

Solidarity

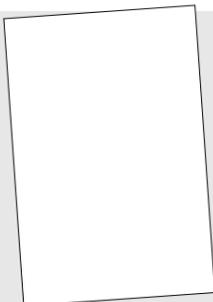
& Workers' Liberty



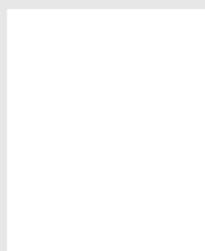
Volume 3 No 184 4 November 2010 30p/80p

For a Workers' Government!

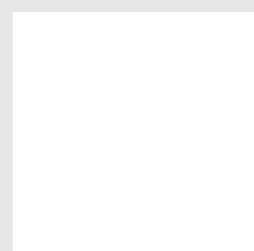
**HELP US GO
WEEKLY**
PAGE 7



**FIGHTING ON
THE
FRONTLINE**
CENTRE PAGES



**WHY ARE
WE ALL
HERE?**
PAGE 14



**Benefit cuts in
next four years:
£18 billion**

**Cuts in education
and local services
in next four years:
£16 billion**

**Bank
profits this
year alone:
£28 billion**

See page 3

MAKE THE RICH PAY!

YEMEN

US plan won't stop the violence

BY DAN KATZ

The plague of crazed Islamist violence and threats has continued with an apparent attempt to bring down planes with explosives. No-one will be surprised that the conspiracy seems to have begun in Yemen.

By any standard measure of freedom and well-being Yemen and its people fare poorly.

Reporters Without Borders ranks Yemen at 170 of 178 countries for press freedom. Transparency International puts it at 131 out of 179 countries for corruption.

National Income per capita is \$950 per year; 45% live below the official poverty line while a tiny minority live very well indeed; there is at least 35% unemployment.

Nearly half of Yemen's rapidly growing population of 23 million is under 15 (UN figures). Life expectancy is 63 years; literacy rates are 35% for women.

Yemen's meagre oil reserves will be dry by 2017, as will the aquifers which supply its capital, Sanaa, with drinking water.

Yemen has no normally-functioning state. The central government has direct authority over only a minority of the country.

Elsewhere it has to bribe, haggle and negotiate to achieve any goal — a process that the president, Ali Salih, has described as “dancing on the heads of snakes.”

Ali Salih has co-opted many of the Yemeni mujhadeen who fought the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s and returned in the 90s.

He now faces a new wave of jihadists aligned with al-Qaeda, based in the south and east of the country. Al-Qaeda have been routed in Saudi Arabia and have now regrouped in Yemen.

However, Yemen is also being pulled apart by a simmering rebellion in the north, run by a minority Shia sect, the Zaydi, and, additionally, by a southern secessionist movement based on those who look to re-found the old south Yemen state.

In such conditions it is difficult to see how a US-led western intervention, based on funding a corrupt and incompetent state, supplemented by drone strikes, can defeat these utterly reactionary Islamists.

More likely, intervention will make matters worse — and, in the first instance, it will make matters worse for those women, journalists and remaining Yemeni Jews who will feel the full force of an Islamist backlash.

TOWER HAMLETS

Lutfur Rahman is no socialist

BY STUART JORDAN

Lutfur Rahman's election as the first ever mayor of Tower Hamlets on 21 October — on a record low turnout — is a bad result for the working-class population of this deprived East London borough.

Rahman is not, as the SWP and others claim, a socialist. His supporters include wealthy Brick Lane restaurateurs, George Galloway's Respect party and political Islamists of the Islamic Forum of Europe.

Cynical manipulation of race, religion and cults of personality — all that is rotten in a national politics devoid of a working-class political voice — were all present during this local election.

Rahman won the mayoralty as an independent but originally wanted to be the Labour candidate. He won the poll of Labour Party members convincingly.

The third placed candidate, Helal Abbas, presented a dossier to the Labour Party Executive, accusing Rahman, among other things, of organising an Islamist entryist project. Without having time to read the dossier, Labour imposed Helal Abbas as their candidate. The second placed candidate, John Biggs, was ignored.

The Islamic Forum of Europe, based at the East London Mosque, is a big player in local politics and is probably sending people into the Labour Party. However, this does not make Labour's decision democratic. It is simply a sad fact that Islamist organisations can organise 200 people to join the Labour Party at a time when the local trade union movement

would struggle to organise 10. We should oppose the Executive decision, but we need to rally the trade unions for a fight to reclaim the Labour Party from right-wing political opponents (including Islamists).

The injustice of his expulsion from Labour gathered Rahman some support, but his victory also points to powerful forces working behind the scenes. During the campaign, a free sheet called *Bangla News* was delivered to every door in Tower Hamlets with the unsubstantiated claim that Abbas was a “wife-beater” and a “racist”. A mysterious organisation called the Domestic Violence Forum East advertised a demo outside Labour Party offices to protest at Abbas' crimes against his wife (and then failed to turn up). A meeting of the local Muslim clerics (except the moderates in the Brick Lane mosque) endorsed Rahman and denounced Abbas.

Rahman's election has split the Labour Party and the broader left. Eight Labour councillors (some ex-Respect) have been expelled for supporting Rahman and forming his cabinet.

In another twist Ken Livingstone's supporters joined Rahman on the campaign trail and denounced Labour's decision. Livingstone is a longtime friend of Islamist personalities and groups, though of course here it is also a democratic stance. Labour Party activists should oppose any punishment Livingstone might get from Labour.

This story is made still worse by the stance of the local anti-cuts campaign, Tower Hamlets Hands Off Our Public Services. THHOOPS is controlled by the SWP, who have argued against placing

any demands on Tower Hamlets councillors because they want to “involve them in the campaign”. They hope that diplomacy and unctiousness will stop the cuts, rather than class struggle.

During the election THHOOPS remained quiet and inactive but *Socialist Worker* positively supported Rahman. Unite Against Fascism has acquired a new affiliate — the Islamic Forum of Europe — making it even more of a politics-means-nothing “popular front”.

Tower Hamlets, the borough of Cable Street, Brick Lane and the Poplar Council, was once a bastion of working-class self-assertion. Now politics has descended into bad farce. Leftwingers inside and outside of the Labour Party are right to feel concerned about rising anti-Muslim racism. But the would-be-left often treats Muslims as a homogeneous mass of passive victims who if offered a bit of token support for any old “militant sounding” political project, as Islamism often is, will embrace “the revolutionary party”. And the left often ignores many other political voices and socially conscious people in Muslim communities.

Now more than ever we need to unite Muslim and non-Muslim workers on a common programme based in working-class politics.

And, whatever happens, trade unionists and community activists cannot put faith in either Rahman or the Labour group to take a principled stance and refuse to pass on the Tory cuts. We need to build a working-class force to assert some rational politics and slough off the bourgeois scum.

Action needed on welfare cuts

BY MATTHEW THOMPSON

The coalition's announcement in last month's Comprehensive Spending Review of cuts to social security benefits, together with planned job losses of 15,000 in the Department for Work and Pensions over the next two years, represents the clearest attack yet on the structure and principles of the welfare state created by the 1945 Labour government.

The cut that has attracted most media attention — withdrawing Child Benefit from children with a parent earning enough to pay the top rate of income tax (currently just under £44,000 a year) — had already been trailed at the Tory party conference.

Child Benefit was introduced in 1946 as a low but universal payment to reflect some of the costs of bringing up children. Its withdrawal from the better off has caused problems for the Coalition government on its own backbenches. Many Tory and Lib Dem MPs fear it will cost them votes.

It is clear that now the universal principle underlying Child Benefit has been removed, the way is open to make further cuts to it. Indeed, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith responded to criticism of the decision at the Tory conference by claiming that it was merely a transitional step and that by 2017 Child Benefit would be subsumed into his scheme for universal credits to replace Working Tax Credit and Income Support, both of which are

means-tested and can only be claimed by those on low incomes.

Even in its own terms of cutting public spending, the new Child Benefit scheme has already run into trouble. Unlike the straightforward task of paying benefit for all children, means testing payments will introduce another layer of bureaucracy as well as increasing state investigation of claimants' personal circumstances. Where for example the father is the top rate tax payer and Child Benefit is claimed by the mother, HM Revenue and Customs will either have to write to the former asking whether their partner has claimed Child Benefit, or the latter asking for details of what their partner earns, information which they, respectively, may not. There is also the problem of self-employed people with fluctuating income who do not know into which band their earnings will fall until the end of the tax year.

The confirmation that Housing Benefit will be also be restricted to £250, £280, £340 and £400 per week for one-, two-, three- and four-bedroom properties, and cut for those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for more than a year, is also attracting media attention and criticism on the Coalition backbenches, especially in London where it will mean families having to uproot themselves and move into smaller accommodation in cheaper parts of the city. Even Tory mayor Boris Johnson has described this as “a kind of Kosovo-style social cleansing of London.”

The Government is also pressing ahead with plans to increase the state

pension age from 65 to 66, albeit by 2020 rather than 2016 as previously announced. The last Labour government had already decided to increase it to 66 by 2024 and to 68 by 2046. The Coalition has said that the rise to 68 is now likely to be brought forward as well.

Like the parallel review of public sector pension schemes being conducted by ex-Labour minister John Hutton, the rationale behind these changes to retirement age is that “everyone is living longer.” This argument ignores the differences in age expectancy based on social class — men in Glasgow die on average at 78 compared to 87 for their counterparts in Kensington and Chelsea — and the fact that even those who live longer may not be capable of working till nearly 70, especially in manual jobs.

Taken together with attacks on incapacity and disability benefits, the choice for many working-class people in the future if the Tories and Lib Dems get their way will either be working into their 70s in low-paid manual jobs and dying before they can claim their pensions, or decades on lower, means-tested benefits paid to the unemployed and sick.

The mass protests in France over similar plans to increase the retirement age have highlighted yet again the lack of action by our own labour movement. When TV chat show host Paul O'Grady can show more anger at the cuts to welfare in his live prime-time TV programme than the TUC does, it shows the glaring need for leadership.

CUTS

Make the rich pay!

Benefit cuts over the next 4 years: £18 billion
Cuts in education and local services: £16 billion
Bank profits for this year alone: £28 billion.

Even bigger sums than those the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition say “must” be cut from benefits and services for the worst off are being pocketed as increased profits, top salaries, and bonuses by the ultra-rich.

Between now and 2014-5, the government plans to cut £18 billion from benefits, £16 billion from education and local services, and another £30-odd billion from other sectors. The total cuts in spending come to £81 billion if you include £10 billion which the government says it will save on interest on government debt by making the other cuts.

Huge sums, with a huge impact. The personnel managers’ group CIPD estimates that the cuts will chop 725,000 jobs in the public sector and 900,000 in the private sector. Millions who don’t lose their jobs will suffer through losing benefits and services. Everyone loses from society becoming meaner, harsher, more cruel, and more unequal.

Yet this year alone Britain’s biggest five banks expect profits of £28 billion. In August they reported half-year profits totalling £15 billion.

Other high-finance firms — investment banks, hedge funds, and so on — will also make billions in profits. They will all pay out billions in bonuses.

They can do that only because the Government

mobilised £1100 billion in cash, credit, and guarantees to help them out when they would otherwise have gone bust, at the height of the financial crisis in late 2008.

Now the government says that the hard-pressed and the worse-off must suffer in order to reduce the government budget deficit built up in the crisis — while the ultra-rich enjoy the greed-crazed money-making which triggered the crisis in the first place.

Non-financial capitalists are prospering, too. At the end of 2007, just before the crisis hit, profit rates for UK non-financial corporations were the highest they’d been since current statistics started in 1965. They went down surprisingly little in 2008 and 2009, and are still higher than at any time (bar two exceptional years) between 1965 and 1994.

Top-100 company directors saw their total earnings increased by fully 55% over the past year.

In April 2010, the *Sunday Times* reported that its Rich List of the one thousand wealthiest people in Britain had seen their total wealth increase by £77 billion over the single year 2009. That’s more than the total of the Government cuts, excluding the calculated interest-payment saving.

Make the rich pay! Fight for a workers’ government that will take the whole of high finance into public ownership, and run it under democratic control as a public service geared to social welfare, not plutocrats’ profits!

An estimated 725,00 jobs in the public sector and 900,000 in the private sector will be lost

Too much social spending? By what standards?

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Do the cuts have to be as big? Or as fast? There is much debate about that. But what about the basic assumption — that there has been “too much” social spending? “Too much” for what?

Q. There has been too much social spending, hasn’t there? So the Government has to cut.

A. You mean there has been too much social provision for old people? There have been too many teaching assistants in schools? Poor people have had too much housing?

In theory, such things could happen. If there were so many teaching assistants and care workers that there were not enough people left to produce basic food and clothing, then we’d have to adjust.

But nothing like that has happened. And in any case the government’s proposal is not to shift people to producing basic food and clothing, but mostly just to put them on the dole, not producing anything.

If there was “too much” of anything, it was luxuries (some of them ecologically damaging) for the rich.

We know that inequality rose fast under Thatcher, and continued to rise under Blair and Brown. In 1937 the top one percent accounted for 12.6 percent of all after-tax income.

After decades of activity by a relatively confident and strong labour movement, that take was down to 4.7 percent by 1979.

In 1990 Thatcher had raised it to 8 percent. By 2000 it was 10 percent. By 2008 the top 0.1% got 4.3% of all income — the highest figure in the UK since the 1930s,

and three times as much as in 1979.

Or put it another way. In April 2010 the *Sunday Times* Rich List reported that the thousand richest people in Britain had increased their wealth by £77 billion in 2009, bringing their total wealth to £335.5 billion — equal to more than one-third of the national debt.

That £77 billion is about the same amount as the £81 billion which the coalition government proposes to cut from public spending. Why not say that the richest one thousand have had “too much”, rather than the relatively poor people who will lose out from the government’s cuts? If those thousand had the £77 billion taken from them, they would still be fabulously rich — only rich at their 2008 level rather than their 2009 level.

Q. But Britain has a huge debt to pay off.

A. To whom? Individuals have debts to other individuals, but to whom can a whole society have debts?

Q. People outside Britain?

A. On best estimates, about one-third of the British government’s £900 billion of outstanding IOUs (bonds) is in the hands of non-British owners. But then British owners hold IOUs (bonds) from other governments.

The cuts are going on across the world. So the mass of people, all across the world, have to have their conditions cut back to pay off a debt... to whom? The man in the moon?

Q. In fact, most of those bonds are held by banks and other financial institutions. If the governments don’t make their payments, and the social cuts which help them make the payments, then those banks and

financial institutions will go bust, creating chaos.

A. That shows that we should have a society where the welfare of the majority, rather than the profitability of banks, is central.

Q. How can it work that way? How can it appear that there is “too much” social provision, “too much” housing for the poor, and so on? And how can the “answer” appear to be to produce less, by making more people jobless, when there are already 7.7% unemployed?

A. Marx summed it up like this: “Capitalist production is not merely the production of commodities, it is essentially the production of surplus value. The labour produces, not for himself, but for capital... That labourer alone is productive, who produces surplus-value for the capitalist...” “The restless never-ending process of profit-making alone” is what drives, shapes, and regulates economic life under capitalism.

Economic life based on profit-making generates, in turn, a vast array of transactions based on selling, buying, and speculating in titles to future surplus value.

The banks bought and sold too many titles to future surplus value, and found that many of them could not be made good. The governments stepped in, substituting titles to shares of that part of surplus value which governments can extract via taxes.

Now the working class has to be squeezed so that those titles to future loot can be made good. The cuts are a microcosm of the whole process by which the life of working-class people, now, is subordinated to the capitalist drive to pile up vaster and vaster wealth in future.

NETWORK RAIL DEAL

A lesson in how not to lead a dispute

RMT maintenance engineers at Network Rail have voted four to one to endorse a reorganisation deal. The RMT has presented this deal as a victory, pointing out that it "will deliver a seven per cent pay rise by the end of 2011... the package will also deliver a £2,000 lump sum before Christmas and rules out compulsory redundancies". An AWL member in Network Rail engineering takes a very different view.

The ballot result comes after a badly organised campaign over the new terms and conditions.

The deal will stop workers leading a reasonable life outside work. 28 weeks of nights, 52 weekend shifts of duty over 32 weekends for established staff, while new entrants will have to work up to 39 weeks of nights, 65 shifts of duty over 39 weekends. No doubt management will use the split conditions to try to split up

established and newer workers.

The introduction of working in areas which are not your normal patch jeopardises safety. Local knowledge plays a major part in working safely.

Job security is only guaranteed until 2012 and is subject to regular "reviews". The whole package is also up for review.

The £2000 bribe shows how desperate management were to get this package through.

But the only reason that this deal has been accepted is because of our union leadership's unwillingness to lead.

The sorry history of this dispute could be taken as a generic lesson in what not to do in a dispute.

Firstly, we had a dispute over harmonisation of terms and conditions, which was called off after a solidly supported national strike. Management backed off, giving assurances that there would be no changes to our terms and conditions.

This was followed by a ten month delay to our pay settlement, reinforcing the idea that the union would rather string out a dispute in the hope that management would cave in than force the issue from a position of strength.

We then faced a re-organisation which had new terms and conditions piggy-backed onto it. What we got was essentially a re-run of the previous dispute. Initially there was good support from the membership — so much so that the ballot got a massive majority in favour of strike action.

Then our dispute was lined up with the signallers' separate dispute with Network Rail, so that we would be out on strike at the same time. A good tactic. The signallers have much a more direct influence on the running of trains and a higher public profile. Management used the anti trade union laws to stop the signallers' strike. Though no injunction was

used against the engineering strike our leadership called it off. This threw away the momentum which had been built up and sent a message to management that we were impotent. It also revealed that there was no plan B.

Months passed. Every time a request was made for an update from the union, we were either ignored or fobbed off.

Management then started the "final offer" war. This consisted of at least three final offers which were almost identical. This had the effect of making workers think that it was all over and there was no other way out. When the leadership did not come out against the last final offer and warned of only long-term all-out strike action to defeat it... the ballot result was exactly what the RMT leadership wanted.

We cannot let this pass. The actions of our union leaders have been shoddy and they must be held to account.

Teachers' jobs at risk

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

David Cameron and Nick Clegg insist that frontline services are being protected from spending cuts. No teachers and nurses will lose their jobs. Not so!

As reported in the last issue of *Solidarity*, thousands of teachers and other education workers who are employed by local authorities and who teach or provide support to children with special needs are facing the threat of compulsory redundancy.

These jobs are linked to money held centrally by local authorities and to specific grants and funding streams. Many of these grants are ending and as local authorities are under pressure to make cuts jobs are threatened. On 15 October the *Times Education Supplement* (TES) reported that nearly 80% of local authorities were planning cuts to their education provision.

