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
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 120 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 in poverty.

Nearly half of Yemen’s rapidly growing population of 23 million is under 15 (UN figures). Life expectancy is 65 years; literacy rates are 35% for women.

Yemen’s meagre oil reserves will be exhausted by 2017, as will the aquifers which provide 60% of their water.

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

More likely, intervention will make matters worse. Instead, 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 HAMLTONS

Lutfur Rahman is no socialist

By Matthew Thompson

The coalition’s announcement in last month’s Comprehensive Spending Review of cuts to social security benefit was met with planned job losses of 15,000 in the Department for Work and Pensions over the next two years, reports the clearest act 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.

The rationale behind these changes to retirement age and the benefits that support them is that “everyone is living longer” — and the fact that even those who live longer may not be capable of working till 70, as the previous government 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 purpose of this review is not to save money; it is to make it even more of a political project to ensure that the “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 70.

Taken together with attacks on inac- pacity and disability benefits, the choice for many working-class people in the future if the Tories and Lib Dems get their way will either to work on 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.

Mass protests in France over similar plans to increase the retirement age have highlighted yet again the lack of consultation and lack of public support for this measure.

When TV show host Paul O’Grady can show more anger at the cuts to welfare than any other programme than the TUC does, it shows the glaring need for leadership.

Action needed on welfare cuts

By Matthew Thompson

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Mass protests in France over similar plans to increase the retirement age have highlighted yet again the lack of consultation and lack of public support for this measure.

When TV show host Paul O’Grady can show more anger at the cuts to welfare than any other programme than the TUC does, it shows the glaring need for leadership.
B enefit cuts over the next 4 years: £58 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 £138 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 governmen
t debt by making the other cuts.

Huge sums, with a huge impact. The personnel managers’ group CIFF estimates that the cuts will chase 25,000 jobs in the public sector and £100,000 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 report-
ed half-year profits totalling £15 billion.

Cutting 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 £67 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 725,000 jobs in the public sector and 900,000 in the private sector will be lost.
Network rail deal

A lesson in how not to lead a dispute

By Pat Murphy, National Union of Teachers Executive (Persons-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.

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 spending cuts. Many of these grants are ending and as local authorities are required to make cuts jobs are threatened. On 15 October the Times Educational Supplement (TES) reported that nearly 80% of local authorities were planning cuts to their education budgets.

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 by 2.25% by 2014.

It is now clear that the pupil premium is not an 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 50% of its children on free school meals to mean current spending per pupil will be cut by 2.25%.

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We cannot let this pass. 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, are following their party line and making no effective fight to prevent these cuts.

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The details of how these cuts are going to be implemented are not yet clear but we can expect them to be announced without any consultation with the affected staff or a democratic ballot. The council’s HR director, Tony Wilkins has already announced that the cuts will be implemented without any consultation with the affected staff or a democratic ballot.

This was followed by a ten month lockout 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.

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

By DUNCAN MORRISON

O n Saturday 30 October around 200 people demonstrated against the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts and, if necessary, will attend a general strike on 24 November. The SPW believe that direct action can be an effective way to resist cuts and for organise for a general strike.

Labour MPs and Local Councillors are working with the Trades Councils and the Trades Union Congress to organise a general strike.

The SPW are calling for a national demonstration on 24 November to bring pressure on Government and to organise for a general strike. The demonstration will be a springboard to escalate the campaign against fees and cuts. Students must organise for these events.

For more information contact the SPW on 07876 663 650 or www.norfolkcoalitionagainstcuts.org

NORWICH
The spirit of Robert Kett

By PAT YARKER

T here was standing room only in Norwich City council chamber 1 on November as local campaign groups and trade unionists, politicians and members of the public heard Ian Gibson, former Labour MP, summarise 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 get a national demonstration before Christmas.

She spoke about the likely effects of Norfolk County Council’s £155 million worth of cuts. Seven months of the deaf community spoke powerfully about the way cuts to their support-services would affect them.

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 concert-ed and co-ordinated nationwide industr- trial action. The next step in the campaign is a march in Norwich on 4 December.

For more information call Pat on 07876 663 650 or 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.
My Life at Work

Explotiation 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.

