

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

**BRITAIN'S SECRET
STATE
PAGE 3**

**THE LABOUR
MOVEMENT &
THE ELECTION
PAGES 9-13**

**FIGHTING CUTS:
LESSONS FROM THE
80S PAGES 17-19**

Raped, tortured, then... LOCKED UP BY THE BRITISH STATE

**Support Yarl's Wood
detention centre protests
Stop detaining refugees!**

BY GERRY BATES

On Friday 5 February a hunger strike broke out at the Yarl's Wood immigration detention centre in Bedfordshire.

As many as 50 women took action to protest against the period of time they have been locked up and the treatment of themselves and their children. The women were from a wide range of countries where human rights abuses and violence are common, including China, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe and Eritrea.

Many women are in detention having been convicted of "crimes" of destitution or for travelling on false papers, which is unavoidable when you are fleeing persecution. Many women have been separated from their children.

Some women were left outside in the snow, some in a corridor without access to water or toilet facilities, as the authorities attempted to separate the strikers from other detainees.

Detention of all refugees, whatever their immigration status, must end!

The scandal of child detention, see page 5

GREECE

A “new wave” of crisis?

BY MARTIN THOMAS

The Greek government could run out of money to pay its bills in the next couple of months. Usually governments are guaranteed at least to be able to pay their bills inside their own countries — because, in the last resort, they can always print more of their national money — but the Greek government, in the eurozone, has no power to print more euros.

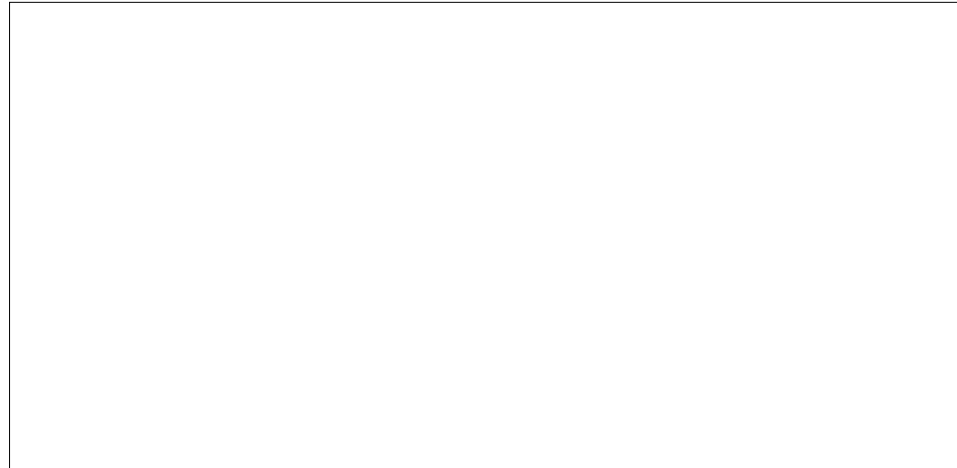
Immediately, the result is promises by Greece's social-democratic government that it will make huge cuts in public spending to free up cash to pay the international financiers to whom Greece has debts. At present Greek prime minister George Papandreou has over 60% of his electorate telling opinion polls that they support him and consider cuts necessary, but protests have already started and will expand.

Three big questions of international scope are raised by the Greek crisis.

The first is the future of the EU and the eurozone. The eurozone is an odd combination. The governments in it lack the normal power of governments to print more money or to cut or raise interest rates. All that power has been transferred to the European Central Bank.

At the same time they have more or less unlimited power to set their national budgets and to run deficits. The treaties that established the euro set limits on annual budget deficits and on accumulated government debt, but those limits have been breached many times, and by big states central to the eurozone as well as by Greece.

The EU felt obliged to promise some sort of support to the Greek government, since failure by Greece to pay its debts would push down the value of the euro in international exchanges. But it is hesitant. As the *Financial Times* reported, the promise is “less a bail-out plan than a



Protest against Greek budget cuts

vague recipe of intent... Eurozone members, led by Germany and France, will lend money [as a last resort, and on terms yet to be revealed]. The International Monetary Fund will meanwhile [oversee] Athens' budget deficit reduction programme”.

Logically, the Greek crisis — and maybe similar eurozone crises in Ireland and Spain soon — should shift the EU off its current muddling-through position in one direction or another. Either the EU, or at least the eurozone, should become much more coordinated over public budgets as well as over interest rates and money supply. Or the weaker eurozone members will be forced to drop out.

The second alternative will be very unwelcome to countries like Greece. Being in the eurozone means that the Greek government can't print money. But it also means that international financiers will always take whatever the Greek government can pay them as good coin, because it is euros.

The first alternative will be difficult. So the immediate outcome will probably be only modified muddling-through. But the stress-lines have been mapped out.

The second question is the extraordi-

nary and irrational power of international financiers. In essence, Greece is in trouble because international financiers are demanding higher interest rates to lend to the Greek government, and international financiers are demanding those higher interest rates... because they see Greece as in trouble. The vicious spiral is self-accelerating, and driven by the same people whose greed-is-good gyrations brought us the financial crisis of autumn 2008.

On the face of it, when the Greek government sells a bond — a piece of paper entitling the owner to a certain percentage rate of interest each year, plus repayment of the original amount at the end of so many years — the interest rate should be just the same as German government bonds, because a thousand euros paid by the Greek government are worth exactly the same as a thousand euros paid by the German government.

In fact interest rates on Greek government bonds have been 3.6% higher than on German. International financiers are saying that they do not believe that the Greek government will pay up. And thus they set in train processes which make it harder for the Greek government

to pay up.

According to the *Observer* on 7 February, super-rich Greeks have been moving their money out of Greece. On the face of it, it makes no sense, unless they fear (with little justification, sadly) that a desperate Greek government will start heavy taxes on the rich. A euro held in Athens is the same as a euro held in Zurich or Frankfurt.

As the *Observer* reported, Greece has “increasingly become divided between the very rich, who live in Hollywood-style opulence in the outer suburbs, and the poor... a fifth of the population lives beneath the poverty line”. How long will the super-rich be allowed to decide the fate of whole countries?

The third question is whether the Greek crisis could be the first of many in which governments do not have enough cash — or in the case of governments which can print their own money, enough internationally-acceptable cash — to meet their bills.

The financial crisis of 2008 was calmed essentially by governments taking the brunt of it and shielding the banks. Governments paid out vast amounts in guarantees, credit, and cash to banks to stop financial systems imploding, and ran big budget deficits to stop market demand for factory production imploding. That shifted the sharp point of the crisis so that it now targeted the governments.

Nouriel Roubini, the US economist who most accurately predicted the 2008 meltdown, is now writing about “The Coming Sovereign [i.e. government] Debt Crisis”. Another mainstream US economist, Carmen Reinhart, has told the *Wall Street Journal*: “Historically, following a wave of financial crises... you get a wave of [government] defaults. You go from financial crises to sovereign debt crises. I think we're in for a period where that kind of scenario is very likely.”

BRITAIN 2010: CHILDREN

A study by the Sutton Trust has revealed that children from poorer backgrounds are almost a year behind their middle-class counterparts by the time they begin school. Among other things the study showed less than 50% of working-class children under the age of three were read to every day, compared to 78% of children from better off families.

Unfortunately, the report's proposed solutions to the problem focus exclusively on stricter parenting and wholly unoriginal initiatives such as setting up of government-sponsored “sensitive parenting classes” in deprived areas.

It would be nice to read a report which avoided criticising working-class parents for not taking their kids to the library and bemoaned how library services in working-class areas are being cut.

You might've thought that a massive government programme of investment in local facilities and services, a reduction of work hours and an increase in wages so they could buy their kids better food would be more constructive — but you'd be wrong. Apparently it's all down to sending them to bed earlier.

TURKEY

General strike to defend jobs

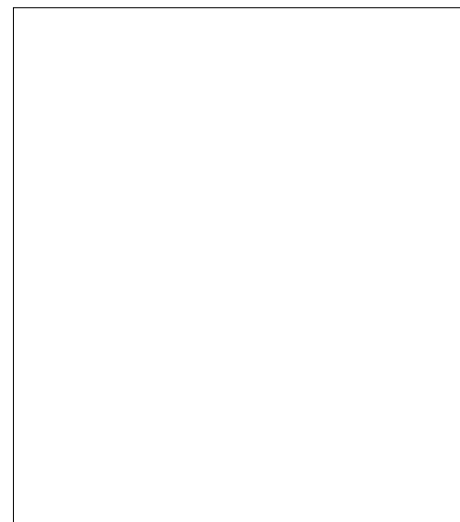
BY WILL LODGE

Trade unionists launched a one-day general strike in Turkey as our last issue went to press. On Thursday 4 February, tens of thousands of public sector workers staged a one-day walk out in solidarity with employees of the government's Tobacco and Liquor Administration (TEKEL).

Workers from industries as diverse as textile production, railways, mining and highways workers all downed tools to support the 12,000-strong TEKEL sit-in protest in Ankara, which was in its 53rd day. Since general and solidarity strikes are banned in Turkey, the event was labelled as workers “exercising their right to not come to work.”

Mustafa Kumlu, president of the Turk-
IS union declared the strike successful: “Despite the pressure and threats of the Governorships, bureaucrats and employers, the action organized was a nationwide success.”

The strike was called by the



Confederation of Turkish Labour Unions in response to plans to re-deploy workers from 12 TEKEL factories to other public sector jobs. The move would result in less pay, little job security, and fewer rights. The workers would be obliged to join the civil service union, giving them no right to collective bar-

gaining, nor the right to strike, at the same time as accepting pay cuts up to 40%. The plans follow the selling-off of TEKEL to British American Tobacco for £1.1 billion in 2008 as part of the government's privatisation programme.

Prime minister Recep Erdogan declared the strike illegal, and signalled that he would not tolerate protests beyond February.

The initial sit-in protest by TEKEL workers in a park in central Ankara was met by riot police who used tear gas and pepper spray against them. Erdogan has also tried to divide the workforce against the protesters, saying that millions of unemployed would settle for what the government was offering.

Aylin Yardimici, a Turkish student studying a masters in European Political Economy at LSE told *Solidarity* that this is the most important labour event since 1980. “The government is facing a lot of pressure for different reasons, and this may be the catalyst. If these groups can mobilise effectively it could signal the end of the government.”

MI5 AND TORTURE

Abolish the secret police!

The allegations that intelligence agency MI5 colluded in the torture of British citizen Binyam Mohamed say a lot about both the security services and the New Labour government.

Mohamed, a British Islamist captured in Afghanistan and flown to Morocco for interrogation, says that his genitals were cut repeatedly and that he was hung by his wrists and beaten until he was sick. Claims have emerged that a British intelligence officer on the spot was aware of what was happening, but, when he wrote to London expressing his concerns, was told he was not required to intervene.

Shadow Home Secretary David Davis claims that there are around 15 other cases suggesting collusion or complicity in torture by MI5 and MI6. The government has not only denied this, but defended the security services to the hilt — as has Kim Howells, the Labour head of Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee (ISC).

Solidarity is in no position to make an informed assessment of the evidence, but many legal figures and civil liberties campaigners have done so — and it seems all too plausible. What should socialists say?

We should denounce the creeping legitimisation of torture and demand strict measures against it. There is a real threat from Islamist ter-

rorism, but — even more than the suspension of civil liberties — the use of torture as a means of fighting it is incompatible with democracy and universal human rights.

The logic of those who argue for it — or some

Binyam Mohammed says he was tortured while an MI5 officer looked on

“soft” form of it — on utilitarian grounds — that while undesirable it may gain information that prevents widespread loss of life — has no possible end point. Why not torture a suspect’s partner and children, or even engage in threats of collective punishment against whole communities? The only way to cut through this deadly logic is to outlaw such practices altogether.

We should call for a public enquiry into the allegations and that this should not be conducted in secret. This is a call the government and the ISC are so far resisting. We should push for labour movement representation on such an inquiry.

We should demand the abolition of the secret police. The MI5 and MI6, despite all their recent pretences at “openness” and modernity, are agencies through which the ruling class does its dirty work and which do not serve community interests in even the distorted way that the police, while also a ruling-class agency, are sometimes forced to do.

We cannot call for the abolition of the police until we are in a position to replace them with something better, but we can and should demand the scrapping of the so-called security services.

Lastly, we should redouble our efforts to mobilise the labour movement against the leaders of the Labour Party — political barbarians who in their wholehearted loyalty to the capitalist state have allowed the Tories to present themselves as champions of civil liberties and human rights.

TORY CO-OPS

A smokescreen for cuts and privatisation

The Tories say they want to create “employee-owned” cooperatives within key public services. Under the scheme, participating workers — in, say, a clinic or a school — would be “freed” from the shackles of central government bureaucracy and would be able to have a share of any “financial surplus” that the service generates.

Have the Tories been taken over by 21st century Owenites? Hardly. The plan is about:

- Creating a smokescreen for massive cuts. By hiving partial responsibility for funding off to independently-run “cooperatives”, the Tories can increase their ability to cut central government funding over public services.
- Extending the ideological agenda of “consumer choice” in the public sector — that is, increasing competition between individual units, between schools, between health agencies.
- It is a form of privatisation.

- Increasing the atomisation of workers in the public sector. If more and more public services are run by individual co-ops (or individually managed units), how can that generate anything other than a culture of competition between them, and division between workers?

- Breaking up national agreements between public sector managers and trade unions — that, of course, undermines the power of the unions.

- Undermining still further democratic control over public services. Which is to say nothing of the democracy within these “co-ops”. Will all workers have an equal say? Will service-users have a voice? Or will the “employees” doing the “owning” actually just be top public sector bosses?

This is a warning of very dangerous reforms to come. Public sector unions must stand firm against any aspect of such reform, and begin a much more serious fight now to defend and extend public services.

Working in the energy industry

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Signal workers win



MY LIFE AT WORK

Tom Fawley is an office worker for N-Power in northern England.

Tell us a little bit about the work you do.

I work for the energy company N-Power. I mainly do office work so spend most of my time behind a desk. Our workplace deals with tasks like making sure electricity meters get set up and connected in new builds.

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

My pay is okay. Some of my colleagues are pretty badly paid, and there are some temping agency workers in the workplace too; they're paid dreadfully. I'm on £20,000 a year, which is slightly above the average. Conditions are generally all right — we get our breaks and management aren't too heavy-handed.

Has the economic crisis affected your work? Has it affected the way workers think about their jobs?

It's definitely affected us. Lots of construction projects stopped, so there weren't as many places needing new electricity supplies. Our next round of pay negotiations are about to begin and people are worried that the bosses might use the cover of the economic crisis to refuse to give us a cost-of-living increase this year which is something we've always had traditionally.

What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to "talk poli-

tics on the job"?

All sorts of issues come up — recently it's been stuff about bankers and the Iraq war while the Chilcot Enquiry was taking place. It's fairly easy to start political conversations, but as a socialist I'm often in a minority on questions like immigration. We're an energy generation company so there is a certain consciousness around green issues, but there are also a lot of people who are pretty sceptical about climate change or look to "green-wash"-type solutions.

Do you enjoy your work?

Yes, I do. There's no direct micromanagement, I'm generally left to get on with things.

What are your bosses like?

I only have to report to them and show our figures once a month, and I don't even know if those figures get read. I've worked with bosses on other sites who were more authoritarian and bullying but the managers here are very hands-off.

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

There are three recognised unions — Unison, Unite and GMB. Unite is the main one in my workplace and that's the one I'm active in. There are problems with rivalries between the unions, and they tend to spend a lot of time on disciplinaries and casework rather than on organising. I'm a Unite shop steward and my work mainly involves trying to build the union. We try to have regular meetings, and people come to us for advice because we tend to be the first people to find out new information on things like pay.

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

Better public transport links to and from the workplace. The buses are terrible and sometimes people on the late shift end up having to wait for up to an hour for a bus after finishing work. I'd also like to see flexible working introduced as our hours are sometimes hard to deal with.

By "TUBEWORKER"

London Underground signal maintenance staff have forced their employer — the former Metronet — to withdraw the threat of imposed weekend working.

They achieved this through solid industrial action. Rather than accept the imposition of new rosters that would mess up their lives, signals workers demanded that RMT ballot them, then called not just a token one- or two-day strike, but more than a dozen days of action, and "action short of strikes" too.

On the first strike day, Friday 5 February, there was 100% support — no scabbing — and workers from other grades refused to cross the well-organised and lively picket lines. This cost the company dear as it had to cancel week-

Well organised picket lines

end engineering work and could not restore the services on several lines when signal failures went unrepaired.

Management have now withdrawn their threat to immediately impose the rosters, and will enter talks with the union to agree a process by which roster changes must be negotiated in future. The company has also explicitly recognised that many staff currently work Monday-to-Friday.

However, management may come back with new attempts to bring in anti-social rosters in a few months' time. While celebrating our victory, we must not rest on our laurels; instead, we need to use this breathing space to build union strength and prepare for future attacks. In particular, we need more London Underground operational staff refusing to work in unsafe conditions during strikes by engineering workers.

CIVIL SERVICE COMPENSATION SCHEME

Vote for strike action!

By A CIVIL SERVANT

The civil service union PCS has announced that it is continuing to ballot its members over strike action, despite the announcement by the Cabinet Office that five unions have agreed to changes to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS). The ballot, which is scheduled to close on February 25, is covering around a quarter of a million civil service workers across all sectors, including Jobcentre staff, tax workers, court staff and driving examiners.

The "agreement" reached by the five other unions (Prospect, FDA, GMB, POA and Unite) is a mixture of reserved rights for those over 50 and lesser rights for those under that age. These rights do not cover the young or those recruited into the civil service since 2007. The CSCS will reduce the amount of money available to those made redundant by up to a third, allowing employers to introduce job losses on the cheap; the PCS label this as cynical given that thousands of jobs are at risk over the coming years.

The PCS has never factored in support from these unions in terms of industrial, political or legal action; in other words the agreement by the five makes no difference to the PCS's position or plans.

Of course senior managers in the civil service will make mischief and try to persuade members to vote "no" in the ballot by claiming that the union movement in the civil service is divided.

Unfortunately, on this issue, it has been divided from day one. The irony is that the five have only got a better deal (FDA and Prospect had wanted to agree

the first offer made to them) through the actions of the PCS: launching a judicial review, rallying MPs (more than 130 of whom have backed an Early Day Motion in Parliament to re-examine the "disappointing and unfair proposals") and announcing the industrial ballot. In other words, the pressure generated by the PCS campaign has made the Government offer further concessions.

