The Sun has gone into tabloid overdrive in support of a vicious government attack on claimants. Anyone on benefits — people they say “refuse to work”, people they say have had “too many children”, people they say are “robbing hardworking Sun readers of their cash”. The government is backing that campaign — they want the same things. The Sun says “scroungers” deserve to be “named and shamed”. So do the government. The Sun is stirring up a vigilante drive among its readers, asking them to file reports of cases of “benefit cheats”. This is just what Cameron means by a “big society”.

This government is proving to be just as nasty as Thatcher’s, finding scapegoats among poor, powerless and vulnerable people and doing that despite the “input” of Lib Dem junior coalition partners. They are constructing a long list of people to stir up hate against — it already includes migrants, refugees and gypsies.

Many working-class people gripe about how easy they think life is for benefit claimants. Often this is an expression of sadness and frustration with their own lives — their own struggles to stay in work or to earn enough to support themselves. But newspapers are owned by millionaires, and they express the view of... millionaires — people who want to keep the profit system running to benefit themselves. The Sun and other tabloids radically distort the reality for those living on benefits. It is never easy and it is very different from the lives of luxury portrayed in the papers and elsewhere.

Our message has to be clear — working-class people whether we are in work or not, should stick together. We should unite against the real parasites — the bankers, the rich, the people who will not suffer at all from the cutbacks, who will benefit from the low taxes on profits brought in by this government.

Continued on page 2
**LET THEM EAT CAKE**

David Willetts, Minister of State for Universities and Science, had an interesting response to the news that thousands of young people will not be able to get into University this year, due to a shortage of places. They should, he said, go on an apprenticeship scheme... or set up a business!

Giving up on a University education is one thing, Having to endure a lecture by a public school-Oxford educated twit about what “choices” you have in life adds insult to injury. Setting up a business is no problem if your parent’s personal wealth is as much as the Willetts — £1.9 million. Not so easy for the rest of us.

Ivy tower resident Richard Blakeway, the London mayor’s director of housing, was shocked to hear how Polish migrants, penniless, unable to get into University this year, according to Shelter you have to put this issue into perspective…

**NORTHERN IRELAND BOMBING**

Stop Lib-Con attacks on the poor

From front page

Prime Minister David Cameron 4 claims that £5.2 billion is “lost” each year in the benefits system as a result of “fraud” and “error”. He does not say that the vast bulk of this amount is “error”, he does not mention the vast amount of the money “saved” by the state because many people do not claim the benefits to which they are entitled.

None of that matters in his determination to be “tougher” on those who “exploit the system”, to prosecute the “cheats” and to jail them.

What sort of “fraud” has the Sun and its readers uncovered? On 16 June, 2008, the Sun lovingly published a mother of eleven and her partner. Their crimes are that the father is on incapacity benefits and the mother is unemployed. Add to this the fact that they live in a five bedroom house and claim £20,000 per year in benefits.

Let’s de-construct this story: Thirteen people living in a five bedroom house. The family gets £44 per week, per person to pay for food, clothing, travel, rent etc... The only wonder of this story is how this family manages to survive.

The fact a national newspaper is allowed to subject this family — not just the parents but the children too — to such a witch-hunt is a disgrace. Do the Sun expect everyone in this family to be checked out onto the streets — the children taken into care perhaps?

What the Sun really does is disgust the Sun and other tabloid newspapers like the Mail and the Express, what really scandalises Cameron is how Evan Edelman isn’t the money, it’s the people. Their hatred of working-class people shows through every time.

The Tories claim the £5.2 billion claw-back from the benefits system will boost the British economy and make all of use “better off”. The economic realities of Britain tell a rather different story.

Britain is still the sixth richest nation on earth. Personal wealth exceeds £9000 billion, which averages out to £444 million per household. But not every household has that sort of money! That’s because the richest 10% hold £4000 billion (about 50% of total wealth). This is pure chance. With each bomb the chances increase that there will be such a slaughter.

Last week three children were slightly injured by a bomb intended to kill policemen planted outside a school. As things are going, it is only a matter of time. One of the three organisations mounting the present campaign, the “Real IRA”, a then-whispering voiced of the Provisional IRA, set off the 1998 bomb in Omagh which killed 29 people.

Three small Republican militant groups are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and to the Protestant-Unionist majority in the Six County state. A large minority of the population of the Six Counties are Catholic nationalists. Not only in the streets of Belfast, which is in the heartland of the Protestant majority section of the north-east Ulster, but also where the Catholic nationalists are the majority — in a large swathe of Six County territory, the border with the independent Irish state.

Given a free choice they would have been part of the Catholic nationalist state. In 1919-1922, and afterwards, they were kept in the Six County state by the Protestant-Unionist majority in the Six County state by the British army and the Protestant-merchant militiamen.

For its first 50 years Northern Ireland was ruled by a Protestant sectarian government which ill-treated the Catholic minority.

The Good Friday Agreement set up an intricate bureaucratic political network of institutions and rules-of-functioning designed to ensure sectarian “fairness” as between Catholic and Protestant by way of compulsory power-sharing in the Assembly.

A military campaign, even a strong one, is not enough to bring about a peaceful change. The latest in a long parade of such turncoats: who made peace with the British with the military defeat of the Provisional IRA should disband, the point of disbanding the IRA, when the British army would still leave these people filthy-rich.

The Six County Catholics are not alienated from the state. In fact they probably identify with the Protestant community more than the Protestants do. The old sectarian, very heavily Protestant, Royal Ulster Constabulary has gone and been replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in which there is a large and growing Catholic presence.

There are now two constitutional nationalist parties standing solidly against militant Republicanism. The Belfast power sharing government includes both of the once extreme poles of the Protestant and Catholic communities – the Paisleyites and Sinn Fein (now effectively incorporating the IRA). On both sides now the extreme opposition to the present arrangement are small minorities.

The decisive thing in the explosion of war in 1971 was that both Protestant and Catholic communities and their extremes bounced off each other like careening billiard balls. The Belfast Unionist government, backed by the British army, was still Protestant sectarian. An Interment, indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial, in 1975 was used exclusively against Catholics. It gave the Provisional IRA a tremendous surge of Catholic support. The British army was pitied against the Catholics and alienated them greatly.

Today nothing like that exists. To succeed, the militarists would have to set up Protestant and Catholic populations actively against each other. The key thing will be how the Protestants react to the Republican militarists. Yet the Orange Order bailed out the Good Friday Agreement rather than provoking the Protestants, half of whom then opposed the Agreement.

But much is of course unforeseeable. The economic slump and large-scale unemployment is greatly altering sections of the youth, who are made to feel they have gained very little socially from the Good Friday Agreement. That content-feeds into the militant groups.

There are clear, stark, disparities in wealth. A 20% one-off tax on the richest 10% would yield a total of £800 billion — virtually eliminating the government’s statutory need to tax income. Yet it would be “bad for British business”. And that is the code for “bad for our class”.

And that is the reason why they have to come after us, after working-class people, whether it is cutting our jobs, taking away our benefits, or taxing us. This is the crisis of the economy and government institutions at our door.

Our response should be clear: stop the Lib-Con attacks on the poor, make the rich pay for the crisis.

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

Minority Republican organisations have planted 49 bombs and been responsible for 32 shootings in Northern Ireland over the last eight months. All that stands between the bombs they set off and a sizeable slaughter of civilians, police or soldiers is pure chance. With each bomb the chances increase that there will be such a slaughter.

Last week three children were slightly injured by a bomb intended to kill policemen planted outside a school. As things are going, it is only a matter of time. One of the three organisations mounting the present campaign, the “Real IRA”, a then-whispering voiced of the Provisional IRA, set off the 1998 bomb in Omagh which killed 29 people.

Three small Republican militant groups are opposed to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and to the Protestant-Unionist majority in the Six County state. A large minority of the population of the Six Counties are Catholic nationalists. Not only in the streets of Belfast, which is in the heartland of the Protestant majority section of the north-east Ulster, but also where the Catholic nationalists are the majority — in a large swathe of Six County territory, the border with the independent Irish state.

Given a free choice they would have been part of the Catholic nationalist state. In 1919-1922, and afterwards, they were kept in the Six County state by the Protestant-Unionist majority in the Six County state by the British army and the Protestant-merchant militiamen.

For its first 50 years Northern Ireland was ruled by a Protestant sectarian government which ill-treated the Catholic minority.

The Good Friday Agreement set up an intricate bureaucratic political network of institutions and rules-of-functioning designed to ensure sectarian “fairness” as between Catholic and Protestant by way of compulsory power-sharing in the Assembly.

A military campaign, even a strong one, is not enough to bring about a peaceful change. The latest in a long parade of such turncoats: who made peace with the British with the military defeat of the Provisional IRA should disband, the point of disbanding the IRA, when the British army would still leave these people filthy-rich.

The Six County Catholics are not alienated from the state. In fact they probably identify with the Protestant community more than the Protestants do. The old sectarian, very heavily Protestant, Royal Ulster Constabulary has gone and been replaced by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, in which there is a large and growing Catholic presence.

There are now two constitutional nationalist parties standing solidly against militant Republicanism. The Belfast power sharing government includes both of the once extreme poles of the Protestant and Catholic communities – the Paisleyites and Sinn Fein (now effectively incorporating the IRA). On both sides now the extreme opposition to the present arrangement are small minorities.

The decisive thing in the explosion of war in 1971 was that both Protestant and Catholic communities and their extremes bounced off each other like careening billiard balls. The Belfast Unionist government, backed by the British army, was still Protestant sectarian. An Interment, indefinite imprisonment without charge or trial, in 1975 was used exclusively against Catholics. It gave the Provisional IRA a tremendous surge of Catholic support. The British army was pitied against the Catholics and alienated them greatly.

Today nothing like that exists. To succeed, the militarists would have to set up Protestant and Catholic populations actively against each other. The key thing will be how the Protestants react to the Republican militarists. Yet the Orange Order bailed out the Good Friday Agreement rather than provoking the Protestants, half of whom then opposed the Agreement.

But much is of course unforeseeable. The economic slump and large-scale unemployment is greatly altering sections of the youth, who are made to feel they have gained very little socially from the Good Friday Agreement. That content-feeds into the militant groups.

There are clear, stark, disparities in wealth. A 20% one-off tax on the richest 10% would yield a total of £800 billion — virtually eliminating the government’s statutory need to tax income. Yet it would be “bad for British business”. And that is the code for “bad for our class”.

And that is the reason why they have to come after us, after working-class people, whether it is cutting our jobs, taking away our benefits, or taxing us. This is the crisis of the economy and government institutions at our door.

Our response should be clear: stop the Lib-Con attacks on the poor, make the rich pay for the crisis.
Understanding the EDL threat

Plans by the English Defence League to demonstrate in Bradford on 28 August present a huge challenge to the local community, the national labour movement and the socialist left.

After failing to fulfil their promise of a “long, hot summer” of demonstrations, the EDL has now planned a repeat that could have repercussions for wider British society. But unfortunately the threat posed by this nasty racist street gang has sent some sections of the left trade unions into a spin. Once again the weakness and wrong-headedness of the “official” movement against racism and fascism have been exposed.

What is at stake and why are the issues so sharply posed?

Over the weekend of 7-9 June 2001, Bradford experienced the worst inner-city rioting since Brixton and Tottenham in 1981. The root-cause of this rioting is disputed in both mainstream and left-wing accounts.

Where reports on the BBC and other news websites painted the events as a high-pitched clash between Muslims, “whites” and the police, commentators like Nick Lowles from Searchlight magazine blame the outbreak of violence on the left being provoked by a handful of fascists.

The large numbers of police deployed and injured, the number of arrests and the total cost of damage grabbed the headlines in some media outlets. But the reality of racist and fascist provocation, in an already charged atmosphere of division and bigotry, was largely overlooked.

The events in Bradford followed similar disturbances in Burnley and Oldham. All three cities had, and to a degree retain, similar social problems: poverty, unemployment, poor housing. All three had and have a right-wing challenge from successive governments. All three contained communities — white, black, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other south Asian communities — which had been set against each other in such circumstances and over a long period of time. In addition, all three areas had become targets for the organised far-right and fascist parties.

The events which sparked the riots in Burnley and Oldham — incidents which in an earlier period would have constituted another police statistic — sparked mass confrontation between white and mainly Asian Muslims, “whites” and the police, commentators like Nick Lowles from Searchlight magazine blame the outbreak of violence on the left being provoked by a handful of fascists.

This is absolutely right. In addition to the common sense imperative for the labour movement to stand firm against the threat of the EDL there is an equally imperative to stand side-by-side with those who are threatened and take the initiative to fight back. These are the best traditions of our movement and this is what we should be organising to achieve. Any other course of action will leave people isolated and under threat. It will lead to the media feed to continue.

Socialists and the left within the labour movement should be campaigning to win the argument for mass mobilisations against these threats. It may already be too late to achieve the numbers and strength needed to drive the racists out of Bradford or to challenge restrictions imposed on anti-racists by the state. It is therefore essential that we get ready combat the conclusions that will be drawn about those who are calling on us to give a firm hand to the racists.

We need to reiterate again that we need working-class campaign. But not just to mobilise the numbers necessary to drive the street racists out. Such a campaign is essential because only a working-class campaign with working-class politics can unite the communities in places like Bradford that the racists seek to break apart and set against one another.

And we need a clear analysis of exactly what the EDL represents. It is certain that organised fascists or those with past associations with fascist groups operate at the centre of the EDL. But the EDL does not mobilise people on the basis of this kind of politics. Centrally and peripherally involved are old-style football hooligans; the hopelessly, disheenrpan white working class — often young and poorly educated. Activists who have engaged in discussions with extremists, to support the EDL know that many of them genuinely believe themselves to be “not racist” or even “anti-racist”. The EDL has attracted support from small numbers of Sikhs, Jews (there is now a “Jewish Division”) and LGBT people. The dynamic around the EDL is therefore not straightforward.

What unites those who demonstrate with the EDL is acceptance of a form of racism — specifically anti-Muslim racism — that manifests itself in softer and harder forms. The EDL’s claim to be “anti-extremist” is capable of covering all forms of this prejudice, after such vigorous and nasty campaigns by the right-wing tabloid press.

So whatever the actual politics of the core members and organisers of the EDL, it is useless and dangerous to label all EDL supporters as Nazis and fascists. Constantly applying these terms — in press releases, leaflets, placards and chants — can only damage efforts to split the vast majority of EDLers from the organisation.

There is currently a split in the leadership of the EDL with rival factions, including people associated with Loyalist terror groups, vying for control. There could be a political hardening of supporters around groups of fascists within the EDL. This prospect seems all the more worrying given the possible splits in and weakening of the British National Party.

Any victory for the EDL — be it the prescription of anti-racist activities; a riot between exclusively Muslim youth and EDLers or even a limited pitch battle with the police — can only aid their growth. Any growth for the EDL can only spell mortal danger for Muslims everywhere and the labour movement more generally. And a continuation of the counter, anti-democratic practices and political abstention within the anti-fascist movement can only aid this growth.

The labour movement must mobilise to challenge the English Defence League in Bradford on 28 August. Stop Racism and Fascism Network: http://srfnetwork.org/

Brighton counter mobilisation

On 30 August the English Nationalist Alliance aim to march through the streets of Brighton. They intend to “protest against the militant students...” Students protest the nationalisation of the region against the constant anti-English activities in the area... no more support of Palestinian terrorists...militant students need to know their place...”

For further information email brightonanitfasacists@riseup.net

EDITOR: CATHY NUGENT
SOLIDARITY@WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG WWW.WORKERSLIBERTY.ORG/SOLIDARITY
**Solidarity**

**PCs Fight this victimisation!**

**INDUSTRIAL**

**LONDON FIREFIGHTERS Fighting mass sackings**

Firefighters in London are considering action after a dramatic breakdown in talks with their bosses, the LFEPA.

Do you and your workmates get the schooling you think is fair or good – even if you think the system is unfair or bad? Below is a list of some of the most common issues that arise in schools today. You can use this list to help you make the case for better schooling for all children.

**For more information, email Sam swpsam@hotmail.com**

**INDUSTRIAL**

**My Life at Work**

**“Schools are going into blind panic mode. They’ll take it out on us”**

Frances Streeting works as a teaching assistant in a secondary school.

Tell us a bit about the work you do.

I work with students who find it difficult to keep up with their learning. My role is to ensure that they can be included in mainstream class, helping them get their work done or at least achieve something.

What are your bosses like?

They are always saying “if that teaching assistant wasn’t in my classroom, I wouldn’t be able to teach”, so we’re pretty central to the needs of students in school, in terms of their learning and their attainment.

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

For most of the time, the pay of teaching assistants is abysmally low. We’re paid term-time only, which means that during the school holidays we don’t get any pay at all. Our pay is pro-rata. My contract says I’m paid £17,300 per year, but I’m actually paid far less.

Conditions for teaching assistants vary from school to school. The job can be a delight if you’ve got a good head of department, and a misery if you’ve got a bad one. Some do a great deal of work with or without help from students in their lives that, as an adult, you have never had to deal with or encounter on a personal level.

How has the recent political situation, both in terms of the economic crisis and the new government, affected your work?

The new government are trying to undo a lot of New Labour’s projects in terms of inclusion, but they’re going to continue to take advantage of low-paid workers in schools. I think we’ll see a lot more teaching assistants being used as a cheap way to do work that should be done by qualified teachers.

There’s also potentially huge job cuts.

In the past there would have been guarantees that restructurings wouldn’t involve pay cuts or redundancies – now, all restructuring involves pay cuts or redundancies. As Gove’s plans come into play and after the October spending review, schools are going to be in a blind panic mode and will take it out on us.

They’ll either try and sack us or use us to do work that they don’t want to pay qualified teachers to do.

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

It’s increasingly easy to talk politics at work. You can’t avoid it. What’s happening to education is now “big politics”; it’s not just about how we want to teach our kids to be taught and how we want the national education system to be run. It’s a big issue. Because workers everywhere else are suffering cuts and attacks too, it’s very easy to argue basic class politics. People are realising that we have to organise together to fight back. Those are easy arguments to have now. Everybody accepts that we have to either fight back or go belly-up.

I’ve always had lots of political discussions in my workplace. My day starts in our little office where all the teaching assistants gather; we have a quick meeting with our immediate line-manager and then go into that classroom about half-an-hour later, and that slot at the start of the day is always filled with discussion with other workers about what’s going on in the news.

What are your bosses like?

They vary. But I think even the best individual manager in a given school would feel compelled to make cuts. They wouldn’t have the courage to stand up to them. One reason why we don’t have any academics in our area is that school heads do have a close relationship with the LEA and have resisted the introduction of academies over the years. But if you suggest to heads or the LEA that they refuse to implement cuts, it won’t happen.

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

I’m in Unison; when I first started there and got elected as a rep we had about five members. We’ve had a couple of disputes since then and have got that figure up to 78. That’s almost 100% density among non-teaching staff so we’re in a strong position. We work closely with the NUT and they’ve always backed us up whenever we’ve been in dispute.

However, we don’t have that right across the locality. In some schools we hardly have any members. We need to build up a layer of activists who will do the work of building up union power across the area — not just in terms of recruiting, but in terms of fighting to win around issues in the workplace.

