the left) has no quick-and-easy answers.

Calling for "workers' solidarity" or "equal rights for men and women, nationals and foreigners", when unemployment grows dramatically, when new populist and fascist parties are defending secularism and the gains of the Enlightenment, is not enough. One has to propose another general perspective, an alternative to the dog-eat-dog cult of individualism which is central to modern capitalism. This radically new vision is tragically missing among "revolutionary" groups.

#### Notes:

1. Muslim fundamentalists are supposed to represent anything from 5,000 to 50,000 people of the four million Muslims living in France, of whom two million are French-born and 2 million are immigrants.

2. Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a small group initiated by the Socialist Party and which was supposed to defend women's rights in working-class districts, but is actually not very active and whose former leader — Fadela Amara — has agreed to participate to Sarkozy's government...

3. The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) is a new larger group formed by the Trotskyist LCR which dissolved itself and has an even looser policy than its predecessor.

4. The 18th district is a working class area hosting a high proportion of foreigners, and also Muslims who are obliged to pray in the street because their mosque is too small.

## ISRAEL/PALESTINE

## PA elections cancelled

In June the cabinet of the Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad, who runs the Palestinian West Bank, cancelled the municipal elections. This was the third scheduled election the PA has annulled in the last year. The cancellation is despite recent polls showing the secular Fatah at 45% and Islamist Hamas 26%.

Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas won the January 2005 presidential ballot in the Palestinian Territories with 62% of the vote. In January 2006 Hamas won the Palestinian Legislative Council election, winning 74 of 112 seats.

In February 2007, Hamas and Fatah leaders reached an accord which set the guidelines for a power-sharing Palestinian administration. In June 2007, amid a wave of violent clashes between Hamas and Fatah, Hamas grabbed control of Gaza. Abbas issued a decree to form a 12-member emergency government based in the West Bank and expelled Hamas from the administration. Salam Fayyad was appointed as prime minister by Abbas, and Fayyad has been ruling by decree for the last three years.

US and EU officials are wary of Egyptian moves to reunite Gaza and the West Bank. The *Economist* quotes an EU official saying: "The last thing many in Europe want is for Hamas to regain an executive role in the West Bank. We prefer division and no elections to reconciliation and elections."

## Come on our solidarity delegation!

The AWL intends to organise a solidarity delegation to Israel and Palestine in the second half of November 2010.

We want to promote the "other" Palestine and the "other" Israel — the people who do not get into the news, from Palestinian women and queer activists to Israel's refuser movement and radical working-class organisations on both sides of the divide. Here are the basic elements of a "third camp" which can champion Palestinian liberation on the basis of unity and reconciliation between the two peoples. These forces are weak, and that is why they need our solidarity.

Last year, we brought Tamar Katz — a 19 year old military refuser recently released from prison — to the UK for a speaker tour. Tamar spoke to hundreds of people in cities, union branches and universities across the country. Now we are organising a delegation to visit Israel and Palestine, to make direct links and solidarity.

If you want to come with us get in touch. (You don't have to agree with every detail of our policy on Israel-Palestine to take part.) We will be staying mainly with activists in Israel and the West Bank, and estimate the total cost of being on the delegation will be £400 — sponsorship from a union branch, student organisation or campaigning group is recommended.

• For more info, email us Heather at [centre\\_stage\\_red@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:centre_stage_red@yahoo.co.uk) or ring 020 7207 0706

## AUSTRALIA

# Union weakness gives Abbott his chance

BY MARTIN THOMAS

**A**ustralia's federal election on 21 August shows a strange picture. The Liberal leader, Tony Abbott, is a Catholic, a monarchist, anti-abortion, anti-gay, an old-fashioned male chauvinist, disdainful of the rights of indigenous Australians, someone who believes that climate change "is crap" and therefore it's fine to be reckless about trashing the environment.

He makes an outcry about "reducing government debt" (code-word for cutting social provision) when Australia, almost alone of the world's richer countries, has absolutely no government debt "problem".

He was one of the architects of the anti-union legislation of the Howard administration (1996-2007), and has spoken of reintroducing a modified version of Howard's "WorkChoices".

He campaigns on a strident anti-refugee platform: "My message to voters from now until polling day will be that if you want to stop the boats you have to change the government".

None of his right-wing stances are particularly popular, except possibly the anti-refugee one.

Yet Abbott has finessed the problem by adopting a "small target" tactic (on the model of Labor's tactic after its eviction from government in 1996, after a long period of office), and, unlike Labor then, he has done it with success.

He has shelved almost all his sharp right-wing policies, saying either that he has changed his mind or that the issue is not immediate. The differences between his announced plans and current government policies have become mere shadings. He has campaigned mostly on "exposures" of real and alleged bits of mismanagement by the Labor government in its "economic stimulus" programme at the peak of the global financial crisis (subsidies for house insulation, school rebuilding).

Abbott could possibly win. If Labor wins, it will be with a smaller majority.

Weaknesses in the labour movement have allowed Abbott's success.

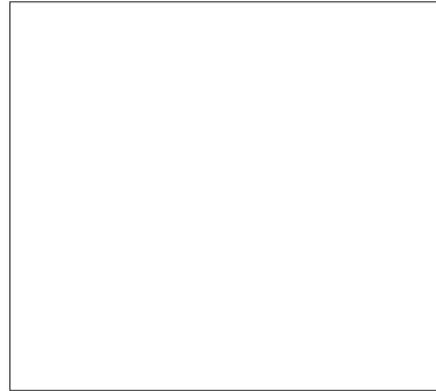
In November 2007 the Liberal-National coalition, long in office, which had done great damage to the Australian working class, was finally voted out.

What brought it down, more than anything else, was its drastic industrial legislation which aimed gradually to shift the entire Australian workforce from regulation by collectively-negotiated and legally-enforceable awards to individual contracts. They also set up a special industrial police, the ABCC, for the construction industry, and made trade unionists liable to fines or jail for such things as insisting on a right to silence when summoned to be questioned by the ABCC about their union comrades' activities.

Australia's unions launched a big and well-organised campaign against the laws, and formulated a good, radical set of demands which they said they'd fight to get a Labor government to implement.

Labor came to office in November 2007 committed to repeal anti-union legislation; to take action on carbon emissions; to run at least a slightly more humane asylum and immigration policy; and to make an official apology to the "stolen generations" of indigenous Australians.

The new Labor government immedi-



Tony Abbott

ately faced a global financial crisis. But Australia was able to come through the crisis as the only one of the world's richer countries not to have an outright recession, and not to run up a big government debt. That was due more to the vast pump-priming investment spending of the Chinese government than to anything the Australian government did. Nevertheless, it happened, and on the Labor government's watch.

After the global crisis had abated, the Labor government moved to recoup the costs of its economic stimulus spending by taxing the mining companies which had made huge profits from a pumped-up Chinese market.

The mining companies and the media launched a huge campaign against the Labor government, accusing it of threatening jobs.

The shocking thing is that the labour movement has been incapable of countering that campaign.

On the back of that campaign, Labor ousted Kevin Rudd on 24 June and put in Julia Gillard as leader.

The operation was largely run by unions, especially the AWU. The official left in the union movement applauded it.

Gillard was backed by the unions and came from an ALP left background.

In fact, the Labor leadership change was a shift to the right, not the left. Gillard followed up by making concessions to the mining companies to get a deal. She signalled a more restrictive policy on immigration. Rudd had welcomed large-scale immigration, saying that he "believed in a big Australia". Gillard declared on 27 June: "I don't believe in a big Australia."

The leadership switch was followed by Labor rising in the opinion polls, but, that rise quickly disappeared.

The fundamental weakness giving Abbott his chance is the lack of political ambition of the unions (including the "left" unions) and the ALP's official "left" wing.

Industrial action has been at a low level. Strike-days are down to about 30,000 a quarter, compared to about 100,000 in 2004, and about 200,000 at the turn of the century.

Labor has repealed the Liberals' attacks only in a very limited way, but the unions have toned down their demands enormously since Labor took office. The unions have about 50% of the vote in every state conference of the ALP, and thus about a 50% say in the federal conference, but even the left unions have done nothing to use that vote to push the earlier demands.

The union leaders drown almost all other considerations under cries about preventing a Liberal return to office.

For example in New South Wales a

strong union campaign against electricity privatisation forced right-wing Labor premier Morris Iemma to resign in favour of a Labor "leftist", Nathan Rees, in September 2008. Rees then introduced a revised version of privatisation, and the unions subsided. In December 2009 Rees was ousted by another Labor right-winger, Kristina Keneally, and she looks likely to be ousted by the Liberals soon. In the latest state opinion polls, Labor in NSW is running at 25% against 46% for the coalition.

Although the economic bad news in Australia since 2007 has been less than in other countries, many voters are apparently more impressed by the badness of the news than by the not-very-comforting thought that it is not as bad as Greece or Latvia or even the USA.

Labor has acted as a manager of capitalism, and a conventional manager at that. Labor governments, federal under both Gillard and Rudd and in the states, have continued thoroughly conventional neo-liberal policies.

And there has been scarcely any voice from the unions demanding anything more. In that situation, disillusion leading to an electoral shift to the right can grow quickly.

The Liberal-National coalition has a natural opinion-poll lead as the best manager of "the economy" (i.e. of capitalism). It had that back in November 2007. It has it again — 47% to 35% — and in the absence of any clear offer from Labor on other issues, that lead is weighty.

Every union — including the "left" ones and also including many which are not Labor-affiliated — is backing Labor without making any demands on Labor.

The only prominent trade unionist taking a different line is Dean Mighell of the ETU in Victoria, who supports the Greens and has launched a legal battle against donations by his federal union to the ALP.

On 11 February Mighell published a call — in *The Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, not in a labour-movement publication — for unions to disaffiliate from the ALP. But that was the opposite of a call for independent working-class politics.

Mighell cited the USA as a better set-up than Australia. "In the United States, unions largely support the Democrats and their campaigning and finance are critical, though they have no affiliation mechanism. They effectively lobby Republican politicians on many issues and some unions actively support Republican candidates if they believe it is in their members' interests".

In Australia, Mighell claimed that disaffiliation will bring the advantage of a more pro-worker policy from the Liberals and the Nationals.

"By remaining affiliated with the ALP, unions are automatically the enemy of the Liberals and National Party and I seriously question if their stance on trade unions would be as severe if unions were not an intrinsic part of their political rival".

Workers should not back Mighell's line. To vote with the unions — for Labor — still makes sense, if coupled with socialists and activists demanding that the unions start using their power within the Labor structures to push working-class policies.

## FRENCH PENSION REFORM

# Will the fightback start here?

Francois Coustal, from the editorial committee of the New Anticapitalist Party's newspaper *Tout est à nous*, spoke to Ed Maltby about the French government's attempt to simultaneously remove the legal right of French workers to retire at 60, and to force them to pay into their pension funds for a longer period.

**EM: How is the struggle against the pension reforms going?**

**FC:** The next important strike day will be 7 September — a general strike — and we expect it to be well-attended. Everyone is building for it, from the Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party) to the radical left. It is a demonstration against the pensions bill but within that there are nuances of slogans and demands. What will be the next step is a more complicated issue. Furthermore, the pensions bill will be being debated in the National Assembly [lower house of the French parliament] in September.

**EM: What is the strategy of the PS?**

**FC:** The majority of the working class are against the reforms, they are very attached to their right to retire at 60. However not everyone thinks we can maintain the current 40-year pension payment period.

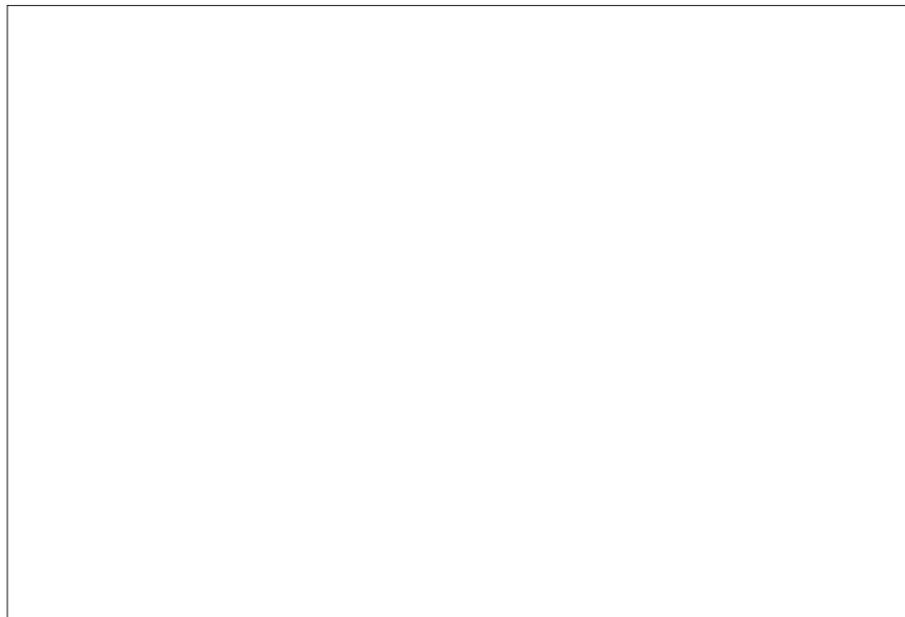
The PS has basically accepted the extension of the pension payment period, but they are formally for the defence of the right to retirement at 60. That is platonic; it does not sit with an extension of the years of payment [cotisations]. But it gives us a fragile framework for a united front. The NPA is for the defence of the 40-year payment period — and we call for it to be shortened to 37 years. The PCF (Stalinist French Communist Party) formally shares our position.

**EM: What is the NPA's strategy?**

**FC:** We want a big mobilisation for 7 September to fight against fatalism; to prove that it is possible to fight against the bill; but we argue for a strategy of escalation. We argue that a big strike day every two months is not sufficient. If the 7th is a success, we will need to follow up rapidly.

**EM: Which sector might go into further action?**

**FC:** The best organised sector in France



is transport. They have the right to retire at 55 years. But they have felt that these reforms will eventually get them, despite their relative advantage. First the private sector, then the public sector, then transport workers will be hit by this reform.

In 1995 the public transport workers had their pensions attacked and they saved them. In 2003, in the struggle over public sector pensions, the transport workers thought they were safe, and they participated in the movement but not so much. And now they understand the idea that even if they are not being directly attacked, they will still be hurt by reform.

The air traffic controllers were mobilised around a struggle against a European directive which attacked their conditions. There is an atmosphere of discontent among them, but not around pensions.

**EM: Has there been any fall in working-class combativity?**

**FC:** If we take the overall figures, it is doubtless that there has been a fall in combativity. But this is has taken place over 20 years. Year on year there is a fall, and then on occasion there are very big movements.

In recent years there have been many small conflicts, often over sackings and very defensive questions. The big movements have been centralised and over

general questions.

There has been little in the way of huge centralised movements beyond the level of a single sector since the big strikes of 2007-8. There have been plenty of isolated local strikes, where we have intervened, but there has been a difficulty creating a common movement. The challenge now is, will there be a big generalised movement over retirement? It is a perspective we are fighting for, but we are not sure.

**EM: How is NPA union activity organised?**

The NPA organises discussion meetings of NPA militants sector-by-sector to exchange ideas; they do not take decisions. There is no common discipline in the sense of having a "union fraction".

We are arguing for discussions in unions about extending the action from 8 September — not just building for 7 September. So, either that a given sector could have continued strike action, or attempting to rapidly call another strike day, faster than the union leadership will want. The idea is to get a movement with credibility.

The NPA has not taken a decision to not have union fractions, but nor have we taken a decision to have them. We have a tradition of respecting the independence of trade unions. It is an old tradition and an old debate on the French

far left, given the weight of revolutionary syndicalism in our militant history.

**EM: Does the NPA contest union elections in an organised way?**

**FC:** In the tradition of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire [Trotskyist group which formed the bulk of the NPA], the idea was to construct union tendencies — not Party tendencies but oppositional tendencies in the unions.

The idea was that these tendencies should aid the projection of the party but not be subordinated to the Party. This is under discussion. The LCR had a body of theory on the subject but the NPA has not necessarily inherited all the baggage of the LCR.

One difference between the LCR and the NPA is that the NPA has militants in all the unions, and the LCR had union members in a certain selection of unions. Also, not all NPA members are in unions, whereas this was necessarily the case in the LCR.

Some people in the NPA raise a left-wing criticism of union membership. This is the subject of a debate which has been going on for two years, not necessarily in a systematic manner.

**EM: What about other ruling-class attacks?**

**FC:** The other big attack is budget austerity, which means cuts in public services. That means cutting jobs above all. This is done on the basis of natural wastage — only one worker is replaced for every two who retire. The two biggest sectors are schools and hospitals. The historically more combative sector is schools, where a strike is being planned for October. But in the hospitals, we don't know exactly where the job cuts are going to fall and staff are more difficult to organise because of that.

There is a sharpening of attacks on immigration. This summer, the major offensive, rather than against Arabs or Africans, has been against Roma. The government uses the police to attack the mobile encampments of Roma, to break them up, force them elsewhere, where they are attacked again. A movement to defend the Roma is being set up.

Often the Roma encampments are in municipalities controlled by the PCF.

## WORKERS OF THE WORLD

BY IRA BERKOVIC

### UKRAINE

**Ukrainian mineworkers employed by Ferrexpo PLC, one of the biggest ore mining companies in the world, have struck against changes to their contracts which would, amongst other attacks, increase their retirement age by 5 years and cut 10 days from their holiday entitlement.**

Ferrexpo is notorious for cutting corners and endangering workers' safety in order to keep profits up; truckers working for the company were told to break the legal speed limit in order to fill quotas on time, and the working day was increased from 8 to 12 hours. The strike's demands include an increase of wages by at least 50% and the lowering of daily

and monthly output quotas to fit the safety requirements and actual human abilities.

• For more information, including information on how to send protest letters to Ferrexpo bosses and solidarity messages to the miners, visit [tinyurl.com/ukraineminers](http://tinyurl.com/ukraineminers)

### BANGLADESH

**Millions of garment workers in Bangladesh, one of the world's centres for sweatshop textile production, have struck against poverty pay.**

Apparel makes up the vast majority of Bangladesh's exports; the country is such an attractive prospect for textile industry bosses because its minimum wage, just 12 cents/hour, is one of the lowest in the world. Although the government has

promised an increase to \$43/month, this is not enough to match recent increases in food prices. Striking workers are demanding an increase to \$72/month.

The response from bosses and security forces has been fierce, with leading union organisers victimised and threatened. One workers' leader, Aminul Islam, was detained and tortured until he signed a statement confessing to "inciting worker unrest."

• For more info, see [tinyurl.com/labourstartbangladesh](http://tinyurl.com/labourstartbangladesh)

### PAKISTAN

**Power loom workers in Faisalabad, one of Pakistan's major industrial cities, have won a huge victory following a massive strike. Many employers refused to enforce new government leg-**

**islation increasing private sector pay by 17%, so when factory bosses missed the deadline for delivering the increase 250,000 workers in Faisalabad walked out.**

Their strike sparked protest actions in Lahore and elsewhere in the country. Following a week-long strike, which saw over 100 workers arrested, bosses eventually caved and delivered the 17% increase. The strike is part of a growing pattern of working-class militancy across Pakistan which will continue to develop as workers assert themselves against ruling-class attempts to keep them at the sharp end of economic, social and environmental crises.

• For more info, see the Labour Party of Pakistan's report at [tinyurl.com/24kwkck](http://tinyurl.com/24kwkck)

# Pat Longman, 1950-2010

Pat Longman, a revolutionary socialist for 44 years and an activist in the Alliance for Workers' Liberty tendency for most of 39 years, died on 2 August 2010, at the age of 59, from chronic liver disease.

Revolutionary politics and organisation are, wrote Trotsky in the Transitional Programme, "carried on on the shoulders" of one "generation" of activists to another.

With Pat's death, we have lost one of the surviving few pairs of shoulders that have carried the programme and the organisation of the AWL tendency through from the 1960s generation to today.

Here we print recollections of Pat and reflections on her political life by three of her comrades. We are conscious that this is but a partial representation — Pat's life involved so many things. And so we invite other comrades and political activists who knew and worked with Pat to write more. We will print any contributions in our next issue. We would also like to gather further contributions

together in time for the memorial meeting to be held for Pat on Saturday 11 September (see page 15).

Unfortunately Pat did not write much although what she wrote was always extremely sharp. We also print here one of her longest articles — a polemic against Sheila Rowbotham's 1979 article "The Women's Movement and Organising for Socialism".

We send our condolences to Pat's daughter Anna and to all Pat's very large range of friends.

In thinking of Pat we recollect the words we had printed on the membership card of our tendency at the time when Pat joined us: "Our dearest possession is life. It is given to us but once, and we must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, we might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world — the fight for the Liberation of Humanity."

## A lifetime of battles

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

"How would it be if salvation were ready to our hand, and could without great labour be found, that it should be by almost all men neglected? But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare." (Spinoza)

**F**or her entire adult life, our friend and comrade Pat was a revolutionary socialist. For nearly all of those thirty nine years, she was a member of one particular socialist tendency which is known today as the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

For Pat and the comrades in the AWL, the "salvation" of which Spinoza wrote is not of the mysterious, 'granted-from-above' variety. "Salvation" for us will be the result of human efforts alone. The fight for socialism was and remains a very "great labour" indeed.

