Doctors slam Tory health plans

Fight now or lose the NHS!

How to build the political campaign, see page 5
**NEWS**

**What is the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty?**

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

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

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

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

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers’ struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups. We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers’ government, based on accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers’ charter of trade union rights: to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Nationalisation of the banks and decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression.
- Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers’ unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

**Defend Dale Farm**

Tories in Essex have voted to spend up to £8 million evicting more than 90 Traveller families from a site at Dale Farm in Crays Hill.

The decision was made by Basildon Council on 14 March at a packed meeting, despite opposition from Labour and Lib Dem councillors.

There have been legal battles over the site since the first families occupied the area in 2001. Opponents said the decision, which commits a third of the council’s annual budget, could lead to more job cuts and make children and elder-ly people homeless.

Balliffs will be allowed to clear the site after a 28-day legal order is imposed.

Police will also have to spend up to £1 million on an operation around the eviction.

**Egyptian women right to protest**

By Vicki Morris

On 8 March, International Women’s Day, a few hundred women and male supporters gathered in Cairo’s Tahrir Square to demand women’s rights.

The demo had been well publicised. Billing it as a Million Women March was over-optimistic, but the org-anisers wanted to echo the calls for a million man (person?) march during the campaign to oust Hosni Mubarak.

We are certainly should be a million person march for women’s rights in Egypt.

Egyptian women face many of the same prob-lems of women around the world and particularly in developing countries, but they have additional prob-lems peculiar to north Africa. For example, more than 90% of Egyptian women undergo Female Genital Mutilation, that is the painful and harmful “surgical” re-moval of their clitoris. That percentage is lower among younger women but de-spite legislation against it the practice is still popular in the south.

The organisers of the 8 March demonstration, in cluding a group called Women for Democracy and the Egyptian Centre for Women’s Rights, many of whom had participated in the recent revolution, made the case that Egypt’s democracy will not be complete until women enjoy equality.

However, the response to the women demonstra-tors, including from ostensibly pro-democracy demonstraters holding other protests in the Square, was shocking and disappointing.

The demonstrators found themselves in heated arguments with onlookers and, ultimately, a number of women were chased across the Square and assaulted, physically and sexually.

Women participants in the recent Egyptian uprising testified to the impor-tant role played by women then, and their sense that gender barriers came down for a while in the Square.

That, it seems, was only a temporary liberation; the sexual harassment returned to “normal” rife levels leading up to the celebration of Mubarak’s departure (CBS journalist Lara Logan suffered a sus-tained sexual and physical assault in Tahrir Square that night). The events on 8 March show that more gains for women be hard won.

Participants have been soul searching to work out “what they did wrong” so that they can do it better till they could be sure of larger numbers for the protest? Were they working to engage in argu-ments with onlookers? Will they be perceived as op-portunistically raising “mi-nority” demands that risk splitting the democratic movement at a criti-cal time? Crucially, were some of their demands “provocative”?

Women for Democracy raised two key demands:

- Egypt’s constitution should be secular.
- It would be possible for a woman to become president.

These two demands seem to have particularly been offen-sive to the hos-tile crowd. But they are entirely reasonable de-mands, and, moreover, Egyptians need to fight for the democratic space where such demands can be raised.

The demands were also timely. On 14 March Egyp-tans are being asked to vote on constitutional amendments hastily drawn up by the military regime now in power. Across the political spectr-um, many observers say they should be rejected (the Muslim Brother-hood is supporting them).

The idea that a whole is currently sus-pended in legal am-bdment. Democ-rats are calling for the removal of the Section which cites sharia law as a basis for the constitution, quite apart from other considerations. Islamic law should not be the law for a law in a country where Coptic Chris-tians are around 10% of the population.

While having a woman president is not the key de-mand in gaining women’s liberation, the proposed constitutional amendments are also objectionable in that they are so worded as to make it clear that the president is assumed al-ways to be a man.

This result, coming right after a magnificent democratic revolution in which women played a full part, is a potent sym-bol of women’s inferior status in Egyptian soci-ety.

- Egyptian Center for Women’s Rights
- www.egyptworker solidarity.org

**Student election battles**

Student union elections are currently taking place at universities across the country. Following the wave of student activism last winter, there have been more than 100 more left slates of can-didates, organised by students and activists, though the cooling of the political temperature has meant relatively few victories.

There have been some bright spots, many, many in London, such as the left’s victory at traditionally conser-vative Royal Holloway, and a decisive takeover of UCU Union by the left after two years of building a powerful anti-cuts base. In many universities where left candidates did not win, they received a strong vote. Results are not yet in for University of London Union, where left leader Clare Solomon is standing for re-election as president, but faces a strong right-wing challenge.

Workers’ Liberty mem-bers led the left/anti-cuts slate at Hull University, and we are also backing as sabatical officers at Leeds, City Westminster and Liverpool. Liverpool University AWL’s Bob Sut-ton told us at a packed meet-ing:

“The response has been overwhelmingly positive. A lot of students didn’t re- alise the Guild played no role in the protests and walkouts last year, it didn’t even meet to discuss our response to the Browne Re- view. People understand a lot more could have been possible if our union had worked to build and gen-erate activism. Students are also very bothered about what cuts will mean for their courses and teach-ing, and want a strong re- sponse to that.”

“Beyond that we’re rais-ing bigger questions such as are the cuts really neces-sary, and putting free edu-cation back on the agenda.”

One of our best cam-paigners got involved after getting a leaflet. His mum’s been messed around by the NHS over getting funding for her treatment, and it’s affected his studies, so the anti-cuts message really hit home with him.

“There are big job cuts planned at Liverpool Hope. The unions are bal-ling for action and a morrow [16 March], when we rally outside the Liver-pool University senate to oppose a rise in fees, we’ll have a student comrade from Hope speaking.

“Our UCU branch will be supporting too, and we’re mobilising stu-dents to support their national in over jobs and pensions next week.”

**AWL news**

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2 SOLIDARITY
Martin Thomas spoke to Fahla Alwan (FWCU), Toma Hamid (WCUI) and Mansour Razaghi (Construction, number of unemployed injured in Samara, and another one was in – was injured by a bullet, after that they started around 15,000 attended. It was a very rough environment between the Sunni Muslim police and protesters attemped to shoot with tear gas and that in Baghdad — but they are trying to create a new model of the relations between the police and protesters. They want a system of the enterprise — to organize the public sector. They are very radical. Some of the demands say: “security and safety benefits and to call for freedom to organise.” There is a demonstration of university cleaners in Baghdad for higher wages. There was a new model of the workers’ movement after the 25 February protest. The FWCU and others created a model of mass’ councils. They divided the city into 15 quars to be represented by delegates. These councils pressure the government and the authorities, the occupations. This is the first time workers in the public sector have called for higher wages and the right to organise. TH: A lot of new “committees of mass protest” are established — mainly in Baghdad — but they are trying to establish broad-based demands in the factories and organisations workers’ activities inside their workplace and factories. TH: They are split. We don’t know how to overcome repression. We talked about continuing the workers’ struggles inside the factories and organisations workers’ activities inside their workplace and factories. They have strategies for people’s neighbourhoods, factories and universities to continue the struggle. In Iraq the armed forces are more like a militia impede by the government, in co-ordination with the occupation. It is not an institution, so the Iraqi army is ready to attack the people. TH: The army is split along sectarian lines and other alliances. In Arbil, for example, they are more pro-Awakening Front or in Baghdad some are in favour of Maliki and other sections are under the influence of Moqtada al-Sadr.

By Mark Oborn

Last weekend, in Yemen’s capital Sana’a, political attacked opposition demonstrations with tear gas and live rounds, killing several and bringing millions of deaths during the recent round of protests to more than 30.