It’s not just about striking; we’ve done things like occupying a manager’s office, we’ve threatened to hold public meetings during OFSTED inspections... tactics like that help build up people’s confidence and make them realise that we can win things from our bosses.

That’s how a new generation of activists is being built up, one that is not afraid of that elsewhere.

A big barrier is that the regional and national structures of the union are very bureaucratic. It’s hard to get the support you need. In Unison, you need the agreement of both the region and the national strike committee to get an officially-sanctioned strike, and my region just won’t back strikes. You get members who are really up for strikes but get blocked and let down by the union. Part of my role as a revolutionary in the workplace is about persuading people to join the union to change it and fight that bureaucracy.

We did have a big strike for union recognition – we had to fight the region tooth-and-nail to get that sanctioned. There was a 96% vote for strike action, but the region unilaterally changed that to a two-day strike. My members were furious. We’ve got to harness that rank-and-file fury to change the way the union works.

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

It’s not about the work thing; really it’s about developing a whole vision of how education might be organised. I’d want to abolish exams and uniforms and turn learning into something that’s done for its own sake. We’re currently teaching people how to get through a nonsensical grading system that doesn’t relate to anything. Abolishing that would make it a job about learning.
Members of the RMT union at London Underground have voted by 76% in favour of strike action against job cuts, and by 88% in favour of action short of a strike. As LU bosses seek to cut any corner possible in order to save money, 800 station workers’ jobs are on the line. Such workers are vital to maintaining both the safety and quality of the service on the Underground, both of which will suffer massively if bosses succeed in laying the workers off. RMT general secretary Bob Crow said:

Less than two weeks after the Potters Bar fire, LU bosses are showing that they care more about their bottom line than the safety and well-being of their workers. These actions are putting the public’s safety at risk. LU management must back down and accept workers’ demands.

TUC Day of Action

By DARREN BEDFORD

Moving to biennial congresses, inviting senior members of the councils to government to speak at Congress 2010, consistently manoeuvring years against motions from unions calling for strike action… the TUC — the national federation of almost all of Britain’s trade unions — is not taking on the government with the same class-war spirit as the government is employing against workers.

But now the TUC has called a “day of action” for 20 October. Cue sensationalist coverage from the Tory press about an “autumn of discontent”. The TUC doesn’t have a great record in this department; its April 2010 national demonstration in defence of the welfare state was very badly built for. An under-manned “day of action” will do more harm than good.

Unions should organise local action, including pickets on the day and mass meetings for October 20, but should pressure the TUC to organise a co-ordinated national campaign of industrial action around common demands that will really give the bosses something to be discontented about.

Southampton librarians make Friday 13 unlucky for council bosses

By DARREN BEDFORD

Librarians in Southampton struck on 13 August against job cuts, de-skilling and casualisation. This followed a first round of action in June.

The council plans to staff libraries with unpaid and untrained volunteers, replacing six full-time trained workers, in order to cut costs. It has said it is dealing with “difficult economic times.” Speaking in the Southampton Daily Echo at the start of the dispute several months ago, Unison’s regional organiser Andy Straker said “There is real anger from our members over this issue. They feel that management and councillors are devaluing their skills and experience. The fact that they believe they can just take people off the street to do our members’ work is an insult. Our members have given years of service to Southampton City Council and to be treated in this way is a disgrace. We believe that the inevitable consequences of these actions will be a worsening in service to the public. If the council needs to make savings by cutting wages and employing volunteers then I suggest they start with councillors.”

Council boss John Harnrides has denounced the workers for “standing in the way of modernisation”. The cuts come off the back of the introduction of a £468,000 roll-out of self-service machines in six libraries. The council claims that the machines will allow them to axe 7.5 full-time equivalent posts and save around £140,000. It seems that Southampton council bosses want librarians’ work to be done by anyone — machines, untrained members of the public — as long as it isn’t actual (well-unionised) librarians.

There is an insidious logic to this that has a wider appeal to the TUC, especially in the north of England — the north-south divide has long been a regular feature of the union movement. Unions in the north have been consistently underfunded and underresourced compared to unions in the south. Despite this, the north has a strong tradition of industrial militancy. TUC spokespeople are keen to exploit this divide by portraying the south as “the safe zone” and the north as the place where unions have to fight for their survival.

But this is a false dichotomy. Unions in the south still have a strong tradition of militancy, especially in areas with a strong industrial history such as the northeast and the west of England. The TUC should be looking to build on this tradition, not denigrating it.

More action in aviation

Over 6,000 aviation workers — including firefighters, security guards and other ground staff — will vote on a 2% pay increase, plus a one-off payment of £500, after resoundingly rejecting the employer’s previous, initial pay offer and voting by a big majority to take strike action.

The workers’ union, Unite, called off scheduled strikers after talks at ACAS and will now recommend that its members accept the new pay offer.

BAA (formerly British Airways Authority) is under privatisation in 1986) employees at six major UK airports (Heathrow, Stansted, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Southampton), and initially offered a 1% pay rise with a potential further increase of 0.1% depending on whether or not they agreed to changes in their sickness agreements. Unite described the offer as “an insult”.

Given the centrality of these workers to the basic running of airports, it is unlikely that they would be able to function during any potential strikes and would have to close. Unsurprisingly, the media attention focused entirely on the detrimental effects any strike would have on passengers rather than asking why workers are obviously absolutely vital to the running of airports (more vital, certainly, than the likes of Willie Walsh) aren’t valued more highly and paid better.

Although the workers involved in this dispute are employed by a central authority rather than by a specific airline, the parallels and crossovers with the ongoing British Airways dispute are clear. Bosses in the aviation sector are using the climate of economic downturn to attack workers’ pay and conditions, and their supporters in the tabloid press are running sensationalist rants about “travel chaos” to build public opposition to any action.

Talks between Unite and British Airways over the cabin crew dispute are set to resume, with the dispute still effectively at a standstill (although BA bosses seem to have an upper-hand). If further strikes take place, the combined pressure of their action with a potential BAA action could bring aviation bosses to the senses and make them realise that if they really want to avoid “travel chaos” then they should give their workers decent pay and conditions.

Bob Crow: not on a worker’s wage!

The recent revelation that RMT leader Bob Crow has taken a 12% pay increase (bringing his pay to well over £1,000,000) is a gift for the right-wing press and their hate campaign against unions.

But we can’t let the Tory papers dictate the terms of this debate; we should be making our own positive case for union officials to be paid the average wage of the workers they were elected by.

Tabled attacks on Crow are part of a general demonisation of him as a “militant” — a label we should all wear with pride. But his and other union leaders’ staggeringly-high levels of pay are scandalous.

Ed Miliband: “escaping the Blairite comfort zone”?

Jack Yates

Ed Miliband, writing for a Fabian Society round-table of leadership contenders, has called for Labour to “escape from the ‘comfort zone’ of Blairism”.

The motivation for this call comes from Labour’s defeat. Although the core vote held up better than expected — especially in the north of England — the data shows a more detailed and worrying picture.

Miliband writes that “Five million votes were lost by Labour between 1997 and 2010. Every one voter that Labour lost from the professional classes we lost three voters among the poor.”

He claims that “Labour lost from the professional classes — we lost three voters among the poor.”

Miliband goes on to say that “Labour lost from the professional classes — we lost three voters among the poor.”

The outcome of the election is a complicated picture that cannot be solved with number crunching alone. The data shows a significant shift in working class support away from Labour and in many cases towards the Tories. But in the north, the “core vote” remained loyal to Labour. Labour — lost in 2010, and I am afraid lost — is currently running at 33% in the polls.

Specifically, 22% of the electorate in Labour’s traditional heartland areas voted for the Conservatives, compared to just 16% in Labour’s traditional heartland areas.

The key political question, therefore, isn’t just winning or retaining working class votes and support but transforming these into political influence and organisation. On this issue, Miliband writes: “Deconnection from voters, including our working-class core, has been a product of policy error, it is the result of the hollowing out of the movement and party. The relationship with the trade union movement need to be built from the ground up.”

But this is not clear-cut call for renewing and expanding party democracy. Miliband says merely that Labour needs to “make the most” of the union link.

Miliband is enamoured with the organising methods of the Obama campaign. Some of these methods are already being employed by the various campaign teams.

However, the Obama model and the community organising models in the US on which they are based can be ephemeral, completely divorced from the logic and politics of actual class struggle. Much of the “Yes We Can” movement built during the US presidential election has vanished.

Exactly what Ed Miliband would do as Labour leader, what deals he’s already struck with trade union leaders (Unison, GMB, and the ASLEF backing him) or indeed with his older brother remains to be seen. If, as seems likely, his version of “working class representation” is rooted in unrepresentative focus groups, short-term mobilisation and classless “movement building” then the real issues facing our class will not be addressed. We should be ready for much more than “soothing words.”

Ed Miliband: “escaping the Blairite comfort zone”? John Yates
New committees and small victories

Tower Hamlets
Trade union activists have begun building community and workplace alliances in the borough as part of the Tower Hamlets Anti-Cuts Coalition.

Unlike neighbouring borough Hackney, Tower Hamlets has never been receptive to local action because of the strength of union organisation in the borough’s schools. Now, under the Tory scheme which allows any school to apply for Academy status, some Tower Hamlets heads are seeing an opportunity to challenge academisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conser
tatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.

The local campaign is still at an early stage and is held back both by squabbling between the SWP and Counterfire (a group made up of recently-exiled SWPers) and by the bureaucratic conservatives who are the leading figures. However, activists were able to organise a meeting and leafletting on the estate around Old Ford primary. Many residents had not yet had enough of the school’s plans to seek Academy status; unsurprising given the governors’ decision to break up the state sector, attack collective agreements and union organisation and introduce backdoor privatisation.
SCOTLAND

No to social partnership: fight the cuts!

BY DALE STREET

A t the end of the July the “Independent Budget” was released, setting out the SNP minority government as part of its deal with the Scottish Tories to avoid a general election. The budget, on, or help the budget – published its findings.

The Review was carried out by Crawford Beveridge (former Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise and also a former Vice-President of Sun Microsystems), Robert Wilson (a partner in Deloitte Consulting in Edinburgh) and Sir Neil McIntosh (former Chief Executive of Strathclyde Regional Council).

Speaking at the launch of the Review, Scottish government Finance Secretary John Swinney claimed that the three men would “bring a wealth of public and private-sector expertise to the Review.”

But the Review’s findings and recommendations, which will “inform” public and parliamentary debates in advance of this autumn’s Comprehensive Spending Review, demonstrate that what they actually brought was years of experience of attacking jobs, wages and services.

According to the Review, cuts of £2 billion (7%) need to be made in next year’s Scottish budget alone. Annual cuts amounting to £37 billion (12.5%) need to be made by 2015. Over the next 16 years, says the Review, every billion worth of cuts have to be implemented.

By 2015, according to the Review, up to 50,000 jobs will have to be axed (amounting to every tenth job in the public sector workforce in Scotland). Alternatively, “only” 29,000 jobs would need to be cut if a more vicious pay “restraint” policy was adopted.

The Review proposes an immediate freeze in the public sector and a two-year pay freeze from the 2011/12 financial year. Unlike in England, there would not necessarily be an automatic pay increase for employees on less than £21,500 a year; a total pay freeze would reduce the number of jobs which “need” to be cut.

This pay freeze would be followed by another two years of pay “restraint”, with rises limited to no more than 2% and 3.1% a year. The SNP government’s council tax freeze should be scrapped, according to the Review, on the grounds that it is not “sustainable in the long term”. And “changes” (i.e. cuts) in public sector pensions are “essential and almost certainly unavoidable”.

The private and voluntary sector should play a greater role in delivering service traditionally provided by local authorities. Since the purpose of the exercise is to save money, this can only mean lower-quality services being provided by lower-paid employees (i.e. an intensification of what has already been underway for years).

The government’s “recycling of efficiency” programme, which supposedly allows savings made out of efficiencies to be reinvested in the public sector, should also be scrapped. Instead, “efficiency savings” would supposedly cushion the impact of cuts in budget allocations.

The Review proposes a wide-ranging cull of public services, including the “flagship” policies of the SNP government, and the creation of another review to look in more detail specifically into cuts in all free universal services.

In order to point any subsequent review in the right direction, the IBR suggests: raising the age limit for concessional travel from 60 to 65, or restricting the entitlement to free travel to non-rush-hour periods; postponing plans to scrap all prescription charges, scrapping free personal care for the elderly; and reintroducing tuition fees or a graduate tax for students.

Other proposals put forward by the Review for further consideration include: scrapping plans to end tolls on the Forth and Tay bridges; the introduction of a “capitalisation” or privatisation of Scottish Water; and a more prominent role for the Scottish Futures Trust (the SNP’s equivalent of the Learning and Life Long-Short Library Library by Conexions, we did petition-were supposed to give a slot to speak twice, but both times it was left off the agenda. This was very frustrating, we might as well have been involved with the LBFBF anyway.

“We’ve got what we want, but I get the feeling it’s only interim — they say they’re going to review it, and what I feel is they’ll come back with something more watertight. This time there were all kinds of questions they couldn’t answer, like the opening times of the new service, and why the unions were not consulted.

“Then there’s the broader issues of cuts. I don’t know how services will cope with 25 percent cuts. It will affect the life of every young person.”

Wealth advice library

The scrapping of Nottinghamshire’s NHS Primary Care Trust, has had a number of knock-on effects. One of the first parts of the Trust to be replaced was the health information and advice resource. Built up over nearly twenty years, this library of printed and electronic data provides an invaluable resource with information and help on a variety of topics. As staff at the library became increasingly aware of a budget cuts, the need for help was clear. The service was to be reviewed.

The Review was carried out by Crawford Beveridge (former Chief Executive of Scottish Enterprise and also a former Vice-President of Sun Microsystems), Robert Wilson (a partner in Deloitte Consulting in Edinburgh) and Sir Neil McIntosh (former Chief Executive of Strathclyde Regional Council).

Speaking at the launch of the Review, Scottish government Finance Secretary John Swinney claimed that the three men would “bring a wealth of public and private-sector expertise to the Review.”

But the Review’s findings and recommendations, which will “inform” public and parliamentary debates in advance of this autumn’s Comprehensive Spending Review, demonstrate that what they actually brought was years of experience of attacking jobs, wages and services.

According to the Review, cuts of £2 billion (7%) need to be made in next year’s Scottish budget alone. Annual cuts amounting to £37 billion (12.5%) need to be made by 2015. Over the next 16 years, says the Review, every billion worth of cuts have to be implemented.

By 2015, according to the Review, up to 50,000 jobs will have to be axed (amounting to every tenth job in the public sector workforce in Scotland). Alternatively, “only” 29,000 jobs would need to be cut if a more vicious pay “restraint” policy was adopted.

The Review proposes an immediate freeze in the public sector and a two-year pay freeze from the 2011/12 financial year. Unlike in England, there would not necessarily be an automatic pay increase for employees on less than £21,500 a year; a total pay freeze would reduce the number of jobs which “need” to be cut.

This pay freeze would be followed by another two years of pay “restraint”, with rises limited to no more than 2% and 3.1% a year. The SNP government’s council tax freeze should be scrapped, according to the Review, on the grounds that it is not “sustainable in the long term”. And “changes” (i.e. cuts) in public sector pensions are “essential and almost certainly unavoidable”.

The private and voluntary sector should play a greater role in delivering service traditionally provided by local

CUTS ROUND UP

IN BRIEF

Social services

Child protection services have been hit by significant cuts in key budget areas. Public health workers tasked with bringing vulnerable and at-risk children into care — re-housing, clothing and feeding them — have their hours reduced. In Plymouth, a number of individual budgets have been slashed, including a 75% cut in the money to buy new clothes, bedding and other necessities. The immediate consequences of these cuts go to a major attack on the poorest, most vulnerable and abused young people in society. Such cuts are a clear indictment of this Tory-Liberal government and show that the vulnerable will suffer first in their economic onslaught.

Connexions

The future of the Connexions youth advice service, which provides help and information for young people from 16-25, is under question in a number of areas.

The entire Connexions operation in Northamptonshire — a privately run, state-funded body — is to be wound up. This not only means the redundancies of all Personal Advisors but a significant re-modelling of advice services in the area. Under New Labour’s plethora of alternative education and training routes — of varying quality, it must be said — emerged. These will largely be phased out or scrapped and along with expected reductions in funding for youth projects, advice agencies and similar bodies, the role of Connexions will change significantly.

And as the Tory-Liberal’s are making clear that young people are bottom of their list of priorities. All those currently employed by Connexions will need to re-apply for roles in a new school-based agency, on much reduced terms and conditions.

Lambeth One O’Clock Clubs Victory

One of the UNISON activists involved in the successful campaign against the sacking of all of the London Borough of Lambeth’s One O’Clock Club workers spoke to Solidarity.

“We feel we’ve won the first battle! It was the first victory because of the scale of what we were trying to achieve — these cuts were not budget-led. In fact the new set up would have cost more. The council had been planning this attack for some time, and after the elections they jumped in the Lib-Con government’s bandwagon.

“The council’s arguments were totally indefensible. They claimed they were replacing unqualified people with better qualified staff... In that case, why not use the existing procedures? Management just ended up looking stupid. It was clear they wanted to attack the union and attack the service we ran.

“What we’ve shown is that if you stick together and fight, and get the support from the wider public, you can win. We can go on from here to fight all the Review has come from the Scottish TUC.

 whilst the STUC would not wish in any way to challenge the goodwill or integrity of members of this review panel, it is a source of real frustration that bodies established to provide views on behalf of the Scottish economy are increasingly drawn from a very narrow section of society, one largely insulated from the impact of job and spending cuts.”

The Review is proposing an across-the-board onslaught on public sector pay, public sector jobs, and public sector services. But the STUC, not wishing all its frustrations, is at pains to emphasise the goodwill and integrity of the Review’s members.

In terms of organising a campaign against the kind of cuts being proposed by the Review, Unison, which condemned outright the Review’s proposals is holding an open-to-all “Strategy Night” on 12th September, and the STUC has called a demonstration in Edinburgh for 23 October (although the details have yet to appear on the STUC’s website).
With proposed government privatisation within the British prison service, and with prison officers taking illegal strike action in recent years, issues of what attitude socialists should take to incarceration and capitalist “justice” have come to the fore. Daniel Randall discussed some of these issues with Joe Black of the Campaign Against Prison Slavery, an activist group fighting for prisoners’ rights from an “abolitionist” perspective. This is an edited version of the interview. The full version is at www.workersliberty.org/node/14838.

**DR:** What are the aims of your campaign? How do you organise?

**JB:** CAPS was formed in 2002 by ex-prisoners, prisoners’ families and a number of groups involved in prisoner support and vividly campaigns against forced labour in prisons generally and the Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (IEPS) in particular, the system of rewards and punishments, brought in in the aftermath of the Strangeways prisoners’ rebellion and the Woolf Report inquiry into it, a system designed to ensure control over and the compliance of the prison population. Our focus then changed to challenging the firms like Aramark that were directly involved in the exploitation of prisoner labour. The high street hardware shop chain Wilkinson’s was chosen as a high profile target, with regular pickets and leafleting outside stores.

