

permanentrevolution

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Arab revolutions shake the world

INSIDE

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Europe /

Crisis of the Eurozone

Fukushima /

The end of nuclear power?

Debate /

Russia 1921

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From the editors

Permanent Revolution 20 Summer 2011

A quarterly review of revolutionary politics and theory

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This issue of Permanent Revolution follows a number of themes we have developed in this journal over the years. On the world economy we examine the latest symptom of the recession in southern Europe with an examination of the crisis in the Eurozone and ask "can the euro survive?" We also point out how the world economy has resumed considerable growth after the 2008/9 recession, despite repeated predictions on the left of an imminent catastrophic world slump. Relevant to this is our review of Socialist Register 2011, an issue concentrating on explanations of the most recent capitalist recession and crisis.

The anti-cuts struggle is a major part of throwing back the Tory/Lib Dem offensive against the working class in this country. How are the anti-cuts groups organising and what is their support? In a series of interviews we give a snapshot of how anti-cuts committees and coalitions are developing the fight. In briefings and our editorial we examine how we can take the fight forward after the 30 June coordinated strike actions.

Our journal has a record of developing ideas and putting forward socialist answers to the threat of climate change. Latest figures show that for all the hot air from governments about curbing carbon emissions, we are heading relentlessly towards a potential climate catastrophe. Most of the left are cheering the retreat from nuclear power following the Fukushima nuclear accident. We are not – because we know it will add another twist to the accelerating carbon emissions as producers of energy switch to gas and coal. We open a debate with two contributions on the nuclear power question after Fukushima.

No one could ignore the mighty revolutionary events that are shaking the Arab world today. In a survey article we look at how these revolutions are developing, the apparent democratic stabilisations in Tunisia and Egypt, the repression in Syria and Bahrain, and the ongoing developing civil wars in Libya and the Yemen. Whatever the outcome of these revolutions the Arab world will have changed for good.

We have in this issue 16 pages of reviews, much more than normal, as a result of producing a successfully selling anti-cuts pamphlet in place of our spring issue, and holding over some reviews. Finally we continue the debate on the degeneration of the Russian revolutions, with two more pieces on the significance of 1921 as a turning point.

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Issue 20 / Summer 2011 / www.permanentrevolution.net

Contents /

Briefings /

2 / Editorial

After June 30 / Runaway climate change

4 / Briefings

Are the Liberal Democrats finished? / SNP in Scotland: looming constitutional crisis / Organising from June 30 / NUT: action at last / Post: what is at stake in the closure struggle / Palestine: Arab revolutions inspire resistance

Backspace /

48 / Reviews

Fracking hell / What do you know of Britain? / Treasure Islands / The crisis this time / Celtic Tiger's pain / New scramble for Africa / Vietnam: in the crossfire / From Davitt to Connolly / Passive resistance: disarming the struggle / Malcolm X: man and myth

64 / Debate

1921 – A turning point in Russia?

12 Britain / Building an anti-cuts movement

The Tory/Lib Dem Coalition is tearing up the welfare state. Locally Labour and Tory-led councils are attacking jobs and services. A movement has sprung up of hundreds of anti-cuts groups and coalitions. How are they organising the fightback? And what are the problems they face? We interview leading activists from several groups around the country

26 Europe / Can the Eurozone survive?

In Greece, Portugal, Ireland and now Spain the workers are paying the price for the bankers' crisis. Will the euro survive the massive strains it is being put under by the money markets? Keith Harvey assesses the likely course of the sovereign debt crisis and what it means for the future of Europe

34 Fukushima / Is nuclear power finished?

Germany and Switzerland are phasing out their nuclear power programmes as a result of the major accident at the Fukushima nuclear power plants. Are the right lessons being drawn by the left in the face of runaway carbon emissions from fossil fuel energy production? David Walters examines the real lessons to be drawn from the Japanese accident and Stuart King argues that the left is wrong to call for the ending of nuclear energy

39 Arab revolutions / End of the old order

Stuart King surveys the revolt rocking the Arab world and throwing imperialism into panic. From revolution to democratic stabilisation in Egypt and Tunisia, from civil war to imperialist intervention in Libya, to ongoing suppression in Syria and Bahrain, the Arab world will never be the same again

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After 30 June – activating the missing link

FOLLOWING THE euphoric high of the 26 March TUC demonstration, many anti-cuts activists had reported a dispiriting low with unions failing to follow up with action locally. The attack on public sector pension schemes finally galvanised a number of trade unions into mounting strike action on 30 June (J30). This creates the possibility of coordinated action in the autumn that could pose a fundamental threat to the whole of the Con-Dem coalition's agenda.

As reported elsewhere in this journal, two of the three main teaching unions, the NUT, and the far from militant ATL, accounting for more than 350,000 members, were joining with the lecturers' union, the UCU, and the quarter-million strong PCS in balloting members for action. That action looks set to close or severely disrupt thousands of schools and further education colleges, along with tax offices, job centres and courts across England and Wales.

Notably absent from the above union action, however, are the three largest, Labour Party affiliated unions, the GMB, Unite and most crucially, UNISON with some 1.3 million members, a union heavily concentrated in local government and the NHS where major attacks are targeted.

The GMB leadership has already virtually run up the white flag and given no indication of any intention to ballot its still significant local government membership over the pensions attack.

The new general secretary of Unite, Len McCluskey, has signed a joint working agreement with Mark Serwotka

dispute on the UNISON national website, much less an appeal for messages of support and donations from other branches. Clearly UNISON leader Dave Prentis does not want other branches to get militant ideas!

Rumours suggest that McCluskey had a sharp exchange with his UNISON counterpart, Prentis, at an early May TUC meeting. The Unite general secretary supposedly lambasted Prentis for UNISON's failure to give any clear signal as to when it might be joining united action. Thus far, UNISON's branch level officers and staff are only receiving repeated instructions to "cleanse" and update their electronic membership records in anticipation of a national strike ballot over the pensions issue. Supposed gaps in the records have been cited as an insurmountable obstacle to balloting in time for action on June 30, which rather begs the question of why UNISON's records are in a qualitatively worse state than those of the PCS, for example.

UNISON members are left with rumours that the union might move into action at some point in October. The union's local government and national delegate conferences in Manchester are due to debate strike action over the pensions issue. But already the Standing Orders Committee for the main conference has barred any discussion of motions calling for support for "needs budgets" in local councils. A motion calling for a 24-hour general strike, which gained nigh unanimous approval at the May CWU conference, will not even feature on the order paper at the UNISON conference on the ostensible grounds that it "could place the union in legal jeopardy".

Even now, threats of internal disciplinary action continue to hang over left activists, and unelected UNISON officials are maintaining so-called regional supervision over several local government branches including three in London and Sheffield. To date such attacks on branches have seen sharp declines in union membership in the historically large Newham and Greenwich branches. As a result cuts in terms and conditions are being imposed with barely a whimper of opposition from the union's structures in those areas.

In short, the obstacles to activating the critical missing link, UNISON, in terms of escalating the union resistance look daunting. At a local level some branches are moving into action, despite leadership obstruction, joining the action on J30 by balloting for strike action on cuts and redundancies. It is also doubtful that UNISON's bureaucracy will ultimately be able to contain the anger sparked by the combination of massive job losses, real pay cuts and the truly massive attack on pensions in local government, NHS and other public sector schemes.

Other union leaderships must not be allowed to use UNI-

In the unions we must rebuild a fighting branch network and a rank and file organisation that can take on do-nothing leaderships of the Prentis variety

and the PCS to fight the cuts. In reality, though, Unite is a minor player in the public sector on a national basis.

There are local exceptions, like Southampton, where currently some 800 Unite members are engaged in a joint programme of rolling industrial action with 1,800 UNISON members opposing the imposition of pay cuts of between 2.5% and 5.5% on top of the nationally imposed pay freeze. Southampton City Council is a Tory controlled council, which might explain UNISON's willingness to endorse the action. But one could search in vain during the first fortnight of action for any mention of the Southampton

SON's current absence from the stage to serve as an excuse for holding back on further action after J30. Continuing widespread action by the PCS and teaching unions can only help those in UNISON fighting for it to join the fray. The period between J30 and the early autumn will also be crucial in terms of developing the local anti-cuts committees into key supporters for future industrial action as

well as fostering links between local union activists.

In the unions, especially in UNISON, we must rebuild a fighting branch network and a rank and file organisation that can take on and replace any do-nothing leaderships of the Prentis variety. We need to transform the unions into real fighting organisation again as we take on this government. Unless we do we will lose.

We're gonna fry! It's official

IT LOOKS like 2010 was a record year for carbon emissions. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that 30.6 gigatonnes of CO₂ was sent into the atmosphere from the burning of fossil fuels. Predictions suggest that this year will see 32 gigatonnes released, a level of carbon emissions that the IEA had expected the world to reach only by 2020. The world recession of 2008/09 has acted merely as a blip on the inexorable upward trend of emissions

What do these figures mean? It now seems very likely that world temperatures will rise by 2°C by the end of the century, there is a 50% chance that they will rise by 4°C. Even at 2°C arctic sea ice disappears in summer, glaciers that provide millions with drinking water disappear, coastal flooding increases, agricultural yields drop, and heatwaves of 40°C plus would become commonplace in southern England.

At 4°C things get really bad, with a five metre sea level rise, collapses in agricultural output and the desertification of whole parts of southern Europe. Methane locked in frozen deposits melts, producing even more global warming gases and possibly producing climate change "feedbacks" that lead to runaway temperature changes.

So what are the world governments doing about it? Still talking about binding commitments on carbon emissions 20 years on from when they saw there was a problem. The two biggest emitters, China and the US, are not even part of the failed Kyoto process which excluded "developing countries" like China and India from carbon emission controls. World leaders trek from world conference to conference, from Copenhagen to Cancun, from Bonn to Durban, failing to reach any real agreement.

To add to our woes the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan has led to a moratorium and closure of national nuclear power programmes. While anti-nuke activists might cheer, the result will undoubtedly be the use of more carbon polluting power sources – both coal and gas (see our article on p32 of this issue).

Germany needs to find alternatives to nuclear, which produces 23% of its energy, within ten years. It promises to do this by cutting energy usage by 10% and doubling renewable energy sources – few believe this will happen. At the same time Switzerland is ending its nuclear energy programme by 2034 and as a result it will stop export-

ing hydroelectric power to surrounding European states, like Italy, which will have to substitute other sources of power.

Where will the energy come from? Very likely from a "dash to gas", which is being promoted by the big oil multinationals as "cleaner than coal". While traditional gas supplies certainly produce half the carbon emissions of coal-powered power stations, much of the new gas for the 21st century is planned to come from "fracking" – fracturing gas shale deposits. This is a highly polluting and energy intensive way of producing gas – some estimates put it as high in carbon emissions as coal.

The same thing is happening with oil: as we reach "peak oil" ever more polluting means of extraction are taking over. Canada's new neoliberal government is leading the way in lobbying for its oil from tar sands to be treated as any other, despite the fact that it requires three times the amount of carbon emissions to extract it compared to traditional oil extraction.

Meanwhile the US answer to dependence on oil has been to turn food crops into ethanol. Over 40% of US corn now is turned into fuel thanks to lavish subsidies from the US government. The US is the largest grower and exporter of corn so it comes as no surprise that world food prices are continuing to shoot up, causing poverty and revolts around the world.

The world governments' attempts to tackle global warming and dependence on fossil fuels over the last 20 years have been a complete disaster. The combination of a capitalist world economy, where competing national states are unwilling to bear the costs of transferring to low-carbon producing economies, and a reliance on neoliberal markets to deliver carbon reductions through trading, are bringing on a real ecological and environmental crisis for our children and grandchildren.

It reaffirms the Marxist argument that capitalism is unable to overcome its profit-driven and competitive "beggar thy neighbour policies" even in the face of one of the greatest threats humanity has faced. Only democratic socialism, a world in which the people control the resources of the planet, and decide its production based on need not profit, need for themselves taking account of the earth as our means of survival, offers a certain way forward out of climate disaster.

ELECTIONS

Are the Liberal Democrats finished?

THE MAY local and national assembly elections were the first UK wide electoral test for the Coalition government. How did they do?

The only clear outcome of the local elections was the complete mauling suffered by the Liberal Democrats. The loss of over 700 council seats, the resultant loss of control in key northern cities, capped by the crushing defeat in the Alternative Vote (AV) referendum, added up to a disastrous night for Nick Clegg.

The outcome was made all the worse because they were the exclusive victims of the anger at the Coalition cuts programme - the Tories actually gained seats at the expense of the Lib Dems. It was perhaps the AV result that proved even worse in its significance for Clegg.

Having started the AV campaign with a small poll lead, the Yes vote went on to collapse, culminating in a more than 2 to 1 victory for the No camp. The "shoddy little compromise" of AV had become vital to win if the Lib Dem leadership were to justify their presence in the Coalition to their members - they lost.

For the Coalition, it all means there is a greater prospect than before of it not lasting the full five years. The strains within it are close to crisis, with the NHS reforms being the most obvious and immediate basis for full on conflict between the two parties. At the very least, the elections of 5 May mean an end to the "rose garden" mood of the first year and a move to a far more adversarial relationship between the Coalition parties.

The new mood was graphically summed up at a recent meeting of the Tory 1922 backbench committee where Lib Dems were referred to as "yellow bastards". But where have

the Lib Dems to go? Leaving the Coalition and provoking a general election is not an option either: they would be slaughtered.

The May elections also pose other possible scenarios worthy of discussion. For a growing number on the right of the Tory party, it opens up the prospect of an early election and an outright Tory victory. In this narrative, the Lib Dems are history, having performed the very useful role of human shields for the first year of Tory cuts.

Closely related to this idea are even more radical plans for a permanent Tory England with Scotland "allowed" independence, an idea that is being floated by a small but growing number of Tory outriders in the media and internet, notably, Quentin Letts in the Daily Mail. None of this has any part of Cameron's thinking, at least not publicly, but it does inform us of possible lines of march to examine that aren't entirely fanciful.

There is undoubtedly a serious discussion underway. Its advocates see England as a pro-Atlanticist, anti-European, free market paradise no longer burdened by "subsidising"

of many northern cities, always at the expense of the Lib Dems. The results indicate a return to the traditional polarisation of voting between the two main parties. There is no doubt many Labour voters "came home", following a short flirtation with Clegg, incensed to see the Tory cuts going through on the back of Lib Dem votes.

What did not happen on 5 May was the making of big inroads into "middle England", particularly in the Midlands and south east. (London did not vote in this round). Overall, we can say that the vote was good enough to protect Ed Miliband's position. However we should also observe that the results came despite him, not because of him. In the polls he is seen as an ineffective leader, scoring well behind Cameron. In the next months we can expect more of the same passionless, think tank politics from Miliband, including irrelevant projects like the "Refound Labour" campaign.

Meanwhile his party is making savage cuts at local level wherever Labour is in power while trying to blame it on the Tories and insinuate themselves into the anti-cuts struggle. It is a hopeless strategy and a whole new generation is learning to distrust Labour and fight it at a local level.

Finally, we should note again, the failure of the various far left election forays on 5 May. As in Scotland the far left never

In the next months we can expect more passionless, think tank politics from Miliband, including irrelevant projects like the "Refound Labour" campaign

Scotland, a country that never voted Tory anyway.

What of Labour? In England and Wales the Labour vote was good but in Scotland the SNP trounced them [see box p6]. Overall in the UK the Labour vote was 37%, well up on the general election. It resulted in the gain of 800 seats and the retaking

recovered from its failure to make the Socialist Alliance a credible alternative to Blair's neoliberalism. Its collapse brought about by both the sectarianism and opportunism of the competing far left factions has left a legacy of distrust and recrimination amongst the broader left milieu it once attracted. Now a

few fragments compete with each other for a handful of votes ignored by the vast majority of the left and the working class.

Chief amongst these forays was the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). Mainly supported by the SP, but with half hearted support from the SWP and a few RMT leaders, it put up 173 candidates and got 25,523 votes between them – an average of 143 votes each! Of the 173, only 13 polled more than 10% of the votes cast, usually in wards where they used to be councillors. Of the 84 seats where they challenged the Greens, the Greens out-pollled them in 81. In the key Coventry area where the SP has always had a base

and where Dave Nellist the former MP is still a councillor, 18 candidates stood and lost. Meanwhile Labour took five seats off the Tories.

At the heart of this worst ever showing for the far left in England and Wales is the refusal, in the face of overwhelming evidence, to recognise that at present the vast majority of working class people see the Labour Party as the only viable means of defending themselves against the Con-Dem government. And as long as the far left remains a series of sects competing with each other for a few votes this will remain the case.

Andy Smith

At the beginning of the year polls were anticipating the return of a Labour-led government to Holyrood. Labour thought that they could just repeat their “No going back to the 1980s”, anti-Tory appeal in the run-up to the 5 May Holyrood election. However, that card had been played out in 2010. Despite voting Labour, Scotland now faced the hated Tories at Westminster once more, supported by the increasingly despised Lib Dems. Yet Miliband’s Labour Party, consigned to “opposition” was making absolutely no difference.

Salmond was able to repeat Gordon Brown’s 2010 pre-election trick and postpone major Holyrood cuts until after the election. Although, he lowered the electorate’s sights, abandoning many earlier SNP promises, those remaining still aimed higher than any made by Labour.

The relentlessly negative Scottish Labour leader, Ian Gray, believed that Scottish voters would automatically return to their “natural” fold, and that the Holyrood gravy train would once more be at Labour’s disposal. He slept-walked towards 5 May. When Labour’s poll support started to ebb away, his response was once more to raise the separatist bogey, and then, in panic, to adopt virtually every other SNP policy.

Meanwhile, Salmond had been assiduously building up the backing of Scottish businessmen, including Brian Souter, the homophobic owner of Stagecoach, Sir Thomas Farmer, the Con-Dem cuts-approving owner of KwikFit, and Sir David Murray, the Unionist owner of Murray International Metals and Rangers FC.

Both Murdoch’s Sun and Tommy Sheridan backed the populist nationalist SNP. But Sheridan failed to persuade many Glasgow voters to back his other recommended choice – the left British unionist, George Galloway.

Underlying the large electoral shift to the SNP is the current lack of working class self-confidence. This reflects the lack of fight back against the Con-Dems’ austerity drive. The STUC is every bit as

SCOTLAND

After 5 May – a looming constitutional crisis

5 MAY, the Lib Dem initiated referendum proposal to introduce Alternative Vote (AV) to Westminster elections was massively rejected in every nation and region of the UK, including Northern Ireland. In the English local, the Welsh and Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament elections, all held on the same day, former Lib Dem voters used the opportunity either to punish Clegg and his allies for entering into a coalition with the Tories, or to vote for the real thing, the Tories.

However, the most sensational result on 5 May occurred in the Scottish parliamentary election. Here the previous minority SNP government was able to increase its number of MSP’s from 46 to 69, an absolute majority forecasted by no one. Furthermore, the SNP’s votes came at the expense, not only of the Lib Dems, but of the Tories, Labour and the small socialist vote too. Only the Greens managed to hold on to their vote and their two MSPs, making a calculated left appeal to

woo former disillusioned socialist voters.

Labour only managed to increase its vote in two constituencies, Dumfries and Eastwood. Here they were the main challengers to the Tories, who by their own admission remain “toxic” in Scotland.

Very few people in Scotland held street parties to celebrate Will’s and Kate’s royal wedding on 29 April – many are saving these for Thatcher’s funeral!

So, what does the SNP victory represent? Ever since the banking crash, which saw the SNP and its charismatic leader, Alex Salmond, too closely associated with the failed Royal Bank of Scotland, the party had been unable to win any Westminster or even many council by-elections. As recently as the 2010 Westminster general election, the Labour Party surprisingly increased its vote in Scotland, retaking a seat previously lost to the SNP in a pre-crash by-election. Labour’s electoral appeal was almost entirely based upon playing up the fear of the Tories.

wedded to social partnership deals with the bosses and the state as the TUC. The effect of these has been to turn trade unions into a free personnel management service for the bosses.

However, much of the SNP's electoral support is superficial – a clutching at straws. As long as workers remain acquiescent, the SNP government will openly pursue its real aim – making Scotland a haven for Scottish business and global corporations. Earlier this year, to show where the SNP's loyalties lie, Finance Minister John Swinney allowed the lapse of Holyrood's income tax raising powers, voted for in the 1997 devolution referendum.

The SNP have extended their council tax freeze for another five years to force local councils into privatising services. The Lib Dem/SNP coalition running Edinburgh Council has brought in consultants

to prepare for such measures. This follows their attack on cleansing workers' pay, preparatory to possible privatisation. The SNP has even attacked the Coalition's proposed levy on North Sea oil, Salmond declaring it a "smash and grab". It's not to be "Scotland's oil", but will remain the petroleum multinationals' oil!

The SNP has entered negotiations with Cameron over Westminster's proposed Scotland Bill. This is based on the miserable additional devolutionary powers recommended by the Calman Commission. The SNP's over-riding concern is to get the political power to cut corporation tax.

Up until 2008, the SNP's very mild reforms were dependent on building up Scotland's "buoyant" finance sector – a trickle-down "social democracy" courtesy of the Royal Bank of Scotland! Now, any such reforms are meant to be

financed by a very limited tax on corporate profits – if their boards agree to play ball!

The media has made much of a looming constitutional crisis due to the SNP's commitment to holding a referendum on Scottish independence in the last years of its office. The novelty of a nationalist victory in one of the UK's devolved assemblies should not prevent people looking to other comparable examples in Spain and Canada.

In these states Catalan Convergence and Union (CiU), the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and Parti Quebecois (PQ) have also formed majority administrations in devolved assemblies. Both the CiU and PNV have settled for greater measures of devolution within the Spanish state, whilst the PQ referendum on Quebec independence was narrowly defeated and has not been attempted again.

SCOTLAND

Where now for socialists in Scotland?

ON 5 May, socialists in Scotland only stood for the list seats for Holyrood, and were split between the SSP, Solidarity and Scargill's SLP. As recently as 2007, socialists held six seats at Holyrood, but they have been fatally crippled in the aftermath of the Sheridan affair.

In the left's equivalent of "bald men fighting over a comb", the SLP gained the most socialist votes. However, the SLP is a phantom party, which only appears in elections. These purely passive votes are a strong indication of the current state of the left. The SSP vote continued to fall from its poor 2007 result, whilst Solidarity's declining vote went into tailspin.

In the absence of Solidarity's leader, Tommy Sheridan, they decided to back another celebrity socialist, George Galloway, standing as George Galloway/Respect in Glasgow. He parachuted into the list candidature there

after being rejected by electors in East London last year. He was backed by the CWI (SP in England), the SWP and their latest Scottish breakaway, the International Socialist Group (ISG), led by that long-standing party hack, Chris Bambery.

