

An injury to one is an injury to all

Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY

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Brown robs the poor, feeds the rich

ARRONGANCE. Imperviousness to, in fact contempt for, all pressures from the working class. Instinctive comradeship with the rich. How else can you explain the decision by Gordon Brown's New Labour government to rob five million low-paid workers by increasing their tax rate from 10% to 20%, at the same time as it dishes out billions in credit to banks and backs down on taxing the "non-domiciled" ultra-rich?

Even loyalist New Labour MPs have rebelled. On 23 April, they won a compromise. But a poor and partial one. The working class needs a fightback against this government — to transform the unions into fighting organisations, and to build a new political voice for the working class.

ATTACKING THE LOW PAID SEE PAGE 3

Oil refinery strike for pensions

BY DALE STREET

At the time of going to press, 1,200 members of Amicus/Unite employed at Grangemouth oil refinery are due to begin 48 hours of strike action at 6.00am on Sunday 27 April – the first strike in a British oil refinery since 1935.

The strike could result in fuel supplies in Scotland, the North of England, and Northern Ireland drying up within a matter of days, and also lead to a shutdown of production in the North Sea oilfield.

(Although the strike is only due to last 48 hours, running down, and then resuming, production at the refinery is a lengthy process. Fuel shortages could last for as long as a month.)

The 97% vote in favour of strike action has been triggered by the decision of the refinery's owners – Ineos, who bought the refinery from BP in 2005 – to decimate the pension scheme inherited from BP.

Having already stripped £40 millions worth of assets from the pension scheme, Ineos now intends to close the final salary pension scheme to new entrants, reduce its contributions to the scheme, impose financial penalties for early retirement, and introduce a money purchase pension plan for new starts.

When Ineos bought Grangemouth from BP, the pension scheme was funded to 115%. Despite Ineos's deprivations, it is now funded to 120% and is in surplus by 11%.

The scheme requires £16 million a year funding by Ineos – small beer for the fourth largest chemical business in the world, with an annual turnover of £45 billion, and profiting to the tune of between £1 million and £3 million from the Grangemouth plant every day.

An emergency motion in support of strike action by the Amicus/UNITE members was passed by the Scottish TUC on the opening day (21 April) of its annual congress: "...Congress strongly supports the 1,200 Unite members at the Ineos refinery in Grangemouth who will undertake industrial action to defend their pensions."

The same day, however, Amicus/UNITE issued a press statement stressing that "a strike is an absolute last resort. There is still time to negotiate and avert a strike and we are calling on the company to get back around the table now."

The union has also accused Ineos of "scaremongering" over the impact of a strike – although what Ineos is now saying about the likely impact of a strike scarcely differs from what Amicus/UNITE was saying when it first announced the strike late last week.

The SNP government, inevitably, is opposed to strike action. It has come up with the idea of drafting in "an expert" (the President of the Faculty of Actuaries) to investigate the proposed changes to the pension scheme.

His findings, which would be available by the end of May, would then be a matter for further consultation between the union and Ineos, in a search for "an amicable solution." In the meantime, the threat of strike action would be withdrawn.

Although Amicus/UNITE has yet to make any response to the proposed intervention of an "expert", it has agreed to meetings with ACAS – whilst simultaneously (and quite correctly) dismissing supposed concessions which Ineos has made in an attempt to head off the strike as "nothing new".

Amicus/UNITE members in Grangemouth are in a position to win a total victory over Ineos. They should use their industrial muscle to do so – and not allow themselves to be fobbed off with a few cosmetic half-concessions by Ineos.

Immigrants aren't criminals!

BY JANINE BOOTH

THIS week, a police report showed that immigrants are, in fact, not the bunch of criminals that some right-wing rags and ignorant bigots would have you believe. It seems that even in the few crimes where a disproportionate number of perpetrators are foreign, the same disproportion of victims are also foreign.

It's bad news for the BNP, but hey, the truth sometimes hurts. Bad news for the *Daily Mail* too, but here's betting it won't stop them reporting immigrant crime as though it is

some sort of rampaging foreign disease threatening to overwhelm us Brits.

I'm old enough to remember that until about the 1980s, newspapers regularly used to refer to a criminal's race, but only if they were non-white. So you would read that "a black man mugged an old lady", but if a white man mugged an old lady, he would just be "a man". But by twenty or so years ago, a steadily increasing howl of protest had put a stop to this particular brand of racist reporting.

These days, though, I regularly read in the rags that "an immigrant" or "a failed asylum seeker" has been apprehended for drink-driv-

ing, or burglary, or assault, or whatever. I never read that "a native Brit" has committed an offence. So the form of reporting that became unacceptable about race and colour in the 1980s is still acceptable about immigration status.

Not only does this fuel presumptions about an immigrant crime wave that this week's report proved to be false, it also shows that racists who can no longer parade their prejudices about blacks can still direct them against immigrants. And the fact that they prey on people's genuine fear of crime may get them an audience but is actually sickening.

Restaurant bosses and workers demonstrate

BY ED MALTBY

ON Sunday 20 Apr, the Bangladeshi Caterer's Association (BCA) mobilised thousands for a demonstration in Trafalgar Square, calling for an end to raids on restaurants by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) and the regularisation of undocumented staff. The demonstration originated with restaurant workers and owners in China Town and spread to involving bosses and workers from other restaurants.

The demonstration reflected the politics of a cartel of small bosses. There were large numbers of restaurant workers in attendance, many of them surely chivvied along by their bosses (bosses shepherded small groups of their employees around the demonstration like schoolteachers), or drawn by communitarian loyalty (the demonstration had a heavily communitarian flavour, and the official materials stressed that the demands went no further than Bangladeshi-owned businesses).

There can be no doubt of the genuine anger and concern on the part of restaurant staff that the government's racist and humiliating raids and attacks on migrant workers have aroused.

But fundamentally the demonstration was exclusively pushing a bosses' agenda. Leaflets stated "We respect the government's immigration policy, believing that it has been introduced in the national interest. But we are unable to understand why the government cannot find an initiative that will [allow us] to fill our kitchen vacancies with appropriate staff". They objected to BIA raids on the grounds of staff shortages and disruption to business!

The first conclusion to be drawn here is that we must not allow bosses to hegemonise the struggle on immigration rights. In close-knit ethnic minority communities which are hard-hit by anti-immigrant attacks, it is often possible for petty-bourgeois "community leaders" – local bosses and religious leaders – to assume leadership of the fight to resist.

Where this happens, the progressive potential of these struggles is hobbled by the reactionary economic and political agenda of small employers. Socialists must fight to build a worker-led, socialist response to border regimes and deportations, which would naturally have its base in the unions. We must fight the anti-worker, communitarian politics of the petty bourgeoisie and build a socialist alternative as a pole of attraction to restaurant workers.

But it is also important to recognise that what the Bangladeshi Caterer's Association is demanding – "Relax the immigration rules that restrict unskilled/semi-skilled workers from entering the country so that Bangladeshi chefs, cooks, kitchen porters etc. can enter the UK... Recognise knowledge of kitchen

language (i.e. Bengali/Sylheti) as an essential skill to be considered by the Migration Advisory Committee" – is part of a Europe-wide process of bosses pressing their governments to convert migration law from a populist-racist electoral gambit into a more effective, subtler tool with which bosses can hyper-exploit their workers.

In France, the process is more developed. In the context of the raids, ID checks and constant surveillance of the Sarkozy government's terroristic war on undocumented workers, bosses have won limited powers to protect and grant papers to their staff.

In this way, workers are tied closely to their bosses – each one personally anxious to win his employer's favour and get regularised. Likewise, this state of affairs gives bosses access to a pool of permanently harassed, cheap labour – without the headaches of either labour unrest or immigration police interference.

This atomised, anxious, super-precarious, super-exploited misery is what the restaurant bosses of the Bangladeshi Caterers' Association have in store for their workers. That is the vicious blow that Sunday's demonstration was calculated to prepare. Undocumented workers must break from the dirty politics of the bosses and priests, and unite with their brothers and sisters in the wider union movement to defeat employers and border guards alike.

A No Borders activist says: "Only one union banner that I could see, and that was the Restaurant Workers' Union, unknown to me. One of their reps explained to me that they were 1,500 strong and based in Brick Lane, mainly Indian restaurant workers. Formed over wage payment problems. He'd lost his job over such issues and had no contact with other unions. He now worked supplying labour to the trade."

Deportation protester banned from flying

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

ON 27 March, Augustine, a Biafran independence activist was deported to Nigeria, where his brother has been killed and his wife and children are missing. He is still laid up with the injuries he sustained by the five thugs who twisted his neck and kicked and punched him to the ground while handcuffed. Unable to afford medical care, we fear for his life.

Three anti-deportation activists leafleted and spoke to passengers to ask them to intervene should they hear Augustine struggling get off the flight. One man whose family was on the flight joined us.

On hearing his cries, people responded. And Augustine was removed. But the airport authorities returned with police and dragged one man, Ayodeji Omotade, off the plane, which provoked even more solidarity. All 136 passengers in economy class were removed from the flight, but Augustine was brought back on hours later and deported – alone with his warders and the first class passengers.

Ayodeji missed his brother's wedding, had his bags lost and money seized and was ordered to report to a magistrates court to prove this money was not the proceeds of crime! He has been banned from flying with BA.

This treatment of Ayodeji has caused uproar around the world and growing numbers of Nigerians – over a thousand already – are threatening a boycott the company should BA not back down and issue a full public apology for what is seen as overt and humiliating racism suffered by Ayodeji and the other passengers.

Ayodeji deserves our full solidarity. His actions and that of other passengers in defense of Augustine are an example to all of us – and the first steps towards defeating the grotesque system of detention and deportation of migrants.

In the growing campaign to take on the outrageous conduct of BA, which has got the attention of mainstream media across the UK and Africa, we also want to highlight Augustine's fate, and the sheer bloody-mindedness of booting off a plane load of Nigerians needing to fly in order to proceed with the rendition of a man who they know faces persecution and now the challenge of overcoming the terrible physical and mental injuries he suffered at their hands.

The Campaign Against Immigration controls will be making contact with air transport workers to build solidarity and non-compliance with forced deportations.

Squeezing the poor: the pips should start squeaking!

FOR many years now, inequality has soared, but intimidation by employers and foot-dragging by sluggish trade-union leaders have pretty much kept a lid on wage battles.

Back in the 1970s, the then Labour chancellor Dennis Healey promised (untrue) that he would "squeeze the rich until the pips squeak". New Labour has been squeezing the poor — and so far the pips haven't squeaked much. But squeak time could be coming soon.

- Food prices have gone up 15.5% over the last year. The Tory *Daily Mail* worked out the figures for its own purposes (18 April), but they're accurate.

- Other basic costs are also increasing fast.

- Mortgage repayments are up 7.4% over the past year. Buy-to-let landlords are collecting rents up 15% over the last year (according to the finance company Paragon). The Government has been forcing high council rent rises for years, with the avowed aim of pushing up council rents to "market" levels: council rents went up 6.2% in 2006-7, and the increase won't be less for 2007-8.

- Gas bills are increasing at 12.5% a year, and electricity bills at 12.9%.

- Fuel costs are up by 16.5%.

The increases in food, fuel, and energy prices are due to basic structural changes in the world economy, and are not likely to slow soon. The US Federal Reserve, and to a lesser extent of the Bank of England, are shovelling out credit to financiers as fast as they can, on the principle that higher inflation is a smaller risk for them than a worse credit crunch and a slump in production, so official policies are feeding inflation too.

House prices are likely to fall, but mortgage lenders are cutting out cheap deals in order to redress their financial position, so mortgage costs will probably continue to rise.

The Government's official price indices, the CPI and the RPI, are kept low — the CPI currently shows 2.5% inflation, and the RPI 4% — partly by

excluding some items, and partly by "weighting" the baskets of goods and prices whose prices they check.

Flat-screen TVs, for example, are becoming cheaper. For someone buying lots of expensive stuff, the CPI and RPI are probably realistic estimates.

But lower-paid workers, whose budgets are dominated by food, housing, and energy bills, are much worse off. The minimum wage is falling in value, compared to the RPI, for the first time this year; it will fall in value much more when compared to the real inflation rate for low-paid workers.

Add two other things:

- The Government has abolished the 10% income tax rate, putting five million people into the 20% bracket. Some will get some compensation from working tax credit.

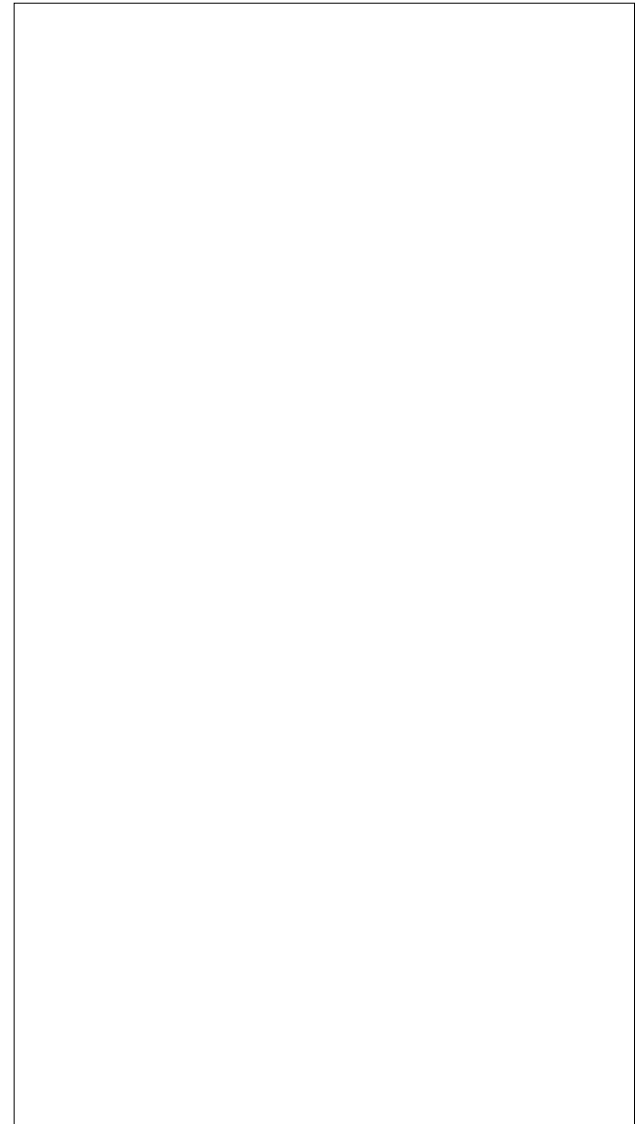
But the *Guardian* reports: "Childless, single people earning between £5,435 and £19,355 a year and ineligible for working tax credits because they are under 25" will lose out. "Part-time workers who clock up fewer than 30 hours a week are also hit by the cut because they do not qualify for working tax credits either. Then there are the early retirees, who do not receive tax credits, but who are too young to bene-

How long will low-paid workers suffer in silence? Maybe not much longer.

fit from the increase in the tax allowance for those aged 65 and over.

"Around 5.3 million households — roughly one in five — will be left worse off, mostly in the poorer half of the population... the Treasury [comes out] with a £3.7bn net gain".

- Last year, already, the Government pushed down real wages across the public sector by enforcing a pay-increase limit of two, or two-and-a-bit, per cent. This year it wants to nail down that two-and-a-bit per cent limit



Unions should mobilise low paid workers. Picture: Stefano Cagnoni/www.reportdigital.co.uk

with pay formulas lasting three years. Four or more solid years of cuts in real wages!

This is new. Grim though New Labour's policies have been, and fast though the gap between the ultra-rich and the poor has increased, since 1997 most workers have had pay rises. The poorest, or at least those of the poorest able to navigate the seas of bureaucracy to claim working tax credit and pension credit, have stayed poor, but at a slightly higher level.

Now the Government's budget deficit is bigger — so New Labour is making the poor pay.

At the same time, the Government is feeding the rich. It has dished out over £20 billion in credit to Northern Rock, and plans to dish out another £50 billion to other banks, by giving them the mortgage-based securities which no private buyer will touch. It backed down to the City outcry against its plans to make rich people who live in

Britain but claim "non-domiciled" status to pay something more like normal taxes.

Even the miserable crew of New Labour MPs is protesting about the abolition of the 10% tax rate.

How long will low-paid workers suffer in silence? Maybe not much longer. Maybe the strike on 24 April will rouse revolt by showing how it can be done.

That is what socialists and activists should work for. And we should work to get the unions to voice the revolt, rather than sitting on it; to mobilise, rather than dither.

The first step should be for the unions to use their research resources to calculate and publicise a cost-of-living index based on the reality of low-paid workers' budgets. The second step, to propose as a unifying demand, and campaign for, a "floor" in all pay settlements which guarantees a pay rise sufficient to match the real inflation rate for low-paid workers.

Feminists plan action for reproductive rights

BY LAURIE PENNY

ON 12 APRIL — a very wet Saturday morning — forty feminists from around the country gathered at the London School of Economics for a teach-in on the threats to reproductive rights in the UK and internationally. The event was organised by Feminist Fightback, with a balance of in-depth discussion and practical planning for action. Dr Anna David, who led the talks on “Motherhood and Imperialism”, said, “I’m really delighted to see this sort of initiative, linking history to modern-day activism. People say that young women just aren’t interested — it’s fantastic to see that it’s not true.”

The aim of the teach-in was to broaden the pro-choice agenda from simply thinking in terms of individual choice and instead to ask why control of women’s reproductive systems has been so crucial to regimes of power and how it relates to other struggles for social justice and women’s liberation.

Two of the workshops focused on the practical side of campaigning: the first on how to make effective pro-choice arguments, with training provided on public speaking and giving radio interviews, and the second on how to organise successful campaigns. Discussions were held on how reproductive freedoms have intersected with questions about the state, racism, empire and democratic access to health care.

Workshops were held on how to communicate effectively with the media; BBC documentary filmmaker James House showed activists how to put their points across on camera, whilst focus groups came together to draw up specific goals for campaign work. Over half of those attending came away from the event with plans for follow-up action such as speaking to trade unions — a key focus identified by the planning sessions.

In the final session people broke down into interest groups — sex education, organising in the unions, migrant workers and reproductive rights, and students on campus. In the trade union group there was a discussion about the fact that unions will vote money to campaigns, but are slower to take actual action.

The group decided to produce a leaflet about reproductive rights specifically for unions, to pull together a target list of branches in London and to organise speakers from Feminist Fightback to go to branch meetings (12 people volunteered from the teach-in to be speakers). The student group decided to run another teach-in in the North; the Sex Education group are going to take a motion to NUT about Reproductive Freedoms and Sex Education; and the Migrant Women’s group will organise leafletting for May Day and get involved with No Recourse to Public Funds campaign.

www.feministfightback.org.uk

Women tell MPs: “Don’t turn back the clock on women’s right to choose”

Saturday 26 April. Mass leafletting from 1pm: meet at Clapham Junction station. Lobby 2.15pm at Battersea Labour Party Office, 177 Lavender Hill, London, SW11 5LW

Local women and Feminist Fightback activists will gather outside the Battersea Labour Party Office on Saturday afternoon to make it clear to local MPs that turning back the clock on a woman’s right to choose is not an option in the forthcoming free vote on the Human Fertility and Embryology Bill.

Local government union proposes strike campaign

IN SHARP contrast to the health sector, members of the public sector union Unison in local government are being given a clear direction to reject their current pay offer and prepare for strike action.

The Unison local government Executive is calling for members to support “sustained and escalating strike action, starting with a two-day strike and escalating to more than two consecutive days of action, to get the employers back to the negotiating table.”

The results of the current branch based consultation will be reported back to the next executive meeting on 12 May. Branches are being encouraged to hold local ballots in the meantime and circulate information about the deal.

Health workers organise for “no” vote on pay deal

FOLLOWING THE health conference of the public services union Unison in mid April, members can be expecting to receive ballot papers early in May inviting them to accept or reject the Government’s proposed three year pay deal.

However, this is not just a rerun of last year. The conference agreed that union branches can produce their own publicity to explain the reality of the deal — pay cut after pay cut after pay cut!

Last year a campaign in the branches for a no vote had to be suspended after activists were threatened with disciplinary action. (Even then, a third of members voted to reject the deal despite the very positive spin but on it in the accompanying information).

About 100 delegates attended a hastily organised meeting at the conference to discuss organising the No campaign in their branches.

The proposed deal is well below inflation, but the union Service Group Executive (SGE) failed, on a tied vote, to make a recommendation against it. Then a motion for the conference to discuss and make a recommendation was ruled out of order.

The union leaders had to retreat last year’s position of calling for a consultative ballot.

The ballot material will tell members that this is “the best deal achievable by negotiation” and should be rejected only if they are willing to take industrial action. It is in substance an industrial action ballot — only, a majority to reject will mean not industrial action, but a further ballot on action.

Counter-motions calling for an immediate move to reject and ballot for action, and another motion from Scotland calling for a rejection of the three year deal and accepting only the PRB recommendation for this year, were both lost by a very narrow margin.

The consultation period should also be a start to the campaign for industrial action. No one expects this to be easy, but with the example of other public sector workers on strike members confidence can rise.