**DR:** You see yourself as “abolitionist”... Some people would argue that fighting for reform around the specific issue of prison slavery cedes ground to the idea that prisons should exist, just operate more humbly (“fairly”) (I don’t agree with this argument myself or think it’s implied by your campaign, I’m playing “devil’s advocate.”) What are your thoughts?

**JB:** CAPS has always argued its case from an explicitly abolitionist standpoint, its supporters have been largely drawn from anti-prison groups and it has mainly worked with abolitionist organisations like No More Prison and Co (Communities of Resistance). We’ve come into direct conflict with prison reform organisations such as the Prison Reform Trust and the Association of Members of Independent Monitoring Boards, some no doubt because we challenge their positions and reformist organisations always seek to co-opt that which they find challenging.

**DR:** It’s clear that there are some anti-capitalist implications to a lot of your arguments; do you think prison abolition is something achievable under capitalism or will it only be possible to eradicate prisons in a post-capitalist society? If the former, what immediate alternative to prisons do you advocate?

**JB:** Crime is essentially a product of capital and the majority of laws ultimately seek to maintain social inequalities, protecting the wealthy and privileged from those who might try to take away their ill-gotten gains. The vast majority of people in prison have always been part of the working class that is rich and powerful rarely enter its gates. Therefore it is logical to assume that the abolition of prison is only possible in a post-capitalist society. Which brings us to the classic question, “What about murder in a post-capitalist society?” There will always be accidental injuries and deaths caused by individuals, just as there will always be conflicts between individuals and, to a lesser extent, groups but surely in a truly healthy post-capitalist society there will be ways to de-escalate such conflicts and prevent potential unwanted outcomes. That the capitalist world without societal inequalities, a world without need, there will be no need to find illicit ways to acquire the means of production and distribution. It’s clear that there are some anti-capitalist implications to a lot of your arguments; do you think prison abolition is something achievable under capitalism or will it only be possible to eradicate prisons in a post-capitalist society? If the former, what immediate alternative to prisons do you advocate?

**DR:** There’s some debate on the radical left and within the workers’ movement about whether prison officers — whose union has been relatively militant recently and has been led by people who identify very explicitly as socialists (its previous general secretary was a member of a revolutionary group) — are workers or part of the armed machinery of the state in the same way that police and soldiers are. What’s your view on this?

**JB:** Prisoners, as I’ve already stated, are by large and used as a weapon to keep the working class compliant, to protect the rich and help maintain the structural inequalities in our society; to keep a lid on the fermenting unrest within it. And prison officers are an essential part of the machinery that keeps prisons functioning.

**DR:** What do you think are the implications of the government’s current policy on prisons and imprisonment? What demands should activists be fighting for in response?

**JB:** The prison system is in crisis and has been for decades. Now there’s a need to find 25% “savings” in the £2.2 billion HMPS budget. How they are going to find the savings is anyone’s guess. One thing that is sure, with staff costs accounting to 80% of the whole budget, POA members are going to be directly in the firing line. Obviously, the idea of not jailing people on shorter sentences could save some money. NAPO, the National Association of Probation Officers, have claimed that the government could save £350 million if they were to end sentences of six months or less but would then need £50-60 million to recruit the necessary probation officers to supervise the replacement community sentences. Yet the ending of sentences of less than 12 months would also be likely to result in a shift towards longer sentences and a negation of the hoped cut in the prison population.

Clearly the big winners in all this will be the outsourcing firms who stand to profit from what is effectively a massive plan to further privatise the criminal justice industry.

This I think is the big threat, the slippery slope towards an even more American-style Prison Industrial Complex and that people should definitely be campaigning against. Not because I think the state should be the body providing these “services” but because private industry should not be profiting from the misery of any prisoners in any form.

By DANIEL RANDALL

“Alternatives to Detention for Asylum Seeking Families Subject to Removal” gives us an insight. The “idealised process”, to be piloted in north-west England, involves “subjecting families that they will be deported (or “removed”, as the policy works bureaucratically) to 28 days of detention in the next two weeks” if they refuse to leave the UK voluntarily. According to the briefing, “it is still undecided [...] whether a specific date and time [for removal] will be given to a longer period of a couple of days, in which they will have to remain in the property until it is occupied.”

If the government’s aim was to develop a policy that maintains all the demeaning and brutal authoritarianism of detention without involving an actual detention centre, then they may accomplish it with this scheme. The “idealised process” leaves families due for deportation in a state of desperate, terrorised flux in which any night’s sleep could be interrupted by a gang of immigration cops at the door, ready to remove the family from the property so that they can be “taken to the airport to board the plane.” And, if the government eventually decides that it will provide specific dates for “removal” (rather than “at some point in the next two weeks”), then the family is expected to “remain in the property ready” until that point — in other words, house arrest.

The government’s “alternative” to locking up children

Wakefield Prison. The vast majority of people in prison are working-class.
The problem with the burqa ban

BY YVES COLEMAN, NI PATRIE NI FRONTIERES

Much has been said about the proposed law on banning the burqa in France. President Sarkozy announced the law in response to a terrorist threat. It is supposed to prevent individuals from wearing burqas in public places. Critics argue that it is a solution to a problem that does not exist. They argue that the burqua is not a terrorist threat and that the law is an infringement of women’s rights.

The law has been defended by the government as a way to enforce the principle of laïcité, or secularism, in France. Laïcité means that the state should not interfere in matters of religion, but it is not always clear how this principle is applied in practice. Critics argue that the law is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it is based on a misunderstanding of the burqua and its cultural significance.

The law has also been defended by supporters of the far-right National Front, which is led by Marine Le Pen. The National Front is a party that is anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. They argue that the law is necessary to protect French values and to prevent the spread of radical Islam.

The law has been opposed by the main opposition parties in France, including the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. They argue that the law is a form of discrimination and that it will harm the rights of Muslim women.

The law has also been criticized by human rights organizations, which argue that it is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it will harm the reputation of France in the world.

The law has been passed by the French parliament and will be implemented in September. It will be tested in court and its effectiveness will be debated in the future.

Notes:
1. Muslim fundamentalists are supposed to represent anything from 5,000 to 10,000 people of the four million Muslims living in France, of whom two million are French-born and the rest are immigrants.
2. Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a small group initiated by the Socialist Party and which was supposed to defend the burqua in working-class districts, but is actually not very active and whose leaders, Faouzi Attou and L’Enfant, is now a member of the Communist Party Central Committee.
3. The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) is a new group formed by the Trotskyists and which is supposed to participate to Sarkozy’s government.

As a militant in a network supporting migrants in their fight to get legalised, I can testify that French workers, even when they express negative comments about Muslim “ostensible religious sym - cles, sometimes in the mass media) and never finished. Obviously it’s manipu- lated by all political parties but it touch- es identity problems for which the far left (or the left) has no quick-and-easy answers.

Calling for “workers’ solidarity” or “equal rights for men and women, nationals and foreigners,” when unem- ployment holds down the wages of new populist and fascist parties are defend- ing, security on the basis of the Enlighten- ment, is not enough. One has to propose another general perspective, an alternative to the bloody dead-end of the individualism which is central to mod- ern capitalism. This radically new vision is tragically missing among “revolution- ary” groups.

Notes:
1. Muslim fundamentalists are supposed to represent anything from 5,000 to 10,000 people of the four million Muslims living in France, of whom two million are French-born and the rest are immigrants.
2. Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a small group initiated by the Socialist Party and which was supposed to defend the burqua in working-class districts, but is actually not very active and whose leaders, Faouzi Attou and L’Enfant, is now a member of the Communist Party Central Committee.
3. The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) is a new group formed by the Trotskyists and which is supposed to participate to Sarkozy’s government.

The problem with the burqa ban

BY YVES COLEMAN, NI PATRIE NI FRONTIERES

Much has been said about the proposed law on banning the burqa in France. President Sarkozy announced the law in response to a terrorist threat. It is supposed to prevent individuals from wearing burqas in public places. Critics argue that it is a solution to a problem that does not exist. They argue that the burqua is not a terrorist threat and that the law is an infringement of women’s rights.

The law has been defended by the government as a way to enforce the principle of laïcité, or secularism, in France. Laïcité means that the state should not interfere in matters of religion, but it is not always clear how this principle is applied in practice. Critics argue that the law is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it is based on a misunderstanding of the burqua and its cultural significance.

The law has also been defended by supporters of the far-right National Front, which is led by Marine Le Pen. The National Front is a party that is anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. They argue that the law is necessary to protect French values and to prevent the spread of radical Islam.

The law has been opposed by the main opposition parties in France, including the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. They argue that the law is a form of discrimination and that it will harm the rights of Muslim women.

The law has also been criticized by human rights organizations, which argue that it is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it will harm the reputation of France in the world.

The law has been passed by the French parliament and will be implemented in September. It will be tested in court and its effectiveness will be debated in the future.

Notes:
1. Muslim fundamentalists are supposed to represent anything from 5,000 to 10,000 people of the four million Muslims living in France, of whom two million are French-born and the rest are immigrants.
2. Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a small group initiated by the Socialist Party and which was supposed to defend the burqua in working-class districts, but is actually not very active and whose leaders, Faouzi Attou and L’Enfant, is now a member of the Communist Party Central Committee.
3. The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) is a new group formed by the Trotskyists and which is supposed to participate to Sarkozy’s government.

The problem with the burqa ban

BY YVES COLEMAN, NI PATRIE NI FRONTIERES

Much has been said about the proposed law on banning the burqa in France. President Sarkozy announced the law in response to a terrorist threat. It is supposed to prevent individuals from wearing burqas in public places. Critics argue that it is a solution to a problem that does not exist. They argue that the burqua is not a terrorist threat and that the law is an infringement of women’s rights.

The law has been defended by the government as a way to enforce the principle of laïcité, or secularism, in France. Laïcité means that the state should not interfere in matters of religion, but it is not always clear how this principle is applied in practice. Critics argue that the law is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it is based on a misunderstanding of the burqua and its cultural significance.

The law has also been defended by supporters of the far-right National Front, which is led by Marine Le Pen. The National Front is a party that is anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. They argue that the law is necessary to protect French values and to prevent the spread of radical Islam.

The law has been opposed by the main opposition parties in France, including the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. They argue that the law is a form of discrimination and that it will harm the rights of Muslim women.

The law has also been criticized by human rights organizations, which argue that it is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it will harm the reputation of France in the world.

The law has been passed by the French parliament and will be implemented in September. It will be tested in court and its effectiveness will be debated in the future.

Notes:
1. Muslim fundamentalists are supposed to represent anything from 5,000 to 10,000 people of the four million Muslims living in France, of whom two million are French-born and the rest are immigrants.
2. Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a small group initiated by the Socialist Party and which was supposed to defend the burqua in working-class districts, but is actually not very active and whose leaders, Faouzi Attou and L’Enfant, is now a member of the Communist Party Central Committee.
3. The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) is a new group formed by the Trotskyists and which is supposed to participate to Sarkozy’s government.

The problem with the burqa ban

BY YVES COLEMAN, NI PATRIE NI FRONTIERES

Much has been said about the proposed law on banning the burqa in France. President Sarkozy announced the law in response to a terrorist threat. It is supposed to prevent individuals from wearing burqas in public places. Critics argue that it is a solution to a problem that does not exist. They argue that the burqua is not a terrorist threat and that the law is an infringement of women’s rights.

The law has been defended by the government as a way to enforce the principle of laïcité, or secularism, in France. Laïcité means that the state should not interfere in matters of religion, but it is not always clear how this principle is applied in practice. Critics argue that the law is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it is based on a misunderstanding of the burqua and its cultural significance.

The law has also been defended by supporters of the far-right National Front, which is led by Marine Le Pen. The National Front is a party that is anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. They argue that the law is necessary to protect French values and to prevent the spread of radical Islam.

The law has been opposed by the main opposition parties in France, including the Socialist Party and the Communist Party. They argue that the law is a form of discrimination and that it will harm the rights of Muslim women.

The law has also been criticized by human rights organizations, which argue that it is a violation of the rights of Muslim women and that it will harm the reputation of France in the world.

The law has been passed by the French parliament and will be implemented in September. It will be tested in court and its effectiveness will be debated in the future.

Notes:
1. Muslim fundamentalists are supposed to represent anything from 5,000 to 10,000 people of the four million Muslims living in France, of whom two million are French-born and the rest are immigrants.
2. Ni Putes Ni Soumises is a small group initiated by the Socialist Party and which was supposed to defend the burqua in working-class districts, but is actually not very active and whose leaders, Faouzi Attou and L’Enfant, is now a member of the Communist Party Central Committee.
3. The NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) is a new group formed by the Trotskyists and which is supposed to participate to Sarkozy’s government.
Union weakness gives Abbott his chance

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Australia's federal election on 21 August shows a strange face of the liberal government. The Liberal leader, Tony Abbott, is a Catholic, a monarchist, anti-abortion, anti-gay, an apartheid and Male chauvinist. His disdain of the rights of indigenous Australians, someone who believes that climate change “is crap”, therefore it's fine to be reckless about trash-ing the environment.

He makes a story about “reducing government debt” (code-word for cutting social provision) when Australia, “exposures” of real and alleged bits of mismanagement by the Labor government, he has been a big push to economic stimulus spending by taxing the mining companies which had made huge profits from a pumped-up Chinese market.

The mining companies and the media launched a huge campaign against the Labor government, accusing it of threatening mining jobs.

The shocking thing is that the labor movement has been incapable of countering that campaign.

On the back of that campaign, Labor ousted Kevin Rudd on 24 June and put in Julia Gillard as leader.

The leadership switch was followed by Labor rising in the opinion polls, but, in August, that rise quickly disappeared.

The fundamental weakness giving Abbott his chance is the lack of political ambition of the unions (including the “left” unions) and the ALP’s official “left” wing.

Industrial action has been at a low level. Strike-days are down to about 30,000 a quarter, compared to about 100,000 in 2004, and about 200,000 at the turn of the century.

Labor has repealed the Liberals’ attacks on public institutions, only in a very limited way, but the unions have toned down their demands enormously since Labor took office. The unions have about 50% of the vote in every state conference of the ALP, and thus about 50% say in the federal government, but even the left unions have done nothing to use that vote to push the earlier demands.

The union leaders have been seeking other considerations under cries about preventing a Liberal return to office.

For example in New South Wales a strong union campaign against electricity privatisation, but Labor premier Morris Iemma to resign in favour of a Labor “leftist”, Nathan Rees, in the wake of the economic crisis.

In December 2009 Rees was ousted by another Labor right-wing, Kristina Keneally, and she looks likely to be ousted by the Liberals soon.

In the latest state opinion polls, Labor in NSW is running at 25% against 46% for the coalition.

Tony Abbott}

Come on our solidarity delegation!

The AWL intends to organise a solidarity delegation to Israel and Palestine in the second half of November 2009.

We want to promote the “other” Palestine and the “other” Israel — the people who are seeking to organise themselves, from Palestinian women and queer activists to Israel’s refuser movement and people who are in solidarity with the people of the West Bank, and expelled Hamas from the administration. We want to organise across the many different, but related, struggles.

The AWL leaders are discussing the possibility of a solidarity delegation to Israel and Palestine.

The AWL hopes to organise a delegation in November 2009.

If you want to come with us get in touch. (You don't have to agree with every detail of our policy on Israel-Palestine or our working-class organisations on both sides of the divide. Here are the basic elements of a “third camp” which can champion Palestinian liberation on the basis of unity and reconciliation between the two peoples. These forces are weak, and that is why they need our solidarity.

Last year, we brought Tamar Katz — a 19 year-old militant, recently released from prison — to the UK for a speaker tour. Tamar spoke to hundreds of people in cities, union branches and universities across the country. Now we are planning a delegation to visit Israel and Palestine, to make direct links and solidarity.

This will be in line with the AWL's policy on Palestine, which is to organise a delegation to the Palestinian state after the “two states solution” is achieved.

The AWL intends to organise a solidarity delegation to Israel and Palestine in the second half of November 2009.

If you want to come with us get in touch. (You don't have to agree with every detail of our policy on Israel-Palestine or our working-class organisations on both sides of the divide. Here are the basic elements of a “third camp” which can champion Palestinian liberation on the basis of unity and reconciliation between the two peoples. These forces are weak, and that is why they need our solidarity.

Last year, we brought Tamar Katz — a 19 year-old militant, recently released from prison — to the UK for a speaker tour. Tamar spoke to hundreds of people in cities, union branches and universities across the country. Now we are planning a delegation to visit Israel and Palestine, to make direct links and solidarity.

This will be in line with the AWL's policy on Palestine, which is to organise a delegation to the Palestinian state after the “two states solution” is achieved.

The AWL intends to organise a solidarity delegation to Israel and Palestine in the second half of November 2009.

If you want to come with us get in touch. (You don't have to agree with every detail of our policy on Israel-Palestine or our working-class organisations on both sides of the divide. Here are the basic elements of a “third camp” which can champion Palestinian liberation on the basis of unity and reconciliation between the two peoples. These forces are weak, and that is why they need our solidarity.

Last year, we brought Tamar Katz — a 19 year-old militant, recently released from prison — to the UK for a speaker tour. Tamar spoke to hundreds of people in cities, union branches and universities across the country. Now we are planning a delegation to visit Israel and Palestine, to make direct links and solidarity.

This will be in line with the AWL's policy on Palestine, which is to organise a delegation to the Palestinian state after the “two states solution” is achieved.
FRENCH PENSION REFORM

Will the fightback start here?

Francois Coatal, from the editorial committee of the New Anticapitalist Party’s newspaper Tout est à nous, spoke to Ed Maltby about the French government’s attempt to simultaneously remove the legal right of French workers to retire at 60, and to force them to pay into their pension funds for a longer period.

EM: How is the struggle against the pension reforms going?
FC: The most important strike day will be 7 September — a general strike — and we expect it to be well-attended. Everyone is building for it, from the Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party) to the radical left. It is a demonstration against the pension bill but within that there are nuances of slogans and demands. What will be the next step is a more complicated issue. Furthermore, the pensions bill will be being debated in the National Assembly [lower house of the French parliament] in September.

EM: What is the strategy of the PS?
FC: The majority of the working class are against the reforms, they are very attached to their right to retire at 60. However not everyone thinks we can maintain the current 40-year pension payment period.
The PS has basically accepted the extension of the pension payment period, but they are formally for the defence of the right to retirement at 60. That is platonic; it does not sit with an extension of the years of payment [cotisations]. But it gives us a fragile framework for a united front. The NPA is for the defence of the 40-year payment period — and we call for it to be shortened to 37 years. The PCF (Socialist/Communist Party) formally shares our position.

EM: What is the NPA’s strategy?
FC: We want a big mobilisation for 7 September to fight against fatalism; to prove that it is possible to fight against the bill, but we argue for a strategy of escalation. We argue that a big strike day every two months is not sufficient. If the 7th is a success, we will need to follow up rapidly.

EM: Which sector might go into further action?
FC: The best organised sector in France is transport. They have the right to retire at 55 years. But they have left that these reforms will eventually get them, despite their relative advantage. First the private sector, then the public sector, then transport workers will be hit by this reform.

In 1995 the public transport workers had their pensions attacked and they saved them. In 2003, in the struggle over public sector pensions, the transport workers thought they were safe, and they partied in the movement but not so much. And now they understand the idea that even if they are not being directly attacked, they will still be hurt by the reform.
The air traffic controllers were mobilised around a struggle against a European directive which attacked their conditions. There is an atmosphere of discontent among them, but not around pensions.

