On the "Put People First" demonstration Workers' Liberty is backing the "Internationalist, Anti-Capitalist, and Feminist" contingent sponsored by groups including Feminist Fightback and No Sweat (www.workersliberty.org/28march09). Everywhere on the demonstration we will be arguing for it to be used to rally workers for battle against the bankers and the bosses responsible for the crisis and job cuts, rather than for vague appeals to people in general to plead with the G20 governments for gentler policies.

We will also be arguing for workers' unity in the crisis, across borders, and across differences of origin and skin colour. In a global crisis, to let the bosses set one group of workers against another is poison.

The policy platform for "Put People First" demands a "new system that seeks to make the economy work for people and the planet".

The old system, the system we live under, is capitalism. It "works for" the private profits of the owners of business and finance, not for "people and the planet". Partial reforms can be imposed on it by struggle — keeping or making public services public, rather than profit-driven, for example — but within the system those can never be more than precarious (though important) exceptions.

The capitalist drive for profits, not "failed policies", creates exploitation, poverty and ecological disaster. Now capitalist governments are attempting to manage the crisis by bailing out the banks at the expense of workers. The outcome depends on struggle between one set of people — the capitalist class and its supporters — and another set of people, the working class.

The G20 leaders will never "put people first"! A system that "puts people first" can only be socialism — running the economy under public ownership, for the common good, under workers' control — and it can be won only by "putting workers first", that is, by mobilising workers to assert their own class interests (those of the great majority) against those of the profiteers, rather than seeking an imaginary cross-class consensus.

Yet the official "Put People First" platform does not even mention the working class.

France has seen two general strikes in the last two months. Ireland has a general strike on 30 March. The 28 March demonstration should be used to help rally workers in Britain for that sort of fightback.

Part of the aim of the governments at this G20 summit is to head off a collapse of globalisation into protectionism. Each capitalist government wants every other capitalist government to keep its borders open for capital and trade flows. But already 17 of the 29 G20 governments have broken the pledge they made at the previous G20 meeting, last November, not to introduce any new protectionist measures within six months.
At the time of going to press, the Prisme Packaging factory occupation in Dundee, which began when its owners announced closure of the company, is about to enter its fourth week. Dale Street spoke to David Taylor, one of the Prisme workers involved in the occupation.

What progress has been made with the idea of setting up a workers’ coop-erative?

We have nearly finished this — we have just to meet with the accountant, and the Royal Bank of Scotland and the Clydesdale Bank.

We are hoping to stay here when we set up the new business, but nothing is set in stone. All the machinery is here, but it is under new ownership. Prisme transferred ownership when it realised it was in economic difficulties and did not want to have any debts left when it ceased trading. We have to buy the machinery from its new owners.

The premises in Prisme had when it ceased trading was some stock and some computer equipment. The factory premises are leased from a private landlord, so Prisme has no say in the transfer of the lease. In fact, Prisme owes money to the landlord.

We hope to be operational before the end of April. Four or five of the people who worked for Prisme have intimated that they are not interested in carrying on in a new business. We’ll start off on the same rates of pay, but go on to a three or four day week if need be to keep the business going.

Prisme depended on just one contract, with the Edinburgh Distillers whiskey company, to keep the company going. They never bust their guts to look for other customers. But our marketing will be miles better. We have a large cus-tomer base with small orders. Of course, we will not stop going in for the occupation to get the money back which is owed to us. There is a legal route for that. We are aware that so long as we are aware, we work to make employers think twice about sacking other workforces.

After three weeks in occupation, what kind of support are you getting?

All unions in Dundee, such as the FBU, the UCU, and the TUC (Dundee Trades Council), have given us donations. We’ve had lots of financial support from trade unions. People have also been coming in off the street with mes-sages of support. The Trades Council set up a fund for us for all donations, and has got us into different venues. We’ve also had e-mails and texts giving us support and pledges of support. There’s about a thousand messages of support on our Facebook page. After only the first few days of the occupation we had received three hun-dred textured messages of support.

The national union campaign has put up a thousand £50 notes, and when the petition sheets come in it boosts morale. We’re not going to pres-sure the petition to the government. Anything like that. It’s a way to highlight what’s going on to boost our morale.

Prisme Packaging was not a unionised workplace. Has what’s hap-pened over the last three weeks changed your views on trade unions?

There’s been a 100% change. It’s not that we did not want to be in a union, it’s just that we were not encouraged to be in a union. When the company first started we had three staff here from the Dundee Times factory (some of a major industri-al strike in 1993). We had thought that those women were too mil-litant and didn’t want Prisme to be like that. But as soon as we realised we were run-ning we’re going to get into a union.

What’s your message for other workers who are faced with the prospect of los-ing their jobs?

We are not militant people. We’re not saying; lock your doors and occupy. What we hope for is for people to fight for what they are entitled to, for people just to stand up for themselves. Also, our occupation is a message to other employers, so that they might think twice before they sack their workforce.

We’re really just trying to raise aware-ness of both employers and employees, to show that people cannot be treated as we have been treated, and that if people stand up for what’s theirs, then employers cannot get away with it.

The economy is based on people who work. It’s wrong that it’s the people at the bottom who reap the circulation benefits, who drive around in Jaguars and Daimlers. I’ve never been political in my life but this has changed my views. Society has to change.

• Messages of support to: Prisme Occupation, Prisme Packaging, Tannadice Street, Dundee, DD3 7TP. Phone: first: 07970 875 455. Facebook group at: www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7198717 6437

The “Put People First” proposals are all put as pleas to the Brown government and its like to be a bit nicer, rather than rallying calls for rank and file action. The big unions involved in “Put People First” and still affiliated to the Labour Party should use that affiliation to rally pressure on the government demanding the 2009 Labour Party conference restore the right for unions and local Labour Parties to put current political motions to conference, and demanding the Labour government carries out the conference decisions. But the Labour Party National Policy Forum in Bristol recently gave no indication of the unions doing that.

The unions should speak out politically, and mobilise industrially — to demand decent jobs, homes for everyone, and win a workers’ government capa-ble of making such demands a reality. Read, and discuss in your union branch, our proposals for how to make that happen.

www.workersliberty.org/workersplan
**EDITORIAL**

**SOCIALISTS AND THE ECONOMIC CRASH**

Shaping up for the crisis

If you tell a man that he’s going to be hanged in the morning, then, as someone once said, it concentrates his mind wonderfully. The British National Party is expected to make serious electoral gains in a number of different elections over the coming period. It will most likely win more council seats. It may win a seat in the European Parliament. It may gain representation in Parliament in the next General Election, a year or so from now. It already has a seat in the London Assembly. The serious left needs to sound the political alarm bells.

One of the main reasons why this is happening is the failure of the left. Not just of the Labour Party hijacked by Blair and Brown, but of the left. The left lags way behind the political imperatives of the crisis of capitalism that is now upon us. It lags behind in every respect: on the levels of political clarity, of organisation, of connection with the working class.

For two decades capitalism has been riding very high. It has been unopposed, unchallenged. It seemed to be winning the battle against socialism. It defeated the Stalinist ruling class of the USSR. It went through a fantastic phase of expansion.

A species of neo-liberalism, reminiscent of the late 19th century, grew up. The unregulated market has been left to itself, to its own devices. The ideal of economic mechanization, Socialism has been marginalized. That is now changing. Capitalism has had a tremendous crash. The worst in the past 80 years, perhaps, for the advanced economies of the industrial world. It has been the result of the crisis of capitalism, of overproduction and underconsumption. It has thrown up a new left.

For the first time in decades, socialists have an open field to argue for a rational world, a working-class-run social democracy. Socialism has been marginalised. The crisis opens tremendous possibilities for us, but the left is not for the next great crisis of capitalism that is now upon us. We would be better placed if we had maintained and built the Socialist Alliance. But the SWP (the biggest left group) took it over and soon liquidated it, turning instead to years of Stalinist communist politics in Russia.

A large part of the left is self-intoxicated on pseudo- revolutionary phrases like “fight racism and fascism” — devoting itself to being would-be Muslim communists instead of fighting for working-class unity around the only slogan that can create it: “Workers, black and white, unite and fight.”

**Left can’t beat BNP threat by trying to outbid anti-EUism**

The “No2EU, Yes to Democracy” slate for the June Euro-elections, propelled by the Communist Party of Britain (Morning Star) and its allies, has now been publicly launched.

Left-wing supporters of this slate, like RMT rail union leader Bob Crow, argue that it will be a powerful challenge to the BNP and UKIP in the Euro-elections because it will contest the “anti-EU” banner with them. But a “response” to the BNP and UKIP which says much the same as they do on the EU (only more weakly, since BNP and UKIP say the EU is “anti-British,” “the EU which No2EU doesn’t!”) adds only two general “soul-saving” phrases to its left-wing (“fight racism and fascism”, “international working-class solidarity”), and says nothing specific about the other social issues (the crisis of capitalism) on which BNP and UKIP have a lot (demagogically) to say — that is no answer. It can only extend the broad ground of prejudice — blaming something or other “foreign”, “Brussels” or “too many Poles”, for the evils of capitalism — on which the BNP and UKIP build.

The pattern here is very important to grasp. Back in the late 1930s, the West Indian Trotskyist CLR James said to Trotsky: “Comrade Trotsky, you were right on all the whole range of questions. You were right to warn about the catastrophe that faced communism in China in the nineteen-twenties, you were right about Germany, you’ve been right about France, you are right about Spain now. How is it that you can be right on all these things and yet be paralysed? The “historical movement hasn’t grown?” (It had actually shrunk, by the late thirties.)

Trotsky said to James in reply: “We are the party of the working class. As the Communist Manifesto proclaimed, we have no interest apart from the working class. When that class is defeated, that has a tremendous effect on our prospects. Having been “proved right” does not matter so much as the fact and the consequences of defeat. Workers in the mass don’t respond on the level of general ideas. They respond to facts. The great fact is the crushing of the workers in China, in Germany, in Spain, and in Italy, early on. We warned against those defeats. We understood the dangers in advance. If our policies had been correct we could have averted the catastrophe. We weren’t able to do that, so we suffered with the class because of the catastrophe.”

That’s true in general. A Trotskyist movement that isn’t a set, that doesn’t seal itself off behind closed doors, that doesn’t march to the tune of a particular question of the working class — that rational Trotskyist movement suffers with the class, rising or falling with it.

**THE AWL AND THE CRISIS**

In politics, Marxists start, not by looking at our own small numbers, but at what is objectively necessary. We pose as “tasks” to ourselves and to the working class the things that are objectively necessary. Instead of being analys ed by our own strength, and the disarray of the left around us, we have to find the will and determination and the historical perspective to rise to the challenges we face.

We are not ready? We must make ourselves ready! We have to rise above “centrist” or “rationalist” arguments for revolutionary socialist politics, vigorously and ardentely, in the working class.

Throughout the world, the working class has been much augmented in the long period of capitalist expansion, greatly increased in numbers. There are in our world far more workers than there were in the world of the great mid-20th century crisis. There is good reason to believe that that working class will be able to fight back, hold its own, and advance.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty has in many ways become reduced to a propaganda role, whereas in the past, for example, we were able to organise the broad left in the Labour Party (in the 1980s). Like the broad labour movement, AWL is not ready. In our age for organisational rather than political reasons. AWL is now a loose grouping, too loose.

We think we have virtues. We try to be honest and rational in politics. We work at avoiding demagogy and kitch-left sloganeering. We don’t organise ourselves as a closed sect. Our people have the right to think for themselves and to express their thoughts publicly. That is in sharp contrast to most of the “Leninist” left.

As rational Marxists, we try to think ourselves in the actuality of history. We draw conclusions from the cata- strophic failures of the left in the past. We stand in, and propagate, a great tradition.

Continued on page 5
By A LONDON SOCIAL WORKER

The Social Work Activities Network (SWAN) conference, which was won as "a loose network of social work practitioners, academics, students and social welfare service managers" by the TUC, was attended by many social workers. The conference opened an important debate on social work matters.

The TUC’s opening plenary session was a highlight. A senior TUC official revealed that the TUC’s proposed changes to the National Health Service (NHS) would include the removal of all social work services. This was met with a round of applause from the audience.

A total of 1,000 social workers and social workers’ union members attended the conference, which was held in London. The conference was opened by a speech from a TUC official, who said that the TUC would support the social work profession.

The conference opened with a keynote speech from a social worker, who spoke about the importance of social work and the role of social workers.

The conference was also marked by a series of debates and discussions on social work issues, including the future of social work, the role of social workers, and the need for social work reform.

The conference was a significant event for social workers, who were able to discuss their concerns and share their ideas on how to improve social work services. The conference was a positive step towards the development of a stronger social work profession.

Social Work Post-Baby P

The success of the TUC’s social work conference was due to the hard work and dedication of the social workers who attended.

