

Solidarity

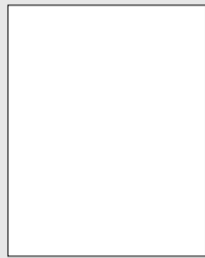
& Workers' Liberty



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For a Workers' Government!

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TUC should call demonstration against Tories' huge cuts! THE UNIONS SHOULD FIGHT, NOT PLEAD!

BY GERRY BATES

On 20 October the Lib/Tory government will announce cuts which they have already estimated as between 25% and 40% across a range of social spending.

These are cuts such as we did not see even in Thatcher's day, cuts which will take the means of decent life away from millions.

Even if they don't create a "double-dip" slump for the whole economy, they will certainly bring a "double-dip" to working-class communities.

Across the country, people will resist the trashing of their local services, schools, hospitals, and benefits.

Across the country, activist anti-cuts committees are already being set up by Trades Councils.

To defeat the whole government programme, we need concerted action by the trade unions. That is why working-class people build and sustain trade unions: so that when troubles come they have organisations strong and big enough to resist on the scale necessary.

But the TUC's top leaders are acting more in the spirit of the former Labour Government ministers, Alan Milburn and John Hutton, who, without quitting the Labour Party or signing up as Tories, have taken jobs as "advisers" to the Lib/Tory government.

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Defend Hague! Gove's Academy plans lag — so far

BY MINNIE RYAN

William Hague is a scummy Tory, Foreign Secretary in the anti-working-class Tory-Lib-Dem coalition.

His sexuality has nothing to do with it.

He could be gay, straight, bi, celibate, or an avid life-long molester of pink Pomeranian poodles, and it would be nobody's business but his own and that of his partner, Ffion.

It is shameful that he may be driven out of politics by a mudstorm of allegations about his sexuality.

For enemies of the Tories and of the Tory-Lib-Dem coalition government to exult, and if goes to shout, "One down, 22 to go" would be to miss the point.

His going would make no fundamental difference to what the government is, or what it will try to do. The pollution of the political atmosphere by this anti-gay witch-hunt damages and demeans us all, Tories and anti-Tories alike.

Slump for some, boom for others

BY CHRIS REYNOLDS

Do we have an economic recovery, or continuing slump? It depends who you are.

The *Financial Times* (4 September) reports: "The lopsided economic recovery is... increasing inequality inside [countries]. It seems like a happy combination for luxury goods companies — [their] shares have more than doubled since investors first scented recovery in March last year.

"Persistently high unemployment and public sector retrenchment — issues that affect ordinary people's spending decisions — hardly matter right now to the typical buyers of luxury goods. What does matter is that corporate profits have surged back and with them business travel and bonuses for top executives."

Keep that in mind when the government tells you that cuts in services and benefits which the worst-off depend on are "necessary".

**MORE FROM THE AWL ON
WWW.WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG**

Democracy? Yes! AV? Hmm...
Discussion article about the Alternative Vote referendum scheduled for 5 May 2011
workersliberty.org/node/14634

70 years on: Class War in the Blitz
The "great national effort" to defeat Hitler never stopped working-class people fighting against their rulers.
workersliberty.org/node/12215

Dale Street reviews Scott-Land: The Man Who Invented a Nation, by Stuart Kelly
workersliberty.org/node/14975

BY PATRICK MURPHY, NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS EXECUTIVE (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

During the general election the Tories promised to turn thousands of schools into academies, free from local authority control, and to allow groups of parents and others to set up so-called "free schools" which would also be academies.

After the election the new Education Secretary, Michael Gove, rushed legislation to allow all schools to become academies through Parliament. Schools rated "outstanding" by Ofsted could be fast-tracked through the process and open as academies from 1 September.

Weeks later Gove boasted that nearly 2,000 schools had expressed interest. On that basis he claimed that up to 1,000 schools would open as academies from September. However, when the new school term began Gove had to admit that the number of new academies was just 32!

The right-wing press have launched an attack on teacher unions for their role in frustrating Gove's plans.

The front page of this month's *Spectator* magazine shouts "The New School Bullies" and accuses the NUT of thuggish behaviour, frightening school heads off a move to academy status. The *Daily Telegraph* on 30 August headlines its report "School reforms held up by trade union militants".

For certain, trade union opposition and campaigning has played a major role in persuading the vast majority of those schools who expressed an interest that they should not rush to become academies. This was done mainly through well-targeted letters to heads and governors, meetings with staff in schools, material to parents, and street stalls and public meetings.

The evidence for "thuggishness" and aggression cited by the Tory press is laughable. The *Telegraph* refers to the NUT warning schools to comply with all

their legal duties and using the Freedom of Information Act to check that they have.

The worst example of intimidating behaviour, cited in both the *Spectator* and *Telegraph*, is a union email to heads which said: "We regard these proposals as a fundamental attack on state education and will do everything we can to stop a school becoming an academy up to and including industrial action."

In fact, this material to schools was produced jointly by all school staff unions, and there is nothing remarkable or aggressive about any of it. If anything, some of it is much too soft with, for example, a petition to governors asking them to ensure that they consult before becoming an academy and ensure that "both sides of the debate" are heard.

But there is more to Gove's failure than union opposition. The attempt to rush huge numbers of schools through a significant change in their status raised suspicions right across state education.

When governors were being asked to commit to this plan the legislation had not been approved. Key questions, such

as how the governing body will change and how much money will the school get, could not be answered. The initial long list of schools expressing an interest was just that, and never an indication of serious intentions.

The other explanation of the Tory press for this slow take-up is that a Labour amendment to the Academies Act has led to a requirement on schools to consult before changing status.

Apart from being a basic democratic check, this will be a useful campaigning tool, but it is unlikely to have had much effect on keeping the numbers so low this September. The 32 new academies needed to apply before the Bill, including this amendment, had passed. They should now be challenged by unions and parent campaigners to prove that they *did* consult and that they properly carried out their legal duty to consult under TUPE.

It seems the Tories cannot accept that academy status is not popular, and that very few people in education believe it solves any of their problems.

Other encouraging news is the announcement that the number of "free schools" likely to open in September 2011 is "up to 12." There are over 20,000 state schools in England and Wales.

To the extent that trade union campaigning has contributed to this we should be proud: use it to demonstrate that you can win, and call for more of the same.

We cannot, however, be complacent. There are around 140 schools proposing to move to academy status this year. Some of those who thought better of a rush to leave their local authority this September still intend to go ahead, albeit at a slower pace. Gove will regroup and consider ways of injecting his plans with more dynamism.

The Government and those heads and governors who support their plans need to know that when unions say we will do whatever we can to oppose moves to academy status, up to and including strike action, we mean it and can deliver it.

Charities not safe from cuts

BY DARREN BEDFORD

In a revelation that cuts starkly against the coalition government's fetishisation of the voluntary and charitable sectors, the National Council of Voluntary Organisations has published a survey showing that third sector bodies face cuts of up to 99%.

Countless organisations and services across the sector, as well as cultural bodies such as community theatres, are severely threatened by the ConDem axe.

The cuts affect every area of the country; the Young Devon group, which provides support services to young people in the area, faces a 90% cut. The South Leeds Community Radio project will see 30% of its budget slashed.

While many of the bodies facing the axe do not employ people directly, they provide vital services to their communities after years of privatisation and out-

sourcing. While socialists opposed, and continue to oppose, privatisation and outsourcing, we should be clear about what these cuts mean: attacks on workers and service-users.

The most vulnerable people in our communities will feel these cuts most acutely. One body that provides services for migrants in economically-deprived Morecambe reported:

"We will be closing on September 30th and all services to migrants in a deprived area of Morecambe will be stopped; no other agency will carry them on. The funding we expected was for April-December 2010. From April-June I frontloaded spending and had spent £23K. We were told in July that we had a 50% cut. To keep staff on until September I used our reserves. So the cut has eaten into other funds and wiped out our opportunity to work on our sustainability from September-December 2010."

The ConDems claim that their "big society" vision involves a greatly increased role for the so-called "third sector", but the scale of these cuts make it clear how they want that sector to be organised.

Workers for charity sector employers such as Turning Point and Shelter have already faced struggles around sick pay, pensions and working hours. As the cuts spread, those struggles will intensify.

Workers and service-users must unite to fight for properly funded services run by staff who are well paid and treated with dignity. Ultimately, that struggle must seek to reverse decades of outsourcing and privatisation and take the services currently provided by those third sector organisations back "in house" and under public control.

● For the NCVO's survey, see <http://tinyurl.com/volsectorcuts>

TUC

The unions should fight, not plead!

From page 1

The TUC talked of calling a demonstration on 23 October, a quick response to the cuts which will be announced on 20 October. Now it has decided only to run a small-scale lobby of Parliament on 19 October.

Left-wing unions will try at the TUC Congress, starting on 13 September, to get the 23 October demonstration up again, but top TUC leaders say any such action should wait until spring 2011.

The ETUC, the consortium of unions from all across Europe, has called a "no cuts" day of action on 29 September. There will be a general strike that day in Spain, a big demonstration in Brussels, and action in other countries. Except in Britain, where the TUC says it's too soon.

TUC leaders tried to invite Tory prime minister David Cameron to speak to TUC congress. Trade unionists protested. Cameron got the TUC leaders off the hook by politely inventing excuses that he couldn't come. The TUC invited Cameron's Lib-Dem minister Vince Cable.

In the end TUC leaders had to withdraw Cable's invitation because they could see that his appearance on the congress platform would — rightly — bring uproar from the floor.

Now they are trying a similar approach behind the scenes. The *Independent* newspaper on 21 August reported talks "beneath the radar" between TUC

leaders and Cameron, by way of Richard Balfe, a former Labour politician who defected to the Tories in 2002.

Many areas of life are supervised by boards, committees, or quangos in which union representatives work chummily with Government representatives. In industry, many unions are still locked into the "social partnership" approach ("shared commitment to business goals") pushed by the TUC in 1997-9.

Unions must not be "partners" in cutting their own members' jobs and services! The union leaders should break off that whole web of collaboration with bosses and Government, and set their sights on mobilising to defeat the cuts.

RMT general secretary Bob Crow is right:

"The TUC has to be the launch-pad for the fight-back against the coalition Government's decision to unleash all out class warfare through their unprecedented attack on our communities, public services, welfare state and transport system. Our defence must be built on generalised strike action and community resistance in the biggest public mobilisation since the anti-poll tax movement.

"As well as setting out plans for our own co-ordinated industrial and community action we also send a message of solidarity to our comrades in Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and elsewhere who are fighting similar cuts to jobs, standards of living and public services."

70 years on: celebrating Leon Trotsky's revolutionary life

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

Speakers include:

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

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

Impasses in Iraq and Afghanistan

BY MARTIN THOMAS

On balance, the US military withdrawal from Iraq still looks on course, but Iraq's semi-parliamentary quarter-democracy looks very shaky.

On 31 August the USA announced the end of "combat operations" in Iraq and a reduction to 50,000 troops there. It reaffirmed US plans to remove all troops and hand over all bases by the end of 2011, though a huge US civilian presence, tens of thousands of "security" mercenaries employed by US contractors, and large US bases just over the border in Kuwait will remain.

But six months after Iraq's election on 7 March 2010, talks for a new government remain stalled, with no breakthrough in sight. The longer that impasse continues, the more probable becomes a military coup, maybe a "soft" one given some degree of assent by Iraqi politicians. The precarious civil liberties won by Iraqi workers — mostly "de facto", with clear legislation still only a promise — become more precarious.

Still, an average of about 250 people a month in Iraq are killed in bombings, shoot-outs, and other sectarian or "resistance" violence. It is a hellish rate, exceeding for example the killings in Northern Ireland during the "long war", which averaged out to a rate which, scaled up to Iraq's larger population, would be about 160 a month.

It remains, despite some spikes, steadily a lot lower on average than the 4,000 per month of 2006 and early 2007.

There is some improvement in civil administration. 50 Iraqi military or police are killed per month instead of 300 at the peak. There is now maybe one attack a month on oil pipelines and other facilities where there used to be an average of 30.

Electricity generation has run at about 6,000 MW/day since January 2009, where it was about 4,000 early 2008. Baghdad's electricity supply is now rated as 19 hours per day, up from seven in early 2008 (all figures from Brookings Institute reports).

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates visited Kandahar on 3 September, as the "surge" of 30,000 extra US troops in Afghanistan neared completion.

Even for the occasion of Gates's visit, the local US military commander, David Rodriguez, second-in-command of Nato and US forces, could not be persuaded to paint an optimistic picture. Asked by journalists whether he expected US troops to make "significant progress", he replied: "Significant; I'm not sure that's the right word". Things would be "hard and slow and tough".

The recurrent pattern in Afghanistan is that the US can defeat the Taliban in a setpiece battle for a particular area, but then either the US military has to keep the area under semi-permanent US military rule (very unpopular), or it hands over to the Kabul government (corrupt, discredited, weak) and sees the Taliban regain ground.

Saying that there was "lack of confidence" among the Afghan population in the ability of the Kabul government, Rodriguez confirmed that the dilemma still holds.

OPINION

Ian Tomlinson must not be forgotten

There's a "call to arms" coming from some of the more militant union bosses around the coalition government's intention to reduce the public sector.

Battle lines are being drawn in the run up to the upcoming TUC conference. There is a lot of talk about building a campaign as big as the one that eventually saw the downfall of Thatcher and her Tory government.

Some of the calls from many on the left leave a lot to be desired. They are certainly vociferous, but who they are aimed at is questionable, and the language used is simply divisive.

In an article in the *Guardian* on 4 August Tony Benn as always put a relatively decent argument for defending ourselves.

But there was absolutely nothing in his piece that mentioned the word "class". In its place was the usual rhetoric of identity politics which has, and is, destroying the British 'left'.

Tony Benn states, "The [cuts] target the most vulnerable — disabled people, single parents, those on housing benefit, black and other ethnic minority communities, students, migrant workers, LGBT people and pensioners."

But what if somebody does not identify with the groups mentioned?

Would it not have been easier simply to point out that *anybody* earning less than £25,000 is going to be brutally affected by the upcoming attacks on services and jobs?

One recent issue sums this problem up perfectly.

A white working class man, Ian Tomlinson, walking home from work gets caught up in demonstrations he likely knows nothing about or perhaps even cares about.

He is brutally attacked by a police officer, subsequently dies, and there is a media frenzy.

Sixteen months later the IPCC, CPS and the DPP prove how much they give a damn about justice for the working class and declare the officer responsible for the man's death will have no case in court to answer.

There is an outcry. For twenty-four hours at most.

Where, comrades, was the outcry from the left over this travesty?

If the "left" in this country want public support in the upcoming battles against the hideous Tory ideology we need to remember the Ian Tomlinsons of this world, cut the nonsensical divisive focus on identity, and get back to one basic fact. The "class war" is back.

The country could be behind a massive fight back against the Tories despicable ideology.

If only we could convince the population that the "left" really do care about the likes of ordinary non-identifiable working class people.

On 9 October in Norwich there will be a benefit day to raise money to fight a costly private legal battle on behalf of an ordinary working class family who lost a loved one in terrible circumstances at the hands of the British state. We urge all trade unionists and supporters to go to our website and take them to your union reps and officials.

Rick Dutton, Norwich Justice For Ian Tomlinson Campaign
www.justiceforthetomlinsonsdays.org.uk

LONDON FIREFIGHTERS

Gearing up to fight cuts

London firefighters will ballot for strike action unless their employer, the London fire authority, withdraws its threat to summarily dismiss the entire workforce and re-employ them on worsened terms and conditions.

A ballot for action short of a strike is already underway and, following mass meetings involving over 1,500 workers, morale and confidence seem high.

The fire authority's chairman is the Tory Brian Coleman who, according to FBU leader Matt Wrack, has been "itching for a scrap with London's firefighters for a long time." Coleman himself takes home nearly £120,000 a year and is well-known for his profligate expense claims.

At the root of the dispute is Coleman's plan to make significant cuts to night-time fire cover. Currently, a firefighter's day shift is 9 hours. A night shift is 15 hours, including several hours of vital rest time. As most fire-related deaths occur between 2 and 5am, it is essential that firefighters on night shifts are well-rested and alert.

Coleman wants to reduce the night shift to 12 hours (by cutting out the rest time) and, eventually, reduce the cover substantially; a leaked document hinted at the possibility of reducing the cover through "the removal of 10 appliances", meaning fire engines.

The ballot for action short of a strike ends on 17 September and, according to

an FBU press release, industrial action could begin on 24 September if a yes vote is returned.

With the media inevitably clamouring to paint this dispute as one of privileged workers selfishly striking to defend their own perks against the public interest, firefighters must link up with other London workers in an almost identical position; the anti-cuts dispute on the tube has been similarly portrayed, but a united propaganda offensive between the FBU and the tube unions could help turn the tide of public opinion away from ire at striking workers and towards anger at the bosses unilaterally driving through cuts.

ANTI-CUTS ROUND UP

Kirklees

Cuts-happy bosses at Labour-controlled Kirklees council are fixing for a head-on confrontation with one of the best-organised union branches in the public sector as they attempt to cut up to £400 million from their budget, resulting in 2,000 job losses.

It has already identified several places to swing the axe, including taking on vulnerable temporary and agency staff and introducing new formulae for calculating sickness absence, which will make it easier for bosses to dismiss absentees.

The local Unison branch, led by left-winger Paul Holmes, has launched a ballot for industrial action and begun organising workplace meetings to build for a yes vote. It is also mounting a public campaign and has planned a rally for Saturday 11 September in Huddersfield. The ballot closes on 29 September.

Barnet

Barnet's Tory council leader Lynne Hillan clung on to her position as leader of the Tory group, defeating rival Mark Shooter probably by only one vote, on Tuesday 7 September.

Hillan has been publicly excoriated by her opponents, who are angry at her inept handling of the Tories' Future Shape/easyCouncil privatisation agenda, Allowancegate scandal, etc. Hillan faces a vote of no confidence (tabled by the Lib Dems) at the council meeting on Tuesday 14 September.

It is conceivable that eight Tory councillors will vote with the opposition against Hillan. Then the Tories would have to pick a new leader. Shooter is not favourite: he has rocked the boat and he is a new councillor, with little experience of local government. In fact, he is a stinking rich hedge fund manager. But the Tories will have trouble finding anyone at all who is not tainted with the unpopular decisions made by the Tory administration in recent times.

The trades council, council unions and assorted Barnet campaigners and bloggers can take much of the credit for the Tories' disarray. We have kept up an unrelenting publicity campaign against the Tories, at the same time as they have multiplied their attacks on us. We might not end up with someone much better leading the council in a few weeks' time, but this administration will struggle to impose its desired policies.

At the same time as Barnet is trying to

outsource most of its services, it is faced, as are councils nationally, with what to do after the collapse of Connaught. The company had the contract for maintaining social housing. Barnet has ended its contract with Connaught; Barnet Unison has launched a petition calling on them to bring the Connaught workforce and the repairs service back in-house. Connaught workers had been TUPE'd out of the council once to the arms length housing management company Barnet Homes, and then a second time to Connaught.

Barnet Homes is also in the news, since it had to bow to political pressure and back down on its wildly unpopular decision to move 83-year-old Edward Meakins out of his house into a flat.

There is a lobby of the council meeting at Hendon Town Hall from 6pm on 14 September with the title "Don't cut our services! Don't privatise our services! No to easyCouncil!" The campaign against cuts will be formally launched at a public meeting on 23 September, 7pm, Emerald Suite, North London Business Park, Oakleigh Road South, N11 1GN.

Greenwich

Greenwich Council says it needs to make around £70 million in cuts but are yet to say where the cuts will come from.

Last year, a leaked document revealed the Labour council was planning £26.8

million in cuts.

Greenwich Save Our Services plans to protest outside Woolwich Town Hall on 21 September calling on the council to fight government cost-cutting.