Glasgow voters recognised an opportunist carpetbagger when they saw one. Knowing he was going to lose, Galloway just picked up his bags and left before the election count. Will any criticisms of their opportunist campaign rise amongst the ranks of the CWI, SWP or ISG?

Given the increasing significance of the national question in Scotland, how will they attempt to square left nationalist Sheridan's simultaneous open support for the SNP and for Galloway, a fervid Labour Party defender and left unionist!

The SSP, a victim of Sheridan's celebrity-seeking posturing, and of

CWI and SWP sectarianism, has still to come to terms with the effects of its sometimes less than principled responses to their party wrecking campaign. The SSP is no longer the party of socialist unity, but has retreated back to being, in effect, the "Scottish Socialist Alliance" again, only more loosely united than in 1996.

A series of debates are taking place within the SSP. Depending on their outcome, the SSP could just fade away, dissolve itself, or seriously address the many issues and challenges it faces.

These arise directly from the post-Sheridan party crisis; from the new political situation socialists face following the economic recession; and from the possible renewed challenge to the UK state, marked by the rise of the SNP. The RCN contributions to these debates can be found on our blog at:

republicancommunist.org/blog/



Meanwhile, over the water, the former revolutionary nationalist Sinn Féin has settled very quickly into helping to run the UK's devolved administration.

All the indications are that the very constitutional nationalist SNP is quite willing to settle for "Devolution-Max". Salmond doesn't have the excuse that he had in his last government of being in a minority, and hence unable to put forward the SNP's promised Independence Referendum Bill. In reality, significant forces in the SNP, including neo-liberal Education Minister, Michael Russell, and former left nationalist, Justice Minister, Kenny MacAskill, never wanted a referendum, and nor do many of the SNP's current business backers.

Salmond is publicly ditching more and more attributes of meaningful political independence. The SNP recognise the continued role of the monarchy (which fronts the British ruling class's draconian anti-democratic Crown Powers), the City (which sets financial policy), and the UK's armed forces (which would be able to use Scottish military facilities). The SNP supports UN-backed imperialist wars, and has campaigned vigorously to maintain Scottish regiments and British and NATO bases in Scotland.

There may still be some commitment to abolishing the unpopular Trident bases and hence for Scotland to step down into NATO's second tier, non-nuclear "Partnership for Peace". However, there are also signs that the SNP would be prepared just to lease out military facilities here, creating, in effect, "Guantanamo" bases.

"Independence-Lite" or "Devolution-Max" represents the height of SNP ambitions. Most of the existing institutions of the British unionist and imperial state would remain in place but be given a lick of tartan paint in Scotland.

The problem the SNP faces is the British ruling class has decided to go no further than a few more limited devolutionary concessions. These are designed both to buttress wider British imperial control over

these islands (emphasised by the recent royal visit to Ireland) and to create the best political conditions for corporate profitability.

Furthermore, despite the SNP's overtures to Americans of Scottish descent (many of whom are on the US right), it is the UK government, which enjoys official US state backing. Indeed the UK is such a reliable junior partner that successive US governments have granted the UK state the imperial franchise in the north east Atlantic. The UK also acts as a useful spoiler to contain any independent French-German Euro-imperial ambitions. The US is unlikely to switch its backing to the SNP. Furthermore, EU leaders will not step on the UK governments' toes over this issue.

Realising it is isolated in the UK and international arena, Salmond probably hopes to persuade the liberal unionist forces in the three main UK parties to push for a second "Devolution-Max" option in his proposed Independence Referendum. This would satisfy his most ardent business supporters, as well as important sectors of his own party. However, if he is forced to promote a referendum, which only offers Yes and No choices on Scottish "independence", then we will soon see all the dirty tricks available to the British ruling class and its political representatives under the UK Crown Powers. The impeccably constitutionalist SNP is no more prepared for these, than it

was in 1979, when the British ruling class was at least split, not united as it is today, over devolution. Meanwhile, the SNP government will be forced to impose the cuts demanded by Westminster and its business backers.

Salmond has just had his own 2011 equivalent of New Labour's "things can only get better" 1997 election, with a similar likely let down in the future. Socialists today appear to be in as much of a mess as they were after Thatcher defeated the miners and Liverpool Council in the mid-80s.

By 1987, the triumphant Tories had decided to introduce the poll tax and face down the growing "national question" in the UK. However, Thatcher was defeated by mass independent class action and continued Irish republican opposition. She was forced to stand down.

Today, the swingeing cuts being imposed on all parts of the UK, and the impending constitutional crisis, offer socialists another opportunity to build up our strength once more. Only this time we must not hand over any fruits of victory to Labour or the nationalists. This means a commitment to a socialist republican "internationalism from below" strategy to unite workers in Scotland, England, Wales and Ireland.

Allan Armstrong
RCN and SSP member

TRADE UNION COORDINATION

What's next for public sector after 30 June?

ON 30 June (J30) hundreds of thousands of workers will strike across the civil service and education sectors. Although the strike was called in defence of pensions, the reality is the attack on pensions is just one part of the onslaught on public sector workers. Workers in other unions, at branch

level, will also take action on the same day over job losses, cuts in council services and attacks on working conditions.

J30 is the first coordinated union strike action against the government attacks on the public sector. It must become a model for further actions. This means

drawing in the maximum number of workers whether or not their union leaders have allowed them to ballot or strike. Workers should be urged not to cross picket lines. Local union branches of UCU, NUT and PCS should mount militant and effective pickets to ensure J30, and any future strikes, is as effective as possible.

Local activists should go and speak to other workplaces where workers face attacks and see if it is possible for those workers to take strike or other actions unofficially on that day around their own demands.

At Lambeth College, where the teachers' unions, the UCU and ATL, will be on strike, there will be a joint meeting of all members

together with Unison members. In the council Unison members are balloting for action as well. We hope to organise a big anti-cuts focus in the centre of Brixton, drawing in the whole community under threat from the cuts.

The day will demonstrate the great possibilities there are of mobilising millions of workers in strike action against the cuts programme of this government – but on its own it will not be enough to make this government turn tail and flee. Which begs the question, after J30 what next?

Ideally, we should not be fighting workplace by workplace and sector by sector. United strike action by all public sector workers that encourages private sector workers

to join them in a general strike would be the most effective means of breaking and dispatching this government. This idea is gaining support most recently in the call by the CWU conference for the TUC to call a 24 hour protest general strike.

This is a very good demand but the organisation it is directed to, the TUC, will not entertain the idea of using the full strength of the working class against the government. The leaders of the TUC are far more interested in keeping their members under control and having friendly negotiating meetings with various government ministers than organising effective strike action. And a 24 hour strike, even a general one, will be a one off demonstration. On its own it will

30 JUNE

NUT takes action at last

THE NATIONAL Union of Teachers (NUT) will be at the heart of the strike on J30, closing schools across the country and allowing school students and parents to join a mass protest against the cuts. Hundreds of thousands of public sector workers will be on strike and thousands of colleges and government offices will be closed alongside the schools. The power of the organised labour movement to create widespread disruption, to close things down, will be vividly shown.

We must ensure a huge Yes vote for J30 and beyond. Militants must expose the squalid decision of the leadership of the NAS/UWT not to ballot and invite their members to join us in our action. Effective and lively picketing, demonstrations with other unions, developing links with the anti-cuts movement should be the order of the day.

Of course a one-day strike, however powerful and inspiring, will not bring us victory – whether in the pensions dispute or in the broader struggle against government cuts. Strike action on

J30, by highlighting the attacks we face and our power to fight them, must aim to act as bridge to further, much more extensive action. We must demand that the NUT Executive identifies now the dates for a wave of strikes that must begin early in the autumn term. NUT groups should bombard the union with resolutions calling for such action.

Considerable pressure from below will be necessary if this is to be achieved. Whilst the NUT has recently produced some highly effective publicity aimed at winning the pensions ballot, this stands in sharp contrast to the lack of resolve that has characterised the Executive's response to the government's attack.

Despite acknowledging the need for strike action last autumn, the NUT Executive, even with its supposed left majority, dragged its feet for six months, only finally announcing a ballot at NUT Conference in April.

As a result the union squandered the opportunity to strike alongside the student protests or with the UCU last

March. Whilst a recognition of the scale of the attacks we face has become part of the discourse of the leadership (and the labour movement generally), it has not resulted, even amongst the left, in a step change in activity. Business-as-usual trade unionism, with its sluggish bureaucratic rhythms and legalism, still prevails.

Activism at the base of the unions is essential if we are to win. Networks of rank and file teachers must be established to keep up the pressure on the Executive and to alert NUT members to any proposed settlement that sells short the struggle (like the 2005/06 settlement that created a two tier pensions scheme).

Crucially, militants must be ready to lead their own strikes if the Executive refuses to call action. Militants must also extend these networks across the public sector, ensuring that all picket lines are honoured and that workers in different unions are encouraged to strike together, whether or not their leaders have sanctioned the action.

Dave Gay,
Greenwich NUT
(in a personal capacity)

not be sufficient to break the governments offensive.

So how do we, as ordinary union members and activists, start to organise so that, if the trade union leaders won't fight effectively, we can? Local action in defence of jobs, conditions and services is vital. In the further education sector colleges are run independently so college managements are currently pursuing different tactics in the implementation of the cuts.

In some colleges this means massive job losses; in other colleges workers are facing attacks on their pay and conditions. At Sheffield College, management attempted to impose 100 compulsory redundancies on teaching and support staff. The local UCU branch responded, starting with one day strikes. The action was escalated to a series of strike actions forcing the management to withdraw selection meetings for redundancy and enter talks on avoiding any compulsory redundancies.

This is happening too in the fight against cuts in local authority budgets; one council may be closing libraries while the adjacent one is concentrating its fire on services for children and young people. How do we focus and generalise our struggle from these disparate

into indefinite strikes, organising alongside them forms of direct action such as occupations, demonstrations and road blockades.

Thirdly, we must develop our rank and file organisation. Meetings of local reps and stewards, both within the same union and across unions, on a local and regional level is the way to start to plan and organise coordinated and widespread action after J30.

If we can network with other union activists and link up with the anti-cuts campaigns, locally,

regionally and nationally, then we can begin to build up an alternative leadership to the national union leaders. Then if the TUC and national trade union leaders refuse to call effective united action we will be in a stronger position to deliver the necessary action ourselves.

J30 must be just the start. We must use it to build organisations and actions that can defeat the Con-Dem coalitions offensive.

**David Esterson,
Lambeth College UCU**

POST OFFICE

Fighting job losses and closures

AROUND 3,500 postal workers in four large London workplaces will probably be on strike in the next few weeks after voting 4-1 for industrial action against proposed job losses. Royal Mail plans to close the mail centres at Nine Elms in South London and Bow in east London as well as the West End Delivery Office at

than a unilateral decision, while the CWU committed itself to supporting the outcome of the consultation. There was also a commitment to avoiding compulsory redundancies, usually through a combination of voluntary redundancy and workers being able either to "follow the work" to wherever it was going to be sorted in the future or relocation to another workplace.

The crucial issue with the London dispute is that these closures are likely to lead to compulsory redundancies. Royal Mail is refusing to give a commitment of no compulsion and it is recognised that if they succeed in this instance it will give the green light throughout Royal Mail.

Crucial to victory, when strike action takes place, will be a refusal of other mail centres to sort post diverted from the centres on strike, as well as local London delivery offices refusing to deliver it. Management will undoubtedly attempt to circumvent the effects of the strike. It is therefore extremely positive that the union's postal conference unanimously passed a resolution which demanded that no one "should handle any of the work from London by un-agreed

What will be crucial is whether local union reps – with the backing of regional and national officials – argue for and win support for this policy

attacks and struggles?

Firstly, one day strikes and protest actions are simply not enough in this situation. They should be used to build confidence and organisation, not as many trade union leaders use them, to exhaust and defuse the militancy of the members – witness Unite's handling of the Heathrow BA dispute.

Secondly, groups of workers under attack will need to use more militant forms of action as well – escalating a series of strike actions

Rathbone Place (the largest in Europe, delivering to the W1 and WC postal districts). All these operations will go to the Mount Pleasant depot resulting, on Royal Mail's plans, in nearly 600 redundancies.

Closure of mail centres has been going on for years, and one of the contentious issues in the agreement which ended the 2009 strike was a formal review of the future of mail centres. Royal Mail committed itself to a consultation procedure, rather

diversions". It also declared that "there will be an industrial action ballot of the whole postal membership if Royal Mail make any postal worker compulsory redundant." The refusal to handle diverted work could lead to widespread unofficial - unballoted - action, since management may well suspend workers who do so, leading to walkouts.

What will be crucial is whether local union reps - with the backing of regional and national officials - argue for and win support for this policy. Many are sceptical about the union being up for a serious fight given its record from previous disputes. The low turnout in the ballot in some of the London workplaces would seem to reflect this scepticism.

This dispute is a major step forward, given the national union has previously accepted the closure of mail centres - and delivery offices - without serious opposition. It still has accepted that jobs will be lost, only insisting that this be done by a voluntary rather than compulsory process.

Everyone knows that there is a fine line between voluntary and compulsory redundancy - if you make the situation unbearable, people will take the money and

In the wake of this year's Arab revolts, the broad sympathy for the democratic demands of the Palestinian movement has spread and deepened

run, even if this leaves them with an uncertain future. And, of course, if not enough people (in management's view) are willing to go voluntarily, then they get rid of them by other means, either by invoking disciplinary measures, or compulsory redundancies.

The importance of this dispute also goes beyond the immediate issue of job losses. Royal Mail has a programme of closing offices, both mail centres and delivery offices, in order to sell them off.

The only reason the West End Delivery Office was included in the London mail centre review is because it is based on prime property, just off Oxford Street. It has already been consolidating delivery offices in West and North West London.

This means not only more work for postal workers - further to travel to work and deliveries further from the office - but also a worsened service for customers.

Indeed many of the mail centre closures that have already taken place have led to regular "failures" (not all the day's work being done in the allotted time).

The fight over job losses also has to be seen as part of the fight against the government's privatisation plans. A victory for the workers would make Royal Mail a far less attractive deal for any prospective buyer.

Pete Firmin

PALESTINE

Arab revolutions inspire new resistance

THE UPRISINGS throughout the Middle East have acted as a catalyst in the relations between the Palestinian national movement, Israel and the US.

The agreement recently struck between Islamist Hamas and secular Fatah to try and form a unity government for the West Bank and Gaza and the re-opening of Egypt's border crossing into

among Palestinians fighting to end Israel's enduring occupation of their homeland and establish an independent state. This was signalled in the militant pro-Palestinian border demonstrations in Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and the West Bank on the anniversary of the founding of the Israeli state, which challenged the Israeli borders and demanded the return of stolen land.

But the upheavals this year in the region did not in itself create the shift in political strategy of leaders of the Palestinian national movement. The election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's prime minister two years ago, brought to power a ruthless, racist Zionist party that refuses to contemplate any meaningful dialogue with the Palestinians, and is unwilling to put an end to settlement building in Jerusalem and the West Bank.

The 19 year long US-sponsored "peace process" is dead in the water. As a result, last year Fatah shifted its strategy away from a tripartite process centred on Washington and Tel-Aviv and instead seeks to gain diplomatic recognition for an independent Palestinian state from the UN and individual governments based on the 1967 borders (i.e.

Gaza, are signs of the shift that has taken place.

On the one hand, Hamas' refusal to come out in support of President Assad against the Syrian protest movement has angered their hosts in Damascus and forced its exiled leadership to seek to heal the breach with Fatah.

On the other hand, the downfall of Mubarak in Egypt has removed the biggest Arab supporter of Israel in the Middle East and created a more militant, confident mood

before Israel's occupation and creeping annexation after the war of that year).

Since late last year Brazil, Argentina and several other Latin American countries have issued formal declarations recognising a Palestinian state, and others including some from European governments, are in the pipeline.

In the wake of this year's Arab revolts, the broad sympathy for the democratic demands of the Palestinian movement has spread and deepened. This makes it almost certain that the resolution recognising Palestinian statehood, based on the 1967 borders, tabled at the UN General Assembly this September, will be passed by an overwhelming majority of states – even if as is likely the US, Israel and many EU states will vote against it.

Even though it would be no substitute for a sovereign, independent state, this will infuse the Palestinians under occupation with an enhanced sense of legitimacy and confidence. A new Palestinian intifada would add power and momentum to the Arab Spring.

This may be more likely if the rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas deepens. At present this new found unity exists mainly between its exiled leader, Khaled Meshal and Fatah, rather than with the Hamas movement on the ground in Gaza.

Whereas Meshal has endorsed Fatah's attempts at diplomatic dialogue, the Hamas leader in Gaza, Mahmoud Zahar, has rejected the idea of renouncing or sharing control of Gaza with Fatah before next year's elections.

But as always the biggest obstacle to the Palestinians' aspirations remains Israel. While accepting the idea of a "two-state solution" Netanyahu places so many caveats and conditions on it that it is rendered meaningless. Even the US special envoy to the region, George Mitchell, resigned the post in mid-May "in despair" at Israeli intransigence.

No wonder. Netanyahu refuses to stop settlement building permanently, which is why Fatah

broke off negotiations last year, two weeks after they were formally resumed. He refuses to consider Jerusalem as anything other than the unified Zionist capital city and rules out under all circumstances the possibility of the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land and homes inside Israel or occupied territories.

He insists a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders is a non-starter and demands several hundred thousand illegal Zionist settlers in the West Bank, along with the stolen land they live on, are incorporated into the Israeli state; and for good measure he says Israel must maintain troops in the Jordan Valley in any future "sovereign" Palestinian state.

Netanyahu's Zionist, expansionist ambitions only underline the fact that a "two-state solution" is impossible, indeed, now utopian. The Palestinian movement must

abandon this goal, based as it is on totally unrealistic redrawing of boundaries and mass population transfers.

A struggle must take place to unify the democratic, non-Zionist movements inside Israel with the Palestinian Israelis and the Palestinians of the occupied territories in Jordan/Lebanon. The goal must be to achieve a single, secular democratic and socialist republic of the whole of Palestine

To those that think this is impossible to achieve, we say: at the start of this year, most people would have said the same thing about removing the dictators and authoritarian rulers that infest the Middle East and Africa. Since the Arab revolt, everything is possible.

Keith Harvey

LINKS

See "Two peoples, one state":

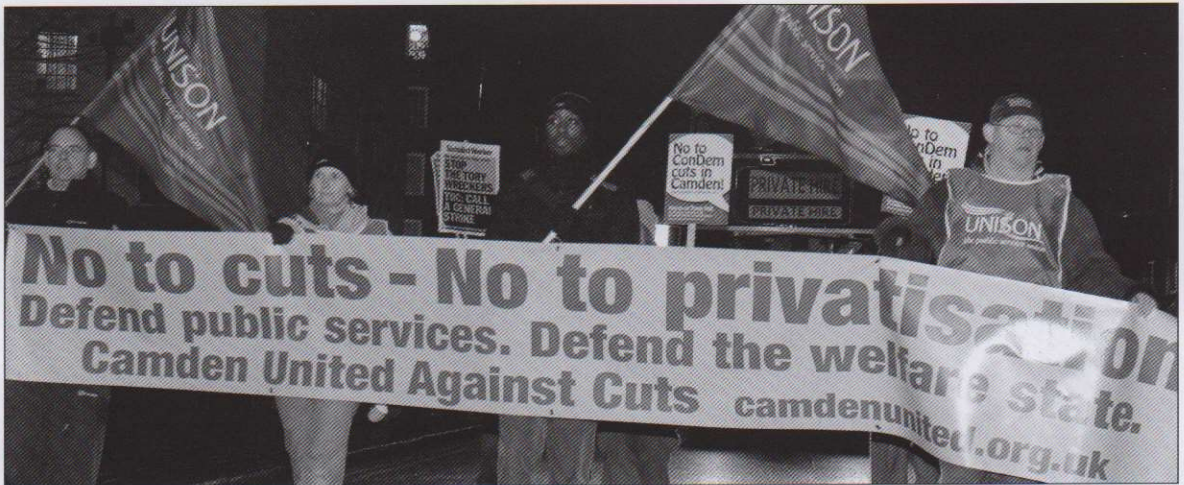
www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2711



Fighting building a



the cuts, movement



Introduction

WE PRESENT here seven different interviews with eight anti-cuts activists and officers of local anti-cuts groups across the country – some are supporters of this magazine's politics, some are not.

Although it is a small snapshot we think it brings out some of the issues and problems facing the growing anti-cuts movement across the country. The early divisions and left competition to control local anti-cuts campaigns seems to have settled down with most of the left working co-operatively, at least at a local level.

While the anti-cuts groups vary considerably in terms of involvement of the local trade unions, all seem to have some connections to local trade union struggles and some are becoming a real focus of trade union and community action.

Many point up the difficulties of pushing trade unions like UNISON into taking national action against the cuts, despite that union's members being key victims of the government's attacks. A conservative trade union leadership – the legacy of defeats suffered during the last 25 years – and the continuing threat of the anti-union laws, all act as a real block to the determined action needed to defeat the cuts.

Clearly, the anti-cuts groups are not, and should not be, merely made up of the trade unions under attack. A key message that comes out of these interviews is how we can build an alliance between the users of council services – old people, young mothers, library users – and the trade unions.

Only by building an active and dynamic campaign uniting the two groups offers the possibility of winning. We shouldn't pretend that this is going to be easy but a start has been made in many areas, as shown in the interviews.

Neither are the cuts just about local councils. The co-ordinated strike action in defence of pensions on 30 June – launched by the NUT/UCU/PCS/ATL – shows that these cuts are a class-wide attack.

They affect our pensions, our NHS, disability benefits, and even a threat to the very homes people

live in with the reductions in housing benefit. Many anti-cuts groups are developing the struggle on all these fronts but are often dependent on national trade union action that they have no control over.

The run up to 30 June showed that a determined lead by some unions, over what could have been a sectional pensions issue, became a generalised focus against the cuts for a number of local UNISON branches and other unions fighting local council cuts.

It shows the way forward for a united struggle but only if the unions involved are forced by their members to launch a sustained and co-ordinated series of strikes. We not only have to fight the government, at the same time we have to transform our unions into fighting organisations once again.

An important problem raised in the interviews is the lack of a single national co-ordinating body for the anti cuts groups. In fact we have three ineffective ones, divided amongst themselves.