In the Comprehensive Spending Review George Osborne boasted that

schools would see a real terms increase in their budgets next year and would benefit from the so-called "pupil premium". But the increase in the schools budget allowing for inflation is a paltry 0.1% per year. As total pupil numbers are due to increase by 0.7% per year, spending per pupil will be cut in real terms by 0.6%.

According to the *Financial Times* (30 October) "a rise in pupil numbers will mean current spending per pupil will be cut by 2.25%" by 2014.

It is now clear that the pupil premium is not additional money but is reallocated from other parts of school spending. It will be allocated to schools on the basis of how many pupils receive free school meals. The *FT* calculate that a primary school would need to have 20% of its children on free school meals to avoid losing money; 62% of children are in primary schools that will fall below that bar and have their budgets cut.

The most vulnerable young people in the country will be hit first by these cuts. That's why the teacher unions should be at the heart of anti-cuts campaigning now.

Second Labour council threatens mass sackings

BY DARREN BEDFORD

Rhondda Cynon Taff council in South Wales has joined Neath and Port Talbot as the second Labour-controlled council to issue Section 188 notices to its workers in an attempt to force through worse terms and conditions.

10,000 workers face dismissal unless they agree to contractual changes that would result in a pay cut. The move was announced unilaterally by the council's HR director, Tony Wilkins. The GMB, which represents many of the workers, has refused to negotiate until the threat of sackings is lifted and has advised all members not to sign any new contracts.

The council, which covers the second-most populous local authority area in Wales, is attempting to slash £60 million from its budget over the next three years. GMB officer Gareth Morgan said "we're aware that some Tory and Lib Dem councils are treating

their staff like dirt. Councils like Walsall, Birmingham and Sheffield are using a legal device of pretending to make all their workforce redundant and offering some of them re-employment on worse pay and conditions.

"Now Rhondda Cynon Taff, in the Labour heartlands, are resorting to this lock out tactic. It is totally unacceptable. It's like holding a loaded pistol to people's heads to force them to accept detrimental change or be out of a job with no compensation. We have scarcely begun discussions and we face this lockout threat."

The actions of the council expose the spinelessness of the current generation of Labour politicians; happy to make posturing speeches about "Tory cuts", but just as happy to pass on those cuts to workers and service-users in the councils they control. Unions such as the GMB, which are affiliated to the Labour Party, should use that link to force Labour councillors and MPs to resist Tory cuts.

Unite: Vote McCluskey!

Members of Unite, Britain's biggest union (formed by the merger in 2008 of TGWU and Amicus), will not be voting the elect the merged union's first General Secretary. The ballot closes on 19 November.

There are four candidates: Les Bayliss and Gail Cartmail from the right, and Jerry Hicks and Len McCluskey from the left.

Solidarity and Workers' Liberty are backing McCluskey partly because McCluskey is the democratic choice of the (highly imperfect, but actually-existing) Unite United Left while Hicks's is essentially a personal candidacy with little potential to organise a rank-and-file left around it, and partly because McCluskey is the only candidate able to defeat Bayliss.

More: www.workersliberty.org/node/13588

Press strikes and ballots

NORTHCLIFFE HUBS

Just 18 months after upheavals for staff at Northcliffe Media, 50 further jobs are threatened. The company had established six "superhubs" handling subbing and other production functions. The company made redundancies, while some staff accepted long commutes and even moved their home to keep jobs.

Local newspaper company Archant is proposing to set up a hub in Ilford for some of its titles, axe deputy editor posts, and close its Bethnal Green office.

Another key regional press company Newsquest has similar plans for hubs, that will affect titles in Brighton, Southampton and Bournemouth.

BBC

NUJ members at the BBC will strike on 5 and 6 November against proposals to reduce their pensions. The proposals had been slightly improved after NUJ,

BECTU and Unite unions threatened to strike during Conservative Party conference and on the day of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Those strikes were called off in order for the improved offer to be put to union members. Only NUJ rejected the new offer, with 70% against.

The strikes take place against the backdrop of adverse and poor coverage of the FBU dispute by BBC news programmes. This has angered rank and file FBU members. The NUJ sees its own fight linked to ongoing battles by the RMT and FBU.

• www.nujleft.org

NEWSQUEST PAY BALLOT

Journalists at Newsquest titles in Hampshire have voted to take industrial action against a pay freeze. Staff at *The Echo* in Essex are submitting a claim for 20 per cent pay rise.

Miliband rats on union law

John McDonnell MP's Private Member's Bill, which would have stopped courts ruling out strike ballots on small technicalities, was defeated in Parliament on 22 October.

Ed Miliband, when standing for Labour leader, volunteered to back moves to stop judges invalidating strike ballots on the basis of minor errors.

But Labour's front bench refused to back McDonnell's Bill, and would not mobilise enough Labour MPs to get the Bill on to its next stage.

A total of 89 Labour MPs turned up to support the Bill, including two who acted as tellers in a procedural vote of 87 to 27. But the Bill fell into a parliamentary black hole because at least 100 supporters were required to force a vote on the second reading.

Students: demonstrate on 10/11! Then organise for direct action

From back page

The demonstration called by the NUS and UCU on 10 November is good, but it is only a start. Students need to use the demo as a springboard to escalate the action. We need to see direct action, from local demonstrations, to walkouts, to occupations.

The National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts is calling for a national day of such action on 24 November.

We also advocate that left-led, activist student unions who are dissatisfied with the way NUS is going should call a representative conference of student unions committed to a basic set of demands, to develop an action programme to fight for in NUS and outside, as soon as possible.

THE GOVERNMENT'S PROGRAMME

The government is proposing a move to a tiered system of fees: universities will be able to charge between £6,000 and £9,000 a year.

It means a move away from a vision of education as a right and a social good, and towards a system under which how much education you are allowed depends on how rich your parents are.

Clearly this government believes that young working-class people are good for basic know-your-place training schemes, bargain basement degrees, and, if they are very good little boys and girls, charity scholarships for a tiny minority, funded by big business endowments. They are introducing all the senseless backwardness of the market into education.

Given that universities have been told to expect cuts to the higher education teaching budget of around 80%, most universities will be forced to charge £9,000 per year fees just to keep their heads above water. Cuts on this level mean huge staff cuts, the closure of "unprofitable" courses, much bigger class sizes, and less contact time (and therefore less support, academic and pastoral) per student.

Universities will become pared-down, profit-making degree factories, increasingly dependent upon grants and sponsorship from big business.

OUR PROGRAMME

In France, the student movement has acted as a beacon to the workers' movement — big struggles on campuses have inspired workers to take action; and students have sent delegations to help strikers by bringing messages of solidarity, strike fund donations, and also by blockading roads and infrastructure.

The student movement here needs to gear itself up to do the same, fast. Fortunately, recent events have shown that this is possible!

At the time of writing, 30,000 students are demonstrating in Dublin. In Oxford, a recent demonstration of over 1,000 students recently took place, on the back of organising meetings which attracted 200 people. On the day we went to press, students at Goldsmiths University occupied their administration building.

Where large regular organising meetings are taking place, students should hold demonstrations, or plan occupations or other forms of direct action. Where they are not, students should organise planning meetings as soon as possible.

Student anti-cuts committees should produce leaflets and posters, animate large campaign meetings, and articulate political arguments to other students

against fees and cuts. They should meet up with trade unions on campus, and invite representatives to campaign meetings. They should send representatives to their local trade union anti-cuts committee or to the local trades council. They should take delegations to picket lines, for instance for upcoming fire and Tube strikes in London.

In February 2009, students at a handful of universities held occupations in protest at Israel's attack on Gaza. Over a matter of days, occupations were held at over 30 institutions. The action was spread by word of mouth, and via blogs and facebook. A smaller wave of direct actions took place in March of this year, against cuts, with occupations at more than half a dozen campuses from Sussex to Aberdeen.

Such a wave could probably be re-created if only a couple of universities held occupations simultaneously. Student activists can and should aim for a national wave of occupations and demonstrations, co-ordinated nationally.

Some in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts are calling for walkouts on 24 November. That form of action is very effective in European student movements — a large group of students picket out lectures to encourage students to join the demonstration instead of attending classes, before marching to other campuses or lecture sites. Where it is possible to organise this kind of action it might be useful, but we shouldn't make a fetish of it.

College and school students should start setting up anti-cuts groups and organising what action is possible — from small demonstrations in their colleges, to walking out of school to join up with student demonstrations or occupations as they happen.

Activists in the AWL or the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts can help them set up their campaigns. University students should send delegations to local further education colleges and encourage students there to join the movement.

The minority of student unions committed to free education and dissatisfied with NUS's sluggishness and conservatism should organise a representative conference to discuss the way forward. This is not an alternative to activist campaigns like the NCAFC. It is necessary to get SUs, most of which either limit themselves to following NUS's lead or leave things to less formal activist groups, bringing their substantial resources into campaigning too. Grassroots action and coordination by student unions can complement each other.

GOLDSMITHS OCCUPATION

Flaminia Giambalvo, one of the Goldsmiths students who went into occupation on 3 November, spoke to us.

"After a rally at the main site in New Cross today, we marched to Deptford Town Hall, where senior management are based, and occupied the building.

"We've had coverage from the BBC and all sorts of solidarity messages, including from the local RMT and FBU.

"We haven't made any demands — just issued a statement. For now, this is a symbolic protest against cuts and against the Browne Review. We'll be here for 24 hours to serve notice on management that we are beginning to mobilise."

STRATEGY

Opposing Labour cuts?

By DUNCAN MORRISON

On Saturday 30 October around 200 people demonstrated against the closure of five (out of 12) Lewisham libraries. The turn out was good and the response from passers by was positive. However the demonstration also exposed the fault lines in the anti-cuts campaigns.

Two Labour MPs and one local Labour councillor were the only speakers at the opening rally. This caused some anger on the demonstration. AWL members and others started a chant of "vote no to the cuts" when the councillor was speaking. Unfortunately the Socialist Party and the local campaign People Before Profit shouted over this with the politically confused cry of "Labour out", raising the completely unanswerable question of who is going to replace an ousted Labour Party!

Meanwhile the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) apparently wanted the organisers

NORWICH

The spirit of Robert Kett

By PAT YARKER

There was standing room only in Norwich City Hall's council chamber on 1 November as local campaigners, trade unionists, service-users and members of the public heard Ian Gibson, former Labour MP, summon up the spirit of Robert Kett in the struggle against the Coalition's drive to recreate Austerity Britain.

Kett's East Anglian rebellion against enclosures went down to defeat, but there was no doubting the defiant mood among Ian Gibson's audience.

A regional officer for PCS outlined his union's push within the TUC to bring forward the planned date of next March's demonstration against the cuts. He said, the PCS would if necessary approach other unions independently to

IN BRIEF

Brighton: 1000 out on 30 October. Delegations from most local unions including Unison and PCS, GMB who won a bin strike last year, RMT. Also there the "Save Bright Start nursery" campaign: a council nursery threatened with closure — and workers from the Connexions service also under threat.

Cath

Notts: At the last Notts Trades Council meeting the SWP came with a last minute motion via Ashfield Unison branch which called for support for the TUC demo in March and also the TUC to call a general strike.

I put amendments to both points so that the motion would call for the TUC to bring demo forward and commit the Trades Council to launch local campaign building towards a general strike. Calling on the TUC to call a general strike isn't generally how general strikes happenwe needed to commit the trades council to doing something.

The SWP opposed both amendments but only spoke against the first on the ground that we couldn't expect the TUC to pull such a demo off in short time! I pointed out the contradiction between this position and calling on them to organise a general strike.

Tom

to try to stop all chanting! These are the same SWP members who recently tried to move a motion for a one-day general strike at Lewisham Trades' Council. So, the mood is right for a general strike, but not to criticise Labour councillors for voting through the cuts!

The SWP spent the rest of the time trying to give the impression that the anti-cuts movement in Lewisham was entirely channelled through their front organisation Right to Work.

In reality, Lewisham Anti-Cuts Alliance (LACA), which is supported by the Trades Council, PCS and NUT, among others, has done most work on the ground and has united most activists.

- LACA has called a lobby of Lewisham Council on Wednesday 17 November at 5.15pm. This is when the Council will vote on the budget cuts.

- lewishamanticutsalliance.wordpress.com

get a national demonstration before Christmas.

The meeting heard about the likely effects of Norfolk County Council's £155 million worth of cuts.

Several members of the deaf community spoke powerfully about the way cuts to their support-services would affect their lives.

A number of speakers from the floor urged the calling of a general strike. But the key problem for activists is how to build opposition to each individual cut-back into a generalised push for concerted and co-ordinated nationwide industrial action. The next step in the campaign is a march in Norwich on 4 December.

- For more information call Pat on 07876 663 659 or see www.norfolkcoalitionagainstcuts.org

Liverpool: A demonstration outside the Town Hall organised by RTW/SWP on 30 October. There was a contingent of students who marched down to meet it. 2-300 in total. Unfortunately the demonstration was a bit uneventful...

Elaine

York: About 300-400 out on 30 October. Called by York Stop the Cuts — Right to Work Campaign. Pretty broad and has affiliated to both Coalition of Resistance and Right to Work. It is mostly run by the left activist community of York. Lots of trade unionists are involved, but it doesn't have much of a union focus.

Mike

On 30 October 250 workers and residents marched through the streets of Brixton, in south London, to protest against the Tory/Lib Dem cuts. The march was organised by the local anti-cuts campaign, Save Our Services. Workers at the council and its housing ALMO, Lambeth Living, have taken indicative votes for strike action, and their Unison branch is awaiting regional authorisation for formal ballots.

MY LIFE AT WORK

Exploitation at the heart of the “Big Society”

Hannah MacMillan works as a support worker in the north of England.

Tell us a bit about the work you do.

I'm a support worker for adults with learning disabilities, for a private “not for profit” company in. I provide one-to-one support to enable people to be as independent as possible and enjoy their lives. This includes helping them to access local government services as well as the wider community. It's such a brilliant job — not even just in a “rewarding” way, but in an actual “I really enjoy my work” kind of way.

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

Definitely not! The majority of us work for £6.50ish an hour with a +50p overtime rate and five days' sick pay a year!

When it snowed earlier this year and the majority of public transport was cancelled, we had to trek to our central office to do paperwork when our clients cancelled, use our annual leave, or lose a day's pay — it was like that for over two weeks.

We get made to feel guilty constantly. There's a lot of “the clients will suffer” type shit bandied around which makes you feel horrible if you call in sick or anything.

Our clients pay around £15 to £20 per hour for our time, so they and their families expect, rightly, a lot from us.

It's difficult to progress to higher pay scales — I've been working for the company for three years and my pay has gone up by less than 50p in that time. I would get an increment if I took an NVQ 2 but there is a sizeable waiting list for that. You can be a senior support worker but only if you work full-time. The pay increases to around £15,000 a year. After that there is only management.

How has the economic crisis and the new government affected your work?

The way people with disabilities receive funding from the government is changing dramatically. Our company is forced to compete with others like it, as well as local government, to provide the services. Our company has made half a

million pounds of cuts, and this will mean job losses. The company are under solid pressure from social services to reduce their prices. And of course it is the lowest paid of us that are the most likely to suffer.

Now the funding people receive is changing to give individuals more control so instead of people just being assessed as needing X amount of support hours and then dumped in a day centre that on paper best caters to their needs, they will be able to choose the kind of support they want.

The idea of having a personal assistant is increasingly appealing especially as local government services are slashed — people are losing their places in services for being deemed not “needy” enough. Having the type of support we provide adds flexibility and a more personalised approach.

How do conditions differ for workers still employed directly by the local council and those employed by outsourced private companies?

Local government staff have much higher pay than us. A friend of mine who is now 20 and did a modern apprenticeship gets £200 a month more than me.

They have a much better policy for long-term sickness, and up until very recently they had a much higher chance of progression.

They are suffering hugely under the strain of the cuts, being forced to constantly justify the worth of their jobs and services to people who have never even see what an essential job they do. It's genuinely heart-breaking.

Adult services is a disgustingly low priority for our City Council, who also employ a lot of agency staff. These members of staff get less pay and no contract. They get shipped in and out and provide no consistency for clients or permanent staff, something which is often incredibly important when working with people with learning disabilities. Agency rates, are huge so it's not about the council saving money, it's about creating a flexible, disposable workforce alongside the more secure and organised permanent employees.

Learning to cook, a big part for any of us, of being able to live independently. Will such opportunities continue to be available to adults with learning difficulties

Voluntary sector companies are ostensibly a big part of Cameron's “Big Society” rhetoric, but the sector is actually facing massive cuts. What's the impact on your workplace?

Cuts can be traced to the need to compete with other companies providing the same or similar services. Brown's and now Cameron's plans to create a “marketplace” will inevitably drive down the quality of the services provided by all companies. Council staff are constantly told “such and such a company can do it better for less”.

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

Pretty easy to be honest. There is a very clear and evident boundary, especially in the local government day centres, between “us and them” — the management are the people you will see once in a blue moon complaining about the placement of chairs and the spending of petty cash.

Nobody falls for the “we're all in this together” bullshit when they can see clear as day that a class divide exists even within a single workplace.

It used to be more difficult, especially during the last big industrial action when the two main unions Unison and GMB were advising opposing actions to their members in the same place!

What are your bosses like?

My big boss was a idealistic support

worker who built up a company based on the idea that people with learning disabilities should be able to participate fully in society after being hugely disillusioned by his work in the sector. Now he stands outside our offices smoking cigars and was smiling on the day his workforce received letters threatening their jobs. The guy below him was shipped in from the probation service and the first thing he did with our company was decorate the offices in the style of a Victorian town house. If it wasn't so bloody horrible it would be funny.

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

People are unionised, but there are no recognition agreements. That is stated very clearly in our contracts. It's hard to even know where to begin because we have such a high staff turnover and people have no trust in unions. GMB and Unison do not do any active recruitment, but there are a few of us who openly recommend joining to our colleagues.

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

Pay! Definitely! So many people my age hate their jobs but do them because they earn well. I have the opposite problem. When you can earn significantly more cold calling in some soulless office for Direct Line than you can supporting your fellow human beings, something is seriously screwed up.

Socialism anyone?

CONFERENCE

Women at the Cutting Edge

BY LYNNE MOFFAT AND CATHY NUGENT

Over the course of Saturday 30 October, around 80 people attended the Feminist Fightback event Women at the Cutting Edge.

This London event was a discussion about the many ways in which the ConDem cuts will affect women and strategies for resisting. Feminist Fightback is a broad feminist activist organisation of anti-capitalist and socialist feminists.

We were a little disappointed with the overall attendance, but it was good to see new faces, different age groups and both men and women at the event.