Pat became a socialist in the 1960s. Where others of her generation found their own form of salvation in one way or another, Pat remained committed to the idea that our class — the working class — could through its own efforts re-make the world for the better.

Those who commit themselves for even a time to the

struggles that in part shaped Pat's life are rare enough. That Pat remained active and committed for four decades and more makes her very rare indeed. That she remained in the same organisation makes her rarer still.

I first met Pat eight years ago. It was in a pub behind the International Community Centre in Nottingham. Amongst a host of hot-headed, brash, over-confident and beer-fuelled men (me included) sat a short, thin, very quiet woman drinking orange juice or something similar. I had no idea who she was, apart from the fact that she was a member of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty.

Before we'd descended on the pub, those gathered had been debating what attitude socialists should take to the European Union. I'd spoken on behalf of the Socialist Workers Party — of which I was a member at the time — against a member of the AWL. The discussion got rather heated and became even more heated in the pub.

Little did I know that more than thirty years before this confrontation a twenty year old Pat — already five years in the socialist movement — joined what is now

the Alliance for Workers' Liberty after a similar debate.

If I'd been much less of a hot-head and actually listened to what Pat was saying to me, I'd have spent a good deal of energy doing something much more useful with my time.

For those of us lucky enough to have worked alongside Pat — talking and discussing ideas, planning and learning — it was always clear that in her years in the movement she accumulated a wealth of experience and knowledge. Whether we were discussing the origins and problems of the feminist movement, the occupation of Iraq, why there is no mass working-class party in the United States, the miners' strike, rank and file organisation or the minutiae of New Labour's plans to privatise the NHS by stealth, the clarity of Pat's thinking and the depth of her knowledge never failed.

This knowledge stemmed not just from reading very many books — which Pat did — but from a lifetime of experience in our movement. Pat lived through and participated in the major debates which formed the anti-Stalinist left in the early 1970s. She was active in and played a role in forming a socialist presence in the women's movement of that same decade. Pat was an elected councillor in Islington — as a member of Socialist Organiser inside the Labour Party — in the local government battles against the Tories and conciliators in the early 1980s and as a trade union militant in the major battles in the print industry later that decade.

Later — as an activist in Unison, the National Union of Journalists, anti-privatisation campaigns and the formation of a working class campaign against the BNP in Nottinghamshire — Pat continued to make an important contribution.

Pat's style, personality and temperament meant that when discussing people and ideas we disagreed with — whether from the left or right — the most 'forthright' condemnation that passed her lips was always "they just don't seem to get it!" This phrase was always accompanied by a frown and a shake of the head.

Pat "got it". She understood this world as most people don't; she fought and struggled to re-make it. Along the way, she displayed an almost super-human ability to make and keep friends.

Pat's friends will remember her politics, but like me they will remember other things: the half-finished chocolate cake always lurking in the kitchen, her love of cats, the piles of crime fiction, and the Bruce Spingsteen tape in that little red car, her kindness and understanding.

We will remember Pat for things big and small: combined, they made her into the person we loved, cared for and respected.

Pat was a socialist from the age of fifteen and a working class revolutionary for over forty years — this is not a small thing. Pat was physically small but her lifelong commitment to her class and its liberation was the labour of a huge personality.

We will miss her greatly.

### A working-class feminist on Islington Council

In 1982, Pat successfully stood in St. George's ward for election to Islington borough council. Socialist Organiser, the predecessor of Workers' Liberty, was active in the Labour Party at the time. The following extract is taken from an interview with Pat from *Socialist Organiser* No. 83, May 6 1982. As workers again face a Tory government seeking to make savage cuts, our class will need councillors like Pat who will argue for councils to refuse to pass on the cuts that Tory central government wants them to make.

**W**e need Labour councillors prepared to stand up to [the Tories] — to refuse to pass on the cuts or to pass on the attacks in the form of increases in rents and rates. It's no good arguing for these policies in Labour Party meetings unless you are also prepared to put forward candidates who will fight for the policies, and replace the councillors who collaborate with the Tories. It is important also that more women are prepared to stand for the council and to fight for women's rights.

One of the main points of the Islington Labour manifesto is to decentralise: to build up neighbourhood groups and to provide on-the-spot help with maintenance and repairs. We want to put more control into the hands of those who are directly affected by council services.

A Labour council must also refuse to police council workers in the usual management role. Instead,

we want to strengthen union organisation and to act as a team with them in fighting the Tories.

The Islington Labour Parties, like many others, have been very much affected over recent years by women active in the women's movement or influenced by it who have come into the Party, established strong women's sections, and played a big role in the left.

The fact that many of the Labour candidates standing this time round support women's rights and have been active in the women's movement will make a big difference; in terms of taking up women's issues and helping women to organise to fight for their own demands.

In Lambeth, Ted Knight justified rate rises by saying he had to buy time until the big battalions of industry, like the miners, moved against the Tories. Especially in an area like Islington, with no big concentrations of industry, mobilising against the cuts and the Tories means mobilising tenants and the community as well as trade unionists. A fightback by working-class women is a very important part of that.

Many women are isolated at home. They don't go to work, they are not in a trade union. Many are very despondent and cynical about Labour councils after previous administrations. I hope we can get more women interested and active. By holding public meetings and putting out information, we can help raise women's expectations and provide a focus. The manifesto says that the section on women's rights will be carried out "in close consultation with the women of the borough through meetings of community activists, trade unionists and Labour Party members."

# “A woman of unexpected strengths”

By MARTIN THOMAS

**P**at was born on 21 December 1950 into a working-class family in Enfield, north London. Her father was a trade-union activist in the print industry, though not particularly active in politics.

Pat joined the then-lively Labour Party youth movement in 1966, and then IS (the forerunner of the SWP). She left school early and first went to a secretarial college, which in those days was training for a lifetime of working in “typing pools”, armies of women hammering at typewriters eight hours a day.

She rebelled, quit, and made her way to university. While a student, she joined our tendency, in 1971.

The commitment she made at the age of 15 was for life. On finishing university and moving back to London, Pat took it for granted that she would choose a job on the basis of what was politically useful, and followed her father into the then strongly-unionised print industry, working at the *Financial Times* and then in typesetting firms. Technological change made her job obsolete, and in later years she had to earn a living by writing abstracts and précis.

She was our tendency's most prominent and consistent activist in the lively feminist movements of the early 1970s.

The term “veteran Trotskyist” calls up an image of a shrill-voiced harridan, finger always poised for strident polemic. That is mostly hostile caricature, but there is a grain of truth in it. To be an effective revolutionary activist, and over a long period, requires a certain brashness and the confidence, the will, and the ability to speak your mind even when in a small minority facing a hostile crowd.

Pat was as far from the hostile caricature as you can imagine: not only slight of figure, but mild-mannered, quiet, and reserved to the point of being cryptic. I worked with her politically, and often closely, over four decades, and loved her dearly, as my best friend, for many years, but never felt I knew her well.

She was a woman of unexpected strengths. Under the diffident manner there was a strip of steel.

She was a good public speaker, even to very large audiences. She was an effective activist in unions and campaigns. In the 1990s, while living in Worksop, she was involved in a workplace occupation to stop the closure of the training centre where she was then working.

It is a great pity that she did not write more, for everything she wrote was lucid and crisp. Pat was a “Marxist intellectual”. It was characteristic of her that around 2000, when AWL started a drive to get our people to study *Capital*, Pat was the first AWL activist outside London to start a *Capital* study group in her area, Nottingham, and that she carried the effort through successfully despite scepticism from others in the local AWL branch.

Pat was not so good as an organiser (on that, more later), but again, it was characteristic of her that, instead of passively accepting a limitation, in 2008, already suffering from the disease that would kill her, she took on the job of organising her AWL branch, and carried it through until she was forced to withdraw by worsening health.

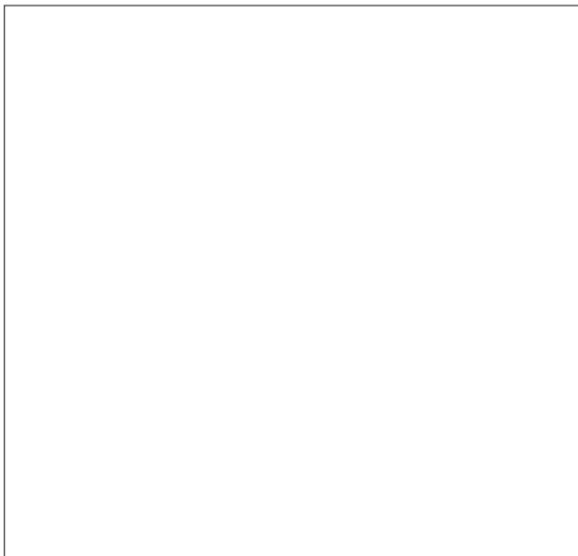
The way Pat joined our tendency, which was also the way I first met her, tells us a lot about her.

It was early October 1971. Pat was still three months short of her 21st birthday. We were organised as the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS (forerunner of the SWP). The IS/SWP leadership had just launched a campaign to expel us — triggered by our active dissent from their switch to a “keep Britain out” line on the European Union — which would end with us being evicted at a special IS/SWP conference in December.

Our local IS/SWP branch, in Stoke-on-Trent, met to discuss the proposed expulsion. Pat had been at her parents' home in Enfield over the summer, and came back to Stoke for the university term just in time for the meeting. I was also new in the area, so I'd never met her before.

The branch leadership was loyalist. The debate at the meeting was very one-sided: me against a string of speakers vehemently supporting the expulsion.

Pat was silent, but after the end of the meeting she agreed to talk to me. If I'd known some more background, I might have thought it wasted effort even to ask her to talk.



Because of her youth and her diffident manner, Pat had a status in the branch like that of a favoured little sister in a big family. She was not a dissident or malcontent. If she should become discontented, then the obvious place for her to go was not our tendency: her current boyfriend was a prominent and articulate member of the International Marxist Group (forerunner of today's Socialist Resistance: in those days, a lively group with some élan).

The other bits of background I didn't know were decisive. Pat was already an activist of five years' standing, relatively well-read; and she had a lucid brain and a will of steel on important issues.

We talked for two hours. Pat did not dither. She opposed the expulsion and she joined our tendency then and there.

The rest of the branch were shocked, and applied what pressure they could.

There was nothing Stalinist. The worst abuse, probably, consisted in fiddling meeting arrangements to stop a group of workers from the local Michelin factory who had recently joined IS/SWP from ever meeting Pat or me, and then, at the meeting to elect delegates to the IS/SWP conference, announcing that those members, absent from the meeting because (by design) it clashed with their shifts, were “disciplined IS members” and so must be presumed to vote with the majority.

However, revolutionary politics was more intense in 1971 than it is in 2010, and the pressure put on Pat was probably greater than anything anyone will experience in an activist-left group today. It had no effect.

In fact, the tables would be turned. Pat and I eventually made contact with the most active of the Michelin workers, Pete Smith. He would later join our tendency and be Pat's partner for some years.

The IS/SWP branch leadership soon went into opposition within IS. They would end up being expelled from IS in 1975 and joining our tendency for a period.

Two blips would follow in Pat's political trajectory. They demonstrate, I guess, that her commitment to our politics was never just a matter of inertia or accumulated routine: she checked out alternatives and then re-convinced herself.

In 1972-3, having split up with her IMG boyfriend, she joined the IMG for a brief time before rejoining us. Again, the tables would be turned: the then-leading IMG member who won her over, Tony Whelan, would within two years quit the IMG with a group of co-thinkers and, for a while, work closely with our tendency.

**F**or a while from the end of the 1980s, Pat stepped back from organised Trotskyist activity. She had moved from London, to Sheffield and then Worksop, and had sole care of her daughter Anna, who is now herself an AWL sympathiser.

In the 1990s, living in an area where there was no AWL presence but an affable local SWP branch, she experimented very briefly with joining the SWP. But, over the long run and in basics, her commitment of 1971, made without fuss or drama, was as steely as her basic commitment of 1966.

A few other episodes tell us about Pat's character. In 1974 she was the organiser of our activity in the then-lively feminist movement. She had been elected organiser because, even at the age of 23, she was by common

consent our most experienced, competent, and politically-equipped activist in the movement. But she messed up our intervention in a big conference of the National Abortion Campaign. There was no political error, just a slackness in organisation.

The other women members were angry, and, within days, voted Pat out and replaced her with a different organiser. Most people in Pat's place would have reacted by being defensive, acting aggrieved, or sulking. She remained active, loyal, cooperative, without even blinking.

Two years later our tendency held a summer school in the midst of a faction fight over orientation to the Labour Party. As with most faction fights, it was messy. Most of the speaking was done by relatively few people on either side, others keeping quiet for fear of being blasted for a slip or mis-statement.

Pat was already billed to speak at the school. When her turn came, she covered her planned topic, but also made her speech a crisp polemic for a serious orientation to the Labour Party.

On the basis of her role in that faction fight, as well as her activity in the union and in the feminist movement, Pat was elected to serve for a while on our organisation's Executive Committee, the smaller committee that has to lead the organisation day by day and week by week.

**I**n 1982 Pat was elected as a Labour councillor in Islington. It was part of an “experiment” in seeing if our activists could use the council “platform” to good purpose. We were partly forced into the experiment because we had fused with the Thornett group, which was already committed to having its members get elected as Labour councillors, but all of us thought it worth trying.

In the end, the benefits were less than the costs both of time taken away from other activity and of the malign political effect of the council environment on our people.

People elected as councillors in left-wing Labour administrations faced hard choices and subtle pressures. Our other activist elected alongside Pat to Islington council was Alan Clinton, a Trotskyist of long standing and one of the theorists of the Thornett group. He quickly capitulated.

Our activists elected to more middle-of-the-road Labour councils kept a clear political line; but those on the most left-wing councils tended to “drift” politically, to one degree or another. All the other 50 Labour councillors elected in Islington, almost all of them left-wing activists from unions or community campaigns, “drifted”. There was only one exception: Pat.

Being on the council was not a happy experience for Pat. She later thought, and rightly, that it would have been better not to stand. But her character shaped her steadfastness even in that misplaced test.

I found it even more impressive because in the early days of the left-wing Labour council, reflex oppositionism was not enough. For example, the council did a technical manoeuvre about the funding of voluntary groups. It made sense. Suspicious voluntary-group activists raised an outcry. They were influential in Pat's Labour Party ward. Without fuss, without drama, lucidly, she explained why the council should not be attacked on that point, though it should be on so many others.

Pat was very ill for the last seven months of her life, and in hospital, slipping into comas and then recovering but remaining very weak, for the last two months. She remained what she was, in politics and character, to the end.

What little I've learned about cutting to the core of political issues, and not being diverted by quibbles, qualifications, and speculations, I owe in large part to Pat.

Mostly Pat met her friends through political or union activity. She had an unusual ability to maintain friendships despite divergent political trajectories yet without blurring or discounting her own political clarity. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did, for her trustworthiness and her constantly surprising fund of unexpected strengths and insights.

I don't suppose we will ever find anyone to replace Pat in her range of political qualities. All we can do is brace our shoulders for the heavier burden that now falls on each one of us to carry our cause forwards.

# Socialism

The following article is Pat's polemic, which is still very relevant, against Sheila Rowbotham's 1979 article "The Women's Movement and Organising for Socialism", published in the well known collection, *Beyond the Fragments*.

**A** noticeable feature of the last few years has been the number of people who have rejected the Leninist conception of the party and looked for other forms of organisation. This rejection has been particularly prevalent within the women's movement where such ideas were able to gain acceptance partly because of the left's initial hostility to the movement.

The socialist-feminist current which appeared during the time of the Working Women's Charter Campaign laid down its aim as producing a synthesis of socialism and feminism. For some time the ideas of the socialist-feminist current remained vague; the book entitled "Beyond the Fragments", and particularly the essay by Sheila Rowbotham, is to be welcomed, for in some ways it makes the task of coming to grips with the criticisms that many socialist-feminists (and others) have of the left easier.

Sheila Rowbotham's article is written from a viewpoint in which the class struggle is largely absent. Her polemic against Leninist forms of organisation takes the form of a struggle for libertarianism against authoritarian forms of organisation. Her rejection of the need for a revolutionary party flows from her dismissal of the need for a revolutionary theory and a rejection of scientific Marxism.

Although she sometimes sees the need for organisational structures, she consistently dismisses the political role of the party; and although she warns against extreme subjectivism, she nevertheless raises subjectivity to the highest level and sees it as the guiding force for political activity.

For Sheila, Leninism can't provide guidance for building an organisation because it excludes the experience of women's and the working class's struggle. It negates the politics of experience which the women's movement encapsulates. A necessary precondition for properly relating to the working class is, according to Sheila Rowbotham, an open and flexible approach to other people's subjective experiences.

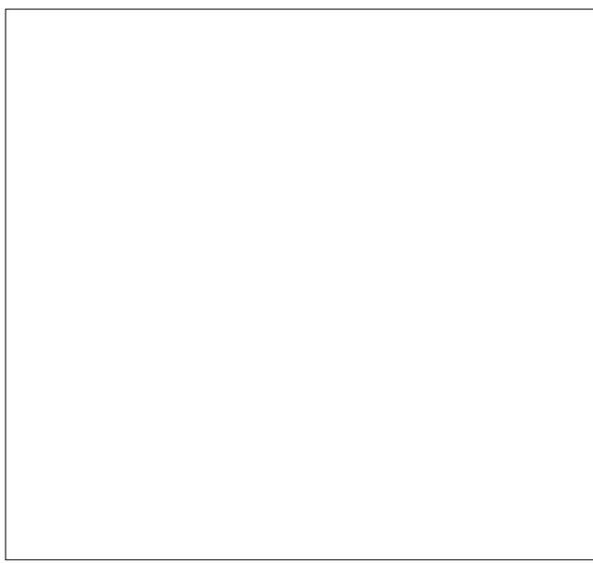
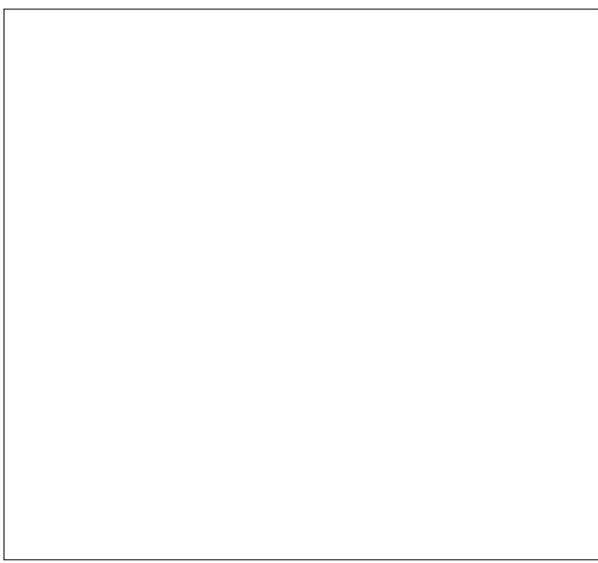
Sheila Rowbotham's anti-Leninism and anti-Trotskyism flow from her experience of left organisations. However, one of the problems of the essay is that the criticisms of Leninism and Trotskyism become difficult to disentangle from her criticisms of particular organisations. Therefore, the lack of democracy within the International Socialism Group (now SWP) is proof that Leninism is inherently undemocratic. Its turn to democratic centralism in the late 1960s is given as the reason for its inability to take up the question of women's oppression, not its underestimation of the political role of the party and its workerist attitudes. Sheila Rowbotham is unable to understand this because the importance of the political programme is the very thing she dismisses herself.

Sheila Rowbotham joined the International Socialism Group in the 1960s when it had a loose federalist structure. The reasons she cites for doing so are specifically its political openness and flexibility. Organisational and political flexibility is needed to respond quickly to the class struggle. However, sometimes it can be used as an excuse not for providing a lead to the class but for tail-ending it and capitulating to backward and chauvinist ideas. Sheila rejects the idea that democratic centralism can provide flexibility and the maximum unity in action, so that political theories can be tested in struggle. She does not see that the absence of such unity leads to inertia and a lack of political focus.

Such a disciplined and unified political approach can only be achieved, of course, by the maximum of accountability and democracy possible. Democracy is absolutely vital to a well-functioning political organisation. Without it political debate is stifled and political lessons remain undrawn.

Sheila replaces political theory by an almost religious and mystical belief about subjective experiences. Talking about the women's movement, she says:

"We have stressed for instance the closeness and protection of a small group and the feelings of sisterhood. Within the small group it has been important that every woman has space and air for her feelings and ideas to grow. The assumption is that there isn't a single correctness which can be learned off by heart and passed on by poking people with it. It is rather that we know our feel-



The paper of the Working Women's Charter and a badge building support for the Trico strikers

## Pat Longman: socialist-feminist

BY JEAN LANE

**M**y first recollection of Pat was as a very young member of the group in the late 70s at a Women's Voice conference in Birmingham. Pat was the organiser for our tendency.

The conference was an important one. The SWP, having earlier opened up Women's Voice to include women from other tendencies and individuals involved in union and community campaigns, were now in the process of closing it down again. In classic SWP fashion the conference was closely managed by the SWP Central Committee and not by its own organisers at all, which had been the situation pretty much throughout the whole experience. The SWP, incidentally, lost a fair few women members over that pretence of openness.