Lewisham Academy

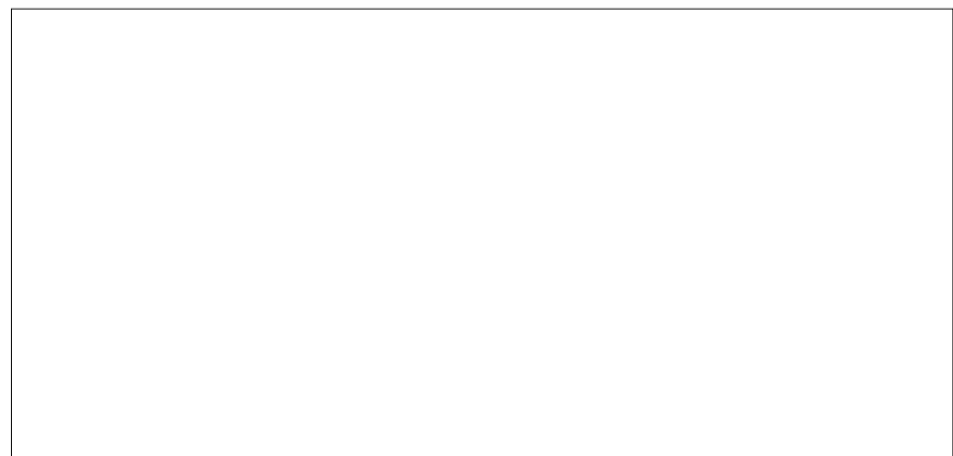
On 6 September 50 people attended a public meeting in Deptford to discuss opposing moves to turn the "outstanding" Tidemill primary school into an Academy.

Under the Tory-Lib Dem government it has become much easier for schools to take themselves out of local authority control. All that is now required is a simple vote by the governing body. Part of the attraction is more money — which will come from local authority funds.

Academies also have the ability to set their own pay and conditions for staff. That will undermine the basis for national pay bargaining.

During the discussion activists challenged the three school governors at the meeting to support a parents' ballot on the Academy proposal.

A Labour councillor on the platform said he favoured more consultation on the proposal. An activist from the SWP suggested that we forget all past differences with Labour and unite. However we should remember every detail of Labour's record, and still unite in specific campaigns with those willing to oppose Tory attacks.



South London NHS

South London and Maudsley NHS Mental Health Trust (SLaM) is to reduce its caseload by 25 percent in order to meet a £3.7m funding cut.

It's hard to imagine how this reduction, irrespective of other cuts that are coming, will not involve job losses, fewer service users, fewer service providers. SLaM provides the widest range of mental health services in the UK across seven south London boroughs often with high levels of social deprivation, substance misuse and mental health needs. Some areas experience up to six times the national rate of psychosis, yet almost 9,000 service users will be "given back" responsibility for their own care.

SLaM healthworker

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Solid strike against job cuts

London Underground workers spoke to *Solidarity* about their strike on 6-7 September.

“A positive fight for our vision of public transport”

Janine Booth, station staff

The strike was brilliant. It was extremely well-organised and we put on more pickets than we've ever done before.

The turnout from station staff was great and the only stations that remained open did so either with hardly any staff at all or because managers worked them. There were very few actual scabs.

TSSA's involvement in the strike is also significant. It's literally historical — it's their first strike on the Underground since the general strike of 1926! We also had a good experience with a lot of ASLEF drivers who respected our picket lines in several places.

There was a lot of public support on the picket lines themselves. We gave out over 20,000 leaflets and have had a flood of supportive emails from the public since then.

To me, this strike feels like the strikes against PPP a decade ago. There's a real sense that this isn't just about our pay but is a real, positive fight for our vision of public transport and how that service should be organised. The fact that we're fighting alongside another union is also a similarity — then it was ASLEF, now it's TSSA.

The task now is to make the action in between strike days effective. We need to make the overtime ban work properly; if people systematically refuse to work overtime then stations will close. We also need to be looking at implementing higher grade working bans and a boycott of the £5 minimum on Oyster top-ups.

There's a political fight to be had too. The Tories have now walked out of two GLA meetings to make them inquorate when it looked like the cuts might be voted down.

“It was inspiring to witness the elevation of political consciousness”

“Cactus Man”, station staff

Igot back from the picket line in a very optimistic mood. Only one member of staff [a driver] walked past us very sheepishly and the support amongst station staff has evidently been rock solid.

This fact will hopefully galvanise that minority of drivers, engineers and other grades who claimed that “station staff never stick up for themselves”. The stations at the eastern end of the Central Line were being staffed, almost exclusively by managers and office staff specially “licensed” for the occasion. Pity the passenger caught up in any dangerous incident on a strike day!

My companions on the picket were firstly a comrade from Waltham Forest Trades Council and latterly two 20-something station assistants on their first ever picket. It was inspiring to witness the elevation of their political consciousness as time and again working-class people expressed their support and the conspicuously wealthy sneered at us. One suited city gent even claimed to us that we had “cost him his job”.

As he was driving a top-of-the-range brand new Jag we concluded that we had done him a favour in hastening his well-funded retirement.

“Workers are developing a sense of their own power”

A Tubeworker, station staff

The strike went really well. Station staff showed that they're capable of militancy and that we have power.

We're often treated as second-class citizens to drivers and engineers within the union, and the strike will have shaken that up.

There were a lot of new experiences for many workers involved. I think some people were surprised at how much impact they had — it's about workers developing a sense of their own power. There was also a real sense of solidarity

Out of 100 people who were supposed to book on across the three stations I work at, hardly anyone did and the stations on my group that were kept open depended entirely on managers. We've built up some momentum now and we should capitalise on that.

We need to take a good look about what it would mean to actually win the dispute; we're really going head-to-head with the people who are in power. That's not to say we can only win if we topple the government, but we are fighting a group of people who are determined to resolve the recession by making us pay through jobs and services.

That makes the timing of the dispute, in terms of the spending review, very important. This could get a lot bigger before it gets resolved.

“There's a real feeling of unity between the grades”

Peter North, driver

The strike had a big impact; all lines were affected and there were several suspensions. Even in places where trains were running, there were waiting times of up to 25 minutes. The strike obviously has management rattled.

There was a good level of support from drivers. A lot of drivers, including ASLEF members, didn't come into work. There were ASLEF members on our picket line at Stratford, and I think that shows that the message is getting out. This isn't just about station staff; there are plans to alter our safety procedures to essentially cut out any aspect that would require us to have a station worker to help us, so with the cuts to station jobs drivers are essentially being asked to do our job in a less safe manner.

The public outreach around the strike has also been excellent. Work has been done to contact disability rights groups and others who will be affected by the cuts.

There was also a better-than-usual level of information going out about the ways in which the issues behind the strike affect all grades; there's a real feeling of unity between the grades building up now.

Given that several ASLEF drivers did join our picket lines I think there'll be some pressure on the ASLEF leadership to look at how their own members are relating to the dispute on the ground and perhaps think about moving to a more supportive position.

IN BRIEF

Strike action: the real thing

Coca-Cola will face the second major industrial dispute with its UK workforce in less than six months as workers at its Edmonton bottling plant in north London prepare for strike action following an 81% yes vote in an industrial ballot.

Union density at the plant is high, with 113 of 150 workers in the Unite union. The dispute follows a 2% pay offer from management, which union reps have described as “derisory”. Speaking in the *Daily Telegraph*, Unite's Wayne King said “Coca-Cola is in no way suffering during the recession yet it wants to force its workers, in one of the world's most expensive cities, to accept a poverty pay deal. Further, the company has failed to meaningfully negotiate throughout the pay process. Small wonder then that the overwhelming majority of our members have voted for industrial action. Unless Coca-Cola responds with an improved offer, then a strike seems inevitable.”

A strike in June, involving workers at 12 Coca-Cola sites across the UK, was averted only after bosses agreed to further national negotiations on changes to terms and conditions.

BBC strike vote against pensions cut

BECTU, NUJ and Unite members at the BBC have voted by more than 90% for strike action to protect their pensions.

In June, management announced plans to cap pensions at 1% growth per year (if salary rose at 3% it would mean pensions growing more slowly — in short, a cut). The BBC says there is a shortfall in the pension fund of £1.5-2 billion, but it enjoyed a 13-year pension holiday to 2008 which is estimated to have saved it £1 billion.

Staff were made angrier when they found out the generosity of senior managers' pension arrangements: for example, the director general Mark Thompson had £163,000 pension top-up in 2009 alone. BBC management have been surprised by the level of staff anger, and have begun a consultation which will run till the end of September. The massive vote for strike action should make them rethink their plans.

EDUCATION

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) is a national network of student unions and grassroots campaigns fighting cuts in education. We also link student anti-cuts activity with trade union anti-cuts campaigns.

The student movement faces job cuts and higher fees. More colleges and campuses will face outright closure; and it is clear that cuts are being used to re-shape education, and extend big business control over our courses.

Last term, students staged large protests and occupations against cuts, and supported industrial action by staff. We need to do the same again this year, but on a bigger scale. NUS leadership are not providing the student movement with any direction, beyond calling a demonstration on 10 November — which we will, of course, attend and build. The NCAFC is arguing for a clear message on the demonstration: for free education and against cuts.

● More details: www.anticuts.com/ / againstfeesandcuts@gmail.com.

Picket line reports

As well as AWL members who work on London Underground helping to organise and maintain pickets at their stations, other AWLers also visited picket lines to support the dispute, talk to the strikers, leaflet members of the public and distribute the *Tubeworker* bulletin.

One picket at Mile End, keen to take copies, told us that *Tubeworker* was a better and more reliable source of information than the union's official publication.

Pickets told us that scabs and managers had been drafted in from other stations to keep Mile End open — only for the station to eventually close when the Group Service Manager decided it was unsafe.

At London Bridge, managers doing station jobs for the day took regular visits outside to glower at the pickets and “check up” on the numbers on the picket line.

At Monument, managers caused chaos and threatened safety by closing the station but failing to lock the gates, meaning that confused passengers were left to wander around a near-deserted station without clear information about what was going on. At Leytonstone, only three out of 12 ASLEF drivers who were expected to go into work actually did so.

● Tubeworker blog: www.workersliberty.org/twblog

Saturday 18 September
Assemble:
1pm, Hastings Pier

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AGAINST THE SACKING OF
FIVE PCS UNION
OFFICERS at CSA Hastings
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src@pcs.org.uk by Friday
10 September for details of
free transport

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

Will talk of restoring democracy come to something real?

By EDWARD MALTBY

At last year's Labour Party conference, the leadership promised an all-up-for-grabs review of Labour Party structure and the undemocratic changes pushed through by Tony Blair in 1997 ("Partnership in Power").

The review is due to be launched at this year's Labour conference, starting on 26 September in Manchester.

But no specifics are available, even to members of Labour's National Executive. The record of the front-running contenders for Labour leader, and a series of undemocratic manipulations already under way for the Manchester conference, warn us that unless the unions and the local Labour Parties press hard, we will only get a sham of a review.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy has initiated a "Labour Party Democracy Taskforce", open to people from other groups in the labour movement, to start a campaign for a real review which will win a democratic Labour Party conference able to debate and take real decisions.

In the run-up to Manchester, a raft of rule changes submitted to the 2009 conference and remitted for debate to the 2010 conference have been declared "out

of order" by the Conference Arrangements Committee.

The CAC used a rule which says that once a change to a particular "part" of the rules has been debated, Conference cannot re-debate that "part" (unless on the initiative of the National Executive) for three years. It is interpreting the word "part" far more broadly than it has been interpreted in the past, so that the 2007 rule change to replace "motions" by "issues" is taken as blocking almost any other rule change on Conference procedure for three years.

In a welcome and very unusual move, we understand that the big unions have indicated that they will support moves from the conference to "refer back" the relevant sections of the CAC report, at least as regards two of the proposed rule changes.

It seems definite now that 2010 conference will once again debate and vote on contemporary "motions" from unions and local Labour Parties, reversing the 2007 decision whereby unions and Labour Parties could submit only "issues" to be discussed but not voted on.

Text submitted as "issues" to this conference will be converted into "motions".

Logically, the National Executive has to propose a rule change to reverse the

2007 conference decision to ban motions. The Executive has promised to do so.

There are rumours, however, that the Executive may try to proceed by just admitting motions in practice without changing the rule. Such a procedure, while nonsensical, would obviously make it easier for David Miliband, if elected leader, to ban motions again.

There may also be undemocratic manoeuvres on the issues or motions

submitted to the conference this year, relating to interpretation of the rulebook limitation that such issues or motions must be "contemporary" and not cover issues recently debated by the National Policy Forum.

Contact: labourdemocracymission@googlegmail.com. Check out frequently updated information at <http://www.grassrootslabour.net> and <http://www.leftfutures.org>.

Proletarian by New Labour standards

Gordon Brown responded to the launch of Tony Blair's autobiography by announcing that he will spend his time on unpaid work for good causes.

As the press reported, this was "widely seen as a side-swipe at the millionaire lifestyle of Tony Blair".

Brown still gets £66,000 a year as an MP. He is touting for trade as a paid public speaker to rich audiences, and will put the revenues in the bank account of a specially set up company from which he can draw in later years. For "good causes" he will be working with people like the Queen of Jordan.

By New Labour standards, all this seems proletarian.

Blair's main job is supposed to be as the representative of the Quartet (USA, EU, UN, Russia) in Israel/Palestine - big success he's been there, eh? - but that is evidently not so demanding as to require him to take time off from promoting his book to turn up for work when Israel and the Palestinian Authority are in delicate and precarious negotiations.

Blair's excuse when asked about his constantly-growing stash of mansions and millions is that he has "130 to 150 people to support on his payroll".

What those 130 to 150 do, we don't know, other than that Blair has seconded a contingent of them to staff David Miliband's Labour leadership campaign.

LABOUR LEADERSHIP CONTEST

Let the cleaners decide?

By JADE BAKER

Westminster University was the venue for the Labour Finance and Industry Group (LFIG) Labour leadership hustings on 25 August. A full capacity of over 300 academic folk looked on as the Miliband brothers and Ed Balls regurgitated their finely orchestrated rhetoric.

Before the speeches an introduction by LFIG was given which couldn't have been less "socialist" in sentiment: "One of the failures of the left is the emphasis which should be put on the need to produce. We see production just as impor-

tant as distribution," said the LFIGer.

This statement is so far off the mark that is just isn't worth commenting on — but what about producing for need?

There's no one that embodies LFIG sentiment more than leadership candidate David Miliband, and he certainly proved this when explaining an initiative he has for positioning a worker (his example was a cleaner) on major companies' remuneration committees:

"They don't have voting capacity of course [of course!]. But, hearing the opinion of a worker is going to sway the opinions on how they spend their money." The cleaners at Barclays are going to decide Bob Diamond's wages? Yeah, right.

This was a reply to a question about Mandelson's famous assertion about New Labour being "relaxed about people getting filthy rich." It is how Miliband plans to level the wealth disparity within our society.

This is no answer to bridging the gap between rich and poor. His idea is nothing but a populist, pseudo-attempt to keep a working-class focus within the party while avoiding all effort to stopping the rich from getting ever richer. "I will try to reduce inequality," he said. He will try.

Well, trying is not good enough. If this is what a future with David Miliband as leader looks like, workers should fight it!

"Crud": "loathsome, despicable, or worthless"

So the dictionary says. And now the incongruous career of former Blair backroom boy Jon Cruddas as a supposed hero of the unions and Labour democracy should come to an end.

In 2007, Cruddas was backed for deputy leader by the big Unite union, and puffed himself as the candidate who would "reconnect" Labour with its working-class base.

He has worked closely with the semi-left-ish Labour pressure group Compass, which claims ten thousand members.

Now Cruddas has backed David Miliband for Labour leader, saying that David Miliband is like "Tony Blair at his best... fantastic from 1994 to 2001". It looks as if Cruddas has made a deal to back the right-wing candidate in "return" for David Miliband supporting Cruddas for his proposed new post of an elected Labour Party chair.

1994-2001 includes Blair's decisive stifling of Labour Party democracy and his pledge to keep Tory anti-union laws, both in 1997; his trashing of Labour's Clause Four (1995); his maintenance of Tory public spending limits for two years (1997-9); and his support for George W Bush's first moves in the supposed "war against terror", bombing Afghanistan. Yes, David Miliband is quite like that.

Compass itself felt obliged to poll its members on the leadership, and they gave a clear preference for Ed Miliband (57% of Compass members voting), with David Miliband a poor third (13%) behind Diane Abbott (20%).

"BIG SOCIETY"

David Cameron's "big tent" is beginning to look like the Millenium Dome. It's hard to keep up with those disaffected New Labour ministers and MPs and advisors who have agreed to serve the coalition as a "tsar" or an "advisor" for state initiatives.

Latest to join up was Alan Milburn. This former member of the International Marxist Group has become an adviser on "social mobility". Well "mobility" is something political invertebrates know all about.

Milburn joins Frank Field who is a poverty tsar (specialising in 100 ways to chuck people off benefits), and John Hutton is looking at public sector pen-

Alan, Alan, look this way, Alan!

sions (how to cut them).

Beyond giving the Lib-Con government a further gloss of inclusivity (making it a kind of modern "national government") what do they all hope to achieve? Some people will do anything to increase their "marketability"; some

just need to be appreciated.

That will be true for Philip Green, boss of Arcadia (Top Shop etc.) whose ego matches the size of his wallet; this is a man who has grown grotesquely rich on viciously exploiting workers in the global textile industry as well as shop workers closer to home. He will be advising the government on "efficiency".

With Philip Green around who knows whether Will Hutton will now be fully appreciated in his new post? His views on "stakeholder capitalism" were underappreciated by Labour. But if he thought the Tories bright idea of turning bits of the health services into "workers' co-ops" was anything other than a new way to privatise, he may be in for a disappointment.

Vote Abbott, transfer to Ed Miliband, organise the left!

BY CATHY NUGENT

Ballot papers for the Labour Party's leadership election were sent out on Wednesday 1 September. Tony Blair, promoting his memoirs, intervened to defend (his) New Labour record and tacitly to back David Miliband.

Blair fears that Labour in opposition could be pushed to the left and thinks David Miliband becoming leader could stop that. For once Tony Blair is not wrong.

David Miliband's election as leader would be a disaster — he is the candidate most clearly attached to the New Labour past.

If David Miliband becomes leader it will galvanise those suited careerists in the Labour party and unions who think with fondness about New Labour's political "success story" under Blair.

It would embolden the Labour council leaders who are pushing through cuts.

What political strength these people have matters.

Maximising the vote for Diane Abbott who, for all her many weaknesses, was a backbench MP voting against New Labour on key issues, will put down a marker against David Miliband.

Transfer votes from Abbott and a strong showing or victory Ed Miliband could also help do that. Ed Miliband is the only candidate who could beat David Miliband.

It could encourage those people in the labour movement who genuinely want to see the back of "New Labour" — who want a more combative, more "anti-Tory", and a more open and democratic labour movement.

Neither Abbott or Ed Miliband are the candidates class-struggle socialists wanted to see in this election. Not by some distance! But many people in the unions and Labour, who oppose New Labour neo-liberalism, will want to see a strong vote for Diane Abbott or even Ed Miliband! It will show that they have some allies, and could win some battles, even if Ed Miliband himself as leader would be wretched.

We care what those people think — they are the sort of people who could be brought into a campaign to reshape the labour movement for the better.

In labour movement elections we can, and often do, back candidates who are just a shade better, or whose victory could embolden the rank and file without contradicting our basic principles. We make the best choice in any given circumstances.

Our basic job here is not so much calling for a vote, but mapping a struggle for something better. We say to people who are voting for Abbott or Ed Miliband — your choice makes sense to us, but if you really want to see your aspirations for the labour movement you need to be part of a fight to open up Labour and trade union policy-making structures and to commit the labour movement to opposing the Lib-Con cuts.

We say vote Diane Abbott no. 1 because she is the only candidate who had ever gone "against the grain" while New Labour was in power — on such issues as trade union rights and the invasion of Iraq. That differentiated her from all of the other candidates. In the candidate hustings her performance was weak, but she has won some support in Labour's constituency parties.

Ed Miliband's left stance didn't stand up to close analysis. He is not a left-winger. But his call for "change" was constructed to take account of left wing views in the party and unions. For instance on 28 August he said "Britain's big question of the next decade is whether we head towards an increasingly US-style capitalism — more unequal, more brutish, more unjust — or can we build a different model, a capitalism that works for people and not the other way around".

Ed Miliband has the standard-issue "centre-left" reform-capitalism-not-too-much policies of the Labour pressure group Compass. Over recent years Compass has focussed on peddling "progressive" policies and advocating "progressive alliances" between Labour and the Lib Dems.