Like other Feminist Fightback events, the day was very accessible with the emphasis put on the maximum participation of those attending. Such a format takes patience and time to work towards

political conclusions. In hindsight it seemed to us that there was not enough time to do justice to each subject. We tried to fit a lot into one day! There was not enough time to draw out the many lines of discussion and tease out some political differences. It's good that there are follow up meetings arising from the workshops.

Each workshop could have formed the basis of an event in itself: how the cuts affect women; demystifying the economic crisis, in and beyond the state (i.e. a discussion about what kind of services we ultimately want).

We thought that the women against the cuts workshop was a good enough overview, but could have focused more on the issue of privatisation.

We thought it was a good idea — as we agreed — to follow up the economics workshop with an effort to collate lots of concrete educational materials — a question and answer on the cuts would be

good. Maybe Feminist Fightback can work with other groups and individuals on this?

One of the participants said they thought it was too hard to use Marx as a starting point for political economy. We disagree. *Capital* is certainly “hard to read”, but there is a good reason why so many reading groups are set up around this text!

In such a group difficult chapters can be broken down into easier chunks. The same is true of other economic texts, of course, but *Capital* is the reference point for a lot more than economics.

We thought that the title of the last workshop was a bit confusing because we all ended up discussing our experience of the *welfare* state. That said, the discussion itself — focusing as it did on how real cuts are already being responded to, for good and bad, and are complicating union and campaigning strategies, was extremely important.

There is definitely an interest in and a need to recognise and build into anti-cuts campaigns how the cuts will affect women. A week before the event we heard of a local student conference being held on the subject. A day after the event Feminist Fightback activists caught wind of an informal “take action against the cuts” feminist meeting in London. We will need to quickly write up and build on our discussions.

The two follow up meetings

- 7-9pm Monday 22 November, Brady Arts Centre, 192-196 Hanbury Street, London E1 5HU: In, Against, (and Beyond?) the State: what are our strategies for fighting the cuts?

- 7-9 pm Monday 6 December, Lucas Arms, 245a Grays Inn Road, London: “Women and the cuts: taking the issues into the labour and anti-cuts movement”.

Make Solidarity your paper!

We answer a reader's questions about *Solidarity's* plan to start publishing weekly from 25 November.

Why have you decided to go weekly?

We felt we needed to pick up the pace of our political activity. We need to respond promptly and seriously to all the attacks that governments around the world are making on the working class. We wanted to support, feed political ideas into, and build the fightback.

Fair enough, but it's going to mean a lot of work for you.

Yes, but we hope to have some help.

You know some student journalists who could be "interns"?

That would be good, but it wasn't what we were thinking of. We think our readers can help.

How?

By donations, and by sending in reports of demonstrations, campaigns, public meetings, local cuts, stories from the local paper....

I'm not much good at writing, I'm not sure I'd be able to help you.

Of course you can! Scribble down what you consider to be important and interesting about what you are involved in, and post it in. Send us an email. Forget about commas and paragraphs, if you feel you need to — we'll sort out that sort of thing.

I hope the new *Solidarity* isn't going to be like *Socialist Worker* — full of backslapping reports where every demo you've had a hand in is "great"...

Absolutely not! Of course we want to be encouraging and positive about direct action and self-organisation. But we won't fear to "be true in little things as in big ones", as Trotsky put it. If something needs to be questioned or criticised, we'll do that too. The health of the movement depends upon that kind of attitude.

...Or full of boring cack about things that happen all the time.

Every piece of political activity has something interesting to say about it.

Really? The only interesting thing about the last anti-cuts event I went to (the 23 October London FBU-RMT demonstration) was meeting up with someone I hadn't seen for years.

That is interesting! I mean, the fact that lefties and activists who "faded away" years ago are remobilising themselves.

So you're going to print people's reminiscences about "the good old days"?

Probably not! And we won't print everything people send in. But we really do want to hear from readers, so that we can build up a picture of the class struggle, get a real feel for what is going on.

What else is going to be "new" in the new *Solidarity*?

Some of it will be the same. We will continue writing and publishing longer educational and background articles. We want to include a lot of history — especially the history of past struggles. We want reviews and theory and commentary on industrial issues.

But we also plan shorter comments on the politics and ideology of this ruling class attack. We want to be closer to the movement in Europe, especially France. We'll ask some people with specialist labour movement knowledge and writers from other countries to write columns. We'll try and cater for less experienced and younger readers.

That all sounds good. How can readers help with that?

In the first place, by sending a donation, and subscribing! Then telling us what they think of the articles — by sending in short letters, including critical letters. Before the launch we'll make available on our website a guide to what we want from reports, what feedback we want, and how to submit longer articles.

Sounds like a lot of work! Won't it stop

you from getting out on the streets?

If we thought that, we wouldn't be doing it! The whole point is to make *Solidarity* a tool for socialist activists who share our broad outlook in the tumultuous times ahead. In every area where we have activists, we are already doing new regular public sales — in town centres, colleges and workplaces and on estates...

On estates? Don't people find it a bit strange socialist paper sellers knocking on their door?

Not strange enough to stop them buying papers! The rule of thumb seems to be: knock on eight doors, find four people in, sell two papers. Many people are willing to "give it a go".

And lots of people right now want to talk about what is happening at work, in their community. Having those conversations and linking them to articles in the paper that reflect those experiences, giving answers to problems and posing political alternatives — that is what we want to do.

But where will those conversations lead?

In the first place to more conversations! By working through ideas, talking about the world, they can lead ultimately to people taking action for themselves, or getting interested in socialist politics, or just feeling less isolated.

I'm quite impressed and I'd like to help you with all this. But I don't have the commitment to become a member of the AWL right now.

Sure. And we want people to join the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for the right reasons, when they feel they understand and agree with the basics of our ideas. But, in the meantime, why not take a few papers to sell — to a workmate, to a friend, to your mum....?

The class struggle will still be here in a few months' time when you feel ready to "do more". The chances are that the political shape and dimensions of what we can do to fight back will be much clearer as well.

OK. I didn't mean to sound cynical, earlier, but I find it very difficult to get my head around whether workers can fight back. I should to talk to you about socialist politics more, maybe about what's in the paper each week...

Good idea!

Help us make *Solidarity* weekly!

The political parties waging in vicious class war against the working class have millions in funding from rich donors and big business. Socialists resisting their cuts rely on donations from working-class people like you — and we are desperately short of money.

As "austerity" begin to bite and class struggle heats up, the role of socialist newspapers like *Solidarity* — and the critical, clear-thinking Marxist coverage of *Solidarity* in particular — will become more vital than ever.

By the end of the year, in addition, we will have gone from fortnightly to weekly. Greater urgency and frequency mean we need more money!

We raised £2,380 in donations at AWL conference in October, and AWL members and supporters have increased their standing orders to the tune of £830 a month to cover extra papers when we go weekly. That means we're up to £17,459 of our £25,000 fundraising total.

With less than two months to go, that's a lot of money left to raise — and going weekly will call for continuous fundraising after the end of the year. You can help in a variety of ways:

- You can donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and click on the donate button on the left.
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Subscribe, if you don't already: www.workersliberty.org/sub
- Take a few copies of the paper to circulate at work or college.
- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

AWL news

BY AIDAN W. LOMAS

As *Solidarity* prepares to go weekly, AWL members around the country have been stepping up the number of paper sales they organise.

For a long time, selling a publication on the street was seen by a lot of people as a faintly cranky. But, as Dylan put it, the times they are a-getting quite different.

People are eager to talk about politics in a way they haven't been in the past and that's reflected in the number of papers we're selling.

AWL North East London now organises four weekly sales, the highlight being

a Tuesday night sale at Highbury & Islington station that regularly shifts over 25 papers.

AWL Nottingham sold 19 papers across two sales recently, and a new sale by AWL member in Northampton at the university shifted eight in just half an hour.

AWL Liverpool is running two regular sales, one in the city centre and one at the university campus.

AWL members in Brighton sold 12 on a recent anti-cuts demo, and estate sales by AWL South London in Camberwell and Peckham regularly see over 20 papers sold.

We sell the paper because we can't

afford to give it away. We need the money. Anyway, people who pay even a small amount for a paper take it more seriously than a throwaway freebie like the *Metro*.

Our newspaper is just one of the ways we communicate our ideas; AWL branches are also trying to organise more public meetings.

Creating spaces where people can come into face-to-face contact with us in a collective way is vital for persuading people of socialist politics.

In Sheffield, the AWL branch is running weekly public meetings throughout November, covering topics such as the French strikes, class struggle in Latin

America and the British trade union movement.

In Liverpool, a series of meetings at the university has combined a focus on the basics of Marxist theory (what is class, how does capitalism work, etc.) with discussion of current issues and struggles. Around 10 students have been attending each meeting.

The motivation for stepping up our "outward-facing" activity is clear; if class-struggle socialists don't use this period to attempt to catalyse resistance to the government and convince new layers of working-class people of Marxist ideas, we may face another generational defeat. The stakes are high.



IRAQ

The banality of imperialism

BY MARTIN THOMAS

The biggest-ever “leak” of official documents in history has filled in the picture of brutal US floundering in Iraq.

391,832 files — daily reports by US military units to their commanders from 2004 to 2009 — have been passed on to WikiLeaks and then analysed by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism in London.

The leaks include no sensations. Units wrote their reports so as to present themselves as behaving properly and follow-

ing orders. Some of the reports we now know to be attempts to cover up incidents which have since — because of other whistleblowing — led to court-martials.

It is the accumulation of detail that overwhelms. For example, the reports include 13,963 “Escalation of Force” cases, where US units decided to open fire in response to unexpected events.

The US units record themselves as having killed 832 people in such cases. 681 were civilians. Only 120 — according to the US military’s own reports — were anti-US fighters.

Fifty families were shot at when US soldiers at checkpoints got twitchy, and at least 30 children were killed.

Iraq Body Count, which adds up the figures from all the casualty reports available from Iraq — since the US military stonily refused to do so — says that the leaked reports identify more than 15,000 civilian deaths that never appeared in media reports or public records. Adding on that 15,000 gives Iraq Body Count a total of around 122,000 civilians killed since the 2003 invasion.

In the reports, US troops informed their commanders of 1,365 claims of torture by Iraqi security forces between 2005 and 2009. Nothing was done about the majority of those reports. How could it be? The torturers were the USA’s next-best thing to workable allies in Iraq.

Why did all this happen? By 2003 the US administration was drunk on military swagger after its triumph in the Cold War and the easy US victories, or apparent victories, in Kuwait (1991), Bosnia (1995), Kosova (1999), and Afghanistan (2001). It was intoxicated with the idea of reshaping the world on US-friendly, world-market-friendly lines

by “short and sharp” blasts of US firepower.

The arrogance, hubris, and triumphalist blundering of the Bush regime translated on the ground into a huge US military machine lurching around, killing thousands of innocent Iraqis to death, and crushing the fibres of Iraqi society.

The US army floundered in a society where the US invasion plan had allowed ordinary civil administration to break down — in fact, helped to break it down — and the USA’s allies proved to be exiles with little popular base; the USA’s enemies, to be dominated by sectarian religious-fundamentalist gangs more hostile to each other than to the USA.

Saddam Hussein’s dictatorship deserved to be overthrown? Yes, but the way it was done, and by whom, led to horrors on a level with those of the dictatorship itself.

- Iraq Body Count: www.iraqbodycount.org
- Wikileaks: wikileaks.org
- Bureau of Investigative Journalism Iraq War Logs site: www.iraqwarlogs.com

SOLIDARITY

Support French workers



Thirty activists — mainly from Workers’ Liberty and the Worker-communist Parties of Kurdistan and Iran (Hekmatist), but joined by others including a small group of French Socialist Party supporters — protested outside the French embassy in London, in solidarity with the current strike movement, on 27 October.

Our placards included “Travailleurs de tous les pays, unissez-vous!”/“Workers of the world, unite!”; “No to Sarko’s strike breaking”; “France-Britain: one fight against cuts”; “Our lives are more important than their prof-

its” (a slogan from France’s New Anticapitalist Party); and simply “Solidarité”. Our chants included “Sarko, Sarko, Sarko — out, out, out” and “The workers united will never be defeated”. We also tried to learn some French protest songs, and sang the Internationale in at least four languages!

Saeed Arman spoke for the WCPI(H), Noori Bashir for the WCPK and Ed Maltby for Workers’ Liberty.

In the run-up to the protest, it received widespread attention from French labour movement and socialist activists over the internet.

IRAN

Stop the killings!

BY MARYAM NAMAZIE

As *Solidarity* goes to press, the Islamic regime of Iran plans to execute stoning case Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani. The authorities in Tehran have given the go-ahead to Tabriz prison for the execution.

Another man has already served a prison sentence and is now free for her husband’s murder.

Ashtiani’s son Sajjad Ghaderzadeh and her lawyer Houtan Kian have been tortured in order to obtain confessions against Sakineh and themselves since their arrests on 10 October along with two German journalists.

Sajjad and Houtan Kian’s only “crime” has been to defend Ashtiani and proclaim her innocence with facts and evidence.

The International Committee Against

Stoning and Execution calls on international bodies and the people of the world to come out in force against the state-sponsored murder of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani. Ashtiani, Sajjad Ghaderzadeh, Houtan Kian and the two German journalists must be released.

1. Contact government officials, MPs, MEPs. Governments must summon the Islamic Republic of Iran’s ambassador.

2. Send letters to the Islamic regime of Iran: Head of the Judiciary, Sadeqh Larijani — email: info@dadiran.ir / www.dadiran.ir/tabid/75/Default.aspx

[First starred box: given name; second starred box: family name; third: your email address]

Ali Khamenei, The Office of the Supreme Leader; email via website: www.leader.ir/langs/en/index.php?p=letter (English)

• www.iransolidarity.org.uk, iransolidarity.blogspot.com

BY RHODRI EVANS

Saddam Hussein’s deputy Tariq Aziz was sentenced to death on 26 October, on charges to do with his role in the Saddam regime’s massacre of Islamist opponents.

The European Union has declared the death sentence “unacceptable”, and the Vatican and several European governments have called for clemency.

Piquantly, though, those who boosted Aziz when he was in power, or when they may have hoped that “the resistance” would triumph in Iraq and re-elevate Aziz, have been silent. There has been no comment from Respect, from the Socialist Workers’ Party, or from the Rump Workers’ Revolutionary Party. None even from George Galloway.

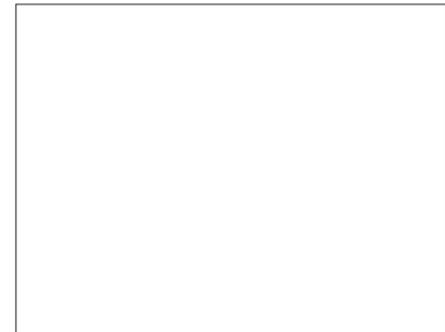
Before 2003 Galloway visited Iraq about once a month on average, described Aziz as his “dear friend”, and ate Christmas dinner with him. In 2005 Galloway took up a petition for Aziz’s release — initiated by a French far-rightist — and enticed Tony Benn and others to sign it. Today, silence.

Aziz surrendered to US forces in April 2003, soon after the invasion, and has been in jail ever since. He is now in very poor health. It is not clear whether his lawyers will appeal, or when the death sentence may be carried out.

In his heyday, Aziz was the chief public face of Saddam’s “Republic of Fear”, speaking to journalists and diplomats much more than Saddam himself.

That he is guilty of heinous crimes is beyond doubt. Whether the death penalty against him, now, at a time when Aziz has no possibility of becoming a rallying-point for a Ba’thist revival, is justified, is another matter.

Aziz was interviewed by the *Guardian* in August 2010, refusing to disavow Saddam but also criticising Obama for planning to withdraw US troops from Iraq too soon (in 2011). Iyad Allawi, one of the two rivals who have been jousting



Tariq Aziz and George Galloway

to be prime minister of Iraq since its parliamentary election in March 2010, was asked by the *Guardian* for comment, and said:

“Tell Tariq Aziz that he is my friend and I think of him often. He is a good man and I know his family well. I wish him all the best and it is wrong to lock him up like this for so long. He is an old man.” (*Guardian*, 5 August).

Allawi is an ex-Ba’thist himself, as well as a former CIA agent. Allawi’s rival Nuri al-Maliki is still caretaker prime minister, while the negotiations (already eight months old) for a new coalition government continue, and it looks as if Maliki has organised the death sentence for Aziz (and on charges to do with Saddam-regime repression against Maliki’s own, Islamist, party) as a factional blow against Allawi’s relatively secular party.

The journalist Mark Seddon has suggested that “Aziz, who could tell the whole story of western involvement in Iraq, before, during and after the war, simply has to be got rid of”. But if Aziz could speak to the *Guardian* in August, he could already have told any “whole story” he has. The history of US government aid to the Saddam regime during Iraq’s war with Iran (1980-88), which Seddon is referring, is anyway already well known.

Thus a US plot seems an unlikely explanation for the death sentence. A Maliki plot? That is more likely.

FRANCE

Anti-Sarkozy anger still runs high

By Ed Maltby

Under the pressure of school holidays, the passing of the pensions reform into law, and loss of wages, the French strike movement is faltering, but not at an end.

Over the last month or so, days of action have regularly brought more than three million workers onto the streets; and continuous strikes have multiplied in many different sectors, leading to transport shut-downs and hundreds of petrol stations running out of fuel. Hundreds of high schools have been blockaded by students, and university students have struck too.

The movement's major goal was the defeat of Sarkozy's pension reform (finally confirmed by the National Assembly on 27 October, and due to be signed into law mid-November), which would see the age at which most workers could receive a full pension raised to 67, and cut back early pension provision for specially arduous jobs.

There is also a broad feeling in France, especially among workers, that Sarkozy has to go. In polls, 70% have supported the strikes, and Sarkozy's approval ratings have fallen to 31%. Sarkozy's confrontational political style; his pro-religion stance; his brutal and racist programme of systematic deportation of Roma, gypsies and travelers from France; the constant stream of round-ups of migrant workers, including children — these factors have combined to create a general feeling that Sarkozy has to go.

The movement gained momentum from 12 October when it made the jump from a series of isolated one-day strikes, into a movement of open-ended "recon-



ductible" strikes in many sectors, in which the strike was renewed each day following a discussion and vote at a workplace meeting.

Since late October, the movement has been losing momentum. Strikes in transport and oil refineries have been called off. Those two sectors were the "motor" for the movement, the areas where the strikes lasted longest, were most solid, and had greatest impact.

Turn-out for the day of action on 28 October was two million, down on previous days which had seen 3.5 million.

There are several reasons for the loss of momentum. Firstly, there were school holidays from 23 October to 3 November. Many high school and university blockades were lifted for this period and many workers were holidaying too.

