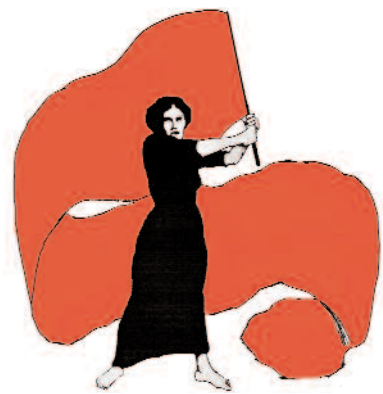


Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

STUDENTS OCCUPY!

PAGE 5

LONDON'S NHS IN CRISIS

PAGE 7

Ireland and "Permanent Revolution"

PAGES 16-19

The super-rich run British politics

THE MAN BEHIND THE TORIES

**Worth £1.1 billion.
Donated £280,000
to Tory candidates
in 2005
general
election.**

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

The Lord Ashcroft affair cuts like the sharp beam of a spotlight through the putrid pretences and hypocrisies of British politics.

Here is a man of vast wealth who bought himself a peerage. He is paymaster to the Tory Party — to the tune of many tens of millions of pounds.

He has bought a shaping influence in the affairs of the Tory Party, and thus on the policies of the Tory Government that may emerge from the 2010 General Election.

He is pouring money into key marginal constituencies and thus he is a major force in determining the outcome of the General Election — of which party will govern Britain during the worst economic crisis since the 1930s.

In the election, how many votes will Ashcroft have?

Look at it like this: measured in terms of political power to shape the outcome, how many votes will it take to counter-balance the political weight in British politics which Ashcroft's wealth gives him? Hundreds of thousands? A million?

The fact that this man, of such weight and influ-

ence in British political and social life, is a "non-dom" who does not pay British taxes on most of his wealth adds a savagely pointed irony to this situation, and has triggered intense interest in the affair.

But what if Ashcroft did pay full British taxes on all his income? The tremendous political weight bought by this single rich man would then be reasonable? Good? Acceptable? Democratic?

No, it would not be good, reasonable, or acceptable. Least of all would it be democratic.

Ashcroft is only an extreme case. Notoriously, the US citizen Rupert Murdoch, owner of British media such as the *Sun* has the power to compel British politicians, Labour no less than Tory, to compete for his favour, to trim and shape their policies to his taste and needs.

Of course, New Labour also has its influential rich donors, some of them also "non-doms". There is a great deal of hypocrisy in New Labour denunciation of the Tories in the Ashcroft affair. Yet none of New Labour's rich benefactors come even close to Ashcroft in terms of the sums involved and the direct influence on policy and on the affairs of a major party which they buy.

The money of rich donors to finance Prime

Minister Blair's "office" played a major part in the New Labour-Blair-Brown subversion, and to a large extent, destruction of the old Labour Party.

The issue here is brutally plain. Democracy.

What the Ashcroft affair brings out clearly is how rotten, and how hollow is what passes for democracy in Britain now. And in this Britain which is still, all in all, a great deal better than the USA, where candidates and elections are openly bought and sold, without shame or inhibition.

Britain is no longer a democracy, even in the old limited and inadequate bourgeois sense. It is a pluto-democracy.

It is not "government of the people, by the people, for the people". It is government of the people, by the rich and their bought and paid-for politicians and for the benefit of the rich. This is how you get such absurdities as the vast plundering of the "public purse" to bail out the bankers while leaving them in control and free to award themselves enormous bonuses.

That is the real point of the Ashcroft affair.

Not the least of the crimes of the Blair-Brown-New Labour gang is that they have made the Labour Party part of that political corruption — an outrage against every real democratic principle.

AVIATION

British Airways dispute set to take off?

BY DARREN BEDFORD

In an act which again defies right-wing mythology about workers being passive and unprepared to take action, cabin crew working for British Airways have voted by an overwhelming majority — on a huge turnout — to take strike action against proposed changes to their contract. 81% of workers voted to strike, on a turnout of nearly 80%.

This is the second time their union, Unite, has had to run the strike ballot. The first time round the figures were even higher, with over 90% of workers voting to strike. After BA bosses successfully used the High Court to have the strike ruled illegal (on the basis of a spurious technicality relating to the balloting process), it was inevitable that the dispute would lose some momentum. Given the circumstances it is impressive — and an indication of BA workers' resolve — that support for the strike only dropped by 9%.

Unite has yet to name dates for action, and working out a concrete strategy to win the dispute must surely be a first priority for the union and its members. To ensure that the direction of the dispute is meaningfully controlled by cabin crew and not by (often unelected) full-time union officials, democratic strike committees with real power should be elected.

The dispute centres around issues such as a two-year wage freeze, 1,700 job cuts and changes to working hours that would effectively see cabin crew working longer for less. But it is also a very fundamental class battle that represents a challenge to the divine right of bosses to rule in the workplace no matter how incompetently or profligately they behave. It also has ecological implications, as the assertion of workers' power in frontline, high-emissions industries such as aviation is ultimately the only way to reorganise and transition those industries in order to make them environmentally sustainable.

Even though not a single day of strike action has yet been taken, the significance of the dispute is highlighted by BA bosses' use of every dirty trick in the book. As well as using draconian anti-union laws to have the first strike declared illegal, BA's union-busting head-honcho Willie Walsh has also proudly boasted of his project to train scab workers in order to break the strike. Part of that project involved giving off-

Not everyone's favourite airline

duty pilots training to work as stand-in cabin crew, a move that has been denounced by pilots' union leaders. Jorg Handwerg, a pilot for Lufthansa and a rep for Vereinigung Cockpits (the union which organised Lufthansa pilots), said "Our struggle with Lufthansa will be reciprocated at BA. I call on all union members to support each other, rather than undermining the legitimate fight of another group of employees... I cannot imagine that pilots would be willing to work in the cabin to break a strike. As a union it does not look very fortunate if members of one union help breaking a strike against another one."

When the strike dates are announced, working-class activists should begin urgently organising solidarity. Get down to the picket lines, invite a striking worker to your union branch or Trades Council, organise a meeting. We cannot let the right-wing media and the BA bosses be the only national voice on the dispute; the workers' voices must be heard too.

ORGANISING SOLIDARITY

Can environmental activists campaigning against the ecological destruction caused by the aviation industry make common cause with aviation workers taking action to defend jobs and pay, and if so, how? Solidarity spoke to Josh Moos, an activist involved in Plane Stupid, a direct-action network that targets aviation, about the issues and the plans for strike solidarity already being drawn up by climate movement activists living near Heathrow airport.

"The BA strike is important for a number of reasons. From an environmental point of view, the aviation industry is particularly destructive and unsustainable, so engaging workers around a workplace like Heathrow is really important in terms of opening a debate about that. It's about building links and developing consciousness.

The strike is an opportunity to do that. But equally, Heathrow isn't isolated; we've got to put it in the context of other workers' struggles in frontline industries, whether that's energy generation, transport, or others. We have to help to build some political interconnectedness between these struggles. Aviation is a difficult industry to try and engage with on many levels because the potentials for transition are much less obvious than they are with, say, a car factory or an armaments factory. There hasn't been an awful lot done by the left and the environmental movement in terms of grappling with that difficulty, so we have to use the strike to start doing some of that work.

There is definitely a tension and potential contradiction between a worker-focused approach and direct action that targets a particular workplace or industry as a whole. There's obviously a risk involved in that some forms of direct action could undermine the kind of work that Workers' Climate Action does trying to engage with workers in frontline industries and their struggles. There's no easy blueprint for how to resolve that tension but getting actively involved in supporting a strike is a good place to start; we have to learn by doing.

If we're going to build targeted direct actions, we need to be conscious when we're doing them. We need to have leaflets for workers that explain that they're not the target, and we have to be aware of the dynamics within the workplace. Ultimately the only way to really resolve the potential contradiction is to have direct action led and built by the workers themselves.

If you look at something like the Swoop [a Climate Camp-organised protest targeting a coal-fired power station], how much better would it have been if we were looking at shutting down that power station through the action of the workers who worked in it rather than through the action of largely middle-class protestors? In terms of concrete plans for strike solidarity in and around Heathrow, everything's at a fairly embryonic stage but there is a lot of

potential. The Transition Heathrow group recently undertook a bit of a land-grab in Sipson; the space they've taken is very near the the airport. The timing of the take was deliberately intended to coincide with the strike, and there are plan to use the space in part, as an organising centre for solidarity. We want to run a kitchen out of the space so we can bring food and drink to picket lines. We also want to get BA workers to come down to the space; we've already had a lot of local people come and help out and we want to use it as a means to build links between workers at the airport and workers in the wider community around Heathrow."

www.workersclimateaction.com
www.transitionheathrow.com

Gatwick

About 70 porters at the second biggest airport in the UK staged a solid two-day strike over Christmas. Action is now on hold while there is uncertainty over which company will hold onto the contract under which the workers are employed.

The workers currently work for a the facilities giant Interserve. Interserve's last posted profits were £88 million. Yet apparently they couldn't afford to offer a penny over the minimum wage to their porters. After months of delay, the mainly Asian workforce, who only won union recognition in early 2009, voted 100% in favour of strike action. They matched this resolve with a solid walkout.

But a potential transfer of the porter-ing contract fell through in January, leaving it unclear who to direct campaigning against and stalling the action. What is clear is that Interserve and the new airport owners, Gatwick Airport Limited, who bought the airport for £1.5 billion, can easily afford to settle the claim for living wage for this group of workers.

A two month extension to Interserve's contract runs out later this month. The patience of the workers, who have been waiting for far too long to have their claim settled, runs out on the same day. Watch this space.

Mick Duncan

General strike rocks Greece

BY IRA BERKOVIC

A general strike which mobilised two million workers brought Greece to a standstill at the on 24 February, as the Greek working class moved into battle against the public spending cuts, wage freeze and other austerity measures by the "social-democratic" PASOK government.

The strike led to the cancellation of all flights in and out of the country and the closure of countless public and private sector workplaces.

Strikers who joined the mass demonstrations chanted slogans with clear anti-capitalist implications, demanding

that the country's bosses and rich should pay for the crisis they created rather than forcing workers to pay through tax-hikes and wage-cuts.

A statement produced by civil service worker-activists said that "the measures included in the stability and development plan are unfair and antisocial and will have negative effects on our salary, and our working and security rights instead of leading us out of the crisis." It went on to assert, "we will not pay for their crisis. The ones who should pay are the wealthy, the banks, the multinational companies, and the tax-defaulters."

Strikes have also taken place in Portugal and Spain recently against sim-

ilar measures, and as Britain's workers — particularly in sectors like education and health — begin to move in response

to a series of government cuts, 2010 can and should become a year of Europe-wide resistance to capitalist austerity.



Greek workers on the march

HUNG PARLIAMENT AFTER THE GENERAL ELECTION?

Whoever wins power, organise to fight the cuts!

A few weeks ago it seemed almost certain that David Cameron's Tory Party would win the election and win a big enough majority in Parliament to push through a savage programme of cuts and privatisations. Now the polls show the gap between the Tories and Labour is closing. A tiny majority for the Tories or a hung Parliament is widely predicted.

We should be careful of extrapolating sweeping conclusions from what the polls indicate about the political mood of millions of people. However some important "facts" about what's happening in the economy, society and with the political parties are clear.

- UK economic growth in both the service and manufacturing sectors has improved in the last period. Whether this "recovery" will last is not at all certain. The consequent change in mood among working-class people, of increased security, may also prove transitory. Nonetheless "recovery" or at least talk of "recovery" must work in Labour's favour, as the incumbent government.

- Against this, the current Tory recipes on the economy, their script about "sorting out" the "national debt", about "cutting fast, cutting deep", must alarm many workers and work to push them towards Labour, despite Brown pitiful recent performance.

- Moreover in the cuts and privatisation "debate" with New Labour, the Tories are casting themselves more and more in the role of born-again Thatcherites. Millions of class conscious workers remember what Thatcher did in the slump of 1980. She waged "red in tooth and claw" class war against the workers. Slashing of the welfare state. Starving the NHS of resources. Brutal police thugs on picket lines. Demonising of the poor. Riots in the streets.

Labour has done nothing to deserve a turn in their fortunes.

While Peter Mandelson criticises the Tory's economic and political stance, he gets on with slashing higher education budgets!

Should Brown win the general election, the New Labour government would be under massive pressure from the City to force through their own very rapid cuts.

What follows for the AWL and other socialists? We take stock again of the political tasks facing the labour movement.

The basic danger for the working class at this election is of a big political shift to the far right, in part as a result of mass working-class abstentionism.

It will be a shame if socialists allow the turn to Labour to lead to positive support for Brown and his policies, but nonetheless, in so far as revulsion from the Tories will perhaps boost positive support for Labour, that is a good thing for the labour movement.

Whatever the actual differences between Labour's record and the Tories proposals — and there are some differences — the decisive difference, is that New Labour is still backed and financed by the biggest unions. It is the reason why we advocate a Labour vote where there is no credible socialist candidate. It gives those unions a potential strength in the Labour Party, and a

possibility of reshaping the party. But the labour movement needs to demand of these union leaders, all union leaders, that they fight for working-class policies, oppose cuts and privatisations, that they work to recreate a political labour movement, a political voice for workers.

That is why AWL's policy for the broad labour movement in this election is to back a Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists. 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 they can for a Labour vote — and in the policies we advocate against the Browns, the Millibands and the Johnsons. We combine advocating a Labour vote 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. Make no mistake about it — we need to fight with all our strength even if the Tories lose the election.

Socialists must insist against both the Tory and the Labour Parties that money for public services can easily be found by raising across-the-board taxes on the wealthy and big business. The bosses — not the workers — should pay for the crisis in their capitalist system. That would be the policy of a government which serves the interests of the workers.

We cannot wait for the result of the general election. We must organise the fight against the cuts that are happening now. We must organise in the unions for an effective industrial campaign against the cuts, and against the passivity and too often treachery of the union leaders. Work to create a network of anti-cuts campaigns, linked to the unions!

Support the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists!

What you can do:

1. Add your or your organisation's name to our founding statement by emailing us at stopthetoriesandfascists@gmail.com.
2. Propose a motion supporting the campaign in your union branch, student union or campaigning group..
3. Invite a speaker or order literature for the election by emailing stopthetoriesandfascists@gmail.com.
4. Organise an event such as a hustings with different working-class candidates and campaigns, or a lobby of your local Labour MP/candidate based on the policies of the Campaign.

The statement, supporter list, a model motion and more can be found at stopthetoriesandfascists.wordpress.com

SCHOOLS

Time to take action on SATS!

BY PAT MURPHY, NUT EXECUTIVE
(PERSONAL CAPACITY)

It's been a long time coming but the National Union of Teachers and the union that represents most primary Heads, the NAHT, have finally agreed to hold a joint ballot to boycott this year's SATs tests in primary schools in England.

The ballot will open on 15 March and close on 16 April with the national executives of both unions meeting soon after to decide whether they have a mandate to proceed. The ballot timetable, the question and the constituency being balloted will be identical for both unions.

Members of what in schools is known as the leadership group (Heads, Deputy Heads and Assistant Heads) will be asked if they are prepared to take action short of strike action "to frustrate the administration of national curriculum tests in English and Maths at Key Stage 2 in 2010". The action will involve a refusals to follow the test opening and administrative procedures (open the envelopes with papers), to carry out the tests and to ensure that all eligible and able pupils take the tests.

Together the NUT and NAHT represent the overwhelming majority of Heads and other leaders in primary schools. If any significant number of them can ensure that tests are not carried

out in their schools there will be no chance that any meaningful league tables can be constructed for this year's results.

The aim of both unions is to end national compulsory testing and league tables for ever.

The campaign took off this year because SATs have already been abolished already in high schools and don't exist in any other part of the UK. The unions argue that their members' jobs, pay and conditions of work are increasingly determined by the outcome of SATs and the position of their schools in league tables and this is what creates the dispute.

There is also agreement across both

unions that the testing and league table regime massively distorts education and enforces a narrow and restrictive curriculum on very young children.

If we can end this regime it will provoke huge cheers from parents, teachers and children alike. It will also help undermine the internal market in schools introduced by the Thatcher government in 1988 and continued by New Labour since 1997 as this relies on league tables to force schools into competition with each other.

The boycott is a long way from creating a collaborative and child-centred culture of education, but it would be a great start.

SCOTRAIL

Striking over safety

BY ANNE FIELD

A second 24-hour strike by around 550 First ScotRail guards, drivers and sleeper-train managers took place on 1 March. The workers oppose company's plans to run driver-only trains on the new Airdrie-Bathgate route, due to open in December.

The striking RMT members had voted to back strike action by nearly five to one ("yes": 379; "no": 80) on an very high (82%) turnout.