This was my first experience of working in socialist-feminist politics but it was not Pat's. She had been one of the women involved in the Working Women's Charter Campaign which began life in 1974, set up by the London Trades Council. The Charter had ten demands around women's right to work, to equal pay, training opportunities, free contraception and abortion, etc. They were demands which were designed as campaigning tools for trade unions and women's groups. Local Charter groups were set up around the country which fought nursery closures, supported strikes such as the Trico strike for equal pay in Brentford and marched in defence of abortion rights when they were under attack.

There were two conferences which were large, well-representative of trade unions, women's groups and the revolutionary left and the debates were heated. Our tendency, in which Pat played a central part along with other women comrades at that time, fought for the charter campaign to be rank and file based, drawing together ordinary working women who were at the forefront of battles against cuts which would have the effect of driving women into the home, and demanding the right of women to a voice in the labour movement which was very male-dominated at that time.

In a method disturbingly similar to that of many left groups today, other tendencies (notably the IMG) wished to court the leaderships of unions and councils which would give a 'respectability' to the Charter campaign. The very same arguments can be heard now in, for example, the Tower Hamlets Anti-Cuts Campaign in which the SWP argue that to put pressure on local government is ultra-left posturing and that what we have to do is get the leaders of local government and the Labour Party on board. To criticise them would be to ostracise them.

The Working Women's Charter campaign welcomed the Sex Discrimination Act which came into being in 1975 but rightly argued that legislation on its own would not be enough to ensure women's equal rights in the workplace, pointing to the failure of the Equal Pay Act to close loopholes which allowed employers to keep women's wages down.

Our tendency argued for the need for a mass-based working-class women's organisation which could link the struggle for women's liberation with that of the emancipation of the whole of humanity via the working-class defeat of capitalism. Our women comrades, Pat included, fought for that perspective within the WWCC. It was in that setting that they got involved in the Women's Voice experiment and it was with that basic

class position that they set up Women's Fightback in 1979.

Women's Fightback was set up when the Tory government got into power. It was very clear to workers and women's organisations that this government meant to increase the attacks on living standards and on union rights, that it would put the previous Labour government attempts to solve the capitalist crisis at the expense of the working class to shame. It was also clear that working-class women would bear the brunt. The women's movement at that time was becoming increasingly feminist at the expense of class politics and the labour movement was about to face an onslaught whilst being led largely by bureaucrats and by men.

**T**he idea of Women's Fightback was to build a bridge between the two so that the justified demands of the women's movement could become part of the battle to transform the labour movement which would then be equipped to fight the battles ahead.

Unfortunately, the women's movement continued in its radical feminist trajectory and Thatcher's class-war government proved too strong for the embattled and ill-led unions culminating in the defeat of the magnificent one-year long strike of the miners in 1984-5. The current situation facing the working class and women workers in particular is similar to that of 1979. The Tory-Lib Dem coalition is hell-bent on making workers pay for the financial crisis through job losses, cuts in pay and privatisation of large parts of the public sector. Working-class women again will bear the brunt of the attacks.

Pat's steadfast view of the need for a rank and file, working class-based women's movement and the need to transform the labour movement is just as relevant now as it was then.

# n and women's experience

ings and ideas move and transform themselves in relation to other women.

"We all need to express and contribute... Our views are valid because they come from within us and not because we hold a received correctness. The words we use seek an honesty about our own interest in what we say. This is the opposite to most left language which is constantly distinguishing itself as correct and then covering itself with a determined objectivity."

Sheila Rowbotham appears to believe that the less well thought-out ideas are and the more spontaneous the better. Difficulties are experienced by women because of our conditioning, particularly in analysing ideas and articulating our thoughts. However, the last thing we need is to glorify these difficulties and mystify them under the guise of sisterhood.

Sheila Rowbotham sees subjective experiences as being pure and honest. However, she never questions where this subjectivity comes from in reality; subjective attitudes can be extremely dangerous and reactionary.

Also, her emphasis on building pre-figurative forms of society in our everyday lives comes dangerously close to lifestyle politics and a concept that we don't have to fight for socialism — living it is good enough.

Sheila's search is not for revolutionary theory but for a moral standard for the left. Honesty and love are stressed above all else. What is meant by these terms is never defined.

**S**heila Rowbotham's critique of the far left is not only that they are too politically intransigent and not open enough. She believes that Leninist forms of organisation no longer fit the British situation. In fact she reiterates the old right wing argument about "the seeds of Stalinism" being inherent in Bolshevism:

"But there is no need to stop here. It must also be admitted that the Bolsheviks, even before Stalin, have a lot to account for, and that Leninism destroyed vital aspects of socialism even in creating a new kind of left politics." She quotes approvingly E P Thompson's dictum "Leninism was a specific product of very special historical circumstances which seemed to be irrelevant to this country and at this time and which could often entail anti-democratic and anti-libertarian premises."

Sheila Rowbotham never defines what these special circumstances are or what is meant by democracy.

Her belief that the Leninist party is inherently undemocratic and unable to incorporate the ideas of the women's movement is given further weight by her criticisms of Marxists' inability to fully understand the nature of women's oppression.

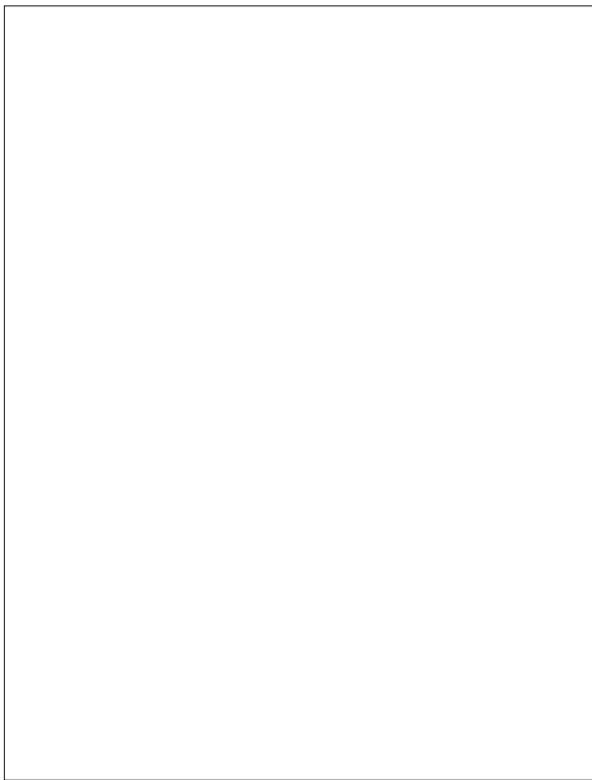
"Under Marx and Engels' influence communists dismissed crucial questions about sexual oppression, control over fertility and the cultural subordination of women as a sex which other contemporaries in the socialist and feminist movement recognised. This is not to dismiss the inspired leaps made by Marx and Engels theoretically or to forget that Lenin was much more sympathetic than some Bolsheviks towards women's oppression. It is not to deny that Trotsky paid more attention to cultural aspects of subordination though he stopped short at sexuality. But they were not omniscient."

It is undoubtedly true that Marx, Engels, Lenin and Trotsky didn't write the last words on women's oppression and that there were people who had a much deeper understanding of how female sexuality is repressed and who fought for gay rights. However, any attempt to weigh up the Bolsheviks' contribution to the fight for women's liberation has to be seen in a historical context.

They mobilised thousands of women workers to fight for their liberation, and achieved a revolution which did more for women's rights than anything previously. The wealth of material that survives from this period, particularly concerning the building of the mass communist women's movement in Russia, has been borrowed by many left organisations and by many feminists in helping them to work out a strategy for women's liberation.

Her critique of the Bolsheviks and the Leninist party leads her to demand an autonomous women's movement; she means more than the recognition of the need for women to organise separately. Her idea implies a struggle for women's rights which is separate and distinct from the struggle for workers' power. She criticises the linking of the mass communist women's movement to the party:

"But the outcome of the debate around the organisational power of women's sections in Communist Parties had been partly preempted by the approach which had prevailed from the 1890s in the Second International



**The experience of the Russian revolution helped many feminists work out strategies**

towards the women's movement of the day. The oversimplified and sectarian dismissal of all autonomous forms of feminism with the insistence on the Social Democratic Parties as the only place for women's agitation isolated many socialist women from the more radical currents within feminism. This necessarily curtailed their capacity to question the Marxist theory of the 'woman question' or to challenge the hegemony of the male leaderships of the Social Democratic Parties. The tighter discipline of the Bolsheviks and the acceptance of democratic centralism cut off the possibility of appeal outside the parties. Under Stalin of course all forms of inner party democracy in the Soviet Union perished and with them the women's sections. This had international implications".

The mass communist women's movement was fighting to build a revolutionary movement of working class women; it was largely successful. Sheila seems to be suggesting that they should have been less concerned with this aim and more concerned with relating to sections of the radical feminist movement in Russia who undoubtedly hid their petit-bourgeois reformism under a veneer of radicalism.

Their hostility towards the Bolsheviks was not because their ideas on sexuality were a little limited, but because they were working class revolutionaries. Does Sheila Rowbotham's reference to the male leaderships of the Social Democratic Parties also mean that there is something called men's politics and women's politics and that male politics have a greater tendency to be suspect?

The German Social Democratic Party was reformist, but was it because Karl Kautsky was a man? Was it

because Rosa Luxemburg was a woman that she was revolutionary?

Note also the jump from Bolshevism to Stalinism as if one was the logical extension of the other. Sheila Rowbotham does acknowledge elsewhere in her article the problems of isolation and backwardness that the Russian Revolution faced, but primarily she attributes the degeneration to the Bolsheviks' pernicious forms of organisation.

**I**t is quite noticeable how much more sympathetic Sheila Rowbotham is towards the ideas expressed in Eurocommunism:

"Eurocommunism has opened up the issue of autonomy in a different context from the classical stress on the party in Leninism. Its supporters stress the need to make alliances rather than the vanguard role of the party. This expresses actual changes in practice of which the *British Road to Socialism* was a part. It involves a different approach to the transition to socialism. This means that many feminists in Britain regard their membership of the Communist Party and the women's movement as less contradictory than belonging to either Trotskyist groups, who believe (with tact or without it) that they should play a vanguard role, or to the Socialist Workers Party whose version of the vanguard amounts to themselves plus a well screened working class in struggle. I think the radical importance of Eurocommunism is that it opens up the possibility of rethinking together a strategy of socialism in advanced capitalism which includes members of the CP."

The criticisms of the party and the dismissal of political theory have as their basis the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class. All the stuff about learning from experience, cosiness, and love hides a hard reformist kernel.

Sheila Rowbotham emphasises time and time again that the personal is political. But she seems to mean more by this than how we relate to each other and the need to take up all forms of oppression. She primarily sees socialism as something that grows out of us and which we build in our everyday lives — it is not something that we have to fight for and strive for by a political struggle.

Eurocommunism can adapt to feminism and to the ideas of the autonomous women's movement because it dismisses completely the central and revolutionary role of the working class. The working class becomes just one of the allies of the women's movement and part of the broad democratic alliance. All of it is linked to a thoroughly reformist strategy that the road to socialism will be accomplished peacefully and through the ballot box.

The working class and women play the role of voting fodder and their struggle is relegated to the needs of the Parliamentary strategy.

The tragic part of it [all] is that Sheila Rowbotham ends up implicitly supporting the political current which above all others stifles and destroys the self-activity of the working class [although Sheila Rowbotham has remained a committed socialist - Ed.]. Its anti-Leninism ends up with the most authoritarian and undemocratic procedures. And at the end of the day the belief that self-activity is politically central is still held primarily by those who relate to the Trotskyist tradition — the very tradition that Sheila Rowbotham is so antagonistic towards.

**A memorial meeting for Pat Longman  
will take place on Saturday  
11 September, 3pm at Bridewell Hall,  
St Bride Foundation, Bride Lane,  
Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EQ.**

**For more details call 07779 328 418.**

# Jimmy Reid and his one great achievement

Union leader Jimmy Reid, who led the long-running occupation of Upper Clyde shipyards in 1971-72, has died. Jim Denham comments on his political career.

**W**hatever his faults — and they were many — Jimmy Reid embodied the truth that workers, when united, can force serious concessions out of capitalism.

He was a member of the Communist Party of Britain during his finest hours in the early 1970s, but then left them to back Neil Kinnock's campaign to "modernise" the Labour Party in the 1980s. Despite his betraying them, the *Morning Star* gave him a good send-off. And rightly so: we should, in general, remember people at their best, not their worst. It is also the case that Reid was far from being the first person to break with Stalinism for thoroughly good reasons, only to then go over to the right.

Today's generation of would-be leftists have not witnessed successful working class struggle: that absence has tended to deform their politics into non-class "anti-imperialism." Jimmy Reid at least demonstrated what could be done when workers united behind a competent leadership and a coherent strategy.

His later evolution into a Kinnockite and then a Scots Nat, was sad. Even worse were his attacks on Scargill during the miners' strike: even if you agreed with his criticisms, it should have been obvious (especially to an intelligent person like Reid) that to have expressed them during the strike was scabbing. Serious as all that is, it should not detract from his immortal achievement, the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders' sit-in. Two points need to be remembered:

1. Reid and his comrades not only forced the reversal of the Heath government's decision to close the yards, but to this day two out of the three yards remain open;

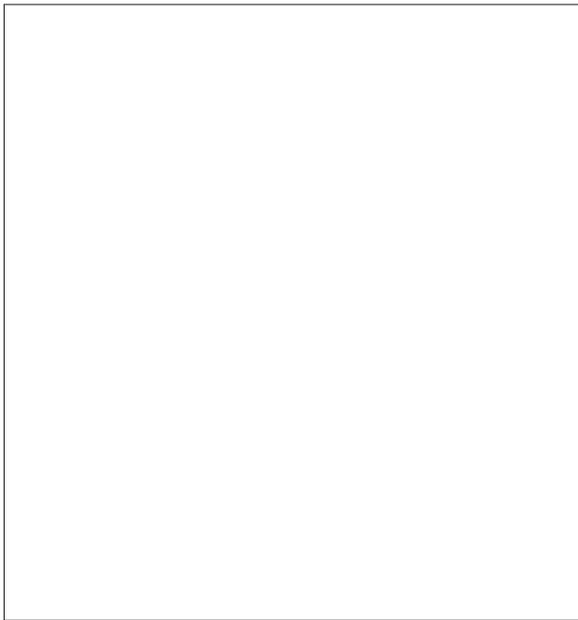
2. Reid was the charismatic, articulate "leader" of the sit-in that the media lionised: but the work-horses were the less glamorous communist rank-and-filers, Jimmy Arlie and Sammy Barr. Those two deserve to be remembered at least as well as Reid.

But most of all, Reid and what he represented, should be remembered because he is a symbol of the truth that with rank and file support, we can beat the bosses. He is also a reminder of the truth that occupations, "sit-ins", etc. are still, potentially, bloody good tactics. Excerpts from Reid's famous speech, when he won the position of Rector of Glasgow University in 1972, is printed below:

**A**lienation is the precise and correctly applied word for describing the major social problem in Britain today. People feel alienated by society. In some intellectual circles it is treated almost as a new phenomenon. It has, however, been with us for years.

What I believe is true is that today it is more widespread, more pervasive than ever before. Let me right at the outset define what I mean by alienation. It is the cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind economic forces beyond their control. It's the frustration of ordinary people excluded from the processes of decision-making. The feeling of despair and hopelessness that pervades people who feel with justification that they have no real say in shaping or determining their own destinies.

Many may not have rationalised it. May not even understand, may not be able to articulate it. But they feel it. It therefore conditions and colours their social attitudes. Alienation expresses itself in different ways in different people. It is to be found in what our courts often describe as the criminal antisocial behaviour of a section of the community. It is expressed by those young people who want to opt out of society, by drop-outs, the so-called maladjusted, those who seek to escape permanently from the reality of society through intoxicants and narcotics. Of course, it would be wrong to say it was the sole reason for these things. But it is a much greater factor in all of them than is generally recognised.



Reid, at his best... during the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders "sit in"

Society and its prevailing sense of values leads to another form of alienation. It alienates some from humanity. It partially de-humanises some people, makes them insensitive, ruthless in their handling of fellow human beings, self-centred and grasping. The irony is, they are often considered normal and well-adjusted. It is my sincere contention that anyone who can be totally adjusted to our society is in greater need of psychiatric analysis and treatment than anyone else. They remind me of the character in the novel, *Catch 22*, the father of Major Major. He was a farmer in the American Mid-West. He hated suggestions for things like medi-care, social services, unemployment benefits or civil rights. He was, however, an enthusiast for the agricultural policies that paid farmers for not bringing their fields under cultivation. From the money he got for not growing alfalfa he bought more land in order not to grow alfalfa. He became rich. Pilgrims came from all over the state to sit at his feet and learn how to be a successful non-grower of alfalfa. His philosophy was simple. The poor didn't work hard enough and so they were poor. He believed that the good Lord gave him two strong hands to grab as much as he could for himself. He is a comic figure. But think — have you not met his like here in Britain? Here in Scotland? I have.

It is easy and tempting to hate such people. However, it is wrong. They are losers. They have lost the essential elements of our common humanity. Man is a social being. Real fulfilment for any person lies in service to his fellow men and women. It does involve morality, ethics, and our concept of human values. The challenge we face is that of rooting out anything and everything that distorts and devalues human relations.

[There is] widespread, implicit acceptance of the concept and term 'the rat race'. The picture it conjures up is one where we are scurrying around scrambling for position, trampling on others, back-stabbing, all in pursuit of personal success. Even genuinely intended, friendly advice can sometimes take the form of someone saying to you, "Listen, you look after number one." Or as they say in London, "Bang the bell, Jack, I'm on the bus."

Profit is the sole criterion used by the establishment to evaluate economic activity. From the rat race to lame ducks. The vocabulary in vogue is a give-away. It's more reminiscent of a human menagerie than human society. The power structures that have inevitably emerged from this approach threaten and undermine our hard-won democratic rights. The whole process is towards the centralisation and concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands. The facts are there for all who want to see. Giant monopoly companies and consortia dominate almost every

branch of our economy. The men who wield effective control within these giants exercise a power over their fellow men which is frightening and is a negation of democracy.

Government by the people for the people becomes meaningless unless it includes major economic decision-making by the people for the people. This is not simply an economic matter. In essence it is an ethical and moral question, for whoever takes the important economic decisions in society ipso facto determines the social priorities of that society.

From the Olympian heights of an executive suite, in an atmosphere where your success is judged by the extent to which you can maximise profits, the overwhelming tendency must be to see people as units of production, as indices in your accountants' books. From the very depth of my being, I challenge the right of any man or any group of men, in business or in government, to tell a fellow human being that he or she is expendable.

The concentration of power in the economic field is matched by the centralisation of decision-making in the political institutions of society. The power of Parliament has undoubtedly been eroded over past decades, with more and more authority being invested in the Executive. The power of local authorities has been and is being systematically undermined.

If modern technology requires greater and larger productive units, let's make our wealth-producing resources and potential subject to public control and to social accountability. Let's gear our society to social need, not personal greed. Given such creative re-orientation of society, there is no doubt in my mind that in a few years we could eradicate in our country the scourge of poverty, the underprivileged, slums, and insecurity.

Even this is not enough. To measure social progress purely by material advance is not enough. Our aim must be the enrichment of the whole quality of life. It requires a social and cultural, or if you wish, a spiritual transformation of our country. A necessary part of this must be the restructuring of the institutions of government and, where necessary, the evolution of additional structures so as to involve the people in the decision-making processes of our society. The so-called experts will tell you that this would be cumbersome or marginally inefficient. I am prepared to sacrifice a margin of efficiency for the value of the people's participation. Anyway, in the longer term, I reject this argument.

To unleash the latent potential of our people requires that we give them responsibility. The untapped resources of the North Sea are as nothing compared to the untapped resources of our people. I am convinced that the great mass of our people go through life without even a glimmer of what they could have contributed to their fellow human beings. This is a personal tragedy. It's a social crime. The flowering of each individual's personality and talents is the pre-condition for everyone's development.

In this context education has a vital role to play. If automation and technology is accompanied as it must be with a full employment, then the leisure time available to man will be enormously increased. If that is so, then our whole concept of education must change. The whole object must be to equip and educate people for life, not solely for work or a profession. All that is good in man's heritage involves recognition of our common humanity, an unshamed acknowledgement that man is good by nature. Burns expressed it in a poem that technically was not his best, yet captured the spirit. In "Why should we idly waste our prime...":

*"The golden age, we'll then revive, each man shall be a brother,*

*In harmony we all shall live and till the earth together,  
In virtue trained, enlightened youth shall move each fellow creature,*

*And time shall surely prove the truth that man is good by nature."*

It's a goal worth fighting for.

## THE GAY LIBERATION FRONT, 40 YEARS ON

# No revolution without us!

BY KATHERINE McMAHON

*"No revolution without us! An army of lovers cannot lose! All power to the people!"* (Statement from the Male Homosexual Workshop at the Black Panthers' Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention)

**T**he Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was set up forty years ago. For a group that lasted only three years in Britain, it is remembered with an impressive amount of respect and admiration. It was around almost twenty years before I was born, yet it is still inspiring and important to LGBT and Queer activists today, who still deal with many of the same issues — assimilation, liberation and revolution — within LGBTQ activism.