The National Assembly finally con-

firmed the new pensions law on 27 October. Workers in France are well aware that the last law that was undone by a strike movement, the CPE, was passed into law before being repealed. But the passage of the bill is a psychological blow nevertheless.

Strikers in the core industries have lost a lot of money. French trade unions rarely offer strike pay or even hardship funds. French rail-workers I spoke to said that they were hesitating about setting up a fund because they were worried that it "wouldn't look serious" to ask for money!

On top of these difficulties, there has been a change of tack by the trade union leaderships. On Sunday 24 October, the leader of the un-militant CFDT union federation made a new call for negotiations and the leadership of the French bosses' union MEDEF agreed.

Since then, the CFDT has been tacking visibly away from strikes and towards lobbying and what it euphemistically calls "other means". The historically more left-wing CGT still advocates continued strike action, and both union federations have endorsed another one-day action on 6 November — but it is routine for French union leaderships to quietly, tacitly let action dwindle rather than ostentatiously call it off.

The unions played a role in leading French workers into action this time. In several sectors, most workers initially lacked confidence, and they were given a push by initiatives by intermediate layers of union activists, licensed and encouraged by the top union leaders.

Still, the new one-day strike set for 6 November may provide activists with opportunities to re-launch the movement. In some universities a strike or

blockade is ongoing, and the schools come back on 3 November. Actions such as blockades of road intersections, railways and infrastructure by large groups of demonstrators are still a daily occurrence. Certain sectors are still on strike, such as municipal workers in French suburbs, and some large private sector workplaces.

It is not impossible that another sector will become the new "motor" for the mobilisation, or that energy and transport workers will return to strike action after they have earned enough money to recover from the worst of the financial hurt of the last three weeks.

In his most recent radio interview, Olivier Besancenot, spokesman of the French revolutionary New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) declared that "the movement has not blown over, it is just catching its breath".

As the next chapter in the French strike movement is resolved, the work of the French revolutionary left in building rank-and-file co-ordinations remains critical, and our work, as British labour movement activists, of keeping a close watch on the situation and offering solidarity to those sectors in struggle and those who re-join the action, remains urgent.

More coverage

There is an extensive collection of interviews, background articles and details for making solidarity with workers in France on the Workers' Liberty website:
<http://bit.ly/sarko2010>

The trade unions in France

By Martin Thomas

Trade union structure, and labour law, is very different in France from how it is in Britain.

The French unions have responded much more vigorously to the cuts than British unions.

Yet union membership rates in France are much lower than in Britain — about 8% on average, 15% in the public sector and 5% in the private sector, compared to about 28% in Britain.

And, despite first impressions, overall rates of strike action in France are not hugely higher than in Britain. In 2006 and 2007, the most recent years for which strike figures are available for France, striker-days in France totalled 1,421,000 and 1,553,000 in the two years; in Britain, 755,000 and 1,041,000.

In the difficult decades for trade-unionism since the 1980s, Britain and many other countries have seen their unions consolidate, through mergers, into relatively few, relatively large organisations.

France has seen the opposite trend. From 1895 until the mid-1960s the French trade union movement was dominated by one big confederation, the CGT (at first revolutionary syndicalist in its policy; then reformist-syndicalist;

then Stalinist-dominated). Now, although the CGT is still the biggest confederation, there are seven or eight other national trade-union centres of some clout.

Why? Under French labour law, workers have the right to vote for and be represented by the equivalent of shop stewards (*délégués du personnel*) whether they are union members or not. In practice the elections for *délégués du personnel* are between lists put up by the different union confederations.

The *délégués du personnel* are more numerous than shop stewards; and they have rights guaranteed by law, which shop stewards don't. The employer is legally bound to organise elections for, and recognise, *délégués du personnel* in every workplace with more than ten workers.

This means that a French worker can reckon herself or himself a keen supporter of a particular union confederation, vote for it, follow its calls to action, and so on, and yet not bother to join unless she or he wishes to attend union meetings or become a union rep. Compare the 8% of French workers who are union members with the proportion of British workers who are union reps, or attend union meetings, and the French movement does not look weaker than the British.

In France, the right to strike is a constitutional right of the individual worker. In Britain, there has never been any positive legal right to strike. Until the Thatcher years, laws existed which gave unions calling strikes a fair degree of protection from legal reprisals.

Thatcher changed the laws so that now unions have to jump through many hoops to call official strikes without running a threat of being fined heavily or having their funds seized, and are legally obliged to disavow and oppose unofficial strikes.

It is possible to get sacked for striking in France, but there is much more protection than in Britain. Thus, in many industries anyway, minority strikes, where sometimes quite small proportions of the workforce strike as a demonstration rather than to shut down the workplace, are common.

It is routine for the union confederations to call national "days of action" on workdays, with strikes and demonstrations, on big issues. There have been eight "days of action" since the start of September.

French union organisations have a smaller income from members' dues than British unions do. It is pretty much unknown for them to give strike pay. The union organisations rely for their functioning and their funding heavily on

what is established by law: the facilities which employers are obliged to give to *délégués du personnel* and *comités d'entreprise* (workplace committees), and the union organisations' guaranteed posts in the administration of the social security and industrial-tribunal systems.

In France, the "union" ("syndicat") is strictly speaking the workplace organisation. An organisation like the CGT is a "confederation" of workplace "unions", grouped into industrial "federations".

Large workplaces will usually have a presence from several confederations, with workers choosing to vote for one or another on grounds of policy, either national (the anarchist CNT, the Trotskisant SUD, and the CGT, still led by the now-decrepit Communist Party, are more militant than other confederations) or local (the "syndicat" in a particular workplace affiliated to Force Ouvrière (FO) or the CFDT may, for example, be led by activists expelled from CGT for their left-wing ideas).

The FSU (Fédération Syndicale Unitaire) dominates in education, and a confederation called the CGE-CGC seeks specifically to represent managerial and technical staff.

Generally, however, it makes no sense in France to ask "what is the union in that workplace?" as you might do in Britain.

Firefighters escalate action

BY DARREN BEDFORD

After two extremely solid eight-hour strikes on 23 October 23 and November 1, London firefighters have stepped up their campaign against mass sackings by announcing a 47-hour strike over Bonfire Night, the busiest night of the year for firefighters.

A barrage of press hostility has inevitably followed, but the belligerence of London Fire & Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA) bosses has left the FBU with little choice but to strike on over the period when they will have the most impact. The vitriolic media reaction is a grim reminder of the role that the right-wing press will play in any significant industrial dispute; a particularly noxious cartoon in the *Metro* has a firefighter holding a strike placard shouting "right lads — down table tennis bats."

The hypocrisy of a press that can hail firefighters as heroes around tragedies like the 7/7 bombings but which will openly label them lazy and selfish when they attempt to defend their jobs is grotesque. The lesson for other striking workers is that they must rely on their own literature and propaganda to win support from the public.

LFEPA chief Brian Coleman says he could rebuild a fire service from scratch based on 2,000 workers who he expects to scab and eventually sign new contracts (with worse terms), plus new recruits. The fact that he is prepared to sack thousands of workers in this way simply for opposing his gun-to-the-head negotiating style is a very clear indication of what he represents politically.

The rhetoric from LFEPA management is that dispute is now about "management's right to manage." From their point of view, they are entirely correct; in provoking this dispute, they are asserting their "right" not simply to manage but to rule by diktat. By resisting them, firefighters are asserting the rights of workers to have a say in what goes on in their workplaces. Every industrial dispute contains, if only on an elemental

level, a challenge to the "right" of the ruling-class to rule. In a dispute like this, that challenge can become more prominent.

London FBU official Paul Embury said, "Brian Coleman, Ron Dobson and their mates at AssetCo thought they were going to have it their own way on Saturday. They must have realised how wrong they were at about one minute past ten. What we saw was an unbelievable show of strength from FBU members across the capital. There were solid picket lines and demonstrations, real unity of purpose and superb organisation. Strikebreakers turned away from fire stations and instead chose to respond to calls from various locations in the back streets of London. The brigade was in a state of near-anarchy. Members did their union proud."

"It was truly the best of days and the worst of days. The best because we saw FBU members at their best — loyal, principled and resilient in defence of their jobs and service. And the worst because none of us likes to take strike action, and neither do we like to see the brigade's reputation dragged through the mud in the way it was on Saturday."

A firefighter at a South London station said "this is just the thin end of the wedge. If management get away with negotiating like this, we'll see appliances removed and station closures next. We don't want to be on strike but we've got to stand up to them."

"This strike is about standing up to management bullying"

BY AN EAST LONDON FIREFIGHTER

The strike at this station is solid. I don't know of anyone who's gone into work today. Our plan is to picket here for a while, and then some of us will be going to the rally in town while

Managers and scabs use violence

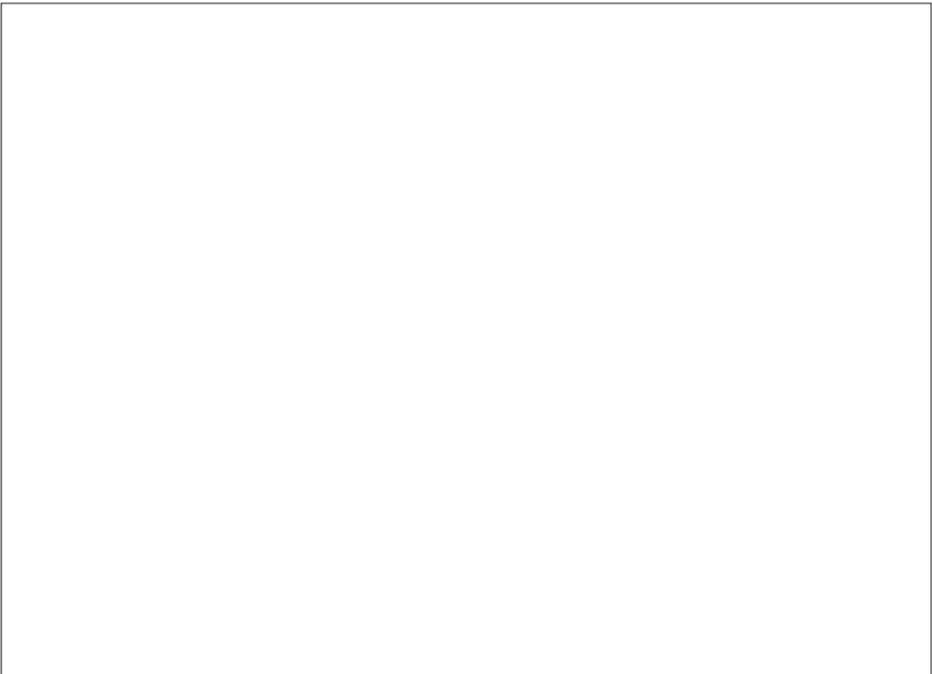
BY IRA BERKOVIC

The FBU has denounced the "shocking violence" directed towards pickets, after three strikers were injured during clashes with scabs. In all three cases, workers were hit by vehicle being driven by scabs despite the drivers in each case having ample opportunity to stop.

In Croydon, a car driven by a non-union manager ploughed into a striker, apparently deliberately. He went to hospital but is now at home recovering. Another striker at Southwark received injuries to his hand as he attempted to flag down a scab-driven engine to attempt to talk to those driving it. At the same station, an FBU Executive member was nearly crushed as an engine drove over him. Given the huge police presence at the Southwark picket, the scab driver can hardly claim to have been intimidated.

Croydon firefighter Tamer Ozdemir

Whether the incidents were down to incompetence or malice, they show the lengths to which management is going to break the FBU in London — either by hiring people clearly incapable of driving fire engines to do so, or by physically attacking strikers. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said "An incredible pattern seems to be emerging. It looks as though the private company hired to do our work has instructed its drivers to drive fast through picket lines. We ended the day in the extraordinary situation where the police had to protect striking firefighters from recklessly speeding vehicles which were driven by those paid to break the strike."



Facing a belligerent boss and a hostile media

others will go to stations where we've heard AssetCo will be trying to operate out of.

This dispute is about the threat of sackings. If management withdrew that threat, we wouldn't be on strike right now. It's as simple as that. When people talk about the risk created by us taking this action, they forget that we've got friends and family in London too. We're Londoners ourselves. So this isn't something we're doing lightly, but it is something we feel like we have to do.

We've seen Brian Coleman's comments in the press about feeling "relaxed" at the prospect of having to sack thousands of firefighters; no-one wants to hear that sort of thing but it's not surprising. That's obviously something he feels like he needs to say to strengthen his position in the dispute.

There is an ongoing campaign of victimisation and bullying from management against firefighters. Members have already had their pay docked on trumped-up technicalities; that's all about intimidating people who're involved in a dispute. Fundamentally our managers are trying to bully us; this strike is about standing up to that bullying.

Solid at Tooting

BY MAGGIE BREMNER

I went to the Tooting Fire Station picket where scab appliances were going to be based. The firefighters had successfully prevented any scab appliance from parking up there. As far as they were aware the scab appliances were parked around London.

They all seemed hopeful that management would return to the table as they felt they had been successful with organising against the scabs but at the same time were planning the next strike day.

They reported that the scab crew were barely trained and would be unable to deal with rescue. These are people who were recruited and trained as standbys for any major emergency but it was reported that basically bosses had grabbed a lot of migrant workers out of job centres who are being exploited and put at risk.

One of the crew said "Any blood is on the management's hands, they know what to do to end this".

"Brian Coleman wants a privatised service"

BY A STRIKING FIREFIGHTER

We are not going to be bullied and dictated to by our management. Coleman is a despicable character; he's the worst kind of arrogant and smug politician.

Matt Wrack challenged him live on the radio about the Section 188s; he said clearly that if Coleman lifted the threat of sackings, the strike would be off. Coleman refused.

It's very clear that his end-goal is a privatised fire service. His relationship with AssetCo makes that clear; he's always getting little hand-outs and enjoying corporate hospitality from them. He wants them to come in and run the fire service.

I think management are rattled. In interviews since the strikes began Coleman has sounded less confident and relaxed to me.

When the Bonfire Night strikes were first called I think some of us were a bit uneasy, but we're past that now. You have to expect that kind of thing from *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail*. We've got to stand up and fight.

Stratford's view

The strikers here told us: "We were called upstairs for a meeting by our senior officers a couple of weeks ago. When we got back down AssetCo had been in and taken a pump and a load of other equipment. Working class traitors is what they are [i.e. the managers]. If we were fighting the war with the Germans now, they would be the collaborators". Another said, "This is about shift patterns and strings attached. But it's about more than that. Everything's getting taken over by private companies so some company owner can make a few bob while we lose our services. The system's not right."

Support Janine Booth!

AWL member Janine Booth is standing for election to the RMT's Council of Executives for the position of London Transport Region member.

Janine has been nominated by 10 out of 16 RMT branches in the region, with five nominating her opponent and one not submitting a nomination.

Janine wants to give grassroots RMT members more say over how their union is run. She is also campaigning for an industrial strategy that aims to win, including the introduction of strike pay so RMT members can carry out prolonged disputes with management if necessary without fear of the financial consequences. And she is campaigning for socialism — at a time when London Underground bosses are attempting to make workers pay for a crisis they created, Janine is fighting for a vision of society where the interests of the working-class majority come first.

AWL members in London will be supporting the campaign by helping distribute Janine's election material at stations and other LU workplaces as well as canvassing staff. The *Tubeworker* bulletin will play a central role. Janine Booth is the only candidate in the election fighting for real change and grassroots control within the union.

• To get involved with the campaign, email janine.booth@btopenworld.com

Janine Booth with other RMT activists on a recent demonstration

Tube strike stays solid

BY DANIEL RANDALL

Tube workers hit bosses with a third day of strike action on November 3, with the stoppage once again severely disrupting services on the London Underground.

The company had been assiduously training up managers in between strike days to cover frontline duties; once again, in being prepared to send people with just a day's worth of familiarisation into front-

line jobs, LU demonstrates its utter contempt for passenger safety.

But moreover, the whole episode has raised another question: if senior managers are so expendable that they can leave their jobs for days at a time to take familiarisation training or cover frontline duties, what exactly are they doing the rest of the time that makes them worth all the money they get paid? "Sack the bosses" sentiment is definitely growing on the picket lines.

There is also a clear mood amongst many for escalating the action, tempered by an appreciation that for many workers, any escalation that is not coupled with a serious move towards paying strike pay would be a serious financial stretch. With strike pay, however many pickets were confident of turning out the membership for more prolonged strike action of 48 hours or longer — the kind of action, in short, that is now necessary to turn up the heat on the bosses.

Where next for the tube dispute?

BY A TUBEWORKER

London Underground has announced a further 800 job cuts (on top of the original 800 station staff job losses that sparked the current dispute). We need to step up our campaign accordingly.

There have been many positive aspects to the dispute so far. We have fought despite there being no compulsory redundancies threatened: we are defending staffing levels, not just individual workers' jobs. TSSA is striking for the first time, and rank-and-file ASLEF members have supported the action despite their leadership's opposition. The creative use of action short of strikes is a big step forward, and public support has been encouraging despite press hostility.

But as the dispute continues, management are implementing the cuts. They have drafted new rosters, carried out a bogus "consultation" and offered voluntary severance to some workers, some of whom have accepted. The unions were slow getting ballots organised and action called: now the real danger is that come February, the final implementation date for the cuts, we will still be holding token one-day monthly strikes to save jobs that have gone. Digging in for a long-term war of attrition based on monthly one-day strikes will wear down workers' confidence.

We need to escalate. Strikes should be stepped up to 48 hours, perhaps staggered over more days. We should also devolve power to the grassroots membership, to plan winning strategies that members support.

We also need:

Accessible hardship funds

While some people say "I can't afford to strike" as an excuse for scabbing, others genuinely struggle financially. Unions should organise hardship funds that members can access. Unions officially have these funds, but they are usually loth to pay out to strikers. So rank-and-file members and branches should set up our own hardship funds and raise money for them. The point of industrial action is not to make a glorious sacrifice — it is to win.

Rank-and-file meetings

Rank-and-file Tube workers can discuss how the dispute is going, share concerns and offer suggestions for next steps. We talk about these things at work, so we should also do so in union forums where our views can be heard. AWL members have fought for years to commit the unions to running disputes through elected strike committees: workers will keep fighting if we feel meaningful ownership over our struggle. Workplace activists should set up local forums involving members of all unions. Even if these meetings are only consultative, simply giving rank-and-file members a chance to openly discuss the dispute would be positive. But ultimately we should fight for strike committees made up elected workplace representatives to be given direct control of the dispute. RMT's Regional Council has a strike committee which has played a useful role, but union activists need to make it more central to the dispute.