The level of support for the strike was the result of an RMT campaign. Members recognised that running trains without guards on this line was going to be the thin end of the wedge.

If First ScotRail could get away with it this time, which route(s) would be next?

In planning to run Airdrie-Bathgate trains without guards, First Scotrail is tearing up a two previous commitments (in 2001 and 2004) to the union that there would be no extension of driver-only trains.

First ScotRail has claimed that the cost of employing a guard on the trains would be prohibitively high as the controls for opening and closing the train's door have already been installed in the driver's cabs.

In fact, the cost of relocating the controls and employing guards would amount to no more than £320,000. This is small beer compared to the risk to passenger safety posed by running trains without guards.

And it is even smaller beer when compared to the £429,000 which First ScotRail paid its highest-paid director last year, or the £18 million which the First Group paid out in dividends to its shareholders last year.

In the run-up to last Monday's strike First ScotRail tried to pass the buck to Transport Scotland, a Scottish government quango which is accountable to the Scottish government.

According to the company running driver-only trains on the Airdrie-Bathgate route had been agreed with Transport Scotland in the summer of 2009.

This would mean that the SNP's Scottish Transport Minister Stewart Stevenson was not being entirely frank when he met with the RMT in early January and claimed that the Scottish government had not taken a final view

on the use of driver-only trains.

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow has now written to First Minister Alex Salmond demanding an urgent meeting to discuss the issues.

Even if the impetus for scrapping guards on the Airdrie-Bathgate route has come, to one degree or another, from Transport Scotland, First ScotRail is only too keen to press ahead with running train services on the route on the cheap.

First ScotRail employees have been pressurised into working as guards on strike days. Again, this shows up First Scotrail's contempt for health and safety: they have been given just a fortnight's training, compared with the six months needed to fully train up a guard.

Staff from another First Group company — First Great Western — have also been flown into Glasgow by First ScotRail in order to try to keep trains running on strike days.

First ScotRail does not need to worry about the cost of lost services or of bringing in and accommodating staff from other First Group companies. Under its franchise agreement — reached with the then Labour-Lib-Dem administration — First ScotRail can be indemnified at the discretion of the Scottish government for any losses arising out of industrial action.

This is not a dispute about a pay claim, where some kind of "compromise" might be reached between a union's pay claim and an employer's pay offer. There can be no "half-way-house" in this dispute: either there will be guards on the Airdrie-Bathgate route, or there won't be.

This makes it all the more important that the RMT strike action is fully supported by other trade unionists — both those working on the railways, and those employed elsewhere.

Nine Marxist economists analyse the crisis

Interviews from March to June 2008 and December 2008-January 2009

- Michel Husson
- Fred Moseley
- Leo Panitch
- Andrew Kliman
- David Laibman
- Costas Lapavistas
- Simon Mohun
- Trevor Evans
- Dick Bryan

Appendix: AWL 2008 conference document on the world economy

www.workersliberty.org/marxists-crisis

SCOTTISH EDUCATION

"Why must our children pay"?

BY DALE STREET

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), the Scottish teachers' union, has called a march and rally in Glasgow on Saturday 6 March under the slogans "Why Must Our Children Pay? Invest in Their Education!"

Like other services in the public sector, education in Scotland is threatened with major cuts in spending as the Westminster government attempts to make public sector workers and public services consumers pick up the tab for bailing out the banks.

There are already 2,500 fewer teachers in classrooms than there were just two years ago. The number of teaching support staff has also been cut, along with the number of students who are to be trained to become teachers.

These cutbacks are already impacting on working conditions in schools and the ability of teachers to deliver a quality education.

In a recent survey carried out by the

EIS, examples provided by members included: a lack of funds to buy classroom resources; misuse of probationary teachers; lack of supply cover for sick staff; insufficient professional development for teachers; increasing class sizes; and insufficient funds to heat schools.

To these issues must be added the wave of school closures which have been carried out by councils across Scotland, especially Glasgow City Council.

Such cutbacks are already taking place even before the next government — irrespective of whether it is Labour or Tory — launches a major assault on public spending.

The SNP will denounce such cutbacks by the Westminster government and use them to try to boost support for their demand for independence. But an SNP government would not behave any differently. Its record in Holyrood has already proven that.

The EIS needs to follow up the rally and march by linking up with other public sector trade unions to organise a united fightback in defence of public services.

Civil service strike

From back page

Management claim that the five accepting unions "represent a complete cross-section of our staff, across all grades". This is a complete fabrication. There is not one Administrative Officer (AO) or Executive Officer (EO) in these unions — grades which make up the majority, well over 70% of staff.

PCS alone (without NIPSA) represents nearly three times as many civil servants as the other unions combined. The other unions didn't even bother to consult their members on the proposals.

It is claimed that the public will not understand our taking action. To the extent that this is true, it is because the public has been fed a steady diet of information about the financial arrangements, bonus payments, gold-plated pensions and golden parachutes of senior civil servants. The reality for the vast majority of us is very different.

We must all now take action to defend our terms and conditions.

All out on Monday 8 and Tuesday 9 March!

BRITAIN 2010: BULLYING

In the wake of the scandal about Gordon Brown's volcanic temper and his bullying treatment of his staff, it is worth remembering the 2006 government enquiry which found that 10% of workers in the Office of the Deputy Prime-Minister had experienced bullying, 6% had reported harassment and 22% has witnessed unfair treatment.

Endemic levels of bullying in the offices of ruling-class politicians committed to a ruthless culture of competition and target-chasing are hardly surprising. The problem, though, goes much deeper than the individual bad tempers of men like Brown or Prescott. As the capitalist crisis continues to bite, cuts culture will lead more and more bosses to adopt authoritarian management styles. In order to provide workers with ideas and resources to fight back against bullying bosses, Workers' Liberty has launched the "We Are Not Slaves" website — see <http://www.wearenotslaves.blogspot.com> for more.

HIGHER EDUCATION CUTS

Student fightback begins in earnest

BY ED MALTBY, NATIONAL
CAMPAIGN AGAINST FEES & CUTS

The press, including the left press, has rightly been full of reports of workers and service—users across the public sector beginning to feel the bite of cuts, but in the higher education sector at least we're happy to be able to bring some news of activists forcing bosses to feel the bite of our resistance to their cuts.

The sector is faced with billions of pounds of cuts, which the University and College Union (UCU) estimates could lead to the massacre of tens of thousands of jobs. Grassroots campaigns against cuts have been springing up all over the country, many looking to coordinate with potential industrial action by lecturers and other education workers. In February, student members of Workers' Liberty helped launch the National

Campaign Against Fees & Cuts, whose call for a national wave of direct action in universities is now starting to create significant noise.

Anti-cuts occupations have already taken place at the Universities of Sussex and Westminster, with action underway at University College London as we went to press. Management at the University of East Anglia was so terrified of potential direct action that it sent a grovelling email to leading figures on the Eastern coordination of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts requesting a private meeting.

Like an industrial occupation, university occupations directly pose the question of whose interests predominate on a campus; those of unelected, unaccountable profiteering managers or those of the people who work and study at the institution?

At Westminster, where nearly 300 jobs

are under threat, activists have demanded that the university bosses open the books and develop a democratic and sustainable plan for the university's development through open and genuine consultation with unions organising on campus. Articulating those kind of demands, and utilising the kind of high-impact direct action tactics that activists at Westminster and elsewhere have used, will become increasingly essential in the coming period as bosses and government attempt to force their cuts through. We should make this a spring of discontent across the public sector.

For more information, visit:

<http://conventionagainstfeesandcuts.wordpress.com> (National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts)

www.free—education.org.uk (Education Not for Sale — a network of anti—capitalist activists in the student movement)

OCCUPATIONS

At Sussex the riot police sent in. At Westminster “we planned a military strategy”

SUSSEX

BY PAT ROLFE

The latest occupation staged by students at Sussex University against education cuts was broken by riot police (3 March) armed with pepper spray and dogs. Police attacked a 200-strong demonstration outside the Vice Chancellor's office, while dozens of students inside were staging an occupation.

This attack represents an escalation of management's attempts to repress the anti-cuts movement. Ominously, students on Wednesday's demonstration at the University of East Anglia also reported a large police presence on their campus. The entire student movement, must join with the labour movement to protest against the use of police!

Staff organised in the Sussex branch of the lecturers' union UCU have also voted to strike — 76% voted “yes” to action on an 80% turn-out. The student campaign will build support for the strike.

Over the past weeks, the campaign has been engaging in open and inclusive debate, so as to draw in a wider section of the student population. Discussions centred around strikes and occupations — when they are tactically useful, when they are possible and how they can win. The campaign's focus has been on building an independent student campaign on campus which can act on its own to put pressure on authorities, and on supporting lecturers and other university staff in their ballot and (hopefully) in industrial action. “I support the UCU” stickers have been appearing everywhere.

Students at Sussex are trying to build a student movement that draws in large numbers of students by engaging them in debate and discussion, and ultimately, a movement which poses a radically democratic alternative for the university, and for society.

• More:
<http://conventionagainstfeesandcuts.wordpress.com>

<http://defendsussex.wordpress.com>

• Videos of police at
youtube.com/user/sussexnot4sale

WESTMINSTER

BY JADE BAKER

(This article was written from inside the occupation by an AWL member at Westminster. Since it was written, the occupation has ended. Students left to join a demonstration at University College London against cuts to language courses. As we went to press, activists at UCL — bolstered by their comrades at Westminster — were besieging their Vice Chancellor's office and demanding that he speak with them.)

First and foremost, the aim of our occupation is to challenge and, hopefully, stop the 250-plus tutoring and admin job cuts that management have announced for April this year.

We prepared a statement of intent for our Vice-Chancellor, Geoffrey Petts, to sign. The statement's demands included a declaration of no compulsory redundancies and a real effort to minimise voluntary ones; making freely available to the unions (UCU, Unison, student union) all documents pertaining to the university's finances; and a guarantee that no staff or students involved in the actions against cuts will face repercussions or reprisals.

The campaign began around two months back with four of us. This tiny number was pretty symbolic of Westminster's up till now under-politicised student population. However, that four speedily became ten, twenty and so on. What's more a couple of die-hard, legendary Marxist tutors got on board and really helped out with the admin side of things. That was immensely helpful as it allowed us to wage a mass propaganda war (leaflets, posters, the lot) for minimal cost.

After a successful mass meeting with staff and students, two weeks ago, where a vote of no confidence in the VC and his management was passed, we realised

the potential for building a successful protest/day of action on the wave of that momentum.

We set a date for the protest coinciding with the board of governors meeting, at which job cuts were top of the agenda. At a Fight Cuts campaign caucus, students were almost unanimously in favour of the idea of an occupation.

From that moment on we planned a military strategy involving leafleting, banner-dropping, postering and speeches in lectures, across all five of Westminster's campuses.

Yesterday, on the day of action, a healthy crowd of 200 turned up. After spilling into the lobby and up the stairwell to the first floor — conveniently where the VC's office and the boardroom are — we humiliated the VC and the board by storming their meeting and forcing them to answer questions about the cuts. Then we decided to occupy the VC's office.

Numbers have fluctuated from 100 down to about 40, but bear in mind the office is pretty small! A definite goal for future occupations will be to consider the logistics of space a bit better; this time we got a bit stuck!

However, we're all exceptionally happy with the results!

Management are yet to return our statement of intent with any credible proposals or amendments. The ones they have made previously contradicted our demands in a cynical and bureaucratic fashion.

One of our goals is encouraging tutors who haven't already joined a union to do so. We want to show solidarity with them and give them the confidence to ballot for a strike.

When we leave, it will be with the knowledge that management are on their guard and that students, tutors and staff are ready to hold them to account. We are ready for every twist and turn of an anti-cuts movement that is rapidly expanding.

This is not the end. Far from it!

• More:
<http://fightcutsatuow.wordpress.com>

Chris Marks for NUS President!

AWL member Chris Marks is Vice President (Education) at Hull University Union and northern co-convenor of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts. At this year's NUS conference (Newcastle, 13-15 April) he will be standing for President. He told us why:

There are now anti-cuts campaigns appearing around the country — a real grass-roots student movement. That's what made the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts possible. NUS, predictably, is doing nothing to support this development. Forget about free education — it doesn't even oppose cuts, really. The leadership's motions to NUS conference argue that any cuts should be reasonable! Meanwhile it has once again refused to side with education workers in struggle against management and the government.

Under NUS's new constitution it's even harder to shift it than before, and there are new plans to entrench the bureaucracy further by turning it into a sort of commercial charity.

Against that, I'm standing as a class-struggle socialist, to provide a voice to students who want a fight back, promote solidarity with workers' struggles and help build the anti-cuts movement.

My opponents are two identikit right-wingers, Aaron Porter and Richard Budden, and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, a sort of soft-left NUS politician who's Black Students' Officer. If 'left' means supporting a collection of good causes, then she's left, but not if it means grass-roots activism, class struggle and anti-capitalist and socialist politics.

Socialist students, and anyone who wants an NUS that gives activists on the ground a real lead against fees and cuts, should back my campaign. Get in touch to give your support, invite me to speak at your union and come to the conference to help out.

c.marks@hull.ac.uk
07931 108 618

Facebook: Chris Marks #1 for NUS President

COLLEGE CUTS

“We should focus on what unites us.”

BY JENNY SUTTON, COLLEGE OF NORTH EAST LONDON UCU & TRADE UNION AND SOCIALIST COALITION (TUSC) PPC FOR TOTTENHAM

My college is facing £2.5 million worth of cuts, which would critically damage our capacity to provide decent education for our community. Now the UCU (University and College Union) branch has voted unanimously to ballot for strike action in the event of compulsory redundancies. I’m Branch Secretary of the UCU at our college where the local MP is David Lammy, Minister for Higher Education. He embodies the complete failure of the Labour Party to represent ordinary people, in education and across public services, and so as part of our campaign I’m

standing against him in the General Election on a platform of save education, jobs and public services. Anti-cuts campaigns in the post-16 education sector are fairly well connected. London Region UCU meetings are well-attended by activists from across the capital, and so can respond collectively to the cuts. London Region UCU are organising a march on Downing Street on Saturday March 20 (meet 12 noon, Kings College, the Strand), and are organising an aggregated ballot for strike action across the 16 (so far) FE colleges that have announced significant cuts and cannot guarantee no compulsory redundancies. We expect to be taking coordinated strike action from the week beginning 19 April, and will be working hard to support each other. Public expenditure is political choice. This government chooses to sustain illegal war and occupation while cutting education, health and public services. They found £500 billion of public

money to bail out the banks. RBS, now 84% owned by the taxpayer, has set aside £1.3 billion for bonus payments this year despite a £5 billion loss! There are more millionaires in the UK than ever before, and the PCS union estimate that £120 billion would be raised if all corporations and individuals paid the correct tax — but MPs, who should be ensuring a fair distribution of wealth, are more concerned with fiddling their own expenses than reigning in the fat cats. This is why we need an alternative. We have to reclaim education, jobs and public services for ordinary people! I’m standing as a Trade Union and Socialist Coalition candidate in the elections. TUSC is not a party, but is a platform for a clear electoral alternative to public sector cuts, privatisation, militarism and environmental degradation. Clearly the unions should represent the interests of their members, fighting unequivocally for jobs, decent pay and

conditions, and public services. Some, like the UCU, RMT and PCS are doing so. Other unions are being held back by their ties to the Labour Party — when Labour is attacking the working class, you can’t defend both the working class and Labour! However, I don’t think a working-class voice is expressed solely through the unions. Many of the most exploited workers have to fight for the right to belong to a union at all. There are a multitude of groups and individuals fighting against racism, fighting for rights for refugees and asylum seekers, fighting in solidarity with workers and liberation movements in the global south, fighting for rights for people with disabilities, fighting against the closures of local hospitals, nurseries and factories... and so on. All these people have a part to play in the movement, and as socialists we should be focusing on what unites us rather than what divides.

Always understaffed



MY LIFE AT WORK

Eleanor Daltrey is a healthcare assistant in south London

Tell us a little bit about the work you do. I work as a healthcare assistant on an inpatient psychosis unit. We work shifts, and most of the time is spent on the ward interacting with service users and doing things like changing beds, taking physical observations and helping with medication or running service user groups for relaxation, music or art. I also accompany service users in the community, for shopping or appointments.

Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve? Pay and conditions are okay. There are small things that add up like shifts finishing late; a lack of training in managing aggression, which increases worker and service user vulnerability; or an absence of supervision and opportunity to discuss problems.

The biggest issue is that we’re always understaffed and even when a shift is “fully” staffed there are often a lot of non-permanent “bank” workers. This can be difficult as they don’t know the service users or how the ward functions. One time I was the only person who had worked on the ward before, and I’d only been there a month!