Ed Miliband was nominated by the big three unions — Unite, Unison and the GMB. The big unions rightly fear the elder Miliband is more likely to assume more bureaucratic control over the Labour Party's organisational structures. That is a positive reason for union activists to cast a vote for Ed Miliband.

But the union leadership's method of fighting against the "threat" from David Miliband is categorically not that of the union militants. They prefer "backroom deals" — maybe they have one with Ed Miliband — on the future role of the unions in shaping the Labour Party's policy. That is one possible interpretation behind the GMB's Paul Kenny grumbling to the *Times* (27 August) about how the unions would have to reassess their relationship with Labour if David Miliband gets elected.

Whatever happens in this election, the democratic decision making structures for Labour's members and affiliated unions will not improve unless union activists are able to mount a fight. And a campaign to open up democracy in the big unions so that political debate is open and transparent, is long overdue.

The fact that both Milibands offer an Obama-style apolitical campaigning approach for Labour in the future — bring in more members, (e.g. at cut price subs), and turn them into foot soldiers for Labour, serves to underline our point here.

The differentiation between Ed Miliband and his brother is only a little more than language differences... for now. New political currents may take shape in the labour movement generated by the political turmoil of the biggest attacks on working-class people for decades. Ed Miliband may go with a new left flow, or indeed may not. That's all in the future. But right now Ed Miliband's commitment to involving the unions in Labour's fortunes — in a very general sense — is a positive shift.

An Ed Miliband victory, regardless of his general politics, and despite them, could open things up. A David Miliband victory certainly will shut them down.

While being aware that we have a lousy set of candidates, and while emphasising our key concern here is pushing the unions to actively campaign for the full restoration of democratic decision-making in Labour, we favour a vote for Diane Abbott and a transfer vote to Ed Miliband.

•Advice on how to vote in the other sections of the Labour Party ballot can be found at: www.grassrootslabour.net and <http://1-r-c.org.uk>

DAVID MILIBAND

"It wasn't my fault"

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

As the Labour leadership contest drew to an end David Miliband worked hard to distance himself from Tony Blair — Blair personally, more than the New Labour government. But it was all deeply unconvincing.

In an interview with the *Independent* (29 August) Miliband accused David Cameron of thinking up policy by way of "positioning", rather than by deciding what was good for the country. Ironically this is precisely what Miliband did in the rest of the interview.

Miliband's attempt to distance himself from Blair involved little more than a shameless rationalisation and vacuous rebranding of himself; he was not a New Labour hack but someone who was trying to take the party "beyond" New Labour he said. He was not a man of the "right" of the Party but the man of "unity". And so it went on...

He thought the Labour Party renewal project (i.e. New Labour) had been a good thing in its time. But the renewal had "stopped on 2 May 1997".

The old generation had had to fight in the ranks of the party for modernisation (i.e. witch hunts against the left and closing down of democratic structures) but the civil war was now over. A new generation (i.e. his generation) could take things down a different road.

He, David Miliband, was proud of his record as Foreign Secretary. As soon as it was clear that the US was up to no good at Guantanamo and other bad things (torture, rendition), he had stepped in to act against it. We may have been slow (!) to realise what was going on, but in any case, it wasn't my fault (i.e. it was Jack Straw's fault). "It wasn't my fault" has been the collective line of Labour ex-Ministers at the Chilcot Iraq inquiry.

Blair, despite Miliband's pleading with him not to, has given what amounted to a public endorsement of his candidature. Blair has even sent some of his own staff

(he had 150 at the last count) to help out with Miliband's campaign.

A large number of "old school" New Labourites have endorsed Miliband's campaign: David Blunkett, Alan Johnson, Jack Straw and Peter Mandelson.

Blair has half-endorsed the Cameron-Clegg line, saying that the Labour government should not have intervened so much in the economy during the banking crisis.

David Miliband differs from such politics only by a hair's breadth, only by the "accident" of wanting the Leader of the Opposition job as his way to Downing Street. He has to criticise the Tory cuts, but does so in markedly softer tones than other candidates.

And the deep affinity David Miliband has to New Labour was most pointedly demonstrated by the £350,000 he has received in donations — £50,000 from public relations millionaire Anthony Bailey (top client BAE Systems).

But what *does* David Miliband stand for? It was almost back to Tony Blair's "third way" (quickly ditched after 1997) when he told the *Independent* he stood for: "mutuality, reciprocity and community." Pass the apple pie, mother?

Wrong on Ed Miliband

Not everyone in the AWL agrees we should call for a transfer vote to Ed Miliband. Bruce Robinson argues the case against.

I find Cathy's article unconvincing [about Ed Miliband]. The positive statements she makes about him are so highly qualified as to make one doubt that they are a real reason for supporting him (e.g. acknowledgement of little essential difference with his brother) or else are highly speculative e.g. about whether his election will lead to democratisation of the Labour Party or an opening for the unions.

I can accept that Ed Miliband has employed rhetoric about breaking with New Labour and talks about re-connecting with lost working class voters. Looking at his website and leaflets, however, I can only agree when Cathy says "His left stance didn't stand up to close analysis".

Apart from the living wage and keeping the top rate of tax, there was at some point talk about "greater protection for workers" but I cannot anywhere find a clear statement of what this means. His talk about greater union involvement in the LP seems to centre on organising

meetings for political levy payers to encourage them to get involved in the party.

So it all comes down to two things: speculating about Ed Miliband's election bringing about an opening for the unions and rank and file in the Labour Party (or the negative effects of DM's election); and secondly, the need to be able to talk to people who might be supporting him for good if somewhat misguided reasons.

I am sceptical that there has been a big secret deal between the unions and Ed Miliband that will be revealed if he wins or that union support somehow reflects a widespread feeling among the rank and file. I am also sceptical that his election will lead to a sense of opening for the left. I do not see a burgeoning support for Ed Miliband that will lead on to a major shift in the Labour Party if he wins.

Might the cuts change things? Yes. But one thing that has been glaring about the leadership campaign is that nobody except ultra-Keynesian Ed Balls has taken on the Tories' ideological offensive over the deficit, and nobody at all has proposed making campaigning against the budget cuts central.

Essex travellers evicted

BY JOHN HUTT

Eviictions began at a 50 pitch travellers' site in Essex this week, marking the beginning of the end of a long battle between the gypsy community and the local authority.

Basildon Council ordered mass evictions from two sites, one at Dales Farm, Basildon, and one at Hovefields, Wickford. Evictions began at the latter site on Tuesday (7 September), and involved bailiffs dragging out members of the Hovefields community.

Protesters gathered at the site, and proceedings were being monitored for any breaches of the law by the bailiffs.

The water supply was cut off and some arrests were made as bulldozers moved onto the Hovefields site.

At one point a sizeable group of the travellers at the Hovefields site applied for homeless status to protect them from eviction. They have also complained against the bailiff company (Constant & Co) employed to evict them. The council, who says it has 115 registered pitches, has fought through the courts for the eviction to be allowed.

Basildon Council leader Tony Ball said: "I am extremely disappointed that direct action has become necessary."

"The council has done all it can to encourage the travellers to vacate voluntarily. However, Basildon Council has an obligation to protect its greenbelt from unauthorised development."

Across the county, plans for specially built travellers' sites, such as a landmark site at Severall's Lane in Colchester, have been halted, as the coalition government has abolished regional planning bodies that oversaw registered site provision.

A local government minister, Bob Neill, has also promised stronger enforcement powers for councils who have "good provision" for travellers, sparking fears that large numbers of gypsies will be shunted from local authority to authority, with no-one having a responsibility to provide adequate facilities.

Grants for specialist travellers' sites have been slashed, although in one article in the *Observer* it was reported that around £18m is spent each year on evictions. The Labour government required local authorities to find land for them and offered £150m over five years to pay for it.

"Concerned residents" in Essex have also taken action, with home and landowners in Chelmsford reported to have set up barricades land to prevent a "flood" of gypsies in the wake of the evictions in the south-east of the county.

The *Observer* reported recently that there are around 18,000 traveller caravans in England, 80% of them on authorised sites or land they rent or own. The numbers on illegal sites is so small that "according to the government's own reports, that they could all be accommodated on one square mile."

The clampdown against the Roma community is a Europe-wide attack, with the French government announcing the closure of 300 sites recently, while the Italian government declared its Roma population a national security risk in 2008.

● <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com>. Supporters are asked to go to the site.

ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Will Obama push for peace?

BY COLIN FOSTER

On 2 September, US President Barack Obama got Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority president Mahmoud Abbas together for talks in Washington.

Netanyahu and Abbas agreed to discuss a "framework" setting out the compromises both sides will make, and to meet again in Egypt on 14-15 September.

Obama has said he plans to get a settlement negotiated by September 2011. But prospects look difficult.

The Israeli government's partial freeze on the building of new settlements in the West Bank expires on 26 September. Netanyahu's right-wing allies in his government coalition oppose extending it.

A recent opinion poll of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, published on 30 August, showed 55% of Palestinians backing a two-states settlement (27% for

a "bi-national state", which was the other option offered in the poll, and 19% saying "don't know", "there is no answer", etc.)

The "technocratic" government in the West Bank, appointed by Abbas in 2007, came out of the poll much better than the Hamas regime in Gaza. Many Palestinians see it as having improved security and reduced corruption.

But only 32% of Palestinians are for direct negotiations now (as against indirect negotiations, or a freeze for now on negotiations). 66% think that Obama is "not in a position" to get an independent Palestinian state established alongside Israel.

Thus Abbas came under pressure over going to Washington at all, and has said that he will withdraw from talks if the settlement freeze is not extended.

There are reasons to think that Obama and those around him really want to push for a settlement.

In evidence to the Senate Armed

Services Committee in March, David Petraeus, the top US military commander for the Middle East, listed his top concern for the region as:

"Insufficient progress toward a comprehensive Middle East peace. The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the [region]... The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of US favoritism for Israel".

However, Obama has not yet felt strong or confident enough to put sufficient pressure on Netanyahu to stop the settlements long-term and negotiate seriously for a deal.

"Two states" remains the only formula which can accommodate the democratic rights to self-determination of both nations, Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs, and thus the only formula which can aim to unite workers, Arab and Jewish, across the borders.

Australia: mining bosses shape the Government

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Speaking at the University of Queensland (Australia) on 26 July, former World Bank economist Joseph Stiglitz told the audience: "The mining companies have just sacked your Prime Minister".

Now the mining companies have semi-sacked the whole government. If labour movements run in the face of strong-arm tactics by the bosses, then they overtake you and stomp on you!

On Tuesday 7 September, the deadlock following the 21 August federal election was finally broken by two of the three ex-National-Party independents in the House of Representatives backing a

Labor administration.

That gives Labor just 76 votes out of 150 in the House of Reps — 72 Labor, one Green, one ex-Green independent, two ex-Nationals independents — against 74 for the Liberal-National Coalition (71 straight Coalition, one maverick National, one ex-National independent).

Australia still has a Labor government. But it will be a very stomped-on Labor government. Rob Oakeshott, the last ex-National independent to back Labor, said: "This is not a mandate for any government. This Parliament is going to be different."

The coup in which the Australian Labor Party sacked its leader, and prime

minister, Kevin Rudd, to replace him by Julia Gillard, was seen by some as a shift to the left. Rudd was a right-winger; Gillard came from Labor's left faction; the big unions were prime movers in the coup. But Stiglitz was right. Gillard's first move was to scale down the Labor government's plan for a tax on mining superprofits.

Gillard traded on a few good opinion-poll scores to go for an early election on 21 August. The mining companies had said they could live with Gillard's lower tax, but now lashed out again, backing the conservative Liberal-National Coalition, which promised to scrap the tax altogether.

INDIA:

Viva global workers beaten by paid thugs

Workers at the Viva Global garment factory, Gurgaon, have been brutally attacked and beaten up with hockey sticks and lathis by goons called in by the factory bosses.

The incident happened on 23 August when workers were entering the factory, as part of a tripartite agreement between the management of Viva Global, the Indian Labour Department, and the Garment and Allied Workers Union (GAWU).

Viva Global is a major supplier of clothes to well-known multinational brands such as Marks and Spencer. There have been serious violations of labour laws and human rights at the Viva Global Factory. Management has been using bullying tactics against union leaders and workers' representatives following workers' demands for basic amenities and legal wages.

On 21 August contract workers were locked out of the factory in an illegal attempt to fire them. Since 25 August workers had kept up a 24-hour protest sit-in in front of the factory.

The union's demands are: All workers must be reinstated, and the management of the Viva Global must apologise to the workers.

M&S's store in Oxford Street, central London, was picketed by protesters from No Sweat and anarchist groups on Saturday 4 September.

● More: www.nosweat.org.uk

BRAZIL:

Oil workers' strike

Brazilian oil workers have staged a one-day "warning strike" at the largely state-owned Petrobras company, as pay negotiations between bosses and the workers' union continue.

The workers have sent their bosses a signal that they will not roll over in the talks and that they are negotiating from a position of strength.

Petrobras is one of South America's largest companies, and the strike saw seven refineries and 30 offshore drilling facilities closed completely. Unions are demanding pay increases consistent with levels of inflation, as well as productivity pay increases.

They are also demanding management guarantees concerning health and safety in the workplace, and wants to establish a national forum to discuss structural changes within the industry as well as its environmental impact.

If the workers are able to develop a radical programme on the environment, they could lead the way for other workers in high-emissions industries to develop plans to transition their workplaces towards socially-necessary and environmentally-sustainable production.

At least two million people joined demonstrations in France against plans to raise the retirement age from 60 to 62 and the age when workers get a full pension from 65 to 67. Tuesday 7 September saw nationwide strikes in the public sector. The day of action was larger than the last on 4 June; another is planned soon, as union leaders meet with President Sarkozy.

South Africa:

From back page

Despite claiming that there was no money available to increase the pay offer, it was increased during negotiations. The strike has rocked the traditionally close relationship between trade unions and the ANC and served as a reminder that the ANC is a neo-liberal, anti-worker administration of a capitalist state.

After Bradford: an open letter to the SWP about anti-fascist activity

Comrades,

Yet again the racist thugs of the English Defence League were able to stage a major provocation without significant molestation from the organised left and labour movement.

Any honest assessment of the events in Bradford on 28 August would demand a serious rethink on your part. The main report on the *Socialist Worker* website is not only short on honesty but verges on the edge of delusion.

Your comrade Mark L Thomas describes the day as ending in "utter humiliation" for the EDL and claims that credit for that rests ultimately with the efforts of Unite Against Fascism. Is this really what happened, comrades?

The preparations for a counter-demonstration to the EDL's were difficult, not least because of the efforts by other anti-fascists to have a total state ban on any demonstration. We understand the effort required to mount effective action of this type. What we don't understand is the logic behind your tactics on the day.

Let us give you the benefit of the doubt and assume that the "Bradford Together" jamboree was your last, best hope of securing some sort of presence in the city. You made a calculation that the only way to get significant numbers of people together was to abide by police restrictions.

What we cannot comprehend is why the SWP made no effort to organise those in the "Bradford Together" gathering into support for those directly confronting the EDL. You must have known of that confrontation.

Think how the day looked for those who rejected your event and instead chose to congregate in a counter-demonstration closer to the EDL. As you note in the report, this was a multi-racial group of people — the majority of them local Muslims — and included organised

socialists and anti-racist activists.

I expect you can guess what the organised activists made of your separate event. What do you suppose the local people who came out to defend their community thought of your activities? Puzzlement... disgust... incomprehending irritation? Probably all three.

What could you have done to be more effective in Bradford?

First and foremost you could have forgone the "prestige" of your own large and self-congratulatory event; organised SWP cadres and arranged for the safe transit of large numbers of willing anti-racists the 400 metres to the actual counter-demonstration.

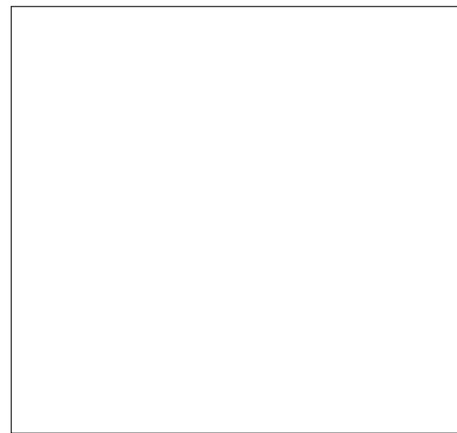
All your comrades would have been forced to do was put down their "Smash the EDL" placards, tuck copies of *Socialist Worker* and recruitment forms in their back-packs and without fuss walk in small numbers at a time around the loose police lines.

The SWP's failure to take this action makes the placards, front-page headlines, invocations of Martin Luther King and chants of "whose streets?" fundamentally redundant. Your ra-ra-revolutionary rhetoric counted for nothing in Bradford. All you succeeded in doing was mis-educating and mis-directing those organised around you.

The effect of your action — or lack of action — was to totally abandon the local community's response. Your actions marked an abandonment of basic class solidarity.

When members of the EDL broke out of the police containment area and were repelled by the local community and supporters, the SWP was nowhere to be seen. Had more EDL members escaped or had the police taken a tougher stance towards the counter-demonstrators, your absence would have been even more grievous.

Any serious reorientation on your part would demand theoretical as well as



practical modifications. For instance, do you really believe that the EDL is a "Nazi" organisation rather than a mixture of football hooligans and anti-Muslim racists? Is everyone associated with the EDL a Hitler-worshipping fascist? Shouldn't your slogans and propaganda reflect this reality? What impact do you suppose the chanting of "Nazi scum, off our streets" has on the poorly-educated, despondent and dispossessed white working class youth drawn into the EDL?

Simplistically conflating the EDL with the British National Party does more damage than good. They are different phenomena arising from the same specific political situation.

British politics is now in flux after more than a decade of New Labour attacks on the working class, ethnic minorities and immigrants.

A period of relatively advantageous opportunities for class struggles that never materialised. A time shaped in part by the events of 11 September 2001 and the military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq. Years when divided public opinion and the polarisation in society was used to the overwhelming advantage of the capitalist class, the government that represents them and their cheer-leaders in the right-wing tabloid press.

Whilst the EDL manifested and grew from the real and specific anti-Muslim racism generated in this situation, the BNP took advantage of the general withering of working-class political structures and solidarity. Where the EDL is incoherent in its ultimate aims and devoid of a tight political line, the BNP has a coherent aim and content.

What connects the EDL and BNP is that both can and must be driven out of the working class by the class itself. The real

prospects for working class resistance now make this a tangible reality. This means developing a specifically working class campaign — a real united front — against racism and fascism: a campaign based on working class politics and working class organisations to combat reaction in our ranks.

You have already noted this need in the pages of *Socialist Worker*. We'll take some credit for shifting opinion within your organisation on this score. However, we fear that when you call for vigorous campaigns on issues like jobs and housing, you really mean that the SWP will do this campaigning and that Unite Against Fascism will make no comment. This would be a grave error.

When you talk of strengthening anti-racist and anti-fascist work what you really mean is building a bigger and better funded front operation, a snazzier and glossier UAF.

Socialists cannot substitute themselves for the entire working class movement, nor can we make the mistake that the trade unions represent the whole of the class. A vigorous campaign within the unions to mobilise them for anti-racism and anti-fascism on their own working class political basis is not just a matter of organising the numbers required for action but a significant political question.

No socialist organisation can therefore opportunistically accommodate themselves to either the majority or a perceived "radical" minority of the union movement.

What you appear to be doing is attempting to square the circle without actually addressing the very real issues. "Don't tread on any toes" on the one hand, self-delusion on the other.

Socialists should attempt to organise working class campaigns with willing trade union organisations, the layers of activists who agree with this approach, sympathetic political organisations and the sort of people who turned out for the counter-demonstration on 28 August.

Such a coordination would not be a substitute for a whole-scale working class movement mobilisation but a tool for making this political mobilisation a reality. In its current form, neither the SWP alone nor UAF can achieve this without the sort of serious orientation already developed elsewhere in groups like Notts Stop the BNP and others in the Stop Racism and Fascism Network.

Charlie Salmon,
Alliance for Workers' Liberty

Chasing the ENA around Brighton

BY DAN

Around 40 members of the English Nationalist Alliance marched in Brighton on 29 August. More than 200 anti-fascists held a counter demonstration.