As a result they have little credibility amongst the anti-cuts groups locally. Yet we need a national focus. These cuts are launched by the Con-Dem Coalition as a nationally planned attack on our jobs, services and conditions, we will only defeat them at a national level by delivering co-ordinated mass action – trade union and community – via strikes, demonstrations, occupations and direct action.

That is, we need to do to Cameron and Clegg what we achieved in the Poll Tax struggle against Thatcher in the late 1980s, but with the added element of national strike action that was completely absent at that time.

Without the unions the anti-cuts groups alone cannot hope to organise the necessary forces to defeat the key policy of the Con-Dem Coalition. But the anti-cuts groups, if they are united and mobilised in a democratic movement, controlled from the bottom up, can provide the dynamism and militancy so sorely lacking amongst many of the national trade union leaders.

Building such a credible and militant organisation is the one of the burning tasks of the coming months.

Brighton

Tony Greenstein is active in the Brighton & Hove Coalition Against the Cuts, is Secretary of Brighton & Hove Unemployed Workers' Centre and a member of UNISON

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti-cuts group?

There is a local anti-cuts coalition which was set up by the Trades Council. In reality it is controlled by the Trades Council but its meetings are often much larger, 40-50 people, even than the Trades Council. It has organised a couple of large marches and rallies locally, the last one being two thousand strong and also a few large public meetings. It also provided essential support in terms of placards etc, for the school students/sixth form demo on the fees issue last year which is estimated at 4,000 strong.

The Socialist Party is the strongest and most serious group involved, though the SWP and others, even some anarchists are part of it. I would say it is comprehensive and covers most groups and gave support to the workers at the Brightstart (Council) nursery who successfully resisted the Tory council attempts to close them down.

Now we have a Green administration on Brighton Council we shall have to wait and see.

What has the role of the local trade unions in the anti-cuts campaigns?

They two main local unions – the GMB and UNISON – work both within and outside the coalition. They initiate and take up their own specific campaigns – for the GMB it is keeping the service public. They represent the binmen and waste transfer workers who are militant in defence of their own positions but politically support New Labour.

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

Individualised. Connexions, a local employment service run by the statutory services, has been effectively closed and UNISON opposed this, but not successfully. Brightstart was saved and the GMB threatened a strike if they attempted to privatise or cut pay and the Council backed off.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

The problem is that in, for example the voluntary sector, workers are divided and consciousness too is not high. In Brighton there is an active Brighton Benefits Campaign which is concerned with the attacks which are taking place on benefit claimants. The group itself includes employed people and consists of a political mixture – an anarchist Solidarity Federation, Green Left, Socialist Party and people from Brighton Unemployed Centre. Many cuts locally are nationally inspired and to tackle that you need a national response which so far has been lacking.

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally coordinate the anti cuts groups?

I don't know what these efforts are. I assume you mean the Coalition of Resistance, National Shop Stewards Net-

work and the Right to Work Campaign. The latter is just the SWP under a different name. The NSSN is essentially, though I have no direct knowledge, the SP and RMT and some others, the CoR seems to be inactive but either way I'm not aware of any such moves.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

The left taking seriously the attack on the social wage and in particular the massive benefit attacks and attacks on the disabled. Resisting redundancies and privatisation. Building an opposition which is both credible and non-sectarian.

Increasing political consciousness and the reducing feeling people have that they have no power. Uniting the left, which at the moment is more concerned with recruiting to its own particular group, and developing a coherent anti-capitalist strategy which explains why we are in this position and doesn't merely argue for an alternative capitalist strategy

Liverpool

Mark Hoskisson, Secretary, Liverpool Trades Union Council (in a personal capacity)

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti-cuts group?

In Merseyside the anti-cuts campaign has been waged through a Public Sector Alliance at a regional level and through the Trades Council at a city-wide level, so there is no separate "anti-cuts group".

The Public Sector Alliance was set up in June of last year. In the summer of 2010 Liverpool Trades Union Council (LTUC) set up an anti-cuts sub-committee. The two bodies have worked closely together.

We have organised five demonstrations in the city, we lobbied the Lib Dem conference which was held in Liverpool, we have organised lobbies of the council meetings

To facilitate everyone's involvement we have opened up the Trades Council to the pensioners, students, the community campaigners alongside the unions

discussing the cuts, held public meetings to build support for the campaign and we mobilised for the TUC's 26 March demonstration, filling six coaches – in addition to the numerous union trains that went down.

Taken together these actions have brought thousands onto the streets of Liverpool. Our public meeting in the run up to 26 March was the largest the city had seen since the campaign against the Iraq war – over 400 in the meeting with another 100 outside.

The scale of opposition we have organised forced Joe Anderson, the leader of the Labour Council, which is pushing through a £91 million cuts budget, to come along to

an LTUC meeting to try and justify his actions. Needless to say he got a rough ride.

As well as the meetings, lobbies and demos we have supported the student actions against cuts and fee increases, organised the showing of plays in city theatres followed by debates, raised the anti-cuts message in the city's "Working Class Life and Music Festival" and of course have mobilised support for all the strikes that have taken place.

To facilitate everyone's involvement we have opened up the Trades Council meetings to welcome the pensioners, students, the community campaigners alongside the unions. The result has been regular meetings of over 40 activists to discuss and plan our campaign ranging from delegates from local unions through to representatives of UK UnCut.

What is the role of the local trade unions in the anti-cuts campaigns?

As a trade union campaign we have had a lot of union support. The number of unions affiliating to and getting involved in LTUC reflects the growth of union opposition to the cuts in the city. We have had several strikes that we have campaigned around - the UCU action, a struggle against specific cuts at Hope University, rail and seafaring strikes related to the cuts and a PCS call centre strike. In each case we have organised solidarity with the strikers, had them address our meetings and mobilised for the demos and pickets they have held.

At the moment we have been working to support a series of strikes by teachers at Shorefields School in South Liverpool which is faced with the threat of being closed and then turned into an academy. This campaign has been brilliant in connecting the unions and the community in the area around the school, bringing teachers, parents and school students together.

We have worked with the City Council Unison branch and with the Joint Trades Union Committee there. And

The demonstration on 26 March made thousands of people really feel they belonged to a movement. The danger is that nothing gets done with that feeling

at the North West TUC delegates from Liverpool Unite and RMT led a fight with the right wing in that union to win support for all strikes against the cuts, regardless of whether or not the councils carrying them out were Labour. Needless to say this has meant that there is a very real friction between us and the regional bureaucratic machines, especially UNISON which has worked to keep a lid on action against Labour Councils.

To be frank the extent to which we can crack the hold of that bureaucracy is the key to actually getting the sort of action that will stop and reverse the cuts - a strike by the whole council workforce.

How has the left worked together in the local campaign, what have the problems been?

The left - in the sense of the great bulk of left activists - work very well together here. But I am guessing when you say left you really mean "the left wing groups". That is a pretty narrow definition of the left in my opinion, but leaving that aside, the main groups have accepted the lead taken by the Trades Council and have worked constructively with us. The Socialist Workers Party/Right to Work Campaign have been great at distributing flyers for a conference we are planning and we held a joint day of action with them against the fascists on St George's day.

The Socialist Party have been fully supportive of the Trades Council's work and Tony Mulhearn, a leading Socialist Party member and former member of the Liverpool City Council that fought Thatcher in the 1980s has spoken at many of our meetings. There have been no attempts at left group coups or anything like that. Unity in action has been the key. I hope it remains that way.

I should add that one of the reasons why there is less nonsense is because the strength of what you might call the left and the labour movement in general in the city means that there is a very democratic tradition. All the groups are able to have their say at our meetings, nobody is told to shut up and nobody is forced to agree with each other.

That democratic spirit cuts against the tradition that I have come across elsewhere when the left groups get themselves into a mess by fighting to "control" a movement. I'm not saying it can't happen here. It might. But there's a tradition of democratic debate that leads activists to simply turn their back on anything that smells like a "front".

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

To date we have had successes - the postponement of plans to close a local swimming baths at Woolton for example; failures - localised redundancies and the closure of some less well known services; and ongoing fights, like a campaign to keep a nursery open in Dovecot.

One of the most high profile campaigns has been at Hope University where the cuts will mean job losses, course closures and redundancies amongst support staff. We linked up with Hope and drew the trade unionists there into the campaign against the cuts while ensuring the campaign publicised their struggle.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

In a word - fragmentation. The problem is the way the cuts are hitting here and there - this nursery, this Surestart Centre, this swimming baths. The people affected feel isolated and the danger of defeat looms. To counter that we have stressed the need to bring campaigns together, to publicise them, link them and make everyone involved see that there is a common fight. It is a question of rebuilding a culture and spirit of solidarity.

One other example is that we suddenly realised that terrible things were happening in the NHS but we were focused on the council and the government. So we got



a Keep Our NHS Public speaker to a meeting. We made contact with the joint shop stewards' committee from the two main hospitals in the city. We supported a demo outside the main city centre hospital and we organised a Defend the NHS meeting.

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally coordinate the anti-cuts groups?

What attempts? No one has been in touch with us with any proposals.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

The demonstration on 26 March made thousands of people really feel they belonged to a movement. The danger is that nothing gets done with that feeling and the anger at the government's programme is not mobilised and turned into action. For example, it is terrible that the TUC have done nothing to follow up the demo. Why aren't they getting their fat backsides off their swivel chairs and building for a public sector general strike on 30 June?

Our task is to make sure the anger is turned into action. We need to build mass campaigns in the localities that link the communities, the unions, the unemployed and the oppressed. To that end, in Liverpool we have organised a People's Assembly against the Cuts in the City. We are laying plans to build huge support for the 30 June strikes. We are starting to mobilise for the demonstration at the Tory party conference in October called by the North West TUC at the instigation of Manchester Trades Council.

The key is to use every local action as a focus for the generalised anger that exists. That way we can ensure that the pressure for action from the unions is kept up - because strikes will be vital to stopping these cuts - and that every community realises that its efforts are part of a wider struggle. We need to counter the fragmentation I mentioned earlier and deepen the sense of a real campaigning movement that 26 March symbolised.

London: Brent

Pete Firmin, President of Brent Trades Union Council and Chair of Brent Fightback

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti cuts group?

Brent Fightback was formed last July after a public meeting organised by the Trades Council. We've had open meetings roughly fortnightly since. Politically it involves the SWP, Green Party, left Labour Party members (in or close to the LRC) and "non-aligned" activists. A couple of (Labour) councillors have occasionally attended the organising meetings. We've not had the problem of some areas of having more than one anti-cuts campaign.

As well as the initial meeting, we've had three public meetings, with upwards of 60 people at each. We held an evening protest march to Sarah Teather's surgery (Brent Central Lib Dem MP and Cabinet member), which was attended by about 100 people with 80 at the lobby of the (Labour-run) council's budget-making meeting. People were prevented from getting into the chamber and even the gallery by security, but some of us did make a lot of noise in the building.

There have also been lobbies by those campaigning against the closure of a sports centre and six libraries, backed by the campaign, and protests by students at Sarah Teather's constituency office over fees.

The Fightback supporters active in the local Labour parties are also raising the issues within the Labour Party, although success has been limited - one Labour Party branch has passed a motion of no confidence in the Council Executive for their decision to close six libraries, that was with one member voting against, the member of the Executive responsible for libraries!

What has been the role of the local trade unions in the anti-cuts campaigns?

Beyond the Trades Council, the local UNISON branch secretary attends regularly and the NUT secretary often. Other activists come from RMT, Unite, GMB, CWU and UCU. However, neither the anti-cuts campaign nor the local unions have managed to mobilise many trade unionists on lobbies or public meetings. The local Health Branch of UNISON supported the march to Teather's surgery, and co-sponsored our public meeting on the NHS "reforms", but did not attend. The GMB branch secretary spoke at one of our meetings, but otherwise has been pretty invisible.

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

Mixed - while there is clearly anger, there is also a sense



Protestors remonstrating with police outside Camden Town Hall

of impotence. This may be changing, with reports of growing enthusiasm among teachers for the strike over pensions, and frustration among UNISON members at their (national) union's unwillingness to do the same.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

The numerical weakness of the left locally – and therefore the local anti-cuts campaign – has meant we have not been in a position to be involved around all the issues under attack. Six libraries are being closed, but only three have activists involved in their campaigns who relate to the overall anti-cuts fight.

There are also problems with people looking to “Big Society” options in response to closures. This was particularly the case with a sports centre which closed – key people involved there were never interested in a political fight, despite others raising the issue. It has also been a problem – though less of one – in the library campaigns, with some looking to such options. The weakness of the unions has meant, for instance, that the council managed to reduce London weighting from inner London to outer London levels with no resistance – a consultative ballot by the UNISON branch showed little support for action over the issue.

We have the disadvantage compared to many areas, of not having a local body of students to work with and

whose enthusiasm could be infectious. Protests at Sarah Teather's office have been organised by students from the Harrow campus of the University of Westminster. Attempts to work with students from the local FE college have not been successful so far.

We have attempted to work, where possible, with local Labour councillors. However, with one or two honourable exceptions, we have met with a brick wall, without even the civility of an explanation. Open letters to councillors have not received a response (from any of the 40), only two came on the demo to Teather's surgery and they failed to provide a speaker for the public meeting on the NHS. The council leadership are extremely managerial, and, unlike some Labour councils, they have not really attempted to blame the government for the cuts they have made, being particularly inept at PR and managing to turn people against them rather than the government.

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally coordinate the anti cuts groups?

Brent Fightback has taken an attitude of supporting and publicising all worthwhile initiatives, whichever of the national groupings they come from. My personal opinion is that each of the three main groupings is primarily the “property” of one political organisation, the most obvious being the National Shop Stewards Network's anti-cuts campaign which is the sole property of the Socialist Party.

The other two main campaigns do attempt to involve wider forces, but are still primarily run by the SWP (in the case of Right to Work) and Counterfire (Coalition of Resistance). They perpetuate the dreadful "tradition" of the British far left that you have to have control of campaigns you are involved in. Attempts to persuade the left unions to take the initiative to break this down haven't got anywhere, partly because some of the general secretaries are more concerned with promoting one or other of the existing campaigns.

At least there is now an element of cooperation between the campaigns, but we need one united democratic anti-cuts campaign if we are to be more effective. However, I also think that local campaigns are not yet strong enough for a real national "federation" to be formed.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

In my view there are two big stumbling blocks in the fight against the cuts – the attitude of some of the big unions – particularly GMB and UNISON – and the attitude of the Labour leadership. Of course, the two are connected.

Where union action does take place, such as that over pensions on 30 June, the unions and their supporters in the anti-cuts campaigns need to be out explaining to the public that this is part of the wider fight against the cuts, not just people protecting their own conditions.

We need campaigns in those unions not committed to fighting the cuts (especially in UNISON) to change that, and we need a fight – from both inside and outside – to force a change in the Labour leadership's attitude to these struggles.

Demos, lobbies etc are an important part of building that pressure and giving workers confidence to take action, but cannot be an end in themselves.

London: Camden

George Binette, Branch Secretary of Camden UNISON and Co-chair of Camden United Against Cuts

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti cuts group?

The Camden campaign predates the May 2010 general election, with attempts to build a single focus for resistance to cuts and privatisation in the borough during the Lib Dem/Conservative "partnership" that controlled Camden Council between 2006 and last May. But Camden United Against Cuts (CUAC) was only launched in January 2011. It began to gather momentum after the formation of the Coalition, with Labour having regained a working majority on the Council.

The evidence of the sheer scale of the cuts – exceeding £90 million over three years – spurred us on. Our first public meeting, called under the aegis of the Trades Council in mid-July, attracted over 100 people and the idea emerged of a demonstration to mark George Osborne's announcement of the Comprehensive Spending Review on 20 October. That demonstration, with some 2-3,000 marching, proved something of a success, transforming the character of a rally across from Downing Street that the Coalition of Resistance had called for that evening.

Since last October there have been several lobbies of Council cabinet meetings and a 500-strong demonstration through the south of Camden to the Town Hall on 28 February when the full Council agreed a massive cuts budget. Blocked by police and private security from entering the Town Hall, the majority of the marchers occupied Euston Road for more than an hour while the "debate" unfolded before a largely empty chamber.

Our feeder march to join the TUC's 26 March demonstration attracted some 2,000, ranging from local government

There can be little doubt that there has been something of a lull since 26 March and for some demoralisation has taken hold as the cuts start to bite

and NHS trade unionists through to Somali community and disabled service users' organisations. At the very end of March NUT members in community primary and secondary schools staged a well supported one day protest strike in opposition to cuts in support services.

Currently, we are meeting roughly twice a month, with attendance ranging from 15-25, and quite a diverse political mix, which has thus far proved relatively stable. We have hosted an informal conference in early April for anti-cuts groups from across London and are planning to hold a public meeting on 9 June to build support for the strikes planned on 30 June by a number of unions against the assault on public sector pensions.

What has the role of the local trade unions been in the anti-cuts campaigns?

Absolutely crucial in terms of funding and logistical support, largely from the local council UNISON and NUT branches, with backing from RMT Camden No3 and UNISON and UCU branches in the local colleges. As noted above, the campaign initially operated in the name of the Trades Council with the call for the 20 October coming from that body.

Prior to the 2010 election the Trades Council had witnessed a modest revival, while since last spring it has proved a very useful vehicle for circumventing some of the bureaucratic obstruction that the UNISON branch might have faced in isolation. The unions have also provided an umbrella under which otherwise disparate single issue campaigns have sheltered.

In some respects there has probably been too great a reliance to date on the unions and over the months ahead tenants, residents and service users' initiatives will need to become more prominent, albeit in the context of a single united campaign.

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

Decidedly mixed – there can be little doubt that there has been something of a lull since 26 March and for some

demoralisation has taken hold as the cuts start to bite. The campaign did contribute substantially to the quite large and lively 17 May demonstration against the Lansley Bill and other attacks on the NHS and there have been a couple of small but significant victories with the Council granting a two to three year reprieve to Netherwood day resource centre for alzheimer's and other dementia sufferers.

Crucially, the fate of Camden's libraries is still unclear with the Council's cabinet due to make a final decision on 8 June. There are signs that the initial threat to close up to five of 13 libraries has receded, but the likely preferred option will feature reductions in opening hours, potentially further sackings of library staff and a sharply increased use of volunteers. Unfortunately, the library campaign

Activists need to push for a very large day of strike action on 30 June, using it to increase pressure on UNISON and Unite to join co-ordinated action in the autumn

has kept its distance from Camden United Against Cuts and there appears to be substantial support for libraries operating on the basis of volunteering.

The sop from the Labour group to UNISON has been its refusal to consider privatisation in the face of active lobbying from the US-based firm, LSSI, and John Laing Integrated Services, a subsidiary of the construction giant, which has actually already taken over the operation of Hounslow's libraries in west London.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

As suggested above, the campaign to save the borough's libraries has largely remained aloof from the general anti-cuts opposition. Thankfully, parents campaigning to save play provision and early years centres have been much more willing to be seen as part of Camden United Against Cuts, but given the staggered nature of the cuts there is a danger of fragmentation into single issue campaigns. We also need to recognise that to date the absence of participation in a sustained way of council tenants and Bangladeshi and black residents has been a significant weakness.

The campaign has more recently started to focus on the Lansley bill and the huge cuts taking place in the NHS, though this has demonstrated the severe weakness of union organisation across the NHS when compared to 10 or 20 years ago. The effective boycott by UNISON regional officials of the 17 May demo didn't come as a surprise, but graphically illustrated the scale of the challenge. As elsewhere the difficulties associated with mounting industrial action in UNISON have been an obstacle. Meanwhile, the much smaller GMB branch has shown absolutely no interest in either industrial action or being part of an anti-cuts campaign.

There has also been the challenge of how (and indeed whether) to relate to the Labour Party in a borough where the council had been under a Lib-Con partnership for four years and where the Holborn and St Pancras Labour Party has a paper membership of some 1,200 and is by no means moribund. At the same time, however, not a single Labour councillor voted against or even abstained on the cuts budget.

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally co-ordinate the anti-cuts groups?

In the early to mid-autumn last year I entertained some hopes for the Coalition of Resistance (CoR), but these have not really come to fruition. On the one hand, CoR's de facto leadership appears both unwilling and unable to challenge national union bureaucracies, while on the other hand there seems little evidence of an identification between local campaigns and a CoR umbrella.

I know that the experience in working with the SWP/Right to Work has been difficult in some areas, though personally I have found their contribution to the local campaign to be very positive. This probably reflects the fact that through union work over a number of years a degree of trust and respect has developed. At the same time, however, I see no evidence that Right to Work is capable of making any breakthrough on the national stage. As for the NSSN with which I was involved for approximately four years before the recent split, there seems no prospect of it creating something akin to the Anti-Poll Tax Federation of the early 1990s.

In London, I feel that the attempt to create a loose alliance of anti-cuts groups from across the capital's borough is a small step forward, but at the end of the day a number of key battles will almost certainly have to be fought at quite a local level.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

In the unions, activists need to be pushing for a very large, visible day of strike action on 30 June, using that day to increase the pressure on UNISON and Unite to join co-ordinated action in the early autumn. If this comes "within the law" and in opposition to the attack on the public sector pension schemes, then so be it.

In Camden there needs to be a serious push for council-wide action by UNISON members in the face of 700 potential redundancies this financial year, but in the meantime there is greater likelihood of sectional disputes. Depending on the outcome of the libraries review, there is a possibility for occupations; likewise, in children's centres. We need to try and ensure that any community resistance becomes a catalyst for union action, but there is also likely to be a challenge in maintaining interest and activity over the course of the summer.

London: Lambeth

Stuart King is active in Lambeth Save Our Services and a member of the NUJ

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti-cuts group?

Lambeth SOS has been active for nearly a year and has the advantage of having the active support of the local UNISON branch, Unite and RMT branches in the area. We have organised a number of large lobbies of the council and the cabinet meetings in the run-up to the cuts budget often of several hundred people. On the night of the cuts budget we occupied the council chamber and declared a "Peoples Assembly".

These actions have been organised at regular fortnightly SOS meetings which are very democratically run, the chair and minute taker are elected at the start of each meeting. The meetings average about 20-30 people, with the largest being over 50 the week after the council occupation. We have tried to organise sub-groups around housing, libraries, benefit cuts and the NHS.

The meetings draw in local activists and community groups, users campaigning against the cuts, alongside the local trade unions. So for example the Lambeth pensioners have been actively involved all along and at one meeting the local Eritrean Association came to tell us of their campaign against the sell-off of their community centre.

Lambeth SOS aims to co-ordinate and publicise these actions and build maximum support for local and national initiatives. So for example with Lewisham and Southwark anti-cuts groups we organised a local feeder march to the TUC March 26 demo. Despite opposition from the TUC and from the police we organised a march of 5-7,000 people that pursued the route we had agreed in advance.