Has the economic crisis affected your work? Has it affected the way workers think about their jobs? Obviously there have been cuts across the NHS. The unit used to function on ten nurses or healthcare assistants per shift, now we have five (if we’re lucky). Recruitment is happening but it’s slow. I think, like a lot of workplaces, people feel relieved just to have a job and don’t complain too much.

What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to “talk politics on the job”? It’s quite difficult to talk about anything, let alone politics, as we’re always in service user areas or too busy. We either don’t get breaks or they’re staggered so workers never spend time together. I imagine there’s more chance to talk on night shifts as the ward is quieter but I haven’t worked nights yet.

Do you enjoy your work? It can be very busy and hectic, but when a shift is run well and you can engage with, and support people it’s enjoyable. It’s great to see people progressing (on the ward and moving on) and to be able to be part of someone’s steps towards recovery.

What are your bosses like? Our ward manager is okay, but fairly hands-off — she rarely comes out of her office, leaving nurses to make decisions. The NHS bureaucracy is a problem, with constant changes in how we should be working and how the ward should function. People seem tired of this and complain a lot about “management” but don’t see any solutions. They also don’t see our manager as “management” as she used to be a nurse on the ward.

Is there a union in your workplace, and does it do a good job? There are several unions in the health service — Unison, Unite and the GMB are the main ones. Unison is the main one in my workplace. The branch is apparently organising campaigns around cuts and proposed closures. However, I’ve tried several times to contact the branch (going to the office, calling and emailing) with no luck, which is fairly poor. I joined online and am still trying to get in touch.

If you could change one thing about your workplace, what would it be? Having more permanent staff on the ward would make a big difference. It would increase safety on the ward; improve support; and free workers to engage with service users instead of being tied up with paperwork.

Female detainees at Yarl’s Wood Detention Centre are on still hunger strike in opposition to the abysmal conditions of their detention. 84 women are currently on hunger strike against their treatment, which includes out-and-out racism from prison guards and other detainees, with African inmates being described as “monkeys”. Over 50 activists demonstrated outside London's Holloway Prison where three of the women involved are currently being held. The campaign continues. More: <http://visionon.tv/>

Haiti solidarity

BY GARETH MUNRO

No Sweat activists met in London for a forum on Haiti to follow up the massively successful music and comedy benefit which raised over £1,000 for Haitian workers' organisation Batay Ouvriye. The meeting heard from Andy Taylor of the Haiti Support Group, who gave an inspiring account of how grassroots organisations in Haiti have tried to pick themselves up and continue organising after the devastating earthquake. He explained how the hyper-exploitative sweatshop capitalism operating in Haiti directly worsened the impact of the earthquake; 500 workers in a single factory were killed because bosses locked them into the workplace hours after their shift was supposed to end so that they

could complete the day's quota. Vicki Morris from No Sweat discussed the meaning of solidarity, and talked about why No Sweat chooses to make direct links with organisations like Batay Ouvriye rather than supporting mainstream charity appeals. The meeting discussed the difference between solidarity and charity, as well as debates current within the social justice movement (is the key dividing line in the world between "rich countries" and "poor countries" or bosses and workers?). It was agreed to investigate which companies are active in Haiti's Free Trade Zones and organise direct action, targeting their UK stores to highlight the struggles of Haitian workers. No Sweat holds monthly organising meetings on the first Thursday of every month at Housmans Bookshop, 5 Caledonian Road, King’s Cross.

LONDON CUTS

12 London hospitals face the axe

BY STUART JORDAN

In a report commissioned by the British Medical Association,* John Lister of London Health Emergency has done vital work in exposing the shady plans to dismantle London's NHS. Lister paints a picture of the future of London's health service that can only be described as catastrophic. The BMA is now mobilising its membership to build and get involved in campaigns with other healthworkers, patients and members of the community — to save the NHS.

It is a massive indictment of the trade union movement, and specifically the healthworkers' union Unison, that the six-figure salaried medics have raised the alarm while other unions have done nothing. But what does the report say?

Over the next five years demand for healthcare is estimated to rise 4%. With current government promises that the NHS budget will increase only at the rate of inflation, this will leave a £15-20 billion funding deficit. The Tories are being vague but we can expect them to be more ruthless.

15% of the UK population live in London and the city is expected to take 20-25% of the cuts:

- At least 12 district hospitals are due to be closed.
- A third of hospital beds will close (a conservative estimate puts this at 5,600 beds).
- 21-37% reduction in nursing costs.
- 9-43% reduction in doctors costs.
- 25% reduction in drugs costs.
- 42% reduction in overheads.
- 32% increase in productivity.
- GP appointment times to be reduced by one third

The NHS bosses think that all this can be achieved by shifting 55% of outpatient appointments (around five million) and 66% of Accident and Emergency admissions (around two million) to "polysystems".

A "polysystem" is the new name for a "polyclinic". Presumably it is the same

thing but without the bricks and mortar. The idea of polyclinics was first promoted in the Darzi Report in 2007. Under this scheme, the district general hospital is replaced by a three-tier system of "polyclinic", "elective treatment centres" and "urgent treatment centres". It is proposed that London should have 150 polyclinics which will have about 100 members of staff: about 20-30 GPs, 50-60 nurses and just 10 clerical staff! They will deal with all the minor injuries and include other facilities like maternity wards.

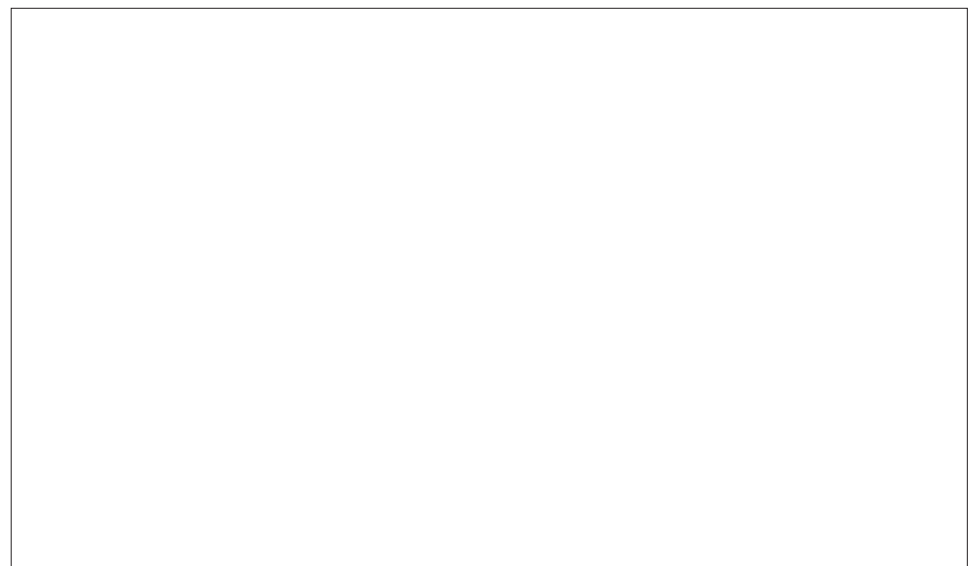
At the moment, there are only a couple of polyclinics in London and they have not reduced demand on local A&E departments and the general district hospital. It is not at all clear why this system would necessarily save any money. A review by *Pulse* magazine claims that where the polyclinic system has been established it has been three-to-seven times more expensive than the current system. Moreover, there are massive clinical risks associated with fragmenting the service.

The whole plan rests on the notion that this system will somehow reduce demand. However, an Audit Commission report, *More for Less* published in November 2009, concluded that "Demand management is unlikely to make a significant contribution to any savings requirement in the short term."

The proposal (which is lunacy from any kind of financial or clinical perspective) makes even less sense when we consider what is happening with PFI.

In Tower Hamlets for example, they have just built a new hospital through a PFI deal which will cost the taxpayer £5.3 billion for a £1 billion building. The hospital comprises 1000 beds, the building is yet to open but already Barts and the London Trust have announced that they will not be using 200 beds because they cannot afford the staff. Despite this, the taxpayer will still have to pay for the new beds at a cost of £1 billion over the next three decades.

Similar stories can be seen across the



2,000 people attended the Saturday 27 February demonstration to save the Whittington Hospital's Accident and Emergency department in North London. On the demonstration were different left groups, local unions, Islington Labour party, the Green Party and the Liberal Democrats.

The culminating rally was held outside the front entrance of the hospital and had speakers from the campaign group Keep Our NHS Public, union reps, local campaigners and politicians. One of those politicians was David Lammy — Labour MP for Tottenham and Minister for Higher Education. As the NUT rep who spoke after him pointed out it was complete hypocrisy that Lammy was pledging his support to stop the closure of Whittington A & E as he is currently making enormous cuts to higher education. Many speakers at the rally called for a cross-London campaign against cuts to the NHS.

The next planning meeting to save the Whittington A&E is at 7pm on Monday 8 March at Whittington Community Centre, Yerbury Rd, N19.

country where NHS services are being cut while the tax payers' money is spent on obsolete building work.

Traditionally, the welfare state was a means of redistributing wealth from the richest to the poorest. Increasingly, with the bank-bailout and privatisation of public services, the valve is turned the other way. The state is increasingly playing the role of a massive slush fund, redirecting a portion of our wages, in the form of taxes, back into the pockets of the bosses. Alongside these structural privatisations, cuts will massively undermine the whole notion of free healthcare.

At a recent BMA public meeting, doctors and other healthworkers repeatedly emphasised that there was no political party that will save the NHS. Instead, we would need to build our own movement, using the kind of direct action tactics that saved the Elizabeth Garret Anderson Hospital in 1976-8. In the months to come, we must do all we can to build mass campaigns to save the NHS.

* *NHS on the Brink*

http://www.bma.org.uk/images/onthembrinkreport2010_tcm41-193388.pdf

KINGSTON CAMPAIGN

Privatisation by another name

BY JOHNNIE BYRNE (PC)

Probably the most insidious threat facing the National Health Service is the "right to request". Enshrined in the *High Quality Care For All: NHS Next Stage Review Final Report of June 2008*, it allows groups of frontline health professionals "the freedom to use their talents to find innovative ways to improve quality of care for patients" — by taking their services out of the NHS. We are now seeing the effects of that reform in Kingston, south London.

The "right to request" is a development of the Thatcher government's internal market. Primary care trusts (PCTs) are now supposed to separate commissioning and provision of services. And groups of PCT community specialists — health visitors, therapists, district and school nurses and the like — are being encouraged to set up social enterprise companies, outside the NHS, to run their

services themselves. The PCT remains as the commissioning body and "buys back" the provision from the clinicians.

Let's be clear: a social enterprise is a private — though not-for-profit — company. Any surplus is ploughed back into services. The company has some protection, at least in its initial contract. After that, who knows?

Contracts generally run for three years but can be for five. However, in the latter model, a percentage of the work has to be "market-tested" or "retendered". The community is "represented" on the board of the company — by non-elected individuals. It is no substitute for democratic public control.

NHS Kingston, Kingston's PCT, is on the point of setting up just such a company, Your Healthcare, due to start trading on 1 April 2010 with a five-year contract.

The local Labour Party and Trades Council first heard of the plan last September from anxious members of the union Unite, and agreed to run a joint campaign against it. We are now in the

process of setting up a branch of "Keep Our NHS Public", in the first instance to prevent this break-up, then to tackle the many other problems facing health provision locally.

The initiative for a social enterprise is supposed to come from the workers. In the case of Kingston, the request seems to have been pushed by managers, brought in specially for the purpose. Workers are too scared to speak openly against it, but many don't want to leave the NHS.

Although their employment conditions will have the theoretical protection of TUPE regulations, their pensions won't. They have been given assurances that they can take their NHS pensions with them — but they won't be able to bring them back should they seek to return to the NHS. NHS Kingston has refused to hold a staff ballot and have refused any public consultation.

In order to create a surplus and be financially viable, Your Healthcare intends implementing "cost improve-

ment plans". We fear this is a euphemism for cuts. The Company's business plan mentions that recruitment, to replace the expected 10% turnover, will be from outside the NHS or from the lower grades of the NHS. This will surely have an immediate effect on the level of professional expertise available to the local community.

The Kingston project is a pilot for the rest of London, and perhaps nationally.

One could argue that social enterprise might have a place in helping people with innovative ideas for combatting unemployment — not in running the basic public service infrastructure of the country.

Why should any small group of individuals, be they ever so professional, well-intentioned and enthusiastic, have the right to destroy our National Health Service?

• Johnnie Byrne is Secretary of Kingston Labour Party

AUSTRALIA

Oil worker militant victimised

In February, Bob Carnegie, a Workers' Liberty member and union delegate on the Ensco 7500 rig, was due to return to the rig for a three-week stint. The labour-hire company employing Bob, Offshore Marine Services, told him that the rig owners, Ensco, did not want him back. After industrial action on the rig, OMS and Ensco bosses finally explained that Chevron had put Carnegie on a "no fly" list. Martin Thomas spoke to Carnegie about his victimisation case.

MT: The case of you being removed from work on the Ensco 7500 gas exploration rig, hired by Chevron and operating offshore from Western Australia, raises a lot of questions beyond the obvious one of your livelihood. What do you think is the most important issue in this case?

BC: The most fundamental issue is the civil-liberties issue posed by the "no-fly" policy operated by Chevron, which removes me from the rig without sacking me, just by Chevron telling the companies which provide air transport to the

offshore field that I am on a "no-fly" list.

The most important thing about the whole dispute is that it has flushed out that Chevron has the "no-fly" list. It was openly admitted by managers from Ensco and from OMS, the labour hire company, in talks in Perth on 22 February.

Chevron is the second largest oil company in the USA, and the fifth largest in the world. Its record in the Amazon is one of the great ecological disasters of the 20th century.

The "no-fly" policy is a secret blacklist. Any worker who has an argument with a Chevron employee about anything can find themselves on the "no-fly" list — without charges, without a hearing, without an appeal, without even any formal notification. If the unions don't fight this "no-fly" list, it will make union organisation on the job almost impossible.

The unions should be mounting a large public and industrial campaign against the "no-fly" list now, right at the start of the Gorgon project. They should also mount a legal challenge to it. *Prima facie* it is a secondary boycott.

They should use the issue as a tool to pressure the Labour government on expanding workers' and union delegates' rights in workplaces, to something nearer the rights that French workers, for example, have. If Labour wants to do it, it can easily legislate improvements, because they will have the Greens' support in the Senate.

In the British sector of the North Sea, according to *Blowout*, the journal of the Oil Industry Liaison Committee (the offshore workers' union), employers have frequently used similar policies, known as "NRB" ("not required back"). But *Blowout* also reports that the OILC has had some success in challenging "NRB" policies in the courts.

I don't mind losing my job if it means the start of a real fight against the "no-fly" policy.

MT: Aside from the "no-fly" policy, what other issues do you see as important here?

BC: Defence of union delegates. I've had qualified support from my union, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) — they were a little reluctant at first, but once the issue was argued I've had support.

However, in the main, when workers in the offshore oil and gas industry are told that they are "not required back", the union's way of helping is to seek to find them employment elsewhere in the industry. That means that the argument about union organisation being weakened by delegates being "NRB" is constantly being put off.

Some would say that winning reinstatement in such circumstances is just too difficult. My view on that is that you never win every battle. But you have the battle. Through it, workers realise who the class enemy is — and in a relatively high-paid industry like oil and gas, often workers will have a blurred picture of that. And if workers see that the union is prepared to put up a fight, they'll join the organisation, and we will develop unions which are strong enough to win reinstatement.

MT: And safety on the rigs is an issue, too?

BC: Yes. That is the primary reason

why I have been removed from the rig — because I raised safety issues.

Safety on the rigs, in my opinion, is worse than on construction sites on the mainland. And construction sites are inherently difficult to keep safe, because they change every day. The rigs are a more stable environment, and should be easier to keep safe.

But the management pay scant attention to Australian standards. They think they can override Australian standards by using their own "risk-management analysis". Using the "DuPont Safety System", they try to shift the responsibility for safety to the workers, and make workers spy on other workers.

Why is safety poor? Because safety costs a fortune. There is tremendous pressure not to stop or delay any job, because the financial costs of doing that are huge compared to other industries. The Ensco 7500 rig costs Chevron \$75,000 an hour, so Chevron loses \$75,000 if rig operations are held up for even one hour. Unlike on a construction site or in a factory, where usually one section can be halted without losses elsewhere, the rig is a much more integrated operation, so it is more likely that stopping one job will stop everything.

Safety reps have less security than in other industries. Almost every worker on the rig is a casual of some sort. If a safety rep puts a prohibition on anything, or speaks contrary to company safety policy, they are likely to face "NRB". I've explained this to officials from NOPSAs [National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority, the government's official safety-monitoring agency], and they agreed it is a problem.

NOPSAs does inspect the rigs. It came to the Ensco 7500 on 17–18 January. The NOPSAs officials gave us a good hearing. But NOPSAs very rarely utilises its powers to stop jobs.