The counter demo was in some respects positive, but mainly ineffective. The ENA, displaying mostly EDL flags, wandered between Brighton station and the nearest pub. Anti-fascists stood chanting inside a soft police kettle, without really troubling the ENA.

Once the counter demo had gathered around 250 people, the police marched us away from the ENA. The majority of anti-fascists wanted to stay put and shout at the ENA. Some, SWP included, seemed happy to lead the march down into Brighton town centre and allow a group of racist, drunk and violent thugs do pretty much as they please.

The police began threatening arrest and the march shuffled away from the ENA. Once the counter-demonstration had reached its designated protest point we chanted to absolutely no effect, and waited for the ENA to reach their protest point, 300 metres away.

Then those willing to edge closer to the ENA moved out of the kettle around the counter-demo. The police began a full riot-gear and mounted operation. As activists began attempting to remove the barriers and dodge police lines, those who had made their way out of the area began running back to see what was happening to the dwindling counter-demo. This split up the already chaotic and largely ineffective protest.

Once the ENA left their rally a handful of activists made their way around the city centre hoping to block them. The ENA made it into a small pub before attempts at blocking their route came to fruition. Activists blocked the pub, keeping some ENAers from marching back through Brighton unchallenged. The police escorted them outside the back of the pub and away from the town centre.

The day involved far too much pointless chanting and cooperation with the police. Tactics were, as usual, divided. The nationalists were allowed too much room to mobilise and intimidate people in Brighton.

But at least a good proportion of demonstrators had showed a willingness to drive the ENA away.

Convicted on police say-so

UAF activist and SWP leader Martin Smith has been found guilty of assaulting a police officer at the protest against Nick Griffin's "Question Time" appearance in October 2009.

Smith had pleaded his innocence and no evidence was brought in court against him: it was the police officer's word against Smith's.

Smith has been sentenced to a 12-month community order, with 80 hours' unpaid work, and fined £450.

This is a malicious charge. It comes alongside a prosecution against Weyman Bennett, UAF and SWP activist, charged with conspiracy to organise violent dis-

order at a protest against the EDL in Bolton in March. It is part and parcel of the state's attempt to stifle anti-fascist protest and intimidate communities threatened by racist and fascist groups such as the BNP into not defending themselves.

The AWL condemns the charges. We hope that the SWP, UAF and other anti-fascists will give up their illusions that the bourgeois state is our ally against fascism and racism.

The working class has to mobilise independently against the far-right. The police, courts and the Home Office are not on our side!

How to fight for trade union democracy

BY DANIEL RANDALL

The TUC responded to the arrival of a government determined to squeeze the working class even more than the Thatcher regime did, by deciding that the times are not now eventful enough to warrant the TUC holding annual congresses as it has done since 1869. Once every two years will now do.

The post and telecoms union CWU rejected moves from its leadership to hold its conferences only once every two years, but agreed to elect its Executive members only every two years instead of yearly. It did that despite CWU Assistant General Secretary Dave Ward having blurted out the thinking behind the change to the *Guardian* (29 October 2009): “[Ward said] that, because officials have to be elected every year, they are in ‘perpetual election mode’ and therefore constantly feel the need to talk tough to appeal to the CWU’s rank and file. He said the union was prepared to hold elections less frequently to improve relations with management.”

The big public services union UNISON responded to the new government by stepping up its drive to expel left-wing activists or bar them from holding positions within the union.

But troubled times require a more alert and responsive union movement, one where democracy is extended, not curtailed.

Precise demands to achieve this differ from union to union, but there are some principles that socialists can fight for across unions:

- accountability to lay committees which are compact, responsive, and well-resourced enough to exercise real control;
- election of officials, and for short terms;
- putting officials on workers’ wages rather than the top-management salaries most union leaders now get;
- freedom for lower-level committees, branches, and members’ groupings in the union to question and campaign to change union policy;
- democracy in the workplace, through elected union reps, and a union structure designed to allow those workplace reps to hold decisive power in the union.

The AWL aims at the building of a rank-and-file movement, coordinating dele-

gates from branches and committees across the whole range of unions, which can uphold those common principles and coordinate the battle for democracy.

Building that movement — or approximations or approaches to components of it, i.e., building the agency that can win union democracy — is as important for the battle as having the right set of demands.

The “broad left”-type groupings in today’s unions usually have some pretensions to being rank-and-file networks, but in reality they are small-ish groupings of politically liked-minded individuals, focused on contesting and winning union elections and secondarily on getting “left” motions to union conferences.

These groupings can be useful, and AWL members participate in them. But they can also serve to trap activists into a focus on union electoralism or on paper victories at conference and to turn them away from the day-to-day concerns of the rank and file.

In history, inspiring rank-and-file movements with a political edge have often begun as industrial campaigns around immediate, day-to-day issues. The rank-and-file revolt in the New South Wales Builders’ Labourers Federation began with battles around such issues as the right to a toilet and dry shelter on building sites, and the famous Teamsters for a Democratic Union movement in America was built from the Teamsters for a Decent Contract initiative, which campaigned for better pay and conditions for freight drivers.

A focus on winning elections in unions can also lead to the people who should lead a real rank-and-file fightback (that is, the revolutionary socialists) becoming enmeshed with the bureaucracy.

The activity of the Socialist Party in PCS is an example; capturing positions within the union’s bureaucracy becomes an end in itself rather than a means. In the Fire Brigades Union, the once-impressive “Grassroots FBU” network wound itself up after it won a majority in the FBU Executive, considering its mission accomplished.

Union democracy is thwarted as much by the demoralisation, misinformation, disengagement, and passivity promoted in the working class by the efforts

chise union members and lead to low levels of membership participation in the internal affairs of unions. We need to reclaim our unions — from the state, from the employers, and from the unaccountable full-timers and their spirit of bureaucratic routinism and sloth. The working class needs trade unions which, in alliance with one another, organise and fight to defend and advance the interests of their members.

Trade unions can function effectively only if they:

- encourage active membership participation;
- effectively represent the interests of their members in the workplace independently of, and in opposition to, the interests of the employer;
- build democracy and accountability into their structures;
- promote political representation which champions the rights of labour;
- secure an end to state intervention in their internal affairs, and win legislation which guarantees workers’ rights.

of bosses and the capitalist media, and by the everyday pressures of capitalist society, as it is by bad rulebooks.

We have to connect battles for democratic reform within unions with industrial strategies to win on workers’ day-to-day issues and political programmes around which the union can organise a wider fight against the bosses and their government. The fight to make unions more responsive to their existing members must be linked with a fight to open them up — we need a drive to organise the millions of non-union workers.

And that must not be just a recruitment drive, aimed at increasing union membership, without organising new members to fight and win in the workplace.

In this feature we look at some problems and campaigns in selected unions. Future issues of *Solidarity* will cover other unions, and in more detail.

UNISON

In some ways UNISON has an elaborate democracy. Its annual conference, and the conferences of its major sectors, local government and health, are large and relatively lively. A large number of UNISON branches are relatively left-wing.

But since about 2000 the leadership has conducted an escalating series of high-profile witch-hunts against socialists and other rank-and-file dissidents, who often end up being barred from office or even expelled from the union. In March 2010 the offices of left-led Unison branches were raided at dawn by right-wing union officials! The union now facilitates courses for its paid officials in how to “deal with” Trotskyists in the union. There is Stalinist-type harassment of left activists in Unison on a level unknown in any other union in Britain today.

The union also has rules banning “horizontal” liaison between branches, and is apt to harass branches for such things — not “crimes” in most other unions — as supporting campaigns not supported by Unison nationally.

The union has an extremely large unelected bureaucracy, large parts of it staffed by New Labour types who are often “career” union officials with no background as workplace activists.

As one Unison activist wrote recently in *Solidarity*, “in Unison the collective delusion of ‘social partnership’ has evolved into paranoid psychosis. Attempts to organise industrial action are regularly obstructed by the union officials. These attempts are seen as the domain of the fringe left-wing. Trade unionism based on workers’ solidarity is now seen as an extremist activity.”

The running of (all-too-infrequent) strike ballots (and the strikes that all-too-infrequently result from them) is controlled by unelected full-time officials, and the union’s rules include clauses preventing criticism of union staff (i.e. the people controlling the union’s functioning!).

“Unison Labour Link”, the part of the union which controls Unison’s affiliation to the Labour Party, is also profoundly undemocratic. The first undemocratic feature is the very existence of Labour Link, as a structure separate from the regular committees and conferences of the union.

With the excuse that some of the unions which merged to create UNISON were not Labour-affiliated, the union has two political funds — the “General” Fund and

the (Labour) “Affiliated” Fund — and rules that UNISON conference cannot debate and decide issues within the province of the “Affiliated” Fund.

To participate effectively in the separate Labour Link structure you must be an individual Labour Party member (which most people who pay into the Affiliated Fund are not) and attend meetings called at a regional level, i.e., quite probably, a long distance from your home or workplace. Even those meetings have very limited control over Labour Link affairs. In effect, Unison’s intervention into mainstream politics is sealed-off from scrutiny or control by its members. The undemocratic nature of the affiliation to the Labour Party, rather than the affiliation itself, has held Unison back from organising more active resistance to the 13 years of anti-worker, New Labour rule.

GMB

The GMB is the successor to a very undemocratic union, the General and Municipal Workers.

The union was tightly controlled from 1934 to 1973 by its three general secretaries of that period, Lord Dukeston, Lord Williamson and Lord Cooper (one of whom — Cooper — was a Lord for most of his term of office in the union, and not just welcomed to the House of Lords after retirement). It has loosened up since 1973, and today some of its leading officials are ostensibly fairly left-wing and talk much about an organising (rather than mere “service provision”) approach.

The GMB places a great degree of power in the hands of regional secretaries, meaning that the degree of openness and democracy in your GMB branch might have as much to do with an accident of geography (i.e., whether your regional secretary is decent or the contrary) as with anything else.

Regional secretaries are formally accountable to the (elected) Regional Council and Central Executive Committee (a nationally-elected body), but they themselves are not elected, so between the (infrequent) Regional Council and CEC meetings supreme effective power rests with the regional secretaries.

GMB Congress has delegates from regions, not from branches, so most GMB branches have little or no input to the congress. It is not uncommon for branches to have no regular meetings, or to be run by retired members. It is common for a large proportion of congress delegates to be retired members.

The GMB’s “turn to organising”, a project called GMB@Work, has created a substantial layer of unelected, paid organisers who (especially given the frequent weakness of GMB branch structures) have power over what the union does day to day. The organisers are “professionally” accountable to senior organisers and their regional secretary, but not to the lay membership. The lengthy terms for elected officers (five years for the General Secretary, four years for branch officers) also make direct democracy and accountability difficult.

GMB members have been involved in some extremely significant struggles recently — most notably an all-out, indefinite strike by refuse workers in Leeds which succeeded in winning some concessions from management. Its national leadership does not have the same holy terror of organising industrial action that

For Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis, control is everything

most of UNISON's leadership does.

However, there is practically no rank-and-file organisation in the GMB — not even the “broad left”-type network that exists in other unions. It is possible for socialists to pass radical policy through this or that GMB branch, or even for them to manoeuvre elements of the union machinery behind particular campaigns, but there is currently no organised mechanism for exerting a counter-pressure to that of the bureaucracy at a regional or national level.

COMMUNICATION WORKERS UNION

The CWU is more lay-led than many unions. Most officers, including regional secretaries, are elected and accountable to members.

Due to the relatively high levels of union density in the main areas where CWU organises — the Post Office and BT — there is more connection between the shopfloor and the union's structures than in other unions. Retired members are excluded by rule from playing any decisive part in union structures, whereas in Unite and GMB they often have as much weight as the members in workplaces.

However, lower levels of lay bureaucracy too often function as junior representatives for the national leadership. The agreements with Royal Mail that guarantee facility time for union officials in the postal service are double-edged. They can lead to a disconnection between reps and the day-to-day struggle in the workplace. In its recent big battles with Royal Mail, the leadership organised “briefings” for reps from offices round the country, but not any meetings where those reps could make decisions and take ownership over the running of the dispute.

There is also a struggle to be had around a rule in the CWU which commits the union to take any agreement that affects terms and conditions to a ballot of the whole affected membership; this rule is flouted on spurious technical bases, so activists need to fight to make sure it is actually upheld.

RMT

Like the CWU, the RMT has a higher degree of democracy and lay member-leadership than the big conglomerate unions, UNISON, Unite and GMB.

Partly this is because it has a more compact base than the big conglomerate unions, where the top officials can fob off any particular section of the membership in an industrial dispute in the knowledge that the issues will be unfamiliar and remote to most of the rest of the membership, and partly because it generally has more active members and branches.

It is also because of a more active history, in which, over decades, in movements such as the Amalgamation Committees of the early 20th century, railworker activists have fought to build a democratic and

campaigning culture inside the union.

The RMT's executive is different from other unions'. Executive members are full-time on union activity during their period on the Executive — paid a flat rate lower than some skilled railworkers — and so are much better-placed to control union affairs than are, say, the members of Unite's large executive, which meets only six times a year. RMT Exec members can serve only a limited term on the Executive, and cannot be delegates to the union's conference until 12 months after quitting the Executive. This provision enhances the power of the General Secretary, as the only figure (besides the President and the Assistant General Secretaries) prominent in both the Executive and the conference.

The RMT is more willing to take industrial action than almost any other union, and the national leadership will usually give a green light to any branch wishing to take industrial action. But decisions about the running of strikes are taken by the Executive, and by no means always in the way that the members in dispute want.

AWL members proposed at a recent RMT rules-revision conference that the union write democratically-elected strike committees, and an obligation to consult them, into the union's constitution, but the proposal was rejected.

The RMT's conference (AGM) is very small, with delegates only from regions, not branches. That has one advantage — all motions get debated, and debates continue until all delegates who wish to speak have been able to do so — but at present it helps a strong leadership, with some prestige, to dominate the AGM, maybe more easily than it could dominate a larger and more diverse gathering.

In its election of workplace reps, the RMT is, oddly, less democratic than other unions: workplace reps are often elected at the branch meeting covering the workplace (i.e., in practice, often by the other reps in the same broad area), rather than in the workplace by the members there. Some RMT branches on the London Underground have now started electing workplace reps in the workplace.

UNITE

The biggest trade union, Unite was formed from a merger of TGWU and Amicus (which themselves had grown through many mergers or absorptions of dozens of smaller unions), Unite hardly functions as a single union at all and the ghosts of sectional loyalties and prejudices are evident throughout the union.

Unite's officers are not elected; they are appointed by a lay committee of three (elected) Executive Committee members who conduct formal interviews.

The TGWU, unusually among British unions, had only one elected official — the General Secretary — and a long tradition of strong domination of the union by

General Secretaries such as Ernest Bevin and Arthur Deakin on the right, and Jack Jones on the left.

Amicus's main predecessor, the AEU, was at one time the most democratic of British unions, with officials elected and subject to close control by rank-and-file district committees and shop stewards' committees

With the union's swing to the right after 1978, and the trashing of much of the engineering industry in Britain under Thatcher, that changed. Amicus switched to appointing its officials.

An Amicus conference shortly before the Amicus-TGWU merger voted to reintroduce election of officials, but the merger overtook that. The merged union is close to the TGWU model.

Probably uniquely among Britain's unions, Unite has not only right-wingers but also a sizeable number of left activists, mostly influenced by the TGWU tradition, opposing the election of officials.

The executive is effectively factionally split between old TGWU members and old Amicus members. It has 80 members and meets just six times per year.

Unite rules make it quite difficult to get motions to conference. Regional political conferences in Unite are limited to members who are Unite delegates to Constituency Labour Parties, plus some members of other union committees. This closes them off to the big majority of levy-paying Unite members, doubly so because on the ex-Amicus side a big proportion of the union's delegates to CLPs are union full-timers or their cronies, put in place with a rubber stamp from a semi-defunct union branch.

The basic make-up of Unite mirrors the old division between industrial trade groups and regional committees in TGWU. However, the regional boundaries have changed somewhat and the warlord-like power wielded by regional secretaries in TGWU has been broken up. Power in the regional structures now lies with regional committees, although these committees don't have any real stability or financial security as yet.

The control of strike ballots is formally under the control of the industrial trade group leadership of the sector in question; usually a consultative ballot on action is taken in a given workplace before the legally-stipulated balloting procedure is entered into.

NATIONAL UNION OF TEACHERS

Only a few national officials in the NUT are elected.

Currently, the unelected Regional Secretaries tend not to overstep their rule-book role of being subordinate to union policy, but that is partly to do with the

current balance of political forces in the union. Under the right-wing regime of Doug McAvoy, those officials were more “interventionist”.

NUT branches are organised geographically rather than by workplace. As Local Education Authorities are broken up by Tory education policies and more academies or academy-type projects spring up on a local basis, fighting for power in the union to shift to strong workplace-based organisation may become a focus.

Another focus could be fighting for the ability of local branches to call industrial action. The NUT's infamous Rule 8 bans all branch or school group from taking any industrial action not previously approved by the Executive, or by the action committee convened at the union's HQ. This committee is made up of lay members from the NEC but is overseen by full-time officials. It only meets monthly, so while there is formal democratic oversight over it, its processes are slow and bureaucratic meaning that it can be an obstacle to quick and effective action.

Even once a local strike ballot has been returned, it is up to the action committee to decide whether the result indicates sufficient strength for the strike to go ahead. Fighting for the right of local bodies to decide on industrial disputes, and insist on Executive endorsement, unless there is some overwhelming reason to the contrary, is vital.

PUBLIC AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES UNION

The PCS is unique among British unions in having a decisive proportion of its leadership and officialdom made up of self-proclaimed revolutionary socialists — specifically, members of the Socialist Party.

However, these “revolutionaries” run the union in a permanent lash-up with the soft-right — standing for election not as the SP or even as Left Unity (the much-diminished broad-left grouping they still formally maintain) but as “Democratic Alliance”. Left Unity, which split several years ago when its left-wing (including the AWL) left to form Independent Left, has seen its meetings shrink greatly.

Branches have little autonomy; to call a dispute, a branch must first seek approval from its Group Executive Committee which, if it agrees with the branch, will take the case to the (unelected) National Disputes Committee. Top-level negotiations are all done by unelected full-time officials. (formally accountable to GECs). Demanding the election, rather than the appointment, of these FTOs has been a long-time focus for the radical left in the union.

Fantasy Union of Railworkers

AWL members in the rail industry have already developed a vision of what a democratic railworkers' union might look like. Their charter, called “Fantasy Union of Railworkers”, also gives some guidelines on the changes needed in other unions.

- No more division into competing unions enabling management to weaken and defeat us.
- FUR involves its members. In each workplace, the union is not seen as a distant organisation, but as something that every worker can be involved in.
- It is a democratic union. Issues are debated, with everyone having their say.
- When the union makes a decision to go on strike, we all stick together and make it as effective as possible.
- Branch meetings are accessible: no off-putting jargon or bureaucratic procedures.
- Every official who makes political or industrial decisions is elected.

• There are no special privileges for union officials, so there is no incentive for anyone to take up a post apart from to represent and serve the members — not to get more money, or to get off the job.

• FUR is controlled by its rank-and-file members: not by an all-powerful General Secretary or an unrepresentative clique.

• The union fights militantly for its members' interests. It defends every job and every condition. It does not sell its members short or sign deals with management that accept worsening conditions for the workforce.

• The union represents and supports each individual member who needs its help. It turns individual grievances into collective disputes.

• While FUR defends its members against management attacks, it does not just react to the employers' agenda. It fights proactively for workers' interests.

• FUR recognises that prejudice and unnecessary division weaken us. So it fights on equality issues.

Full text available at: <http://www.workersliberty.org/node/2224>

Our unions should challenge sexism

BY A WOMAN RMT MEMBER

Have you ever experienced sexism at work? Have you ever witnessed it? Sexism can be very prevalent in male-dominated industries and often goes unchallenged. But women should not have to go through it, and the unions should do something about it.

WHAT IS SEXISM?

Sexism is discriminatory and demeaning behaviour towards members of the opposite sex. In the vast majority of cases it is men behaving like this towards women.

Sexism reinforces the inferior and constricted position in society that women have occupied for centuries. When working-class women have to come up against this in their workplace and in society, it creates divisions between them and working-class men.

In the workplace, it takes many forms.