The conference was a clear indication of the importance of social work and the need for social work reform. The TUC has shown that it is willing to support the social work profession, and this is a positive development for social workers.

The TUC is also keen to see the introduction of a social work act, which would provide a legal framework for social work and ensure that social workers are properly paid.

The TUC has also called for the introduction of a social work training programme, which would ensure that social workers are properly trained and qualified.

The TUC is now calling on the government to take action to support social workers and to ensure that they receive the proper funding and resources they need to carry out their work.

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Social Work Post-Baby P
The market costs lives

BY MIKE FENWICK

Revelations from Mid Staffordshire Hospitals Trust bring into focus a depressing and disquieting reality. Care and all the concerns and warnings raised about the government’s drive to privatisethe NHS, 400 people more than would have been expected died because of poor care and as the management focused on gaining Foundation Trust status.

Foundation Trusts are a further step towards privatising hospitals, making them financially independent from the NHS and able to raise funds directly from the private sector. For those Trusts waiting for Foundation status there is a green light to start competing for contracts to deliver services previously provided by other hospitals. It allows them to start negotiating local terms and conditions for workers, undermining national agreements. It’s the market incarnate in the health service, and the only criterion for success is getting money to the Treasury despite that these Trusts keep the books balanced.

So as people died not only did Monitor, the so-called watchdog, find “no regulatory concerns” with Mid Staffordshire, awarding it four out of five for performance, and the Healthcare Commission was rating the Trust as “fair” or “good”.

The main goal in 2006-07 for Mid Staffs was to meet a target saving of £10 million and cut more than 150 jobs to do so, contributing to a shortage of 120 nurses. Budget cuts and nursing shortages were also found to have undermined care at Birmingham Children’s Hospital and reduced the other NHS scandal in recent weeks.

Among the shortcomings found at Mid Staffs were:

• No all-day, on-call cover by consultant doctors left overnight, adding to stressed and undermanned wards.

• The shortages led to supervising staff at the Trust reported wards in a large scale as being understaffed, and this was central to the recruiting of volunteers for the “just in time” model of recruitment.

A decent local hospital is always the first choice in every survey of patient opinion and the government’s enthusiastic insistence on providing another choice is unwarranted. So money is being wastefully spent on apparatus for some form of the sake of offering a “choice” no-one asked for, at the cost of services people do want to use.

The forthcoming changes inside Primary Care Trusts, with a split between the purchaser and provider services, will repeat the same experience in community services with the goal set as becoming Foundation Trusts. Care and treatment of people, the human element that underpins the existence of the NHS, is set to become increasingly marginalised. In those areas of the service where targets are not set there is an even greater threat of neglect and poor care as exemplified by the Health Service and Local Authority Ombudsman’s case studies of the deaths of six people with learning disabilities.

All these changes and the resulting tragedies mean an upsurge in public anger and demonstrations against attacks on local services and the increasingly likely threat of closures of whole hospitals. The local District General Hospitals that provide good local access to emergency and specialist medical services have been the backbone of the NHS since the 1960s but are now at significant risk. The growing trend to centralise specialties in a few regional or national centres, alongside for-profit experimentation, will undermine the future survival of the general hospital in a health economy where big is best.

There is no evidence that any of the recent changes in the NHS have led to better healthcare or significant increases in efficiency. Traditionally the administrators have turned a blind eye to the need to cut through dodgy “kitchen left”,. We have had to dig into the past to try to understand that. We are a propaganda group. We explain things, pose a long overall perspective.

But AWL is also a fighting propaganda group. That’s what we’ve always been, except that the “fighting” element has decreased as the class struggle has decreased. Now the tempo is changing, and we have to change tempo too.

Long, long ago, in 1967, one of Solidarity’s editors wrote a statement of our general approach. It ended as follows, in words AWL now repeats: “We call on you to join us. We want not the spare earnings of dilettantes, but the dedicated, active lives of revolutionaries, people who make the struggle for socialism the core content and organising principles of their lives.”

If you are a member or supporter of AWL, face your responsibilities in the great capitalist crisis. If you are neither, but want what we want — join us! — MIKE FENWICK

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE

The market costs lives

BY MIKE FENWICK

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The main goal in 2006-07 for Mid Staffs was to meet a target saving of £10 million and cut more than 150 jobs to do so, contributing to a shortage of 120 nurses. Budget cuts and nursing shortages were also found to have undermined care at Birmingham Children’s Hospital and reduced the other NHS scandal in recent weeks.

Among the shortcomings found at Mid Staffs were:

• The use of two clinical decision units (CDUs), basically waiting rooms, which staff said were used as dumping grounds to avoid the four-hour target for being treated in A&E.

• Nurses who lacked training and equipment — often what they had wouldn’t work.

• The shortage of nurses on wards meant call buttons went unanswered.

• Relatives claimed patients were sometimes left for hours in wet or soiled sheets, or were left unattended in pain and discomfort.

Normal nursing routines such as turning patients at risk of developing pressure sores failed to happen leading to complications in recovery and further distress and delay for patients.

The Trust was poor at identifying when things went wrong and managing risk. Some serious errors happened more than once and the Trust had high levels of complaints compared with other trusts.

All to save money, to meet a target not a need!

The NHS was in surplus last year returning money to the Treasury despite the government continuing to find funds to throw at their favourite PFI schemes and market initiatives.

For example in North Staffs the Primary Care Trust is looking at escapping from a contract with one of the Independent Sector Treatment Centres (private hospital) which was government forced them into. Nations Healthcare, the private contractor, is guaranteed income for the next year although they will only be carrying out a few of the operations they’ve been contracted to do. The total cost of the five year contract to the NHS will be £15 million. Just around 7% of patients in Stoke took up the offer of this choice of care, with the vast majority sticking with their local services.

A decent local hospital is always the first choice in every survey of patient opinion and the government’s enthusiastic insistence on providing another choice is unwarranted. So money is being wastefully spent on apparatus for some form of the sake of offering a “choice” no-one asked for, at the cost of services people do want to use.

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Shaping up for crisis

From page 3

A renegade socialist, a former comrade, said recently to one of the editors of Solidarity: “Why are you going on about Trotsky, why do you look to find out what Trotsky had to say about things? Why bother with tradition? Now is now and that was then.”

Why? In the crucible of the great crisis of the 20th century, 1914 to 1945, the Bolshevik movement of Lenin and Trotsky gave deep expression to the greatest of the working-class conquest of power in Russia in 1917, and created a lit-
SOLIDARITY

How to fight for free education

By Ed Maltby, Education Not for Sale secretary

The worst recession in generations is underway, and workers and the young will be hit first and hardest. Public services are under threat, the environment is slipping off the agenda, and the BNP are experiencing unprecedented electoral success and growth.

On top of that, Universities UK, the university bosses’ union, has just released a report calling for top-up fees to be doubled.

If you think the situation is bad now — students being skint and having to work crap, exploitative jobs to support themselves; working-class students being released a report calling for top-up fees, exploitative jobs to support them —

think about how the combination of the occupation spread to the universities, London Met and Cambridge University Press, where hundreds of staff are facing redundancies. Those staff who are keeping their jobs, especially junior teaching and research staff and ancillary workers like cleaners and security, are facing attacks on pay, conditions and job security.

If we don’t want our members to live in extreme poverty, studying on run-down campuses run as for-profit enterprises, we need to launch a fight for free education funded by taxing the rich, a living grant, and job security and a living wage for campus staff and all workers.

The movement we need cannot remain a narrowly “student” movement. We cannot separate out the crisis in the rest of the economy, and the attacks on workers’ rights, migrants and the environment from the attacks we are suffering on our campuses. We need to link up with workers’ organisations and workers’ struggles like the forthcoming London Underground strike and the construction strikes, to force the government to make the rich and big business pay for the capitalist crisis — not ordinary workers and students. To win, students need a united-up, militant strategy of direct action on campuses, working closely together with the best elements of the national union movement to articulate a real political challenge to the government.

The occupations over Gaza have shown that direct action can win. To put it bluntly, we need a similar wave of occupations for free education if we are really going to get the ball rolling.

But by abandoning its commitment to free education, putting pitifully little effort into what limited protests it has organised, by refusing to provide a national strategy to student unions or give a clear political voice to our movement, and by shying away from organising the kind of mass direct action that has been getting the goods for our fellow students and young workers in France, Germany, Italy and Ireland, the NUS has neutered itself.

Our union isn’t in a fit state to fight on fees, cuts, or student poverty. We need to fix this. As NUS national executive, I have announced a strategy based in mass student mobilisation and in alliance with the labour movement. And if NUS is prepared to deliver this, we need to create a fighting alliance of those student unions which are prepared to take action, to organise the campaign where NUS won’t. We need to get student unions, whether they remain in NUS or not, to begin organising independently of the NUS structures.

If you agree with us on the need for a democratic student movement that fights back and links up with organised labour, get in touch with Education Not for Sale, and help us shake the student movement awake!

* www.free-education.org.uk

Sheffield Gaza occupation rallies activists across the country

By Gemma Short

Students at Sheffield University have been in occupation of space in the Hicks Building since Monday 16 March; on 23 March the occupation spread to the university’s new, extremely plush, flagship exhibition centre.

The occupation has rallied and organised large numbers of activists at Sheffield, with many dozen actively participating and supporting from many hundreds more. It has also provided inspiration to activists around the country. This is the last and currently the only ongoing of the 30-plus student occupations that have taken place in solidarity with Gaza; as such it has become a focus for the whole movement, with messages of support pouring in and regular visitors from other universities.

Sheffield Workers Liberty students have been central to the occupation, with a noticeable impact on its political character. Following our meeting with Israeli refuser Tamar Katz, the occupation voted to make solidarity with the refuser movements one of its demands; we have also made links with porters and other university workers, and included a demand in support of their struggles over pay and conditions.

Unfortunately, we have been under mined at every turn by the right-wing leadership of our student union, whose executive narrowly voted against the occupation, and also by conservative elements within the university’s Palestine solidarity movement and left. Nonetheless, as Solidarity goes to press, the struggles continue.

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS DISPUTE

Local solidarity way to save jobs

By Patrick Rolfe

Cambridge University Press recently announced plans to axe 160 jobs at two sites in Cambridge. Thirty redundancies at the company’s education department have already been confirmed, and management wanted a further 130 redundancies at the press itself. However, a concerted effort by the press workers, the local trades council, and local people has forced management to reduce the number of redundancies to 53.

Workers at the press recently agreed to a three-year wage freeze, a gradual realignment of wages with industry norms, and the loss of their final salary pension scheme, measures which were part of a “survival package”, which was supposedly necessary to keep the press operating. The workers also implemented an 80% increase in productivity, completely on their own initiative, all to save the press from closure.

However, according to Nigel Gawthrop, the Union’s Father of the Chapel (workplace union representa tive), management have been trying to shut down all their printing activity in Cambridge. Last year, for example, they failed to gain the Cambridge Assessment Contract, which should have been easy to obtain, and more recently, they have outsourced English Language printing jobs to Brazil and south-east Asia. Weeks before the “consultation period” with workers was due to end, bosses sent out letters to key customers informing them that the press was going to stop operating. Bosses even began to outsource some of their contracts to other local printers! Since such an action assumed that redundancies would occur before they had been confirmed, it broke legal code by putting people’s jobs in danger. Management were forced to write to all their customers again saying that the press was still open for business.

The only person who has assurances that their job is safe is the managing director, Stephen Bourne, whose pay now runs at £260,000 a year. However, the situation isn’t hopeless. In one of the largest demonstrations in Cambridge’s history, nearly 500 people protested against the job cuts on 14 February, and the workers have been engaged in a sustained publicity campaign to gain public support. Management are rattled, and embarrassed by workers exposing their bad practice; they have given significant concessions, reducing the overall number of redundancies from 130 to 53.

Solidarity of Cambridge workers has apparently saved 77 jobs, and further use of workers’ and local peoples’ power and organisation could save all the jobs at the press.

Strikes in Ireland

From luck page

I rish socialist will be alert to the dangers, however. Many of the union leaders organising this action were close to agreeing a deal which would have included a pension levy, albeit lower, and a revised pay deal which may have included a freeze. Their terms were not enough for the employers who walked away and announced their own harsher measures. A good deal of the leaders’ anger is at the humiliation that their deal would mean a cut in the union membership has been so coldly snubbed. It is more than likely they will see the current action as part of a campaign to get back into those talks. The scale of the mobilisations so far should give hope to workers who want to go well beyond that.
The fourth “great depression”

BY COLIN FOSTER

We are probably in the first 20% of the fourth international “great depression” in the history of capitalism. The period between the early 1970s and the mid-1980s was never labelled a “great depression”, but belongs with two other periods of economic disorder and recurrent recession: from the early 1870s to the mid 1890s, and from 1929 to World War Two. Some capitalist economic downturns have relatively little lasting social and political impact. Larger downturns are different. They fluidly structure; annihilate previously central patterns; spur on, and give opportunities to, capitalist leaders pushing new approaches. They leave things drastically changed not just economically but socially and politically. Evidence is accumulating that this crisis is “big enough”. Banks and other operators in the financial markets ran up losses on financial assets in 2008 of $50 trillion (according to an Asian Development Bank estimate). That’s almost $10,000 for every child, woman, and man in the world. The losses are “on paper”, that is, they mostly take the form of bits of paper which the financiers hold having a lower nominal value than a year ago. But capitalism runs mostly “on paper” (or “on” electronic records). Credit has shrunk dramatically. Even if there are no further big upheavals in the financial markets, the capitalist world is set for a prolonged period of debt-shrinkage, with firms, banks, and households trimming expenditure in order to get their debt under control.