The unions should agitate to make NOPSAs far more accountable. Although it is a government body, it is funded by the offshore oil and gas industry. It tends to be less aggressive with employers than other government departments.

The unions should be campaigning for Australia's offshore oil and gas industry to be raised to the safety standards of the Norwegian sector of the North Sea oil field, or at the very least of the British sector. But the high levels of non-unionisation on the rigs will be a problem in winning that campaign, unless they can be remedied.

MT: Leaving aside the question of safety, what are conditions on the rigs like as regards being livable for the workers?

BC: The living conditions on the Ensco 7500 are worse than in any maximum security prison in Australia. You live four to a cabin, eight to a toilet and a shower, with incessant noise, and with no recreation area.

When you're not actually working, you can sit in the mess room, which holds about 70 people, and watch TV, or lie in your cabin, unless someone else in the cabin is trying to sleep. The vessel could not work in the Norwegian or British sectors of the North Sea because it doesn't meet the minimum accommodation standards there. It's a question whether the vessel should even have been allowed to come to Australia with such atrocious conditions, though objections would have put the unions in an

invidious position, because otherwise the rig would have been brought here and operated with all non-union labour.

The unions should lobby governments intensively for a regulatory framework on the north-west shelf and in the Bass Straits which lays down accommodation conditions comparable to the Norwegian sector — or at least to the British sector — of the North Sea. There should at least be some quiet space where you can read a book or have a bit of time to yourself.

MT: The offshore oil and gas industry is a relatively new industry. It is expanding fast. Unions whose old bastions of organisation are shrinking due to industrial change need to organise in such sectors, and the MUA and AWU have put resources into organising offshore. It is an area where strong union organisation could have huge economic clout, but with difficulties not found elsewhere. Do you think some fresh thinking is needed in the union movement about organising in this sector?

BC: The rank and file on the rig have been absolutely steadfast. When the dispute over my removal occurred on the rig, for the two days 20 and 21 February, there was confusion on the vessel over the role of other workers who wanted to support the dispute.

From the information I've had, both the AWU and the MUA officials were deeply concerned about facing legal action for a "secondary boycott" should anyone else other than the MUA members participate in the dispute.

My concern about that is that solidarity is the soul of trade-unionism. The sanctity of the picket line, and the principle that no trade-unionist does the work of another trade-unionist on strike, are far more important than any perceived threats of the employer taking action on "secondary boycott" grounds.

What does a union amount to, if workers forget the sanctity of the picket line?

I think workers will respond to aggressive, militant attempts to organise their industry by unions which are prepared to represent them and to fight beside them on all the issues — not just pay, but also safety, living conditions on the rigs, and job security. Meek trade-union organising which relies on collaboration between the unions and the employer, may deliver some union membership in the first instance, but is ultimately doomed. It is up to the MUA-AWU alliance to decide which path it will take.

The first step has to be to organise the rig workers directly employed by the rig companies such as Ensco, Maersk, BHP, etc. The unions have to be prepared to push the envelope with regard to getting full access for union organisers to be able to frequent the rigs. At present an effective way to stop union organisation is for the companies to make it difficult for union organisers to get access.

If winning access means that these companies have to be placed under pressure in other areas, then that is what has to be done. Nearly all these companies are very image-conscious. Protests outside their offices in city centres would be enormously effective.

The unions should organise regular monthly members' meetings ashore, and regular meetings on each rig, at least once in every tour of duty. When negotiating collective agreements, the unions should insist on including strict wording to deal with "NRB" policies.

Background

On 1 February, the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA) had boasted victory over pay for seafarers employed in offshore oil and gas fields.

After limited industrial action and negotiations, labour hire company TMS agreed to pay rises of 30% over five years, and a Project Allowance Bonus. Other labour hire companies are expected to agree similar rises.

Pay rises are important. But, as in every industry, building and defending union organisation, and establishing civilised conditions, are more important in the long term. The high pay can quickly melt away when inflation or adverse labour-market conditions set in. Union organisation and civilised conditions are more stable and far-reaching gains, and lay the basis for the bigger political and social changes we need. How much real value has high pay if a worker who stands up for his workmates can easily be victimised?

These general truths apply doubly to the offshore oil and gas industry. The capital costs there are huge and the workforces quite small. Chevron pays Ensco \$550,000 a day to hire the Ensco 7500 rig, but only about 135 people work on the rig at any one time. The whole multi-billion dollar Australian offshore oil and gas industry employs only thousands of workers.

Bosses can much more readily afford relatively high wage rates than in more labour-intensive industries and, anyway, must offer relatively high rates to get people working continuously away from home for long periods.

Bob Carnegie had been working on the Ensco rig only since December when he was victimised for his union activities. In that time he dealt with four industrial issues as a union delegate. On each one, management felt they had no choice but to concede. Evidently they were worried that if they allow strong union organisation to take hold on the rig, they would face more issues on which they have no choice but to concede.

● More information: workersliberty.org/node/13752

ITALY

More lies, scandals.... and prosecutions?

By HUGH EDWARDS

At the end of February Italy's Corte di Cassazione — a cross between a Court of Appeal and a Supreme Court — upheld the conviction of British lawyer David Mills for having accepted bribes from Silvio Berlusconi. However, as a result of one of the umpteen *ad personam* laws passed by Berlusconi to keep him out of jail, the Mills case was “prescripted” — its range of executive action to carry out any sentence ran out of time.

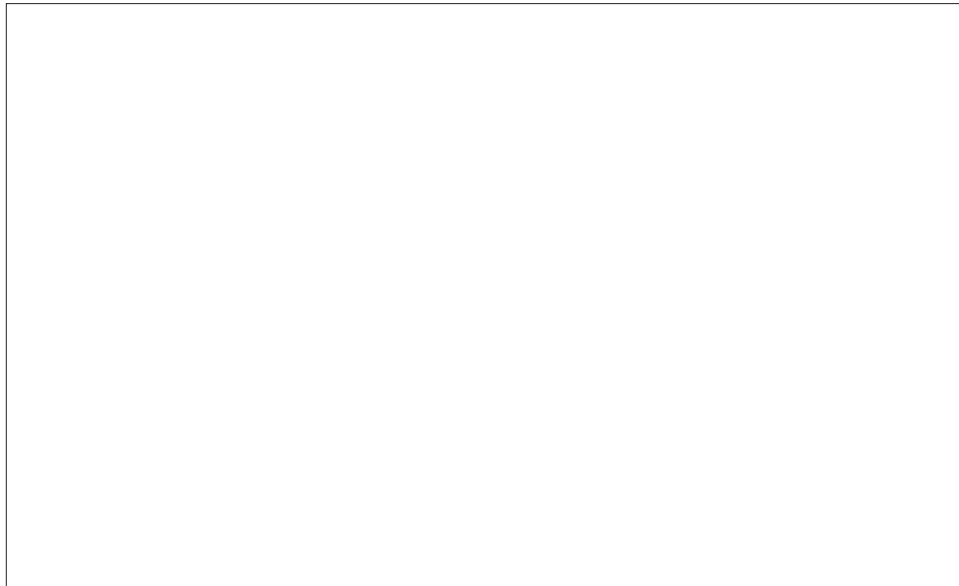
Mills avoided going to prison for the four and a half years imposed on him at his original trial. But the Berlusconi camp may not yet be out of the hot water.

Predictably, Berlusconi and his media lyingly asserted that Mills had been absolved — thereby logically absolving his corruptor Berlusconi.

Berlusconi had escaped being tried alongside Mills because another *ad personam* law had protected him from prosecution. But that law, in turn, has since been struck down by the Constitutional Court and, following the reaffirmation of Mills's guilt, so, too, Berlusconi faces a trial. No wonder he screamed in outrage that the magistrates were worse than the Taliban!

But, bad enough as the news was as regards his personal fate as a corruptor — a status already well established legally, and documented historically as a sidekick to another of Italy's great corruptors, Bettino Craxi — it is only the tip of a very, very large iceberg that could well sink the ship of the Berlusconi regime.

In the last few weeks also there have emerged more and more revelations regarding the existence and the extent of the systematic and widespread corruption presided over by Berlusconi and Guido Bertolaso, head of the Civil Protection Agency. This has been in complicity with senior executives in public administration at both the national and



Berlusconi, “back in the day”, as sidekick to Bettino Craxi

regional level, high-ranking judges and lawyers, and a posse of businessmen throughout the building industry in Italy.

On the basis of telephone interceptions carried out by the fraud squad, the carefully scripted and sedulously peddled image of Berlusconi and Bertolaso has been, piece by piece, torn to tatters.

The Civil Protection Agency was established 18 years ago with all the emergency powers and resources necessary to deal with the natural disasters all too prone to happen across the fragile infrastructure of the Italian peninsula. In principle it was a public agency whose actions and resources were in the last analysis accountable to public scrutiny both in Parliament and the other offices of public administration, they in turn open to examination by press and public. Berlusconi has changed all that.

First, he enormously enlarged the scope of the agency, no longer defined and limited to the field of natural disaster, but now extended to embrace the administration of all and every major

public, social, cultural and recreational event of a national/international character.

It became responsible for the celebration of the 150 years of Italian unity, the world swimming championships, the future winter Olympics, and so on. And by this mechanism, the unlimited and unchallengeable power and authority invested in Bertolaso by a decree of Berlusconi, neither subject to debate or scrutiny anywhere, has reached a level unequalled in any modern bourgeois democracy.

Bertolaso has responsibility for decisions involving billions of euros of public money: no wonder the eavesdroppers on a couple of corrupt building contractors on the night of the earthquake where 300 people died were horrified to hear one celebrating the event with a cynical laugh that his business was guaranteed for life.

What the expiring Bonapartist Berlusconi has, so far, failed to accomplish in terms of his political ambitions to further subvert bourgeois Italy's all

too fraying democratic institutions, has been significantly achieved in a major arena of executive control of the economy.

However, the interceptions of the fraud squad indicate that the “Truman Show” quality of Berlusconi's manufactured reality is running out of credibility. Thus, for example, the original summit of the G8 nations in 2009 had been scheduled for Sardegna. The tragic earthquake in Abruzzo typically afforded Berlusconi the opportunity to polish further his and Bertolaso's image as “men of action”, motivated by public spirit of the noblest kind to help the victims. The G8 summit was shifted on the hoof to Aquila.

The original location in Sardegna, a 300-million euro contract, pocketed by a corrupt contractor who had bribed senior figures to get the contract, was simply left to the mercy of the elements. Now the majority of the inhabitants of Abruzzo still live in hotels on the Adriatic coast, having been assured they would be out of there before Christmas, and thousands of others occupy the gerry-built “towns” erected on the spur of the moment by Berlusconi, with the connivance of the corrupt network.

Meanwhile, in the beautiful city of Aquila, which bore the brunt of the earthquake, four and a half million tons of masonry lie in streets and squares, as Bertolaso and his Civil Protection outfit went elsewhere. But the victims of the earthquake have begun to come back to take possession of the centre of the ruined city, defying the police and the public officials who have been entrusted by Berlusconi to keep them away.

Four of the major figures involved are in jail. Bertolaso, while under charge for corruption, still remains in office, having offered his resignation, melodramatically refused by Berlusconi, who up until this moment remains out of the frame. For how long?

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

GERMANY: “EMMELY”

Barbara E, known as “Emmely”, worked for Kaisers supermarket chain in Germany for 31 years. The company say she had set aside €1.30 worth of bottle deposits for herself, and that these deposit slips were the property of a customer. The suspicion was never proved, but still Emmely was sacked in February 2008.

A few weeks before, Emmely was involved in an 18-month-long national strike. She organised the strike in her shop for the service union Verdi and she had been warned by workmates that she was on the black list.

Her case will be heard at the highest labour court in Germany on 10 June.

The case of Barbara E has caused an outcry across and beyond Germany, stirring up a debate on the treatment of workers. It has drawn attention to the fact that workers in Germany are being sacked on petty charges, such as “stealing” fragments of a euro cent by recharging mobile phones, and that these dismissals are regularly authorised by

German labour courts.

The fact is bosses worldwide are using the crisis in order to lay off more workers and to enhance the intensity of labour.

NICARAGUA: ABORTION

A 27-year-old's life is at risk as a result of pro-life legislation in Nicaragua.

The mother-to-be, known as Amalia, has been denied chemotherapy despite being diagnosed with an aggressive cancer that has spread to her breasts and lungs and may have reached her brain.

The Leon hospital where Amalia's condition was discovered are refusing to treat her because she is pregnant and the stressful and invasive therapies required may harm the foetus, an offence under Nicaraguan law.

Human rights organisation Amnesty International has issued a legal challenge to the hospital's decision on the basis that denying Amalia treatment “criminalises the medical profession”, according to Amnesty spokesperson Esther Major.

The legislation that threatens Amalia's life was only recently introduced by President Daniel Ortega's administration. Nicaraguan women were granted the right to therapeutic abortion in the 19th century, a right that Ortega overturned in 2006 in accordance with his Catholic faith.

Amalia already has a 10-year-old daughter, who is likely to be orphaned by stringent observation of a law that prices the life of an unborn foetus over the health and happiness of a mother and her existing child.

More details: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates>.

FRANCE: CALAIS

Activists in Calais have succeeded in establishing a safe space for beleaguered migrants.

The contested Kronstadt Hangar, a centre where migrants are able to meet with activists and legal advisers to organise and share information, was reopened with a press conference on

Saturday 6 February.

Soutien au Sans-Papiers (SoS) activist Marie Chautemps said: “The Kronstadt Hangar was opened as a direct intervention into a winter of repression that the migrants in Calais have faced.”

The port town in northern France has seen an ongoing wave of battles between sans-papiers migrants and the authorities, since the “Jungle” asylum camp was brutally closed last September.

The Kronstadt Hangar was forcibly closed by French CRS riot police when it was first opened on Monday 7 February. The CRS formed a ring around the centre and successfully stopped migrants from gaining access to much-needed resources.

Many migrants in Calais remain homeless, a direct result of the government assault on the Jungle community.

Embedded SoS and No Borders activists continue to help migrants in their battle for asylum recognition. For more information about the Kronstadt Hangar and No Borders UK, visit <http://london.noborders.org.uk/node/290>.

For a public, democratically-controlled banking system!

BY CLARKE BENITEZ

In the minds of perhaps most workers in Britain, there is nothing that better exemplifies the grotesque inequality at the very core of the way our society is organised than the obscene and ongoing scandal of bankers' bonuses.

Despite leading the world to near economic collapse and bringing about a situation in which millions of people's livelihoods were threatened through their profligacy and blind faith in the anarchic, chaotic whims of the market, bankers and city financiers across the world are still pocketing massive bonuses on top of their already massive "wages."

Despite small New Labour increases on taxation of the super-rich, despite

the ostensible "nationalisation" of banks and mortgage-lenders like RBS and Northern Rock, it seems that the sheer greed and acquisitiveness of the capitalists who run these organisations is impossible to curtail.

In 2006, a study undertaken by the *Independent* calculated that the bonuses (just the bonuses, not even the salaries) paid to city financiers could have funded a 100% salary increase for every frontline nurse, fire-fighter and paramedic in the UK. Statistics like that speak for themselves.

Now, when those same financiers have seen their precarious house of cards come crashing down around them, we are being forced to pay, and they are still raking it in.

In 2009, Barclays paid out nearly £3 billion in bonuses. HSBC recently announced it was handing out £8 million in bonuses to just five bankers. Even bankers who have waived their bonuses — like RBS's Stephen Hester — have publicly expressed their disappointment at having to do so.

The "Robin Hood Tax" on financial transactions proposed by the liberal left and much of the labour movement bureaucracy simply does not go far enough. It is a sticking-plaster on a gaping wound and, furthermore, probably entirely utopian.

To imagine that any immediately-available government — New Labour, Tory or coalition — would impose even this timid measure, when all three main parties have proved time and time again that they are committed to defending the right of capitalists to grow obscenely wealthy at the expense of other people's livelihoods, is a fantasy.

The organised working-class movement needs to fight to impose *its own programme*, not just in terms of making demands on existing governments but in terms of seeking to become a government — that is, seeking to achieve working-class power.

A workers' government would do away with the capitalist marketplace and banking system. It would replace the existing banks with a single, publicly-owned and democratically-controlled banking system.

Today's bankers would undoubtedly baulk at what they would paint as an over-centralised, totalitarian scheme; let them! Our starting point is not the "right" of competing capitalist banks to exist, or the "right" of bankers to make money. It is the right of the working-class majority of society to decent jobs, decent homes, decent pensions and a decent standard of living.

A democratically-controlled banking system, whose resources could be used to guarantee that collective social provision, would be vastly preferable to the current model of competing financial institutions and products within which even something as basic as how we store our money is turned into a commodity.