The first GLF was formed after the New York Stonewall Riots, of late June, 1969. It is curious that a single event in a single city is cited so often as the beginning of the movement for gay liberation both in the US and the UK. After all one must not forget the incredibly important work done before Stonewall by groups such as the Mattachine Society in the US and the Committee for Homosexual Equality in the UK. Male homosexuality was made legal in the UK just two years before Stonewall happened, and the Mattachine Society made a valuable start in creating an environment in which lesbians and gay men could begin to fight for their rights.

However, the key word in understanding Stonewall's importance is "liberation". Previously, the homophile movements (as they were often known in an attempt to take the focus off sex) had argued that gay people were just like straight people; that they were good citizens, ordinary people, and deserved to be treated as such. Stonewall was about insisting and, in fact, violently refusing these assumptions. It was led by those who did not look like, or did not want to be, "good citizens", or "just like straight people". After Stonewall, it seemed more possible to fight for *liberation*, not *assimilation* — to fight for freedom on our own terms.

The bare bones of the story of the Stonewall Riots are these.

The Stonewall Inn — a gay bar popular with the kind of gays who did not seem "respectable" — queens, homeless people, sex workers — was raided by the police.

At that time, anyone found to be wearing less than three items of "gender appropriate" clothing was liable to be arrested, and the police began to bundle people into their vans.

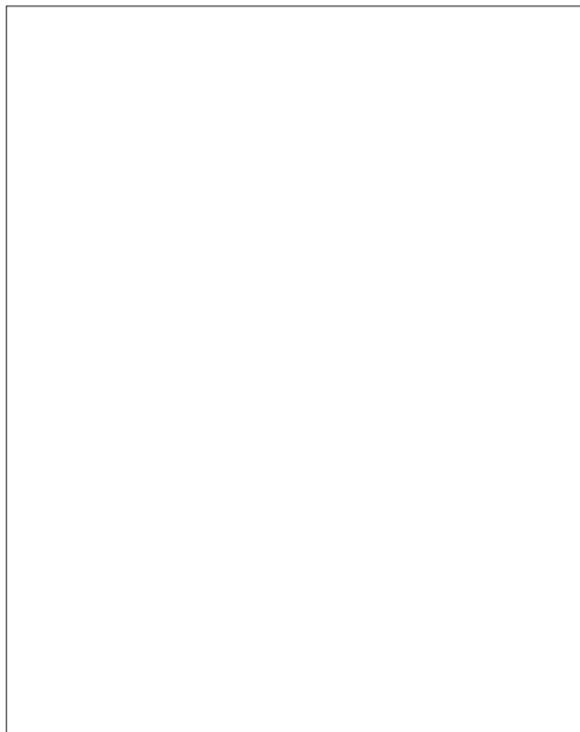
There are various speculations about why a relatively common occurrence, as raids were, turned into a riot, but something snapped. People began fighting back against the police. Three nights of rioting followed.

Those who had been involved in various other movements — particularly the feminist and anti-Vietnam war movements — who were sick of hiding their sexuality in their other political activities and sick of hiding their other political affiliations if they were involved in any gay activism, began to organise. The Mattachine Society showed their colours by putting up posters on the boarded up front of the Stonewall Inn exhorting their fellow homosexuals to stop being disruptive; beside these, other posters called for meetings to begin to fight more concretely for liberation.

Thus the GLF was born. It was explicitly and determinedly about fighting for liberation, for linking up the struggles of different oppressed groups, and refusing to be assimilated into oppressive, capitalist, patriarchal and racist society. It was allied with the Black Panthers. The GLF's solidarity and refusal to accept the homophobia rife in the movement led to Huey Newton's eventual statement of support for gay liberation. They were also allied, in various ways, with the feminist movement, and various local working-class struggles, along with the New Left and anti-war movement.

The London GLF began after two London activists visited the US, attended some GLF meetings, and decided to create a group in London.

The meetings began at the London School of Economics and grew spectacularly, moving home sev-



eral times to accommodate everyone and proliferating into numerous working groups. It did a whole variety of actions, showing a particular fondness for impressive theatrical direct action, as well as more traditional forms of protest.

One particularly memorable protest saw the GLF link up with a variety of other left groups to protest against the "Festival of Light", a Christian effort to turn back perceived moral degeneration. The GLF infiltrated the Festival of Light office, forged tickets to the opening gala, and snuck in about 150 people with a whole variety of exciting tricks up their sleeves. A group dressed as nuns released mice into the hall; one person (who the stewards took a long time to notice) dressed as a bishop told people "don't worry sister, keep on sinning"; a same-sex kiss-in on the balcony; a banner drop proclaiming "Cliff Richard for Queen!" (Cliff Richard being one of the festival's patrons); copious heckling. These actions were brilliant for their sustained disruption, their humour and their inventiveness, but they would not have meant nearly as much had the activists not spent the aftermath talking to people outside, holding impromptu discussions with people who were attending.

The GLF often worked with other groups — marching against the Tory government's Industrial Relations Bill in 1971, joining feminist groups in protests against

the Miss World competition. They were usually relegated to the back of marches, but march they did.

People came from all sorts of different activist backgrounds, which had the huge advantage of meaning that the actions that came out of it were eclectic and incredibly creative, but had the disadvantage of meaning that, after a while, cracks began to appear.

Rifts over gender issues and the role of lifestyle politics meant that the GLF as a cohesive organisation pulled itself apart after only three years.

In that three years, however, it laid the groundwork for liberationist LGBTQ activism that still has a legacy today; many of its working groups turned into other groups that did valuable work as well. Its legacy was seen in the Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners groups during the miners' strike — which was reciprocated three years later by miners' support for the campaign against Section 28. Today, the various events which protest against the commercialisation and depoliticisation of Pride are the continuation of the start that the GLF made.

It is striking that, 40 years later, the GLF's demands are still relevant. While it is undeniable that huge gains have been made, LGBTQ activists who see the links between capitalism, sexism and heterosexism still face a struggle. Pride marches are expensive, commercial and sponsored by big business, and have lost organisational connection with communities; the big issues of the day revolve around assimilationist demands like gay marriage. When the largest and most conservative LGB (they explicitly leave out the T and Q) organisation takes the name of Stonewall and holds training sessions on why employing gay people is good for business, it is increasingly important to remember that Stonewall was a *riot*, and that it led to a radical movement of people who refused to try to assimilate, and who desired to create a new world in alliance with all other oppressed groups.

- Workers' Liberty pamphlet *Radical Chains: Sexuality and Class Politics* discusses these issues: [www.workersliberty.org/publications/workers-liberty-pamphlets/radical-chains](http://www.workersliberty.org/publications/workers-liberty-pamphlets/radical-chains).

- Reclaim the Scene is a free and political alternative to the commercial, pay-to-enter Manchester Pride (weekend of 28 August). The basic demands are: an accessible, friendly and welcoming "scene"; Pride to be free (are we too poor to be gay?); LGBTQ rights to top the Pride and the scene's agenda.

We will be forming a political bloc on the parade, and there will be a free post-parade picnic with political speakers, music, kids' entertainment, LGBTQ films, art, and stalls at UMIST Campus on Sackville Street in Manchester, from 2-9pm on 28 August. All welcome! More information at [www.reclaimthescene.com](http://www.reclaimthescene.com)

## 70 years on: celebrating Leon Trotsky's revolutionary life

7pm, Tuesday 21 September  
University of London Union, Malet Street

Speakers include:

Sean Matgamna (Workers' Liberty), John McDonnell MP, Farooq Tariq (Labour Party Pakistan), Kim Moody (American union activist and author), speaker from France's New Anti-capitalist Party

**"For 43 years of my conscious life I have been a revolutionary; and for 42 I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I were to begin all over again, I would try to avoid making this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent, indeed it is firmer today, than it was in the days of my youth."**

## NEW YORK SUBWAY WORKERS PAMPHLET

# Lessons in winning “reform from below”

London Underground RMT activist Becky Crocker reviews *Hell on Wheels: the Success and Failure of Reform in Transport Workers Union Local 100*, by Steve Downs.

**T**his pamphlet tells the story of New Directions (ND), a rank and file group within Union Local 100 of the Transport Workers Union, which represents transport workers in New York, including on the subway system.

Written by Steve Downs of the socialist group Solidarity, it focuses on the problem of how to achieve reform within unions.

After nearly 15 years in opposition, ND fell apart very shortly after its people got elected to run the Local in 2000. For Alliance for Workers' Liberty activists attempting to reform our own unions, ND's story is very relevant.

The author almost seems to take for granted the explosions of militancy that form the backdrop to this story. Given leadership, even unofficial leadership, NY transit workers can respond with 10,000-strong demonstrations and unofficial strikes. It makes us wonder whether a high level of militancy is necessary for a real rank and file shake up of the unions. What do socialists do in the absence of such militancy?

It is a shame that the pamphlet is almost silent about the role of the socialist group behind ND. We could learn a lot about how to organise and how a small socialist group can be a lever for wider change. It is possible that Solidarity's method of organisation was a factor in the collapse of ND. They seem to have submerged themselves in ND at the expense of their political identity, making it easier for conservative elements to dismantle it from within.

The main events in the story of New Directions:

1. 1985. *Hell on Wheels* (HOW) bulletin started by members of what would become Solidarity. It broke the monopoly of the union leadership on information, encouraged all grades to stick together and campaigned, e.g. encouraged people to refuse to work on safety grounds and “out of title”. Management's attempt to make train operators work as conductors was quashed when a supporter of *Hell on Wheels* refused to open and close doors and received no punishment.

2. 1988. HOW joined with an African-American group, the Nubian Society, to form New Directions. The pamphlet describes their work as: “leading Local 100 members in resisting the New York City Transit Authority's demands for contract concessions and greater control of the workforce, opposing the union leadership's acquiescence to those demands and fighting for greater union democracy.” They won 22% of the vote in their first bid for Local President and won three seats on the Local Executive.

3. 1992. ND changed from an electoral coalition to a membership caucus with HOW as its newsletter.

4. From 1994, ND began to look like a serious contender for control of the union Local, attractive to apolitical would-be reformers, like Roger Toussaint, who joined in 1997.

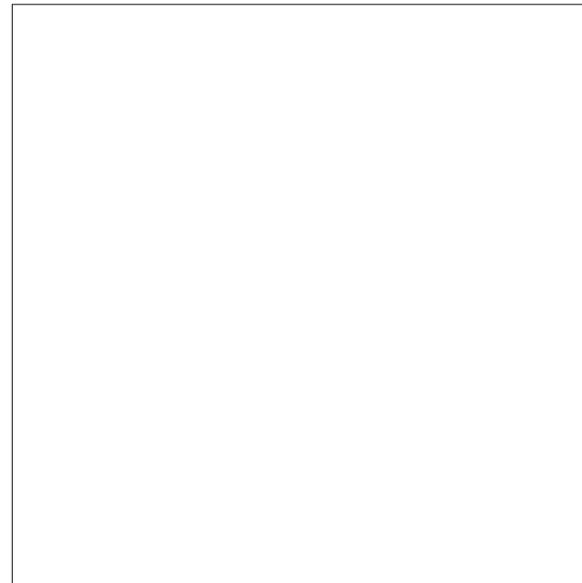
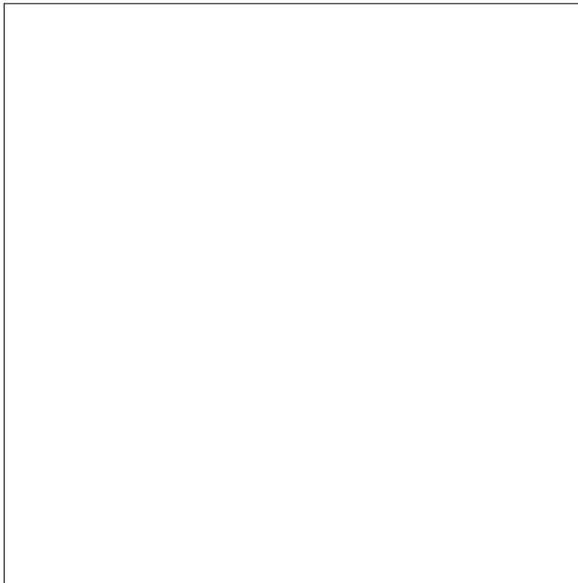
5. 2001. Roger Toussaint wins election for President; ND also wins three Local-wide positions, five VPs and a majority of seats on the Local's executive board.

6. Within a year, ND falls apart. Toussaint in effect shut it down by not attending meetings. He ran the Local with almost military authority. Toussaint campaigned weakly and negotiated an unsatisfactory contract in 2002. In 2005, Toussaint followed a solid 60-hour strike for a decent contract by ordering members back to work and negotiating major concessions. When members rejected the contract, Toussaint contemptuously ordered another vote, until it was accepted.

## “CHANGE FROM BELOW”

**T**he pamphlet describes the central factor in the collapse of the ND as the “long-running conflict within the caucus over the strategy for rebuilding and reforming Local 100. Specifically... between... a strategy of reform from above and... from below”.

Downs, the writer of this pamphlet, always pushed “reform from below”: “for greater organisation of



Left, New York Local of the Transport Workers Union. Right, Roger Toussaint. Once elected president of the local he severed himself from the rank and file movement that had given him a platform

members on the job as a key to both improving the union's ability to fight management and the members' ability to replace their officers”. Replacing top officers he says, “would not be enough”.

One example: in 1992, when a proposed new contract would have eroded seniority benefits, ND launched a “vote no” campaign involving “rallies, large marches across Brooklyn Bridge, work slowdowns and extensive distribution of literature”. This “resulted in the first ever contract rejection in Local 100”. So ND used their focus around “organising on the job” to challenge the union leadership as well as management.

Another example: in 1999, ND exerted pressure to make sure the renewed contract did not include “give-backs”. Again they campaigned for organisation on the job, built mass demonstrations (a record 10,000 workers gathered outside the Metropolitan Transport Authority's offices, chanting “strike!”). ND pushed for the first membership meeting for decades; 4000 people attended and approved a strike vote.

Downs and his comrades wanted ND to be an active rank and file group. As well as propaganda and elections, it was to engage with members in ways that tangibly affected what happened in disputes. The pamphlet says little about how disruption at work was organised: some was due to their own actions, some to their influence.

The AWL shares this orientation towards the workplace because there we can interrupt the exploitative relationship between workers and management, build the confidence of workers and hit directly at management. A powerful and confident workforce is less easily controlled by union leaderships who want to settle deals against our wishes.

The AWL is small. At the moment, we mostly make propaganda for rank and file action, rather than being able to organise large-scale demonstrations. ND shows what a rank and file movement can do if its forces are large and influential enough, although the day-to-day routine remains education and explanation.

## RUNNING IN ELECTIONS

**T**he pamphlet looks at the relationship between organisation on the job and another aspect of ND's work, contesting elections.

This is relevant to AWL activists; we run for positions in our unions and have discussed in the past how to balance this with our workplace focus.

Downs says he and his comrades viewed contesting elections more as a chance to promote ND's platform than as an end in itself. After winning more seats, they acknowledged the responsibilities of winning union positions. But they always felt their main duty was to support rank and file members and fight their corner in negotiations.

Others in the ND group felt that “little could be

accomplished without first winning the top positions in the Local”. From 1994, “ND became attractive to low level officers... not committed to a long-term, reform from below strategy”. In 1998, after ND narrowly missed winning control, there was “a decisive shift within ND toward those who thought that winning control of the top positions in the union mattered more than organising on the job”. In 2000, ND selected Roger Toussaint as Presidential candidate. He campaigned to clean up the Local from the leadership.

The pamphlet phrases the debate on elections as “change from above” or “change from below”. But it is not so simple. Running in elections is not an alternative strategy to building power in the workplace. Without getting a new leadership elected “from below”, there is a limit on what you can do to reform the union. Toussaint came “from below”. The problem was not that ND sought electoral positions, but how ND ran the Local once elected.

## ELECTED LEADERSHIP AND RANK AND FILE

**T**oussaint, once elected, severed himself from the rank and file movement that had given him a platform. He rejected any role for ND that might influence the Local, implying ND would be interfering with the work of elected officials. He and those around him effectively shut ND down when they ceased attending its meetings.

Toussaint ran the Local in a dictatorial manner. He made decisions about strikes without consulting the workers involved. Negotiations were not made more transparent. He appointed members of the executive onto the union payroll, which effectively bought him votes. He negotiated a compromise deal on health benefits in 2002 over the heads of the members.

It seems that ND did not ultimately collapse around the “reform from above or below” debate. It was more that Toussaint, after coming from below, abandoned his desire to reform. Plus, the left wing was not strong enough to bind or replace him.

The pamphlet concludes, “this case study... demonstrates how a union leadership, no matter how militant, that doesn't see the necessity to build rank and file power can't carry out what it would really like to do”. It seems more the case that the leadership didn't want to effect much change.

The pamphlet raises the question of accountability, “to whom [are] elected officers... responsible: the people who elected them, or the person above them in the union hierarchy?” The author of this pamphlet says that ND could have continued as “a place where active members and officers could meet to discuss what ‘rebuilding our union’ meant in practice and how to achieve the goals for which ND had fought for years”. But that would have required the leadership to feel in some way accountable to the rank and file movement which had got them there.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT UNION MILITANCY**

**The story of a 10,000 strong march across Brooklyn Bridge, successful slowdowns and illegal strikes (all strikes are illegal under New York law) contrasts vividly with what we see on London Underground, which is regarded as one of the most militant workforces in Britain. Last time RMT on London Underground organised a protest, there were just five people and the Regional Council President dressed in a chicken suit!**

The author of the pamphlet comments that the 1991-92 slowdowns to protect seniority rights were important for ND's development: "they showed conclusively that the membership was willing to fight". The fact of having an angry workforce seems to be integral to the author's idea of how to achieve union reform.

It is a point of view we share. We in the AWL want a militant and democratic membership, where we don't just take action because our union leader Bob Crow says, but because we feel ownership and control of the action. Most of the action described in the pamphlet is organised independently and in defiance of the union leadership.

But how do we achieve this? Small socialist groups can't at will control the level of militancy of thousands of workers.

In a way, the pamphlet is least useful where it is most inspiring. We might want to replicate mass participation by workers, but there is no indication of the nuts and bolts of how these actions were organised. It doesn't tell you what the union density was, whether the union meetings were organised around workplaces, or branches, what methods were used.

Paradoxically, the explosions of militant action might be correlated with the union's weakness. NY transit workers have obviously won some gains in the past,

like pensions and health benefits, which they strike to maintain. But strikes and collective action are illegal; working conditions are described as "brutal"; when *HOW* started there was no Local-wide newspaper; shop stewards were scarce and agreements not enforced; 50% of the workforce were on an attendance warning, workers are predominantly black and Latino and feel treated as second class citizens. In the big strike in 2005, it says "most pickets" aimed at "paying the MTA back for all the petty harassment they had endured over the years".

In contrast, RMT is almost part of the London Underground institution. Union organisation has a character of "doing what the union says", and that may be partly because of a relatively high level of organisation.

When Toussaint got elected, the pamphlet says, "members' expectations were high — they thought they finally had a leadership that wouldn't back down from a confrontation". When the first dispute led by Toussaint was slow to kick off, however, "the membership did not mobilize on its own — as it had in the past when ND led the fight... Believing that they had a militant, strong leader at the head of their union, the members waited for direction from Toussaint."

This only went so far. In 2005, Toussaint had to go ahead with a strike because the members' high expectations made them determined. But in general, perhaps if the members have faith in a leadership that is perceived to be "left-wing", that can make them more apathetic.

So, what do we do?

If we can't control the basic situation at will and can't create the conditions in which to build a big, lively rank and file project, where do we start?

We, like Solidarity, are a small group of socialists, trying to influence the wider situation. It would be useful

if the pamphlet talked more about the socialists involved in this project. We assume Steve Downs, Tim Schermerhorn, Naomi Allen, and a few others are Solidarity members. Did they try to build their organisation by recruiting others? The pamphlet talks as though the agency within this situation was ND, not Solidarity.

When *HOW* became the newsletter of ND, Solidarity abandoned control. They ended up without a voice when Toussaint effectively shut down ND, and *Hell on Wheels* along with it. ND had allowed their voice to be controlled by people they didn't trust. They started a new bulletin, Rank and File Advocate (RAFA), a year later.

More than that, the pamphlet talks as though Solidarity buried itself in pursuit of building a broader project. They describe a central plank of their politics as "building the union from below"; they are not explicit about their wider goals.

If members of Solidarity had been more assertive as socialists, more might not have been achieved, but more might have been *retrieved* and *learnt* from Toussaint's betrayal. The union bureaucracy, even confronted by a strong rank and file, is a robust part of holding together the capitalist order. There is a massive political battle ahead of any attempt at union reform as we confront the capitalist system and the place of the bureaucracy within it.

The pamphlet concludes that ND failed because the "top down" approach won out. Even if "top down" summed up all Roger Toussaint's failings, the "top" of any union has its place in capitalist society. We will need political understanding — and organisation — if we are to defeat it and achieve reform in our unions.