Some examples are:

Sexist jokes. Have you been asked to make the tea simply because you're the only woman in the room? It's not that most people think a woman's place is strictly in the home; these days, such jokes are "funny" because we all know a woman's role is more than housework. But sometimes it would be nice to make the tea without any reference to gender.

Sexually inappropriate comments. Some men, particularly if they are in a superior grade (which men often are), only relate to their female colleagues through flirting. Some think they have the right to make comments like "been keeping you up has he?" if you come into work looking dishevelled. Again, this can be funny up to a point, but why can't men and women just talk to each other like two human beings?

Not being respected in our jobs. Does it ever feel like you have to work so much harder to prove you can do your job than your male counterpart? Do you feel you get treated with less respect than male colleagues?

Bitching about women who need to have a flexible working arrangement or who have medical restrictions because of health problems or pregnancy. Employers often treat women in these situations really badly, and the last thing they need is workmates adding to the stress. If male workmates think it is acceptable for bosses to harass women who are pregnant, the same bosses will think it is okay to harass all workers if they are e.g. sick.

When sexist remarks or "jokes" are made by someone who has power over you — your supervisor for instance — it becomes very difficult to challenge if you are not backed up by your union. You can't even "needle" them as a reply, make a disparaging joke about them, because the chances are their reaction is going to be to make your working life difficult. They are using the sexism to put you down.

All workers need to understand that sexism is an additional weapon that managers and bosses have in their power to use against all of us.

HOW DO WE RESPOND?

Hopefully, in most workplaces now, a racist joke would be met with outrage. But sexism is seen as "just a bit of banter", which we laugh along with in case we get accused of "having no sense of humour".

Similarly, if women want to be talked to as an equal, rather than "flirted with", we get accusations of being prudish.

These accusations silence us from standing up to sexist attitudes. Women can often feel like they are treading a balance between "having a laugh" with col-

leagues and not taking unwanted comments. It shouldn't have to feel like that.

Some women are more affected by it than others. If we don't like it, we can feel there is "something wrong" with us. Comments about personal subjects e.g. our sexual behaviour, can be personally upsetting, and that makes it hard to stand up to

It is not easy for women affected by a sexist culture to have the confidence to stand up to it especially if we feel like we're on our own.

A recent motion to RMT conference offered a few ideas on how to challenge sexism at work. This might be adapted to fit other workplaces and industries.

- Carry out a survey of women's experiences. This will hopefully break down the feeling among women that they are the only ones suffering sexism.

- Run workshops on challenging sexism. Once we have found that we're not alone, hopefully we will feel confident to come forward with a collective voice against this. We can learn from each other.

- Run a national campaign. It will be easier for individuals to challenge sexism if there is a campaign from their national union behind them.

- Train union reps and members on the importance of standing up to sexism at work. Fighting sexism should not be a battle just for the women affected, who can often be a minority in a workplace. A better culture is one where every worker understands and takes up these issues. But even union reps can sometimes be guilty of sexist behaviour — or of letting it go unchallenged — sending out the wrong message in a workplace.

This is just about workers standing together to stamp out prejudice and ideas that divide us. It is sad that this doesn't already happen.

Our bosses can exploit these prejudices and divisions to weaken us and attack all our rights. We should fight those divisions.

"Sexism is not something we have to tolerate"

INTERVIEW WITH A FEMALE LONDON UNDERGROUND WORKER.

Women working on the Underground often have very different perspectives on sexism. What one woman sees as "banter" is seen as hurtful and insulting by another.

I was speaking to another woman worker (and union activist) recently and she told me she hadn't any problems with male colleagues. She said they called her a "bitch" and a "prostitute" all the time. When I said I thought this was horribly sexist, she said also called men very rude names. But the names she gets called are gendered, are derogatory towards women in general.

Either, because this sexist language hasn't been challenged in the past and women haven't formed a view that this is a problem, or women simply do not see it as a problem.

Either way, dealing with the issue should not fall back on an individual's level of toleration.

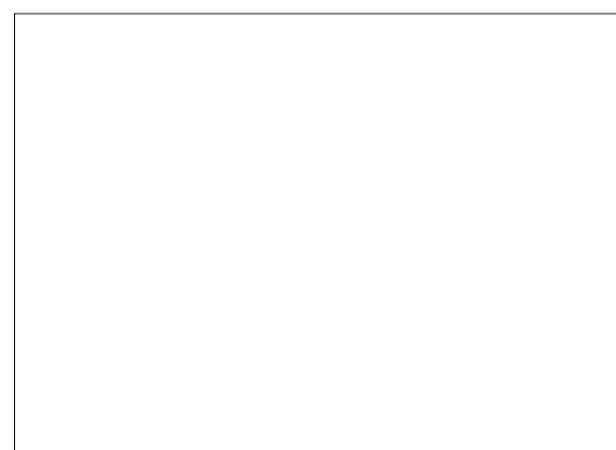
On the other hand the variation in an individual's level of toleration makes it harder to argue the need to do something about it.

Even when you are relatively clued up about issues like sexism it is easy to become "desensitised". It was only when I started talking to friends about things I had experienced at work, and they expressed their horror, that I began to get some perspective, and objectivity, and began to think "what we go through is mad".

If we begin to talk about the issues, then people may start to change their ideas and some behaviours associated with sexist ideas. The idea that workmates should talk to each other as equals will begin to permeate.

That process is important because it a matter of giving confidence to women. If they do have a problem with sexist remarks then it is not that there is something wrong with them for feeling uncomfortable or wanting to object. If we do not talk about these things, then we leave women isolated.

The exact same principle is necessary in relation racist and homophobic remarks.



Come a long way? Hannah Dadds, the first female tube driver in 1978

It is much easier to challenge the sexism of workmates that are your equal, are in the same grade, than it is to challenge that of your supervisor — and most of the supervisors on the Underground are men!

"Laddishness" is an issue. During the summer women come through the station in short skirts and little tops and the men ogle. They can be serving a woman but also obviously looking down their top. I've seen male colleagues on the gate have their heads at an angle, as if they wanted to look up women passengers' skirts. I don't want to be working on the same job with male colleagues who are so blatantly ogling women in a really disrespectful way. It makes you wonder: if they think about women like this, what do they think about me?

When I tackled someone about the ogling he said. "It's just natural. Men can't help it." I said "I'm pleased that you acknowledge that this is a weakness." "Oh, no it's not a weakness. It's just natural." "Okay," I said, "It's natural for women too." Then he said "Oh no, if a woman is behaving like that, she must be very damaged." These are the backward attitudes you come across.

Of course it isn't wrong, in general, to look at people

and women do it too. And personally I find it surprising the way heterosexual men don't go for stereotypically "beautiful" female physical types. But even these preferences are expressed in sexist terms — "fat birds in tight clothes"!

Often men feel like they have to play along with unpleasant sexist "banter" of the "alpha males", the men who are most sexist. Even though some men don't like it and they don't really think like that about women, they can be cowards, going along with the everyday sexism. But you can challenge most men (men in your own grade anyway) about this kind of acceptance of sexism.

If there were more women supervisors and they challenged the sexism, the male supervisors might be forced to listen to them. But it's no good having just one or two women supervisors, as we do now. They get a lot of sexist shit too.

Having more women supervisors might also work against the general lack of respect women get for doing their job. On the whole, women are less likely to get promotion.

Perhaps women's lack of confidence stops them going for promotion. Men may more easily see themselves in a role that involves taking more responsibility. If you don't see many women doing different jobs, then you tend not to think "That's something I could do!"

Managing shift work and childcare responsibilities can be a bigger issue for women. One woman I know did get a promotion but she could not get the flexible hours she needed. Higher grades tend not to be offered as part-time work. Some grades have to do night work which is obviously awkward if you have childcare responsibilities, even shared ones.

With job cuts and new rosters coming in, it is going to be harder to accommodate flexible working.

It is going to be more important to get female reps and these reps will need to be fully backed up by the union. In a recent dispute I was accused (by people who didn't back the strike) of getting "too emotionally involved" because I tried to tackle the level of scabbing. That kind of criticism would not be made about a male rep.

PLAY

Learning from their mistakes

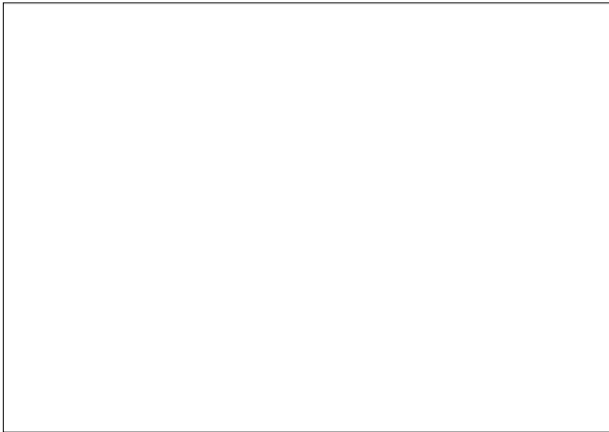
Molly Kirwin reviews *Danton's Death* directed by Michael Grandage.

Georg Buchner wrote *Danton's Death* in the Vormarx ("before March") period of German literature and politics leading up to the failed March 1848 revolution. Set in the last spring of the French revolution (1794), Buchner's play examines the split in the Jacobin party between the moderates led by Danton (Toby Stephens) and Desmoulins (Barnaby Kay) and Robespierre's radical group.

That split in some ways foreshadowed the divisions which have occurred in future revolutions as the desire for rapid change meets the paranoia of opposition.

Danton's group were not "moderates" in the normal definition of the word. They were fully involved in the elimination of the French monarch and other clear opponents of the new order. This play encapsulates the period of final turmoil when Danton's faction insists that the Terror of September 1793 to July 1794, when some thousands were guillotined as counter-revolutionaries, could not continue and the revolution must consolidate itself. This puts them in direct conflict with Robespierre (Elliot Levey).

Cristopher Oram's set design definitely captures the feeling of imprisonment the revolutionaries must have felt in their desire for freedom. They fought to destroy their country's omnipresent chains at the expense of being branded traitors.



Toby Stephens as Danton

A dark five-sided, high-walled balcony surrounds a plain stage space with scenes and spaces loosely defined by various props, a bench, a table, and the opening of three metre-high shutters.

The scenes run into each other, creating confusion for the audience at the beginning as to where we are in the story. However, as the play reaches its end there is no doubt that we the audience are with the prisoners in their cell.

The final scenes are inevitable — despite Danton's assurances and brilliant defence in court — but extremely well executed (in both senses). The execu-

tion scenes are realistic, and a murmur of shock ran throughout the audience at the guillotine and the heads of its victims. It was hard to tell however, whether the shock was due to the end of the story or the representation of the guillotine's deadly blade on stage.

Toby Stephens' theatre debut as the charismatic orator Danton is not disappointing. At the beginning his representation is merely arrogant and misogynistic, full of unconquerable swagger. By the end, however, Stephens' portrayal has solidified into one of great strength and complexity, and we can fully empathise.

Barnaby Kay's Desmoulins is tender and sensible. His scenes with his wife Lucille (Rebecca O'Mara) are intimate and subtle despite her appearances being brief.

Danton and his wife Julie (Kirsty Bushell) were less sympathetic despite her ideological support to the extent of her own suicide.

Robespierre's cool, sinister and yet sincere characterisation by Levey is wonderful. Although there is distrust you can see he is acting from impersonal and idealistic motives. This is a hard role to pull off.

Howard Brenton's adaptation of Buchner's romantic and rhetorical master piece never loses the power of the original language but makes it comprehensible to all. Although not a laugh a minute, this play is interesting, emotional and still politically relevant. See this play if you are interested in how to avoid the revolutionary mistakes of the past.

Guided by the light?

Tom Unterrainer reviews *Strategy and Tactics*, by John Rees, (Counterfire)

At the SWP's Marxism event immediately after Rees' severing of links with George Galloway and Respect, you could overhear long-standing members comment on "the biggest joke" of the year. What was the joke? A session titled "Strategy and Tactics" presented by ... wait for it ... John Rees.

Many SWP members took the Respect debacle hard, not celebrating its end as most rational citizens of the left did. They were confused and upset, perhaps a little bitter, at Rees and the party leadership. What they didn't understand, quite obviously, was that behind the political chaos lurked a method.

Timing is important, you see, and in order to get things right you not only need to act but to understand what you're doing. Nothing wrong with that, right? Sounds like the sort of thing Lenin could have said or written, no?

If the Bolsheviks had organised for September or November rather than October, history would have a very different landscape. As it was for Lenin and the Bolsheviks, so it is for John Rees and his new "network" of revolutionaries in Counterfire.

Rees has form — a decent temporal pedigree, if you like — and he's not shy of reminding his readers of the fact:

"[H]ad revolutionaries [ie. Rees] not decided to launch the Stop the War Coalition within days of the attack on the Twin Towers, it is unlikely that it would have had the same galvanising effect that it did."

Nothing glaringly inaccurate in this claim. But remember, timing is not even half of it. To get things right, you need to understand what's going on. You need to apply a method. You need to think as John Rees thinks, you need dialectical thinking:

"At the point where revolutionaries took the step of initiating the Stop the War Coalition in 2001, we undertook an analysis something like this.

"We had already understood the nature of the new imperialism from theoretical work at the end of the Cold War, during the First Gulf War, and during the war in the Balkans. We understood the contradiction between expansive US military power and its relative economic decline. We judged, from preceding experience in the anti-globalisation movement, that there

would be a mood to resist and that the left might not be divided in the way it had been in the Cold War."

The fact that John Rees and his one-time comrade Professor Alex Callinicos appear to disagree on the exact "nature of the new imperialism", that the SWP significantly mis-judged the political ramifications of the end of the Cold War (the demands for a general strike in 1992 being a key marker), and that they capitulated to reactionary Serb national-chauvinism during the Balkans war all have a bearing on the politically poisonous mess they created after 9/11.

John Rees may be able to think and act. His timing may be very good. He's obviously a skilled dialectician. The question is, what sort of dialectic? When Rees calls for "social, economic and political contradictions" to be analysed, through what objective and subjective lenses are they to be viewed? Between what forms do these contradictions manifest themselves?

As Rees notes himself, the fundamental contradiction of society is between labour and capital. For Marxists, all else flows from this contradiction. But you don't need to be a Marxist to note this basic fact. You can develop any number of contending views and conclusions dependent upon your politics. So rather than siding with labour in the contradiction, you could become a defender of capital. Or alternatively, you could seek to resolve the contradiction — through an "intellectual elite" for example.

If we honestly assess Rees' record — using his self-proclaimed greatest triumph, the Stop the War Coalition — what conclusions can we draw? This organisation combined a host of reactionaries with would-be revolutionaries into an "anti-war" leadership. Working class politics and working class concerns were not only sidelined but systematically argued against and excluded. Is John Rees' dialectic working class orientated as with Marx? No number of quotations from Lenin can veil the essential truth: the actually existing working class does not feature.

Strategy and Tactics is nothing more than an exercise in self-justification, a tool for mystification and obfuscation, something to mis-educate future recruits and to protect John Rees from organisational scrutiny. Works like this and "revolutionaries" like John Rees intend to preserve the discreet "star system" of leadership familiar to SWP members and old-time Stalinists alike. Counterfire members are to be guided by Rees' light, no matter how dark the destination.

US AND THEM

Who stole that £300 from you?

Benefit fraud? It adds up to much less than the money "saved" by people not getting benefits they are entitled, usually because of the difficulty of claiming them. It is also tiny compared to business fraud.

According to a new report by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners, the typical organisation loses 5% of its annual revenue to fraud. More than \$2.9 trillion is embezzled world-wide, each year — that's over \$400 (nearly £300) for each child, woman, and man in the world.

And most of it is embezzled by bosses. "Frauds committed by owners/executives were more than three times as costly as frauds committed by managers, and more than nine times as costly as employee frauds. Executive-level frauds also took much longer to detect."

Snooping software installed on company computers is annoying but useless in combatting fraud: it accounted for only 0.8% of fraud detections. Far and away the major way that frauds are detected is by workers blowing the whistle (40% of all fraud detections).

<http://www.acfe.com/rtnn>.

Time for a squeeze? Depends who you are

The PCS union estimates that the government loses £70 billion a year through (illegal) tax evasion and £25 billion a year through (legal-but-dodgy) tax avoidance.

Is the "must-cut-the-deficit" Lib/Tory government as eager to squeeze there as it is in benefits and services? Not at all.

Offshore tax dodgers are currently being offered what they call "the best amnesty ever".

Revenue and Customs recently paid millions of pounds to get copies of computer disks stolen from Liechtenstein banks which showed what some super-rich were up to.

Now the tax authorities say that people who own up to undeclared assets need only pay up to 10 years' back tax — or half the usual tariff — and a fixed 10 per cent penalty. No threat of jail sentences. The tax-evaders may avoid inheritance tax altogether.

Tax bosses think it makes pragmatic sense to take a "bird in the hand" approach.

NEW YORK MOSQUE CONTROVERSY

Defend minority rights!

BY BARRY FINGER

The controversy over the proposed Islamic Centre — The Cordoba House, now known as Park51 — several blocks from the site of the World Trade Centre evokes a rather strange memory from my own youth.

During the 1950s, the Jewish community in a small Long Island town, to which my family belonged, wished to build a Jewish Centre on that town's Main Street. After all, that was where all the other communities had built their churches.

The Jewish community was reassured that building a house of worship and community centre was certainly within its rights. And no one would dream of denying the Jewish community its rights. It would have been difficult to deny the patriotism of young community of returning World War Two veterans. That denial had been the fall back position of polite pre-war anti-semitism. It was rather a question of sensitivities. If the Jewish community wished to be truly respected, wouldn't it agree to a small sacrifice by locating their community centre a block or two from Main Street?

It was one thing to recognise Jewish civic rights in general. But wasn't it just expecting too much of Christians that they be forced to worship on an equal plane with, well... Christ killers?

This all seems rather absurd today. But this scenario of suppressing religious minority rights is bubbling to the surface again. And this time it's not so polite.

Set off by the right wing slime machine, with the ever predictable support of Rupert Murdoch's media empire, prominent, oh-so patriotic right wing politicians, such as Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich — demagogues who otherwise delight in insisting that the Constitution privileges religion over secularism in every aspect of civic life — and abetted by Democratic liberals in retreat such as Harry Reid, this attack on immigrant and American Muslims has ripped the scab off the myth of American tolerance.

Muslims of course have Constitutional rights, but according to the reactionary guardians of American dignity, is not primarily a question of religious rights, but of proprietary rights to political symbolism. And that symbolism, they insist, is one of jihadi triumphal-

ism in the shadow of 9-11 carnage.

That the Cordoba House, a proposed cultural centre with a pool, gym, auditorium and prayer room, modeled on the 92nd Street Y (a Jewish landmark of cultural inclusion in upper Manhattan) is a symbol of jihadi triumphalism is entirely a concoction of the right's fevered imagination. But it reverberates solidly with a Republican base, the majority of whom believe that Obama favors the interests of Muslim Americans over all others and maintains a secret agenda to impose Sharia law on an unsuspecting public. And this nonsense plays equally well off the larger chauvinist insecurities of an America in social decline, where whites can now envision being forced to concede their majority status to an influx of third worlders.

This ground swell of deliberately cultivated fear and suspicion has triggered a raft of particularly ugly, anti-Muslim outrages: a recent throat slashing of a Muslim cabdriver in Manhattan, a bombing of a mosque in Jacksonville, Florida, opposition to a mosque expansion in California, an arson at the site of a proposed mosque in Tennessee, and a coordinated Christian fundamentalist bacchanal of Koran burnings planned for September 11th.

Unfortunately Obama endorsed the abstract right of Muslims to build institutions free of external coercion, only to equivocate on whether this centre should actually be built in its designated site in light of the intolerance that the proposal itself engendered.

Whether the Cordoba House proves to be the open space equivalent of the 92nd St. Y or falls far short, it is clear that it is not a Wahabi madrassa, nor is it being built at ground zero.

Its primary influence is Sufi'ism, a relatively pacific current within Islam. Its imam, Faisal Abdul Rauf, has made some questionable remarks about Hamas, is all too careful not to offend the Iranian dictatorship, and has offered support for Sheikh Yusef al-Qaradawi, the Muslim Brotherhood's spiritual guide. But Americans don't generally propose a comprehensive political litmus test from the leaders of other faiths. And the imam's evasions are no more grievous in the larger scale of religious outrages than rabbis who will not distance themselves from semi-fascist, far-right Israeli parties or Catholic priests who failed to renounce IRA

terrorism, or Protestant ministers, who all but endorse the murder of abortionists.