But for such a banking system to be established, we require a government prepared to take on the rich, up to and including the expropriation of their wealth. We need workers' rule. We need a workers' government!

The left and movement in

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.

Inspire members with the confidence to fight back

Jerry Hicks is an activist in the Unite union and aims to become a candidate in its 2010 General Secretary election.

The pundits tell us that the gap in the polls between the parties is narrow. What was going to be an easy Tory victory now seems not to be the case. If the polls are narrowing, it's because people still have a genuine memory and distrust of the Tories.

There's a basic class issue here; I consider that Labour has let the working class down, but I think there's still a basic understanding that the Tories are the party of the wealthy and it's positive that that memory still exists.

My feeling is that the turnout in the election will be poor, but it's not because people don't care about politics. People are passionate about all sorts of issues — whether that's the environment, nuclear arms or the closure of a local school or hospital — but many people rightly conclude that most politicians are careerists who promise little and do less. I have no illusions in Labour — I remember the 1997 the slogan "vote Labour, don't trust Blair", and I thought how good that was then, and how right it turned out to be.

I yearn for a credible alternative to the Labour Party. Where there is an electoral alternative, people should look to it. However, there are some good Labour MPs, such as John McDonnell, David Drew, Jeremy Corbyn and a (small) number of others who deserve support. I also think the Green Party is moving left, and some of their candidates also deserve support as do the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and Respect. But where there is no alternative, which unfortunately there won't be in the majority of constituencies, people should perhaps however reluctantly vote Labour without any illusions. Saying that I could think of a few who are too awful for me to consider voting for and thankfully I won't have to!

John McDonnell's failure to get enough nominations from MPs to trigger an election for Labour's leadership was a terrible indictment of the state of democracy inside the party. The project to reclaim the Labour Party is a noble objective but one with little chance of success in my view.

The trade-union left is weak too. A few years ago the press was full of talk of the "awkward squad", but that generation of trade union leaders hasn't managed to push back any of this country's anti-union legislation, or tackle the crisis of

democracy that led to the travesty around the BA strike. We've got a situation where parish councilors are often elected unopposed. Cutting and privatising councilors are elected on turnouts of 30%, but when 90% of BA workers on an 80% turnout vote for strike action their will can be overturned by a single, unelected judge. The TUC and the trade union leaders have a responsibility not to allow that. That BA were still in a position to run the court and then allowed to get away with it is a scandal. I and millions of workers know who the enemy is, but the TUC and many union leaders have become part of the problem and no longer the solution.

I'm hoping to be a candidate in the general secretary election in my union, Unite, because I believe we need a movement prepared to lead a fightback. The Liberal Democrats promise "savage cuts", the Tories have said they're prepared to make themselves the most unpopular government in a generation and Brown and Darling have also promised £75 billions of pounds worth of cuts (I can answer that one scrap Trident!). Whoever gets in, it'll impact on my sector and my union. It'll impact on all working people and those who aren't working, too; benefits will be cut and pensions will be attacked. The axe is definitely being wielded, which is what makes actions like the upcoming PCS strike so important. I'll be doing whatever I can to support that.

The chips are well and truly down now. Many people won't have faced a situation like this before and it's a time that calls for some real steel and backbone. If we acquiesce it's at our peril. I know people's confidence to fight can change from day to day, but I think trade union members can be inspired. It depends on the leaders' ability to provide that inspiration. We need to learn from the Vestas model; if my union and others had ring-fenced that factory and put some real pressure on the Labour government, including threatening to withdraw funding from the Labour Party unless it was brought into public ownership, we could've won and that victory would've made us stronger.

Opportunities like that do arise; it's the responsibility of the leadership to instil confidence in the members and inspire them to fight. We need bottom-up campaigns supported by the unions and a leadership that will lead by example.

Making union voices heard

Val Graham is a Unison activist in Derbyshire County Council and a member of the Unison Labour Link committee for the East Midlands. She spoke to *Solidarity* about what East Midlands Unison Labour Link is doing in the run-up to the general election.

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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.

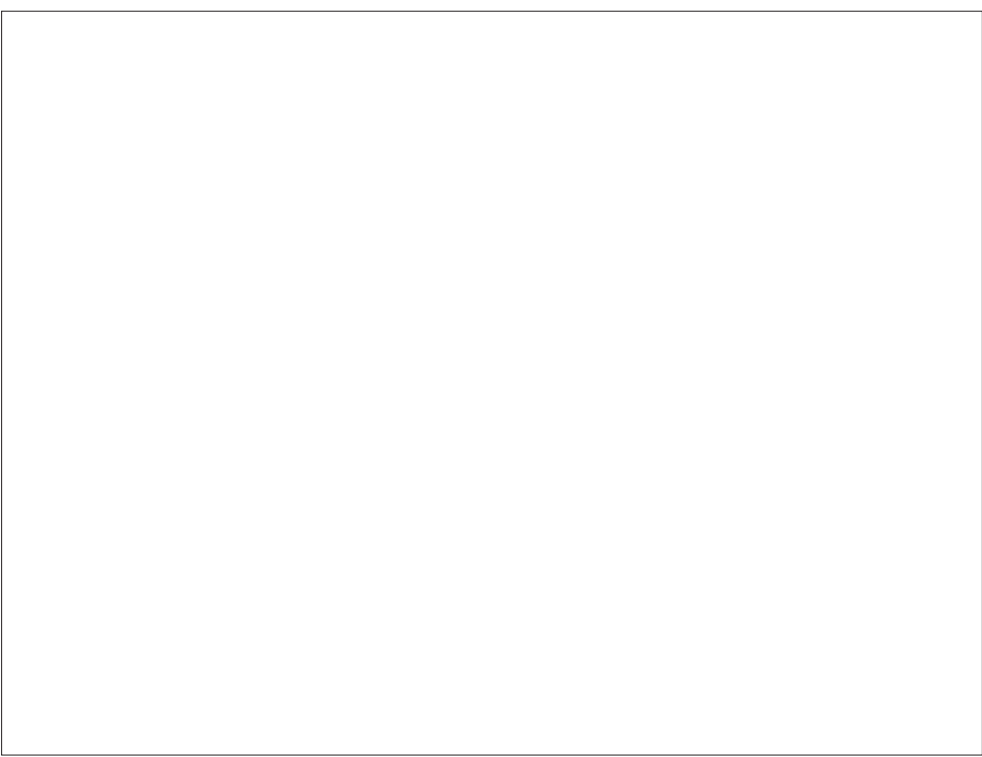
Getting across our messages will take money, yet we have no rich donors or “captains of industry” to finance our work. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this election year

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.

FIGHTING FUND

In the last month we have received £95.50 in new standing orders. That gives a consolidated amount of £955 towards our grand total. Fund so far stands at £4,843.



1981 Toxteth riots: people remember what the Thatcher government was like. It puts them off David Cameron

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We decided that about half the money we have in the region will go to four selected Labour candidates on the basis of replies they gave to a questionnaire we sent out about union policies. Their constituencies have been given a certain amount of money, but tied to campaigning on the Unison “Million Voices for Public Services” initiative.

The other half is open to be bid for by Labour Link activists in other constituencies for financing leaflets, advertisements, public meetings, and so on, in line with union policy, whether it be about privatisation or trade union rights or council housing or whatever.

We had a discussion at the Labour Link Forum on the sort of things we want to do. We've talked about targeting union members for leaflets.

Our approach appears to be working in that Labour candidates are submitting their leaflets and their proposals to Unison Labour Link for ratification. I've certainly observed an impact in how the

PECKHAM AND CAMBERWELL

Campaigning on the Aylesbury estate

AWL member Jill Mountford is the AWL's candidate in the general election, standing in Peckham and Camberwell against Labour's Harriet Harman.

Peckham is a deprived area in South East London, with high levels of unemployment and poverty.

At the centre of the constituency is the Aylesbury estate, home to 8,500 people. The estate gets a lot of bad press, being described by the *Daily Mail* as "Hell's waiting room".

Two weeks ago the AWL held an election meeting on the estate. And we found that the people that live there generally feel very differently to the *Mail*.

The homes on the Aylesbury are generally of a good size and are purpose built to a good standard. The problem is that there has — quite deliberately — been no real investment in the estate's buildings for a long time.

The Aylesbury is earmarked for demolition, despite the wishes of the residents.

Jill Mountford comments, "In 2001 there was a ballot on the estate to decide whether Southwark Council — then Labour controlled — should give away these homes to private housing associations, trashing the assured tenancy contracts that give residents security by replacing them with the so called "secured tenancy" contracts — these contracts are designed and weighted in favour of the landlord. 73% of residents voting, said a big, loud "no" to this offer. Less than 10% of residents said "yes".

Harriet Harman said she would respect the decision. But we all know that she, and her New Labour mates, haven't.

The estate is due to be pulled down in stages, being replaced by a massive PFI housing development. The overall number of homes will be reduced and the number of council homes will be radically cut. What will be delivered is a "mix" of housing, including many so-called "affordable homes". The problem is that these homes will *not* be affordable to those currently living on the estate.

The council currently has a waiting list of 15 000 and this project looks likely to increase that number and to push out many of the poorer residents.

In addition, as the Liberal-Tory council fails to improve the estate which it intends to demolish it is collecting around £1 million each month from the Aylesbury tenants in rent. The residents are being milked for cash.

• To help our campaign
Email: sacha@workersliberty.org
Phone 07904 944 771

THE LEFT IN THE ELECTION

The AWL and the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

BY CATHY NUGENT

Over the last few months we have commented in *Solidarity* on the talks between various leftists and left groups on working together in the General Election. And comment is all we have been able to do, because those talks were held behind closed doors. We, and others have been excluded from the "process". The information we had about the talks was limited to the bits and pieces that "leaked" out. Now, what has emerged, is the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). A loose assembly of socialist groups and individuals who expect — so they say — to stand candidates in around 50 constituencies.

How does TUSC look now?

It is still mainly a Socialist Party project, despite the recent arrival of the SWP and two small Scottish socialist groups. Individual leftists are also involved. If so many people have "come together" is it not, therefore, a reasonable stab at "left unity"? No! It is the hasty clubbing together of groups and individuals under a convenient and limited electoral banner — time-limited local campaigns, mostly tied to either the local SP and SWP, which will for a certainty, do their own group-building thing on the ground, irrespective of "TUSC".

Let's be clear — we are not being critical here of attempts to run local socialist election campaigns as such or of group building. We are critics of the *pretence* that this is a united, properly democratic, socialist coalition.

In our view open, on-going democratic discussion is the only way to forge solid and genuine left unity and for creating a united left that can present a clear socialist political presence on the doorsteps in this election, and indeed outside of elections! That is not how TUSC came into being. That is not what TUSC is.

And the politics of TUSC? In all likelihood there will be nothing very objectionable in any platform — if the local campaigns follow, more or less, the line of the TUSC platform. Even the SWP, which has spent the last ten years advocating and practicing political accommodation to Islamist clerical-fascism, will most likely, following past patterns, argue unobjectionable social-democratic — that is tamely reformist — demands in this election. (That's what they do anyway!)

To have been really useful in this election an alliance of socialists would have had to thrash out a programme in open democratic discussion. It would not be presented as a fait accompli. Such a process would have been more likely to have got to grips with the strategic needs of the working-class movement as it faces its most serious attacks for decades.

That said, TUSC's programme is better than it might have been.

The Socialist Party was aligned with the Communist Party of Britain (Morning Star) in last year's European election in the No2EU coalition. We opposed that coalition on the grounds that opposition to the EU as such was wrong. To that reactionary nationalistic "spin" we counterposed a united working-class fight against the European bosses throughout Europe. The SP's adaptation to nationalism was particularly shameful, something of a departure for them, which they did not deign to account for. The CPB as an organisation has now fallen away from this coalition and without their particularly malign influence the anti-EU propaganda is limited to opposition to the Lisbon treaty.

That is one positive. So is the fact that the coalition does not involve, as it looked for while as if it might, George Galloway.

But we have other more longstanding political concerns. If you are minded to give the Socialist Party or the SWP the benefit of the doubt right now — for the sake of left unity — think again about their recent forays into electoral activity — the Socialist Party's No2EU adventure, the SWP's alliance with George Galloway and the British offshoots of the clerical-fascist Muslim Brotherhood.

Nonetheless many TUSC candidates, and other independent socialist candidates will be putting forward anti-capitalist and general socialist ideas in this election. In general terms, it is right in principle that socialists should stand in elections to make this kind of propaganda. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is standing such a candidate against Harriet Harman in south London.

For this reason we will back those TUSC individuals who have good records in the labour movement or on the left. We will work for the best candidates, people like Darren Ireland in Merseyside for example.

On the other hand, a few TUSC candidates may be "beyond the pale". Tommy Sheridan, for instance, who for egotistical and foolishly personal reasons nearly destroyed the Scottish Socialist Party.

So socialists should not give blanket, unconditional or uncritical support for TUSC.

We continue to advocate left unity, but if this is to be achieved it will only be by way of open and critical discussion of the tasks which face the labour movement.

In the general election the AWL's main activities will be:

1. to advocate what we think are the necessary tasks for the broad labour movement within the Campaign to Stop the Tories and the Fascists;
- and 2. to develop the necessary socialist ideas in our campaign for Jill Mountford in Peckham and Camberwell.

We urge all socialists who want to discuss with us and be involved in these activities to get in touch.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

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

We stand for:

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

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

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

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

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

MICHAEL FOOT

The man who accepted defeat to avoid defeat!

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

It was a tragedy for the British working class and its labour movement that Michael Foot, who has died at the age of 96, was its political leader when it faced its life-and-death confrontation with Thatcherism at the beginning of the 1980s.

By this stage in his long journalistic career — 70 years ago he was already editor of the *London Evening Standard* — and long political life, Foot was a burnt-out, time-serving ex-radical, deeply mired in political dirty dealing with Liberals and Ulster Unionists to keep the Callaghan Government (1974-79) in power.

In political terms, Foot was a “dead man walking”.

But Michael Foot was a journalist — a very good one. And so he is praised in his obituaries by sympathetic journalists in the bourgeois press. Compared to the focus-group-obsessed, spineless, colourless, and principle-free mainstream politicians of today, Foot was, indeed, a “man of principle”, as the obituarists insist. In contrast to today’s narrow-minded, small-souled gangs of political technicians scrambling for office, Michael Foot was a man of broad mind and generous sympathies.

And as a working-class leader? There Michael Foot was a disaster.

When he became Labour leader Foot told a mass rally in Liverpool that the Labour Party would raise a storm of indignation that would drive the Tories from office. In fact he did the very opposite.

Two incidents from that time epitomised what Foot, the political leader of the labour movement from 1980, was by then.

Peter Tatchell, the official Labour candidate in a by-election in the London district of Bermondsey, was targeted in the press as a man who believed in political direct action (and in some of the press and on the ground in Bermondsey he was subjected to a campaign of savage gay-baiting). In the House of Commons, Tatchell’s party leader, Foot, denounced and repudiated him. Tatchell went on to lose the by-election in what had been a safe Labour seat.

In the second typical incident, at the beginning of 1982, Labour Party leader Foot contributed a two-part article to the *Observer*, in which he told the British workers that direct action to resist a properly-elected government, Thatcher’s government, was democratically impermissible. This was a government that had already legislated to outlaw effective trade unionism — sympathetic strike action — and was avowedly intent on smashing up the labour movement.

Foot told the working class not to use the only weapon it had between general elections, industrial direct action, and not to resist a militantly anti-work-



ing-class bourgeois government which was using state power in almost a Jacobin fashion to remodel society and break the back of the labour movement!

The serious class warrior, Margaret Thatcher, would in the course of the struggle with the working class deploy as much violence as she found necessary to beat down working-class resistance

During the miners’ strike she would send semi-militarised police to occupy rebellious mining villages, and police cavalry to defend picketing miners in pitched battles such as the Battle of Orgreave, in mid-1984. Labour leader Foot has told the labour movement that to defeat Thatcher by direct action, as we had defeated Thatcher’s predecessor Edward Heath, would be a crime against democracy, and during the miners’ strike, Foot’s hand-picked successor as Labour leader, no-guts Neil Kinnock, played a Tory game by adding his voice to the reactionary denunciations of the miners, who were themselves victims of state violence, for their “violence”.

Foot was finally driven off the central political stage after the 1983 General Election amidst a barrage of press jeering and mockery because he had appeared in

public in what looked like a donkey jacket. It was brutally unjust, as was so much of the press commentary on the labour movement and on the left then. Yet it was appropriate too. Foot had turned himself and the leadership of the labour movement into a bad joke.

Foot had been a central leader of the early campaign for nuclear disarmament. Here too, he led the retreat in deference to an established order. That time, the Labour Party establishment.