Moreover, the capitalist world of “globalisation” has been one organised, to a large degree, through global financial markets centred on New York. States with large trade surpluses “recycled” the cash through financial markets centred on New York, and mostly through US-dollar assets. That is still happening, for now. After the chaos on Wall Street, it seems unlikely that it can long continue to happen to the same extent. A much “smoothed” world economy seems likely. When the G20 top governments met last November, their long statement after the talks contained just one hard commitment: to “refrain from raising new barriers to investment or to trade in goods and services” at least for the next six months. In mid-March a World Bank study showed that 17 of the 20 countries involved have since taken protectionist measures.

So, big social and political impacts are likely. And difficult to predict: the processes are complicated and will involve previously unknown elements. But we can learn from previous epochs of economic troubles.

CAPITALIST OFFENSIVE

The disasters from the early 1970s to the mid 1980s were “used” by capitalist leaders like Thatcher in Britain, Reagan in the USA, and Pinchot in Chile to drive through big defeats of the labour movements and lefts that looked strong in the early period of those disorders. They also trashed large chunks of capital (23% of manufacturing industry in Britain collapsed in the early 1980s) and cleared the way for capital to restructure under a new regime of “globalisation” and “financialisation”.

Capitalist leaders will always seek to use crises to drive through restructuring of class relations which will “stick” and enable the subsequent upturn to take place on terms more favourable to capital. They do not always succeed. In the 1950s and 80s, while labour movements were pounding in many old industrial countries, big new labour movements arose in South Korea, Brazil, and South Africa.

The depression from 1929 to World War Two led to the triumph, by 1941, of fascism all over Europe except in Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, and Britain. Stalinism was consolidated in the US. But there were other possibilities. In the USA, workers’ struggles in the depression won a much stronger union movement, and much more welfare provision, than in the previous boom. Both in the 1930s, and the 1970s-90s included revolutionary crises turned into working-class defeats only by lack of an adequate revolutionary party, such as in Spain in 1936-7.

The period between the early 1870s and the mid 1890s led to the rise of giant capitalist firms and cartels dominating whole industries, to a big expansion of the role of finance, to “high imperial”, to systematic “scientific” racism, and to a new upsurge of the anti-semitism which many had thought an obsolete relic. It also generates the rise of the mass socialist labour movements in most industrialised countries, in most of them for the first time.

In all such epochs, then, the social and political impact cannot be “read off” directly from the economic developments. It is the outcome of struggles — of victories or defeats which cannot be predicted calmly unless we, the militant working-class activists, want to write down our effort and initiative as a mere fixed quantity.

The social and political impact also generally comes with a lag. In the first flush of crisis, both capitalist leaders and workers tend to be “stunned” and preoccupied with short-term bail-out measures. The political “knock-on” effects of the Great Crash of 1929, for example, took some years to appear. Often the hopeful new developments in working-class activity come with the first slight economic upturn within the general period of depression, rather than with the initial downturn. These periods of turmoil reshape the left too. By the late 1980s, all the big socialistic currents of the 1970s and 80s, bar Marxism, had vanished or been “recycled” into new currents. Between 1929 and World War Two the Communist Parties outside the USSR were transformed from a significant revolutionary working-class force (though by 1929 Tatiana Latysh had already been called a “cynically counter-revolutionary role throughout the world”). In the early 1890s the “broad” left seemed relatively well-placed, as compared to 1873 or 1929. Actually, the political shortcomings of that left (chiefly, Maoist or Stalinist baggage) proved fatal.

Six conclusions follow:

1. We must expect big social and political convulsions.

2. The outcome of those convulsions depends on struggles…

3. And, in part, on us and on our preparations before the big struggles erupt. “The decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is felt)” (the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci wrote emphasis added).

4. It does not just depend on how big “the left”, broadly defined, is. It also depends on the clarity of the left. War, wrote Lenin, exposes what is rotten. So does a big and sustained crisis. The coming years are likely to shatter whole chunks of the left. Progress will depend on those — maybe a small minority at the start — to judge accurately.

5. The social and political convulsions come with a delay. Although all the drama of recent months has been predictably in the initial period of stalled response for the current crisis. That could last another year or two or even three. Or maybe only months. We can’t know.

6. The “advantage” for us on the left of such Marxist and socialist education as we have been able to acquire is that we can understand the import of the crisis earlier than others, and so galvanise ourselves earlier, while others are still stunned and overawed by the crisis. For the AWL, in particular, everything depends on our ability to do that — to pull ourselves out of the slovenly habits acquired in two decades of working-class defeat and capitalist triumphalism, and raise ourselves to the level of the new situation.

The Thatcher and Reagan governments used a capitalist crisis to push through defeats on the labour movements of the UK and USA
Who boosted the Taliban?

BY FARYAL VELMI

T he Taliban’s take-over of the scenic Swat Valley in Pakistan’s (then) Northwest Province is a damning indictment of over six decades of military and civilian ‘bourgeois’ rule in Pakistan.

Pakistan’s ‘revolving door’ of government, with military dictators and corrupt politicians taking turns at creaming off central resources and accumulating wealth, has left a vast proportion of the country mired in poverty, illiteracy and without access to basic amenities like sanitation, clean water and electricity.

Where the state has abjectly failed, various shades of Islamist fundamentalists like the Taliban have stepped in. They not only offer an alternative every corner of the country, but — as Swat valley has shown — an alternative ‘government’ as well.

But how as Pakistan arrived at this precipice? Tracing back through the nation’s history offers some answers to what has caused its current predicament.

BEGINNINGS

On August 14 1947, the British ‘Raj’ was brought to an end throughout the Indian sub-continent — creating an independent Pakistan and a new country, Pakistan. Formed out of West Pakistan (modern day Pakistan) and East Bengal (known as East Pakistan and now Bangladesh), the country’s birth was traumatic.

In the biggest migration the world has ever seen, millions of Hindus and Sikhs crossed from Pakistan into India — while millions of Muslims travelled the other way. At points where the travellers met, many thousands of people were killed in sectarian and ethnic violence.

Although a very small minority of Hindus and Sikhs stayed behind in Pakistan, a much larger Muslim population remained in India. (There are now around 200 million Muslims in India — out of a population of 1 billion — matching the entire population of Pakistan).

Pakistan’s ‘founding father’ and first Governor General was Mohammed Ali Jinnah (Pakistan only became a republic in 1956). With his monochrome and three-piece suit, Quaid-E-Azam, (the Great Leader), was every bit a man of the Raj — his wheeling, dealing and lobbying within the British Empire and support for Britain in World War Two paid off, with the imperialists acceding to the creation of Pakistan. Although the new country was created on purely religious grounds — a Muslim nation — Jinnah had secular aspirations for Pakistan.

He talked about a common pluralistic Pakistani national identity uniting Hindus and Muslims — as well as the various diverse ethnic populations of Punjab, Peshawar, Sindhis, Baluchis, Bengalis and the Mujahirs or Urdu-speaking refugees from India.

FIRST MILITARY RULE

In 1958, a decade after Jinnah’s death General Ayub Khan took over, imposed martial law, banned all trade unions and political parties and cracked down on all liberal newspapers and magazines. Rigged elections and suppression of any dissent kept Ayub in power; and it took 10 years for opposition against Pakistan’s first dictator to foment.

When opposition finally burst through it was as explosive as the demonstrations that were happening in Europe at the time. Students and workers took to the streets against Ayub and were met with gunfire from the police and military. In East Pakistan, separated from West Pakistan by thousands of miles of hostile Indian Territory, a nationalist movement that wanted independence from Pakistan burned at the heart of the protests.

Erosion of this popular uprising in both east and west was too much for Ayub, and he ceded power to another general, Yaya Khan.

Trying to tap into this climate of dissent, the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) was formed by Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto — a Sindhi from a wealthy landowning family. The Party’s popular slogan of ‘bread, clothes and shelter’ got them much support from both the urban poor and the peasantry. But it was the Pakistani army’s brutal invasion of East Pakistan in 1971, and its subsequent defeat that reshaped the generals.

East Pakistan became Bangladesh and in what remained of Pakistan a new era of democratic civilian rule opened. But the political agenda of the PPP that had made them so popular was never realised. Although Bhutto had nationalised many of the nation’s banks and industry, little of the money found its way into the country’s beleaguered health or education systems. Bhutto never delivered on his rhetoric.

Instead he turned his attention into developing Pakistan’s nuclear capabilities — as regional enemy India conduct ed its first nuclear test in 1972.

Behind the scenes the military elite was re-grouping and General Zia-Ul-Haq was positioning himself to topple the PPP government. In Tariq Ali’s insightful book, The Duel — Pakistan on the flight path of American power, he details how every single military dictator in Pakistan has been aided and abetted by the US. The coup of 1977 was no different. Zia — trained in Fort Leavenworth in Kansas — was considered much more reliable by the US. He seized power and declared martial law in 1977. Two years later, Bhutto was hanged on trumped up conspiracy-to-murder charges.

In true feudal style, the PPP leadership was handed down to his children, and his young daughter Benazir later emerged as heir apparent.

ZIA

General Zia ruled until 1988. He was both a tyrant and a rabid Islamist ideologue; his ‘Islamisation’ programme saw the introduction of many oppressive laws and ordinances and a parallel sharia court system. The ranks of Islamist organisations like Jamaat-I-Islami swelled due to official government patronage.

But as Soviet tanks rolled across the border of neighbouring Afghanistan in 1979, the tyrant became an even more vital ally of the “free world” who would side with the US and put Pakistan on the front line of the Cold War. Zia relished this role, his shrewd instinct for self preservation cloaked in a burkha of shi'it Islamic rhetoric.

With endless millions of dollars flowing from Washington, Zia directed the Pakistan People’s Party government in its secret service the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISI) to create a “jihad” — recruiting, funding and training a guerrilla Afghan resistance, the more extremist the better — to fight the “infidel” USSR army. And Osama Bin Laden surfed into Afghanistan on a wave of Saudi petrodollars to add a bit of oppositional virulence to the mix. With a CIA hand-book in one hand and AK47 in the other, he joined forces with the Talibans’ Mullah Omar and set about building up the “Base” or Al-Qaeda network. Both the CIA and ISD had roles in the creation of the Afghan-based jihadi networks which would have earth shaking ramifications both in Afghanistan and on their own home soil.

After a bloody conflict that left tens of thousands dead and Afghanistan’s towns bombed to destruction by the USSR, the USSR withdrew. But Zia’s time was also up. In 1988 he, along with the US ambassador, was blown up in a mid-air explosion. Everyone from Rajiv Gandhi to PPP supporters was blamed, but the truth has never been discovered.

Benazir Bhutto had already returned to Pakistan from exile, a short while before Zia’s death, to be greeted by a million people with great expectations that she would resurrect her father’s perceived radical political agenda. After a hastily arranged marriage to Asif Ali Zardari, Bhutto was elected in 1989. That a 35-year-old woman could win the popular vote after the reactionary Zia years is a fine testament to the political grit of the working class and peasantry of Pakistan. But her victory unfortunately remained merely symbolic.

Benazir ruled unashamedly for her class, with nepotism and wide scale corruption reaching stomach-turning heights. Zia’s reactionary laws were left intact; illiteracy, poverty and infant mortality remained staggeringly high. Sectarian violence between the Sindhi-dominated PPP and the Muhajir Quami Movement (MQM) spilled out onto the streets of Sindh, especially in Karachi.

The MQM had been set up by Altaf Hussain in 1984 to represent the interests of Urdu-speaking Muhajirs and their families who had travelled from India after partition. Protest against prejudice and discrimination that Muhajirs faced, the MQM set up a power base of working-class and middle-class supporters. Emergency “shutter down” strikes and protests called by the MQM against the PPP government were capricious, bringing the country’s financial capital Karachi to a standstill.

Benazir was ousted from power in 1990.