Further pressure, in our view, can generate further concessions; that is why it is vital that members vote "yes" in the ballot. If successful, the PCS are hoping to hold a one day "all together" strike, followed by a week of one day strikes held by different elements of the PCS, emulating the recent CWU postal strikes.

BRITAIN 2010: INFLATION

Forthcoming official figures are expected to show that UK inflation rose above 3% in January 2010, representing the fastest pace of inflation for 14 months. The Retail Price Index, which calculates a separate inflation figure taking factors such as housing costs into account, puts inflation at nearly 4%.

What this means for working-class people, with the sharp end of the economic crisis being over and the recovery beginning, is that the cost of living is still going up. And, crucially, it's going up at a time of threats to jobs and pay freezes, proposed by both parties capable of forming the next government (the Tories and New Labour).

CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING

Correction and update

In our article on conditions in construction engineering (*Solidarity* 3-166) it was not unambiguously clear that employers are not using the Posted Workers Directive as such to attack workers. Rather they have used loopholes in the Posted Workers Directive created by recent European Court of Justice rulings. (We said the Directive had been "amended" by the court).

Those rulings — to the surprise of the unions — have established an interpretation of the PWD as guaranteeing posted workers only those terms and conditions which are established by law in the country they are posted to. Because industrial agreements in Britain have no legally-binding status, the PWD does not guaranteed posted workers coverage by

those agreements.

The other thing established by the ECJ rulings is that if unions take action to demand "levelling up" of posted workers to locally-negotiated standards then they may open themselves up to legal action for "restraint of trade".

"Levelling up" of posted workers is one issue now being grappled with by the unions in construction engineering. Another is underemployment. A scheduled official strike action over redundancies by 160 members employed by Alstom due on 12 February at the Staythorpe power station construction site in Nottinghamshire was called off. The GMB say Alstom are now sticking to nationally agreed procedures.

NATIONAL CUTS CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

Build a coordinated movement against cuts

BY ED MALTBY

Over 150 students, lecturers and campus staff, representing anti-cuts campaigns from more than a dozen campuses around the country, attended the National Convention Against Fees and Cuts on Saturday 6 February in London. They were participating in the launch of a National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. This network of grass-roots anti-cuts campaigns is something all student activists should get involved in.

In the last few months, college campaigns against the government's huge education cuts have been springing up. Demonstrations, meetings and strike ballots are taking place sporadically. However, these campaigns were not linked up or co-ordinated.

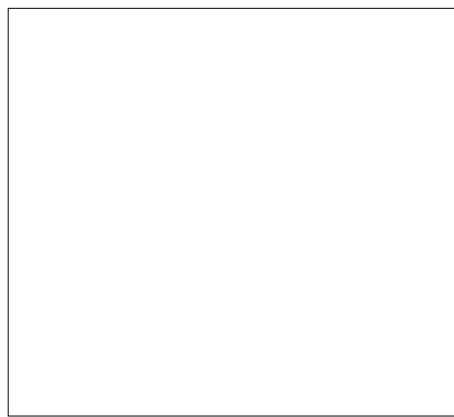
Isolated, and generally run by fresh and inexperienced student activists, the campaigns needed to be integrated into a national campaign in order to be viable.

AWL members and activists in

Education Not for Sale took the decision to organise the Convention with a view to creating such a co-ordination. In the run-up to the Convention itself, regional meetings in London, the south coast and the north of England were organised, which built up durable networks linking up student campaigns in those regions.

The first steps are also being made toward building a rank-and-file movement across the different unions that organise in the education sector. This task is made more urgent by the failure of both the leadership of the college lecturer's union, the UCU, and the SWP-dominated UCU Left to face up to the gravity of the situation.

Mark from the University of Gloucestershire summed up the situation at his campus: "Management are cutting access to the journals; there will be no new books in the libraries next year; and lots of lecturers have been made redundant, with at least 30 compulsory redundancies. They're closing two entire campuses. A lot of my friends in their final year are finding it really hard to get resources for their disserta-



He's announced £449 million in education cuts

tions. Lecturers are a lot more stressed now they've got a lot more work to do.

"We're organising meetings and planning direct action. Aside from just stopping the cuts, we want university management to start listening to students and to consider our views and think about how it affects us before they do things. If you look at how much our VC and senior management are being paid, they're increasing their salaries — so

there's plenty of room for cuts there. Our VC is on over £200,000 a year now."

The process of building the network was boycotted by the SWP's student organisation. The SWP are hostile to the development of any new organisation in the student movement: their project is to recruit to their own sect, and they systematically clamp down on any new initiative which they see as distracting from this aim. So it's not surprising that the only contribution of the SWP student leadership to the Convention was to try to derail the discussions and prevent structures from being built.

Non-sectarian socialists like the AWL view our work in the student movement as a means of building a mass movement of students that feeds into and links up with the struggles of the working class as a whole. We want to see a fight against education cuts as part of the movement against the cuts and austerity regime that workers in all sectors are facing; we don't want to sit in splendid isolation to count new party membership forms.

• conventionagainstfeesandcuts.wordpress.com

LEEDS UNIVERSITY

Striking to save jobs

BY GORDON EASTMAN

In the face of a threatened £35 million wave of cuts, with 54 jobs already axed and 700 more at risk, lecturers at Leeds University have voted overwhelmingly to strike to save their jobs.

On a 65.8% turn-out, lecturers voted overwhelmingly for strike action and for action short of a strike. Leeds University UCU have called a series of strike dates, on Thursday 25 February, Tuesday 2 March and Thursday 4 March. These dates should see mobilisations of students, education staff and workers in other sectors in solidarity.

The teachers voted to strike despite an anti-strike campaign waged by the Leeds University Students' Union. Called "Education First", the scab campaign sought to persuade students to harass their teachers into voting against the strike. This is indicative of the gener-

al tenor of the leadership of the "official" UK student movement over recent years — an anti-worker, sectional, philistine attitude to politics in the education sector, that justifies attacks on staff with talk of "defending the student experience".

It's telling that the National Union of Students executive and many other student union executives around the country offered no comment. In a healthy student movement, a campaign like "Education First" should provoke outrage!

But students and staff involved in the Leeds University Against Cuts campaign, part of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, fought back against the leadership of the student union and organised solidarity with lecturers.

Ruth, a member of the campaign, told *Solidarity*, "The uproar that Education First provoked spurred a lot of people on

— I think it had the opposite effect to what was intended. It's good to see lecturers taking action, and they have a lot of backing from students. We'll be organising demonstrations and going down to the picket lines — and we want to see solidarity and support from the rest of the student movement, like the occupiers at Sussex Uni got the other week."

SUSSEX UNIVERSITY

A "flash occupation"... more to come

BY PATRICK ROLFE

On 8 February, over 100 students at Sussex University marched up to the top floor of the university's prestigious Bramber House conference centre and staged a "flash occupation". They marched out 30 hours later, promising more actions to come in the future. The occupation was part of the Defend Sussex Campaign, a fight by students and staff at Sussex against huge cuts that the university is planning.

Our Defend Sussex blog outlines the scale of the threat: "The university is planning to cut £3 million this academic year, and £5 million next year. The costs of these cuts will be passed on to schools through restructuring and course clo-

sures, and to staff and students in the shape of job losses, pensions cuts and fee increases. However, at the same time as proposing these cuts, the university administration is planning to spend £112 million on new buildings and refurbishments on campus, as well as raising the salaries of the top 14 managers to a combined £2.1 million per year." These cuts are being packaged as a business plan that management calls the "Unique Solution" — an indication of the business ethos that education chiefs are promoting.

During the occupation, students issued statements via the internet, declaring their support for the UCU's forthcoming strike ballot on campus, and held a collection towards the strike fund, raising £250.

Word of the occupation spread quick-

ly through the national network of anti-cuts campaigns in education that the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts had established the weekend before, and messages of support flooded in.

Bin workers in Sussex, who had recently been on strike against cuts that they were facing themselves, got in touch to pledge their support. Their message of support for the Sussex occupation illustrates clearly the point that the whole workers' movement and the student movement must grasp — attacks on education are part of the same wave of public sector spending cuts that we are seeing in the whole economy. There is no such thing as "student politics" — these cuts, and the resistance to them, are one part of the class struggle that defines our whole society.

End child detention!

Front page story

Each year over 1000 children are locked up in immigration detention centres in England, often in preparation for deportation.

Al Aynsley-Green, the Children's Commissioner, describes the centres as "no place for a child", and the effects on the children as "distressing and harmful".

The children are often woken in dawn raids.

Children have complained that arresting officers have acted in a "terrifying" way, "bashing and kicking" at doors, were "rude" and watched as they used the toilet or dressed.

Children are often prevented from contacting their friends and are unable to find out what has happened to their pets.

Dr Rosalyn Proops, an officer for child protection at the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, calls for an end to child detention, saying, "These children are among the most vulnerable in our communities and detention causes unnecessary harm to their physical and mental health."

Dr Miriam Beeks, a volunteer doctor with Medical Justice, writes about Yarl's Wood, "There was one child who had been detained before, he was extremely traumatised. He had been having counselling with the Children's Society. He was born in the UK and didn't know anywhere else. He just sat in the corner with his head in his hands. He was extremely worried about his mother."

Dr Beeks was horrified to learn of a child aged 12 and a younger sister, both with advanced HIV, who were deported to a country where they were very unlikely to be able to get the drugs they needed to keep them alive. Dr Beeks stated, "It was as good as a death sentence."

• Protest info:
<http://london.noborders.org.uk>

CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Vatican and Italian politics

REPORT BY HANNAH THOMPSON

On Sunday 14 February three hundred people marched on the Italian embassy in London to protest against Pope Benedict XVI's proposed September visit to the UK, a visit which will be costing the British taxpayer an estimated £20 million.

"No Vatican — London for a Secular Europe", was organised in solidarity with Facciamo Breccia, a coalition of Italian secularist organisations who, on

the anniversary of the creation of the Vatican on 11th February 1929, mobilise thousands of Italians onto the streets of Rome to protest against the Vatican's influence in Italian politics.

"The secular movement in Italy is marginalised by almost all political parties," explained Marco Tranchino, who coordinated the London solidarity demo (see interview with Tranchino below).

The Vatican itself was founded by the fascist dictator Mussolini in 1929, and has since then lived up to its fascist credentials. On the panel outside the embassy, LGBT human rights cam-

paigner Peter Tatchell — who recently stood down as Green parliamentary candidate for Oxford East due to injuries suffered from excessive and repetitive police-beatings — expressed his revulsion at Benedict's 2009 re-statement of Holocaust denial Bishop Richard Williamson. Tatchell stated, 'There is no excuse for giving religious leaders the honour of a state visit to this country.'

Tranchino stressed that the Pope's visit to Britain comes in the light of an escalation of homophobic attacks worldwide, especially in Italy.

When questioned about the direction of the campaign, Tranchino was eager to mobilise the faithful, but dismissive of partisan ideological concerns.

The Vatican represents religious bigotry on a global scale and is a remnant of the ravages of fascism upon Europe. It represents everything that socialists, feminists and LGBTQ activists have fought against for the past century. Socialists should condemn the Vatican and support battles against the Pope's visit and for a secular, equal society. We also need socialist critiques of homophobia, sexism and religious bigotry.

"We need to work for human rights"

Edward Maltby spoke to Marco Tranchino, organiser of the 14 February London demonstration "No Vatican — London for a Secular Europe"

EM: Why did you organise the march? What are your demands?

MT: This demonstration is organised by "Facciamo Breccia" (a coalition of Italian secularist associations) every year the no VAT (i.e. not Vatican) demonstration sees thousands of Italians marching in Rome to protest against the power of the Vatican and its undemocratic interference in Italian politics.

However, the Vatican's influence is such that the mainstream media hardly report this event. It's surreal. You come home after marching together with twenty thousand people after a huge colourful demonstration, you switch the television on and there is nothing

reported about it.

This is because Italian public television "RAI", the equivalent of the BBC, has signed agreements with the Vatican and is bound to respect the Catholic Church and its teachings. The pope is in the news almost everyday. Sadly, the other most important TV channels are owned by the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi who colludes with the Vatican. Needless to say, those stations also don't dare give space to this protest.

At the same time, the Italian mainstream media report everything that happens in London, rightly recognising this town as one of the most important cultural centres of the world. If you listen to the Italian radio or watch the news on TV, the chances are high that there's something reported from the English capital.

That's why I realised that I could contribute to the Italian secularist fight from London, joining forces with the secularist and humanist associations in the UK, asking them to march in solidarity with Italians who are painfully affected by Vatican interference. I am deeply grateful for the support of the humanist and secularist associations, and I have enthusiastically joined them in their activities here.

EM: What are the problems faced by the secular movement in Italy?

MT: Our demands include an end to the interference of the Vatican in European politics and especially in Italian affairs. At present Italy is a country with sovereignty limited by this theocratic artificial state.

The secular movement in Italy is marginalised by almost all political parties' cowardly fear of alienating the votes of the Catholic people.

Those who talk openly about the undue influence of the Vatican are attacked violently, together with those who talk openly about issues that should not be controversial at all: human rights issues.

There will be Italian regional elections soon and the Vatican has attacked Nichi Vendola, a left wing candidate for the Puglia region [Rifondazione per la Sinistra], for being openly gay. Left wing Italians recently chose Nichi Vendola as their candidate in primary elections, showing that they admire his honesty and his views and are not bothered by his sexual orientation; an

important sign that all politicians should acknowledge.

The Vatican is also against the left wing candidate for the Lazio region, Emma Bonino [Radical Party], an internationally recognised high profile politician who served in the European Commission. Why? Because she supports women's rights and public secular education.

These ones, sadly, are only recent examples of Vatican interference: the list is huge and it started in the fascist years.

EM: Do you think that political religion has become more assertive in recent years? Why do you think this might be?

MT: I agree that political religion has become more assertive in recent years, trying to hold on to its power and privileges, managing to get even more powerful. It is disgraceful that the recently approved Lisbon Treaty binds the European Institutions to "an open, transparent and regular dialogue with Churches and religious organisations".

The British public was shocked at the pope's attack on the equality laws, all the headlines were about it. This kind of interference doesn't shock the Italian public, because the Italians are taught to respect those attacks as pastoral guidance.

The European Institutions have warned Italy on several occasions about Italian injustices. I can list a few examples: the lack of civil rights for homosexual couples, the lack of protection against homophobia and transphobia, the financial advantage given to Catholic businesses — tax exemptions even for non religious businesses owned by the Catholic Church. More recently, the crucifix exposed in public schools and buildings.

I think the Vatican is afraid that the European Union might help Italy to free itself from the Vatican power and is reacting to this.

EM: Some people on the march told us that they were "not interested in politics", but had only come to the march "to make a point about gay rights" or "to make a point about secularism"? Do you think that it is possible to separate out a concern for "secularism" or the rights of a particular minority from a broader political analysis of society? What do you think the best way is of combating the influ-

ence of religion in politics?

MT: I am very glad that we managed to attract the people you mention. I think that if we want to get the silent majority to stand up and be counted in the fight against the influence of religion in politics, we do need to focus on human rights. The religious influence in society creates painful injustices, which we need to fight. We need to promote a strong, open society in which the protection of human rights for all is well embedded. We can win hearts and minds if we are able to let people understand that these demands are for everybody's interest and not only the rights of a particular minority. Other considerations that concern society can also be derived by these demands.

The values of humanism and secularism, for which human rights are paramount, are well expressed in the Brussels Declaration [www.iheu.org/v4e/html/the_declaration.html]. That contains a clear vision of the society we would like: a society with equal treatment and opportunities, that upholds social responsibility, that rejects racism and promotes equality. Readers of *Solidarity*, I am sure, share all these values. But if we want to change things and make this vision for Europe come true, we have to talk to all the others as well. If we got all conservative voters in Italy to agree that human rights are paramount, that children's rights are not negotiable... how could Berlusconi's Government get away with fingerprinting the children of the Roma population?

If we all agreed on human rights, if we all agreed that xenophobia is wrong, how could left wing and right wing governments of Europe reject people at our borders as if they weren't human beings?

If we managed to expose the link between the Church's stigmatization of homosexuality and transexuality and homophobic and transphobic attacks and killings, how could good-hearted people, the majority of the Catholics in Italy, not condemn this stigmatization?

The political debate is divisive, clearly, but we shouldn't feel animosity towards people that are influenced by religion, or vote for the opposite faction or another political party: they are our brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers and they almost certainly do it in good faith. It's them we need to talk to.

Papal politics undermine human rights and democracy

TORY PARTY

What is “Cameronism”?

By Jack Yates

What links the notorious war criminal Henry Kissinger, the right-wing anti-semite Michal Kaminski and Lord Michael Ashcroft, a billionaire who made his fortune by hijacking the Belizean economy? No, this isn't the plot of some tawdry action thriller. Neither is it the opening salvo of a convoluted conspiracy theory.

Occam's principle that "entities must not be multiplied without necessity" suggests the existence of a simple answer. So what is it? What links these three egregious personalities and a teeming cesspool of others? Why, David Cameron's "cuddly" Conservative Party.

Cameron would have us believe that he represents a departure from previous styles of Conservatism. As against a detached and politically exhausted Labour leadership, Cameron is "in touch" with voters and full of new ideas. To convince us of the total conversion, he's adopted public relations methods honed by Tony Blair and his clique. Just as Blair seemed to glide effortlessly into Downing Street, Cameron is attempting his own swan-like journey.

But whereas Blair represented a real break with business-as-usual within Labour, a break cemented by a class-war against labour movement influence and democratic functioning in the party, Cameron's glide is powered by the same old conservative forces. The evidence ranges from a clutch of relatively banal anecdotes to relationships and connections exposing the possible shape of a Tory-governed Britain.

BRITAIN 2010: MARRIAGE

Divorces and the break-up of the traditional family means "broken Britain", so the Tories tell us. People should get married. Marriage is good. It mends "broken Britain". Not so, according to the logic of recent government statistics.

Marriage is in fact more unpopular than at any time throughout record-keeping history (since 1862). The divorce rate is also dropping. Surely, therefore, any increase in marriages will also necessarily lead to an increase in the levels of divorce? Therefore won't the Tories' plan to incentivise people to get married just lead to more divorce?