Islamists seem to be increasingly visible in the previously non-party and mainly secular opposition movement in Yemen. A radical cleric — once an ally of the president — Abdul Majid al-Mohad, has joined the protests. He is calling for an Islamic caliphate. Elsewhere in Yemen various current, with differing programmes, content with the weak central government. In the south a secessionist movement is strong, and the north is suffering conflict that open breaks out open war. Yemen’s president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in power for 32 years, is increasingly isolated and desperate. A well-used tactic is to blame ‘Wests’ and the West for interfering in Yemen’s affairs. On 1 March Saleh told an audience at Sana’a university, “There is no operations room in Tel Aviv that aims to destabilise the Arab world,” adding, “It is all controlled by the White House.” Saleh failed to re- mind the audience that he received $300m of American aid last year. Ten members of parlia- ment from the ruling party have resigned. Some key advisers have announced their support for the anti-Saleh movement. In February the opposition coalition rejected the president’s offer of a unity government and decided to join the protests instead. However, if Saleh does resign, it is not clear that what comes after will be better.

By Hosein Ismail

When our last issue went to press, there was spec- ulation about a comeback in the battle over union rights taking place in the US state of Wis- consin, allowing Republi- can governor Scott Walker to push through cuts in exchange for abandoning his attack on collective bargaining. This would have been logical for the ruling class “remove organised labour from the fight in order to conspire the rest of the working class”, as the US socialist, Solidarity’s Wisconsin blogger put it. Instead, on 9 March, Re- publican legislators split the “Budget Repair Bill”, removing key elements so as to avoid the quorum which Democratic lawmakers need to break by fleeing to Illinois. The union-bashing measures passed on a roll- ing to a revival of protests. Almost instantly, thou- sands of workers and suppor- ters besieged the state Capitol, a major contributor to Walker’s election cam- paign, forcing it to close for a day. School students organ- ised walkouts. And on 13 March, 100,000 people protested in Madison. Workers were joined by hundreds of students march- ing in on their tractors. It is, of course, much harder to remove than to prevent it passing. The anti-union “Budget Repair Bill” effects on 25 March, the warn- er is that the movement will now ebb away. Many union officials are trying to shift the emphasis onto an electoral fight to recall Republican legisla- tors and Walker himself from office. This is plausible, but since they are now dra- matic for the ruling class it means demobilising the di- rect action struggle, and re- newing the business-dominated De- mocrats, who not certain to repeal all of Walker’s attacks even if they lose the election. At the other end of the spectrum, US socialists report that there is a widespread “buzz around the idea of a general strike to force the re- peal of the anti-union laws” passage of a trade of a trades council has voted to prepare for a general strike. “General strike” is what pro- testers mean when they reified the Capi- talist
Eric Lee

Later this month I’ve been invited to debate some of the leading figures from the new media in the English language in the media revolutions taking place in Middle East.

The organisers are calling it “Activism vs Slacktivism” and, no, I don’t understand what that means either. But I do know the organisations that will be up on the podium with me — including Amnesty International and Oxfam.

I was invited because I’d written something in the Guardian recently challenging the idea that what happened in Egypt could be called “the Twitter revolution”. What I actually wrote was this: “While the media has reported on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook as revolutionary methods of mobilisation, it was the old-fashioned working class that enabled the pro-democracy movements to flourish.”

Apparently I am now seen as something of a techno-skeptic. It’s an interesting position to be in as for so many years I was regarded by the socialist and anti-imperialist movement as an internet evangelist. And yet my position on these issues has not changed.

In preparation for the debate I’ve been thinking about contributing a paragraph summarising my view. This forced me to think about things and to boil down my thoughts to just a few sentences.

And here’s the core of what I said: “Social media are like the horse that Paul Revere rode the night the American revolution began. Without a fast and a robust horse, Revere could never have sparked the rebellion. What we remember about that night in 1775 is not how effective the horse was at its job, but the messenger — Revere himself — and the message that he carried.”

We don’t mention the horses anymore but also if we discharge our responsibility for the society we inhabit, we are responsible for the effects of those decisions. This is often the work of journalists and politicians who really don’t have a clue what they are talking about.

For those of us who actually engage in politics, who don’t just observe but know a thing or two about how to mobilise people, all this talk about “a Twitter revolution” is true that having cheap and reliable and incredibly fast communications is a real asset to a revolution that is taking place. But what we are seeing now in parts of the media is a falsification of those tools. This is often the work of journalists and pundits who really don’t have a clue what they are talking about.

How Twitter is like a horse

A debate from the AWL website

Chris Reynolds’ on intervention in Libya (Solidarity 3/16/11) is one of those strange articles that the AWL produces due to a confused position on imperialism.

Imperialist powers, like Britain, are pushing for a no-fly zone in an effort to contain Libya’stras. As socialists we should oppose this. We should support the Libyan rebels and working class of Benghazi and Tripoli in opposing Qaddafi. An imperialist imposed no-fly zone would certainly not be in the interests of the Libyan revolution or freedom for Libya’s workers and poor — it would help an elite rule on behalf of imperialism.

On the one hand [the article] argues that US or UK intervention deserves no positive support. But then it asks is it our job to oppose it and answers — no. Well, actually, yes! We should be for the arming of Libyan rebels, including surface to air missiles but not to any imperialist troops, planes or weapons under imperialist control.

Jason

And who would hand over surface to air missiles to the [Libyan rebels] except armies under imperialist control?

The “libyan revolution thinks increasingly” that a no-fly zone would follow. In that circumstance it would be important to assist the Libyan revolution.

It is important to build solidarity with the left and organised workers in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia.

Without a much more organised workers’ movement there is not much the left here can do. However, there are people, Libyan exiles, going to Libya going to free Bengazi. We can continue to demonstrate on the anti-Qaddafi demonstrations and we can make sure that any stop the war protests, or at least [a contingent is clearly in solidarity with the Libyan revolution. That would be the way to do it we don’t go on the demonstrations — are the AWL comrades suggest getting into the streets, not getting into the confrontations?

It is perfectly understandable that Libyan rebels who are being bombed by Qadafai ask for help in taking out his planes. They are right to do so. The important point is to demonstrate not only in solidarity with the Libyan rebels not imperialism. You say this is unrealistic. Maybe so. But there our large demonstrations on the streets would be to say, “Hands off the Libyan revolution! Imperialist troops out of Libya!”

Clive

Should we be organising, or supporting, or telling other people to attend, protests like Stop the War’s which are focused on “no-fly zone intervention.” They could be used to demonstrate themselves that they would not, if they succeeded, be stranding the Libyan rebels without a hope. But that’s self-defeating now isn’t it?

(The peculiar twist to it is that what’s actually happening is that imperialism is not intervening to stop Qadafi.)

There simply isn’t much we can do. But one thing we can do is not make it our sole point of principle to denounce imperialism for doing things we’re actually not doing anyway.

And we can build solidarity with the left and the workers’ movement in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere, to try to limit the terrible consequences of a Qadafi victory.

Clive

Eric Lee

I was invited because I’d written something in the BBC to feature it “regularly as a matter of course in broadcast newspaper reviews”.

All the Labour MPs have endorsed the motion. So has Caroline Lucas, plus some Lib-Dems, Plaid Cymru and other nationalists. In a letter to the Morning Star (9 Febru- ary) Keith Flett, writing as president of Haringey TUC, re- ferred to the paper as “our paper”.

The Morning Starnbsp; newspaper should be consigned to the museum of British socialism. It remains a rag bag of MPs, greens, nationalists and Stalinists.

The houses of Parliament is entertaining a motion pro- moted by the last relics of Stalinism. Early Day Motion 1334 currently has 68 MPs signatures. It notes that the Morn- ing Star is apparently “the only socialist daily newspaper in the English language worldwide” with “strong links with the trade union movement”. The motion “welcomes the dif- ferent light it shines on news and current affairs that of other daily”s and calls on the BBC to feature it “regularly as a matter of course in broadcast newspaper reviews”.

The whole point of being socialists is to be within the working class for ideas. [That] struggle whilst not promising any quick fixes is not insignificant or forlorn.