FAMILY DYNASTIES

With BB (as she was known) gone, Nawaz Sharif, a Zia protégé, was elected as Prime Minister, with his Muslim League party winning the elections. The rest of the decade would play out much the same, with a revolving door at the gates of Prime Minister House being shared by the two family dynasties — Bhutto and Sharif. Sharif, from a wealthy landowning family, made benevolent gestures to the country, particularly to his native Punjab — but like the PPP government before him, he only excelled in lining his own pockets.

Sharif was ousted on corruption charges in 1993. It was BB’s turn again. Voted in by an indifferent electorate who felt there were no alternatives, second time round the corruption and looting continued. BB’s polo- playing husband Asif Ali Zardari appointed himself as a freelance investment minister, roaming the globe and...
Iraqi Trade Unions

The conference included hundreds of delegates from oil and gas, ports, electricity, public sector, transport, communications, education, rail, health care, metal working, journalists, food workers and students. Delegations from the US, the UK, South Africa, Japan, Australia, and Iran were also there.

At this conference three powerful unions, the Federation of Oil Unions in Iraq, the Electricity Association and the General Federation of Workers’ Councils and Unions signed an agreement to create a new union confederation under the conference’s banner “A better world can be made by workers.”

For decades under Saddam Hussein’s regime, the Iraqi labour movement was attacked and workers were stripped of their rights; they were imprisoned, tortured, and killed. In 1987 the regime enacted Decree 150 banning freedom of association for public sector workers.

By the 1990s the only unions left were pro-regime labour federations, which were used as an instrument of the state to suppress workers’ struggle.

After the 2003 invasion occupying forces abolished all laws of the Ba’athist regime except those pertaining to workers’ rights.

What’s the situation now? The fall of Saddam Hussein enabled a tiny space for the labour movement to develop. While class organisation was limited, that period, that did not mean that it entirely disappeared.

The remnants of political organisations retained memories of class struggle and this history gave impetus to a re-emerging Iraqi labour movement. At the conference, heroes and strike leaders were celebrated, while the Ba’athist regime received standing ovations and bittersweet tears to the eyes of some workers.

In recent times there have been struggles and victories; in August 2008 a wave of strikes and occupations forced the government to retreat on proposed pay cuts for Ministry of Industry workers.

However the Iraqi labour movement faces many challenges. Nazim al-Radi, president of the General Union of Iraqi Ports, explains: “We have been struggling for our most basic needs on one hand, standing fearlessly against all forms of sectarianism and religious violence to break workers’ unity – as well as confronting the occupation’s economic and social attacks on the working class.”

Violence, particularly against women, is still common. People who can get home safely and have a job count themselves lucky, to a certain extent.

As well as larger questions of the occupation and the economy, the labour movement also faces internal problems of fragmentation. People talk of a “dysfunctional mindset” filtering through all organisations: chairing, meeting conduct, arriving at decisions, are all having to be rediscovered.

All the unions are tied to external leftist or religious parties. The Iraqi “ploration of Oil Unions is linked to Islamists; GFWUC and FWCU are linked to different factions in the Worker-communist Party of Iraq; and all the unions that represent Iraqi workers.

The conference overwhelmingly passed a number of resolutions on questions of workers’ rights, international solidarity and public resources. These included the call for immediate enactment of a new Labour Law; linked to the Communist Party. The Kurdish ruling party, PUK, also has its own unions.

The purpose of this conference was two-fold: to unite Iraqi unions around basic fights and create space for joint action; and to bring the attention of the international labour movements to Iraq and all the unions that represent Iraqi workers.

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More controversial matters were the question of a secular state in Iraq and the discussion of violence against women.

An amendment from the floor suggested the addition of “secular” to a motion “to promote and support the establishment of an independent state and the formation of a non-sectarian and non-ethnic government.”

The debate on this motion mainly centred around the definition of “secular” as opposed to “anti-religious”. The amendment passed.

Following this, international delegates were removed from the voting and the vote was taken again. Again it passed. Forcing this, a request was demanded. For a third time the amendment passed, this time with a greatly improved majority.

At the reading of the final statement, Hassan Juma, President of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions, walked out on hearing the word “secular”, taking his delegation with him. In the hotel car park, the leaders of the major unions met: Hassan Juma threatened to pull his union out of the merger, because, he said, his members would be in danger if they returned to Basra having supported a secular state; and so “secular” was removed from the final statement.

A motion on women’s rights was rejected from the floor by Herman Kadhim, a women’s rights activist, reprimanded the organisers of the conference for neglecting this issue. A huge debate raged over whether women were being killed as women in Iraq. A number of men claimed this no longer happened. Some delegates walked out in disgust. Following the debate the motion fell.

Outside of the conference I spoke to a number of women about the issues facing them. People raised the lack of training at work which prevented them from progressing; they also spoke about forced prostitution, the disproportionate effect secular violence on women, and honour killing.

Honour killing was legal under Saddam Hussein, but has continued with the perpetrators making deals with political parties to avoid prosecution, or forcing women to burn themselves.

The fact that women’s rights and secularism were debated at all is a massive achievement. It is a good thing that there was a serious fight on these issues, because it means these discussions are really being debated on the ground. And the discussion will be taken back to local communities and workplaces. The debate is alive in Iraq today.

The greatest success of this conference is that it is happening at a time of strong and varied labour movement in Iraq. To a large extent whether it can survive the increasing threat of sectarianism and develop a stronger political agenda depends on our solidarity. If Iraqi trade unions continue to struggle, we can give our heartfelt support.

The politics of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty... and much more

• Imperialism, national and war
• Marxism and oppression
• The AWL’s history and tradition...
yes and no. AWL started as a "Cannonite" organisation, that is, an organisation with politics in the broad spectrum of the post-Trotsky "orthodox" Trotskyists, the opposers to the "Shachtmanites", the heterodox strand of Trotskyism after 1940. Specifically AWL identified with the Cannonites in the 1933 split in the Fourth International between "Pabloites" and Cannonites.

There is a distinct AWL — or, to take the name of the first of the series of organisations preceding AWL, Workers' Fight — tradition. We were not "converted" to "Shachtmanism"; we evolved towards convergence with the main politics of the Shachtman organisation of the 1940s, the Workers' Party, while retaining some disagreements with their critique of the "orthodox Trotskyist" positions (for example, on their refusal to support China against Japan during World War 2, and on their rejection of the so-named "Proletarian Military Policy").

WHAT THEN IS "SHACTMANISM"?

Broadly, one of the two basic strands emanating from the Trotskyism of Trotsky's time. But there were a number of distinct "Shachtmanisms" between the 1940 split in the US Trotskyist movement and the Fourth International, and Shachtman's death in 1972.

First, the Shachtmanism of between 1940 and 1947-8. In this period the "Shachtmanites" — not only Max Shachtman himself — developed a distinct strand of Trotskyism characterised by several points.

1. Rejection of the thesis, central to the "orthodox" Trotskyists' world-view, that the US was a "degenerate workers' state" and that the US army was "defensive" towards the USSR, that is of being unconditionally (if sometimes critically) on the side of Russia in foreign policy, includ- ing military "foreign policy". Identification of the US as imperialist, and unqualified opposition to it and to the "orthodox" Trotskyists' identifications of the conquests of the "Third Camp" for the October 1917 revolution. This stance was summed in the notion of a "Third Camp" between the US and Russian imperialist blocs — a camp of independent working-class politics. The term "Third Camp" came from Trotsky, refer- ring to the working class in relation to left-1930s world politics.

2. Plainly branding such events as Mao's victory in China (finalised in 1949, but clear from autumn 1948) as "reactionary", in contrast to the "orthodox" Trotskyists who saw them as historically progressive and as part of the working-class revolution, spreading across the world in a "deformed" way. Some strands of the "ortho- doxes" — the Pablo/Mandel Fourth International — hailed Mao as a political legatee of Trotsky and not Stalin. The "Shachtmanites" maintained Trotsky's view from August 1940 that the leaders of the Stalinist parties were "not the revolutionary leaders of the proletariat but aspirants to totalitarian rule... Their ideal is to attain in their own country the same position that the Kremlin oligarchy gained in the USSR".

3. Assertion that — despite the Shachtmanites' dis- agreement with Trotsky in 1939-40 — they and not the "orthodox" Trotskyists continued and developed what had been "Trotskyism" at Trotsky's death.

4. Assertion that a revolutionary party at the head of the working class was an irreducible prerequisite for working-class revolution — specifically, in the mid 40s, in Europe — in contrast to the "orthodox" Trotskyists who judged the issue but in practice acted as if they believed that the working class's revolution could occur, somehow, despite the absence of sizeable revolu-

James P Cannon: an activist in the pre-World War 1 IWW and Socialist Party, he was one of the early leaders of the US Communist Party and the founder of the US Trotskyist movement, in 1928. He hated, and taught many activists to hate, Stalinism, and after 1953 tried to pull "orthodox" Trotskyism to a more independent stance. But between 1940 and 1950 he helped create iron shackles of prejudice tying "orthodox" Trotskyism to axiomatic "defence" of the USSR.

WHAT WAS THE SECOND "SHACTMANISM"?

From about 1947 there was general agreement among the "bureaucratist collectivists" in the Workers' Party that Russia and its empire seemed doomed before human beings as a great threat... to this barbarous future unless the working-class revolution was made soon.

Shachtman's Workers' Party (renamed ISL in early 1949) continued to see capitalism as mortally ill — even in the years of the great post-1940 expansion of capitalism in the two superpowers (including areas) outside the Stalinist realm. It retreated from some of the ideas central to the 1940s Workers' Party and to Trotsky's Trotskyism, and began to sink into a sort of "economism", in which the working-class movement in the US came more and more, over time, to be accepted as it was.

See for example the 1953 speech by Max Shachtman on the 25th anniversary of US Trotskyism, in which he assessed what remained viable from the Trotskyism of a different age and a different world, the pre-World-War 2 world. It is a magnificent statement of the true central- ity of the working class in the Stalinist conception of socialism, but simultaneously a notable shift from the Leninist idea of the prior centrality of the Marxist struggle to transform the ideas and consciousness of the working class. It was not an abandonment of that Leninist idea, but nonetheless a significant defocusing.

Layers of the ISL came to be absorbed into the trade unions and the trade union bureaucracy, especially the UAW.

AND THE THIRD "SHACTMANISM"?

That came after the dissolution of the ISL into the Socialist Party in late 1958. Shachtman separated from those who maintained the Marxist "Third Camp" position — Hal Draper, Phyllis and Julius Jacobson, etc. — and came to accept US liberal capitalism and imperialism as the only viable alternative to Stalinism. Shachtman, we should remember, was still expanding into new areas until some years after Max Shachtman's death.

Shachtman turned to work in the US Democratic Party. At first he had the perspective of splitting off from that party such elements as the "Dixiecrats" — Southern racists whose connection with the Democratic Party went back to the Civil War of the 1860s — and thereby creating an American "Labor Party" controlled by the unions.

That was, or might have been, a concretisation of the long-term commitment of the US Trotskyists, from the late 1930s, to work for development of an American party structured and linked to the unions like the British Labour Party, but — so they would strive to ensure — with better socialist and Marxist, political.

From that starting point, Shachtman got drawn into dirty Democratic Party machine politics. The Workers' Party and ISL had propagated "democratic reform policy" for the USA — for the USA to support and aid democratic and progressive forces across the world, explaining that this was a way to cut across the typical Stalinist exploitation of democratic and social issues on the class to establishing the totalitarian dictatorship of a new exploitative ruling class. Now Shachtman came to identify aspects of the actual foreign policy of the US state as fulfilling those of US Trotskyism, in which he believed Stalinism was a better conceptualisation of the Stalinist USSR, as this writer has demonstrated in detail elsewhere, in the book The Fate of the Russian Revolution. The single most startling example: the disturbing insistence that the Stalinist Russian army was advancing during World War Two, he said in every respect Stalin's "Red Army".

The "heterodox" Trotskyists counterposed to this mil- lenarianism an attempt at rational working-class socialist politics where the Marxist conception of the relation- ship between ends (socialism, workers' power) and means (working-class organisation, working-class revo- lution) was maintained.

The "Shachtmanites" developed the view that the US was a distinct form of class society, "bureaucratic collectivism". Most AWL people would accept that, there are also people in AWL who consider "state capi- talism" a better conceptualisation of the Stalinist USSR, though they are not in agreement with the Workers' Party's "state capitalists", CLR James and Raya Dunayevskaya.

