

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

ZIMBABWEAN LEFT

SPEAK OUT

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CAPITALISM AND SOARING FOOD PRICES

Millions starve. Business make record profits.

By COLIN FOSTER

In Britain, rising food prices — up over 15% a year — mean poorer households scrape and struggle. In many countries, they mean people starve. The most basic foods — wheat, rice, corn — have pretty much doubled. Families don't have enough to eat. In Egypt, workers have struck and occupied factories. In other countries, there have been food riots.

The high prices are good news for the world's giant agribusinesses. Monsanto's net income for the three months up to the end of February 2008 was more than

double the 2007 figure, up from \$543m to \$1.12bn.

Cargill's net earnings soared by 86 per cent from \$553m to \$1.030bn over the same three months. Archer Daniels Midland, another giant US-based agribusiness, increased its net earnings by 42 per cent in the first three months of this year from \$363m to \$517m.

The Mosaic Company, one of the world's largest fertiliser companies, saw its income for the three months ending 29 February rise more than 12-fold, from \$42.2m to \$520.8m.

As well as profiting from high food prices, the agribusinesses are also making gains from the push to

“bio-fuels” — growing crops not for food but to provide substitutes for oil.

The correlation of factors in rising world food prices is difficult to work out. Speculation, low interest rates, bio-fuel production, droughts, dearer oil raising fertiliser prices, increased urbanisation and meat-eating in Asia, are all implicated, or may be.

But the world still produces enough food for everyone. The poor could buy enough food if they weren't so poor; and they wouldn't be so poor if the rich weren't so rich.

Continued on page 6

IMMIGRATION RAIDS

Resist these attacks

By ROBIN SIVAPALAN

Since the end of February when the government introduced new penalties for bosses who hire “illegal workers” the number of raids on workplaces has increased drastically — twice as many in the last few months as during the whole of the 1990s. Fines totaling £500,000 have been issued. 63,140 people, asylum seekers and undocumented workers, were removed from the UK last year. That is still not enough for the Liberal Democrats and the Tories who continue to urge on the rabid dogs who run the Immigration Department.

The ruthless persecution of migrant workers from outside Europe is in part largely for the benefit of the media. The BBC were recently invited to watch 56, mainly Asian, workers lined up against the wall in a chicken processing factory in Derbyshire by 60 Border Agency officers backed by the police. Meanwhile, there are fears of fruit rotting in the fields this summer because Polish workers are leaving in droves, the result of a UK currency dip.

On 24 April there was a raid on the Latin American community working at the Elephant and Castle. A prominent London Citizens activist was deported as a result.

A few days later, a food processing factory in west London with mainly Sri Lankan and Indian workers was raided at 6am by 80 officers. 22 workers were detained, three assigned for immediate removal. When in the past workers lost fingers at the factory in the machinery and the bosses refused to call an ambulance, where were the authorities then issuing fines?

The GMB union has been organising workers at this particular factory for a few years, but the union, like many other unions, has yet to develop a strategy to defend undocumented workers.

These attacks on migrant workers need to be resisted both politically and industrially. Trade unions urgently need to develop strategies to resist a regime of checks, raids and deportation. Equally, all socialist organisations (not just some) need to wake up to the struggles of migrant workers, help organise effective solidarity and argue politically for open borders.

The Campaign Against Immigration controls activists will be organising with workers involved in these raids to step up the pace of this work.

• See: www.29thmarch.org.uk

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SANS PAPIERS

“We want regularisation”

By ED MALTBY

Since 15 April, a series of unprecedented strikes by undocumented workers have taken place in France. In the greater Parisian region alone, an estimated one thousand undocumented workers are involved in strike action. The strike and actions, led by the CGT and other unions, is mainly concentrated in construction and restaurants. All the disputes are demanding the mass regularisation of undocumented workers. The strikers chant, “Le cas-par-cas, on n'en veut pas!” — “We won't accept case-by-case treatment!”

The strike has caused considerable disruption to many businesses in Paris. But as sans-papiers are generally isolated, with only one or two at a time in a given workplace, only a few workplaces — a couple of dozen in Paris — have been shut down or seen business seriously affected.

I spoke to a member of Co-ordination 75, a federation of Parisian sans-papiers neighbourhood collectives, who summed up the situation: “We have around 600 workers in Co-ordination 75 who are involved in action. But those 600 workers between them have 300 bosses! The CGT is unwilling to organise joint picketing with regularised workers to support striking sans-papiers. It's too dangerous for isolated sans-papiers to try to picket or blockade their workplace, and for Co-ordination 75 to organise flying pickets.” Several restaurants have been occupied, such as the Charlie Birdy, organised by the CNT and Solidaires, or Chez Papa, organised by the CGT.

French bosses have been putting pressure on the government to “resolve the situation”. The Sarkozy government remains publicly opposed to mass regularisations, preferring a “tough stance”. The CGT has brokered a deal with the immigration minister, Brice Hortefeux, to obtain 1,000 regularisations for the striking sans-papiers immediately. Opinions are divided within the sans-papiers movement on this issue.

SHEFFIELD UNIVERSITY

Stop the student witch-hunt!

By GEMMA SHORT

Five members of Sheffield University student union's delegation to the 2008 National Union of Student's conference (including myself) face disciplinary action following their refusal to vote in line with a “mandate” imposed on them by their union's Council in favour of the NUS Governance Review.

They face permanent exclusion from all future union elections. At least two of the five are potential candidates in next year's sabbatical elections.

This disciplinary action should be seen as a politically motivated attempt to exclude socialist and other radical elements, that is, people who want to fight the attempt by NUS leadership to introduce a constitution which would carve out all but a small layer of full-time students' union officers from the decision making process.

In the last ten years the focus of student activism has shifted away from the “official structures” of campus unions and NUS nationally. Union structures — presided over either by apolitical elements or by various shades of Blairite, or worse — have atrophied, effectively disenfranchising the

Some consider this to be a sell-out deal to divide and prematurely end the strike movement, others see it as a principled and necessary short-term move to preserve the will of the strikers for the long term.

Ali, an Algerian member of Co-ordination 75 explained, “Hortefeux has said, okay, we'll regularise 1,000 sans-papiers to end the strike. The CGT gave him a list of only 600 names, without consulting us. The idea is to regularise 600 of the leaders of the various collectives, the best organised, most militant workers, to shut us up. 600 is an insult, though — there are tens of thousands of sans-papiers in the Parisian region alone!”

But a member of Solidaires union defended the decision in light of the difficulties facing the strike, saying “The activists who are leading this mobilisation are at the end of their tether. They aren't able to open up any new sites, they can't extend the mobilisation. With their current forces they can't continue the fight, so they have decided to retire in good order and to strike harder later. Sans-papiers want the regularisations for which they have fought and taken risks. If we don't prove now, in practice, that struggle pays, the movement will shrink. The desire to cash in our gains today so as not to find ourselves isolated tomorrow is legitimate.”

Neither side, however, denies that the leadership of the CGT has acted in an authoritarian way, not consulting with other activists and unions, and stifling criticism.

The French Trotskyist group, the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) points out that the way Hortefeux has dealt with the deal, by suddenly declaring to various ministries that only regularisation requests rendered by the CGT would be considered, effectively locking out other organisations, was calculated to divide the movement, and put activists in competition with each other.

The LCR is supporting the strikes energetically. Jérôme, an activist from the LCR involved in the strike movement, said, “The laws on residency and freedom of movement are imposed on workers, not on bosses, experts, celebrities, or famous sports stars. Workers' families are obliged to be ‘whiter than white’. When workers fall ill they become a so-called unbearable burden, working-class pupils and students are undesirable, pensioners are told to go and look elsewhere. By grounding this battle firmly in the terrain of the class struggle, the initiators of this movement have done a great service to all sans-papiers, and to the whole working class.”

vast majority of rank-and-file members of most students' unions and excluding them from setting their political and campaigning direction. Policy is increasingly decided either by Executive Committees or unrepresentative Union Councils.

At Sheffield there are members of Union Council (supposedly our union's sovereign body) who were elected with less than five votes.

That is why several candidates in the NUS delegate elections stood on an explicit platform of opposition to NUS's proposed new constitution and committed to vote against it. The new constitution was rejected by NUS conference. That is why Sheffield's sabbatical officers (all but one of whom were prominent advocates of the new constitution) want to console themselves by silencing their political opponents.

Who are the real democrats in this situation? The right-wing sabbaticals who pushed policy through an unrepresentative Union Council, who conduct their proceedings behind closed doors, and who have presided over union elections in which less than 10% of union members voted? or the conference delegates who

upheld their democratic commitment to the hundreds of students who voted for them not to vote for the new constitution?

This is an attack with potentially national dimensions. In other students' unions supporters of the defeated constitution have taken, or propose to take, similar measures against delegates who broke “mandates.” These unions include Edinburgh and Hull.

This case highlights the abject lack of democratic culture in our union. All socialists, radicals and democrats in the student and trade union movement to support the Sheffield Five by:

• Adding your name to a protest letter (based on the text above) by emailing gemstone_88@fastmail.fm

• Sending a message of protest to Sheffield SU president Mark Willoughby at mark.willoughby@shef.ac.uk and copy to gemstone_88@fastmail.fm

• Joining the Facebook group: “Their democracy or ours: The case for real democracy”

• Getting in touch to discuss further campaigning.

• More: www.free-education.org.uk

ISRAEL AT SIXTY

We still stand for two states

May 2008. Sixty years after the declaration of the state of Israel in compliance with the November 1947 resolution of the UN. The conflict with the Palestinians and the Arabs which at the Jewish state's birth led to Arab invasion, war and the elimination of the Palestinian state stipulated in the UN resolution (almost all its territory went to Jordan and Egypt) is, perhaps, further from being resolved now than it was sixty years ago. The 41 year occupation of territory captured in the June 1967 war continues to poison Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Arab relations.

Israel economically blockades Gaza. Food, fuel and medicine in Gaza are in perilously short supply.

Egypt brokers a deal with the Gazan Islamist jihadist/nationalist factions for a ceasefire with Israel: the Israeli government dismisses the Egyptian "ceasefire process" on the grounds that it boosts Hamas. One hopeful sign: there is relative calm on the Gaza-Israel border: Hamas rockets have virtually stopped... for now.

A few days before the Egyptian deal, four Gazan children and their mother were killed by the Israeli military out on another mission to hit back at Hamas gunmen. Whether the ceasefire goes through or not, such things will continue.

Elsewhere on Israel's borders, in Lebanon, another conflict is escalating — between Hizbollah and its Sunni and Druze rivals.

Israel celebrates 60 years of existence. That existence has been under greater threat in the past — when it faced many more hostile Arab governments than now. That existence has also been more secure — at times when Israeli governments were less belligerent, more willing to negotiate with the Palestinians.

The political failures and repeated cycles of violence that have brought about this tragic situation for ordinary Israeli and Palestinian workers are well known:

Arial Sharon's invasion of the West Bank and virtual destruction of the Palestinian Authority;

the rise of Hamas and the Hamas-spearheaded campaign of suicide bombs in Israel;

the building of the separation wall and the scandalous construction of Israeli settlements;

the intricate Israeli "security infrastructure" — it isn't just about security — which cuts Palestinian territory in pieces;

the isolation of Gaza;

Fatah corruption contributed greatly to the rise of clerical fascist Hamas;

Hamas suicide bombs helped turn most Israelis against believing peace was possible.

Central to the present terrible situation has been the refusal of the western big powers — in the first place the US — to put enough pressure on Israel to compel the Israeli government to negotiate and stick to a settlement with the Palestinians.

The peace movement newsletter, *The Other Israel* describes the consequent debasement of politics: "What makes it so extremely difficult to act nowadays is not the



Gush Shalom's convoy against the blockade: delivering medical supplies

killing in itself — however sickening the daily news. It is the cloying cover of unbearably unconvincing sham and pretence, spread over the yawning gap of raw fear, hatred and bloodshed. The cheapening of words; terms, ideas which had once been taken seriously [about two states]. The solemn pronouncements and ceremonies which arouse no hope, nothing but a cynical shrug."

Despite the US's recent diplomatic efforts and Condeleezza Rice's frequent visits to Israel for the declared objective to help Palestinians win an independent state the efforts are more about undermining Hamas. They green light the Israeli blockade and other Israeli chauvinism which do not diminish Hamas, but increase its support.

It is a time for socialists to take stock, a time for restating our basic attitudes. We must once more commit ourselves to solidarity action that is consistent with the only long-term political framework that can reconcile the peoples of the Israeli-Palestinian territory: two states for two peoples.

• We oppose the economic blockade of Gaza. As US "liberal" Nathan Brown describes, this has nothing to do with any justifiable, "ordinary" political pressure against clerical fascist Hamas: "The cumulative effect [of the sanctions]... can hardly be described as calibrated pressure; instead it is better described as an attempt to shut down an economy encompassing a million and a half people combined with an international effort to mitigate the most severe effects of engineered economic collapse."

Gaza, that is the entire population of Gaza, has been held to ransom.

• Socialists should not give one iota of political support to Hamas. Bit by bit Hamas is establishing a repressive clerical fascist regime in Gaza. It enforces repressive "security" and justice, media compliance and increasingly Islamist social pressure. In Gaza it applies its programme for the whole of Palestine, should it win overall control.

• Socialists should oppose the left that promotes Hamas as anti-imperialist heroes (often against the "imperialist stooges" of Fatah). Simon Assaf is *Socialist Worker's* main Hamas promoter. It is dirty and dishonest work. For instance in an article in *SW* (29 January) he describe Hamas as a "movement" — not the strong highly organised and centralised group with a cell structure that it is. He calls it "a resistance organisation" — but not the political Islamist organisation that it is.

And Hamas stands for? He says that it is simply that part of the movement that "rejects any peace deal with Israel that does not address the central issues faced by Palestinians." Implying that its rejectionism is to do with

the terms of any two state deal. But Hamas rejects "two states" entirely; it wants to see an Islamic state in the entire territory of Israel-Palestine!

• Socialists must solidarise with those Palestinians who combine opposition to Israeli occupation with resisting Islamist social pressure and repression in Gaza and elsewhere.

• Socialists can have no political faith in the waning Bush administration to stitch up *any* deal in Israel-Palestine, let alone one that does much justice to the Palestinians.

• Socialists warn against future military moves by Israel against Gaza, moves that seen increasingly likely.

• Socialists must call for an international solidarity campaign which focuses on: Israel withdraw to the 67 borders, for a Palestinian state alongside Israel, in contiguous territory where the Palestinians are the basic majority. An independent Palestine — even if Hamas ruled there — would be better than the status quo. Palestinians would have their national rights.

• Socialists must support the Jewish and Arab Israeli grass root campaigns against the occupation. A demonstration against the most recent Israeli military incursion into Gaza mobilised broader layers than usual (see report by an Israeli socialist www.workersliberty.org/node/10351).

• International socialists must support the campaign of Gush Shalom to send humanitarian aid convoys to Gaza;

• Back the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions who speak out against Israel's driving out of the Bedouin in the Negev.

• Support the Arab Jaffa residents who stood in solidarity with poor Jews expelled to make way for posh developments in Tel Aviv. The significance of this working class and poor peoples solidarity across the rives of blood and hatred is a small example of the sort of attitude that could radically transform the whole situation for the better.

The only way to undermine and destroy the dishonesty and bankrupt ideology of the ruling classes and reactionary political forces who dominate the terms of the Middle East conflict is a strong grass roots counterweight — a militant labour movement in the Israeli and Arab working classes committed to a democratic solution to the conflict, two states. That is the only way to build. A confident, uncompromising, democratic peace movement and credible secular alternatives. Our solidarity can help the alternatives that do exist to grow much stronger.

• Solidarity: iraquionsolidarity.org (Middle East Workers' Solidarity) gush-shalom.org (Israeli peace group).

HELP US GROW!

You will notice that with this issue *Solidarity* has had a design makeover. *Solidarity* is a distinct revolutionary socialist political voice, and one that is often compelled to speak against the prevailing view in the conventional left. In redesigning the paper, we hope to make the paper more reader-friendly and our politics more accessible. Design is only part of the process. Contents, in the last reckoning, is what matters. There is great scope for improvement here too.

We need more writers — more reports of events in the labour movement and inside the left, more feature articles, more letters commenting on our articles.

Solidarity is published by the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL), which has definite views and policies, but for all that, *Solidarity* is an "open" paper. We promote and encourage dissent and free comment. Members of the AWL who disagree with an AWL policy have a constitutional right to express their ideas in the pages of *Solidarity*.