EM: Has there been any fall in work-class combativity?
FC: If we take the overall figures, it is doubtless that there has been a fall in combativity. But this has taken place over 20 years. Year on year there is a fall, and then on occasion there are very big movements.

In recent years there have been many small conflicts, often over sackings and very defensive questions. The big movements have been centralised and organised.

EM: What is the NPA’s strategy? fc: The NPA has not taken a decision to extend the action from 8 September — not just building for 7 September. So, either that a given sector could have continued strike action, or attempting to rapidly call another strike day, faster than the union leadership will want. The idea is to get a movement with credibility.
The NPA has not taken a decision to not have union fractions, but nor have we taken a decision to have them. We have a tradition of respecting the independence of trade unions. It is an old tradition and an old debate on the French condition and an old debate on the French unions.

EM: Has the NPA union activity organised?
The NPA organises discussion meetings of NPA militants sector-by-sector to exchange ideas; they do not take decisions. There is no common discipline in the sense of having a “union fraction”.

We are arguing for discussions in unions about extending the action from 8 September — not just building for 7 September. So, either that a given sector could have continued strike action, or attempting to rapidly call another strike day, faster than the union leadership will want. The idea is to get a movement with credibility.
The NPA has not taken a decision to not have union fractions, but nor have we taken a decision to have them. We have a tradition of respecting the independence of trade unions. It is an old tradition and an old debate on the French condition and an old debate on the French unions.

EM: What about other ruling-class attacks?
FC: The other big attack is budget austerity, which means cuts in public services. That means cutting jobs above all. This is done on the basis of natural wastage, which we replace for every two who retire. The two biggest sectors are schools and hospitals. The historically more combative sector is schools, where a strike is being planned for October. But in the hospitals, we don’t know exactly what any of the job cuts are going to fall and staff are more difficult to organise because of that.

There is a sharpening of attacks on immigration. This summer, the major target has been rather than Arabs or Africans, has been against Roma. The government uses the police to attack the mobile encampments of Roma, to break them up, force them elsewhere, where they are attacked again. A movement to defend the Roma is being set up.

The other big conflicts, the biggest sector are the schools and hospitals, which are the most accessible, because they are public services and therefore easily mobilisable.

BY IRA BERKOVIC
UKRAINE

Ukrainian miners employed by Ferreexo PLC, one of the biggest ore mining companies in the world, have struck over 40 times to reject contracts which would, amongst other things, increase their retirement age by 5 years and cut 10 days from their holiday entitlement.

Ferreexo is notorious for cutting workers’ working hours and endangering workers’ safety in order to keep profits up; truckers working for the company were told to break the legal speed limit in order to fill quotas on time, and the working day was increased from 8 to 12 hours. The strikes’ demands include an increase of wages by at least 50% and the lowering of daily and monthly output quotas to fit the safety requirements and actual human abilities.

• For more information, including information on how to send protest letters to Ferreexo bosses and solidarity messages to the miners, visit tinyurl.com/ukraineminers

BANGLADESH

Millions of garment workers in Bangladesh, one of the world’s major centres for sweatshop textile production, have struck against poverty pay. Apathy at work is now the majority of Bangladesh’s exports, the country is such an attractive prospect for textile industry bosses because its minimum wage, just 12 cents/hour, is one of the lowest in the world. Although the government has promised an increase to $4.3/month, this is not enough to match recent increases in food prices. Striking workers are demanding an increase to $7.2/month.

The response from bosses and security forces has been fierce, with leading union organisers victimised and threatened. One workers’ leader, Amirul Islam, was detained and tortured until he signed a statement confessing to “inciting worker unrest.”

• For more info, see tinyurl.com/laboursrstartbangladesh

PAKISTAN

Powerloom workers in Faisalabad, one of Pakistan’s major industrial cities, have won a huge victory following a massive strike. Many employers refused to enforce new government legislation

isolation increasing private sector pay by 17%, so when factory bosses missed the deadline for delivering the increase 250,000 workers in Faisalabad walked out.

Their strike sparked protest actions in Lahore and elsewhere in the country. Following a week-long strike, which saw over 100,000 workers arrested, employers capitulated, delivering the 17% increase. The strike is part of a growing pattern of workers’ militancy across Pakistan which will continue to develop as workers assert themselves against ruling-class attempts to keep them at the sharp end of economic, social and environmental crises.

• For more info, see the Labour Party of Pakistan’s report at tinyurl.com/24kowrk
Pat Longman, 1950-2010

Pat Longman, a revolutionary socialist for 44 years and an activist in the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty tendency for most of 39 years, died on 2 August 2010, at the age of 59, from chronic liver disease.

Revolutionary politics and organisation are, wrote Trotsky in the Transitional Programme: ‘‘on the shoulders’’ of one ‘‘generation’’ of activists to another.

With Pat’s death, we have lost one of the surviving few pairs of shoulders that have carried the programme and the organisation of the AWL tendency through from the 1960s generation to today.

Here we print recollections of Pat and reflections on her political life by three of her comrades. We are conscious that this is but a partial representation — Pat’s life involved so many things. And so we invite other comrades and political activists who knew and worked with Pat to write more. We will print any contributions in our next issue. We would also like to gather further contributions together in time for the memorial meeting to be held for Pat on Saturday 11 September (see page 15).

Unfortunately Pat did not write much although what she wrote was always extremely sharp. We also print here one of her longest articles — a polemic against Sheila Rowbotham’s 1979 article ‘‘The Women’s Movement and the Struggle for Socialism’’.

We send our condolences to Pat’s daughter Ann and to all Pat’s very large range of friends.

In thinking of Pat we collect the words we had printed on the membership card of our tendency at the time when Pat joined us:

“Our deepest possession is life. It is given to us but once, and we must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, we might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world — the fight for the Liberation of Humanity.”

A working-class feminist on Islington Council

In 1982, Pat successfully stood in St. George’s ward for election to Islington borough council. Socialist Organiser, the predecessor of Workers’ Liberty, was active in the Labour Party at the time. The following extract is taken from an interview with Pat from Socialist Organiser No. 85, May 6 1982. As workers again face a Tory government seeking to make savage cuts, our class will need councillors like Pat who will argue for councils to refuse to pass on the costs that Tory central government wants them to make.

We need Labour councillors prepared to stand up to the Tories — to refuse to pass on the cuts or to pass on the attacks in the form of increases in rents and rates. It’s no good arguing for these policies in Labour Party meetings unless you are also prepared to put forward candidates who will fight for the policies, and replace the councillors who collaborate with the Tories. It is important also that more women are prepared to stand for the council and to fight for women’s rights.

One of the main points of the Islington Labour manifesto is to decentralise to build up neighbourhood groups and to provide on-the-spot help with maintenance and repairs. We want to put more control into the hands of those who are directly affected by council services.

A Labour council must also refuse to police council workers in the usual management role. Instead, we want to strengthen union organisation and to act as a team with them in fighting the Tories.

The Islington Labour Parties, like many others, have been very much affected over recent years by women active in the women’s movement or influenced by it who have come into the Party, established strong women’s sections, and played a big role in the left.

The fact that many of the Labour candidates standing this time round support women’s rights and have been active in the women’s movement will make a big difference in terms of taking up women’s issues and helping women to organise to fight for their own demands.

In Lambeth, Ted Knight justified rate rises by saying he had to buy time until the big battalions of state took over. The Islington Labour Party, like many others, have been very much affected over recent years by women active in the women’s movement or influenced by it who have come into the Party.

Whether from the left or right — the most ‘‘forthright’’ condemnation that passed her lips was always ‘‘they just don’t seem to get it’’! This phrase was always accompanied by a frown and a shake of the head.

Pat ‘‘got it’’. She understood this world as most people don’t; she fought and struggled to re-make it. Along the way, she displayed an almost super-human ability to make and keep friends.

Pat’s friends will remember her politics, but like me they will remember other things: the half-finished chocolate cake always lurking in the kitchen, her love of cats, the piles of crime fiction, and the Bruce Springsteen tape in that little red car, her kindness and understanding.

We will remember Pat for things big and small: combined, they made her into the person we loved, cared for and respected.

Pat was a socialist from the age of fifteen and a working-class trade union militant for over forty years — this is not a small thing. Pat was physically small but her life-long commitment to her class and its liberation was the larger of a huge personal quality.

We will miss her greatly.

MEMORIAL

A lifetime of battles

By Tom Unterrainer

“How would it be if salvation were ready to our hand, and could without great labour be found, that it should be by almost all men neglected? But all things excellent are prepared for the eyes of theubrevis (Spinoza)”.

For her entire adult life, our friend and comrade Pat was a revolutionary socialist. For nearly all of those thirty-nine years, she was a member of one particular socialist tendency which is known today as the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty.

For Pat and the comrades in the AWL, the ‘‘salvation’’ of which Spinoza wrote is not of the mysterious, ‘‘granted-from-above’’ variety. ‘‘Salvation’’ for us will be the AWL tendency through from the 1960s generation to today.

In 1982, Pat successfully stood in St. George’s ward on Islington Council. She was a member of one of the strongest women’s sections in the country and played a big role in the left.

Pat was a revolutionary socialist. For nearly all of those thirty-nine years, she was a member of one particular socialist tendency which is known today as the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty.

That Pat remained active and committed for four decades and more makes her very rare indeed. That she remained in the same organisation makes her rarer still.

First met Pat eight years ago. It was in a pub behind the International Community Centre in Nottingham. Amongst a host of hot-headed, brash, over-confident and beer-fuelled men (me included) sat a short, thin, very quiet woman drinking orange juice or something similar. I had no idea who she was, apart from the fact that she was a member of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty.

Before we’d descended on the pub, those gathered had been debating what attitude socialists should take to the European Union. I’d spoken on behalf of the Socialist Worker Party — of which I was a member at the time — against a member of the AWL. The discussion got rather heated and became even more heated in the pub.

Little did I know that more than thirty years before this confrontation a twenty-year old Pat — already five years in the socialist movement — joined the establishment strong women’s sections, and played a big role in the left.

The fact that many of the Labour candidates standing this time round support women’s rights and have been active in the women’s movement will make a big difference in terms of taking up women’s issues and helping women to organise to fight for their own demands.

In Lambeth, Ted Knight justified rate rises by saying he had to buy time until the big battalions of state took over. The Islington Labour Party, like many others, have been very much affected over recent years by women active in the women’s movement or influenced by it who have come into the Party.

Whether from the left or right — the most ‘‘forthright’’ condemnation that passed her lips was always ‘‘they just don’t seem to get it’’! This phrase was always accompanied by a frown and a shake of the head.

Pat ‘‘got it’’. She understood this world as most people don’t; she fought and struggled to re-make it. Along the way, she displayed an almost super-human ability to make and keep friends.

Pat’s friends will remember her politics, but like me they will remember other things: the half-finished chocolate cake always lurking in the kitchen, her love of cats, the piles of crime fiction, and the Bruce Springsteen tape in that little red car, her kindness and understanding.

We will remember Pat for things big and small: combined, they made her into the person we loved, cared for and respected.

Pat was a socialist from the age of fifteen and a working-class trade union militant for over forty years — this is not a small thing. Pat was physically small but her life-long commitment to her class and its liberation was the larger of a huge personal quality.

We will miss her greatly.
PAT LONGMAN

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Pat was born on 21 December 1950 into a working-class family in Enfield, north London. He was one of a number of working-class activists in the print industry, though not particularly active in politics. Pat joined the then-lively Labour Party youth movement in 1966, and then IS (the forerunner of the SWP). She left school early and first went to a secretarial college in London, Pat took it for granted that she would choose the printing industry, working at the Financial Times and then in typesetting firms. She was a woman of unexpected strengths. Under the different tenant, there was a strip of steel.

Pat was a good public speaker even to very large audiences. She was an effective activist in unions and campaigns. In the 1990s, while working in Workhop, she was involved in a workplace occupation to stop the closure of the training centre where she was then working. It is a great pity that she did not write more, for everything she wrote was lucid and crisp. Pat was a “Marxist intellectual”. It was characteristic of her that, instead of passively accepting a limitation, in 2008, already suffering from the disease that would kill her, she took on the job of organising her AWL branch, and carried it through until she was forced to withdraw by worsening health.

The way Pat joined our tendency, which was also the way I first met her, tells us a lot about her. It was early October 1971. Pat was still three months short of her 21st birthday. We were organised as the Trotskyist Tendency inside IS (forerunner of the SWP). The Tendency had just launched a campaign to expel us — triggered by our active dissent from their switch to a “capitalist” form to good purpose. We were partly forced into the tendency into a big conference of the National Abortion Campaign. There was no political fight. Just a shakiness over the issue of clapping for or against the Labour Party. As with most such fights, it was petty. Most of the speaking was done by relatively few people on one side, or one of the theorists for the other committee that has to lead the organisation day by day and week by week.

Pat was already billed to speak at the school. When her turn came, she covered her planned topic, but also made her speech a crisp polemic for a serious orientation to the Labour Party.

On the basis of her role in that faction fight, as well as her activity in the union and in the feminist movement, Pat was elected to serve for a while on our organisation’s Executive Committee. Pat was as far from the hostile caricature as you can imagine: not only slight of figure, but mild-mannered, with a delicate brain and a will of steel on important issues. We talked for two hours. Pat did not dither. She opposed the expulsion and she joined our tendency then and there. The rest of the branch were shocked, and applied what pressure they could.

There was nothing Stalinist. The worst abuse, probably, consisted in failing meeting arrangements to stop a group of workers from the local Michelin factory who had recently joined IS/SWP from ever meeting Pat or me, and then, at the meeting to elect delegates to the IS/SWP conference, announcing that those members, absent from the meeting because (by design) it clashed with their shifts, were “disciplined IS members” and so must be presumed to vote with the majority. However, revolutionary politics was more intense in 1971 than it is in 2010, and the pressure put on Pat was probably greater than anything anyone will experience in an activist situation. That is mostly hostile caricature, but worsening health.

In fact, the tables would be turned. Pat and I eventually made contact with the most active of the Michelin workers, Peter Smith, and Pat would join our tendency and be Pat’s partner for some years. The IS/SWP branch leadership soon went into opposition within IS/SWP and in 1975 and joining our tendency for a period. Two blips would follow in Pat’s political trajectory. They demonstrate. I guess, that her commitment to our politics was never just a matter of inertia or accumulating routine: she checked out alternatives and then re-confirmed herself.

In 1972-3, having split up with her IMG boyfriend, she joined the IMG for a brief time before rejoining us. Again, the tables would be turned: the then-leading IMG member who won her over, Tony Whelan, would, within two years quit the IMG with a group of co-thinkers and, for a while, work closely with our tendency.

For a while from the end of the 1980s, Pat stepped back from organised Trotskyist activity. She had moved from London, to Sheffield and then Workhop, and had sole care of her daughter Anna, who is now herself an AWL sympathiser.

In the 1990s, living in an area where there was no AWL presence but an affiliate local SWP branch, she experimented very briefly with joining the SWP. But, over the long run and in basics, her commitment of 1971, made without fuss or drama, was as steady as her basic commitment of 1966. A few other episodes tell us about Pat’s character. In 1974 she was the organiser of our activity in the then-lively feminist movement. She had been elected organiser because, even at the age of 23, she was by common consent our most experienced, competent, and politically sharp activist in the movement. She had been elected organiser.

Pat was silent, but after the end of the meeting she agreed to talk to me. If I’d known some more ground, I might have thought it wasted effort even to ask her to talk. She asked why the AWL branch.

Because of her youth and her different manner, Pat had a status in the branch like that of a favoured little sister in a big family. She was not a dissident or malcontent. If she should become discontented, then the obvious place for her to go was not our tendency: her current boyfriend was a prominent and articulate member of the International Marxist Group (forerunner of today’s Socialist Resistance: in those days, a live party). Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.

Pat was already silent, but after the end of the meeting she tells us a lot about her. I would guess her other friends valued her, as I did.
The following article is Pat’s polemic, which is still very relevant, against Sheila Rowbotham’s 1979 article “The Women’s Movement and Organising for Socialism,” published in the well known collection, Beyond the Fragments.

A noticeable feature of the last few years has been the number of people who reject the Leninist conception of the party and looked for other forms of organisation. This rejection has been particularly manifest in the women’s movement where such ideas were able to gain acceptance partly because of the left’s initial hostility to the movement.

The socialist-feminist current which appeared during the time of the Working Women’s Charter Campaign laid down its aim as producing a synthesis of socialism and feminism. For some time the ideas of the socialist-feminist current remained vague; the book entitled “Beyond the Fragments,” and particularly the essay by Sheila Rowbotham, is to be welcomed, for in some ways it returns again the task of coming to grips with the criticism that many socialist-feminists (and others) have of the left.

Sheila Rowbotham’s article is written from a viewpoint in which the class struggle is largely absent. Her polemic against Leninist forms of organisation takes the form of a struggle for libertarianism against authoritarian forms of organisation. Her rejection of the need for a revolutionary party flows from her dismissal of the need for a revolutionary theory and a rejection of scientific Marxism.

Although she sometimes sees the need for organisation structures, she consistently dismisses the political role of the party; and although she warns against extreme subjectivism, she nevertheless raises subjectivity to the highest level and sees it as the guiding force for political activity.

For Sheila, Leninism can’t provide guidance for building an organisation because it excludes the experience of women’s and the working class’s struggle. It negates the political experience which this very women’s movement encapsulates. A necessary precondition for properly relating to the working class is, according to Sheila Rowbotham, an open and flexible approach to other people’s subjective experiences.

Sheila Rowbotham’s anti-Leninism and anti-Trotskyst enthusiasm flow from her experience of left organisations. However, one of the problems of the essay is that the criticisms of Leninism and Trotskyism become difficult to disentangle from her criticism of particular organisations. Therefore, the lack of democracy within the International Socialism Group (now SWP) is proof that Leninism is inherently undemocratic. Its turn to democratic centralism in the late 1960s is given as the reason for its inability to take up the question of women’s oppression, not its underestimation of the political role of the party and its workerist attitudes. Sheila Rowbotham is unable to understand this because she misunderstands the nature of the working-class movement and everything she dismisses herself.

Sheila Rowbotham joined the International Socialism Group in the 1960s when it had a loose federalist structure. The reasons she cites for doing so are specifically its political openness and flexibility. Organisational and political flexibility is needed to respond quickly to the class struggle. However, sometimes it can be used as an excuse not for providing a lead to the class but for tail-ending it and capitulating to backward and chauvinist ideas. Sheila rejects the idea that democratic centralism can provide flexibility and the maximum unity in action, so that political theories can be tested in struggle. She does not see that the absence of such unity leads to iner-tia and a lack of political focus.

Such a disciplined and unified political approach can only be achieved, of course, by the maximum of organisational and democracy possible. Democratic centralism is absolutely vital to a well-functioning political organisation. Without it political debate is stifled and political decisions remain undrawn.