Industrial action can include and be started with a local work to rule, overtime bans, frustration of government target collection and other measures short of strike action, following the example of Irish nurses last year.

Pay can generate a united fightback from health workers, building on the myriad frustrations and disputes already to be found in most work places. Previously isolated groups, feeling powerless to challenge constant downgrading of posts and cuts in clinical standards, can find common ground in a campaign together on pay.

The conference also voted to turn the 60th birthday celebrations for the NHS, this summer, into a protest against privatisation. And large fringe meetings are finally becoming a part of the culture at Unison health conference.

The biggest was a meeting in support of Karen Reissmann, the Manchester nurse

sacked for her campaign to defend mental health services. There was also a meeting about the witch-hunting against the left in Unison, with both Yunus Baksh and Glenn Kelly speaking.

What next?

- Advertise any local public sector pay meetings and rallies following the 24th April (NUT, UCU and PCS strike day) send a delegation and a message of solidarity. Let your members see it’s already a big campaign we’d be joining, and not something we have to do alone.

- Join the Health Activist e-list, which is already buzzing with information and ideas about how to organise a No campaign in your branch To join the health activists e mail list, just send a blank email to: healthactivists-subscribe@unisonlists.org.uk

- Use it as an opportunity to recruit new members and identify new activists who will help take up the struggle. Map your hospital or work place, identifying key individuals in each ward or department who will take and pass on publicity and act as a link-person for the union.

Unison elections

MEMBERS OF the public service union Unison should have already received ballot papers for the Service Group Executive (SGE) elections being held now.

The activist left is standing on a platform of fighting the pay cuts now rather than at some date in the future. A vote for the left might make all the difference to how much money is in members’ pockets during the next three years!

For once, there is a decent degree of left unity in these elections. There is only one definite clash, in the London local government general seat. Glenn Kelly of the Socialist Party is standing against United Left candidate Dave Eggmore. Given the importance of maximising votes for the left on these committees, we are opposing Glenn on this occasion. (He already has a seat and a vote on the Service Group Exec, as a member of the Unison National Executive).

Where there is a choice, vote for a candidate committed to making the union fight for its members and the services they provide! Workers’ Liberty is backing the following candidates in the contested seats:

Health: East Midlands (General Seat): Nick Holden Sharon Vasselin (female seat); London: Janet Maiden and Len Hockey; North West: Caroline Bedate; Yorkshire and Humberside: Adrian O’Malley.

Higher Education: Matt Raine.

Local Government: East Midlands region: Vicky Ingram and Marc Glasscoe; London: David Eggmore and Sonia Howard; South West, Jeremy Guise and Amanda Brown; Scotland, Duncan Smith; West Midlands, Dave Hughes; Yorkshire and Humberside: John McDermott and Vicky Perrin.

Probation service

THE PROBATION Service is proposing to remove the automatic annual increments awarded to most workers. It is the first public-service sector to come out with this proposal. If it is successful, other public service bosses are bound to follow the example.

The two unions involved, NAPO (National Association of Probation Officers) and Unison (which organises most of the admin staff), have already lodged a dispute against this move and have an indicative ballot for action starting on 1 May.

Their strategy is to move toward strike action to bring the employers back to negotiations. At the same time they are pursuing legal action about possible breach of contract.

In the background is the Government’s ongoing attempt to downgrade the Probation Service and open up its core functions to private sector competition.

Public sector activists call for action after 24 April

Civil service

BY WORKERS' LIBERTY PCS MEMBERS

A NUMBER OF Groups (sectors) in PCS are striking on 24 April alongside the teachers and lecturers.

Our strike will make the news and will undoubtedly worry the powers that be; how much better if the whole of the PCS union was on strike.

Of course it does not stop there. Where are Unison, GMB, Unite etc? Gordon Brown has a united and consistent policy towards public sector pay and employment, yet the union movement does not.

At PCS national conference, which will happen shortly, AWL members have put forward motions calling on all the union to fight, not just a few Groups.

The motions also point out that one-day or indeed two-day strikes now and then are not the most effective manner of taking action. We are in favour of the maximum national action, but in addition we want selective action where key workers are taken out for short periods to hit the employer in between national actions. We should not allow them a period to recover.

Unions working together is more than general secretaries gathering in a room. Activists must come together locally. Although they are still weak in many areas, local trade councils offer a ready made vehicle for such co-operation.

Teachers

BY WORKERS' LIBERTY TEACHERS

ON 24 APRIL over 200,000 teachers will take national action to defend our pay. We will be joined by around 100,000 civil servants and 25,000 Further Education [FE] lecturers.

The government's insistence that public sector workers should pay the price for their failed economic policies and rising inflation is being rejected and resisted by the biggest day of public service workers' action in decades. At a time when billions are being set aside to guarantee failing banks and city bosses pick up £14bn in bonuses alone, this revival in trade union confidence and militancy is a tremendous and long overdue sign of hope.

But it is only a start. After today members of the NUT and the other unions have a decision to make: is this a protest action or are we serious about winning?

If we are serious, more action will be required beyond this one day, and as soon as practically possible.

When members return to work after the strike, messages should be sent to the National Executive supporting a fresh strike ballot so that further action can be called. We should also encourage members of other teacher unions, particularly the NASUWT, to put pressure on their leaders locally and nationally to join the NUT campaign.

The presence on 24 April of civil service members of PCS and FE lecturers from UCU demonstrates that opposition to a public sector pay freeze is spreading across the trade union movement. In the next few months that opposition is likely to grow.

Support staff in schools have also been offered only 2.45% and they are being consulted by Unison with a recommendation to

reject the deal and to strike.

Health workers, fire brigade staff and prison officers are among the other groups due to react to below-inflation pay awards in the coming months.

It would make no sense for teachers to enter the stage briefly for one day, only to leave it when thousands more workers join the battle against the pay freeze.

A united fight by public sector workers can defeat the pay freeze and win inflation-proof increases across the board.

The NUT should re-ballot this term — this time for discontinuous action — and immediately approach the other unions to build a co-ordinated campaign. Discontinuous action would allow us to call further days or half-days of action or to call selective action in particular areas where striking members receive strike pay.

We should start action with whomever will take it — “a coalition of the willing”. That will make it easier to bring Unison and NASUWT on board.

All of this can only happen if it is prepared on the ground. In the staffroom it means talking to members of other teacher and support staff unions and sending petitions and messages to NUT headquarters calling for action. In cities and towns, it means building united public sector pay campaigns across the different unions as has been done already in Leeds and Bristol.

Lecturers

BY WORKERS' LIBERTY UCU MEMBERS

IN FURTHER Education [FE], the long standing demand to bring main grade lecturers' pay into line with school teachers' has still to be won. Two years of increases barely above inflation pay increase have been followed by two years of below inflation pay increases. This year is due to be the third year in a row of cuts in real wages.

Worse than that is the continued casualisation of the FE teaching profession, with around 40% of teachers on a variety of short term, hourly-paid or otherwise inferior contracts. This can result in FE teachers receiving as little as £16,000 for what is effectively a full teaching year, and often without any job security.

Another problem is the increasing workload in colleges. Weekly contact hours of 25 hours are now not uncommon.

The Chinese water torture of “reform” of qualifications, funding methodology and “contestability” is remarkable for the government's inability to take a sensible decision and then pursue it, and immune both to the needs of the learner and the expertise of the teachers.

To start a sustained campaign, we must first recognise the weaknesses in the UCU's action on 24 April.

Although there was “yes” vote in the strike ballot, it was not a strong yes vote. Of those who voted, slightly more than a third voted no. Although the turnout was not bad in terms of national strike ballots (nearly 40%), weaker and less organised branches not being balloted at all.

UCU organisation on the ground remains weak. The regional structures weakened after the NATFHE-AUT merger need to be re-established and given resources and power to strengthen UCU branches in individual colleges.

We have to use today's strike action to build towards a united response across the public sector. If the NUT calls further strikes, we should join them.

And we must build links with members of other unions (particularly via Trades Councils).

Photo: Philip Wolmuth/www.reportdigital.co.uk

Shelter strikes again on 24-25 April

WORKERS in the housing charity Shelter are on strike again on 24-25 April against enforced cuts in pay and conditions. Previous strikes on 5 and 10 March forced Shelter bosses, who at first insisted that they would never negotiate, to put the cuts on hold and talk at ACAS. But their ACAS offer was only a one-off “compensation” payment.

Shelter workers rejected the deal by 64% majority, in a 56% turnout, despite pressure from TGWU-Unite full-time officials to accept. Workers have achieved a lot.

● A union has been built from a shell into a reasonably well-organised majority of Shelter staff.

● Four successive ballot results have demonstrated staff's rejection of the cuts.

● Shelter staff have taken national strike action for the first time ever, forcing management to come back to the negotiating table after they vowed they would not.

● A huge amount of support from the wider labour movement has been pouring in, and this has allowed the creation of a good-sized strike fund.

● A great deal of negative press for Shelter management.

Shelter bosses will claim that they will “never” back down. But they said that before our first strikes, and then... backed down, at least partially. They are clearly shocked and un-nerved by Shelter workers' rejection of their measly ACAS offer. More action can get them to back down properly.

For too long the voluntary sector has been a place where lack of job security, poor pay and unpaid overtime “for the service users” has been the norm.

Why socialists should oppose airport expansion

BY PAUL VERNADSKY

IF new runways at Heathrow, Stansted, Edinburgh and Birmingham airports are built, they will generate more greenhouse gas emissions, which will further contribute to global warming. We should oppose the expansion of Heathrow and other UK airports as part of our working class socialist strategy for preventing dangerous climate change.

The advantages to working-class people of airport expansion (more cheap travel, new jobs) could be much better got by expanding and cheapening rail and coach travel.

Money spent on expanding Heathrow, Stansted and other airports could be spent creating more socially useful jobs. Some of those jobs should create more ecologically friendly modes of transport. According to the HACAN Clear Skies report, *Clogging up Heathrow's Runways 2006*, almost a quarter of flights from Heathrow are to destinations less than 500km away, and already well-served by train. The government's own estimates say that rail travel per passenger brings 10% of the pollution of air travel.

The drive to expand airports rests centrally on "business" arguments of no benefit to working-class people.

THE AVIATION INDUSTRY IN THE UK

IN the 2003 White Paper, *The Future of Air Transport*, the government gave support to new runways at Heathrow, Stansted, Edinburgh and Birmingham airports, as well as for new terminals and runway extensions throughout the UK. The government estimated that overall passenger numbers would rise from 180 million (in 2002), to 500 million per year by 2030.

Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) figures record the total number of passengers and "air transport movements" (ATMs) i.e. flights. When New Labour came to power in 1997, ATMs were 1,703,000. Last year, the figure was over 2,400,000 — an increase of over 40%. Passenger numbers grew by 64% over the same period, to nearly a quarter of a billion (240,000,000) last year. (UK airport statistics 2007, Tables 1.0, 3.1)

HEATHROW

OVER a quarter of all UK flights currently go through Heathrow. However existing operations and planning restrictions limit the airport to 480,000 air transport movements (ATMs). There are also restrictions which mean aircraft land on one runway while others take off from the other runway, and then at certain times of the day they switch round — mainly to limit the noise.

Late last year the government published figures assessing the impact of a third runway at Heathrow, together with the introduction of "mixed mode" use of existing runways.

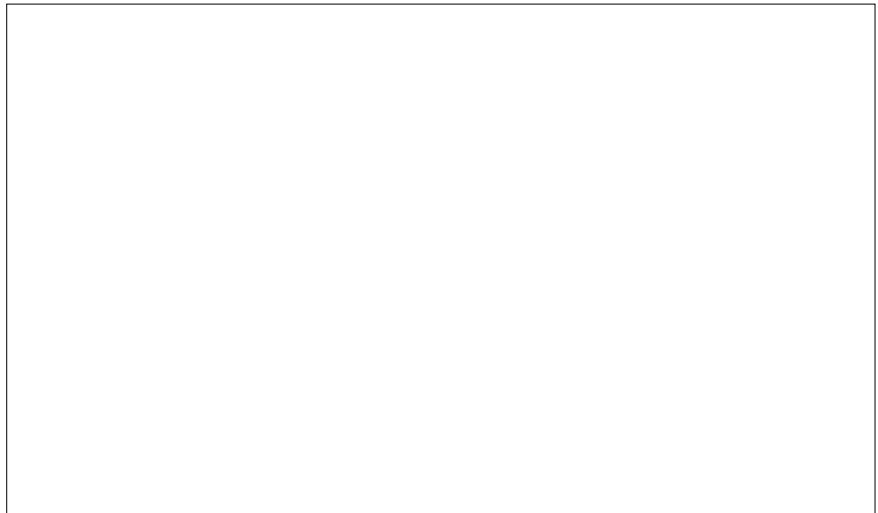
Heathrow is currently functioning very close to its ATM capacity. The opening of Terminal 5 means it can handle more passengers. The government wants to allow BAA, which owns Heathrow, to build a third "short" runway, together with another terminal building by 2020. It predicts that ATM capacity will increase to 605,000 ATMs in 2020 when the new runway and terminal would open, and to 702,000 ATMs in 2030, remaining constant after that. (DfT, *Impact Assessment for Adding Capacity at Heathrow Airport*, 2007 p.136)

In other words, according to the government's own figures, the opening of a new runway would generate an additional 222,000 ATMs every year from 2030, an increase of 46%.

The third runway would not be suitable for the largest four-engined, wide-bodied aircraft. Therefore the new runway would probably be used by smaller aircraft making shorter flights, taking some of this short haul capacity from the existing runways and freeing space for them to take more long haul flights. (DfT 2007 p.136)

The government also wants to allow BAA to introduce "mixed mode" operations on the existing runways from 2010 until the new runway opened in 2020. If capacity was allowed to rise to 540,000 ATMs and mixed mode was introduced, the government argues that this would reduce holding delays by three minutes. (DfT 2007 p.150)

The situation is similar at Stansted, where a new runway has just been approved. Last year it handled 208,462 ATMs and nearly 24 million passengers — around 96% of its present limit. This compares with just under seven million passengers in 1998. A second runway at Stansted would be able to take up to 46 million passengers — i.e. almost doubling existing capacity. (DfT 2003, §11.24, §11.27)



Hundreds of anti-expansion protestors "flash mob" Heathrow Terminal 5 on opening day

AVIATION AND UK CARBON EMISSIONS

THE main reasons for opposing airport expansion are environmental. There are longstanding concerns about noise and about air quality close to airports.

Expanding airports have an effect on both urban and rural environments — in the case of Sipson near Heathrow, it means the complete destruction of the whole community.

However the most significant factor is the impact of aviation emissions on climate change. In 2005 the UK emitted 554.2 million tonnes of CO₂ (MiCO₂) in its domestic economy, or 595.1 MiCO₂ if international aviation and shipping emissions are included. (DfT 2007 pp.177-178)

In response to a parliamentary question on 2 May 2007, aviation minister Gillian Merron said that aviation represented 6.3% of UK emissions. However she added that if the effects of "radiative forcing" i.e. burning greenhouses gases at a higher altitude, are added, the figure for flights departing the UK would be approximately 13% of total UK emissions.

The paradox in government policy is stark: it supports aviation expansion at the same time that it argues for the need to drastically reduce carbon emissions to combat global warming. The government's own Climate Change Bill accepts that 60% reductions are needed by 2050 and between 26-32% reductions by 2020. More realistically, carbon reductions of 80% are necessary to prevent dangerous climate change.

More passengers and more flights have meant that aviation emissions have been growing rapidly in recent decades.

According to the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, international emissions from aviation went up by nearly 50% between 1990 and 2000. It estimates that including the effects of radiative forcing, aviation will account for between 50% and 100% of the UK total carbon budget by 2050. (Anderson and others, *Growth scenarios for EU & UK aviation*, 2006 p.6, p.13)

THE CLIMATE IMPACT OF HEATHROW EXPANSION

THE government's own figures predict from the increase in ATMs between 2020 and 2080 that this will generate an additional 180.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide — or over 3 million tonnes of CO₂ every year. It estimates the "social cost" of these emissions is around £4.8 billion. (DfT 2007 p.138)

The calculations include assumptions about technical progress during that period.

The introduction of mixed mode would apparently slightly reduce carbon emissions, by reducing holding times, when aircraft burn fuel while waiting to land. However if ATM capacity is increased with mixed mode — as the government

favours — it will more than cancel out the emissions saved.

The government didn't publish greenhouse gas emissions estimates for Stansted in 2003. However the Stop Stansted Expansion campaign estimates that annual carbon dioxide emissions will rise from around 5 million tonnes a year at present to 7 million tonnes annually with full use of the existing runway and to 12 million tonnes a year with a second runway.

WHY WE SHOULD OPPOSE AIRPORT EXPANSION TODAY

THE arguments of those who support airport expansion are saturated in nationalism, stoking up the fear of "foreign competition" and losing out to European rivals. Future Heathrow, the lobby group backed by BA, BAA as well as Unite, GMB and Balpa unions, argues that Britain will lose its position in world aviation to foreign competitors in Frankfurt, Paris, Amsterdam and Madrid — a bit ironic given that BAA is owned by a Spanish firm.

This xenophobia provides a convenient cover for the real case — which is that airport expansion will benefit corporations in and around London. Future Heathrow says that 70% of new businesses locating in the UK do so within one hour of Heathrow. Its propaganda talks about "Heathrow's global gateway status plays a key role in attracting globally mobile and high value-added businesses". Heathrow expansion is very clearly linked to meeting the "needs" of business people to fly directly to the key business nodes across the globe or to locations within the UK.

The argument is consistent with a Marxist understanding of how capitalism works. In volume 2 of *Capital*, Marx highlighted the circulation of capital and the costs associated with it. Capitalists can drive up profits by minimising buying and selling times, cutting the time goods spend in storage and in transit before sale — and from reducing transport times for both goods and people — including high-powered executives. Although it is not stated so baldly, it is clear that airport expansion will help increase returns to capital.

If passenger numbers do double by 2030 as projected, it will not involve most working class people taking double the number of flights. The additional capacity is designed to meet the demands largely of business.

The government and just about anyone in favour of expansion frequently quote a report on the wider economic impacts of the third runway by Oxford Economic Forecasting (OEF). The report estimated that around £7 billion a year of additional GDP in today's prices could be generated by 2030. However *The economics of Heathrow expansion*, a report by Delft published in February 2008 has questioned the validity of the assumptions behind the OEF report and the reliability of its projections.

AVIATION AND EMPLOYMENT

THE fall back position for Future Heathrow is that airport expansion will create jobs, especially locally. Between 4% and 13% of workers in the five surrounding local authorities work at Heathrow.

The OEF report found that the number of employees of airlines, airline operators, ground services and air traffic control centres was 94,000 in 2004. If air cargo handlers, airport hotels and retailing are added on, this made 186,000 workers directly employed.

Another 167,000 workers are counted as "indirectly" employed, including jobs in the energy sector dependent on fuel purchases, construction jobs for facilities, jobs producing meals and in shops at airports. (Delft 2008 p.14, p.43)

The OEF report also revealed that aviation employment has been falling sharply. The number of employees of airlines, airline operators, ground services and air traffic control centres fell from 103,000 in 1998 by 9%, whilst the overall figure fell from 549,000 in 1998 to 523,000 in 2004, a decline of 5%.

The government's own figures show fewer people working at Heathrow by 2030 with a third runway than there are today, dealing with more passengers. Jobs could be saved and expanded better by cutting work hours for those employed at the airport, and by expanding alternative modes of travel.

Of course halting airport expansion probably will dislocate some jobs directly and indirectly around airports. Capitalism does that all the time – look at the fall in manufacturing jobs in the UK over the past thirty years. Socialists want employers and the government to cover the cost of these changes, in other words to ensure a "just transition" for workers. This means the bosses pay for alternative jobs, compensation and genuine training to give those displaced workers alternatives at least as good as they have at present.

The argument on jobs comes down to this: support the immediate, narrow, sectional interests of workers in particular jobs, especially in the south-east of England now; but ignore the long term, general interests of the global working class, which is already the biggest victim of climate change, not only now but for the foreseeable future.

It seems to me that as a matter of defending the long-term social interests of the global working class, as a matter of basic international solidarity and as the "representatives of the future in the present", Marxists should oppose airport expansion. Opposing airport expansion means defending workers' real class interests, rather than fetishising workers' current particular occupations.

We should join campaigns to oppose expansion, and argue for a working class based approach orientated on the labour movement and local people – and which tries to relate to those who work in the industry. Winning the wider labour movement to opposing airport expansion will pull away the veil from expansion advocates who are basically only interested in the benefits British capital. A successful campaign will help to transform the unions and attract new young activists to the movement. Oppose airport expansion!

Ideas For Freedom 2008

Ideas For Freedom is a weekend of open socialist debate hosted by the Alliance for Workers' Liberty, taking place in London on 11-13 July.

Our major theme this year will be 'Revolutionary Traditions', forty years on from the world-wide upsurge of class struggle which began in 1968.

Topics of discussion will include the Vietnam War; Ireland 1968-1969; May '68 in France; the Russian Revolution; socialist feminism; the unions; the future of the Labour Party; a four-session 'Introducing Marxism' course, and much more. Full details of the agenda and speakers will appear online soon at www.workersliberty.org/ideas.