The web, email, social networks, text messages, mic- roblogging are all tools. They are great tools — but like Paul Revere’s stead, they are only tools. Revolutions can succeed without them, and revolutions can fail even when these tools are widely available

• Debatedetails: http://fairsay.com/debate

Jason

There are times when it makes sense to mobilise against imperialist invasion even though the immediate effect may not be as successful as we would like.

But were we right to participate in the anti-war movement, with our own anti-Saddam slogans, nonetheless, be- cause we gained a valuable possibility of a movement of the Iraqi people themselves against the dictator, and stop- ping the war which didn’t mean mass-murder; and be- cause the war which was about to happen was one of full-scale invasion and occupation of Iraq.

If we was there the table now was another full-scale inva- sion and occupation we would be right to oppose it again. But now the most important thing that we should do is not to support any kind of military intervention.

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“Stealth privatisation.” A “plan to dismantle the health service.” That is what Lib Dem peer and long ago Labour minister Shirley Williams, calls Tory Minister Lansley’s “health reforms” to “rebuild NHS and create National Health Insurance.”

The Chairman of the British Medical Association has publicly denounced Tory plans for the NHS. On 15 March a 600-strong assembly of doctors voted unanimously to reject them and called on the Coalition government to withdraw it. Minister Lansley that the Tory-Lib Dem Coalition is out to finish what Margaret Thatcher began in the 1980s — dismantling the NHS. Lansley plans to lift the cap on private beds in NHS hospitals. He is encouraging non-NHS “providers” to muscle in on the action, and cut off the cream of the state-funded private providers. This Bill is an enormous step towards something more like the unfair and murderous incompetent American system of “healthcare-for-profit companies.”

But the issue goes much deeper than the question of political democracy. It raises the question of human equality. At the most basic level.

Healthcare, by definition, is a matter of life and death. Inequality in healthcare is inequality in the right to live and stay alive, in health for as long as possible.

The then Labour government set up the NHS 63 years ago. The reform socialist Nye Bevan, who set it up, wanted it to guarantee universal, equal, state-of-the-art healthcare to every citizen, free to the user.

The Coalition is, deliberately and cold-bloodedly, albeit stealthily, trying to replace that system with a system of market-regulated healthcare — in which life and quality of life are things money, and only money, can buy. In which the lack of money condemns the sick to stark inequality — to lack of access to the best medical underpinning of life and quality of life.

It is a brutal assertion and underpinning of inequality. It is an attempt to re impose market-regulated inequality in an area where the Labour government, in the original NHS, the right to healthcare irrespective of inequalities in wealth. To reassert the privileges of money. Of the raw penalties inflicted on those who do not in a market-regulated society have enough money to pay. In this case to pay to stay alive and to stay healthy. And at the most fundamental level.

That orages the feelings and beliefs of most people in Britain. On that level, even the Tories profess in general to believe in equality, and “equality of opportunity”. So, of course, and most strongly, do the Lib Dem-Tories who make this Coalition government possible.

That is why they are going about it by “stealth privatisation”. They know they will not get away with it, if there is sharp, stark, public awareness of what they are trying to do. That is why if the labour movement spearheads and or — unless they organise resistance — resistance, refusing to go along, not just taking protest in mere words — we can mobilise a sizeable majority of the public, including forces and groups normally way beyond the reach of the labour movement. Trade union action — occupations against closures of hospitals or parts of hospitals; Labour-controlled councils refusing to cut; strikes — can be such a spearhead.

The problem of the labour movement, faced now with the urgent need to resist the Tory drive to privatisate the health service, is in the first place, a political problem. This Tory-led government is, obviously, politically: it concerns itself with the overall running of society and with administering it. So too any challenge to their right to do what the health Bill proposes to do. We need an alternative government.

Plainly we need a workers’ government. A government by and on behalf of the working class and the broader category of working people in Britain. A government that looks out for its own people, serves them, strikes at their enemies — what this government of millionaires is doing for its own, for the capitalist ruling class.

The Labour Party is right now the labour movement’s alternative to rule by the big and little Tory parties. We need a workers’ government, and in situ alternative to the current government is a government of the Labour Party, only six months out of office! That is the measure of our political problems in opposing, defeating and replacing the Cameron-Clegg government.

We must fight back despite that. In the course of the fight back socialists must work to renew the labour movement.

Japan and the nuclear debate

With maybe tens of thousands dead and with more aftershocks and even another earthquake to come it is hard to imagine how Japanese people can rebuild their lives. If readers know of, or have ideas for, concrete labour movement solidarity please let us know.

The earthquake and subsequent explosions at the Fukushima nuclear power plant have prompted a debate about the safety of nuclear power. That is all good.

There should be no going back to “business as usual” with nuclear power. The terrible events in Japan have raised serious questions about how nuclear power is run under capitalism. For instance, should nuclear power stations be built in earthquake prone areas? Japanese plants were said to be earthquake resistant. They turned out not to be.

Why have the Japanese authorities evacuated people within a 12 mile radius of Fukushima if, as they say, there is no serious prospect of serious radiation leak? It may be down to reasonable precautions but there needs be absolute transparency about such decisions. This is people’s lives and health.

But Milliband’s Labour Party, even though it is the only alternative which the labour movement has for now, remains a lambentable and unsatisfactory alternative. Rooted in the past, and perfectly justified by the experience of the New Labour governments, many socialists chafe on such a “centre-left” disdain of the Labour Party is one of the great assets the Labour leaders have in this situation. It is a great weakness of the would-be left.

Only large-scale, mass working-class action can defeat this government. And socialists are always concerned with the mass movement of the working class, no matter what level it is at on a given moment. We cannot in the short term go out and build a better labour movement. We have to relate to the one we’ve got.

We should not wait on such a restoration but take every action possible to us now. The trade unions, with their seven million members, have the strength to smash “stealth privatisation”. We can bring down this filthy government by millionaires on behalf of millionaires! We can fight back to reassert the rights of the working class. Leaders won’t lead then the rank and file must. Time is short. We can organise to fight back on the leaders. If the leaders won’t lead then the rank and file must lead.

We must campaign in the unions for an urgent move to restore the old Labour Party, as a necessary part oforganising resistance to the vandal Coalition.

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The Paris Commune came out of the Franco-Prussian war (July 1870–January 1871). After the defeat of the French forces by the Prussian army at Sedan on 1 September 1870 the French Emperor, Napoleon III resigned and a Republic was set up after mass demonstrations in Paris, calling for the Third Republic.

With the Prussians marching upon Paris, a newly established “Government of National Defence” was organised. On 20 September 1870, the Prussians began a siege of Paris which would last for four months. When, in October, the French government began negotiations with the Prussians, the Parisian workers rose up and established a revolutionary government which was suppressed a month later. At the end of January 1871 Paris was surrendered to the Prussians. But the population remained armed and only a small section of the capital was actually surrendered. On 8 February rigged elections to a National Assembly were held. The Assembly was meant to ratify the terms of “peace.”

A small section of the capital was actually surrendered. On 26 March and a Paris Commune was proclaimed, taking over from the Central Committee. The Commune was to be both the legislature (law maker) and executive, responsible for carrying out the new laws. The majority of representatives were working class and were socialists of one sort or another — inscriptionally left Republicans who were followers of Louis Auguste Blanqui; as well as members of the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) who in France were mainly influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and many were (out of line with Proudhon’s views) trade unionists. A small number of bourgeois Liberals and Radicals were also elected. One of the first acts of the Commune was to grant a complete release from all rent from October, 1870, to July, 1871. There were to be many other acts in the interests of proletarian Paris. But there was never one clear manifesto.

Meanwhile the Assembly consolidated its army, strengthened by several regiments of released prisoners of war from Germany. By the end of March all the “moderate” members of the Commune had resigned and the “respectable” population had left Paris. On 1 April Thiers officially declared war on Paris. His attacks were on the people of Paris, not on the Paris Commune, for the Paris Communards were as much “clerical and monarchical” as any other socialist or anarchist.

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The “Nationale Assembly”, with Adolphe Thiers as the chief executive — scared of the revolutionary mood in Paris wanted to overthrow the Republic and disarm the armed workers. He depose Paris as capital of France and transferred the government to Versailles.