Sheila replaces political theory by an almost-religious belief about subjective experiences. Talking about the women’s movement, she says: “We have stressed for instance the closeness and protection of a small group, and the feelings of sisterhood. Within the small group it has been important that every woman has space and air for her feelings and ideas to grow. The assumption is that there isn’t a single correctness which can be learnt off by heart and passed on by poking people with it. It is rather that we know our feeli-
ings and ideas move and transform themselves in relation to other women.

“We all need to express and contribute...”

Sheila Rowbotham appears to believe that the less well thought-out ideas are and the more spontaneous the better. Difficulties are experienced by women because of their conditioning, particularly in analysing ideas and articulating their thoughts. However, the last thing we need to is glorify these difficulties and mystify them under the guise of sisterhood.

Sheila Rowbotham sees subjective experiences as being pure and honest. However, she never questions the need to take up all forms of oppression. She primarily sees the working class revolution as more by this than how we relate to each other and the need to take up all forms of oppression. She believes that the working class revolution as more by this than how we relate to each other and the need to take up all forms of oppression.

Sheila Rowbotham’s reference to the Trotskyist tradition — the very tradition that Sheila Rowbotham has defended — is not to deny the possibility of rethinking together a strategy of socialism in advanced capitalism which includes members of the CP. Sheila Rowbotham emphatically emphasizes that the personal is political. But she seems to mean more by this than how we relate to each other and the need to take up all forms of oppression.

The criticisms of the party and the dismissal of political theory as a basis for the rejection of the revolutionary role of the working class. This necessarily curtailed the capacity to question the Marxist theory of the working class. The working class becomes just one of the allies of the women’s movement and part of the broad democratic alliance. All of it is linked to a thoroughly reformist strategy that the road to socialism will be accomplished peacefully and through the ballot box.

The working class and women play the role of voting fodder and their struggle is relegated to the needs of the parliamentary strategy.

The tragic part of it [all] is that Sheila Rowbotham ends up implicitly supporting the political current which sees all others stilled and destroys the self-activity of the working class. This necessarily curtailed the capacity to question the Marxist theory of the working class. The working class becomes just one of the allies of the women’s movement and part of the broad democratic alliance. All of it is linked to a thoroughly reformist strategy that the road to socialism will be accomplished peacefully and through the ballot box.

The working class and women play the role of voting fodder and their struggle is relegated to the needs of the parliamentary strategy.

The tragic part of it [all] is that Sheila Rowbotham ends up implicitly supporting the political current which sees all others stilled and destroys the self-activity of the working class. This necessarily curtailed the capacity to question the Marxist theory of the working class. The working class becomes just one of the allies of the women’s movement and part of the broad democratic alliance. All of it is linked to a thoroughly reformist strategy that the road to socialism will be accomplished peacefully and through the ballot box.

The tragic part of it [all] is that Sheila Rowbotham ends up implicitly supporting the political current which sees all others stilled and destroys the self-activity of the working class. This necessarily curtailed the capacity to question the Marxist theory of the working class. The working class becomes just one of the allies of the women’s movement and part of the broad democratic alliance. All of it is linked to a thoroughly reformist strategy that the road to socialism will be accomplished peacefully and through the ballot box.
Union leader Jimmy Reid, who led the long-running occupation of Upper Clyde shipyards in 1971-72, has died. Jim Denham comment on his political career.

At the outset define what time an by alienation. It is the occupation of Upper Clydeshipyards in 1971-72, has attitudes. Alienation expresses itselfindifferent ways often describe asthe criminalantisocialbehaviour of a cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind talism.

The cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind talism.

The cry of men who feel themselves the victims of blind talism.

The whole must be be remembered because he isa symbol of the pre-cond ition for everyone's development.

The whole must be be remembered because he isa symbol of the pre-cond ition for everyone's development.

This is a personal tragedy. It's a socialcrime. The flow -ering of each individual’s personality and talents is the pre-condition for everyone’s development.

This is a personal tragedy. It's a socialcrime. The flow -ering of each individual’s personality and talents is the pre-condition for everyone’s development.

The whole must be be remembered because he isa symbol of the pre-cond ition for everyone's development.
No revolution without us!

BY KATHERINE McMATHON

“No revolution without us! An army of lovers cannot lose! All power to the people!” (Statement from the Male Homosexual Workshop at the Black Panthers’ Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention)

The Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was set up forty years ago. For a group that lasted only three years in Britain, it is remembered with an impressive amount of respect and admiration. It was around almost twenty years before I was born, yet it is still inspiring and important to LGBT and Queer activists today, who still deal with many of the same issues — assimilation, liberation and revolution — within LGBTQ activism.

The first GLF was formed after the New York Stonewall Riots, of late June, 1969. It is curious that a single event in a single city is cited so often as the beginning of the movement for gay liberation both in the US and the UK. After all one must not forget the incredibly important work done before Stonewall by groups such as the Mattachine Society in the US and the Committee for Homosexual Equality in the UK. Male homosexuality was made legal in the UK just two years before Stonewall happened, and the Mattachine Society made a valuable start in creating an environment in which lesbians and gay men could begin to fight for their rights.

However, the key word in understanding Stonewall’s importance is “liberation.” Previously, the homosexual movements (as they were often known in an attempt to take the focus off sex) had argued that gay people were just like straight people; that they would be “good citizens,” or “just like straight people.” After Stonewall, it seemed more possible to fight for their rights.

Three items of “gender appropriate” clothing was liable to be arrested, and the police began to bundle people into their vans. There are various speculations about why a relatively non-political occasion was turned into a riot, but something snapped. People began fighting back against the police. Three nights of rioting followed.

Those who had been involved in various other movements — particularly the feminist and anti-Vietnam war movements — who were sick of hiding their sexuality in their other political activities and sick of hiding their other political affiliations if they were involved in any gay activism, began to organise. The Mattachine Society showed their colours by putting up posters on the boarded up front of the Stonewall Inn exhorting their fellow homosexuals to stop being disruptive; besiege these, other posters called for meetings to begin to fight more concretely for liberation.

Thus the GLF was born. It was explicitly and determinedly about fighting for liberation, for linking up the struggles of different oppressed groups, and refusing to be assimilated into oppressive, capitalist, patriarchal and racist society. It was allied with the Black Panthers. The GLF’s solidarity and refusal to accept the homophobia in the movement led to Harry Newton’s eventual statement of support for gay liberation. They were also allied, in various ways, with the feminist movement, and various local working-class struggles, along with the New Left and anti-war movement.

The London GLF began after two London activists visited the US, attended some GLF meetings, and decided to form a group in London. The meetings began at the London School of Economics and grew spectacularly, moving home several times to accommodate everyone and proliferating into numerous working groups. It did a whole variety of actions, showing a particular fondness for impressive theatrical direct action, as well as more traditional forms of protest.

One particularly memorable protest saw the GLF link up with a variety of other left groups to protest against the “Festival of Light,” a Christian effort to turn back perceived moral degeneration. The GLF infiltrated the Festival of Light office, forged tickets to the opening gala, and snuck in about 150 people with a whole variety of exciting tricks up their sleeves. A group dressed as nuns released mice into the hall; one person (who the stewards took a long time to notice) dressed as a bishop told people “don’t worry sister, keep on singing”; a same-sex kiss-in on the balcony; a banner drop proclaiming “Cliff Richard for Queen!” (Cliff Richard being one of the festival’s patrons); copious heckling. These actions were brilliant for their subversion, their humour and their inventiveness, but they would not have meant nearly as much had the activists not spent the aftermath talking to people outside, holding impromptu discussions with people who were attending.

The GLF often worked with other groups — marching against the Tory government’s Industrial Relations Bill in 1971, joining feminist groups in protests against the Miss World competition. They were usually relegated in the back of marches, but they did march.

People came from all sorts of different activist backgrounds, which had the huge advantage of meaning that the actions that came out of it were edgy and incredibly creative, but had the disadvantage of meaning that, after a while, cracks began to appear. Riffs over gender issues and the role of lifestyle politics meant that the GLF as a cohesive organisation pulled itself apart after only three years.

In that three years, however, it laid the groundwork for liberationist LGBTQ activism that still has a legacy today; many of its working groups turned into other groups that did valuable work as well. Its legacy was seen in the Lesbians and Gay Men Support the Miners groups during the miners’ strike — which was reciprocated three years later by miners’ support for the campaign against Section 28. Today, the various events which protest against the commercialisation and depoliticisation of Pride are the continuation of the start that the GLF made.

It is striking that, 40 years later, the GLF’s demands are still relevant. While it is undeniable that huge gains have been made, LGBTQ activists who see the links between capitalism, sexism and heterosexism still face a struggle. Pride marches are expensive, commercial and sponsored by big business, and have lost organisational connection with communities; the big issues of the day revolve around assimilation demands like gay marriage. When the largest and most conservative LGBT (they explicitly leave out the T and Q) organisation takes the name of Stonewall and holds training sessions on why employing gay people is good for business, it is increasingly important to remember that Stonewall was a riot, and that it led to a radical move of people who refused to try to assimilate, and who desired to create a new world in alliance with all other oppressed groups.

• Workers’ Liberty pamphlet Radical Claims: Sexuality and Class Politics discusses these issues: www.workersliberty.org/publications/workers-liberty-pamphlets/radical-claims;
• Reclaim the Scene is a free and political alternative to the commercial, pay-to-enter Manchester Pride (weekend of 28 August). The basic demands are: an accessible, friendly and welcoming “scene”; Pride to be free (are we too poor to be gay?); LGBTQ rights to top the Pride and the scene’s agenda.

We will be forming a political bloc on the parade, and there will be a free post-parade picnic with political speakers, music, kids’ entertainment, LGBTQ films, art, and stalls at UMIST Campus on Sackville Street in Manchester, from 2-9pm on 28 August. All welcome! More information at www.reclaimsitescene.com

70 years on: celebrating Leon Trotsky’s revolutionary life

7pm, Tuesday 21 September
University of London Union, Malet Street

Speakers include:
Sean Matgamna (Workers’ Liberty), John McDonnell MP, Farooq Tariq (Labour Party Pakistan), Kim Moody (American union activist and author), speaker from France’s New Anti-capitalist Party

“For 43 years of my conscious life I have been a revolutionary; and for 42 I have fought under the banner of Marxism. If I were to begin all over again, I would try to avoid making this or that mistake, but the main course of my life would remain unchanged. My faith in the communist future of mankind is not less ardent, Indeed it is firmer today, than it was in the days of my youth.”

THE GAY LIBERATION FRONT, 40 YEARS ON

No revolution without us!
Lessons in winning “reform from below”

London Underground RMT activist Becky Crocker reviews the success and failure of Reform in Transport Workers Union Local 100, by Steve Downs.

**This pamphlet tells the story of New Directions (ND), a rank and file group within the New York Local of the Transport Workers Union, which represents transport workers in New York, including on the subway system. Written by Steve Downs of the socialist group Solidarity, it focuses on the problem of how to achieve reform within unions.**

After 15 years in opposition, ND fell apart very shortly after its people got elected to run the Local in 2000. For Alliance for Workers’ Liberty activists attempting to reform our own unions, ND’s story is very relevant.

The author almost seems to take for granted the explosions of militancy that form the backdrop to this story. Given leadership, even unofficial leadership, NY transit workers have staged 10,000-strong demonstrations and unofficial strikes. It makes us wonder whether a high level of militancy is necessary for a real rank and file shake-up of the unions. What do socialists do in the absence of such militancy?

It is a shame that the pamphlet is almost silent about the role of the socialist group behind ND. We could learn a lot about how to organise and how a small socialist group can be a lever for wider change. It is possible that a different method of organising could be a factor in the collapse of ND. They seem to have submerged themselves in ND at the expense of their political identity, making it easier for conservative elements to dismantle it from within.

The main events in the story of New Directions:

1. 1985. HOW bulletin started by members of what would become Solidarity. It broke the monopoly of the union leadership on information, encouraged all grades to stick together and campaigned, e.g. encouraged people to refuse to work on safety grounds and “out of title.” Management’s attempt to make operators work as conductors was quashed when a supporter of Hell on Wheels refused to open and close doors and received no punishment.

2. 1988. HOW joined with an African-American group, the African Society, to form New Directions. The pamphlet describes their work as: “leading Local 100 members in resisting the New York City Transit Authority’s demands for contract concessions and a greater control of the workforce, opposing the union leadership’s acquiescence to those demands and fighting for greater union democracy.” They won 22% of the vote in their first bid for Local President and won three seats on the Local Executive.

3. 1992. ND changed from an electoral coalition to a membership caucus with HOW as its newsletter. From 1994, ND began to look like a serious contender for control of the union, attractive to apolitical would-be reformers, like Roger Toussaint, who joined in 1997.

4. 2001. Roger Toussaint wins election for President; ND also wins three Local-wide positions, five VP’s and a majority of seats on the Local’s executive board.

5. Within a year. ND falls apart. Toussaint in effect shut it down by not attending meetings. He ran the Local with almost military authority. Toussaint campaigned weakly and negotiated an unsatisfactory contract in 2002. In 2005, Toussaint followed a solid 60-hour strike for a decent contract by ordering members back to work and negotiating major concessions. When members rejected the contract, Toussaint contemptuously ordered another vote, until it was accepted.

**CHANGE FROM BELOW**

The pamphlet describes the central factor in the collapse of the ND as the “long-running conflict within the caucus over the strategy for rebuilding and reforming Local 100. Specifically… between a strategy of reform from above and… from below.”

Downs, the writer of this pamphlet, always pushed “reform from below”: “for greater organisation on the job and the ability to replace their officers.” Replacing top officers he says, “would not be enough.”

One example: in 1992, when a proposed new contract would have eroded seniority benefits, ND launched a “vote no” campaign involving “rallies, large marches across Brooklyn Bridge, work slowdowns and extensive distribution of literature”. This “resulted in the first ever contract rejection in Local 100”. So ND used their focus around “organising on the job” to challenge the union leadership as well as management.

Another example: in 1999, ND exerted pressure to make sure the renewed contract did not include “givebacks”. Again they campaigned for organisation on the job, built mass demonstrations (a record 10,000 workers gathered outside the Metropolitan Transport Authority’s offices, chanting “strike”) and pushed for the first membership meeting for decades; 400 people attended and approved a strike vote.

Downs and his comrades wanted ND to be an active rank and file group. As well as propaganda and elections, it was to engage with members in ways that tangibly affected what happened in disputes. The pamphlet says little about how disruption at work was organised: some was due to their own actions, some to their influence.

The AWL shares this orientation towards the workplace because there we can interrupt the exploitative relationship between workers and management, build the confidence of workers and hit directly at management. A powerful and confident workforce is less easily controlled by union leaders who want to settle deals against our wishes.

The AWL is small. At the moment, we mostly make propaganda for rank and file action, rather than being able to organise large-scale demonstrations. ND shows what a rank and file movement can do if its forces are large and influential enough, although the day-to-day routine remains education and explanation.

**RUNNING IN ELECTIONS**

The pamphlet looks at the relationship between organisation on the job and another aspect of ND’s work, contesting elections.

This is relevant to AWL activists; we run for positions in our unions and in the Local once elected. We have to decide the past how to balance this with our workplace focus.

Downs says he and his comrades viewed contesting elections more as a chance to promote ND’s platform than as an end in itself. After winning more seats, they acknowledged the responsibilities of winning union posts. But also they felt that this was to support rank and file members and fight their corner in negotiations.

Others in the ND group felt that “little could be accomplished without first winning the top positions in the Local.” From 1994, “ND became attractive to low level officers… not committed to a long-term, reform from below strategy”. In 1998, after ND narrowly lost the union presidency, there was “a decisive shift within ND toward those who thought winning control of the top positions in the union mattered more than another rank and file group. The pamphlet states Roger Toussaint as Presidential candidate. He campaigned to clean up the Local from the leadership.

The pamphlet phrases the debate on elections as “change from above” or “change from below”. But it is not so simple. Running in elections is not an alternative strategy to building power in the workplace. Without getting a new leadership elected “from below”, there is a limit on what you can do to reform the union. Toussaint came “from below”. The problem was that ND sought electoral positions, but how ND ran the Local once elected.

**ELECTED LEADERSHIP AND RANK AND FILE**

Toussaint, once elected, severed himself from the rank and file movement that had given him a platform. He rejected any role for ND that might influence the Local, implying ND would be interfering with the work of elected officials. He and those around him effectively shut ND down when they ceased attending its meetings.

Toussaint ran the Local in a dictatorial manner. He made decisions about strikes without consulting the workers involved. Negotiations were not made more transparent. He appointed members of the executive onto the union payroll, which effectively bought him votes. He negotiated a compromise deal on health benefits in 2002 over the heads of the members.

It seems that ND did not ultimately collapse around the “reform from above or below” debate. It was more that Toussaint, after coming from below, abandoned his desire to reform. Plus, the left wing was not strong enough to bind or replace him.

The pamphlet concludes, “this case study… demonstrates how a union leadership, no matter how militant, that doesn’t see the necessity to build rank and file power can’t carry out what it would really like to do.” It seems more the case that the leadership didn’t want to effect much change.

The pamphlet poses the question of accountability, “who elects the leadership? the rank and file or the people who elected them, or the person above them in the union hierarchy?” The author of this pamphlet says that ND could have continued as “a place where active members and officers could meet to discuss what ‘building our union’ meant in practice and how to then organise on the job.”

But that would have required the leadership to feel in some way accountable to the rank and file movement which had got them there.
Questions about union militancy

The story of a 10,000 strong march across Brooklyn Bridge, successful slowdowns and illegal strikes (all strikes are illegal under New York law) contrasts vividly with what we see on London Underground, which is regarded as one of the most militantly active transport networks in Britain. Last time RMT on London Underground organised a protest, there were just five people and the Regional Council President dressed in a chicken suit!

The author of the pamphlet comments that the 1992 slowdowns to protect seniority rights were important for ND's development: “they showed conclusively that the membership was willing to fight”. The fact of having an angry workforce seems to be integral to the author’s idea of how to achieve union reform.

At one point of view we share with the AWL we want a militant and democratic membership, where we don’t just take action because our union leader Bob Crow says, but because we feel ownership and control of the action. Most of the action described in the pamphlet is organised independently and in defiance of the union leadership.

But how do we achieve this? Small socialist groups can’t at will control the level of militancy of thousands of workers. In a way, the pamphlet is least useful where it is most inspiring. We might want to replicate mass participation by workers, but there is no indication of the nuts and bolts of how these actions were organised. It doesn’t tell you what the union density was, whether the union meetings were organised around workshops, or branches, what methods were used.

Paradoxically, the explosions of militant action might be correlated with the union’s weakness. NY transit workers have obviously won some gains in the past, like pensions and health benefits, which they strike to maintain. But strikes and collective action are illegal; working conditions are described as “brutal”; when HOW started there was no Local-wide newspaper; shop stewards were scarce and agreements not enforced. There was a lot of managing the threat, workers are predominantly black and Latino and feel treated as second class citizens. In the big strike in 2005, it says “most pickets” aimed at “paying the MTA back for all the petty harassment they had endured over the years”.

In contrast, RMT is almost part of the London Underground institution. Union organisation has a character of “doing what the union says”, and that might be partly because of a relatively high level of organisation.

When Toussaint got elected, the pamphlet says, “members’ expectations were high. They thought they finally had a leadership that wouldn’t back down from a confrontation”. When the first dispute led by Toussaint was slow to kick off, however, “the membership did not mobilise on its own – as it had in the past when ND led the fight. Believing that they had a militant, strong leader at the head of their union, the members waited for direction from Toussaint.”