We have just had a Lambeth People's Assembly to which over 130 people came. We hope to develop it as a focus for all the struggles in the borough, co-ordinating and organising actions and policies.

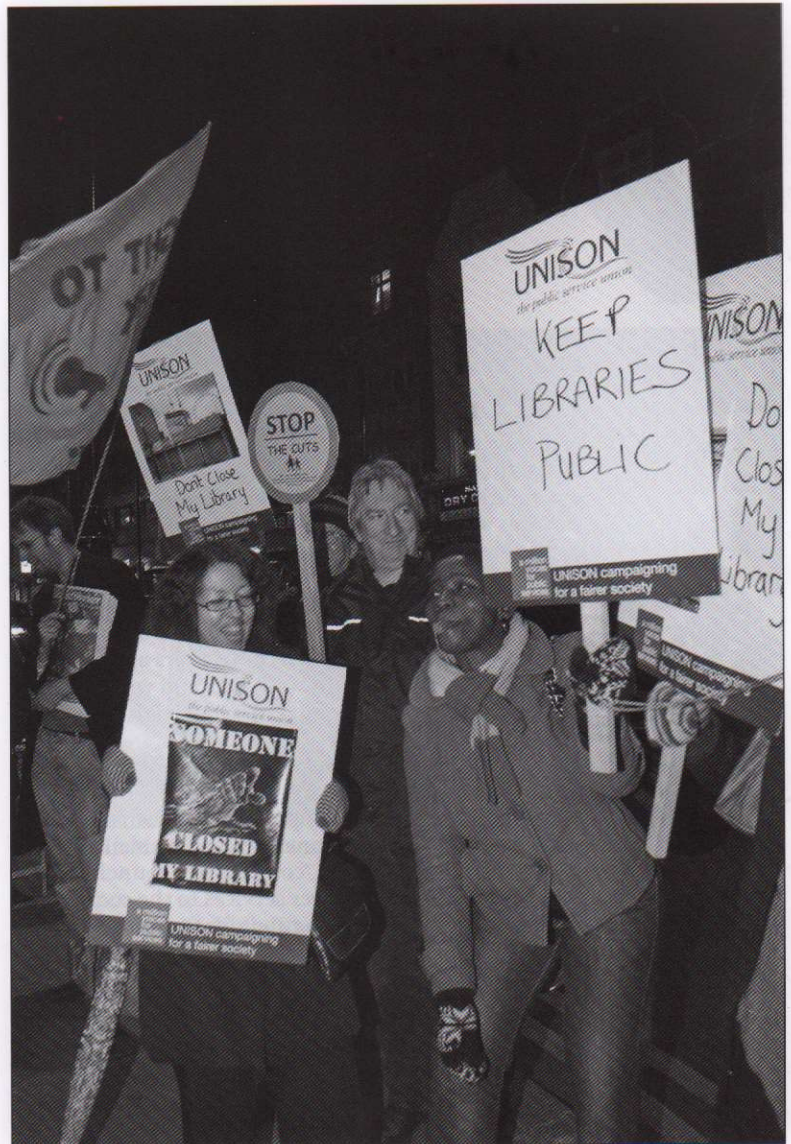
What has the role of the local trade unions in the anti-cuts campaigns?

As I said Lambeth SOS is lucky in having the active support of the town hall unions. It means we always have several shop stewards present and know exactly what the council is planning. Most recently we heard that the labour council is planning to privatise the councils information/call centre, probably handing it over to Capita. Nothing to do with the coalition cuts, just the continuation of New Labour policies locally.

How has the left worked together in the local campaign? What have the problems been?

We certainly had a few problems at the beginning. The SWP decided that the base of Lambeth SOS was "too narrow" and went off to organise Lambeth United Against the Cuts inviting the local Labour MP Kate Hoey (who is in favour of "fair cuts") to speak. This initiative went nowhere and caused disagreement in the local SWP. Now they are back in Lambeth SOS. The local trades council secretary tried the same thing, setting up an alternative but again it failed and now the trades council is generally supportive.

So most SOS meetings will have members of all the left - PR, SWP, Socialist Party, AWL, Workers Power, libertarian socialists, LRC members of the Labour Party - working alongside trade unionists and activists in no



Protestors at a lobby of Lambeth Council in London

political groupings, and generally everyone works very collaboratively.

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

The first cuts were to school crossing patrols and park rangers. Some of the crossing patrols were taken on by the schools while the park rangers felt they were too small a group to take action on their own. Youth services and libraries are now the targets. The library staff have voted for strike action and are balloting. There was a very lively meeting of adventure playground users and staff and a lobby of the council. Also the pensioners are planning actions against the town hall which is not only cutting their services but now charging them to meet there!

UNISON across the town hall is planning to ballot to take strike action against the cuts on 30 June, the same day as the co-ordinated strike action against the cuts in pensions. We will have to see how successful this is and whether the UNISON leadership will give the go ahead.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

Probably everyone in Lambeth SOS will have differing opinions on this. One problem is a tendency from some of the trade unionists to focus on trade union action at the expense of community and user direct action. There

is an understandable degree of caution of some of the UNISON members to welcome occupations fearing it will alienate the workers.

This came up in a discussion of "liberating" an adventure playground effectively closed by the council through restriction of hours. Some of us argued that such propaganda initiatives, putting the spotlight on the council closures will actually give the workers more confidence as they see the community is behind them. We can't just wait for the unions to take action against the cuts. They are hobbled by the anti-union laws and even if they jump all the hurdles, the UNISON leadership as often as not sabotage the action. Until the workers are willing to organise unofficially, with walk-outs and wildcats, they will be slow to respond and at the mercy of the bureaucrats in charge.

But occupations are not an easy option. We don't want to start running services, like adventure playgrounds and closed libraries, through occupations because that is exactly what the council would want. Lambeth council's version of the "big society" is the "co-operative council" where they would like to hand over services to the community and say "there you are, you run it for free".

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally co-ordinate the anti-cuts groups?

I said in an article in PR's anti-cuts pamphlet that the left had disgraced itself yet again by trying to monopolise and control the anti-cuts movement. We now have three different, competing national anti-cuts campaigns, Coalition of Resistance, Right to Work (SWP) and the NSSN All Britain Anti-Cuts campaign (SP). As a result all are viewed with suspicion by the anti-cuts activists and none of them have a real roots in the movement.

COR is holding a delegate conference on 9 July and maybe we can change the way it works, make it more representative of the anti-cuts groups on the ground.

The result of this weakness is that the only bodies that can initiate national co-ordinated actions against the cuts are the unions, such as the TUC 26 March demonstration

and the co-ordinated strike action on June 30. But the unions alone are not sufficient and have all the problems I have mentioned above.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

The key question is can we turn the opposition to the cuts into real mass action that forces the government to retreat. Locally that means moving from lobbies and demonstrations to strikes and occupations, direct action against councillors, obstructing the work of councils, blocking roads etc. It means linking the struggles on the NHS, benefits, disability, into the struggles around council cuts.

Nationally it means pushing the unions wherever possible into national and co-ordinated action against the cuts. It means encouraging workers not involved in a particular action to join other unions on strike, unofficially, by refusing to cross picket lines and encouraging walk-outs against cuts and redundancies.

If we can develop the struggle in this way in particular localities and regions we would be in a position to launch a real national anti-cuts organisation, one built from the bottom up, organised by the most militant areas. At that point the existing "party front" anti-cuts campaigns would either join in or be consigned to irrelevance.

Manchester

Tina Purcell, is Joint Secretary of the Manchester Coalition Against Cuts

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti-cuts group?

Manchester Coalition Against Cuts (MCAC) was launched in January following an anti-cuts conference called by Manchester Trades Council. Over 100 people attended the conference and supported its aim to bring together different anti-cuts groups and to fight against all cuts. Since then, we have organised a number of actions: a demonstration in March which attracted over 2,000 people, a lobby of the council, support for a number of anti-cuts groups,



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and a lively rally where local activists spoke alongside Billy Hayes and Lee Jasper.

A group of about 15-20 meet fortnightly. Our latest initiative is to build support for 30 June. We are organising city centre stalls to raise awareness about why public sector workers are striking and why all workers and all those who oppose the ConDem cuts need to get behind this strike. We are approaching local unions to organise pickets and to get people to get involved in actions and rallies.

What has been the role of the local trade unions in the anti-cuts campaigns?

Well, Manchester Trades Union Council called for the conference which set up MCAC. Manchester City Council's Unite branch has played an important role in supporting local anti-cuts groups and has set up a Unite4Manchester blog. However, so far the links between MCAC and local unions have been confined to involvement of individual left activists in the anti-cuts groups. Local UCU branches, in particular Salford, have responded very positively to MCAC initiatives.

How has the left worked together in the local campaign? What have the problems been?

The rationale behind MCAC was to transcend the sectarianism of the left in setting up front organisations. However, only the SWP and Counterfire have seriously taken on board the task of building MCAC. The Socialist Party turned up to the first meeting but hasn't been since. As a consequence MCAC is seen as an SWP front, which is not the case. The "officers" are non-SWP (Counterfire and non-aligned).

There seems to be a lot of suspicion about what MCAC is about, including within local unions. This is probably due to past experience of working within organisations that are dominated by the SWP. However, I suspect that for some local union bureaucrats it's a convenient excuse not to get involved. For others who have legitimate concerns about being the pawns of left organisations, it's counter-productive and prevents us from building a strong anti-cuts movement. There is another anti-cuts group set up by libertarian types but I've no idea what they do concretely. Relations with UKuncut are good.

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

As soon as the severity of the cuts in Manchester was made clear local communities sprang into action. Most notably the residents of Levenshulme who took to the streets as soon as they heard their local baths were going to close and the council was forced to make a U-turn.

The Sure Start campaign is one of the most visible campaigns, and reflects some of political differences that have emerged and the dangers posed by isolated campaigns. Some of the Sure Start leaders have accepted the big lie that cuts are necessary and are focussing their campaign on why Sure Start should be saved rather than getting involved in building a movement against all cuts. Another important struggle is over the closure of all youth services. MCAC has played an important role in building opposition to this. Youth workers have been gagged by the



Workers in Manchester demonstrate against cuts in services

council – they face disciplinary action if they talk about closures, so MCAC provided a voice to council workers who are prevented from speaking out.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

Whilst there is a lot of anger about the cuts, there has not been a strong enough mobilisation to seriously take on Manchester City Council. We are very much in the early stages of building resistance to the cuts, and we lack the cohesion of a strong united anti-cuts group that can bring all those fighting the cuts together. Without a strong united movement, it's difficult to move beyond petitions and demonstrations.

The lack of union action is also holding us back. In February, the Unite Branch of Manchester City Council voted for action against job losses, but no action has been taken so far. That said there have been small victories that show that action does bring results: Levenshulme Baths, and now the decision to refer the proposed closure of Manchester Advice to further scrutiny.

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally coordinate the anti-cuts groups?

Disappointing. The anti-cuts movement has faltered over the last year due to the Socialist Party and the SWP trying to push their fronts rather than coming together to form a genuinely democratic and united anti-cuts movement. I attended the COR conference, and was initially impressed by the desire to overcome sectarianism and get on with the vital task of building united opposition. However, there is too much baggage on the left for COR to have any real purchase on the ground. We need to start from scratch, building up from local grass-roots organisations that aren't associated or dominated by any one political tendency. Political discussion about strategy makes little sense without a strong vibrant movement.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

Building confidence amongst workers that there is an alternative. But to do that we need a strong movement that can express that alternative. The anti-cuts movement is far too scattered. The left in particular needs to build up a united rank and file movement in the unions to win the argument for strike action against the government. Building links between local campaigns and trade unions is crucial to building confidence across the movement so that we feel strong enough to take whatever action we can, be it strike action or occupations to save our services.

We can only do this if we on the left can get our act together to speak in one voice.

Sheffield

Alison and Patrick are active in the Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance. Alison is a member of UNISON

Can you give us a brief overview of your local anti-cuts group?

Alison: Sheffield Anti-cuts Alliance (SACA) was formed following a public meeting attended by around 300 people in the early autumn of 2010. It was initiated by local PCS members led by NEC and Socialist Party member Marion Lloyd, SWP trade unionists from the NUT and the UNISON Health Branch and local Unite NEC member and convenor Martin Meyer.

The first meeting was lively and a bit chaotic but in a good way – people who weren't the usual suspects got up and argued for their area of interest to be included in the campaign's priorities – from council housing to welfare benefits. Since then the main success has been organising the demonstration against the Lib Dem Spring Conference in Sheffield in March 2011, when around 5,000 people made Clegg and co feel very unwelcome – a quite substantial sized demo for Sheffield with a great atmosphere. SACA also managed to get a hefty contingent down to London for the March 26 demo.

The campaign meetings have however progressively whittled down to a hard core of left militants and some

single issue campaigners – there are still some newish faces around but the initial enthusiasm has been squandered by the efforts of the SWP and Socialist Party to either wield control (SWP), or walk away (SP) if it looks like they can't dominate. The Right to Work campaign was a parallel feature to begin with but following Bambery's departure this seems to have had less profile locally.

Patrick: Yes, it has met as a group on a sometimes two-weekly basis but often much more irregularly, which is causing a gradual loss of interest, members and loss of focus in my opinion.

What has been the role of the local trade unions in the anti-cuts campaigns?

Alison: The Trades Council is affiliated to SACA but not without a struggle – some of the local trade union leaderships seem wary of supporting the campaign mostly for sectarian and anti-left reasons. UNISON is the worst offender with the regional office having written to all branches warning them against supporting or affiliating to SACA arguing that the campaign had explicitly supported TUSC candidates in the election. (It hadn't, although a prominent activist, Maxine Bowler, of the SWP stood for TUSC. SACA has had for example members of the Greens and Labour attending meetings fairly regularly).

UNISON Region has been anti the campaign from the start – even arguing that the demo against the Lib Dems should not be supported as troublemakers would be likely to turn up and it would be too dangerous for members and their families! The PCS, NUT, GMB, Unite, UCU, NAPO etc, are supportive and individual members of UNISON and other union branches are involved (and the Hallam University branch of UNISON is affiliated).

Patrick: Importantly, in the case of Sheffield Trades Council there have been several recent changes. A number of trade union members involved in Saca have been voted onto the Trades Council, which has significantly changed the political balance in the Trades Council in favour of the left and greatly enhanced the relationship between the two organisations. There was previously a very strained relationship between the Saca and the Trades Council but we started to work more together in the build up to the recent 26 March TUC demonstration in London.

Local trade union bureaucrats and the New Labour politicians had stated from the outset that "some cuts are necessary" and so they are not actively fighting the cuts in any genuine tangible sense. More the case, is that much of the local trade union leadership have been actively blocking trade unionists especially in UNISON and Unite, from fighting back over the last 13 years of New Labour rule. This will continue to be the case now that we have a New Labour city council after the Lib Dems were defeated in the local elections. The New Labour city council has pledged to implement "unavoidable" cuts.

Now the cuts are coming through on the ground what has been the response so far?

Alison: Mixed. There is currently a strike underway at Sheffield College over compulsory redundancies that looks like achieving at least a partial victory in terms of massively reducing the number of jobs threatened, and

LINKS

BRIGHTON: Brighton & Hove Coalition Against the Cuts
brightonbenefitscampaign.wordpress.com

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool Trades Council
liverpooltradescouncil.wordpress.com

LONDON: Brent Fightback
www.brenttuc.org.uk

LONDON: Camden United Against Cuts
camdenunited.org.uk

LONDON: Lambeth Save Our Services
lambethsaveourservices.org

MANCHESTER: Manchester Coalition Against the Cuts
coalitionagainstcuts.wordpress.com

SHEFFIELD: Sheffield Anti-Cuts Alliance
www.sheffieldanticuts.wordpress.com



there have been one day strikes against new call centre arrangements in the PCS. Just up the road there is a long running dispute over cuts at Rawmarsh School in Rotherham. SACA is gearing up to support the unions taking action over pensions on 30 June.

The attacks on care homes for people with dementia has galvanised a Save Our NHS campaign locally which has had an 80 strong public meeting recently and a local demo is planned for 28 May – SACA activists support their activities and do joint work as with the Sheffield UKuncut campaign.

The council cuts are definitely biting in terms of compulsory redundancies at the moment but the UNISON branch is in “special measures” – i.e. under the control of the regional office, and neither Unite nor the GMB have balled as yet, despite all having a “no compulsory redundancies” position on paper. There are also campaigns against library cuts and Sure Start cuts with links to SACA.

What problems have been thrown up in organising the resistance to the ongoing cuts locally?

Alison: The usual: anti-left sectarianism by some of the trade unions, thus meaning that SACA is not as much of a support to branches or a pressure on local trade union bureaucrats as it could be. An AGM hasn't been held yet, which is evidence for some bureaucrats that SACA is a shell controlled by the far left. Inside SACA there is the usual “let's not make this a talking shop”, versus “let's discuss things properly and agree positions” debate – which usually results in no proper discussion but a lot of hot air none the less!

Trade unionists actually taking action may feel SACA is somewhat irrelevant. There is also a lack of momentum following 26 March – a feeling of what next? There was no real national guidance at the demo or after in terms of what to do after our “symbolic protest”.

Patrick: I think the main problem lies with the Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats being intent on pushing through cuts and stifling any fight back.

Also low levels of confidence exist among many workers within the public sector, as well as low levels of trade union membership within the public and private sector. But the question of confidence is beginning to change rapidly with the strong votes for strike action and mobilisation for 30 June.

Another problem is long-standing left sectarianism, rivalry and a resulting deep distrust between local activists. SACA is in some ways helping to overcome this but the fact that it is not at present a genuinely democratic organisation with decisions being made behind the scenes does not bode well. The fact that there is no national organisation leading and co-ordinating the movement against the cuts does not help either. Each political organisation of the main parties of the left seem to be in competition with each other for the leadership of the anti-cuts movement.

The present form of organisation in SACA is, in my opinion, not helping to bring more people into active involvement against the cuts, i.e. its irregular meetings, poor publicity, lack of more democratic forms of organisation, of discussion, debate and the lack of broad participation.

Also it completely lacks an effective cultural and media front. An artistic fight back front incorporating peoples creativity. Also the important need for funds and fund-raising ideas is holding the organisation and movement back locally.

The crisis of the left is, in my opinion, a lack of a viable, sustainable economic socialist alternative and a clear, comprehensive and achievable political strategy and *vision*. I know these matters are being discussed in some areas but not Sheffield.

What is your opinion of the attempts to nationally co-ordinate the anti-cuts groups?

Alison: Not seen any evidence of it in Sheffield. CoR is non-existent in Sheffield, although it apparently has a presence in Doncaster. Right to Work gets rolled out when

I think the main problem lies with the Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats being intent on pushing through cuts and stifling any fight back

the SWP want to lead an initiative but otherwise is no more than a “virtual” organisation. NSSN isn't really in evidence here either.

Patrick: I had great hopes that Coalition of Resistance might be the organisation that could bring about a national coordination but sectarian stupidity and rivalry have sadly proved to be too entrenched. The movement needs to seriously address this matter as one of great urgency as the cuts come thick and fast and the Con-Dems are gambling on pushing through further cuts and privatisation, and aim to bring in further anti-trade union legislation.

I feel deep frustration at the entrenched stupidity of much of the leadership of the main players on the left, i.e. the SWP, SP, CPB and their party leaderships in failing to bring the whole of the anti-cuts movement and the left together, to help coordinate and build a genuinely dynamic democratic and accountable national leadership capable of defeating this government and the whole neo liberal cuts and privatisation agenda.

But the struggle continues.

What are our key tasks over the next six months?

Alison: It was easy to be in opposition to the Council when it was run by the Lib Dems. Now that Labour are back in the driving seat some readjustment to the new situation is needed. The trade union bureaucrats argue that all we need to do is vote Labour when clearly cuts won't be going away. We have a public meeting in June with John McDonnell MP which will hopefully re-galvanise people.

We need to show that we are capable of building support for workers taking action on 30 June then perhaps we can face down the sectarianism of the bureaucrats.

Eurozone in crisis

The febrile state of the financial markets which trade in Eurozone countries' debt is clear evidence of a continuing turmoil that threatens the future of the single currency.

Keith Harvey assesses the likely course of the sovereign debt crisis and what it means for the future of Europe

Introduction

EUROZONE CAPITALISM is at a crossroads. The historic driver of European integration, Germany, stands conflicted, its multi-national export might eyeing the opportunities of the new emerging economies in Asia and central Europe, its politicians sick of bailing out the southern European invalids. In the year to 2011 its economy grew by 5.3%, the highest rate of the re-united Germany, as corporate profits soared 125%. Meanwhile, its French allies, enjoying strong growth themselves¹, try to contain Germany's international ambition and focus it once more on the development of a Greater Europe. The Gauls remind their Teutonic neighbours, that a financial collapse of one of the PIGS – Portugal, Ireland, Greece and to a lesser extent Spain – runs the risk of a re-run of the post-Lehman debacle in 2008-09 and, more importantly perhaps, threatens the assets of their own banks.

Meanwhile the PIGS themselves remain mired in austerity-induced depression, with slow or no growth, rampant unemployment, social conflict and no obvious or easy way out of an interminable debt crisis.

Six months ago, in the midst of the deepest phase of the Irish debt crisis, Martin Wolf of the Financial Times opined:

“The big question now is not whether the Eurozone can avoid a wave of fiscal cum financial crises. The question is whether the union can survive.”²

Indeed. Since these words were written, Portugal has followed Greece and Ireland with an official bailout by

the European Central Bank, member states and the IMF, while ratings agencies and financial markets have hovered over Spain³, waiting for signs that its debt crisis too will demand centralised assistance. As the failure of the Greek bailout to meet its debt reduction targets on its anniversary in May 2010, has led to a further bout of speculation as to when it will be forced to default on its debts or indeed, quit the Eurozone altogether.

The future of the European Union is at stake, the very existence of the Euro in its current form, the assumption of ongoing enlargement, the EU's role in capitalist world politics in general and specifically its part in the international response to global financial distress.

Finally, Europe is the site of the most bitter and prolonged class struggles in the developed world. Fatal weaknesses in the EU's political and economic structure have been revealed in the aftermath of the financial meltdown in 2008, the economic recession of 2009 and the fiscal retrenchment across Europe since 2010.

The fate of these ongoing struggles, especially in Greece, Portugal and Spain, will determine the landscape for years to come, shaping the fortunes of the left and right political parties. How serious is this current crisis of European, above all Eurozone, capitalism and what are the likely scenarios that might play out over the coming year?