Perhaps we are stretching the logic. The point is that the Tories are fighting trends that have their own logic. As well as demonstrating the entirely progressive and healthy erosion of traditional "values" about the sanctity of the heterosexual nuclear family unit joined together in a religious, state-sanctioned ceremony, the current low levels of marriages probably also have a bit to do with the fact that fewer people have thousands of pounds to fling about on lavish parties.

Better to keep the church (or synagogue, mosque, gudwara, temple, druidic grove, etc.) and the state out of loving relationships; who really needs a signed bit of paper to validate their union these days? It'd probably just end in divorce anyway.

Item: The Kissinger connection. There's nothing out of the ordinary in a political leader lending his ear or seeking advice from the former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger. Although his tenure as the world's "chief diplomat" ended more than thirty years ago, Presidents and Prime Ministers still seek his advice on foreign relations and policy.

A little more unusual, perhaps, is his apparent role in recommending potential Tory candidates for the House of Commons. The former *Daily Mail* editor, Susan Douglas, seems to have benefited from Kissinger's intervention in her efforts to become an MP. Not a ground-shaking revelation in itself but it does suggest a closer-than-usual relationship between a man responsible for a campaign of butchery and suppression across several continents and the leader of the Tories.

EUROPE

Item: The European hard-right. The Tory party is the fighting machine par excellence of the British ruling class. As such it has a responsibility to reflect and enact the intentions and impulses, self-consistent or not, of the bigots, little-Englanders and xenophobes who back it.

Outside of purely economic considerations this is nowhere clearer than in the Tories' attitude to Europe. Whilst capitalists and their political representatives in France and Germany, for instance, champion closer economic and social coordination between the states of Europe — an expansion of markets, securing the hegemony of French and German capital in former Stalinist and near-European states and the connected enablement of a larger "sphere of influence" — such moves seem anathema to British capitalists.

The myth of Britain as a "sovereign" economy with independent links across the Atlantic and beyond is sustenance enough. But this is not just a question of pure economics: it demonstrates the tip-toe backwardness, inside and out of the capitalists' own frame of reference, of the British ruling class.

A look at who the Tories have aligned themselves with inside the European Parliament after their departure from the mainstream conservative grouping reveals a great deal.

A more despicable rag-bag collection of racists, religious bigots and rightwing political extremists can only be found on the fascist margins of Europe. The Polish anti-Semite Kaminski is just the tip of the ice-berg. Kaminski, formerly an explicitly fascist politician, is now attempting to present a "reformed" face to the world. But these efforts have not dulled his extreme nationalistic inclinations.

Kaminski's role in preventing the recognition and commemoration of the massacre of 400 Jews in Jedwabne in 1941 points to his real political base-line. There are many other similarly disturbing examples from Cameron's friends in Europe. But what does this tell us of the shape of future Tory policy?

On Europe, we can be sure that they'll continue to reflect the leanings of the masters of British capital and exploit nationalist sentiment whenever possible. It's unlikely, however, that Europe will play a major role in the election cam-



Come fly with me... Ashcroft and Cameron

paign as it did so disastrously for William Hague and other Tory leaders in the past.

More generally, their relationships in Europe strike an ominous tone for domestic issues. The dominant, anti-European forces within the Conservative Party sit comfortably with right-wing extremists because they share much more than hostility to greater integration. It will be no surprise if Cameron attempts to roll back some of the advances — however small they've been — in women's and gay rights and make attacks elsewhere. Cameron has already promised (albeit unconvincingly) to cut immigration by 75% if he comes to power. We can expect more of the same.

LORD MICHAEL ASHCROFT

Item: Lord Michael Ashcroft. Ashcroft and his financial dealings have inspired a collective noun for Tory front-benchers: "an evasion of Ashcroft lackeys". The particular issue of whether Ashcroft pays full tax on his one billion pound fortune, money he uses to bank-roll the Tories in marginal seats, has become first-rate sport in the mainstream media. There's much more to be said about Ashcroft than his tax status.

First, how did the Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party become the 37th richest person in the UK? Honest toil? Hard graft? Not unless he managed to transform the social relations of capital!

Ashcroft has used his considerable wealth to prevent investigations, most notably by the *Times* newspaper, into his financial dealings. The exact details are unknown. What we do know is that from the early 80s he transferred his operations to the newly independent Belize and steadily took control of the entire financial industry. According to Dean Barrow, the Belizean premier, "Ashcroft is an extremely powerful man. His net worth may well be equal to Belize's entire GDP. He is nobody to cross". Ashcroft is a man worth a good deal more than many nation states and maintains similar political connections.

Ashcroft's political dealings are not limited to Britain. In Belize he funded the "People's United Party" to the tune of \$1 million. Another \$1 million went to Australia's Liberal Party in 2004. In August 2008, Ashcroft paid a visit to New Zealand to lend his support to the National Party. He's a man with fingers in a good-many political pies.

So what does Ashcroft want with the Tory party and why do they allow such a man — someone who could seriously jeopardise their political standing — to accrue so much control and create so much tension? Again, the simplest answer most certainly suffices: Ashcroft is a rich and powerful man who wishes to become richer and more powerful. He's the Tories' sort of a guy! In relative terms, Ashcroft's method of making money has been successful. If it works in Belize, why not in Britain? The Tory party needs money, someone who thinks like them offers to give them it.

Marx wrote of capital as born "dripping with filth and blood from every pore". With the benefit of more than a century of hindsight, we can see that it's re-born — again and again — in much the same way. Whoever wins the election, Tory or Labour, the government's first post-election task will be to enable the shift in capitalism required to adapt to new, "post-crisis" conditions. The dimensions and immediate consequences of this shift will differ depending on who occupies the seats of power. The Tories have already shown themselves to be on the relative right of New Labour on this question. They would have let more banks and businesses go to the wall and ensured an even greater assault on the working class.

In such a circumstance — with a plethora of greatly de-valued financial institutions and industries — what type of person prospers? Persons of the Ashcroft variety who purchased his first company, and the livelihoods of one thousand workers, for the princely sum of £1.

So what considerations will determine how the Tories would manage the economy? Jobs and stability? Certainly not. The interests of people like Lord Michael Ashcroft, Tory Deputy Chairman? Certainly.

This picture of David Cameron's Conservative Party and "Cameronism" is only partial. What about the structure and tensions within the Tory party nationally? What factions and groups exist within the Parliamentary party and what do they want?

These considerations, the subject of an article in the next *Solidarity*, are vital in understanding not only what a Tory government will look like but also to what extent the palpable fragmentation of right wing opinion — to the benefit of forces like UKIP and the British National Party — is having an effect.

LONDON COALITION AGAINST POVERTY

Building up the confidence to fight

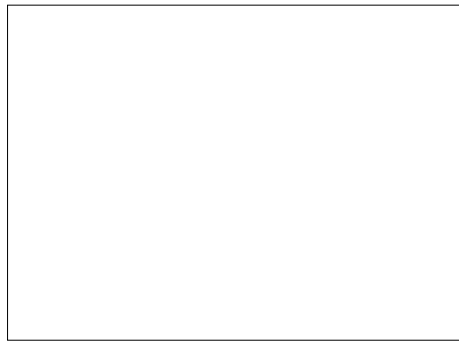
Vicki Morris spoke to Eran Cohen from London Coalition Against Poverty about the ideas behind their network.

VM: What is "direct action casework" and what are its advantages/disadvantages over broader political campaigns around poverty?

EC: Direct action casework is a combination of social-work type legal casework mixed with direct action. The practice is fairly old (there's many examples from the USA in the 1930s) and the idea is simple when operated in a welfare state: someone who is refused the housing/benefits they're entitled to through intimidation or a dodgy legal basis (what we call gatekeeping) is supported by a combination of bureaucratic legal work — such as filling in the correct forms and writing threatening letters quoting relevant laws — and, when the time is right, an office occupation or other suitable offensive pressure.

We don't see DAC to be used instead of a broad political campaign, but as a tool to build the collective confidence of our constituency in order to have an effective campaign.

When individuals win concrete results through struggle they gain the confidence to do so again and again, turning themselves into an example of effective working class solidarity in action. And when those individuals gain the insight to become successful organisers in their hostel/estate/workplace/jobcentre what we see is exponential growth in confidence. A confident constituency is the fundamental base for a militant campaign.



VM: For now your activities are small-scale and for the most part they are local to Hackney. How do you spread your campaigning model to other places? How important to you is it to do this?

EC: We think it is vital to see new groups across London become part of the coalition. As a class our power lies in numbers and organisation, so even a claimants/tenants group in every ward could fail to make an impact if they were not federated or otherwise coordinated.

As far as helping new groups set up, it's a bit more complicated. Our methods take a year or so (based on our experience in Hackney) to bear the fruits of self-managing organisation, so it is hard to just go into a new area and begin organising. What we tend to do is get in touch with groups and individuals who want to use the LCAP model in their area and give them the resources, training and advice needed to do so.

VM: A few questions about the way you organise. How often do you elect officers (treasurer, etc)? Who's eligible

to take part in elections? Do you have a constitution?

EC: We have several officer posts, and these roles are elected every year at our AGM. Despite working in quite wide constituencies, we are a membership organisation. Only members can stand for election and vote at AGMs. And yes, we have a constitution.

VM: You raise most of your funds from donations and fundraising, are there any types of organisations, eg, union branches, that you would take money from?

EC: We have accepted donations from union branches in the past and are happy to continue doing so. Initially we had a foundation grant which saw us through two years of activity, but we have decided not to accept such funding in the future as it can lay us open to compromise and manipulation.

VM: A big focus of your work has been on challenging "gatekeeping" at, for example, local authorities' Homeless Person Units. Does this bring you into conflict with workers? Do you think that you can build bridges to workers in places like this? How would you do it? Is that a priority for you?

EC: We do unfortunately end up with some workers becoming "enemy figures" in the course of a group's struggle. When doing outreach (flyering) at the Homeless Persons' Unit we usually take a few leaflets aimed at workers, explaining what we are doing.

During actions we always make it clear to the workers that we are not there

to fight them, but the housing system and policies which force them to gatekeep in order to fulfil targets.

This is not true in every case, though, as we have had to take action against specific housing officers who have been quite abusive to homeless claimants (in one case, the housing officer rudely questioned a woman's claims that she was escaping domestic violence, and kept another claimant locked in a small interview room with no ventilation for a whole hour, while her toddler was in the lobby on the other side of the door).

VM: On a related theme, what subgroups do you have? Where besides Hackney are there groups?

EC: In Hackney we have the Housing Group (formerly Hostel Residents Group, but now they have started working with other non-council tenants) and the Hackney Unemployed Workers Group (who operate as a claimants union and campaigning group around Hackney Jobcentre).

In South London we have SELCAP (South East London CAP) who currently are not campaigning but are regularly doing casework.

There's talk of a new group being set up in Waltham Forest, although I don't have any more details on it, and another potential group in Brent. We have close contact and some cross-membership with Haringey Claimants Union and hopefully we will be working closely with them soon.

• <http://www.lcap.org.uk/>

NO SWEAT

£1,000 for Haitian workers' federation

BY DANIEL RANDALL

Anti-capitalist activists and comedy fans (and a few people who fell into both categories) packed out London's Cross Kings pub on February 10 for a music and comedy benefit to raise money for Batay Ouvriye, the radical Haitian workers' federation with a proud history of organising amongst Haiti's hyper-exploited workers and urban poor. We were responding to an appeal for international solidarity in the wake of the devastating earth-

quake.

High-profile comedians such as Jeremy Hardy, Robin Ince and Shappi Khorsandi appeared on the bill, alongside folk-rock singer Robyn Hitchcock. The comedy, as well as the context, was political; Shappi Khorsandi's scathing attacks on the Stop the War Coalition and George Galloway for their support for the Iranian regime were particularly well-received by AWL members in the audience.

No Sweat also used the gig to launch its "Send It Back" campaign, through which it encourages activists to cut the labels out of their sweatshop-made goods and send them to No Sweat in preparation for an eye-catching piece of direct action at Christmas 2010...

Andy Taylor from the Haiti Support Group made a moving speech in which he described the conditions of life for Haitian workers and explained how every pound given directly to a grassroots organisations like Batay Ouvriye translates to £1,000 given to a mainstream, bureaucratic charity appeal like the DEC.

No Sweat will be continuing its work in solidarity with Haitian workers and its February forum is dedicated to discussing the subject; come and join us.

UK socialists show solidarity with Israeli refusers

BY IRA BERKOVIC

Around a dozen activists, mostly members of the AWL, made their presence felt opposite the Israeli embassy on 28 January in a picket called to show solidarity with Emelia Marcovich, the latest Israeli student refuser to be sent to jail.

Emelia is a member of the Shministim, a network of Israeli high-school students and sixth-formers who face jail rather than take part in compulsory national service in the Israeli Defence Force. Emelia is also active in solidarity campaigning between Israelis and Palestinians, working on campaigns against house demolition and the so-called separation "fence".

AWL is particularly active on the issue of refuser solidarity because we feel it is important to dispel the myth, particularly popular on the British left and in the Palestine solidarity movement, that

Israeli society is a homogenous bloc free from class or political differentiation and that all Israelis are bloodthirsty colonialists.

The courage of activists like Emelia prove that there is a movement within Israel — however currently weak and marginalised it may be — that wants to support the Palestinian struggle for independence and justice and fight for a settlement between the two peoples, Israeli and Palestinian, based on mutual respect and equal rights.

We will be continuing our support for the refusers and other radical and working-class movements in Israel/Palestine over the next few months and are planning a solidarity tour to Israel and the occupied territories to make links with such organisations.

• For more information, email Heather at center_stage_red@yahoo.co.uk

**NO SWEAT LONDON FORUM
Voices from Haiti's
workers' movement:
reconstruction and
resistance**

Thursday 25 February, 6:30-8:30pm @ Housmans Bookshop, Caledonian Road (nr. King's Cross station)

More: www.nosweat.org.uk

SERTUC LGBT History Month Film Show

Showcasing shorts by independent LGBTQ film makers in London
Thursday 25 February, 6.30pm, TUC Congress House, Great Russell Street, London, WC1
Sans Titre 22, Fearful of Bubbles, Drum Heart ... and Pictures of Zain by Faryal

Free

CAMPAIGN

The Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists

The following statement is being circulated in the labour movement (see also back page). To add your signature/find out more email: stopthetoriesandfascists@gmail.com.

The choice of government at the general election will be between Labour and the Tory Party. The current signs point to a Tory victory.

These are Tories who, in the midst of the worst crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, have promised cuts matching or outstripping the Thatcher cuts of the 1980s. Who already say they will slash public-sector pensions. Who, to push through these cuts, will have to try to break the public sector unions. Tories on whom the liveliest external pressure is, at present, from the fast-growing further right, like UKIP and the BNP.

Cameron presents himself as the new model Tory. It is a scandal that the Labour leaders can allow him to present himself as a champion of the Health Service. In fact he is as determined a class warrior as any previous Tory leader, including Thatcher.

There are now, for the first time in many years, real policy differences between Labour and the Tories. Activists who know their history will not dismiss them with a shrug and a claim that things can't get worse.

Though the trade unions' role in Labour Party affairs has weakened, because of the passivity of the union leaders, who keep an iron bureaucratic grip on trade union affairs, the union-Labour link — with a couple of exceptions — has survived the 13 years of New Labour government. The trade union movement will, with varying degrees of reservation and sometimes with gritted teeth, finance and back the Labour Party in the election.

But the New Labour leaders are demoralised and discredited. They won't and can't fight the Tories adequately. They can't combat the widespread inclination to shrug in resignation. And just being anti-Tory is not enough — not least because if Gordon Brown's Labour does after all win the election, then it too will make cuts. Not least because the BNP will continue to grow unless socialist answers to the capitalist crisis and social decay on which it feeds become visible.

There is mass working-class disillusionment with New Labour — rightly so, on its record of slavishly serving the rich and stifling Labour Party life. But the disillusionment has come with a right-wing and anti-political drift.

The unions have begun in a very small way to reassert themselves in Labour politics. Now we need a "Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists" which will organise rank-and-file trade union activists and organisations to link a Labour vote with a positive campaign for working-class demands.

There is no chance of the outside-Labour left having a sizeable and concentrated presence in the general election, even on the scale of the Socialist Alliance in 2001. To create better choices, we need a campaign across the country to provide a working-class voice within the Labour vote at the general election. That is the best way to start organising for a labour movement fightback against a coming Tory government — or against the cuts and privatisations of another Labour government.

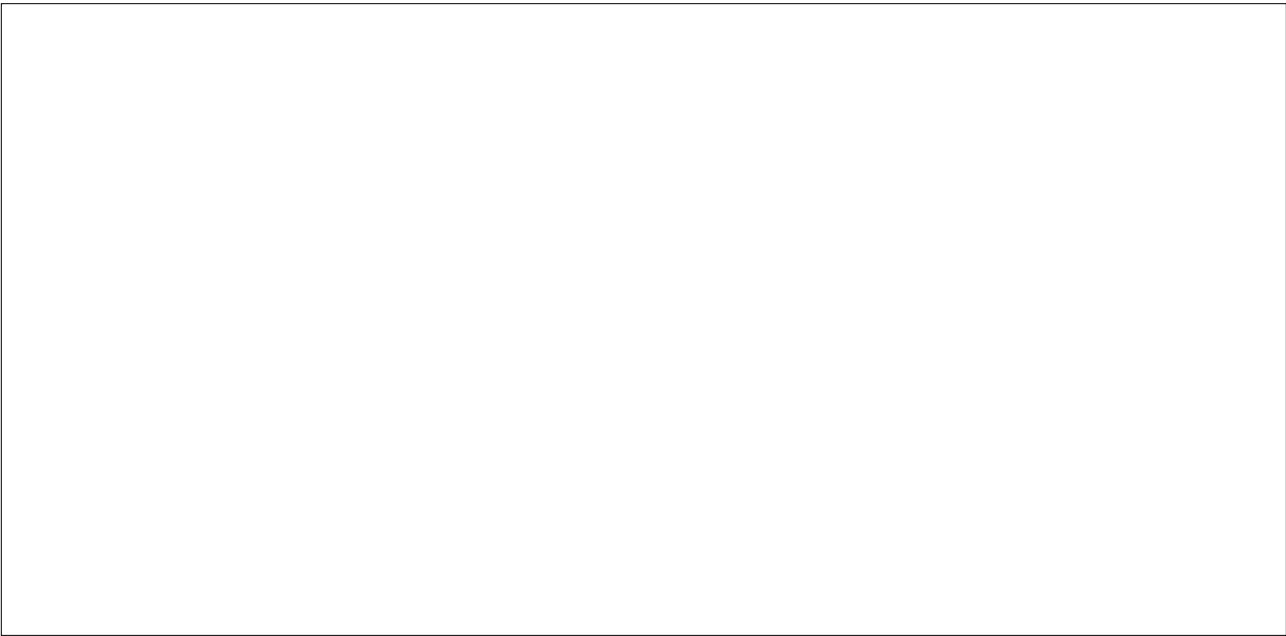
Shaken by the crisis, which has shown that modern society can live not by the market alone but only by social regulation, the Brown government has introduced "socialism"... for the bankers. A £1100 billion handout of guarantees, credit, and cash, tempered only by token taxes on wealth.