More support for the action short of a strike

Creatively applying tactics other than strikes is a positive step, but because these tactics are new, members need more support and explanation to help us apply them. We need letters (not just emails) to all members and visits from union reps to give us confidence to properly enforce tactics such as the boycott of the £5 minimum Oyster top-up policy. LU imposed this policy in January, and RMT's Regional Council asked the union to ballot for a boycott. But the union did not hold the ballot until August nor put the boycott on until September. Although many staff are boycotting it, the policy has now bedded in to some degree. More direct union support would help, and is also vital to prevent divisions emerging around the action short. The overtime ban for engineering grades has now been switched to a work-to-rule; this makes sense because of the nature of their work, but has caused some resentment among station staff for whom the overtime ban is still in place.

A real campaign to win public support

This battle is for the heart-and-soul of London's public transport, a showdown between management's vision of a soulless, de-staffed, unsafe Underground designed to squeeze the maximum profit from passengers and our vision of a top-quality service run in the public interest by well-paid, valued workers. On picket lines, we have explained to angry commuters that the unreliable, disrupted service they get on strike days is a foretaste of what the tube will be like all the time if management get their way.

We can not expect the right-wing press to give cover our strike positively. But our unions should do more to win pub-

lic support. Pickets have handed out "why we are striking" leaflets to the public, but these came from RMT's Regional Council rather than head office. The Regional Council has also taken the lead in winning active support from disability rights and pensioner activists, groups who will be particularly affected by staffing cuts. Union head offices have produced some material e.g. protest postcards, but should do more to put our case more clearly.

A political campaign

The Greater London Assembly (GLA) has now voted to condemn the cuts, passing a resolution at the third attempt after Tories twice scuppered earlier votes by walking out. The unions should use the GLA vote to mount a significant political campaign, arguing that the position of the elected GLA prevails over the position of unelected LU managers.

We also need a wider political campaign. These cuts are part of a historic assault on working-class rights and living standards. Our unions should coordinate with others and our activists should participate in local trades councils and anti-cuts campaigns. Cross-union coordination means not just bombastic statements of support for other unions' campaigns, it means working together. The FBU/RMT/PCS/NUT demo on October 23 was positive. We need more actions like that, properly advertised and built, and serious discussions between unions to coordinate industrial action. We should face down right-wing scaremongering about 'secondary picketing' by asserting our right to support fellow workers in struggle.

Thatcher's not our role model!

BY JEAN LANE

Margaret Thatcher won 31% of votes, putting her in first place in a women's role model survey carried out by YouGov and AOL UK. This could be a comment on the state of women's politics today. But it may be more to do with how surveys are carried out.

I wonder, for instance, how many miners' wives and girlfriends were asked. Oops, sorry, there aren't very many of them around nowadays, are there? I wonder whose fault that is.

"Role models: someone to look up to.

"Young women desperately need role models — and what the media gives them is heiresses, sex objects, surgery addicts and emotional wrecks. There must be better suggestions". This is how the *Guardian* covered the news of the poll result on its website.

There seems to be something missing from this list of inappropriate people for young women to look up to. Unless Tory Scumbag can be included in the category Heiresses, that is.

Actually, Thatcher was a millionaire heiress, in keeping with a long Tory tradition. The current Tory Cabinet is made up of extremely wealthy, privileged scumbags who wouldn't know a public service user if one begged them for a fiver and who look to Margaret Thatcher for inspiration as to how to ensure no-one else will know one for much longer either.

If as a role model you want to look up to someone whose government devastated whole areas of industry, throwing thousands of people out of work and then described the unemployed as "moaning minnies", Thatcher's your woman.

If you want to look up to someone who closed down huge sections of the welfare state, driving thousands of working class women back into the home or who privatised many of the public services remaining, including British Telecom and British Gas, selling them off to profit-grabbing companies, Thatcher's your woman. ("If a Tory does not believe that private property is one of the main bulwarks of individual freedom, then he had better become a socialist and have done with it.")

How about someone responsible for the selling off of council housing, inducing working class people to buy their own, leaving millions in negative equity? Or someone who introduced the Poll Tax, forcing thousands of working people into the courts for refusal to pay?

Perhaps someone who introduced many of the anti-union laws designed to prevent any group of workers from fighting back against these attacks?

Thatcher was a class-conscious Tory who fought for the interests of the ruling class in government. She did a good job from the point of view of the rich, overfed, self-serving, greedy class of leeches who sit on the top of our society and bleed it dry without ever having to do a day's work.

That such a role model can top a poll today is an indication not of how good she was, but of how poorly we are served by those who should be representing the interests of our class. Any of the groups of workers in the 1980s who were driven onto the dole queues by Thatcher's government, whether it was the steel, the coal, the docks, the rail, could have beaten her and her government and very nearly did so.

With the exception of one, Arthur Scargill, no union leader took the fight seriously or recognised what the stakes were. She did. For that she should be admired maybe, but not by us.

The left fails Muslim women

BY DALE STREET

Muslim women fighting for women's rights have been largely abandoned by the left, by human rights organisations, and by anti-racist campaigners.

That sums up the basic argument put forward by Gita Sahgal at a meeting held in Glasgow on 28 October as part of Black History Month 2010.

Sahgal left her post of Head of Gender Unit at Amnesty International earlier this year after Amnesty had ignored her complaints about the organisation's collaboration with Islamists (specifically, Moazzam Begg and his "Cageprisoners" organisation).

Sahgal began her talk with excerpts from a documentary which she had helped make about war crimes committed by the Islamic-fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh during its war of independence in the early 1970s. Members of the organisation massacred hundreds of thousands and committed mass rape.

Bangladesh achieved its independence. As a result of the growing influence of Islamism, it falls well short of being a fully secular state. But there is now an ongoing popular campaign to secularise Bangladesh, spearheaded by women and youth.

It was therefore wrong, concluded Sahgal, to see secularism as something imposed on other countries by the West.

From Bangladesh in the early 1970s Sahgal moved on to Britain in the late 1980s, dealing with the attempts to ban Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, and the campaigning work undertaken by women in the Muslim community, such as Women Against Fundamentalism, in opposition to the increasing influence of Islamism.

Jamaat-e-Islami provided the link.

British Islamists who called for an extension of the blasphemy laws and for *Satanic Verses* to be banned included Bangladeshi Jamaat-e-Islami members who had migrated to Britain. The Islamist campaign against *Satanic Verses* also gave rise to the later emergence of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), in which Jamaat-e-Islami supporters continue to occupy leading positions.

Excerpts from documentaries which Sahgal had made at the time showed women from the Muslim community staging counter-demonstrations against the Islamist anti-Rushdie demonstrations, and also organising demonstrations in protest at domestic violence.

Their slogan was "Here to Doubt, Here to Fight". This was an adaptation of the anti-racist slogan of the 1970s, "Here to Stay, Here to Fight". It meant that women in the Muslim community were not prepared to surrender their right to question the social "orthodoxies" which the increasingly vociferous Islamists were wanting to impose on them.

But the excerpts from her documentaries also showed the start of a different political response to the reactionary Islamist mobilisation around *Satanic Verses*: a readiness by politicians to accept the Islamist leaders as genuine representatives of their communities, and a willingness to accommodate to their demands.

Both Labour and Tory MPs, for example, put their names to a Bill which sought to extend the blasphemy laws to cover Islam as well as Christianity. (By contrast, the late socialist Labour MP Eric Heffer was shown calling for the abolition of all blasphemy laws.)

This failure to confront Islamism and this accommodation to its political demands was described by Sahgal as "one of the most remarkable and saddest aspects of politics since the Rushdie Affair, or since 9/11 in 2001."

Organisations like the MCB had been boosted and funded as government partners, supposedly providing a conduit into the Muslim community. As Sahgal pointed out, this was a continuation of an old colonial policy: to allow some self-appointed leaders to rule over their followers as they wished, provided that they kept them from rebelling against the colonial power itself.

In Afghanistan and Iraq the West had espoused the cause of women's rights. But it had not hesitated to abandon the same cause by appeasing and forming alliances with Islamists. There could therefore be no

Gita Sahgal

reliance on Western governments to promote women's rights.

On the left, organisations such as the Stop the War Coalition had boosted the Muslim Association of Britain (the British "section" of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood) while the political party "Respect" was effectively an alliance between sections of the left and Jamaat-e-Islami supporters.

The MCB was not even prepared to recognise Ahmaddiya Muslims as Muslims, still less represent them (or, Sahgal might have added, defend them against the murderous attacks of Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan).

The Islamic Human Rights Commission, another Islamist organisation popular with the left, was concerned only with what it defined as the breaches of human rights of Muslims committed by Western governments (and Turkey) but did not lift a finger to defend the human rights of those oppressed by Islamist regimes such as Iran.

And yet, in the name of "anti-racism", the bulk of the left and the bulk of the anti-racist movement had shrunk back from confronting the threat posed by the rise of Islamism as a political movement.

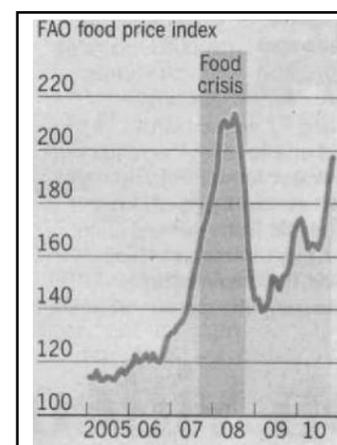
Nor was there any reason to suppose that the situation was going to improve in the immediate future as more funding was being made available for "faith-based" groups to fill the gap left by cutbacks in local-authority social services.

This would provide an opportunity for Islamist organisations not only to secure more funding from the government but also — as the holders of the purse-strings for local social expenditure — to exercise a greater degree of influence and control in Muslim communities.

Some of what Sahgal said was open to criticism. But it was refreshing to hear a spirited denunciation of Islamism and the threat it poses to women's rights in particular.

It would have been better to have heard such a denunciation in a socialist meeting or in a trade union meeting rather than in the Glasgow Centre for Contemporary Arts.

But the venue for Sahgal's talk underlined the point she was making: the bulk of the left, having accommodated to political Islam at the expense of women's rights, would not be prepared to hold such a meeting.



Figures from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation show world food prices still soaring. The biggest driving force here is speculation. To stop hungry people becoming the victims of rich speculators, we should fight for workers' governments which will bring high finance under public ownership and democratic control, and regulate food distribution for social provision, not profit.

FILM

The misogynist with 500 million friends

Daisy Thomas reviews "The Social Network" (directed by David Fincher)

"I want to take the entire college experience and put it online". That's what Mark Zuckerberg (played by Jesse Eisenberg) says in *The Social Network* when he is outlining the idea for "the Facebook" in 2003.

The *Social Network* is a complicated and amusing look at the conception and development of the world's most popular social networking sites — now, with more than 500 million users in 207 countries, worth a cool 25 billion dollars.

The story starts off with a boy and a girl, as many stories do. On an evening in 2003, Zuckerberg, then a student at Harvard University, USA, got dumped by his girlfriend, Erica Albright (Rooney Mara). Zuckerberg drunkenly and angrily blogged about her, then created "Facemash". Essentially, "Facemash" was a rating site for the hotness of the girls on the Harvard campus. He got their photos through incredibly complicated hacking skills.

That first creation generated so much traffic (22,000 hits) that the Harvard server crashed. Zuckerberg explained that young men were attracted to it because they could comment on girls they knew — not strangers, but girls they knew. It had more grip than sites like "hotornot.com".

"Facemash" earned Zuckerberg notoriety and start-

ed the chain of events which led to betrayal, losing a friend, other personal vileness — and becoming a billionaire.

After "Facemash", he was approached by Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss (Armie Hammer) who controlled the prestigious "Porcellian Club". Zuckerberg expressed interest in the idea of creating a site where information and photos could be shared among friends within the exclusive confines of Harvard University.

However, he short-changed the Winklevosses and began designing "the Facebook" instead of creating their website.

From this point, most of the movie's story was told through flashbacks from the two separate lawsuits Zuckerberg faced. The first was the Winklevoss suit. They sued him for breach of contract and intellectual property theft.

In their opinion, Zuckerberg took their idea "HarvardConnect" and adapted it for Facebook.

The second lawsuit, put forward by Eduardo Salverin (Zuckerberg's CFO and former friend, played by Andrew Garfield), covered several areas including ownership of shares, involvement, and money. Distaste for Zuckerberg's new friend and business partner, Sean Parker (Justin Timberlake) may have contributed.

Despite the fact that his character is so very annoying, Timberlake's performance is superb. Garfield also does a fantastic job, really evoking sympathy for his

character when Zuckerberg treats him disrespectfully, cuts him out, and screwed him out of money.

This disrespectful behaviour was not just for Salverin, however. Although he would become a billionaire from a scheme advertised as making friendship easier, Zuckerberg seems to spend most of the movie existing in his own bubble, not really taking anything or anyone seriously.

This can be seen in his dismissal of the Harvard server security breach and later, with his dismissal of the "cease and desist" letter about Facebook from the Winklevosses. For him, that shows how: "you don't get to 500 million friends without making a few enemies".

Only at the end of the movie does Zuckerberg show some vulnerability.

In general, the film is a really interesting look at how this major internet phenomenon came about, and the cast performs brilliantly. The director, David Fincher, as well as the writers, Aaron Sorkin (screenplay) and Ben Mezrich (author of *The Accidental Billionaire* on which *The Social Network* is based), should be commended on their achievement.

Even if you're not so utterly addicted that you have to check Facebook four or five times a day, I recommend watching this film because it shows how a single idea (and a lot of vile behaviour) can kick-start a billion dollar enterprise.

The cause of Carlos

Stan Crooke reviews "Carlos" (directed by Olivier Assayas)

If you've ever thought of a career as an internationalist terrorist — forget it. Okay, there might be a plus side to it. You become an international jet-setter. A media celebrity. An icon of radical chic.

You eat in the best restaurants, enjoy the best food, drink the best wines. You dress like Che Guevara after a visit to Saville Row.

(And why not? After all, have you ever heard anyone raise the slogan: "An international terrorist on a worker's wage"?)

But there's a downside to being an international terrorist as well.

Governments use you for their own devious ends. You smoke incessantly. Your boss sacks you for not killing enough people. Your wife complains that she

can't give your daughter a decent upbringing. You become a has-been. You put on weight. And eventually you get caught and sent to prison — for a very long time.

(Just in case anyone in the audience is too dim to work this out for themselves, one of Carlos's female acquaintances spells it out for everyone: "Fighting capitalism with guerrilla means is romantic but doomed to failure. No more desperate causes. They lead nowhere.")

Even worse, some film director might decide to make a five and a half hour film about you, trim it down to a two and a half hour version, and put it on general release. The result: Olivier Assayas's "Carlos".

Watching the general-release film is like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle from which over half the pieces are missing, and without the picture on the box to tell you how it all fits together.

The film begins in 1973 — a mere 14 years after the real-life Carlos first became politically active — with his attempt to kill a leader of the British Zionist Federation.

Three corpses later (after Carlos has killed two French detectives and a Palestinian informer) it is 1975 and time for the hostage-taking of the leaders of OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum-Exporting Countries) in Vienna.

This is followed by a succession of short shots of Carlos on his travels in the late 70s. (Another downside of being an international terrorist: very difficult to find a place called home.) German terrorists pop up all over the place, and KGB chief Yuri Andropov puts in a cameo appearance.

Suddenly, it's 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, soon followed by Carlos's capture in 1994. (No mention, therefore, of Carlos's political evolution over the following decade and a half — or, mercifully, his excruciating love poems to his third wife.)

In fact, so little of Carlos's actual and attempted terrorism is covered in the film that the viewer is left wondering how he ever managed to achieve notoriety. He's a world-famous international terrorist — but he hasn't

Bourgeois arrogance behind revolutionary rhetoric

killed anyone since 1975?

The Carlos depicted in the film is a pretty odious character: vain, self-centred, narcissistic, domineering, misogynistic — and pretty dim politically. His terrorist-political activity, such as it is, is essentially a space in which to exercise his ego.

Again, for anyone slow on the uptake, this is spelt out by one of the characters in the film. She sums up Carlos as: "Bourgeois arrogance hiding behind revolutionary rhetoric."

Similarly, when Carlos says that he has done much for the Palestinian cause his interlocutor replies: "No, you have done much for the cause of Carlos."

"The war is over," one of Carlos's fellow terrorists tells him towards the end of the film. Well before then, however, the "war" has become an irrelevance. It's the film you wish was over.

Combined times

As Russian grass, clean, green below blue sky,
Life can be free and fine, the Old Man said:
Soon Koba split his stubborn grey old head,
Pulled by the weighted years back to die,
From a future he dared try to fructify
To where the king-priest Moctezuma bled;
When Traitor Koba ruled, tyrants cross-bred,
When peons danced to their heart-ripping lie.
Time tells, Time won't be made to multiply:
Where Cortez sailed back, across the sea
Back millennia, behind Time, he
Soared ahead; till Time went all awry.
Pirates loot Time, steal Time's stored reward:
Liberty's pilgrims forge their own gold hoard.

S. M.

Leon Trotsky died 70 years ago

SCIENCE

Why do we exist?

Les Hearn reviews *The Grand Design* by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow

Stephen Hawking's latest popular work (*The Grand Design*, written with physicist and author Leonard Mlodinow) seeks to answer questions that many have asked:

- Why is there something, rather than nothing?
- Why do we exist?

Hawking and Mlodinow (H&M) also pose a question which potentially answers the first two:

- Why this particular set of laws and not some other?

The answer, say H&M, is to be found in M-theory.

The trivial answer to the last question is that, if the laws were different, we would not exist and would not be asking any questions. But the observed laws seem to be very finely tuned to allow matter to exist in extended forms, like atoms, molecules and us. This has been called the anthropic principle and, in its strongest form, has often been given as circumstantial evidence in favour of design, allowing god to slip back in after being excluded from all other observed processes.

H&M controversially argue for a strong anthropic principle: "The fact that we exist imposes constraints not just on our environment but on the possible form and content of the laws of nature themselves". However, their argument does not rely on a grand designer but on the possibilities inherent in M-theory.

M-theory is an attempt to unify all of the forces of nature into one overarching explanation, encompassing the very large and the very small. The reason for trying to do this is not just a love of orderly explanations but that previous unifying theories, that which

unified the electric and magnetic forces in the 19th century, that which included quantum mechanics (quantum electrodynamics — QED) and that which unified the weak force with the electromagnetic (EM) force (the Standard Model) in the 20th century, led to enormous benefits. Promising attempts to unify the strong force with the EM and weak forces have been made (Grand Unified Theories — GUTs). M-theory is an example of a Theory of Everything (ToE) which aims to include the gravitational force.