Meanwhile in Paris a Central Committee of the National Guard was created — to resist reaction. On 18 March Thiers attempted to disarm Paris and sent the regular army into the city. After fraternisation with Paris workers, led by working-class women, they refused to carry out their orders. Elections were held on 26 March and a Paris Commune was proclaimed, taking over from the Central Committee. The Commune was to be both the legislature (law maker) and executive, responsible for carrying out the new laws. The majority of representatives were working class and were socialists of one sort or another — inscriptionally left Republicans who were followers of Louis Auguste Blanqui; as well as members of the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) who in France were mainly influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and many were (out of line with Proudhon’s views) trade unionists. A small number of bourgeois Liberals and Radicals were also elected. One of the first acts of the Commune was to grant a complete release from all rent from October, 1870, to July, 1871. There were to be many other acts in the interests of proletarian Paris. But there was never one clear manifesto. Meanwhile the Assembly consolidated its army, strengthened by several regiments of released prisoners of war from Germany. By the end of March all the “moderate” members of the Commune had resigned and the “respectable” population had left Paris. On 1 April Thiers officially declared war on Paris. His attacks were on the people of Paris, not on the Paris Communards, for the Paris Communards were as much “clerical and monarchical” as any other socialist or anarchist.

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The women and children were swarming up the hillside in a compact mass; the artillerymen tried in vain to fight their way through the crowd, but the waves of people engulfed everything, surging over the cannon mounts, over the ammunition wagons, under the wheels, under the horses’ feet paralysing the action of the riders who spurred on their mounts in vain. The horses reared and lunged forward, their sudden movement clearing the crowd, but the space was filled at once by a backwash created by the surging multitude. Like breakers, the first rows of the crowd crash- ing on to the batteries, repeatedly flooding them with people.

The artillerymen and cavalrymen of the train were holding their own with brave determination. The cannon had been entrusted to them and they made it a point of honour to defend them.

The women especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with you! We want the cannons!” The women, especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with you! We want the cannons!” The women, especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with you! We want the cannons!” The women, especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with you! We want the cannons!” The women, especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with you! We want the cannons!” The women, especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with you! We want the cannons!”

The artillerymen could see… in the face of such resistance all advance was impossible, but still they did not falter. Soldiers who had deserted their regiments shouted at them to surrender, but they stayed in the saddle and continued to spur their horses on furiously.

A National Guardman... shouted “cut the traces”!

The crowd let out great cheers. The women closest to the cannons, to which they had been clinging for half an hour, took the knives that the men passed down. They cut through the harness.

The artillerymen found themselves cut off from their mounts... and surrounded by groups of people inviting them to fraternise.

They were offered flasks of wine and meat rolls. The cannons had been retaken. The cannons were in the hands of the people.

An extract from an eye-witness account of the events in Montmartre on 18 March, 1871. d’Esteves, La Verite sur La Commune par un acien proscit.

The 11th arrondissement was one of the most revolutionary districts. It is claimed that the Paris Communards believed the Republic needed social reform and greater control over the state by the citizens. Five of its seven candidates got elected to the Commune.

Below is the text of an election poster — a Statement of Principles of the Republican, Democratic and Socialist Central Electoral Committee of the 11th Arrondissement.

...The Revolution is the march of the peoples of the world for equal rights and duties.

In the Democratic and Social Republic this equality becomes a reality. Solidarity must reign among all men. The law must be a progressive embodiment of universal justice. The people must assert the rights and regime where this sovereignty can be exercised; therefore no majority may decide to replace it by any other form of government. If this were ever to take place it would mean no less than suicide for the people and the enslavement for future generations, along with the complete destruction of our natural, legitimate and inalienable rights which cannot be imposed or restricted: 1. The right to live; 2. Individual freedom; 3. Freedom of thought; 4. Freedom to assemble and associate; 5. Freedom of speech, of the Press and of all forms of expression; 6. Free elections.

The violation or attempted violation of any of these rights is legitimate grounds for insurrection. The Democratic and Social Republic should not and does not recognise any form of monarchy, since it delivers in the fellowship of the people of all lands as individuals.

Politics. The state is the people governing themselves through a National Assembly composed of representatives elected by universal, organised and direct suffrage and subject to removal. The people reserve the right to discuss and ratify all institutions and fundamental laws.

Work Production and Distribution. The whole system of work should be reorganised. Since the aim of life is the unlimited development of our physical, intellectual and moral capacities, property is and must only be the right of each one of us to share (to the extent of his individual contribution) in the collective fruit of labour which is the basis of social wealth.

The Nation must provide for those unable to work. Public Office (Responsibility). The officials of the republic must be responsible at every level for all their actions. All public, national and communal offices should be temporary, elective and accessible to all, subject to a test of ability. All posts are to be re-numerated.

The plurality of functions is an offence against the entire Nation or one of its members and will be subject to the severest penalties. National Defence. It is the duty of all citizens without distinction to defend the national territory. Justice and Judiciary. Justice should be available to all; it will therefore be free for both defending and prosecuting parties.

All misconduct will be punished proportionately to the extent and consequences of the damage caused.

The jury system will be instituted in all courts. Human life shall be considered inviolable, and no one shall be allowed to offend against it except in self-defence. The aim of the penal system shall be the reform of the criminal. Education. Education should be social. Secular and compulsory elementary education must be universal. Secondary and specialised education will be available to men and women citizens free of charge, on the basis of competitive and ordinary examinations.

Freedom of thought is the natural right of every individual; the various forms of worship will therefore be the entire responsibility of those who practice them. The separation of the churches and the State must be total. It is forbidden to practise any form of worship in public. Taxation. The burdened in fund voluntary fiscal system of numerous different taxes collected in a multiplicity of ways must be abolished. State revenue will be ensured by the levy of a single, progressive tax on all citizens in the form of an insurance premium. This tax will be collected at a local level and will be based on annual income. Each individual commune will control the share of the tax and will be responsible for its collection.

These are, in brief, the principles to which we are committed. We now call for the necessary reforms and political, legislative, financial and administrative measures to carry them into effect.

We look forward to a future where every citizen will exercise his rights to the full and be conscious of his duties, where there will be no more oppressors or oppressed, no class distinctions among citizens and no barriers between the peoples of different nations.

Since the family is the primary form of association, all families will join together to form greater family, the Nation, and all nations will unite in a superior, collective entity. Human-
Organising women’s work

The new movement was so unexpected and so radical that it was beyond the understanding of professional politicians, who merely saw it as an insignificant, aimless revolt.

Others have tried to belittle the spirit of the Revolution by reducing it to an idle demand for “municipal rights”, for some kind of administrative autonomy. But the people are not taken in by the lies peddled by governments, not by so-called parliamentary representation, in proclaiming the Commune they are not demanding certain municipal prerogatives but communal autonomy in its greatest sense.

To the people the Commune does not merely signify administrative autonomy; above all it represents a sovereign right of the community to create its own laws and political structure as a means to achieving the aims of the Revolution. These aims are the emancipation of labour, the end of monopolies and privileges, the abolition of the bureaucracy and of the feudalism of industrialists, speculators and capitalists, and finally of the creation of an economic order in which the reconciliation of interests and a fair system of exchange will replace the conflicts and disorders begotten by the old social order of inaction and laissez-faire.

For the people of the Commune this is the new order of equality, solidarity and liberty, the crowning of the communal revolution that Paris is proud to have instigated.

Today it is the duty of the commune to the workers who created it to take all necessary steps to achieve constructive results... Action must be taken and it must be taken fast. However, we must not resort to expedients or makeshift solutions that may sometimes be appropriate in abnormal situations, but which only create formidable problems in the long run, such as those resulting from the closure of the National workshops in 1848.

The Commune must abandon the mistaken idea of old, it must gather inspiration from the very difficulties of the situation and apply methods that will survive the circumstances that first led to their use.

We will allow factories to open through the creation of special workshops for women and trading centres where finished products may be sold.