We commit ourselves to link a Labour vote with a fight for a workers' government, a government based on a renewed and reorganised labour movement that serves the working class as the Tories — and then Blair and Brown — have served the bosses and the rich.

• For working-class representation in politics. New Labour has seriously disenfranchised the working class, blocking the political channels which might have enabled working-class organisations to enforce policies.

• Reconstruct and fight for Labour Party democracy and the trade-union voice in the Labour Party.

• For a special effort to elect those left Labour candi-



dates who have represented a working-class opposition voice against New Labour.

• Support for workers and working-class communities fighting back. Struggles like Visteon, Vestas and Tower Hamlets College show that strikes, occupations and mass action are the way to win.

We will fight for:

• Decent jobs for all. Create a million green jobs and slash emissions through a democratically-controlled programme of converting energy industries, transport, and housing. Cut work hours with no loss of pay. Tax the rich and business to expand public services.

• Open the bosses' books; nationalise companies which axe jobs, under workers' control.

• Sack the bank bosses — for a single, publicly-owned, democratically-controlled banking, pensions, and mortgage service.

• A crash programme of council house building and repairs.

• Scrap the Tory anti-union laws. For legal rights to organise, to strike, to take solidarity action, and to picket. Full equal rights for part-time, temporary and agency workers.

• Stop and reverse cuts and privatisations. Restore the NHS. Nationalise the drug industry. No to Academies; a good local secular comprehensive school for every child. Free education from nursery to university. Living student grants.

• Attack inequality. No to wage cuts, for wages that rise at least in line with inflation. A minimum wage of two-thirds median male earnings without exceptions. Shift the tax burden from workers to the rich and business, abolish tax for the least well off. Benefits should be enough to live on, and rise in line with earnings or prices, whichever is higher. Oppose New Labour's attacks on the unemployed, disabled and long-term sick.

• For a decent public sector pension in old age; level up private sector schemes. Restore the link between state pensions and earnings.

• Women's rights: extend social provision instead of making cuts which put social burdens back on "caring" women. Trade union and political action for equal pay. Defend and extend abortion rights and provisions. For abortion on demand.

• Fight homophobia and transphobia. For 100% legal equality for LGBT people.

• Against fascism, racism and communalism. Unite workers – black and white; Muslim, Christian, all religions and none; migrant and British-born; "legal" and "illegal" – to fight for jobs, housing and services for all. Fight for asylum and immigration rights – no one is illegal!

• On the evidence, sending troops to Afghanistan does more harm than good; they should be withdrawn. Cut arms spending; scrap the Trident replacement.

• Unite with workers across Europe; fight to level up wages, conditions, services and rights, including: nurs-

The Visteon occupation challenged the political status quo

ery provision, pensions, rights to consultation over job cuts and relocations.

• Put MPs on a worker's wage, with properly-vetted expenses.

We pledge ourselves to fight for these policies, and to revive and rebuild the labour movement at every level. Keep out the Tories! Vote Labour and prepare to fight Brown and the New Labour neo-Thatcherites whose rule has brought working-class politics to its lowest point in many decades!

For a workers' government!

Initial signatories — all in a personal capacity

Susan Press, Labour Representation Committee Vice-Chair and Hebden Bridge town councillor

Maria Exall, CWU National Executive

Pete Keenlyside, CWU Postal Executive

Pat Murphy, NUT National Executive Committee member for West Yorkshire

Liam Conway, Notts NUT Joint Secretary

Ruah Carlye, NUT school rep, east London

Pat Markey, Northampton Teachers' Association Secretary

Tom Unterrainer, Nottingham City NUT Vice-President

David Williams, former deputy leader of Birmingham City Council, Solihull Unison Assistant Treasurer and workplace rep

Dan Nichols, LFEPA Unison Labour Link Officer

Jean Lane, Tower Hamlets Local Government Unison Secretary

Mike Fenwick, Airedale Health Unison

Ed Whitby, Newcastle City Unison stop steward

Kate Ahrens, Leicestershire Health Unison steward

Ruth Cashman, Lambeth Unison Joint Assistant Secretary

Anna Longman, Guy's and St Thomas' Unison member, Feminist Fightback activist

Alan Fraser, Southern Region GMB Regional Education Officer

Paul Coles, London Borough of Barnet Mill Hill Depot GMB Convenor

Camila Bassi, Sheffield Hallam University UCU Chair

Tony Byrne, RMT East Midlands Region Political Officer

Becky Crocker, RMT London Transport Region Young Members' Officer

Susan Carlyle, former Labour councillor in Tower Hamlets

Dave Kirk, RWE Npower Unite rep

Elaine Jones, Wirral TUC Vice-President, Unite 6/522 branch activist

Jim Denham, Unite 5/445 Assistant Secretary

Maggie Bremner, Unite North Newbury branch secretary

Vicki Morris, Barnet TUC publicity officer, NUJ London free-lance member

Karen Johnson, Communities and Local Government/Department for Transport PCS

Ed McWilliams

Adele Winston, BECTU member

Ed Maltby, National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts co-convenor

Tali Janner-Klausner, London School Students' Union

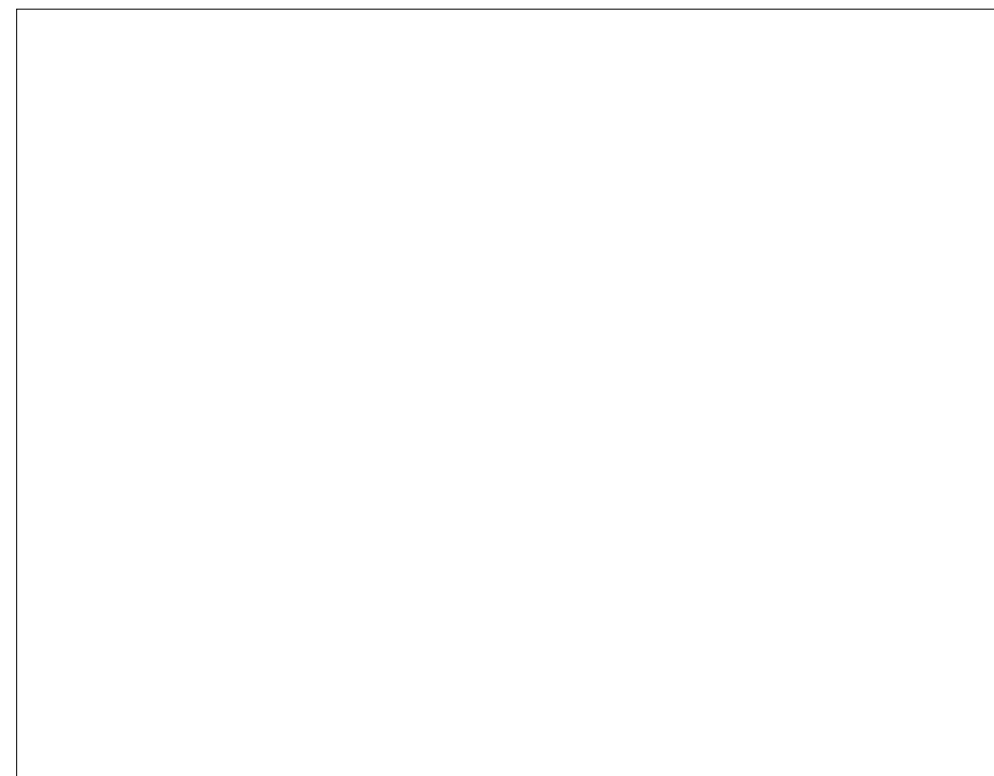
Daniel Randall, NUS Trustee Board

Chris Marks, Hull University Union Vice-President (Education)

Alice Marshall, Hull University Union Vice-President (Welfare)

Charlotte Binstead, Sidney Sussex College JCR/SU President

The left and the right in the general election



Should we stop trying to defeat capitalism on its own ground — and turn to working-class self-organisation?

How should the working-class left respond to the general election and the cuts that will inevitably follow, whichever party wins? *Solidarity* spoke to a range of activists (all in a personal capacity) from across the left. We will continue the discussion in future issues.

We need to lift our gaze up from the mire of party politics

Andy Littlechild is Chair, RMT London Underground Engineering branch and a member of the Solidarity Federation.

My views about the particular details and outcomes of this general election are probably much the same as those of most people on the left. However, views that are at the same time gloomy in terms of what we're about to have to face after the election, as well as circular views that are bound within the constraints and defeating context of electoral liberal democracy.

Our current unions are social democratic, so are stuck needing to pursue their members' interests by campaigning for the most progressive, or (more likely) least harsh party/candidate etc.

Boris Johnson and his GLA lackeys have intimated that they will frame specific anti-union legislation against strikes on the tube; that would put further rules on how ballots are to be conducted. The proposed process will render both balloting and taking any meaningful action virtually impossible, and will impose strictures that, if applied to parliamentary

elections, would mean no government could be elected. (Which in itself may not be such a bad thing!)

Though initially aimed at the tube unions (i.e. RMT), it could spread to other public sector industries and eventually across all employment.

In the absence of a credible alternative, with the big unions and TUC completely sold out to the Labour Party and the employers' agenda, I guess there is no other choice than to campaign for "better" Labour candidates and/or a new workers' party, even if just to contrast to or oppose the Labour Party.

I think that this is not a meaningful possibility though, but rather a pitiful situation that the working class are in.

The unions will need to get ready to defend against the coming mass attack from employers, whichever government gets elected.

There is really no scope for trade unionists to choose which issues to fight around, the employers have that prerogative only. Ours is just a defensive class struggle against the class war which is being waged against us by the ruling class.

No doubt there will be attacks on public sector jobs, pay, conditions and the services they provide to the public, along with the same and further casualisation, etc., in the private sector, with increasing exploitation/demonisation of migrants.

Economic or workplace/industrial organisation is not sufficient, but a separate political organisation — meaning a party — has been tried and proven to be a cul-de-sac for workers. The separation of politics from economics is an artificial division that has led to workers only being trusted to deal with workplace issues, with political power handed over to a political elite (the party), who without fail consolidate that power unto themselves, looking to their own interests, that become increasingly opposed to those of the workers!

What are really needed are mass prole-

tarian organisations that deal with all political and workplace matters — self-managed by the workers themselves, federating to each other according to necessity, to resist and overcome the current system., on to organising and jointly facilitating genuinely free communism.

Your questions [about the workers' party, etc.] were framed in the depressing way that accepts the status quo to the point of being swallowed by it, but that accurately depicts the limit of debate on the left generally.

At some point we need to lift our gaze up from the mire of the parties left or otherwise; and begin to draw up a programme of strategy and tactics to extract ourselves as socialists and communists from the trap we're emeshed in. This will be the real beginning of the necessary grand work.

Sadly though, the forces of the left seem addicted to the increasingly futile contest with capitalism on its own ground; with its ever diminishing returns, and with sectarian competition with itself through endless left division, rivalry and back biting, driven by "vanguard party" aspirations.

All this occurs at activist level, and activists all seem to love (love/hate!) the company of other activists with its intrigue, controversy, etc., much more than the company of working people.

This activist party drama desperately needs to end, and, once ended, the activists supported by their current parties return to build real workplace and community self-organisation.

People's Charter and Labour Representation Committee can be focuses for unions

Mick Shaw is the national president of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU)

The election is not one we approach with any enthusiasm. Whatever happens and whichever of the major parties forms the next Government, it's clear that there's going to be large cuts in public expenditure.

From the point of view of the FBU and the fire service, a Tory government would be the worst possible outcome. The cuts will be much deeper and more rapid under the Tories than under a Labour government or a hung parliament.

Will you help the socialist alternative?

In the 2010 General Election the Alliance for Workers' Liberty will raise the banner of a socialist alternative — to give clear political answers to both the Tories and New Labour.

We will work for a Labour vote tied to a positive campaign against the cuts and privatisation agenda of Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

We will be standing a candidate against Harriet Harman in Peckham and Camberwell, south London; Jill Mountford will stand for a workers' voice in Parliament.

Getting across our message will take money, yet we have no rich donors or "captains of industry" to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this election year.

CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college (contact our office for details).
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and press the donate button.
- Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank (to "AWL", account number as above).
- Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

THANKS

In the last three weeks we have received £300 from Pat, £1000 from B, £800 from A and £70 from Dan. Our fighting fund running total now stands at £3888.

labour movement election

In terms of the issues unions should be campaigning on, I think that the People's Charter is a useful basis for that campaigning. Public spending cuts, public sector pay freezes and attacks on public sector pensions are all very important issues for us and the People's Charter links those to a wider political and economic context, making clear who has caused the current economic situation and demanding that workers should not be required to pay the cost. The fact that it's attracted support from some right-wing MPs shouldn't be made too much of; Bob Spink is just a loose cannon, and if the Lib Dem MPs who've signed it genuinely support its demands then that's to be welcomed.

The FBU is no longer affiliated to the Labour Party, so we would not be able to take part in any attempt by the unions to assert themselves inside the party before or after the elections. We do think it's very important that socialist MPs such as John McDonnell and Jeremy Corbyn are re-elected and that there is the biggest contingent of socialist MPs in Parliament.

Some people look to the FBU to take part in independent electoral initiatives, but anyone who imagines that the FBU is going to be supporting any attempts at left-wing electoral initiatives in the near future is very wide of the mark. There's no significant enthusiasm for that inside the FBU. Maybe particular individual local candidates with strong local bases and track records could successfully appeal to our local officials for support, but they'd very much be the exceptions rather than the rule.

My judgement is that it is still possible for trade unions to assert some influence within the Labour Party, but up to now it's been very uncoordinated and unsuccessful. The People's Charter and the

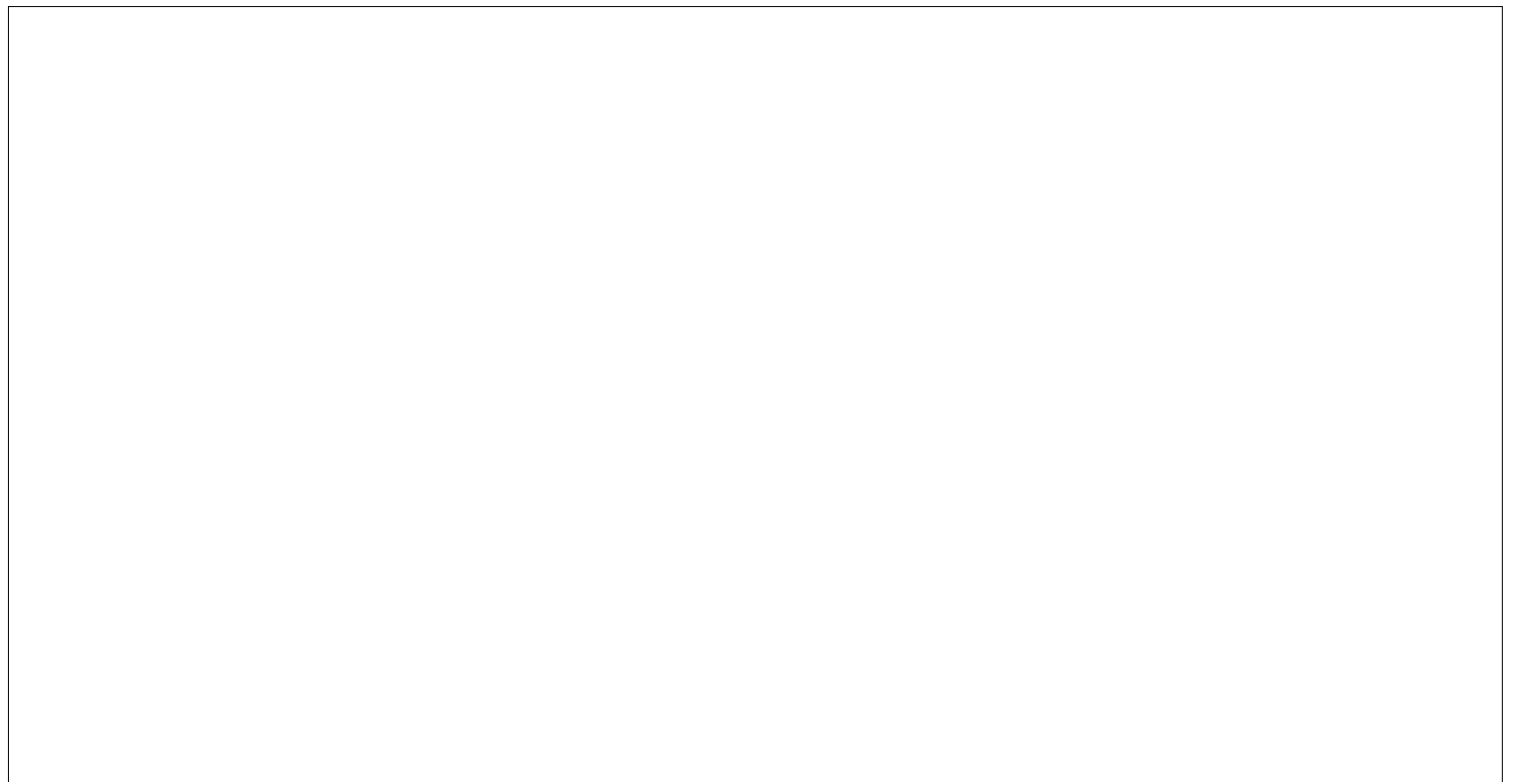
Get active in the community

Ben Sellers is Co-President of SOAS students' union.