Shachtman — as distinct from another minority in the Workers' Party, Joseph Carter and Hal Draper — main- tained until about 1947 that Russia's bureaucratic collec- tivism was a singular, episodic, "accidental", unique break of history. In that view he paralleled Trotsky's "latter versions of the "degenerated workers' state" thesis", which rested heavily (see In Defence of Marxism) on the notion that Stalinist Russia could not survive for more than "a few years or even a few months" — that it would very quickly be superseded either by a new working- class revolution or a bourgeois counter-revolution. (In the long term here, history has pronounced for Trotsky and for the pre-1947 Shachtman, who held to Trotsky's views on the unviability of Stalinism despite their differences on theoretical designation. Trotsky was utterly wrong on his timescale — "a few years or even a few months", but in a much longer time-frame, he is proved by the collapse of Stalinism to be right about its inability to compete with advanced capitalism. "Afghanistan and the shape of the 20th century", www.workersliberty.org/wl2-2.)
In 1949 Mao Zedong’s Stalinist movement took power in China, and over the next decade it created a social system there modelled on Stalin’s USSR. The Maoist state created a nationalised economy — its “own” nationalised economy — while terrorising the working class, thus refuting the assumption that such a nationalised economy could not be created except by a workers’ revolution which crushed the bourgeoisie.

held position of the “orthodox” Trotskyists who gave critical support” (often not spending much effort on the “critical” side) to Russian and Chinese foreign policy.

Shachtman is notorious on the kitsch left for having supported the US-backed anti-Castro invasion of Cuba in the spring of 1961 and for backing the US in Vietnam. His reasoning was that the victory of Stalinist totalitarianism — or, in Cuba, its consolidation — would destroy all prospects for the existence of real working-class movements in such places, as well as all civil and human rights. A capitalist regime — even an authoritarian, as distinct from totalitarian, capitalist regime — kept open the possibilities of a working-class movement, working-class action, and the development of working-class socialist politics.

Plainly a lot of this argument was true, and far better than the approach of the “orthodox” Trotskyists — and, over Vietnam, the Cliffite “state-capitalists” — of seeing only “colonial revolution” or “anti-imperialism” in Stalinist-led movements, ignoring Stalinism and the consequences for the working class of its consolidation of state power.

But the actions and attitudes his new stance led him to were politically suicidal for “Third Camp” socialism, or for any form of working-class socialism. He tied himself to the chariot-wheels of US imperialism, and turned his politics into mere camouflage and decoration and prettification of US liberal imperialism.

Over Vietnam, he maintained his pro-US attitude beyond the point at which US intervention had narrowed down to a savage, mechanical attempt to beat down the Stalinist-led people of Vietnam and Cambodia and Laos, even if that meant “bombing them into the Stone Age” (as it did). The later Shachtman has been identified as one of the inspirers of what came to be called the neo-conservatives — and that there are at least parallels is indisputable.

In his own way Shachtman opted for a variant of the fantasy politics of the “orthodox” Trotskyists in the 1940s (and until the collapse of Stalinism), when they coveted delusory nonsense about working-class socialist revolution around the terrible realities of Stalinist imperialism, and, in countries like China, Vietnam, and Cuba, around Stalinist social rule.

SO WHICH IS YOUR “SHACHTMANISM”? O f these three “Shachtmanisms”, AWL shares most of the first (1940-8), a large part of the second (1948 to 1958 or 1960), and for practical purposes the final one.

Even if we can see the sense Shachtman saw in what he initially set out to do in the Democratic Party, and even if in his concern for the consequences of Stalinist victory in Vietnam, Shachtman was right against the forerunners at the time of AWL, with the politics of this last phase of Shachtman’s life AWL has nothing in common. That Shachtman we repudiate.

THEN WHY BOTHER WITH SHACHTMAN? F or almost twenty years after Trotsky’s death, Shachtman was not a renegade but the opposite: the chief continuator of the politics of Trotsky and the Bolsheviks. He was the main writer of the “heterodox” Trotskyists in their best period. His work has permanent value.

Shachtman’s “renegade” reputation was created after Trotsky’s savage polemics in their dispute about “defending” the USSR in the USSR-Finnish war of winter 1939-40 — among people, the “orthodox” Trotskyists, who were moving quickly and directly towards the same relationship to the Stalinists that Shachtman in his degenerate old age had to US imperialism.

DON’T TROTSKY TEAR SHACHTMAN TO PIECES? A gain, the answer is yes and no. Yes, Trotsky wrote devastating polemics and condemned Shachtman, so to speak, thesis and practice. No, that is not the end of it. Trotsky’s polemics against Shachtman and his co-thinkers from 1939-40 are enshrined in a selection, “In Defence of Marxism”, which was made in late 1942 by those who had backed Trotsky, but in fact often with their own variants of the idea that Russia was a “degenerated workers’ state”.

The people making the selection had by then — in fact after some hesitation (see “The Fate of the Russian Revolution”) — decided to embark on full-hearted and often ludicrous support for “Trotsky’s Red Army” after the tide of war had turned for Russia after Stalingrad, and when the USSR was the ally of the USA and Britain. The selection was one-sided. It omitted all Trotsky’s articles for the general public on the USSR’s invasions of Poland and Finland, in which he condemned those invasions fiercely. It gives, and was chosen to give, an entirely false picture of Trotsky’s final views on Russia and Stalinism.

For example, Cannon’s position was initially that the Russian invasion of Poland and Finland was nobody’s business to judge except those who made the decision to invade, thinking it was useful for the “defence of the USSR”. “Defencism” for Cannon then meant accepting, or suspending comment on, the bureaucracy’s judgment on such matters.

The same foolishness would lead Cannon, from his jail cell in mid 1944, to denounce those who condemned Stalin and his army for stopping their advance on Nazi-occupied Warsaw for six weeks and thus leaving to be massacred by the Nazis the heroic Polish insurgents who had risen on the assumption that Stalin’s army was only days from entering Warsaw. The time to move on Warsaw was for Russia to decide, Cannon insisted, and for “defencists” to accept and “defend”.

SOLIDARITY

Max Shachtman: one of Cannon’s first comrades in the foundation of US Trotskyism, he became a leading writer of the Trotskyist “orthodox” strain. Trotsky in Trotsky’s lifetime, unequalled after 1940 as he helped formulate the “heterodox” strand of later Trotskyism. His collapse, in old age, into US Democratic Party machine politics, cannot undo the contribution from his times of vigour.

AND TROTSKY REFUTE “BUREAUCRATIC COLLECTIVISM”... I n 1939 Shachtman wrote that Trotsky was right “99%” of the time, but not on Finland and “defencism”, Trotsky responded: “The proportion of my mistakes is in reality considerably greater”. That was surely true; and it was Trotsky telling his “supporters” that they should not follow him blindly, that they should learn to think for themselves.

Trotsky did denounce, and so to speak, damn Shachtman — who was then his co-thinker on the thesis that Russia remained a “degenerated workers’ state” — because Shachtman broke ranks on Finland and unconditional “defencism”.

That denunciation is often taken as a denunciation of the idea later adopted by Shachtman, that the USSR was not a “degenerated workers’ state” but a new exploitative class society, “bureaucratic collectivism”. But in September 1939 Trotsky wrote in the article “The USSR in War” (in the collection “In Defence of Marxism”) that if the Stalinist form of society survived and spread then Russia would have to be “reconceptualized”, Russia, as it was, without any bourgeois counter-revolution or further “degeneration” of the autocracy, would have to be seen as a new form of class society.

Thus he conceded in principle almost everything to those who said it was already a form of exploitative class society (either entirely new and previously unknown — “bureaucratic collectivism” — or a new version of capitalism — “state capitalism”).

“Some comrades”, Trotsky wrote in his next article, “Again and Once More on the Nature of the USSR”, “evidently were surprised that I spoke in my [first] article of the system of ‘bureaucratic collectivism’ as a theoretical possibility. They discovered in this even a complete revision of Marxism. This is an apparent misunderstanding...” In other words, he insisted that a
Leon Trotsky: leader, with Lenin, of the Russian workers’ revolution of 1917, he later led the Marxist opposition to Stalin’s bureaucratic usurpation.

“bureaucratic collectiveist” analysis of Stalinism was not necessarily “revisionist” in any sense other than the good one of making necessary revisions of outmoded analysis.

That did not stop his supporters in 1939 — who were entirely silent on the political questions then, leaving it to Trotsky to deal with those while Cannon dealt with the “organisational questions” — from later insisting that the idea that Russia was a “degenerated workers’ state” was part of the basic “programme” of Trotskyism, and any departure from it was “revisionist” and renegacy.

S O T R O T S K Y W A S J U S T W R O N G ?

Trotsky, in his polemics, compared the “degenerated workers’ state” position which he defended, explicitly only pro tem, to the position of Lenin and the Bolsheviks on the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” perspective for the Russian Revolution which they had elaborated in 1905 and held to until their “April conference” in 1917, when Lenin won the Bolsheviks — against the resistance of his closest co-workers, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, and others — to the perspective of working-class power and socialist revolution vision which had been the “permanent revolution” of Trotsky.

Lenin’s “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” had an entirely adequate appreciation of the bourgeois vis-a-vis an anti-Tsarist bourgeois-democratic revolution. It had understood that the bourgeoisie was tied to the Tsarist autocracy, and a bourgeois-democratic revolution would have to be made by the proletariat and the peasants. It had not understood, as Trotsky had understood, that in this revolution the proletariat could not be its co-equal with a working class or the bourgeoisie, and that if it did survive it would have to be reconceptualised was ignored. He also understood that this regime lacked the chance to fall in “a few years or even a few months”, it was too soon to decide that the autocracy was a form of new relationship with Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” (which was no more, but also no less, than a sharper version of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” taken to its logical and historically concrete conclusions) was tragically inexact.

What if Lenin had died in exile in 1917, before he had had a chance to bury the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” and arm the Bolshevik Party for an immediate struggle for workers’ power? The Bolshevik Party would have gone through 1917 as only a critical supporter of the bourgeois-democratic forces that held power after Tsarism was overthrown.

Trotsky died in August 1940, leaving his followers — whose political conclusion on Stalinism in 1939-40 he had chosen to ignore, but nonetheless criticised severely by the deed of substituting himself for the leaders of the SWP-USA in facing the SP-M in the SWP on the political questions — with the equivalent of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”, namely the “degenerated workers’ state”.

He had indicated how and when revision of that position in the direction of defining the USSR as a distinct form of class society would be necessary. His arguments at the end — that the USSR could not survive the war, that it would be overthrown by either the working class or the bureaucracy, and that if it did survive it would have to be reconceptualised — was ignored. He also understood that the regime lacked the chance to fall in “a few years or even a few months”, it was too soon to decide that the autocracy was a form of new ruling class, was pushed aside.

His self-proclaimed “disciples” took Stalinist Russia’s survival as the evidence that it was, for sure, a workers’ state, “in transition to socialism”. They talked in their press about the workers in the USSR fighting the war because they had “something to defend”. They idiotically pretended that Stalin’s plundering, raping, totalitarian army was somehow, despite the Stalinist police state, “the Red Army”.

They went through most of the war with, above the editorial slot in the chief “orthodox” Trotskyist publication in the world, a quotation from Trotsky proclaiming “the USSR to be the ‘main fortress of the world proletariat’” — a quotation from 1919. Mutatis mutandis, they did what Lenin’s “class disciples”, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Stalin, etc. would have done with Lenin’s “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry” had Lenin died in exile at the beginning of 1917.

When Trotsky pointed to the empirical evidence of the supposed survival of “conquests of October” in the nationalised property in the USSR and in the plan (the bureaucratic plan which Trotsky proposed to replace with a working-class plan), the view of those institutions as “working-class” in origin but now held by the bureaucracy had some of the character of historical truth. When he argued that the bureaucracy was a historical “excessiveness”, attaching itself to the “degenerated workers’ revolution” that it had no organic and necessary role in the system of social production in the USSR, and that, on the contrary, the bureaucracy disintegrated the economic system — there was truth to that. (Even though questions were begged about the relationship between the working class and the bureaucracy which had been in production in the USSR, about the specifically bureaucratic form of the Stalinist-run economy, and about the autonomous role of the Stalinist bureaucracy in organising the overproduction and forced industrialisation after 1929.)

When the Stalinist system replicated itself in the East European satellite states of Russia (Rumania, Bulgaria, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary...) and Stalinist bureaucracies made Stalinist revolutions (Yugoslavia, Albania, China...) — thereby creating as much as “remained of the October Revolution”, but modelled not on the October Revolution but on fully-formed (fully “degenerated”) Stalinism — it could not be argued that the “working-class” character of nationalised property in the USSR. The USSR had now to be seen in the adjusted perspective imposed by the creation of new Stalinist systems.

It came to be impossible on the facts — on the “empirical” facts of the economy, in which Trotsky had anchored so much of his reasoning, to hold to Trotsky’s theory of the degenerated workers’ state. A new theory, named that of “deformed and degenerated workers’ states”, was elaborated, painfully, reluctantly, slowly, jerkily, and with wild leaps from one position to another. (For instance, the Second World Congress, early in 1948, defined the East European satellite states as police-state capitalist republics, while Trotsky continued to argue that they were still “bureaucratic collectivist” analysis of Stalinism was an unstable, historically accidental, historically unviable concatenation of incompatible elements.