Why the urge to unify or to build more inclusive theories? This sounds like the sort of "blue skies" research that politicians scorn, in favour of research with commercial benefits. However, the work of James Clerk Maxwell in the 19th century to uncover the relation between electric and magnetic fields, curiosity-driven, showed that electromagnetic fields spread through space at the speed of... light! Thus, light was an electromagnetic wave, which led to the discovery of radio waves, microwaves, X-rays, gamma rays, and to untold benefits in medicine and communication. It is quite reasonable (though not guaranteed!) that future unifying theories will lead to useful outcomes.

H&M's approach leans heavily on the work of my favourite scientist, Richard Feynman, a profound thinker but also an engaging and playful character. You would be rewarded if you looked into his life (and perhaps watched clips of interviews with him on the BBC website).

Feynman worked on the science of the very small, where quantum effects rule. One example concerns the behaviour of light when it shines on two vertical narrow slits very close together. This gives rise, not to two vertical bars on a screen, but to a wide horizontal band of dark and light bars.

This has classically been explained (by Thomas "Phenomenon" Young, another fascinating character) as the interference of the peaks and troughs of waves, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes cancelling each other, much as ripples in water do. This fatally wounded the particle theory of light held by Newton.

This commonsense explanation was however shown to be inadequate, not least by the proof by Einstein that light could act as particles, photons, in the photoelectric effect. Newton's theory rose again Lazarus-like. More oddly, faint beams of light consisting of single photons when shone on a double slit gradually reproduced, spot by spot, the interference pattern supposedly explained by wave behaviour.

The "solution" was to associate a probability wave with each photon so that where it ended up was essentially random but over time a distinct pattern emerged. It was as if each photon passed through both slits and the probabilities interfered with each other resulting in the detection of the photon at a particular place.

Theory predicted that matter particles would also have a probability wave associated with them and, sure enough electrons (and larger particles) behave in a similar way with a double slit — even single elec-

trons interfere with themselves (this experiment was voted the most beautiful experiment in physics in 2002)!

Feynman's explanation is that the system, in this case the single electron/double slit/screen system, has not just one but every history. The particles take every possible path on their way from the source to the screen — simultaneously! Furthermore, our observations of the particles go back into their past and influence the paths they take.

If, like me, you're going "What?", you're in distinguished company: Feynman himself said "I think I can safely say that nobody understands quantum mechanics". Nevertheless, the theory has passed every test.

Lots of people are unhappy with the implication that someone has to be looking before a quantum process is "forced" to arrive at a particular outcome — and yet this has been confirmed by many experiments. It actually is the case that the outcome is influenced by the process of measurement or detection (though this need not be a conscious process).

This sort of crazy quantum behaviour obeys strict laws. Laws of nature are not like human laws which seek to encourage certain preferred behaviours. They explain how things behave and how they can behave. The laws of modern physics, including the modern understanding of gravity, explain an incredible range of observations to incredible precision and have made amazing predictions which have almost entirely been borne out. H&M pose more fundamental questions, including "Is there only one set of possible laws?"

The laws are, needless to say, not entirely known. While three of the four forces of nature, the electromagnetic, weak and strong forces, have provisionally been united in the "standard model", crucially gravity still needs to be integrated into the picture. This what M-theory, incorporating string theory and supergravity, seeks to do. One of its startling predictions is that there are 10 space dimensions and one time dimension, in contrast with our everyday experience of three space dimensions and one time. The unobserved dimensions are rolled up very small, so that particles are actually vibrating strings or membranes.

M-theory does not predict the exact laws observed. These depend on how the extra dimensions are "rolled up". A great many universes are possible, some 10⁵⁰⁰ or 1 followed by 500 zeroes, each with a different combination of fundamental constants, and it is not surprising that we exist in one where the constants are compatible with the evolution of life. The "apparent miracle" is explained.

H&M point out that the law of gravity is not incompatible with the emergence of a universe "from nothing". In particular, the principle of conservation of energy is not violated (because, while matter energy is positive, gravitational energy is negative) and, at least in quantum mechanics, what is not forbidden is compulsory. Furthermore, with a wide range of possible sets of constants, some (at least one!) universes must come into existence in which life can evolve.

And here, without the need for a creator, we are!

Sport? Only for middle-class kids

BY CLARKE BENITEZ

Working-class children's access to sport will be drastically reduced following the CSR, as the Youth Sport Trust faces virtual abolition as the entirety of its funding is slashed.

The YST is a voluntary-sector body that ran the Schools Sports Partnerships programmes with Department for Education funding — programmes which, while far from perfect, allowed many working-class children more regular access to sport than they would otherwise have had (including to sports which have historically been the preserve of middle-class and privately-educated children). The next time there's a barrage of Tory propaganda about obesity and ill-health in working-class communities, we can point to cuts such as this to explain where the blame for such problems lies.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade

unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

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

We stand for:

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

with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

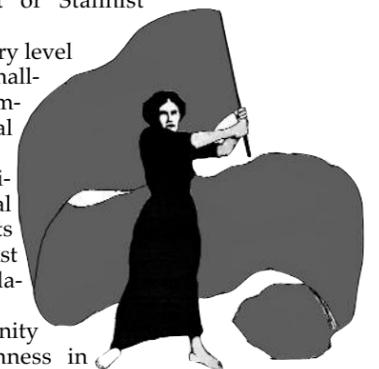
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

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

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

020 7207 3997 / awl@workersliberty.org / PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA



US ELECTIONS

Extend the deficit? No: tax the rich!

In the US mid-term elections Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives, gaining 60 seats from the Democrats. The Democrats retained control of the Senate, despite losing six seats, some to candidates backed by the ultra-right Tea Party movement. In this article, written on 24 October before the election, Barry Finger looks at the debate over economic policies which have dominated this election and what arguments socialists might use to undermine working-class support for the "Tea Party right".

This article originally appeared on the website of *New Politics*, an American socialist journal. See <http://newpolitics.mayfirst.org/node/374>

Christina Romer, the former chair of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, argues in the *New York Times* that "Now Isn't the Time to Cut the Deficit."

Her argument, which is unexceptional among liberal economists, is simply that "tax cuts and spending increases stimulate demand and raise output and employment; tax increases and spending cuts have the opposite effect." This, she reassures her readership, is a "basic message of macroeconomics."

This reasoning arises from an analysis of the economic crisis that is based on a shortage of aggregate demand, specifically that component of aggregate demand emanating from the business class. They are not investing nor are they consuming in sufficient volume to lift the rate of economic activity. On the other hand it is equally clear that the business community has no faith in an economy that is stabilized by the growth of the public sector at the expense of the private sector, which is what Romer's prescription would bring about and what the President's stimulus package has already resulted in.

Insofar as political disruption by a renewed left is not an immediate issue, capitalism has faith in that recovery, and that recovery alone, which arises from the restoration of profitability, where the expansion of demand is driven not by state purchases but by the process of renewed capital formation. That is, capitalism has faith only in an economy that has been adequately restructured through the devaluation of surplus capital, by downward pressure on wages and by the minimization of government overhead costs. It looks forward to a revival of economic activity based solely on a firm capitalist footing — not one limping along on government crutches.

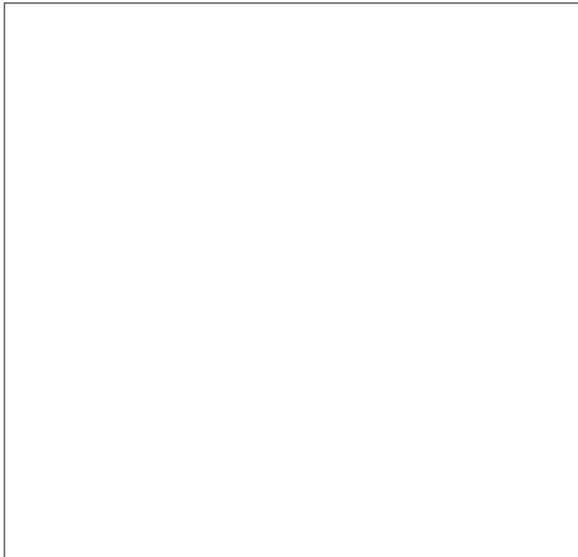
Deficit hawks argue, as they have in Europe, that there is a structural component to the addiction to the need for chronic borrowing which threatens the long term viability of capitalism. They believe that a burgeoning state demand will ultimately crowd out private investment, raising interest rates and choking off economic growth.

But the immediate problem is a cyclical problem and the structural problem, lies not with state demand, but the hypertrophic growth of the financial sector. And this is where capitalism's ideologues have turned a blind eye.

The left, I would argue, should demand that the state sector grow by becoming the employer of the last resort, independent of its effects on profitability or on the relative growth of the state. However, there is no reason to buy into Romer's argument that the deficit needs to be temporarily enlarged for that purpose.

What advantage is there for the state to borrow from the wealthy? To do so would mean creating assets in the form of public debt held by a class that has will not relinquish its unused liquidity. It will simply borrow the money from the Feds at a virtual zero interest rate and sit back and collect a future windfall, that the working class will in part be taxed to honor.

The flaw in Romer's analysis is this. She assumes quite reasonably that taxing the public to finance state demand simply reduces private demand and therefore is not, on balance, expansionary. One effect simply neutralizes the other. And if her description of the spending



One way to undermine support for the Tea Party

behavior of the wealthy were accurate, her analysis would be convincing. But the wealthy are not spending their income. Their demand is a potential demand, not an actual demand. The wealthy are waiting the recession out and therefore contributing to its duration.

They should therefore be taxed. Taxing the wealthy under these circumstances would be expansionary precisely because it would entail injecting unused cash into the economy to expand government purchases. The state would be doing what the wealthy are not — transforming their potential demand into actual demand. And this would not come at the future cost of increased taxes.

This is how socialists might address Tea Party concerns that are seducing so many of the white working class. It clearly identifies one of the levels in which the behavior of the wealthy contributes to the economic distress of working people.

The other long term issue is that of the structural deformity of capitalism. And this too worries those who so resent the Wall Street bailout. It is, of course true, that revenues taxed to support state purchases are lost to the accumulation process.

But there is something far more threatening to capitalist expansion which is festering within the very anatomy of the private sector. The financialization of capitalism — at least in the US, Britain and much of Western Europe — arises out of capital's drive to free itself from the perils of productive investment. But its implications are structurally disruptive.

Instead of recycling idle balances of profit back into the real economy, this new financial system increasingly neutralized these balances by transforming them into ever new financial instruments of risk aversion. It securitized mortgages; it created new forms of risk hedging, it created new financial insurance policies, etc. This internal recycling of funds within the financial sector — first skimmed from the productive sector — permitted a growth in asset values not justified by a parallel increase in surplus value.

Capitalism had — in other words — massively overissued claims on future profits that were unsustainable in light of the flagging rate of accumulation, which the financialization of the economy itself massively contributed to.

The financialization of the economy transformed the relationship of Wall Street to the productive sector from symbiotic to parasitic, and its continuance in this form is an ongoing permanent threat to the resumption of anything resembling long-term business expansion. Rather than addressing this, the business class would prefer to dismantle working class gains in what is left of the welfare state.

The shredding of the safety net, however, will leave the real structural vulnerability of capitalism largely unaddressed.

Market freedom

BY JORDAN SAVAGE

The BBC struck a surprising blow against the right-wing of American Republicanism this week, with Andrew Neil's documentary "Tea Party America" (BBC 2, Monday 7pm).

The hour-long film investigates the origin and growth of America's "Tea Party" movement.

Tea Party activist Liz Matz sums up the movement's anti-Obama, anti-Big Government agenda in the phrase: "Progressivism is stateism, and they both add up to Socialism."

Under the de-facto leadership of figureheads such as former vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin and Fox News' Glenn Beck, the Tea Party seeks to amass the support of libertarian capitalists in the US and drive politics to the right.

Kentucky activist Anne Nagy offers an illustration of the eloquent political fervour that grips Tea Party supporters, when she says: "We are going to fundamentally change [the way America does politics] because we don't have a set leader, you can't cut off our head."

Barry Goldwater Jnr. (son of the 1964 presidential candidate, who had the support of Ronald Reagan) is characteristic of those interviewed in his instance that Obama cannot answer the demands of the American people: "That kind of hope and change is not what Americans want. They don't want Socialism, they want freedom."

One of Neil's great strengths in this documentary is his analysis of the language of the Tea Party movement. He identifies a uniformity in Tea Party activists' use of images of "tyranny" and "freedom", and their constant comparison of Obama to dictators of the past. This analysis enables him to unearth the FreedomWorks propaganda machine.

Under the leadership of president Matt Kibbe, this rightwing lobby that has invested an enormous amount of money in the Tea Party and provided training and guidance for the new activist movement.

It was Kibbe who identified the Tea Party (its name stems from an acronym for "Taxed Enough Already") with the Boston Tea Party of 1773.

He reveals that by perusal of leftwing texts that claim the Boston Tea Party as a part of their tradition, he was able to learn direct action techniques to bring to the American right.

The documentary lacks one crucial element in terms of access — there is no interview with Glenn Beck, and so he remains the inflated caricature that is his Fox News persona, without the challenge of a live, intellectual interview.

Jobs for the girls

BY JOAN TREVOR

Many commentators remark on the prominent role of women in the Tea Party, women such as Sarah Palin, Christine O'Donnell and Michele Bachmann. Some of these women lay claim to being feminists — "conservative feminists".

It is not any kind of feminism that the left would recognise: conservative feminists are usually anti-abortion, anti-sex education, illiberal, homophobic. They reject the kinds of social measures that help working class women to play a full and fulfilling role in society: decent pay, well-funded welfare, adequate benefits. They fundamentally believe in the right of the capitalist class to rule, and that the market is right.

Within that, their feminism is, essentially, careerism. They are politicians who operate in a sexist milieu — a sexism that, on the whole, they endorse. But, while Tea Party women believe that men and women are different, as individuals they are just as fierce in their right-wing beliefs as men, and find themselves checked in expressing it by sexism. Tea Party spokesperson, Rebecca Wales, explains: "For a long time people have seen the parties as good-ole'-boy, male-run institutions. In the Tea Party, women have finally found their voice."

The voice of Tea Party women is not different from those of their menfolk — but it might help to launch a few women's political careers.

SOCIALISM IN DISARRAY, PART FOUR

The poverty of “anti-imperialism” and today’s left

SEAN MATGAMNA CONTINUES A SERIES

“There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a ‘negative’ Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to ‘sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism’. A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not ‘sharpen’, but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation”

- V I Lenin

The collapse of European Stalinism in 1989-91 also cleared the way for the revival of the left. Socialism would now be deflated, but real. The real left gained a chance to live and grow again, to clear the old battlefields, to define itself anew, and to develop its influence in the working-class movement.

The way was cleared for the re-elaboration of our traditions and our ideas, for the re-growth of the socialism of Marx, Engels, Luxemburg, Mehring, Lenin, Trotsky, and Gramsci.

We have not yet done that.

True, international capitalism has, until the recent eruption of the global credit crisis, been going through a vast expansion under the banners of free trade, neo-liberalism, and globalisation. The social conditions have not been friendly to the conviction of the necessity of replacing capitalism with socialism, the need for a socialist revolution, the belief that, historically, capitalism has outlived itself.

These conditions helped many ex-Stalinists mutate into born-again advocates of bourgeois democracy and capitalism — something, all in all, better than their former Stalinist political personae. Working class democracy was never even potentially real for those power-worshippers, and naturally they do not regard it as a possibility.

But the world working class is expanding; it has, maybe, doubled in size over the last 30 years. That is, capitalism is rearing up armies of its own gravediggers. “Objective conditions” would have allowed us to achieve a great deal than we have.

We have seen not a revival of the left, but a riot of bourgeois triumphalism, and a continuing, indeed, increasing, accelerated, disarray and decline — political, moral, intellectual decline — of the “actually existing” left.

In so far as the bulk of the would-be left has redefined itself, it has in the last decade been in terms of an alliance with one of the most reactionary forces on the planet, “political Islam”, or Islamic clerical fascism.

The rise after 11 September 2001 of international “anti-imperialist” terrorism by Islamic clerical-fascist movements, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, threw the remnants of the left into a mortal political and ideological crisis.

In retrospect, the collapse and disarray in the left after 1991 was understandable, and inevitable, after the way the left had been shaped in previous decades.

Though the old European Stalinism, holding state power, is dead, socialists, including the heirs of the anti-Stalinists, live still in the grip of the moral, political and intellectual chaos created by Stalinism. The moral and political crisis of the present-day left is fundamentally a confusion of ideas, of identity, of an unexplored, and often startlingly unknown, history, and of our language of politics.

The crisis of the would-be left today consists in the continued influence within it, in its ways of seeing the world, of un-purged and essentially unrecognised Stalinist politics, patterns, attitudes. This is true of most of these who think they stand in the Trotsky tradition, too.

The all-shaping fact about the post-Stalinist left, including most of the left that sees its own roots in the antipode of Stalinism, Trotsky’s movement, is that it is not in fact, in real political life, post-Stalinist. Stalinism still shapes it and still ruins it. Now, in the new era of capitalist crisis, and the new age of austerity, that Stalinist shaping threatens to make the left as sterile and impotent as it was in the last two-thirds of the twentieth century.

It will be easier to understand the character and causes of the self-debilitating faults of the contemporary left in the light of our discussion of the Stalinist experience.

1. NO ALTERNATIVE TO CAPITALISM?

Since the collapse of the Stalinist Russian empire in 1991, world capitalist power has traded even more on the idea that there is no alternative to capitalism. There never was; there never will be; there cannot be.

We should, as David Marsland said at a debate organised by Workers’ Liberty in 1991, “marvel at the market’s gifts to mankind”. Be grateful for the things God gives you! Don’t dream, don’t scheme, don’t rebel! For, warn the ideologues — and the old Labour Party reform-socialists too — if you rebel, then you will stumble into the nightmare of state terrorism, into the Gulag, into the Stalinist archipelago of slave labour camps and mass murder.

They trade on the claim that Stalinism was Bolshevism; that Bolshevism was not negated in the Stalinist counter-revolution, as it in fact was, but continued and developed by the logic of its own nature into Stalinism.

The Stalinist counter-revolution against Bolshevism was, they claim, Bolshevism itself. Bolshevism, which fought Stalinism to the death of the rearguard Bolsheviks, was only infant Stalinism. The anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks were fighting against their other self.

In fact, in all this, the triumphant bourgeoisie has merely appropriated the core lies of Stalinism. The story is demonstrably nonsense — nonsense as ridiculous as Stalin’s indictment of the old Bolsheviks in the mid-thirties as having been working for British and other intelligence services when they were leading the 1917 Revolution!

Yet aspects of the post-Stalinist left, for instance the accommodation of the kitsch-left to Islamist terrorism, have been as if designed to prove the bourgeois ideologues’ point.