This only went so far. In 2005, Toussaint had to go ahead with a strike because the members’ high expectations made them determined. But in general, perhaps if the members have faith in a leadership that is perceived to be “left-wing”, that can make them more articulate.

So, what do we do?

If we can’t control the basic situation at will and can’t create the conditions in which to build a big, lively rank and file project, where do we start?

We, like Solidarity, are a small group of socialists, trying to influence the wider situation. It would be useful if the pamphlet talked more about the socialists involved in this project. We assume Steve Downs, Tim Schenkenberg, Naomi Allen, among others, are Solidarity members. Did they try to build their organisation by recruiting others? The pamphlet talks as though the agency within this situation was ND, not Solidarity.

When HOW became the newsletter of ND, Solidarity abandoned it completely. They ended up without a voice when Toussaint effectively shut down ND, and Hell on Wheels along with it. ND had allowed their voice to be controlled by people they didn’t trust. They started a new bulletin, Rank and File Advocate (RAFA), a year later.

More than that, the pamphlet talks as though Solidarity buried itself in pursuit of building a broader project. They describe a central plank of their politics as “building the union from below”; they are not explicit about their wider goals. If members of Solidarity had been more assertive as socialists, more might not have been achieved. But more might have been retrieved and learnt from Toussaint’s betrayal. The union bureaucracy, even confronted by a strong rank and file, is a robust part of holding together the capitalist order. There is a massive political battle ahead of any attempt at union reform as we confront the capitalist state and the place of the bureaucracy within it.

The pamphlet concludes that ND failed because the “top down” approach won out. Even if “top down” summed up all Roger Toussaint’s failings, the “top” of any organisation has its place in a capitalist society. It will need political understanding — and organisation — if we are to defeat it and achieve reform in our unions.

Thanks to Solidarity for copies of Hell on Wheels. To order the pamphlet visit www.solidarity-us.org/hellonwheels

Radio

 Useful Idiots

Dan Katz reviews Useful Idiots BBC World Service, Wednesday 12 August

The question that John Sweeney’s programme posed was interesting: why have so many seemingly intelligent people turned themselves into apologists for terrible, brutal, murderous regimes? Harold Pinter defended Slobodan Milosevic. Noam Chomsky declared that Pol Pot’s Cambodian genocide was a project of the Stalinist states and their outposts in Southeast Asia. Tony Benn doubted Solidarnosc’s trade union credentials. Jean-Paul Sartre refused to back an investigation into the 1970s massacre of political prisoners in China — and dutifully he repeated the lie. Anderson turned himself into a useful idiot for the British state which allowed at least 30 million people to starve.

Tony Benn doubted Solidarnosc’s trade union credentials. Jean-Paul Sartre refused to back an investigation into the 1970s massacre of political prisoners in China — and dutifully he repeated the lie. Anderson turned himself into a useful idiot for the British state which allowed at least 30 million people to starve.

The obsequiousness, bag carrying and platform-providing that Socialist Action use to manipulate labour movement figures in the UK.

Sweeney is less convincing when he presents right-winger comment. Bruce Anderson as a useful idiot for Pinochet’s Chilean fascist regime. What Anderson says is genuinely shocking: that the overthrow of democracy and murder of “less than 4000” people (including some who were “innocent”) was a price worth paying to stop the socialist revolution.

Sweeney considers his relationship with Press TV it is pretty stupid (because it admits Press TV is a voice of the Iranian state, simply alleging that the Cultural Revolution destroyed the Chinese education system).

If members of Solidarity had been more assertive as socialists, more might not have been achieved. But more might have been retrieved and learnt from Toussaint’s betrayal. The union bureaucracy, even confronted by a strong rank and file, is a robust part of holding together the capitalist order. There is a massive political battle ahead of any attempt at union reform as we confront the capitalist state and the place of the bureaucracy within it.

The pamphlet concludes that ND failed because the “top down” approach won out. Even if “top down” summed up all Roger Toussaint’s failings, the “top” of any organisation has its place in a capitalist society. Nevertheless Anderson is neither naive nor in any way conflicted — two things that might mark out a real “useful idiot” — he just is a nasty, rational right-winger.

Tony Benn provides a crystal-clear example of the verity of the best man theory. George Galloway is different because of the way he prides Mao and his economic/social policy for developing China. Leaving aside the fact that this is laughable jibberish (for example, the Cultural Revolution destroyed the Chinese education system), Benn only offers mealy-mouthed criticism when pushed hard (Wasn’t his mass murder? It turns out Benn did not approve of everything Mao did).

In another category of useful idiot is George Galloway. Galloway is different because of the way he self-interest and self-promotion is bound up with his toadying. Sweeney considers his relationship with Press TV, the English-language voice of the barbaric Iranian state (Galloway has a programme on Press TV). An Iranian journalist explained how he was tortured in jail and how Press TV collaborated with his interrogators inside the prison. A former Press TV worker stated that the prison station only provided coverage after the government retrieved him.

Galloway refused to appear on the programme, as did Galloway’s comrade, Yvonne Ridley. In a written statement Ridley used the occasion to warn the British left that: the BBC’s Director General has turned himself into a useful idiot for the British state and the Bush-aligned American state. A defence of Press TV it is pretty stupid (because it admits Press TV is a voice of the Iranian state, simply alleging that the BBC is just as bad). As John Sweeney points out as he ends the programme, the BBC does not only give the government’s point of view, and does not collaborate with torturers. One-nil to Sweeney.

“Useful idiot” Yvonne Ridley says the BBC is just as bad as the Iranian state’s media outlets.

Key points:

- The question that John Sweeney’s programme posed was interesting: why have so many seemingly intelligent people turned themselves into apologists for terrible, brutal, murderous regimes?
- Harold Pinter defended Slobodan Milosevic. Noam Chomsky declared that Pol Pot’s Cambodian genocide was a project of the Stalinist states and their outposts in Southeast Asia.
- Tony Benn doubted Solidarnosc’s trade union credentials.
- Jean-Paul Sartre refused to back an investigation into the 1970s massacre of political prisoners in China.
- Anderson turned himself into a useful idiot for the British state which allowed at least 30 million people to starve.
- Sweeney considers his relationship with Press TV it is pretty stupid (because it admits Press TV is a voice of the Iranian state, simply alleging that the Cultural Revolution destroyed the Chinese education system).
- Tony Benn provides a crystal-clear example of the verity of the best man theory.
- Galloway is different because of the way he prides Mao and his economic/social policy for developing China.

**Useful idiot**

Yvonne Ridley says the BBC is just as bad as the Iranian state’s media outlets.

from that tour later admitted that the state had wanted to “put rings in your noses, and you helped us.”

So the question is: why would intelligent people allow themselves to become propaganda tools of a state which allowed at least 30 million people to starve to death? 50% of the workforce were on an allegedly better terms with the deranged Mao regime, for example, deserved their complicit silence or support from direct lies? Sweeney’s programme gives us no answers. It is well reported by recruiting others? The pamphlet talks as though the agency within this situation was ND, not Solidarity.

In another category of useful idiot is George Galloway. Galloway is different because of the way he prides Mao and his economic/social policy for developing China. Leaving aside the fact that this is laughable jibberish (for example, the Cultural Revolution destroyed the Chinese education system), Benn only offers mealy-mouthed criticism when pushed hard (Wasn’t his mass murder? It turns out Benn did not approve of everything Mao did).

In another category of useful idiot is George Galloway. Galloway is different because of the way he prides Mao and his economic/social policy for developing China. Leaving aside the fact that this is laughable jibberish (for example, the Cultural Revolution destroyed the Chinese education system), Benn only offers mealy-mouthed criticism when pushed hard (Wasn’t his mass murder? It turns out Benn did not approve of everything Mao did).

Galloway refused to appear on the programme, as did Galloway’s comrade, Yvonne Ridley. In a written statement Ridley used the occasion to warn the British left that: the BBC’s Director General has turned himself into a useful idiot for the British state and the Bush-aligned American state. A defence of Press TV it is pretty stupid (because it admits Press TV is a voice of the Iranian state, simply alleging that the BBC is just as bad). As John Sweeney points out as he ends the programme, the BBC does not only give the government’s point of view, and does not collaborate with torturers. One-nil to Sweeney.
The economic crisis has shaken the tremen-
dous foundations on which the capitalist sys-
tem had built in the two decades since the
collapse of European and Russian Stalinism.
They had been decades of globalisation; of
economic and social disaster. The
something else too startling the world. In an era
of globalization and market fetishism, it was revealed
that, in the US and Britain, were ruled by “socialistic” —
selective socialistic but socialistic all the same — gov-
ernments.
The ultra-right-wing neo-liberal US administration of
George W Bush and the neo-Thatcherite Blair-Brown
had played, the role of social banker, financial organisation,
and regulator of the entire economy.
They used the government power to collect and
redistribute taxes, to channel many, many billions of
dollars and pounds from society to subsidise the banks
and stop them collapsing.
This was an implicit acknowledgment that uncom-
mercial markets led not to the creation of inex-
haustible social cornucopia, but to social disaster. The
British government’s explanation is more than merely
plausible — the economy did not as it did to play
the role of financier, and guardian of the fin-
cancial order. In the US, the “dollarisation” of the
fueling-points of all mundane commercial and social
activity, would have closed down. “Society”, would
have seen to it, as the US economy did when the banks
closed their doors in the early 1930s, or worse.
As governments in ancient societies of “Asiatic des-
pots” — and other “hydraulic” societies, in Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, had had to play an essen-
tial role in organising the prerequisites of social produc-
tion — irrigation canals, etc. — so the ultra-free-market
US and British governments were compelled, on pain of
disastrous social dislocation and collapse, to step from behind the ideological curtain of pretence and assume the role of social organisations.
In the “market” the banks depended on social action by
the overall representatives of society to avert a catastro-
phe generated by their own capitalist system, to act to cancel out the natural consequences of market
relations for the bankers and for society.
But the socialisation of the “socialism”, was in the interests of society, it was also pointedly in the direct
interests of the bankers and those who own, control, and profit from them.
It was bankers’ socialism, fat-cat socialism. Bourgeois
socialism.
It is however, point to and underline the funda-
mental rationale of Marxian socialism, the thing that makes it sensible and, essentially, invulnerable to the
defeats or errors or even annihilation of socialists parties and of Marxists: capitalism itself prepares and continu-
ously develops the socialist transformation of society. As
Friedrich Engels put it: “socialistic society” invades” large-
scale capitalism. Marxian socialism is only the conscious
expression of this objective reality.
Capitalism grows from small-scale production to
ever more gigantic concentrations of the means of
production in huge society-wide enterprises. Capitalism
developed from a world where markets regulated the
affairs of small commodity production to a world of
giants whose strategies defines the workings of markets
and whose needs — and society’s needs in relation to them — can now be more seen, only be met by social, society-wide action.
Today, whole towns-worth of shops are concentrated in
each big supermarket. Whole branches of economic
organisation are organised in the giant and increasingly
international companies that dominate human life.
But these enterprises are owned, managed, and regu-
larised and regulated to produce the maximum private
profit in order to please the shareholders and executives rules their decisions. The fate of the
workers within them — whether, for example, the
to working out operations in one locality and
migrates across national borders, or continues to allow
a particular community to go on working, existing — is
totally in the economic and social dislocation and
eventuates of shareholders and enormous
salaries and bonuses for the corporate bosses who run
these “point channels” of the giant multinational
anti-Marxist polemicist (Observer journalist Nick
Cohen) dismisses the idea that Marx, writing early in
industrial capitalism, could have understood its essen-
tials. In fact Marx, according to himself, based his
analyse of capitalist society on over 400 years of capi-
talism in history — so the concept of industrial capital-
ism — before his time. In any case the question is, did
he see into the essentials of our system?
Does capitalism continue to have and to be dominat-
ed by the characteristics which Marx analysed and their
manifestations in our society? Doesn’t it? Do we live in a world dominated by capitalist companies,
entities whose driving force and goal is to wring the
maximum profit for their shareholders out of their
operations — that is, out of those who work in them —
no matter what the human and social consequences,
have more wealth and immensurable more social
power than many contemporary governments?
Our world is shaped and reshaped, calmed or buna-
m-in by those companies’ competition for profit.
It would not be too fanciful to say that the big share-
holders in each company bear something like the same
sort of relationship to those employed by the compa-
nies, or conglomerates of companies, as the minority
citizens in an ancient Greek city were to the four or
time five more numerous slaves, women and foreign-
ners who made their lives there. And even more so for
the peoples of the underdeveloped world. They exploit
them.
The competition of these international entities is
reshaping our world now in ways whose ultimate
working-out can only be surmised.
The great tragedy-bearing paradox of political and
social life is that though this social development corre-
cponds to the bedrock Marxian expectation of the
way capitalism, in accordance with its inner drives and
needs, had to develop, the fundamental case for social-
ism today, socialism in general and Marxian socialism in particular, is marginalised, more discredited that at
any time in one hundred years and more.
Let the necessity and urgency of replacing this system by
genuine social control, under the social own-
ership and the day-to-day, interstice-by-interstice con-
trol of the producers, is a great deal more obvious now,
more pressing than in the time and the capitalism of
Marx and Engels. And we are now in the worst eco-
nomic crisis in many years, perhaps decades. … An edi-
torial in the Daily Telegraph in 2008 said the plain truth:
“the world now corresponds more to the expectation of
Karl Marx than of any other economist or social
philosopher”
These workers point to the absence of an intellectual-
ly credible socialism as one of the great assets which
capitalism in this crisis possesses. There is no denying it. That is why the present anti-Marxist polemics are
self-contradictory everywhere. To delve into the crisis series of articles is why, by way of what events, has the socialism that embodies the project of substituting for the capitalist system a real effort to try and work out the planned economy of economic and social life come to stand for so lit-
tle in a world where once again the fundamental ideas
of Marx and Engels were rediscovered?
On one level, the answer is expressed in one word:
Stalinism. But European Stalinism has been dead twen-
ty years. Why has the authentic socialism, the socialism
of whose who fought Stalinism, and often fought it to
the death, not revived, not springing alive and young
again out of the vanished shadow of Stalinism?
Because, to a large extent, like Joe Hill in the song,
Stalinism can assert: “I never died”. Stalinism, political-
ly, intellectually and in ingrained collective habits of
mind, is still alive on the world-be-let. If that left is to
emerge from its present nullity, it will have to purge it-
self of the traits I will analyze in these articles.

A. STALINIST ROOTS OF THE PRESENT CRISIS
ON THE LEFT

1. Defining an age
In the summer of 1933, a few months after the
Nazis had consolidated power in Germany, a conversa-
tion that defines a whole political age, and in so
doing offers a key to understanding the malaise of
the left today, took place in a group of young mem-
bers of the Communist Party, in Cambridge. Some of
the participants in that conversation would serve the
US and British internal secret services for decades to
come, and be exposed, in the
1950s, 60s and 70s. The story of that conversation is
told in Andrew Boyle’s The Climate of Treason.
Kris Philby, just back from Germany, reported to his
friends. Hitler had been allowed to come to power
peacefully. The powerful German Communist Party
(KPD) had had six million votes and hundreds of thou-
sands of militants. It had its own armed militia, which
until the Nazis consolidated their power had had the
strength to repress the fascists in the working-class dist-
ric of Berlin. And yet the KPD had allowed itself to be
smashed, without even making a fight of it. When the
bourgeoisie called the Nazis to power, the KPD had
slunk into its grave — without even tokenresistance.
During the two and a half years from the September
1930 elections to the consolidation of Nazi power in
January-March 1933, as the Nazis grew spectacularly,
the KPD had fought a series of battles against the
Social Democrats to oppose them. In 1920, a general strike had
failed an attempt at right wing coup, the so-called
Kapp Putsch, in 1933 the KPD did not even attempt to
organise a general strike! The KPD and the Social
Democratic Party — whose leaders in the Reichstag
pledged to be a loyal, legal opposition to Hitler — destroyed the possibility of a general strike. They ensured that the call for a general strike made by the Left was frustrated and destroyed the possibility of a general strike made by the Left. They were now laid in a new atmosphere of intimidation and pressure. The Communist International was still denying that any defeat at all, still denying that the KPD had been destroyed. It was still playing with idiotic slogans: “After Hitler — our turn!” Those who wanted to continue the work of the First World War and “keep them busy in the West while we get on with building up socialism here”, as he put it to the German Communist leader Henn Neumann. Stalin would later have Neumann shot: his wife Marguerite would be one of the two women to be shot in the KPD concentration camps to Hitler’s, in 1940, as a gesture of goodwill to the German ally, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. She died shortly after the war.

In Cambridge in that summer of 1933 the young men listened to Trotsky’s account of their own political world. The Communist International was still denying that any defeat at all, still denying that the KPD had been destroyed. It was still playing with idiotic slogans: “After Hitler — our turn!” Those who wanted to continue the work of the First World War and “keep them busy in the West while we get on with building up socialism here”, as he put it to the German Communist leader Henn Neumann. Stalin would later have Neumann shot: his wife Marguerite would be one of the two women to be shot in the KPD concentration camps to Hitler’s, in 1940, as a gesture of goodwill to the German ally, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. She died shortly after the war.

The Communist International was still denying that any defeat at all, still denying that the KPD had been destroyed. It was still playing with idiotic slogans: “After Hitler — our turn!” Those who wanted to continue the work of the First World War and “keep them busy in the West while we get on with building up socialism here”, as he put it to the German Communist leader Henn Neumann. Stalin would later have Neumann shot: his wife Marguerite would be one of the two women to be shot in the KPD concentration camps to Hitler’s, in 1940, as a gesture of goodwill to the German ally, after the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939. She died shortly after the war.

The old aspirant socialism promised freedom: the new “socialism” brought slavery. Socialism was the “free association of producers”; “socialism” knew only the moral of the slave market, of the venal courtier, of the rules of “socialist” society, “socialism” raised irrational, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine. Socialism was democracy all through society and the economy in a world with no social, personal, religious, sexual or class oppression, a world with neither slave nor ruling brigand. “Socialism” was political and social tyranny. Even where there was economic progress, this “socialism” fell behind bourgeois civilisation, excising and stigmatising the gains of centuries in culture, everyday rationality and human rights, most relentless, of working-class political and social rights.

Socialism meant the cutting down of the state’s repressive functions and its power, the beginning of its withering away; “socialism” was the rising up of a totalitarian state to the exercise of unprecedented power over society, installing a state-monopolist-speaking, from out of the programmes and goals of socialism, what the Stalin Manifesto defined as “to win the war against the world”, of its own opposite, the worst of all, of the working class struggle against the bourgeoisie, of that which the Stalin Manifesto defined as “the victory of reason over the murder of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history.” “Socialism” was reason in captivity to a church-state, a church-state of its own opposite, a church-state of socialism, “socialism” raised irrational, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine. Socialism was democracy. “Socialism” was the victory of reason over the murder of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history.” “Socialism” was reason in captivity to a church-state, a church-state of its own opposite, a church-state of socialism, “socialism” raised irrational, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine. Socialism was democracy. “Socialism” was the victory of reason over the murder of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history.” “Socialism” was reason in captivity to a church-state, a church-state of its own opposite, a church-state of socialism, “socialism” raised irrational, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine. Socialism was democracy. “Socialism” was the victory of reason over the murder of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history.” “Socialism” was reason in captivity to a church-state, a church-state of its own opposite, a church-state of socialism, “socialism” raised irrational, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine. Socialism was democracy. “Socialism” was the victory of reason over the murder of history, of social evolution, and of socialism itself as the heir of capitalism in history.” “Socialism” was reason in captivity to a church-state, a church-state of its own opposite, a church-state of socialism, “socialism” raised irrational, greedy, privileged consumer in a world of scarcity and famine. Socialism was democracy.
common?