The consistent extrapolator from the seeming defeat by history of Trotsky’s viewpoint was Isaac Deutscher, who after 1940 went from being a Trotskyist to being a Stalinist, albeit one who saw history, and the development of the USSR economy, “now” under Stalin, as moving towards the democratisation and ultimate liquidation of Stalinism. Isaac Deutscher became in effect a “Brandlertite”, an heir of the cluster of ex-Comintern organisations of the 1930s (named after the German communist Heinrich Brandler) who disagreed with Comintern policy in their own countries but on the USSR were Stalinists with more in mind and more power than just the “anti-Zionism”. (The ideological “product” is still with us, now a central idea in the “Trotskian” left.)

CLIMATE CHANGE FILM

MIDDLE-CLASS PARADISE

ROBIN SIVAPALAN REVIEWS THE AGE OF STUPID

This latest public-safety warning film on climate change was seen by thousands at 65 cinemas in the UK on Sunday 15 March, breaking a world record for the biggest simultaneous screening of a premiere.

Viewers were all satellite-linked to the low-carbon centre stage at Leicester Square. This involved watching b-list stars and politicians, including Ken Livingston and David Stern, being interviewed as they strode down a second-hand green carpet surrounded by a gaggle of generic environmentalist-professionals and foxes.

Speakers from local campaigns had been asked to introduce the film and speak about activism in their area afterwards; I spoke at Harrow for the Climate Camp about the G20 protests and the capitalist crisis. The film is set in an apocalyptic 2055 or thereabouts, with Pete Postlethwaite sitting behind a computer terminal with Noah's Ark of the earth's history which viewers from whatever might hear it and be interested in the rapid oblivion of a "suicidal" species that knew about climate change but did nothing about it.

Apparently people were moved to tears — UN diplomats, no less. It has been supported by the Stop Climate Chaos coalition and cheered on by every kind of mainstream worthy. And a white middle-class audience,presentation of working-class solidarity in a society where the poor have no power. It is meant to be some way from my own.

At 18 I had enjoyed a fairly happy childhood, growing up in a stable, working, working-class home, encouraged to attend and work hard at school in a way that my parents had never been a generation before. Unlike Goody's, my parents were able to give me the support I needed to overcome practically and emotionally the subtle and manipulative ways in which our middle-class "betters" tell us we will never amount to anything.

But Goody also proved those "betters" wrong. She did it not in a way socialists would approve of. She did it by making lots of cash and getting her picture in the papers. Nonetheless, she did defy the anti-working class prejudice which we all see in society. It is the dream of the current five, as I did in my twenties. And they will be unlikely to get printed slip reminders of the way the government did it not just to concede to the hypocritical politicians, its rulers and opinion formers, but more directly to the audience. The director herself humbly aspires to nothing more than to retire to a farm to cultivate looks because this is a political issue; it's an issue for everyone who cares about our joint prospects of survival.

So why did the film-makers not foreground any sense of collective struggle against climate change? Why just these exceptional individual efforts? Probably because the director and producer are self-styled entrepreneurial heroes and can only relate to the notion of working-class solidarity as that of self-made millionaires and move into another middle-class agency; it's difficult to imagine it other than the top, but fiddling to it finding anything in it to relate to.

Am I being churlish? Is this film just an "accessible" popularisation that can be understood by all? Is this what the director thought when she clashed with Shilpa Shetty, when they themselves peddle far worse racism many times more systematically, and when in fact she was reacting badly — unforgivably, but understandably in the literal sense — to baffling, class-rooted sophistication.

But what did her quest for cash amount to in the end? Not much relatively speaking. Just about enough to see her raise some money that way and perhaps buy herself 100 birthday cards. For a little while longer the newspapers and TV stations will carry on making much, much more money out of their site.

But her actual lasting achievement might yet be to get the Government to reverse its policy on cervical smear testing, bringing younger women back into the screening programme. No one should have to die at 27 in order to achieve that. And it would be better if the government did not just to concede to the hypocritical interest of the tabloid press.

Nevertheless it would be a step forward if young women have the chance that I had to stay healthy. They will be unlikely to get printed slip reminders once a year of their cervixes, but for three years, instead of the current five, as I did in my twenties. And they will not be getting the kind of annual health checks, all women are entitled to.

But if the policy is changed it will be one small step closer to young working-class women getting a better deal in every area of their lives.

JADE GOODY

DEFYING ANTI-WORKING CLASS PREJUDICE

BY CATHY NUGENT

On the day that I attended my first cervical smear test Jade Goody would have been a few months old. She was a little girl who, as she said in adulthood, missed out on a lot rubbish, but a good-looking woman. When she clashed with Shilpa Shetty, when they themselves peddle far worse racism many times more systematically, and when in fact she was reacting badly — unforgivably, but understandably in the literal sense — to baffling, class-rooted sophistication.

Making the most of what life had to offer

feeling a failure in a thousand ways, what people think of themselves is bound to be a little bit resentful, a little or a lot rubbish, but often very tolerant and empathetic.

The best of what people saw corresponds to the remnants of working-class solidarity in a society where the labour movement is in retreat; they saw her ordinariness, her f-you attitude to snobs; the worst of what people saw or wanted to see in her, was her vulgarity and her supposed stupidity (which was in fact only a lack of education).

The best and the worst of Jade Goody was of course even radical networks such as Climate Camp, who have been promoting climate change through such disparate narratives, it seeks to pose climate change as a challenge for "all of us".

It's the white middle-class dream, to have a struggle to champion in their own name, motivated by images of dark people suffering aimlessly or acting stupidly, and to be brave enough to speak more directly to the audience.

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STEVE COHEN (1946-2009)

A fighter to the end

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

Steve Cohen, a revolutionary socialist for over 40 years, died on 8 March aged 63. Steve had suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for over 15 years, but despite pain and limited mobility remained involved in political activity until a short time before his death.

Steve Landau has written an obituary that gives a detailed appreciation of Steve's life and politics. Unfortunately we cannot reprint it here for reasons of length but it is available on the AWL website (www.workersliberty.org/node/21265). It recounts Steve's political history in the International Marxist Group in the 70s and subsequent development as a "critical Trotskyist", the nature of his identity and commitment as a Jewish socialist, his fight against immigration controls and all forms of racism, including anti-semitism, and his determination to use every aspect of his life — including his illness — as a field for political struggle.

Rather than trying to duplicate what Dave has written, which I am in a case couldn't do, having known Steve far less well — I would like to deal with his relationship with the Alliance for Workers' Liberty and make some personal and political comments.

STEVE AND THE AWL

I first heard of Steve as a figure on the Manchester left some time after I moved here in the early 90s, but only got to know him personally as a comrade over the last few years when his illness had already restricted his activity.

I think the reason our paths crossed then was Steve's growing interest in the AWL and his being referred to me as the then Manchester organiser. He was influenced by our publication of a book of "Shachtmanite" writings on the USSR and also, I think, impressed by our stand against left anti-semitism, a position he had himself pioneered in his influential 80s pamphlet That's a lie. Steve also took anti-semites later he would write: "For what it is worth — and I'm not a member — it seems only the Alliance for Workers Liberty who can be seen to be mounting campaigns against anti-semitism and organising solidarity actions against the Israeli state.

A couple of years ago he wrote to me that he wanted to be considered as a sympathiser of ours (in a broad sense rather than formally), and he kept in touch with what we were doing in Manchester; he would try to come to public meetings if his health allowed. He was also keen to be involved in No One Is Illegal and wrote a number of articles for Solidarity.

Richard Gold, a good friend of Steve's, said he asked Steve a few weeks before he died which organisation he would join today if his health permitted him to be fully active. He replied that he would join the AWL.

None of which is to bask in Steve’s reflected reputation or claim Steve as an "orthodox" supporter of the AWL. His politics were too individual for that and he had many disagreements with us — such as on two states in Israel-Palestine where, perhaps reflecting sympathies for anarchism and an opposition to border and walls and states that underestimated the importance of the overall struggle.

Steve also differed on forms of organisation, rejecting democratic centralism. He said he was an "anti-Leonard".

Steve drew some political lines very sharply. I tried to discuss with him a few weeks ago his response to the construction workers’ strikes, which he condemned outright as ‘racist strikes’. Unfortunately he was too ill to discuss this. On other political issues, though, he could be a ‘soddie’, which might come from his years in the IMC, or from what Richard Gold called his “nice politics”.

JEWISHNESS, ZIONISM, PALESTINE

Steve recently said in an email to me "my frame of reference is absolutely Jewish absolutely central to my experience as a Jew absolutely resonant with the very fabric of my being..."

He was Jewish and thinking about himself as a Jew, and thinking about the Jewish question, made sense to him.

What I keep arguing for is a joint campaign both for anti-Zionism of fools" on the left which he saw as reiterating anti-semitic themes some of which went back to the Middle Ages; he argues against the left slanders against Zionism and for understanding the choices Jews in Europe had in the face of Nazism while refusing to accept a Jewish nationalism. "As an opponent of Zionism I will not exceptionalise Israel. And as an opponent of Zionism I do not, will not, demonise Zionism... My Jewishness is to be taken seriously as something that I no longer see any point in being Jewish. And I aim to give up on it. Not that I feel bad about being a Jew. Just the opposite. Rather I want to become the sort of Jew the anti-semites want us against. The cosmopolitanism of no fixed identity. And I hope you are willing to surrender your own tribal/ethnic/nationalist/religious identities allegiances. Join me as a traitor to your own traditions."

This expresses Steve’s internationalism and universalism, which I think had a utopian element. As part of this, he had no time for the left going along with religious or chauvinist movements. At the start of 2009 he was trying to get Jewish leftists together to discuss the left’s response to Gaza and begin to organise separately from the mainstream of the solidarity movement. He wrote to me: "...the impression I get from my sitting room, computer and friends is that most of the legitimate protests over Gaza have been turned from peace marches into war marches. Hamas seems to have replaced the SWP as the dominant organisation on the ‘left’… And the Manchester [Jewish] Representative Council with its Zionist chauvinism seems to be the doppleganger… What I keep arguing for is a joint campaign both for Palestinian liberation and against anti-semitism. This would preclude the chauvinists from both sides. Does that make sense?...

Steve discussed his idea of a movement opposing chauvinists on both sides in his article “For the Third Camp: Vote to Palestinian Liberation! No to Anti-Semitism!” (www.workersliberty.org/node/78078) I think he was wrong to believe this could be done without having a positive programme for resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (that was to be for later discussion) but his position that “oppression has become inseparable” was right and that his article led him to oppose the academic boycott of Israel (see his article “I would hate myself in the morning” at www.workersliberty.org/node/63649).

STEVE AS AN ORGANISER

Steve was also an organiser. Dave Landau has written about his involvement in anti-deportation campaigns and setting up No One Is Illegal. As he could not do what he wanted to because of his illness, he consistently tried to involve as many people as possible in his projects.

He was difficult to say no to — though I succeeded when he tried to involve me in disability activism (something I now despise). I was unwilling to tell him. A further political commemoration is planned for June. Our condolences go to his family, friends and comrades.

A Stalinist betrayal? Aye Write!

By Peter Burton

 programme blurb for the recent Aye Write book festival in Glasgow advertises a "special session to mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the Spanish Civil War". The blurb goes on, “Scotland played a major role in the war with 500 volunteers. Daniel Gray (Homage to Caledonia) discusses the Spanish Civil War at the beginning of the Anarchist’s Story: the life of Ethel Macdonald, an embedded reporter from Motherwell known as ‘The Scots Scarlet Pimpernel’, and dozens of Spanish Revolution (note, revolution, rather than civil war) in Spain wasn’t inevitable given the role of Stalin and the Stalinists. The question was a bit longer than this but you get the gist. Suddenly the atmosphere changed, the replies from

the top table making it clear that they did not understand the politics of Spain — it was all down to Hitler and Mussolini’s superior weapons, you know, and the role of Britain and America.

This “analysis” led to loud cheers from large numbers of ageing Glasgow Stalinists in suits and red ties. This, in turn was met by the anger of another wrecker who loudly called for a campaign to investigate the death of Bob Smillie, repeatedly asking the top table if they would sign a petition to this effect. They eventually agreed to, though I suspect, more to shut him up than anything else.

The books being promoted are not without merit, but Daniel Gray’s obsession with the Spanish Civil War hasn’t led to clarity about the scale of the repression that took place. Then there was my attempt to point out the blood between Stalinism and Bolshevism in Glasgow.

• Review of Homage to Caledonia by Daniel Gray: www.workersliberty.org/node/12163

A Stal
The onset of Great Depression II: conceptualising the crisis

We continue our series. (www.workersliberty.org/marxists-crisis)

A t this writing (January 2009), firms in all sectors of the US economy are cutting their payrolls; unemployment and homelessness are soaring; and the working class is taking the biggest hit to living standards in several genera-
tions, raising deep doubts about the capacity of our capitalist society in the near term to ensure overall social reproduction.