Monetary union

The single currency as a means of payment between businesses and countries was launched in January 1999 and notes issued to the public at the start of 2002.

The agreement to go beyond the fixed exchange rate system (EMS) was taken in a 1992 treaty, in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the USSR and the end of the Cold War.

Previous attempts to move in that direction between 1969 and 1974 had failed. As G Carchedi notes:

"... the high level of combativeness of the European working classes forced the member states to cope with different national situations with different economic policies, thus effectively precluding concerted economic action."⁴

Conflicted European government reaction to the demands of insurgent labour movements, wrecked the possibility of a unified monetary policy.

In addition, the collapse of Bretton Woods in 1971, as the US abandoned the post-war system of currency regulation, meant there were wild fluctuations in the value of the dollar. As the Americans manipulated the greenback to ensure its rivals paid for its crisis, so there was no stable anchor against which the much weaker European governments could set their currencies.

The Euro, by uniting the power of the European economies, aimed to limit the power of US currency manipulation, while speeding up the creation of a single market by removing trade barriers, enabling the Europeans to project their nascent economic power abroad.

These sought-after advantages of the single currency remain relevant today. Most pro-capitalist commentators emphasise the cost advantages a single currency brings to cross-border trade and investment (lower transactional costs).

But the other potential benefit for a nascent pan-European capitalist class is that a single currency should prevent national states from financial manipulation to benefit their own national interests.

Currency manipulation (inflation, devaluation), is ruled out, as is adjusting interest rates in order to gain competitive advantages for their own business sectors. At the same time, a decade or more of neo-liberal market measures had significantly weakened the European working class – its combativity and cohesiveness, as well as, increasingly, its ideological opposition to market-driven solutions.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s created the right political circumstances to try again to launch a single currency. The advantages to German capitalism were as they had always been but now the other continental EU powers were keen to tie down a unified and strengthened German imperialism within a broader set of obligations.

In addition, after a decade of neo-liberal attacks working class resistance to pro-market measures was less pronounced.

An agreement was reached in 1992 that had several components, each favourable to Germany. Firstly, the Euro launch locked in the currencies at a rate of exchange completely favourable to German industry and finance. Secondly, by having an independent European central bank it also at once and for always, prevented "weak" national governments within the Eurozone manipulating their monetary policy to gain advantages over the overwhelmingly technologically superior German industry.

Through adoption of the euro Germany wanted to force

When the Euro was established conditions were attached. Member states had to keep their budget deficits at less than 3% of their GDP

all the European capitalist governments, to confront their own working class and seek to improve their productivity and profitability either by technological renewal of their productive base and/or by making their workers toil longer, harder and for less, as well as cutting back on the overhead costs to capital represented by the state-financed system of social benefits.

The quid pro quo was the use of social funds, "cohesion funds" – a whole panoply of "transfer payments" – to smooth out the rough edges of uneven capitalist development, financed in the main by the German finance ministry.

But Germany would be the big winner, Euro stability and wider European adoption facilitated the massive continued expansion of German exports, not only to the rest of Europe but to the booming countries of Asia and Latin America. What is more, Carchedi argues:

"... a single currency would enhance the competitiveness and speed up the integration of the now liberalised

European financial markets by making them deeper and more liquid and thus would potentially strengthen Europe's monetary weight on the world market."⁵

In mid-2008, on the eve of the Euro's crisis, but as the US's credit crunch deepened the Euro was riding high, it reached a record high of \$1.60 on 22 April, while a few months later the dollar, the world's reserve currency, was barely above its all-time low against a basket of leading currencies. But the smug satisfaction of European governments that thought they had dodged the credit crunch was short-lived.

The crisis brewing underneath

When the Euro was established conditions were attached⁶. Member states had to keep their budget deficits at less than 3% of their GDP and they could be fined up to 0.5% of their GDP by the European Commission for failure to do so. But from the outset this rule was never enforced.

France and Germany, who had insisted on this condition to discipline the weak south, flouted it themselves, as the Euro's early years coincided with a sharp downturn in the European Union in the wake of a recession in the US in 2001-03. In addition Germany was burdened with huge cost and budget strain as a consequence of the west "absorbing" East Germany.

Then, at Germany's insistence, the rules were fudged again and again to allow new countries to join the Euro, especially Greece in 2002. A blind eye was turned to the real, underlying state of public finances by EU commissioners. As one finance minister put it in 2007 this was "The worst possible combination . . . strict rules, severe sanctions and no credible enforcement."

On the other side, the international financial markets barely distinguished between the creditworthiness of different countries. Immune from default or with a northern bailout at least implicitly guaranteed, the south paid low German interest rates.

This laxity by the Eurozone bourgeoisie and its leaders ensured that underlying divergences in economic performance were not being reflected in the financial markets, but beneath the surface tranquility, huge differences were opening up.

On the one hand Germany – through a policy of investment and holding down unit labour costs, which declined by 10% between 1999 and 2008 – increased its competitiveness. But on the other hand, peripheral countries in southern Europe, above all Greece and Portugal, were becoming less and less so. Greek labour costs rose 20% during 1999-2008, while the single market and currency was wiping out swathes of their domestic industry and agriculture.

The south was unable to compete with the rise of China and Latin America, due to a poor technological base, poor labour productivity and they could not now devalue their currency to cheapen the price of their exports.

But as its economic base was being hollowed out, Greece did not adjust its state spending. On the contrary, governments lied about the true state of public finances and continued to borrow cheaply and heavily from both the

ECB and on international money markets at the very low interest rates that prevailed after 2003.

This was a ticking time bomb as low competitiveness and rising debt, was hidden from view, tolerated in the name of the single market and European unity, with the very worst social effects mitigated by transfer payments from the north to the south.

The crisis erupts

In September 2008 the world nearly ended, or at least so it seemed to most international financial commentators. That was the month Lehman Brothers, the fourth biggest investment bank in the world, crashed with debts of around \$600bn, as Hank Paulson the US Treasury Secretary and the Federal Reserve drew a line in the sand. For a long weekend they resolved there would be no more bailouts – the neo-cons insisted that the US state would not guarantee the dodgy debts of the financial speculators. By Tuesday they had changed their mind. But it was almost too late. Global financial markets almost came to a stop, as inter-bank lending froze and the wheels of the world economy came off.

As the scale of the private sector bank bad debts mounted towards \$2 trillion, a forty-fold rise from IMF initial estimates of \$50bn, total collapse of the banking system was only averted by co-ordinated central bank intervention around the world. The issuance of low interest loans, quantitative easing, central banks buying back Treasury bonds from the private sector by printing money and the de facto nationalisation of banks and insurance companies, while writing off their losses or parking them in special bad banks – all this saved international capitalism from falling into the abyss in late 2008.

Yet it could not prevent a severe recession in Europe and the US during 2009, as trade and industry shrank. The combined effect of the socialisation of private sector bank losses, the loss of corporate and consumer tax revenues as well as the cost of increased welfare payments that were necessary as unemployment soared, produced a fiscal crisis of the capitalist state throughout the west.

Naturally the crisis hit hardest at the weakest links, Greece, Ireland and Portugal. On coming to power in 2009 the Papandreou government revealed that the previous administration had hidden the true extent of the state's parlous finances, so financial markets immediately started to raise the cost of Greek government debt. Much of this debt had to be refinanced by May, but by then the interest rate on Greek two year government bonds rose from the 1.3% it had been in October 2009 to 16%.⁷

The ratio of debt to GDP soared, as did the government's budget deficit. Faced with a certain Greek default, the Germans faced their Hank Paulson moment: the collapse of the Euro project, freezing of the entire European financial system, and huge losses for German and French banks. Not wanting to repeat the fate of the hapless American neo-cons, the German government agreed to come up with the cash and the guarantees needed to bailout Greece, so long as the IMF was involved. The ECB announced it would start buying sovereign debt, a decision running counter to the Maastricht Treaty

After tortuous negotiations the ECB and national Eurozone governments agreed a €750bn bailout fund, which they hoped would be enough not only to sort Greece out, but big enough to reassure the financial markets that there was enough cash in the coffers should any other stricken debtor country come knocking on the ECB's door.

Greece's share of the pie was €110bn. The price of this "assistance" was the implementation of savage austerity measures. [see p30] But the real help was not to the Greek people, whose pensions, wages and jobs were about to be savaged. Rather, given that the institutions exposed to sovereign debt in Greece and elsewhere in the periphery were primarily German and French banks, the intervention was to help stabilise them and prevent a second major credit crunch.

Banks and financial institutions from the EU's big three – Britain, France and Germany – own more than half of the Greek debt, and also more than half of Irish, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian debt. By the end of 2009 that amounted to a total of over \$2tr.⁸

Martin Wolf admitted in the Financial Times at the time the €750bn fund was agreed that "It is overtly a rescue of Greece, but covertly a bailout of banks".⁹

In fact the ECB/EU strategy is essentially about handling the sovereign debt crisis of the peripheral countries in such a way that, step by step, the national treasuries and the ECB insulate the private sector banks from as much of the debt crisis they had created as possible. As one analyst recently noted, in a couple of years: "... virtually all the debt owed to private creditors will have been repaid while virtually all the public debt owed by countries at risk will be to public creditors (European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), European Union, IMF)".¹⁰

Eric Toussaint observed that the ECB's intervention is designed to allow the banks to make a profit from their "assistance" to the debtor countries, thereby bolstering their balance sheets:

"The ECB decided to buy debt securities issued by countries that are meeting hard times but, and this is crucial, it does so with private banks on the secondary market. Instead of directly lending to Eurozone member states, the ECB thus lends capital at a 1.25% rate to private banks which then, with this money, buy securities from states in difficulty at two or three times the rate for short term borrowing (if they are 10 year bonds the rates can reach 10-13% in the cases of Greece, Ireland or Portugal). Next the ECB buys the securities issued by US (to make sure that institutional investors still get their return and that the ECB can buy as a last resort) it had refused to grant direct loans to, from the same private banks!"¹¹

This whole exercise perfectly illustrates the way the ECB – independent of national governments and political parties – acts as the executive committee of the Eurozone capitalist class, or the northern Eurozone capitalist class at least. While the national governments have in turn been hesitant and divided over what steps to take, with their varying national and electoral interests, the ECB is free to preserve the general interest of European finance capital as a whole, a nominal independence which serves and reinforces the dominance of the northern European imperialists within it.

While the Luxemburg premier Jean-Claude Juncker can ruefully, if self-mockingly, reflect, "We know what we have to do but we don't know how to get re-elected when we have done it", the unelected ECB is free to act both within and outside the terms of the Maastricht Treaty. Jean-Claude Trichet, the head of the ECB for the last eight years (longer than any elected politician) is the most important figure in this drama and the personifi-

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cation of the interests of the financiers. He has violently opposed a private sector "haircut" – a debt rescheduling where private banks accept a proportion of public sector losses – not even a trim!¹²

Martin Wolf of the Financial Times confirms that:

"Someone must bear the losses on the past bad lending and borrowing. In its wisdom, the Eurozone has decided that the losses of the private sector creditors should be socialised and the ultimate burden fall on the tax payers of deficit countries. The latter will then suffer first a slump and then years of fiscal austerity. The justification for all this is the view, particularly strongly held in the ECB, that the Eurozone cannot cope with any defaults, be they on lending to banks or on lending to governments."¹³

The crisis returns

Another capital city, another bailout. Six months after the Greek crisis erupted and was "resolved", Ireland went into meltdown. Interest rates on two year government bonds rose from around 2% to 6%. After the bailout they briefly fell, but by May 2011 had reached 12%.¹⁴

The reason? In September 2008 at the height of the credit crunch the property developer party in government – Fianna Fáil – agreed to unconditionally guarantee all of the Irish banks' bad debts flowing from their reckless loans to property speculators.

The government believed that its €20bn cash reserves would be enough of a buffer. But two years on, with the economy in freefall, the markets called their bluff. Out came the begging bowl. In mid to late November 2010 thousands took to the streets; students walked out of colleges and trade unionists marched, as the IMF arrived in town to agree another bailout. Again, a draconian austerity package was agreed that cut government spending by €15bn immediately, as Ireland promised the IMF it would get the budget deficit down to 3% of GDP by 2015. (see box)

Then it was Portugal's turn. In March this year prime minister José Socrates failed to get parliament's approval for a slash and burn budget to cut the deficit. Immediately, the ratings agencies downgraded the country's debt. In

March interest rates for Portugal's two year borrowing was set at around 5%; by May it had reached 12%.¹⁵

The obligatory – and completely fatuous – government assurances that the administration was in no need of external assistance were the prelude to a €78bn bailout in April and the call for an election in June.

The strategy pursued by the ECB since the May 2010 bailout fund was agreed has been fairly straightforward: pump emergency money in to prevent defaulting on debt and hope like hell that economic growth picks up enough to counter the recessionary effects of the austerity pack-

It is inconceivable that, should the Eurozone survive this crisis, then the governments will not give more power to the ECB over national economic decisions

ages and so allow the deficits to shrink, creditworthiness rise and, with this, interest payments on debt fall. In the meantime, put in place a new fund from 2013 that allows for a system of involuntary debt restructuring in which private sector investors will have to contribute and share losses. This gives them time to prepare their balance sheets for the shock.

There is only one problem with the strategy; namely, that it has completely failed – as can be seen in the worsening situation of Greece, one year on from its “rescue”.

The gamble that austerity would revive, rather than crash, the economy has failed. Greece is in deep recession. Although there was some growth early this year, its economy contracted nearly 5% over the last 12 months and is predicted to fall a further 3% this year.

For the most part this is the result of austerity. Average salaries fell 10% in the first half year after the May 2010 agreement with the IMF and EU on reforms to pensions had been pushed through. Thus these measures took about 8% out of the economy.

But late last year the austerity programme had stalled, as mass resistance caused the government to dilute and delay measures. As a result local council spending exceeded IMF targets and so the deficit increased to nearly 11%. Greek debt is on a path to exceed 160% of GDP or higher in 2013.

Naturally, the financial markets punished the Greek government for this laxness. One year on from the €110bn loan the cost of borrowing through the issue of Greek bonds has increased again to 16%.¹⁶ Greece is thus effectively frozen out of private markets.

The IMF and ECB are not impressed. A visitation in May demanded Papandreou kick-start the agreed but not implemented €75bn privatisation programme and collect tax from the middle classes and rich – to achieve an 18% cut in the debt/GDP ratio by 2020.

But this will not resolve the crisis. Greece is in a Catch-22 situation. In order to grow when spending is being cut Greece would need a massive export boom. Given the

economy's low technological base and poor productivity, for that to happen it would need to devalue its currency. But while it is in the Euro it cannot, and even if it did the resulting fall in value would simply worsen the debt/GDP ratio.¹⁷

Private investors (and many government leaders) know the situation is unsustainable. They have priced into their calculations a 60% likelihood of the Greek government defaulting on its debt before 2013. They know the governments of the Eurozone (in fact, the working class taxpayer) will be the only source of future financing. But to do this is to set a political time bomb ticking in northern Europe that would blow up any party willing to argue for it amongst their electorate.

So some sort of default on Greek and other debt is inevitable; it is only a question of when, in what form and with what consequences for the financial system and Greece.

The ECB publicly rules out any default, saying it would ruin European banks holding Greek debt. The full extent of the losses the mainly French, German and British banks would have to bear is not clear. However, recent surveys suggest that a 30% cut in the value of the Greek debt would hurt, but not cripple, large banks such as BNP Paribas, Soci t  G n rale in France, or Deutsche Bank in Germany.

But of course, there is also the question of Irish and Portuguese debt and, above all, Spanish banks' debts, should they be thrown into a 2008-style crisis of liquidity and solvency.

It is not at all clear that the combined resources of the Eurozone governments and ECB can act as a brake on such a combined crisis.

For the present at least it does appear that the Spanish are unlikely to require ECB assistance. Spain's two year borrowing rate has fluctuated around 3.5% for the best part of a year, which is an increase from recent lows, but still below the recent peak credit crunch rate of nearly 5%.¹⁸ While the economy has managed steady, albeit low, growth for over a year,¹⁹ forecast at around 1% for 2011, the deficit is predicted to fall to 6% in 2011 from 9% in 2010.²⁰ The probable price will be the Spanish Socialist government's majority, as unemployment remains over 20% and youth unemployment double that.

Where next?

Further crises lie ahead. The trigger could be further bad news on growth, a major bank failure or the inability of one or more debtor countries to raise funds when they return to the financial markets later in the year.

How will the EU react? Will one or more country exit the single currency under pressure from mass resistance, in order to break with austerity, devalue and dash for export-led growth?

Will an attempt at an orderly restructuring of debt by, for instance, rescheduling payments over a longer term, or seeking investors to take a small “haircut”, lead to panic and a Europe-wide bank run?

It is impossible to predict exactly. But the fault line between a booming German export-led economy and a stagnant southern European one will continue to grow. The paradox is, that the wealth of the north means bailing

out the south is more affordable and less risky. Do they really want to jeopardise the recovery? As their horizons broaden from the greater European market to the world as a whole they are less willing to do so. This tension sums up the contradiction at the heart of the Euro today.

Each time the EU faces a crisis its leaders are forced to contemplate the break up of all they have achieved so far or take a step further down the road to greater co-ordination, and even to federalism.

A crisis is an opportunity, and many federalists see this as the chance to transcend the contradictions in the present halfway house set-up. The decision to establish the European Financial Stabilisation Fund in 2013 is a move in the direction of more federalism. The French minister for European affairs, Pierre Lellouche, told the *Financial Times* that the 2010 bailout and decision to launch an EFSF "amounted to a fundamental revision of the European Union's rules and a leap towards an economic government for the bloc."²¹

It is inconceivable that, should the Eurozone survive this crisis, then the governments will not give more power to the ECB over national economic decisions – at least supervision of budgets, debts and bond issuance.

But there remain major differences between the main Eurozone governments as to how far and how fast they should proceed towards greater unity. France wants some sort of a fiscal union, either through Euro-bonds or in the form of fiscal transfers between member states. Germany puts a lot more emphasis on stricter penalties and sanc-

tions for deficit countries and coordination at the level of EU member states.

But a set of tougher German measures, such as an orderly insolvency procedure for bankrupt European states or the setting up of a European Monetary Fund, have been rejected by France.

The two powers share different objectives to date. On the one hand Germany always, and especially since the end of the Cold War, has wanted a political union. This would set in stone Germany's pre-eminence economically and politically within a federal state and at the same time allow its bourgeoisie to advance their global imperialist interests more assertively, freed of the memories and associations of the Second World War.

On the other hand, the French bourgeoisie fears embedding a second class status within such a union and tying its hands on the global stage. It doesn't want its ability to act as before as an independent imperialist power at least in key regions, such as Africa and Asia to be inhibited. The French working and middle classes have also repeatedly – whenever they have been asked – shown their hostility to more powers for a federal European body, recognising correctly that this has always signalled a new round of anti-working class attacks on their welfare or democratic rights.

Of course, inherited, entrenched attitudes and policies are often broken up and recast in the course of a major crisis, and the European Union is living through such a crisis today.

ENDNOTES

1. France grew at a 4% annual rate in the first quarter of 2011. The combination was strong enough to boost the Eurozone's growth to 3.2%.
2. Martin Wolf, *Financial Times*, 1 December 2008
3. www.calculatedriskblog.com/2011/05/european-woes.html This has the borrowing figures for all the affected nations.
4. G Carchedi, "For another Europe," Verso, 2001 p133
5. *Ibid*, p134
6. Assorted British Stalinists moaned about the rigour of the financial conditions and how UK independence was vital for the defence of the welfare state. They should have told Blair and Cameron.
7. www.bloomberg.com/apps/quote?ticker=GGB2YR:IND&n=y#
8. Figures from the Bank of International Settlements
9. M Wolf, *FT*, 5 May 2010,
10. Patrick Artus, chief economist at Natixis, *Flash Economie*, 24 March 2011, <http://gesd.free.fr/flas1218.pdf>
11. Eric Toussaint, *International Viewpoint*, May 2001
12. On 17 May European Central Bank executive board member Juergen Stark said: "It is an illusion to think that a debt restructuring, a haircut, or whatever kind of rescheduling or restructuring you have in mind would help to resolve the

problems this country is facing," he said. "There is no other way than to continue with fiscal consolidation, and I would even say to double the effort in fiscal consolidation."

13. M Wolf, *Financial Times*, 8 May 2011

14. www.bloomberg.com/apps/quote?ticker=GIGB2YR:IND&n=y#

15. *Ibid*

16. *Ibid*

17. One estimate suggests that even the most optimistic scenario would not help: even if interest rates on long term debt fell to 6% and GDP grew at 4% even then to stabilise debt at its current levels the country would have to run a primary budget surplus (i.e. before interest payments) of 3.2% of GDP for many, many years, i.e. indefinite, deep cuts in welfare and infrastructure spending.

18. www.bloomberg.com/apps/quote?ticker=GSPG2YR:IND&n=y#

19. www.tradingeconomics.com/spain/gdp-growth

20. www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-05-11/salgado-says-spanish-budget-deficit-is-shrinking-no-new-measures-needed.html

21. *FT*, 8 May 2010. The former European Commission president Romano Prodi wrote an article at the same time entitled "A Big Step towards Fiscal Federalism in Europe".⁷²

Should the Eurozone

THE SOVEREIGN debt crisis of the southern "peripheral" Eurozone countries has put a question mark against the future of the single currency. In Greece the clamour to exit the Eurozone is widespread as adherence to the strict budget rules is seen as a straitjacket and membership prevents a devaluation of the currency, a step which would boost exports and growth.

The anti-capitalist left in Europe is generally agreed on a number of issues. Everyone recognises that the sovereign debt crisis is, at least in part, a result of the state bailout of the banking sector and that a borrower-led default on all or a substantial part of this debt should be initiated.

Another idea is that an "audit" of the debts of budget-cutting governments be carried out by workers' organisations and sympathetic experts to investigate the origin and nature of sovereign debt. This could be used as a way of mobilising popular opinion for a radical write-off of the debts.

It is accepted that a series of taxes on profits and wealth should be levied against the big corporations to fund the necessary welfare payments and services that are being cut back so as to close the budget deficits of debtor countries.

Moreover, it is regarded as essential that the major banks and other financial institutions are nationalised so that interest rate setting and credit distribution boost wages and employment, not preserve a "strong euro" or boost profits of the private banks.

But one issue divides the left and is being hotly debated; namely, should the left seek an immediate exit from the single currency as part of a socialist and anti-capitalist strategy for fighting the debt-induced austerity crisis?