The National Union of Students are asking people to pledge to only vote for MPs who will not raise tuition fees. It's a sad state of affairs that a big part of the NUS's campaign is to get students to vote in the first place. That shows how disenfranchised students feel from the voting process.

Most main political parties show a bleak outlook for the next ten years. They all supported the bailouts of the banks and therefore support a system that doesn't work. And no-one who looks like they'll win will be relocating that money to education or health spending.

Rather than encouraging my members to vote, I'll be encouraging them to go and engage in communities, get active politically in other ways, and go out into working-class communities to make the arguments against the BNP. We need to create a proper alternative that can show a way to bring down the system that disenfranchises people and creates so much misery.



Labour movement ideas about public services need to be at the forefront of our campaigns

Labour Representation Committee are initiatives which the FBU supports, and we'd like to see more unions backing those initiatives and organising around them both before and after the election.

There needs to be a reconnection between the Labour Party and the labour movement

Mark Chiverton is a public sector worker, a Unison activist and the Labour Party PPC for the Isle of Wight.

We're running a strong Labour Party campaign on the Isle of Wight. We'll run on a traditional Labour platform; we don't want the election to be a contest to see who can cut public services the most.

There's a worry that that's what the election will turn into, and I'm absolutely opposed to that. The provision of public services is an absolutely essential component of any civilised society and it's very important that the Labour Party connects with the aspirations of working-class people around those issues.

As a public sector worker and trade unionist, a Tory government would be a disaster for my industry. Some of the lines being pushed by right-wing groups like the Tax Payers' Alliance around issues

like public sector pensions are outrageous. With a Tory government, we'd see more externalisation of services, we'd see de-recognition of trade unions in the sector.

There are still opportunities for trade unions to assert an independent voice in this election. The Labour Party has an organic link to the organised working class. What we need is a new model for that relationship where workers put forward their views and there's a more responsive relationship to those aspirations on the part of the party leadership and any Labour government.

It's about reconnecting with people in the workplace and the community. There are considerable aspects of government policy which are a considerable worry for people I'm meeting, so it's about bridging that gulf and making those reconnections.

I'm involved in Unison's "Million

Voices for Public Services" campaign. I want to see a reaffirmation of traditional labour movement values, embodied in campaigns like that — ideas of publicly-owned, democratically-controlled services. Those ideas should be central to the mission of any future Labour government. We need to see an end to things like the banking bonus culture.

But in order for unions to express their voice in the party, there's also a need to make the Labour Party conference a more representative and influential policy-making forum. There has been a frustration in recent years that Constituency Labour Parties and trade unions don't have any real influence any more. That's not to hark back to some mythical golden age in the past, but there does need to be a reconnection between the Labour Party and the labour movement.

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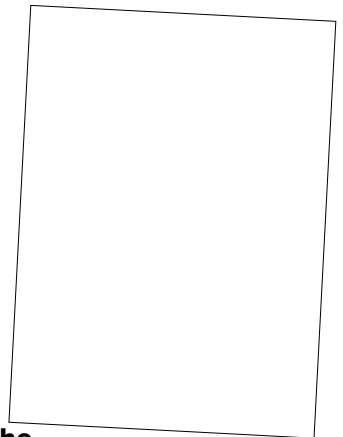
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AWL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Get involved!

AWL member Jill Mountford is standing in the Camberwell and Peckham constituency whose sitting MP is the prominent Labour MP Harriet Harman.

Over the last few weeks AWL members and our supporters have leafleted most of the constituency, and are building for our second meeting on a local estate.

Members have been working hard, discussing with residents and workers. Femi, a journalist from Nigeria, met us in Peckham Rye and commented that Labour had managed to hand out billions to the bankers but could not fix the pot-holes in the road [we were standing next to huge craters], or clear up the litter from outside his block of flats.

Almost no-one has anything positive to say about the New Labour government or the local council (run by a coalition of Liberals and Tories). Many feel betrayed and angry.

Edwin, an unemployed building worker from Camberwell, told us he had been looking for work for eight months and the strain is beginning to tell on his family. Others have very similar stories.

Commuters getting off of the train at Peckham Rye often stop to buy a paper, or take a leaflet and wish us well.

Jill Mountford told *Solidarity*, "The issue that is raised time and again is the state of public housing in the area. People with families, physical disabilities or who are elderly often find living in high-rise accommodation is inappropriate. Others complain that rents are high and that council stock is run-down and badly maintained.

"On the Aylesbury estate the residents are being pushed aside for a PFI privatisation project which will replace a great deal of council housing with a mix of new homes, many unaffordable to the people who currently live in the area."

Jill said, "I had a letter printed in the *Guardian* against Harman's risible, newly-manufactured, 'class war' pose. After that letter I had lots of encouragement from all sorts of people in the local area. People I only know vaguely came up and congratulated us. They want someone to stand up against New Labour and the other mainstream parties. They feel left out of the political process, with no-one to represent them.

"The nicest thing that happened last week was when a teaching assistant at my kids' school gave me a hug and a kiss in the playground after seeing the campaign leaflet that we'd posted through her front door. She had obviously passed the leaflet around other TAs — some of whom expressed support too."

- You can help our campaign. Find out more at www.workersliberty.org/mountford
- Email: sacha@workersliberty.org
- Phone 07904 944 771

INTERVIEW: A TENANTS' ACTIVIST

Organising on the Aylesbury

The Aylesbury Estate at Elephant and Castle is at the heart of the Camberwell and Peckham constituency. Built in the 1960s and 70s, the estate is currently home to 7,500 people, but is due to be demolished in stages. The council plan a privately-funded regeneration scheme. The tenants are concerned that vast amounts of money will be made by private companies, as council housing with secure tenancies is replaced with various types of private housing.

Inevitably the poorest and most vulnerable will lose out as council housing stock is reduced in a borough which already has 15,000 on its waiting list.

Solidarity spoke to Aysen Dennis, a tenants' activist on the estate, who has helped distribute leaflets for Jill Mountford's campaign.

What is the situation on the estate?

It is obvious what we think of PFI. We do not want privatisation.

If they get the money — and that is not certain in this recession — they will start to knock down the estate and build homes for yuppies.

Already some of the tenants have been moved.

We have been campaigning for nearly 10 years, but over that time we have been denied proper maintenance and proper cleaning. So some tenants have become fed up and want to move.

We are worried that if we lose the council housing, we lose it for good.

In fact, at the same time as people are being moved out, some tenants from the Heygate [a nearby estate, whose regeneration is behind schedule] are moving in here.

We are unsure about the future. Most probably any tenants with rent-arrears will lose their rights. They intend to provide 700 fewer council homes than currently exist. The selection process is unclear.

They are trying to persuade elderly people to move away from London. But people have often been living here for a long time, and have social networks here. People know each other, and support each other.

They have tried to stigmatise us, saying that the estate is a difficult place to live, with crime and drug problems. Of course there are problems, but these could be dealt with if the estate was properly managed. I am happy here and I have no intention to move.

What does your tenants' group want?

We want positive help. The lifts need replacing so they do not break down all the time. The kitchens and bathrooms should be renewed. But the basic structure is fine. I don't want to be moved to

a small box where I don't know the next-door neighbours.

We want council housing, and more council housing, with secure tenancy rights. We do not use the term "social housing" which means all sorts of things.

Our group has a meeting in March to inform residents about the danger of PFI — which means private profits. And we meet across Southwark as Defend Council Housing.

What do you think of the local council? And Harriet Harman? [Southwark Council is run by a Liberal-Tory coalition]

I don't recognise differences between the parties. They are all liars. I do, however, expect them to carry out their duties toward the tenants, which they have failed to do.

Harriet Harman has done nothing for us. We had an open day, but she didn't come. At a local public meeting she allowed a local tenants' group which favours PFI to make her case for her. When we have been to lobby her in parliament mostly we have been met by her condescending secretary.

The only time she comes here is at election time.

There's an election coming, what sort of government do you think we need?

A socialist government, of course! What would such a government do? To change the whole system, starting by nationalising the banks, taking full state control of housing and education. And, as a woman, it is an outrage that in 21st-century London women are still being paid less than men.

UK INDEPENDENCE PARTY

Sometimes quirky, always reactionary

By DAN KATZ

It is now common to meet working-class people who say they are sympathetic to, or will vote for the UK Independence Party. Clearly what they stand for has a resonance, including a resonance with former Labour supporters, alienated by New Labour's record in government. Anti-fascist activists need to arm themselves against this unpleasant far-right party.

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) polled 16.5% of the vote in the 2009 European elections beating Labour and winning 13 seats in the European parliament. UKIP will get fewer votes in the coming general election — partly because of the voting system, and partly because this election will be about electing a national government. Nonetheless, it will pick up votes.

Writing recently in the *Times* UKIP founder Alan Sked denounced its increasing intolerance, "If the party is really so obsessed with race, immigration and Islam, it should simply merge with the BNP, which it increasingly resembles... I hope that all decent people will condemn the party."

UKIP also seems unfazed by a series of expenses scandals which have embroiled its MEPs, and happily denounces the "Brussels Gravy-train"

while indulging itself.

UKIP's key policies are withdrawal from the EU, defence of the pound, opposition to immigration and — increasingly — a stand against the "Islamisation" of the UK, offering a "respectable" alternative to those who believe themselves "better" than the fascist BNP.

They appeal to former Tories who believe Cameron is too cosmopolitan and soft, and those too self-consciously proletarian to ever consider voting for a posh Tory in the first place.

In an effort to broaden its policy base UKIP also offers a radical-right welfare state policy, which, for example, advocates tearing up current benefits policy, and comes complete with clichés about scroungers and single mums.

However, UKIP's major policy statements also include peculiar, quirky attempts at social micro-management. For example, "UKIP would allow pubs and clubs to introduce properly ventilated 'smoking rooms' or to choose to be designated as 'all smoking' or 'all not smoking' according to its clientele" — something which was probably — literally — dreamt up in a bar late at night. The party has a strange amateurishness alongside populist political opportunism.

UKIP's appeal is to what sociologists might identify as a particular layer in

the "lower middle classes" — a layer and an attitude that is well-known to anyone familiar with small-town or suburban Britain: pale and white, frightened, timid, curtain-twitching, house-price-obsessed, mean, narrow, parochial and solidarity-free. And like all effective populists they know who they are aiming at: their material includes an "anti-establishment" element, condemning the big-bourgeoisie as "anti-British".

UKIP claims, "Britishness can be defined in terms of belief in democracy, fair play and freedom, as well as traits such as politeness." The Britishness of politeness will probably come as a surprise to many Spanish and Greek waiters. Of course it is risible nonsense — the British as a whole are no more or less polite as a group than any other people.

This mythologising about the unique quality of British "decency" is a sad echo from times past (a utopian and nationalist appeal to resurrect Great Britain's glory), but is also a nod towards the fear produced by the very real social decay we see around us.

Dealing with UKIP adequately can only be accomplished by a revitalised labour movement, capable of spreading a message of internationalism and solidarity to those at the edges of the working class.

We need to save the NHS

STOP THE CUTS

By STUART JORDAN

Over recent years New Labour's permanent revolution of "restructuring" inside the NHS has laid the groundwork for the privatisation of healthcare. These changes have been put in place without any public scrutiny. Now, using the political cover of the economic crisis, NHS bosses and politicians are planning enormous cuts and this will speed up plans for privatised healthcare.

Last year McKinsey management consultancy was tasked with finding £15-20 billion in savings in the NHS by 2014-15. Their report, leaked to the press, painted a bleak picture for healthcare workers and patients. Their concluding recommendation was a cut in the workforce of 10% — that's 137,000 workers on the dole and lots of sick people going without treatment. Politicians of every stripe were quick to distance themselves from the report's conclusions, but a survey conducted by *Health Service Journal (HSJ)*, reveals that many Strategic Health Authorities are acting on their own initiative and implementing the recommendations.

NHS South East Coast are seeking to lay off 10,000 staff in the next four years. NHS North East have plans for an 8% reduction, or 5,500 staff by 2012. 38% of Trusts are now running recruitment freezes.

The management body, Foundation Trust Network, recommends compulsory redundancies and a list of terrible conditions for those staff who are lucky enough to keep their job:

- freezing increments on pay progression for two to three years
- reducing the number of pay points on salary bands
- stopping staff from being able to opt back into the national salary scale, "Agenda for Change", after accepting local arrangements
- implementing robust sickness policies
- no guarantees of employment to any trainee
- capping pensions for higher earners (over £100,000)
- removing other pensionable items such as London weighting
- ending clinical excellence awards.

"Front" NHS workers are not alone in facing cuts. Both Labour and Conservative politicians have engaged in populist rants about the "bureaucracy". Andy Burnham's strategy paper "From Good to Great" calls for a reduction in management costs of 30% over the next four years. Up to 5,700 commissioners and administrators are facing the axe this year. (Although their severance pay, estimated at around £470 million,

might, in the end, make this an empty threat.)

What none of the politicians are willing to admit is that an overloaded bureaucracy is caused by the privatisation agenda. The creation of internal markets and commissioning requires a lot of pen-pushers. Yet at the same time as there has been the proliferation of managers and administrators, frontline staff are given increased administrative responsibilities, such as organising ward supplies and shift rotas. So, in fact, frontline staff need more properly organised administrative support.

Cutting the "bureaucracy" without addressing the underlying cause of bureaucracy and the dysfunctionality of the existing bureaucracy will only make this burden worse.

"Management speak" has become a means to obscure the real agenda and goals of health policy. The current buzzwords are "demand management" and "reviewing the skill mix of the workforce". Behind the doublespeak is a sinister agenda.

The Foundation Trust Network argues that "natural wastage will fail to give the shape of workforce and skill mix required to sustain patient services in the future, and that [compulsory] redundancies are likely to be needed." This statement only makes sense if it is the intention of NHS bosses to run down services to the extent that better-off patients will start shopping for their healthcare elsewhere.

Under the rubric of "demand management" the government is placing a cap on money paid out to acute trusts. Under new rules, if admissions to acute services increase above 2007-8 levels then the acute trusts will only get 30% of the tariff they are entitled to (the flat fee paid for each procedure done by the NHS). The remaining 70% of the tariff will be channelled into the Strategic Health Authority for "demand management".

In theory, the SHA is supposed to use the extra cash to run public health campaigns and preventative medicine schemes. However, according to another consultancy firm, the real effect of the policy will be to run up a £7.5 billion annual deficit in the acute sector by 2015, a deficit that will "threaten their continuing viability, at least as independent institutions".

If hospitals or hospital departments are forced to close down (and we are already seeing this, for instance, with the threatened closure of north London's Whittington Accident and Emergency department), then — those who can afford it — will start investing in private health insurance. This is the privatising reform behind "demand management" — it is a big threat to socialised healthcare.

The cuts are likely to come quickly. Sir David Nicholson, chief executive of the NHS, rants, "I'm not interested in proposals. I want the money in the tin; I'm counting on the money." An editorial in the *HSJ* makes the plea "any national negotiations over flexible working and job guarantees must be conducted efficiently and with a minimum of posturing from any of the parties involved." The NHS bosses are aware that the unions are very weak at the moment, while savage cuts could see resistance grow quickly.

Meanwhile union officials are engaged in closed-

door negotiations with trusts and the Department of Health. They want a no compulsory redundancy deal. Health Secretary Andy Burnham is exploring "the pros and cons [!] of offering frontline staff an employment guarantee locally or regionally in return for flexibility, mobility and sustained pay restraint". Alistair Darling has already announced that from 2011-13 nurses will receive no more than a 1% increment. The most likely scenario is that staff will be offered a three-day week to avoid redundancies (and heavy redundancy costs).

Trade unionists in the health service need to mobilise their members and hold their leaders to account. The union tops may be about to give up our terms and conditions, national bargaining and pay in exchange for a no compulsory redundancy deal. We must demand much more, especially given the disastrous political implications of these cuts.

The fragmented nature of the NHS means that the cuts will hit at different times and the resistance will be patchy. It is the job of socialists to link up the struggles that do emerge and draw on the strength of stronger and more militant sections of the labour movement. The NHS, the embodiment of the working class principle of "free state of the art healthcare at the point of need", is under threat. Only mass trade union direct action, linked up to working-class campaigns in local communities, can save it.

LEICESTERSHIRE

Unison has pledged to fight cuts in the Leicestershire NHS, after it was announced that around 700 jobs may be lost. Health bosses in the area are trying to make up a budget deficit of £58m caused by rising costs. Unison say that staff are already "pushed to the limit."

Save the Albany Midwives Demonstrate: 7 March, London

The Albany Midwifery Practice in Peckham, South London until recently was under contract to King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

The Albany always aimed to provide continuity of carer throughout pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period.

The Albany Midwives cared for a caseload of local women regardless of their perceived medical or social risk. Their perinatal mortality rate, however, is lower than the national average and far lower than the average for Southwark borough as a whole.

Yet King's has now forced the service to close down by terminating their contract with the Albany. www.savethealbany.org.uk

STOP THE CLOSURE OF WHITTINGTON HOSPITAL ACCIDENT AND EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

**Demonstration
Saturday 27 February
12 noon, Highbury Fields, N5
www.dwhc.org.uk**

SWP RESIGNATIONS

A new front in the SWP?

BY COLIN FOSTER

John Rees, the SWP's leading figure from Tony Cliff's death in 2000 to 2007, has resigned from the SWP together with 41 others, with a statement endorsed by 18 other recent ex-SWPers.

Their statement links their resignation with that of Lindsey German, another former SWP leader who resigned in protest at pressure from the SWP Central Committee not to speak at a particular local meeting of the Stop The War Coalition (of which she is the paid convenor).

Like German's resignation letter, the new statement says nothing about what the signatories will do now, politically.

The statement claims that "the events of recent weeks leave us with little choice" but to resign, but does little to substantiate the claim.

It criticises the SWP on the grounds that "the task of building broad, political opposition in every area to the disasters created by neoliberalism and war is now subordinated [by the SWP] to short term party building". In fact the SWP continues a "front"-building, "Munzenbergist" approach pretty similar to that of recent years, and the resigners' complaints here seem to come down to that they wanted more Labour MPs and trade-union leaders on the platform of the recent SWP-organised "Right To Work" conference.

"Valuable recent initiatives, like the Right to Work

campaign, have minimised the involvement of Labour MPs, union leaders and others who have the capability to mobilise beyond the traditional left".