Four years ago I was employed by a company because of learning disabilities, for a private “not for profit” company. I provide one-to-one support with several clients to help them live as independently 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 £6.50 an hour with a 30p over-time rate and five days’ sick pay a year! When it snowed earlier this year and the majority of local public transport was cancelled, we had to trek to our central office to do paperwork when our clients cancelled, unpaid. I work six days a week — it was like that for two weeks. We get made to feel guilty constantly. There’s a lot of “the clients will suffer” type stuff 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 an hour. If I would get an increment if I took an NVQ 2 but there is a sizeable waiting list for that. You can be a junior 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 support from the government is changing dramatically. Our company has been forced to compete with others like it, as well as local government services to people who have never even seen what an essential job they do. It’s genuinely heart-breaking.

Adult services is a disappointingly 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 institutionalised care, with 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 more secure and organised permanent employees.

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 only lead to the need to compete with other companies providing the same or similar services. Brown’s and how Cameron’s plans to create a “market place” will inevitably drive down the quality of the services provided by all agencies. Council staff are openly 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 clearly 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 finds himself an office with a 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.

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?

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

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?

There is definitely an interest in and a need to recognise and build into anti-cuts campaigns how the cuts will affect the rights and lives of women and girls. I met my partner at a Feminist Fightback event and she has continued to attend these events, and others like it, in order to challenge these cuts. I really hope that these campaigns will start to build and that our movement is able to come together and campaign together!

Conférence

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.

The central 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 socialists.

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

Like other Feminist Fightback events, the day was an accessible place to hear ideas and put the emphasis 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 type of support we’ve prevous added flexibility and a more personalised approach.

How do conditions differ for workers still employed directly by the local government when we employed and support out sourced private companies?

Local government staff have much higher pay than us. A friend of mine who is now 20 and did a modern apprentice 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 seen what an essential job they do. It’s genuinely heart-breaking.

Adult services is a disappointingly 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 institutionalised care, with 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 more secure and organised permanent employees.

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.

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The two follow up meetings

• 7–9pm Monday 22 November, Brady Arts Centre, 192-196 Hanbury Street, London E1 8HU: In, Against, (and Beyond?) the State: what are our strategies for fighting the cuts?

• 7–9pm Monday 6 December, Lucas Arms, 245a Gray’s Inn Road, London: “Women and the cuts: taking the issues into the labour and anti-cuts movement”
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 with that. 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 so inclined — we’ll sort out that sort of thing.

I hope the new Solidarity isn’t going to be like Socialist Worker — full of back-slappping 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 you’ve had a hand in is “great”…

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 tell 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 shape the broad outlook in the times we are living through. 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 role 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!

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!

We raise £2,380 in donations at AWL conference in October, and AWL members and supporters have increased their standing orders to the tune of £855 a month to cover the extra papers 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 00049444 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.

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 context where only popular struggle is real 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 rally people to the government and convince new layers of working-class people of Marxist ideas, we may face another generational defeat. The stakes are high.
The banality of imperialism

By Martin Thomas

The biggest-ever “leak” of official documents in history has filled 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 orders. Some of the reports we now know to be attempts to cover up incidents that have since — because of other whistleblowing — led to court-martials.

It is the accumulation of detail that overwhelms. For example, the reports included 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 cases of torture by Iraqi security forces between 2005 and 2009. Nothing was done about the majority of those reports. How could it be that those 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 and Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (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: iransolidarity.org.uk

WikiLeaks: wikileaks.org

Bureau of Investigative Journalism

Iraq War Logs site: wwwIRAQwarlogs.com

Support French workers

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 boasted Aziz when he was in power, or who may have hoped that “the vultures” 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 third 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 in the second half of 2011. Iyad Allawi, one of the two rivals who have been jostling to be prime minister of Iraq since its parliamentary election in March 2010, was asked by the Guardian for comment, and said:

“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.

Tariq Aziz and his friends

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Anti-Sarkozy anger still runs high

By Ed Malbay

U
nder the pressure of school holidays, the passing of the pension 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 together more than three million workers onto the streets; and continuous strikes have multiplied in the transport sector, 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 retire rise to 67, and cut back early pension provision for especially arduous jobs.

There is also a broad feeling in France, especially among workers, that Sarkozy has to go. France; the constant stream of round-ups and deportations of chasseurs d’immigrés (French for “rabbis of immigration”), the constant mention of the CPE (Crédit d’Emploi pour le Jeune), the permanent state of siege in urban areas, the continued strike action, and the inability of Sarkozy’s government to improve the situation in French education.