As centrist commentator Fareed Zakaria stated in *Newsweek*, the imam "speaks of the need for Muslims to live peacefully with all other religions... emphasises the commonalities of all faiths... advocates equal rights for all women, and argues against all laws that in any way punish non-Muslims... His vision of Islam is bin Laden's nightmare."

The entire opposition to the Islamic cultural centre sounds eerily familiar. It is "offensive" to the memory of the victims of 9-11, and it is precisely this "offence" no matter how irrational and bigoted, that somehow takes precedence over all other democratic considerations.

Evidently, not so offensive to that memory are the topless bars and sex shops in the area. Evidently, the proposed construction of banking houses and hedge fund headquarters — the trigger point to so much current economic misery — on the actual spot of this "hallowed" ground still falls under the rubric of proper battle ground memorials. Evidently, too, denying other — Muslim — peaceful citizens, who also lost family members, homes and livelihoods, and who also were among the first responders, their Constitutional rights best honours 9-11 victims.

Wasn't an appeal to "sensitivities" the justification for murdering unflattering filmmakers, issuing fatwas against blasphemous novelists, making death threats against Muslim apostates? Wasn't that the apologia of those, including not a few self-proclaimed socialists, who insisted that the Danish newspapers refuse to publish cartoons that "offend" Muslim sensitivities?

Fifty years ago, the Jewish community my parents belonged to acceded to the prevailing bigotries and relocated their community centre one block off Main Street. The proposition of collective guilt, whether it be for a murder supposedly committed by Jews two millennia ago or collective Muslim guilt for the attacks of 9-11, is itself a simple moral outrage.

This is not a question of tolerance, although one should never fault the value of a virtue so short in historical supply. It is a question of democratic justice and equal rights for those who think differently, for those who pray differently.

No, the Pope is not welcome here!

Vicky Thompson lambasts state sponsorship of the Pope's visit to the UK (16-19 September)

Well-known socialist blogger Andy Newman has defended the government's decision to spend £12 million hosting the Pope.

He also claims that religious leaders deserve not merely our tolerance but our respect. But how far should respect and tolerance really extend?

To the IDF soldiers who commit atrocities against the Palestinians or the Christians who perform acts of violence against abortion practitioners? To Hizb ut-Tahrir? To those who perform genital mutilation or try to cure innocent children of witchcraft? To Fred Phelps? To the Christians who jeer at Pride Parades? To Scientologists?

What about the supporters of states like Saudi Arabia or Iran, where capital punishment is not merely sanctioned but actively encouraged by the religious elite?

The idea that one's affiliation with a friend in the sky is grounds for respect is patently absurd. Religion doesn't belong on the pedestal with race, gender, sexuality and disability, because religion is a choice, and in some cases it's a choice that directly infringes upon other people's right to live without fear...

Andy Newman doesn't have a clue when it comes to religion and the social function it serves. Religion renders pain bearable, poverty tolerable, and the only way to end its influence is to throw off the conditions which necessitate its existence. It acts as a smokescreen, teaching subservience to one's material conditions.

Why else do faith schools exist, except to ensure that

children aren't exposed to enough scientific ideas to make their questioning of the thousand year old lies inevitable? In post-revolution Russia, Orthodox Priests led campaigns against adult literacy centres, where the illiterate peasant population were learning to read. The Catholic Church only abolished its list of banned books in 1966, by which time it had accumulated over 4,000 titles that Catholics weren't supposed to read, many of them containing atheist ideas. Christians in America campaign to ban books from public libraries and Muslims issue fatwas against the authors of texts considered to denigrate Muhammad.

Levels of religiosity and belief in creationism decline as incomes rise. This is why Europe is more secular than Africa; why America's north is far less religious than the "Bible belt" Deep South. There is also direct correlation between level of education and religion.

Religion wants you to be poor and uneducated. Heck, religion needs you to be poor and uneducated.

Marx believed that Christianity was by its nature the religion most compatible with capitalism: "for such a [capitalist] society Christianity with its cultus of abstract man, more especially in its bourgeois developments, Protestantism, Deism etc., is the most fitting form of religion". As a result, Christian Socialism is the most schizophrenic of politics, with one ideology part of the problem and the other the only shot at a solution.

How can one be a socialist without acknowledging that Christianity will never side with socialism; without realising that the religion perpetuates vast chasms of inequality within society; without knowing that Christianity fulfills a dangerous social function, far more than it honours a nice man called Jesus?

In Russia, the Orthodox Church backed the Black

Hundreds, virulent anti-Semites who led pogroms against the Jews and murdered revolutionaries. In the Spanish Civil War, the Catholic Church sided with Franco, supporting the fascists and legitimising the massacre of leftists. In Italy, Pope Pius XI was allied with Mussolini.

The Catholic Church is institutionally sexist and homophobic. Child sex abuse is endemic within it and yet the Church — seemingly lacking even a basic appreciation of irony — recently likened the ordination of women priests to abusing children. Through its campaigns against condoms, the Catholic Church is complicit in the deaths of millions of people from AIDS. Because it opposes all contraception, it consigns millions of married couples to bearing endless children and thus keeps them in poverty.

Oh, and then there's the nine year old Brazilian girl who, raped by her stepfather and not physically developed enough to carry the pregnancy to term, had an abortion. Guess who got excommunicated? Was it the child-raping stepfather? Nope, it was the nine year old rape victim. "Abortion is much more serious than killing an adult," declared the local bishop.

A 2004 BBC survey found 39% of the British to be atheists. Over half of this country's teenagers don't believe in god. We are facing brutal Thatcherite spending cuts. 1.3 million jobs will be lost. Among the things set to suffer are elderly care, Sure Start, back to work schemes and moves to protect the homeless.

The elderly, the young, the unemployed and the homeless are fair targets, but the twelve million pounds... We're told that's money well spent.

• Full text www.workersliberty.org/node/14850

THE ORIGINS OF THE PLEBS LEAGUE PART 4

“The Burning Question of Education”

COLIN WAUGH CONTINUES A SERIES*

Achieving control of Ruskin College was central to the WEA/extension project. From the summer of 1907 onwards, its supporters threw themselves into open propaganda, behind-the-scenes lobbying and bureaucratic manoeuvring — all aimed at purging the college of whatever stood in their way.

As well as setting up the committee to oversee the writing of *Oxford and Working-Class Education*, setting out the structure and to some degree the content of study at Ruskin College, the August 1907 Oxford Delegacy/WEA conference also set up an Oxford Tutorial Classes Committee, with Oxford tutor William Temple — for the University — and Albert Mansbridge — for the WEA — as its joint secretaries. Under this, and with support from a number of Oxford colleges, eight tutorial classes were eventually started.

The first two of these began in January 1908. On Mansbridge's initiative, R H Tawney, by this stage a part time lecturer at Glasgow University, began to teach tutorial classes for working people at Longton in Staffordshire and in Rochdale. By the way he ran these classes, Tawney showed that Mansbridge's approach could work in practice. At this point, the WEA/extension alliance moved on from promoting tutorial classes to organising them. At the same point, influential backers within Oxford University began manoeuvring to control Ruskin.

In 1899, when Ruskin was founded, there were in Oxford some academics who supported the founders' project. The faculty chosen by Ruskin founder Walter Vrooman included, along with Hird and Hacking, two Oxford graduates who were at that stage sympathetic: H B Lees Smith and Bertram Wilson. In 1900 Lees Smith, who was now the vice principal, wrote an appeal to unions for funds. He concluded this by saying: “We shall be quite content if we have a Labour College, no more and no less”. However, the situation began to change in 1902 when the founders ceased to provide an income.

First, three Oxford professors sent an appeal round the university asking for donations, on the grounds that otherwise Ruskin would become dependent on union funding alone. Although this appeal was unsuccessful, Bertram Wilson, as general secretary and treasurer of the college executive, began to pursue the same goal by appealing to very wealthy individuals, including aristocrats, across the country. In the process, he also distanced himself further and further from his initial sympathy. Clearly, the more “non-partisan” the curriculum at Ruskin could become, the more chance there was of raising money from such sources.

Union funding was still pursued. The point was, rather, that the extension side did not want Ruskin to be funded exclusively by unions because they believed that this funding might eventually come under rank and file control.

In 1907, Lees Smith was appointed as a professor at Bristol University. At the same time the Ruskin governors made him Director of Studies at Ruskin, and chairperson of the college's executive committee. In this capacity, he acted over the head of Dennis Hird, to appoint one of his friends, H Sanderson Furniss, as a lecturer, and, in October, another, Charles Sydney Buxton, as vice-principal. Neither of these people could claim to have any knowledge of — or connection with — the labour movement or working class. At this time also the governors restructured the college executive. They put the vice principal and general secretary in joint charge with the principal, rather than under him as before.

Early in the term which began in October 1907, A L

* See www.workersliberty.org/node/14617 for previous parts.

This article is a version, edited and abbreviated by *Solidarity*, of a 28-page pamphlet published by *Post-16 Educator* in January 2009 to mark the centenary of the “strike” by students at Ruskin College in 1909. For the whole text, visit the website www.post16educator.org or send a cheque for £3, payable to “Post-16 Educator”, to: 221 Firth Park Road, Sheffield S5 6WW.

Lord Curzon. He was never going to be sympathetic to the demands of working-class students

Smith, a fellow and tutor of Balliol College and one of the Extension Delegacy's nominees on the committee that had overseen Oxford and Working-Class Education, came to Ruskin to meet the students. At this informal meeting he told them that there was “a sort of committee” that was trying to promote closer links between the college and the University.

Soon after this the chancellor of Oxford and former viceroy of India, Lord Curzon of Kedleston, who was writing a book about how the university as a whole could be reformed — also visited Ruskin. This episode was later described in the Plebs League pamphlet *The Burning Question of Education* as follows:

“The students were all standing and had formed a ring, in the centre of which Lord Curzon spoke. Mr Hird also advanced to the centre and stood facing Lord Curzon while he replied. The contrast between the two men was very striking.

“The circumstances in which they met invested the event with a distinctly dramatic colour. Lord Curzon wearing his Doctor of Laws gown — not the glittering robes of the Chancellor's office, but robes of dark coloured cloth devoid of ornamentation, as if they represented the University in mourning for the condescension implied in his visit.

“Not so Lord Curzon himself, however. He stood in a position of ease, supporting himself by a stick, which he held behind him as a prop to the dignity of the upper part of his body. A trifling superiority in height, increased by the use of the stick, allowed him to look down somewhat on Mr Hird. It was easy to see that this man had been a Viceroy of India. Autocratic disdain, and the suggestion of a power almost feudal in its character, seemed stamped on his countenance.

“As the purport of Mr Hird's reply reached his comprehension, Lord Curzon seemed to freeze into a statuesque embodiment of wounded dignity. For Mr Hird was not uttering the usual compliments, but was actually rebuking the University for having neglected Ruskin college until the day of its assured prosperity. As he spoke, the students moved instinctively towards him as if mutely offering him support...

“In substance, he said: ‘My Lord, when you speak of Ruskin College you are not referring merely to this institution here in Oxford, for this is only a branch of a great democratic movement that has its roots all over the country. To ask Ruskin College to come into closer contact with the University is to ask the great democracy whose foundation is the Labour Movement, a democracy that in the near future will come into its own, and, when it does, will bring great changes in its wake.’ As he concluded, the burst of applause that emanated from the students seemed to herald the dawn of the day Dennis Hird had predicted.

“Without another word, Lord Curzon turned on his

heel and walked out, followed by the remainder of the lecture staff, who looked far from pleased.”

Very soon a sub committee of the Ruskin executive, composed of half of its members plus Lees Smith as director of studies, proposed that Hird be forbidden to continue teaching economics and sociology (which he alone taught) and that instead he must lecture only on literature and on temperance. Early in November, when the students found out about this, all except one signed a petition against it.

In the spring of 1908, a meeting took place, at the students' request, between representatives of the students and the two main trade union governors of Ruskin. These governors were the general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, Richard Bell, and David Shackleton, the general secretary of the Textile Workers Association. The students asked for this meeting so that they could press these governors to try harder for union funding. According to Craik, who was one of the delegates, Bell and Shackleton insisted that the college must continue to depend partly on private donations.

In the summer of 1908 the Ruskin executive, again acting over Hird's head, brought in “Revision Papers” — compulsory written tests — for all first year students. (Up till then all assessment had been via tutors' comments on monthly essays, given in one-to-one interviews. This was the basis on which workers were recruited as students. However, whereas Hird and Hacking were good at giving feedback in this way, Lees Smith and Furniss apparently found it difficult.) Students who protested against these “Revision Papers” were told that they must either take them or be barred from entering the second year.

In August 1908, the *Cornhill Magazine* printed an article by the vice-principal of Ruskin, Sydney Buxton. This article included the sentence: “The necessary common bond [i.e. between working class people and the better-off] is education in citizenship, and it is this which Ruskin College tries to give — conscious that it is only a new patch on an old garment, an idealist experiment in faece Romuli”. Faece literally means dregs.

The joint Oxford Extension Delegacy/WEA committee, still with Mansbridge and Temple as secretaries, had by this time been made permanent, and in October the WEA extension bloc and its supporters, who were now nearly in control of the college, started a carrot and stick policy towards the students and the two staff members who supported them. Thus from autumn 1908 through to the first three months of 1909, students were often invited to tea with Oxford dons.

At the same time, there were more and more attempts to clamp down on them speaking at meetings both in Oxford and elsewhere. In October a sub committee of the executive had been quick to condemn the formation of The League of the “Plebs”. Because the students had now begun to stay away from lectures by Furniss and Buxton, the executive ruled that attendance at all lectures was compulsory. On 2 December, after *Oxford and Working-Class Education* had been officially published, Mansbridge wrote to the labour movement members of the joint committee to say that in his view “all is now in order at Oxford”.

In this situation, Dennis Hird, although banned by the executive from associating himself openly with the Plebs League, took the students' side. At the beginning of March 1909 the governors claimed that he was “failing to maintain discipline”, and demanded his resignation, which he gave.

The WEA/extension bloc may well have anticipated that the students would protest against them setting Hird up in this way. As well as this, they probably calculated that they could use these protests to identify and purge the most leftwing students, and thereby intimidate the others. However, they probably did not realise that the students and ex-students had a positive project of their own, and the capacity to carry it through.

PLEBS THINKING 1908-09

Some of the material written by the students and former students shows that they were moving

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towards a coherent theoretical analysis of the factors at stake in the Ruskin struggle.

The four-page editorial in the first issue of *Plebs Magazine* was probably written by George Sims. Sims was a carpenter from Bermondsey who had left school at the age of eight to become a page boy in a Park Lane mansion. Although sponsored at Ruskin by a well-off individual, Dr Salter, he had between 1904 and 1907 been secretary of Bermondsey and Rotherhithe Trades and Labour Council. Sims had been a member of the SDF, but he was expelled from it in 1908 for advocating industrial unionism. In 1918, while serving as a sergeant major in northern Italy he would write an open letter to *Plebs Magazine* in which he would say: "I met Marx in 1906. True, he had been dead then some twenty-three years... Who can be dead when his influence appeals to, lives with one as intimately as the closest of friends?... I had tried for years to get a feeling of reality in religion... But with the first reading of the *Communist Manifesto*, how the pamphlet appealed to something in me ... the Christian looks to the miracle of individual conversion and the fatalist to the event. We are neither fatalists nor believers in miracles — simply people who know the inevitableness of the end; the inevitability of social evolution, of development and progress based upon material needs..."

On Friday 5 February 1909, Sims spoke at a Plebs League social held in the Cooperative Hall, Cowley Road, Oxford. This was reported in *Plebs Magazine* issue 1 as follows: "Mr Sims, of Ruskin College, in a short and breezy speech, explained that the object of the *Plebs League* was to bring about a definite and more satisfactory connexion between Ruskin College and the Labour Movement. He said in order to promote those interests, it was essential that the teaching the worker received should be in harmony with such interests, and that it should not require that mental condition known as the open mind, which often betokened an empty mind. It was necessary that the control of their institution should be ultimately in the hands of the workers. Their mandate was 'the education of the workers in the interests of the workers'."

The editorial's first words were: "Enter the 'Plebs', not from above but from below, not to fight a sham battle among the shadows by the orders and for the interests of our masters, but to fight a real battle in the full light and with a clear knowledge of the issue before us". Sims then explained the purpose of the magazine as follows: "To make clear the real position of Ruskin College, to point out its present weaknesses, to outline its possibilities, to demonstrate its value to the Labour Movement if definitely founded thereon, to stimulate active interest in working-class education and to open out propaganda of an educational character from the working-class point of view ..."

Next, he explained that the management of "Plebs" "will be entirely free from any connection with existing organisations", adding that "we are not appealing to any party or section of the working-class but to all workers, irrespective of whether they are ILPers, SDPers, Trade Unionists or Non-Unionists".

Then, having defined the "mission" of the "Plebs" as "to bring about a definite and more satisfactory connection between Ruskin College and the Labour Movement", he explained how this would require: "that this institution shall be open to all workers, that it shall be controlled by a representative assembly of the workers, and finally that the education imparted

shall be of a kind and of a quality capable of application in the interests of the workers as a class".

Sims explained how there was two irreconcilable sets of class interests in present day society. Within this, he said: "Now the non-producers want more and more, and the producers want more and more. But in order that the former may get more, the latter must take less, and inversely." (He presented, then, a conception of class struggle based on inequality of distribution rather than on the Marxist conception of exploitation at the point of production.)

He moved on to reject the education on offer via extension, saying that "it is essential that the teaching the worker receives shall be in harmony with [his/her own class] interests... that it shall not require of the student that particular mental condition known in 'the home of lost causes' [Oxford University] as 'the open mind,' open, in order that the apologist may write his sweet will upon it and close it with the seal of the verbal juggler". From this it follows that: "If the education of the workers is to square with the ultimate object of the workers — social emancipation, then it is necessary that the control of such an educational institution must be in the hands of the workers".

In support of this principle of not trusting other classes with workers' education, Sims cited the example of a factory owner who gives money "for the purpose of promoting the education of working men" while denying his/her own employees the leisure time needed for study, adding that: "Inability to recognise the class cleavage was responsible for the downfall of the Plebs of the Roman Empire".

Sims maintained that: "Ruskin College provides the necessary machinery for turning out men capable of playing an important part in the fight for freedom". He then added three points about 'the aims and ideals of the League of the Plebs'.

First, "It seeks to bind the students of Ruskin College, past and present, in closer union with each other . . ." Secondly, "It endeavours to permeate the Labour Movement in all its ramifications with the desire for human liberation". Thirdly, "Realising that the propelling force behind all social progress is social knowledge, it aspires to the dissemination and continuity of such knowledge among those whom it will reach". Restating the mandate of the League as: "the education of the workers in the interests of the workers" [Sims's italics], he ended by defining the ultimate goal as "Industrial Democracy".

The other main article in the first issue of *Plebs Magazine* is "The relation of Ruskin College to the Labour Movement" by the miners' checkweighman Noah Ablett, who had been a student at Ruskin in 1907-08. Ablett had been a preacher during the 1904-05 South Wales religious revival. Soon after this, however, he joined the ILP. While at Ruskin, Ablett took part in the Oxford branch of the British Advocates of Industrial Unionism.

In December 1909, Ablett was back in Oxford, speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Oxford branch of the Plebs League, held in the Commercial Road Schoolroom, St Ebbe's. His response to questions was detailed in *The Plebs* issue 1 as follows: "Ruskin College was not an educational experiment in the ordinary sense of the word. It arose out of the necessities of the Labour Movement. It was a temporary and specialised institution, and therefore could not be considered as part of the national scheme of education. The present institution, Mr Ablett continued, was not owned and controlled by the Labour Movement and this was a defect that this League of the 'Plebs' was going to put right . . . If the present institution could not be secured, then other institutions must arise to fulfil this now indispensable function for the working-class".

Ablett points out the growing trend for the working class to act independently (as for example "in the political arena") and noted the desperate attempts by "the hosts of reaction, in their innumerable guises" to prevent this spreading to other areas of life. Noting also that: "Nowhere is this more evident than in the controversial sphere of education", he went on: "The number of attempts to impose education from above' are legion. Prominent among them stands the University Extension movement with its powerful ally the Workers' Educational Association".