As well as more writers, we need more sellers. Could you help here? Get in touch!

Cathy Nugent

ROUND UP

• **NHS PAY:** A pay offer covering the next three years is being put to health workers this month. The national leadership of UNISON is completely split on whether it should be accepted or rejected. Workers' Liberty supporters are convinced we should reject the offer. We also believe that industrial action is possible and we can win.

The three year deal offers pay rises worth just 2.75% this year, 2.4% next year and 2.25% in the third year. The lowest measure of inflation is 3% so the offer is effectively a pay cut.

UNISON head of health Karen Jennings said after last year's pay deal that health workers would not accept another below inflation rise this year.

Health workers will gain nothing by agreeing to a three-year deal now. The government would be very happy to freeze our pay as the economy is very volatile, and they'd also be able to go into the next General Election having avoided a pay dispute in the NHS. Creating a low paid and compliant workforce will allow them to attract more private firms to takeover health services. For health workers the choice should be clear if we don't fight now, the next time we'll have the chance to improve our pay might be under a Tory government! Reject the offer: say no to three years of pay cuts!

You can read our special pay bulletin on our website: www.workersliberty.org. If you would like copies to distribute in your workplace contact us: unison@workersliberty.org

Mike Fenwick

• **LOCAL GOVERNMENT PAY:** Two out of three Unison members voted to reject the local government pay deal in a consultative ballot. The yes vote was helped by the action taken on 24 April. These strikes gave a public profile and some urgency to the issue.

The leadership of Unison should take the initiative and build for a national ballot — but they are "less than enthusiastic". There is a direct relationship between the mood of the leadership and the mood of the members. Without a clear campaign Unison members will be less likely to vote yes or even at all. Unison leaders will then say "the members don't want to strike" — they create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Branch activists must gear themselves up for a battle.

On the morning of the teachers' strike, Teaching Assistants in one primary school in Tower Hamlets met to discuss their own pay. They calculated the overall loss of salary — the money taken out of their pay packets — that would result in a below-inflation pay offer, the scrapping of the 10p tax rate, increased pension contributions, the loss of lump-sum payments, higher rent, mortgage and service charges, inflated food and energy bills. It became clear that they were not just talking about making ends meet, but of getting the ends in sight of each other!

As one Unison members put it: "we are not being treated like children, but like the family pet — kicked if we bark; patted on the head if we're good."

By the end of the meeting, there was little desire to be the "good pet" — these members were ready to strike.

A Unison activist

• **CIVIL SERVICE:** Pay will be the major issue before this year's PCS national conference. Given the general pay squeeze across the public sector and high inflation rate everybody expects that civil servants will get below inflation offers; with many of these increases being non-consolidated. All rational activists agree on the importance of public sector unions working together. If this were to happen, or even if a few unions were to band together, it would be politically and industrially significant

There will be major differences at con-

TEACHERS' PAY

Action in the autumn

By PATRICK MURPHY, NUT EXECUTIVE

The National Union of Teachers Executive met on 8 May for the first time since the 24 April pay strike. For a while it looked like there would be no discussion or vote on proposals to develop the pay campaign. Although the union's Co-ordination and Finance Committee (CFC) had met the previous day and agreed some activities for the term ahead their report will not be discussed until the next Executive meeting two weeks later. In the event supporters of the left caucus on the Executive put a motion on pay to ensure that some commitments were made.

The motion, unanimously carried, agreed:

1. to reaffirm its commitment to the decision of annual conference to ballot members for discontinuous action
2. to discuss timescales for a ballot and also forms of strike and non strike action at its next meeting in two weeks time.
3. to seek a meeting with Govt to put forward our demands on pay and on workload.
4. to congratulate divisional and association secretaries for the work done so far and encourage them to work for the peti-

ference as to the tactics needed to win. Outwardly the differences are to do with flexibility in strike and other tactics.

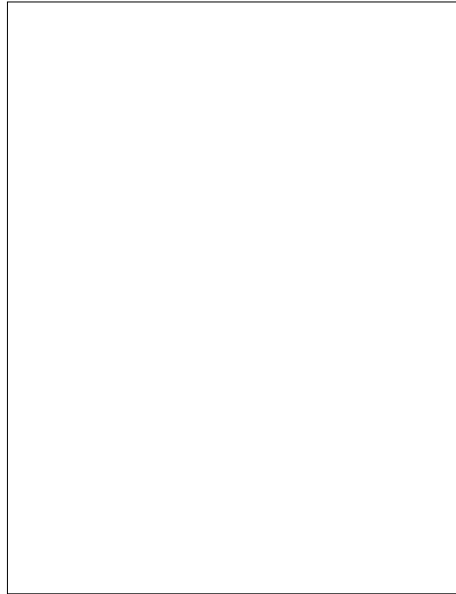
The standard operating model over the past few years has been one day national strikes followed by months of inactivity and then another one day national strike. Not surprisingly many members doubt the wisdom and effectiveness of such action.

Consultations have shown that members are fed up with the standard model. So the Executive is now proposing more flexible tactics like targeted actions, targeted over time bans and rolling strikes. In a move similar to that adopted by the CWU the Union is looking at taking out groups of workers in one part of the "production line"; putting them back in and taking workers out in another part of the "line" so increasing the dislocation caused by the actions. These moves are to be welcomed.

Unfortunately this emphasis on flexibility is likely to collide with the inflexibility of the Socialist Party (SP) in PCS. For in the sectarian world they inhabit, emphasis on flexibility smacks too much of the tactics of the Independent Left (IL). This grouping, made up of independents and supporters of *Solidarity*, is a breakaway from Left Unity. From its foundation IL has criticised the industrial tactics of the leadership of the Union. We have advocated flexibility including the use of the selected action. Therefore in the minds of the SP flexibility = IL. Of course such an attitude is nuts, but in the narrow political world of the PCS this association matters. Therefore even if the conference agrees on flexibility the NEC will have to be forced to deliver it.

We go even further in our motion on the need for flexible tactics including selective action. Depending on the whims of the standing orders committee it would be good if delegates were given a clear choice on the way ahead and our motion was tagged with that of the NEC.

Also before the conference is a motion to affiliate to the Labour Representation



London pay strike 24 April

tion (deadline 23 May) and the lobby of Parliament on 9 June.

There will be a Divisional Secretaries briefing in June. The original intention was that this meeting would "consult" secretaries on the campaign, including future strike action. A number of us

argued, however, that the Executive should give a lead and present firm proposals, including a ballot timetable.

The most positive aspect of the motion carried at the Executive is the decision to bring a timetable for a discontinuous action ballot to the next Executive on 22 May. The fact that this discussion wasn't started immediately makes it very unlikely, however, that there will be further action during this school term. The earliest likely NUT ballot timetable will now see members asked to vote in the first half of the Autumn term with action to start in November.

The only that could change this would be a decision by Unison to take their local government members into pay action this term. A significant number of local government workers are employed as support staff in schools. A Unison consultation of members which ended on 12 May saw their below-inflation award rejected by two votes to one. It's rumoured that the union's leadership has decided to ballot members for strike action from 26 May with the first action to take place on 8 July. If this is true and the plan is serious there is still time for the 22 May NUT Executive meeting to co-ordinate our next ballot so that we can take joint action on that day. This would make July an even bigger and more effective version of 24 April.

Committee. The SP, in the shape of the NEC, is vehemently opposed to such an affiliation. In moving opposition to affiliation the SP will play the LRC = Labour Party card and emphasise that "we are not a politically aligned union" — a hopelessly right-wing argument. Of course in fringe meetings the same comrades will argue for a new workers' party!

The election results for NEC show a virtually clean sweep of NEC positions by Left Unity. The IL vote increased solidly. The worrying thing for all though is the low turnout. A swing of about 1% of the membership could radically change the composition of the NEC. So we need to start a discussion in the Union about increasing turnout. The present situation cannot be allowed to continue.

As with all PCS conference there will be much heat but little light. The IL and supporters of this paper will continue to emphasise the need to win disputes and to have the tactics to do so; we will try and persuade activists to join us but we all know that once the conference is over the real work will begin..

• **GRANGEMOUTH:** A fortnight after the Grangemouth oil refinery was shut down by strike action, talks continue between refinery owners (INEOS) and UNITE.

The strike by the 1,200 union members was in defence of the refinery's final salary pension scheme, inherited by INEOS from the refinery's previous owners (BP).

INEOS wanted to close the scheme to new staff, force existing employees to pay 6% of their salaries into the scheme, and financially penalise workers who opted for early retirement.

Calculated on an hourly basis, the strike was the costliest industrial action in British history. Despite its relatively short duration, the overall loss to INEOS and the British economy in general amounted to £600 million.

The government itself lost some £170 million in tax, as the Forties pipeline, which pumps ashore crude oil from 70 North Sea oilfields, was forced to close.

But rather than maintain the pressure on INEOS by announcing a further round of strikes if the company did not withdraw its proposals, last month's strike action has been followed up by talks between INEOS and UNITE officials behind closed doors.

According to the UNITE website, talks resumed the day after the end of strike action. It was a "constructive and meaningful discussion" which "ended in a proposal that will be considered by the company and the union in the coming days with a view to finding a resolution to the pension's dispute."

But a further single-sentence UNITE press release, issued a week and a half later (on 8th May), was even more tight-lipped about the ongoing talks: "Representatives of INEOS and Unite met today and agreed a series of further meetings to discuss the current pensions issue with a view to resolution."

Although some newspaper reports have referred to INEOS having withdrawn its proposal to close the final salary pension scheme to new staff, this has not been confirmed in any of the UNITE press releases.

And, according to the most recent reports about the INEOS-UNITE meetings, talks may continue for a further six weeks — meaning that, in the absence of further strike action in the next fortnight, a further ballot would need to be held before strike action could be resumed.

The £600 million impact of their 48-hour strike in late May underlines the tremendous power which the Grangemouth oilworkers can wield if they choose to do so.

Despite pressure from both the Holyrood and Westminster governments not to resume strike action, further industrial action would be the quickest and most effective means to ensure that INEOS backs down on all counts.

WORKERS' GOVERNMENT

Blair's children

By MARTIN THOMAS

We are probably on the way to a Tory government. In the local elections on 1 May, not only did Labour do badly; the Tories did well. An opinion poll on the weekend of 7-8 May showed the Tories ahead of Labour by 49% to 23%.

Where working-class voters have turned away from Labour in disillusion, generally left or leftist parties have failed to gain. No-one should exaggerate the electorate's shift to the right, or suppose that it is fixed in stone. Just one sizeable working-class victory in struggle might reverse it. But it is the culmination of a steady drift for the last ten years.

Many people talk of "Thatcher's children", suggesting that Margaret Thatcher, Tory prime minister between 1979 and 1990, shifted public opinion solidly to the right.

Thatcher did shift the political Establishment, Labour and Lib-Dem as well as Tory. But in the population at large, the story is more one of "Blair's children".

The British Social Attitudes [BSA] surveys have the limitations of all such opinion-poll sociology. What they show, though, chimes in with political experience.

After Thatcher defeated the miners' strike, in 1985, the working class was intimidated. But you can be intimidated and still want to fight back against what you fear once you see hope.

In 1997, there was hope around Blair's victory. Then Blair closed off the political channels in the labour movement. That smothered hope. That generated acceptance that grinding free-marketism is the way things have to be, whether the government is "left" or "right".

The percentage saying that "working

Paul Kenny: a child of Blairism

people do not get a fair share of national wealth" was pretty steady around 66% between 1986 and 1998. By 2006 it had sagged to 55%.

Should the government redistribute income to the less well-off? 43% said yes in 1983; still 43% in 1996. By 2006, it was down to 34%.

The BSA's composite index of "left-right" attitudes was fairly steady up to 1996, and has drifted to the right since then. The percentage "strongly left wing" was 7.6% in 1986, still 7.6% in 1996, and 4.1% in 2006. Opinion has also become somewhat more authoritarian, somewhat more hostile to immigrants.

All Blair's work, not Thatcher's. Almost no-one under 32 today has any live political memory of Thatcher (they would have been 14 or younger when she left office). No-one under 34 has known a general election in which they could vote which Blair did not win.

It is not just Blair's work. The shift to the right is partly also the work of the "awkward squad", the new contingent of union leaders who took office in the five or six years after Blair took office.

Through all or most of the working life of people under 30, "the unions" have been defined for the broad public not by the old right-wingers but supposed left-wingers -

NEW LABOUR

Alexander in a spin

By DALE STREET

In a television interview on Sunday 4 May Scottish Labour leader Wendy Alexander suggested she was in favour of an early referendum on Scottish independence — "Bring it on!" was the expression she used. Later Alexander said she wanted a referendum during the next twelve months and that Gordon Brown backed her position.

On 7 May Brown said Alexander's position had been misunderstood — neither he nor Alexander supported an early referendum! The following day Alexander told the Scottish Parliament that she wanted a referendum "now". By the close of the week Brown and Alexander had issued parallel statements — Alexander's call had really been part of a cunning plot to expose the SNP: the SNP say they are in favour of independence; Labour demands an immediate referendum on independence; the SNP rejects this; this shows up the SNP as hypocrites.

At the same time Brown's supporters let the press know that Alexander knew Brown did not support an early referendum. This while Alexander's supporters are briefing the press that this was another example of Brown's indecisive leadership, Alexander had gone ahead without Brown's backing, to force his dithering hand.

The Scottish media have made much of the Alexander-Brown clash and the Scottish Labour against London Labour clash, but this sorry episode serves only to show up how policy — on what is a major issue — is determined in New Labour.

There had been no prior discussion at any level of the Labour Party in Scotland prior to Alexander's announcement. When the new line was subsequently and quickly abandoned it was the result of phone calls from other individuals in the Labour Party hierarchy.

The fiasco also points to the inability of the Labour Party in Scotland to mount a coherent political challenge to the SNP.

Since it formed a minority Scottish government last summer the SNP has enjoyed growing support. It has introduced free school meals for some age groups, scrapped bridge tolls, reversed earlier decisions to close accident and emergency units, frozen the council tax, and promised to use public funding, not PFIs or PPPs, to build new hospitals.

Labour's own politics and record in power preclude an attack on the SNP from the left. It can now hardly attack the SNP for not doing what it itself showed no interest in doing.

Despite its populist reforms, the SNP is wedded to promoting the interests of big business, by transforming the Scottish economy into a second 'Celtic tiger'. But Labour can hardly attack the SNP for being a pro-big-business party. That's what Labour now — legitimately — claims to be!

But an attack on the SNP from the right would be electorally suicidal.

The result is that Labour's attacks on the SNP are little more than attempts to "box clever", exemplified by Alexander's "immediate referendum" call.

In the event, the outcome was a total fiasco which further undermined Alexander's already tarnished leadership. And deservedly so.

Inflation is 10% for low paid



By TOM UNTERRAINER

The "official" rate of inflation currently stands at 3% (for April 2008). The government uses a method to calculate it, called the Consumer Price Index (CPI) which measures the rise in prices for a specific set of consumer items, weights them by the proportion of money that is spent on each group (say 20% on fuel, 30% on food etc...) and averages it out across income brackets. That the CPI does not take mortgage repayments into account suggests it is a less than reliable measure. But worse, the CPI positively distorts the real cost of living increases for low-paid workers.

Surprisingly, the *Daily Mail* has provided some very useful information for those wanting an idea of real cost of living. In conjunction with online price comparison

sources ('USwitch' and 'mySupermarket') the *Mail* has published figures that show an increase of 15.5% for an average shopping basket, around 30% for transport (an average of unleaded and diesel and the increases in car insurance and rail tickets) and large increases for gas and electricity.

These percentages are the raw, unweighted figures. The Office for National Statistics website is a vast repository of facts and figures related to prices and interest. In the document *Family Spending: 2007* the ONS provides information on the proportion of money spent on different consumables by ten distinct income groups. This information can be used to calculate a proportional measure of real cost of living increases.

For example, an individual in the lowest income bracket (the 'Lowest ten per cent' or 'First decile group') earns a maximum of £183 per week. Of this £183 about 19% is spent on food and 13% on transport. If you just take the *Mail's* figures for food and transport increases, and the ONS data on the proportions spent on these groups, then a proportional cost of living increase for the poorest workers is 7%!