From 1895 until the mid-1960s the trade unions in France worked in relative isolation, and were seen as small groups of activists, rather than mass unions. This was because the French state was also small, and the national government had to function and their funding heavily on what is established by law: the facilitation of unions’ legal right to hold elections for union leaders, and to have rights guaranteed by law, which employers are obliged to give to delegés du personnel and comités d’entreprise (workplace committees), and the presence of workers’ representatives 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 federation 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 the anarchist CNT, the Trotskyist SCF, and the CGT, still led by the now-dead Communist Party (after the “socialist” change of tack by the trade union confederations in the late 1980s).

There is an extensive collection of international background articles and details for making solidarity with workers in France on the Workers’ Liberty website: http://bit.ly/sark2010

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, 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 detailed figures are available for France, striker-days in France totalled 1,421,000 and 1,533,000 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’ trade unions have found it hard to get workers to unite and consolodate, 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 Stalinist-dominated). Now, although the CGT is still the biggest confederation, there are seven or eight other national trade-union centres of some clout.

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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 délégues du personnel are between lists put up by the different union confederations.

The délégues 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, délégues 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, and not be recognised by the union. It is routine for the union confederations to call national “days of action” on workplace issues, and sometimes quite small proportional proportions of the workforce strike as a demonstration rather than to shut down the workplace, are common.

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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. There are no national (the anarchist CNT, the Trotskyist SCF, and the CGT, still led by the now-dead Communist Party (after the “socialist” change of tack by the trade union confederations in the late 1980s), or local (the “syndicat”) in a partic-ular workplace affiliated to Force Ouvrière (FO) or the CFDT may, for example, be led by activists expelled from the unions 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 this workplace?” as you might do in Britain.

SOLIDARITY
After two extremely solid mass sackings on 23 October 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 no choice but to strike an engine down 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 nonsensical tension in the Met has a firefighter holding a strike placard shouting “right lads — down table tennis bats.”

The basis 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 he expects to sack 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 Emberry said, “This strike is about standing up 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.

We ended the day in the extraordinary unity of purpose and superb organisation of Londoners ourselves. So this isn’t some-thing 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 vic-timisation and bullying from manage-ment against firefighters. Members have already had their pay docked on timeliness and bullying from management; 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.

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 back to 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 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 some-thing we’re doing lightly, but it is something we feel like we have to do.

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Solid at Tooting

BY MAGGIE BREMMER

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.

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.”

Facing a belligerent boss and a hostile media

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.”

Managers and scabs use violence

BY IIA BERKOVIC

The FBU has denounced the “shock tactics” used 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 hospi-tal 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 crashed as an engine drove over him. Given the huge police pres-ence at the Southwark picket, the scab drivers can hardly claim to have been intimidated.

Croydon firefighter Tamer Ozedmir

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 driv-ing fire engines to do so, or by physical-ly attacking strikers. FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said “An incredi-ble 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. Wednesday was 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.”

Firefighters escalate action

BY DARREN BEDFORD

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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 frontline 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 fake 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 are 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.

We also need:

**Accessibility 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 only allowed 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 set up local forums involving members all the time if management get their way.

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.

**More support for the action short of a strike**

Creatively applying tactics other than strikes is a positive step, but because these tactics are now, 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

There is a forensic heart-on-streets campaign to win London’s public transport, a showdown between management’s vision of a soulless, profit-seeking, understaffed, 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 public support. Pickets have handed out “why are we 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 issuing 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 bumbling activity in our own union; for other unions’ campaigns, it means working together.

The FBU / RMT / PCS / NUT demo on October 25 was positive. We need more actions like that, properly advertised and built, and serious discussions between our 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.

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.

Janine Booth with other RMT activists on a recent demonstration

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 are paramount.

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@tottenhamworld.com
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.”

“Role models desperately need role models—and what the media gives them are hesiters, 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 Heistress, that is.

Actually, Thatcher was a millionaire heistress, in keeping with a long Tory tradition. The current Tory Cabinet is made up of extremely wealthy, privileged scum buns 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 of showing us the ‘rich, overfed, self-serving, greedy class of leeches who sit on the top a good job from the point of view of the rich, overfed, self-serving, greedy class of leeches who sit on the top)

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

Gita Sahgal

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.

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, Moazam Beg and his “CAGEprosperous” organisation). Sahgal began her talk with excerpts from a document 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 severed diplomatic relations. 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 unacceptable to 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 attempt 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.