The event will begin on Friday 11 July with a film night and social at the Bread and Roses, 68a Clapham Manor St., London SW4, and continue on Saturday and Sunday at the Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Rd., London N7. Cheap food, a free creche and accommodation are available.

Tickets £25 (waged), £18 (students/low-waged) or £13 (unwaged) Phone 0207 207 3997 for more info.

UN Food Program supplies are flown to Haiti, which has seen food riots in recent days

A workers' answer to the food crisis

BY ELLIOTT ROBINSON

LAST week thousands of garment workers in Bangladesh went on strike in protest at rising food prices. Factory workers earn as little as a \$1 a day and have seen the price of rice increase by a third since last year. Some 30 million people in Bangladesh – nearly a quarter of the population – may be going without a daily meal.

Food riots have taken place this year in Egypt, Haiti and Burkina Faso. The United Nations predicts that 33 countries in Asia and Africa face "political instability" as a result of food price rises. It says the global food bill has risen by 57% in the last year, with basic staples such as rice and wheat doubling in price.

The food crisis is not the result of too little food produced across the globe. Last year the global grain harvest was 2.1 billion tonnes, up 5% on the previous year – easily more than enough to feed the entire population of the world. Although harvests in some places (such as the US) were down a bit, the main problem is that only about half of this grain goes directly to feed people. The rest is being used for other purposes.

According to the *Independent* (16 April), around 100 million tonnes of grain last year went on producing biofuels – more than quadruple the figure at the turn of the century. This was the result of a push by the big capitalist powers, both the US and the European Union – as well as by other regional powers such as Brazil with existing ethanol industries – to increase production in a vain and unplanned attempt to combat climate change.

Last week the British government introduced the requirement for transport fuels to be 2.5% biofuel from crops. The EU has plans for a similar measure. Yet the facts about biofuels have been well known for years. Apart from the deforestation that takes place to "clear" for biofuel crops, it takes 232kg of corn to fill a 50-litre car tank with ethanol – enough to feed a child for a year.

If nothing else, socialists should support Biofuelswatch and the Campaign against Climate Change, who want a moratorium on biofuels until they can be shown to be socially and ecologically sustainable.

However nearly a third of the global grain harvest – some 760 million tonnes last year, went on feeding animals. There is a growing demand for meat across the globe and this requires a big input of grain. Apparently it takes 8kg of grain to produce 1kg of beef, and 2kg of feed to produce a kilo of chicken –

what is known as "conversion efficiency". As well as consuming grain, cows also produce large quantities of greenhouse gases. One cow produces more methane per day than a 4x4 driving 33 miles.

In response to the food crisis, some greens have called for a vegetarian diet. George Monbiot has suggested a switch to tilapia, a freshwater fish that consumes 1.6kg of feed per kilo of food – the best conversion efficiency of any farmed animal.

I think socialists should generally avoid focusing on individual lifestyle solutions to problems caused by the anarchy of global capitalism, and resist attempts to coerce people into changing their eating habits. As William Morris put it in 1886, "But a man [sic] can hardly be a sound Socialist who puts forward vegetarianism as a solution of the difficulties between labour and capital... there are people who are vegetarians on ascetic grounds, and who would be just as tyrannical as other ascetics if they had a chance of being so." However we should not dismiss lightly the human health benefits as well as the ecological gains from a better diet, brought about voluntarily.

For socialists, the food crisis is another symptom of capitalist crisis – the chaotic system of profiteering which drives down workers' living standards. The food crisis, coming on the back of big increases in the price of fuels – for heating and powering homes, for transport (both public and private) – adds up to the most concentrated squeeze on working class incomes since the 1970s.

In Britain, food prices have risen fast. Bread prices have doubled in the last three years and are up by a third on last year. Rice prices are also up by a third; eggs by 40%; chicken by 70%; and pasta by 80% (the *Guardian* 16 April) And all this while the fat cat bosses still reap a fortune and while the government imposes pay cuts across the public sector.

The answer, both in Britain and across the globe, is for workers to take action. We need an authoritative estimate of the cost of living and a sliding scale of wages to keep up with the real cost of meeting basic needs. We need industrial action to smash the imposed pay ceiling for workers.

We also need political demands – particularly as the rising cost of living will hit many of the poorest, least organised and vulnerable workers. The government should levy a windfall tax on supermarkets, the banks, petrol companies and energy suppliers who continue to rake in huge profits. We should demand benefits and pensions be increased to guarantee a minimum standard of living. We should fight for these reforms now, and as part of our struggle for socialism – which will guarantee everyone's basic needs are met.

Left wiped out in Italian elections

HUGH EDWARDS REPORTS FROM ITALY

FOR the third time in 15 years Silvio Berlusconi has won a convincing victory in the Italian elections of 13-14 April. His rightwing People of Liberty party, along with his ally Umberto Bossi's populist and racist Lega Nord (supported in wide areas of the north), has been guaranteed comfortable majorities in both houses of the Italian parliament.

The Democratic Party of Walter Veltroni, heralded as the "revolutionary mould-breaker" of old-style "coalition-obsessed" Italian politics, trail nearly 10 points behind in both houses.

Contrary to expectations that there would be massive abstention, given widespread demoralisation and cynicism following the lamentable failure of the Prodi government and of the Radical Left within it, turnout was around 81% — a fall of only 3% from the last election in 2006.

But a good part of the increased abstention made up the absolute disaster that befell the Rainbow Coalition (the Radical Left) led by Fausto Bertinotti's Communist Refoundation party. The coalition lost nearly three million votes, failing abysmally to reach the quotas of 4% and 8% for the "Camera" and the "senate" respectively.

The presence of the "communist" and "radical" left in the parliament has, therefore, been completely wiped out, losing 110 seats. It is a veritable earthquake, destined to have an extraordinary impact on left politics in Italy, and within a very short time.

One cannot imagine a more deadly and fitting complicity to those, like the superannuated career-fop Bertinotti, for whom the Parliamentary road to socialism had become an article of faith.

Bertinotti has since resigned from the leadership of the party, and the same fate seems certain for others. Already an emergency national conference has been called for, along with demands for the resignation of the national directorate of Refoundation.

Of the two "Trotskyist" currents in the election, the Communist Party of Workers, operating with minimal material and human resources but arguing with impressive force and anger against Italian and international capitalism, took a very creditable 160,000 votes for the Camera and 14,000 for the Senate. At the very least it indicated that there does exist an audience for revolutionary ideas, idea that in the face of what a Berlusconi government is preparing for the Italian working masses will become ever more precious and widespread in the months ahead.

Food prices spark strikes and occupations

BY JACK STAUNTON

Workers at Mahalla in the Nile Delta have suffered a fresh wave of repression from Hosni Mubarak's regime after a series of militant strikes, protests and demonstrations beginning on April 6th. The Egyptian police arrested hundreds of workers, demonstrators and even journalists reporting on the revolt, as the regime seeks to silence working class people angry at low wages and massive food price inflation which has seen bread prices go up nearly 50% in the last year.

The strikes at the Mahalla textile works are dangerous for the Mubarak regime, since it is the largest factory in Egypt and his government has already been destabilised by economic chaos and embarrassed by the recent Gaza refugee crisis, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians tried to flood into Egypt. The food crisis cannot easily be resolved — indeed, it is part of a worldwide phenomenon which has also seen riots in countries like Haiti and Bangladesh — and the regime faces an organised opposition.

When the strike was called on April 6th security forces occupied the factory, cleared the area and seized strike committee leaders Kamal El Faoumy and Tarek Amin. They also used the strike as a pretext to round-up activists from all manner of opposition political parties, most prominently the reactionary Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, several of whose leaders were put before military tribunals.

But that was not the end of the repression. In subsequent days, faced with riots in Mahalla and surrounding villages and unable to keep a lid on protestors, the regime's police security forces used rubber bullets, tear gas and live ammunition against the people leaving at least two dead and hundreds injured. The total number of arrests was in excess of 800.

The textile mill in Mahalla has for the last two years been the scene of massive strikes, its tens of thousands of workers serving as a beacon to the Egyptian workers' movement.

Recent weeks have seen a wave of other strikes complementing the Mahalla action, including a broad range of workers from dentists to students also affected by economic turmoil and the repressive Mubarak regime.

Perhaps most important was the factory occupation staged by the textile workers of Wabariyat Sammanoud between 13 and 19 April, demanding a more than 100% increase in their food allowance from 43 to 90 Egyptian pounds. The 1,300 workers occupied the plant day and night, showing their steely determination by sleeping on the tiled floor of the factory and maintaining a constant look-out for police.

Many of the workers had to bring their children to the sit-in — indeed, around 60 per cent of the Wabariyat Sammanoud workers are women, and faced the opposition of family members who did not want to let them stay in the factory overnight or abandon their so-called "household duties". The strike was a complete success and the bosses, taken aback by the resilience of the workers, were forced to capitulate.

Similarly, the government has tried to appease the Mahalla workers — on 9th April it sent Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif to the town, prom-

ising pay rises — while it has also tried to keep a lid on the food inflation crisis by suspending all wheat exports. Panicking, the government is trying to silence workers using the carrot and the stick at the same time — it is clearly in trouble, even if the Mahalla movement appears to have ebbed for now. The Egyptian working class is rising as a force, with the strikes of recent weeks showing an even higher level of class struggle than the strike wave sparked at Mahalla in February.

But the working class does not appear ready to overthrow Mubarak. There is a high level of trade union activity, but it lacks political direction, with the left tied up in the cross-class Kifaya (Enough) pro-democracy coalition, which includes all manner of Islamists and bourgeois liberals. Just to serve as foot-soldiers for these parties to take power off Mubarak would be an enormous mistake.

If the working class is to seriously challenge the Mubarak regime but also the system which has caused such hardship — hunger, even — for Egypt's workers and peasants, the workers' many strikes and protests need to find their own independent political expression.

Colombian students seek solidarity

Numa Andrés Paredes Betancourt, a member of the National Executive Committee of the ACEU (one of Colombia's main student union federations), visited Britain recently as part of a trip organised by Justice for Colombia, the labour movement campaign in solidarity with workers and students in Colombia. Daniel Randall spoke to him at the National Union of Students conference in Blackpool.

DR: Could you tell us something about the campaigns you're running currently?

NAPB: In international terms we want people to focus on campaigning to get the UK government to stop funding the Colombian military. We need to let the Colombian government know they're being watched and break their stream of misinformation.

In Colombia, our main project is to fundraise so we can establish a safehouse for student activists who've been displaced or forced to go into hiding due to government and paramilitary threats. Such a safehouse could also be used as a space for organising. Most of our work is focused towards this project at the moment.

We're also looking to deepen our international links, with a view to organising a conference or similar event with delegations from student unions and activist groups internationally. That's certainly something we'd like to stay in touch about.

DR: Your movement is very active despite the great dangers facing it. Here in the UK, the

student movement is significantly less active even though we have much more freedom to campaign. How does that make you feel?

NAPB: We're campaigning for the maintenance of the university as a space where people can develop politically. Our struggles in Colombia are driven by resistance to the privatisation and marketisation of education, so the issues facing us are similar even though the levels of danger are different.

DR: What are the links like between the

labour and student movements in Colombia?

NAPB: We have very close links with trade unions, because student unions in Colombia always take up wider socio-economic issues in our campaigning. Our best links are with the unions representing teachers and other campus workers. We've gone as far as to establish a national coordinating committee between education workers' unions and student unions to plan joint strikes and demonstrations.

Behrooz Karimizadeh released, but comrades remain in prison

BY KAVE

ON 15 April, Behrooz Karimizadeh, one of the founding activists in the Iranian socialist group Freedom and Equality-Seeking Students, paid 300,000 toman (roughly £16,000) to be released. He will need to visit several doctors in order to recover. He is under intense policy control and his telephone is monitored.

We must not forget that three other Freedom and Equality-Seeking Students,

Ali Kanturi, Farhad Hajmirzaee and Peyman Piran, are still in prison. The first two in particular are in a bad condition. They need solidarity to secure their release!

• If you would like to help us campaign or raise money get in touch: sacha@workersliberty.org
• For a detailed discussion of where FESS comes from, see freerstudent.blogspot.com/2008/04/freedom-and-equality-seeking-students.html

Zimbabwean socialists say: "We need international workers' solidarity"

MIKE SAMBO OF THE ZIMBABWE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST ORGANISATION SPOKE TO SACHA ISMAIL

What is the latest with the election results?

WE have not yet heard results for the presidential poll, but meanwhile ZANU PF requested for a recount of ballots for 23 constituencies and the exercise was done over the weekend. We are still waiting for the outcome of this recount.

How is the crisis developing?

The political and economic crisis has been deepening at an alarming rate each day ever since the government started its chicanery around the election results. The economic situation has deteriorated so far that it is very difficult for ordinary people to survive. Prices for everything have gone up far beyond what people can afford. For example, a loaf of bread, which cost around \$11 million Zimbabwe dollars before the elections, now costs around Z\$60 million dollars. There have been massive hikes in transport costs too. Some commodities have disappeared from the shop shelves.

What do you think Mugabe will do?

Clearly Mugabe on his own has no lasting solutions to the crisis. He has only two ways of overcoming the crisis. The first is for him to expedite his expropriation of the big capitalists and move towards full state capitalism. This is less likely because ZANU PF has always had a strong layer of business people, who are using the state as an instrument of accumulating wealth. These people surround Mugabe and act as limits on his radicalisation, vehemently opposing policies such as nationalisation and price controls.

The second option would be to seek a settlement with the MDC and bring the opposition into a government of national unity. We suspect this was always the game plan: the elections were merely to determine who would have the upper hand in such a government. Both MDC and ZANU PF could live with this.

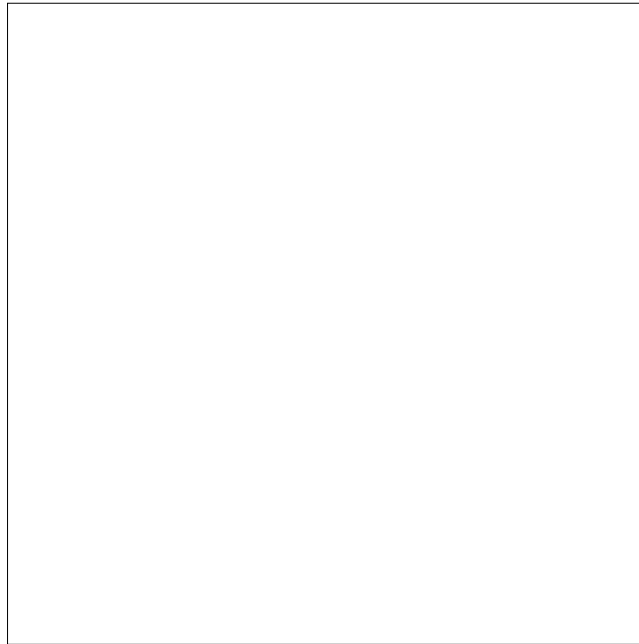
If he tries to hold on, will the army back him?

Many have claimed, falsely, that the army and police are not behind Mugabe. The current situation in the country tells us otherwise. There is a virtual undeclared state of emergency. The army and the police are harassing people across the country, and imposed a 6pm curfew in urban areas — particularly Harare. In rural areas where the MDC won parliamentary seats people are being tortured and even killed. There are reports that over three thousand people have been displaced and ten killed so far.

Elsewhere, the government has appointed military bodies to run government departments and ministries. All this confirms the army's loyalty to Mugabe. Even if he dishonours the election results and tried to cling to power, there will be no mutiny in the army ranks.

What is the MDC doing and saying?

Clearly the MDC is in a quandary. They seem confused: on one hand they claim to have won the elections by 53%, while on the other they are ready for a runoff, which means accepting there was no winner in the 29 March elections. They lost a golden opportunity to mobilize mass resistance to Mugabe immediately after the elections.



Removing Mugabe will take mass mobilisation

When it became clear that Mugabe wanted to hold on even if the MDC had won the elections, people were in a fighting mood, prepared to defend their vote by any means necessary. The MDC did not move quickly to take advantage of this mood in civic society. They did not even move to organise protests, claiming that Mugabe would use the opportunity to impose a state of emergency — which he has effectively done anyway, despite the lack of protests.

Rather than mobilising people on the ground, the MDC has been lobbying the international and regional community to put pressure on the government, tactics which have proved useless when dealing with an intransigent dictator like Mugabe.

Previously the MDC had agreed not to go to Mugabe's courts to redress any elections Mugabe tried to steal, but sooner after the elections it unsuccessfully sought a High Court order for the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission to announce the results.

On 15 April, the MDC called for a stay away [strike] which was not successful for various reasons; from that point on they have focused on a possible rerun of the elections. This is a blunder. The same conditions which allowed Mugabe to play around with the results last time remain the same; there is no guarantee he will not do the same again in the run off. We have made the point to MDC activists repeatedly that any election without a new constitution which allows free and fair elections cannot be won by anyone other than Mugabe.

What are the unions doing and saying?

The trade unions and the rest of the civic society have not done anything useful since the elections. The 15 April stay away could have succeeded if the MDC had worked together with the unions. The unions and civic society groups did not play an active role in this mobilization; the reason is that both the trade union movement and civic society groups have chosen not to be seen as entities independent from the MDC. They raise no criticism of the MDC.

What is the ISO doing and saying? Do you still think it is right to critically support the MDC in the elections?

The driving force behind our critical support to the MDC remains unchanged: run-away inflation, caused by the ever-declining economy, caused by Mugabe's dictatorship — and affecting working people the worst. That alone necessitates all concerned organisations and political parties working together to help fight the dictatorship.

What we are saying is that we can only remove Mugabe by mass mobilisation — but if it all ends in a run off, as looks likely, let people come out in big numbers and vote for the MDC.

At the same time, we do not advise the MDC to participate in the run off. And we critically support the MDC, but without creating any illusions in the party.

South Africa dockers in Durban stopped Chinese arms reaching Mugabe. Do you have links with these workers?

What the South African dock workers have done is exactly the type of solidarity we require in Zimbabwe. The ISO has repeatedly argued to the MDC that we require working-class solidarity on an international scale — not lobbying of western imperialists like Bush and Brown. Mugabe has always taken advantage of the MDC's alliance with the imperialists to present himself as a strong pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist champion.

Tsvangirai's tactical bankruptcy is the result of his reliance on the western powers, ignoring the strength of working people both in Zimbabwe and internationally.

We do not currently have links with these South African workers, but are trying to get hold of them through our comrades in South Africa. We salute the SA workers and call for workers regionally and across the world to organise solidarity protests with Zimbabwe's working people.

Mugabe steps up terror

Continued from back page

Mugabe's ruling Zanu-PF party and Zimbabwe's Electoral Commission have withheld the results of the first round presidential elections and instigated a recount in 23 electoral areas. The recount has been further delayed. This "extra time" has been used by Zanu-PF MPs and supporters to intimidate MDC activists and voters into line before the second round. MPs and government ministers are reported to have arrived in towns and villages brandishing firearms together with armed groups of supporters.

Known MDC voters have been forced into mass meetings and threatened with retribution if they do not vote for Mugabe in the second round. In the village of Nyamuriwo in north-eastern Zimbabwe the homes of three MDC supporters were attacked and set-light in the early hours of 19 April. The MDC had never openly campaigned in the village before but swept to victory on 29 March by a significant margin.

So far more than 3000 people have been displaced, 500 injured and 10 killed in post-election violence. Human Rights Watch reports that Mugabe supporters have set up "torture camps" to beat, intimidate and contain leading oppositionists.

The 18 April independence celebration in the Gwanzura Stadium was used by Zanu-PF as massive show of military force. Mugabe repeated his claim that opposition supporters are part of a British imperialist plot to undo the overthrow of white rule in the country and claimed that fair elections have been "religiously" held since 1980.

Where he had previously won every single election by pumping millions of dollars of state resources into campaigns, this time — and in spite of undoubted efforts at fraud and intimidation in the first round — Mugabe and Zanu-PF lost decisively.

In the short term it is likely that the Election Commission will find grounds for a run-off election between Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC. Continuing electoral fraud and heightened levels of intimidation will almost certainly result in a victory for Mugabe and Zanu-PF. Zimbabwe's democratic opposition faces a vile and dictatorial regime ready and willing to dispatch military and paramilitary forces to quell unrest.

The action of the Durban dockers and the resistance it has sparked in other parts of Africa demonstrates the possibilities for working-class action and solidarity against the Mugabe regime. Action that could and should be extended in opposition to China's murderous arms trade in Africa and beyond.

“We hit rock concerts a lot”

Anthony Main is the secretary of Unite Australia, a union for young fast-food and retail workers drawing inspiration from Unite New Zealand but operating in different conditions.

Because of the huge distances in Australia, the labour movement there is more decentralised than in Britain. A union can be left-wing in one state, right-wing in another. Unite Australia operates in Melbourne, where the unions are generally stronger, more combative, and more left-wing than elsewhere in Australia (and the political left is stronger than in other cities). Its initiators were the Socialist Party Australia, a group linked to the Socialist Party in England and Wales and mainly based in Melbourne.

Anthony Main spoke to Martin Thomas from *Solidarity*.