Each arrondissement would open premises where the raw materials would be taken in and distributed to individual women workers or to groups according to their skills. Other buildings would receive the finished products for their sale and storage.

The necessary organisation for the application of this scheme would be under the control of a committee of women appointed in each municipal district.

The Commune’s Commission of Labour and Exchange could organise the distribution of raw materials to the arrondissements from a vast central building.

Finally the Finance Delegate would make a weekly credit available to the municipalities so that work for women can be organised immediately...

Paris as festival

Would you believe it? Paris is fighting and singing! Paris is about to be attacked by a ruthless and furious army and she laughs! Paris is hemmed in on all sides by trenches and fortifications, and yet there are corners within these formidable walls where people still laugh!

Paris does not only have soldiers, she has singers too. She has both cannons and violins; she makes both orsins and bombs and music. The clash of the cymbals can be heard in dread silence between rounds of firing, and merry dance airs mingle with the rattle of American machine-guns.

Paris would indeed be a strange sight for someone suddenly finding himself in the midst... At every stage he would come across some astonishing spectacle. Where he might expect to see a people in mourning, roaming grief-stricken among the empty streets and squares of their depopulated city, instead he would find them peacefully going about their affairs, bent, according to their fancy or the time of day, on either business or pleasure...

No better reply could be made to our stubborn enemies’ ceaseless cannonade than the refrain that a thousand voices intone every night in the music halls of Paris: “The people of the workers are brothers to us. Our enemies are the Versaillais.”

This is an abridged article written by the symbolist poet Villiers de l’Isle-Adam under the pseudonym Marius for the Commune paper Le Tribun du Peuple.

Seizing factories

On 16 April the Commune decreed that trade unions might take over any factories which were closed down because their owners had left Paris for the safety of the provinces during the war against Prussia.

The idea that workers’ co-operatives should replace capitalist production went back to the beginnings of the French labour movement, to the utopian socialist theorists of the 1830s; during the 1848 revolution more than 300 meetings on this subject had been held in different factories.

The co-operative idea was very common in the French section of the International. The strong anti-state element of French socialism, for example, Proudhon’s writings, and the close links between anarchism and workers' organisations, meant that the aim was not nationalisation, state control over areas of the economy, but the formation of independent producers’ co-operatives. The State in Paris now meant the Commune and it was called upon to give aid in starting up such co-operatives.

Co-operatives

The only way to reorganise labour so that the worker enjoys the product of his work is by forming free producers’ co-operatives which would run the various industries and share the profits.

These co-operatives would deliver labour from capitalist exploitation and thus enable the workers to control their own affairs. They would also facilitate urgently needed reforms in techniques of production and in the social relations of workers as follows:

a) The diversification of work within each trade to counter the harmful effects on body and mind of continually repeating the same manual operation;

b) A reduction of working hours to prevent physical exhaustion leading to loss of mental faculties;

c) The abolition of all competition between men and women workers since their interests are absolutely identical and their solidarity essential to the success of the final and universal strike of Labour against Capital.

And therefore:

1. Equal pay for equal hours worked;

2. A federation of the various sections of the trades on a local and international level to facilitate the sale and exchange of products by centralising the international interests of the producers.

The general development of the producers’ co-operatives calls for:

1. Propaganda and organisation among the working masses; every cooperative member shall therefore be expected to join the International Working Men’s Association;

2. Financial aid from the State for the setting up of these co-operatives in the form of a social loan repayable in yearly instalments at 5% interest.

We also believe that in the social order of the past women’s work has been particularly subject to exploitation and therefore urgently needs to be reorganised. ... It is to be feared that the women of Paris will relapse under the pressure of continuous hardship to the passive and more or less reactionary role that the social order of the past had cut out for them. This would endanger the revolutionary and international interests of the peoples of the world and consequently the Commune.

Taken from the Address to the Central Committee of the Women’s Union for the Defence of Paris and for Aid to the Wounded to the Commission of Labour and Exchange.

Karl Marx, 12 April 1871

...After six months of hunger and ruin, caused by internal treachery more even than by the external enemy, they rise, beneath Prussian bayonets, as if there had never been a war between France and Germany and the enemy were not at the gates of Paris! History has no like example of like greatness! If they are defeated only their “good nature” will be to blame... the present rising in Paris — even if crushed by the wolves, swine and vile curs of the old society — is the most glorious deed of our Party since the June insurrection [1848 revolution] in Paris. Compare these Parisians, storming heaven, with the slaves to heaven of the German-Prussian Holy Roman Empire.

SOLIDARITY 7

THE BURNING OF THE GUILLOTINE

Citizens,

We have been informed of the construction of a new type of guillotine that was commissioned by the odious government — one that it is easier to transport and condemn. The Sub-committee of the 11th Arrondissement has ordered the seizure of these service instruments of monarchist domination and has voted that they be destroyed once and forever. They will therefore be burned at 10 o’clock on 6 April 1871, on the Place de la Mairie, for the purification of the Arrondissement and the consecration of our new freedom.
Jean-René Chauvin carried out the battle of memory, notably in producing his book A Trotskyist in the Nazi Hell, and in underlining the numerous features shared by the system of the Nazi concentration camps with that of the Gulag.

With the death of Jean-René Chauvin, there was the departure of one of the last witnesses of a generation who embodied the possibility of victory against reaction, of remaking October, of defending France, the possibility of stepping, through socialist revolution, a new world war more murderous than the previous one.

This generation had joined Trotsky in the 1930s without having known directly the retreat of the revolution at the very heart of the Third International with the defeat of the Left Opposition in Russia in 1928. Despite its ardour, its political determination to fight capitalism, in its “democratic” variant as well as the fascist, as well as Stalinism, this generation was beaten by the Second World War even if that didn’t necessarily signify its physical death.

Jean-René Chauvin was born in 1918 shortly after the end of the war. His old father was a Guédist leader of the SFIO, section of the Workers’ International, the name of the Party Socialist (Socialist Party), from 1905 to 1970, a regular at the congress of the International before 1914, who, ways commanded by the dominant role played outside from worlds of war affairs by an isolated émigré by the name of Lenin.

Jean-René Chauvin, a Trotskyist at Berne, Jean-René sympathised with the Groupe Révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Left), a left-wing tendency in the SFIO, led by Mareau Pivert, but it was the impact of the civil war in Spain and the announcement of the August 1936 Moncloa trials which mark his Trotskyism. All his low life, he retained the air of a young man. However, his political journey of more than 75 years in the camp of revolutionary sociology saw many events that should make one old before one’s time.

Instead of the collapse of Stalinism, we saw its extension beyond the frontiers of the Soviet Union across the eastern half of Europe, with millions of deportees in the Gulag and tens of millions of people in several countries (China, North Korea, North Vietnam).

In place of a drawing, was the collapse of the working class along with the maintenance of Stalinism and capitalism, conflict in this new division of the world and in the wiping out of the workers’ movement, all the while staying simultaneously successfully hostile to each other, the Trotskyist movement after Trotsky proceeded to a self-destructive rationalisation in decreeing that there had been no defeat. On the contrary, it affirmed that there had been an untimely extension of the world revolution to the extent that one saw the appearance of armed movements fighting Western imperialism with AK-47s and other Soviet military supplies.

Jean-René Chauvin took part, with Yvan Craipeau, in the majority abusively qualified as “right-wing” which briefly led the PCI (Parti Communist Internationaliste [International Communist Party]), the French section of the Fourth International, in 1947-1948. This leadership could not resist disenchantment, despite the wave of strikes of 1947, among them the famous Renault strike. The PCI proceeded to have the upper hand for a long time, until its place was contested by May 1968.

The Craipeau tendency refused this rationalisation, learning on the dogma of “degenerated workers’ state” which decided that the period opened by 1917 had closed.