2. UTOPIANISM STILL CENTRAL

The great and prolonged crisis of capitalism in the twentieth century properly roused revolutionary Marxists to the idea that the eras of peaceful and progressive capitalist development were gone forever.

“The point was to change it”, to overthrow it now: that was all. The philosophers had interpreted History; and History had favourably pronounced on the philosophers with the seeming collapse of capitalism. The point was to change it — and that narrowed down into “Build the Revolutionary Party”.

This idea persisted long after the crisis that unleashed it was over and long after history had taken unexpected turns, with the consolidation of Russian Stalinism, and the spread of Stalinism across one third of the globe.

The perspective of hopeless capitalist collapse was kept in place by the dominant “orthodox” Trotskyist doctrine that the Stalinist states were “post-capitalist”, the deformed embodiment of a still developing and expanding albeit distorted proletarian world revolution, and thus proof that it was still “the age of wars and revolutions”. It persisted despite capitalist revival and prosperity in the most advanced countries, and fast capitalist growth in many poorer countries.

Long before the fall of European Stalinism, and Francis Fukuyama’s thesis, derived from it, that we had reached “the end of history”, post-Trotsky Trotskyists had applied a similar idea to capitalism.

History, they thought, had reached a point beyond which almost everything in advanced capitalism was reactionary. The SWP-UK had its own dialect of this idea, a core idea of its sectarianism — a thesis that when world capitalism became ripe for socialism, thereafter everything capitalist became reactionary [note 1]. It was the method of the great utopian socialists — once the socialist idea has been invented, every-

thing else is reactionary.

The “evolutionary” aspects of modern communism were, as we have seen, central to the contribution of Marx and Engels and their school of politics. They have largely been lost by the would-be left.

Here the would-be Marxist Left are victims of our own failure to come to terms with our own history in the mid-twentieth century. Capitalism did break down into protracted crisis including world war, between about 1914 and about 1950. Opportunities for the working-class to replace capitalist rule with its own rule did exist in “the epoch of wars and revolutions”.

But the working-class was defeated. And in a strange and unprecedented way. The victors in the defeat of the working class and the destruction of Bolshevism presented themselves — and even thought of themselves — as representing the working class. They presented their system, in which the working class was enslaved more than in most capitalist states, as working-class socialism.

That confused all the maps and signposts. In Britain in 1940, when a German invasion seemed imminent, the road signs were removed so as to confuse the invaders. Something like that happened to the socialists. The Marxist signposts have yet to be sorted out and re-erected.

Capitalism revived; it eventually overwhelmed, in economic, military and political competition, the aberrant, historically freakish and unviable Stalinist bureaucratic collectivism which in the mid-twentieth century had seemed to many to be the alternative to capitalism.

The twentieth century crisis of capitalism (and the failure of the left) knocked out of post-Trotsky Trotskyism the “evolutionary floor” which Marx and Engels gave to communism. Socialist revolution became not a matter of the positive development and education of the working class movement, but a quasi-mechanical consequence of the ever-present “crisis” as soon as general mass discontent and the building of a revolutionary-party “machine” should rise high enough.

The post-Trotskyist movement went through its own long “Third Period”. Proletarian revolution was always imminent or in process. Strange and alien phenomena — in the first place, those of Stalinism — were misidentified as aspects of it. That was an aspect of reversion to utopianism.

The orthodox Trotskyists built on Trotsky’s identification of the USSR as a “degenerated” workers’ state and their own definition of the new Stalinist states as “deformed” workers’ states to shed Trotsky’s idea that Stalinist Russia was an unviable freak social formation that would in the short term collapse, either before bourgeois onslaught or working-class revolution, or have to be reconceptualised as a new form of exploitative class society (see *The USSR In War*, and *Again And Once More On The Nature Of The USSR*, both in *In Defence Of Marxism*). They moved to an implicit acceptance of “socialism in one country” — the development of the USSR, and now other backward states of Stalinism, in parallel with and eventually outstripping, advanced capitalism [note 2].

They relegated Trotsky to the status of a posthumous utopian savant. The “word” was given, thereafter in capitalism no progress was possible. Capitalism was unconditionally and universally reactionary. That then meant: reactionary against Stalinism — and has now come to mean: reactionary against no matter whom.

For the post-Trotsky ‘orthodox Trotskyists’, the basic socialist democratic programme of self-determination and opposition to colonialism came to be submerged into the notion of Stalinist deformed revolution in backward parts of the world such as China. “Imperialism” was the advanced capitalist states, as counterposed to the states and movements of Stalinism, and allied with Stalinism, which embodied “anti-imperialism”. Class criteria, and Marxist programmes, were subverted and destroyed.

From a loss of historic perspective here has followed the all-shaping negativism of the “left” towards advanced capitalism.

The power of the idea that capitalism was in its death

agony to motivate and mobilise made it of great value to apparatus Marxists. Trotsky once recommended the idea for its mobilising powers — he did not mean, falsify reality so as to be able to use it!

Our alternative to capitalism is a socialism that retains, spreads and deepens the conquests of bourgeois civilisation from the Renaissance and earlier onwards. These include rational, critical, realistic assessments of our world, of our alternative to capitalism, of ourselves. That too was often lost.

We need to remind ourselves of the fundamental ideas of Marxist socialism, which I outlined in part two of this series.

For Marxists advanced capitalism is the irreplaceable mother of our socialism. (And not a good mother: a poisonous old harridan-spider who has repeatedly eaten her own young! Or tries her best to!) Socialism has become possible only because capitalism has created a mass proletariat and, created means of production which, liberated of the drives and unreason of capitalism, can create abundance for all in the basics of life.

We base our socialist programme on this Marxist idea of the necessary evolution of capitalist society, of its forces of production, as the irreplaceable ground-preparer for socialism; on the social, intellectual and political preparation of the proletariat through both capitalist evolution and communist education and organisational work, to make it able to seize power in capitalist society.

These “evolutionary” aspects of modern communism were central to the contribution of Marx and Engels and their school of politics. They have largely been lost by the kitsch Left.

3. ABSOLUTE ANTI-CAPITALISM: THE POVERTY OF “ANTI-IMPERIALISM”

Not only has the present-day “anti-Stalinist” would-be left taken into itself many of the political features of old Stalinism. Some of the ideas and attitudes of the would-be left now are starkly more irrational than were these ideas in their Stalinist version.

Ideas that made their own sense when the supposedly socialist or travelling-towards-socialism USSR was at the centre of a world view — for instance, the absolute hostility to advanced capitalism, and automatic support for the “camp” in conflict with it — are rendered utterly nonsensical now that the USSR is no more. No socialist can even half-seriously believe that Iran or Taliban-ruled Afghanistan show a desirable future to humankind, as the devotees of Stalinist Russia thought they could.

The easiest way into the maze of post-Stalinist political remnants in the contemporary left is to deal first with one of the would-be left’s all-shaping “positions” — the centrality of “anti-imperialism”.

A. VIETNAM

The would-be left of today is rooted in the “1968 Left”. It was right for that 1968 left to oppose the Vietnam war and fight to end it — right to side against America in Vietnam, to express horror at a very savage war, at mechanised destruction rained down by the greatest power on earth on a peasant people, at the prospect that “victory” against the Stalinists would have required “bombing Indo-China into the stone age”, or “destroying it in order to save it”, as a US major said of a Vietnamese city in 1968.

But in the left reshaped by opposition to the Vietnam war and “reconstructed” by “1968” and after, there was a powerful strain of reactionary anti-imperialism. It was no accident that know-nothing western Maoists played such a big part in the anti-war movement. Its slogans — like “Victory to the NLF” — implied positively siding with the Stalinists. It was a formative, reshaping experience, saturated as it was with millenarian expectations for the victory of the socialist revolution, soon. For the orthodox Trotskyist ancestors of the present left (the writer amongst them), there was much of political indifference about Stalinism: “don’t confuse me with complexities”.

B. THE ALGERIAN WAR AND OPPOSITION TO IT

Vietnam came a decade after an earlier shaping experience for the modern left, the Algerian war of liberation against France.

On that, much of the revolutionary left tried to exercise political judgement as between Algerian organisations — which were engaged in a bloody rivalry — and backed the “left-wing” of the national liberation movement, the MNA, led by Messali Hadj.

Messali was understood to have had links with the

early Communist International and had support in the Algerian trade union movement and among Algerian trade unionists in France. The International Socialist League (Shachtman); the Cannon segment of the split orthodox-Trotskyist world movement, including the Lambertists in France; the SWP’s predecessor Socialist Review, and Healy’s group in Britain, which published a pamphlet with a portrait of Messali Hadj on the cover — they all backed Messali, against the more recently emerged and formally more right-wing and initially purely nationalist FLN.

For some of them, Messali was their substitute for a Communist Party, and for the Stalinists who had already made “deformed” “socialist” revolutions in Yugoslavia, China and North Vietnam.

The Pablo-Mandel orthodox-Trotskyists backed the other nationalist organisation, the FLN, the eventual rulers of Algeria.

It became known that the MNA was putting up much less of a fight than the FLN, and eventually, around 1958, that in some areas it had arrangements of coexistence with the occupying French forces. There are perhaps parallels with the rival anti-German forces in early-1940s Yugoslavia, Stalinist and Chetnik-Royalist, and with the two IRAs of the 1970s, the Stalinist-led “Official Republicans” and the initially right-wing breakaway, the “Provisional IRA”.

In the polemical war between the different Trotskyists, the Pablo-Mandel group eventually won hands down against the champions of the MNA and Messali. I know of no balance sheet drawn up by any of the champions of Messali and the MNA.

The anti-imperialist politics that seemed to triumph then, of unconditional solidarity with those leading the anti-imperialist fight irrespective of politics, dominated the left thereafter. This experience was fed into the anti-Vietnam war movement by Trotskyist groups influenced greatly by their experience over Algeria, and by the IS organisation, the future SWP-UK [note 3].

C. THE NEW TURN IN THE 1999 WAR AGAINST SERBIA

The confusionist politics of the would-be left on “imperialism” stretches way back, and is rooted in the selective anti-imperialism of the Stalinist movement. But something new emerged — or new in the clarity in which events posed the issues — in the Balkans war of 1999. It was the prelude to the would-be left’s craziness with political Islam after 9/11.

By way of campaigning “against the war”, NATO’s war, and “against imperialism”, that is against the NATO powers, which made war to stop genocide in Kosova, the would-be left actively sided with the primitive Serb ethno-imperialism of Slobodan Milosevic and worked to whip up an “anti-war movement” in support of those engaged in a war to kill or drive out the Albanian population (over 90%) of Serbia’s colony, Kosova.

Some did this because they had not quite got rid of the idea that the Milosevic regime, the most Stalinist of all the successor regimes in the former Stalinist states, was somehow “still” progressive, or even still “socialist”.

Others — the SWP — simply thought that a big anti-war movement on any basis would rouse young people to action and thus help build up the forces of the SWP. So the crowd came in response to their demagogic agitation, they cared not what came to the Albanians...

Balkans War was a turning point for the left

Yet others were one-sided pacifists, or old style Neanderthal anti-Germans, like Tony Benn. They spent the war re-enacting a foolish parody of the sort of Stalinist antics that over decades destroyed independent working-class politics.

The state of the British left at the start of the 21st century was most horribly depicted in the demagogic, one-sidedly pacifistic “anti-imperialism” which it deployed to build that pro-Milosevic “stop the war” movement in April-June 1999.

In an overflow meeting at the Friends Meeting House on the Euston Road, the CND Catholic ex-Bishop Bruce Kent denounced the then Minister of Defence George Robertson, a man of Scottish working class background, in the tone and manner of a Duchess talking of a careless dustbin man, as “that l-i-t-t-l-e man!”

The central “demand” of the anti-war movement of 1999 was for NATO to stop the war before it had secured its immediate objective of forcing the Serbs in Kosova to desist and withdraw their troops. Translated into the real political world, that meant: let the Serbs get on with it!

D. THE IRAQ ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT

Three years later in Britain the same people recycled their “anti-war movement” as an opposition to war with Iraq.

Now they took on the colours of the Ba’th Party — Galloway on the platforms left no doubt of that — and after the occupation of Iraq, of the “resistance” which they supported there, made up of Sunni supremacists, Al Qaeda, and other clerical fascists, including, on and off, the Shia-based Sadr movement.

The Iraq anti-war movement of 2002-3 consisted of a number of very large demonstrations. Vast numbers of people came out to proclaim that they did not want war, or, after the war, the occupation of Iraq. A smaller number came out to protest against Israel in the Israel-Hezbollah war of August 2006.

The ongoing campaign, between demonstrations and long after they had passed, consisted of a group of people with politics that were not necessarily those of the marchers: the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialist Workers Party, the Muslim Association of Britain (which proudly proclaimed its links to the Muslim Brotherhood), George Galloway MP, the long-time voice in Britain of the fascistic Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, and others.

These gave the campaign its slogans and rallying cries and, so to speak, constituted the face and voice of the anti-war movement: they also (the SWP mainly) provided the many thousands of placards distributed to marchers. Thus they determined that the demonstrations had a markedly Islamist and anti-Israel dimension, demanding the destruction of Israel in such slogans as “Palestine must be free — from the river to the sea” — often carried by young people who had not grasped the implications of such slogans.

It became a pro-Islamist “anti-war movement” after 2002, although, when it had first taken shape in 1999, its SWP core had made it into a murderously anti-Muslim movement...

The SWP-UK’s “Respect (George Galloway)” party, rooted in the anti-war movement, campaigned in the 2004 Euro-election as “fighters for Muslims”.

The chameleon political quick-change antics would denote utter political disorientation even without any

Continued on page 18

of the “anti-imperialist” extravagances that went with them.

E. DIFFERENT IMPERIALISMS AND DIFFERENT “ANTI-IMPERIALISMS”

There are many different sorts of imperialism, and therefore of anti-imperialism, in history. Up to the middle of the 20th century, and in some cases beyond, the world was divided into great colonial empires — British, French, Belgian, Dutch, Portuguese, Russian. Russia waged the last of the old-style wars of colonial conquest for the decade after it invaded Afghanistan, in 1979.

That colonial imperialism has gone out of existence, as a result of revolt against the rulers, or because the rulers found continued occupation unprofitable. In the capitalist world after World War Two, the USA exerted a great pressure on the old colonial empires to liquidate; using its superior economic power, it stopped the British-French-Israeli “Suez Adventure”, the invasion of Egypt in 1956.

To an important extent the repression of peoples that was a routine part of colonial imperialism continues, now worked by the successor states, many of them bureaucratic administrative units, not nations, created by colonialism, to contain “alien” segments of the state’s population.

Against old colonial imperialism, the Communist International advocated struggle for national independence, led by “revolutionary” nationalists or by the Communist Party, or both in alliance. This was seen as part of the movement towards world revolution and the global removal of capitalism, in which the working class, especially the working class of the advanced countries considered ripe for socialism, would be the protagonist and leader of the rest of the plebeian population. The proletarian revolution was the central “anti-imperialism”, the answer to the domination of the world by the rich countries

With the liquidation of old colonialism, what is imperialism? Primarily, the workings of the capitalist world market. What, now, is anti-imperialism? It is the working class anti-capitalist revolution!

Against the “imperialism of free trade, and economic might, and military clout”, of the USA now, the only feasible, serious, real “anti-imperialism” is inseparable from working-class anti-capitalism.

Against colonialism and military occupation, anti-colonial struggle for self-determination has definable, reachable, achievable, limited objectives. The anti-imperialism which denounces ineradicable aspects of the natural and necessary relationship of capitalist states where the world market is God — which condemns inequalities of wealth and what goes with them, which denounces state egotism and self-aggrandisement — is, if translated into the realities of our world, denouncing capitalism.

Populist anti-imperialism, as distinct from working-class anti-imperialism, denounces capitalism in a mystified and mystifying, and fundamentally confused and incomplete, way. It does not propose to overthrow capitalism, and hence has no serious anti-imperialist programme.

As the Theses of the Second World Congress of the Communist International noted in 1920, the unequal weight of different independent countries is as natural a consequence of market relationships as is inequality in wealth between formally equal citizens within a bourgeois democracy. It can perhaps be ameliorated in both cases, but then the inequalities pile up again. It is like hacking down grass, that is densely seeded and abundantly watered: the effect is soon undone by nature, so long as seeds and roots remain in place.

Populist nationalists at most aspire to or attempt to create “economic independence” — autarky. That too is limited in its possibilities, economically regressive, and unsustainable. It was the policy of ruling Stalinists — Trotsky itemised as one of Stalinism’s most reactionary aspects its policy of cutting off from the world market, as distinct from regulating and controlling relations with it.

For decades now, populist nationalists in Latin America have been denouncing “Yankee imperialism”.

What can they do against imperialism, as populist “anti-imperialists”? Not a lot, and nothing fundamental.

That sort of “anti-imperialism” ruled in independent Ireland for the quarter century before 1958. It implied autarky, cutting off from the international division of labour. From 1958, the same politicians who set it up, with the same individual in the lead, Sean Lemass, began to dismantle it.

Behind high tariff walls, it created some native small industries, which couldn’t compete internationally.

The economy stifled, haemorrhaging people.

“Partial” anti-imperialism of that populist and nationalist sort is, in general, regressive and reactionary. It is of limited effectiveness and duration. In some cases it is possible for industry to grow up behind “nursery tariffs”, as in its day 19th century German industry did; but generally the populist anti-imperialism does not even lay foundations on which the economy can build once reintegrated into the international division of labour from which it has withdrawn to one extent or another.

At best it proposes more or less serious interim ameliorations — protectionism, nationalisation of foreign owned industries, etc. It aims to strengthen “national” capitalism against “foreign” capitalism. These ameliorations may in themselves be worthwhile, play important roles in developing the economy of a given state for a period, in changing the relative places of developing states, but “imperialism” will not in that way be overthrown. Other than the proletarian revolution no anti-imperialist programme exists except a reactionary one, more or less reactionary according to the degree of regression to economic autarky.

We live in a world where the most important victims of imperialism in the time of Lenin’s and Trotsky’s Communist International, India and China are becoming super-powers... In which Iran, occupied as late as 1946 (by Britain and Russia), and Iraq, a British protectorate until fifty years ago (1958), long ago grew to be competing regional imperialisms, and spent most of the 1980s locked in a World War One-style regional imperialist war of attrition, with horrendous World War One-level casualties on both sides.

In this world, the residual elements of “anti-colonialism” will be auxiliary and subordinate to working-class socialist anti-imperialism. Otherwise “anti-imperialism” becomes a siding with anything else against the dominant capitalist powers, and comes to include siding with lesser, weaker imperialisms and regional imperialisms, like Iran or Iraq.