WE started Unite as a campaign in 2003, and then about two years ago we cranked it up a bit and moved it on from being just a campaign to a formal membership-based organisation. When we first started it, it came from a small group of people in the Socialist Party, and the Socialist Party alone — literally, a handful, in inner-city Melbourne.

Once we stepped it up, we tried to build it a bit broader, and we gathered around us another handful or so of good activists that would regularly contribute to the work. There was a larger periphery, in the dozens, of people who will help us on a regular basis. It was a smaller initial nucleus than Unite New Zealand.

Initially we were a campaign trying to raise issues of low pay and casualisation, and encouraging young people to join their respective unions. That was pretty straightforward. We did naming and shaming dodgy bosses, and other media-friendly campaigns, to try to gather young activists around us. We organised a couple of rallies and pickets, that sort of thing. From that we got approached by workers in a couple of shops whom we assisted to unionise. We had some small successes of that sort, but in the main we were just encouraging people in their ones and twos to join their union and raising issues at a political level.

We had a bit of a setback in 2004 when we helped some workers organise a Borders bookstore in Carlton [in Melbourne]. In those days our position was that workers should join the appropriate existing union. The union in retail, the SDA, is very right-wing. The SDA signed up the entire shop, and they sold out the entire workforce.

What the workers in that particular shop wanted was a collective agreement and penalty rates [higher hourly rates for weekends and evenings], since the shop's open late nights and weekends. The union leadership went behind the workers' backs and said to Borders that they would sign a collective agreement without penalty rates if Borders would give them a closed-shop agreement throughout Australia. We'd kicked the doors down for them, and they'd gone in and signed a rotten deal.

We then had to campaign against the SDA to make sure that agreement didn't go through. We went to the Industrial Relations Commission to tell them that the workers had not endorsed the agreement, so the IRC knocked it on the head, and we told the SDA they had to come up with a better deal. The SDA put it in the bottom of their in-tray and forgot about it, and now all those workers have either left the shop or left the SDA.

We pulled a few of them around the Socialist Party, and that's all well and good, but at the end of the day we did not end up with a union agreement in the shop.

We showed that you can win victories by fighting in retail, something that has not really been done in Australia for a long time, but workers were tearing up their union cards in front of us and saying: “You told us to join this union, and now they've shafted us”. We had to reassess.

If we were telling people to join established unions, and that was what would happen once we got a dispute off the ground, what do we do? The class struggle was at a very low level. There's not much going on here.

When the coalition [conservative] government introduced WorkChoices [new anti-union laws, in 2006] we got legal advice and had a look at it. We saw an opening there for us to continue what we had been doing with Unite —

all the political campaigning and so on — but also encourage people to join Unite more formally.

There were loopholes in the legislation which allowed what they called “bargaining agents” to represent workers. A bargaining agent can be an individual, a law firm, or an association like the [Industrial Relations] Commission, to negotiate agreements, and to deal with individual grievances. We took the idea to a few of the left-wing unions. Some of them really liked it; some of them gave us a bit of support; we raised enough money to get ourselves an office and pay for a full-timer.

We paid for me to work full-time for Unite for the first six months. We had a plan to raise membership sufficiently that the income from dues would pay for the full-time organiser's wages. That didn't happen in the first six months, so we had to accept a bit of a setback and go back to running the organisation on a volunteer basis. At the same time, all the unions, including the left unions, were totally taken up with the idea of re-electing the Labour Party [to federal government]. We were finding it harder to get the support needed within the movement.

More recently, we've raised a bit more money, and put another part-time organiser on — she's working three days a week. Having a full-time professional team there to go out and recruit and build the membership is very important. The problem with getting that is mostly the objective situation. When there were the massive rallies in Melbourne against [conservative prime minister] Howard and WorkChoices, our phone was running hot. When the ACTU [equivalent of the TUC] moved the campaign towards one to re-elect the Labour Party, we noticed fewer people contacted us. When there were thousands of people on the streets, what we were doing was very attractive; but when the

“We've got to go to workers in the environments where they feel more comfortable about talking to us.”

ACTU campaign went quiet, we noticed a downturn in the levels of interest we got.

The advantage that Unite New Zealand have got is that it's very, very easy there to register a union. We're a union, but we're unregistered. In a nutshell, we don't have an official right of entry to workplaces. Registered unions here have a right to go in and talk to the members, with a few restrictions — we don't have that. I went to New Zealand and spent some time working with Unite there. It is not as easy as you might think. The right of entry is a bit of a lever for recruitment, but it's not the be-all and end-all. They can still find it hard to recruit, even with that right.

If you're dealing with retail and fast-food, these places are open to the public anyway, so you can walk in and talk with the workers. And when I went out with Unite organisers in New Zealand, quite often when they went into shops, even though they had the official passes, the boss would say to them: “The workers are too busy now. You'll have to come back”.

My understanding of why this organising has taken off in New Zealand, and not so much in Australia, yet, is that during the 1990s the New Zealand labour movement faced severe neo-liberal attacks. That happened ten years ago. The formation of Unite came as part of a wave of opposition to that. That type of opposition hasn't happened yet in Australia. In Unite we're in advance of any generalised opposition.

The most difficult thing is the objective situation, the low level of class struggle. One of the advantages of having Unite, even if our reputation far exceeds our membership, is that we're quite well known, we're always in the media, and we've been able to get into schools. I'm constantly being invited to speak in schools, so we do feel we're doing some cutting-edge work. But the type of questions we get in schools are: “what's a union?”, “what do I join a union for?”, “is it ok that I get paid \$4 an hour?”... it's such a low level of consciousness, especially

among young people.

In New Zealand, they've done some fantastic work to raise that level of consciousness. Unite is a household name there, almost, especially among young people. It is seen as pretty hip and trendy — the people who organise all the colourful demonstrations.

That's going to come in Australia. The class struggle is going to increase. When it does, minor problems like the right of entry will be pushed aside, once we've cracked a couple of shops and won a couple of victories. Matt McCarten of Unite NZ said to me: “The main thing we did, we broke a couple of shops and won a couple of victories”. That's what we need to prove ourselves. At the moment, we've got a very good idea, but we haven't actually proven ourselves to the people we want to recruit.

The biggest criticism you could have of Unite Australia is that maybe we overstated the opportunities when we decided to step things up and set ourselves up as a union. But there were loads of people around, including all the leaders of the left unions, who thought it was a great idea, and they're still supporting us, though not to the extent that we would like. As soon as we can prove ourselves, even on a small scale, that will enable us to get much more support and to raise the membership.

We've not yet been able to get beyond two, three or four members in a shop, and to fully organise a particular shop and win a dispute with the employer.

For the present, the campaigning — the leaflets, the rallies, the naming and shaming, the petitions — is probably the main part of our work. We do have a union membership, but it is mainly ones and twos in different shops, with a high turnover, and the main thing we do with those members, at present, is sorting out individual grievances, helping people to negotiate individual contracts [heavily promoted as an alternative to union collective agreements by the conservative government, and now quite widespread], helping on health and safety issues, etc.

There is a complicating factor here with the established union in retail being the SDA. They are not affiliated to the Trades Hall Council, however [the state equivalent of the TUC]. We have been able to get some support from other unions by saying that there are about 1.5 million workers in retail in Australia. The SDA has about 200,000 members. That leaves 1.3 million workers for us to go out and recruit. We're not trying to poach members from the SDA. We advise our organisers not to go into SDA closed shops.

We have made an agreement with the Liquor, Hospitality, and Miscellaneous Union [LHMU] that we won't attempt to recruit anyone from places that sell liquor — pubs, clubs, bars, hotels, the casino. They were happy with that, and they said it was ok for us to go to organise cafes. I get lots of phone calls from young workers in pubs who want to join, but we have to tell them to go to the LHMU.

When we go into shops, sometimes we get managers yelling at us or calling security right away. It tends to depend on the manager, rather than a policy of the whole chain. Sometimes workers are very friendly, but it also happens that you get workers immediately starting to look round and saying: “I hope my boss doesn't see me talking to you”.

Most of our success in recruiting has not come from that sort of cold-calling. We still do it, because we want to show to people that the union is visible and active.

But the main place we recruit people is on the university campuses, through the stalls, in the cafes, during freshers' fairs. Pretty much all university students are also workers. We also target high schools. We hit rock concerts a lot. If we can't get inside, we go outside, but usually now we get invited to go inside and be one of the market stalls there. We're the only union that does that. That's very successful, especially in the first few hours we're at a concert.

It's hard to recruit workers in the workplace because of intimidation and the low level of consciousness. We've got to go to workers in the environments where they feel more comfortable about talking to us — on campus, in the high schools, in skate parks, at concerts. It's not 100% easy, but it works better than cold-calling workplaces. The slightly older students, early 20s, tend to be a bit more aware and receptive, because they've had one or two jobs, and they've had their fingers burned. They've started to realise that things aren't right.

Organising young workers Experiences from and New

The 15 or 16 year olds are usually more difficult, because they're very excited to have a job. The job brings them a bit of money in their pocket, and they're not too worried about low wages. But it's mixed. We've got some very, very good 17 year old high school students who not only are members and try to organise their workplaces, but also go round other shops in the area, leafleting, and talk to their mates in school to try to recruit them.

The four key issues we've raised are low pay; casualisation, irregular hours; youth rates; and individual contracts. The fifth issue, we've found, is health and safety, mainly bullying in the workplace. We've got a whole range of literature on those issues. The key issue for us, I think, will be low pay. The minimum wage is low; on top of that you've got youth rates; and on top of that you've got a whole range of employers who are not adhering to the law at all. We have kids telling us they're paid \$5 an hour, when the minimum wage is about \$13.50 an hour.

We've worked with people to give them advice on individual contracts. In retail, the majority of new starters are asked to sign individual contracts. We explain the rules: you can't be forced to sign it, you have to have time to read it, if you're under 18 your parents have to have a chance to read it, and so on. At the same time we advise them that they should be talking over the issues with their workmates and getting together to win something better collectively.

I come from a manufacturing union background, and the gains we've been able to make on health and safety are pretty minimal compared to what unions have been able to win in manufacturing. Our main focus has been on bullying. We've used statistics

"The bosses know that we can cause them a little bit of mayhem"

UNITE New Zealand, a new union which started with just three paid organisers, all on minimum wage, has shown the way where unions with huge contingents of highly-paid officials have failed. It has organised all the main fast-food chains in New Zealand, and won better wages, the abolition of "youth rates" and some security of hours. Mike Treen, national director of Unite, toured Britain in February 2008, speaking at meetings for the No Sweat campaign, www.nosweat.org.uk. Mike's speech at the London meeting was printed in *Solidarity* 3/127. Mike also spoke to Colin Foster after the meeting.

Your approach contrasts with most other union organising drives these days, in that you started with a clear declaration of across-the-board demands that the union was going to fight for, rather than trying to recruit individuals on the basis that if they had a individual problem, then the union could help.

Yes - though when we first went to the some of the workplaces were weren't always clear what the big issues were. We had to find that out.

In our initial recruiting drive we were identifying the relevant demands, and through the organising drive we were seeking to get collective solutions to those issues. Our goal was always a collective agreement with the boss, not to sell union-sponsored insurance or whatever.

We had limited resources. We borrowed substantially to get started. We had a small organising staff - three people, to start with - on the minimum wage, but we needed more people. Some of our recruiters were workplace delegates from already organised industries, e.g. hotel workers. One woman took redundancy to volunteer. Another was a part-time bar worker.

We also approached left-wing people, socialists and anarchists. We said to them: you talk about organising workers, here's your chance to do so. So we had about a dozen fully-engaged organisers, paid or unpaid, to start with.

Initially a lot depended on a previous network of the Alliance party [a left-wing party, originating in a big split from the New Zealand Labour Party, which fell apart shortly before Unite was launched]. People usually came in as unpaid, but as they proved themselves to be in it for the long haul the union started to pay them. We now have nine staff, and we still use volunteers if we have a campaign on.

Unite also has close links with the Postal Workers' Association. The PWA has no paid officials at all, but is near to organising a majority of postal delivery workers in New Zealand. It has a deal with Unite whereby Unite provides paid full-time organiser time when the PWA wants it.

"Every little victory we have, we try to write up. That helps people to get confidence. It is something to learn from."

How important was left involvement?

Key Unite people had been involved in the Workers' Charter, a broad left-oriented group. The Workers' Charter initiative became a newspaper for Unite. Two of the key Unite people, myself and John Minto, were well-known in the broader anti-war and social justice movement in New Zealand. John is the

spokesperson for the Quality Public Education coalition. I'm an organiser in Latin American solidarity, the Global Peace and Justice campaign, and other movements. We've seen this as an opportunity to unite the broader left, to work together and break down divisions.

How do you keep up involvement?

We have various specific targeted newsletters, focussing on nitty-gritty issues, and *Unite News*. Every little victory we have, we try to write up. That helps people to get confidence. It is something to learn from.

To start with in the fast-food campaign we used mass email and texting a lot. Not so much now. We don't have a regular electronic newsletter right now, but we should do.

If we are doing a stopwork meeting now, or an action, we still do a mass text and email to everybody. Or even it's a regular meeting which you'd think people would know about, but they don't.

How do you keep up the membership, in an area with such a fast turnover?

We absolutely insist on a routine of visiting to all of the sites. There is regular contact. We have a monthly newspaper which gets out to all of the sites.

We also have a constant process of identifying new union workplace delegates. We make a particular effort to organise among the lower level supervisors. That group is important because they tend to be longer-term in the job than other workers. Whenever we formulate demands, we make a conscious effort to address the concerns of that group. They carry a bit of the memory, and can give it to new people.

We've managed to keep up 100% membership at the picture theatres, among 300 very part time, very casual, very young workers. It's harder to do that in fast food, but we've mostly kept up the membership base. We must be doing something right!

In the picture theatres the bosses know now that we can cause them a little bit of mayhem (though in fact there have not been that many strikes) and they negotiate seriously. Each time we've been able to make improvements. The workers are pretty proud of the union.

If we can emulate that in the fast food sector it will be a great advantage to us, though it's a bit harder there.

The next big demand in the fast food sector?

Well we've just won the abolition of the youth rate and the legal minimum wage has gone up, so we're not expecting a big fight in this round of negotiations. Our aim is to raise the bar on the bottom wage, to bring it up to \$15 an hour. The current level is \$12 an hour.

We want to get the public thinking that the minimum wage for everyone should be two-thirds the average wage. The two-thirds target is the official position of the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions. We want to get to the two-thirds and keep at that level as average wages move up. We're going to have a meeting on this with the other unions who represent low paid workers. The other big issue is security of hours. There it is still no minimum guarantee of work hours.

WE also spoke with Mike Treen about the extent to which Unite NZ's approach reprises that of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the great movement of the casual and "unskilled" workers in the early 20th century USA.

The rest of the US trade-union movement at that time organised almost exclusively among better-off, more "skilled", white workers in permanent jobs. The IWW's approach was different in many ways:

- industrial unionism (against craft unionism)

- energetic class-struggle agitation, propaganda, and agitation
- low membership fees
- low or no initiation fees
- high-intensity organising waves
- addressing workers in new areas with a set of demands to be won by the union once organised (developed after a lot of preliminary discussion with workers in those areas) rather than with general agitation about the advan-

"Each time we've been able to make improvements. The workers are pretty proud of the union. If we can emulate that in the fast food sector it will be a great advantage."

tages of having a union in the abstract; following up the recruiting drive with immediate preparation for action on those demands

- organising areas by getting volunteers to go in and take jobs in those areas, then talk union on the job

- using street corner agitation, and colourful, high-profile public agitation generally (e.g. the IWW's free speech fights, to establish its right to street-corner agitation in cities which tried to ban it)

- trying always to make industrial action short, sharp, and decisive. If a dispute drags on regardless, imaginatively trying new active tactics - never leaving the workers passive

- an open, democratic approach, with disputes always run by strike committees elected from the workers and regularly reporting back.

Mike agreed that in fact Unite NZ had largely followed that approach, though not by conscious imitation of the IWW. The IWW in the USA, however, also made a principle of never signing agreements with the employers. Unite, on the contrary, made it an objective from the start to seek formal negotiations with the employers and to get gains nailed down in formal written agreements.

Mike agreed that the old IWW approach makes it almost impossible to sustain ongoing trade-union organisation outside the high points of strikes and campaigns.

Noting what Mike had said about the success of Unite having depended on a sufficiently large core of activists, mostly political people, socialists and anarchists, being willing to put long hours into the initial organising drive, without pay or on minimum wage, I asked about the political feedback. Once up and running, has Unite produced a reverse flow of young people, activated by the trade-union organising, who move on to political activism?

Mike cited a recent case where Unite delegates attending a union conference — Unite's basic democratic forum is the delegates' conference — had gone from the conference en masse to a civil rights demonstrations against anti-terror raids. As regards newly-unionised young people moving to socialist activism, however, he was more cautious. The returns are not in yet. And Unite's relation with the organised left has not always been easy.

Some left groups, Mike said, had set up "Unite branches" which are actually just a mechanism for them to seek a few contacts, and are more trouble than help to Unite generally. Some were stand-offish at first, but are more engaged with Unite now. One group has moved on to try to set up its "own" more militant alternative union.

Picture: Paul Box/www.reportdigital.co.uk

Rising workers

from Australia to New Zealand

from government departments about bullying, and campaigned on the basis of: "know your rights; you don't have to put up with it".

We've had a lot of cases of workers being sexually harassed by their bosses, and we've given advice and support to those workers. Often it's a tough one, when you have young women workers harassed by older male bosses and they don't want to take it further.

Our comrades in Britain says it's not the same there. There are undemocratic unions in Britain, but they think there's still space to intervene, and it would be counterproductive to set up rebel unions. In general, it's not our policy to go round setting up rival unions. It's a matter of the peculiar situation in retail here, with the SDA, coupled with the legal openings created by WorkChoices, coupled with the campaigning work we'd already done around the issues.

And I think the legal situation for trade-union organising is more difficult in Britain than it is here.

For the last couple of years we've been trying to develop a relationship with the more progressive student unions here, like at RMIT University. Some of the universities have ten, twenty cafes on campus. We talk to the student union about the workers' conditions, and suggest working together to organise these places. I've had some good results. At present I'm trying to get a dispute going with one of the cafes at RMIT. The difficulty has been the lack of continuity in student politics with leaderships changing every year. Our new part-time organiser has been mainly working on the universities, getting clubs set up on campuses, working on the dispute at the cafe at RMIT...

Rising from 40 years' sleep

May Day, the International Workers' Day, is known as a commemoration of the Haymarket riots in Chicago on 4 May 1886. But the reason why May Day was first celebrated internationally — the struggle for the eight-hour working day — is often forgotten.

The Federation of Organised Trade and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada conference in October 1884 unanimously passed a resolution calling for the eight-hour working day to be enshrined in law starting from 1 May 1886. As this date approached workers in the USA prepared a general strike to win the demand, and almost half a million struck on 1 May. In the centre of the movement in Chicago 40,000 went on strike and 90,000 demonstrated.

It was the rally in the city three days later, drowned in blood by the police, which would make the date famous.

Several ringleaders were executed — they became known as the "Haymarket martyrs".

The incident put the issue of the eight-hour day centre-stage in the international labour movement. The 1889 founding meeting of the Second International, held in Paris, called for a demonstration on 1 May 1890. The day of action was a success, with protests and strikes around the world, and would soon become an annual event.

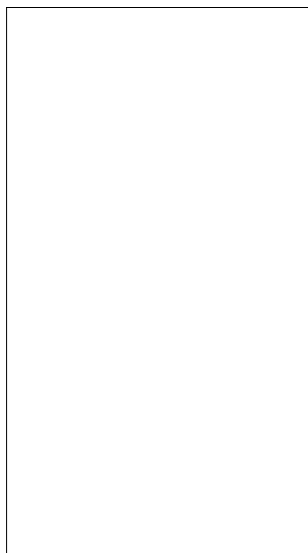
In Britain, where Tom Mann and a burgeoning labour movement had for several years campaigned for an eight hour day, half a million workers demonstrated in Hyde Park on 4 May. Frederick Engels was there. This is his account. (First published on 23 May 1890 in *Arbeiter Zeitung*).

THE May Day celebration of the proletariat was epoch-making not only in its universal character, which made it the first international action of the militant working class. It also served to register most gratifying advances in the various countries. Friend and foe agree that on the whole Continent it was Austria, and in Austria it was Vienna, that celebrated the holiday of the proletariat in the most brilliant and dignified manner, and that the Austrian, above all the Viennese, workers thereby won themselves an entirely different standing in the movement. Only a few years ago the Austrian movement had declined almost to zero, and the workers of the German and Slav crown territories were split into hostile parties wasting their forces on internecine strife.

But on 4 May Vienna was thrown into the shade by London. And I hold it to be the most important and magnificent in the entire May Day celebration that on 4 May 1890, the English proletariat, rousing itself from forty years' winter sleep, rejoined the movement of its class. To appreciate this, one must look into the events leading up to 4 May.