It sought to influence larger sectors, notably among the Young Socialists who at the time experienced a very promising push to the left (the career of Pierre Mauroy, now at the heart of the Socialist Party, began by the repression of this push to the left of the Young Socialists, and the exclusion of the “dangerous Trotskyists…”

The conditions at the time did not permit the “right” leadership of the PCI to hold, with a party pulled about by the challenges of the new world situation and the triumphal continuation of Stalinism. There was the debacle of, for some, the ephemeral adventure of the RDR (Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire, Revolutionary Democratic Assembly). In those years, even if political success was not on the cards, Jean-René, hardened by his bitter experience of the Nazi camps, took part in the activity of denouncing the Stalinist camps.

At the start of the 1950s, with the struggle against the Algerian war, the birth of the PSU (Parti Socialiste Unifié [United Socialist Party]), and the activities of the Revolutionary Socialist Tendency at its heart, that generation prepared May 1968.

After the PSU, it was the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) that was created, which Jean-René would participate in over several decades, would never be the legitimate heir of the POI of 1936, scattered by the test of the war, nor even of the PCI of the Liberation, weakened in 1948 before going dark in the crisis of 1957-58. Jean-René thus retained a label of independent Trotskyist despite several spells in the LCR.

In recent years, the sectarian-electoralist evolution of the LCR, now the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), symbolised by the figure of the Postman (Olivier Besancon), will always see Jean-René and some other “old Trotskyists…” remind us of the ABCs of the workers’ united front against the right and the MEDEF [Mouvement des Entreprises de France — employers’ confederation] of the French Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in the UK.

At the end of Wilebaldo Solano last September, the end of a long division of the POI to the left of the generation which had to carry the Fourth Internationale, which was founded by Trotsky for victory “within 10 years” and not just for holding out and looking on.

The idea is important— it allows us to remember and learn the lessons of past struggles; to celebrate those who fought before and see what will be necessary to achieve revolution. May Day plays a central role in this. May Day is more than maypoles and Morris dancing — it is International Workers’ Day.

The idea of a workers’ day began around the demand for the eight-hour day — Australian workers in 1856 coincided Morris dancing— it is International Workers’ Day. The idea of an eight-hour day emerged through the US, including Chicago where twelve were shut dead by police, and organisers were later arrested and sentenced to death. In 1886 the Second International named May Day International Workers’ Day. The initial demand of the eight-hour day, that of the working class of the world has won its delivery in 1978 and the Tories now intend to replace it with a non-working one.

Workers’ Day. The idea quickly spread to other countries — 1 May 1886 strikes were held throughout the US, including Chicago where twelve were shut dead by police, and organisers were later arrested and sentenced to death. In 1886 the Second International named May Day International Workers’ Day. The initial demand of the eight-hour day, that of the working class of the world has won its delivery in 1978 and the Tories now intend to replace it with a non-working one.

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Parents would send their children off in a short time. Escape from exhaustion, illness, the deadly lights for a crust of stale bread and even an assassination plan fomented by the Stalinist cadres of one camp. Jean-René Chauvin died on 27 February 2011. Thus the Bute urged by Olivier Delbeke
By Dale Street

On the “Respect” website, George Galloway tells an anecdotethat neatly sums up the politics of the man the Scottish far left has, in “Respect — George Galloway”, chosen as its standard bearer. George Galloway complainsthat people are mixing up their dictators.

“Last week at a breakfast in Dubai, an Englishman mused that of course, your pal Gaddafi ought to have got a hard time in Libya isn’t he? — though YouTube is gazingwith films of me denouncing Gaddafi over many years. Of course, he could have been getting his Arab dictators mixed up, or, worse — confusing me with Tony Blair.”

The sausage-muncher should have known that when Galloway uttered the immortal words, “Sit, I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability and I want you to know that until you victory, until you Jerusalem, it was at a meeting with Saddam Hussein, not Muammar Gaddafi.

He should have known that when Galloway wrote that a military commander who had seized power in his country in an army coup “seems an upright sort to me and should be given a chance,” he was referring to Pakistan’s General Musharraf, not Libya’s Colonel Gaddafi. He should have known that when Galloway praised a Middle East dictatorship as “the last Arab country, the fortress of the remaining dignity of the Arabs,” praised its ruler as “the last Arab ruler,” and told the victims of the dictatorship that they were “a free people,” he was speaking of Bashir’s Sudan, not Gaddafi’s Libya. (1)

He should have known that when Galloway referred to a country in the grip of a reactionary dictatorship for the past three decades as a country which “has only been a democracy for thirty years but (which) has come a long way in that thirty years,” he was referring to the Iran of the mullahs, not to Gaddafi’s Libya.

He should have known that when Galloway joked with a dictator’s son about Cuban cigars, weight loss and hair loss, and promised him, “we’re with you, till the end,” he was socialising with Uday Hussein, not Saif Gaddafi.

And, really, the sausage-muncher should have known that there are two, simple criteria in deciding whether or not a dictator is or is not a “mate” of George Galloway: “anti-imperialist struggle” and “achievements”. And what exactly is “anti-imperialist struggle”? Contrast what Galloway had to say about Gaddafi (footnote “mate”) with what he has had to say about Syrian dictator Al-Assad (“man of “dignity”) and you will understand.

Speaking in 2008, Galloway dismissed Gaddafi as “just another Arab dictator”. Why? Because he had abandoned the “anti-imperialist struggle.”

And Gaddafi has betrayed everybody and everybody.

He turned away from the justifiable struggle of the Arab people against Zionist occupation and against imperialist dominance of the region. He has lost any respect which any struggling people had for him. “Where did the money (from the sale of oil) go? Well, of course, much of it was stolen by the Gaddafi family and clave around him. Corruption was absolutely rampant and endemic. ‘Other parts of the fortune were spent on harebrained schemes and divvied up and handed round various other dictators.” (4)

“ACHIEVEMENTS”

The second criterion, the more nebulous one of “achievements”, is easiest understood by contrasting Galloway on Saddam Hussein with Galloway on Gaddafi.

In his semi-autobiography I’m Not the Only One Galloway wrote: “Just as Stalin industrialized the Soviet Union, so on a different scale Saddam plotted Iraq’s own Great Leap Forward. He is likely to have been the leader in history who came closest to creating a truly Iraqi national identity, and he developed Iraq and the living, health, social and education standards of his own people.”

Gaddafican boast of no such achievements:

“Where did the money (from the sale of oil) go? Well, of course, much of it was stolen by the Gaddafi family and clave around him. Corruption was absolutely rampant and endemic. ‘Other parts of the fortune were spent on harebrained schemes and divvied up and handed round various other dictators.” (4)

So, to put it in terms so simple that even an English sausage-muncher could understand: some dictators are truly “Arab”; truly “anti-Zionist” and truly “anti-imperialist” and can also boast of “achievements” and those are George Gaddafi’s “good dictators”. The others have sold out and have no achievements to their credit. This is a morally abhorrent exercise in nonsense which owes everything to Stalinism and nothing to socialism (or even anti-imperialism, in any meaningful sense of the word).

There was nothing “anti-imperialist” about Iraq’s invasion of Iran in 1980, its campaign of genocide against its Kurdish minority following the war against Iran, or its invasion of Kuwait in 1990. These were the actions of a sub-imperialist power, i.e. one seeking to establish regional dominance. Similarly, Syria’s support for Hezbollah and the “Palestinian resistance” has nothing to do with “anti-imperialist struggle” and everything to do with Syria’s anti-Islamic struggle and its own regional ambitions.

Galloway’s attempts to contrast Saddam’s “achievements” with Gaddafi’s lack of achievement is in terms of facts equally absurd.

Like Gaddafi, Saddam plundered the country’s wealth (where does Galloway think the money came from to pay for all his palaces?), squandered it on “harebrained schemes” (such as the invasions of Iran and Kuwait), and allowed some of it to be used to finance and, of course, reward the political activities of apologists for his dictatorship.

There is, however, a political method in Galloway’s madness. That method is Stalinism.

Appologists for the now defunct Stalinist Russia argued that there was no repression in the country. Or, if there was repression, then it was a necessary evil arising from the threat of imperialist aggression.

And Russia’s regime was “progressive” because it was modernising the country.