The back-story is that John Rees and Lindsey German were central to the SWP's shameful link-up with George Galloway MP in the "Respect" coalition between 2004 and 2007. Martin Smith, Alex Callinicos, and the rest of the SWP Central Committee endorsed and supported that turn, too.

But in 2007 the "Respect" tactic collapsed. Galloway split, leaving the SWP with a rump, and taking a few SWPers with him. Most of the few non-SWPers who stayed with the SWP proved unreliable: for example, four of Respect's councillors in Tower Hamlets, the one place where they had a sizeable council group, stayed on the SWP side, but of those four, one soon went over directly from SWP membership to the Tories, and the other three, a bit later, went over to Labour.

Smith and Callinicos scapegoated Rees for the fiasco.

The back-story to that back-story is that in the 1980s Cliff steered the SWP into an ostentatiously "party-building" mode, spurning "broad front" activity and much of trade-union activity above workplace level. After a period of flux in the early 1990s, Cliff pushed the SWP to readjust. SWP satellite groups in Germany and France were pushed into joining the social-democratic youth movements.

In 1999 the SWP threw itself into building a "broad-

front" Stop The War Coalition over the Kosova war. Actually the campaign was to "stop the war" on Milosevic's terms — i.e. to demand NATO allow Milosevic a free hand for "ethnic cleansing" in Kosova. But it was floated on floods of pacifistic and anti-US rhetoric, with an undercurrent of the Stalinoid nostalgia which made some leftists see Serbia as retaining some element of (Stalinist) socialism; and the SWP considered it a great success.

The SWP wheeled out Stop The War again for the Afghan war in 2001 and for the invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2003 it managed to get gigantic demonstrations.

Cliff died in 2000, and the SWP then lacked leaders with the confidence and authority to make readjustments. For the last decade it has occupied itself with countless attempted "broad-front" campaigns — sometimes outright alliances with Islamic clerical-fascists — and timid and empirical attempts to recoil and restore a bit of attention to the SWP's ravaged political profile and "party" organisation.

Will the resigners now become just campaign activists, giving up on any effort to build a Marxist organisation as well as the broader campaigns?

Will the SWP now convert the Stop The War Coalition — where German, Rees, and others have significant control through holding paid official posts — into a battlefield, striving to oust German and Rees and get SWPers into the key posts?

UAF: how not to build the united front

BY SACHA ISMAIL

About 500 people attended the Unite Against Fascism conference on 13 February. With even roughly adequate political perspectives, these activists would be well-placed as tribunes and organisers for an effective anti-fascist movement. Unfortunately the conference confirmed what we knew already: the SWP leadership has involved them in a morass of political unprincipledness and confusion.

I attended the opening plenary and the workshop on "Bringing anti-fascism into the workplace". Both were highly instructive.

In the plenary we had fluff from Kay Carberry, assistant TUC general secretary, who said that some working-class voters and even trade unionists are attracted to the BNP because they're "influenced by media stories". Christine Blower from the NUT was slightly better, correctly pointing out that the growth of the far right is a social question. "Fascism is not the answer to poverty, or to youth unemployment, or to poor housing." OK, but what is?

Finally, Martin Smith from the SWP spoke. He did ask why the BNP are growing, but his answers were confused to say the least.

The first reason he cited is what he called Nick Griffin's "eurostrategy" — his attempt to repackage the BNP as a respectable, suit-wearing nationalist party. The solution? Make sure people know what they are! That's what Smith does all the time — even when the BNP's lawyers ring him up! I'm in favour of calling the BNP fascists, but this hardly gets to grips with why they are growing.

After complaining that the BNP's "job is being made easier by people who are supposed to be on our side" — the BBC! — and criticising New Labour politicians like Margaret Hodge on their anti-migrant racism — but not much else — Smith resorted to a favourite SWP metaphor for anti-fascism: the sword and shield. UAF is the shield, defending us against the immediate fascist attack. But in the longer term we need the sword of socialist politics to go on the offensive against the bosses and politicians responsible for the conditions in which fascism grows.

But what UAF in fact does is super-glue the labour movement's sword to its shield — and then accuse anyone who wants to unglue them so we can fight effectively of disrupting anti-fascist "unity".

On a side note. The liberal journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a supporter of the British Muslims for Secular

Democracy group, was called an Islamophobe by a heckler in the audience. This is really pretty laughable and tells you a lot about the political milieu the SWP has helped to foster.

In the workshop there were a lot of interesting and inspiring contributions about anti-racist initiatives people have taken in their workplaces, particularly in schools. Without wanting to undermine any of that, the political level was incredibly low.

A number of speakers used phrases like tackling the roots of fascism. When I contributed, I asked how this was possible in a campaign that deliberately refuses to raise social demands, for fear of alienating bourgeois allies. This includes even right-wing politicians — both David Cameron and two former Monday Club official are on UAF's sponsors list — and strike-breaking bosses, most recently at UAF's anti-EDL demo in Leeds during the bin workers' strike. How can we say what is necessary if we are in bed with these people?

An SWP comrade was first to reply. She admonished me for making the same mistake as the German Communist Party when, on Stalin's orders, it refused to unite with the Social Democratic Party to fight Hitler. UAF is supposedly what Trotsky called a "united front".

Kevin Courtney from the NUT and Steve Hart from Unite asked if I was against having Tory-voting strikers on picket lines. Hart argued that the only question that matters is: do you support the strike? Similarly, the only question that matters here is: are you against fascism?

What is wrong with this?

Trotsky talked about a "workers' united front" — in the first instance, an alliance of the Communists and Social Democrats to fight against the Nazis. *Workers' unity against the fascists* — absolutely right. But in UAF the SWP "unites" not just with social democrats, not just with Labour Party people, not just with non-revolutionary trade unionists, but with outright bourgeois politicians and bosses.

Trotsky advocated cooperation between working-class activists for physical self-defence, but as part of the class struggle — fighting against the social conditions which gave rise to Nazism. He advocated complete freedom of criticism, so that communists could continue to highlight the limitations of their allies. UAF's relationship even with top Labour Party people — never mind Tories — is that of a "single issue" anti-fascist "popular front", not a working-class united front in a modern setting.

Fascism is not a "single issue", an isolated evil you

can just declare yourself against. Marxists have a more complex and subtle understanding of it as a product of social conditions, class relations and the class struggle. The ruling class and its political representatives cannot and will not fight it effectively.

When Tory workers join a union and go on strike, it is not their political affiliation that is at issue, but their class. In fact, if anything, they are striking against their own politics, even though they are not conscious of it. Inviting a Tory MP — a ruling-class Tory leader — to sponsor a campaign or appear on a platform is, self-evidently, completely different. That socialist trade unionists fail to understand these ABCs is astonishing.

WHAT WE NEED

Such is the urgency of the threat from the far right that most of the left critics at the conference seemed quite nervous about criticising UAF.

A Socialist Party speaker in the workshop session made some very vague, hinted-at criticisms of the campaign, mainly focusing on its lack of democracy. (The SP were more biting in a workshop on opposing the EDL.)

A Socialist Resistance speaker in the opening plenary denounced the idea of a popular front with Liberals and Tories, but then argued for "continuing to build the united front". Continue? What united front?! A similarly vague critical resolution promoted by SR and supported by the Jewish Socialist Group, Cambridge NUT and Brent Trades Council was not pushed; instead the speaker expressed a pious hope that the steering committee — which is not even elected at the conference! — would discuss it.

We need criticism from activists in the fight, not criticism from the sidelines. Nonetheless, clear, sharp criticism of the SWP and the destructive course on which it is leading the anti-fascist movement is what is needed.

Build a working-class network against racism and fascism

Saturday 27 March

11am-5pm, Queens Walk Community Centre,
Queens Walk, The Meadows, Nottingham
Called by Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP
nottmstopbnp@yahoo.co.uk.

JEROME DAVID SALINGER 1919-2010

Spellbound by the moment

By JORDAN SAVAGE

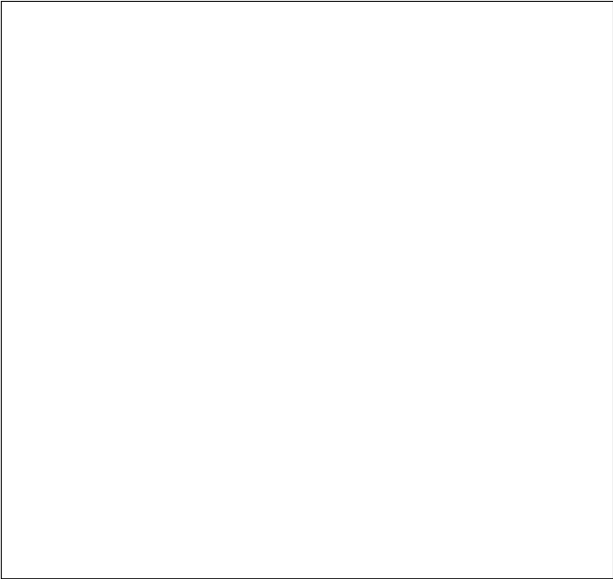
“Short stories are by nature daring little instruments and almost always represent commensurate daring in their makers”, writes Richard Ford in his introduction to the second *Granta Book of the American Short Story*. Of course, any collection of American fiction, and particularly one dedicated to the short story, that overlooks J D Salinger’s contribution can only be considered, as Holden Caulfield might put it, “phoney” in the extreme.

This oversight aside, Ford’s idea of “daring” provides a useful lens through which to consider Salinger. In his stories about the Glass family, for example, the precocious siblings seek to outdo each other on levels of daring; Seymour realises that it is Zooey, and not Buddy, on the telephone, for example, because there are certain words that only Zooey would have the audacity to use. Salinger’s constant reference to the audacious and precocious nature of his Glass children has the effect of turning them into caricatures, grotesque, overblown figures in whom it is possible to read everything that the author hates and admires. Faith, confidence, war, romance and the creative arts are all up for grabs in stories that are superficially only about family traditions and inter-generational relationships.

Many writers have been *more* daring than Salinger: Charles Olson, Ezra Pound, Allen Ginsberg. Salinger, though, is one of those significant few who, through sheer gumption, changed the face of literature (and in Salinger’s case, a national literature) for all time.

With *The Catcher in the Rye* (USA, 1951) Salinger effected a sea-change in the popular understanding of high art. Through this deadpan and angry teens-eye-view of commercial America, Walt Whitman’s high poetry is brought down a peg and the poetry of observation begins an inexorable rise, to be crowned by John Dos Passos’ *USA* trilogy in the 1960s.

Suddenly, the opinion that Tybalt and Mercutio are the real heroes of Romeo and Juliet, and that it’s probably the system’s fault when messed-up kids get kicked out of school, is compulsory teaching in every



J D Salinger

classroom in the United States.

What is crucial to Salinger’s daring, though, and what makes his off-beat prose so affecting and so enduring is that his guns-blazing refusal to accept mainstream doctrine as gospel is coupled by his poet’s understanding of the moment.

By “the moment”, I mean just that: precise points in time when everything hangs in the balance, before being swung in one direction or another by some cataclysmic event that provides stories with their crisis and, usually, their conclusion. It is the concept of the momentary that is lacking from Ford’s analysis of the short story, too; what makes stories daring, so often, is their choice of focus not on the catastrophic element but on something else, the passer-by or the eye of the storm.

The novel is there to provide us with an analysis of the unusual; the short story is a glimpse through a window and will always tend more toward the profound if it tends more toward the real-life experience. Be honest, now: you hear about extraordinary events much

more than you participate in them, don’t you? The short story at its best tends to share that situation: it is aware of the great and the terrible but it did not cause them, was not directly party to them and will not interrogate them.

Salinger’s *A Perfect Day for Bananafish* (1948) could be a textbook lesson in this technique. We are given the necessary elements of psychosis that sow the seeds of the climax — Seymour is so totally paranoid that he covers his body with a bathrobe on the beach, to keep strangers from staring at a tattoo that is not actually there. At the end of the story, he lies down quietly on his bed beside his wife Muriel and shoots himself in the head.

You will notice, though, that the story is not entitled “The Insanity and Death of Seymour Glass”. This is not what the story is about; it is about the quiet, enchanting moments that Seymour spends telling the strange story of the bananafish, who gorge themselves until they die, to the infant Sybil. It is not a cheerful story, but it has long been known that children delight most in stories that frighten as much as delight.

The stillness of this innocent exchange on the beach permeates throughout Seymour’s later actions, giving his suicide a Camusian sense of contentment. The exchange with Sybil can be looked at endlessly for literary significance: like the mythological Sybil, she is a cipher between the world of the living and the world that is to come, and so this child’s voice is the voice that calls Seymour on to the next level of his existence.

Furthermore, it is always worth looking at stories-within-stories as the intended focal point; whilst they are brief, short stories are self-conscious, and whilst Salinger is on the one hand telling of Seymour’s death, on the other his is saying, “look here — I am telling a story”.

J D Salinger died of natural causes at the age of 91. That he lived much of his life as a recluse can only be seen as a gift, as his work is so much better able to stand alone without the constant intrusion of the publicity-conscious author. Whilst he may have insisted, as Seymour does in *Franny and Zooey*, that “I am a writer and therefore not a nice man,” he was certainly a master of his craft and a pioneer of counter-cultural literature.

ALBERT BOOTH 1928-2010

An “Old Labour” man

By JANINE BOOTH

Albert Booth, former “Old Labour” Cabinet Minister, lifelong socialist and trade unionist, and my much-loved uncle, has died aged 81.

Albert was born in Winchester in 1928. His father’s search for work took the family up and down the country, and by the late 1930s they were living in Willesden, north London. One day, ten-year-old Albert answered a knock on the door. An unemployed hunger marcher was collecting along their street to pay for the funeral of a fellow marcher who had died en route. Young Albert listened with horror as he learned that when working-class people died, their bodies lay unburied until their grieving loved ones could raise the cash for a burial. The sheer, brutal injustice of this added to the socialist zeal imparted by his parents (my grandparents) to send Albert on the road to a socialist life.

Spending the war living in Scarborough, Albert left school at 13 and studied evening classes, funded by a grant from the Co-op. As the war ended, he moved to Tyneside and began work as an engineering draughtsman. He quickly became an active trade unionist, and by his early 20s was attending the national conference of the draughtsmen’s union (now part of Unite).

He joined the Labour Party as an extension of his trade unionism, was a national council member of the Labour League of Youth, secretary of his constituency party at the age of 24, and was a Labour election agent in 1951 and 1955. On the latter occasion, a young woman named Joan Amis volunteered her services to



Campaigning for Labour in 1983

Labour’s election campaign; Albert and Joan married two years later, had three sons and a fantastic lifelong partnership. Albert was a Tynemouth borough councillor from 1962 to 1965, and chaired the local Trades Council.

Having previously put up a decent show in losing a safe Tory seat, Albert was elected Labour MP for Barrow-in-Furness in 1966. As an MP, he was active in the soft-left Tribune Group, then rather more influential than now. His closest political ally, in many ways his mentor, was Michael Foot.

When Labour kicked out the Tories in 1974, Foot became Secretary of State for Employment and picked Albert as his minister, in what was seen as an appoint-

ment to satisfy the unions and the left. As minister, Albert drafted some important legislation, including the employment sections of the Race Discrimination and Sex Discrimination Acts. At last, it became illegal to sack a worker for being black, or to pay a worker less for being female. He also drafted the Employment Protection Act, which created ACAS and enshrined in law that the state favoured collective bargaining, ie., that employers should negotiate workers’ pay and conditions with their trade unions. This clause would later be repealed by Thatcher, and has not been restored by New Labour, a fact for which former Labour Party General Secretary Jim Mortimer roundly castigated the government at Albert’s funeral.

When Harold Wilson resigned as Prime Minister in 1976, Foot became leader of the House of Commons and Albert succeeded him as employment secretary. The legislative highlight was probably the 1977 health and safety reps’ regulations, still in use and set out in the “Brown Book”. It forced employers to recognise union-selected health and safety representatives and to afford them various important rights, for example, to carry out workplace inspections.

However, that Labour Government badly let down working-class people, falling out with the unions, attacking jobs and public services, lashing up with the Liberals, and signing a woeful deal with the International Monetary Fund. It ended in the “winter of discontent”, and its unpopularity opened the door for Thatcher’s Tories. Albert argued against some of

Continued on page 16

Filesharers of the world unite?

BY WILL LODGE

A small victory was earned for filesharers last month when the creator of Oink website was acquitted at Teesside Crown Court. Filesharing, where individuals can share information online, has angered the music and film industries by ignoring copyright laws, and thus denying big corporations millions of pounds of income. This ruling gives hope to four Swedish filesharers (administrators of Pirate Bay) found guilty in April 2009 of “assisting in making copyright content available”, who were sentenced to a year in jail, and fined damages of more than \$3,600,000, payable to 17 big companies including Sony BMG and Universal.

John Kennedy, chairman of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (umbrella organisation for such companies), said of the Oink case: “I cannot sleep at night when that man has £200,000 sitting in his bank account.”

Current copyright law is directly opposed to the idea of having a shared culture, in arts and ideas. In the past, patent laws and potential profits have led pharmaceutical companies to withhold the design for AIDS drugs from many Third World countries, effectively holding the technology beyond their reach. The same problem is preventing these countries from developing renewable energy technology.

We advocate wholesale non-compliance with intellectual property rights; if a global just transition (as just one example) is to be achieved, then sweeping changes to copyright law are needed. Filesharing is one such way to circumnavigate and expedite the process.

Some groups are campaigning for reform. The Pirate Party UK (PPUK) was founded in July 2009, following the success of the Swedish Pirate Party in the 2009 European elections. The PPUK joins a list of Pirate Party affiliates across the world, as part of the Pirate Parties International (PPI) group. The PPUK holds three basic principles. These are:

The Swedish Pirate Party

1. The reform of Copyright and Patent laws
 2. The protection of our Right to Privacy
 3. The protection of our Right to Freedom of Speech
- The reforms they advocate do not go far enough, however, since they merely seek to legalise filesharing where profit is not made.

The PPUK has frustratingly avoided attempts to broaden out from being a single-issue party. In response to unprompted discussions on its web forums over suggested policies on the NHS, the legalisation of cannabis and other issues, former party Treasurer John McKeown said: “Whilst we are very grateful for all the suggestions about different policies that we should adopt, the Pirate Party UK intends to remain on topic and concentrate on our three core beliefs... the PPUK will remain neutral on all other issues.”