The Retail Price Index (RPI) currently stands at 3.8%. This broader measure of inflation includes housing costs and other items not measured by CPI. Of this 3.8% around a quarter is calculated on food and transport, so if we remove this amount, all other items have increased in cost by 2.8%. Add this to the 7% already calculated and we can estimate that cost of living has

Derek Simpson, Tony Woodley, Billy Hayes, Mark Serwotka, Paul Kenny and the rest.

Those union leaders have had economic conditions as advantageous for trade unionism as capitalism is likely to offer — until the current crisis, relatively low unemployment, and (much of the time) quite rapid job growth in their main area of strength, the public services.

And what image of unions have Simpson and Woodley, Hayes and Kenny, shown to workers? As "well-meaning", but not as a powerful force. Gordon Brown raises taxes for low-paid workers previously on the 10% rate; he limits public sector pay rises to two-and-a-bit per cent when inflation for low-paid workers is about 10% — and none of the "left-wing" union leaders can be moved even to a rueful reflection that it was a bad idea to give up the unions' right to challenge the Labour leaders on issues like that at Labour Party conference.

Despite everything, the unions are not just the wretched "left" leaders. Young workers can learn from examples in other countries, and in history, as well as from what they see directly before them. And the developing economic crisis will jolt many into new thought.

By 2005, according to the BSA, as few as 13% of people saw "a great deal of difference" between the Tories and Labour. For "Blair's children", there is a tremendous gap to be filled by explanation of how politics "a great deal different" from Thatcher-Blairism is possible.

And the answer is, through a drive to renovate the labour movement from below, and instill it with the will to fight for a workers' government, a government based on, serving, and accountable to the working class.

increased by 9.8% for the lowest paid workers. The real figure is likely to be higher as the 2.8% is an average figure for those earning between £183 a week and those who earn tens if not hundreds of thousands of pounds per year.

So a worker in the lowest pay bracket on £9000 per year, for example, will have the real value of their income slashed by at least £600 per year — that's if they are lucky enough to get a pay rise at all.

If a lone revolutionary socialist with a spreadsheet and access to the internet can figure out that the 3% CPI rate is completely unrepresentative of real cost of living increases, then the thousands of statisticians and economists employed by government must know the same thing. If the number crunchers know, then Gordon Brown certainly knows — it's just that he doesn't care.

He doesn't care about the hundreds of thousands of low paid workers who will have their earning slashed by his imposition of 2% rises in the public sector. He doesn't care about those working in the private sector with no union representation and no chance of a fair deal on pay.

We need a trade union movement that takes these issues up in a serious way, develops a serious strategy to overturn governments attacks and seeks a way forward for genuine working class representation in politics.

• We will be following the real cost of living in each issue of *Solidarity*.

UKRAINE

Social Forum

BY KAREN JOHNSON

I attended the first ever Social Forum in Kiev, Ukraine. Called by a coalition of Ukrainian independent trade unions and left wing groups for 1 and 2 May 2008 it included speakers from trade unions, and the anti-fascist movement, and special guest Dashty Jamal, an Iraqi trade unionist and refugee rights campaigner.

The Forum started with a demonstration and march from Kriesthatyk to counter the state Stalinist-influenced May Day trade union march. 100 independent campaigners from Ukrainian anarchist and social movement organisations most notably antifa, a leading anti-fascist group. Dashty Jamal addressed the demonstrators, speaking of the importance of making links between Iraqi and Ukrainian workers.

The Forum started that afternoon. The first session discussed the role of trade unions and was opened by Ivan Franko, leader of the Independent Ukrainian Trade Union. Ivan spoke of the difficulties of organising and recruiting Ukrainian workers. With taxes running high in the Ukraine, many workers are left owing the state money if they declare their earnings. Many Ukrainians are forced to work in lowly paid insecure jobs to avoid declaring their income. Ukrainian workers fear joining trade unions calling for better wages and better working conditions for fear of being replaced.

Dashty Jamal spoke of the political problems facing trade unions and socialists in Iraq. The final session of the day addressed gender and womens rights in the Ukraine.

The second day of the conference was opened by an Antifa activist. The speaker spoke about being targeted by far right organisations. Six Antifa activists had been killed over the last year. Dashty Jamal spoke about the racism experienced by Iraqi refugees from individuals and European countries such as the UK, Germany and Sweden. These countries had persecuted Iraqi asylum-seekers, denying them support and not allowing them to work in an attempt to make Iraqi asylum seekers lives so difficult they have no option to return to Iraq, despite the dangers. The UK and Germany have forcibly returned Iraqi asylum seekers who have refused to return voluntarily.

**No Sweat
Film showing
— China Blue
and action
meeting**

3pm
Saturday 17 May
The Cross
Kings, 126
York Way,
London



IRAQ

US tries to “harden” Iraqi army

BY RHODRI EVANS

At the start of May, US troops blockaded Sadr City, the huge mainly-Shia district of Baghdad where two and a half million people live and is the stronghold of Moqtada al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army.

They stopped food ration supplies. They moved in to the area close behind Iraqi government troops (close, probably, to deter the troops from deserting, as many did when the Iraqi army attacked the Mahdi Army in Basra in March/April).

They bombed the area. They build huge dividing walls to limit Mahdi Army movements. On 8 March, the Iraqi army told residents of a part of Sadr City to move out of their homes before the area was blown to bit by American bombs. The focus on that area, apparently, was because it is close to the Green Zone and missiles have been fired from it into the Zone.

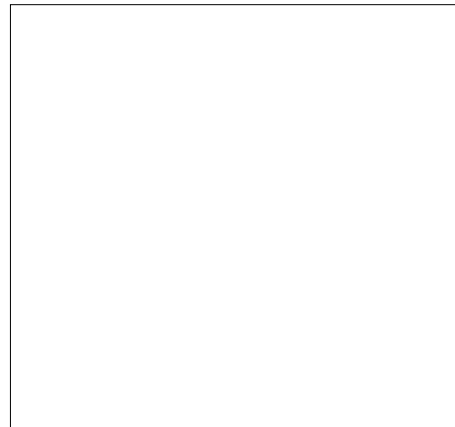
According Leila Fadel, reporting for the McClatchy news agency: “Two soccer fields in east and northeast Baghdad are expected to receive some 16,000 evacuees from the southeast portion of the city where the fighting has been most intense.

“Colonel Abdul Amir Risna Sagar... said [he] would set up 500 tents around the two fields...”

The residents, understandably, refused to move. (16,000 people on two soccer fields is a space of about 80cm x 80cm for each person!)

On 12 May, a tentative ceasefire was negotiated between Moqtada al-Sadr and the Iraqi government of Nuri al-Maliki. Maliki’s army can come into Sadr City and search for heavy weapons (the Mahdi Army says it has none); Maliki has dropped his demand for the Mahdi Army to disband, and promised he will “try to refrain” from calling on the US army as back-up; the Mahdi Army says it will refrain from displaying weapons on the streets.

The BBC reports about 1000 people killed in the attack on Sadr City – mostly



not Mahdi Army fighters.

Comments by US commanders indicate more caution now than when they launched a huge assault on the city of Fallujah in 2004. They want to push back the Mahdi Army incrementally, rather than risk full-scale war. “We are obviously in support of the Government of Iraq as they move forward in a dialog with elements of the Sadr Trend”, “I hope Moqtada al-Sadr continues to depress violence”, and so on.

At the same time, though, the Iraqi army and the US are launching a new offensive in Mosul, described by its provincial governor as “under the control of Al Qaeda”. Death rates in Iraq, lower since August 2007, are rising again.

The official story about these offensives is that they are about suppressing militias and establishing civil order in Iraq. But the Badr Corps, the militia of the Shia-Islamist, ISCI/ SCIRI, one of the main parties in Maliki’s government coalition, is well known to be deeply embedded in the official army.

The Worker-communist Party of Iraq, through the Iraqi Freedom Congress, declared: “Under the guise of National Guard and police forces, the Badr militias of the Islamic Supreme Council and Dawa Party militias played a significant role in these bloody events... They are justifying

their heinous crimes by saying that they are combating the outlaws, meaning the Mahdi Army”.

The Mahdi Army, so Patrick Cockburn’s new book on its leader Moqtada al-Sadr makes clear, is a deeply reactionary clericalist movement. Despite al-Sadr’s sporadic appeals to Sunnis on an Arab-Iraqi-nationalist basis, there is strong evidence of the movement “purging” previously mixed or Sunni neighbourhoods in Baghdad, and killing many Sunnis.

The movement’s very name is sectarian, in the circumstances. In the Shia tradition, “the Mahdi” is the “hidden” Twelfth Imam, one of the martyrs of Sunni “usurpation”, who has been in hiding for over a thousand years but will eventually reappear to bring peace and justice.

Al-Sadr has said that the Mahdi will reappear very soon. The Americans invaded Iraq because they knew this, and wanted to seize and kill the Mahdi.

Despite this, the Mahdi Army has mass support among poorer Shia, as a movement less corrupt and more assertive against the Americans than the returning-exile-led Shia-Islamist movements, ISCI/SCIRI and Dawa. That popular support will surely have been increased by the sufferings of the people of Sadr City in recent weeks.

The Maliki government and the USA are trying to “test” and “harden” the Iraqi army. But these operations push the creation of a livable political framework in Iraq further away, not bring it nearer.

Neither the militia-ridden Iraqi army, nor the reactionary and sectarian Mahdi Army, can win self-determination and democracy for Iraq. Hope lies with Iraq’s much-harassed workers’ movement.

Dockers at Umm Qasr, near Basra, struck for one hour on 1 May in solidarity with the US West Coast dockers’ protest against the American occupation. “We are struggling today to defeat both the occupation and the sectarian militias’ agenda”, they declared in a letter to the US dockers.

Food crisis

FROM FRONT PAGE

It would not be difficult to arrange for the food to get to the hungry. Public ownership of the stocks of basic foods, distribution under workers’ control at low prices, and increased wages would do it. But the governments are all more concerned to keep the banks sleek.

It is a typical capitalist crisis. As Marx and Engels put it in the Communist Manifesto: “It appears as if a famine, a universal war of devastation, had cut off the supply of every means of subsistence... and why? Because there is too much civilisation, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce...”

In the years leading up to the financial crisis that broke in August 2007, profits soared. Inequality widened. The luxury spending of the ultra-rich spiralled to the heights, while workers lagged further and further behind.

Now the financial swirl that led the boom for the ultra-rich has overreached

itself and fallen into crisis – as capitalist booms, driven by the frantic urge to profiteer faster than the competitor, always do overreach themselves.

The banks are in trouble. But they get bailed out — with over £50 billion of easy credit for British banks from the British government, for example – because in a capitalist economy they are too important to fail.

A few top bosses lose their jobs, and get big pay-offs, \$200 million for Merrill Lynch chief Stan O’Neal for example. Some expenses are cut. Deutsche Bank has told its executives that now they must pay themselves for porn channels on pay TV in their hotels on business trips, rather than putting them on company expenses, and can’t claim more than £50 for lunch unless they are schmoozing customers.

Lower-paid workers’ families, especially in poor countries, are, for capitalism, certainly not “too important to fail”. Even in boom times, capital seeks to make sure that at least a minority of lower-paid workers’ families do “fail”, to provide a whip of fear

to apply to the rest.

In slumps, many are crushed. That is how the system works. That is how it enforces the reductions in costs which – unless workers take advantage of the crisis to overthrow capitalism and establish our own rule — will allow for the next wave of capitalist expansion.

107 years ago, the Russian Marxist movement which would grow to lead a workers’ revolution in 1917 first gained a wide hearing in the crisis caused by a famine in 1891.

The pioneer Marxist George Plekhanov outlined their tasks: “By means of spoken and printed propoganda they spread the correct view of the causes of the present famine through all strata of the population.

“Wherever the mass is not yet sufficiently advanced to understand their teaching, they give it, as it were, object lessons. They appear wherever it protests, they protest with it, they explain to it the meaning of its own movement and hence they increase its revolutionary preparedness...”

“The whole success of the socialist movement is measured... in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Everything that helps this growth [the socialists] see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful...”

ZIMBABWE

Condemn the arrests!

BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION ZIMBABWE

ISO Zimbabwe condemns the arrest and detention of Zimbabwe congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) President Lovemore Matombo and Secretary General Wellington Chibhebhe on 8 May 2008. They are being held for stirring people to rise against the government and for allegedly reporting falsehoods on innocent people being killed by ZANU PF supporters across the country. The arrest of these workers' leaders is unlawful; it is one among a hodgepodge of other dirty tactics that Zanu PF is using to intimidate workers as we wait for the announcement of date for a run-off.

It is Zanu PF which has unleashed violence and torture on the citizens of

Zimbabwe. Since 29 March, 50 people have been killed, more than 4,000 people displaced and some had their homes burnt to ashes.

Meanwhile the economic situation has steeply deteriorated. Mugabe, who all along had resisted pressure from the neoliberal hardliners within ZANU PF to open up the market and remove all restrictions on foreign exchange rates, has finally succumbed to pressure and has allowed [Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor Gideon] Gono to do what ever he sees fit to repair the already patched economy. This has impacted negatively on ordinary people, as already we have seen prices of commodities skyrocketing. People who are earning less than \$5 billion [Zimbabwe dollars] need \$50 billion to survive.

Amidst all this suffering, Zimbabwe has paid back US \$700 million to the African

Development Bank. The Bank described this as "testimony of the government's determination to live up to its international financial obligations vis-à-vis donor agencies and development partners."

We say no to this payment of foreign debts; the money should be used towards health, education and meeting of other basic necessities of the people. The ZCTU leaders must be released now and call for mass actions to demand:

- The release of detained MDC parliamentarians.
- An end to politically motivated violence.
- A non-taxable minimum wage that is linked to inflation.

For how to protest, see www.workersliberty.org/node/10572

FRANCE

Education strike

BY ED MALTBY

In France, students and teachers are continuing a huge strike against the Sarkozy government's planned attacks on education which threaten to demolish state education, and open the way for a Blair-style "choice agenda" and private-sector expansion into education.

French teachers and students, especially in lycées (equivalent to FE colleges), have been striking since February. Although the major teaching unions have been trying to "exhaust" the movement, calling occasional "days of action" over a long period, and holding back from sustained strikes, teachers and students have been organising discontinuous strike and blockades.

The action is sporadic and patchy, because the unions haven't organised a network of support for local actions. But the strikes, co-ordinated by workplace meetings of teachers, and neighbourhood meetings of teachers' and students' delegates, have regularly brought out thousands of strikers demonstrations through Paris — growing to 50,000 in mid-April.

Nor is it limited to Paris — major actions have been underway since mid-April — in Toulouse, Le Mans, Tours and Grenoble.

Montrouil, a suburb of Paris, is a good example of how the strike operates. Students and teachers from the different lycées hold regular meetings. Teachers and students agree on strike dates, based on their assessment of the strength of the movement. The only way that the strike can avoid the dangers of victimisation and economic pressure is if the students blockade the school. Students do this each morning of a strike day, using planks, bins and where necessary human chains. Students, hall monitors (surveillants, generally part-time HE students) and teachers then picket the school, handing out leaflets, and often organise for students from that lycée to march off and visit other striking schools to offer support to pickets there.

Members of the (Trotskyist) LCR youth, the JCR, are supporting the mobilisation by publishing a regular newsletter on the mobilisation, complete with tactical advice, as well as political articles. They send activists to the gates of lycées every morning to leaflet and discuss politics and tactics with students.

Given the lack of serious support for local mobilisations from the teaching or the student unions, these local co-ordinations are obliged to try to constitute themselves as the leadership of the movement, holding regular regional and national co-ordinations. But because many lycées involved in the mobilisation don't have regular general assemblies to elect delegates, because of poor organisation or repression from the administration, the delegate structure is weak, lycées are often represented by whoever turns up, and channels for reporting back from the co-ordination are limited and patchy. Nevertheless, the regional and national co-ordinations are challenging the leadership of the major unions, and attempting to give a formal infrastructure to largely spontaneous strikes and blockades by the grassroots. Unlike in 1998, the lycée student unions are incapable of boycotting or ignoring the co-ordinations, and are obliged to participate in the demonstrations and actions they call. But the balance of forces within the movement will not swing decisively in favour of the grassroots if activists do not succeed in organising more general assemblies and the election of strike committees, to give real muscles and nerves to the rank-and-file network.