British Islamists who called for an extension of the blasphemy laws and for Satanic Verses to be banned included Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami members who had migrated to Britain. The Islamiau campagin against Satanic Verses also gave rise to the later emergence of the Islamic 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 standing up 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 fight the war against capitalism”. But 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 the communities, and a willingness to accommodate to their demands.

Both Labour and Tory MPs, for example, put their names to a Bill which provided for the introduction of the blasphemy laws to cover Islam as well as Christianity. (By contrast, the late socialist Labour MP Eric Heffer was shown to have a readiness by politicians to accept the Islamist leaders as genuine representatives of the communities, and a willingness to accommodate to their demands. Both Labour and Tory MPs, for example, put their names to a Bill which provided for the introduction of the blasphemy laws to cover Islam as well as Christianity. (By contrast, the late socialist Labour MP Eric Heffer was shown to have)

Thatcher’s not our role model!

Jean Lane

Without a battle against women’s oppression, there can be no New Deal for the Third World. The New Deal for the Third World is the end of poverty. Without a battle against women’s oppression, there can be no New Deal for the Third World. The New Deal for the Third World is the end of poverty.
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 site (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 homewrecks of the girls on the Harvard campus. He got their photos through incredibly complicated hacking skills.

The next creation generated so much traffic (22,000 hits) that the Harvard server crashed. Zuckerberg explained that young men were attracted to it because they—women they knew—not strangers, but girls they knew. It had more grip than sites like “hotornot.com”.

“Facemash” earned Zuckerberg notoriety and started the chain of events which led to betrayal, losing a friend, other personal vilification—and becoming a billionaire.

After “Facemash”, he was approached by Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss (Arnie Hammer) who controlled the prestigious “Polorian 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 W inklevosses 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 about 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.

Stan Cooke reviews “Carlos” (directed by Olivier Assayas)

If you’ve ever thought of a career as an international 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 patriotism with guerrilla means is romantic but doomed to failure. More desperate causes. They lead nowhere.

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 eventualy 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 been in the cause of Carlos.

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, lane can be tree and fire, the Old Man said. Soon Koba spits his stubborn grey old head, Pulled by the weighted years back to die, when peasants danced to their heart-ripping lie. Time tells, Time won’t be made to multiply. As Russian grass, clean, green below blue sky, soon koba split his stubborn grey old head, Pulled by the weighted years back to die. Life can be free and fine, the Old Man said: As Russian grass, clean, green below blue sky, to where the king-priest Moctezuma bled; From a future he dared try to fructify Soon Koba split his stubborn grey old head, Pulled by the weighted years back to die, From the place, and KG B chief Yuri Andropov puts in a cameo appearance.

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Leon Trotsky died 70 years ago

S. M.
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, H&M go so far as to argue that is 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 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 on the possibilities inherent in M-theory. Design is ruled out by the very structure of the laws. What is not forbidden is design! Furthermore, our observations of the universe 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 observed laws. These depend on how the extra dimensions are ‘rolled up’ and what happens to strings or membranes in the process.”

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 have 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 bars on a screen, to produce two vertical bars on a screen, to a wave 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 commonplace explanation was however shown to be inadequate, not least by the proof by Einstein that light could act as both particles and waves. The photon was a particle strictly with wave behaviour.

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 but not both, and the probabilities interfered with each other resulting in the detection of the photon at a particular place.

Theory predicted that there 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 electrons interfere with themselves (this experiment was voted the most beautiful experiment in physics in 2001).

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

If, like me, you’re going “What?”, you’re in distinct company. Feynman himself said “I think I can only 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 to the future to have 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 obeyes 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 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 explained, the gravitational force still needs to be integrated into the picture. This what M-theory, incorporating string theory and supergravity, seeks to do. One of the projections 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.

WHERE WE STAND

The Alliance for Workers’ Rights: *Join the struggle to build solidarity, unionism and National democracy*

Solidarity}

TODAY one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which shaped by the capitalists’ relentless drive to increase its profit margin. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, illness and environmental destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalist class, the working class has one weapon: solidarity. Working-class communities, we can point to cuts in spending on health, education and housing, which in turn could mean cuts in education and careers. We can point to cuts in spending on health, education and housing, which in turn could mean cuts in education and careers. The Alliance for Workers’ Rights (AWR), with the support of the Workers’ Unity and Action, is entirely committed to building a strong, united working-class movement and to the development of solidarity across the class divide.