Similar trends are evident around the world, reflect-
ing a heightened degree of interconnection and tran-
nationalisation. Mountains of debt — consumer, business, government, offshore — continue to accumu-
late, and the fragility of the international financial sys-
tem beyond the most recent big myth, that capitalist accumulation, with its immanent trope toward polarisation, reckless expansion, irresponsibility and instability, is increas-
ingly yielding to any other standpoint affirming human survival and fulfillment. We have always known this, while legions of mainstream pundits and scholars have kept it, and have been incapable of knowing it. (They still are.)

Then what does this mean? Why do we feel helpless, like the proverbial deer in the headlights? Where is the confident projection of a future beyond capitalism, to be built on the sort of massive democratic upsurge that secured the October Revolution of 1917, the US New Deal in the 1930s, and the social wage of the advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe in the post-World War Two period?

Part of the problem, of course, is that Marxist predic-
tions of crisis have often turned out to be wrong, so that when a crisis “finally” does emerge we experience it in the same way as the correct statement of a stopped clock (which is right twice a day). An old joke haunts us: “Marxists have successfully predicted ten of the last two crises to hit the US economy.” We need to know: how can we use our grasp of fundamen-
tals to produce a superior analysis of this crisis? How can we avoid succumbing to the sterile maximal-
ism of simply asserting that “capitalism = crisis” and vapid talk of “general crisis,” on the one hand; or join-
ing the hoards of talking heads who spew forth endless vapid talk of “general crisis,” on the other.

Well, we can but try. The answer won’t be found, in my view, in the form of endless empirical description, nor by means of the “Marxist econometric model” that the late David Gordon so metically sought. Nor will it be found in further study of Marx’s texts, although that study remains important as one source of new ideas. As always in the essayistic mode, I argue that conceptual clarification is essential, and in this instance I believe a specific conceptual gap has been a defining feature in the work of Marxist economists in capitalist societies who are systematically hostile toward the early-socialist states of the 20th century (the so-called “Western Marxists”). More on that in a moment.

CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIES

C risis of capitalist accumulation have traditionally been classified as “cyclical” and “structural.”

1) “Cyclical” crises are the classical crises of accumulation-cyclical; balance-of-forces-cyclical. Of the three, this is, I submit, the least well understood, large-

2) “Structural” crises, by contrast, occur when a given stage of accumulation (or “social structure of accumu-
lation”) must necessarily give way to a succeeding one. One example is capitalism’s need for a qualitatively enhanced form of state regulation, an institutional transformation of the early 20th century that was mightily resisted by capital, even as that system’s most thoughtful representatives saw the need for it and mass working-class struggle from below brought home its necessity. Another such stage (or “stadial”) conception of crisis rests on the “social structure of accumulation” (or, in a different formulation, the “regime of accumulation”) that emerged in the post-

3) Stadial-structural crises (to skip over the second type of crisis) are the classical crises of overproduction, with either the realisation or the liqui-
dation aspect in the dominant position. They embody a particular conjuncture. Accumulation-cyclical crises are the classical crises of overproduction, with either the realisation or the liqui-
dation aspect in the dominant position. They embody a central capitalist contradiction: individual capitals must seek ever-higher profit rates in ways that under-

4) Stadial-structural crises (to skip over the second type of the moment) refer of course to the stadial, or stage-
like, character of capitalism. The stormy transition to a new one big myth, that capitalist accumulation, with its immanent trope toward polarisation, reckless expansion, irresponsibility and instability, is increas-
ingly yielding to any other standpoint affirming human survival and fulfillment. We have always known this, while legions of mainstream pundits and scholars have kept it, and have been incapable of knowing it. (They still are.)

Then what does this mean? Why do we feel helpless, like the proverbial deer in the headlights? Where is the confident projection of a future beyond capitalism, to be built on the sort of massive democratic upsurge that secured the October Revolution of 1917, the US New Deal in the 1930s, and the social wage of the advanced capitalist societies of Western Europe in the post-World War Two period?

Part of the problem, of course, is that Marxist predic-
tions of crisis have often turned out to be wrong, so that when a crisis “finally” does emerge we experience it in the same way as the correct statement of a stopped clock (which is right twice a day). An old joke haunts us: “Marxists have successfully predicted ten of the last two crises to hit the US economy.” We need to know: how can we use our grasp of fundamen-
tals to produce a superior analysis of this crisis? How can we avoid succumbing to the sterile maximal-
ism of simply asserting that “capitalism = crisis” and vapid talk of “general crisis,” on the one hand; or join-
ing the hoards of talking heads who spew forth endless vapid talk of “general crisis,” on the other.

Well, we can but try. The answer won’t be found, in my view, in the form of endless empirical description, nor by means of the “Marxist econometric model” that the late David Gordon so metically sought. Nor will it be found in further study of Marx’s texts, although that study remains important as one source of new ideas. As always in the essayistic mode, I argue that conceptual clarification is essential, and in this instance I believe a specific conceptual gap has been a defining feature in the work of Marxist economists in capitalist societies who are systematically hostile toward the early-socialist states of the 20th century (the so-called “Western Marxists”). More on that in a moment.

• January 2009. David LAIBMAN is Professor of Economics at Brooklyn College and the Graduate School, CUNY, and Editor of Science & Society. His most recent book, Deep History: A Study in Social Evolution and Human Potential, was published in 2007 by NYU Press. He can be reached at dlaibman@scienceandsociety.com. This text will appear in the “Editorial Perspectives” section of the July 2009 issue of Science & Society.
I began to research, consult and publish findings from many of New Labour’s central tenets about education. Academics, independent of government, in 2004, and Alexander.

Curriculum challenged in an interim report from the Cambridge in the 1990s to report on the state of England’s and Robin Alexander produced a report that was used due to be published. Whatever the full details of the Rose Report — which seem to have been subject to governmental political pressure and excluded the unions from the consultation. Due to be published.

If it wins the next election, New Labour proposes to re-shuffle rather than reform the curriculum. Alexander presents a radical re-conceptualisation of what primary school should be like and how it should be organised. He argues that a third of the school-year should be set free from the National Curriculum’s centralised prescription and given over to a “curriculum” whose content should be decided by individual schools at local level. He proposes an end to the two-tier curriculum currently enforced on pupils by the over-testing regime. While literacy and numeracy take the lion’s share of available time in school, learning in art, music, the humanities, sport and science must compete for what’s left. Quality as well as quantity of provision suffers, and pupils are prevented from getting a broad and balanced education.

A condensed briefing and the full report can be downloaded from: www.primaryreview.org.uk

NEW LABOUR

A challenge to the tyranny of testing

If it wins the next election, New Labour proposes to reshape primary education. Pat Yarker reports on a challenge to the Government’s line of march.

In January 2008 Ed Balls appointed Sir Jim Rose to review the current Primary curriculum and recommend changes for implementation from September 2011. Jim Rose, a distinguished professor of education, had already conducted a review of the teaching of reading (in 2006); that was seized on by education ministers to justify imposing on teachers, despite much opposition, a single method (phonics) to teach children to read. As we go to press his report is due to be published.

Rose was one of the “Three Wise Men” tasked by the Tories in the 1990s to report on the state of England’s primary schools. Rose together with Chris Woodhead and David Hargreaves was a report that John Major to intensify a backlash against so-called “child-centred” traditional approaches and to strengthen central government’s control over school- ing. Whatever the full details of the Rose Report — which was released in November 2006 — it unleashed a political pressure and excluded the unions from the consultation.

One of the inadequacies of the Rose review’s remit and intellectual perspectives were robustly challenged in an interim report from the Cambridge Primary Review team: Towards a new Primary Curriculum. Ironically, the report’s author is Robin Alexander.

The Cambridge Primary Review was initiated by academics, independent of government, in 2004, and began with a statement and publish findings from 2006. Its evidence has bolstered arguments counter to many of New Labour’s central tenets about education. Professor Alexander peppers this latest publication with direct criticism of the Rose Review for intending merely to re-shuffle rather than reform the curriculum. Alexander presents a radical re-conceptualisation of what primary school should be like and how it should be organised. He argues that a third of the school-year should be set free from the National Curriculum’s centralised prescription and given over to a “curriculum” whose content should be decided by individual schools at local level. He proposes an end to the two-tier curriculum currently enforced on pupils by the over-testing regime. While literacy and numeracy take the lion’s share of available time in school, learning in art, music, the humanities, sport and science must compete for what’s left. Quality as well as quantity of provision suffers, and pupils are prevented from getting a broad and balanced education.

Sacrificing breadth of learning experience to the imperatives of high-stakes testing and the “standards” agenda so relentlessly enforced by New Labour has been a betrayal of pupils and teachers. Better, Alexander argues, to understand breadth of learning experience goes hand in hand with getting child well-being. Alexander dispenses with the notion of literacy and numeracy at the core and re-conceives the primary curriculum as a matrix of twelve specified aims and eight “domains”. This is an original attempt to move beyond the entrenched argument about whether “broad” or “progressive” topics should organise curriculum-content in the primary school.

Alexander argues that primary school is both a period for preparing the child for secondary education and a period aimed at developing the child as she or he chooses to develop the child as she or he chooses. The primary curriculum should be informed by a commitment to the knowledge of, understanding, inquiry and disposition as well as skills.
**Challenging Israeli militarism — and “absolute anti-Zionism”**

**By Sacha Ismail**

Between 5 and 13 March, I had the privilege of being the only UK with Tamar Katz, a 19-year-old woman from Tel Aviv who was jailed for three months at the end of last year for refusing to serve in the Israeli Defence Force as an act of solidarity with the Palestinians.

During that time Tamar spoke thirteen times in nine cities — London, Brighton, Newcastle, Manchester, Bradford, Cambridge, Nottingham, Sheffield and Edinburgh — I’d guess to a total of about 700 people. In addition to two events sponsored by the rail union RMT and an International Women’s Day meeting host- ed by Feminist Fightback and the Organisation of Women’s Freedom in Iraq, she did meetings at ten universi- ties — eight of which had had students occupa- tions in solidarity with Gaza, while the other two, Newcastle and Sheffield, occupied a few days after Tamar spoke (see page 8). We got a turnout of 70 in Cambridge and Edinburgh, 90 in Sheffield, 100 in Nottingham. There was univer- sally great enthusiasm for hearing what Tamar had to say. This is what’s before you consider the numerous requests for meetings that we unfortunately had to turn down.

I think what inspired people was the combination of Tamar’s personal and political courage with the reali- sation that there is a left opposition in Israel — some- thing which Workers’ Liberty members were already aware of, but which comes as almost a surprise to many other members of the other solidarity activists. For us too, however, hearing about the struggles of the belea- guered but determined Israeli left was very inspiring.

Here is a ‘fringe won’ who went to prison for months, much of it spent in solitary confinement, in order to make solidarity with a cause she believes in. That is a call to socialists and other activists in Britain, where we do not routinely face such difficult circum- stances, to redouble our efforts in the struggle.

There was another theme that came up again and again in questions: what did Tamar’s friends and rela- tives think of her coming to speak in Britain? When Tamar was getting ready to come here, one of her rela- tives asked her how she could justify making Israelis look bad in the eyes of the world. She replied that, on the contrary, she was doing a service to the Israeli peo- ple, by distinguishing between them and their govern- ment, and showing the world “another Israel”.

We want to redouble our efforts in the struggle, to make a breakthrough both in elections and on the streets. I wasn’t surprised by half of the people with their hands up wanting to make the priorities of profit in the name of solidarity and human need and ultimately overthrowing the bosses system and replacing it with a society based on work- ers’ power. Nothing else will stop the jobs massacre, the privatisation of all public services and the calendar destruction of climate change.

We went to Rotherham that evening to demonstrate against Nick Griffin who was speaking at a pub. This demo was poorly organised by UAF and the Unite offi- cial who declared himself in charge. I think the poor planning could potentially have put the activists in harm’s way several times. If it the protest had gone on any longer, I am pretty sure there would have been a direct clash between us and Griffin’s goons, who near- ly matched us in numbers.

In the current economic crisis the BNP are poised to make a breakthrough both in elections and on the streets. UAF’s leadership is stilling any attempt to build a militant working-class strategy to defeat the fascists. We should call UAF to account in our unions for this disastrous strategy. We also need to fight alongside the many people around UAF willing to, to oppose the BNP on the streets and argue for socialism as the only answer to the despair the BNP feeds on.

**The SPW and the G20**

“Demand the G20 puts people first” reads the main headline on the SPW’s website.

The accompanying short article puts forward no political analysis, simply noting that “trade unions, NGOs, climate campaigners and anti-war activists are gearing up for a week of protests.”