Galloway adopts a similar approach to the supposedly “good” Middle East dictators: they might not be democratic, but at least they pursue an anti-imperialist struggle. And they might not be egalitarian, but at least they building a modern economy.

But this distinction between the Saddam/Al-Assad variety of dictator and the Gaddafi variety is an entirely spurious one. Outside of a residual Stalinist mindset, it makes no sense at all. And from a socialist perspective it is simply repugnant.

In fact, in terms of bloodshed, slaughter, war and genocide it could easily be argued that Gaddafi’s own record, notwithstanding his own achievements in these matters, is pretty modest compared with that of Saddam.

And what about Galloway’s new Scottish partners? Privately they might agree with what I have written here, or most of it.

So what are they doing as the political bag carriers of the pro-Arab business and pro-chauvinist mouthpiece for murderous dictators and open advocate of a united Arab invasion of Israel?

4. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUVx6deEb g&feature=related
Bolshevism and democracy

The following report by Irving Howe of a debate on the record of Bolshevism is taken from the US Trotskyist Labor Action, the paper of the Workers’ Party.

In his debate between Max Shachtman of the Workers’ Party and Liston Oak, managing editor of the New Leader, Look pointed out that the New Leader was a right-wing social-democratic journal. Liston Oak had been a member of the Communist Party of America.

This debate took place on the 29th anniversary of the Russian Revolution—the first time they elaborated their own government. The principles of the great October revolution remain the principles on which the Workers’ Party stands.

LISTON OAK

Liston Oak, who spoke as a Social Democrat, began his speech with an admission that there were great differences between Leninism and Stalinism, but asserted that Lenin and Trotsky had used similar “dictatorial” methods as has Stalinism, and that the Stalinist regime was the result of “one-party dictatorship established by the Bolsheviks.”

Oak saw Bolshevism as a kind of terrorist conspiracy on the part of a small group, ruthless in fanaticism and readiness to resort to violence, and unscrupulous in the means it used to reach its ends. Though Stalin is “crueler” than Lenin, he said, they are both in the Bolshevist tradition, Stalin continuing the amoral methods of Lenin. Stalinism is the result, in Oak’s view, of the me- ingness of the Bolshevik leaders to work with or unite with any of the other socialist group sin the Russia. Having estab- lished a minority dictatorship, Oak continued, the Bolshe- viks could only resolve to terror and thereby pave the way for Stalin.

To buttress his case, Oak quoted from Social-Democrats like Kautsky and Plekhanov, who were opposed to the Bol- shevik revolution and who later like Luxemburg supported the Bolshevick revolution even though disagreeing with certain of Lenin’s tactics; and from Trotsky’s early writings at the turn of the century in which he polemicised against Lenin. Oak attacked Lenin’s conception of the party as lead- ing a conspiratorial clique of “professional revolutionists” who seek to manipulate the masses as if they were the generals of an army. The Social-Democratic or Menshevik conception of a party, on the other hand, he said, is a closely-knit demo- cratic organisation.

Oak supported the pre-Lenin policy of the Bolshevists which called for a coalition government with the bourgeois parties. (What was amusing about this, though Oak didn’t seem to notice it, was that it was Stalin — who Oak now professed to admire — who, at least, in a letter which Lenin denounced upon arriving in Russia.)

Oak then denounced the Bolshevists for ill-basing the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, though he did not mention why this was done. He denounced, further, the dissolution by the Bolshevists of the Constituent Assembly which had been elected several months before the Bolshevick Revolution and represented the pre-revolutionary senti- ments of the masses when they were still hesitant about supporting the Bolshevists.

Turning to our day, Oak rejected the conception of revolu- tion, which he believed would inevitably fall under Stal- inist control, and came out in favour of gradual reforms since he believed that capitalism still has certain progress- ible functions to fulfill.

MAX SHACHTMAN

Max Shachtman emphasised the historical background against which the debate was being held: “Capitalism is bankrupt. To support it is equivalent to the suicide of society... What is Bolshevism? Bolshevism is the planned and organized attempt to mobilize the working class to take over state power in its own interests in order to sue its political supremacy for the purpose of establishing a classless society...”

“If,” continued Shachtman, “It can be proved that Stalin- ism is the natural and inevitable product of Bolshevism then you have found the real class enemy. He who attempts to hold socialist power and that any attempt to do so can lead only to the destruction of the working class. This is because this Bolshevism is the only road to working-class power and socialism.”

Shachtman then proceeded to an historical examination of Bolshevism. The truth about it has been obscured first by the propaganda barrage by the bourgeoisie which would identify it with dictatorship and class enemy, then by the Bolshevists themselves who, in response to the overtures of the Mensheviks who also identified it with dictatorship.

He traced the origin of the Bolshevik movement in

Lein

Russia, its struggle to overthrow the Tsarist autocracy, its demand for democratic rights for the Russian masses. He differentiated Bolshevism, which placed its faith in the working class and the peasant masses, from the Mensheviks who wanted a coalition with the liberal capitalists. And he fur- ther pointed out that the actual experiences of the Russian Revolution confirmed the Bolshevist point of view, and showed it to be in harmony with the most profoundly demo- cratic aspirations of the masses — for that is why the masses turned to Lenin.

The Bolshevik Party attacked by its enemies as dictato- rial, was in reality a highly disciplined organisation for it was serious in its objective to destroy Tsarism and capital- ism, but at the same time it was the most democratic organ- isation in history, for in no other party was there such freedom and fullness of discussion, such intellectual loyalty toward scrupulous regard for the rights of minorities. Only the Stalinist debasement has missed people to identify Bol- shevism with internal party dictatorship.

“You will not find one party in modern times,” stressed Shachtman, “in which there was such free discussion, such rich and fruitful interchange of ideas... The whole internal history of Bolshevism is a history of free discussion and de- bate, not conducted in a dark corner, but openly, in the press of the party itself!” Shachtman laid particular stress on this last phrase.

“You need only read the works of Lenin,” continued Shachtman, “to see reflected there the vigorous, rich and fer- tile intellectual life, the favourable atmosphere for the de- velopment of revolutionary thought, that always prevailed in the Bolshevik party. Read these words and see if so much as a seed of Stalinism can be found in them!”

Shachtman then pointed out that on three essential touch- stones of democratic and socialist standards the Bolshevist party was unsurpassed, its attitude toward national minori- ties, its attitude toward imperialist wars, and its attitude to- ward revolutions. He noted how the Bolshevists granted freedom to Finland as soon as they acquired power and then made a devastating contrast with the behaviour of the Eng- lish Social Democrat, Arthur Henderson “who sat in the British Cabinet as Privy Councillor when the British bombed and shielded during Dublin the Easter uprising of 1916 and murdered the Irish socialist martyr James Connolly!”

Shachtman, by this time going full guns, launched into a contrast between the war records of the Bolshevists—who denounced World War One as imperialist and spread no illu- sions about it among the masses — and the war record of the Social-Democrats, each section of which supported its own imperialist rulers. “There is your road to socialism,” he turned to Oak, “To the stars through Hohenzollern and Churchill!”

Shachtman contrasted the attitudes of the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, contrasted from the Mensheviks who became belated supporters of revolution, and how Oak himself had during the civil war supported an alliance with the Stalinist totalitarianism.

“We say,” concluded Shachtman, “Stalinism grew out of Bolshevism only because the social democracy destroyed the hopes of the isolated Russian Revolution by trying to keep capitalism alive in Europe. The central lesson in the rise of Stalinism is the na- tion of Bolshevism but the abandonment of reformism and insistence on the struggle for international revolution.”

REBUTTALS

In his first rebuttal, Liston Oak stressed a few main points:

1. He argued that if the Bolshevists had formed a coalition with “the other socialist parties” they would not “have had to resort to minority violence.”

2. He quoted from documents of early opposition groups in the Bolshevist Party in the early 1920s which stressed the danger of bureaucratism in Russia.

3. Any party, he asserted, which seeks political power and identifies itself with a class, “as did the Bolshevists,” finds it necessary to suppress all opposition. “Totalitarian organi- zation leads to totalitarian society.”