When in 1960 the left won the bulk of the unions at the Labour Party Conference to support British nuclear disarmament, the Parliamentary Labour Party, led by party leader Hugh Gaitskell, refused to accept the Conference decision and threatened to split the Party. Foot retreated with the cry: “never underestimate the desire of the Labour Party for unity”, and the result was that the right wing reversed the 1960 decision at the 1961 Conference.

Foot had seen better times. He was one of Nye Bevan’s chief lieutenants in the heyday of the leftwing Labour upsurge in the 1950s. He was editor of the then-Bevanite journal *Tribune*. He worked with the Trotskyists and led a vigorous campaign inside the Labour Party against the banning of their paper *Socialist Outlook* in 1954.

He stood up to the Stalinist avalanche of lies against Trotsky and the other Bolsheviks, long before it became fashionable to do that, in the mid-1950s, after Stalin’s successor Khrushchev had denounced him as a crazed mass murderer.

Foot, like most of the Labour left then, had been a sympathiser with Stalinism in the late 1930s and early 1940s. And he was a victim of Stalinism.

Made disillusioned by the writings of ex-Stalinists such as Arthur Koestler, he came to identify Stalinism with the Russian Revolution, and “revolution” per se with Stalinism. The Russian Revolution, and the violence of the revolutionary workers against the old ruling classes was the “original sin” that led to Stalinism. Parliamentaryism and legality was the only safe course for socialists to pursue.

It was a paralysing philosophy for a working-class leader faced with the onslaught of Thatcher. Foot and other Labour people then, like union leader Jack Jones, feared a military coup in Britain, like that of Chile in September 1973, if they went all-out to resist Thatcher. Later Jack Jones would admit and publicly discuss this. In fear of that, they accepted crushing defeat without a fight — accepting defeat to avoid defeat!

The British labour movement deserved better in its time of decision, than Labour leader Michael Foot.

• Socialism and Democracy — a pamphlet which includes a 1982 debate with Michael Foot. www.workersliberty.org/node/8147

Ernest Erber (1913-2010)

BY BARRY FINGER

Ernest Erber, who died in February at age 96 might be known to readers of *Solidarity* and members of the AWL only from Max Shachtman’s memorable response to his 1948 resignation from the Workers Party. *The Fate of the Russian Revolution* carries large excerpts from Shachtman’s spirited and anguished reply.

Erber, who wrote under the party name Ernest Lund, was an original founder of the Socialist Workers Party as it emerged in the 1930s from the American Socialist Party. He was to become an early comrade of Draper’s and Shachtman’s and a leader of the later split from the Cannonites in 1940, when the Soviet Union invaded Finland. As a member of the Young People’s Socialist League in the SP, Erber traveled to Spain and wrote a pamphlet for the YPSL on the civil war. The SP had organised and funded the Debs column and Erber was briefly to join the editorial staff of *La Batalla*, the POUM newspaper.

Erber served on the National Committee of the WP and served for a time as managing editor of the *New International*, and on its editorial board until 1948, when he resigned. In the late 1940s, when the WP was debating its future role in the socialist movement, Erber was virtually alone in arguing to maintain the revolutionary perspective of the WP as a “small mass party,” in opposition to the propaganda group the ISL was to become.

It was therefore all the more shocking when he resigned, as he had provided no advance warning of his anti-Leninist political disagreements with the party and had never raised his views on Bolshevism in the PC. He had, in fact, just wrapped up an educational seminar on Bolshevism that he had presented to the Socialist Youth League. There were however inklings of his unease.

Erber in 1948 became increasingly unwilling to defend Bolshevism beyond the vulgarised attacks that equated Leninism with Stalinism. In retrospect, Erber represented a pro-Socialist — and shortly a pro-Democratic Party orientation that Shachtman himself

was soon to adopt, with far more devastating results for third camp socialism.

Shachtman — like Erber — never did his thinking out loud, never squared his repudiation of a lifetime of revolutionary activity with his ostensible commitment to socialism. His indictment of Erber would read as a bill of particulars against his later self had he not dragged most of his milieu into the same mire. Few indeed were those who maintained the political integrity to point out that irony.

Erber was to go on, outside the WP, to proclaim that he was a democrat first and a socialist second. His resignation from the WP was not, however, simply a dress rehearsal for the tragedy to come. For, unlike innumerable other defectors and renegades, he also distinguished himself by endorsing Luxemburg’s observation that only those who are prepared to go forward to socialism will be prepared to defend the democracy that already exists. He should also be remembered in our movement for that.

• www.workersliberty.org/fate

SCOTTISH DEFENCE LEAGUE

Lockerbie “vigil” planned

BY DALE STREET

The Scottish Defence League (SDL) decision to stage what it calls a “respectful vigil” in Lockerbie on Saturday, 27 March, represents a sign of weakness — if not outright desperation.

In November of last year, the SDL tried to stage a demonstration in Glasgow. It failed. Two weeks ago (20 February) it tried to stage a demonstration in Edinburgh. Again, it failed.

Lacking the confidence to attempt another demonstration in a major urban centre, the SDL is retreating to rural Lockerbie.

According to their statement announcing the “respectful vigil”, the SDL has selected Lockerbie for two reasons.

Firstly, because Scottish Justice Minister Kenny MacAskill denied them “freedom of speech” in Edinburgh a fortnight ago. And secondly, because it was MacAskill who released Abdelbaset al-Magrhi (convicted of the Lockerbie bombing, although this remains strongly contested) on compassionate grounds.

In fact, it was Edinburgh City Council, not MacAskill, who was responsible for serving a ban on the SDL under the Public Order Act. And the normal venue for a protest against an MSP is their home constituency. In the case of MacAskill, that would mean another attempt to stage a demonstration in Edinburgh.

Eleven inhabitants of Lockerbie were killed when Pan Am Flight 103 crashed into the town. Whatever local opinion might be about the release of al-Magrhi, the local population is unlikely to find anything “respectful” about a mixture of football casualties and fascists staging a “vigil” about the event in their town.

Dumfries and District Trades Council, which covers Lockerbie, has already announced plans for a march and rally in Lockerbie in opposition to the SDL “vigil”. It would appear that the Trades Council is planning a local version of the “Scotland United” rallies in Glasgow and Edinburgh, which, in terms of timing and location, were organised to ensure that the SDL were not confronted directly. Indeed Scotland United has now urged anti-facist supporters to stay away from the SDL march to prevent the thugs gaining publicity from likely clashes.

Organising to confront the SDL in Lockerbie would be more difficult than was the case in Glasgow or Edinburgh — partly because of the logistical problems of getting to the town, and partly because, if organised insensitively, anti-SDL activity *could* alienate the local population as much as the SDL’s stunt.

On the other hand, any march and rally in a town the size of Lockerbie will probably end up pretty close to wherever the SDLers will be meeting up.

MEDIA WORKERS’ CAMPAIGN

Tackling the BNP in print

BY WILL LODGE

A new campaign has been launched to highlight and improve the impact that the media can have in fighting the British National Party (BNP).

EXPOSE has been set-up by a range of media workers across the left, and the launch event was backed jointly by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU), which represents media workers.

Speakers at the launch event (23 February) included Peter Hain MP, Weyman Bennett, joint secretary of Unite Against Fascism (UAF), and Michelle Stanistreet, deputy general secretary of the NUJ.

Most spoke about rallying against the fascists, and outlined the poor record of journalists in pandering to the BNP’s media machine.

Medhi Hasan from *New Statesman* talked about the live coverage of the emergency general meeting when the BNP voted to allow ethnic minorities to join the party, he told of how the BBC’s banner called the BNP a “right-wing party”. “If I was a Tory, God forbid, I would be outraged. This is what we call the normalisation of the abnormal.

“This has to stop. We have to get our coverage of the far-right, right! Cover the BNP, do it, cover them; but do it properly! Why do we have such excessive coverage? They crave the oxygen of publicity; it’s our duty not to give it to them. Don’t treat them like a normal political party. The BNP, even to the most stupid and ignorant people, is not a normal political party.”

The strong theme that came out of this event was that journalists need more readily available resources with which they can take apart the BNP. When journalists are working to a tight deadline, it might be tempting to just re-word the BNP press release without being critical of their policy. The new campaign plans a website from

Building a working-class anti-fascist and anti-racist network

Saturday March 27, 12-5pm, Queens Walk Community Centre, Queens Walk, The Meadows, Nottingham

Tired of seeing Lib Dem and Tory councillors on the platform at anti-fascist rallies? Believe that we need a working-class movement to cut the social roots of the growth of the BNP and EDL? Still think that only unity between working-class people across racial, ethnic and communal divides can undermine the far-right's attempts to sow hatred? Then this conference is for you. Come along to discuss the issues and plan action.

Sponsored by Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP and South Yorkshire Stop the BNP.

More: <http://nottmstopbnp.wordpress.com>

which journalists can access background information on the BNP, to create more balanced articles to be more balanced. The NUJ already have a site, www.reportingthebnp.org, which they hope to expand and make more readily available, as a part of the EXPOSE campaign.

Despite a considerable Socialist Workers’ Party (SWP) presence at the event, and SWPer Weyman Bennett speaking for UAF, the event didn’t turn into a mass SWP rally, partly because a large proportion of the audience and speakers were journalists and NUJ members. Bennett himself didn’t even mention the UAF, and focussed on the media aspect. Addressing the room he said: “We are a beacon of hope, and the media can be a shining example of how to expose these people.”

Unfortunately there was little debate on the issue of “no platform” politics. Encouragingly, most of the speakers spoke about taking on the BNP by giving them critical coverage, rather than no coverage, although many expressed the view that “pantomime” events such as the BBC’s Question Time shouldn’t be held.

Sunny Hundal, editor of the Liberal Conspiracy blog, came closest to advocating a “no coverage” approach. “Should the BNP’s threat be played up or down? I think down, to prevent media frenzy.” He did, however, advocate taking action, and the “need to tackle the myths of the right.” It is important politically that a debate on no platform is held within the movement, if EXPOSE is to maintain democratic principles.

There was much talk about action, and taking the campaign forward. Pat Styles of BECTU said: “All it takes for evil to flourish is for good people to stand aside and do nothing... We should be vigilant.”

A planning and organising meeting hosted by the NUJ was advertised. Hopefully organising meetings will allow for a broader media campaign to critically analyse and report the BNP, by setting up media activist networks. It may also try and create fractions within existing unions and campaigns.

At the event AWL member Vicki Morris called for the NUJ to move away from being apolitical, and there were a few calls from both speakers and the floor to try and get the NUJ to adopt a stronger, more rigorous, conscience clause. At the moment it is only expressed as a pledge to support journalists who refuse to work on assignments that break “the spirit or the letter” of the NUJ’s code of conduct. The EXPOSE campaign looks promising, but it will take time to see if it lives up to early expectations.

East London anti-fascists unite

BY DAVE MALBON, SECRETARY, BARKING, DAGENHAM & HAVERING TOGETHER

Trade unionists have come together under the umbrella of Havering and Barking and Dagenham Trades Councils to form Barking, Dagenham and Havering Together, a new campaign to combat the rise of the BNP in boroughs.

There’ll be more of a focus on Havering, because there’s already a lot of established anti-fascist campaigning in Barking. We don’t have that campaigning infrastructure in Havering; the BNP feel confident enough to hold press conferences and general meetings in the borough. They’ve got a good chance in the three wards in which they’re standing in Havering.

The BNP has grown in east London because there’s a perception that the main parties aren’t doing much about issues such as housing or education. That’s what

the BNP will be going for; they’ll find local issues and exploit them. The recession’s been very good for the BNP — people have genuine concerns and they’re casting around for someone to blame.

Trade unions can be central to anti-fascist campaigning because we have access to potentially enormous amounts of people. We can speak to our members and give out information about what the BNP represents. Trade unions stand for unity, whereas the BNP stand for division. A lot of the unions involved in our campaign are public sector unions, and there’s a recognition that a BNP council would mean worse conditions for public sector workers. There’d be problems with recruitments and retention of public sector workers with a BNP council; anti-fascism is about protecting workers’ rights.

The message we’re trying to send is that issues like housing and education aren’t the property of the BNP. They’re traditional trade-union, working-class issues.

People are right to be angry about those things but we’ve got to counter the BNP’s lies about them. The anti-fascist movement should conduct positive campaigning around those issues to undermine the BNP’s racist lies.

We’ll be having leafleting days, and beyond that we’re looking to get unions involved in the campaign and distribute publicity and information. But beyond that, we want them to organise workplace meetings and mobilise their members.

There’s a debate in the campaign around what we should say about how people should vote; it’s a contentious issue. Some unions can’t come out in favor of one particular party as there are legal and constitutional restrictions. As TUs we have to concentrate on the issues and making sure people don’t vote for the BNP. We can’t say much more beyond that.

BDHT will be organising regular leafleting activities. Please contact 07973421463 with any queries.

TORY PARTY

Cameron’s weather-vane politics

In the second of two articles Jack Yates looks at David Cameron’s Tory Party

Swindon councillor Lynden Stowe isn’t the only Tory politician who risks being confused with right-wing extremists. Stowe, a near perfect doppelganger of British National Party leader Nick Griffin, was accosted by police officers at the Conservative’s pre-election conference in Birmingham recently when fellow delegates mistook him for the fascist leader. No such vigorous action was taken to bring David Cameron to account for his spurious commitment to cut immigration by 75%.

Indeed Cameron’s patently racist, opportunistic and thankfully impossible promise to close the borders was welcomed by the Tory rank-and-file. The Tory base has taken up Cameron’s immigration baiting comments and made them their own.

A recent leaflet entitled *Illegal Immigration: Enough* was circulated by Conservatives in Romford. Among the *Daily Mail*—with—teeth dross one can expect from the average such leaflet, the Romford Tories detail Cameron’s comments, pointing out his blaming of immigrants for problems in public services: “Cameron said that he was focused on the pressure on our public services, including health, education, housing and prisons, created by the new immigrant arrivals.” Other headlines on the leaflet call for a new border police to keep out immigrants, resurrect the “British jobs” slogan, and promise to reverse human rights legislation. The content is indistinguishable from leaflets circulated by UKIP and the BNP.

Added to this, a recent poll on the ConservativeHome website records that 84% of 2,352 Tory members surveyed wanted immigration to be the primary election issue. How do such extreme and reactionary views fit with the new, cuddly, “made-over” Tory Party? The fit is quite comfortable.

Within all bourgeois political parties, there’s a three-fold tension between the leadership, rank—and—file and the sections of society they aim to represent. At times, these tensions are exposed for all to see. At others, they’re subterranean. The early years and final stages of Thatcher’s reign demonstrate this clearly.

Initially unpopular with the Tory back—benches and the country—at—large but fulfilling the impulses of the financial warriors at the head of the economy, Thatcher swung the country behind her and quelled unrest within her own party by harnessing popular, reactionary sentiment. She exploited the Falklands war (1982) to whip up and exploit jingoism and nationalist sentiment. This move kept her in power when she looked most vulnerable. During the final weeks and months in office — unpopular within her own party and without, politically exhausted and incapable of fighting back — those who served loyally from the early 1980s moved forcefully against her.

Cameron faces similar (but for the time being low-profile) problems.

A PARTY DIVIDED?

Groupings and factions within the Labour Party have, at one point or another, played a prominent role. Sometimes dramatised by leading personalities, at others sensationalised by the right—wing press, the fight for working—class representation and socialist politics is well known. The fight to diminish trade union influence and crush socialist organisation within the party is just as familiar. That the fights and factions within the Tory Party are less high—profile does not mean they are unimportant.

No fewer than 10 groups – some “organisationally independent” – lobby and seek influence within the Conservative Party. From the extreme-right Freedom Association to the “One Nation” Tory Reform Group, each enjoys different levels of support and significance. Each represents a significant strand of “Conservative” opinion and ideology. The divisions are most prominent over Europe.

For instance, the Freedom Association (TFA) is chaired by Roger Helmer, the arch—Euroseptic Tory MEP. Although TFA has no formal organisational links with the Conservative Party proper, they are bound by

Unconvincing

a thousand threads. As well as being opposed to European integration to the point of outright nationalism, TFA is viciously anti—union and anti—working class. Members oppose any form of the welfare state — up to and including free public health care — and hold reactionary positions on almost every social issue. The Freedom Association’s “Better Off Out” anti—EU campaign enjoys the support of 17 Tory peers, 15 MPs, seven MEPs and 20 local councillors.

The Cornerstone Group is another despicable Tory faction. A “broad” grouping that includes “‘One Nation’” Tories and Thatcherites alike, Cornerstone emphasises the importance of religious values in “British culture”. The group, which has 30 supporters in Parliament, was described by Tory front—bencher Alan Duncan as the “Taliban Tendency”.