ELECTION RUN OFF

"Mugabe is more stubborn"

FROM A STATEMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION ZIMBABWE

After the elections enthusiasm, as we revert to our routines, we are faced with the critical task of implementing our Central Committee resolutions — amongst them, unconditional but critical support to the MDC. This, obviously, will be difficult for comrades who had been firm with our previous perspective of no to elections arguing for the formation of an alternative to the MDC. Two things need to be carefully considered now.

Firstly, how tactically to jump onto the changing wagon as late-comers who vehemently opposed the MDC yesterday. And secondly, the fact that the MDC is maintaining its reliance on the west and other external forces, neglecting its grassroots support. We cannot of course unconditionally support the MDC when it is begging for support from imperialists and their proxies in bodies like the Southern African Development Community and heads of state, ignoring the need to mobilise the masses on the ground, involving other working people regionally and internationally as we saw recently with the South African dock workers.

The long awaited presidential elections results were finally made public: with Mugabe having garnered 43%, MDC 47% and [dissident ZANU PF leader Simba] Makoni 8%. The MDC, despite its previous claims that it won 53%, did not formally contest the results, implying somehow they are agreeable or they were not serious with their claims. On the other hand Mugabe himself seems to be getting more and more stubborn and confident with the passage of each day.

Since end of March, Mugabe has prepared for a run off by militarizing the entire state and its institutions, putting soldiers and armed police in every street and rural areas. 32 people have been killed and more than 40,000 people displaced, whilst those in urban areas are living in fear of curfews.

Against all these harassments, most MDC leaders fled out of the country, joining Tsvangirai who is now based in Botswana and flying into South Africa daily, leaving a leadership vacuum here.



Tsvangirai's dithering attitude on the run off has exacerbated the confusion among his supporters.

To those who had faith in elections or viewed Mugabe as an impartial character, Mugabe's response has taught them numerous lessons on dealing with entrenched dictators. It is now clear that power in dictatorships is protected by the barrel [of a gun], and power can not be drawn from ballot booths alone.

For MDC to ignore this and proceed to participate in the coming elections will be tantamount to digging their own grave, as there is no enough guarantee that Mugabe will not repeat what he did after being beaten. What is happening now shows that he is more secure than before and he has instilled enough fear in people to avert any possibility of grassroots resistance to his rule, meaning any further electoral fraud can now be executed with less hesitance than before.

Constitutionally a run off is supposed to be held within 21 days of the announcement of election results but as of now we have not yet heard anything from Zimbabwe Electoral Commission regarding the date. Recently we heard the secretary for legal and parliamentary affairs in ZANU PF saying on national television that, regardless of the law, the ZEC may as well postpone for a period of up to twelve months.

This confirms that Mugabe is not willing to go anywhere soon. Meanwhile he is shored up his base by any means necessary, including arbitrary arrests of MDC parliamentarians and activists and ZCTU leaders.

Since the elections, the economic crisis has deepened sharply and things promise to get worse in the near future. Things have been tough but this time it's worse. We are into full-fledged neoliberalism.

Mugabe had opposed moves by Reserve Bank Governor Gono and his other business people in ZANU PF to embark on full-blown neoliberalism, to benefit only the best off at the expense of the poor majority. Mugabe resisted by insisting on fixing exchange rates, price controls and subsidies, simultaneously printing lots of local currency but maintaining the exchange rates at very low levels.

Now Mugabe has allowed the Reserve Bank to introduce a "willing buyer, willing seller" arrangement as basis for all foreign exchange transactions. From Saturday 3 May banks have been offering much more lucrative exchange rates, with some banks offering as much as Zim \$250 million for US\$1, meaning if you change US\$100 with a bank you will be given Zim \$25 billion dollars. Higher denominations of \$100 million and \$150 million have also been introduced to cater for the high demand for cash.

Whilst the elites are celebrating this development, the poor are in danger as prices skyrocket daily. Workers are earning on average \$6 billion a month - whilst on 12 May a rough calculation of how much is required for a family of three to survive was \$50 billion.

All this tells us there is real struggle waiting against the twin enemies of Mugabe's dictatorship and neoliberal capitalism.

- A critique of this statement will be published in the next issue of *Solidarity*.

Troops, militias and slogans

Comrades from all sides of the AWL's debate on Iran/Iraq summarise what they thought of the debate, what they think were the important arguments in the discussion and where they think the discussion can now go. *Solidarity* will continue this debate. Please send in (short) contributions.

All members of the AWL agree on three basic points: 1. opposition to the occupation, 2. the clerical-fascist nature of the various sectarian movements and 3. that we give exclusive political support to the Iraqi labour movement, women's and LGBT organisations. We wish to see these particular movements take political power. Revolutionaries cannot give such support to the occupation forces or to clerical-fascists.

Our slogans must square the issue of political support with "military support". Imagine a situation where a unified, bourgeois nationalist movement took up arms against the occupation forces. This movement would be no great champion of the working-class. Nevertheless, we could give "military support" to this movement because we would prefer national self-determination for Iraq as opposed to continued occupation.

But in Iraq, we are not dealing with such a movement. The "resistance" is indisputably hostile to the labour movement, is the murderous enemy of women's liberation and LGBT people. "Military support" is governed by political considerations — it is not a matter of picking a lesser-evil.

Clerical-fascists are anxious to kill our comrades in Iraq as they are the occupation forces — often more so. The political consequences of a "victory" for clerical-fascism over the occupation (i.e. the withdrawal of occupation troops/the scuttling of Iraq) would envelop the country in full-scale civil war between rival Sunni and Shia factions, would probably involve military interventions from Turkey and Iran, would cancel out any and all prospects for national liberation for the foreseeable future. Neither the labour movement or the "Iraqi government" are strong enough to resist these consequences.

Yet the slogans "Troops out" and "Troops out now" concretely mean military support for clerical-fascist movements. The slogans positively "will" a victory for these movements. Therefore, we cannot and should not adopt them.

Tom Unterrainer

I support the slogan "solidarity with Iraqi workers, troops out now" because it is the correct and most sharpest formulation of a "third camp" position in Iraq, while maintaining our opposition to the various shades of Shia/Sunni fundamentalisms operating in Iraq. We must also make a clearer stand against an imperialist occupation that has made Iraq a hell on earth.

The demand for the troops to leave Iraq Now is being made by nearly all of the major Iraqi trade unions, we have a duty to support them.

Supporting Iraqi trade unionists strike against the privatisation of the oil industry (as we rightly do) but not supporting them in their call to rid their country of the imperialist force that is carrying out the privatisation is an inconsistent position.

If the labour movement were to flex its muscles and certain sections threatened industrial action against occupation, then what would our position be? We supported strikes against the war etc., but we don't believe in troops out now. It is not a consistent position.

It is said that the occupation troops are in some way holding back the fundamentalists from attacking and destroying trade unionists, LGBT, secular people, women who refuse to wear the veil etc. This is flawed and not the reality of Iraq now.

The Badr Corps are taking over the police apparatus in some Iraqi cities — an example of how the state and the fundamentalist forces and militias have meshed and merged — all with tacit approval of the US. Abduction, murder and torture by the Badr

Corps and other fundamentalist militias — under the noses of the US army — is not a prediction of an apocalyptic future, it is happening now. Things cannot get any worse for many sections of Iraqi society.

Faryal Velmi

Over the last few years the debate on Iraq has become something of a ritual with both sides merely repeating previous arguments about the "Troops Out" slogan. The issues are, I think, more than just a question of slogans. Those arguing for the majority position claim that they just oppose "troops out" but otherwise oppose the occupation. The problem is that their need to oppose that slogan has led to a serious imbalance in what we say in our press.

Long descriptive/analytical articles end with a call for solidarity with the Iraqi workers' movement (which all agree on) and the vague assurance that we are against the occupation too. While the majority is willing to cheer on workers taking action in the UK or US against the war — and this in itself is in contradiction with the view that withdrawal would be harmful — there is little agitational or propaganda material in *Solidarity* that would encourage them to take such action.

We need more material and arguments on opposing the occupation and support for Iraqi self-determination if we are to present a rounded position on what is politically necessary in Iraq and Britain.

I am therefore sympathetic to many of the arguments of the alternative position, though I think they are also mistaken in making the troops out slogan the focus of the argument. I could not vote for this position as there were many things in the text I did not agree with, ranging from windy rhetoric about "acquiescing in imperialism", and the deletion of any opposition to the Iranian regime acquiring nuclear weapons to a confused argument in support of the troops out slogan.

We have started a discussion about the programme we advocate for the Iraqi labour movement if it is to become a strong force in the current situation. Hopefully that will take the discussion forward.

Bruce Robinson

There is a level of unease in our organisation at the perceived inadequacy of our position on Iraq. It's a perception that I obviously feel is entirely legitimate. But where should the discussion within the AWL usefully go from here.

One of the most encouraging elements of the debate at our conference was the acknowledgement by several supporters of the majority position that the debate was indeed about more than a journalistic tinkering with slogans. Those of us with the minority position (I use the terms "majority" and "minority" loosely, as neither are ideologically homogenous blocs) have stressed all along that our position is about re-orientating AWL's coverage and propaganda on Iraq away from mere geo-political commentary and towards an attempt to thrash out the means by which organised labour — in Iraq and internationally — can catalyse a working-class, anti-occupation, pro-democracy and pro-secularism movement that can force the withdrawal of troops on progressive terms.

We believe that clear, sharp slogans addressing the presence of those troops (such as "troops out") are an important aspect of the political basis for building such a movement, but the formulation of words is for me very much secondary to the overall political perspective of which the slogans are a part.

Comrades have indicated a willingness to open up a discussion about what kind of politics and programme is necessary for such a movement to be built, and I think this is now the most fruitful and productive terrain upon which to continue the debate. We need to make sure that such a programme is not developed on the basis of the kind of abstentionist politics that we feel have characterised the majority's position until now.

Daniel Randall

The Iraq debate was not a precise and honest debate, but instead marred by ambiguity and ill-defined protest.

The counter-motion on Iraq accused the organisation of two key political errors. One, ignoring or under-stating opposition to US-led intervention and occupation of Iraq. Two, abstaining from slogans about the presence of troops that, in turn, reflects a support for imperialism and a disregard for building the third camp.

Further still, two caricatures have been implicitly posed in this debate. One, that of an organisation dominated by geeky, arm-chair, geopolitical analysts who want to play chess with Iraq and (in the process) crudely and anti-dialectically reading off facts on the ground a set of sloganistic demands that are incapable of effecting any meaningful change. Two, that of an organisation sinking under the weight of doom-mongers who have an abject lack of faith in the potential of independent working class agency.

Proponents of the counter-motion are our political saviours? The problem is that they are seriously wrong in their political assessment of the organisation. How and why have they come to be so wrong? I think the answer is rooted in two things.

Firstly, an embodied, experiential unease, and therefore political misinterpretation, of honest anti-imperialism. Honest anti-imperialism means that within our overall and given opposition to imperialism, we systematically assess and state all of the side-effects of imperialism through particular moments and localities. That can lead to seemingly (and I mean seemingly) contradictory statements on imperialism. This has led to a simultaneous uncomfortableness and confusion.

Secondly, an idea that it's okay and enough to simply posture with slogans, i.e., to reap the agitational power of sharp words alone. In this case, those supposedly ever-so sharp words "troops out/troops out now". The tradition of the AWL is that, in deciding our slogans we assess both the most likely alternatives if those demands were to be fulfilled and the consequences of these alternatives for the third camp.

It is alarming that while the proponents of the counter-motion admit that a likely outcome of "troops out/troops out now" being fulfilled under present conditions would be a bloody annihilation of the labour movement in Iraq, they shrug off the political responsibility of such a slogan.

The comrades circumvent this whole methodological mess by making "troops out/troops out now" some sort of all-powerful, ultra-sharp agitational tool (not a demand as such, or, more accurately, a transitional demand in one's head). "Troops out/troops out now" is thus seen as a tool that can deliver a strong and buoyant labour movement, which will first drive the troops out and then deal with the (secondary) problem of the Islamist, sectarian militias.

In brief, the counter-motion demonstrates a stagist, fantasy politics.

Camila Bassi

Whoever forces the troops out of Iraq would likely take power. The strongest anti-occupation forces at the moment are the contending Islamist militias, each of which are trying to lay their hands on a chunk of territory. But that is hardly evidence that if the workers one day forced the troops out (imagine the damage which could be caused to the occupation by prolonged oil strikes or indeed strikes "back home") then Islamist power would surge. When dockers in Umm Qasr and Khor Alzubair staged a brief strike on May Day for the immediate withdrawal of troops in solidarity with American port workers doing the same, they were not "objectively" fuelling sectarian war or "objectively" accelerating their own demise. They were strengthening the camp of the working class as an independent political force. We should support them and their demands.

David Broder

Part clas the of L

BY DUNCAN MORRISON

Over the weekend of 10–11 May the Alliance for Workers' Liberty held its annual conference. The event was lively and vibrant, with a lot of newer and younger comrades contributing to the debates and discussions. We used the time to assess our previous year's work and plan our future work.

On the Saturday, discussions were held on the world economy, workers' representation and anti-fascist work. Comrades debated the exact extent to which the Labour Party will cease to be a channel for working class politics should the Bournemouth rule changes not be overturned. We also identified preparing to stand a propaganda candidate in the coming general election and mobilising for the anti-Red, White and Blue festival demonstration as key activities in the coming months.

On Sunday we had debates on Iran and Iraq which centred on whether we should adopt "Troops out" or "Troops out now" as one of our slogans. The motions and amendments which supported these additions were defeated. All sides of the discussion agreed the need to step up our solidarity work with workers in Iran and Iraq.

The other major debate on the Sunday was in the session on climate change and the environment. It focused on whether we should oppose the building of nuclear power stations. Those arguing that we are no more specifically opposed to nuclear than any other source of power, were defeated.

The conference elected a new 18-person national committee for the year ahead that will direct and lead our work. Three comrades also joined the organisation and one former comrade rejoined.

Regardless of our differences, conference provided comrades with a series of comprehensive policies and a clear line of march for our work in the year ahead.

ty and ss after death labour

FAROOQ TARIQ, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE LABOUR PARTY PAKISTAN ADDRESSED THE CONFERENCE.

I am from the Labour Party Pakistan, although I am embarrassed to say "Labour Party" when I come to Britain! But it meets the objective reality in Pakistan, where there has been no such class-based party before. The Labour Party Pakistan is fighting for a socialist Pakistan in a society which is dominated by religious fundamentalism, by promoters of the neo-liberal agenda and those who support the war on terror.

General Musharraf has signed up to the neo-liberal IMF agenda, which when it was imposed on the economy and society resulted in absolute poverty. Over 70 percent of the population of Pakistan lives in absolute poverty, on less than one dollar a day.

But there have been big workers' and peasants' struggles in Pakistan, and most prominently the lawyers' movement that started last March.

Because of this campaign there were elections in February this year. But before the elections there was another military coup by Musharraf. After 3 November General Musharraf announced elections, but we advocated a boycott of the election because it legitimised the overthrow of the legal system. Around 33 percent of voters boycotted the election. But the main bourgeois party, the Pakistan People's Party, won overwhelmingly in three provinces and there was a massive vote to remove Musharraf from power.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the People's Party is not the same as the reformist leadership of the 1970s. Ali Bhutto, the architect of the People's Party, had nationalised around 35 percent of the economy in the 1970s and made some advances in trade union rights and

women's rights. After the assassination of Benazir Bhutto there was a massive reaction in Pakistan, and the whole of Pakistan was at a standstill.

And yet the People's Party leadership, in collaboration with the military dictatorship, decided to take part in the elections at a time when many of their activists said Musharraf should resign and then they would see if they wanted to take part in the elections. Over the last three months there has been a ruling coalition of four bourgeois parties, which is trying to maintain and prolong the presidency of General Musharraf.

So democracy has not come, despite the elections and the military dictatorship still holds state power.

The Labour Party Pakistan has tried to build resistance to the military dictatorship, its first step being building a peasant movement in the army-owned farms of Punjab. 68,000 acres had been invaded and occupied by the military dictatorship. Indeed, twelve percent of the total agricultural land of Pakistan is owned by the Generals.

After taking power they tried to attack the peasants – who, for a hundred years had at least been tenants – and make them work on contracts, so that they could take over ownership of the land for themselves. We decided to work with the peasant movement, saying "We shall pay no more, we pay enough" – over the last hundred years 50 percent of the share of crops have been taken away by the military. Around 2000 peasants refused to pay the share of crops they had to pay for working on these fields. When the military came to claim their taxes seven peasants were killed and over a hundred were injured.