The case for leaving the Euro has recently been put by Costas Lapavistas, a Greek Marxist academic working in London.¹

His main argument is that the single currency is not some neutral, technical instrument, but a central weapon of European capitalists under the leadership of Germany, to impose a series of anti-working class measures across the Eurozone. He argues:

"The specific character and ferocity of the European turmoil are due to the monetary union. The Euro has acted as the mediator of the world crisis in Europe. From the perspective of Marxist theory, this is hardly a surprise since the Euro is a form of world money and not just a common currency. The Euro is designed to act as means of payment and hoarding in the world market or, in the language of mainstream economics, as a reserve currency. It serves the interests of the major states that command it as well as of the large financial and industrial enterprises that deploy it internationally."

The Euro was created by an alliance of states and:

"... three elements have been instrumental to it: first, an independent central bank in full command of monetary policy and presiding over a homogeneous money market for banks; second, fiscal stringency imposed through the Growth and Stability Pact; third, relentless pressure on labour wages and conditions to ensure competitiveness for European capital."

"This pressure has been most intense in the core countries as governments and bosses have pressed down on labour costs so as to increase competitiveness. This has resulted in surpluses in the north and deficits in the south with the gap being bridged mainly by bank loans from the north to the south."

As a result, argues Lapavistas, "the paramount concern has been to rescue the Euro. To achieve this aim, policy has focused on saving the banks exposed to peripheral debt. Thus, the ECB has advanced abundant and cheap liquidity to banks; in contrast, miserly liquidity at high interest rates was made available to states. At the same time, unprecedented austerity was imposed on peripheral countries."

Having made the case for saying an exit strategy would disrupt the core pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist project of the European bourgeoisie, he goes on to criticize the pro-Euro far left for not thinking through the logic of their correct demand for a debt default.

He argues that the left insists the European Central Bank should take on peripheral debt, and undertake funding of Greece, Portugal etc for years ahead, without recognising that if the ECB were to take on the bad debts they would have to be paid for as they were written down (or banks recapitalised if they were forced to take a huge loss). In which case Lapavistas asks: where would the money come from? And answers "In the context of Europe this means drawing on the tax income of core countries, and therefore imposing burdens on working people."

In addition, all such rescue schemes would weaken the Euro internationally by boosting inflation in the Eurozone, something completely unacceptable to Germany.

So "debtor-led default in the periphery would immediately raise the issue of Eurozone membership, given that the lenders are the core countries. Exit is an important component of a radical left strategy that could annul austerity while restructuring economies in the interests of labour."

He continues, pointing out that leaving the Euro on its own is no panacea.

"But changing the monetary standard is a major shock that would require a broad programme of economic and social change. The most important concern would be to prevent the monetary shock from becoming a banking crisis, for then the repercussions on the economy would be severe. It follows that banks would have to be placed

be broken up?

under public ownership and control, protecting depositors, avoiding bank runs, and creating a framework to restructure the economy. Needless to say, it would also be necessary immediately to impose capital controls.

"The new currency would depreciate thus putting added pressure on banks borrowing abroad, but also removing the shackles from the productive sector and boosting exports. Regaining command over monetary policy while defaulting on the debt would also immediately remove the stranglehold of austerity on the productive sector. On the other hand, rising import prices would put pressure on workers' incomes, thus necessitating redistributive measures through tax and wage policy. Finally, industrial policy would be introduced to restore productive capacity in the periphery and to create employment. A concerted effort could then be made to raise the productivity of labour allowing peripheral countries to improve their position in the international division of labour. Naturally, such a dramatic shift in the balance of social forces in favour of labour would require democratic restructuring of the state improving tax collection and dealing with corruption."

The case against leaving

Michael Husson and Oziem Onaran, supporters of the Fourth International, have argued that "for a left government leaving the Euro would be a major strategic error." They point out that non-Euro countries like the UK have also embarked on savage austerity programmes and that championing an exit from the single currency, would strengthen the far right and nationalists such as Front National in France.

Moreover: "If a liberal government were forced to take such a measure by the pressure of events it is clear that it would be the pretext for an even more severe austerity than the one we have experienced up to now."²

"The new currency would be devalued [which] the financial markets would immediately use to begin a speculative offensive. It would trigger a cycle of devaluation, inflation and austerity. On top of that, the debt, which until that point had been denominated in Euros or in dollars would suddenly increase as a result of this devaluation."

They concede that membership of the Eurozone brings with it definite institutional and legal constraints and pressures but argue that "from a tactical point of view it would be better in this test of strength to use membership in the Eurozone as a source of conflict."

In this conflict "the specific task of the radical, internationalist left is to link the social struggles happening in each country with arguing for a different kind of Europe."

Husson argues that a programme of demands such as taxes on capital, nationalisation, debt forgiveness and

green investments can and should all be fought for across Europe now, and that:

"... these objectives are neither further nor closer away than an 'exit from the Euro' which would be beneficial to working people. It would definitely be absurd to wait for a simultaneous and co-ordinated exit by every European country."

Oziem Onaran argues that "the issue of a debt audit/default campaign [is] a much more important departure point for mobilisation than the debate around the Euro. The most important obstacle today to initiating any progressive economic policy in Europe and individual nation states is the speculation on public debt and the governments' commitment to satisfy the financiers... A European network of movements – broad fronts as well as anti-capitalist organisations – could be turned into a means of bringing together peoples' opposition to austerity in different countries. An internationalist solution might generate a more powerful front in the core and the periphery compared to national alternatives..."

"These demands are likely to be more broadly accepted by the majority of working people when they are formulated as part of a European campaign for capital controls and tax coordination, since a united campaign is a stronger weapon against the threats of capital flight by a multinational and mobile European finance capital."³

Both sides of the argument have strong points. Lapavistas is correct to insist that the very origin of the Euro, and the whole nature of the current attempt to defend its strength and stability, underscore that its very existence is a central component of European capital's anti-working class strategy. Its purpose is the creation of a pan-European imperialist bloc, fashioned at the expense of the European labour movement.

But his argument that a debt default strategy involves the working class of the core countries picking up the bill for debt forgiveness in the form of higher taxes is not convincing. This outcome would be decided by struggle and it is for the working class movement to impose the costs on the capitalist class, preferably within the context of a socialist European strategy.

In the end a pro-working class, transitional set of demands that start from resistance to the austerity cuts and a refusal to pay the debts should be at the core of any strategy. Whether membership of the Euro is compatible or desirable in the context of that unfolding struggle, is a tactical issue that can be addressed further down the road of success in refusing to accept the burden of the crisis.

ENDNOTES

1. www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article2091
2. hussonet.free.fr/srmh10.pdf
3. socialistresistance.org/1936/debate-ozlem-onaran-replies-to-costas-lapavistas

Fukushima, the left, and nuclear power

The recent nuclear accident in Japan has led the left to redouble its efforts against nuclear power. But, asks Stuart King, how does this square with reducing global warming? David Walters argues that completely the wrong lessons are being drawn from the Fukushima accident

WHEN A massive earthquake hit Japan on 11 March, followed immediately by a tsunami, the Fukushima nuclear plant suffered a major accident. It took weeks for the private operating company TEPCO to bring the crisis under control, and it will take at least another six to nine months to achieve a cold shut down of the plants nuclear reactors.

This was a very serious accident, rated 7 on the INES scale, the same as the Chernobyl accident, although Fukushima has released so far only 10% of the radiation of the Ukrainian disaster. Immediate casualties were much lower. Unlike Chernobyl no one died as a result of the radiation leaks at Fukushima – two workers involved in the clean-up were hospitalised when radioactive water seeped into their boots. By contrast an estimated 24,000 are dead or missing as a result of the earthquake and tsunami.

This is not to belittle the accident, but to put it in perspective. The long term effects of radiation are yet to be quantified but they will certainly be less damaging than Chernobyl, where incompetence by the Russian Soviet authorities exposed tens of thousands to contaminated food and milk for weeks after the event.

The Fukushima accident could have been much worse, reactor cores could have completely melted down, leading to much greater contamination and an even more difficult clean up operation.

The accompanying article by David Walters looks at the accident, its causes and consequences. Unlike many on the left he does not conclude that the accident was the “inevitable result” of an impossibly dangerous industry, rather that it was a result of a private company cutting corners on safety in the interests of short term profit.

For much of the far left Fukushima was just a

confirmation of their anti-nuclear prejudices. Socialist Worker was typical. Its front page headline declared “Nuclear Plants are never safe: shut them all down” (19 March, 2011). Inside its editorial declared “Every plan to build a nuclear plant in every country across the world should be stopped – now. And all existing plants should be shut down. That’s the message we should take from the horrific events in Japan.”

Now just a moment’s thought by any serious thinking socialist would have revealed what a ludicrous demand this was. In Britain something like 19% of electricity comes from our nuclear power plants. Shutting them down immediately would lead to rolling blackouts across the country. In the medium term it would lead to electricity being produced by more CO₂ polluting forms of electricity production – gas and coal – increasing global warming with all the dangers that entails.

And in France where almost 80% of the country’s electricity comes from nuclear? The economy would shut down and workers would be burning their furniture in the dark to keep warm. Now that would be a real vote winner!

The pat reply to this argument will be that nuclear can be replaced by renewables – wind, wave and solar power – and by better energy efficiency in homes, offices etc. Well it can’t – the figures don’t add up.

Building offshore windfarms, renewing the grid to use them, developing wave power etc will take years if not a decade or more, even if a socialist government threw all its resources behind it. Even a massive public works programme on energy conservation in homes and offices would take many years. At the same time we need to phase out *all* coal-fired power stations within the next decade or so, a really important

demand in relation to CO₂ emissions – and in Britain they still produce just under a third of our electricity.

Renewables cannot fill the gap if we take out nuclear power as an option.

As socialists we cannot magic away these problems. We can bury our heads in the sand, raise demands that no one takes seriously (even ourselves) or provide some scientific based and socialist answers to the problems we face – the major one being how we put forward a programme to massively reduce CO₂ emissions on a world scale to prevent global warming.

Nuclear power as a low CO₂ producing energy source, for all its draw-backs and dangers, will certainly be part of the solution. The lesson of Fukushima is not, as Socialist Worker would have it, that nuclear power is an impossibly dangerous industry, but that it is far too dangerous an industry to be in private hands and to be driven by the profit motive.

Of the ten commercially operating nuclear plants in the UK seven were built between 1962 and 1970. They are old technology, as was Fukushima, more dangerous

to run than the new generation of nuclear power stations. They need to be phased out and replaced by new ones as part of an energy mix where renewables are the major source of electric power, a mix where coal and gas are phased out.

The whole of the nuclear industry (apart from decommissioning) has been privatised and is run by multinationals like EDF. It needs to be nationalised with the profit motive removed. But it cannot be run by state bureaucrats who are as keen on cost cutting as any capitalist. It needs to be placed under the control of the workers who run it (and know the safety issues) alongside the communities that exist side by side with nuclear plants. Together they can monitor and control safety and management and should be given the resources by the state to employ their own experts and technicians to be able to do so.

Fukushima was a dangerous accident. Rejecting nuclear power in the context of uncontrolled global warming would be a disaster.

Stuart King

Fukushima, nuclear energy and a socialist programme

WITH THE recent tsunami induced accidents at the privately owned Fukushima power plants in Japan, the issue of nuclear energy has once again become a campaigning issue for anti-nuclear activists around the world. Many of the left groups that have spoken out, most notably those active in “Green” circles, have now gone on a major cam-

paign to “Shut them all down now”. Presumably this means the immediate closing of the world’s 440 nuclear power reactors.

We see this call being made by various socialist organisations in Japan, and even some of the unions they lead. It should be noted, however, that the main union rep-

resenting the workers who operate Japan's 54 reactors, including those placing themselves at great risk, do not echo this call.

The nuclear accident in Japan, where at the same time close to 30,000 people have lost their lives due to the earthquake and tsunami, certainly raises the question of safety at nuclear plants, not just in Japan, specifically the Fukushima reactors, but throughout the world. Socialists who are pro-nuclear do not shy away from these debates and discussions at all.

At the current time we know only a few facts about the accident at Fukushima. What we do know is that it appears the "physical plant" itself, that is the reactor housing, went mostly unscathed because of the tsunami or the earthquake. No nuclear plant in the world's 60 year history of civilian nuclear energy has ever been wrecked, destroyed or otherwise overwhelmed directly by these natural phenomenon. That is correct: no earthquake has significantly damaged a reactor to cause a release of radiation or a meltdown. Many in the anti-nuclear movement don't like to admit this but it's true.

So what did happen then at Fukushima?

The earthquake did two things. It caused the operating reactors to automatically shutdown. It also knocked out the grid, that is the outside power grid the plants send power into for distribution and take power from during outages, either routine ones or emergency ones. In case of this occurring, two forms of auxiliary power come into play: battery backup that will last a few dozen hours, and auxiliary diesel generators that can last days or weeks until power is restored.

The use of water for cooling in any reactor is well known. In the old Fukushima reactors electricity was essential to provide pumping and cooling. We do not have to review that here as it is covered in many places already. Back-up power is provided but it failed in this case. We have to

Nuclear has been somewhat different historically from other forms of power generation, given the dangerous nature of generating energy from atomic fission

ask why it failed and what solutions could have mitigated this failure?

The batteries operated as they were designed to, essentially providing power to run the cooling pumps. However, TEPCO, the privately investor-owned utility that built and operates the plants (as well as numerous others) located the fuel tanks for the diesel generators at the oceanfront. This facilitates loading of fuel supplies, once every few years from, barges. They located them here because it was cheaper to do so. These fuel tanks were smashed by the ensuing tsunami caused by the earthquake. A double whammy, one that could have been predicted given the geological and quake-prone area Japan is close to.

Instead of building these fuel tanks up the hill behind

the power plant, they took the cheap way out – for profit. Secondly, while TEPCO did install a breakwater, clearly visible on any available satellite imaging service such as Google Earth, they laid down the absolute *minimum* sized breakwater, which was clearly not sufficient to combat the 13 metre tsunami that hit this plant. Breakwaters are easy to build. A few million dollars worth of concrete and formed components and TEPCO could have easily built a break water that would of prevented the damage and subsequent disaster from occurring.

The operating engineer in me, like engineers everywhere, sees this disaster, but we do not run from it. We do not shout "Fear! Run! Shut it down!" No, we try to address the actual issues involved and seek a solution. What could have been done to prevent this disaster (I noted some precautions that could have been taken above)?

All seaside reactors everywhere in the world now have to be seen in the light of the experience of this tsunami and proceed to design fail-safe solutions so this can never happen again. We need to demand that worst-case tsunami possibilities be addressed and solutions applied. And it can be done, because humanity's cognitive ability to analyse and address these problems within the laws of physics and applied engineering, knows almost no bounds. But we don't run. We address the problem and we solve it.

If Japan actually shuts down 100% of their low carbon energy, that is their nuclear reactors, which make up 30% of the installed capacity (and closer to 40% of their actual generation) then they will have rolling blackouts and their society will go backwards, toward an increase in use of fossil fuels (already underway with the closing of Fukushima) and away from an eventual socialist solution for everything from feeding their nation to industrial production. And of course their contribution to global warming, with all the dangerous consequences of that, will increase.

But TEPCO didn't do any of these things which could have prevented this accident. Like corporations all over the world, private enterprise does only that which they deem financially and politically necessary to get by. There is also a similar bureaucratic and cost-cutting compulsion even in state owned enterprises run, supposedly, for the public good.

Nuclear has been somewhat different historically from other forms of power generation, given the dangerous nature of generating energy from atomic fission. Everywhere it is highly regulated. This is true even in Japan where government and corporations are incestuously entangled with one other. In other countries, regulators have degrees more independence. Overall, there is no more regulated industry in the world than nuclear. But, as Japan shows, there are still vital safety issues that need to be addressed.

On a personal note, my own minimum experience with nuclear energy in the US and having being a shop steward in a union local with 800 nuclear workers, has educated me on the importance of safety, of following regulatory guidelines, and seeing the consequences of not following those guidelines for workers involved.

I was convinced after visiting nuclear power plants and talking to my fellow union workers, that I didn't want

to work in such an environment. Because it was unsafe? No, for just the opposite reason, in fact. The tremendous amount of NRC (Nuclear Regulatory Agency) oversight, training, regulations and paperwork, that is, the "safety culture", was simply too great for me to want to deal with. The workers there take these issues so seriously that I didn't believe I could tolerate this work environment.

In the beginning of May of this year the New York Times ran an editorial, disguised as an "article" (one of the authors being an anti-nuclear ideologue from Greenpeace), supposedly showing the "near misses" and accidents that were missed or not noted by the NRC. There is no doubt that some of this is true, while giving a false overall picture of the issue. But it's also true that despite these incidents, not one of these resulted in injury to the public or work force.

The fact is that, thanks to the workers involved in operating these plants, most of whom are union members, the safety record of the US civilian nuclear energy industry and the sound regulatory oversight, has made even this, flawed, for-profit industry, the safest of any major industry in the US for the last 50 years. Can we say the same about the refinery, pharmaceutical, chemical, coal, gas and oil industries? No, we cannot. The relative risk of these industries has to be looked at, and anti-nuclear "investigative" journalism routinely ignores this.

But it is not enough. And there are flaws in the entire system that warrant some serious revisions.

We have serious issues facing our class, our planet. From economic development of the productive forces in the oppressed neo-colonial world to raise their standard of living, to the phasing out of climate-changing fossil fuel use, we are going to require *more*, not, less energy, specifically electricity.

Most on the left are at best confused by this and at worse, seek a return to some sort of pastoral green, "democratic" pre-industrial utopia. As Marxists we should reject this "we use too much" scenario that has infected the left across the world. We certainly *should* use energy more wisely, more efficiently and with a sense of conservation. This can happen only when the profit motive is removed and scarcity in basic necessities is a thing of the past. No one should object to this. But these things do not produce one watt of power, especially if you consider what we have to do. These include:

- Switching off from fossil fuels completely (they should be used only as chemical feedstock, i.e. as the basic material to make chemicals and lubricants)
- Increasing the development of the productive forces especially in the developing world. This means developing whole electrical grids, new, primarily non-fossil fuel, forms of generation and the infrastructure to support this, for the *billions without any electrical usage at all*
- Freeing up the productive forces to *eliminate all forms of want* as the material basis for a true socialist mode of production. Using nuclear energy is both the cheapest and *safest* way to do this.

George Monbiot in his latest entry on his blog⁷ challenges the renewable energy advocates with some hard questions. No socialist by any means, Monbiot has brought attention to the issue of energy and what it will take to

reduce carbon emissions. He notes, writing on Britain, among other things:

"1. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions means increasing electricity production. It is hard to see a way around this. Because low-carbon electricity is the best means of replacing the fossil fuels used for heating and transport, electricity generation will rise, even if we manage to engineer a massive reduction in overall energy consumption. The Zero Carbon Britain report published by the Centre for Alternative Technology envisages a 55% cut in overall energy demand by 2030 – and a near-doubling of electricity production."

We certainly should use energy more wisely, more efficiently and with a sense of conservation. This can happen only when the profit motive is removed

How is this electricity going to be produced in a sustained and regular way? We know wind generated power is erratic and variable, a problem only partially solvable by new continental wide electricity grids. We know other forms of low carbon power – tidal, coal with carbon capture and storage, large scale solar – are experimental and even if viable are likely to turn out more expensive than nuclear.

We get no answer from so-called socialist Greens on this problem, at least not yet. They simply have not considered the real issues.

Monbiot goes on:

"3. The only viable low-carbon alternative we have at the moment is nuclear power. This has the advantage of being confined to compact industrial sites, rather than sprawling over the countryside, and of requiring fewer new grid connections (especially if new plants are built next to the old ones). It has the following disadvantages:

"a. The current generation of power stations require uranium mining, which destroys habitats and pollutes land and water. Though its global impacts are much smaller than the global impacts of coal, the damage it causes cannot be overlooked.

"b. The waste it produces must be stored for long enough to be rendered safe. It is not technically difficult to do this, with vitrification, encasement and deep burial, but governments keep delaying their decisions as a result of public opposition.

"Both these issues (as well as concerns about proliferation and security) could be addressed through the replacement of conventional nuclear power with thorium or integral fast reactors but, partly as a result of public resistance to atomic energy, neither technology has yet been developed. (I'll explore the potential of both approaches in a later column)."

I want to address this last point. Monbiot is slowly seeing his way to something that has taken a long time: that nuclear energy is really the only way to go, even

Arab revolutions shake the world

Not since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 have revolutions against dictatorships spread with such rapidity from one country to the next.

Stuart King examines the roots and progress of the Arab revolutions to date

AS 2010 drew to a close a 26 year old Tunisian, Mohamed Bouazizi burnt himself to death outside the headquarters of the municipal offices in a minor Tunisian town 300 kilometres from the capital. He was protesting at the police confiscation of his vegetable cart and scales, the sole means of support for his extended family of eight.

Mohamed's action had dramatic consequences. A wave of revolution spread across Tunisia and into Egypt. The masses poured onto the streets in both countries and their revolt soon spread throughout the Middle East and into Africa.

Civil wars continue to rage through Libya and the Yemen; Syria and Bahrain have slaughtered hundreds of their citizens and imprisoned tens of thousands in an attempt to crush the uprising; and as far away as Uganda and Ethiopia "days of rage" and protest are organised against repressive and long-standing rulers.

Not since the revolutions of 1989 in eastern Europe,

following the fall of the Berlin Wall, have regional revolts spread with such speed against dictatorship – and met with such success. If the overthrow of the Stalinist dictatorships changed the world and the balance of imperialism's power within it, a successful Arab revolution that sweeps away all the dictatorships propped up by western imperialism will have a similarly historic impact. Not just Ben Ali and Mubarak but the reactionary Sheikhs and monarchs that infest the Middle East from Saudi Arabia to Jordan are all facing their days of reckoning.

This upsurge has begun as a democratic revolution. A broad alliance of different classes and strata came together against entrenched dictatorships. The revolution is led by the youth. They have blazed a path towards democratic change, drawing in the unemployed, professionals, small business people, the working class, rural labourers and peasants.

The masses are driven onto the streets by both economic

misery and political repression. They protested against corruption in the highest and lowest places. The "kleptocracies" of Ben Ali, Mubarak and Gaddafi, rulers and their families who siphoned off billions of dollars from the state, were a primary target. But the masses' rage was also directed at the police and state bureaucrats who demanded bribes and backhanders for overseeing every minute detail of work and daily life.

The people demonstrated, and died, on the streets in protest at the torture and repression of those who dared

The Arab world is linked by language, culture, religion and a common history of imperialist oppression. This explains why the revolutions were so quick to spread

to speak out. They protested at the price hikes for bread and rice, the land grabs by the rich, the decline of wages, the growing unemployment and poverty throughout their countries.