Contrast these two unpleasant outfits with the marginally less unpleasant Tory Reform Group, chaired by Ken Clarke. The TRG, which campaigned against support for apartheid South Africa against mainstream Tory sentiment, believes “‘that elections are won and lost in the centre ground and that the Tory Party is at its best when it is firmly in the centre.’” TRG has been a source of inspiration for Cameron, who is quoted at length on their website.

Compare the differing attitudes of past Labour leaders to Cameron’s tolerance and acceptance of his factions and some, if not all, of their ideas. Where right—wing Labour leaders waged open war against their critics and competitors to the left — and still do — Cameron seeks reconciliation and synthesis. Where publications such as *Socialist Organiser*, the predecessor of *Solidarity*, were banned and our supporters expelled from the Labour Party, extreme right—wingers enjoy Cameron’s grace and favour. What’s going on?

A survey conducted for *Total Politics* magazine found an interesting division in support for the various Tory Party factions and “Cameronism” itself within the parliamentary party and prospective candidates. They found that 38% of Tories identified as “One Nation” moderates, 26% as Thatcherite, 6% gave support to the Cornerstone Group and 12% labeled themselves “Cameronites”.

In seats where the Tories have a chance of winning, these figures shifted somewhat. 43% of MPs and candidates in these areas identified as Cameronites. What is the significance of these figures? The across—the—board figures show that David Cameron and his politics enjoy very marginal general support. That these figures were collected in the run—up to an election is of some significance: wouldn’t a loyal group of MPs seeking to win governmental power throw themselves behind the “leader”? Cameron and Cameronism enjoys only limited support from leading Tories — a fact Cameron must be aware of. The “respectable” reactionaries who pollute the Tory benches are not happy.

Further down the Tory food chain, things are not as harmonious as Cameron would wish them to be.

In 2009 Conservative Party membership stood at 290,000 organised into local, constituency based Associations. In theory, these Associations select parliamentary candidates. They represent the back—bone of British conservatism (with a small and large “c”) and they are not uniformly content with their leader, in much the same way as Tory MPs are not. In a number of instances, including the case noted in the first part of this article, local Tory Associations have either prevented or severely hampered the attempts of Central Office to impose preferred candidates. They object to the

media friendly, more ethnically and gender diverse set of prospective MPs Cameron favours. Why do the bigoted, little—Englanders of the party rank—and—file object?

As far as the Tory Party is concerned, Cameron and his policies are an ephemeral artifact of this particular election. He represents neither the party as a whole nor a viable future — save some calamity that befalls the majority of Tories — for Conservatism. Cameronism represents an attempt to reconcile all wings of the Tory Party, perceived public opinion, and the wishes of British capitalism. It’s a public relations exercise to win an election. As such, Cameronism is subject not only to personality consultants and PR gurus but the shifting whims of public opinion.

WEATHER-VANE POLITICS

“Triangulation”, the political methodology employed in Bill Clinton’s successful bid for the White House and refined by New Labour, aims to elevate candidates above the traditional party divisions. The process involves adopting some, if not all, of your opponents’ policies and taking credit for them.

Cameron has sought to adopt significant areas of New Labour policy — just as Blair and company wrapped themselves in Tory garb from the mid—90s onward — and present them as his own. In so doing, he has the obvious advantage of not being Gordon Brown or, indeed, Tony Blair. But Cameron’s triangulations are slightly more complex. Whereas Blair built on the legacy of previous Labour leaders, marginalising the left and trade union influence (shifting significantly to the right before “triangulating”) Cameron has a more difficult geometrical problem to fathom.

Not only must he work hard to convince voters that he cares about public services and “society” — traditional Labour tropes, whatever the realities of Labour government — but also reconcile his own party’s extreme right—wing. The matter is made all the more complex by the palpable disintegration of right—wing sentiment into a number of political formations outside of the Tory ranks.

The growth in support for UKIP and the BNP is a threat to Tory and Labour alike. We can see the extent to which Labour has responded in policies and individual comments like Brown’s “British jobs for British workers”. But the Tories will feel the disaggregation all the more strongly. Unlike Labour, they have significant organised factions who share most — if not all — of publicly stated UKIP and BNP policy. These factions put direct pressure on Cameron from within his own ranks.

These competing pressures and above all, the pressure of attempting to win an election, mean that Cameron and his cuddly conservatism remain without political substance. Whatever Cameron the man thinks and feels, he and his party are naturally susceptible to significant right—wing tendencies, all the more so given the realities of modern Britain. As such Cameronism, can be little more than a sort of weather-vane politics. The question, then, is how long will it be before the right—wing storm hits us all?

BRITAIN 2010: CHILDREN

Lack of adequate funding and support for the Children and Family Court Advisory Service (CAF-CAS) have reached “crisis levels” in some areas, according to workers in the service. CAF-CAS, which provides legal support and guardians for children involved in court proceedings, is facing enormous case-load backlogs which workers are unable to clear, meaning that children are often not allocated support workers or guardians until four or five months into court proceedings.

Harry Fletcher, of justice and probation workers’ union NAPO, said that managers without the training or skills to do frontline work were being given casework in a desperate attempt to clear the backlog. Another depressing example of vulnerable children being sold short.

“PERMANENT REVOLUTION”

Is there a socialist quintessence in Irish nationalism?

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

Adozen years on from the “Good Friday Agreement” (GFA) things in Northern Ireland are far from settled. The recently threatened breakdown of the power-sharing executive was avoided. But the Good Friday system is far from stable.

Communal antagonism is still so strong that it takes 60 or so permanent walls to keep active communalism from erupting into violence across Belfast.

The political system set up by the GFA is an intricate network of bureaucratised Catholic-Protestant sectarianism. Militarist republican activity is still a major factor in Northern Ireland. It is a growing force.

The age-old pattern of physical-force-on-principle republicans going political, and being denounced as traitors for it by other physical-force-on-principle republicans who try to fill the vacated role, is still in operation in Irish republican politics. So too is the half-century phenomenon of “Trotskyist” mystics weaving socialist political fantasies around physical force republicanism, muddying the political waters — Rayner Lysaght and his comrades of the Irish “Fourth Internationalists” (Mandelites).

Thus Rayner Lysaght with his “shaping” and capering, and despite odd conceits, such as using the third person pronoun for himself, nonetheless raises serious questions. (We print Lysaght’s comments, first published on our website — as part of an ongoing debate — on page 18). These issues are still very important on the Irish left. True, Lysaght doesn’t handle any of them seriously. I’ll try to make up for that, taking the issues in the order of their political importance.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

I’ve already, more than once, said what I have to say on permanent revolution and Ireland in the introduction to a little cluster of letters on the subject from 1966-7 [www.workersliberty.org/pr-ireland]; in an imaginary dialogue on it, where I used all the arguments Lysaght and others had made in a long discussion in *Socialist Organiser* (1982) [www.workersliberty.org/node/13647]. I’ve discussed “Marxism and Ireland” in a number of articles, including in a review of Lysaght’s strange compilation “The Communists and the Irish revolution”. But he chose to ignore them: why?

Theorists of permanent revolution concern themselves with the relationship of the working class socialist revolutions to bourgeois revolutions in underdeveloped countries. Where feudalistic institutions need to be overthrown, freedom for market economic development, civil liberties and a democratic republic need to be seen. That included colonies and semi-colonial countries struggling for bourgeois democratic freedom against colonialism and imperialism and in the first place for self-determination.

History knows a number of bourgeois revolutions against feudalism — that of the Dutch republic in the 16th century, the English Cromwellian revolution of the 1640s, and the great French revolution against the king and the entitled aristocrats in 1789 and after.

These revolutions won freedom for developing bourgeois societies from old feudal constraints, restrictions and interference. They won civil liberties — in England such things as habeas corpus, no pre-publication censorship and, above all, the rule of parliament — with very limited suffrage — instead of that of the king.

In France the lower orders made the revolution and put their own radical stamp on it before ceding power to the bourgeoisie.

There are a number of theories of permanent revolution. They can be divided conveniently into pre- and post-October 1917 theories.

After the defeat of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in 1848, Karl Marx talked of the revolution “in permanence”, and he roughed out working class tactics for such situations: the workers would join with bourgeois revolutionaries against reaction, would strike the common enemy together with them, but would “march separately” — maintain working class political independence and serve working class goals. It would

be a continuous process, up to the working-class conquest of power.

In fact, central Europe evolved differently. In Germany, Bismarck, the servant of the junker landlords and the monarchy, carried out most of the bourgeois social goals of the 1848 revolution, in his own way, and from above, without dislodging the junker class or the monarchy. When the radical bourgeois political tasks posed in 1848 were realised in 1918/19 — the monarchy overthrown, the democratic Weimar Republic set up — it wasn’t as part of an ongoing working class-led permanent revolution, but counterposed by its leaders, including the right-wing social democrats, to the German proletarian revolution. You could say it was inverted “permanent revolution”.

The pioneer Marxists in Russia and other socially and politically backward countries had advocated a revolution like that of the French revolution. The pioneering Russian Marxists, Plekhanov above all, took their stand against the populists who hoped that history would spare Russia the experience of capitalism. Russian capitalism already existed and was developing. Inevitably, it would continue to develop. What exactly did this mean in Russia — in concrete Russian conditions?

Trotsky in 1905 analysed Russian social conditions and postulated that the Russian anti-tsarist revolution would be led by the working class which would go on interruptedly to take power and make a working class revolution. It would be one continuous process.

That would be a working class revolution in social conditions that were greatly unripe for the creation of socialism — where Marxists believed socialism was not yet socially possible. What would happen after the Russian workers had taken power and set up a workers’ republic? That would be determined by the fate of the working class revolution in Western Europe, where social conditions were ripe for the creation of a socialist society. The defeats in the west — in Germany, the inverted counter-revolutionary permanent revolution — left Russia isolated. The Russian Stalinist counter-revolution was the result.

On this there were two basic Marxist schools of thought in the 1905 revolution and after, both based on the premiss that increasingly capitalist but immensely backward Russia was socially ripening toward a revolution like that which England and France had had. These were the Bolshevik and Menshevik schools.

I’ll put it very schematically. For the Marxists, including the great pioneers Plekhanov and Axelrod, this bourgeois revolution would be led by the bourgeoisie. One task of the Marxists was to make sure the bourgeoisie weren’t frightened off doing that by an over-assertive working class movement.

Lenin in 1905 and after agreed that Russia was ripe enough only for a bourgeois-democratic revolution like that of France 100 years earlier, but, analysing the social relations in Russia, including the role of the bourgeoisie and their relationship to the landlords on one side and to the powerful working class movement on the other, he concluded that the Russian bourgeoisie could not lead an anti-tsarist revolution: they were tied in too closely to the landlords and too afraid of the militant socialist working class to do that.

Lenin’s paradoxical conclusion was that the bourgeois revolution in Russia would be led by the workers and peasants, in something like equal partnership, who would in that revolution play the role of the plebeian sans culottes in the French revolution who had, before the Jacobins were overthrown, driven the revolution far deeper than the bourgeoisie wanted. The “bourgeois revolution” would in that sense also be a revolution against the big bourgeoisie. It would be bourgeois in what it achieved — a republic, democratic rights — and in the social limitations that made a socialist revolution impossible — but the bourgeoisie could not lead that revolution.

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For Trotsky, there would be an uninterrupted sequence of bourgeois-democratic revolutionary-socialist tasks, led by the working class, and in that sense, a fusion of the two revolutions, bourgeois and proletarian.

1917

What happened in 1917? The February revolution made a clean sweep of tsarism, discredited by the war and its catastrophes. In Lenin’s absence the Bolshevik party in Russia, led by Kamenev and Stalin, settled into supporting the new regime which, in fact, procrastinated over such “bourgeois” tasks of the revolution as the distribution of land to the peasants.

Now, basing himself on the great militancy of the working class and, as always, guided by concrete realities, not by dogmatic abstractions, Lenin grasped concretely what Trotsky had grasped already in 1905 — that the Russian revolution would be a working class revolution, or it wouldn’t happen: counter-revolution would roll things back. The bourgeois and proletarian

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The political system set up by the GFA is an intricate network of bureaucratised Catholic-Protestant sectarianism. Militarist republican activity is still a major factor in Northern Ireland. It is a growing force.

The age-old pattern of physical-force-on-principle republicans going political, and being denounced as traitors for it by other physical-force-on-principle republicans who try to fill the vacated role, is still in operation in Irish republican politics. So too is the half-century phenomenon of “Trotskyist” mystics weaving socialist political fantasies around physical force republicanism, muddying the political waters — Rayner Lysaght and his comrades of the Irish “Fourth Internationalists” (Mandelites).

Thus Rayner Lysaght with his “shaping” and capering, and despite odd conceits, such as using the third person pronoun for himself, nonetheless raises serious questions. (We print Lysaght’s comments, first published on our website — as part of an ongoing debate — on page 18). These issues are still very important on the Irish left. True, Lysaght doesn’t handle any of them seriously. I’ll try to make up for that, taking the issues in the order of their political importance.

PERMANENT REVOLUTION

I’ve already, more than once, said what I have to say on permanent revolution and Ireland in the introduction to a little cluster of letters on the subject from 1966-7 [www.workersliberty.org/pr-ireland]; in an imaginary dialogue on it, where I used all the arguments Lysaght and others had made in a long discussion in *Socialist Organiser* (1982) [www.workersliberty.org/node/13647]. I’ve discussed “Marxism and Ireland” in a number of articles, including in a review of Lysaght’s strange compilation “The Communists and the Irish revolution”. But he chose to ignore them: why?

Theorists of permanent revolution concern themselves with the relationship of the working class socialist revolutions to bourgeois revolutions in underdeveloped countries. Where feudalistic institutions need to be overthrown, freedom for market economic development, civil liberties and a democratic republic need to be seen. That included colonies and semi-colonial countries struggling for bourgeois democratic freedom against colonialism and imperialism and in the first place for self-determination.

History knows a number of bourgeois revolutions against feudalism — that of the Dutch republic in the 16th century, the English Cromwellian revolution of the 1640s, and the great French revolution against the king and the entitled aristocrats in 1789 and after.

These revolutions won freedom for developing bourgeois societies from old feudal constraints, restrictions and interference. They won civil liberties — in England such things as habeas corpus, no pre-publication censorship and, above all, the rule of parliament — with very limited suffrage — instead of that of the king.

In France the lower orders made the revolution and put their own radical stamp on it before ceding power to the bourgeoisie.

There are a number of theories of permanent revolution. They can be divided conveniently into pre- and post-October 1917 theories.

After the defeat of the bourgeois-democratic revolution in 1848, Karl Marx talked of the revolution “in permanence”, and he roughed out working class tactics for such situations: the workers would join with bourgeois revolutionaries against reaction, would strike the common enemy together with them, but would “march separately” — maintain working class political independence and serve working class goals. It would be a continuous process, up to the working-class conquest of power.

In fact, central Europe evolved differently. In Germany, Bismarck, the servant of the junker landlords and the monarchy, carried out most of the bourgeois social goals of the 1848 revolution, in his own way, and from above, without dislodging the junker class or the monarchy. When the radical bourgeois political tasks posed in 1848 were realised in 1918/19 — the monarchy overthrown, the democratic Weimar Republic set up — it wasn’t as part of an ongoing working class-led permanent revolution, but counterposed by its leaders,

George Wyndham, originator of a 1903 Land Act. The British bourgeoisie carried out a revolution in the land system in Ireland.

including the right-wing social democrats, to the German proletarian revolution. You could say it was inverted “permanent revolution”.

The pioneer Marxists in Russia and other socially and politically backward countries had advocated a revolution like that of the French revolution. The pioneering Russian Marxists, Plekhanov above all, took their stand against the populists who hoped that history would spare Russia the experience of capitalism. Russian capitalism already existed and was developing. Inevitably, it would continue to develop. What exactly did this mean in Russia — in concrete Russian conditions?

Trotsky in 1905 analysed Russian social conditions and postulated that the Russian anti-tsarist revolution would be led by the working class which would go on interruptedly to take power and make a working class revolution. It would be one continuous process.

That would be a working class revolution in social conditions that were greatly unripe for the creation of socialism — where Marxists believed socialism was not yet socially possible. What would happen after the Russian workers had taken power and set up a workers’ republic? That would be determined by the fate of the working class revolution in Western Europe, where social conditions were ripe for the creation of a socialist society. The defeats in the west — in Germany, the inverted counter-revolutionary permanent revolution — left Russia isolated. The Russian Stalinist counter-revolution was the result.

On this there were two basic Marxist schools of thought in the 1905 revolution and after, both based on the premiss that increasingly capitalist but immensely backward Russia was socially ripening toward a revolution like that which England and France had had. These were the Bolshevik and Menshevik schools.

I’ll put it very schematically. For the Marxists, including the great pioneers Plekhanov and Axelrod, this bourgeois revolution would be led by the bourgeoisie. One task of the Marxists was to make sure the bourgeoisie weren’t frightened off doing that by an over-assertive working class movement.