We are against imperialism as such, on the lines sketched by the Second Congress of the Comintern? Yes, but the point is that “anti-imperialism” is not an absolute imperative, not outside of context, not outside of the concrete truths of world politics. The Comintern theses themselves made a modification, an exception, insisting on “the need to combat pan-Islamism and similar trends, which strive to combine the liberation movement against European and American imperialism with an attempt to strengthen the positions of the... mullahs, etc.”

F. CHAMELEON ANTI-IMPERIALISM

Nameless, class-less, anti-imperialism, specifying only what it is against, is in existing conditions a trap and a snare.

Despite the froth-at-the-mouth hostility to “imperialism”, it is only as progressive or otherwise as the “anti-imperialist” forces it identifies with. Anti-imperialism is only a negative, and, so to speak, politically translucent, undefined, shading in politics. It is a form of chameleonism, taking on the colours of the chosen “anti-imperialist” forces, including lesser imperialisms in conflict with the USA.

Pure and simple negativism towards the USA and the advanced capitalist countries can and does lead those “anti-imperialists” — people operating by emotion, positive but above all negative, without a map of the political terrain in which they operate or a living conception of a socialist “destination” — into self-righteous political reactionism. They take on the colour of the “anti-imperialists” (including real or aspirant lesser imperialisms, for example again Iraq or Iran). The same approach would have led them in World War Two to back Japan, the fundamentally weak and less developed imperialist power; and Japan talked of “Asia for the Asians” and of itself as embodying that course.

In our world, chameleon “anti-imperialism” necessarily signifies not only residual struggles for national independence, but also, and more powerfully, the anti-imperialism and “anti-capitalism” of people who reject everything socialists see as progressive in capitalism and liberal-democratic bourgeois society, everything on which we must build socialism — religious maniacs of the various currents of political and fundamentalist Islam. Many of them consciously support regional imperialisms such as Iran and Iraq, and not a few of them pine for the restoration of the pre-1918 Turkish Empire — “the Caliphate”!

When the Communist International codified its guiding principles on such things, the victory of “revolutionary nationalists” could be seen as a part of a general movement against imperialism spearheaded by the drive against capitalism of the Communist

workers of the advanced world. Or as “anti-imperialist” movements in which communist working class local forces, allied to, augmented and in part defined in their political character by their links with the world movement, could compete with reactionary “anti-imperialists” for political and social dominance, and shape the movement into a working-class-led anti-capitalist “permanent revolution”. The Comintern did not expect that the colonies would become independent under capitalism — least of in a world in which communism has disappeared as a mass force.

Today, “anti-imperialism” is often only a detached fragment of the programme of the Communist International. The frame and the prospect of short or medium term working-class victory is no longer part of it, except in the heads of people who shout about “permanent revolution”, not as a strategic orientation in which the working class can really fight for power, but as a magic mantra. It is a foolish mystification and in practice a mechanism for accommodation — and de facto political submission to — alien class and political forces. Forces, it needs to be said bluntly, that are sometimes reactionary compared to a straightforward capitalist society. Iran, and its 1979 revolution, is the seminal modern experience here.

In Iran, the clerical-fascists have been in power 30 years and will rule for some incalculable time yet.

For the kitsch anti-imperialists of the would-be left, it is not enough to criticise the great powers, tell the full truth about their goals and methods, and the consequences of what they do — in Iraq now, for the pertinent example. They believe that “Leninist”, “anti-imperialist” political virtue demands that they side explicitly with the enemies of their “imperialist” enemies, no matter how reactionary is what they counterpose to imperialism and its Iraqi allies. They also counterpose their “anti-imperialism” to the working-class communist version of anti-imperialism.

Slogans have become detached from their conscious meaning; they have turned into fetishes — into things with more of the nature of religious mysticism to them than rationally deployed political tools. “Troops Out Now” is a pointed way of siding with the enemies of our enemies, of calling for their defeat. Sometimes it can be a *reductio ad absurdum* of self-determination, conceived of as progress.

It is a purely negative thing here: another sloganistic fetish-object. The idea of self determination is separated from the whole complex of ideas and goals, and processes which, for Marxists and in the Marxist programme, it is part. There is no time-perspective; no idea of letting things develop until they become — or may become — more favourable to a desirable positive outcome. The negative-only outlook devours that dimension. Here too the lack of historic perspective is all-devouring!

It is not the “anti-imperialists’” indignation against advanced capitalist society and power politics which socialists reject, but their crazily improvised alliances and the alternatives which their allies propose, and which they — to put at its weakest — “go along with”.

The craziest current example is the support by some of the would-be left of the “right” of the ruling Iranian mullahs to have nuclear weapons! Iranian self-determination and “independence” demands the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, and in particular their possession by the mystics of a clerical-fascist regime, some of whom, certainly, are capable of wanting nuclear annihilation for the greater glory of Allah and their own ascent into a Hollywood bordello-heaven.

Those who accept as “anti-imperialist” progress the various strands of anti-western politics and military campaigns, rampant in and around the Muslim world, and to an extent in the countries of western Europe wherever Muslims are a sizeable part of the population — they are “reactionary anti-imperialists”, like those they reflect.

G. LENIN’S CRITIQUE OF “ANTI-IMPERIALISM”

At the same time as Lenin denounced the “high imperialism” of his day, condemning it as having led ineluctably to the catastrophe of World War One, he also criticised the different sorts of anti-imperialisms, as Marx and Engels had criticised the different socialisms and anti-capitalisms in their day (the Communist Manifesto).

“There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a ‘negative’ Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to ‘sharpen proletarian consciousness against imperialism’. A negative slogan unconnected with a definite positive solution will not ‘sharpen’, but dull consciousness, for such a slogan is a hollow phrase, mere shouting, meaningless declamation”.

“The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to

corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not 'demand' such development, we do not 'support' it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!"

"Imperialism is as much our 'mortal' enemy as is capitalism. That is so. No Marxist will forget, however, that capitalism is progressive compared with feudalism, and that imperialism is progressive compared with pre-monopoly capitalism. Hence, it is not every struggle against imperialism that we should support. We will not support a struggle of the reactionary classes against imperialism; we will not support an uprising of the reactionary classes against imperialism and capitalism".

If we support national uprisings against imperial rule, wrote Lenin — and we do — then that is not just because we are "against" imperialism, but because we are positively for national freedom.

When Marxists, continuing the policy of the anti-imperialism of early twentieth century Marxism and communism, support even the most undeveloped victims of capitalism against their advanced capitalist-imperialist conquerors, would-be conquerors, maltreaters and exploiters — for example, the Ethiopians under the leadership of the feudal monarch, Haile Selassie against the Italian invasion in 1935 — we do not adapt to, and still less do we idealise, such forces and their dominant views of the world. We do not champion such views against the typical world outlooks of advanced capitalism.

We do what we do from our own class viewpoint on history, on advanced capitalism, and on what programmatically we fight for as an alternative.

Those who uphold reactionary anti-imperialism on the left today conflate that old communist policy with idealising and glorifying anti-US forces and accepting them as a viable programmatic alternative to capitalist imperialism.

For some of those who tried to build an anti-war movement in support of the Serbian regime of Slobodan Milosevic over Kosova in 1999, "anti-imperialism" came to mean condoning attempted genocide because it was done by a "progressive" regime opposed by "imperialism"...

The way that much of the left today courts and flatters Islamist clerical fascism, painting up its "anti-imperialism", etc., is the clearest and most terrible example here. The Communist International never did that, nor did the Fourth International of Trotsky. Nor even, for a very long time the Fourth International after Trotsky, despite its partial political disorientation, and its putting "The Colonial Revolution" at the centre of its conception of an ongoing socialist revolution, Stalinist-led "for now". We never abandoned or subordinated our critical attitude to, and political war against alien, non-working class, criticisms of imperialism.

H. ANTI-IMPERIALISM SHADES INTO REACTIONARY ANTI-CAPITALISM

What Marx and Engels, in the Communist Manifesto called "reactionary socialism" was the view of much of the traditional right at the time of the Communist Manifesto. Strong strands of it can be found in political Islam, as in Catholic-Christian clerical fascism.

It was and never entirely ceased to be an aspect of the Catholic Church. For example, even the mildly pro-Nazi Pope Pius XII, whose church in Europe after the war organised and itself became a network of escape and temporary refuge for clerical-fascist collaborators with the Nazis, who were often mass murderers themselves (the Croatian Ustashe, for example) — even Pius XII, in his Christmas message for 1942, called for "legislation [to] prevent the worker, who is or will be a father of a family, from being condemned to an economic dependence and slavery which is irreconcilable with his rights as a person. Whether this slavery arises from the exploitation of private capital or from the power of the state, the result is the same..." (He also, as other parts of that Statement show, was one of the legion of those then who thought that capitalism was coming to an apocalyptic end.)

The socialist who therefore would have looked to the Pope and his subordinates as allies would have been a certifiable political idiot!

For the reactionary anti-capitalists whom Marx and Engels discuss in the Communist Manifesto, it was a matter of criticising modern industrial society and wanting to go back to a pre-industrial time, back to an idealised Middle Ages or rule by enlightened kings and aristocrats. Its essence was an incapacity to link

their criticism of capitalist industrial society and its bourgeois rulers with a perspective of the development of the actual, real, evolving society which they lived in and criticised.

They had a positive alternative to offer, though one historically, and in terms of social development, behind existing society. In part it was an imaginary older system they advocated — an utopia, based on idealisation of what had once existed. They were radical critics of capitalist society too alienated to do much about it. The criticism of Thomas Carlyle, a political reactionary and of John Ruskin was used in anti-capitalist educational work until well into the twentieth century.)

The would-be left has, by way of accommodation to "anti-capitalists" like clerical-fascist Islam, taken over this reactionary, critical, alienated, impotent role of the reactionary socialists of the 19th century. Does it have an "ideal"? Nothing so worked out as that of the "back-there-somewhere" reactionary socialists.

The severe rejection of utopianism by Marx and his followers restrains the elaboration by would-be Marxists of ideal societies. So the alternative is defined only negatively. And that opens the way for even clerical fascism to be embraced — or at least to be held hands with — on the basis of the single cardinal virtue of being against "imperialism".

But, aside from and as well as the effects on it of accommodating to reactionary anti-capitalist or "anti-imperialist" forces, the kitsch leftists are made into sterile critics like the "reactionary socialists" by a too-all-cutting-off negativism towards capitalist society — the society on which, in the Marxist perspective, we must build to erect our socialism. This is one of the prerequisites of their accommodation to Islamic clerical fascism.

I. OPPOSITION TO EUROPEAN UNITY

The most long-standing example of the regressive — archaic-nationalist, right wing — character of the would-be left is the way that a large part of it has made opposition to a capitalist European Union a central policy, indeed a principle.

"No to the Bosses' Europe — Yes to the Socialist United States of Europe", the slogan of the Trotskyist left, sounds good, but in practice it means and, in the absence of immediate prospects of a European working-class revolution, must mean, supporting the continuation or re-erection of barriers between countries in Europe.

For the pioneers in this question, the Communist Parties and their sympathisers, and the USSR which guided them, that is what they wanted it to mean. Their de facto advocacy of the continued "Balkanisation" of Europe flowed from their opposition to that which gave the movement to a united Europe much of its impetus — Europe as an effective antagonist of the USSR. Described candidly, it was literally opposition to progress outside Russia, outside the "utopian socialist" colony.

In the 1960s and 70s, anti-EUism came to be part of the Trotskyist left in the 1960s and '70s, for whom it never made any political sense higher than keeping in with the "big battalions" of the pseudo-left.

Socialists and the labour movement cannot be consonant with our own history and oppose the unification of Europe, even by the bourgeoisie, when the immediate and short-term alternative is the old state system. Within the bourgeoisie moves to unification we, of course, have our own programme — working-class unity across the fading frontiers, democratic structures and procedures.

The Socialist United States of Europe has been part of our programme since World War One showed the bloody bankruptcy of the European state system, and indeed before that. Because of the multifarious defeats of communism, the working class did not unite Europe.

After the Second World War, the bourgeoisie, faced with the looming power of Stalinist Russia, looked to unite Europe in their own bourgeois-bureaucratic way, taking as their model the Zollverein, the customs union set up after the Napoleonic Wars by the myriad small German states, which over decades prepared the way for the unification of most of Germany half a century later.

"Left" opposition to the unification originated with the Stalinists. Right-wing social-democrats like Hugh Gaitskell opposed British involvement, orienting instead to the British Empire and Commonwealth. The trade union bureaucracy and the Labour left followed suit, adding their own little Englandism and national reformism.

The would-be revolutionary left first adapted to mainstream trade-union and Stalinist-influenced attitudes, then moved to their own "revolutionary" ver-

sion of the same attitudes.

During World War One, Trotsky wrote: "Let us for a moment admit that German militarism succeeds in actually carrying out the compulsory half-union of Europe, just as Prussian militarism once achieved the half-union of Germany, what would then be the central slogan of the European proletariat?"

"Would it be the dissolution of the forced European coalition and the return of all peoples under the roof of isolated national states? Or the restoration of tariffs, 'national' coinage, 'national' social legislation, and so forth? Certainly not.

"The program of the European revolutionary movement would then be: The destruction of the compulsory anti-democratic form of the coalition, with the preservation and furtherance of its foundations, in the form of complete annihilation of tariff barriers, the unification of legislation, above all of labour laws, etc. In other words, the slogan of the United States of Europe — without monarchy and standing armies — would under the foregoing circumstances become the unifying and guiding slogan of the European revolution".

Trotsky underestimated the degree of nationalistic recoil from such a German-imposed European unification, but the whole approach is enormously instructive in a world in which opposition to the European Union and to European unification under the bourgeoisie has for decades been a "left-wing" article of faith.

To be continued.

NOTES

1. See Tony Cliff's *Russia — A Marxist Analysis*. The claim that all capitalist development had become reactionary was Cliff's way of avoiding, ducking, the conclusion which implicitly saturated his own version of state capitalist analysis of Stalinism — that the Stalinist economic system, presented by him as better-developing than "western" capitalism, was therefore relatively progressive.

His picture of Russian Stalinism paralleled that developed by the orthodox Trotskyists. It was, beneath the name "state capitalism", one of its dialects of the orthodox Trotskyist account. Russian Stalinism had, he wrote, quoting the assessment by Marx and Engels of early capitalism in the Communist Manifesto, created wonders greater than any of the wonders of the ancient world. When he finally arrived in 1963 at a general theory of state capitalism which supposedly unified his radically different theories of state capitalism in Russian and in China, it was that state capitalism was the only way that backward countries could develop. The role of state capitalism in underdeveloped countries was analogous to the role of the bourgeoisie in the development of ordinary capitalism in Europe. It was progressive? Yes by the logic of what he wrote, and by the logic of his historical analogies. But he avoided that conclusion with the cancelling out statement that because world capitalism was ripe for socialism, therefore this state capitalism, though it was developing the means of production in a large part of the world, could not be progressive. It was reactionary. The conclusion was entirely arbitrary.

2. So, after about 1947, did the heterodox Trotskyists of the Workers Party/ISL, when Max Shachtman abandoned Trotsky's idea — which he had maintained despite deciding that Russia was a new form of class society — that the USSR was historically unviable. He came to see it as a viable alternative to capitalism — indeed, to believe that it was winning in the competition with capitalism and inevitably would win if a working class socialist revolution did not in good time replace capitalism. The battle between socialism and the looming threat of world Stalinism was what the old slogan "socialism or barbarism" now meant. If Shachtman was "revisionist" vis a vis Trotsky and the Marxist tradition upon which he stood, it was here not in seeing the USSR as a new class society, but in seeing it as able to defeat capitalism by competition from its periphery.

3. The point at which "anti-imperialism" came to be used by orthodox Trotskyists as a euphemism for the Stalinist revolutions can perhaps be pin-pointed in the second month after the start of the Korean War in June 1950. For over a month after the outbreak of the war, the American orthodox Trotskyists, the SWP, hovered on the brink of a "third camp" position, refusing to back either side. They had too sharp an awareness of what Stalinist rule brought to people and to working classes not to be inhibited in backing Russia's proxy — North Korea. Their segment of the orthodox Trotskyists would not conclude that China was a "deformed workers' state" until five years later. They were only just bringing themselves to accept the idea, against which they had first fought bitterly, that the Stalinist satellite states in Europe were deformed workers' states. They resolved their dilemma and came down solidly on the side of North Korea by way of ignoring was specific to Stalinist societies and rechristening Korean Stalinism as "the colonial revolution" in the Korean peninsula. James P Cannon, after a month's indecision, wrote an open letter to the President and Congress of the USA demanding they stop their attack on the "colonial revolution" in Korea. "Anti-imperialism" allowed him to square the political circle.



Fighting management belligerence and media hysteria



London firefighters have stepped up their campaign to save jobs and are striking from Friday 5 to Sunday 7 November.

Their bosses are determined to force through new contracts and threatening to sack thousands of firefighters in order to do that. The media has called the strikers lazy and selfish.

In truth firefighters are not only defending their jobs but also the safety of *all* Londoners.

• More, centre pages. Picture: Stratford Fire Station

Support London firefighters!

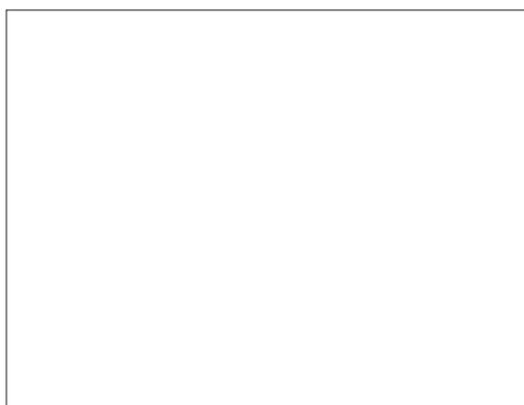
AGAINST SOARING FEES AND CUTS

Take direct action!

By ED MALTBY

Against £9,000 a year tuition fees and massive cuts to teaching budgets, students need to organise direct action on as many campuses as possible, while linking up with the workers' movement. We need to deliver a political blow to the government and galvanise trade union as well as further student anti-cuts struggles.

Continued on page 5



On 3 November students at Goldsmiths University occupied Deptford Town Hall (part of the university) in protest at the cuts

National Union of Students and University and College Union
DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE CUTS

Wednesday 11 November
12 noon, Horse Guards Avenue

Free Education contingent
11am, ULUM Malet Street

Individuals: £18 (22 issues) waged, £9 unwaged; or £35 (44 issues) waged, £17 unwaged. Trial sub: £5 for six issues.
European rate: 28 euros (22 issues) or 50 euros (44 issues).

PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, cheques (£) to "Solidarity".
Or make £ or euro payments at workersliberty.org/solidarity

WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG

Name

Address.....

Organisation

SUBSCRIBE TO SOLIDARITY