Can these revolutions bring about fundamental social change if they succeed in overthrowing dictatorship? Certainly there is everything to play for. If the demands that brought the masses onto the streets in the first place are not satisfied by a mere political re-alignment of the ruling class and a few democratic concessions the revolution can be driven forward towards the overthrow of capitalism.

Many democratic revolutions in recent decades have failed to deliver real economic change despite overthrowing dictatorships – the struggle against Marcos in the Philippines, against Somoza in Nicaragua, against Suharto in Indonesia. If the Arab masses can learn the lessons of these revolutions, can move from democratic to radical anti-capitalist and socialist demands, and build a movement to remove the root causes of poverty and dictatorship, a servile semi-colonial capitalism, then their sacrifices will be matched by the promise of a future based on solidarity, equality and working class power.

Imperialism's worst nightmare

The countries of the Arab world are linked by language, culture, religion and a common history of imperialist oppression. This explains why the revolutions were so quick to spread from one country to another. It wasn't just the advantages of the new media – satellite news channels, the internet, Facebook, Twitter – although this undoubtedly aided the process; it was because these states shared many common problems and had a common enemy.

A lack of jobs and growing unemployment, especially amongst the young and educated, plagued each country. They all faced rising food prices for staple products and massive inflation. The world economic recession of 2008-09 had hit these countries badly – reducing remittances from workers abroad, putting foreign investment on hold and leading to a falling away of tourism (for some coun-

tries like Tunisia and Egypt a vital earner and employer). Growth stagnated, prospects worsened.

But this came on top of years of neoliberalism in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. Privatisation had led to the withdrawal of subsidies for staple foods, the ending of guaranteed state jobs for graduates, the handing over of schools and education to private enterprise and the growing corruption and enrichment of the few who benefited from the fraudulent sell off of state assets. While these IMF inspired economic programmes affected some countries more than others – Egypt and Tunisia more than Libya and Syria – dictatorships and corruption affected them all. Democratic reform was blocked, there was no way out except revolutionary change.

Then there was the common enemy standing behind these dictatorships, egging them on to ever more privatisation measures and subsidy withdrawal – the World Bank and the IMF – the collective economic arm of imperialism. Imperialism not only dictated their rulers' economic policy but armed their military and security services to the teeth to deal with any internal threats. The tanks, sniper rifles, small arms, tear gas and rubber bullets that killed and maimed so many demonstrators across the Arab world over the past months came courtesy of US, French and British imperialism, and their arms manufacturers.

These dictatorships – in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Iraq, the Arab Emirates – were part and parcel of imperialism's control of the region, an area of the world absolutely central to the major world economies because of its oil and gas reserves. Libya too was in the process of being welcomed back into the imperialist fold when an unwelcome revolt, from the west's point of view, swept the country.

The attitude of the US and European imperialists at the start was a little different to the last time their hold on the region was threatened by a series of nationalist takeovers in the 1950s and 1960s starting with Nasser's ascent to power in Egypt in 1952. Then British and French troops, aided by Israel, attempted to seize the Suez Canal and bring down Nasser. The imperialists were divided and the US forced a humiliating end to the Franco-British military expedition. This time the western giants are united and more sophisticated methods are used to keep control of the region.

Nevertheless the imperialists were caught off balance. The immediate reaction was to back their dictatorships – there was Hillary Clinton's declaration of support for Mubarak and Sarkozy's rush to aid Ben Ali in Tunisia. It took some time for them to realise the dictators' days were numbered, that they needed to move quickly to contain, control and stabilise the revolts. The dictators could go, "should go", as long as the capitalist regime continued, though now draped in democratic garb. Indeed it was only several months after the first victories in Tunisia and Egypt that Obama finally enunciated a new "democratic" policy for the Middle East (Saudi Arabia excepted of course).

The nightmare scenario; the dictator brought to justice, the army broken, police and security services hung from lamp posts, the people and a revolutionary government in control, had to be averted at all costs. Yesterday's trusted

friends and allies, Mubarak and Ben Ali, their families and cronies, were quickly sacrificed or told to lie low in their Saudi and French villas.

But the threat to imperialism's dominance was, and is, still very real. Controlling a revolution isn't easy, even if you have billions of dollars to spend doing it. The US has lost one of its key allies in the region, the Egyptian government, and isn't certain yet of its replacement. Egypt under Presidents Sadat and Mubarak represented a forty year investment for US imperialism which cost it hundreds of billions of dollars in aid and support. It was a central part of a reactionary triumvirate - Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia - designed to control the Middle East and suppress radical nationalism and socialism. This third pillar will yet be hard to replace.

Tunisia and Egypt: revolution and stabilisation

The revolutionary upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt followed a remarkably similar path despite the disparities in the size of each country. Tunisia has a population of 10 million; Cairo alone has a population estimated at 22 million. Both were favourites and "poster boys" of the IMF and World Bank who heaped praise on the regimes' privatisation efforts. Both were run by longstanding dictators whose families and relations looted the state coffers and profited massively from corruption.

Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali came to power in a coup in 1987. He was from the police security apparatus rather than the army. The Tunisian army, unlike in Egypt, was a relatively weak institution. By the first decade of this century privatisation and neoliberalism were in full swing.

Ben Ali's extended family, as well as his wife's, were renowned for their wealth, corruption and extravagance. Their network, just known as "the family" in Tunisia, is estimated to have controlled between 30-40% of the Tunisian economy shortly before their overthrow. Wikileaks' revelations from the US ambassador's reports fuelled outrage in the country - one referred to ice cream being flown in from the French Riviera for one of Ben Ali's son's parties.

Meanwhile, unemployment and poverty were shooting up as the economic recession tore into the region. Unemployment was particularly high among young people who quickly took the lead in demonstrations following the death of Mohamed Bouazizi on December 17, chanting "Bread, water and no Ben Ali". By mid-January the demonstrations had reached the capital and in a pitched battle, with police using live ammunition, the demonstrators conquered the capital. The young people were aided by a general strike forced on the leadership of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT) by militant regional branches.

The Ben Ali family fled the country on January 15. Ben Ali's wife was rumoured to have taken 1.5 tonnes of gold with her to Jedda in their private jet. The people had organised armed patrols at street and housing block level after plain clothes police had attacked neighbourhoods.

After "the family" fled the army took over on the streets, untainted during the years of police repression and generally welcomed by the protesters.

An attempt by the government to change a few faces and continue as normal failed when mass demonstrations brought down the new regime within days. A series of government reshuffles then took place, drawing in and losing UGTT ministers. In February another wave of strikes, demonstrations and storming of government buildings led to the dissolution of the old ruling party the RCD. At the end of February the interim Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi was forced from office after more than 100,000 demonstrators demanded his resignation, the postponement of the general elections and immediate elections to a constituent assembly to change the constitution.

The new interim Prime Minister then announced elections to such an assembly, which will take place on 24 July. The assembly will discuss a new constitution and decide a date for new general elections.

Egypt's modern Pharaoh

The regime of President Hosni Mubarak was a much tougher nut to crack than Ben Ali's. Mubarak had been president of Egypt since 1981 when he stepped into the shoes of the assassinated Anwar Sadat, the man responsible for moving Egypt firmly into the US sphere of influence and making peace with Israel.

Mubarak came from the military and had been the commander of the air force in the 1970s. He pursued Sadat's policy of opening up to the west with vigour. Egypt under Nasser in the 1950s and 60s was a highly nationalised economy, where industry, jobs, welfare and subsidised food and services were provided largely by the state.

Mubarak proceeded to dismantle this system, speeding up the privatisation policies dramatically in the 1990s under the direction of the IMF. Egypt was to become "a tiger economy" on the Nile, and at one point government members promised an IMF delegation that they would be privatising "one company a week".¹ They were almost true to their word with water, electricity, sanitation, irrigation,

Egyptians were starting to react and protest at the decline in their living standards, despite brutal repression from the police and state security services

health care, transport, telecommunications and education all going under the hammer in the next decade. Even the old landowners, expropriated under Nasser, were given title to their lands back, causing serious clashes with poor farmers defending their land.

The results of this were dramatic. By the beginning of the decade poverty increased as food and fuel subsidies were withdrawn and factories tried to compete in the textile industry with China and Bangladesh. Industrial wages fell from \$2,210 annually in the early 1980s to \$1,863 by the late 1990s, while profits rocketed. The World Bank estimated that those living in "moderate poverty", less

than \$2 a day, increased from 16.7 million to 19.6 million. At the same time the World Bank declared Egypt the "world's top reformer" in terms of liberalisation! By 2008 unemployment was estimated to have reached 26.3% of the workforce - 7.9 million, with the percentage of youth unemployment, estimated to be as much as three times higher.²

It was the youth, and especially the most educated, that the neo-liberal state alienated and condemned to unemployment, poverty or complete dependence on family. Egypt, like the rest of the Middle East, had seen a surge in the youth population. In the two decades from 1990 the number of 15-29 year olds in the country increased by 65%. At the same time guaranteed state jobs for graduates were phased out. By 2010 Egyptian graduates were ten times more likely to be unemployed than those with elementary education.³ It is not surprising that militant and educated young people were at the forefront of the uprising in Egypt when it came on 25 January 2011.

Changes in the economy were dramatic. Whereas in

1991 the private sector of the economy made up only 30% of production, by 2006 it made up 80%. The real beneficiaries of this were the small group of businessmen around the Mubarak family, and in particular his son and "heir apparent" Gamal Mubarak. By the time of their overthrow, the Mubarak family were estimated to own and control between \$40 and \$70 billion in assets, much of it salted away in Europe, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States.

Thirty-nine leading business people and state officials associated with Gama were estimated to be worth more than a billion dollars each. Ahmed Ezz was a typical beneficiary of the state privatisations who ended up owning two thirds of the country's steel production. He was a leading figure in Mubarak's NDP party and took charge of the completely fraudulent November 2010 parliamentary elections, which delivered a 97% majority for the NDP in the legislature. This was meant to be the preparation for Gamal Mubarak to seamlessly take control of the country once his father stepped down.

Who are the Muslim Brotherhood?

ALTHOUGH THE Muslim Brotherhood (MB) has been in existence in Egypt since 1928 the modern MB bears little relationship to the original movement that grew to over half a million members by the 1940s, and played an important role in the struggle against British domination of Egypt.

By the 1970s, following years of repression under Nasser, the MB had only a few hundred members and was politically and religiously linked to the reactionary Saudi monarchy. It benefited during the 1970s from Anwar Sadat's infatuation (opening). It supported the growing moves to liberalise and denationalise the economy and many of its leading members became wealthy businessmen as a result. Some estimates suggest that by the 1980s 40% of all private ventures were controlled by figures with links to the MB.¹

Like political Islam in the rest of the Middle East, the MB enjoyed a dramatic growth in influence in the 1980s and 90s. The failures of Arab nationalism to develop their countries economically, to rid them

of imperialist exploitation, and their successive defeats in war by the colonial settler state of Israel, eroded popular ideological support for secular nationalism. After the 1979 Iranian revolution political Islam filled the ideological gap amongst the Arab masses.

With the tacit support of the Sadat regime, the MB ousted leftists and Nasserists from the main student associations in the late 1970s. But Sadat's peace deal with Israel, which recognised the Zionist state and abandoned other Arab states, like Syria, whose land remained occupied after the 1967 war, caused outrage amongst students and the population in general. Student associations led the protests, and repression led to radicalisation and division. One section of the student movement gravitated to the jihadi movement and violent confrontation with the state. Another stuck with the MB and its reformist perspective of working for change within the state institutions and parliament.

The brutal crushing of the jihadi movements by the army in the

1990s left the field free for the phenomenal growth of the MB in that decade. The MB went on to win control of a whole number of professional associations, syndicates, amongst the doctors, dentists, engineers and agricultural professionals. It also gained significant support in the lawyers and journalists associations. This was important in a period where university education had expanded rapidly and the syndicates had become mass organisations rather than elite institutions.

In the poorer and working class areas the MB expanded its influence through private mosques, charitable associations and NGOs connected to it. As the state withdrew from providing for the poor the MB established a social welfare network and drove deep roots into the poorest neighbourhoods.

This explains the huge electoral gains of the MB in the 2005 elections where, despite widespread fraud, it gained 20% of the parliament having stood in only 150 seats. The left's relative decline was

Growing opposition

For those who followed developments in Egypt in the first decade of the century, the sudden explosion in January 2011 came as no real surprise. Egyptians were starting to react and protest at the decline in their living standards, despite brutal repression from the police and state security services. Large protests started around political rather than economic issues, solidarity demonstrations with the Palestinian Intifada in 2000, significant protests against the invasion of Iraq in 2003 which were heavily repressed.

By the middle of the decade Kifaya – “Enough”, a radical movement for change – was established and led by many youth activists. It campaigned for an end to Mubarak’s presidency and against a Gamal takeover. Many from this movement went on to join the April 6 Movement formed in solidarity with striking textile workers. The movement attracted 70,000 members on Facebook, an astonishing achievement given the repression at the time.

The growing opposition to Mubarak was reflected as well in legislative elections in November 2005. The Muslim Brotherhood [see below] made its best ever showing winning 88 seats, nearly 20% of the parliament. Other opposition parties such as the Nasserists and Liberals gained just over 3% of the total.

This show of opposition to the NDP, despite heavy repression and fraud in elections, undoubtedly led to the massive electoral fraud in the 2010 elections which virtually excluded all other candidates than those of the regime in the second round. Growing electoral fraud was to spark off protests even amongst senior judges and other professionals from 2006 onwards, showing that discontent with the regime was growing in ever broader sections of Egyptian society.

A major strike at the Misr Spinning and Weaving Company at Mahalla al-Kubra in December 2006 set off a wave of similar strikes across the country. All were unlawful and disowned by the state run Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) which was merely an arm of the NDP and

evident in its 3% showing in the same election.

The MB’s politics also began to change in this period. In the 1980s it had been supportive of the privatisations. By the 1990s, with the impact of Mubarak’s neoliberal programme becoming ever more apparent and poverty and misery increasing, the MB started opposing the extreme marketising programme. In the trade union elections for instance its members “supported the right to strike, criticised the neoliberal economic programme, opposed government interference in the trade union elections and opposed wholesale liquidation of the public sector.”²

In the international arena the MB also became more militant. In the 1990s it championed the Palestinian cause, supported Hezbollah in its defence of the Lebanon against Israeli attacks and developed strong links with Hamas. It opposed imperialist intervention in Iraq in 1991 and attacked the Saudi and Gulf State regimes that housed US military bases, positions which led to a sharp break with these regimes and an end to their financial and material support for the MB.

But the MB remained a contradictory and in increasingly divided organisation. Its leadership

contained many business millionaires while its base suffered the direst poverty. One section of its leadership reassured the “international community” that if it achieved power it would abide by all the treaties (including those with Israel) signed by the current regime, while others denounced such treaties.

Its new programme (2007) declared its commitment to parliamentary democracy, political freedoms and equality of rights between women and men, Christians and Muslims. Yet at the same time it declared that the President of the Republic could neither be a Christian nor a woman. Its position on women’s involvement in politics and parliament remains ambiguous. And formally it remains committed to an Islamic state and enforcing Sharia law. The subtitle of its 2007 programme was “Yes, Islam is the solution”.

These tensions and divisions in the movement have been exposed during the current uprising. The MB was the first into discussions with the regime while Mubarak was still firmly in power. At the same time its younger members were central to the demonstrations in Tahrir Square that demanded no negotiations until Mubarak and his

regime were gone.

Recently the MB has opposed the ongoing Friday demonstrations and protests in Cairo fighting for a faster degree of change and a purging of the figures in government associated with the old regime. At the end of May the MB withdrew its representatives from the 25 January Youth Coalition which organises over 50 youth groups that were active in the uprising, because of the ongoing Friday demonstrations. It also suspended its web editors for supporting the demonstrators’ actions and demands on its website.

The conservative leadership of the MB will continue to struggle to reassert control over its movement, particularly the youth, as it builds the Justice and Freedom party to contest the September parliamentary elections. There is no doubt that the MB will provide a large conservative block in the new parliament offering support for elements of the old regime and military to ensure a smooth transition for Egyptian capitalism.

ENDNOTES

1. Islamism(s) old and new, Sameh Naguib in Egypt: the moment of change, Zed 2009, p109
2. Beinun, J Political Islam and the new global economy, quoted in Egypt, ibid

government. At Mahalla al-Kubra the strike was over unpaid bonuses and finally involved over 10,000 workers.

Women strikers played a key role, leaving their garment section and marching to the spinning and weaving department staffed by men. They stormed in demanding "Where are the men? Here are the women!" A strike leader was later to remark ruefully, "The women are more militant than the men. They were subject to security intimidation and threats, but they held out".⁴ The Misr workers were victorious, unlike many workers' struggles under Mubarak which ended in defeat, with strike leaders behind bars.

Revolution

The revolution in Tunisia was the spark that lit the fuse of the Egyptian revolt. On 25 January, ten days after Ben Ali fled, the April 6 Youth Movement called a demonstration on "Police Day" against police brutality. They had a series of demands that were to be central to the Tahrir Square protests over the next three weeks. They included the resignation of Mubarak, the lifting of the state of emergency (in place since 1967), the release of all political prisoners, the dissolution of the fraudulently elected parliament and its replacement by an interim government of "technocrats", the resignation of the Interior Minister and new elections.

Ten thousand turned up in Cairo and demonstrations occurred elsewhere in cities such as Alexandria. The demonstrations were attacked by police but this time the youth fought back. The traditional opposition parties like the Muslim Brotherhood failed to get involved although many of their younger members joined the protest. But by the 28 January, a Friday, things had changed. As the population poured out of the Mosques an estimated million people confronted the police and security services in the streets in a "Day of Rage" - the police were overwhelmed and retreated to barracks or threw aside their uniforms. The Egyptian revolution had begun.

The demonstrations became 24 hours and focused in the capital on the occupation of Tahrir (Liberation) Square. Mubarak made cosmetic changes to the government and called for "negotiations". The movement refused to negotiate with the new Vice President Omar Suleiman, a trusted Mubarak lieutenant, although the Muslim Brotherhood made steps in this direction.

In the absence of the police the army put troops on the streets and tanks entered Tahrir Square. This was a mistake. The demonstrators fraternised with the troops, brought flowers and tea to the soldiers and carried young officers on their shoulders around the square. Divisions were opening up between the army and the Mubarak regime and between the young officers and troops and their well paid, wealthy generals.

The high command of the Egyptian army is made up of major capitalists in their own right. They control and profit from large sections of the economy linked to the armed forces; land, manufacturing suppliers, clubs, estates and shops for officers. These top officers enjoy enormous privileges and favouritism in society. Some of this was threatened by the wide-ranging privatisation plans led by Gamal Mubarak and his business cronies, who were seen

WHILE THE Tunisian and Egyptian people successfully threw off the yoke of dictatorship, elsewhere in the Arab world mass revolts continue to be met with repression and counter-revolution.

In Syria mass demonstrations across the country against the Assad regime led to the most brutal repression; hundreds have been gunned down on the streets as the Ba'athist regime clings onto power. In Yemen long running mass protests against the 33 year rule of Ali Abdullah Saleh threatens to turn into civil war, as the heavily armed tribal and clan groups are drawn into fighting.

Even in Iraq mass demonstrations against corruption and incompetence in government were put down ruthlessly, with tens of protestors shot dead on the streets. Since then Moqtada al-Sadr has cleverly focused the opposition into mass protests against the US keeping a military presence in the country after 31 December.

In Bahrain we have seen the most open and vicious counter-revolution. When protestors demanding reform in the Sunni-dominated monarchical state overwhelmed the security services and threatened revolution, Saudi troops were called in to crush the rising. Since then the Shia areas of this Gulf State have suffered organised terror and repression.

Obama's new doctrine of "democracy for Arabia" counted for nothing in a state that is a major base for US navy forces in the region. Meanwhile our own David Cameron welcomed the blood soaked crown prince to Downing Street and stood for a photo call with him for the world's press.

Libya: from revolt to civil war

But it is in Libya, above all, where a revolt against corruption and dictatorship has morphed into a bloody civil war which threatens to divide the country and place it once again under imperialist hegemony.

Demonstrations which started on 15 February, days after Mubarak was driven from power, were met with massive force. Police and security services opened fire on demonstrators in Benghazi and other eastern towns, and in a pitched battle between demonstrators and Gaddafi forces between 15 and 20 February the population seized the country's second largest city. Hundreds were killed in the battle.

The protestors in Tripoli were not so lucky, a combination of police and sniper fire, aided by helicopter gunships, suppressed the demonstrations with large-scale loss of life. The working class suburbs of Tripoli, heart of the protests, were put under military curfew, with nightly round-ups of protest leaders.

In Misrata, Gaddafi attempted to put down the rebellion by force, but initially an attempt to retake the city was driven back by the citizens armed with light weapons and home made bombs. Since then pro-Gaddafi forces have laid siege to the town with tanks, multiple rocket launchers and snipers. This offensive has taken a

The suppressed revolutions

heavy toll on the civilian population and fighters alike.

The army in Libya was a less central institution than it was, and is, in Egypt. Gaddafi, in power since 1967, has become a specialist in divide and rule to maintain his dictatorship. Thus the army was weak, and even the security services were divided between different loyalists and family members. Added to this was a traditional tribal system that Gaddafi fostered to maintain divisions between the east and west of the country, between regions and cities.

It was little wonder that this brittle dictatorship, increasingly centred around one man, his family and tribe, was to quickly fall apart faced with the Arab revolution. Sections of the army refused to shoot their own people and Gaddafi had to bring in mercenaries from across Africa – from Niger, Chad, Mali and Kenya – to help suppress his own people.

Libya is not a poor country and its population is small. It has oil and gas and its per capita income averages some \$14,878. It had a million migrant workers from across Africa and Egypt that carried out many of the essential and menial jobs. Yet even so the people were fed up with the arbitrary rule and corruption of the Gaddafi regime. Here it was not primarily economic hardship and poverty that drove the revolution but a yearning for freedom and democracy, a right to live freely without fear of repression and imprisonment.

NATO intervenes

Libya is rich in oil and gas. The Gaddafi regime had a history of being a thorn in the side of imperialism. It spouted anti-imperialist rhetoric and supplied arms to nationalist movements that sought to undermine stooge semi-colonial regimes in Africa and around the world, including supplying weapons to the IRA in the north of Ireland. His security services were implicated in various bombings including the destruction of a Pan Am jumbo jet plane over Lockerbie in Scotland.