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Continued on page 19

A reply to the charges

BY D R O'CONNOR LYSAGHT

Surfing the net the other day, this writer was surprised to see his name taken in vain as being a “second-hand-tale-spinning adoptive Irish nationalist” (www.workersliberty.org/node/12419). Further on, he was intrigued further by a reference to a faction with which he was involved as “conducting an anti-semitic witch-hunt thinly disguised as “anti-Zionism” in the quasi-Trotskyist organisation the Irish Workers Group.

It is clear that his old adversary, Sean Matgamna, is still at it, scattering his fire not only against his official target, Gerry Lawless, but against all who crossed his path from the old SLL to Schachtmanism and, perhaps, beyond. This writer would not bother about answering were it not obvious that these statements have a resonance among the impressionable, as witnessed by the reaction to Matgamna's screed on the part of McCullough (WL website 18 May 2009) and, even more, on the part of Anwen (WL website 22 May 2009). Accordingly, as his reputation is under at stake he considers it necessary to reply.

1. “Second-Hand-Tale-Spinning.” Presumably, this refers to the author's document, *An Introduction to the Early History of Irish Trotskyism*. (If Matgamna has any other examples, he should present them) This work was based on a presentation given to an education class of Dublin People's Democracy some 28 years ago. It has all the defects of a pioneering work. (Historically, pioneers tend to get frozen to death in snow storms, eaten by savage animals, drowned in unpassable rivers, etc.).

It has been superseded by other works to which the author was happy to give aid: notably Ciaran Crossey and Jim Monaghan's article on the same subject. Further work needs to be done on the subject. Nonetheless, reading it today, the faults seem mainly to be those of omission. It is difficult to find any major inaccuracy therein.

Admittedly, it is not dependent on printed sources. This is because those sources were not available to the author at the time. What he did was get statements on the earlier period from surviving participants in the struggle, notably, Johnny Byrne, Matt Merrigan and Eamon Corcoran. Though unreliable compared to the printed accounts of the time, such statements are acknowledged as being a form of primary information.

For the later period, the author did rely to a certain extent on Gerry Lawless, though he used his judgement on what to include. For the period after 1967, when he joined the Irish Workers' Group (IWG), he relied on a third primary source: his memory of events in which he was involved.

2. Anti-Semitism. Matgamna suggests that Lawless was not converted to Trotskyism until after his court case in the early sixties and that that he continued, somehow, to combine his anti-semitism with his public support for the teachings of those well-known semites Marx and Trotsky at least until after the IWG split in 1968.

It is not the business of this writer to excuse the vagaries of Gerry Lawless. It should be said, however, that he could not have been a member of Maria Duce after the mid-fifties, since that body collapsed shortly after the death of its clerical führer in 1954. Lawless may not have been converted to Trotskyism until his association with Gerry Healy in the early sixties. However it is possible, too, that any plea of Fahy-ite influence to the EHCR might equally well have been, as Mick O'Riordan is said to have claimed he said (this is really tale-spinning!) — an undoubtedly opportunist ploy to soften the judges.

Certainly, the present author did not find any anti-semitism during his own brief period as member of the IWG in its last years. He remembers no “anti-semitic witch-hunt thinly disguised as “anti-Zionism” in that organisation in 1967-8. If there had been such a move, he would have been targeted, as, at that time, he was inclined to the Zionist side himself.

What he does remember in that period was the faction fight that gave the group its mortal wound. In it, he was with Lawless, and also with such incipient revolutionary socialist leaders as Michael Farrell and Eamon McCann. He suggests that it is unfair to them, whatever about himself, to suggest that they were part of an anti semitic witch-hunt however disguised.

This is not to say that there were no charges made against the majority faction that could be construed as ones of anti-semitism. In a somewhat turgid document, Matgamna's ally, Liam Daltun denounced Lawless for including in a broad front a prominent right-wing (and allegedly anti-semitic) member of the London Irish diaspora and quoted a Lawless supporter as calling for “a real Irish national socialist party.”

Whatever about the first, nobody thought that the second was more than a gaffe or that its perpetrator really kept a swastika armband in his closet or yearned to murder Jews (or, even, that he was trying to do a Tommy Tiernan). Anti-semitism was not an issue in the struggle; if it had been it would have been the duty of Matgamna and his allies to make it central. In fact, the author sees no reason to change the opinion that he gave in his document that the issues were, in order of importance, the national question, the best way to build a party and Gerry Lawless, and that they were given prominence in inverse order.

3. Adoptive Irish Nationalist. The writer is puzzled by this charge. What does it mean? If it means that he is an “adoptive Irish national” because he was born in Glamorganshire only to spend most of his life in Dublin, then he can reply that his Irish grandfather left him a claim to Irish citizenship far more natural than the County Clare-born Matgamna's claim to Englishness.

However, it is probable that more is at stake here. The two parties agree on the progressive nature of the struggle to unite Ireland and have both tried to advance it. The difference between them comes on strategy. While, again, neither agreed with the paramount importance of the armed struggle over politics nor with the negotiations for a settlement to which that struggle led inevitably, they disagreed on where work to build the alternative of a mass struggle should begin by being concentrated.

The writer considers that any successful revolution in Ireland has to be developed in the manner prescribed by Trotsky under the heading of Permanent Revolution: “that the complete and genuine solution of [its task] of achieving democracy and national emancipation is conceivable only through the dictatorship of the proletariat as the leader of the subjugated nation” (*Permanent Revolution*, 1978, p. 276.). This would be less definite if the perspective were a two-sovereignty one, at least for the twenty-six county part, but that would leave the six counties more of a conundrum than ever, organised as it is with a majority of its population getting some real, and more obviously perceived benefits at the expense of the minority.

The recent Northern Irish troubles were essentially a revolt of this cross-class minority which failed because its leaders' strategy could not get adequate support from the twenty-six counties, led by the working class majority of the whole island. The potential of that support was shown on many occasions, most notably in 1972, after Bloody Sunday, and during the 1981 hunger strikes. It was recognised and feared by the rulers of both these islands until the consolidation of Sinn Féin hegemony over the struggle convinced them that they

had nothing to fear.

The so-called “peace process” has not changed matters. Fundamentally, of course, its aim is to pacify Ireland for imperialism; Britain does not see the maintenance of partition as, in itself, a priority, but it does want to ensure that, if it come, it will be without disturbance to the status quo: instead of a colony and a semi-colony, a single semi-colony. In pursuit of this aim, it is pouring money into its territory to try to level up the communities. It is failing to do this. The wounds on both sides are too great, the Unionists too intransigent and the present slump places Northern Ireland in the position of being an obvious target for cuts. The question must be posed: how will the Process collapse? Will it be to the benefit of the anti-imperialists, or of the loyalists? At the moment, it seems likely that it will be the latter.

Accordingly, the need is to emphasise the doomed nature of the process in the Republic itself, to link it with the struggle against the cuts, Nama, etc. and to convince the northern minority, particularly the proletarians, that this is the way forward: a tall order, indeed, but a necessary one.

Sean Matgamna's perspective is different. For him, permanent revolution does not apply to Ireland. It would appear that, to him a successful immediately programmatically proletarian revolution is the most likely scenario. It can be objected that no such revolution has occurred in a country more obviously ripe for it than either or both parts of this island: that it is possible that imperialist decay has made Permanent Revolution a probable rule for the most developed countries. More specifically, the Matgamna perspective makes it both necessary and possible to concentrate the attention, at least of Northern Irish revolutionaries on the unionist working class, rather than on the workers across the border.

These Unionist workers with their industrial traditions are assumed to be as inherently progressive as industrial workers elsewhere, their obvious political regression due to perfectly reasonable doubts about the progressive nature of nationalist Ireland which can be overcome, in part by such nostra as repartition or Protestant Irish Home Rule. The fact that this regression is related to the use of sectarianism as a productive force in building Ulster industry is not considered. Nor is the corollary possibility that these workers desire not self-determination but ascendancy over their neighbours. That this programmatic failing places them in the proletarian rearguard, rather than the vanguard is ignored similarly.

Instead, it is easy for defenders of the Matgamna-ite faith to paint their opponents' approach in ethnic terms. Not to give the working-class protestants a leading role in the proletarian revolution from its beginning is obviously a breach of working class solidarity, not a sober recognition of the weakness of that section of the said class. Those who deny that section a leading role, must be contaminated with bourgeois nationalism, and, of course, such a person may well be, like other nationalists, an anti-semite. Throw enough shite at the person, and you can forget that person's programme.

There is nothing much more to be said. While he considers himself smeared, the writer is not going to try his luck in the bourgeois courts.

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The peace process: “pacifying Ireland for imperialism”?

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

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Lenin postulated a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry”. Dictatorship here meant not what Stalinism would make the word mean in the 20th century. “Democratic dictatorship” was not oxymoronic, but plebeian democracy: it would be dictatorship in the sense that it would overrule the laws and entrenched rights of the old rulers, and act “dictatorially”.

It was, Lenin argued, in the interests of the working class that as much as possible of the old feudalistic debris be cleared away, and replaced by a democratic republic in which all political and social relations were transparent and stripped of mystifications: these would be the best conditions for the working class struggle for socialism in the decades after the bourgeois revolution had reached equilibrium.

Trotsky made pretty much the same assessment as did Lenin, but he disagreed with Lenin’s political conclusions and perspectives. Trotsky advocated “permanent revolution”. Yes, said Trotsky, to Lenin’s democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry, to lead the bourgeois revolution the workers and peasants will make the bourgeois revolution, but not as in Lenin’s conception as more or less equal partners. The revolution would culminate not in the establishment of a bourgeois democratic republic but of a workers’ republic: the permanent revolution would go in one uninterrupted movement, led by the workers, at the head of, not in equal partnership with, the peasantry.

The peasantry, argued Trotsky, can play no independent role in making the socialist revolution: they

will, as in history so far the peasantry always have, follow, be led by, one of the town classes — either the bourgeoisie or the proletariat.

The workers, backed by, at the head of, the peasantry will make the revolution. The workers will take power — not democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry but dictatorship of the proletariat (again, dictatorship meaning not the meaning Stalinism has given it in modern history, but as above: it would be a mass popular dictatorship against the old ruling class and their institutions and their servants, smashing their power and institutions — taking those institutions by storm). And what will the working class do in power?

Pass a self-denying ordinance and not look out for their own working-class interests — for example, not pass eight-hour day legislation? No, Trotsky argued, to consolidate, the workers in power will act in their own class interests. Make Russian socialism? No. That was impossible. It was too backward, economically and socially. Here Trotsky did not differ from either the Mensheviks or Lenin that socialism could not be built in Russia.

After the workers’ revolution, Trotsky concluded, either the workers’ dictatorship would be overthrown in Russia, as the Jacobins had been in France in 1794, or the revolution would spread to Western Europe and the countries where, once in power, the workers could, in ripe social conditions, begin to make a socialist society: on the international plane, the Russian revolution will if that happens be able to compensate for its backwardness, and Russia will take its place as a backward working class ruled segment of a European working class state, which is driving towards socialism in the advanced countries.

For Trotsky, there would be an uninterrupted sequence of bourgeois-democratic revolutionary-socialist tasks, led by the working class, and in that sense, a fusion of the two revolutions, bourgeois and proletarian.

1917

What happened in 1917? The February revolution made a clean sweep of tsarism, discredited by the war and its catastrophes. In Lenin’s absence the Bolshevik party in Russia, led by Kamenev and Stalin, settled into supporting the new regime which, in fact, procrastinated over such “bourgeois” tasks of the revolution as the distribution of land to the peasants.

Now, basing himself on the great militancy of the working class and, as always, guided by concrete realities, not by dogmatic abstractions, Lenin grasped concretely what Trotsky had grasped already in 1905 — that the Russian revolution would be a working class revolution, or it wouldn’t happen: counter-revolution would roll things back. The bourgeois and proletarian revolutions would have to form a continuous sequence.

In 1918, in *The proletarian revolution and the renegade Kautsky*, Lenin described the bourgeois-democratic revolution in the first period after the working class had taken power in the October revolution.

So the difference between democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry and Trotsky’s permanent revolution were of no importance? Lenin got there too, in his own step-by-step way? Lenin got there, but he had a struggle to reorient the Bolshevik party, to turn it away from support for the post-February revolution regime and direct it toward taking power. No one else but Lenin could have changed the role of the Bolshevik party from the role it played for a few weeks under Kamenev and Stalin to that of the party that led the proletariat — and thus also the bourgeois democratic — revolution half a year later.

Suppose that Lenin had died in exile in January 1917. Then the “democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry” would not have been, as it was, a corridor to permanent revolution and Lenin’s policy that culminated in working-class power after October 1917. It would have been interpreted as Stalin and Kamenev interpreted the old party line before Lenin returned to Russia and was the day for permanent revolution at the April conference of the Bolshevik party. If Lenin hadn’t been there, or failed to win over the Bolshevik party, then Trotsky’s “permanent revolution” would be known to us as the utopian fantasy of a Russian Marxist who blurred the distinction between the ideas of the revolution and of the socialist populists.

Without Lenin — without his ability to focus on evolving reality and not be confused by a previous, now outmoded, inadequate or incomplete scenario — democratic dictatorship of the workers and peasantry would have led the Bolshevik party to play the role of saboteur of the working-class revolution that some



WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

COUNCIL CUTS SURVEY

Resist these vicious cuts!

BY SACHA ISMAIL

A BBC survey of councils has made the extent of cuts threatening local services clear.

The first batch of councils which answered the survey reported job cuts of at least 25,000 in the next three to five years. The BBC calculates that, translated across the board, this could mean 180,000 job being slashed.

Such cuts would, obviously, be a disaster for both council workers and "service users", i.e., workers and working-class communities more generally. One third of councils said their children's services faced cuts; the figure for adult services was half.

Cuts of 10-15% were the most common estimate. Eight councils said they planned to cut 1,000 or more jobs. (Birmingham, which

did not reply to the survey, is planning to sack 2,000 workers!) The deepest cuts will be made in the deeply-deprived BNP strongholds of Stoke-on-Trent (20-25%) and Barking and Dagenham (25-30%!), providing more fuel for the fascists' populist fire.

Both local government leaders and the government have made a lot of noise about protecting "front line services". But you can be sure that they will be cutting back workers and services deemed most expendable, not fat-cat managers, bureaucrats and consultants.

The response to these cuts from local government union Unison and from the TUC can be roughly summarised as "Blah, blah, blah".

There is massive public hostility to these cuts; some opinion polls suggest that, despite the absence of a "mainstream" political option

The BBC survey shows likely spending cuts in 93 councils over the next 3-5 years.

Available at: news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8537382.stm

expressing this view, a majority opposes all cuts. Socialists and trade unionists must provide a coherent voice for that majority, and build a movement around it.

- No cuts in services. The unions must fight every job loss, and build real campaigning unity with service users and anti-cuts campaigns. The only sackings and pay cuts should be for highly paid managers and consultants.

- Councils, particularly Labour councils, should refuse to make cuts. They should work with unions and activists to demand more money from the government. Opposition to council tax rises is not a principle, but any significant rises simply pass on cuts to working-class living standards by the back door and should be resisted.

- Government should tax the rich and big business to fund our services!

CIVIL SERVICE STRIKE

All out to defend terms and conditions!

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

Members of the civil service union PCS have voted decisively to take industrial action over redundancy and early retirement terms. National strikes will take place on Monday 8 and Tuesday 9 March.

The union has focused mainly on the adverse changes proposed to the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS). But we mustn't forget that tens of thousands of staff, members of the inferior Nuvos pension scheme, are only entitled to statutory minimum redundancy payments. This dispute is also about eliminating the two tiers of redundancy terms, and levelling up.

To undermine the strike, senior managers have written to all civil servants, with four examples "showing" that staff will not be that much worse off under the new proposal. But the letter has nothing to say concerning those in the Nuvos scheme; this implies that those staff members are still entitled only to statutory minimum redundancy payments. The two tiers continue!

The examples given are only for compulsory redundancies, whereas the vast bulk of all redundancies in the recent past have been where staff have chosen to leave the service. Clearly the Government wants "volunteers" in the future to leave on much worse terms than they enjoy currently.

To take the 46-year-old on £25,000 with 25 years' service, the first of the given examples: it leads to a redundancy payment under compulsory terms of £60,000. At the moment, the compulsory payment would be £75,000, possibly more if that person has 1987 reserved rights. Under voluntary terms the maximum would be £50,000 but could be as low as £8,550 (the statutory minimum). We have a great deal to lose!

The letter also claims that as five unions (FDA, Prospect, POA, GMB and Unite) have accepted the changes PCS is the "odd one out". This is disingenuous. It is PCS members who will be most directly affected by these changes, as well as members of the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) who don't get a mention (they too are in dispute over the changes).

Continued on page 4

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