• Thanks to Solidarity for copies of *Hell on Wheels*. To order the pamphlet visit [www.solidarity-us.org/hellonwheels](http://www.solidarity-us.org/hellonwheels)

**RADIO**

# Useful idiots

Dan Katz reviews *Useful idiots* BBC World Service, Wednesday 12 August

**The question that John Sweeney's programme posed was interesting: why have so many seemingly intelligent people turned themselves into apologists for terrible, brutal, murderous regimes?**

Harold Pinter defended Slobodan Milosevic. Noam Chomsky sided with Pol Pot's Cambodian regime. Tony Benn doubted Solidarnosc's trade union credentials. Jean-Paul Sartre refused to back an investigation into Russian slave labour camps. Vanessa Redgrave's WRP took Libyan money. The SWP explained away the Taleban's policy on women. George Galloway prostrated himself in front of Saddam.

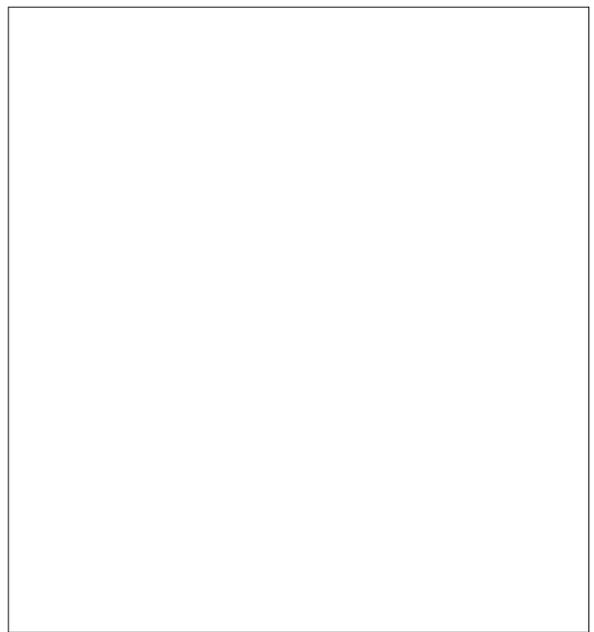
There is a long list of "useful idiots" — prominent people who either directly, or effectively, place themselves at the disposal of monsters, and use their reputations as cover for brutality.

But even before Sweeney's radio programme starts there is irony. The BBC's blurb attributes the term "useful idiots" to Lenin. They say it is, "supposedly Lenin's [phrase]". In fact there is no evidence that Lenin ever said or used the term "useful idiots".

The blurb says that the term "refers to Westerners duped into saying good things about bad regimes." Which implies Lenin "duped people" into supporting a "regime" — the early Soviet Russian state — which he knew to be bad.

Hence the BBC's listings writer has turned his or herself into a "useful idiot" of all those who want to make Lenin a Stalinist. In fact cultivating useful idiots was a project of the Stalinist states and their outposts in the West, the "Communist" parties, not Lenin. "Useful idiot" implies cynicism, contempt and manipulation, and has Stalinist roots.

Self-confessed former "useful idiot" Jonathan Mirsky described a visit to Mao's China and being shown "Potemkin" schools during the Cultural Revolution. Apparently all schools were shut in China, except for these model schools, open to show gullible Westerners how good life was. He says he was told that there was no crime in China — and dutifully he and other (highly educated) journalists wrote it down and believed (or at least regurgitated) the lie. A guide



**"Useful idiot" Yvonne Ridley says the BBC is just as bad as the Iranian state's media outlets.**

from that tour later admitted that the state had wanted to "put rings in your noses, and you helped us."

So the question is: why would intelligent people allow themselves to become propaganda tools of a state which allowed at least 30 million people to starve to death during the "Great Leap Forward"? Clearly part of the answer is that some "useful idiots" have wanted to believe the lies they are told. Which begs a further question: why would someone want to believe that the deranged Mao regime, for example, deserved their complicit silence or support from direct lies? Sweeney's programme suggests that left-influenced intellectuals who see imperfections in their own societies find comfort in the belief that something better exists elsewhere.

Sweeney claims useful idiots are not just from the left. Ted Heath, Tory Prime Minister, enjoyed the flattery of the Chinese state enough to become their useful idiot in the 1970s. Listening, I am vaguely reminded of

the obsequiousness, bag carrying and platform-providing that Socialist Action use to manipulate labour movement figures in the UK.

Sweeney is less convincing when he presents right-wing commentator Bruce Anderson as a useful idiot for Pinochet's Chilean fascist regime. What Anderson says is genuinely shocking: that the overthrow of democracy and murder of "less than 4000" people (including some who "were innocent") was a price worth paying to stop the spread of Communism. Nevertheless Anderson is neither naive nor in anyway conflicted — two things that might mark out a real "useful idiot" — he just is a nasty, rational right-winger.

Tony Benn provides a crystal-clear example of the verbal method of the bog-standard useful idiot when he praises Mao and his economic/social policy for developing China. Leaving aside the fact that this is laughable jibberish (for example, the Cultural Revolution destroyed the Chinese education system), Benn only offers mealy-mouthed criticism when pushed hard (Wasn't Mao a mass murderer? It turns out Benn did not approve of everything Mao did).

In another category of useful idiot is George Galloway. Galloway is different because of the way self-interest and self-promotion is bound up with his toadying. Sweeney considers his relationship with Press TV, the English-language voice of the barbaric Iranian state (Galloway has a programme on Press TV). An Iranian journalist explained how he was tortured in jail and how Press TV collaborated with his interrogators inside the prison. A former Press TV worker stated that the station only presents the regime's viewpoint.

Galloway refused to appear on the programme, as did Galloway's comrade, Yvonne Ridley. In a written statement Ridley used an argument that is often heard on the British left: that the BBC's Director General has turned himself into a useful idiot for the British state and its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a defence of Press TV it is pretty stupid (because it admits Press TV is a voice of the Iranian state, simply alleging that the BBC is just as bad). As John Sweeney points out as he ends the programme, the BBC does not only give the government's point of view, and does not collaborate with torturers. One-nil to Sweeney.

# Why is socialism in disarray?

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he economic crisis has shaken the tremendous mystique which the world capitalist system had built in the two decades since the collapse of European and Russian Stalinism. They had been decades of globalisation; of enormous capitalist expansion; of US hyper-power bestriding the world; and of mass belief in markets as the self-sufficient god-like regulator of economic and therefore of all social, that is of all human, affairs.

Something else too startled the world. In an era of globalization and market fetishism, it was revealed that we, in the US and Britain, were ruled by “socialistic” – selectively socialistic but socialistic all the same – governments.

The ultra-right-wing neo-liberal US administration of George W Bush and the neo-Thatcherite Blair-Brown government of Britain, both previously amongst the extreme idolaters of the market, stepped in and assumed the role which the failing large banks had played, the role of social banker, financial organiser, and regulator of the entire economy.

They used the government power to collect and redistribute taxes, to channel many, many billions of dollars and pounds from society to subsidise the banks and stop them collapsing.

This was an implicit acknowledgment that uncontrolled markets led not to the creation of the inexhaustible social cornucopia, but to social disaster. The British government’s explanation is more than merely plausible — that if it had not intervened as it did to play the role of organiser, financier, and guarantor of the financiers, then the high street cash-point machines, the fuelling-points of all mundane commercial and social activity, would have closed down. “Society”, would have seized up, as the US economy did when the banks closed their doors in the early 1930s, or worse.

As governments in ancient societies of “Asiatic despotism” and other “hydraulic societies”, in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, had had to play an essential role in organising the prerequisites of social production — irrigation canals, etc. — so the ultra-free-market US and British governments were compelled, on pain of financial and social dislocation and collapse, to step from behind the ideological curtain of pretence and assume the role of social organisers.

In the crunch the banks depended on social action by the overall representatives of society to avert a catastrophe generated by their own capitalist system, to act to cancel out the natural consequences of market relations for the bankers and for society.

But if this “socialism”, or “social-ism”, was in the interests of society, it was also pointedly in the direct interests of the bankers and those who own, control, and benefit most from the economy.

It was bankers’ socialism, fat-cat socialism. Bourgeois socialism.

It did, however, point to and underline the fundamental rationale of Marxist socialism, the thing that makes it sensible and, essentially, invulnerable to the defeats or errors or even annihilation of socialist parties and of Marxists: capitalism itself prepares and continually develops the socialist transformation of society. As Friedrich Engels put it: socialist society “invades” large-scale capitalism. Marxist socialism is only the conscious expression of this objective reality.

Capitalism grows from small-scale production to ever more gigantic concentrations of the means of production in huge society-wide enterprises. Capitalism has developed from a world where markets regulated the affairs of small commodity production to a world of giants whose size modifies the workings of markets and whose needs — and society’s needs in relation to them — can, as we have just once more seen, only be met by social, society-wide action.

Today, whole towns-worth of shops are concentrated in each big supermarket. Whole branches of social economy are organised in the giant and increasingly international companies that dominate human life.

But these gigantic social enterprises are still organised and regulated to produce the maximum private profit. Not human need but the income of shareholders and executives rules their decisions. The fate of the workers within them — whether, for example, the enterprise shuts up operations in one locality and migrates across national borders, or continues to allow a particular community to go on working, existing — all that is regulated by the obligation of the enterprise to produce profit for shareholders and enormous



The economic crisis shook the “mystique” of capitalism. But can socialists organise to end the system?

salaries and bonuses for the corporate bosses who run these great chunks of social activity and social labour.

An anti-Marxist polemicist (*Observer* journalist Nick Cohen) dismisses the idea that Marx, writing early in industrial capitalism, could have understood its essentials. In fact Marx, according to himself, based his analysis of capitalist society on over 400 years of capitalism in history — as distinct from industrial capitalism — before his time. In any case the question is, did he see into the essentials of our system?

Does capitalism continue to have and to be dominated by the characteristics which Marx analysed and their manifold manifestations in our society? Doesn’t it? Do we live in a world dominated by capitalist companies, entities whose driving force and goal is to wring the maximum profit for their shareholders out of their operations — that is, out of those who work in them — no matter what the human and social consequences, have more wealth and immeasurable more social power than many contemporary governments?

Our world is shaped and reshaped, calmed or tsunami-hit by those companies’ competition for profit.

It would not be too fanciful to say that the big shareholders in each company bear something like the same sort of relationship to those employed by the companies, or conglomerates of companies, as the minority of citizens in an ancient Greek city state had to the four or five times more numerous slaves, women and foreigners who made their lives there. And even more so for the peoples of the underdeveloped world. They exploit them.

The competition of these international entities is reshaping our world now in ways whose ultimate working-out can only be surmised.

The great tragedy-bearing paradox of political and social life is that though this social development corresponds to the bedrock Marxist expectations of the way capitalism, in accordance with its inner drives and needs, had to develop, the fundamental case for socialism today, socialism in general and Marxist socialism in particular, is marginalised, more discredited that at any time in one hundred years and more.

Yet the necessity and the possibility of replacing this system by genuine social control, under the social ownership and the day-to-day, interstice-by-interstice control of the producers, is a great deal more obvious now, and more pressing than in the time and the capitalism of Marx and Engels. And we are now in the worst economic crisis in many years, perhaps decades... An editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* in 2008 said the plain truth: “the world now corresponds more to the expectation of Karl Marx than of any other economist or social philosopher.”

Commentators point to the absence of an intellectually credible socialism as one of the great assets which capitalism in this crisis possesses. There is no denying it. That, indeed, is how things stand with socialism. Socialism is in intellectual, political and organizational

disarray, everywhere.

The question I want to explore in this series of articles is why, by way of what events, has the socialism that embodies the project of substituting for the capitalist system a rational, democratic and non-exploitative form of economic and social life come to stand for so little in a world where once again the fundamental ideas of Marxism about capitalism have been shown beyond serious argument to be stark truth. Why is it socialism, and not capitalism, that is most discredited?

On one level, the answer is expressed in one word: Stalinism. But European Stalinism has been dead twenty years. Why has the authentic socialism, the socialism of those who fought Stalinism, and often fought it to the death, not revived, not springing alive and young again out of the vanished shadow of Stalinism?

Because, to a large extent, like Joe Hill in the song, Stalinism can assert: “I never died”. Stalinism, politically, intellectually and in ingrained collective habits of mind, is still alive on the would-be left. If that left is to emerge from its present nullity, it will have to purge itself of the traits I will analyze in these articles.

## A. STALINIST ROOTS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS

### ON THE LEFT

#### 1. Defining an age

**I**n the summer of 1933, a few months after the Nazis had consolidated power in Germany, a conversation that defines a whole political age, and in so doing offers a key to understanding the malaise of the left today, took place in a group of young members of the Communist Party, in Cambridge. Some of the participants in that conversation would serve the USSR as double agents within the British secret services for decades to come, and be exposed, in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. The story of that conversation is told in Andrew Boyle’s *The Climate of Treason*.

Kim Philby, just back from Germany, reported to his friends. Hitler had been allowed to come to power peacefully. The powerful German Communist Party (KPD) had had six million voters and hundreds of thousands of militants. It had its own armed militia, which until the Nazis consolidated their power had had the strength to repress the fascists in the working-class districts of Berlin. And yet the KPD had allowed itself to be smashed, without even making a fight of it. When the bourgeoisie called the Nazis to power, the KPD had slunk into its grave — without even token resistance.

During the two and a half years from the September 1930 elections to the consolidation of Nazi power in January-March 1933, as the Nazis grew spectacularly, the KPD had refused to try to unite with the Social Democrats to oppose them. In 1920, a general strike had defeated an attempt at right wing coup, the so-called Kapp Putsch; in 1933 the KPD did not even attempt to organise a general strike! The KPD and the Social Democratic Party — whose leaders in the Reichstag

pledged to be a loyal, legal opposition to Hitler — destroyed the possibility of a general strike. They ensured that the call for a general strike made by the small Trotskyist organisation met with no response.

It was one of the great pivotal events in the history of the labour movement, and in the history of the 20th century. The final consolidation of Russian Stalinism, World War Two, Stalin's conquest of Eastern Europe, the decline and decay and ultimately the complete destruction of the revolutionary working class movement that had rallied to the Russian October Revolution.

In fact, the KPD acted as it did on Stalin's direct orders. Stalin had decided that it was in the USSR's interests to let Hitler come to power because Hitler would try to revise the Treaty of Versailles imposed on defeated Germany by the victors of the First World War and "keep them busy in the West while we get on with building up socialism here", as he put it to the German Communist leader Heinz Neumann. Stalin would later have Neumann shot: his wife Margurite would be one of a trainload of German Communist refugees from Hitler who were transferred — in an act that symbolised and summed up Moscow's relationship with the international "communist" movement — from Stalin's concentration camps to Hitler's, in 1940, as a gesture of goodwill to the German ally, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. She lived to tell the story.

In Cambridge in that summer of 1933 the young men listening to Philby's report tried to make sense of events — of their own political world. The Communist International was still denying that any defeat at all, still less a catastrophe, had occurred: it denied that the KPD had been destroyed. It was still playing with idiotic slogans: "After Hitler — our turn!" Those who wanted to stay in the Stalin's "Communist International" had to accept that way of looking at it. This was the period of "High Stalinism": the Pope in Moscow decided such things and brooked neither opposition, disagreement nor sceptical reserve. Even so, the question forced its way through: were the leaders of the Communist International correct?

More daring than the others, one of the Cambridge group suggested that, maybe — maybe — mistakes had been made. Maybe they should have fought the Nazis rather than let them consolidate fascist rule peacefully? Perhaps Stalin's critics were right? Perhaps, after all, Stalin did not quite know what he was doing.

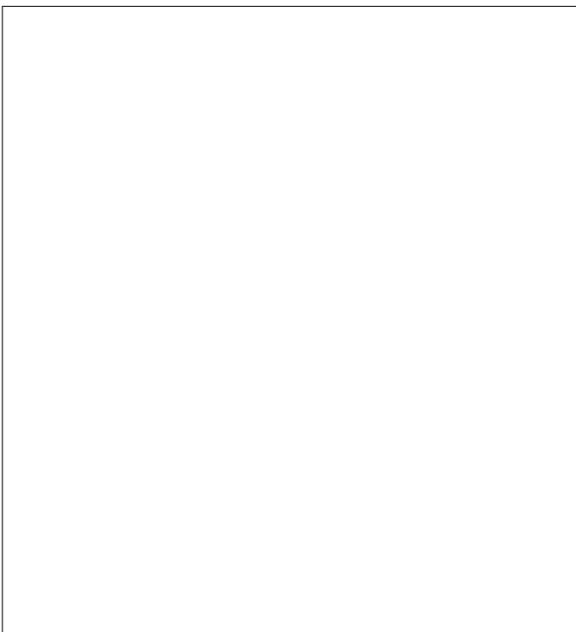
"No!", said Philby, the future KGB general, very heated. The KPD had made mistakes, and Stalin had not got anything wrong in Germany. To talk of even the possibility that Stalin was mistaken was to miss the point, Philby insisted: he denied that, where the affairs of the labour movement were concerned, Stalin *could* be mistaken and wrong. Like the infallible Pope, who cannot err where Catholic "matters of faith and morals" are concerned, Stalin could not err where the affairs of the left were concerned. "W...why", he stuttered, "W...what-ever Stalin does — th... tha... that is the left!" There was no left other than Stalin.

## 2. "Communism" and the left

**It is a statement that sums up an entire epoch in the history of the left, and, to call things by their proper names, what was becoming the ex-left: for the hitherto left and right were now melding in a new Stalinist synthesis. What Stalin did, what the Russian and later other Stalinists in power did, whatever they did, including things that had previously characterised the right, whatever they said in the name of socialism and communism — that was now socialism, that deed and doctrine, was now the left! The left today is the child and grandchild of that "left".**

Defence of what that "socialist state" did, and generalisations from what it did, whatever it was — that became the left. The official accounts of what they were and what they did; the rationalisations, fantasies and lies which disguised the real nature of what they did; the learned "Marxist" commentaries on the "reasons" for what they did; the deep "theoretical" "Marxist" arguments that were concocted to explain what they did and why "socialism" in the USSR was so very far from the old hopes and socialist goals of the old left; the codification of Stalinist practice, written over and into the basic texts of socialist learning, turning "communism" and "Marxism" into incoherent and ever-changing Stalinist palimpsests — that was now "the left".

With the Stalinist counter-revolution, what had for decades been socialism, a powerful progressive force in the world, the implacable enemy by instinct and belief of oppression, social inequality, repression, exploitation, superstition, unreason, and of its own opposite, the right in instinct and conviction, was transformed into a "socialism", that, amongst other things, as we will see, incorporated the basic traits of the old right and was itself the negation of the old socialism. Everything socialistic was transformed.



**The German Communist Party and Socialist Party's pledged themselves to be a loyal, legal opposition to Hitler**

## 3. Stalinism and socialism

**The old aspirant socialism promised freedom; the new "socialism" brought slavery. Socialism was "the free association of producers"; "socialism" brought a murderous intensification of labour exploitation under a ruling class which, as Trotsky put it at the end of the 1930s, concentrated in itself all the worst traits of all the ruling classes of history.**

Aspirant socialism was first the victory of the working class in the class struggle against the bourgeoisie, what the *Communist Manifesto* defined as "to win the battle of democracy". "Socialism" was the victory of the bureaucratic Stalinist ruling class in its class struggle with the workers of the USSR. Aspirant socialism was republican liberty and equality; "socialism" was an absolute monarchy whose King-Pope-Caesar-Caliph-Sultan, as Trotsky observed, could truly say "society, c'est moi".

Socialism was democracy all through society and the economy — a world with no racial, national, religious, sexual or class oppression, a world with neither slave nor ruling brigand. "Socialism" was political and social tyranny. Even where there was economic progress, this "socialism" fell behind bourgeois civilisation, excising and stigmatising the gains of centuries in culture, everyday rationality and human rights, most relentlessly, of working-class political and social rights.

Socialism meant the cutting down of the state's repressive functions and its power, the beginning of its withering away; "socialism" was the rising up of a totalitarian state to the exercise of unprecedented power over society, installing a state-worship identical with that of fascism. Socialism was the triumph of a rational, humane morality, replacing class society's morality of the jungle and of petrified superstition with the moral principles of consistent, comprehensive human solidarity, rooted in the working class solidarity on which labour movements are erected; at all the levels of "socialist" society, "socialism" knew only the morality of the slave market, of the venal courtier, of the insecure, hypocritical ruling elite, of the unfeeling, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine.

Socialism was the victory of reason over the murderous unreason of class society; "socialism" raised irrationality to the pitch of nightmare, and sometimes outright madness. Aspirant socialism was reason in revolt; "socialism" was reason in captivity to a church-state, ruled-over by a Pope-Caesar, with his cardinals, bishops and local supervising, enforcing, preaching and "educating" secular clergy all across the world. The intellectual and moral foundation of socialism was the ruthlessly critical appraisal and reappraisal of reality. In Marx's words, it continuously "plucked the imaginary flowers [of religious consolation] from the chain, not in order that man shall continue to bear that chain without fantasy or consolation, but so that he shall throw off the chain and pluck the living flower. [It] disillusion man, so that he will think, act, and fashion his reality like a man who has discarded his illusions and regained his senses..." "Socialism" was consoling, degrading cant and lies about the state of things in the Stalinist-ruled part of the world.