Towards the beginning of last year the world's largest and most wretched working-class district, the East End of London, stirred gradually to action. On 1 April, 1889, the Gas Workers' and General Labourers' Union was founded; today it has a membership of some 100,000. Largely with the cooperation of this partner union (many are gas workers in winter and dock workers in summer), the dockers' big strike started on its way and shook even the bottom-most section of the East London workers out of stagnation. As a result, trade union upon trade union began to form among these, mostly unskilled workers, while those already in existence there, which till then had barely kept themselves going, now blossomed forth quickly. But the difference between these new trade unions and the old was very great.

The old ones, which admit none but "skilled" workers, are exclusive; they bar all workers who have not been trained according to the statutes of the guild concerned, and thereby even expose themselves to competi-



tion from those not in the guild; they are rich, but the richer they become, the more they degenerate into mere sick-funds and burial clubs; they are conservative and they steer clear above all of that socialism, as far as and as long as they can. The new "unskilled" unions, on the other hand, admit every fellow-worker; they are essentially, and the Gas Workers even exclusively, strike unions and strike funds. And while they are not yet socialists to a man, they insist nevertheless on being led only by socialists.

But socialist propaganda had already been going on for years in the East End, where it was above all Mrs E[leanor] Marx-Aveling and her husband, Edward Aveling, who had four years earlier discovered the best propaganda field in the Radical clubs consisting almost exclusively of workers, and had worked on them steadily and, as is evident now, with the best of success. During the dock workers' strike Mrs Aveling was one of the three women in charge of the distribution of relief. Mrs Aveling led almost unaided last winter's strike in Silvertown, also in the East End, and on the Gas Workers' committee she represents a women's section she has founded there.

Last autumn the Gas Workers won an eight-hour working day here in London, but lost it again, after an unhappy strike, in the southern part of the city, acquiring sufficient proof that this gain is by no means safe in the northern part either. Is it surprising, then, that they readily accepted Mrs Aveling's proposal to hold the May Day celebration, decided on by the Paris Congress, in favour of a legalised eight-hour working day, in London? In common with several socialist groups, the Radical clubs and the other trade unions in the East End, they set up a Central Committee that was to organise a large demonstration for the purpose in Hyde Park. As it turned out that all attempts to hold the demonstration on Thursday, 1 May, were bound to fail this year, it was decided to put it off till Sunday, 4 May.

To ensure that, as far as possible, all London workers took part, the Central Committee invited, with uninhibited naivete, the London Trades Council as well. This is a body made up of delegates from the London trades unions, mostly from the older corporations of "skilled" workers, a body in which, as might be expected, the anti-socialist elements still command a majority. The Trades Council saw that the movement for an eight-hour day threatened to grow over its head. The old trades unions stand likewise for an eight-hour working day, but not for one to be established by law.

By an eight-hour day they mean that normal daily wages should be paid for eight

hours — so-and-so much per hour — but that overtime should be allowed any number of hours daily, provided every overtime hour is paid at a higher rate — say, at the rate of one and a half or two ordinary hours. The point therefore was to channel the demonstration into the fairway of this kind of working day, to be won by "free" agreement but certainly not to be made obligatory by parliamentary act.

To this end the Trades Council allied itself with the Social-Democratic Federation of the above-mentioned Mr. Hyndman, an association which poses as the only true church of British socialism, which had very consistently concluded a life-and-death alliance with the French Possibilists and sent a delegation to their congress and which therefore regarded in advance the May Day celebration decided on by the Marxist Congress as a sin against the Holy Ghost. The movement was growing over the head of the Federation as well, but to adhere to the Central Committee would mean placing itself under "Marxist" leadership; on the other hand, if the Trades Council were to take the matter into its own hands and if the celebration were held on the 4th of May instead of on the 1st, it would no longer be anything like the wicked "Marxist" May Day celebration and so they could join in. Despite the fact that the Social-Democratic Federation calls in its program for a legalised eight-hour day, it eagerly clasped the hand by the Trades Council.

Now the new allies, strange bedfellows though they were, played a trick on the Central Committee which would, it is true, be considered not only permissible but quite skillful in the political practice of the British bourgeoisie, but which European and American workers will probably find very mean. The fact is that in the case of popular meetings in Hyde Park the organisers must first announce their intention to the Board of Works and reach an agreement with it on particulars, securing specifically permission to drive over the grass the carts that are to serve as platforms. Besides, regulations say that after a meeting has been announced, no other meeting may be held in the Park on the same day.

The Central Committee had not yet made the announcement; but the organisations allied against it had scarcely heard the news when they announced a meeting in the Park for 4 May and obtained permission for seven platforms, doing it behind the backs of the Central Committee.

The Trades Council and the Federation believed thereby to have rented the Park for 4 May and to have a victory in their pocket. The former called a meeting of delegates from the trades unions, to which it also invited two delegates from the Central Committee; the latter sent three, including Mrs Aveling. The Trades Council treated them as if it had been master of the situation. It informed them that only trades unions, that is to say, no socialist unions or political clubs, could take part in the demonstration and carry banners. Just how the Social-Democratic Federation was to participate in the demonstration remained a mystery.

The Council had already edited the resolution to be submitted to the meeting, and had deleted from it the demand for a legalised eight-hour day; discussion on a proposal for putting that demand back in the resolution was not allowed, nor was it voted on. And lastly, the Council refused to accept Mrs Aveling as a delegate because, it said, she was no manual worker (which is not true), although its own President, Mr Shipton, had not moved a finger in his own trade for fully fifteen years.

The workers on the Central Committee were outraged by the trick played on them. It looked as if the demonstration had been finally put into the hands of two organisations representing only negligible minorities of London workers. There seemed to be no remedy for it but to storm the platforms of the Trades Council as the Gas Workers had threatened. Then Edward Aveling went to the

Ministry and secured, contrary to regulations, permission for the Central Committee as well to bring seven platforms to the Park. The attempt to juggle with the demonstration in the interest of the minority failed; the Trades Council pulled in its horns and was glad to be able to negotiate with the Central Committee on an equal footing over arrangements for the demonstration.

One has to know this background to appreciate the nature and significance of the demonstration. Prompted by the East End workers who had recently joined in the movement, the demonstration found such a universal response that the two organisations — which were no less hostile to each other than both of them together were to the fundamental idea of the demonstration — had to ally themselves in order to seize the leadership and use the meeting to their own advantage. On the one hand, a conservative Trades Council preaching equal rights for capital and labour; on the other, a Social-Democratic Federation playing at radicalism, and talking of social revolution whenever it is safe to do so, and the two allied to do a mean trick with an eye to capitalising on a demonstration thoroughly hateful to both.

Owing to these incidents, the 4 May meeting was split into two parts. On one side were the conservative workers, whose horizon does not go beyond the wage-labour system, flanked by a narrow-minded but ambitious socialist sect; on the other side, the great bulk of workers who had recently joined in the movement and who do not want to hear any more of the Manchesterism of the old trades unions and want to win their complete emancipation by themselves, jointly with allies of their own choice, and not with those imposed by a small socialist coterie.

On one side was stagnation represented by trades unions that have not yet quite freed themselves from the guild spirit, and by a narrow-minded sect backed by the meanest allies, on the other, the living free movement of the reawakening British proletariat. And it was apparent even to the blindest where there was fresh life in that two-faced gathering and where stagnation.

Around the seven platforms of the Central Committee were dense, immense crowds, marching up with music and banners, over a hundred thousand in the procession, reinforced by almost as many who had come severally; everywhere was harmony and enthusiasm, and yet order and organisation. At the platforms of the combined reactionaries, on the other hand, everything seemed dull; their procession was much weaker than the other, poorly organised, disorderly and mostly belated, so that in some places things got under way there only when the Central Committee was already through. While the Liberal leaders of some Radical clubs, and the officials of several trades unions rallied to the Trades Council, the members of the very same unions — in fact, four entire branches of the Social-Democratic Federation — marched with the Central Committee. For all that, the Trades Council succeeded in winning some attention, but the decisive success was achieved by the Central Committee.

What the numerous onlooking bourgeois politicians took home with them as the overall effect was the certainty that the English proletariat, which for fully forty years had trailed behind the big Liberal party and served it as voting cattle, had awakened at last to new, independent life and action. There can be no doubt about that: on May 4, 1890, the English working class joined the great international army. And that is an epoch-making fact.

The English proletariat has its roots in the most advanced industrial development and, moreover, possesses the greatest freedom of political movement. Its long slumber — a result, on the one hand, of the failure of the Chartist movement of 1836-50 and, on the other, of the colossal industrial upswing of 1848-80 — is finally broken. The grandchildren of the old Chartists are stepping into the line of battle.

A sick joke

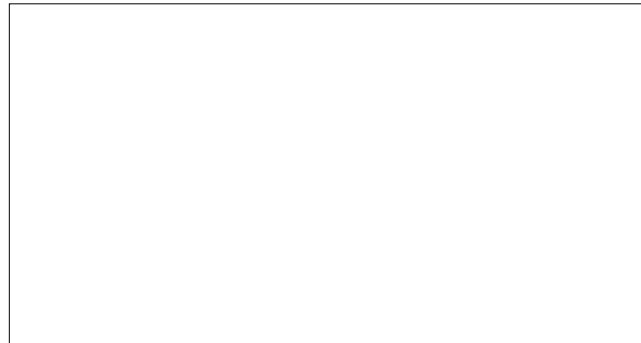
The new film *Three and Out* is a comedy about a London Underground driver who suffers two “one unders” — people throwing themselves under his train — and then deliberately goes for a third in order to get a pay off. Here a *Workers’ Liberty* member who drives trains on the mainline and was previously a Tube driver, and experienced a “one under” himself, responds.

IN 2001, when the woman threw herself under my train, I had no warning it was going to happen. She threw herself on the tracks, then changed her mind and tried to climb up, but couldn’t. She didn’t die, but was smashed up pretty badly. Apparently she was a serial “one under”, which is pretty depressing. I was off work for four weeks, and had to have counselling.

Lots of people can’t drive again after this happens. So in addition to our sympathy for the desperate individuals who do this, you should remember that many drivers lose their livelihood too. The whole thing is also highly traumatising for station staff, and of course for the cleaners who have to clean up afterwards.

One unders are surprisingly common. According to Aslef, last year 249 drivers got down from their cabs to find a corpse on the tracks. Some drivers will have more than one, others will work forty years without any kind of incident at all. It’s just luck.

So I’m pretty pissed off about this film, as I imagine the families of those who’ve committed suicide in this way are too. And London Underground were complicit! They provide facilities for the filming, and have allowed



Three and Out’s makers say they deal with “one unders” sensitively. Not so.

posters all over the Tube. Management have since put out a statement dissociating themselves from the film, but that didn’t stop them helping it be made!

It’s just nonsense that you get a big payment for three one unders. Some people have more than three and keep working; others will have to leave their job after one incident. They’ve made up this payment in order to be able to attack drivers in the film.

If you were one of those middle-class people who thought that workers are all council scum, workshy, scheming — and that Tube workers are a load of lazy gits, always striking, money

for nothing — this would be right up your street. And I suppose that’s who it’s aimed at.

Driving a Tube is an incredibly boring, monotonous job. If drivers sometimes don’t seem very friendly to passengers, it’s because they’ve got an awful job to do, keeping their concentration in the tunnels for long periods of time.

This is a silly film, but one element of it is an attack on a particular section of workers — and a relatively well organised and militant section at that. What group of people will be under fire next?

Palestinian against Palestinian

DAN KATZ REVIEWS TWO NEW BOOKS THE SALADIN MURDERS AND THE BETHLEHEM MURDERS BY MATT REES.

IN the last ten years detective fiction fans have been introduced to sleuths from South America, various bits of Asia, Africa and all over Europe. Generally this globalisation has improved my life.

But the authors of noir and detective fiction don’t often do politics. And if they do, they might mess it up (e.g. Henning Mankell spoils his Kurt Wallender books when he begins to believe he understands how the world works).

Omar Yusef from Bethlehem ticks the right boxes: ex-alcoholic, grumpy, etc. Yusef is not (yet, perhaps) as fully-formed a character as, say, Walter Mosley’s Easy Rawlins — but a compensation is that Rees does understand politics. Rees is British but spent six years as *Time* magazine’s chief in Jerusalem.

Rees clearly believes and has one of his creations say so that it is sometimes easier to discuss issues through fiction. Here the point he makes is unusual: that the main day-to-day problem faced by most Palestinians is other Palestinians.

In the first book Omar Yusef comes up against the Bethlehem branch of the Al-Asqa Martyrs Brigade; in the second, set in Gaza between the time of the Israel withdrawal and the seizure of power by Hamas, the problem is the lavishly corrupt brutality of the Fatah-led Palestinian security services.

The Israelis are in the background (a collaborator is exposed in *The Bethlehem Murders*), Hamas is too — but the armed Palestinian resistance and the Palestinian security services are the main target.

Something to ostentatiously open at a Workers’ Power meeting.

Trotskyist agitprop

The Jacobin Jerques were an agitprop group within the youth section of the American Trotskyist grouping established by Max Shachtman in the 1940s and 50s. Steve Cohen sent us some of the great spoof songs they produced. Here is one. More of these at <http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/parton/2/1950s.html>

Joe McCarthy’s Coming to Town

by Joe Glazer (c. 1951) to the tune “Santa Claus Is Coming To Town”

You’d better beware, you’d better be good,
You’d better do only the things that you should.
Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

He’ll call you a pink, he’ll call you a red,
He’ll drive every liberal thought from your head.
Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

He knows when you’re subversive, he knows each move you make;
His gumshow boys are watching, so be good for McCarthy’s sake.

So you’d better play safe, don’t talk and don’t read,
Don’t write and don’t join if you want to succeed.
Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

If you’ve got a book whose cover is red,
When you start to read look under the bed,
Cause Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

If you go to church to pray or to wed,
You’d better make sure that the preacher’s not red,
Cause Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

Now if you are a teacher and you want to get ahead,
Don’t mention Thomas Jefferson, talk about Joe McCarthy instead.

So, you’d better play safe, don’t talk and don’t read,
Don’t write and don’t join, if you want to succeed,
Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

Be careful who your friends are, be careful what you say,
Don’t be too controversial, or McCarthy will get you some day.

So, get rid of your brains and you’ll never go wrong,
You’ll always be safely sailing along,
When Joe McCarthy’s coming to town.

Blues in the 1960s and 1970s

PETER BURTON CONTINUES A SERIES ON THE HISTORY OF THE BLUES

BY the beginning of the 1960s, genres influenced by African American music such as rock and roll and soul were part of mainstream popular music. White performers had brought African-American music to new audiences, both within the US and abroad. In the UK, bands emulated US blues legends, and UK blues-rock-based bands had an influential role throughout the 1960s.

Blues performers such as John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters continued to perform to enthusiastic audiences, inspiring new artists steeped in traditional blues, such as New York-born Taj Mahal.

John Lee Hooker blended his blues style with rock elements and playing with younger white musicians, creating a musical style that can be heard on the 1971 album *Endless Boogie*. BB King’s virtuoso guitar technique earned him the eponymous title “king of the blues”. In contrast to the Chicago style, King’s band used strong brass support from a saxophone, trumpet, and trombone, instead of using slide guitar or harp. Tennessee-born Bobby “Blue” Bland, like B.B. King, also straddled the blues and R&B genres.

During this period, Freddie King and Albert King often played with rock and soul musicians (Eric Clapton, Booker T & the MGs) and had a major influence on those styles of music that has carried through to the present.

The music of the civil rights and free speech movements in the US prompted a resurgence of interest in American roots music and early African American music. As well as traditional venues, music festivals such as the Newport Folk Festival brought traditional blues to a new audience, which helped to revive interest in pre-war acoustic blues and performers such as Son House, Mississippi John Hurt, Skip James, and the Reverend Gary Davis. (Skip James at Newport in 1963 blew a white middle class audience away with his guitar playing, having not played or recorded for 30 years.)

These artists began to tour again after many decades of not playing, bringing blues to a new wealthier generation of young people. Muddy Waters had been playing electric blues as part of the American Blues Music tours in Europe from 1958 onwards. Dylan’s 1963 and 1964 Newport performances had made him popular with the Newport crowd, but on July 25, 1965 Dylan was booed by some fans when he played alongside an electric blues/rock and roll band while headlining the festival. (The backing players were from the Chicago based and influential Paul Butterfield Blues band — most notably Mike Bloomfield on lead guitar.)

It is usually said that the reason for the crowd’s hostile reception was Dylan’s “abandoning” of the folk orthodoxy, or poor sound quality on the night (or a combination of the two).

This incident, Dylan’s first live “plugged-in” set of his professional career, marked the shift in his artistic direction from folk to rock, and had wider implications for both styles of music. He added his authority to what the electric bluesmen were already doing, bringing the unofficial and artificial separate acoustic folk and electric blues culture to an end — much to the annoyance of many Stalinist purist folkies (for a detailed history of the CPGB Stalinists’ mindset about Folk Music see C P Lee: “Bob Dylan and the road to the Manchester Free trade Hall”).

Ewan McColl, in spite of his radical radio shows and contribution to political song, was one of the purists who insisted on artists singing in their own national tongue.

Nuclear energy and metabolic rifts

SOLIDARITY'S current debate about the future of the nuclear industry appears to be an argument at cross purposes. Martin Thomas, Les Hearn and others have argued that nuclear is not as dangerous or as lethal as some other energy sources like coal. If only we had a planned economy under workers' control without a £70 billion Trident replacement project in the pipeline, then nuclear would be a good idea.

I think it useful to look again at Marx's metaphor of the "metabolic rift". As the grandfather of historical materialism, Marx not only developed a radically practical philosophical worldview, but also an ecological analysis that described what human beings are doing to the planet. In *Capital* Marx defines "labour" as the "universal condition for the metabolic interaction [Stoffwechsel] between man [sic] and nature, the everlasting nature-imposed condition of human existence."

At the time of writing, the concept of metabolism was just beginning to be theorised by the scientific community and Marx used this as a metaphor to describe the relationship between humanity and the natural world. The term implies a dynamic material exchange that creates growth. In turn, this growth creates new conditions for further material exchanges.

So labour is "the process by which man [sic], through his actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature. He sets in motion his arms, legs, head and hands, in order to appropriate the materials of nature in a form adapted to his needs." From the most primitive societies to advanced capitalism, labour is the process through which we manipulate natural materials in order to satisfy human needs and in the process, set up new conditions for our future labour and the reproduction of human life.

The expansionist nature of capitalism has meant that there is now no part of the planet that is untouched by human labour and

nature itself is socially produced. This can be seen in simple terms in the way a peasant might plant an apple tree near to their farm or in global terms with CO₂ emissions which have changed the earth's climate.

Under capitalism this metabolic process breaks down. Marx developed this idea with particular regard to capitalist agriculture. Having read the work of the soil chemist, Justus von Liebig, Marx began to see that capitalism was robbing the soil of all its nutrients, a problem associated with pollution and human waste. Capitalism "produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself. The results of this is a

The rulers were deadly afraid that the Republicans of the cities would link up with the downtrodden Catholic peasantry.

squandering of the vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single country."

By robbing the soil in this way, capitalism has had to find ways to replenish it.

"Capitalist production only turns towards the land only after its influence has exhausted it and after it has devastated its natural qualities." (Marx, *Theories of Surplus Value* part 3). Thus with the desertification of the world's soil, under capitalist agriculture, society had to develop a new metabolism in the form of the industrial fertilisers, pesticides and machinery.

Capitalism has massively increased the productive power of the agricultural worker and thus freeing up labour-power to develop the agricultural technology. The descendants

of peasant farmers are now working in tractor factories and agroscientific laboratories. But there are also massive material inputs needed to create capitalism's vast yields. We now live in a world where the production of one calorie of food requires 10 calories of fossil fuel contributing various pollutants to the world's ecosystems.

The metabolic rift is a failure to maintain a means of reproduction and one we are feeling very sharply with the approach of peak oil and climate change. The metabolism is dynamic and socially mediated. Unlike, some reactionary green myths, the maintenance of our means of reproduction does not rely on us returning to a pre-industrial age. It relies on us manipulating society's immense productive powers to create and recreate a dynamic equilibrium with nature, an equilibrium that allows for change and progress.

So what has any of this got to do with nuclear energy? Marx argued that "Freedom [from material necessity] can consist only in this, that socialised man, the associated producers, govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under collective control, instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature."

As Les and Martin point out, capitalism produces all sorts of toxic waste products which kill people. However, nuclear energy produces waste that will continue to be a problem for future generations for tens of thousands of years. It will be a permanent reminder of this historic rift for any future socialist society. Saying that science will develop a solution to this problem is a failure to look reality squarely in the face.

Capitalism systemically destroys the means by which human society can reproduce itself. This is seen in climate change, soil depletion, deforestation and the extinction of thousands of species of plants and animals. The system is rigged for the

creation of unending profit, exploiting workers and nature alike. It worships the alienated exchange-form of our labour and ignores use-value, the realities of human and natural worlds.

The nuclear industry is one of the best examples of how the system creates a rift in the metabolism between humanity and nature. The dynamics of capitalism create a technology which burdens the next 10,000 years with highly volatile waste products in the interest of short term profits. Whilst nuclear technology might be a rational energy source for a future society of associated producers, it is difficult to imagine that this society would opt for this technology without the scientific know how to deal with the waste problems. It might be that capitalism will develop an effective solution to the problem of nuclear waste but it will be done on their terms (ie only if there is a profit to be made).