Conceding that education in the physical sciences may be class neutral, he insisted that in fields like "social science e.g. history and economics, [e]ducation, particularly the kind needed by the workers, is not that impartial universal thing so much gushed about by educationalists". He advocated changes in Ruskin College's "curriculum and governing authority" such that it "will take its place as an integral part of the Labour Movement".

Posing the question: "What is the importance of the strategic position of Ruskin College to the Labour

Movement?", Ablett first pointed out that: "It is a rule generally recognised in the tactics of any conflict that any position which excites the envy and desire of the opposition, is worthy the effort of preservation" — in other words, we must deny the ruling class this position from which they can attack us.

But he then moved at once to a positive case for "the advantages of Ruskin College to the Labour Movement", claiming that: "The first, and greatest of these, lies in the necessary calibre of the students. Here are fifty students annually from the trade unions, from every industrial quarter of the country. They are essentially men who have already qualified themselves for active service in the Labour Movement. And, above all, they have ideals necessarily untainted by the commercialism that is such an unfortunate blot upon most educational institutions. In the present loose democracy of the trade-unions, individuals count for much. Such a body of men, scientifically trained to adapt themselves to the needs of the workers with a knowledge of the economics of Labour coupled with the ability of speech and the pen, would naturally be expected to wield a great influence in their respective localities. Gathered together in a little community for one or two years; the interchange of ideas; the various methods of improving conditions; the lessons to be gained by successes, and failures; these things constitute advantages of too great, and unique a character to be overlooked".

Ablett then spelt out the danger faced by the college: "...if the attempt now being made to attach Ruskin College to the University — and the consequent permeation of University ideas into the minds of the young bloods of Labour — should succeed, then the main source of the future strength of the Labour Movement will be drained away into channels useless from the point of view of the mission of the workers stated above". He added that: "There are people who oppose this view, who think Ruskin College, if attached to the University, would permeate instead of being permeated", a standpoint he dismissed as "ridiculously disproportioned".

Here again, then, we see the idea that the college must become fully part of the working-class movement, that it should produce thinkers and organisers, and that the WEA/extension project would make this impossible. As Ablett put it: "If [Ruskin] is absorbed by the University, its interest to the working class will be nil. They will have to look in other directions. If on the other hand, the workers take control of it, a new era will have dawned in the annals of the Labour Movement. The education of the workers will assume a new and fuller meaning."

We can also see the students' and ex-students' analysis in the post-strike reprint of their pamphlet, *The Burning Question of Education*. This was now subtitled "Being an account of Ruskin College dispute, its cause and consequences". Here the writer argued that: "Every class that has obtained power in our history has been able to maintain it only by controlling the educational machinery... There is as much conflict in the educational world as in the industrial and political world".

Later the writer explains that, as a result of the extensionist take-over of Ruskin, "the whole idea of the 'Plebs' was widened so as to assume the form not merely of an institution, but of an educational structure similar in magnitude to the Trade Unions and political parties". Against this background, it was then argued that under the new circumstances: "To be loyal to Ruskin College is to conceal the disloyalty of Ruskin College to the Labour Movement". This was explained in the following terms: "Class interests and class education are inseparable. An educational institution which either consciously, or unconsciously, neglects to recognize this incontrovertible fact, stands in the way of progress and deceives those who believe in it".

Finally, the writer said: "The theories contained in the 'Social Contract' [were] the means of rallying and marshalling the forces that, set into operation, accomplished the French Revolution. But the educational structure of the working class, training the best young brains of organised labour, may have to turn out many Rousseaus, who will have to direct a movement many times larger and more important to the future of humanity than the movement which came into power with the French Revolution. How important then becomes the control of Ruskin College!" (The last sentence indicates that at this stage the League still hoped to win control of Ruskin, and in fact merger talks between the Central Labour College and Ruskin did take place — unsuccessfully — after the CLC moved to London in 1911.)

Analyses like those quoted here arose from and fed back into the practical struggle over the control of Ruskin and adult education.

IDIOT TEST

From the current issue of the Scottish Socialist Party's *Scottish Socialist Voice*.

"Scotland would need its own currency independent of either the pound or the Euro.

"The former is controlled by an unelected Bank of England committee made up of people who represent the interests of the City of London.

"The latter is controlled by the German and French governments who focus on controlling inflation with high interest rates and limit public spending through deficit targets — breaking these targets would mean severe austerity measures being imposed as is currently happening in Greece.

"We could back our currency with the revenues from North Sea Oil and align ourselves with other small countries' currencies such as Sweden and create a defence fund to ward off international speculators."

Please give generously to the Defence Fund. All donations welcome. (Apart from pounds.)

BRITISH COMMUNIST PARTY

The life and politics of Jimmy Reid

BY DALE STREET

Jimmy Reid (who died in August this year) was born in Govan in Glasgow in 1932. After a brief spell in the youth section of the Labour Party (the Labour League of Youth, LLY) he joined the Young Communist League (YCL) at the age of 16.

In his autobiography Reid attributed his switch from Labour to the YCL to his revulsion at the careerist aspirations of local LLY members, his disillusionment with the record of the then Labour government, and the positive impression which Communist Party (CP) trade union activists in his workplace had made on him.

With a quarter of the party's entire membership living in and around Glasgow in the last 1940s, the CP was a natural and powerful pole of attraction for local young trade union militants.

Unlike thousands of his CP contemporaries, Reid's membership of the party was a long-term commitment. He remained a member for 28 years, working full-time for the party for eleven of them.

By 1952 Reid was already national chair of the YCL. In 1958 he moved to London to work full-time for the YCL. Within a few months he had taken up the position of YCL National Secretary. The following year he was elected to the CP's National Executive Committee.

Reid was rising through the ranks of the CP at a time when thousands of its members were exiting those ranks in protest at the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 — an event that did not even merit a mention in Reid's autobiography.

Reid's undoubted talents — he was a gifted speaker and writer, and had always been a voracious reader — assisted his rise through the CP's ranks. More importantly, Reid displayed the necessary commitment to the party's politics.

In his autobiography Reid boasted of the political education he had given himself in Govan Library. He omitted to mention the later political training which, as a CP functionary, he received in Moscow and the uses to which he put that training.

Whenever any speaker at a YCL national congress mentioned the Soviet Union or one of its satellite states, for example, Reid would take to his feet and lead the entire congress in applause. Reid also had no qualms about arguing in defence of the USSR's possession of the atomic bomb: it was, he claimed, the "workers' bomb".

While doing his national service Reid had attended a current affairs lecture on communism. Reid describes how he rubbished the officer who provided the lecture: he quoted "chapter and verse" in order to show "where Lenin differed from Trotsky on the question of building socialism and his ultimate rejection of the possibility of exporting revolution."

In an interview conducted just a year before he quit the party, Reid excused what he called the "deficiencies of the socialist countries as we see them here from Britain" as an unfortunate historical leftover from an earlier epoch:

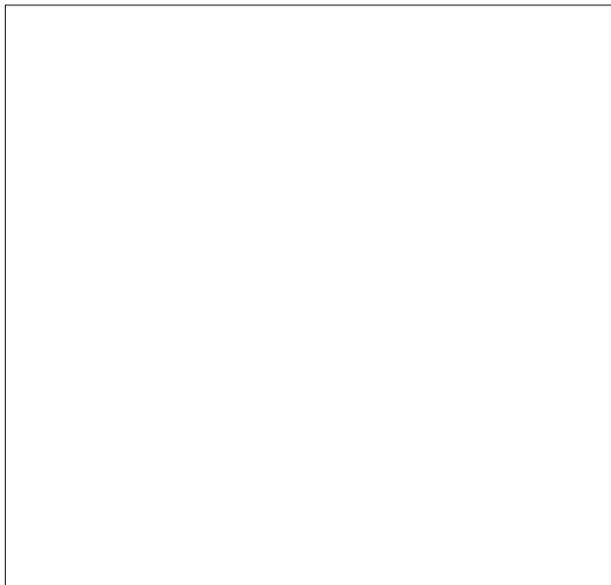
"I think that socialism inevitably develops in each country in accordance with the history and the traditions, and many other factors which apply to that country at the given moment of time when they carry through their socialist transition. ... That will leave its imprint on the form of socialism as applied in every country. We have to watch we don't get arrogant.

"If you are talking about bureaucracy and pockets of elitist groupings appearing, it's my contention that in the socialist countries they have tackled the fundamental question of economic power, all the wealth-producing resources are socially owned. If in such a society you have got bureaucracy, if that exists, it is a distortion of socialism."

Even after Reid had left in CP he remained, at least at first, an apologist for its cover-up of Stalin's crimes. Thus, only a few months after his resignation from the CP Reid wrote: "I am convinced that he (Pollitt, a one-time CP leader) and the other old British Communists did not know (about Stalin's crimes)."

On the contrary, Pollitt, Palme Dutt, Willie Gallacher and other CP leaders who had slandered Trotsky and his supporters as agents of Nazi Germany and the Japanese Mikado merited the utmost respect, according to Reid, given their status as "mass leaders in their own right."

In 1964 Reid returned to Scotland, taking over as



Jimmy Reid at the time of the UCS work-in

Secretary of the CP's Scottish Committee. He was also elected as a CP local authority councillor in Clydebank.

UPPER CLYDE SHIPBUILDERS

Reid now found work as a fitter in Upper Clyde Shipbuilders (UCS), at first in its Govan yard, and then in its Clydebank yard. In 1971 Reid was elected shop stewards convenor for the Clydebank yard.

Despite having a full order book, UCS (which consisted of three shipyards in Glasgow plus the one in Clydebank) went into receivership in June 1971. Along with Jimmy Airlie and Sammy Barr (two other CP trade union leaders in the shipyards) Reid led the struggle to save the yards from closure.

The strategy adopted to save the jobs was based on a "work-in". This would demonstrate that the workers were not work-shy, and that the yards were financially viable.

But the tactic of the work-in brought with it a whole series of problems of its own.

Those who "worked-in" were employees who had been declared redundant by the receiver. To take part in the work-in meant foregoing a redundancy payment, and many were not prepared to do so.

In August 1971, when the first wave of redundancies had taken place, 69% of those declared redundant took part in the work-in. By December of the same year, after further waves of redundancies, 27% of redundant workers were involved in the work-in. By June of the following year only 14% of redundant workers were "working-in", just 2.6% of the retained (i.e. non-redundant) workforce.

Anyone taking part in the work-in would not be liable for compensation in the event of injury. In order to minimize the risk of injury, they were therefore barred from working aboard the vessels under construction. But the vast majority of the workforce had always worked on the vessels.

In any case, if those declared redundant actually had worked on the vessels being constructed in the yards, then this would merely have speeded up completion of the orders — leading to even more men being declared redundant. Not the objective at all!

The solution adopted by the shop stewards was to implement a system of "work-sharing" in which redundant workers involved in the work-in shared the workload of employees who had not been dismissed, but maintaining normal levels of output.

As more and more workers were made redundant, this became increasingly difficult to sustain.

The "wages" of the redundant workers had to be paid for from a levy of the non-redundant workers and the fund-raising efforts of the work-in's supporters. By October of 1971 the then vast amount of £6,000 needed to be raised each week for the payment of "wages".

Despite these limitations the earliest days of the work-in were inspirational. It sent out the message that job losses and redundancies were not inevitable. It demonstrated that the Tories' policies of withdrawing support from what they termed "lame ducks" could be defied. It showed that working-class solidarity was not just a slogan but a real social and political force.

For hundreds of thousands of trade unionists the work-in was proof that job cuts and the Tories could, and should, be resisted. And they mobilised in support of the UCS work-in.

Over 150,000 workers had staged a protest strike in June 1971 against the Tories' plans and 50,000 had demonstrated in the streets of Glasgow.

In August a mass meeting of 1,200 shop stewards from the West of Scotland called a one-day strike and demonstration in support of the work-in. Around 200,000 workers backed the strike, with 80,000 marching on the demonstration. It was the biggest demonstration in Glasgow since the days of Red Clydeside.

Given his proven oratorical skills Reid inevitably, and justifiably, became the "public face" of this internationally renowned fight to save jobs.

ANTI-MONOPOLY ALLIANCE

For Reid and other CPers the work-in was also was an opportunity to put into practice the CP concept of an "anti-monopoly alliance".

In the 1950s the supposed rationale for such an anti-monopoly alliance was summed up by a CP training course "Our Aim is Socialism" in the following terms:

"Monopoly capital ... has tied Britain to the United States, with the resulting loss of independence. The continuation of this policy threatens the British people with economic, political, military and national destruction.

"The way to prevent this is to build a broad popular alliance of workers and their allies — the small shopkeepers, farmers, professional people, who between them constitute the overwhelming majority of the nation."

This was a latter-day version of the "popular front" politics initiated by Communist Parties throughout the west in the 1930s. "Popular frontism" involved the dissolution of specifically working-class demands and politics into a broader and vaguer alliance with non-working class, or even anti-working-class, forces.

It was above all in Scotland, according to the CP, that the establishment of such an anti-monopoly alliance was crucial. As Wolfson and Foster (two CP academics) wrote in *The Politics of the UCS Work-in*:

"Scotland was seen to have a pivotal role. As an area particularly exposed to the contradictions of monopoly, it had the potential to act as a fulcrum for the development of a new dimension of anti-monopoly policies in Britain as a whole. By summer 1971 these perspectives were, by and large, the common property of most leading stewards in UCS."

In March 1971 Reid had submitted a report from the CP's Scottish Committee to the party's Executive Committee in which he had argued that the time was ripe for the launch of such an anti-monopoly alliance.

His report had attacked Tory policies as "a preparation for entry into the Common Market" (forerunner of the European Union) and proposed, in response, an alliance of "the vast majority of British people — industrial workers, farmers, professional people, small businessmen and traders alike."

The logic of the CP's politics was that an "excess" of militancy would scare away potential allies and "isolate" the working class. Staging a sit-in — a "responsible" and "respectable" way to oppose job losses, in which there would be no vandalism, no hooliganism and no drinking — fitted in perfectly with such politics.

"Popular frontism" was reflected in the very first leaflet produced by the campaign in defence of the shipyards:

"We ask for, and confidently expect, the support of ALL Scots, men and women. We appeal to all our brothers and sisters in the trade union movement for HELP. We appeal to all business people and shopkeepers for HELP. We appeal to the clergy of all denominations for HELP. Let the voice of the Scottish people be heard."

The UCS work-in also provided an opportunity for Reid and the CP to push the Scottish TUC into applying the idea of an anti-monopoly alliance to a much broader range of economic and social issues.

Shortly after the start of the work-in, the STUC General Council agreed to convene what it called a "Scottish Assembly" to discuss unemployment and its impact on the Scottish economy.

The 1,500 people who attended the "Scottish

Continued on page 18

Assembly" held in Edinburgh in February of the following year "represented as broad a spectrum of Scottish civic life as had ever been assembled" (STUC history).

Representatives of all political parties attended, along with representatives from the Scottish Council for Development and Industry, the churches, the universities, the local authorities, the CBI (Scotland) and Chambers of Commerce and trade unions

Those in attendance included Sir William McEwan Younger, the Tory party chair in Scotland, and Teddy Taylor, right-wing Tory MP for Glasgow Cathcart. In their speeches the two Tory speakers blamed the rise in Scottish unemployment on the fact that responsibility for Scottish economic policies and regional development lay in faraway Westminster.

This was a lasting legacy of the UCS work-in: the start of a tradition of the Scottish TUC convening "all-embracing" gatherings to oppose job losses and plant closures on the basis that they were "bad for the Scottish economy", in lieu of pursuing an industrial and political strategy based on working-class mobilisation and self-activity.

After fifteen months the initial aim of keeping the four yards intact had been abandoned. The Clydebank yard was taken over by the US company Marathon, and the three Glasgow yards were re-organised as Govan Shipbuilders. The total workforce in the yards fell from 8,500 at the start of the work-in to just over 6,000.

The Govan Shipbuilders deal involved a commitment by the unions to increase productivity by 120%. The Marathon deal involved what amounted to a ban on unofficial strikes. Should any strikes nonetheless occur, then workers could be penalized by the loss of their bonus payments.

However, the Tory government had been forced into making concessions, especially under the impact of other disputes which occurred in early 1972. It was the Tories' refusal to provide further subsidies which had triggered the yards going into receivership. But in February of 1972 the government promised £35 million for the three Glasgow yards.

In the course of the work-in Reid was elected Rector of Glasgow University. Some of his left critics denounced him for this, contrasting it with Trotsky's refusal to accept nomination for the position of Edinburgh University Rector in 1935:

"The elections to the rectorate are conducted on a non-political basis... But I myself occupy too definite a political position... (I could not) appear on any public tribune not under the Bolshevik banner.")

Reid's acceptance speech, which focused on the theme of alienation, was hailed as a bold and passionate statement of the case for socialism.

In fact, it was a mixture of veiled calls for an anti-monopoly alliance ("... giant monopoly companies and consortia dominate almost every branch of our economy") and Scottish devolution ("... de-centralise as much power as possible back to the local communities), coupled with references to a "humanism" of CP "socialist humanism" provenance, and discourses on alienation and empowerment which owed more to Saul Alinsky than to Marx and Lenin.

In the February 1974 general election Reid stood as a CP candidate in Central Dunbartonshire, picking up a respectable 15% of the vote and coming third. Reid blamed his defeat on the "red scare" campaign which the local Catholic church had run against him, backed by certain local Labour Party members who, he said, would be Franco-supporting Falangists if they were in Spain.

In the October 1974 general election Reid did less well, picking up just under 9% of the vote. Ironically, given the soft Scottish nationalism espoused by Reid, he was beaten into fourth place by the SNP candidate.

(In fact the SNP enjoyed the main political benefits of the work-in and the accompanying Scottish-populist rhetoric. Wolfson and Foster concede:

"The powerful combination of forces that had been brought together in 1971 disintegrated in the face of petty bourgeois rhetoric... The SNP left with the immediate electoral advantage (and) in 1973 won the parliamentary by-election in Govan, which contained two of the UCS yards.")

In 1975 Reid stood for the Scottish seat on the National Executive (engineering union) AEUW, but was easily beaten by right-winger Gavin Laird. Then he narrowly lost the election for the position of the union's Scottish Regional Officer.

RESIGNATION

The following year Reid resigned from the CP. In his "autobiography" — which was also published in 1976 — Reid gave four reasons for his resignation.

Astonishingly, the first reason he gave was the CP's failure to support the British war effort in 1939. (The CP opposed the war as an inter-imperialist war. It changed line after Hitler's invasion of Russia in 1941.) Pollitt had been right, Reid wrote, to have called in 1939 for a government of national unity.

Secondly, while the CP had been correct to call for a "No" vote in the 1975 referendum on British membership of the Common Market, it had been wrong to subsequently call for a boycott of Common Market institutions. In the name of democracy, he wrote, the party should accept the logic of the referendum result.

Thirdly, the CP had neglected the politics and strategy contained in its programme, "The British Road to Socialism", first adopted in the 1950s.

Fourthly, Reid criticised the CP's concept of democratic centralism as too much centralism and not enough democracy. Why it had taken him 28 years membership to reach this conclusion?

The immediate "trigger" for his resignation, Reid vaguely wrote while leaving the details unsaid, had been an "industrial matter" in which some CP members had taken a decision as a result of which "workers were betrayed and some suffered."

Reid also wrote (rather unconvincingly) that his relationship with the CP had become an increasingly distant one over the preceding five years.

A review of Reid's autobiography published in *International Socialism* (theoretical journal of what is now the SWP) commented on his resignation:

"Reid has found through bitter experience that despite his elevation to the position of mass leader, of folk-hero, when it came down to it, his high opinion of himself and desire for personal recognition (advancement would be too strong a description) ran up against the brick wall of his membership of the CP."

LABOUR PARTY

In 1978 Reid joined the Labour Party. Later the same year he was selected to stand as a candidate for Dundee East.

In the following year's general election Reid made inroads into the SNP majority, but not enough to win the seat.