Aspirant socialism was a coherent, developing view of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history. "Socialism" disarranged all the ideas, meaning-charged words and perspectives of socialism, shuffling them and reshuffling them into indecipherability and arbitrary, shifting meanings, interpreted by a caste of state-Caesar-Pope-

licensed priests. Aspirant socialism proposed to reorganise and reconstruct advanced capitalist society and on the basis of capitalism's own prior achievements to liberate first the workers and then all of humankind from class society; "socialism" took as its goal the development of backward societies towards what capitalism in the advanced countries had already achieved from what for socialism was the take off point for working class socialism.

Aspirant Marxist socialism saw capitalism and socialism as succeeding stages; "socialism" conflated and identified the "swinishness" that was inseparably part of "catching up with" and "outstripping" advanced capitalism, with the emancipation from swinishness of the socialist future, reducing it to incomprehensibility.

Aspirant socialism organised revolutionary political parties in which discipline in action was prepared, assessed, and made real by freedom of thought, of initiative, of criticism and of dissent. "Socialism" created monolithic sect-parties without freedom of thought or criticism or dissent, parties organised not according to the needs of the class struggle and of reason, but by the Jesuit rules of hierarchy and unreasoning obedience, self-suppression and self-hypnosis.

Socialism was the great clean, un-won truth of the 20th century; "socialism" was the foulest lie of the 20th century. Socialism is, remains, socialism; "socialism" was, of course, Stalinism.

For sixty and more years, socialism, in common discourse, was the "socialism" that existed in the USSR. The ideas conveyed by the words socialism and communism before Stalin established his system faded into the mists of pre-history, and "socialism" came to be the theory and practice of Stalinism—what became known in the 70s and 80s as "actually existing socialism".

## 4. The old left and the new

**The Marxist left developed its ideals and goals and norms from out of the programmes and goals of the defeated plebeian left in the bourgeois revolutions, right back to the Renaissance, the English Revolution of the 1640s and the French Revolution at the end of the 18th century (the Anabaptists, the Levellers and Diggers, the sans-culottes, Noel Babeuf). It had carried forward their drive for democracy and equality against the shallower pluto-democratic, bourgeois, versions of these ideas. Thomas Rainsborough had expressed this goal and this spirit beautifully during the "Putney Debates" at the end of the English Civil War: "I think that the poorest he that is in England hath a life to live as the greatest he..."**

Fundamental to "old socialism" had been a conception of the capitalist system, as a regime under which, in order to live, workers are compelled to sell their labour-power to employers who own the means of production, exchange, and communications, and who, by setting the workers to work, get those workers to produce far more value than is paid to them as a wage. That system is regulated by fear — fear of poverty, deprivation, penurious old age, of the future of the young generation. It operates in the workplaces as a pitiless tyranny designed to exact, wring out, use, the labour power purchased by the capitalist — wage slavery.

Before the Russian Revolution, "socialism" was interchangeable with terms such as "the Cooperative Commonwealth", the "Workers' Republic", the "Republic of Labour". It meant the reorganisation of the means of production, of the means of life, around which the citizens expend most of their time all over the world — under the collective control of the producers.

Old socialism proposed to substitute for capitalism and wage slavery common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and communication, and democratic common administration for the common good. Collective ownership by all of society is necessarily democratic ownership: it isn't "collective ownership" by those who "own" the state which administers the "collective" economy.

The democracy at every level of socialist society would, socialists believed, be profound and all-embracing. Where now, what Marxists call bourgeois-democracy is at its best a shallow and one-dimensional political democracy, socialism would remake the whole of society. Democracy would become real — real and full self-administration by the working class. Under socialism, socialists believed, there would be equality for all, irrespective of gender, race, sexuality. The sisterhood and brotherhood of all people would be realised. Reason, and not the blind forces of market economics, would govern society. The democratic Commonwealth of Labour would replace rule by aristocrats of the bank account, skin, inherited status and privileged, pre-empting education.

What, with their different methods, tempos, and perspectives, had all the different strands of socialism in

*Continued on page 22*

common?

All of them — the socialist reformists such as Keir Hardie and Nye Bevan, no less than the revolutionaries — sought to abolish capitalism and the exploitation and wage-slavery on which it rested, and to replace it with a non-exploitative, rational, humane society.

Their ideas of what would replace capitalism differed greatly, for instance, as between anarchists and Marxists (though Marxists and revolutionary anarchists — which is not by any means all anarchists — agree on the ultimate goal, a state-free society). But all the socialists sought to replace private ownership of the means of production and exchange and the exploitation of the producers that goes with it, by collective social ownership by the workers themselves.

All of them, in one way or another, with one qualification or another, looked to the working class, the slave-class of the capitalist era, to achieve this great social revolution.

They saw themselves as educators and organisers of the working class, working for social betterment and for the socialist transformation of society.

Before the spread of the Stalinist plague, Marxist socialists were guided by adherence to the working class, to the working class side in the class struggle — always and everywhere and in all circumstances; and to the education of the labour movement in consistent democracy, in working-class political independence, and consistent anti-capitalist militancy.

Plekhanov, the founding father of Russian Marxism expounded the idea that governed what the Russian Marxist movement did and aimed to do. It was what all socialists, more or less, did and thought they existed to do.

“What is the socialist movement?... To a contemporary socialist the socialist movement does not look anything like it did to a [utopian] socialist in the [18]30s [for whom] ‘future history resolves itself into propaganda and the practical implementation of their social plans...’

“What did the [Marxists] see in it? Above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie. In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things.

“If, therefore, for the [Marxists] the whole future history of bourgeois society resolves itself in the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, all their practical tasks are prompted by precisely this class struggle. Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory.

“But what exactly can they do? They ‘agitate, educate and organise’ the working class and raise it to the position of an aspirant ruling class.

“A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks. For this reason the [Marxists] consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

“The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat.

“Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful. Anything that has no effect one way or the other is of no consequence for them, it is politically uninteresting.”

(GV Plekhanov: *The Tasks of the Socialists in the Struggle Against the Famine in Russia*, 1891)

## 5. Bolshevism, Marxism and the Russian Revolution

**Bolshevism, in power in Russia after 25 October (7 November) 1917, and taking the lead in establishing a new, Communist, International — the “Third International” — tried to reorganise the old socialist movement that had collapsed at the outbreak of war in 1914. Bolshevism and the Communist International saw themselves as the continuator of the best of the old movement — those that had held to their principles when European bourgeois civilisation broke down in 1914 — armed for the new time of open revolutionary battles.**

The Bolshevik Communist International picked up many of the threads of earlier socialism, and wove them into a more or less coherent strategy of working-class struggle for power — the direct action of the French, British, Irish and American syndicalists, the political “syndicalism” of the De Leonites and Jim Larkin, the revolutionary parliamentarianism of Liebknecht, the sometimes acute criticism by communist-anarchists of the parliamentarians of the pre-1914 Socialist International, the concern with national liberation of such as James Connolly — all in previous socialist activ-

ity and theorising that was healthy, all that was above all indomitable in its commitment to the workers’ cause and in its will to fight the class struggle to working class, socialist victory.

This was at the start a living movement of self-respecting, experienced militants. It conducted its affairs according to reason; it took it for granted that honest differences of opinion inevitably arise even among very like-minded people honestly pursuing the same goals, and that they can only be resolved by reason, discussion, and democratic decision-making.

All present-day notions of both would-be left and the anti-Bolsheviks of socialist and communist popes possessing infallibility — and the power of coercion to compel compliance — arose in the era of triumphant Stalinist and bourgeois reaction. Every member of Lenin’s Bolshevik party Central Committee of October 1917 had opposed him at some turning point or another, some of them even on the October insurrection itself. Trotsky too found himself opposed by all his close comrades at one point or another.

This is how Lenin, writing in 1907, defined the relationship between party democracy and majority rule in action.

“The principle of democratic centralism and autonomy for local Party organisations implies universal and full freedom to criticise, so long as this does not disturb the unity of a definite action... Criticism within the basis of the principles of the party programme must be quite free... not only at party meetings but also at public meetings.”

The Bolsheviks denounced bourgeois democracy and parliamentarism in the name of the fuller, direct democracy of workers’ councils and only in the name of a better more potent democracy. Their criticism of bourgeois democracy would later, like so much else, be annexed and perverted into an absolute and unconditional disparagement and dismissal of “bourgeois democracy” and put to its own pernicious uses by totalitarian Stalinism.

The Russian working class, in its unprecedented creativity — for instance, in creating soviets (workers’ councils) — and the Bolsheviks who led them to victory had in life found solutions (or, to put it at its weakest, pro-tem solutions) to many of the problems that had perplexed earlier socialist thinkers. The Communist International was experimenting, exploring, drawing provisional balance sheets when it was cut down by the Stalinist counter-revolution against the 1917 working-class revolution. But by the time of Trotsky’s death at the hand of Stalin’s assassin on 21 August 1940, the great socialist tradition had dwindled down to a few tiny organisations in, perhaps, a couple of dozen countries. It would dwindle further. Stalinism, which cut it down, would for most of the 20th century dwarf and overshadow socialism.

## 6. The basic beliefs of old socialism

**Marx had argued that socialism would grow out of advanced capitalist society, which had developed the forces of production far enough that what in the basic necessities of life could be abolished almost immediately; that socialism would be the creation of the mass of the people, led by the working class, which would rule, could only rule, collectively and, by definition, therefore, democratically. That socialism would immediately destroy the old state machine, replacing it with an accountable system of working-class administration.**

Marx uncovered the mechanics of the exploitative relationship between, on one hand, the owners of the social means of production, and, on the other, the sellers of labour power. The participants in the exchange are legally free and in law equal, and yet it is exploitative.

In a sentence: the worker sells his labour power to an employer, who puts him to work; his work produces more than it costs the capitalist to buy his labour power at the hourly or daily rate.

Marx explains: “The value of the labouring power is determined by the quantity of labour necessary to maintain or reproduce it, but the use of that labouring power is only limited by the active energies and physical strength of the labourer. The daily or weekly value of the labouring power is quite distinct from the daily or weekly exercise of that power, the same as the food a horse wants and the time it can carry the horse are quite distinct. The quantity of labour by which the value of the workman’s labouring power is limited forms by no means a limit to the quantity of labour which his labouring power is apt to perform.

“[For example], to reproduce his labouring power, [a worker may need to produce new value equivalent to] working [three] hours daily... But... the capitalist has acquired the right of using that labouring power during the whole day or week. He will, therefore, make him work say, daily, [nine] hours. Over and above the [three] hours required to replace his wages, or the value of his labouring power, he will, therefore, have to work

six other hours, which I shall call hours of surplus labour, which surplus labour will realise itself in a surplus value and a surplus produce [profit, interest, rent, etc.]

“The worker cannot become rich in this exchange, since, in exchange for his labour capacity as a fixed, available magnitude, he surrenders its creative power... Rather, he necessarily impoverishes himself... because the creative power of his labour establishes itself as the power of capital, as an alien power confronting him. He divests himself of labour as the force productive of wealth; capital appropriates it, as such...”

“The productivity of his labour, his labour in general in so far as it is not a capacity but a motion, real labour, comes to confront the worker as an alien power; capital, inversely, realises itself through the appropriation of alien labour.”

The Marxian socialist programme is no more than the solution to this radical contradiction in bourgeois society, and the lesser contradictions at all levels which arise from it, which have shaped and continue to shape that society.

## 7. Old socialism and Stalinism

**Lenin, Trotsky and the Bolsheviks did not believe that socialism was possible in the ex-Tsarist empire, backward and historically retarded, as it was. What they believed was that the workers could take power there, and make the first in a chain of revolutions that would encompass the advanced countries where socialism was possible. As Rosa Luxemburg, who was also the Bolshevik’s friendly critic, wrote in 1918: “The fate of the revolution in Russia depended fully upon international events. That the Bolsheviks have based their policy entirely upon the world proletarian revolution is the clearest proof of their political far-sightedness and firmness of principle and of the bold scope of their policies”.**

The working class revolutions in Europe — Germany, Italy, Hungary — between 1918-1923 were defeated. In isolation, the Stalinist mutation, a new form of class society emerged with collective property owned effectively by a privileged elite of exploiters of the working class and the farmers, who, in practice collectively “owned” the state which owned the economy. It triumphed by way of a bloody one-sided civil war against the workers of the USSR, and against the resistance of those Bolsheviks who held to the ideas under which they had made the October Revolution, Trotsky and his comrades. After World War Two Stalinism spread, rolling into Eastern and central Europe on the caterpillar tracks of Russian tanks and in Yugoslavia, China and other states by Stalinist organisations at the head of peasant armies winning civil wars.

“Socialism” after the victory of the bourgeoisie in the west and of Stalinism in the USSR and in the Communist International, was no longer the rule of the working people in a world created by advanced capitalism, as in Marx’s and Lenin’s conception of socialism it had to be, but the rule of an oligarchy over the producers in underdeveloped or even pre-capitalist societies, with the historical mission of undertaking the development of those societies to what advanced capitalism had achieved. Values were turned inside out and upside down.

The place of “socialism” in history, the very shape and sequences of history as hitherto conceived by Marxists was radically revised. The idea of what the socialist militant was and did was turned inside out. Socialism was no longer, as in Marxism it had to be, necessarily the offspring of advanced capitalist society, impossible without what advanced capitalism achieves in history, not least the creation and social education of a working class that would create socialist society.

Where the Bolsheviks had believed only that the Russian workers could take power, as part of a wider social revolution in advanced capitalist Europe, this was improved, to the belief that the main task of socialism, following the experience of Stalin’s “socialism in one country” Russia, was to do what capitalism had done in the “advanced countries” — to develop backward countries and enable them to catch up with and outstrip the advanced countries of capitalism.

“Socialism” became a thing of savage self-contradiction. “Marxism” became a pidgin religion whose paradoxes, conundrums and mysteries-of-the-faith could properly be understood only by those who approached them with the right “method”, frame of mind, and “dialectical” adaptability — those able to understand the special new meanings that now inhered in old words.

## 8. Socialism as state slavery

**A bureaucracy collectively “owning” the state had expropriated the workers in the USSR, depriving them of all rights and using them far worse than the workers in any capitalist countries were used, worse, even than in Nazi Germany (as Trotsky wrote in the programme of the Fourth International, in 1938). It**

## Stalinism was a state religion

turned them into state slaves or (as Trotsky wrote in 1939) semi-slaves.

The new ruling class continued to call itself communist and Marxist; it defined and camouflaged its own savage rule over the working people as the rule of the working class over society; it represented its anti-socialist and anti-working class revolution as the living continuity of the October revolution.

By repeated purges, ideological bamboozlements, and by bribery and corruption, they took control of the Communist International, the powerful international network of revolutionary working-class organisations made up of people who had rallied to the Russian revolution.

Stalinism, totalitarian utopianism – and this is centrally important for what concerns us here, the state of socialism today – was in its role in the history of political institutions and ideas above all a movement of social and political misrepresentation and parody. The gap between what it was and what it claimed to be would, on the stage, have been a comedy of the blackest humour; in life it was stark tragedy that engulfed enormous masses of people.

In the USSR, and later in other Stalinist states, they ran fake trade unions, fake parties, fake elections, fake rule by the working class, fake national autonomies, and fake, utterly fake, socialism.

Stalinism, in its account of itself and what it was doing, was a gigantic historical masquerade, sustained for nearly six decades.

“Communism” changed in the 1920s and 30s from being a genuine revolutionary working-class movement into a series of totalitarian organisations in the capitalist states, working to serve the USSR and its leaders. Their own local leaders aspired to become what in the USSR the “communists”, the bureaucratic ruling class, were. They created immense ideological confusion in the working-class movement. They isolated the Left Opposition, and later the Joint Opposition of Trotsky, Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Krupskaya, and the international movement, led by Trotsky, from the mass army of would-be communists, who saw in the Stalinist parties the local battalions of the Russian Revolution.

At first they used subtle political misrepresentation. Then they used violence and repression. It became increasingly reckless and intense, until in the years from 1935 onwards, it culminated in mass murder in the USSR, in Spain, and, on a much smaller scale, in other countries. At the end of World War Two, Stalinists in Vietnam and Greece massacred Trotskyists and assassinated individual Trotskyists and other socialist opponents in France, Belgium, Italy and the USA.

Throughout fascist and then Stalinist-ruled Europe, the cadres of Bolshevism, Trotskyism, were murdered. They did splendid deeds here and there in that Europe, for example in producing *Arbeiter und Soldat*, an underground paper for the German workers in uniform in the army of occupation in France, (an enterprise which cost the lives of two dozen Trotskyists, most of them German soldiers).

But those were mere episodes only, not part of, or harbingers of a great socialist movement. At the end of the Second World War Stalinism loomed in the world as a great and expanding power, surpassed only by the USA.

The USSR in 1939 made up a sixth of the world. At the end of an expansion which reached its peak with the proclamation of the Stalinist People's Republic of China in October 1949, but would not end until the Russian defeat in Afghanistan (1979-89), Stalinism controlled one-third of the surface of the earth.

It had mass parties, which were the main parties of the working class in a number of capitalist countries, France, Italy, Indonesia, etc.

### 9. The Stalin(ist)-refashioned left Stalinism was the opium of the 20th century socialists. Stalinism was religious.

In 1920 the liberal-socialist Bertram Russell branded Communism as a religious movement akin to early Islam. That was not true then. The leaders of the Comintern, Lenin, Trotsky and others, dealt in fact, reason, logic, albeit leavened by daring extrapolation, and the will to attempt things of such enormous scale and scope that less daring people were intimidated at the very thought of what the Bolsheviks dared to do.

What was wrongly said of Bolshevism, falsely, unjustly, malevolently said, came to be true of Bolshevism's grave-digger, Stalinism.

From now on, blindly, fanatically, incorrigibly, with the religious fervour of a death- and Paradise-obsessed Islamist devoutly fighting a holy war, in which he thinks only death can bring him advantages in a wonderful afterlife, “Communists” championed a tyrannical state ruled by a narrow, intolerant, ignorant elite. For the religious fanatic, a personal afterlife, for the “Communist” a socialist future life for humanity, for both of them delusion.

The story is well-enough known amongst political people. But Stalinism and Stalinism's characteristic traits are seen as things of the past, attributes of a dreadful time and of a dreadful movement — of the past. It is not a matter of the past: the political mindset and the habits of thought — and hypnotic thoughtlessness — fostered and entrenched by Stalinism over the decades of its domination of “left-wing” politics, still dominate the “left” long after the collapse of Russian Stalinism.

The Stalinist nature and origin of the characteristics dominant in the present day “left”, its characteristic mindset, its habits of thought and lack of thought, and its methods, are obscured by the fact that most of that “left” is made up of the seeming heirs of the great historical antagonist of Stalinism, Trotsky.

That Stalinist “left” came to be the predominant “Marxism”, and, with more or less distancing criticism of it, the common conception of socialism, for the two-thirds of the 20th century that remained after Stalin's counter-revolution was accomplished. The anti-Stalinist Bolshevik left was extirpated or marginalised, for generations, or transformed by the pressure of Stalinism and by its example. It was restyled out of all recognition.

Living in a political world hegemonised by Stalinism the old distinctions between what was “left” and what “right” — always imprecise and conventional as such terms are, and by their nature must be — was more or less destroyed. Major aspects of what had been the old left and the old right were merged; they began to cross-breed, producing often strange and unexpected hybrids.

The “left” today, including most of those with Trotskyist movement roots to them, grew out of the Stalinist revolution in the politics of “socialist” revolution which denuded it of class, of integrity, of method, of programme, of standards, of its own real history, and of its old objectives. That Stalinist counter-revolution in the politics of revolution took place on three fronts — social and economic in the USSR and political all over the world in the labour movement and on the left.

The difference between the old socialism and the movement reshaped by the Stalinist counter-revolution was not only in day to day activities and in programme,

but in the mindset of “socialism”. The shift in mindset is the point here, because much of it still dominates the left.

As the capitalist world went into its deep mid-century economic, political, social and military crisis — a crisis that many, friend and foe alike, thought was terminal — fully a sixth of the world was already “socialist”: a parallel world was being created in Russia. In consequence, Stalinist influence came to be far wider than the labour movement and socialist and “Communist” circles”. It extended in the 1930s to the US liberal publications the *Nation* and the *New Republic*, the liberal daily in London, the *News Chronicle*, the *New Statesman* and the Labour left publication *Tribune*. *Tribune* was a Stalinist paper up to the Hitler-Stalin pact and World War Two.

Much was made of the contrast between the “communist” and the capitalist world. In the USSR there was planned progress, spectacular progress, not capitalist chaos and regression. There was no “mass unemployment”, no great slump, no economic semi-paralysis. The post-capitalist future was already in being and, as one liberal admirer, H N Menken reported after a visit, “I have seen the future and it works”. Many in the west who had scorned, rejected, or fought actively against the October Revolution of the Russian working class, rallied to the Stalinist counter-revolution and its staid economy — which had the “merit” that its waste and destruction were not blazoned forth across the world, as those of capitalism were.

Those — Trotsky and others, surprisingly few others — who pointed to the realities of Russia, to the semi-slave and chattel slave labour conditions, the helplessness before the all-powerful state to which the workers were reduced were shouted down and driven off the highways of public discourse. The virtual ignorance and indifference with which the liberal establishment as well as the broad left responded to the Stalinist terror and totalitarianism in Russia in the 30s is one of the oddest things in its history.