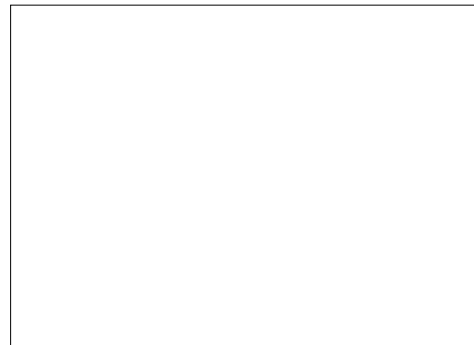
But despite these injuries the movement is still going on and peasants are still occupying land, saying "We will not leave this land". They might come and kill us — our slogan was "We will own the land, or we will die". The peasant movement had a



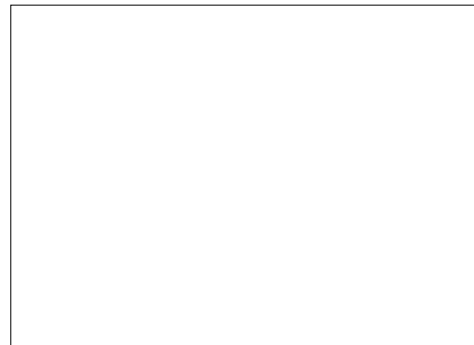
Paul Hampton introduced the environment document: "climate change has substantial consequences for working class politics. The AWL has a role to play in drawing out the political implications of dangerous climate change and taking part in the fight to prevent it."



Sofie Buckland spoke to the feminist document: "The Feminist Fightback activist model is about building bridges between anti-capitalists and socialist, labour movement based politics... We should continue to critically assess current feminist theory."



Tom Unterrainer introduced the Review of the Year document: "In union work, we should create a visible profile for our union fractions... We should turn towards rebuilding, reinvigorating, and politically reorienting Trades Councils."



Sean Matgamna spoke on the Labour Party after Bournemouth: "[Bournemouth] will reduce Labour to a US-style political party, with real political input from the organised working class limited to a junior lobbying role for trade union leaders."



The Iraq debate: Daniel Randall introduces his motion (left), and Dave Kirk leads off on the "Troops out now" amendment (right).



high level of militancy and displayed extreme examples of bravery, which gave encouragement to all the people of Pakistan. This movement was the first step for the peasant movements in Pakistan.

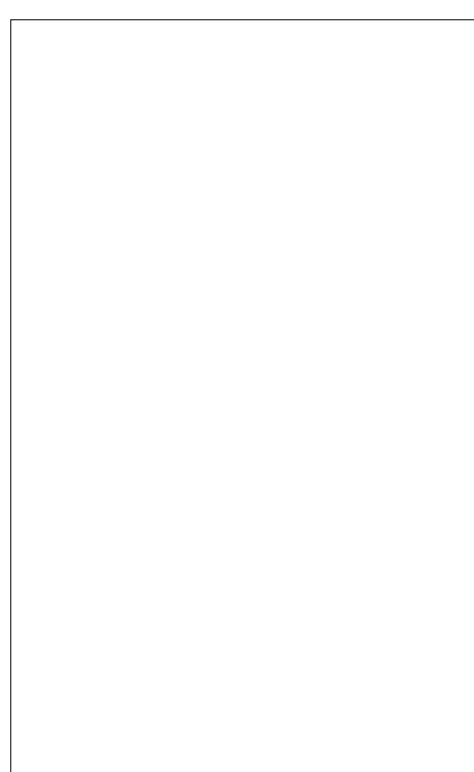
The Labour Party Pakistan has also built a radical, independent women's organisation and a women workers' helpline, and this organisation mobilised over 2,000 working class women on 1 May, and also a similar number on 8 March. In many cities we have radicalised hundreds of women who had never before taken part in any political activity.

We are a new party in Pakistan, but we have been able to attract the most radical workers, peasants, women and youth activists to our party. At this time we have around 4,000 members. We have a principled position of opposition to religious fundamentalism.

I read some criticism in *Solidarity* of our decision to join the All Parties Democratic Movement. We welcome this criticism — *Solidarity* has always given us support and we have translated many of its articles for our newspaper. We have taken part in an alliance which has included religious parties, but it is not a religious alliance. It is not for Islamic revolution. It is alliance to launch a movement against dictatorship and to make the boycott strategy effective.

Alongside this we are building a new alliance, the People's Democratic Front, in which seven left-wing parties are participating, and that alliance is also finding good support among workers and peasants. It is very difficult for socialists to build a party in a society dominated by religious fundamentalism. So one of our main tasks is to have a political fight against the ideas of religious fundamentalism.

One of our comrades was killed last December, and another was kidnapped and shot at but survived. But our main growth at this time is in the North-West Frontier Province, which is dominated by



Farooq Tariq giving the opening address at Workers' Liberty conference

religious fundamentalists but where a lot of radicalisation is taking place.

Thank you for giving me this platform. When I heard about the AWL conference I hoped to attend at least for some time. We have been inspired by your in-depth analysis of politics, particularly of the workers' movement. We bring you revolutionary greetings. Thank you very much.

• The conference also heard speakers from the LCR (France) and the Worker-communist Party of Kurdistan. Written greetings were received from Lalit (Mauritius), the New Left (Ukraine), Polish comrades and Liaisons-le Militant (France).

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Innuendo in the contract

Sheffield was to be the second city in England to host a Hooters franchise — the American restaurant chain where young “cheer leader/surfer girl-next-door” waitresses, wearing a uniform of “white Hooters tank top, orange shorts, suntan hose, white socks, solid white shoes, brown Hooters pouch, name-tag and of course...a smile!” are the main employee (<http://hooters.com>). Now the franchise contract has been discarded under pressure from a campaign. The AWL were not a part of the campaign. But I'm not sure about our reasoning.

It was suggested the main anti-campaign — mounted by the Sheffield Fems — was anti-working class, because it demonstrated against the men and lad culture Hooters would encourage. But I think the Sheffield Fem campaign is anti-working class because it is anti the sex industry in general, rather than because it demonises Hooters clientele (who would probably be more likely to be students and local white collar workers).

The fear Hooters would create the growth and spread of the sex industry in the area is what was most pious and irrelevant about the anti-campaign. The focus was on the losses for local business and the cheapening of Leopold Square; so far being inhabited by a “boutique” hotel and generic mid-price chains of restaurant, like Wagamama's and Zizzi's.

Some comrades objected on practical grounds — we couldn't follow the campaign around giving out alternative litera-

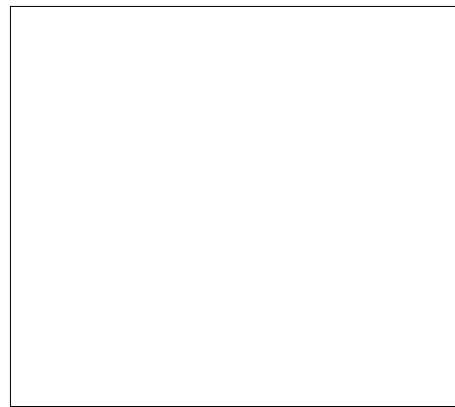
ture against Hooters. However the Sheffield Fems campaign should never have been the starting point from where we shaped our own oppositional stance to Hooters. It was in fact an unfortunate distraction to the real political problems for workers arising if the Hooters bar had been opened.

We don't call for strip clubs to be shut down because we see strippers as workers (not as some feminists might, as sex slaves) and because of the job losses this would incur from closures. Neither of these arguments was relevant here. Jobs were not going to be lost if this deal fell through. The particular type of exploitation women workers would face in Hooters, according to the American convention, was contractual sexual harassment — a denial of their working rights.

Sex work is not the same. Sex, or the lure of sex in the case of strippers, is the service being sold, not a woman's body. A sex worker — with full working rights — has a control over her own body and the situation she is in.

In the case of workers for Hooters, their service is to sell alcohol and food, but to ensure they both get and keep their job are forced to agree that they will oblige their customers with a smile even when said customer touches or flirts with them in a provocative manner.

In the USA Hooters girls have to sign a contract that reads: “I hereby acknowledge and affirm that the Hooters concept is based on female sex appeal and that the work environment is one in which joking



Service with a (compulsory) smile

and innuendo based on female sex appeal is commonplace.” It continues: “I also expressly acknowledge and affirm I do not find my job duties, uniform requirements or work environment to be intimidating, hostile or unwelcome.” (Julie Bindel, the *Guardian*, 11 April 2008)

Hooters claim they still have a “model programme” for reporting harassment, yet I find it hard to see where the line between “joking” and “harassment” is drawn. Nor can I see how a worker would find it easy to file a case against a customer or the company, having signed a contract to say she does by no means find this indistinguishable behaviour from customers “intimidating” or “unwelcome”.

Whilst I disagree with much of the substance of *Guardian* writer Julie Bindel's article detailing the Sheffield case, I found it useful that she highlights previous lawsuits against Hooters: “(in) a notorious case against the company in Florida... the plaintiff alleged that she had been subjected to ‘an endless torrent of sexually inappropriate remarks, demands for sex and uninvited touching that created a situation in which no reasonable woman would have continued to work.’” (Julie Bindel, the

Guardian, 11 April) I don't think this is a one-off but a generalised product of contractual and cultural chauvinism.

Another reason stated for not becoming involved in the Sheffield campaign was because our response to the opening of a workplace should not depend on whether the workers might potentially be at risk of suffering a particular variant of the exploitation spectrum; all workers are exploited.

There are varying types of exploitation however. Shouldn't we be against overtly sexist and regressive workplaces where harassment — the sort of harassment only women are expected to tolerate — is culturally compulsory. We shouldn't wait until there are a group of women workers are humiliated in their workplace until we do anything about it. If Hooters had already been established in Sheffield with jobs guaranteed, then unionising those workers would be the course of action. As it happens Hooters has gone away as a product of a local campaign against it, and good riddance frankly.

I think it a shame we did not run a politically sound campaign against Hooters from the off; one that didn't comply with the scare mongering of Sheffield Fems against the “louts” Hooters would attract, but which focused on workers' rights.

If we look to transitional demands and victories for our labour movement these sorts of jobs shouldn't have to exist anymore. We need to take a case by case approach to working environments and industries. Supporting localised struggles is about shaping community campaigns so they are not coloured by bigotry and anti-working class sentiment, but are focused on engaging working class people in democracy against individual bosses and even the bullish misogyny of a capitalist empire, like Hooters.

Louise Gold

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THE LEFT

What a waste

BY CHARLIE SALMON

The split between the SWP and Galloway-sycophants in Respect has politically destabilised and reduced both sides. Destabilised in the sense that the SWP was presented with the problem of sticking to its perspective of building a populist alternative to New Labour whilst the Galloway faction lost its best organisers and activists. Reduced in the sense that both sides fared miserably in the recent London elections.

The SWP, having lost the “cachet” of the Respect name through purely legalistic manoeuvring, resorted to running a campaign under the “Left List” title. In the face of major obstacles they managed to drum up at least £30,000 from members and sympathisers to get Lindsey German into the mayoral election booklet. They must have spent many thousands of pounds more on leaflets, postcards and posters. Let's guess that in total, the London election campaign cost the SWP £40,000.

What did the SWP get for its money and the considerable effort members put in to the campaign? 1.3% of the vote on the GLA lists and just 16,000 first preference votes for mayor. For a relatively small group of revolutionary socialists, with limited resources standing across London this is not an insubstantial vote. But the SWP did not stand as revolutionary socialists, did not campaign with socialist propaganda. The “Left List” platform wasn't even very

left-wing — barely distinguishable from the Liberals on the environment and housing; positively asinine in its statements on transport and trade unions.

Had the SWP drawn some obvious conclusions from the political disintegration of their one-time members and allies, reassessed the principles under which socialists make alliances and organised efforts and actually engaged in a process of addressing the issues at stake for independent working class representation, the vote would not have been so bad. But to waste so much money — the money of SWP members, revolutionary socialists, trade unionists and workers — on such a dire political campaign was a travesty.

Flat earthers

The annual general meeting of the flat earth society is abuzz, positively bristling with excitement. One of their fellow flat-earthers, recently returned from a trip into space, is due to address the conference. “Ladies and Gentlemen, comrade flat-earthers: after a long and arduous journey, a journey conducted with no small risk to my person, a journey undertaken with the utmost of bravery and purpose of intention, I can reveal to you the facts — indisputable, concrete facts — that confirm the flatness of our planet”. The audience erupts into applause, flowers are tossed at the speakers feet.

When the crowd settles, someone raises their hand. Called by the chair, she asks: “Comrade flat-earther, what did you see?”

What does Earth look like from space?” Taken aback by this impertinence, the astronaut responds: “That is a very good question. But it is a question that I am unable to answer”. “Why?” asks the questioner. “Well, I didn't look out of the window. But I can tell you without doubt that the planet Earth is flat!”

The Workers' Power group has something of the flat-earth society about it. After attending a recent AWL youth dayschool and hearing more than one thing that offended his view of the world, WP member Simon Hardy contacted Iraqi academic Sami Ramadani to gather his “thoughts” on Muqtada Al Sadr. Ramadani replied: “It is despicable of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty to ... accuse the Sadr movement of assassinating trade unionists”. Ramadani goes on to down-play the Sadr movement's attacks on women and students.

Sami Ramadani is a useful idiot for the political idiots of the Workers' Power group. Like the astronaut who failed to look out of the window, Ramadani lends his credentials as a bona fide Iraqi to those sections of the left locked into apologetics for clerical fascism.

Any regard for the statements and appeals issued by Iraqi trade unions, women's and socialist groups tells a very different story. A story of attacks, intimidation, threats and murder from groups like the Sadrists against those fighting for the workers' movement, women's rights and democracy.

If Simon Hardy thinks he will convince anyone that Sadr and his militias are the friends of our brothers and sisters in the Iraqi labour movement by an appeal to Sami Ramadani, he's kidding himself. WP members should take a trip into space and if they still refuse to look out of the window, they should consider staying there.

FILM: PERSOPOLIS

Through the eyes of a girl

BY LOUISE GOLD AND SILVI SUBBA

Persepolis is a story of the bravery of a young Iranian girl as she learns and comes to understand the politics of her nation, and the various factions that have fought to rule over it through history.

It is also a story of individual growth, and interference in that growth from political oppression and restraint.

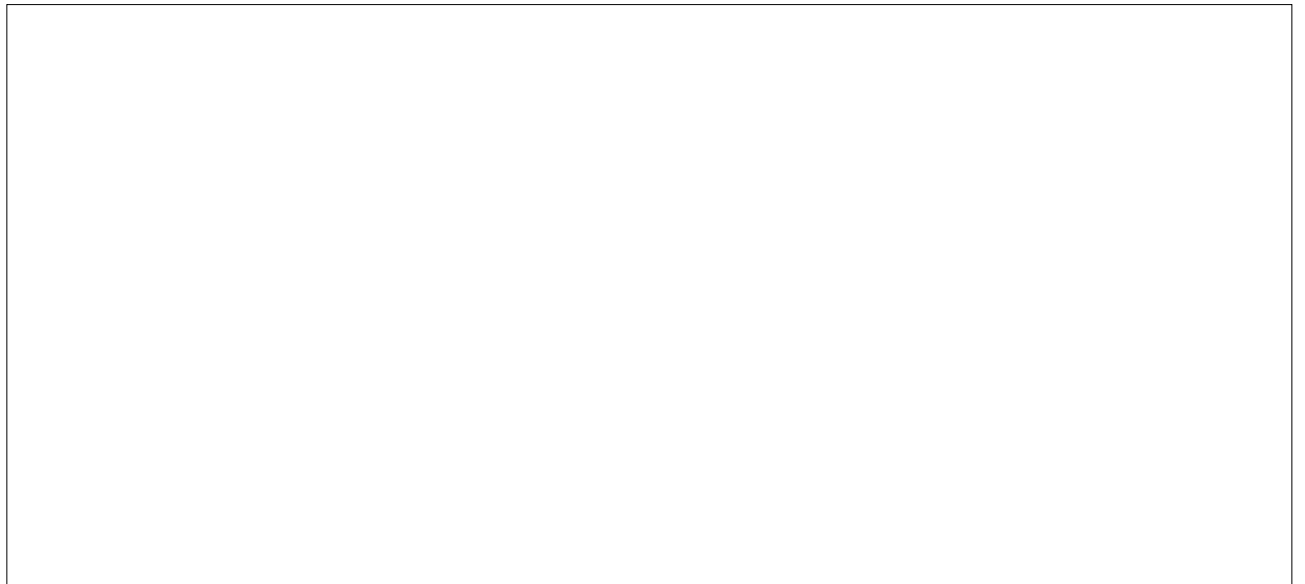
The main protagonist, Marjane, begins the story as a child secretly devoted to God and the idea she can become a prophet, despite her unbelieving Marxist parents. (There is some conversation between God and Marx later in the film which serves as comic interlude.)