All of them—the socialist revolutionists such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels—sought to abolish capitalism and the exploitation and wage-slavery on which it rested, and to replace it with a non-exploitative economic system. Their ideas of what would replace capitalism differed greatly, for instance, as between anarchists and Marxists. Still, their immediate and general aim—which is not by any means all anarchists—agree on the ultimate goal, a stateless society. But all the socialists and libertarians alike would timeval exchange and the exploitation of the producers and their collective social ownership by the workers themselves.

All of them, in one way or another, with one qualification or another, tried to work out a strategy for the working class, to achieve this great social revolution. They saw themselves as educators and organizers of the working class, working for social betterment and for freedom everywhere and in all circumstances; and to the education of the labour movement in consistent democracy, in working-class political independence, and consistent anti-capitalist militancy. Plekhanov, the founding father of Russian Marxism expounded the idea that governed what the Russian Marxist movement did and aimed to do. It was what all socialists, more or less, did and thought they did to do.

What is the socialist movement? To a contemporary worker, this does not look like a thing like it did to a [socialist] in the 1870s for whom 'future history resolves itself into propaganda and the organisation and struggle of their social classes.'

What did the [socialists] see in it? Above all class struggle, the struggle for the interests of the working class (which for short they call its class consciousness). The whole success of the socialist movement is contingent on the recognition of its own position, its relations with the historical mechanism of society as a whole.

Marx explains: "The value of the labouring power is limited quite distinct from the daily

six other hours, which I shall call hours of surplus labour, which surplus labour will realise itself in a surplus value and a surplus profit [profit, interest, rent, etc.]

"The worker cannot become rich in this exchange, society exchanges surplus value for available magnitude, he surrenders its creative power... Rather, he necessarily impoverishes himself..." But the creative power, in the right of production itself as the power of capital, as an alien power confining him..."

The Bolsheviks denounced bourgeois democracy and parliamentary politics. This was the direct democracy of workers' councils and only in the name of a better and more potent democracy their criticism of bourgeois democracy was justified; it was annihilated and perverted into an absolute and unconditional disengagement and dismissal of "bourgeois democracy and put to task by the Bolsheviks...

The Russian working class, in its unprecedented creativity—instance, in creating soviets (workers' councils)—and the Bolsheviks who led them to victory had in life found solutions (for to put it at its weakest, pre-tom solutions) to many of the problems that had perplexed earlier socialist thinkers. The Communist International conducted its experiments, drawing provisional balance sheets when it was cut down by the Stalinist counter-revolution against the 1917 working class revolution, the time of Trotsky's death at the hand of Stalin's assassin on 21 August 1940, the great socialist tradition had dwindled down to a few tiny organisations in, perhaps, a couple of dozen countries. It would dwindle further. Stalinism, which cut it down, would for most of the 20th century dwarf and overshadow socialism.

6. The basics of old socialism

Marx had argued that socialism would grow out of advanced capitalist society, which had developed the factory system and its social and economic tasks. For this reason the [socialists] consider it their principal task to study the capitalist mode of growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

What does the militant movement measure for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat?

"The whole militant movement sees as useful to their cause everything that slows it down as harmful. Anything that has no effect one way or the other is of no consequence for them, it is politically uninteresting." (G Plekhanov: The Tasks of the Socialists in the Struggle Against the Famine in Russia, 1891)

5. Bolshevism, Marxism and the Russian Revolution

Bolshevism, in power in Russia after 25 October (7 November) 1917, and taking the lead in establishing the new Russian state — the "Third International"— to reorganise the old socialist movement, and to try to work out a strategy to their principles when European bourgeois civilisation broke down in 1914 — armed for the new time of open struggle.

The Bolshevik Communist International picked up many of the threads of earlier socialism, and wove them into a coherent and consistent strategy of working class struggle for power — the direct action of the French, British, German and American socialists, the political "syndicalism" of the De Leonists and Jim Larkin, the revolutionary parliamentarianism of Liebknecht, the sometimes acute criticism by communist-anarchists of the parliamentarians of the pre-1914 Socialist International, the concern with national liberation of the Bolsheviks—"all in previous socialist activi-
turned them into state slaves or (as Trotsky wrote in 1939) semi-slaves. The working class continued to call itself communist and Marxist, it defined and camouflaged its own savage rule over the working people as the rule of the workers, it controlled its own anti-socialist and anti-working class revolution as the living continuity of the October revolution. By repeated purges, ideological bachioclements, and by bribery and corruption, they took control of the Communist International, the powerful international network of revolutionary working-class organisations made up of people who had rallied to the Russian revolution.

Stalinism, totalitarian utopianism — and this is centrally important for what concerns us here, the state of socialism today — was in its role in the history of political institutions and ideas above all a movement of social and political misrepresentation and parody. The Stalinist utopianism, gap between opinion and reality, slogans that in life, at the end of the class, of integrity, of method, of proclamations, of standards, of its own real history, and of its old objectives. That Stalinist counter-revolution in the USSR was the most pernicious because it had leapfrogged ahead to show the more economically-developed countries the way to the future. By 1950 a third of the world was “socialist”. Countries like China, which were among the least developed, now appeared to be running on a par with those of the old left. The losers so far in the modernisation and industrialisation of the world, were turning into the winners, humankind’s panic-stricken allies.

So tens and tens of millions of people all over the world believed. Stalinism’s success reshaped the thinking of the left everywhere. Even those who in Trotsky’s time had been the implacable critics and denouncers of Stalin’s Russia. The Fourth International had by about 1950 come to believe that Russia and the other states envisaged by the Stalinist counter-revolution bother to maintain an international “revolutionary” communist movement at all? Is it not the case that the Russian state has to have subservient movements in most countries and sometimes mass movements; legions of adherents and militant propagandists across the world such as no other state could match.

How exactly did the Stalinists achieve their “revolution” in the politics of revolution? What was the point? What was new in the socialist working class movement?

Stalinism was a state religion

It had mass parties, which were the main parties of the working class in a number of capitalist countries, France, Italy, Indonesia, etc.

9. The Stalinist-refashioned left

Stalinism was religious. In 1920 the liberal-socialist Bertram Russell branded Bolshevik socialism as akin to early Islam. That was not true then. The leaders of the Comintern, Lenin, Trotsky and others, dealt in fact, reason, logic, albeit clouded by darwinian extrapolation, and the will to attempt things of such enormous scale and scope, in history. The Stalinists were committed at the very thought of what the Bolsheviks dared to do. What was wrongly said of Bolshevism, falsely, untruthfully, as he who knows to the Abyssinia of Stalin’s grave-digger, Stalinism.

From now on, blindly, fanatically, incorrigibly, with the religious fervour of a death-and-Paradise-obsessed Islam, Stalinism fought a holy war, in which it thinks only death can bring him advantages in a wonderful afterlife, “Communists” championed a tyrannical state ruled by a narrow, intolerant, ignorant elite.

For the religious fanatic, a personal afterlife, for the “Communist” a socialist future life for humanity, for both of them delusion.

The story is well-enough known amongst political people. But Stalinism and Stalinism’s characteristic traits are seen as things of the past, attributes of a dreadful time and of a dreadful movement — of the past. It is not a matter of the past: the political mindset and the habits of thought — and hypotonic thoughtlessness — fostered and entrenched by Stalinism over the decades of its domination of “left-wing” politics, still dominate the “Left” long after the collapse of Russian Stalinism. The Stalinist nature and origin of the characteristics dominant in the present day “left”, its characteristic mindset, its habits of thought and lack of thought, and its methods, are obscured by the fact that most of that “left” is made up of the seeming heres of the great historical antagonist of Stalinism, Trotsky.

That Stalinist left came to be the predominant “Marxism”, and, with more or less distancing criticism of it, the common conception of socialism, for the two-thirds of the 20th century that remained after Stalin’s counter-revolution was accomplished. The anti-Stalin Bolshevik left was exterminated or marginalised for generations, or transformed by the pressure of Stalinism and by its example. It was rested out of all recognition.

Living in a political world hegemonised by Stalinism the old distinctions between what was “left” and what was “right” were a thing of the past, in a world of totalitarianism, as such terms are, and by their nature must be — was more or less destroyed. Major aspects of what had been the old political world and the new one, in a world of totalitarianism, were turned on their heads. The political alternatives which were once thought to be the measure of the world were put in the place of politics and the world.

But those were mere episodes only, not part of, or harbingers of a great socialist movement. At the end of the Second World War Stalinism loomed in the world as a great and expanding power, surpassed only by the USA. The USSR in 1939 made up a sixth of the world. At the end of an expansion which reached its peak with the proclamation of the Stalinist People’s Republic of China between 1949 and 1950. But just what it is to end and until the Russian defeat in Afghanistan (1979-89), Stalinism controlled one-third of the surface of the earth.

In 1939 the USSR made up a sixth of the world. At the end of an expansion which reached its peak with the proclamation of the Stalinist People’s Republic of China between 1949 and 1950. But just what it is to end and until the Russian defeat in Afghanistan (1979-89), Stalinism controlled one-third of the surface of the earth. But in the mindset of “socialism”. The shift in mindset is the point here, because much of it still dominates the left.

As the capitalist world went into its deep mid-20th century economic, political, social and military crisis — a crisis that many, friend and foe alike, thought was terminal — fully a sixth of the world was already “socialist”: a parallel world was being created in Russia. In consequence Stalinism influence created its own version of the labour movement and socialist and “Communist” circles. It existed in the USSR from the US liberal publications the New Masses, the New Republic, the Daily Worker and the Labour left publication Tribune. Tribune was a Stalinist paper up to the Stalin-Stalin pact and World War Two. Much was made of the contrast between the “communist” and the capitalist world. In the USSR there was planned progress, spectacular progress, not capitalist chaos and regression. There was full employment, no great slump, no economic semi-paralysis. The working class, the October Revolution of the Russian working class, rallied to the Stalinist counter-revolution and its stafified leadership, and the Stalinist controlled and very influential Left Book Club. Meanwhile, many on the right, including George Orwell’s account of his difficulty in getting his account of the Stalinist police terror in Republican Spain published is nowadays well-known. With some elements of Jew-baiting in the Moscow Trials, he was denounced by even right wing Jewish leaders. An example of how top heavy was the old left-political focus became the fact that Victor Serge’s report on the Stalinist counter-revolution was circulated in Britain by “The Right Book Club”.

The 20th century in Russia and its leadership was stifled. Some Russian émigrés fared better. The Labour left publication Tribune still supported the Stalinist controlled and very influential Left Book Club. Meanwhile, many on the right, including even George Orwell’s account of his difficulty in getting his account of the Stalinist police terror in Republican Spain published is nowadays well-known. With some elements of Jew-baiting in the Moscow Trials, he was denounced by even right wing Jewish leaders. An example of how top heavy was the old left-political focus became the fact that Victor Serge’s report on the Stalinist counter-revolution was circulated in Britain by “The Right Book Club”.

The Stalinist nature and origin of the characteristics dominant in the present day “left”, its characteristic mindset, its habits of thought and lack of thought, and its methods, are obscured by the fact that most of that “left” is made up of the seeming heres of the great historical antagonist of Stalinism, Trotsky.

That Stalinist left came to be the predominant “Marxism”, and, with more or less distancing criticism of it, the common conception of socialism, for the two-thirds of the 20th century that remained after Stalin’s counter-revolution was accomplished. The anti-Stalin Bolshevik left was exterminated or marginalised for generations, or transformed by the pressure of Stalinism and by its example. It was rested out of all recognition. In 1939 the USSR made up a sixth of the world. At the end of an expansion which reached its peak with the proclamation of the Stalinist People’s Republic of China between 1949 and 1950. But just what it is to end and until the Russian defeat in Afghanistan (1979-89), Stalinism controlled one-third of the surface of the earth.
what it was. Many of the features of Stalinism — like the collective-superman “Party of a new type” — could be understood by analogy with the traits of old medieval society. The Bolsheviks knew and proved in practice that thousands of years of feudalism had made it possible to build a new society on the ruins of an old one. 

2. The politics of anything-goes-endeavour

In the place of all that the old socialism had done Lenin did not want to be left behind. He was not interested in the socialist unionising the working class into political independence and anti-capitalist politics, now was put in the place of the working class — not yet an independent political identity. 

There was nothing in old socialism that could not be sacrificed, turned inside out, stood on its head. The Soviet Union and its Stalinist successors did exactly that — on a very large scale. Trotsky, who had described this condition as only a tiny pariah minority, as incapable of “independent political identity.” The Stalinist parties were the parties of the working class and its social and political development at their point of view. A party — may have all its equally “correct” and perfectly self-consistent from a Stalinist point of view. 

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty aims to build solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all workers, wherever they are; solidarity to global social struggles is still today shot through with the旧道路 to global social struggles is still today shot through with the redemptive and democratic spirit of the movement for socialism. 

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 workplace 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.

Our stand for:
- Independent working-class representation in politics
- 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 super-profits to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all
- A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression, injustice and exploitation, in defence of women’s rights, race equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers’ unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have a common interest in each other with than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace to democracy to global social organisation.

SOLIDARITY
under the pressure of rising working-class self assertion across the country, the University extension movement accepted Albert Mansbridge's scheme for tutorial classes and committee study (as opposed to more "popular" bigger lecture classes). This acceptance was spearheaded by a group of young, socialist Oxford University and Cambridge University tutors. Supported by prominent figures in the church, civil service and ruling class generally, members of this group worked with Mansbridge himself and the other main Workers' Educational Association activists, J. MacTavish, to produce a report, Oxford and Working-Class Education.

In 1907, after years of leaving lobbying, the TUC Congress made a high profile appeal to unions to give financial support to Ruskin. This triggered a drive by the WEA/extension alliance to seize control of Ruskin before it could become irreversibly a labour college.

During April and May 1907, The Times published several articles by Catiline Club members [Oxford tutors associated with the movement]. On 27 July, in the climate of upper class opinion formed by these articles, [WEA backer] Charles Gore started a debate in the House of Lords about the development of both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. This in turn set the scene for the WEA annual conference in August, which was held under the title "What Oxford can do for Working People", again in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Oxford Extension Delegates.

A teaching method developed by the Socialist Labour Party, probably influenced the Plebs League motives of the world. Third, they should provide a route by which a minority of this group could become students at Oxford University itself. Here they would do either a special two year diploma in Economics, based on one that already existed, or another, to be introduced, in Political Science. It was expected that many if not most of those following this route would then become union leaders and/or MPs.

Among other recommendations, criteria for selection to the university should include: "the character and influence of the students, and in particular of any prob- ability which may exist that they will be asked to hold places of trust and responsibility". The last point here was important because "it is one of the objects of the scheme which we recommend to give the broad gener- al training needed to qualify workpeople for public positions".

It was envisaged that students should "come up [i.e. go to Oxford] either as members of an ordinary College, or as Non-collegiate students, or as members of Ruskin College". The first year at Ruskin should become a route to entering the university as a diploma student. Those doing such a diploma could do it either via a second year at Ruskin or by one of the other routes cited above.

If adopted, these proposals would gear teaching at Ruskin to diploma course entry, and transfer virtually all decision-making about what was taught and learnt there to the university.

Alongside administrative proposals, anxiety about Marxist ideas was reflected in the model curricula attached as appendices to the report, as well as in the notes about how lecturers should handle such topics. For instance in the recommended unit on "Economics" the text says that "if many members of the class have socialist views, it would be well to preface this part of the subject [ie the economic theory] by reading Marx's Capital... The first nine chapters of Book I contain the essence of the whole. The style is rather difficult, but a simplified exposition of the ideas is to be found in Hyndman's Economics of Socialism... The teacher who adopts this course must, however, be very sure that the criticism of Marx, implicit in the ordinary textbook, is equally carefully explained ..."

Oxford and Working-Class Education emphasised the need to foster "harmony" between the classes by giving workers a "broad outlook" and a "synoptic mind". Its tone was liberal and progressive. Despite this, it was assumed throughout that the existing distribution of wealth and power in society would stand the same. In the end, it was an attempt by one section of the ruling class to convince other sections, including within Oxford University itself, that the growth of working class power could not be ignored or simply repressed, and that tutorial classes leading to university entrance via Ruskin were the best weapon for combating it. THE STUDENTS' CONCEPT OF EDUCATION

In the early years of the twentieth century, in trying to educate themselves about socialism, activists like those at Ruskin began to see themselves as part of a new social group, the working class, which confronted not the old social order. They wanted to explain this to as many workers as possible, and they saw the study of eco- nomics as a way in which they could equip themselves to do this. In this, they were continuing an approach pioneered by the SDF and HH Hyndman and William Morris. Knowingly or otherwise, however, they were also revisiting the struggle over "really useful knowl- edge" of eighty years before. (In that struggle, activists had tried to defend the economic ideas of people like Thomas Hodgskin against the London bourgeoisie's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge.)

Second, they knew from experience that the best way to convince other workers was by connecting his analyses to their working lives. This was a step towards socialism from below, because it was about finding things in Marx which would help them understand underlying forces, rather than simply announcing the law of value from above as the key to everything. They saw study of Marxist history as the best preparation for activists planning to use this approach.

Third, they based their approach on points made by both Marx and Engels about dialectics. Marx and Engels believed that workers could use dialectical thought to cut through ruling class ideology. The Ruskin students also focused on the version of dialectics that was accessible to them. This was Josef Dietzgen's The Positive Outcome of Philosophy as published by Charles Kerr, which included the essay The Nature of Human Brainwork.

Although Dietzgen's approach was rather limited, this too represented a turn towards socialism from below, because it was about activists equipping them- selves — and helping as many other workers as possi- ble to equip themselves — with a capacity for reason- ing, viewing both as a process inside each person's mind and as a tool for use in discussion and debate. The Ruskin students also had a method by which teaching and learning could best be conducted. This method was arguably the key contribution made specifically by the Socialist Labour Party to the develop- ment of independent working-class education. The education historian Brian Simon was later to claim, convincingly, that it was similar to a method developed in the late 1700s by the [political reform group] London Corresponding Society.

Many of the 54 students at Ruskin College in 1908-09...
I

England or Wales rather than Scotland, would have classes of up to 100, under the threat of physical punishment. This was often the case, even in London. In 1919, he was its national secretary. Between 1910 and 1912, Harvey would edit the SLP’s main publication, The Socialist.

There are grounds for believing that it was through Harvey that a teaching and learning method developed in Scotland, which was then adopted by Ruskin. Harvey, left the ILP and joined the small branch of the Marxist respectively. Many would have left at an early age, and this influence.