The PPUK plans to field candidates in the general election; they have already announced their intention to stand in the Worcester and Bury North constituencies. Party leader Andrew Robinson said that the party hoped to raise awareness:

“What we really want to do is raise awareness so that the other parties say ‘bloody hell, they’ve got seven million votes this time out’... or enough votes to make them care and seriously think about these issues.”

WORKERS’ GOVERNMENT: THE POLICE

BY CLARKE BENITEZ

Ali Dizaei, the disgraced Metropolitan Police commander recently found guilty of perverting the course of justice, was dogged throughout his career by allegations of corruption and misconduct and was finally prosecuted for perverting the course of justice for framing a business associate for assaulting him.

Dizaei also became prominent for publicly accusing the Met of racial discrimination against him (he is British-Iranian), giving the right-wing press an easy angle on the whole case — they claim that he “played the race card” and exploited “political correctness gone mad” to avoid being brought to justice.

Who knows how many corrupt and self-interested operators prepared to go to any lengths to defend and extend their own power and influence there are in the upper echelons of police forces in Britain? And while Dizaei’s own claims of racial discrimination may have had ulterior motives, we also know, from numerous recent exposés, that racism and bigotry are still rife throughout the police.

No police officer found guilty of corruption is ever “just one rotten apple”; the entire institution is rotten.

The police are not a neutral body, existing to protect the interests and welfare of “the public”. Rather, they are a partially-armed force in the service of the state, and the class that rules that state. It is their interests they exist to defend.

Anyone who has ever come into contact with the police on a demonstration or picket line will understand the truth of that. The existence throughout the police force of corruption and bigotry of all kinds is no accident.

Clearly, to demand that the police is “abolished” overnight makes no sense (who should abolish it?) but neither is it sufficient to simply demand the “democratisation” of the existing police force.

Greater formal accountability over the existing force would certainly be a step forward, but a workers’ government — a government based on and accountable to working-class organisations and through which those organisations could democratically manage and plan society — would go further; it would seek to break up the machinery of the capitalist state. Such a government would seek to replace the police with directly accountable local units controlled by elected workers’ councils.

In the immediate term, socialists can positively fight for demands such as the abolition of the political police (Special Branch) as well as MI5 and MI6 and for all the rights and freedoms which the police and capitalists seek to undermine.

We also need to maintain a clear understanding about what the police represent and whose interests they serve; your local bobby helping grannies across the road could be the same person riding you down on a two-tonne horse to use your head for truncheon practice during a strike or demonstration.

Albert Booth

from page 15

this in Cabinet, but supported the leadership’s line outside, earning criticism from the left.

Socialists said that never again should there be a Labour government like that one — although subsequent ones have been even worse!

When Labour lost the 1979 election, Albert became transport spokesperson, and hired a young Peter Mandelson as his researcher, his first job at Westminster. In his last years, Albert described this to me with a sad smile as the worst mistake he ever made.

Albert lost his seat in the 1983 general election. One reason was that he refused to compromise his commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, at a time when this was a dividing line between Labour’s left and right, and when the new nuclear submarines were to be built in his constituency. Despite Albert arranging for Foot to write to Vickers workers assuring them that Labour would defend their jobs when it scrapped nuclear weapons, the issue still both lost him the seat and provoked substantial personal grief for him and his family. His stand on this issue earned him a reputation for integrity, Tam Dalyell describing him in an obituary in the *Independent* as the most principled politician he ever knew, even though not the best.

A further reason for his defeat in Barrow was a nasty campaign by anti-abortionists based in the local Catholic church, who preached that Catholics should not vote for Albert Booth and put up posters denouncing him as a baby killer. Albert believed that the law should not prevent women accessing abortion should they feel they needed to, and had refused to sign an anti-abortion Early Day Motion.

Albert became Labour Party treasurer in 1984, and sought election to Parliament in the Warrington South

constituency in 1987. He had been offered the safe seat of a retiring Labour MP, but refused on the logical grounds that it was the Tory seats that Labour needed to win! He lost the election, but achieved the biggest swing to Labour in the country. He was then offered a seat in the House of Lords, but refused on the principle that as a democrat, he could not accept a seat that he had not been elected to.

Albert then worked as transport director for South Yorkshire and then Hounslow Councils until his retirement, when he remained active in his trade union, though less so in a Labour Party he found increasingly distant from him politically. In the week before his death, he both gave his apologies that he could not attend his union branch meeting because he did not feel too well, and decided that he could no longer represent the Labour Party as a delegate to external bodies.

He also spent his time enjoying life with his family, cycling, walking, fishing, spending hours preparing delicious meals, and volunteering with his local Methodist church. Albert (or Uncle Ted to me) was a genuinely nice bloke — humble, friendly, very funny, great with kids, listening as much as talking, never pulling rank or putting anyone down. In one amusing episode, he spent about half an hour at my 30th birthday party arguing with a posh and arrogant young Tory that one of my mates had brought along. He politely pulled apart each one of his arguments, but never once revealed who he was.

Albert was a profoundly caring man, his socialism coming more from morality than from Marx. He understood that socialism would come not from earnest wishing, but from a movement, the labour movement. Albert Booth’s political life was not without mistakes, but the labour movement is poorer without him.

The left and local government in the 1980s

“There is a tide in the affairs of men / Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune / Omitted, all the voyage of their life / Is bound in shallows and in miseries.”

So too with labour movements: there are turning points, crises, decisive moments whose outcomes shape the future. The victory of the Thatcher Tories in 1979 was one such turning point. But it was the turning point it proved to be only because of the response of the labour movement and its leaders to the assaults that followed.

Instead of mobilising to resist laws that shackled the unions, cuts, large-scale sackings in the slump that hit industry and the working class within a few months of the 1979 election. The slump was not only a British affair, but the Thatcher government took advantage of its deadening effect on the sort of rank-and-file industrial militancy that had defeated the Heath Tory government six years earlier, to wage a prolonged social war on the working-class and its labour movement.

The sorry saga of the local government left was a crucial part of the comprehensive failure of the leaders of the labour movement.

The local government left was a seemingly powerful force in major areas of Britain including London, Liverpool, Sheffield and many others. The Labour Party was then what it is not now — a body with a large, politically active membership. Over the five years of the Wilson-Callaghan-led Labour government (February 1974–May 1979), the Labour Party in the country had been in sharp opposition to the Labour government.

Influential in that Labour Party left were many Marxists who had taken refuge there from the problem of building revolutionary organisations which had turned sharply sectarian — in the case of Gerry Healy’s Socialist Labour League (SLL)/Workers’ Revolutionary Party (WRP), crazy, in the conventional as well as the political sense — in the mid 1970s. Some of them were prominent in local government.

One of these was Ted Knight, “Red Ted” to the press, a former leading member, full time organiser, etc, of the SLL/WRP, who was leader of Lambeth council.

Much of that local government left had participated in the work of the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory (SCLV), a rank-and-file movement that had campaigned in the 1979 general election against the Tories while simultaneously organising a Labour left pledged to fight the policies of the Labour leaders, should they win the general election. Ken Livingstone, “Red Ken”, had been the main speaker at the founding conference of the SCLV in July 1978, and “Red Ted” was a prominent supporter.

The platform of the SCLV included a pledge by the putative local government leaders involved in the campaign not to pass on government cuts to the working class by way of rate (council tax) rises, but to use local government to organise resistance to central government cuts.

The model of left local government to which they thereby committed themselves was not the “business as usual”, typical Labour local government, but that of Poplar in the 1920s, which resisted the government and whose leaders, including George Lansbury, were prepared to go to jail rather than comply with government anti-working class measures. There was also the recent example of the 1972/3 Clay Cross Labour council, which had defied the Tory government and caused a great stir.

But within weeks of the Thatcher victory in the general election, Lambeth council, led by the newly installed “Red Ted”, announced a rate rise!

The Lambeth Labour Party forced Knight and the councillors to retreat, for the moment, on that rate rise. But it was a signal to retreat before the Tories that echoed down the first half of the 1980s, as the local government left took control in London, Sheffield, Liverpool, etc.

Everywhere, the local government left buckled. They used ‘left’ rhetoric and worked policies that made them indistinguishable from the Labour right.

(In Liverpool a Marxist organisation, Militant, the present Socialist Party, took control: arguably Militant/SP was worst of all. Whereas Ted Knight justified retreat because the industrial “big battalions” had not mobilised, Militant/SP sold out during the great miners’ strike — when they could have opened a ‘second front’ against the Tories.)

The SCLV split on the issue of rate rises.

The tendency that is now the AWL had initiated and organised the SCLV (and a little later its successor, the Rank-and-File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy). We produced and controlled the SCLV paper, *Socialist Organiser*. We resisted the turn by the local government left, signalled by its reneging on its pledge to oppose rate rises.

The question thus focused amounted to a difference on political perspectives.

Either class struggle, using the local government positions as fortresses of resistance on the Poplar/Clay Cross model, or turn left-led local government into agencies for passing on Tory cuts.

They could not pass on the cuts *and* mobilise local working-class resistance to the government.

We argued for the Poplar/Clay Cross model; the rate-risers opted for “business as usual” in local government and a few ‘left’ frills and gestures.

Having chosen the second, some of them, years later, when the Falklands war and victory in the 1983 general election had enormously strengthened Thatcher, stumbled into a sort of confrontation with the government. Ted Knight, who at the crucial turning point had led the retreat before the Tories, would be disqualified from holding office for five years.

The SCLV left divided into revolutionaries and left-talking — and sometimes ultra-left talking! — reformists, the most important of whom was Ken Livingstone.

Briefing was set up by Livingstone, Knight and others as their publication. Shortly after, Livingstone and Knight launched *Labour Herald*, in which such people as David Blunkett were prominent.

It was financed and produced for them by the WRP, itself financed by Libya and other Arab governments.

As *Socialist Organiser* insisted, there was not one argument used in self-justification by the local government left, that would not logically apply to a national Labour government. Thus the local government left became a school of reformism for the generation that would control the Labour Party in the 1980s, 90s and afterwards.

It might have been a school of class struggle...

The following open letter to Ted Knight, written in 1980, posed the issues clearly and in time, before the retreat signalled by Lambeth had become a general local government left rout.

Sean Matgamna

In April 1980 Lambeth council made a 49.9% rate rise and a £1.50 rent rise. Ted Knight responded to criticism by a bitter attack against *Socialist Organiser*. John O’Mahony replied with an open letter in *Socialist Organiser*, May 1980.

Dear Comrade Knight,

I decided to write this open letter when I read your article “Build a wall of unity across London” in *London Labour Briefing*. It was perhaps due in any case.

From being chair of the July 1978 conference which founded the Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory,

and an early supporter of *Socialist Organiser*, you have adopted a more and more antagonistic and splenetic attitude to us.

You long ago abandoned the position against rent and rate rises adopted without opposition at the July 1978 SCLV conference, and now we find ourselves sharply opposed on this serious question.

You denounce the no rent and no rate rise policy as a “recipe for political disaster”. *Socialist Organiser* thinks, on the contrary, that your policy of rent and rate rises is a policy of disguised cuts of working class living standards, and a backdoor form of collaboration with the Tories to implement cuts. It testifies to a grievous misunderstanding on your part of what the responsi-

bilities of serious socialists are right now, be they in a trade union, in the Parliamentary Labour Party, or in control of a Labour council.

Far from being a policy to rally forces behind Labour councils, your policies can only give Heseltine a weapon to split and divide local communities and alienate support from Labour councils.

Whatever our differences, *SO* will continue to support Lambeth or any other council which fights the Tories, even if only partially or hesitantly, and even if you do it with politics which we think inadequate or seriously wrongheaded.

Since we do not (contrary to the view you attribute to us) think it a matter of principle never in any circumstances to raise rents and rates, the dispute, for now, concerns matters of opinion and political judgement.

We try to win enough support to make our judgement Party policy and to have your policy rejected, but this is still for us a dispute to be fought by argument and votes in the appropriate labour movement bodies. It is a dispute within the left wing of the London labour movement.

But you don’t see it like that. Any left-wing criticism of your policies you present as testifying to a bad faith which makes those on the left who criticise you the same as the right. Your *London Labour Briefing* article attempts through smear tactics to link the *SO* left with the right wing. You write:

“A feature of the (London Labour) conference was a unity between right wing spokesmen and those associated with *Socialist Organiser* in a desperate, and at times hysterical endeavour to characterise Lambeth council as a “cutter”.

“Both groups see the danger of acknowledging that an independent left wing council can defy the Tory government and maintain a policy of refusing to cut any service, or job, or job opportunity.

“Finally they declare Lambeth councilors to be traitors because they have put up council rents. After a three-year rent freeze, and a manifesto commitment limiting such a standstill to a period of wage restraint, Lambeth councillors were faced with a clear risk of surcharge if they refused to make an increase.”

The technique you use here has long been a prize exhibit in the black museum of working class history. It is the Stalinist technique dubbed “the amalgam” by Trotsky in the 1930s when it was used to poison the labour movement against the Trotskyists by “amalgamating” their politics and criticism of Stalinism with those of the right, and pretending that right and revolutionary left were therefore in some mysterious way identical.

Just what has the position of *SO* to do with the Right? They are unhappy with rate rises and prefer cuts instead; we oppose cuts and oppose rent and rate rises because we think they are a variety of cuts. What is there in common? Nothing whatsoever!

Except that Ted Knight wants to present himself as being hounded by the right and resents and fears the criticism of the left.

Comrade Knight, you spent a considerable part of your life in the Trotskyist movement. (It is no secret, and you have not declined to talk to the capitalist press about it). Twenty-three years ago you were a business manager of *Labour Review* which exposed and helped clear away the mountains of Stalinist lies and “amalgams” which had suffocated the Marxists between the 1930s and the 1950s.

Many *SO* readers will find it hard to imagine how effective for a quarter of a century the Stalinist system of ideological terrorism based on lies and “amalgams” was in poisoning the moral, political and intellectual life of the labour movement, and in isolating the Trotskyists. You however must remember it. Like everyone who lived through even part of that period as a Marxist, you learned to hate the mendacity, the demagoguery, and the lack of political scruple of those who used the “amalgam”.

Of course, the content of your smear is modest enough compared with what the Stalinists did. And there is no Lambeth GPU [Soviet state security organisation]. But in principle it is no different. Nor, I suspect,

Continued on page 18

A campaign to stop the Tories and fascists

Continued from back page

Should Brown win the general election — though it seems very unlikely that he will — socialists will certainly have to organise resistance to a Brown government.

How does the SCSTF propose to resolve the dilemma socialists face in the general election? It proposes that the left in the unions — and in the Labour Party, such as it is — and in independent socialist organisations, should unite to conduct as big a campaign as we can muster for a Labour vote. We should combine that with educational and preparatory work against New Labour, and an attempt to organise working-class forces to fight whoever wins the election, Labour or Tory.

If this seems an impossible, self-contradictory, oxymoronic formula for action, that is because the situation we face is contradictory.

But it is not as self-contradictory as it may seem. There is a precedent for such an enterprise.

In 1978–9, the left did something very like what the SCSTF is attempting to do now. We organised a “Socialist Campaign for a Labour Victory” (SCLV).

The SCLV produced literature and held meetings that combined criticism and opposition to the policies of the outgoing Labour government of Jim Callaghan with militant opposition to the election of a Thatcher Tory government.

It sharpened the fight against the fascists of the then big and growing National Front.

It made a considerable impact in the labour movement.

It organised an important part of the forces that would campaign for left-wing policies in the fight against the Tory government after the 1979 election.

It allowed us to organise unofficial Labour campaigns even in areas where the Labour candidate was obnoxious to socialists and defeatist toward the Tories and the fascists.

It allowed us to stake out the political ground for a left-wing fight against Thatcher combined with a fight against the right-wing of the Labour Party.

It was a policy that could have been summed up in the slogan: “Vote Labour and organise to fight!”

Of course much is different now.

It would be foolish to imagine that a mechanical re-enactment of the SCLV experience is likely now. Most important, the Labour Party now is a mere shell. There is no populous, disaffected Labour Party.

The scope, “traction”, of the SCSTF is likely to be considerably less than that of the SCLV. Even so, changing what needs to be changed for our circumstances, the SCLV indicates what should be attempted now.

The SCSTF can be a focus for a sharper fight against the fascist BNP in the general election.

But what of the revolutionary left candidates standing in the general election, including the AWL’s Jill Mountford in Camberwell and Peckham? What of places like Liverpool and Leeds where there may be broad-left candidates?

The SCSTF takes no stand on that. It is attempting to relate to broader labour movement forces. The case for supporting these left candidates will be made by the revolutionary organisations as such, including the AWL.

Some of these candidacies may do important political work in their area: the SCSTF is concerned with the broad, overall shape of things, and by what can be done in areas where there are no socialist candidates.

The unpleasant reality, however, is that the would-be revolutionary left groups do not cease to be what they are, politically, just by standing in the general election. They do not thereby acquire political adequacy in the fight against the Labour right wing and the Tories.

To think they do, or to behave towards them as if they do, would be a variant of what Marxists have called, in its broad reformist-socialist manifestation, “electoral cretinism”.

Socialists concerned with the broad labour movement and with what government comes out of the May 2010 election should back the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists.

George Lansbury before he became Labour Mayor of Poplar Council and one of the leaders of the “rates rebellion”. We always argued for this model for social councillors

is it different in intent.

When spleen against your left critics leads you to use this foul and dishonorable technique, then perhaps it is time you took a cool look at where you have arrived at politically now — and at where you are going.

You smear *SO*, I suggest, because there is a major and increasing contradiction between your projection of yourself (and, perhaps, how you think of yourself), as a man of the revolutionary left, and the actual political role you now play. You now occupy a position not too far from what we used to call a “fake left”. Your talk is a great deal more “left” than your actions.

You feel any challenge to your credibility keenly because you know it to be vulnerable. When you say — on what basis? — that we call you a “traitor”, one wonders if the accusing voice you hear is not inside your own head. We have not called you a traitor. You are seriously failing to be a revolutionary militant, but you are not yet a traitor.

Let us discuss the situation. I want to try to state and define the differences dividing us for two reasons.

In the first place *SO* cannot go on silently tolerating disloyal attacks such as yours. And in the second place, to define our differences and clear away misunderstandings (if such there be) will help perhaps to prepare unity in action against our common enemies where that is possible.