We stand for:

- **Solidarity:** independent working-class representation in politics, supporting workers’ struggles, promoting work-place, community, and social services.
- **Unionism:** helping organise rank-and-file groups.
- **Democracy at every level of society:** from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- **Working-class solidarity in international action:** equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predict.
- **Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.**

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

Where do we exist?

Sport? Only for middle-class kids

By Clárke 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 VST/Sports Council says the Schools Sports Partnerships programmes with Department for Education funding — programmes which have proved to be so popular, allowed many working-class children to participate, there are no other programmes to be replaced. Youngsters from working-class backgrounds who have never been able to play 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.

Unions, supporting workers’ struggles, producing workplace place, 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’ movement 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 working-class rights.
  - 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 action.
- Equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predation.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity leaflet, 020 7207 3997 / awr@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

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### Jobs for the girls

By JORDAN SAVAGE

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 recognize: 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.

Within that, their feminism is, essentially, avaricious. 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 this is why they are so well-favoured within the Tea Party. They fundamentally believe in the right of the capitalist class to rule, and that the market is right.

Within that, their feminism is, essentially, avaricious. 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 this is why they are so well-favoured within the Tea Party.

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### Extend the deficit?

No: tax the rich!

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 bail-out.

It is, of course, true, that revenues taxed to support state purchases are lost to the accumulation process.

But there is something far more menacing to capitalist expansion which is fostering within the very anatomy of the private sector. The financialization of capitalism — at least in the US, Britain and much of Western Europe — has been capital’s drive to free itself from the perils of industrial production.

Instead of recyling 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.

Securitized mortgages; 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 unabashed.

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The viewpoint of Tea Party women is not different from those of their menfolk — but it might help to launch a few women’s political careers.
The poverty of “anti-imperialism” and today’s left

SEAN MATGAMNA CONTINUES A SERIES

SOCIALISM IN DISARRAY, PART FOUR

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

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 defeated embodiment of a still developing and expanding albeit distorted proletarian world revolution, and by the people that had lived through the “age of wars and revolutions”. It persisted despite capitalist revival and prosperity in the most advanced countries, and fast capitalist development in the periphery.

Long before the fall of European Stalinism, and Francisco Franco's regime, the thesis was, 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, as it came to be called, that when world capitalism became ripe for socialism, thereafter everything capital 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 which we have to do with are the offspring of Marx and Engels and their school of politics. They have largely been lost by the world left.

The world would be Marxist if we did not have the self-defeating and self-defeats of the Stalinist states with their systems of Leninism and Trotskyism.

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 of God you give! Don’t dream, don’t scheme, don’t rebel! For, warn the ideologicals — and the old Labour 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, is no longer relevant, the nervous Bolsheviks, was only infant Stalinism. The anti-Stalinist Bolsheviks were fighting against their own 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! Let aspects of the post-Stalinist left, for instance the accommodation of the kitch-left to Islamist terrorism, have been as if designed to prove the bourgeois ideologues’ point.

2. UTOPIANISM STILL CENTRAL

But the world working class is expanding; it has, maybe, doubled in size over the last 50 years. That is, capitalism is rearranging armies of its own gravestones.

“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 rout of bourgeois triumphalism, and a continuation, indeed, increasing, accelerated, disarm and decline — political, economic, intellectual decline — of the “actually existing” left.

In so far as the bulk of the would-be left has redeemed itself, it is the last decade or so of the twentieth century. A new world, a new world, but still a world of un-purged and essentially unrecognised fundamentalism.

The post-Trotskyist movement went through its own development in the 1990s.

The twentieth century crisis of capitalism (and the failure of the left) knocked out of post-Trotskyism from the “Third Period”. The post-Trotskyists and Engels gave to capitalism. 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 “evolutionary” aspects of modern communism which we have to do with are the offspring of Marx and Engels and their school of politics. They have largely been lost by the world left.

The world would be Marxist if we did not have the self-defeating and self-defeats of the Stalinist states with their systems of Leninism and Trotskyism.

The world now is not socialist, but it is possible to begin to develop a new sort of revolutionary politics.

Socialism in Disarray supports a series of articles in the context of the collapse of the Stalinist world in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The theme of the articles is to examine the historical experience of the working-class to explore the failures of Stalinism, and to explore the potential for a new generation of revolutionary politics.

T he collapse of European Stalinism in 1989-91 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 privatisation. The social conditions have not been foreign to the conviction of the necessity of replacing capitalism with socialism, the need for a social revolution, the belief that, historically, capital-ism has outlived itself.