This method would have been attractive to students who, like them, are bereft of the advantages of education, and to the working classes in general.

Third, this was the case not only at the level of the ideas which they collected, but also in the manner by which they equipped themselves to argue for those ideas. The overwhelming working class composition of the SLP, and the fact that many of these students, had to produce for itself, from amongst its own ranks, people who could conduct struggles on its behalf. For this reason, people who had been excluded from the world of education through social or economic reasons, began to be encouraged to think for themselves and speak about ideas.

Gill’s formulation, like the poems by activists in the early 1930s, are narratives that they wanted was anything but narrow training or cramming. Rather, there was a tradition which encouraged discussion, and the need for education to be relevant to the working class. We can see this in, for example, the section of the Communist Manifesto which discusses “the ruling ideas”, in Morris’s description of capitalist intellectuals as “the crowd of useless, drabgleeched knives and fools who, under the pretense of the title of the intellectual part of the middle classes, have in their turn taken the place of the mediaeval jester”, in Engels’s description of Oxford and Cambridge as “protestant monasticism”, or in Josef Dietzgen’s characterisation of academics as “graduated flunkies” — which encouraged them to be critical of the system. Walter Vrooman, who had described Oxford tutors as “giants of understanding” who were “walking cyclopaedias” characterized like the majority of them, had been hewn from more solid and durable stone than ours. Very soon, too, they were urging us and helping to dig with them in the same quarry. They had been rearing in the works of Karl Marx...Still earlier students had begun to do the same thing by conducting among themselves studies classes. He went on: “...it was the practice in those self-service classes for each member to be given one of the more difficult sections of the first volume of Capital...to explain to the class the text that he understood to mean. Through these classes and the individual study which they involved we gradually gained a knowledge which was simply denied to the meager lecture staff, with the exception of the Principal.”

The activists concentrated at Ruskin College in 1907-08, understanding that one third of the working class would be produced from within its ranks people who, as being practical organizers, could also think for themselves. They called it their social mission, and indeed it did result in an expanding circle of people. Between October 1908 and the strike in March/April 1909, their approach and organization gave rise to the Extension of Plebs Education in Oxford and Working-Class Education, squared up to one another within the college.

It seems likely that this method was devised before the split with the SDF by one of the founders of the SLP, George Yates. Yates was an engineer working, who at the time was employed as a draughtsman but who had also worked as a lab technician at Edinburgh University. This method would have been attractive to students at Ruskin, because activists there, especially in England or Wales rather than Scotland, would have had only a basic primary schooling, learning by rote in classes set up to instill knowledge of physical punishment. Many would have left at an early age, and any text-related education they had beyond that would usually have been self-taught.

The SLP method was rather rigid. However, it did involve discussion, it did emphasise understanding and application of the principles. But it also argued with the possibility of more or less any company. In fact, when he talks about the lectures on Marx’s economics given from 1910 to 1912 at John Maclean’s classes, he claims that: “Maclean’s method had the merit of popularising and instilling in the small number of workers, but had the defect of not helping to spread the propaganda.” The SLP method was more intensive and formalised, but it also led to the creation of small classes inside the factories. No such tutors came from MacLean’s classes in this period...

Commenting later on equivalent classes organised amongst Scottish workers in the same period, Agnes Jackson described a similar approach: “It was our practice, then, to form classes for the study of Marx’s economics. These classes, usually initiated and conducted by the SDF branch, officially — and were often attended (more or less under obligation) by every member of the trade...especially in London, they were formed by the members individually.”

He added: “I have noted...a difference between Scottish and English practice in the matter of economics classes. This difference turned upon... the fact that the ‘traditional method’ of Engels...in England, was nothing like so evident in Scotland... the level of education in the primary elementary schools was about the same there as in England: and in addition, for historical reasons, there was in Scotland a popular respect for learning that had no counterpart in England. I fancy — though this is only my guess — that an early drilling in the Shorter Catechism had something to do with giving our Scottish comrades their taste for, and respect of, logic.”

The SLP method, then, produced articulate activists, who were the future leaders and advocates of this new form of education. In their view, they were the future leaders and advocates of this new form of education. In the following way. “Is this true? To a large extent it may be said that education for the working class is the only education which is not true of social science, i.e., history and economics. To the working-class, the present form of Society is a temporary stage, which it seems likely that this method was devised before the split with the SDF by one of the founders of the SLP, George Yates. Yates was an engineer working, who at the time was employed as a draughtsman but who had also worked as a lab technician at Edinburgh University. This method would have been attractive to students at Ruskin, because activists there, especially in England or Wales rather than Scotland, would have had only a basic primary schooling, learning by rote in classes set up to instill knowledge of physical punishment. Many would have left at an early age, and any text-related education they had beyond that would usually have been self-taught.

The SLP method was rather rigid. However, it did involve discussion, it did emphasise understanding and application of the principles. But it also argued with the possibility of more or less any company. In fact, when he talks about the lectures on Marx’s economics given from 1910 to 1912 at John Maclean’s classes, he claims that: “Maclean’s method had the merit of popularising and instilling in the small number of workers, but had the defect of not helping to spread the propaganda.” The SLP method was more intensive and formalised, but it also led to the creation of small classes inside the factories. No such tutors came from MacLean’s classes in this period...

Commenting later on equivalent classes organised amongst Scottish workers in the same period, Agnes Jackson described a similar approach: “It was our practice, then, to form classes for the study of Marx’s economics. These classes, usually initiated and conducted by the SDF branch, officially — and were often attended (more or less under obligation) by every member of the trade...especially in London, they were formed by the members individually.”

He added: “I have noted...a difference between Scottish and English practice in the matter of economics classes. This difference turned upon... the fact that the ‘traditional method’ of Engels...in England, was nothing like so evident in Scotland... the level of education in the primary elementary schools was about the same there as in England: and in addition, for historical reasons, there was in Scotland a popular respect for learning that had no counterpart in England. I fancy — though this is only my guess — that an early drilling in the Shorter Catechism had something to do with giving our Scottish comrades their taste for, and respect of, logic.”

The SLP method, then, produced articulate activists, who were the future leaders and advocates of this new form of education. In their view, they were the future leaders and advocates of this new form of education. In the following way. “Is this true? To a large extent it may be said that education for the working class is the only education which is not true of social science, i.e., history and economics. To the working-class, the present form of Society is a temporary stage, which they equipped themselves to argue for those ideas. The overwhelming working class composition of the SLP, and the fact that many of these students, had to produce for itself, from amongst its own ranks, people who could conduct struggles on its behalf. For this reason, people who had been excluded from the world of education through social or economic reasons, began to be encouraged to think for themselves and speak about ideas.

Gill argued that “What he [the working class student] requires is a knowledge of the social forces operating in society, and how best they can be utilized for the benefit of the people. While it may be as well for him to know the other side of the case in the field of Political Economy, it is essential that he should know his own side. The theories of men, who dedicated their lives to the Workers’ cause, should be interpreted to the working class...The working classes should be made conversant with the origin, and growth of all working-class organisations in the manner which would enable them to understand their possibilities and shortcomings. The working classes should be the central focus in the interpretation of history and economics. In his formulation, like the poems by activists in the early 1930s, are narratives that they wanted was anything but narrow training or cramming. Rather, there was a tradition which encouraged discussion, and the need for education to be relevant to the working class. We can see this in, for example, the section of the Communist Manifesto which discusses “the ruling ideas”, in Morris’s description of capitalist intellectuals as “the crowd of useless, drabgleeched knives and fools who, under the pretense of the title of the intellectual part of the middle classes, have in their turn taken the place of the mediaeval jester”, in Engels’s description of Oxford and Cambridge as “protestant monasticism”, or in Josef Dietzgen’s characterisation of academics as “graduated flunkies” — which encouraged them to be critical of the system. Walter Vrooman, who had described Oxford tutors as “giants of understanding” who were “walking cyclopaedias” characterized like the majority of them, had been hewn from more solid and durable stone than ours. Very soon, too, they were urging us and helping to dig with them in the same quarry. They had been rearing in the works of Karl Marx...Still earlier students had begun to do the same thing by conducting among themselves studies classes”. He went on: “...it was the practice in those self-service classes for each member to be given one of the more difficult sections of the first volume of Capital...to explain to the class the text that he understood to mean. Through these classes and the individual study which they involved we gradually gained a knowledge which was simply denied to the meager lecture staff, with the exception of the Principal.”

The activists concentrated at Ruskin College in 1907-08, understanding that one third of the working class would be produced from within its ranks people who, as being practical organizers, could also think for themselves. They called it their social mission, and indeed it did result in an expanding circle of people. Between October 1908 and the strike in March/April 1909, their approach and organization gave rise to the Extension of Plebs Education in Oxford and Working-Class Education, squared up to one another within the college.

The politics of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty — Why the working class is key

The move ment be transformed?

• Imperialism, nationalism and war

• Marxism and oppression

• The AWL’s history and tradition... and much more

£2.50/£1 including postage from PO Box 823, London, SE15 8NA. Cheques to “AWL”.

26 SOLIDARITY
Can we promote a different kind of education for workers?

Sheila Cohen (NUJ/UCU) discusses the sorry state of trade union studies (courses accredited by the TUC and available at a variety of further education institutions) and what can be done to promote independent working-class education.

Like so many other things during the long New Labour years, trade union studies has become wrapped in an incomprehensible coating of jargon and bureaucratese. The amount of encouragement and support that one receives for relatively modest sums is simply government-funded. Which, significantly, is amply government-funded.

Basically, if a trade union steward attends the majority of classes and can produce "proof" of her learning in the form of contributions to flipcharts, notes, completed questionnaires and other miscellanea, she is duly awarded the appropriate "Key Stage" recognition. Though discussions within Stage One cover crucial issues such as the reasons for union decline and membership "apathy", these are dealt with in a superfluous "reasons for joining" section, rather than involving any political and historical discussion of the issues which have led to the trade union movement and how that movement might be renewed.

This dismal state of affairs has been fuelled by three main developments:

- The overwhelming trend towards individual case-work fuelled by anemic "rights"-based legislation from both the European Union and New Labour. Workplace reps will testify that, although this has made for a huge increase in workload, it has done nothing to strengthen basic trade union organisation.

- The development of new forms of workplace representation such as "equality reps", "environmental reps" and, of course, "learning reps" (see below). This, of course, might be seen as a progressive development, but what it actually does is to dilute the class role of the shop stewards.

- "Partnership" and general trade union weakness in the workplace. While partnership approaches have long lost credibility for those who remember the earlier "Social Contract"-based legislation of the mid-1970s legitimising "rights" on shop stewards have created a bureaucratic."worker training" which again means courses are preoccupied with correct procedures, legalities and endless "information and consultation" flannel which again adds nothing to the class strength of workplace representatives. (The shop stewards of the 1960s, with their "frontier of control" mentality, certainly didn't get "trained" in anything other than the workplace-based school of class warfare.)

At the same time, the comparative strength of employers means they can prevent time off for stewards who might be interested in some of the more analytical courses still offered by the TUC, such as "Contemporary Trade Unionism".

In addition to all of these factors, and overwhelming, influence is the mushroom-like growth of "Unionlearn". The value of this programme to employers is evidenced by the fact that the Con-Dem government has made no attempt to contain it.

As Labour Research reported just before the election, the organisation of the "trade union envoy" (bash) — former Labour MEP Richard Balfe — has confirmed that the Conservatives would retain this programme, which, significantly, is amply government-funded.

Balfe's assurance echoed the views of the leader David Willetts, who told the House of Commons, "One thing we like about Unionlearn is that it is very cost-effective. The amount of encouragement and training that one receives for relatively modest sums is very attractive indeed."

Very attractive indeed to employers and neo-liberal politicians, certainly, as demonstrated by the widespread endorsement of Unionlearn by luminaries such as Peter Mandelson and the boss of First Bus. This is because, of course, the objectives and content of Unionlearn courses are to provide a cheap alternative to adequate early-years schooling in providing workers with "basic skills" like literacy and numeracy — a process which has nothing to do with trade union education.

The potential for shop stewards classes and other basic forms of working-class education to raise basic class questions is still evident. Although any group of reps can produce a live discussion on issues of organisation and resistance against both employer and trade union bureaucracy — though many stewards have become somewhat stolid and institutionalised union "partner-ship" approaches. Any serious debate, however, becomes difficult when required to spend a whole day discussing, for example, how you would conduct the defence for a member disciplined for talking too long on the phone.

It is in this current context that the need for truly independent forms of working-class education have become pressing. The above analysis has referred mainly to TUC education, but, as many tutors in these areas will attest, the same stifling tendencies are also evident in other forms of working-class education from Ruskin to the WEA. However, the difficulties of offering an alternative are considerably more formidable than those of providing a critique.

The environment of explosive rank and file resistance within which the Plebs' League flourished is today, at least so far, notable absent. Attempts to set up class-wide rank and file links at workplace level have suffered from sectarian rivalries and "party-building", and any initiative to build independent working-class education from the base would of course encounter parallel difficulties — though this does not make the attempt any less worthwhile.

In this unpromising situation, however, we do have some allies. The conclusion that the class content of trade union education has been, if not neutralised, then fundamentally threatened, has already been arrived at by a large number of trade union stewards interested in discussing independent working-class theory and labour history rather than in teaching the correct way to conduct a "disciplinary".

The disillusionment of many of these tutors — and no doubt their students — with the increasingly "skills"- and procedures-based agenda in trade union education provides one set of reasons for attempting to provide some alternative form of trade union education rooted in the concerns of workers rather than employers. This would include labour and trade union history as a basic component. It would encourage an understanding of political and economic issues based in a critical — i.e. Marxist — analysis of the capitalist system. It would avoid what the Plebs' League students so vividly described as the "sandpapering" of their class instincts. It would be rooted in and develop from working-class students' everyday working-class experience. Most of all, it would bring theory and practice together to shed light on the everyday concerns faced by workplace trade union activists, including crucial questions like internal trade union democracy and class independence from the employer.

As emphasised above, this will not be an easy project. A small group of trade union tutors and activists was set up last year to develop independent working-class education (IWCE), but its future is uncertain. Although we could seek support from some of the more active trade union education institutions, like Northern College and Ruskin, such institutional support contains dangers, as it threatens the political independence crucial to this project. How to square the circle?

The experience of the US project Labor Notes suggests one answer — a "building out" from the original grass-roots network of workplace-based activists established by its monthly newsletter and biennial conferences to a programme of day or weekend schools which the same activists have found invaluable in building their own organisation and strength in the workplace. Probably as a result of these "Troublemakers School", the 2010 Labor Notes conference was the biggest yet.

My own view is that it is only through building up a similar network of contacts who can be more or less relying on to take an interest in this project that we can move forward. These contacts would include both trade union stewards and workplace activists. Without such a network we would be wise to recognise the very real practical problems surrounding the setting up of a programme for independent working class education — highly desirable though such a project is. If we can build up a reasonably reliable base of this kind, however, we may be able to move forward to some form of independent working-class education-building event within the next year.

The support of socialists committed to rank and file organisation and class-based education will be crucial in this enterprise.

- To obtain more information on IWCE, (and for copies of Colin Waugh's pamphlet on the Plebs' League), please email colin.waugh@cnwl.ac.uk
Support the Pakistan Labour Relief Campaign

By Sacha Ismail

The number of people affected by the floods in Pakistan has now reached 20 million. More than 650,000 houses have collapsed, mainly in villages. Thousands of hectares of crops have been destroyed, along with people’s livestock, household goods, clothes, shoes and other essential items. Millions are without drinkable water, food, shelter and clothing. Diseases like flu, fever, diarrhea and cholera are spreading fast. Now more torrential rains are forecast. This is one of the most devastating floods in human history, affecting more people than the South East Asian tsunami and the Khashm and Haitian earthquakes combined. Yet aid has been slow in coming — so far less than $4 committed per affected person.

The impact of the floods is an indictment of how the capitalist system works — in Pakistan, and worldwide. The government of Pakistan’s corrupt capitalist elite predictably failed to act swiftly, leaving tens of thousands of people without aid. Only after a day did it arrive at the makeshift camps with paltry amounts of food. The result was fighting breaking out, making things even worse for desperate people. Meanwhile the big capitalist powers have not put their money where their mouths are.

There is absolutely no doubt that Pakistan’s large and growing Islamist movement will be taking advantage of the floods to organise, stepping into the gap the Pakistani government has left. Swat, where the floods began, is a stronghold of the Pakistani Taliban.

That makes it all the more important that socialists and labour movements internationally support the alternative aid efforts being organised by the Pakistani left. The Labour Relief Campaign, set up in 2005 after a devastating earthquake killed 100,000, has launched an emergency fundraising appeal. The LRC’s sponsoring organisations including the Progressive Youth Front, Women Workers’ Help Line, Labour Education Foundation, National Trade Union Federation, and the socialist group Labour Party Pakistan. It has raised hundreds of thousands of rupees and is raising thousands more every day.

Support the appeal!

For how to contact and make payments to the Labour Relief Campaign, see www.workersliberty.org/pakistanappeal or Labour Party Pakistan: www.laborpakistan.org

FLOODS IN PAKISTAN

Individuals: £20 per year (22 issues) waged, £10 unwaged.
Organisations: £50 large, £22 smaller (5 copies).
European rate: £20 or 32 euros in cash.

Send to PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to “Solidarity”. Or subscribe online at workersliberty.org/solidarity

Workers’ Liberty & Solidarity

Defend Europe’s Roma, help stop Dale Farm eviction!

By Rosalind Robson

Racially motivated violence, party political racism and government-sponsored discrimination against Roma is on the increase in Europe. And life for Britain’s travellers and Roma is set to get harder under this government.

Attacks on Roma were once most common in Eastern Europe — made worse by the fall-out from the collapse of Stalinism and the aftermath of the Balkans war. Now western European politicians are joining in. Nicholas Sarkozy has ordered the expulsion from France of all illegal gypsy immigrants (see page 11).

The situation for Britain’s gypsies (Roma and travellers of Irish origin) has been marginally better than that of Eastern Europe — and discrimination in recent decades less virulent. But it continues. Objections to gypsy sites are ubiquitous. They come from “brick and mortar” neighbours, driven by people concerned about house prices, who may be happy to have gypsies work for low wages on local farms but don’t want to “live” alongside them. People who are stirred up by the small-minded snobbery of parish and town councillors.

The last government paid lip service to ending discrimination but their promise of new sites failed to materialise. Now this government has withdrawn funding to help local councils establish sites.

A long-run battle by Tory Basildon council to evict the residents of Dale Farm — a site owned by its residents, first established 40 years ago — may now be reaching a climax. The council say they have nowhere to “put” the residents except into housing. That is a deliberate result. It is completely unacceptable to people who want to live as travellers and have done so for centuries.

Dale Farm residents will need the help of Labour movement and other activists. Contact dale.farm@btinternet.com

Attacks on Roma in Europe:

• Hungary 2009-10. Jobbik party wins victories campaigning on anti-Roma agenda.
• Czech Republic 2009. National Party TV ads in European elections have to be withdrawn after they call for a “final solution” to the gypsy question.
• Italy. Northern League regularly attack Roma.
• Denmark 2010. Copenhagen’s Mayor and the national Justice Minister characterise Romany migrants as criminals and advocate deportations.