The anti-Stalinist left was stifled. George Orwell's account of his difficulty in getting his account of the Stalinist police terror in Republican Spain published is nowadays well-known. When Trotsky pointed out the elements of Jew-baiting in the Moscow Trials, he was denounced by even right wing Jewish leaders. An example of just how topsy-turvy the old left-right polarisation became is the fact that Victor Serge's report on the Stalinist counter-revolution was circulated in Britain by “The Right Book Club”, a weak would-be counterpoint to the Stalinist-controlled and very influential Left Book Club. Meanwhile, many on the political right approved of Stalin because he was destroying the Bolshevik left. Mussolini at the time of the Moscow Trials claimed Stalin as one of his disciples. Some Russian émigré fascists made the discovery that Stalinism was Russian fascism and Stalin their “Führer”.

It was in Russia that the future of humanity was, somehow, emerging, being forged by Stalinism. Miraculously, courtesy of the miracle-working Stalinist “Party of a New Type”, socialist Russia had leapfrogged ahead to show the more economically-developed countries the way to the future. By 1950 a third of the world was “socialist”. Countries like China, which were among the least developed, now appeared to be marching at the head of history's column; the losers so far in the modernisation and industrialisation of the world, were turning into the winners, humankind's pioneers and leaders.

So tens and tens of millions of people all over the world believed. Stalinism's success reshaped the thinking of the left everywhere. Even those who in Trotsky's time had been the implacable critics and denouncers of Stalin's Russia. The Fourth International had by about 1950 come to believe that Russia and the other states were irreversibly “in transition” to socialism. We are concerned here with the changes Stalinism brought in attitudes — political morality, standards of behaviour, mores, mindset of the left.

Why did the Stalinist counter-revolution bother to maintain an international “revolutionary” “communist” movement at all? It was of enormous value to the Russian state to have subservient movements in most countries and sometimes mass movements; legions of adherents and militant propagandists across the world such as no other state could match.

How exactly did the Stalinists achieve their “revolution in the politics of revolution”? What was changed? What was new in the socialist working class movement?

## B. THE POLITICAL CONTENT OF THE STALINIST COUNTER-REVOLUTION

### 1. Stalinist utopianism

Stalinism was a regression to pre-Marx “utopian socialism” — a bleak and strange mirage, utopianism on a gigantic scale, yes, but utopianism in

**what it was. Many of the features of Stalinism — like the collective-superman “Party of a new type” — could be understood by analogy with the traits of old utopian socialism.**

The Bolsheviks knew and proved in practice that the Russian workers could take power; they did not “know” that socialism could be built in backward, and in addition civil-war-ruined Russia. They knew perfectly well it couldn’t.

That isolated Russia, in which the Bolsheviks clung to power, should be built up and its economy developed was self-evident. The anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks were pioneer advocates that this should be done. That it could be done as far as the building of socialism, a socialism more advanced than the most advanced capitalism in its economy and its social relations, occurred to nobody before the end of 1924, when Stalin formulated the idea and the programme of “Socialism in One Country”.

Russia would be built up out of its deep backwardness and outstrip the capitalist world? It was the programme of the old utopian colony-builders who attempted in some wilderness to start society anew, in parallel to existing capitalist society. Socialism would come, so to speak, from outside capitalism, not from inside, not by the working class in advanced capitalism taking power and building on what had been achieved. The Marxist objections to it were as many as the lessons Marx and Engels had drawn from the experience of the old colony-builders, Owen, Cabet, Thompson.

In practical revolutionary politics it was objected to by Trotsky and others because it implied that Russia would remain isolated for many decades, that there would be no socialist revolution anywhere in that time, that capitalist armies would not militarily “intervene” in the process and so on. It implied that the communist parties would become “frontier guards” in their own areas for the “Socialism in One Country” Russian state.

Totalitarian-utopian Stalinism unravelled all of the assumptions and concerns of the old Marxist movement. It redefined the role of parties — in Russia as the agent of development, outside Russia as a significant network for the “defence”. It displaced the working class as the protagonist in the socialist movement and offered as its substitute, The Party, which might be tied to the working class but then again, might not, but in either case was the decisive, the irreplaceable agency. It implied redefining the relationship of the “party of a new type” to the working class: not to educate in order to develop consciousness and political independence but objects to be manipulated and used.

Part two, in the next issue of *Solidarity*, will further anatomise the political characteristics of Stalinism and itemise those that still survive in the contemporary would-be left.

## 2. The politics of anything-goes expediency

**In the place of all that the old socialism had done and tried to do, of the work of educating and organising the working class into political independence and anti-capitalist politics, now was put expediency — the brute expediency of the Russian ruling class. There was nothing in old socialism that could not be sacrificed, turned inside out, stood on its head.**

The USSR and its external parties, controlled and, to a serious extent, financed by the Russian ruling class, came to be everything. The Stalinists concentrated all that was “nihilistic”, Jesuitical, Machiavellian into a world outlook in which rifled remnants of a bowdlerised Marxism were recast as the philosophy of manipulation in the service of the “socialist fatherland”, for use by the “Party of a new type”, which was

in the jailed Gramsci’s unfortunate title for a work of genuine Marxism, “the Modern Prince — the new protagonist that replaced the working class.

Old agitational and propagandist techniques of manipulation were brought to new levels of perfection by the Stalinist rulers and their agents and allies across the world. Politics, history and, they thought, “History”, were freed from the primitive slavery to facts. Politics that were virtually fact-free and virtually truth-free became possible on a mass scale. Great political campaigns could now be and were lied into existence. To be sure, this was not something unknown before Stalinism; but the Stalinists, beginning with their lies about what the Soviet Union was, made it an all-embracing permanent way of political life.

Truth did not exist, only “class truth”, which meant “party truth”, which meant Russian bureaucratic truth, which meant anything they thought would be useful. Consistency was a vice of lesser, unemancipated mortals. Now you could say and do anything and it was your political and moral duty to do whatever was most useful. Logic? Anything was logical so long as you got the “context” right and understood the “historical process”. It was all a matter of “perspectives”. Dialectics, comrade!

Truth? No such thing! There is no “objective” truth, only shifting, relative truth. And therefore? Applying the rules of Stalinist dialectics, and putting things properly in “context” and “perspective”, anything that is useful can be shown to be true. Morality? No such thing! What serves the struggle is moral. The end justifies the means.

History? There is no “objective” history, only class history. Therefore? “History is only current organisational needs read backwards”, as one Stalinist professor put it. Therefore, to get the most useful history, select, suppress, construe, spin, mythologise, lie and misrepresent as much as necessary. Wherever Stalinists had the preponderant influence, there was a giant intellectual step backwards to the standards and norms of the pietistic, authority-fixated scholastic ideologues of the Dark Ages who saw nothing wrong in interpolating into ancient texts, for the greater glory of God and of the Church.

Wherever the Stalinist influence ran, it worked to falsify history. If it is true that those who do not learn from history are apt to repeat it, then those who have had their own and other history falsified simply can not learn from it: they have had their retrospective, their historical, eyes put out.

At different times Trotsky described this condition as “syphilis” and “leprosy”. In the summaries of the proper revolutionary communist approach which he wrote in the 1930s, the demand to be truthful and to “be true, in little things as in big ones” is always central. The fact that such a “demand” had to be made and that it was made only by a tiny pariah minority, as incapable of imposing the necessary norms of behaviour as they were incapable of doing what they knew had to be done to defend the working class, was one measure of how far the “Marxist” movement had fallen, how deeply it had regressed, and how much had to be done to restore its health.

Trotsky, a voice crying out of the grave of Bolshevism and old socialism contended against the anti-morality of Stalinism: “Permissible and obligatory are those and only those means, we answer, which unite the revolutionary proletariat, fill their hearts with irreconcilable hostility to oppression, teach them contempt for official morality and its democratic echoers, imbue them with consciousness of their own historic mission, raise their courage and spirit of self-sacrifice in the struggle. Precisely from this it flows that not all means are per-

missible. When we say that the end justifies the means, then for us the conclusion follows that the great revolutionary end spurns those base means and ways which set one part of the working class against other parts, or attempt to make the masses happy without their participation; or lower the faith of the masses in themselves and their organization, replacing it by worship of the ‘leaders.’”

The Stalinists answered not with arguments but with lies, abuse, blows and bullets, and in Trotsky’s case, with an ice-pick through his skull.

Much of the popularly accepted history of workers’ and other struggles is still today shot through with Stalinist myths, lies, anathemas and demonology: for instance, the Spanish working class revolution of 1936-7, which was bloodily suppressed, is buried in the handed down concept from that time of “The Spanish Civil War” (in which the Stalinists and some other sensible people encountered a little local difficulty in Barcelona in May 1937, and dealt with it with the proper and necessary civil-war severity.)

There was, indeed, a Spanish Civil War, but there was also the most important working class revolution since 1917. There was never any honest self-criticism and analysis of acknowledged mistakes; there was no possibility of democratic discussion other than “discussion” authorized by the leaders from time to time.

The faculty for recognising and correcting mistakes atrophied, along with the old ideas of socialism. If everything is decided by what the rulers of the USSR think best serves them at a given moment, then starkly contradictory positions — the most notorious example: anti-Nazi, then pro-Nazis, then anti-Nazi again, in 1939-41 — may indeed have all been equally “correct” and all perfectly self-consistent from a Russo-centric point of view.

The Marxist standards of measurement were no part of it — the standards and criteria that have the working class and its social and political development at their heart. If they fall into disuse — or if the ascendancy of other criteria and standards makes their employment impossible — then we cannot recognise our mistakes and where we went wrong. The historical memory of the working class is destroyed, or worse, falsified, and that adds to the tremendous difficulties which its existence as the basic wage-slave class of bourgeois society, a society where ‘upward mobility’ is sometimes possible for some members of the working class, already places in the way of the working class developing an independent political identity.

Trotsky truly said that the revolutionary party — a real revolutionary party — is the memory of the working class. The Stalinist parties were the parties of enforced amnesia, hysterical delusion, of the substitution of historical myths and lies for the memory of a working class socialist movement which is truly itself, and knows what it is, and therefore has no need to lie about it, either to itself or anyone else, a movement which accumulates experience and learns, and unlearn, from its experience, and from its own mistakes as it goes along.

That is one of the reasons for the tremendous regression in working-class consciousness in the late 20th century. When George Orwell wrote about the “memory hole” in 1984, and about the systematic rewriting of history to get it into line with the eternally changing now, he invented nothing. He merely read off, and gave an imaginary physical expression — physically redoing and up-dating old newspapers — to what he saw happening in and around the Stalinism-infected labour movements and in the USSR.

## WHERE WE STAND

**T**oday one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists’ relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

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

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

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

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

• Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate. If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



## THE ORIGINS OF THE PLEBS LEAGUE PART 3

# Oxford University and working-class education

COLIN WAUGH CONTINUES A SERIES\*

Under the pressure of rising working-class self assertion across the country, the University extension movement accepted Albert Mansbridge's scheme for tutorial classes and committed study (as opposed to more "popular" bigger lecture classes). This acceptance was spearheaded by a group of young, socialistic Oxford tutors. Supported by prominent figures in the church, civil service and ruling class generally, members of this group worked with Mansbridge himself and the other main Workers' Educational Association activist, J MacTavish, to produce a report, *Oxford and Working-Class Education*.

In 1907, after years of leftwing lobbying, the TUC Congress made a more high profile appeal to unions to give financial support to Ruskin. This triggered a drive by the WEA/extension alliance to seize control of Ruskin before it could become irreversibly a labour college.

During April and May 1907, *The Times* published several articles by Catiline Club members [Oxford tutors associated with the movement]. On 27 July, in the climate of upper class opinion formed by these articles, [WEA backer] Charles Gore started a debate in the House of Lords about the development of both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. This in turn set the scene for the WEA annual conference in August, which was held under the title "What Oxford can do for Working People", again in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Oxford Extension Delegacy.

At this joint event, MacTavish, who would later succeed Mansbridge as general secretary of the WEA, made a demagogic speech in which he said: "I am not here as a suppliant for my class... I claim for my class all the best that Oxford has to give. I claim it as a right wrongfully withheld... What is the true function of a University? Is it to train the nation's best men, or to sell its gifts to the rich?... To Oxford I say: Open wide your doors and take us in; we need you; you need us".

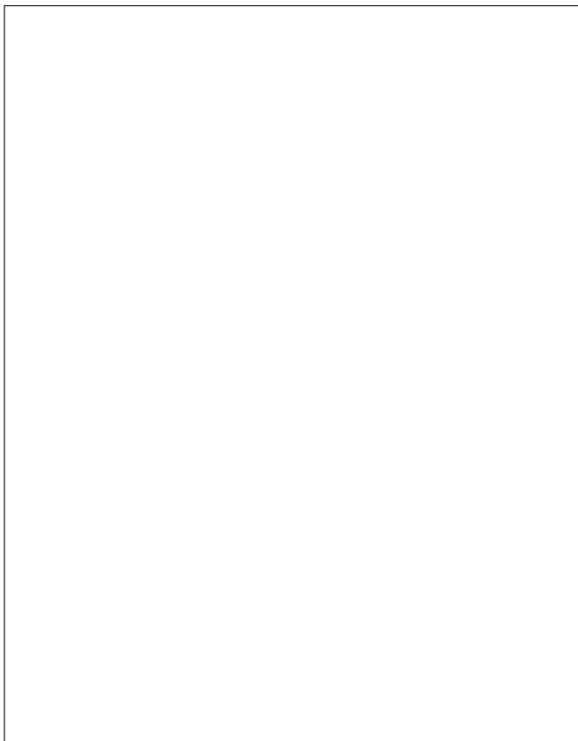
On 10 August the WEA meeting set up a committee. Seven members of this committee were nominated by the vice-chancellor of Oxford University and were prominent figures in the University, as well as Catiline Club member Alfred Zimmern and HB Lees Smith. The other seven were nominated by the WEA. These included Mansbridge and MacTavish, along with Ruskin governor David Shackleton [from the TUC]. The committee produced a report on 28 November 1907.

*Oxford and Working Class Education* was the manifesto in which the WEA/extension alliance announced its project to the political class, to the middle class public, and to sympathetic trade union leaders. Specific plans for Ruskin College were also included.

Its main recommendations were as follows. Tutorial-type classes should be set up all over the country for working class adults. The tutors for these classes should be supplied by the universities. The funding should come mainly from LEAs. The running of the classes should be controlled by the students themselves, organised through the WEA.

These classes should have three main purposes. First, they would make life more enjoyable for the people who took them.

Second, they should counter bias, and help working-class people, especially those involved in unions and/or the Labour Party, to make objective judge-



A teaching method developed by the Socialist Labour Party, probably influenced the Plebs League

ments about the world.

Third, they should provide a route by which a minority of this group could become students at Oxford University itself. (Here they would do either a special two year diploma in Economics, based on one that already existed, or another, to be introduced, in Political Science. It was expected that many if not most of those following this route would then become union leaders and/or MPs.)

Among other recommendations, criteria for selection to the university should include: "the character and influence of the students, and in particular of any probability which may exist that they will be asked to hold places of trust and responsibility". The last point here was important because "it is one of the objects of the scheme which we recommend to give the broad general training needed to qualify workpeople for public positions".

It was envisaged that students should "come up [i.e. go to Oxford] either as members of an ordinary College, or as Non-collegiate students, or as members of Ruskin College". The first year at Ruskin should become a route to entering the university as a diploma student. Those doing such a diploma could do it either via a second year at Ruskin or by one of the other routes cited above.

If adopted, these proposals would gear teaching at Ruskin to diploma course entry, and transfer virtually all decision-making about what was taught and learnt there to the university.

Alongside administrative proposals, anxiety about Marxist ideas was reflected in the model curricula attached as appendices to the report, as well as in the notes about how lecturers should handle such topics.

For instance in the recommended unit on "Economics" the text says that "If many members of the class have socialistic views, it would be well to preface this part of the subject [ie the transition to economic theory] by reading Marx's *Capital*... The first nine chapters of Book I contain the essence of the whole. The style is rather difficult, but a simplified statement is to be found in Hyndman's *Economics of Socialism*... The teacher who adopts this course must, however, be very sure that the criticism of Marx, implicit in the ordinary textbook, is equally carefully explained ..."

*Oxford and Working-Class Education* emphasised the need to foster "harmony" between the classes by giving workers a "broad outlook" and a "synoptic mind". Its tone was liberal and progressive. Despite this, it assumed throughout that the existing distribution of

wealth and power in society would stay the same. In the end, it was an attempt by one section of the ruling class to convince other sections, including within Oxford University itself, that the growth of working class power could not be ignored or simply repressed, and that tutorial classes leading to university entrance via Ruskin were the best weapon for combating it.

## THE STUDENTS' CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

In the early years of the twentieth century, in trying to educate themselves about socialism, activists like those at Ruskin began to solve for themselves the problems about lack of socialist texts by Marx, Engels and others, and of support from radicalised intellectuals as was more typical in continental Europe. Against the model proposed in *Oxford and Working-Class Education* they were able to set at least the beginnings of a coherent approach to socialist adult education from below. In developing this they brought back to life educational content and methods that had been developed by working-class organisations in the past.

By 1908 there existed amongst at least some of those who were students at Ruskin a fairly precise conception of what should be taught and learnt. This conception was incompatible with *Oxford and Working-Class Education*. It revolved round three elements: Marxist economics; industrial history; and philosophy.

Activists who adopted this model focused mainly on Marx's version of the labour theory of value, which they saw as the key to understanding the capitalist social order. They wanted to explain this to as many workers as possible, and they saw the study of economics as a way in which they could equip themselves to do this. In this, they were continuing an approach pioneered by the SDF and HH Hyndman and William Morris. Knowingly or otherwise, however, they were also revisiting the struggle over "really useful knowledge" of eighty years before. (In that struggle, activists had tried to defend the economic ideas of people like Thomas Hodgskin against the London bourgeoisie's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.)

Second, they knew from experience that the best way to convince other workers that Marx was right was by connecting his analyses to their working lives. This was a step towards socialism from below, because it was about finding things in workers' experience which would help them understand underlying forces, rather than simply announcing the law of value from above as the key to everything. They saw study of industrial history as the best preparation for activists planning to use this approach.

Third, they based their approach on points made by both Marx and Engels about dialectics. Marx and Engels believed that workers could use dialectical thought to cut through ruling class ideology. The Ruskin students focused on the version of dialectics that was accessible to them. This was Josef Dietzgen's *The Positive Outcome of Philosophy* as published by Charles Kerr, which included the essay *The Nature of Human Brainwork*.

Although Dietzgen's approach was rather limited, this too represented a turn towards socialism from below, because it was about activists equipping themselves — and helping as many other workers as possible to equip themselves — with a capacity for reasoning, viewed both as a process inside each person's mind and as a tool for use in discussion and debate.

The Ruskin students also had a method by which teaching and learning could best be conducted. This method was arguably the key contribution made specifically by the Socialist Labour Party to the development of independent working-class education. The education historian Brian Simon was later to claim, convincingly, that it was similar to a method developed in the late 1700s by the [political reform group] London Corresponding Society.

Many of the 54 students at Ruskin College in 1908-09

\* See [www.workersliberty.org/node/14617](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14617) for previous parts.

This article is a version, edited and abbreviated by *Solidarity*, of a 28-page pamphlet published by *Post-16 Educator* in January 2009 to mark the centenary of the "strike" by students at Ruskin College in 1909. For the whole text, visit the website [www.post16educator.org](http://www.post16educator.org) or send a cheque for £3, payable to "Post-16 Educator", to: 221 Firth Park Road, Sheffield S5 6WW.

Continued on page 26

ere either in or close to the ILP or SDF. However, in June 1909, one of the first year students, George Harvey, left the ILP and joined the small branch of the SLP in Oxford.

When he came to Ruskin, Harvey, born in 1885, was a checkweighman at Follonsby colliery in County Durham. Harvey was recruited to Ruskin via the Ruskin Hall Scheme. The SLP branch in Oxford was in existence by July 1905 and in 1910, after a period of growth, was still one of only 13 in England. Its most prominent member was Leonard Cotton. Cotton had been a founder member of the SLP. From 1910 to 1919 he was its national secretary. Between 1910 and 1912, Harvey would edit the SLP's main publication, *The Socialist*.

There are grounds for thinking that it was through Harvey that a teaching and learning method developed mainly by the SLP came to influence the students then at Ruskin. However, other factors too bolstered this influence.

First, several key items of socialist literature were available to working class people in Britain at this time only through cheap translations produced by the SLP.

Second, the SLP in Britain, partly as result of Daniel De Leon's influence, had a more rigorous approach to the ideological side of socialist activity than the SDF or ILP.

Third, this was the case not only at the level of the ideas which members held, but also in the means by which they equipped themselves to argue for those ideas. The overwhelmingly working class composition of the SLP may well have meant that, even more than other groups, it had to produce for itself, from amongst its own ranks, people who could conduct struggles about ideas.