Most of what I have to say implies that you have much in common with *SO* — if that were not so, there would be no point in the letter.

Our root difference lies in our perspectives for the labour movement and what conclusions serious socialist militants should draw from those perspectives. Britain is in a chronic and accelerating decline. There is no way out under capitalism. In order even to protect itself the working class must fight to put in a workers’ government to fight for its interests.

Socialists must strive to orientate the entire labour movement towards the goal of taking control of society away from the incompetent parasites who now dominate and ruin or threaten to ruin our lives — not in the distant future, but in the next period ahead. All the present struggles — including the struggle to kick the Tories out — must be focused (insofar as Marxists can affect their focus) on that perspective. It is a matter of great urgency that the Marxists within the labour movement bind themselves together to help prepare the labour movement for this fight.

“The alternative may very well be a major and historic defeat for the working class of Britain.”

The central question now is to break the labour movement from class collaboration; to break it from the dominant reformist commitment to bargaining within the capitalist system on a basis of taking responsibility for the system and being confined to capitalist options within it.

But you, however, see your role and responsibility in Lambeth as only that of being a humane administrator there.

That Lambeth Council has avoided any serious cuts is something to be proud of. But how has it been achieved? By backdoor cuts in living standards!

Council services, plus disposable income, plus government services add up to one standard of living for the workers in the area. You act and talk as if they don’t. You operate as if your only concern is with the gross council service component of it — even if that is maintained by “redistributing” net income within one and the same living standard to sustain it.

This is myopic and a bureaucratically compartmentalised falsification of reality.

That your view of your “department’s” responsibilities is a humane and a good one does not make a dif-

ference to the utterly inadequate view of the world involved here.

A socialist militant, as distinct from a professional councillor, is concerned with the social overview and the general consequences of what he does to sustain his or her own “department”. But not you.

In order to avoid the risk of losing your position in Lambeth (as a result of taking on the Tories and being surcharged or disqualified) you pass on the Tory cuts, translated into cuts in income by rent and rate rises. You refuse to stand and fight the Tories now, and instead cling to the power to decide from which area of working class income the siphoning off should take place.

This is the essential truth, even if some redistribution of income to the working class of Lambeth may occur from the high proportion of Lambeth rates raised from business premises.

And of course you know that rate rises are not a way of avoiding indefinitely the choice of cuts or taking on the government.

Instead of preparing for that confrontation, you have turned Lambeth Council into a major school of reformist class collaboration for Lambeth and the London labour movement. You teach “responsibility”, confinement to the parameters and options laid down by the Tory government (until the “big battalions” of Labour kick the Tories out), to justify and explain the choices you make and advocate within those parameters.

To justify your rate-rise policies, you refer to powers above you — the government — that you dare not take on or challenge at a fundamental level. Isn’t this in essence the sort of argument Callaghan used to justify his posture before the IMF?

If the argument holds good for you in Lambeth, confronting the Tory government, why not for Healey and Callaghan and Wilson in the weak and isolated British state, confronted by the IMF?

Wilson and Callaghan might have said that weak Britain could not win against the international capitalist system and many miseducated reformist workers would agree with them. It is even true that though the workers in Britain could take power, the immediate consequence would be, at least, boycott and sabotage, withdrawal of credit, etc., by international capitalism, and therefore it is true that there could be a possibility of stabilising workers’ power only if the anti-capitalist movement spread to countries like France and Germany.

Immediately after taking power, the British workers’ state would face a very difficult period.

If we apply your argument about Lambeth — supposedly under the control of the Left and those like you who present themselves revolutionaries — to Britain as a whole, it is an argument not to take power until the “big battalions of France and Germany” lead... It is an old argument of the more aware reformists and reactionaries in the labour movement to justify their own passivity and accommodation.

Lambeth alone can’t defeat the Tories? No, indeed! But you could give a lead that would inspire the general resistance to the Tories. At the least you would be a Clay Cross on a much larger scale; and even to be a Clay Cross on the original scale was no small thing.

In your interview with the *Chartist* magazine (March-May 1980) you say you hope to avoid cuts on top of the rate rises. You base this on the belief (“perspective”) that the labour movement will fight the Tories and drive them from office (and you seem to set a maximum time scale of one year for this — it must happen “before April 1981”).

The clear implication is that if we don’t fight, or if we fight and don’t win, then you will probably have to cut.

But this is the “perspective” you had in July 1979

when you cited the fact that the “big battalions” had not yet moved against the Tories (two months after the election!) to justify capitulation to Heseltine and the imposition of cuts (which were later reversed when the Lambeth Labour Party revolted against and overturned your policy).

Three things are wrong with your “perspective”.

In the first place, it is a more or less explicit ‘declaration of intent’ to capitulate and make cuts (on top of rent and rate rises) if the labour movement does not manage to settle with the Tories in a few short months. Now *SO* also believes the working class will take on the Tories and that we can beat them this time round too. But for a militant in a key position to make his decision on whether to fight (or, as now, manoeuvre), or surrender dependent on a decisive victory by others on his own side within a short time ahead is utterly unserious.

Your “left” talk about industrial action to bring down the Tories turns out to be an excuse to wait on events. Do you remember NUM President Joe Gormley in 1973 calling for a general strike when he was trying to convince the miners that they alone should not take on the Tories?

In the second place, it has nothing to do with a Marxist idea of “perspective” — it is nothing but passive expectation and hope.

Your conception of the role and responsibilities of a militant is remarkably like that of the Militant tendency. For what is to be the role of the leader of Lambeth council in the battle to dislodge the Tories, which you call for? What will be the role of Lambeth Council itself? Is it to be a bastion of left wing and working class strength (which it could be perhaps, but is not now), or is it to be preserved at all costs from possible damage in the struggle?

Your vision of the struggle against the Tories is a vision of a purely industrial struggle to be initiated and waged by others. You hope the industrial struggles of the working class will come to your rescue and meanwhile “the Leader” administers Lambeth humanely. And if the rescue does not come in time you will have to consider administering it less humanely by making cuts.

I suspect that this “syndicalist” (for other people)

view of the struggle is probably central to your present outlook. For if you conceived of the struggle as demanding the mobilisation of working class communities, tenants, etc., then you could not blithely raise rents and rates.

In the third and final place, I suspect you do not believe in your own “perspective”. You do not at all act like a man who takes his own ideas seriously. If decisive class battles are in the offing, then a serious militant would feel a strong need to find his own role in the struggle, to help develop it — perhaps to spark it: because you know that there are no grounds for confidence that the leaders of the “big battalions” will lead the working class struggle against the Tories. But your only conclusion from your “perspective” is that it is a licence to hang on in Lambeth. It is no more than an alibi for time-serving now.

If you really believed in the likelihood of a decisive labour movement clash with the Tory government then you would be less timid in face of the government (and feel less need to lash out at the left). And if you were still a militant, you would not shirk the personal risks (surcharge, disqualification as a councillor, gaol) of confrontation with the government, if that could give a lead to the movement.

Of course one understands the psychological logic of someone switching from the mindless voluntarism of the late 60s SLL to Militant-style passive “perspectives”. But the fact remains that either you no longer see any role for yourself in the struggle or else you do not believe in “the perspective” you enunciate. Which is it?

Before you tried to identify *SO* with the right you should have remembered the well-known proverb, “one does not speak of the rope in the house of the hanged”. For, though you need to present yourself as one who is hounded by the right, in fact you seem to have much better relations with the right (in Lambeth and in London) than you have with the revolutionary left. For example, a few minutes of discussion between yourself, pocket calculator in hand, and the right, sufficed to determine the size of rate increase in Lambeth recently.

Last July — and we have seen what “perspectives” you had then — when you decided to carry out cuts,

you gave a signal to enery right wing council in the country to follow suit. Your “Red Knight” publicity had given you a national standing as a foremost opponent of the Tories and their cuts, and you had a solid base of support.

Yet two months after the election, when the movement was still feeling its way on how to deal with the Tories, when many people looked to Lambeth’s “Red Knight” for a lead, you signalled, loud and clear: “Surrender, cut”.

You said the “big battalions” had not moved to bring down the government, so there was no choice but to surrender. And every right wing council in the country breathed a sigh of relief.

The revolt of the Lambeth Labour Parties soon forced you to rescind the cuts. (In my opinion you do not have a right to the lavish self-praise for “democratic accountability” which you now give yourself when publicly discussing this episode. A right winger or a Tribunite might have: not someone with your history).

But if one wants the outstanding recent example of leftists helping the right, and even momentarily politically amalgamating with them (under cover of “left” flak), then that was surely it, comrade Knight.

It is, I have suggested, this sort of contradiction between what you do and what you say that makes criticism from the left dangerous (and perhaps painful) for you. How unaware are you of the contradiction? The record suggests that you must be aware of it.

In July 1978 the SCLV conference chaired by you adopted the no rent and rate rise policy, with not one voice of opposition. It must have seemed to everyone present to be your politics too.

At a conference on the cuts called by the SCLV in June 1979, you may have been decisive in persuading the majority to opt for rate rises as the only alternative to cuts. A couple of weeks later you tried to cut, on top of raising the rates.

That you considered cuts an immediate option when you made those “militant” speeches seems more or less certain. Were you just saying the ‘popular thing’ at conference to bamboozle people that rate rises were an alternative to cuts or don’t you know from one day to the next what you will do?

Again. In the recent interview with *Chartist* magazine, you pronounce yourself against rent increases — about a week before you imposed an average rent increase of about £1.50 a week on the working class tenants of Lambeth Council.

How would you go about arguing that this is not the record of one who knowingly fakes?

Finally, one of the central things about the role and contradictions I have discussed is, I think, that you necessarily have a purely personalist view of politics now.

A man alone in a very loose social democratic party, you must protect yourself from surcharge, jail, disqualification from public office. What is “the Leader of Lambeth” if he can no longer be even a councillor?

The Clay Cross councillors took on the Heath government and when the “first 11” were victimised, a “second 11” came forward. They were part of a fighting community. Each one could confidently say, “If I go down, there are others to come after me”. They behaved as great working class fighters, and dealt blows to the government out of all proportion to Clay Cross’s size.

But you, comrade Knight, are an individual operating through loose alliances, without a stable political base, and not one of a group of revolutionaries. You cannot think that you are replaceable or not at any rate with equanimity. You have only the weapons of manoeuvre and manipulation. You are increasingly driven by the contradictions in your position to resort to the arts of the “fake left” and to the use of techniques like ‘the amalgam’.

Without being part of a serious political organisation, you have advanced to high political office, to a key position in the London labour movement. Faced with the prospect of a fight you feel weak and isolated; faced with capitulation — with betraying your whole political life — you vacillate and try to manoeuvre, and lash out at the revolutionary left.

The name the Marxist movement has given to the type of political course you have chosen is adventurism. It is a process whereby the onetime professional revolutionary can sink into being a professional leader of a safe Labour council.

The point where you find yourself using Stalinist techniques against the revolutionary left should be the point where you take stock. Events are likely to move fast in the period ahead. You are probably much further along the road to being a professional councillor, and more distant from being a revolutionary, than you know yourself to be.

Refurbished reformism

By March 1980 Socialist Organiser had split over the rate rise issue. Mike Davis and Geoff Bender wrote a polemic against ‘our’ side of the split on behalf of themselves and Jeremy Corbyn, Mark Douglas, Keith Veness and Pete Rowlands. Below is part of our reply, printed in *Socialist Organiser* (March 1980)

Since the general election, many Labour politicians who were quite tame during the period of Labour government have suddenly been talking left. Left-wing activity focused on wheeling and dealing around official positions in the labour movement has been given a boost.

There is a tension in the SCLV between that focus and a broader class struggle perspective, centred on campaigning in the factories and on the streets. The rate rises issue sums it up very well: do we look for alternatives for Labour councillors trying to manage the system or for policies to mobilise anti-Tory mass action?

When Lambeth council leader Ted Knight makes rousing speeches against the cuts last June and then a few weeks later gives a lead for every rightwing and fake left council by proposing cuts, do we draw any conclusions? Do we learn any lessons about the real value of the policy of ‘rate rises instead of cuts to gain time for a fight’, which Lambeth was supposed to be the model for? Do we draw conclusions now when Ted Knight follows up a battle to get the Lambeth labour movement to agree to rate rises by also pushing through rent rises and cuts in growth?

Do we learn the lesson of the need for an independent campaigning policy? Or do we go on fluttering like moths around the illusory light of the ‘power’ and ‘broad labour movement influence’ of the Lambeth Labour group?

The SCLV conference gave a majority to the broader class-struggle perspective — against those who wanted to veer away from the SCLV’s original politics. It also established a flexible, open structure in which comrades with a different emphasis and different priorities can work.

Mike Davis and his co-thinkers have not actually been deprived of any valid minority rights.

All their objections come down to the fact that they are not the dominant majority.

There is a curious parallel — with all the necessary qualifications granted — with the protests of the right wing in the Labour Party against the left’s majority on the National Executive Committee and the Inquiry; the same protests about the need for a ‘broad church’, the same assumed concern for anonyiiiious unaffiliated individuals who are going to be put off by the left’s extremism, the same wrapping up of political disputes in organisational disputes.

The right wing in the Labour Party is trying to appeal over the heads of the Labour conference, of the elected NEC, and of Labour activists, to ‘public opinion’ and to confused and passive Labour voters. They use popular, anti-socialist prejudices. Mike Davis and his co-thinkers are — certainly in effect, if not intentionally — trying to appeal to the general, more or less confused and more or less passive broad left. They use popular anti-revolutionary prejudices, which harm the SCLV as a whole.

In fact, though, they will damage themselves more than the SCLV. These comrades are spokesmen for a tendency which is moving strongly to the right and which is governed by a strong impulse to divest itself of its one-time revolutionary politics and to accommodate to the ‘Left’ establishment and the ‘powerful’ individuals like Ted Knight.

It is not coincidental that they are trying to scandalise the SCLV over their imaginary grievances and in so doing present themselves to the broad non-Marxist left as a ‘good SCLV’. Their political trajectory is not only away from the positive work that the SCLV is doing — on their own admission, even where they opposed the initiative, as with the Women’s Fightback campaign. It is away from serious left-wing politics altogether towards reformism.

In Britain in 1980 a refurbished reformism is the last thing the working class needs or can afford to waste time on. It needs a serious, hard-left, Marxist movement, rooted in the broad labour movement, including the Labour Party. That is what the SCLV conference decided to try and build in the working class struggles that are now opening up.



As cuts begin to bite The fightback must start now

A new campaign to fight the Tories and facists

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

A new initiative, the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists, attempts to resolve the dilemma facing socialists in the May election: what should we want the outcome to be?

What government of the available possibilities do we want to emerge from the general election?

Of course we would like a workers' government — a government that would serve the interests and needs of the working class as the Tories and the Blair-Brown governments have served the bankers and the rest of the capitalist ruling class.

That is not an option.

The handful of candidates being fielded by the would-be left organisations, the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers' Party, even if every one of them is elected, would not create such an option. The practical "governmental" question is: do we want a Tory or a Labour government?

In this, the thirteenth year of Blair-Brown government, is there for us a meaningful difference between the Tories and New Labour? We think there is. A Labour government, should the Labour Party win the general election, will impose cuts; its record in office is foul. Yet a Tory government will very likely impose far more drastic cuts, and, moreover, attempt to smash the civil service and other public service unions: the commitment to speedier repayment of the national debt implies very drastic cuts.

One of the biggest scandals of the New Labour government's 13 year rule has been their refusal to repeal the Tory anti-trade union laws. A Tory government may impose new additional anti-union laws — for instance, a ban on public-sector strikes.

These are important differences between Labour and the Tories. The decisive difference, however, is that New Labour is still backed and financed by most of the unions.

The unions have the strength in the Labour Party, if they choose to use it, to remodel Labour — to put an end to the wretched neo-Thatcherite New "Labour" experiment.

The Labour Party-trade union link, drastically modified and without the RMT and FBU, has survived the period of New Labour government. The nearest thing to a mass labour movement presence in the 2010 general election, unfortunately, will be the union-backed Labour Party of Gordon Brown.

- Continued on page 18
- Campaign statement page 9

Facing the cuts: Bolton youth service workers. The unions need a much more militant industrial strategy to fight the cuts

BY DAN KATZ

The UK jobless total now stands at 2.46 million unemployed, or a rate of 7.8% — including 923,000 16-24-year-olds. More job cuts are on the way. A survey of 700 employers by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development reveals that firms in all sectors plan to shed 6% of their workforce in the first quarter of 2010.

The government wants to cut higher education funding in England by £449 million. The University and College Union (UCU) says 6,000 university jobs were already at risk across the UK and 9,000 more could go in England alone.

Although the government has delayed a Comprehensive Spending Review, which would have contained all the really big decisions on cuts, until after the election, there are already programmes in place for big "efficiency savings" in the public sector.

The government has made a start on cutting the benefits bill by scrapping plans to extend maternity pay from nine to 12 months.

Chancellor Alistair Darling has announced plans to cut more than £45 billion off the budget deficit in the next four years. The Institute for Fiscal Studies claims spending on public services and administration will have to be cut by 11% over four years under the Treasury's plans, and that the pledge to freeze NHS spending in real (inflation-adjusted) terms over 2011-13 would not

spare the health service from its biggest two-year squeeze since it was set up in 1948.

The NHS budget for buildings and buying medical equipment is set to fall sharply. The capital budget for the NHS in England will be reduced by more than a fifth in the next financial year. The total reduction is £1.4 billion, according to figures obtained by Channel Four News. Similar restrictions seem set to be placed on school building budgets.

Whatever the result of the election, we can expect attacks on universal benefits, such as child benefit, and on public sector pay and pensions.

Gail Cartmail from Unite said: "In cities such as Newcastle where two thirds of those economically active are employed in the public sector, the impact of public sector cuts would be devastating to the local economy — reduced taxation, reduced spending and, ironically, greater reliance on public services such as Job Centres and increased government expenditure on supporting the unemployed and their families."

With all of these cuts already underway — put in place by the New Labour government, Tory and Lib-Dem controlled local authorities or by the SNP in Scotland — it would be foolish for anyone in the labour movement to wait for the result of the general election, as if that result will change the basic picture. The fightback must start now. We need a network of labour movement campaigns against the cuts, linked to the unions, taking up the issues that are affecting working-class communities.

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