4. He cited the Kronstadt rebellion against, and its sup- pression, the Bolshevist government “as evidence of the un-democratic nature of Bolshevism.”

5. He denied that the Social Democrats were responsible for the failure of the European revolution after the First World War, asserting rather that it was the Bolsheviks who split the working class movement and thereby helped per- petuate capitalism.

6. He asserted that capitalism still had a future in certain places, one of which is “the backward countries which need capital investment.”

REBUTTALS LANCES MENSHEVISK ACTIVITY

In turn, Shachtman drove home the following main points in his rebuttal:

1. The Bolshevists were not responsible for splitting the socialist movement; instead, the Social Democrats who supported their imperialist wars and put such revolutionary socialists as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Lux- emburg in jail. It was this division which split the socialist movement — this division between support of and opposi- tion to imperialist war.

2. The reasons no coalition was formed with the “other socialist parties” when the Bolshevists assumed power are: (a) the masses of followers of the Social Revolutionary Party followed its left wing which did participate in the Bol- shevik government; and (b) the masses of followers of the Social Revolutionary Party followed its left wing which did participate in the Bol- shevik government; and (c) the Mensheviks and SRs were opposed to the workers taking power and when the civil war came they supported the foreign intervention against the workers’ state.

3. The Communist Assembly was dissolved by the Bolshe- visks because it no longer represented the sentiments of the masses, having been elected before the revolutionary wave which rose to its crest in the October revolution. It gave way to the more representative Soviet of Workers’ Deputies which supported the Bolshevik government, even though convened by Mensheviks.

4. There was only one party after a while in Russia, not because the Bolshevists so desired it, but because every other party took up arms against the workers’ state. Shachtman cited detailed evidence of how the Social Democratic gov- ernment in Georgia collapsed on an appeal to Germany on June 13, 1918 and a few months later with Britain to use their troops against the Bolshevists.

5. He pointed out that Stalinism had some future and inferred whether his theory that it could help forward revolutionism was what led to the British Labour Party government’s scandalous behaviour in Greece and Palestine.

6. He concluded, with emphasis on the democratic and revolu- tionary character of Bolshevism, its loyalty to the idea of working class liberation and its lessons for our time.

Shachtman then demolished the point of view of the Stalinist totalitarianism in more general terms, constructing an abstract argument about totalitarian means and ends.
By Max Munday

The Liberal Democrats at their Spring Conference in Sheffield (11-14 March) were safe enough — both politically and physically — behind the security barriers.

The police presence was enormous at the demonstration on Saturday 12 March with around 1,000 cops and horses manning fences, a mobile metal riot wall barriers.

This — a largely passive protest of 3,500 — cost £2 million to local people to organise and to the City Council for the losses caused by the protest.

The protests this month, mostly quiet march, protests missed outside the City Hall compound and heard a multitude of speakers, including some to be heard not only by the assembled SWP members.

No one listening left without being told several times how bad the cuts were and how we hated the Government message, and how the “heard” by the Cuts are backed up by a movement that compels it to keep its minders and its Labour-link to actually defeat this attack.

The protest at the Lib Dem Conference reinforces a historic truth: the right have always known what the left thinks. It’s time to make them care.

For example, in Barnet, where Barnet Museum and Church Farmhouse Museum in Hendon are both due to have their funding axed, a competitive element has crept in to the campaigns of each. In fact, the philistine Tory council doesn’t care about either. We’ll benefit by joining our campaigns and making the general case for the value of public services.

On the TUC anti-cuts demonstration on 26 March with its inevitable flags, roving pomelons andamba bands be enough? The Anarchist Federation didn’t seem to think so and its report glorified a small group of protesters’ “bail-in” of some high street shops whilst rubbishing Trotskyists selling their paper.

So where do we stand? With the SWP and its endless speeches, chanting and exclusive focus on demonstrating and petitioning the Second World War: “This will be the first generation where parents leave behind worse social provision than the previous one.”

By an RMT member

RMT Young Members held their largest ever conference on 25-26 February.

Fifty delegates might not sound like a lot for a union of 80,000 members, 11,000 of whom are under 30. But four years ago there were just nine delegates. Young people get organised.

The conference focused on the fight against cuts. RMT General Secretary Bob Crow described the Government’s cuts as an attack on the working class of historic scale: “This will be the first generation

Lib-Dem protest: build a political campaign!

By By a young member

We can beat cuts!

RMT Young members get organised

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http://www.surveymonk e.com/s/KD9KHZC.

PETITION WARS

Where there is not a generalised working class fightback against the cuts, the users of individual services under threat can themselves campaign to counteract the policy of equally valuable services down the road by targeting the axe with the axe. The result can be petition wars.

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By a civil service union activist

John Hutton has produced his final report on the future of public sector pensions. But even before the report, according to the TUC, the value of these pensions had been reduced by 25 per cent due to a mix of negotiated changes and the government’s arbitrary switch to the Consumer Price Index as a measure of inflation.

But other Hutton recommendations will worsen the situation. The recommendation to end unbridled salary increases and increase the Normal Pension Age (NPA) for all staff to 65 will impact badly on existing and future public servants. Ultimately public sector unions have already agreed that all new entrants after 2007 would have an NPA of 60. In a Radio 4 interview Hutton thanked them for agreeing to this.

The ending of final salary schemes and their replacement with Career Average Schemes (CAS) takes us into the realm of “known unknowns”. Those staff who are not promoted or only get one or two promotions during their career could be better off with a CAS, depending on the accrual rate. That is if the NPA remained 60.

The Hutton report does recommend one good thing — that rights in relation to pension benefits accrued (learnt to be protected should be protected. Of course the Government could ignore Hutton’s recommendation or they could protect rights in a way that reduces them in practice.

ARGUMENTS

What should the unions argue and campaign for?

The key demands have to be on the change in the indexing measure (over which retired members can be mobilised as well) and increased contributions. We must insist on fairness. For a cap on the pension earnings of senior managers. The NPA must be 60 for all (35 in certain parts of the public service) and regardless of when a person joined the public sector. We are not in favour of a two-tier work force.

There has to be absolute protection for accrued benefits (subject to the cap on senior management pay-outs).

Whether future pensions be final salary or not is a matter of technical detail (for example around accrual rights) but we should be clear that the lower paid must get a better deal (in proportionate terms) than those better off.

Pensions should be progressive and multibound. This could mean guaranteed minimum pensions. Indeed, why doesn’t the government use some of the 25% drop in the value of public sector pensions to craft a better deal for those on lower incomes? We need to address equality issues as for (mainly) women who interrupt working with caring responsibilities.

The unions have to take on the argument that the country cannot afford the current level of expenditure on public sector pensions.

We have to attack the notion that people are living too long and this makes pensions "unaffordable". The unions can do this (partly) by bringing out the great variation in death rates; with those on low pay (doing repetitive work having high death rates and lower average age of death than those in better paying work.

The increases in NPA deprive many workers of (and in some cases, all of) their retirement years.

Finally we have to ally the fight for jobs and service with that for pensions.

Unaffordable?

Hutton argues that his proposals are driven by cost and affordability. This is a lie. Indeed buried in his report is the admission that the cost of public sector pensions peaked in 2010-11 at 1.9% of GDP and is expected to fall to around 1.4% by 2019-20.

Hutton repeatedly refers to pensions as a major barrier to public sector reform and private sector involvement in provision. So the real pension crisis is the lack of decent provision in the private sector.

Rather than seek to address that, by for instance levelling up private pensions to the best public sector pensions, Labour minister Hutton wants to bring public sector pensions down to a level that is acceptable to private companies. The same companies which now have their eyes on education, health and other state services.

Unions w ill agree a similar emergency motion to their conference in Harrogate at Easter.

Further delay will embolden the government and reinforce feelings of helplessness among union members. But a move to action will present the wider trade union movement with the fundamental choice — are they going to simply talk about defending pensions or are they going to act to defeat these proposals?"