These conditions helped many ex-Stalinists mutiny into “anti-Soviet” advocates of bourgeois democracy and capitalism — something, all in all, better than their former Stalinist political persona. Working class democracy and revolution has continued, and often startlingly unknown, history, and of course, socialist experience.

The rise after 11 September 2001 of international 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 new left was 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 temperature of the day is today.

The 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 crisis of the would-be left today consists in the confused influence within it, in its ways of seeing the world, in the confusion of essentially unrecognised Stalinist politics, patterns, attitudes. This is true of most of those 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 prevails, and ruins it. Now, in the new era of capitalist crisis, and the new age of austerity, that Stalinist shaping threatens to make the left sterile and barren. 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.

There is not, nor can there be, such a thing as a “negative” Social-Democratic slogan that serves only to “sharpen prole-}
agony to motivate and mobilise made it of great value to apparatchiks. Trotsky once recommended the idea for its mobilising powers — he declared that falsity 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 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 II of this series.

For Marxists advanced capitalism is the irrepressible mother of our socialism. (And not a good mother to a poisonous old harridan-spider who has repeatedly eaten her own young! Or tries her best to!) Socialism has therefore been created because capitalism has rendered utterly nonsensical now that the USSR is no longer a model for all the others. We base our socialist programme on this Marxist idea of the necessary evolution of capitalist society, of its forces of production, as the irrepressible 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 the theories of their petty-bourgeois followers. They have largely been lost by the kitch Left.

B. THE ALGERIAN WAR AND OPPOSITION TO IT

The would-be left of today in the “1968 generation” and “reconstructed” by “1968” and after, there was a powerful strain of reactionary anti-imperialism. It was no accident that nothing western Maoists played such a big part in the anti-war movement. Its slogans — like “Victory to the NLF” — implied political illusions and aims which had been thoroughly satirised by Trotskyists as “that little-man!”

It became known that the MANA was putting up less much 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 IRA’s 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 orthodox Trotskyists backed the other nationalist organisation, the FLN, the eventual rulers of Algeria.

It is not only that the MANA was “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.

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 Kosovo 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 recyled their “anti-war movement” as an opposition to war with Iraq.

Now they took on the colours of the Blair party — and then, after the occupation of Iraq, of the “resistance” which they supported there, made up of Sunni supremacists, Al Qaeda, and whatever other “anti-terrorists” they could find. Now they took on the colours of the Ba’th Party — of the Neanderthal anti-Germans, like Tony Benn. They spent the war re-enacting a foolish parody of the sort of marches the Communist Party of Britain, the Socialists Workers Party, the Muslim Association of Britain and other “factions” of the British left at the start of the 21st century, rooted in the anti-war movement, campaigned in the 2004 Euro-election as “fighters for Muslims”, the SWP’s “Respect (George Galloway)” party, the long-time voice in Britain of the fascist Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, and others.

The state of the British left at the start of the 21st century was most horribly depicted in the demagogic, one-sidedly pacifist “anti-imperialism” which it deployed to build that pro-Milosevic “stop the war” movement in April-June 2004.

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 telling off a careless dustbin man, as “that little-man!”

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 anti-war movement of 2002-03 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 fascist Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq, and others.

The issue of the KOSOVO war was a turning point for the Left. 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 murderous anti-American, anti-capitalist movement.

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

The chameleonic political quick-change antics would denote utter political disorientation even without any continued on page 18
of the “anti-imperialist” extragrandeur that went with them.

E. DIFFERENT IMPERIALISMS AND DIFFERENT “ANTI-IMPERIALISMS”

There are many different sorts of imperialism, and therefore of “anti-imperialism”. The struggle, for example, between the British, French, Belgians, Dutch, and Portuguese in the 19th century. Russia waged the last of the old-style wars of colonial conquest for the decade after it invaded Afghanistan, in 1879.

That colonial imperialism has gone out of existence, as a form of the ragged, or raggedy, rulers that were the ruling classes of the 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 1879.

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In our world, “anti-imperialism” becomes a sideshow, more or less serious, to some of 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 could be interpreted, in some sense, on the need to combine anti-imperialism and the liberation movement of the European and American imperialisms with an attempt to strengthen the position of the proletariat.

The/C/NAME/A/ANTI/IMPERIALISM/AN

NAMELESS, CLASS-LESS, ANTI-IMPERIALISM, SPECIFYING ONLY WHAT IT IS AGAINST, IN EXISTING CONDITIONS A TRAP AND A SNAKE.