The longer, linked article in Socialist Worker rightly explains that “the ultimate aim of the G20 world lead- ers is to protect profits and rule of the wealthy”. So why is there nothing about putting concrete demands on existing governments. “We demand the Brown government abolish tuition fees” has some grip; “we demand that Brown puts people before profit” is just ludicrous.

Such class-struggle ideas are currently accepted by only a small minority in the movement around the G20 summit — but that is all the more reason for socialists to champion them loudly and clearly.

But Socialist Worker coverage does not mention class struggle or the working-class as an organised force. Instead it talks about “ordinary people” and calls on “the people of the world to join together” to build a “united, radical and effective movement”. They wind up endorsing the subordination of the workers’ move- ment to the middle-class NGOs whose politics domi- nate the G20 protests.

**Labour Party democracy call**

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy is ask- ing unions and Constituency Labour Parties to submit a constitutional amendment for Labour Party conference 2009 to restore the conference’s right to debate and vote on motions on current political issues:

• Text of motions and deadlines (June): www.workersliberty.org/nds/12135
Solidarity with the Tamil people

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

Earlier this month a meeting in Chennai in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, sponsored by the United Socialist Party (sister party of the Socialist Party in the UK), launched an international Sri Lanka solidarity campaign.

The early evening launch in the UK, on Saturday 21 March, was a low-key affair in a small room in Camden Town hall by a few members of the SP.

A steering committee was agreed, based on the SP’s proposal whereby SP people are coordinator, treasurer and honorary President. Other people were allowed to nominate themselves and were accepted by the room, including five young second-generation British Tamils (one of them myself from Workers’ Liberty, the only other socialist group involved so far).

The campaign aims to be “broad”, and the steering committee meeting on Saturday 29th is to remain open.

BY DAVID KIRK

On Saturday 21 March 60 people, including many young workers and students, attended the Workers’ Liberty day school on “Capitalist Crisis, Workers’ Response” in London.

In the school’s opening session a RMT comrade talked about London Underground’s plan to slash jobs and the tube and about how militant trade unionists can lead a fight back against these kinds of cuts (see back page). Sean Matgamna outlined why he thought all those who see themselves in the tradition of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky will need to sharpen and intensify our analysis in preparation for the political movements thrown up by capitalism’s crisis. The key propaganda arguments will be around the need for a workers’ government as the only alternative to the barbarism of capitalism in retreat and the renewed fascist threat.

The rest of the day was spent in workshops. A sharp debate on the recent construction industry strikes saw Mike Fenwick arguing that the Lindsey Oil Refinery strike had been a wildcat response to a real issue of deprivation. The current Tory council makes a lot of central government “unfairness” when it wants to justify its plans to cut services and to go on for extensive outsourcing (the “Future Shape” programme). But, at the same time, the council consistently neglects poorer areas.

Overdue regeneration of the worst housing estates (formerly council, now run by an ALMO), Barnet Homes, are grinding to a halt in the credit crunch with contractors laying off workers, unlike Golders Green, who deliver; plans to revive the built-up, congested and downright ugly west of the borough boil down to more big stores and high-intensity private apartment blocks while fantastically wealthy areas like leafy Totteridge are left untouched; amenities, cultural and recreational services are “no frills” when they exist at all.

Barnet trades council has helped to set up an independent residents’ group, Barnet Community Campaign, to protest against Future Shape and cuts, including a campaign against the proposed axing of elderly sheltered housing wardens.

Barnet expects to make £12 million savings this year, £70,000 of that will be through the wardens cut.

One thing the campaign will have to do is counter the arguments of the Barnet administration: instead of privatising and cutting, they should be mobilising residents to campaign for more money from central government, and putting their own house in order.

Council leader Mike Freer is under new pressure with the recent disclosure that council officers were behind Barnett’s own Treasury policy when placing £2 billion worth of investments — £27 million of that is currently frozen in failed Icelandic banks. The questions are: how much did Freer know when and, shouldn’t he have known more? Freer is the Tory PPC for Finchley and Golders Green and will go up against the Labour group’s leader on the council, Alison Moore.

Council workers’ unions — Unison, GMB, teaching unions — should co-ordinate or at least service the disparate campaigns going on in local government around the country. In Barnet it has been the work of individual union branches to seek out information from other areas of the country. We confront different issues and different local foets, but ultimately we are all in the same boat and need to discuss and work together, never more so than now with massive cuts in pub-
In Solidarity 9347 Mark Sandell took issue with our coverage of the engineering strikes. Or does he?

I'm not clear where Mark stands himself. Does he take the point of some on the left that Solidarity should have flatly opposed the engineering construction strikes — or that it was not the workplaces where the underlying issues around sub-contracting, union agreements, and jobs? But thanks we got the balance wrong within that approach?

Or is it that he agrees with the broad approach we took — siding with the workers, but arguing against slogans like “British Jobs For British Workers” and for the strikes and demonstrations to turn to class demands addressing the underlying issues around sub-contracting, union agreements, and jobs? But thanks we got the balance wrong within that approach?

I wouldn't be at all dogmatic that we got the balance right. The strikes were a new thing, not quite like anything we'd ever seen before, and in a specialised industry where we have no members and few contacts. Much more important to get the balance right.

However, Mark's specific arguments do not convince me.

One: “We bent over backwards to justify, explain away, or ignore the depths of the nationalism involved?” We balked at criticising the role of the unions, the reps, and the backside deals of the workplace.

We said: “Some [workers] will be more seduced into picking up the worker-dividing demand: ‘British jobs for British workers’”. There is a real danger that nationalism and xenophobia will grow as workers in Europe struggle to hold onto jobs.

And all the Italian workers are not to blame for the capitalist crisis. Nor are any other workers! Keeping out foreign workers will not stop souring employment. What it will do is boost prejudices against workers from other countries and divide the working class, further strengthening the bosses' power over us... We need action direct action directed against Gordon Brown's government and the big employers, rather than echoing Gordon Brown's slogans..."

“The slogans of ‘British workers first’, or ‘British jobs for British workers’ cannot but turn worker against worker. Politically they are the wrong slogans — and potentially disastrous slogans.”

Where is the “justifying”? The “explaining away”? Or the “ignoring”? Or the “balking at criticising”? Or, again, the “taking the SP’s word on this dispute” (the SP’s word on this strike, the “British Jobs for British Workers” element was marginal, and largely an artificial construction by the media)?

Two: “The key reason these strikes spread was because they touched a nationalist nerve that is plain to see in any workplace — the dispute was chiefly defined by its nationalism.”

In other words, the “taking the SP's word on this dispute” (the SP’s word on this strike, the “British Jobs for British Workers” element was marginal, and largely an artificial construction by the media) was just, or primarily, an explosion of nationalism.

The engineering construction strikes have some similarities with that dispute: at least as many as, perhaps more than, they had with strikes primarily motivated by resentment against brownface or whiteface.

Mark does not mention the fact that after a few days the Lindsey strikers deliberately abandoned the “British Jobs For British Workers’ placards and adopted demands focused on defence of union agreements against subcontracting. To be sure, all the evidence is that many workers still held many of the ideas expressed in the placards. They thought that “British Jobs For British Workers” was a “diplomatic” mistake, rather than sharing our fundamental critique of it. But doesn’t the deliberate abandonment of the slogan show something?

School teachers do not see new schools being run by subcontractors who bring in non-union overseas-recruited temporary workers, deliberately housed so as to isolate them from local workers, and operating outside the national union agreements. Postal workers do not see new mail centres operated that way. Health workers do not see new hospitals operated that way. Civil servants do not see new offices operated that way. Tube workers do not see new operations run that way.

Engineering construction does. Many of the industries I've mentioned — education, the post, health, civil service, the Tube — have fairly large numbers of migrant workers, if by some freak workers in one of those industries did see new projects being operated by whole non-union overseas-recruited temporary workforces, outside the national union agreements, then they would be angry, and might seek to take action.

If the action involved many migrant workers (the engineering construction strikers, after all, included some Polish and many Irish workers), it would probably be coloured by nationalism. But it would not be just an outpouring of nationalist prejudice. It would be a working-class reaction coloured by nationalist prejudice. That is what these strikes were.

Compare the strikes by toolroom workers in British Leyland car factories in early 1977. There were the first stirrings of an industrial conflict against the pay-restraint policies of the Labour Government at that time of economic crisis, the beginnings of a revival of militancy after strike levels had plunged dramatically in August 1975 with the adoption of Government pay-rise limits endorsed by the union leaders.

The toolroom workers were a specialised, skilled, higher-paid section. Their headline demand was for separate negotiations right to each of their concerns — as was not uncommon with skilled workers’ disputes in the 1960s and 70s — was with “differentials”, the margin by which their wages were higher than those of other workers.

The Communist Party and trade-union organisations under their influence (of which there were then, unlike now, many) flatly opposed the strike as “divisive”. The British Leyland Combino Committee opposed the strike. Yet we thought that despite everything there was a class content to the strike, and we supported it. Undoubtedly the strike was coloured by craft chauvinism, and owed some of its popularity among the toolroom workers to that craft chauvinism. Objectively, however, the toolroom strike was not an anti-capitalist action directed against Gordon Brown's government and the big employers, rather than echoing Gordon Brown's slogans...

WHERE WE STAND

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, buildings, housing, organisation 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 worker-controlled and accountable trade union movement.
- A workers’ right 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.

WHERE WE STAND

A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression.

Equal pay for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request.

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

Democratic control 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!
By Janine Booth, RMT London Transport Regional Council Secretary

Everyday now we hear news about thousands of job losses across industry. This is not because there’s no work to be done — you’ve only got to look around you at the state of housing estates, the understaffing of hospitals, the size of classes in schools — to see there’s a lot of work to be done; and yet still workers are losing their jobs. What should the unions be doing about this?

Well you don’t save jobs by rolling over on issues like pay and conditions. You look weak, the employer thinks you are a pushover and they’ll come after you next time; they’ll beat you on pay and conditions they’ll come for you on jobs as well.

One proof that you can fight in a recession has come recently from within the rail industry.

London Overground rail workers have just won £2,500 across the board (near to 29% rise for some grades) just by threatening (and voting 10 to 1) to go on strike.

But there are jobs cuts all over the rail industry (see page 4). London Underground is cutting more than a thousand jobs in administration grades. Transport for London is due to cut around three and a half thousand jobs over the next eighteen months.

At the same time London Underground have made an offer of a five-year pay deal — RPI plus one percent in the first year and then RPI only for the next four years. That looks like a pay freeze, which would be quite bad enough, but it’s actually a year-on-year pay cut, because RPI systematically understimates real inflation as it affects working people (see page 7).

Now ISS and Tubelines have announced that they would not be paying the final instalment of the London living wage (£7.45 per hour) for the cleaners who work on the Underground — so they are going to ballot for strike action.

From 24 March the RMT is balloting for industrial action on jobs and pay for all members in all grades on the whole of London Underground and the whole of Transport for London, including Metronet. That is nearly 10,000 members. Even without the other unions on board — and the other unions have shown no sign of wanting to fight this pay freeze and job losses — we should still be able to shut down London with some effective industrial action.

But it is not easy to get workers to fight against attacks during a recession I think this is for two main reasons; one to do with the recession and the other to do with poor union leadership.

A lot of workers believe that you do have to tighten your belts during a recession. Management promote this fear. They say why are going on strike when other workers are losing their jobs, at least you have got a job. It’s like saying if you see someone drowning you don’t reach over and try and pull them out but jump in and drown with them as some kind of act of solidarity.

Even though we think we are going to get a really good yes vote in our ballot, I don’t think it’s true that every London Underground worker has thrown off the idea about not fighting during recession. But because management’s pay offer is even worse than they thought it was going to be and they’re so outraged by it that, despite the recession, they really need to fight back.

Also, we haven’t noticed the bosses tightening their belts. There are 123 senior managers in London Underground on over £100,000. Three of these senior managers are employed to run projects that don’t exist. The manager of the Thames Gateway project — cancelled in 2006 — is still being paid to manage that project.

The second reason people are being held back is a lack of faith in their union leadership’s ability to lead them to victory. For instance a year ago teachers and local government workers struck and marched together, and yet that fight became dissipated. Subsequent strike ballots went badly, it seems to me, because workers didn’t think that going out on one 24 hour protest gesture every six months was going to win their demands.

It is very important to promote strike committees and rank-and-file control over a dispute.

The role of Marxists like Workers’ Liberty is to remember, analyse and learn from previous disputes, both the good things and the bad. But it is not our job, as some socialists seem to think, to hope the disputes lose so that you can denounce the union leadership. To help these disputes to win, making positive proposals about running the dispute, to help the rank and file organise, to promote more democracy in the union, to challenge damaging ideas such as nationalism and grade chauvinism — that is our job!

[Continued on page 6]