Later Marjane the teenager becomes disillusioned by the idea of a career as God's intermediary on Earth, having lived through the Islamic revolution. She rebels against the conventions of society and her parents — with Iron Maiden as her guide — and is forever pressing against the limits of a government led by religious dictate.

Although animated, the film provides a convincing depiction of Iran through the ages, through revolution and war, and through Marjane's journey into womanhood. It is atmospheric and through its switching between colour, and black and white, reminds us it is an autobiographical account. I think it's important to remember this when watching the film, as the script is not written purely for the sake of making an impression on an audience but because it left an impression on a young girl.

Dialogue recounting Marxism and rebellion create both hope and melancholic despair as we watch Iran's recent history unfold on the screen. This sort of conversation is through the medium of various characters who all come to much the same unfortunate end.

I liked the fact we are left without a happy ending but with the feeling of a person caught very much between a rock and a hard place. Marjane is a woman by now and whilst she has had her fair share of relationships, but she does not land with a hero who can save her from unhappy realities. She leaves the film alone in a taxi in France. This seems to carry the implication that the story is not



over for the many displaced people of the Iranian revolution. Whilst Iran becomes harder and harder to call home, countries elsewhere seem equally as difficult to forge homes within.

If you liked the film version of this graphic novel then you should definitely read the novel itself. Although the film is very well made with great animation and remains true to the narrative style of the graphic novel, the account of everyday life in Iran is better told in the book. Perhaps due to time constraint the filmmakers excluded various scenes which in my opinion are very significant in making the tale more poignant and witty and shedding light on Iranian society.

While the film focuses on war and conflicts of religion, the novel also looks at class segregation within Iran before the Islamic Revolution. For example, there is a short tale

The struggle to be a free and autonomous individual

of Marjane's maid who is not allowed to eat at the same table as the rest of her family and whose love for a neighbour's son is unrequited because of her status.

The young Marjane describes her revelation simply, "I finally understood why I felt ashamed to sit in my father's Cadillac. The reason for my shame and the revolution is the same: the difference between social classes."

The book also conveys more effectively how anti-imperialist language was appropriated by Islamists to justify oppressive policies after the revolution.

Through Marjane's perspective as both child and then young adult and through her wonderful family we learn about Iran's history, culture and society. Her own journey into adulthood tells a tale of isolation. It is a very inspiring read and makes one think about humanity, the consequences of war and the things in life we take for granted.

BOOK: COUNTER-CULTURE

Revolutionary rock stars?

Peter Burton reviews *There's a riot going on, revolutionaries, rock stars and the rise and fall of 60s counter-culture* by Peter Doggett

Peter Doggett's book recalls in detail (over 525 pages) the uneasy relationship between rock stars, political activists and the "counter-culture" between 1965 and 1972.

His raison d'être for the book: "In an era when Bono, the hand in glove darling of the global political establishment and Bruce Springsteen, the personification of cosy liberalism, are revered as rock and pop icons, it's timely to be reminded of an era when artists were prepared to court unpopularity (and worse) for their ideals."

Doggett also attacks some of the myths that have been created by the artists themselves about this period citing the documentary *The US against John Lennon* as sanitising the role of an artist who gave both money and publicity to the IRA, Black Panthers, the Vietnam solidarity Committee, Zippies, Yippies and, not least, the "Dylan Liberation Front".

The book begins with an account of how Jerry Rubin began to channel the Berkeley Teach-in in May 1965 for free speech, towards being against the war, by using artists like Phil Ochs. Rubin also attempts to revive a by now disgruntled Dylan. He describes the role of Ginsberg, Ed Sanders and Tulin Kupferberg and their musical ensemble "The Fugs" as they explored the limits of censorship travelling across America.

The more Dylan tried to distance himself from the political activists the more they, in turn, tried to reclaim and re-activate him. This took on bizarre proportions as a Dylan obsessive AJ Weberman makes it his sole mission to "liberate" Dylan by launching a "Dylan Liberation Front" campaign!

Apparently Black Panther leaders like Bobby Seale and Huey Newton read coded hidden messages into Dylan's lyrics on "Bringing it all Back Home" and "Highway 61

Revisited": they thought it told them what tactics to use in their war against "The Man"!

There are recurring chronological accounts of the relations between artists and the key underground activists of the time. This is interspersed with arguments that took place within the counter-culture over tactics, aims and the very nature of protest itself. This is the central ongoing theme of the book.

Doggett is particularly sharp on the absence of women from the revolution. Joan Baez notwithstanding, they were largely expected to roll joints and throw themselves into the cause of sexual freedom.

Asked about the position of women in the black consciousness movement, Stokely Carmichael, "honorary prime minister for the Black Nation", replied "prone". Women were not allowed to bear arms in the Black Panthers.

Doggett also recalls the big events of these years: Kent state, Woodstock, the Isle of Wight festival, Altamont, Biafra, Attica, the Chicago Democratic Convention, the Newport Folk Festival, Grosvenor Square and the Prague Spring. He sometimes takes time out to talk about the civil rights protests in the fifties.

With an invaluable discography informing readers of seminal albums and individual songs and the affect they had on different individuals, a number of great anecdotes — Country Joe McDonald bursting into anti-Vietnam song at the Chicago Conspiracy Trial having been primed by pranksters Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin to do so — and details of meetings between Tariq Ali, Robin Blackburn and Lennon and Yoko and other relationships, this is an invaluable book about the counter-culture in the US at a crucial time. It shows us the limits of the New Left. There are also many lessons for us about successful and unsuccessful tactics through examination of both the underground activist's methods and the US states' response.

FILM: IRON MAN

Bloodless

BY MIKE WOOD

Tony Stark is a millionaire weapons designer who decides to ensure his weapons never fall into the wrong hands — but only after being captured by terrorists in Afghanistan using them! The fact that he does so by designing his most destructive weapon yet presents him with predictable problems by the end of the film. Nevertheless rest assured that he triumphs over adversity by killing a large number of anonymous swarthy bad guys in spectacular set pieces.

Despite his fight against the Taliban there is surprisingly little politics in Iron Man. Terrorists function as generic evil doers with largely unexplained motives. When Stark crushes, burns, shoots, and generally obliterates them there is no blood and no consequences, or at least none that can't be solved by building better weapons. Nor any reflection on the fact that in order to stop unnecessary violence he's killed a hell of a lot of people.

This seems to be exactly the kind of superhero film people want, and it's not hard to see why. Iron Man is an extremely well constructed action film with a great deal of charm, largely thanks to Robert Downey Junior.

Whilst there's nothing here to think about that also means it isn't overtly jingoistic or mean spirited like so many vigilante films. If you don't mind checking your brain at the door it's great fun.



From observer to participant

BY PETE RADCLIFF

Like many teenagers in 1968, my political education was as an observer for many years of a number of major struggles throughout the world. The civil rights movement in the US; the events in China, which were mystifying as portrayed by the media and explained meaningfully by no-one, and the horrors of the US war in Vietnam.

The first half of 1968 started out again as another of watching, but this time the intensity of the experience was ratcheted up by the Prague spring of "Socialism with a Human Face", the Tet Offensive in Vietnam and most excitingly the May-June events in France. A friend and I started getting *Black Dwarf*, a paper of the "new left" and often, even to us, pretty pretentious politically, and *Socialist Worker*, which we came across whilst in Manchester city centre and started from then going into town especially to buy.

We started to read about trade union struggles of which I had a vague knowledge as my uncle, a Liverpool member of the SLL, had been frequently seen by my family on the TV.

At 16, I guess we felt a little self-conscious compared to the revolutionaries we saw when we bought papers off them. They were probably only three or four years older than ourselves. We presumed they probably weren't interested in us. So we started purchasing Marxist books and started studying.

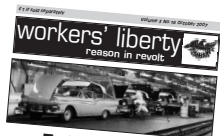
In October I traveled down to London for the big Vietnam demo and then I at last decided to make the jump into meetings and organised politics.

First in a series

Marx's telescope

This Workers' Liberty pamphlet looks at the light that a little-known but major work of Marx, the *Grundrisse*, can bring to understanding 21st century capitalism.

By Martin Thomas.



Marx's telescope

Marx's Grundrisse, capital and the revolutionary class — a briefing for anti-capitalists

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RESISTING FASCISM

Fight Brown to fight the BNP

BY JACK YATES

The British National Party has made a small but significant advance in May's local and London Assembly elections. The BNP now have:

- A member on the 25 person Greater London Assembly;
 - Ten new councillors across the country.
- Even though this is not as many as they claimed they would get, it is a third year of increased BNP presence in local government;
- New councillors in Stoke, Rotherham and many other urban areas;
 - A firmer toe-hold in places like Barnsley where they came second in seven wards.

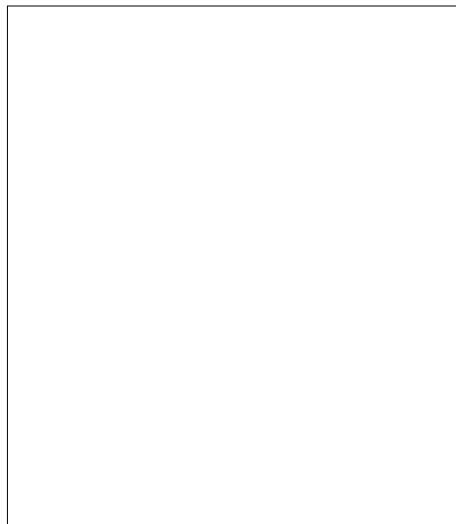
In many areas where they didn't get elected there are reports of increased and sustained BNP activity. For example, in Derbyshire — particularly around the venue where they held their festival last summer — the BNP did frighteningly well. They took two of the three wards in the town of Heanor, only failing to get the third by one vote!

This May the campaign "Hope Not Hate", backed by the influential anti-fascist magazine *Searchlight* and supported by many trade unions, ran a very populist campaign in alliance with the *Daily Mirror*. The purpose of the campaign? Just calling on people to vote: anything but BNP. Using celebrities such as Alan Sugar, contestants of the *Apprentice*, the casts of soap operas and a guest appearance from Gordon Brown, "Hope Not Hate" hoped to generate a popular, all-embracing campaign to defeat the BNP.

In their post election statement, "Hope Not Hate" claim the campaign was a success as the BNP failed to live up to their prediction of securing 40 more councillors. But on the "Hope Not Hate" blog, socialist and anti-fascist Dave Landau takes co-ordinator Nick Lowles to task on the BNP's "failure" in London. "Call me old fashioned," says Dave, "but I cannot be cheerful about them getting a seat on the London Assembly... [getting] a seat on the LA it will be a real boost and all talk of getting 40 new seats will be forgotten in favour of this 'victory'."

Of course, the BNP always hugely exaggerate their possibilities. Last year they only made one net gain in the number of councillors, despite significantly increasing their vote and achieving a huge increase in the number of second places.

This year there are other factors. The



BNPer Richard Barnbrook was elected to the GLA

Tories, more credible and better organised than they have been, pulled more votes. This will have affected both BNP and more significantly UKIP. The BNP exploitation of Tory disarray in leafy suburbia has been made more difficult.

What is so depressing about this year's result is that they were achieved despite bitter BNP internal feuding over the last six months. In December BNP leader Nick Griffin expelled a number of their leading members. The BNP opposition ("Voice of Change") mobilised hundreds against the BNP leaders. Mutual accusations of "Nazism" filled the cyberspace between the two sides. Despite ongoing legal action the opposition now seems to be attempting to make peace and to be accepted back in. The realisation of a BNP electoral success has allowed Nick Griffin to see off his internal opposition.

If there had been a serious campaign against the BNP that wouldn't have happened; the split that started in December may have led to Griffin losing control and all sorts of centrifugal forces being set in motion.

OPPOSING THE BNP

The reasons for the BNP's continuing successes are so obvious, they shouldn't really need explaining. Every minimally class conscious worker will have heard the argument again and again from people they work with and live near. "Labour are rubbish, they have done nothing for us British (English/white or whatever other

false identity springs to mind) workers. We need to look after our own kind against these foreigners."

In the past such views would be easily marginalised. Trade union solidarity, a sense of common working class political interest, even when mediated through the distorting prism of Labour Party loyalty, were always more meaningful than such racist claptrap to the overwhelming majority of people.

But when so many trade union leaders do little or nothing to defend their members; but bend over backwards to defend a Labour Government which humiliates, attacks and disenfranchises their members, is it really surprising that the BNP racists are not so easily silenced?

This year has seen growing class militancy and increased strike activity. But strikes are localised in particular sectors. In many low paid areas of manufacturing, the service economy and local government, trade union confidence is as low as it have ever been. Even worse there is absolutely no socialist or working-class political force that can command any confidence or respect from workers. To honestly face these facts may be difficult. But once they are faced then we can start to recognise what we must do. How to respond?

1. Stop telling lies that disguise the failures of our movement. The trade union leadership, has failed to fight back adequately against a government which continues to privatise, pamper the rich and attack the poor worker, the immigrant and the socially disadvantaged. Our union leaders, working through the anti-fascist campaigns of UAF and Hope not Hate, shouldn't just call on people to vote, they should use their huge organisational resources to:

- champion the interests of the working class by fighting Brown's government;
- ensure there are council and parliamentary candidates worth voting for!

2. Don't make alliances that compromise what needs to be said and done. The organised left, despite having (perhaps) "read the books" on why fascism was victorious in the 1930s, seems blind to the lessons. UAF and Hope Not Hate promote "popular front" alliances with respectable religious and 'community' leaders and right-wing political forces who know that no one will challenge them.

- Read an article analysing the BNP from Dave Landau, written for *Socialist Worker*, but then rejected for sectarian reasons: workersliberty.org/node/10524

APPEAL FROM NOTTS STOP THE BNP

Protest against BNP 15-17 August

The Red White and Blue festival is a major annual event held by the BNP. For too long they have been able to hold these "festivals" without major opposition. We are planning to stop them this summer. If the festival is not blocked by the council we are planning a mass demonstration.

Unlike previous years we have advance knowledge:

- Where the RWB festival is to be: Codnor/ Denby bordering Nottingham and Derby and only a few miles from the M1.
- When it will be: 15-17 August.

There will be a planning meetings in Nottingham to mobilise and a website has been set up to co-ordinate information and action <http://nobnpprotest.wordpress.com>

We will be holding a public meeting in Nottingham soon.

Over the last year antifascists in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire have been working together to undermine the BNP. Primarily this has been facilitated by the Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP campaign but it has also been supported by Derby UAF as well as a multitude of trade union organisations. All of these campaigns are determined to stop the RWB festival being a successful recruitment event for the BNP. Already 150 people were mobilised in October, 2007 and physically blockaded and stopped a local BNP rally being held and addressed by Nick Griffin. In addition leaflets and stalls have been held in towns and villages where the BNP have been known to be particularly active.

Please get back in touch with us at NottmStopBNP@yahoo.co.uk if you are prepared to join us in building these activities. There is an urgent need for action against fascism.

MARXISTS ON THE CAPITALIST CRISIS 4: SIMON MOHUN

An era of rampant inequality

ANARCHY OF THE MARKET

This is an odd sort of crisis for a Marxist. If you had read Marxist crisis theory at a fairly abstract level, I think you would be a bit puzzled by this crisis. It's not about falling rates of profit. Profit rates have been rising.

It's not about a profit squeeze. It's not the case that wages have been squeezing profits. In terms of the classical parameters of Marxian discussion, we come back to disproportionality. That seems to fit what has been going on a bit better. More generally one would say from a Marxian point of view that this crisis is the anarchy of the market showing itself in a particularly dramatic form.

But that's all. And I wouldn't exaggerate it. There will be some pain, but capitalism will survive the pain, and there will be a much more interventionist approach by financial authorities in the USA and around the world to regulating finance and investment banks. Ben Bernanke at the Fed [US Federal Reserve] is going to do pretty much whatever it takes, together with Hank Paulson at the US Treasury, to make sure that the system does not run out of liquidity.