After the Tory victory in the general election Reid initially allied himself with the Bennite Left in the Labour Party. At the time of Benn's unsuccessful attempt to win the position of deputy leader in 1981 he co-wrote — or at least signed up to — the so-called "Radical Manifesto", together with long-standing Bennites such as Francis Cripps and Frances Morrell

The nationalism of the "Radical Manifesto" was in tune with the kind of economic policies long espoused by the CP and by Reid himself. The manifesto claimed that "Britain has become a subject nation, unaware of its own subjection."

It advocated withdrawal from the EEC (another forerunner of the EU), a tax on imports and various other controls on multi-national capitalism, along with government regulation of working hours and minimum and maximum rates of pay.

Benn's defeat in 1981 initiated a gradual resurgence of the right within the Labour Party, resulting in Kinnock's election as party leader in 1983. Reid backed Kinnock's "modernisation" of the Labour Party, which launched the party on a trajectory that eventually culminated in 'New Labour' (although Reid was to split from Labour before the process reached its logical conclusion).

Outside of the Labour Party the "Eurocommunist" wing of the CP, grouped around Martin Jacques and the grossly mistitled *Marxism Today* magazine, provided high-sounding theoretical justifications for the Kinnockite "reforms".

Inside the Labour Party the ex-CPer Reid provided them with the stamp of approval of a seasoned trade union militant.

Reid had left the shipyards and begun a career in journalism which was to see him writing for the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Scotsman*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Sun*, *Tribune* and the short-lived *Seven Days* newspaper.

He was regular fixture on television and radio chat shows.

In the early 1980s the then Labour MP Tam Dalyell tried to persuade Reid to stand again as a Labour candidate. But Reid was not interested partly because he did not want to give up what had become a financially lucrative and personally satisfying career in the media.

DENOUNCING SCARGILL

In 1984 Reid used his television appearances and newspaper columns, plus other articles to launch a furious denunciation of the miners' strike, led by Arthur Scargill (a one-time comrade in the YCL). (See

<http://www.workersliberty.org/node/14902>.)

Scargill's leadership of the strike had been "a disgrace" and the price to be paid for his "folly" would be "immense". If kamikaze pilots had their own union, then "Arthur would be an ideal choice for leader."

Reid spoke as if his concerns and criteria were those of the labour movement left: the "main casualty of the strike" would be the democratic left; the strike would "mean a further decline in the Party's mass base among the working class"; the strike had created a climate among British workers favourable to the Tories' anti-union laws; the NUM itself would be "finished as an effective fighting force for the rest of the century."

A few weeks before the end of the strike he wrote:

"I reject the notion that Scargill is leading some crusade against Thatcherite Toryism. Beneath the rhetoric Scargillism and Thatcherism are political allies. I would put it this way: the political spectrum is not linear but circular. In my experience the extreme left always ends up rubbing shoulders with the extreme right. They are philosophically blood brothers."

As an alternative to Scargill, Reid harked back to the days of the old CP:

"If only the manipulative Joe Gormley, President of the NUM, had allowed himself to be succeeded by Mick McGahey and not the hot-headed Arthur Scargill, the miners would have had more success and the British coal industry would have been saved.

"Whatever you think of the old communists, they understood discipline, and what was possible and what would end in failure."

Reid's backstabbing attack on not just Scargill but one of the biggest post-war industrial disputes was a disgrace, made all the worse by Reid's exploitation of the status which he still enjoyed as a result of his role in the UCS work-in.

Despite his support for Kinnock's opposition to the miners' strike, Reid became increasingly critical of the "modernisation" of the Labour Party. After the 1992 general election, for example, he complained: "During the recent election it was easier to spot the ball than spot a trade union boss on a Labour Party platform."

SCOTTISH NATIONALISM

Reid resigned in 1998, announcing his intention of voting for the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) in the following year's Holyrood elections.

Despite his public statements of support for the SSP, Reid never joined it. Instead, he took the initiative to launch *Scottish Left Review*. This would provide a "focal point of thought and discussion for the Scottish Left, it will be non-party but aim to provide a forum for those on the left of all parties and none."

A participant in the planning meeting for the launch issue (2000) described it as attended by "a disparate group of 'lefties': one Labour and one SNP MSP, two former Labour MEPs, members of the Communist, Labour, Liberal and Scottish Socialist parties, Democratic Left Scotland and others of no party."

"Disparate" is also the most charitable word to use to describe the magazine's wading-through-treacle and vaguely left-nationalist contents.

In April 2005 Reid joined the SNP at the STUC congress in Dundee. He was elected president-for-life of the SNP Trade Union Group the following year. But if Reid supported full-blown independence, he was certainly never vocal in espousing it.

He joined the SNP, he said, because it "adhered to the values that the labour movement was based on", and also because he had given up on the Labour Party.

After a serious illness in 2003 Reid was interviewed by the *Scottish Review* magazine (not to be confused with *Scottish Left Review*). It was conducted as a "looking back on my life" interview.

In answer to the final question ("Do you still believe in that ideal?"), Reid replied:

"I believe in socialism. I believe it will become abundantly clear that globalisation driven by multi-national corporations will be a disaster. I think there will be a resurrection of the idea of socialism, but the Soviet model was a distortion of socialism. It ruled half the world's population — absolute rule — and no excuses can be made for it. The whole thing stank. Do I regret it? I don't regret anything."

In the days following Reid's death cyberspace was scarcely big enough to contain all the anecdotes about Jimmy the bon viveur, the witty raconteur, the spell-binding speaker, the man of passion, the larger-than-life son of the Clyde.

Such anecdotes, and many more besides, were undoubtedly true. Reid did not regard it as a crime to enjoy life. Hugh Kerr recalled after Reid's death: "At a good lunch afterwards, with his customary brandy and cigar, Jimmy said: 'Hugh, you know, there is nothing too good for the working class.'"

to Home Rule and in its submission to the Kilbrandon Commission in the early 1970s (co-authored by Reid) the CP argued for a devolved Scottish parliament and Scotland's right to independence if its people so desired.

At the CP's 1969 Congress it Reid moved the resolution advocating the establishment of Scottish and Welsh parliaments in order to overcome the "distortion of the economy and the undermining of social and cultural life by monopoly capitalism."

During the October 1974 general election campaign Reid delivered a speech entitled "The Case for (Scottish) Nationalism", subsequently reprinted in his autobiography of 1976.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is true, Reid was profoundly hostile to the SNP. But his argument, on joining the SNP, was that it was the SNP which had changed, not him. As he claimed in his 2007 article: "They (the SNP) now govern Scotland with policies that objectively can only be described as Social Democratic."

And did Reid perhaps find in the all-things-to-all-people and all-good-Scots-together SNP that missing "popular front" for which he had been searching for over half a century?

There was also a consistency to the kind of economic policies advocated by Reid during his political life. Despite the sometimes radical language in which they were expressed, coupled with references to the need for democracy in the economic as well as the political sphere, the bedrock of those policies was nationalism.

This was already a hallmark of the economic policies of the CP which Reid joined in 1948. At the previous year's CP congress General Secretary Harry Pollitt had asked the rhetorical question: "Why do we need to increase production?" His answer was: "To pay for what we are compelled to import. To retain our independence as a nation."

The economic nationalism of the "British Road to Socialism" was even cruder:

"In the economic sphere, Britain has been turned into a satellite of America, and an American monopolist placed in supreme command of Britain's industry, and American economic controllers and supervisors established in London and reporting to Washington. American big business controls our financial policy, imposes trade restrictions and bans, and openly dictates policy."

Reid effortlessly took such nationalistic policies with him when he joined the Labour Party. The 1981 "Radical Manifesto" for example, expressed the same belief in the loss of British sovereignty: "Britain has become a subject nation, unaware of its own subjection."

For the authors of the "Radical Manifesto", however, economic sovereignty had been lost to Brussels rather than to Washington. Hence its call for withdrawal from the EEC.

Even where it seemed that there had been a real shift in Reid's politics — between Reid the leader of the UCS work-in and Reid the denouncer of the miners' strike — there is an element of continuity.

The emphasis of Reid's much publicised speech at the launch of the work-in was on discipline. There would be no vandalism, no hooliganism, no drinking. The shipyard workers were not strikers, they were not wild cats. They would conduct themselves with dignity, maturity, responsibility and discipline.

In attacking the miners' strike of 1984/85 Reid employed the same criteria. The miners, and particularly their leader, lacked discipline. Scargill was too "hot-headed".

The "old Communists" whom Reid had met in his youth nearly four decades earlier remained the model for him: "Whatever you think of the old communists, they understood discipline, and what was possible and what would end in failure."

Even Reid's accusation that "the extreme left always ends up rubbing shoulders with the extreme right" had a well-established historical pedigree. It had been used by Stalinists against Trotskyists in the 1930s and 1940s ("A Vote for Haston is a Vote for Hitler") and by Reid himself during the UCS work-in — he attacked his critics on the left of being "so far to the left that by Einstein's theory of relativity they must be going over to the right."

(Where the Reid of the UCS sit-in did differ from Reid of the miners' strike is in the fact that the former would have not gone public with his criticisms. He would have displayed that "discipline" which he accused Scargill of lacking.)

Hassan acknowledged all this in his obituary of Reid: "We have certainly lost something but also gained something by the passing of the men of Reid's generation.... It would be good if we could acknowledge this complexity, rather than eulogise Reid, as even right-

wing commentators such as John McTernan and Alex Massie have done."

(McTernan was Blair's Political Secretary. Massie is a right-wing journalist. Hassan could also have mentioned Alan Cochrane, Scottish editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, and Martin Kettle, formerly a *Marxism Today* journalist and now assistant editor of the *Guardian*.)

Writing in the *Daily Telegraph* McTernan lamented the death of Reid as "like the launch of the last great Clyde-built liner — the end of a great industrial heritage, a moment in British history."

And in the same paper Cochrane wrote: "It is one of the tragedies of public life in this country that Jimmy Reid never represented Scotland in the House of Commons."

But such paeans of praise for Reid from right-wing journalists were nothing new. Even at the time of the UCS work-in the *Scottish Daily Express* hailed him as a "big, swarthy communist who exudes the warmth of a teddy bear, a formidable leader of men" and as "a compelling orator ... a man of great intelligence and drive and massive ability and determination."

The *Financial Times* wrote of him as "a tough customer with an extreme left-wing vocabulary" but, at the same time, someone "it is evidently possibly to deal with, as it has been in the past with other British trade union leaders of a more or less 'Red' variety."

Why were right-wing commentators were so effusive in their posthumous praise for Reid?

Because there was never anything radical about Reid's politics. As McTernan wrote: "Not for Jimmy Reid the revolutionary impossibility of the hard left ... Reid stood for an austere working-class morality." McTernan was right. In an interview conducted in 1975, for example, Reid described "any other road" to socialism apart from "the democratic and electoral road" as "lunacy".

Asked in the same interview for his opinion of the International Marxist Group (today: "Socialist Resistance"), the Workers Revolutionary Party (today defunct) and the International Socialists (today: the SWP), Reid bluntly replied: "I reject them. My main criticism is that they are really elitist in a sense."

The UCS work-in attracted praise from right-wing commentators for the same reason.

For Massie the UCS sit-in was not part of the upsurge of industrial militancy which eventually brought down the Tory government of 1970-74 but an exercise in Presbyterian identity politics: "There was something noble about the UCS work-in back in 1971. ... In some respects the UCS dispute was the zenith of this Scotland's image of itself: hard-working, dignified and proud."

Boosting Reid as The Great Trade Union Leader also provided right-wing commentators with a platform from which to attack more recent leaders of trade union militancy. According to Massie:

"The contrast between Reid and a charlatan like Arthur Scargill or a pygmy like Bob Crow is total and entirely in Reid's favour. One wonders how the NUM might have fared had they been led by men such as Reid and Airlie rather than a demagogue like Scargill."

Boosting Reid also allowed his admirers to moralise about the working class of today...

"A world swept away, and in its place, what? Council estates that are ghettos of worklessness. Feral youths. Gun crime. Parents unable to bring up their own children, and helpless when those very kids have their own babies," wrote McTernan.

For some the death of Reid became an opportunity to declare, yet again, the death of class struggle.

According to McTernan, with Reid there also passed away the days when "a union could organise marches, occupy a plant, meet with ministers, and get a bail-out from a Tory government."

In the *Guardian* Kettle wrote that "the shop stewards' movement and the trade union movement itself are, except in the public services, shadows of their past. ... Socialism and even social democracy are minority political movements with, at best, uncertain futures." The way forward, claimed Kettle, lies in "industrial partnership".

Reid was certainly emblematic of a cluster of overlapping political traditions: old-style Stalinism; "Red Clydeside" (part fact, part fiction); a Scottish left which owed not a little to Presbyterianism; and what Hassan calls "a certain kind of granite masculinity" (epitomized in the words of one of his UCS speeches: "We don't only build ships, we build men.").

Those overlapping political traditions had largely passed away well before Reid's own demise. They were not our political traditions, and, some elements of "Red Clydeside" excepted, we have no reason to mourn their passing. But whatever the most appropriate epitaph for Reid might be, it certainly cannot be: "With This Man There Died the Class Struggle."

Reid attacked the miners, not just Arthur Scargill

The posthumous commentaries on Reid's politics are more problematic.

It is true that Reid achieved national fame because of his leading role in the UCS work-in. But uncritical adulation of his role in the work-in — which, in any case, is itself contested terrain — has nothing in common with an understanding of Reid's politics.

Reid was a political activist to one degree or another for 62 years of his life and a member of three different political parties. Inevitably, there was a degree of evolution in Reid's politics over such a length of time.

His eventual adoption of a more critical attitude towards the Stalinist states, in place of his earlier blind loyalty, was probably the most obvious example of a shift in his political outlook. But there was also a more fundamental continuity in his politics, one which should not be obscured by his changing party affiliations.

POLITICAL CONTINUITY

As the Scottish political writer Gerry Hassan put it in his obituary on Reid, albeit from his own political standpoint:

"One of my disagreements with Reid was the way he took his journey from the CP in the 1970s to the Labour Party in 1978 to his embracing of the SNP. Many Scottish left-wingers travelled the same way. How can I put it? As the world changed in front of them the only avenue they had to continue their impossible dream ... was by changing the vehicle."

The CP which Reid joined in 1948 had ceased to be a revolutionary party some two decades earlier. From the mid-1930s onwards it had pursued the "popular frontist" strategy. During the World War Two it had even backed Churchill's "national unity" government (albeit only after Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union).

The CP was also viciously hostile to the revolutionary tradition represented by Trotsky. Only eight years before Reid joined the YCL Trotsky had been murdered in exile in Mexico by a Stalinist agent.

In a May 1945 by-election the CP had raised the slogan, "A Vote for Haston (the Trotskyist candidate) is a Vote for Hitler." A CP speaker explained at an election campaign meeting: "In Russia they defeated fascism because they shot all the Trotskyists and the fifth column scum, and if we had our way, these people on this platform would be shot."

The CP's 1951 reformist programme which Reid was so attached to, "The British Road to Socialism", had been personally approved by Stalin. It was formally adopted by the CP in 1952, by which time Reid had been installed as the national chair of the YCL.

When Reid left the CP to join the Labour Party he was not abandoning revolutionary politics in favour of reformism. Like the party to which he had belonged for 28 years, and for which he had worked for 11 years, Reid had never been a revolutionary. When Reid moved from the CP to the Labour Party he was changing the vehicle, but not his politics.

Reid's decision to join the SNP was also consistent with his politics. As he wrote in article published in "Scottish Left Review" in 2007:

"In 1966 or thereabouts I returned to Scotland after about ten years domiciled in England, convinced that the main task for the Scottish left was to win the Scottish labour movement for a policy of Home Rule in the form of a devolved or independent Parliament for Scotland. I simply could not understand how it was possible to be for the right of self-determination for all small countries in the world — except your own."

In the late 1960s the CP sought to win the STUC over



LONDON UNDERGROUND

Striking to save jobs and services

BY IRA BERKOVIC

London Underground workers brought the capital's underground system to a near standstill (6-7 September) as they struck against job cuts that would radically alter the way public transport is delivered in London.

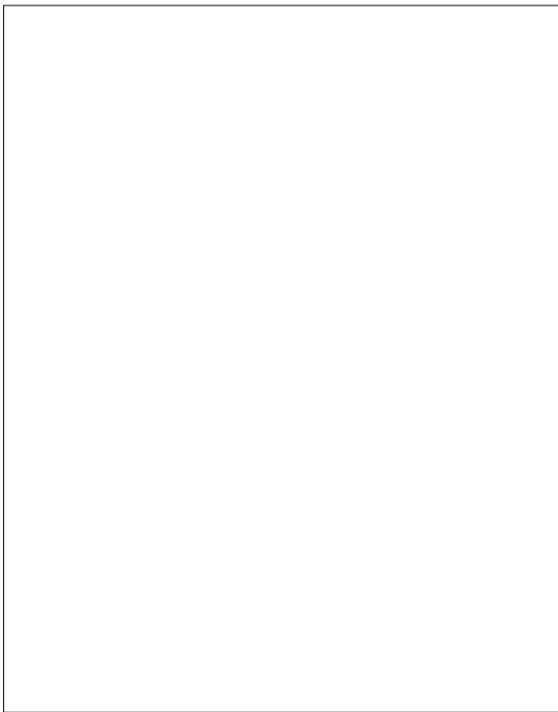
Stations across the network were forced to close with all but one tube line either entirely suspended or running a greatly reduced services.

Management were forced to staff stations themselves or train up emergency scabs picked from back-office employees. Ironically, the scab or boss-run stations provide a chilling vision of what the Underground would be like permanently if management's cuts are allowed to go through: unsafe stations run by skeleton crews of improperly-trained staff.

Despite media attempts to whip up anti-strike venom, public support for the strike was high as pickets made a special effort to take the pro-public service message of the strike to commuters.

Workers will strike again on 3 October and an indefinite overtime ban is already underway.

- More: www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk
- Interviews with strikers: see page 5



A successful strike

“At war with Londoners”?!

The London media made no attempt whatsoever at maintaining even a veneer of impartiality, and its anti-strike, pro-boss rhetoric reached staggering new lows.

The *Evening Standard's* coverage of the strike was unashamed propaganda for management, casting the dispute as one in which tube workers were “at war with Londoners”. It praised the “defiance” of commuters who “used every means of transport available to try and beat the tube strike” (translation: some people caught the bus. Hold the front page!).

Its interviewees were overwhelmingly identifiably middle-class; it was hard to feel much sympathy for “Banker George White, 28, from Kennington” who apparently found the strike “incredibly annoying”, or “Stephen Ray, 37, a company director from Cobham in Kent”, who was forced to shell out “£15-20” for a taxi and was “not hugely impressed.”

There was almost no mention whatsoever of the massive cuts against which the tube workers are striking! Flashpoints of class struggle like this make the mainstream media's role as ideological ‘tribunes’ of the boss class very clear. Workers' organisations need their own propaganda to counter that of the bosses.

SOUTH AFRICA

One million strike against austerity

BY DARREN BERESFORD

A public sector strike that mobilised over a million workers over 20 days has been suspended, with unions winning gains but many workers thinking they could win more.

The strike is the biggest in the history of South Africa, which is the largest and most significant economy in the continent. Action began in August after workers rejected bosses' pay offer of 7% and its offer to increase the housing allowance to 700 Rand per month.

The scope of the strike soon expanded to take in other issues, such as medical allowances.

Teachers' leader Thobile Ntola said “This strike is not only about the increment of salaries. It's not about housing. It's about the delivery of public services, but this can only be done by focused, committed and passionate workers.”

The impact of the strike was enormous, with countless public sector workplaces forced to close as huge sections of the economy were brought to virtual standstills. When the strike began, it was indefinite and the levels of militancy were high. Nomusa Cembu, also a teacher militant, said “the current macroeconomic policy is responsible for low wages in the public services. The strike programme will include a total shut down of institutions.”

The strike even mobilised police and prison guards, state employees not known for their class consciousness or readiness to involve themselves in working-class industrial action on a progressive basis. Other sections of the state machinery were used to undermine the strike — 2,800 military personnel being deployed as cover in hospital.

The strike began to draw in other workers from the private sector. In a statement announcing its support for the strike, the mine-workers' union said “We are angry that whilst those who are privileged have children go to school overseas; our children have turned into street kids. The NUM fully supports the public sector strike and would next week Thursday ensure that every mining operation, every construction site and every energy worker joins the public sector strike in different forms.”

Continued on page 8

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