Whether or not we believe there is a role for nuclear in a future society, we should be absolutely clear that the bourgeoisie views nuclear technology in a way fundamentally opposed to the how Marxists should see it. Their concern is for profit, ours is for human need, and the nuclear power stations that they are proposing to build will reflect this difference.

There is no mention on the government's (or any of their corporate partners) agenda of developing Thorium-based nuclear generators despite the obvious advantages of this technology from a social and ecological perspective. There is certainly no mention of workers' control or giving up the nuclear arsenal. The power plants that will be built and the waste management systems that they put in place will have the profit-motive written into the very essence and will be very difficult to utilise in a democratically planned economy.

The government's proposals will mean that we are stuck with these power stations until 2050 (at least), with waste products that will have to be dealt with for the next 4000 generations.

Capitalism does not simply develop benign technology that can be appropriated wholesale in a workers' revolution. Capitalism develops many technologies that a rationally planned economy would avoid and it utilises the technologies it does develop in irrational and destructive ways. The development of the car has changed the way in which we build our towns and has created various public health problems, alienation (road rage) and environmental destruction.

Similarly, modern housing is dictated by capitalist logic, with an abundance of one, two and three bed apartments, which are not only ecologically unsound but leave millions isolated. A socialist reconstruction of society will involve knocking down a lot of walls and welding together a lot of cars to make more communal, ecologically sound use of our technology. But any particular technology developed under capitalism will invariably bear the mark of this ecological destructive and alienating system. In some cases the technology can be modified in ways that will restore the metabolic relationship. But in the case of nuclear this seems unlikely.

Opposition to nuclear technology is not based on "Luddite" anti-technological reaction. It is a recognition that the current technology (which is still very much in its infancy) and of the current political climate, dominated by the rule of profit, will create power stations and waste that would burden any future socialist society.

It is based on the Marxist understanding that capitalism invests society's wealth in the interests of profit rather than human need, and that the type of technology (and the means in which that technology is utilised) reflect this priority.

Stuart Jordan

Stay with Arcobaleno

WHILST the participation of Rifondazione Comunista and other parties of the "radical left" in the Prodi government of 2006-08 was clearly a serious mistake and has been belatedly acknowledged as such by Bertinotti himself (see *il Manifesto*, 6 April 2008), Hugh Edwards is wrong to concentrate his fire on Bertinotti and the PRC (*Solidarity* 3-130).

Whatever its many faults, the Rainbow Left is clearly part of the workers' movement, standing on a platform that wants to get rid of all types of agency work, link wages and pensions to inflation, enhance employment protection in small enterprises, increase taxes on the rich and so on, in addition to defending secularism, women's rights (including abortion) and gay rights (including civil partnerships) and making numerous environmental demands. Veltroni and the Democratic Party are a much greater danger as far as working class representation is concerned.

Veltroni's choice of an American name for his party is no accident. This erstwhile Eurocommunist careerist bureaucrat, who became a leader of the PCI's Youth Federation in his teens straight from school, without any experience of either university or manual work, who years ago wrote a crass hagiography of the egregiously Robert Kennedy and has long been obsessed with Hollywood films, has now rejected even a nominal linkage with European social democracy — the new party's name quite deliber-

ately excludes the very words "socialist", "social democratic", "left", "labour" or "workers", which many objectively right-wing social democratic parties continue to employ (most notably the PSOE of Zapatero).

He has explicitly repudiated any notion of Italian society being divided into bosses and workers; keeps comparing himself (or even better has the actor George Clooney compare him) with Barack Obama; uses Obama's vacuous "Yes, we can!" as his chief campaign slogan; has adopted the Village People's YMCA as his campaign song (with a new chorus of "I am piddi" in English!) and gets his ex-Christian Democratic deputy leader to brand Bertinotti as the Italian Nader.

The Democratic Party's repudiation of the working class is mirrored in the working class's repudiation of the Democratic Party. Recent opinion polls show Veltroni's coalition (Democrats plus Lista Di Pietro) has only 31.6% amongst manual workers as against 51.2% amongst white collar employees, 45.7% amongst pensioners and 43.7% amongst students. Contrary to opponents' slurs branding it a party of nostalgic pensioners or utopian students, the Rainbow left has a higher score amongst manual workers than amongst any other group (11.9%).

Unfortunately the bulk of the widespread despair and alienation amongst manual workers facing rising food and utility prices and falling real wages has taken the form of support for Berlusconi's coalition, which has the backing of 46.5% of manual workers.

Veltroni has quite deliberately refused to do any deal with the Rainbow Left along the lines of the broad centre left alliances of 1996 or 2006 — he aims to eliminate the Rainbow Left from parliament or at any rate the upper house, the Senate, where each region has an 8% threshold (the Rainbow Left's nationwide opinion poll standing is about 5-6%).

For Veltroni in the event of a hung parliament a grand coalition (perhaps to change the electoral and constitutional arrangements in a more Anglo-American direction) is far more attractive than any deal with the Rainbow Left. Given the Democratic Party's inclusion of various homophobic and misogynist clerical and military bigots in its lists, not only the defence of the working class but also the defence of secularism and abortion rights requires the continuing parliamentary presence of the Rainbow Left.

Whilst I have some affection for Sinistra Critica's genuinely ecosocialist and feminist version of Trotskyism, neither they nor the more dogmatic sectarians of the Partito comunista dei lavoratori or the Partito d'Alternativa Comunista stood any chance of getting a single deputy. Workers should have voted for the Sinistra Arcobaleno as "Una scelta di parte" (a taking of sides), to use their election slogan, and as far as I can judge the best place to do political work is still inside, not outside the Sinistra Arcobaleno

Toby Abse (13 April 2008, the day of the election)

The crisis depends on the fightback

Leo Panitch has been editor of the annual *Socialist Register* in recent years, during which it has produced issues on "Working Classes, Global Realities" (2001), "The New Imperial Challenge" (2004), and "The Empire Reloaded" (2005). He is also the author of many books and articles, several co-written with Sam Gindin, former research director for the Canadian Auto Workers Union (CAW). He is active in the Socialist Project group, www.socialistproject.ca, and is a professor at York University, Toronto. He spoke to Martin Thomas.

I DON'T think that US hegemony has waned, and I don't think it's about to wane in the very near future, despite the current financial crisis.

In my view, the better term for the US role in the world is Empire. That captures in my mind the way in which the American state plays a role of coordination and oversight and crisis-managing for global capitalism, in the absence of a global state.

It managed to do that in my hemisphere, on this side of the Atlantic, by penetrating other, independent states, in South America and North America, before the Second World War. Its capital penetrated those states and encouraged the restructuring of those states in a way that was consistent with fostering trade and the protection of the property rights of US capitalists, or in fact of foreign capitalists in general.

That became generalised after the Second World War, not so much with the Third World as with Europe and Japan, which became increasingly Canadianised. European and Japanese capital, in different ways, were penetrated by American capitalists. Conditions for that were established politically. That penetration was very deep, and it was done in collaboration with the ruling classes of those countries. This was imperialism by invitation. The ruling classes saw the American state as the safest guarantor of capital's rights, especially in the countries where the labour movement was strong.

From the 30s on, European capital had poured into the United States, even during the New Deal. So this has been a collaborative type of hegemony or Empire.

When Europe and Japan were put back on their feet after the Second World War, and became competitive in terms of trade with the United States, the notion arose that meant American hegemony was fading. It was a very common view, but fundamentally misleading. It failed to understand that the Europeans and Japanese wanted the Americans to play a more active role in managing the global economy, not a lesser role. To the extent that they were unhappy with American policy, it was mainly for that reason.

That has continued through the era of neo-liberalism. There have been moments where in very economistic ways, based on the size of the trade deficit or the penetration of foreign direct investment into the United States, people have predicted US decline as imminent. It has proved to be wrong in every case. The American state is still seen as the most important protector of global capital.

Many people think that the deficit means that the US economy is a basket case; but, through the technological revolution we've just lived through, in information technology and so on, it has managed to maintain its dynamism as a capitalist power.

The deficit has reflected the fact that the United States has been the market for so much of what is produced in the world today. It has not reflected a decline in American exports, which over the last 15 or 20 years have increased more than any other G7 country's.

To read off from the size of the trade deficit a problem in terms of American hegemony, I think, is not to understand the role that the United States, and New York as a financial centre, and American banks in London, play in terms of the glue of international capitalism. No-one is doing a favour to the United States by putting short-term capital into New York, or holding onto dollars. They are purchasing dollars and Treasury Bills because they remain the most stable store of value in a highly volatile capitalist world.

The volatile nature of international finance, in which free trade in currencies is a large factor, makes this a highly volatile set-up, and one that is prone to financial crises. Notably, not many financial crises have been dollar crises in the way that we saw sterling crises from the 1950s to the 1970s, when sterling was still a central currency. (London is still a big financial centre; but now it is essentially one of the great centres of American dollar finance).

What's been quite remarkable, at least since the 1979 Volcker shock, has been the extent to which, for all of the size of the deficit and the free floating of the dollar, there hasn't been a massive run on the dollar. Even in recent days, we've seen a rather managed decline of the dollar, and a decline which is functional to reducing the size of the US trade deficit.

When the dollar got inordinately high, after the very high interest rates that established enormous confidence in the US Treasury Bill and the dollar, you then had the meetings around the Plaza Accord which coordinated a readjustment.

People are constantly observing the level of the dollar, given the role it plays in the international capitalist economy. But what's astonishing is the extent to which the dollar has not suffered.

So it's like Keynes's comment that if you owe the bank £100, you have a problem, but if you owe the bank a million, the bank has a problem? The capitalists of the rest of the world have to keep the dollar up because so much of their interests are tied up with it.

Absolutely. And that reflects the degree of integration.

Marxists tend to discuss crises in terms of a decline in the rate of profit. But, by most accounts, over the last several years, profits have recovered quite considerably. Are we going to see a crisis without a prior fall in the rate of profit, or what?

Our position — my position and that of my comrade and co-author Sam Gindin — has been that the profit squeeze of the late 60s and the 70s was resolved by the defeat of labour, and to some extent the defeat of the Third World national-liberation radicalism that produced a rise in commodity prices (though we may be seeing another surge of commodity prices now).

With the restructuring that was brought about in the 1980s in the banking system and in industry, in the United States but also in Europe and elsewhere, the basis was established for profit rates to recover as they have done, especially in the last decade.

That account involves a very different interpretation of the cause of the profit crisis of the 1960s and 70s than is offered by Bob Brenner. It suggests an explanation of the profit crisis much more similar to the "wage squeeze" explanation that was offered way back in the 1970s by Andrew Glyn and Bob Sutcliffe.

We think you have to have a broader understanding of the factors squeezing profits than just wage militancy, though that was very important in some countries, in Britain and to some extent in the United States. There was a much more general range of pressures on capital that were expressed by the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the radicalisation of the students, all of which produced the fiscal crisis of the state and not as much room, for a period, for the state to cut back on corporate taxes.

Put all that together with the wage militancy of the working class, and we think that had a lot to do with the profit crisis — of course in the context of the renewed competition which made it difficult for any individual firm to raise prices.

We think that was resolved by breaking the back not only of the wage militancy but also of the tendency of the social movements to win extensions in the welfare state - by introducing neo-liberalism.

Brenner thinks the crisis was largely one of competition between national capitals, and that there has been a problem ever since in terms of not enough firms exiting. They're making some profits, not as high as they used to, but they stay in business.

In our view, by contrast, we have been living through one of the most dynamic periods in the whole history of capitalism. It has been enormously exploitative, and has created enormous insecurity around the world, including in the heart of the Empire itself, but its dynamism has been related to its ability to be exploitative and create insecurity.

It isn't only a matter of increased exploitation of the industrial working class, or of the low-paid service sector; it's a matter of getting the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, the professionals, to work for corporations enormous hours.

The recovery of profits that we have seen has been substantial and real, and not, as Bob Brenner usually explains it, a matter of ad hoc ways of getting out of a continuing structural crisis. In my

The USA is to the world what New York is to the USA

view, doesn't make sense as a Marxist to speak of a crisis that lasts for forty or more years.

Does all that rule out another serious profits crisis? No, it does not do so, by any means. We need to keep looking, even if not in orthodox terms of the "tendency of the rate of profit to fall", for the possibility of a serious profit crisis.

How serious a profit crisis will be depends, I think, on how much the rate of exploitation can be raised again - that is, on how much working-class resistance there is to the type of restructuring that allows capital to get out of it. That is why so much hinges on how we interpret all these things in terms of working-class renewal and working-class strategy.

Capitalism is crisis-prone above all in the financial sector, but it remains crisis-prone in a deeper sense in the productive sector. How serious crises are depends, in the end, on class relations. The most serious crises of capitalism are those in which it is difficult to increase the rate of exploitation. That is why the 1970s crises was so protracted, because it was difficult to increase the rate of exploitation then, given the strength of militancy of rank-and-file labour.

Has the credit system become more crisis-prone?

THE system has become larger, more complex, in some ways more efficient, and also more crisis-prone. The size and complexity of it are directly related to the neo-liberal re-regulation which has allowed a lot more competition in the financial sector than was allowed in the New Deal type of legislation.

The expanded credit system has been quite functional to the growth of global capitalism. When so much capital and trade is flowing round the world with free-floating currencies, you need a highly complex system of financial trading in order to be able to adjust the enormous risks involved in the marginal changes in currencies and interest rates, etc.

This goes all the way back to the situation the farmer faced in the 1870s, and still faces today. When a wheat farmer in western Canada puts seed in the soil, in the spring, he doesn't know what the price of a Canadian dollar is going to be in October, when he will be selling the grain.

One of the ways of dealing with that is by developing co-operatives, but the most fundamental way of dealing with it, going all the way back to the 1870s, when the Chicago Mercantile Exchange was established, is through a large, complex set of financial intermediaries.

That farmer would go into his little local bank and begin to hedge the price he might be able to sell the wheat when he was signing a contract in April to deliver it in October; and that would go through fifteen intermediaries before it would get to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, where there would be a trade in wheat futures.

The same was true in almost every other agricultural product. Today we see that all around the world in "derivatives". They play that role in the management of risk. It's no accident that, with the help of Milton Friedman, when Bretton Woods broke down in 1971, the market in derivatives around currencies was established at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange.

The system has become larger, much more complex. The derivatives now cover not only real products, but financial instruments of all kinds. There are a gazillion players in this market, and they are all speculating.

But, as Dick Bryan argues [*Capitalism with derivatives: a political economy of financial derivatives, capital and class*, Palgrave

Macmillan, 2006) this may be the most important development in capitalism since the joint-stock company in terms of its ability to smooth out the enormous risk that's involved in this complicated and diverse global capitalism.

At the same time the system is more crisis-prone. It is more crisis-prone because it does involve speculation. It is enormously complex, and the people trading in it are operating on the basis of highly complex algebra that most of us don't understand and very few of them fully do. It's not clear, to anyone in the system, who holds a given piece of paper at a given time.

Also, neo-liberal regulation is mainly self-regulation. The banks are regulated through Basel and the Bank of International Settlements and the national or regional central banks; but they are regulated in a way that requires them to be self-regulating, that is, to keep a certain amount of capital adequacy on their books; and they are able to get around the regulation quite easily.

What happened with the subprime mortgage market is that, going back to 1988, American investment banks began setting up in London the "structured investment vehicles" that allowed them to get round the capital adequacy standards that had been set up in Basel I. They set up off-book accounts that allowed them to trade in risky products such as the subprime mortgage derivatives.

On top of it all, most national banking systems are not deep. I once heard Volcker speak at the Board of Trade in Toronto. He had just come back from Argentina. This was before the Argentine crisis. He had asked the head of the Argentine central bank what the total capitalisation of their banking system was. Before coming to Toronto he had stopped in Philadelphia, at a bankers' dinner there, and asked the second-largest bank in Philadelphia, a regional bank, what its capitalisation was. It was larger than all of Argentina's!

So he came to Toronto and said: "Look, this is impossible. What's going to have to happen is that Western banks are going to have to buy these banking systems". The former head of the Bank of Canada got up — and this guy is a pure monetarist — and said: "Well, that is all well and good, but most countries don't want their banking systems to be owned by foreigners".

So there are contradictions, as well as efficiencies and functionalities, in this highly volatile, global financial capitalism.

The central banks and the finance ministries - and the Federal Reserve as a proto-world-bank, and the Treasury, though it has played this role less under Bush than it did under Clinton - have managed to keep the capitalist system going; they have managed to fire-fight; the crises have been contained, from moment of chaos to moment of chaos.

One never knows whether they can keep on doing this. Their main function in terms of regulation is to know enough about the players in the financial market that they can manage crises. We may be seeing, out of this crisis, a turn towards increasing mandatory regulation, which will also be coordinated.

I still think the system would be mostly self-regulated. It would be like Sarbanes-Oxley, where the boards of directors are required to sign off on accounting papers and become legally liable.

But maybe global capitalism doesn't have to continue to be neo-liberal in the sense we have known it. I wrote an article ten years ago called *The Social Democratization of Globalisation*, and I think that is possible out of the current crisis. How far it will go, and whether it means anything in terms of shifting the balance of class forces — that really depends on whether the working classes, broadly defined, manage to act to shift the balance of class forces from below.

But I do think it's possible that out of this crisis there will be more directive oversight on the part of capitalist states and the American state, even if the crisis drags on, as it may do, for a couple of years, with a shake-out in the banking system that produces further concentration in it.

The Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank have followed sharply different policies in the current crisis. International coordination doesn't seem to be working very well.

Yes and no. Going back to the beginning of this particular crisis, last August, there was immediately coordination between the US Treasury and Federal Reserve in terms of throwing liquidity into the markets, and the European banks threw most of it in.

Some of the banks hit mostly heavily by the crisis with the subprime derivatives were ironically the quasi-public Landesbanks in Germany, and the European Central Bank, really acting for the Bundesbank, oversaw the remedial measures.

Interestingly, most of what they pumped in then immediately made its way to London, to the interbank market. There was coordination then.

Then there was coordination around the liquidity thrown in in December.

So on that level there been quite a lot of cooperation, and the European Central Bank has played a central role.

On the question of inflation, however - on the question of whether lowering interest rates is the way to go - you're right. It partly reflects the fact that the Bundesbank - and the European Central Bank has carried the same tradition forward - has always been, from the time Bretton Woods began, much more monetarist than any other central bank, much more concerned about inflation.

The New York Fed has been much more pragmatic about that. And it has had the room to be, because of the world confidence in the Treasury Bill and in the weakness of the left in the United States — there is much more confidence in the guarantee that the American state offers against default. Also, the United States is more populist. The Fed does not have the de facto independence from the political system, that the European Central Bank has.

The different approaches are also, I would guess, a reflection of different policy judgements. There's a sense that the lowering of the interest rate is not enough, in itself, to make the financial

system ready to be lending, and you see this in the fact that long-term interest rates are not declining. People have been saying that the Fed is pushing against a string, and that may be the case to some extent.

There is one way in which I think the Fed has acted as world central bank in a way that the ECB never does - so you see the hierarchy of imperial apparatuses here. When there were the beginnings of a stock market crash, in Asia and spreading to Europe, in January or early February, the Fed met on a Monday night and then on Tuesday morning announced the big interest rate reduction. The Fed felt it had to send that signal of a drastic reduction in interest rates, not so much for what it would accomplish, but for its symbolic effect in terms of reassuring the stock markets. The stock market has traditionally taken the view that a reduction in interest rates means that people shift from bonds to stocks, though I'm not sure how much that continues to operate today. In any case, the signal from the Fed did have an effect.

There's a special role which the Fed plays which the European Central Bank does not play vis-a-vis global stock markets.

Some financial crises in recent decades have had relatively little knock-on effect on trade and production. Do you think that one factor in this is that the financial sphere is feeding much more off consumer credit? And then could we see this financial crisis, rather bigger than previous ones, feeding into a crisis in trade and production initially through a reduction in consumer spending rather than in investment spending?

So far, the indication is that it's not impossible in Europe, or in North America, or least of all in the Third World, to be raising funds for investment.

Has the ability of capital to integrate workers through the credit market hit its limits?

If the derivatives play the central role they do, as Dick Bryan explains, in hedging risk, there is a question whether the financial crisis will affect trade in the long run.

People tend to overlook the extent to which, even though real wages have not increased, or not increased much, since the 70s, living standards for workers in the advanced capitalist world have gone up. They've gone up primarily through those workers becoming integrated into finance.

They've gone up to the extent to which those workers have become indebted and the financial system has been willing to integrate them through the enormous growth in the credit card market and in mortgages. That is also reflected to a certain extent in the fact that workers' savings have been picked up through pension funds and institutional investment so that workers tend to think of themselves, astonishingly, as investors whose net wealth will increase as they get older.

That all went so far, and then it fell apart, because it penetrated, not only in the credit card market but also in the mortgage market, to that portion of the American working class which has always been the Achilles heel of the integration of American workers into the American dream, and that is the African-American working class.

You don't understand it at first when you walk around Washington Heights in New York and you see unemployed young black men wearing \$200 sneakers. They're doing it on credit. It seems hard to believe that capital extended the types of loans it did to African-Americans in Cleveland to buy sub-standard housing stock with the promise that it, too, would increase in value; but it did that.