There are many accounts today drawing parallels between the present situation and the late 1920s. Some of those parallels are quite interesting, to do with consumer debt, buying on margin [borrowing to buy stocks and bonds and hoping to make money on rises or falls in price], and a credit crisis spreading into the rest of the economy. But there is a lot that is different, too.

Bernanke, as an academic economist, made his reputation in the study of the Great Depression. The general view is that the Great Depression was turned from an ordinary cyclical downturn into a Great Depression by the bank failures in the USA. Bernanke and the Fed and the US Treasury are not going to allow those bank failures to happen now, even if they have to (in effect) nationalise all the bad debt.

There will be a recession, but I wouldn't exaggerate it. There will be a lot of pain in financial houses in the City and on Wall Street, but I think most people will say "serve them right"; and the interesting question for the future is the extent to which the financial institutions will be made to bear responsibility for the mayhem they have created. That's an open question. The Bank of England, for instance, took a very tough line over Northern Rock shareholders. Bear Stearns shareholders in the USA did a bit better, but not brilliantly.

Is this a crisis of liquidity, or is it a crisis of solvency? [I.e. is it a crisis of people and firms not being able to get hard cash in time to cover the payments they have to make, or of them not having enough assets, liquid or illiquid, to cover their liabilities?] The central banks are determined to make sure a crisis of liquidity is resolved, by just pumping liquidity into the market, but will allow any institution that turns out to be insolvent to go bust. We'll have to see if that works. There are clearly risks, but my guess is that the underlying economy is stronger than a lot of the doom-sayers in the press claim.

I could be wrong. It's quite possible that the banks are hiding things, and there are nasty surprises still in store. Financial markets will be volatile for some time, until all the bad debt is out in the open. But the crisis does not look that dramatically severe to me.

The capitalist financial system of today can be more crisis-prone. It is not necessarily so. It depends on how it is regulated. The greater the pyramiding of financial assets, the greater the disruption if something goes wrong. But something has to go wrong for that to happen; so the real issue is, what will go wrong?

Lots of things can go wrong, but whether they will or not is another question.

What's happening now is basically that the US housing market was in a bubble, and that bubble has been pricked. It is unclear now what the effect will be. It is clear that the way in which that housing debt was securitised [bundled into pieces of paper giving titles to income, and traded on financial markets] is going to be much more heavily regulated in future.

Closer regulation does not rule out some new fancy financial manipulation producing some new form of assets which can be sold on with similar problems. We don't know. The problems that exist at the moment result from a mis-selling of mortgages which seems to me virtually to have amounted to fraud, but I imagine that won't

be allowed to happen again.

At present, because the banks are reluctant to lend to each other, the [high] interest rates that the banks are charging have become "decoupled" from [low] official interest rates. The British government is in two minds about this. It wants interest rates down to mitigate the risk of recession, and at the same time it wants interest rates to stay high so that house prices fall.

When markets correct, they generally overshoot. But it doesn't seem likely to me that the pain in consumer credit markets is going to spread significantly into firms' production and investment plans. Obviously it is spreading into retail trade. John Lewis, for example, is reporting figures that look very grim compared to last year. But John Lewis is saying that it will ride it out, and I think that is what will happen.

On a world scale, profits are quite high; growth rates in most parts of the world are quite high. It doesn't look like a crisis with a capital C.

AFTER THE GOLDEN AGE

The early 1970s marked the end of what is called the Golden Age of capitalism, the era of post-World-War-2 expansion. Then we had a period of five to seven years in which things were open. Things were getting increasingly difficult for capital; labour was quite well organised, and was resisting moves by capital to resolve the crisis in a direction favourable to capital. The rate of profit was collapsing.

There was a major turn about 1979-80. It was symbolised by Paul Volcker's raising US interest rates in 1979; the election of Reagan in 1980, and his attack on the air traffic controllers' union; by the election of Thatcher in Britain in 1979; and by Mitterrand being forced to abandon his "socialist" experiments in France (or what were called his "socialist" experiments) in the early 1980s.

All round the metropolitan capitalist world, there was a major shift in the balance of forces towards capital and away from labour. Since about 1982, the rate of profit has recovered.

In the USA — I haven't explored this for other countries, because the data is much harder to get hold of — the rise in the rate of profit [profits as a rate of return on assets] has been not reflected in an equivalent rise in the profit share [profits as a percentage of total income]. The rate of profit would have risen higher, with a rise in the profit share too, were it not that a lot of what might be called profit income was diverted into the pockets of the wealthy.

There were huge increases in pay at the top of the distribution, while for about 83% of employees real wages per hour were stagnant from about 1978 to 1997. These inequalities, and their corrosive effects on society, are slowly, slowly coming more to the forefront in political terms.

The rate of profit bottomed out in the early 1980s and, broadly speaking, on a long-term trend, has been rising since then. And the statistical measure fits with everything else we know. The working class has taken a hammering in almost all metropolitan countries in the last 20 or 25 years in terms of labour organisation, income, and so on.

The US statistics allow you to distinguish between workers who have no supervisory role, who are about 82% of the employed population, and the top 18%. Looking at IRS [US Inland Revenue Service] statistics, we find that the major changes have taken place right at the very top of that 18%, among the top one per cent or one-half per cent.

The share of productive labour [in the Marxist sense, i.e. of labour producing surplus value] in total labour in the USA remained roughly constant in the last two decades of the 20th century. The share of unproductive wages has dramatically increased, and that is largely driven by increased pay in legal service, finance insurance and real estate, and business services.

In terms of hours, the share of unproductive labour in the USA has not risen; but many unproductive workers are paid a lot more.

There's been a huge change in the balance of power within capital, which is often summed up in terms like financialisation. Since the early 1980s the resurgence of capital has also been a rise of finance, and that is to do with globalisation and the new facilities to shift large

amounts of money around electronically.

However, it would not be quite right to talk of this as a successive struggle of finance capital versus industrial capital. They are much more intertwined than that picture would suggest. Rather, the nature of capital has changed, with finance becoming much more preponderant.

Why then have interest rates often been low over the last decades? To ask that question, I think, is in effect to revert to the picture of two capitalist interest groups, finance and industry, in conflict. I don't think that is accurate.

There's been a celebration of markets, of money-making, of individualism, of greed, and so on, which is associated with a significant change in the way in which capital presents itself. Finance capital now mainly works through the extraction of very large fees for providing advice in mergers and acquisitions. The extraction of financial income works via interest rates less than it used to.

US DECLINE?

What about the theories of the relative decline of the USA? The US economy is the most powerful economy in the world, and one of the most resilient economies in the world; and it will remain that way for some time to come. Relatively speaking, the US economy is in decline. You cannot have a China growing at 10% a year for 20 years without effects on the balance of world economic power. The growth rates of China, India, and latterly Brazil — the so-called BRICs — are significant, and will have effects. You can see that in the way that China is operating in Africa at present, and securing resources in a way that was inconceivable 20 years ago.

I don't think the dollar is as powerful as it was in international markets. The euro is looking like a much stronger currency. Increasingly, those who run the treasury departments of central banks, particularly in the Far East, are looking very hard at their dollar portfolios, and asking whether they are a sensible long-run home for their assets. The dollar is significantly weaker as a world currency than it used to be. But that has happened over a long period of time. It's a slow process.

A catastrophic slide of the dollar does not seem likely to me. It is always possible, but it would be so disruptive and so much against every individual country's short-term interest, that it is unlikely to happen.

A lot of the discussion around this issue is very ultimatum, as if we must either have one thing or the other. But maybe not. There will be some disinvestment from dollar assets, but assuming that the USA does recover from the turmoil, then funds will flow back into dollars again. I don't think it's the final catastrophe. I'm very much opposed to that way of looking at things.

But a crisis can be a catastrophe without being "the final" catastrophe...?

I think the dollar will fall. I think people don't recognise, however, how much the dollar has already fallen, and how much the US balance of payments has already improved. It is still pretty terrible, but it has improved massively over the last five years.

In fact, the dollar could rise in the medium term against the pound. Of course, these things are not certain. If they were certain, we'd make a fortune on the money markets.

I think the difference in policies between the US Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank is in large part down to different circumstances. There isn't a housing bubble in most of Europe. In the USA, more inflation might not be such a bad thing; it could bring down real house prices with a smaller fall in nominal prices. That's one reason why the Fed is more relaxed about inflation: it sees it as a way of easing some of the price adjustments that would otherwise be more painful.

In Britain, of course, there is a housing bubble, and it looks as if it will be punctured. It is still early days, as yet. Nationwide is predicting a year-on-year fall in nominal house prices. How far will that go? It remains to be seen.

• Simon Mohun has done extensive research on the development of productive and unproductive labour (in the Marxist sense, i.e. labour which does not produce surplus value), especially in the USA. He is a professor of economics at Queen Mary University of London. He spoke to Marthin Thomas.

REVOLUTIONARY CHARTISM PART 3

A workers' parliament

CHRIS FORD CONTINUES A SERIES

The General Convention of the Industrious Classes opened in London on 4 February 1839, riding high on a wave of popular unrest and unparalleled mass mobilisations. London Democrat William Cardo wrote that the "Parliament of the House of Lords and Commons would soon be assembled... and at the same time another Parliament, the People's Parliament would assemble... there would be the spirit of the English people". Historians may point to the moderate artisans of the London Working Men's Association as the authors of the Charter, or the middle-class radicals of the Birmingham Political Union as having proposed the Convention. But it was not their achievement.

The General Convention was the first elected body of the disenfranchised working class. It has been criticised for its inadequacies, but its achievements at this historic moment should not be undervalued, as the embodiment of a massive and energetic wave of workers' self-organisation encompassing an array of country-wide local associations and organisations. These bodies, which elected their delegates through mass meetings, which often workers attended armed as a display of force, created a counter-power; in the eyes of many the Convention held more legitimacy than any other institution in England at the time. The Convention's delegates adopted the title "MC" — Member of the Convention! — to counter the MPs of the parliament of the upper classes.

The London Democratic Association could count on three convention delegates as their own: William Cardo for Marylebone, Harney for Derby, Newcastle and Norwich, and Neesom from Bristol. The main representatives of London came from the London Working Men's Association who manoeuvred like modern labour bureaucrats to obtain a monopoly over London representation. The LDA viewed the Convention as a potential revolutionary assembly on a collision course with the Government. As the elected assembly of the people they expected it to prepare for the actions required in such a showdown.

In the Convention the LDA allied with physical force revolutionaries, such as Richard Marsden, Peter Murray M'Douall and Dr Taylor. On the right, were the advocates of "moral force", the LWMA leaders such as Lovett and middle class Radicals such as the banker Thomas Atwood who believed the "interests of masters and men are in fact one". They saw the Convention's role as organising presentation of the petition and to stick to legal means only.

The most influential body in the Convention was the centre — Feargus O'Connor and Bronterre O'Brien. O'Connor was already the best known, most influential leader of the movement, if not yet within the Convention itself. The policy of the centre was of a self-limiting revolution. They believed they could use intimidation of the mass movement to force reform — along the lines of the agitation for the Reform Bill of 1832. But times had changed, and the workers could be as effective as the middle class was in 1832. By the time the Convention met

these differences over strategies had already split Chartism.

THE RED FLAG OF DEFIANCE

Harney believed the House of Commons would reject the People's Charter; he argued the debate over how many signatures were on the petition was superfluous. Harbet demanded the Convention decide to present the Charter to the Commons immediately — it was due to be presented on 28 February 1839. But instead it was decided to present it on 6 May, sending out agitators to win wider support and gathering more signatures.

Even worse, O'Brien proposed a meeting of the "Members of the Convention and Members of Parliament" to secure support for the Charter. Harney said this would be an "absurd waste of time, and moreover degrading to the character of free-chosen representatives of the people." He saw these delays not only as a concession to a moral-force strategy doomed to failure, but more worrying an invitation for the government to repress the movement. The government would not forever co-exist with this mass movement if the dominant moral-force faction was vulnerable to challenge by the Democrats. As the Convention opened, Queen Victoria in her speech to Parliament said: "I have observed with pain the persevering efforts which have been made in some parts of the country to excite my subjects to disobedience and resistance to the law, and to recommend dangerous practices".

The LDA warned that while the government may not feel able to repress them wholesale they would engage in a creeping repression to "crush the present national movement" in a counter-revolution. In March Harney made this appeal: "rather than bow to the intended hateful despotism, we must and will unfurl the red flag of defiance."

Harney saw a glaring contrast between the militancy of the movement outside the Convention and the moderation within it, warning at a rally in Newcastle that they "were likely to have Girondists in the Convention of the men of England". The LDA looked to the poorest and most militant section of London workers with whom they had support. On the 28 February, the day the Peoples Charter was originally to have been presented, they held a mass rally at the Hall of Science, City Road and unleashed a broadside on the Convention's moderation. A series of resolutions were passed declaring that "if the people and their leaders did their duty" the Charter would be law within a month. The resolutions called for the Convention to: meet all acts of oppression with immediate resistance; proceed urgently with the presentation of the Peoples Charter; make immediate preparation for ulterior measures.

The press, led by the *Morning Chronicle*, responded with a witch-hunt against Harney, depicting him as a dagger waving young romantic. There was also uproar within the Convention, with the moderates demanding apologies from Harney, Rider and Marsden for bringing the movement into disrepute. This lasted for a week. An

unbowed Harney stated that he would "stand by his principles and if he could preserve union without abandoning them he would do so; if not he must sacrifice that." He charged the Convention for "all the consequences that might arise out of this protracted personal discussion" and that he would continue to "appeal to the working men of the country".

The LDA made further efforts to get the Convention to keep up the momentum of the movement and "rouse support" with simultaneous mass meetings across the country. But the Convention continued to whittle away its energies by concentrating on getting more signatures to the petition, thus putting off the decisive questions until after its presentation. Harney defended his position and the LDA in a *Manifesto addressed to the Democracy of Northumberland, Norwich and Derby*, asserting that the Convention was a self-governing assembly whose duty was "to hear and receive the opinion of the people", instead of treating them with the "bitterest hostility."

The most pointed criticism was reserved for those who made militant speeches outside the Convention but were moderate inside, "Is it because I am honest enough to utter the feelings of my heart... that I have not one set of speeches for the North, and another set for the Metropolis?" The *Manifesto* did not argue for a withdrawal from the Convention but appealed to the Chartist rank and file to "strengthen the Convention" by ensuring their delegates take a different course: "you must and will have the Peoples Charter law of the land in this present year 1839".

TIMES TO TRY MEN'S SOULS

In the localities Chartists were arming and drilling. In a number of industrial towns there was gun running. Workers secretly produced weapons at work. This caused panic amongst local magistrates who flooded the government with demands to sanction the formation of militias of the privileged. The *Times* criticised the Ministers for leniency. Lord John Russell, on the other hand, wrote to the Duke of Newcastle on 16 March that he doubted that "those who have encouraged their followers to provide themselves with arms are ready to encounter so fearful a risk". The indecisiveness of the Convention and the anti-revolutionary stirrings of the ruling classes could only give confidence to an otherwise weak and cautious government.

Harney's warning of the danger of delaying was soon vindicated. Paraphrasing Thomas Paine's *The Crisis*, he wrote in the Chartist national paper *The Northern Star* that the "times are coming to try mens souls", already "the Democratic Association is attacked — its members are denied a place of meeting". Barred from their usual venue at the Hall of Science, the LDA were now having difficulty finding meeting rooms.

So there was a divergence not only between the Whig Government and ruling classes in the localities, but also between the Convention and the Chartist rank and file. Faced with a weak Government and massive movement in the country, the Convention had a historic opportunity.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

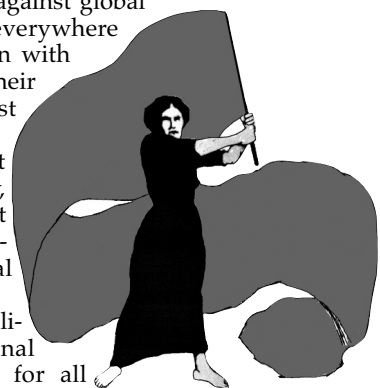
- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services,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

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

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

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

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



Fergus O'Connor, who had been ill during the first two months on 1839, reasserted his leadership through an alliance with the London left. A rally of three thousand on 16 March at the Crown and Anchor in London provided a platform to attack the moderates, with Harney joining O'Connor, and O'Brien as main speakers. O'Connor asserted that petitions could not defeat Dragons; a resolution was passed stating the Convention should take whatever means necessary to achieve the Charter. Harney said there should be no more petitions unless "signed by steel pens". His focus was on the looming presentation of the Peoples Charter to Parliament: "The 6th of May should be the last day for doubt or hesitation. The people should then set about asserting their rights in earnest and should have before the close of the year Universal Suffrage or death". It was an ominously prophetic conclusion.