Despite the fact that the mouth hostility to “imperialism”, it is only as progressive as otherwise as the “anti-imperialist” forces it identifies with. Anti-imperialism is only a negative, an inwardly turned, often undeveloped, shading in politics. It is a form of chameleonism, taking on the colours of the chosen imperialist sort is, in general, regressive and reactionary. The CNLP, for example, Iraq.

We are against “anti-imperialism” as such, on the lines sketched by the Second Congress of the Comintern.

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corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not “demand” such development, we do not “support” it. We do not accept that the amalgamation of the proletariat and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-industrial time, back to an idealised Middle Ages or rule by enlightened kings.

The socialist who therefore would have looked to the idealised Middle Ages or rule by enlightened kings would have been a native of the working class today, fighting for his life and the life of his family, from being condemned to an existence. In part it was an imaginary older system they advocated — an utopia, based on idealisation of what had been the reality. The working class is too alienated to do much about it. The criticism of Thomas Carlyle, a political reactionary and imperialist, of John Ruskin, the last educational work until well into the twentieth century.

The would-be left has, by way of accommodation to “anti-capitalist” or “anti-imperialist” forces, taken over aspects of this reactionary, critical, alienated, impotent role of the reactionary socialists of the 19th century. Does it have the “ideal”? Does it have the “back-there-somewhere” reactionaristic 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 and political clergymen to put the typical world outlooks of advanced capitalism.

We do what we do from our own class position on history, as the new working class, and on what we programatically we fight for as an alternative.

Those who uphold reactionary anti-imperialism on the one hand or Stalinism on the other have been the communist parties idealisating and glorifying anti-US forces and accepting them as a viable programmatic alternative to capitalism.

For some of those who tried to build an anti-war movement in support of the Soviet regime of Stalin in the 1930s, so-called “anti-capitalism” came to mean condoning attempted genocide because it was done by a “progressive” regime opposed to imperialism.

The way that much of the left today courts and subordinates itself to that which is put “The Colonial Revolution” at the centre of the Stalinists. Right-wing social-democrats like Hugh the Trotskyist, despite its partial political disorientation, and its de facto advocacy of the continued “Balkanisation” of Europe flowed from their opposition to a central policy, indeed a principle.

“Anti to the Classes Europe — Yes to the Socialist States of Europe”, the slogan of the Trotskyist left, sounds good, but in practice it means and, in the context of anti-colonial struggles, in the context of working-class revolution, must mean, supporting the continution or re-erection of barriers between countries in Europe.

For the pioneers in this question, the Communist Parties and their sympathizers, 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 a central policy, indeed a principle.

“The Colonial Revolution” of production in a large part of the world, could not be pro- tected by Marx and Engels of early capitalism in the vision of a united socialist world.

The Stalinists, whether in the Trotskyist or the Stalinist: a “colonial revolution” did not mean any political sense higher than keeping in the “big battalions” of the pseudo-left.

Socialists and the labour movement cannot be consonant with our own historical and international experience of European war, even the wars in the immediate and short-term alternative is the old state system. Within the bourgeois moves to unification we, of course, have our own programme — working-class unity across the facing 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 the unforeseen and disastrous consequences of capitalism, 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, in the idea that an “anti-imperialist” Europe, customs union as the basis for a new Europe, set up after the Napoleonic Wars by the myriad small German states, which over decades prepared the way for the creation of the German half a century on from that unfinished revolution.

“Left” opposition to the unification originated with the Stalinist Right-wing social-democrats and Hugh Gaitskell opposed British involvement, orienting themselves to the European Free Commonwealth. The trade union bureaucracy and the Labour left followed suit, adding their own little nationalist and nationalistic reformism.

The would-be revolutionary left first adapted to mainstream trade-union and Stalinist-influenced attitudes, then moved to their own “revolutionary” version 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-rolling up of Germany, then the central slogan of the European proletariat? Would it be the dissolution of the forced European coalitions and the return of Europe to the national agreements and isolated national states? Or the restoration of tariffs, ‘national’ coinage, ‘national’ social legislation, and so forth. European imperialist”.

“The program of the European revolutionary movement would then be: The destruction of the compulsion demands for a strong and progressive Europe. 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 mean in the absence of immediate prospects of a European world order, the complete and final defeat of the capitalist “ideals”.

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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

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** BY ED MALTBY **

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Continued on page 5

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