The question now is whether the ability of advanced capitalism to integrate workers through the credit market has run up against its limits, and what are the implications if it has. What are the implications in terms of economic crisis, and what are the implications in terms of workers not taking it any more.

One wishes one would see much more radical protest than we have seen so far around the housing crisis in the United States. You hear enough about it in terms of politicians talking about people being affected as victims, but you don't yet see much mobilisation. That's not to say there won't be.

There is speculation in the Wall Street Journal today that the market is waiting for the American state to buy up all this bad debt — whether directly through the Fed, or through a special agency — in other words, to socialise it. The Wall Street Journal quotes one analyst from a private investment firm saying that he is not predicting that this will be done, but he is saying that it is what the market is looking for.

The operation would be like the British government has done with Northern Rock, but on a massively bigger scale. The bad debt even in the United States is probably in the hundreds of billions of dollars, let alone the total around the world.

It's conceivable that might happen, and then the consumer's ability to get into the credit system would be replenished. But that hasn't happened yet, and I don't want to predict it necessarily will. It's not impossible that this crisis will be dealt with by Band-Aid measures, and it could lead to a significant shake-out whereby regional banks in the United States would close, intermediaries would go bankrupt, a piece of Citibank might be sold off...

I remember the late Harry Magdoff saying to me, in his apartment, after the stock market crash in 1987, when the question was to what extent were the banks implicated by their loans to the stockbrokers: "Well, so they'll nationalise a couple of banks!"

In this context we have to understand nationalisation in an entirely different way than one might have understood it as a left-wing social democrat in England in 1945.

It's socialism for the rich!

Exactly. In the first place for the rich. But not only for the rich...

Even the perspective of a massive bailout implies that the edges of the consumer credit system are pulled back in. Northern Rock is not writing ultra-easy mortgages any more.

Yes. And they're very worried about it. They're very worried about the fact that the financial system is reluctant to lend.

On the other hand, Martin Wolf in the Financial Times says essentially that what the Federal Reserve is doing might work, but he sort of hopes it doesn't, because there are fundamental structural problems with the very low level of savings in the USA., and if the Federal Reserve's measures allow things to stagger on a bit further, they are just paving the way for a bigger crisis down the road.

Yes. Wolf's a very smart guy. There's a more reactionary variant of the same argument coming from the *Wall Street Journal*.

You hear the argument that if the Fed had not lowered interest rates in 2001 after the "new economy" bubble and 9/11, you wouldn't have had the housing bubble. But what are they saying? That they'd prefer to have this crisis then?

They're saying that they'd prefer to have a smaller crisis now that forces the resolution of unsustainable imbalances, before those imbalances become bigger.

But the fact is that agencies like the Fed are going to try to prevent crises — or, if not to prevent them, to stop them being catapulted into global capitalist crises. That is their nature.

Ben Bernanke, the head of the Federal Reserve, wrote his PhD thesis on how the Fed and the Treasury could have prevented the Great Depression by supplying liquidity to the banking system instead of playing the orthodox banker role and requiring that the books be balanced. As I read all the inclination in the American state, and I think for the most part in Europe, that is the role that the central banks will try to play.

Also, I don't see that the result of a bigger crisis would be that Americans started saving again. I don't see that people would have the capacity to save. On the contrary, you'd see a rundown of savings of wealth.

The greatest imbalance that people worry about is the US trade deficit. But that is being dealt with, so far, by this relatively managed decline of the dollar. There may be inflationary consequences; but the deficit was up at 7%, and it has fallen to 5% of GDP.

Moreover, we need to remember that the world is not doing America a favour, as accountants seem to think, by covering the deficit with short-term capital inflows. People are buying Treasury Bills today because in this highly unstable world they are the closest things to gold that pays some interest rate. People are also buying gold and commodities and so on, and that reflects the volatility, but in so far as they are buying bonds, and they are, they are buying Treasury Bills.

In Gindin's and my view, only the United States, by virtue of the asymmetrical nature of power in today's capitalism, can sustain such a deficit for a long time. But it can, because of the role that the dollar and the US Treasury Bill play in the world economy.

It's a bit like London, as a financial centre, and its "trade deficit" vis-a-vis the UK. It's a bit like New York, and its deficit vis-a-vis North America.

Without thinking at all that national borders have been done away with, I think we need to look at the American deficit in the light of the special role of the dollar, which I don't see the euro is about to displace.

What about the effect of the decline of the dollar, and the resulting squeeze on US imports and rise in US exports, on China and the other big new exporting countries?

I don't have a crystal ball. The people who talked about "decoupling" are wrong. There is no "decoupling" that China can yet do from Western markets, above all from the American market. In that sense, to speak of a realignment of forces in global capitalism, as Giovanni Arrighi does, is misleading.

We are seeing an increasing integration of global capitalism. China's role in global capitalism is much enhanced. But realignment is not the right word, if it is understood as Chinese capital displacing American capital, or Chinese power displacing American power.

But the decline of the dollar could have inflationary effects in those countries whose currencies remain pegged to the dollar.

If the measures that have been introduced in China to alleviate some of the discontent of the working class, whereby they've offered some labour-standards protections and some requirements for representation by the party-run Chinese unions, or the promised reform of the health system, were to come through, and you were to get inflationary pressures, you might get considerable class conflict, and that might spill over into regional conflict inside China. The uneven development in China is astonishing, and people in the regions not undergoing rapid capitalist development are highly dependent on remittances from workers in the cities.

The repercussions could be very real. But the different new exporting powers are all very different. Brazil and Russia are doing very well out of the high price of commodities, which represents a cost to China and India.

I find it very difficult to gaze in a crystal ball here, given the enormously different social formations we are talking about, or to make any hard predictions.

When the IRA ceased fire

In August 1994 the Provisional IRA declared a ceasefire in its "Long War", which by then had lasted 24 years (interspersed with some previous, temporary ceasefires). The 1994 ceasefire was interrupted by a partial return to bombing between February 1996 and July 1997, but eventually the ceasefire proved permanent. The Provisionals entered negotiations.

Today former IRA members sit in a Belfast coalition government with Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. The Provisionals have abandoned their previous goal of forcing a united Ireland by military struggle, and instead gone for mainstream bourgeois politics.

Was the ceasefire, then, a "sell-out" of a militant revolutionary nationalist struggle which otherwise would have brought liberation, or even spilled over into socialist revolution? The Catholics of Northern Ireland, in 1994, thought not: they celebrated on the streets when they heard about the ceasefire. We thought not too. Sean Matgamna wrote this assessment in *Socialist Organiser* (a forerunner of *Solidarity*) of 8 September 1994.

THE Provisional IRA ceasefire is the best news out of Northern Ireland in many a long year. Is it likely to prove a stable ceasefire? Is it the prelude to a settlement? Why has it come now? What happens next?

It is a very peculiar ceasefire. The Provisionals have not been decisively beaten, still less militarily crushed. They have not lost the ability to continue their low-intensity military activities. They have not been disarmed, either militarily or politically.

They retain their weapons, and may use the peace to improve their position militarily. They are already using it to improve their position politically.

As far as is publicly known, the Provisionals have won none of the objectives of their twenty-three-and-a-half year war. The British declaration that Britain will not stand in the way of Irish unity if a majority in Northern Ireland wants it, is nothing new. Britain made the same declaration 21 years ago, before the March 1973 referendum in Northern Ireland. On the face of it, the Provisionals have gained nothing of substance.

Neither has there been any move by Northern Ireland Unionists towards acceptance of the united Ireland which the Provisionals want. Far from it: the Protestant paramilitaries evidently intend to continue and increase their campaign of murdering Catholics chosen at random.

Not beaten, not victorious, with their forces still intact and, maybe, growing, the Provisionals are beginning to run the film of the last 26 years of Northern Ireland history backwards. The present phase began with large-scale civil rights agitation in 1968.

Now the Provisionals have switched back from war to political agitation. Their military campaign grew after the Protestant anti-Catholic pogroms of 1969 — out of the political agitation of 1968; there is nothing to say that a new phase of the military campaign will not grow out of the current political phase, if it proves disappointing.

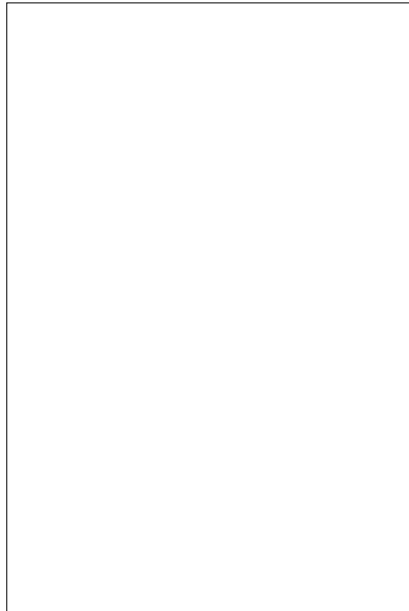
It depends. One of the key, but for now unanswerable, questions is how much of the present move to politics represents a collapse of the Provisional leaders' belief in the military campaign, and how much is the result of a political calculation that a strategy centred on military action can for now best be served by a switch to politics.

There has for long been evidence of a real desire by some Sinn Feiners to go completely political, but the signs right now suggest that the ceasefire is mainly a result of political calculation within an unchanged strategy, and has been "sold" to the IRA as just that. They believe that they can best move forward by way of the so-called "pan-nationalist" bloc, which ranges from Irish Americans, who are still a power (sometimes a very reactionary one) in US politics, through John Hume's SDLP and the Provisionals in the North, to Fianna Fail, the party of government in the South for most of the past sixty years.

The clearest evidence for this is the fact that the Provisionals seem to have made this "political" turn without an IRA split. In the last decade the spirit of pragmatism — the pragmatism of a living movement which, despite its ideology of general Irish republicanism, is really a very narrow movement of only a section of a section of the Irish people — has displaced much of the old Republican reasoning from first principles about such things as the sanctity and purity of "armed struggle". The Provisionals are now a far more reason-bound and far less traditionalist movement. But even so, it is scarcely conceivable that the Provisional IRA could avoid a split if, despite winning no real victory, the leadership simply called off the armed struggle. Neither the military discipline of the Provisional IRA, nor war-weariness — that would not be uniform: there would always be some willing to go on — could achieve this seeming unanimity.

The Provisional IRA must have been won to a policy of "seeing what the pan-nationalist bloc can achieve". Some of them must believe that the way is open, if they are disappointed, to resume the military struggle. Nothing else explains the seeming unanimity.

This implies that the ceasefire may be anything but final. Many who are now more than eager to paint the political



IRA destruction

prospects before the Provisionals in the most encouraging colours will change or prove unable to deliver what they now promise. This might prove to be true even of the much-talked-about promise of a river of dollars to wash Northern Ireland clean of its old sectarian cataracts.

Central in determining what will happen is the political goals the Provisionals continue to pursue. There is no change here, despite the plausible press reports that appeared last year to the effect that the Hume/Adams agreement contained an acceptance by Provisional leader Gerry Adams that there could only be a united Ireland with the agreement of the Northern Protestants.

There is talk now that sounds like that, but it is coupled with demands on Britain to "become persuaders" to get the Unionists to accept a united Ireland, and with international activities to put pressure on Britain to put pressure on the Protestants. The weapons of pressure include the promotion of economic coercion by way of the so-called McBride principles in the USA. Talk of "voluntary agreement" here is only a way of saying international pressure instead of pressure by way of the Provisionals' military campaign.

In the past we have pointed out in *Socialist Organiser* — provoking the scepticism of many who, otherwise, have time for what we say — that no sense can be made of what the Provisionals do to the Irish Protestant-Unionists, whose consent they need for a united Ireland, unless you understand that their real "strategy" is to compel Britain to coerce the Protestants. Now, with the central stress Adams is publicly placing on the demand that the British become "persuaders", no-one who wants to understand Northern Ireland can fail to see that this, indeed, is their policy. If it does not succeed — and it cannot — then this new peace is likely to break down.

Marxists judge their attitude to wars by who is fighting whom, for what goals. We have an automatic sympathy for the Catholic victims of Partition in their revolt, but no good can come from the political goals of the Provisional IRA.

Much of the brutal stupidity of their military campaign has been generated by the unrealisability of their political objectives — which amount to solving the problem of the alienated half-million Northern Ireland Catholics by forcing the one million Irish Unionists into a united Ireland where they would have equal citizenship, but no special recognition of or safeguards for the national identity which is no less important to them than their different identity is to the Northern Ireland Catholics.

It would take large-scale civil war and the outright subjugation of the Protestants to achieve that. Then they would be the sort of sullen alienated minority in an all-Ireland state that the Catholics have been in Northern Ireland — and some of them would, in the Provisional IRA campaign, have the perfect model of what to do about it.

Whether pursued by way of a military campaign, or by international pressure through the pan-nationalist alliance, the political goal of forcing the Protestants into a Catholic united Ireland makes no sense for the Irish people, or for the Irish working class.

The serious left will have to judge the new phase of political

campaigning by Sinn Fein from this point of view. All the campaigning will be grist to the mill of their political objectives. All of it will be designed to build support for those objectives and for their organisation, and to build up their potential to launch a new phase of armed struggle should their calculations lead them to such a decision.

SOcialist *Organiser* believes that the repressive measures that have been assembled by the British state during the Provisional should now be dismantled forthwith — the Prevention of Terrorism Act, the no-jury courts in Northern Ireland, the military presence in the Catholic areas, and so on. We call for an amnesty for the Republican prisoners, and we demand that the British and Irish governments immediately set up talks involving all parties in Ireland to seek a democratic settlement there.

We will continue to argue this, as we have over many years. But no-one on the left should enlist in the new Provisional political campaigns on these and other questions unless they support the Provisionals and what they aim for politically. If war is the continuation of politics by other means, then these political campaigns are a continuation of the Provisionals' war by other means — and, maybe, preparation for another military offensive, fuelled by the strength the Provisional IRA can gain in this phase.

The fight against these repressive measures of the British state can play a progressive role, that is, counterpose to the present reactionary set-up in Northern Ireland something better and not worse — and escalating Protestant-Catholic conflict is worse, much worse — only if it is made part of a political campaign for a real solution to the conflict, a solution that allows the possibility of working-class unity being developed across the communal divide.

Probably the most significant thing, politically, about the situation after the ceasefire is that the Provisionals' entire focus is now — and undisguisedly, despite soothing words here and there — directed away from an intra-Irish solution, involving agreement between the different communities on the island, and towards an externally imposed, or, in the Provisionals' jargon, "persuaded", solution. Their solution lies in pressure from Dublin, London, Washington and Brussels, not in Belfast.

But the only possible solution is one that builds intra-Irish agreement. We must hope that the "international pressure" approach of the Provisionals does not push back even further all prospect of that.

Finally, let us consider the possibility that what is happening is what much of the media believes is happening: a decisive move to politics and a definitive end to the armed struggle.

The signs are that even if sections of the Provisional leadership have a genuine hankering to go into mainstream politics, that is not what is happening now. But it may be that the Provisionals will divide in the period ahead, belatedly producing a military wing of the 1983 splinter group Republican Sinn Fein on one side and a primarily political group on the other.

If that happens it will be a re-enactment of something seen often in Irish politics, a repetition of a pattern so old that James Connolly could summarise it 100 years ago in such a way as to seem to predict a whole series of episodes in 20th century Irish politics. It is a pattern of people and organisations who have been revolutionaries in military terms, while not at all revolutionary in social terms, and quickly evolve into more or less ordinary bourgeois and petty-bourgeois politicians once they move into conventional politics.

Fianna Fail was part of the IRA of 1922. They fought a civil war. In power after 1932 they were mild reformers and thoroughgoing conservatives. A smaller organization emerged in the 1940s, led by leaders of the right wing of the IRA of the 1930s. The Workers' Party and the Democratic Left emerged in the 1970s and '80s out of the IRA of the 1950s. None of these played a notably progressive, let alone a revolutionary socialist, role.

This is the well-trodden path that the Provisionals are taking if they really have "gone political" or when a section of them do. They are narrower than all their predecessors emerging into bourgeois politics out of the Republican chrysalis, because they are primarily based on the Six Counties Catholics, not on support all across Ireland. Individuals who will form an Irish revolutionary socialist movement in the tradition of James Connolly may come out of the Provisionals. To look to the movement as a whole for good things for working-class socialism would be to engage in the most foolish wishful thinking.

The great need in Northern Ireland is for an independent working-class socialist organisation — preaching not the rapidities of the Provisionals' "New Ireland" but a Workers' Republic, preaching workers' unity as the way to it, and advocating as the basis of immediate working-class unity, a democratic political settlement of the dispute between the communities, which can only be a federal Ireland.

The Provisionals have hegemonised anti-establishment politics in Northern Ireland for a quarter-century. They are likely to do so for a while yet. But their hold will now begin to slacken in the political cross-currents ahead. International socialism can begin to come into its own.

LCR rebuffs press slanders

BY DAVID BRODER

CHRISTIAN Picquet, former editor of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire paper *Rouge*, will no longer be able to hold on to his full-time post in the LCR office after the poor level of support won by his tendency at their recent conference.

Picquet is the leading figure in the Unir (meaning "unite") tendency in the LCR which calls for the unity of the entire "anti-neo-liberal" left on the model of Germany's Die Linke and is thus very critical of the LCR's current "new anti-capitalist party" project as too left-wing. At the LCR congress in late January Picquet was a leading advocate of the "Platform B" resolution calling for a broad-party initiative: but Platform B won the backing of only 14% of delegates, as against 83% for the Platform A new anti-capitalist party project.

After Picquet had made a public stand for his position and received such poor support, the incoming leadership meeting on 15-16 March argued that Piquet's tendency could not continue to run the paper (there has been tension over this for some years). The LCR agreed to pay for one person working part time to promote and organise the minority. The statement on the LCR website (<http://www.lcr-rouge.org/>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/apr/23/uksecurity/bbc>) pointed out that Picquet, the editor of *Rouge*, had refused to attend a meeting of the Secretariat (of which he was a member) for two years!

The Unir faction have complained that they are being silenced, an allegation similarly levelled against the LCR by conservative daily *Le Monde*, who ran the title "LCR leadership sack their main oppositionist". But how is it undemocratic for the LCR leadership to "only" accord €2,000 euros a year for Picquet's tendency to finance their meetings and activities, "only" one part-time employee (who could be Picquet himself, if his tendency so wishes) and "only" a weekly column in *Rouge*? It is not incumbent on the LCR majority to let Picquet, opposed to the group's main project, set the tone of their press. A paid job in a Trotskyist group is not a job for life.

Indeed, the main problem is that the LCR leadership do not cut sharply enough against the "movement-ist" politics Picquet espouses: in the recent municipal elections they from the start ran joint lists with all sorts of forces, from Greens to Breton nationalists. The LCR is right to give the fullest freedom of debate, regular space in the paper for minorities to express their views and their representation on committees. But that does not mean that minorities should have veto power.

Respect on "extremism"

ON 23 April, the Guardian published a letter from the three Tower Hamlets Respect councillors linked to the SWP, Olur Rahman, Rania Khan and Lufta Begum, which denounces the "extremist" views of Islamist organisations like al-Muhajiroun, calls on the government to "stop" them and requests a meeting with Tower Hamlets police to discuss the issue. (See www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/apr/23/uksecurity/bbc)

On one level, it is quite encouraging to hear left-wing Muslim activists display such stark hostility to Islamic derived fascism. Like socialists in Muslim-majority countries from Indonesia to Algeria, these comrades have learnt the reality of clerical fascism the hard way, through harassment, threats and violence.

Nonetheless, from a socialist point of view, the letter is deeply problematic. We should reject the characterisation of Islamist politics and organisations as "extremist". Socialists should oppose Islamism because it is reactionary — in some cases, extremely reactionary — not because it is outside a bourgeois "mainstream" which, after all, also labels revolutionary socialism as extreme.

What we counterpose to the poison of Islamism is not moderation, but working-class unity and struggle against capitalism — something which Rahman, Khan and Begum's letter fails to mention.

In addition, we should oppose the implied call for state bans, even against organisations like al-Muhajiroun or the BNP. As Trotsky put it in the mid-1930s:

"Anyone... who calls on the 'state', ie the class enemy, to 'act' in effect sells the proletariat's hide to the Bonapartist reaction. Therefore, we must vote against all measures which strengthen the capitalist-Bonapartist state, even those measures which may for the moment cause temporary unpleasantness for the fascists."

What the SWP will say about their comrades' stance — and whether their criticism, if it comes, will be from a working-class or a pro-Islamist standpoint — remains to be seen.

Sacha Ismail

Livingstone number one?

Continued from back page

No friction with the police, either. He supported the cops over their killing of Jean Charles de Menezes. When in 2001 there was a big May Day demonstration in London — for the first time in decades — Livingstone said in advance that the police should arrest and charge "without provocation" anyone with "the intention" of committing offences.

None of that old innocent until proved guilty stuff! Livingstone denounced the protesters as "violent nutters". When the (non-violent) protesters were "jailed" by the police by being cordoned in, on the streets of London, for seven hours solid, Livingstone backed the police again.