The Crown and Anchor rally saw the final separation of the middle-class Radical elements from the working class movement. The Birmingham Political Union delegates resigned from the Convention on 28 March, declaring that the rally had shown the Convention was prepared to put in "peril the success of Radical Reform on an appeal to the last and worst weapon of the tyrant and oppressor".

Their apparent defeat saw the LDA step up a gear with the launch of one of the best publications of the Chartist movement, the *London Democrat*.

FOR OLD ENGLAND AND FREEDOM

The new unstamped penny weekly, the *London Democrat*, was launched under the editorship of Harney and JC Coombe. The *Operative* predicted from the manner in which it is conducted it was "likely to obtain an extensive circulation". The LDA had previously been reliant on other papers to get its statements published, now they had their own means to get their ideas across. It could boast a wide readership with a network of distributing agents not only in London but Birmingham, Bath, Bristol, Bradford, Derby, Hull, Liverpool, Manchester, Norwich, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.

Harney adopted the pen name of Marat's paper, "The Friend of the People", and no doubt with the recent attacks against him in mind in the editorial he wrote:

"I am aware that the remedies I shall propose will call down upon my head the hatred and vengeance of the enemies of equality. I can foresee that I shall be slandered, calumniated, and persecuted. I can even suppose that misled by prejudice, and the villainous misrepresentations of my enemies, even the working classes, in whose cause I have devoted my existence, may themselves oppose me".

Harney set out to expose "the causes of the evils under which they groan, and the remedies for those evils" through "Scenes and Sketches from the French Revolution" to give certain extracts from the different histories of that mighty event"; so that the "present generation may derive a lesson from the deeds of the past, and that, in the revolution which will speedily take place in this country" avoid the errors and "imitate" the deeds of revolutionary France. Harney blamed the "inhuman selfishness of the middle classes" for the subsequent bloodshed in the French Revolution and warned that whilst the degradation of the people of England was not identical to France of fifty years prior, "similar causes will produce similar effects".

On the current situation the *London Democrat* concluded that the workers' "enemies do tremble; and more fool you if you keep much longer in doubt. It is an old saying, that you may as well kill a fellow as frighten him to death. Of this then I am sure, that if frightening them will kill them, they're not far off from death's door." That the people do possess the power and the "means of success are in your hands: 'tis your eyes-only that requires to be cleansed of the film that covers them".

The LDA's internationalism found expression in support for the Polish democrat Major Beniowski, veteran of Polish Revolution of 1830. He contributed a regular column on the history of Polish rising. He subsequently ran a treatise on military science with practical advice on resisting dragoons and cavalry.

Many observers by this time were now anticipating a working-class rising and the LDA focused on May 1839 bringing success for the proletariat as the Days of May in 1832 had to the middle-class. Harney wrote that the "6th of May is approaching; tyrants are preparing, traitors deserting; but the honest 'Democrat' unfurling the standard of liberty; will rally the poor and oppressed,...to

strike the home blow ... for old England and freedom".

The Second International Marxist Max Beer, in his *History of British Socialism*, described the *London Democrat* derogatorily as a "mine of Anarchist phrases", and of Harney that his "tongue could no longer be curbed". One of the problems of even sympathetic writers is a tendency to see the *London Democrat's* readership as in London alone. At this point in 1839 the localities of Chartist strength were increasingly militant well beyond London. According to FC Mathers' study of the government it was the most favourable time for a rebellion.

"Had the Chartists risen on 6 May they would in fact have found the Government's defences in a parlous state of disorganisation - troops scattered in small detachments; the reinforcements from Ireland not yet arrived; the magistrates inert from fear or indifference and the propertied inhabitants afraid to come forward as special constables to defend themselves".

At the time opinion was further confirmed by the Army's officer corps, whose *Naval and Military Gazette* reported in March 1839 that the army was "totally inadequate to meet a general outbreak in the North".

Harney, of course, was not forming his revolutionary opinions out of access to Home Office documents but on the pulse of the movement with which he was intimate. Alternative conclusions have since viewed Harney as being the "most intelligent and best informed of the revolutionaries" in this period. Support for the movement was still strong, as was the agitation. While it is an issue of historical dispute, the reports to the Convention by agitators they had dispatched around the country could only give confidence to the advocates of revolution. For example John Richards, one of the agitators sent out to the Potteries, reported a bleak and explosive situation:

"As regards the Condition of the different towns I have visited, I can only say that poverty destitution and its accompanying feature Squalid Misery form the principle feature... but I fear all will be of no avail, this being the Language used in those places. Better to die by the Sword than perish with Hunger."

YOUR SOCIAL SYSTEM REQUIRES REVOLUTION

The *London Democrat* saw Chartism as a historically unique movement, called forth in opposition to the "different features" of this new society. The movement required goals which went beyond the bounds of freedom envisioned in the past. In addressing this task the *London Democrat* anticipated many the ideas of the 1848 revolutions. Writing on the "middle class", "CR" informs us: "The Past history of the world does not afford another example of the people resolved to annihilate such a complicated and overwhelming tyranny. It has different features, and bids for to be more effectual and attended by happier results than any movement which has occurred in past times from the fact that it is a real working-class movement".

This new revolution was to transcend the Peoples Charter itself. "Unless the 'Peoples Charter' is followed by actions to 'equalise the conditions of all, the producing classes will still be oppressed and the country will still be involved in the most disastrous calumnies". That the Peoples Charter was not an end in itself was emphasised by Coombe, who said "I have a great objection to it's being considered a panacea for all the evils under which you labour". Freedom required a more total uprooting of these "artificial" social relations;

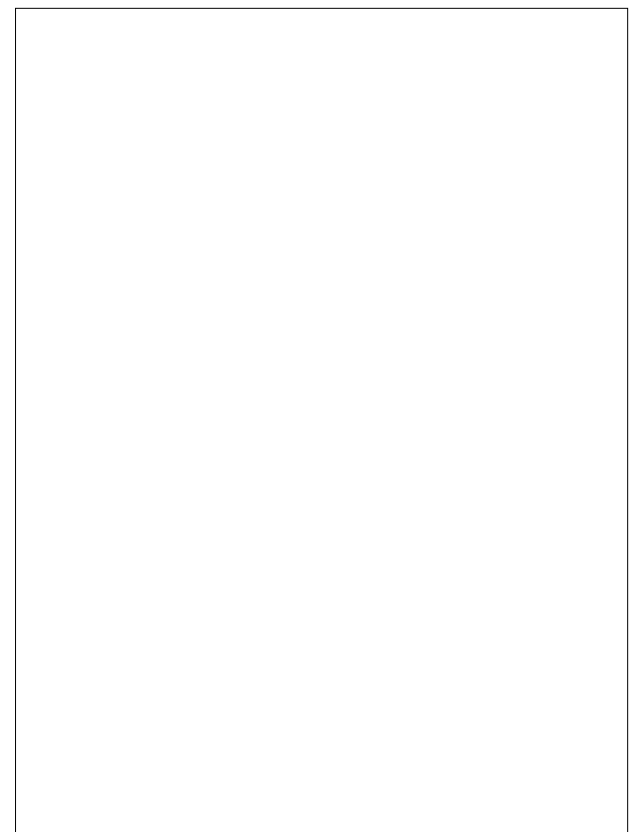
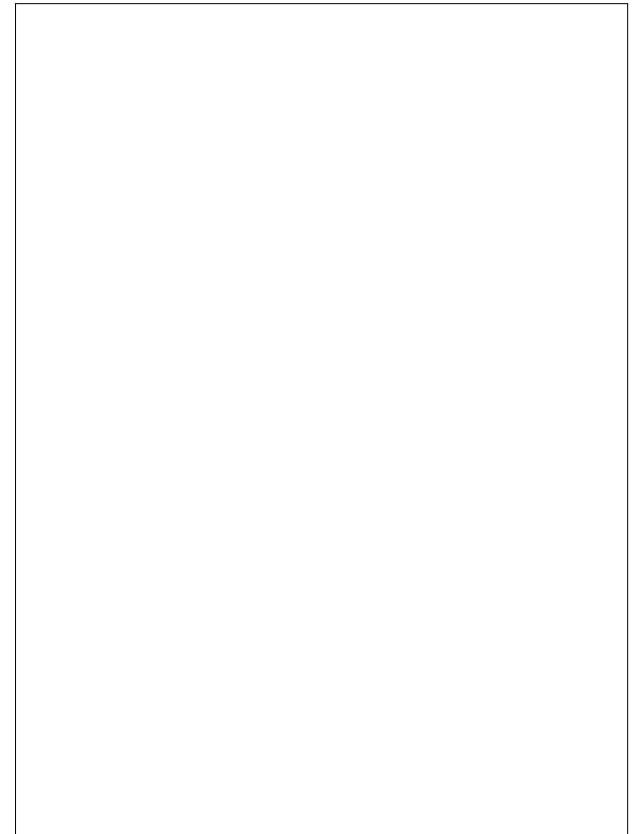
"The disease which is now preying on your vitals is much too deeply seated to be affected by remedies of this kind. Your whole social system requires 'revolution', your commercial system requires 'revolution', and nothing short of actual convulsion will affect a cure...Establish the 'Peoples' Charter tomorrow, and the working man would have not one difficulty less to contend with".

This new movement was "confined entirely to the working classes" and in the historic opportunity placed before it the *London Democrat* reiterated the break with bourgeoisie in 1832: "They will probably pretend to join the working classes in their movement. The working classes will do well to have nothing to do with them."

The principles of self-emancipation outlined in the *London Democrat* were pioneering: "Whatever the middle class have ever taken into hand has turned out to the people's cost to be delusive and fraudulent; therefore, as the producing classes intend to regenerate their country, they must rely on themselves and on themselves alone". The counter-revolutionary role of the exploitative classes was further outlined by Harney drawing on the Polish Revolution of 1830: "But why, my friends, did the revolution fail? The revolution failed because Poles themselves wished to keep millions of their own countrymen in bondage".

Rothstein argues that the LDA, and Harney in particular, had anticipated "some of the things subsequently taught by Marx and Engels". What was of lasting significance, and was argued in the principles of the LDA was that they did not accept the argument of "get the Charter first and consider what we will do afterward". Harney posed the question: the "Charter was a means to an end, but what was the end?"

A CARTOON HISTORY OF THE 20TH CENTURY



Black people arrived in America in chains — the chains of chattel slavery. They are now free US citizens — but equality with white people is far from being won. Yet, the candidacy of Barack Obama in the run up to the US Presidential election next November and the outcry about the "black liberation" views expressed by his "pastor" — all US political candidates to have any hope of election must present themselves as devoutly religious — Jeremiah Wright shows how delicate an issue race still is in the USA.

These two cartoons typify the comments of the two US Trotskyist papers in the 1940s, when black people were still being casually lynched in the US south, and legally sent to the electric chair for rape. The US Trotskyists and before them in the 1920s, and even in its Stalinist 1930s, the Communist Party, built up a proud record as champions of the USA's savagely oppressed black people.

The poll tax in many states excluded black people from the possibility of voting in elections. They were discriminated against in jobs, housing, education. There was still segregation in the US army during World War Two.

One of the most accessible ways for people in Britain to form some idea of the US black people in the past and present is in the work of Walter Mosley. His Easy Rawlins thrillers are pieces of raw US social history.

THE LEFT AND IRELAND IN 1969

This series will resume in the next issue with a detailed account of the argument in the International Socialists about British troops in Northern Ireland.



WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

ATTACK ON ABORTION TIME LIMITS

Defend a woman's right to choose!

By REBECCA GALBRAITH

On Tuesday 20 May MPs will debate and vote on anti-choice amendments to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. The Bill includes such things as provision for research on different types of embryos. It is being used to attack abortion rights, to cut the current 24 week time limit to 20 or even 13 weeks! The fight against these attacks needs to be seen as central to women's liberation and class struggle.

Since 1967, when women won limited abortion rights, we have had to constantly defend them. The campaign against the Alton Bill is an interesting comparison to our current fight.

In 1987 David Alton put a one line amendment reducing the abortion time limit to 18 weeks. By focussing on the time limit he sought, what he thought was a weak spot in the shield of the pro-choice movement. But in response to his amendment there was mass mobilisation. In nearly every town in Britain a FAB (Fight Alton's Bill) group was formed; in colleges and hospitals students and nurses set up their own campaigns, Women Against Pit Closures sponsored the national campaign and the TUC co-

sponsored FAB's 19 March demonstration. Those involved believed that the campaign had to be built on the basis of mass action — street petitioning, meetings, pickets, local marches, national demonstrations.

The current campaign, run by Abortion Rights, has focussed on lobbying MPs (only defensively) and holding meetings in Parliament. They have organised a protest on 20 May, which we should support, but this is the first demonstration and it takes place on the day of the vote itself.

Taking to the streets demonstrates that politics is not just about what happens in the Houses of Parliament, it is about the fight of the working class and the oppressed for their demands.

The 1967 Act is outdated and was always based on the idea that women are unable to make valid decisions for themselves — it is time they stopped treating us like fools who don't know our own minds! Women should be able to get an abortion without having to get the consent of any, let alone two doctors. The two doctor's signature rule simply causes unnecessary delays.

Despite the fact that on 29 October the Commons Science and Technology Committee recommended liberalising the 1967 Act by upholding the 24 week

time limit, removing the two doctor jury and allowing nurses to perform first trimester abortions, it is expected that no pro-choice amendments will be put forward. If this remains the case then a real and vital opportunity for liberalisation will have been lost.

The arguments for a reduction have focussed on foetal viability and the claims of pro-lifers that it has improved. Let's get this straight, it hasn't! Survival rates (viability) below 24 weeks gestation have not improved since 1990. But viability is not the point, and making our arguments on these terms is dangerous. If medical advancements meant, for instance, that a foetus was viable at 16 weeks our position should not change. Given the choice women would always choose to have an early abortion and those who seek later abortions are likely to be the most vulnerable. Whether the foetus is viable or not, it is still dependent on a woman, inside her and affecting her life.

We need to move away from fighting on the basis of viability and to put a woman's right to choose firmly back into the centre of the struggle for women's equality and liberation, and to ask why control of women's reproductive systems has been so crucial to regimes of power. To deny a woman choice is to deny her autonomy and control over her own life; women have the most to gain and most to lose from the struggle for abortion rights and it is women who should lead the campaign.

The campaigning I have been involved in over the past months, through Feminist Fightback, has also shown me that we need to create a better space to talk about the emotions involved in abortion. At the moment only the anti-choicers talk about how difficult abortion can be, leaving those women who may feel absolutely fine after an abortion worrying that their reaction is not normal, and those women who feel frightened about abortion afraid to voice concerns in pro-choice groups.

The fight for reproductive freedom affects working-class women with particular sharpness. Abortion is a class issue; rich women will always be able to go abroad or get safe, illegal abortions here. It is working class women who will be forced to return to back street abortions. It is working class women, now, in Northern Ireland who are forced to carry an unwanted pregnancy until they can get the money to go private or travel to England. It is poorer, less educated and migrant women who are likely to be denied their rights by the two doctor requirement and who are most affected by the government's dismembering of the NHS and welfare state, and the absence of decent childcare provision.

What now? Feminist Fightback, jointly with Left Women's Network and supported by pro-choice trade unionists and student activists, have written a briefing for MPs urging them to put forward pro-choice amendments. This can be downloaded from www.feministfightback.org.uk and sent to your MP.

Over the past few months we have organised pickets, demonstrations, a teach-in and leafleting. We will continue to do this and to make demands for reproductive rights stronger and more militant.

We call on trade unions to get involved. In 1979, as a result of mass campaigning for abortion rights, the trade unions called a national demonstration against the Corrie Bill. This was attended by 60,000 people.

That is the tradition that we want to stand in. Feminist Fightback intends to establish a network that exists specifically to organise pro-choice activity in the labour movement and from a working class perspective. We also believe that Abortion Rights should adopt this perspective.

The right of women to control their reproductive freedom is in the interest of the whole of the working class. True reproductive freedom for all women will only come with profound changes in society that affect the totality of women's lives; this is what we are fighting for.

Feminist Fightback protests outside Battersea Labour Party

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