Tom Bell, later prominent in the Communist Party, described the SLP method as follows: "Our method in the classes was to open with an inaugural survey of the whole field we proposed to traverse, and to make the workers familiar with the subject as a whole; the textbooks etc, which included *Wage Labour and Capital; Value, Price and Profit; Capital...* Each student was given a series of definitions of terms used by Marx. These had to be studied, memorised and discussed thoroughly, for perhaps the first four weeks. The student would study *Wage Labour and Capital* at home. At the class we would read it over paragraph by paragraph, round the class. This practice aimed at helping students to speak fluently and grammatically. At the following class meetings questions would be put and answered, and the points raised thoroughly understood by everyone, the results of each lesson being summarised by the leader. This method was applied in the same way to industrial history. Later on, simple lessons in historical materialism and formal logic were added. So that, after six months of this, every worker who went through the entire session came out a potential tutor for other classes."

Bell also described the classes held in Glasgow on Sunday afternoons: "We had two and a half hours tuition; reading out aloud; questions and answers to last week's lessons; short discussions and examination of home-work; after which tea was made and for another hour we talked and discussed freely on all manner of political and educational subjects. An hour's respite and we would repair to Buchanan Street ... or to Glasgow Green, to hold forth on socialist propaganda to large audiences who collected there every Sunday night."

**I**t seems likely that this method was devised before the split with the SDF by one of the founders of the SLP, George Yates. Yates was an engineering worker, who at the time was employed as a draughtsperson but who had also worked as a lab technician at Edinburgh University.

This method would have been attractive to students at Ruskin because many activists then, especially in England or Wales rather than Scotland, would have had only a basic primary schooling, learning by rote in classes of up to 100, under the threat of physical punishment. Many would have left at an early age, and any text-related education they had beyond that would usually have taken the form of private reading.

The SLP method was rather rigid. However, it did involve discussion, it did emphasise understanding and it did produce workers who could argue with confidence in more or less any company. In fact, when he talks about the lectures on Marx's economics given from 1906 by the SDF/BSP member John Maclean, Bell claims that: "MacLean's method had the merit of popularising economic study amongst large numbers of the workers, but had the defect of becoming a propaganda lecture. The SLP method was more intensive and produced a crop of competent class tutors, who led classes inside the factories. No such tutors came

from MacLean's classes in this period..."

Commenting later on equivalent classes organised amongst SDF members in London in the same period, Jackson described a similar approach: "It was our practice, then, to form classes for the study of Marx's economics. In Scotland, these classes were usually promoted and conducted by the SDF branch, officially — and were often attended (more or less under obligation) by every member of the branch. In England, and especially in London, they were formed by the members individually..."

He added: "I have noted . . . a difference between Scottish and English practice in the matter of economics classes. This difference turned upon . . . the fact that the 'traditional distrust of theory' which Engels notes . . . in England, was nothing like so evident in Scotland . . . the level of education in the public elementary schools was definitely higher in Scotland than in England: and in addition, for historical reasons, there was in Scotland a popular respect for learning that had no counterpart in England. I fancy — though this is only my guess — that an early drilling in the Shorter Catechism had something to do with giving our Scottish comrades their taste for, and respect of logic."

The SLP method, then, produced articulate activists, people who would be confident enough, for example, to challenge the Oxford University graduates employed to lecture on economics at Ruskin.

Some Ruskin students and ex-students also began to develop a critique of the dominant higher education curriculum, which they referred to as "orthodox" education. This critique went much further than a narrow demand for training in Marxist economics or techniques for winning debates.

That there was an urgent need for a kind of training was expressed well by a delegate to the Rhondda No. 1 District of the SWMF, when he said: "We have to contend with the masters, who have men thoroughly versed in the laws of supply and demand, and we want to bring into our ranks young men educated in these matters at Ruskin College, able to hold their own against all comers". In line with this, an article in *The Plebs Magazine* issue 2 by the Western Valleys miner Ted Gill (at Ruskin in 1907-08), titled "The function of a Labour College", integrated this need within a broader framework.

Gill argued that "What he [the working class student] requires is a knowledge of the social forces operating in society, and how best they can be utilized for the benefit of the people. While it may be as well for him to know the other side of the case in the field of Political Economy, it is essential that he should know his own side. The theories of men, who dedicated their lives to the Workers' cause, should be interpreted to him in a sympathetic and efficient manner. He should be made conversant with the origin, and growth of all working-class organisations in the manner which would enable him to comprehend both their possibilities and shortcomings. The workings of his own organisation should be his special interest in order to detect possible defects, the removal of which would lead to greater unity".

Gill's formulation, like the poems by activists in the early issues of *The Plebs' Magazine*, testifies that what they wanted was anything but narrow training or crude agitation. Rather, there was a tradition which encouraged them to be critical of academia.

We can see this in, for example, the section of the *Communist Manifesto* which discusses "the ruling ideas", in Morris's description of capitalist intellectuals as "the crowd of useless, draggle-tailed knaves and fools who, under the pretentious title of the intellectual part of the middle classes, have in their turn taken the place of the mediaeval jester", in Engels's description of Oxford and Cambridge as "protestant monasticism", or in Josef Dietzgen's characterisation of academics as "graduated flunkies" — which encouraged them to be critical of academia. Walter Vrooman himself had described Oxford tutors as "giants of understanding" who were "walking cyclopaedias crushed like the miser beneath the weight of their possessions".

In line with these views, the editorial in *The Plebs' Magazine* issue 3 (April 1909) would argue that: "University life is the breeding ground of re-action. It incites by its very nature toward breaking away from working-class aspirations and cleaving unto the ideals of the class above. The knowledge that is to be of any service to the Labour Movement is not to be gained in that quarter. The problem of the workshop, the mine and the factory, is not to be solved in the University. All that the latter can do for the Labour leader is to intellectually enslave him, and through his enslavement to clog and confuse the working-class movement..."

In the polemical struggle against the WEA, which was still going on in Plebs in the 1960s, one of the key charges was that the WEA's emphasis on tutorial classes

required students to accept "orthodox" education rather than challenge it. It is therefore not surprising that the Ruskin students rejected the WEA's central assumption: that all true education is class neutral.

Thus in *The Plebs Magazine* issue 3, the author of an unsigned article about 'Our critics' would address the claim that "Education is not a class question" in the following way. "Is this true? To a large extent it may be true of the physical sciences, but it is not true of social science, i.e., history and economics. To the working-class the present form of Society is a temporary stage, and a painful one at that, in social evolution; one whose exit must be hastened as speedily as possible. To the other class on the contrary, it is the natural form of Society, just and eternal: 'everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds'.

Needless to state these different views result in different interpretations of history and economics. In history, progress will be due to the activities of the ruled or the rulers: in economics, the owners or employers will be either benefactors or parasites. In short, in the world of education there is reproduced the antagonism which prevails in the world of production. That all workers do not recognize this no more disposes of the fact, than is the value of industrial organization discounted, because so many workers remain unorganized. Indeed, there is a curious resemblance between unorganised labour and uncontrolled [ie by the working-class] education, and in both cases the capitalist class stands to benefit".

In the period leading up to the Ruskin strike, Ruskin students began to teach one another, using the method described here. There existed in the College, then, on the one hand, the official programme of lectures, the majority of which increasingly came to conform to the model set out in *Oxford and Working-Class Education*, and, on the other, an alternative model introduced by the students from below.

Describing his arrival at Ruskin as a student in 1908, the former South Wales railway-worker Will Craik would later say: "We new arrivals had little or no knowledge of what had been taking place at Ruskin before we got there. Most of us were socialists of one party shade or another... We were, however, soon made aware that the socialism of the second-year men was hewn from more solid and durable stone than ours. Very soon, too, they were urging us and helping us to dig with them in the same quarry. They had been quarrying in the works of Karl Marx... Still earlier students had begun to do the same thing by conducting among themselves study classes". He went on: "... it was the practice in those self-service classes for each member to be given one of the more difficult sections of the first volume of *Capital*... to explain to the class what he understood it to mean. Through these classes and the individual study which they involved we gradually gained a knowledge which was simply unobtainable from the resident lecture staff, with the exception of the Principal."

The activists concentrated at Ruskin College in 1907-09, then, understood the need for the working class to produce from within its own ranks people who, as well as being practical organisers, could also think for themselves as socialists, and spread the capacity to do this to an expanding circle of people. Between October 1908 and the strike in March/April 1909, their approach and that of the Extension delegacy/WEA, as set out in *Oxford and Working-Class Education*, squared up to one another within the college.



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DISCUSSION

# Can we promote a different kind of education for workers?

Sheila Cohen (NUJ/UCU) discusses the sorry state of trade union studies (courses accredited by the TUC and available at a variety of further education institutions) and what can be done to promote independent working-class education.

**L**ike so many other things during the long New Labour years, trade union studies has become wrapped in an incomprehensible coating of jargon and bureaucratese. The structure and content of Stage One Reps' courses and others is now dictated almost entirely by something called "accreditation", ie criteria for awarding the qualification, which itself sits meanly in the midst of the "NVQ" (National Vocational Qualification) nightmare that New Labour has bequeathed to the nation. This system ensures almost no concern for real learning, though its book-length course guides are rife with "Learning Outcomes".

Basically, if a trade union steward attends the majority of classes and can produce "proof" of her learning in the form of contributions to flipcharts, notes, completed questionnaires and other miscellanea, she is duly awarded the appropriate "Key Stage" recognition. Although discussions within Stage One cover crucial issues such as the reasons for union decline and membership "apathy", these are dealt with in a superficial "reasons for joining a union, reasons against", rather than involving any political and historical discussion of what has happened to the trade union movement and how that movement might be renewed.

This dismal state of affairs has been fuelled by three main developments:

- The overwhelming trend towards individual case-work fuelled by anaemic "rights"-based legislation from both the European Union and New Labour. Workplace reps will testify that, although this has made for a huge increase in workload, it has done nothing to strengthen basic trade union organisation.

- The development of new forms of workplace representation such as "equality reps", "environmental reps" and, of course, "learning reps" (see below). This, of course, might be seen as a progressive development, but what it actually does is to dilute the class role of the shop steward.

- "Partnership" and general trade union weakness in the workplace. While partnership approaches have long lost credibility, they and the earlier "Social Contract"-based legislation of the mid-1970s bestowing "rights" on shop stewards have created a bureaucratic emphasis on "training" which again means courses are preoccupied with correct procedures, legalese, and endless "information and consultation" flannel which again adds nothing to the class strength of workplace representatives. (The shop stewards of the 1960s, with their "frontier of control" mentality, certainly didn't get "trained" in anything other than the workplace-based school of class warfare).

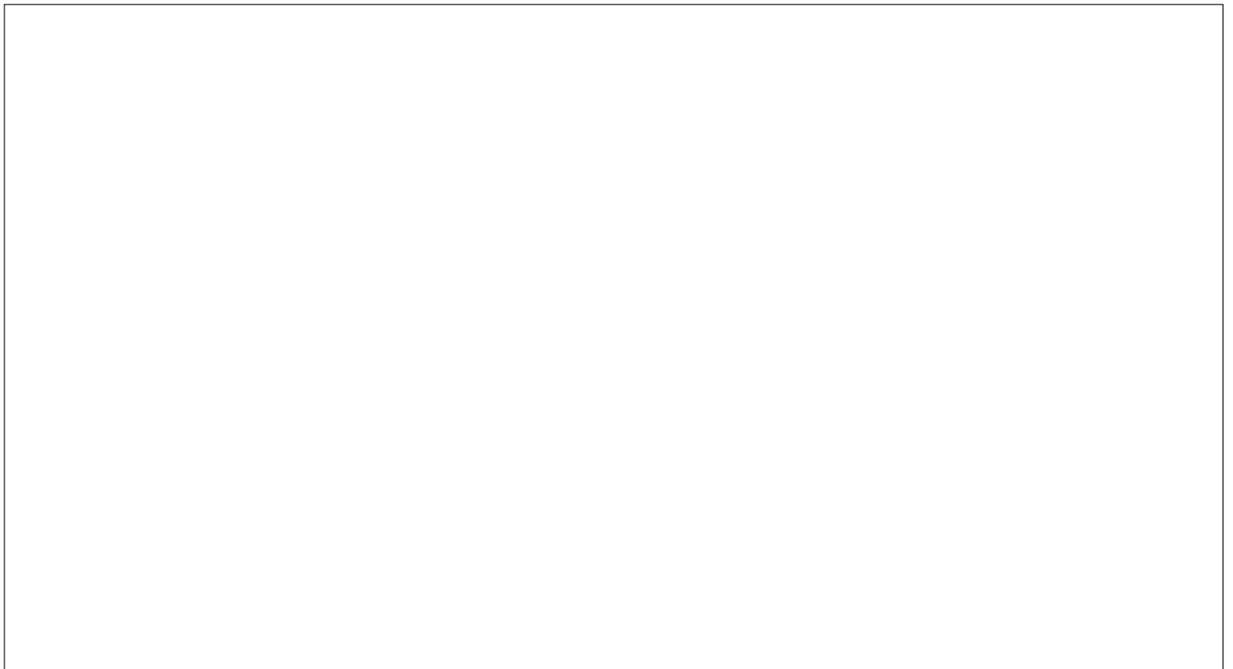
At the same time, the comparative strength of employers means they can prevent time off for stewards who might be interested in some of the more analytical courses still offered by the TUC, such as "Contemporary Trade Unionism".

In addition to all of these factors, and overwhelmingly influential, is the mushroom-like growth of "Unionlearn". The value of this programme to employers is evidenced by the fact that the Con-Dem government has made no moves at all to threaten it.

As *Labour Research* reported just before the election, the Conservative Party's "trade union envoy" (huh?) — former Labour MEP Richard Balfe — has confirmed that the Conservatives would retain this programme, which, significantly, is amply government-funded.

Balfe's assurance "echo[ed] the views of skills secretary David Willetts, who told the House of Commons, 'One thing we like about Unionlearn is that it is very cost-effective...The amount of encouragement and training that one receives for relatively modest sums is very attractive indeed.'"

Very attractive indeed to employers and neo-liberal politicians, certainly, as demonstrated by the widespread endorsement of Unionlearn by luminaries such



Unionlearn, attractive to employers, and nothing to do with trade union education

as Peter Mandelson and the boss of First Bus. This is because, of course, the objectives and content of Unionlearn courses are to provide a cheap alternative to adequate early-years schooling in providing workers with "basic skills" like literacy and numeracy — a process which has nothing to do with trade union education.

**T**he potential for shop stewards classes and other basic forms of working-class education to raise basic class questions is still evident. Almost any group of reps can produce a lively discussion on issues of organisation and resistance against both employer and trade union bureaucrat — though many stewards have become somewhat stolid and institutionalised under Unison-style "partnership" approaches. Any serious debate, however, becomes difficult when required to spend a whole day discussing, for example, how you would conduct the defence for a member disciplined for talking too long on the phone.

It is in this current context that the need for truly independent forms of working-class education have become pressing. The above analysis has referred mainly to TUC education, but, as many tutors in these areas will attest, the same stifling tendencies are also evident in other forms of working-class education, from Ruskin to the WEA. However, the difficulties of offering an alternative are considerably more formidable than those of providing a critique.

The environment of explosive rank and file resistance within which the Plebs' League flourished is today, at least so far, notable absent. Attempts to set up class-wide rank and file links at workplace level have suffered from sectarian rivalries and "party-building", and any initiative to build independent working-class education from the base would of course encounter parallel difficulties — though this does not make the attempt any less worthwhile.

In this unpromising situation, however, we do have some allies. The conclusion that the class content of trade union education has been, if not neutralised, then fundamentally threatened, has already been arrived at by a large number of trade union tutors interested in discussing independent working-class theory and labour history rather than in teaching the correct way to conduct a "disciplinary".

The disillusionment of many of these tutors — and no doubt their students — with the increasingly "skills"- and procedures-based agenda in trade union education provides one set of reasons for attempting to provide some alternative form of trade union education rooted in the concerns of workers rather than

employers. This would include labour and trade union history as a basic component. It would encourage an understanding of political and economic issues based in a critical — i.e. Marxist — analysis of the capitalist system. It would avoid what the Plebs' League students so vividly described as the "sandpapering" of their class instincts. It would be rooted in and develop from working-class students' everyday working-class experience. Most of all, it would bring theory and practice together to shed light on the everyday concerns faced by workplace trade union activists, including crucial questions like internal trade union democracy and class independence from the employer.

**A**s emphasised above, this will not be an easy project. A small group of trade union tutors and activists was set up last year to develop independent working class education (IWCE), but its future is uncertain. Although we could seek support from some of the more active trade union education institutions, like Northern College and Ruskin, such institutional support contains dangers, as it threatens the political independence crucial to this project. How to square the circle?

The experience of the US project *Labor Notes* suggests one answer — a "building out" from the original grassroots network of workplace-based activists established by its monthly newsletter and biennial conferences to a programme of day or weekend schools which the same activists have found invaluable in building their own organisation and strength in the workplace. Probably as a result of these "Troublemakers' Schools", the 2010 *Labor Notes* conference was the biggest yet.

My own view is that it is only through building up a similar network of contacts who can be more or less relied on to take an interest in this project that we can move forward. These contacts would include both trade union tutors and workplace activists. Without such a network we would be wise to recognise the very real practical problems surrounding the setting up of a programme for independent working class education — highly desirable though such a project is. If we can build up a reasonably reliable base of this kind, however, we may be able to move forward to some form of independent working-class education-building event within the next year.

The support of socialists committed to rank and file organisation and class-based education will be crucial in this enterprise.

- To obtain more information on IWCE, (and for copies of Colin Waugh's pamphlet on the Plebs' League), please email [colin.waugh@cnwl.ac.uk](mailto:colin.waugh@cnwl.ac.uk)



## Defend Europe's Roma, help stop Dale Farm eviction!

By ROSALIND ROBSON

**R**acially motivated violence, party political racism and government-sponsored discrimination against Roma is on the increase in Europe. And life for Britain's travellers and Roma is set to get harder under this government.

Attacks on Roma were once most common in Eastern Europe — made worse by the fall-out from the collapse of Stalinism and the aftermath of the Balkans war. Now western European politicians are joining in. Nicholas Sarkozy has ordered the expulsion from France of all illegal gypsy immigrants (see page 11).

The situation for Britain's gypsies (Roma and travellers of Irish origin) has been marginally better than that of Eastern Europe — and discrimination in recent decades less virulent. But it continues. Objections to gypsy sites are ubiquitous. They come from "bricks and mortar" neighbours, driven by people concerned about house prices, who may be happy to have gypsies work for low wages on local farms but don't want to "live" alongside them. People who are stirred up by the small-minded snobbery of parish and town councillors.

The last government paid lip service to ending discrimination but their promise of new sites failed to materialise. Now this government has withdrawn funding to help local councils establish sites.

A long-run battle by Tory Basildon council to evict the residents of Dale Farm — a site owned by its residents, first established 40 years ago — may now be reaching a climax. The council say they have nowhere to "put" the residents except into housing. That is a deliberate insult. It is completely unacceptable to people who want to live as travellers and have done so for centuries.

Dale Farm residents will need the help of labour movement and other activists. Contact [dale.farm@btinternet.com](mailto:dale.farm@btinternet.com)

### Attacks on Roma in Europe:

- Hungary 2009-10. Jobbik party wins victories campaigning on anti-Roma agenda.
- Czech Republic 2009. National Party TV ads in European elections have to be withdrawn after they call for a "final solution" to the gypsy question.
- Italy. Northern League regularly attack Roma.
- Denmark 2010. Copenhagen's Mayor and the national Justice Minister characterise Romany migrants as criminals and advocate deportations.

### FLOODS IN PAKISTAN

# Support the Pakistan Labour Relief Campaign

By SACHA ISMAIL

**T**he number of people affected by the floods in Pakistan has now reached 20 million. More than 650,000 houses have collapsed, mainly in villages. Thousands of hectares of crops have been destroyed, along with people's livestock, household goods, clothes, shoes and other essential items. Millions are without drinkable water, food, shelter and clothing. Diseases like flu, fever, diarrhea and cholera are spreading fast.

Now more torrential rains are forecast. This is one of the most devastating floods in human history, affecting more people than the South East Asian tsunami and the Kashmiri and Haitian earthquakes combined. Yet aid has been slow in coming — so far less than \$4 committed per affected person.

The impact of the floods is an indictment of how the capitalist system works — in Pakistan, and worldwide. The government of Pakistan's corrupt capitalist elite predictably failed to act swiftly, leaving tens of thousands of people without aid. Only after a day did it arrive at the makeshift camps with paltry amounts of food. The result was fighting breaking out, making things even

worse for desperate people. Meanwhile the big capitalist powers have not put their money where their mouths are.

There is absolutely no doubt that Pakistan's large and growing Islamist movement will be taking advantage of the floods to organise, stepping into the gap the Pakistani government has left. Swat, where the floods began, is a stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban.

That makes it all the important that socialists and labour movements internationally support the alternative aid efforts being organised by the Pakistani left. The Labour Relief Campaign, set up in 2005 after a devastating earthquake killed 100,000, has launched an emergency fundraising appeal. The LRC's sponsoring organisations including the Progressive Youth Front, Women Workers' Help Line, Labour Education Foundation, National Trade Union Federation and the socialist group Labour Party Pakistan. It has raised hundreds of thousands of rupees and is raising thousands more every day.

### Support the appeal!

For how to contact and make payments to the Labour Relief Campaign, see [www.workersliberty.org/pakistanappeal](http://www.workersliberty.org/pakistanappeal) or Labour Party Pakistan: [www.laborpakistan.org](http://www.laborpakistan.org)

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