Livingstone's "ideological conflicts" put him on the side of the rich, and against the working class. And in the current state of New Labour, it can't be said that the campaign for Livingstone represents a living labour movement within which Livingstone can be challenged and replaced.

Livingstone was a left-winger in the 1970s. When first elected as leader of the Greater London Council in 1981, he promised that "wherever there is an industrial dispute in London" he would "go down and support it".

But he always said that he had no interest in reading Karl Marx or other socialist theory; he wanted a broad Labour left with "might not be ideologically perfect" but would get down to business better than "some more theoretical tendencies".

That "never mind about the theory, get something done" approach quickly mutated into getting anything done which boosted Livingstone's own profile.

Livingstone's GLC abandoned its initial ambition to lead a

working-class struggle to defeat the Tories. By 1983 Livingstone was telling *Socialist Organiser* [a forerunner of *Solidarity*] that "nothing the Labour GLC does challenges the structure... they're all things that a Thatcher government could live with..."

The GLC's side-gestures in those days — anti-racist agitation, money for women's groups, support for the miners' strike — were good as far as they went. Livingstone's "left-wing" side-gestures of recent years have not even been that.

In the early 1980s Livingstone worked with the WRP, a group once important on the left which had degenerated into an operation funded by the Iraqi and Libyan governments to make "anti-Zionist" agitation. In 1985, the WRP shattered into fragments after internal conflicts in which the facts came out about the Iraqi and Libyan money. To this day, Livingstone defends the late Gerry Healy, leader of the WRP; claims that it must have been "MIS" which broke up the WRP; and also denounces his critics on the left (such as *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty*) as "MIS".

At City Hall, he has handed many top jobs to members of a tiny left, or ex-left, group called Socialist Action. They do nothing socialist there.

Livingstone has welcomed and boosted Dr Yusuf al-Qaradawi, an Islamist ideologue. He presents this as a gesture against Islamophobia. Actually, by hailing Qaradawi as a "moderate", Livingstone is slandering most Muslims.

Qaradawi, a leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, prays: "O God, destroy the usurper Jews, the vile Crusaders, and infidels..." He considers homosexuality a crime. He says husbands should control their wives by violence if they disobey, for example by not wearing the hijab. He believes that ex-Muslims who stop believ-

ing should be killed. And much more on a website supervised by Qaradawi, islamonline.net. (See workersliberty.org/node/4068).

So much for Livingstone. It would be good to report that the spending of £30,000 by the SWP (Socialist Workers' Party) on a "Left List" challenge has given socialists and secularists a real voice in this election.

But no. The SWP had to pay £10,000 to get Lindsey German's mayoral manifesto into the booklet circulated to all voters — but the manifesto reads like a desperate but inept attempt to be populist and catch-all at any cost. It contains only vapidities like "Stop big business putting profits before the planet" (how?).

There is no word of socialism in the manifesto, nor any of working class representation, other than a vague reference to "London's working majority against the wealthy minority". And the manifesto is as poor in specifics as it is in general ideas, with no focus on what the GLC, specifically, can do.

There could have been something better. The London Transport Regional Council of the rail union RMT voted by a large majority in favour of the RMT initiating a broad working-class socialist slate for mayor and Assembly, in alliance with other left-wing unions and socialist groups.

In the end the RMT Executive decided not to go ahead with the slate. It felt there was not enough support and momentum behind it. One factor there would have been the minority in the RMT Regional Council opposing the slate — led by the SWP, who wanted the RMT to stand down in favour of the Respect alliance the SWP then had with George Galloway, an alliance which broke up only a few months later!

Next time we should ensure there is a proper working-class slate.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social

partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

WE STAND FOR:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.

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

The first conscious "proletarians"

PART 2 OF A SERIES ON THE REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE GREAT CHARTIST MOVEMENT, BY CHRIS FORD

THE London Democratic Association advocated the overthrow of the English ruling classes by means of revolution. They rejected outright any limiting of the Chartist movement to pacifist — or "moral force" — principles. The LDA Objects declared: "We frankly state, that we consider the everlasting preaching of "moral force", as opposed to "physical force" to be downright humbug; for ourselves we shall be well understood in saying, that we are prepared to adopt all just means within our power for achieving the salvation of our country, so far as we can affect that object. We are resolved to be no longer slaves! We are determined to free our fatherland, peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must!"

Liberal historians, such as Mark Hovell, portrayed the LDA as no more than a "violently revolutionary clique", formed to rival Lovett's moderate London Working Men's Association. Others have described it as the London representation of the ambitions of Feargus O'Connor to take over the leadership of Chartism. This is history as pejorative, and reduces the LDA's belief in the necessity of revolution to a reaction to inadequate strategy by the LWMA, or reckless romanticism on the part of Julian Harney.

In fact, the LDA had able leaders and thinkers, whose belief in revolution came from a grasp of the society in which they lived; their organisation was based on a body of thought which challenges opponents of revolution both then and now.

In *The Holy Family* (1844) Marx outlined a trend towards a "real humanism" in the "logical basis of communism", stemming from Locke through the "socialist tendencies" within French materialism, to the Babouvists and returning to the "mother country" with the emergence of "English communism". In Marx's view this was founded by Robert Owen. The Young Hegelians [of the 1840s] were, according to Engels, ignorant of the English Chartists: "no one in Germany had any idea [of] the vehemence of this agitation". Yet the LDA arrived at more radical conclusions than Owen in their quest for a society of: "Social, Political and Universal Equality".

Among the LDA's influences was Thomas Spence, who advocated a revolutionary self-governing New Republic based on "convention of Parochial Delegates". Spence's critique was a plebeian theory of liberation in the late 18th-early 19th century. By 1812 Spence was extending his vision beyond agrarian radicalism to include the new industrial proletariat, "Shipping, Collieries, Mines and many other Great Concerns (which cannot be divided) can yet be enjoyed...in Partnership". Allen Davenport, a founder of the London Democratic Association following the "Spencean system", incorporated Owen's co-operative ideas for industry writing that the: "discovery of steam power has completely changed the aspect of human affairs, and caused such a stupendous revolution in the production and distribution of wealth,... honest and industrious people in this country are wasting away through want of common necessities of life, and die, annually by sheer starvation; yet people persist in calling this murderous state of things civilisation".

Davenport saw the Aristocracy's subjugation of the agricultural labourer, was now coupled with the "monopoly of capital": "monopoly of machinery is degrading, and starving the ingenious mechanic out of existence."

BABEUF, HARNEY AND SOCIAL EQUALITY

HARNEY also looked to the notion of freedom embodied in the French Revolution's conceptions of reason and the state of nature: "Kings, aristocrats, and tyrants of every description... are slaves in rebellion against the sovereignty of the earth, which is the people, and against the legislator of the universe, which is Nature". He saw the accumulation of private property as an infraction on this state of nature, and believed the earth should be the common property of all.

While also being a Spencean, Harney steeped himself in the French Revolution, adopted Marat as his nom de plume and called his paper *Friend of the People*. Much of his knowledge of the revolution was drawn from Brontterre O'Brien's translation of Buonarroti's *History of Babeuf's Conspiracy For Equality* in 1838. The first words uttered on the LDA Address are those of Buonarroti, "Let each of us depend upon institutions and laws, and let no human being hold another in subjugation". The quotation was also inscribed on the LDA membership cards.

O'Brien's was the chief channel through which such ideas reached working people. French communism entered into the armoury of the early revolutionary democrats. Buonarroti's work introduced the designations "bourgeoisie" and "proletariat", and we find them used in the Objects of the LDA.

There is some similarity in the manner the Babeuvists sought to use the "celebrated Constitution of 1793" and the LDA's view of the People's Charter as a means to their [social] ends. The Babeuvists' phrase "Liberty, Equality, and general happiness" was echoed in the LDA's "destruction of inequality, and the establishment of general happiness".

Ian Birchall downplays Babeuf's influence on O'Brien in *The Spectre of Babeuf*. He bases this challenge on O'Brien's admiration of Robespierre, something which led O'Brien to differ fundamentally from Babeuf on the question of private property. Birchall argues that "O'Brien can scarcely be seen as a follower of

Babeuf". But what of Harney?

At the Festival of Nations held in London in 1845, Harney spoke in praise of Robespierre, before invoking Babeuf as one of his successors who advocated "a veritable republic... in which, private property and money, the foundation and root of all wrong and evil, should cease to be". Birchall fails to make a distinction between Harney and O'Brien, and to analyse the different phases of O'Brien's thought. Harney adapted Robespierre and the Constitution of 1793 for the class struggle of the English proletariat of 1839. The theme of the 1793 constitution was a repeated reference of revolutionaries in the 19th century — in the same way that Marxists made the Russian Revolution a point of reference in 20th century.

A CONSTANT REVOLUTION

THE experience of the Babeuvists in the French Revolution taught Harney there could be no social equality with the privileged classes in "possession of property", subjecting the proletariat to "social slavery". The French middle-class had engaged in revolution out of selfish ambition, debasing equalitarian principles of the revolution once in power. Bourgeois "liberty" was the freedom of the bourgeoisie to be the new ruling class, and to use the proletarian masses to obtain their ends which they then suppressed as true representatives of those ideals. The comparison with the English middle-class in the aftermath of the Reform Act of 1832 was obvious. The LDA thus agreed with the Babouvists proclamation that the French Revolution is "but the precursor of another revolution, far greater, far more solemn, which will be the last". Harney believed Chartist England could set Europe aflame again.

The Industrial Revolution was forcing a redefinition of radical idea. The fight could not be narrowed to one with "Old Corruption", as radicals called the aristocratic system. A new objective stage in history called up "new passions and new forces".

When the LDA drew up their Objects they set out "to obtain an effectual Reform of the Commons House of Parliament; the basis of which shall be Universal Suffrage, Equal Representation, Annual Parliaments, No Property Qualification, and Payment of all Members". These points were identical to the People's Charter. To the modern reader these demands may seem moderate, but at the time they struck fear into the heart of the ruling class.

After the 1832 Reform Act the proletariat, which first fought alongside the middle class for parliamentary reform, found itself shouldered out. It was a "great betrayal". All social classes began to look at electoral and Parliamentary reform differently.

If the Chartists had won their Charter they would have turned the system upside down, establishing something very different from the bureaucratic parliamentary democracy of the 21st century. MPs would be fully accountable delegates, subject to regular elections. As Allen Davenport wrote "It is time the working classes should decide on these important questions".

Through Universal Suffrage these Chartists wanted not only an equality of classes in access to Parliament, but the dissolution of the class division itself. The British ruling class remained conscious of the threat. Thus when Parliament thought it safe to return to electoral reform in 1866, they still feared a proletarian electorate returning delegates mandated to enforce their interests and undermining the entire system.

THE INTERESTS OF THE PROLETARIAN CLASSES

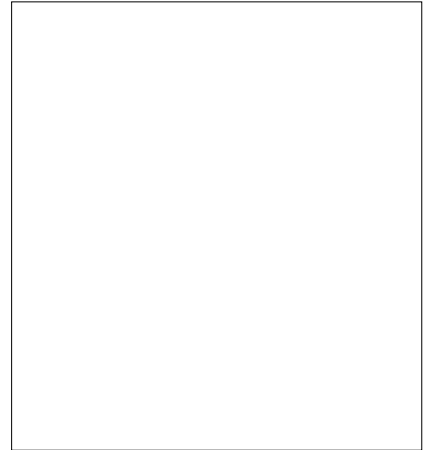
THE LDA Objects declared the "desire to unite the unrepresented of all classes into one common bond of fraternity, for the attainment of Universal Suffrage, this Association being convinced, that, until the Proletarian classes are fully and faithfully represented, justice in legislation will never be rendered unto them". The rebellion against the new Poor Law (1834) shaped Chartism into a militant mass movement. The LDA wanted "total unqualified repeal" and "such improvements as the circumstances of the country may require" in the new conditions of industrial capitalism.

Long before the struggle for a ten-hour working day was viewed by Marx as the "Magna Carta" of the English proletariat, agitation for shorter work hours struck at the barbaric heart of the Industrial Revolution. Following the emasculating of proposed protective legislation in the 1833 Factory Bill, fresh agitation took place in 1838 and 1839.

The LDA promoted an "abridgement of the hours of labour in factories and workshops, and the total abolition of child labour". And went further: "Even in the present artificial state of society, no adult person should be required to work more than eight hours per day, especially while so many thousands are without any employment at all". In linking the creation of jobs in times of high unemployment to a shorter working day, the LDA anticipated a social-demist demand in the following century.

The LDA did not speak the language of inter-class "fraternity" but pledged to support "by all available means, every rational opposition made by working men against the combination and tyranny of capitalists, whenever the latter shall seek to reduce the wages of labour, extend the hours of toil, or institute proceedings against the labourer". In this they were the opposite of the LWMA, who in their desire for friendship with the middle-class Radicals betrayed struggles such as the Glasgow spinners strike (1837).

Alongside freedom of association the LDA championed the freedom of the press, calling for the repeal of the laws "which prevent the free circulation of thought, through the medium of



Babeuf

untaxed and honest press".

The LDA also strove for a proper system of education through "public instruction, and the diffusion of sound political knowledge", though as Harney said, the "ruling class will never grant the working class that kind of education by which they will learn their political rights".

SOCIAL CLASSES AND REVOLUTION

THE LDA was the first organisation of English workers to define itself by the term "proletarian", among the first to consider distinct working class interests. In their evaluation of other social classes they judged them not only by their exploitative position but also in relation to the object of social equality. Class was viewed as the embodiment of an artificial division in a society, of inequality and oppression.

The LDA's definition of the proletariat was written by Harney: "Proletarians (so called from the Latin word proles) means the multitude who, possessing no fortune or property, have only their offspring (proles) to offer as guarantee for their attachment to the state". This was taken from O'Brien, who wrote of the working classes "bequeathed to us by the ancient world under the name of Proletarians". As early as 1831 O'Brien had been arguing that "labour is held in servile subjection by a tyrant called Capital".

The LDA did not however agree with O'Brien's analysis of the position of the middle class in England. EP Thompson noted that historians "would not accept O'Brien's over crude assimilation of the post-Reform Whig administration to the interests of the middle-class".

The LDA in 1839, pointed out that "the middle class are still not the most powerful in the state. The Aristocracy are still able to maintain a system from which they alone derive the benefits... The middle class have failed in their favourite question, repeal of the Corn Laws and now are raising Household Suffrage and Triennial Parliaments".

But the LDA was fiercely against any alliance with the middle class on the lines of 1832. They had learned already the lesson European revolutionary movements had to learn through the defeats of 1848.

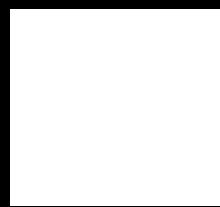
The *London Democrat*: "[the] middle class have taken no part in the struggle for the People's Charter and show no sympathy for the workers' miseries. Miseries engendered by the present anti-social system, for which they are using every means and straining every nerve to maintain".

From the experience of the Great French Revolution the author, "CR", drew the lessons:

"Had the working classes of France in the first French Revolution relied on themselves alone and refused co-operation of the few treacherous Aristocrats... and rejected the interference of the basest and most perfidious of men, in the Gironde faction... their Revolution would have triumphed. The failure of the revolution is to be attributed to the middle classes of France, who desirous of overthrowing the Aristocracy, in order that they might be able to appropriate the wealth and property of the Aristocracy, and the Church, to their own purposes joined in effecting the Revolution".

The Democratic Association did not have the categories of bourgeois or proletarian revolution as clearly defined as they would be in the *Communist Manifesto*, but rather sketched out a constant revolution being carried through to its absolute of "Universal Equality" and a truly natural and human society. They judged the middle-classes in relation to this objective, and concluded that their role was to be as counter-revolutionary exploiters vying for positions of privilege.

The LDA declared that in "the spirit of pure democracy, we hold out the hand of fellowship to all who will sincerely co-operate with us to achieve the objects we have in view". That opportunity arose with the rise of Chartism in 1839.



workers' liberty & Solidarity

SA dockers block aid to Mugabe

"We will not unload the weapons"

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

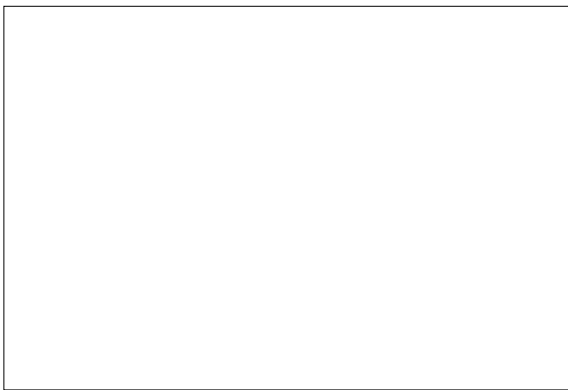
IN a magnificent display of working-class solidarity, dockworkers in Durban, South Africa, refused to unload 77 tonnes of Chinese weapons bound for Zimbabwe.

The *An Yue Jiang* left China just days after polls closed in Zimbabwe's presidential elections with a cargo of three million rounds of AK-47 ammunition, 1500 rocket-propelled grenades and more than 3000 mortar rounds. Chinese officials claim the cargo is "perfectly normal trade" — true enough as each year China exports more than \$1 billion dollars of weapons in exchange for cash, raw materials and influence. The Stalinist bureaucracy already uses its massive arms industry to prop up regimes in Burma and Sudan. Now it will be used to bolster the Mugabe regime.

China has scrapped import tariffs on 190 goods from 28 of the least developed African countries and expanded trade and aid links, investing in construction, food and oil projects in addition to weapons sales. These trade and diplomatic relations are used to build Chinese great-power influence in Africa.

That China is prepared to arm Mugabe in his efforts to suppress democracy in Zimbabwe says much about its reactionary agenda.

When the Durban dock workers — organised by the Transport and Allied Workers Union — learned of the shipment, they knew exactly what the weapons would be used for. Sprite Zungu, a member of the SATAWU, spoke to *Solidarity* when the ship was approaching port: "At the moment, nothing is moving here — the workers are still outside. The union has had many meetings with workers' federations, COSATU [the South African equivalent of the TUC] and the courts. We are holding these meetings to put the posi-



tion of our union. That position is that our members will not handle containers which are full of weapons that will be used against the Zimbabwean people.

"Our intention is to force the ship to return to China. We realised yesterday [17 April] that this ship was full of weapons — it was in the newspapers and on television. We knew that the Zimbabweans had just had their elections, we knew that the results had not been released. It was clear to us that these weapons would be used to put down the democratic opposition. The port authorities are part of the government. They could try to force the unloading of the ship, there are rumours this could happen. They have released a statement saying that the South African government has nothing to do with the action. There's a trade agreement between Zimbabwe and South Africa. They want to keep this agreement. But we don't care what the government says. We will maintain our position as a union. We will not unload the weapons."

The dockers' action ultimately forced

the ship to leave South African waters after COSATU called for permission to be refused and the Durban High Court barred transport of the cargo. The International Transport Federation followed suit, mobilising affiliated unions to put pressure on the Mozambique and Angolan governments. Both have now refused permission for the ship to dock. The Chinese government is now likely to recall the ship to avoid continuing the controversy.

Whilst the action in Durban has called a halt to the transport of weapons by sea, a second order of more sophisticated weaponry from Shenzhen — one of China's central hi-tech manufacturing regions — is due to be flown into Zimbabwe. Sources on the 'Zimbabwe Situation' website (www.zimbabwesituation.com) claim the decision to transport these weapons by air was made by Zimbabwean military officials anxious to avoid disruption to their campaign of intimidation in the run-up to an anticipated second round in the presidential elections.

Livingstone, no. 1?

NO, readers of *Solidarity* should not vote no.1 for Ken Livingstone for mayor of London. Despite all the frantic appeals to us to vote for him as a "lesser evil" than Boris Johnson, he deserves no credit or endorsement from working-class people.

Because of the vestigial links New Labour may still have with the trade unions, we'll vote Livingstone no.2. But for our no.1 vote we'd rather be with the left-wingers and activists who will vote for the Left List (despite the terrible weakness of that list, on which more later).

The same principle holds for the other local government elections on 1 May: vote socialist if you can, especially for the 39 candidates of the Socialist Green Unity Coalition (in which *Solidarity* and *Workers' Liberty* participate); vote Labour as a fallback.

If in doubt about the Tory candidate for Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, read the *Compass* briefing at <http://tinyurl.com/yrbivr>. And the threat from Richard Barnbrook and the BNP is described at <http://tinyurl.com/6p7rfq> and <http://tinyurl.com/3pmrh2>.

Livingstone? He still has a sort of left-wing reputation — but only because the left has lowered its expectations so much.

He says it himself: "There's no rival to the market in terms of production and distribution... There isn't a great ideological conflict any more. The business community, for example, has been almost depoliticised..."

In other words, Livingstone has found no political friction with City bosses in the joint campaigns he has run with them for more tall office buildings, for the euro, and for the Olympics, since becoming London Mayor in 2000.

In 2004 Livingstone called on Tube workers to cross their union's picket lines. So Livingstone has an "ideological conflict" with striking workers — but not with bosses, or with the former CIA chief Bob Kiley whom Livingstone recruited on £2 million a year to be Commissioner of Transport.

Continued on page 12

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