Imperialism had no love for Gaddafi but had struck a deal with him after the second Gulf War. Having spent several years rehabilitating and bribing Gaddafi and his clan to get their oil multinationals like BP back into Libya, they were suddenly faced with a stark choice – back the rebellion or back the dictatorship. Having been caught on the wrong side in Egypt and Tunisia they quickly moved against Gaddafi and supported the rebels, only to find him fighting back strongly and threatening to crush the rebels in Benghazi and the east.

The United Nations, that collective arm of the most powerful imperialist countries, was quickly lined up to support a NATO enforced “no fly zone” over Libya. The US, Britain and France had no problem in turning this resolution into a charter for “regime change”, up to and

including hunting down Gaddafi and assassinating him.

Sections of the British left immediately started to have second thoughts about the “Arab spring” after NATO’s intervention. On the basis of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” some swung back to supporting Gaddafi as the lesser evil to imperialist victory. The rebels in Benghazi were suddenly characterised as the cat’s paws of imperialism, monarchists and worse. Worries were expressed that Assad’s overthrow in Syria might undermine the fight against Israeli aggression.

On the other side organisations like the AWL and its paper Solidarity, cheered on imperialist intervention in Libya on the basis that the jets and guided missiles were saving the populations of Benghazi and Misrata from massacre by Gaddafi’s forces. This came as no surprise – the AWL leadership had long ago abandoned any pretence of anti-imperialism, especially where the Middle East was concerned. Here its policy is always determined by defence of the Zionist state of Israel, support for the two state solution, and opposition to the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Imperialist intervention and control can only bolster such a policy and thus has to be justified in one way or another.

We have argued that NATO’s intervention had to be opposed by every anti-imperialist and supporter of the Arab revolution, but also that the populations in revolt in Benghazi, Misrata and elsewhere deserve the support of every socialist.¹ We fully recognise that the purpose of British, French and US imperialism is to make the country safe for their oil corporations and exert control over the new Libyan government. It has nothing to do with defending the Libyan people. That is why they are backing the most right wing elements of the Libyan Transitional National Council like the former Gaddafi Interior Minister, Abdul Fatah Younis.

The people of Benghazi and Misrata certainly need aid and arms to defend themselves against Gaddafi’s onslaught, but these could have been delivered, without political strings attached, if the imperialists had wanted to supply them – they didn’t. The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions could and should have come to the aid of the Libyan rebels; it was a key internationalist demand of the Arab revolutions. But in the absence of this happening we don’t condemn the Libyan people in revolt for supporting UN intervention to help them fight off Gaddafi, nor do we denounce them as “imperialist puppets” for doing so. We just think that NATO intervention will have deeply reactionary consequences for the people of Libya unless the revolution frees itself from imperialist control at the earliest opportunity.

* See Libya: imperialism’s next war in the middle east www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/3302 and Libya: imperialists move to control uprising www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/3295

as both a threat and outsiders by the military elite. They were the first part of the governing clique to be ditched to placate the demonstrators. It had no effect.

On 2 February Mubarak's security services and armed NDP thugs launched a vicious attack on Tahrir Square while the soldiers stood by. Many protestors were killed but the thugs were fought off. The attack and the victory achieved by protestors brought further forces onto the streets. In the third week of protests a huge strike wave hit the country, paralysing the economy as workers struck for both economic and political demands; professional asso-

The chance of real socialist change lies with the new workers' and trade union movement that has sprung up since the uprising, but it is in its very early stages

ciations joined the struggle en masse. On 10 February a spokesman for the High Council of the Armed Forces stated that the Council would support the legitimate demands of the people, this was a clear sign that the army was about to ditch Mubarak to preserve the regime. But in a speech that night Mubarak refused to resign.

Massive protests on Friday 11 February declared "the Friday of Departure". The demonstrations brought millions onto the streets. In the evening people marched on the presidential palace. The army acted - Mubarak was forced to step down that evening and two days later the Military Council dissolved the parliament and announced new elections for six months time. In Cairo over 230 protesters had been killed in the three weeks of struggle against Mubarak and thousands injured. At least 150 were killed in other towns and cities.

As in Tunisia the demonstrations continued after the ousting of Mubarak. Some of the key figures of the regime were dropped but many continued in office. There had been "a smooth transition" and the military and important elements of the old regime remained in power. In early April the masses returned to the streets to demand quicker and deeper change, the demonstrators called for the imprisonment and trial of the Mubaraks and other regime leaders for their corruption and murder of protesters. Demonstrators in various cities stormed security services headquarters to stop files proving the guilt of the oppressors being destroyed.

On 8 April over a million marched again in Cairo under the popular slogan "Save the revolution, they are stealing it from us!" The march was opposed by the Muslim Brotherhood leadership. In the evening the army was ordered to clear Tahrir Square of protestors, resulting in clashes that killed two and injured many. Nevertheless, a few days after, on 13 April, the Supreme Military Council bowed to popular pressure and Mubarak and his two sons, Gamal and Alaa were arrested, imprisoned and charged with corruption. Later Hosni Mubarak was charged with premeditated murder of protesters.

Channelling the revolution

In both Tunisia and Egypt the determination of the masses to win change and their willingness to die on the streets to break the dictatorships led to acute revolutionary crises for the regimes and panic amongst the imperialist powers. In both cases the masses managed to do away with the hated dictators and force the regime into a democratic opening. Yet in both countries the capitalist state remained intact, its army remained loyal and the transitional governments in control are trying to ensure the energy of the masses is now channelled into the safe haven - for capitalism - of parliamentary elections.

In Egypt this transition is being overseen by the military high command, which has already introduced new repressive laws against protestors and strikers who can be brought before military courts, fined and imprisoned.⁵ The debate and arguments among the opposition have already turned towards the general elections planned for September. After years of repression and the atomisation of opposition by the regime, in the space of just a few months parties have to compete for political power.

This gives enormous advantages to the party of the old regime, the NDP, launched under a new name but representing the same old crony capitalists. It also favours the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which has declared its intention to launch a new "Freedom and Justice" party. The MB is the only opposition organisation that has real roots amongst the masses and networks of charities throughout the country. Rumours of a tacit deal between the MB and the military abound, and the youth movements, the left and the liberals fear being frozen out in an election they are unprepared for.

The new parliament will elect from its members a constituent assembly which will write a new constitution, so these elections are vital in determining the very political framework of the post-dictatorship parliamentary state, potentially enshrining the right to strike and organise freely in the country. Presidential elections might well take place as early as November and Mohamed El Baradei, the trusted UN technocrat, is seen by both the local capitalists and the imperialists as a safe pair of hands to see Egypt kept safely within the bounds of international capitalism and ensure its commitments to the Israeli "peace process" are honoured.

The chance of real socialist change lies with the new workers' and trade union movement that has sprung up since the uprising, but it is in its very early stages. Only in March did a preparatory conference for the Egyptian Federation of Independent Unions meet with several hundred workers and labour activists coming from across the country.⁶ It is at the moment quite white collar based and needs to reach out to the industrial and textile workers. It also faces the challenge of supplanting the old ETUF with its resources and organisation. The ETUF is unlikely just to fade away. It will undoubtedly receive funding and support from the old NDPers, and probably from US agencies to enable it to operate as a "yellow union" seeking to divide the workers' movement.

If the socialist opposition, and the working and middle class youth who played such a heroic role in the uprising,

can join forces with the emerging workers' movement they could play a decisive role in preventing the capitalist regime from continuing the same old policies under different faces. Indeed as the economy goes from bad to worse and inflation soars, any government that takes power in the autumn will be under enormous pressure to implement new austerity and privatisation programmes.

A socialist movement and a workers' socialist party needs to be forged during this crisis and transition. Armed with a programme for the masses that meets their burning demands such a movement could grow strong and grow quickly.

It could begin the fight for the following measures:

- ▶ A massive public works programme to build schools, improve irrigation and sanitation and build homes, all of which could help slash unemployment and train up a new generation of youth.
- ▶ Price controls and subsidies on bread and basic food staples and measures against speculation and hoarding would help the poorest.
- ▶ Taking back the private industries from the profiteers and this time placing them under the control of the

workers not state bureaucrats, would be an essential measure to direct the economy to the peoples' needs not the needs of imperialism.

▶ A clear internationalist foreign policy of support for the Palestinian struggle aimed at ending the Israeli blockade of Gaza and breaking the Zionist state's grip on the region is vital.

▶ A policy of supporting and giving practical military support to all those fighting the dictatorships in Syria, Libya, Bahrain and the Yemen is also essential. The Egyptian people and army should be aiding the struggle against Gaddafi and demanding the ending of NATO intervention in the region.

Such policies, campaigned for vigorously by the workers' movement, would meet a strong response and support in the Arab street and in the countryside, and could start to build a strong socialist movement to challenge the rule of capitalism and imperialism. The heroism and sacrifice of those who made the Egyptian revolution happen will be well rewarded by the building of such a movement.

ENDNOTES

1. Quoted in, Egypt: the moment of change, Rabab El-Mahdi and Philip Marfleet editors, Zed 2009, p4
2. Statistics from El-Naggar, ibid, p42
3. Statistics from El-Naggar, ibid, p42
4. Joel Beinin in Egypt: the moment of change, op cit, p80

5. See interview with Mamdouh Habashi at:

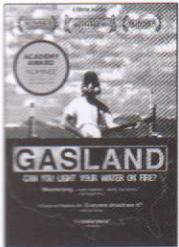
www.socialistproject.ca/bullet/509.php

6. See report in Almasry Alyoum (English edition) at:

www.almasryalyoum.com/en/node/337515



Charting the mistakes
of US geography



Fracking hell in small town America

FRACKING

Director: Josh Fox / 2011

THIS IS a film about fracking. Fracking? It sounds like the substitute for a swear word in some space opera. It's worse than that. Fracking is short for hydraulic fracturing, a method of extracting natural gas from shale deposits in the ground. And it's very bad news for many tens of thousands of US citizens.

As proponents of fracking are wont to say, beneath the surface of large areas of the US there lies an ocean of natural gas. Burning that gas, it is claimed, produces fewer carbon emissions than coal or oil would – so it has green credentials! With the US becoming increasingly concerned about energy independence it is seen as a way of avoiding over-reliance on the Middle East and Russia. And of course selling it is a great way of turning a big profit.

How do you get it out of the shale? You force huge quantities of water loaded with all manner of chemicals into bore holes in the ground. These fracture the sedimentary layers where the gas has been hiding, releasing it and allowing it to be captured.

So what's the problem? Well those chemicals – up to 595 different flavours in a variety of combinations – don't just push out the gas, they hang around in the water table and filter into streams and rivers and the drinking water drawn from ground wells used in many parts of rural USA.

Josh Fox, the film's director, has a gentle, languid voice. His commentary puts you in mind of Garrison Keillor recounting folksy tales of gentler times. Josh lives in the beautiful wooden house his hippy parents built, tucked away by a wooded stream in the Catskills in New York State. He plays the banjo

well and he has a video camera.

Josh was offered over \$100,000 to lease the land his house stands on to a gas company. So were his neighbours. But he'd heard bad things about what fracking could do to the land and the communities it moves in on, so he took his camera on a road trip to find out more. And he took his banjo too.

First stop was the town of Dimock in Pennsylvania. The first time you see footage of someone holding a cigarette lighter to water pouring out of a kitchen tap and it explodes in flames it's quite startling – to say the least. After you've watched five or six different householders do it you are less surprised.

Scared locals supplied him anonymously with water samples to be tested. Others described the state of the water bubbling up from their wells. It was brown and smelled of kerosene. Water that had been clear and sweet for generations turned bad at the very moment the gas companies began to frack the neighbourhood.

Strangely the gas company took away samples and concluded there was no evidence that fracking was causing a problem and the water was fine. Equally strangely nobody from the gas company cared to actually drink any of it when it was offered.

The first time you frack a well between one and seven million gallons of water and additives are forced into the ground. The well may be fracked up to 18 times before it is closed. Each time it will use another one to seven million gallons of water. Much of the water is never reclaimed and stays to leach its poisons into the water table. There are hundreds of thousands of wells scattered across over thirty USA States. Hundreds of thousands more are planned.

Josh points out that central to the

current expansion of fracking was legislation passed by the US government back in 2005, the Energy Policy Act. Vice President Dick Cheney was instrumental in getting this passed. The energy task force he set up had 40 meetings with industry leaders but only one with environmental groups. The industry spent more than \$100 million lobbying for changes that would benefit them.

As a consequence of this lobbying and Cheney's diligent activities, the 2005 act included exemptions from the Safe Drinking Water Act for the gas companies. Prominent amongst these is the company of which Cheney was once CEO – Halliburton. The exemption is known as the "Halliburton Loophole" in the US.

Josh travelled further afield to places such as Garfield County, Colorado, and Forth Worth, Texas. Everywhere he went the story was the same or worse.

These various Lake Wobegones were effervescing with natural gas, their waters scattered with dead fish and birds. Billowing clouds of gas emissions wreathed the back yards where kids could no longer play. Folks drove huge cisterns to town to fill up with potable water. One water well exploded and had to be capped with concrete after burning for days on end.

And then there was the sickness. It was bad enough seeing sickly domestic cats and horses with clumps of fur falling out. The human cost was, in places, quite devastating. People began to complain of headaches, dizziness, nausea. Soon they would begin to suffer from excruciating pains in their limbs. Their senses of taste and smell would fail. By this time their nervous systems were permanently damaged and they probably had lesions on their brains. A premature death was clearly on the cards for many of these victims.

Indeed in Louisiana doctors encountering a number of cases of arsenic poisoning, suspected spouses were trying to do away with each other. The marriages were fine. The arsenic was

contamination from the fracking process.

In the busy, urban Fort Worth area emissions from fracking were greater in volume than those of all road vehicles. And one of the consequences of the storm surges following Katrina along the coastline of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas was that large quantities of concentrated toxic sediments trapped in water pits, low lying tanks and storage areas were swept into the wider environment where they will stay without biodegrading.

The policy of the companies was simple and effective. They would extract the gas with minimum concern for the environment, the local community or the workers involved and then leave. Those who complained had to go fund their own way to the courts. If they stuck to their guns they might eventually get a payment, provision of alternative water supplies or filtering units. They also had to sign a confidentiality agreement that prevented them discussing with Josh or anyone else what they had been through.

The film is an eloquent and visually arresting testament to the reality that it is big business and not the individual for whom America is the land of the free. There are no fancy effects or clever graphics and it is better for it. Josh gives the ordinary folks of these

small towns a voice and the message is clear and by turns both poignant and shocking.

As the film draws to a close Josh is found listening to a clutch of Congressmen and women attempting to amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to make it harder for gas companies to get away with this blatant disregard for anything other than a fast buck.

We leave Josh still playing the banjo and wondering if his beautiful Catskills haunts will survive this rapacious hunt for energy and profit.

So should we be worried in the UK? Certainly. The Energy and Climate Change Select Committee has just announced that there should be no moratorium on prospecting for shale gas in the UK. It dismissed evidence that shale gas exploration can be dangerous and damaging to the environment.

And shale gas's green credentials? They are not so great. Leave aside the huge damage the extraction process entails. Shale gas has high levels of methane in it, a greenhouse gas that is much shorter-lived in the atmosphere than CO2 but much more potent too. Shale gas creates more carbon emissions than regular natural gas and possibly more than oil and coal too.

Buy or rent this film, show it to your friends and get ready to campaign.

Jon Dennis

data to what we, and more importantly, our politicians, think we know about the "large island" we live on.

The book is peppered with examples of "bad geography" – in some ways similar to Ben Goldacre's "Bad Science" columns for the Guardian. The central theme of the book is concerned with population and immigration – the question that may have lost Brown the last election, following the Gillian Duffy "bigoted woman" episode in Rochdale (although Dorling points out she was actually more bothered about being called "that woman" than bigoted!). Dorling boldly states that Britain needs more immigration not less and confronts notions of an "optimum population" and the accepted wisdom that migrants are flooding into the UK, by showing that in fact overall numbers are falling.

The Britain that Dorling describes is a country that is becoming increasingly polarised. The north/south divide is a familiar concept perhaps, originating from the lowland/upland natural divide of the landscape, but today it clear that it's better to be in the south when there's a recession.

In London 35 jobs were created for every one in Yorkshire and Humberside in the year to March 2010. (p7) Life expectancy in Kensington and Chelsea is 13 years longer for men (86.7 years) than in Glasgow (74.3 years) – divide in life expectancy that is wider than at any time since the 1920s.

The South now, despite the fact that the divide narrowed in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, comprises "the outermost commuting suburbs and enclaves of a metropolis . . . the rest of the country being what is left over and behind." (p11)

Tony Blair labelled the north/south divide a myth – but Dorling sees New Labourism as a continuation of Thatcherism, a celebration of individualism that cares little about community and the sharing out of resources according to need.

As a result of the north/south divide and its tendency to widen during recessions, people choose to

Charting the mistakes of 'bad geography'

SO YOU THINK YOU KNOW ABOUT BRITAIN?

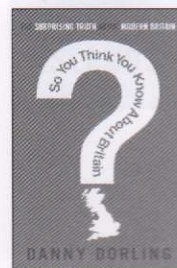
Danny Dorling

Constable / 2011 / £8.99

WILLIAM HAGUE recently declared that Europe will have to be "tough" if it is to stem the flow of migrants arriving from North Africa. On 22 May the Foreign Secretary told Sky News that

Europe "can't just accept" hundreds of thousands, or even millions of people. But is he right? Or is this an example of "bad geography"?

Danny Dorling's latest book is a must read for anyone interested in maps, statistics and how they are used. Dorling, a Professor of Human Geography at Sheffield University, examines the facts and figures about Britain and compares this





migrate within national borders and emigrate, Dorling shows how the "Bridget Jones factor" – too many single women in the capital, not enough young men to go around – has a basis in fact. Young women tended to do better at school from the 60s onwards, they began to go to college and university more than their male counterparts and they followed graduate jobs to London and the South East. On the other hand

The legacy of imperialism is also that Britain has developed to become a more highly multicultural nation than most places around the world

young men in the 80s and 90s – stuck behind in towns and cities that were being left behind economically – simply left the country.

This phenomenon is poorly recorded in official statistics, as the International Passenger Survey – the sole means of finding out why people leave the country – only samples a tiny number of the people leaving these shores each year. People who do get surveyed often do not answer truthfully or do not actually know that when they set off for a couple of years travelling they will meet someone, find a job and settle down in another country.

The 1991 census revealed that 974,000 people thought to be living in the UK were in fact not here. The Dutch government in contrast, registers all its overseas citizens and thus has a better idea of how many have left. This lack of accurate information is likely to get worse if the coalition has its way and scraps the census: then the only information we will have to go on will be based entirely upon what Hague, Cameron and the like choose to declare is fact.

Dorling's attitude to migration is that people tend to go where they are needed – where the jobs and resources are, but that "fewer people leave after many have left".

Immigration is probably slowing into Britain following recession, and emigration from hard hit countries such as Ireland and Iceland is currently at a high level.

However, conventional wisdom as illustrated by Hague above, is that Britain is full up, there is no more room, that the "optimum population" has been reached and some time ago. But when compared to more densely populated areas such as Malta, the Netherlands,

Japan or cities such as Barcelona – the reasons for Britain feeling full up become clearer.

One of the UK's exports to the rest of the world is the suburb and with it the concept that you do not live near where you work – instead you travel every working day, alongside everyone else doing the same thing, to and from your individual Englishman's castle home.

In order to compete with our neighbours and be better off than those at the bottom of the pile we move away from the inner cities, work longer hours to afford a mortgage and thus keep our children in day care for longer – which also involves daily driving to drop them off and pick them up. "Too much commuting, too much selfish use of space, too many small and wasted gardens, too few adults living above the ground floor", Dorling sees our cities heading towards the US model where you have to drive everywhere and some areas are "no go".

We can't all have the idyll of the country cottage surrounded by half an acre of garden but it is this sort of aspiration that Dorling blames for leading to an increasingly divided nation. Cameron for example, doesn't even know how many homes he owns – sitting

empty most of the time. Why is this acceptable when the immigrants that Hague is warning of would most likely live in the highest density housing and consume the least in society?

And who are the immigrants into Britain anyway? There are some fascinating facts in the book.

I heard Dorling speak about inequality and immigration at a UAF meeting in Sheffield in April. He asked the audience to guess which country the highest proportion of children born elsewhere, but living in London, are from. No one in the audience got it right. They are in fact the children of US citizens, most of their parents highly paid business people – 32,700 of them. (p107) Somehow I don't think these kids living in affluent families are the dreaded non-EU migrants the Tories want to crackdown on!

Migration fluctuates naturally and the Tories know this but don't want to admit it. They want to claim credit for a crackdown on immigration when rates would have fallen anyway as a result of the recession, at the same time as emigration will increase. It is not immigration that is the issue, but who the immigrants are – race is at the heart of the matter or otherwise Hague and the tabloids would be calling for a crackdown on US citizens coming in, taking up space and using precious resources.

Dorling understands that "other places are poor partly because we are rich" (p88) and bemoans the failure of the British labour movement to accept the legacy of imperialism that the welfare state was built on – feeding the attitude that other parts of the world are somewhat feckless for not having achieved the gains our working class has made. Illustrating this point is another fascinating fact: that there are more Malawian nurses in Manchester than there are in Malawi. However the legacy of imperialism is also that Britain has developed to become a more highly multicultural nation than most places around the world.

It is this multiculturalism and diversity that Dorling sees as one of

our few redeeming features. In comparison to the US (Dorling uses the example of New Orleans and the unequal chances of survival for the residents of that city in the face of Hurricane Katrina), Britain is less segregated but becoming more similar to the US in terms of polarisation. As well as the north/south divide, Dorling demonstrates that town and country have split apart in terms of age profile, income and politics. After the 2010 election, the electoral map is more divided between town (Labour) and country (Tory) than ever.

Rural areas, especially in the south, with diverse populations of farm labourers, tradespeople, farmers and landowners, such as grace our screens in popular TV series like *Lark Rise to Candleford*, have been replaced by villages full of second home owners and commuters in search of a "nice" area with "good" schools. This, in turn, leads to a situation where lack of understanding or knowledge about each other's lives grows – we assume, and are shown on TV, crime and delinquency in the cities and peaceful affluence in the countryside – in actual fact deaths caused by guns are highest in the country and those most at risk are farmers and their families!

Stereotypes are powerful but Dorling demolishes the concept that immigrant communities do not integrate (Muslims are more likely to marry Christians than the other way round) and that we are moving to a situation of increasing ghettoisation – the only areas that can technically be called ghettos are a few white only estates and rural areas where there are indeed "no go" areas for those other than the rich.

It is in terms of income and age that we are dividing. However another fascinating fact is that you are much more likely to be cared for for free if you are ill or old in the north and in poorer areas, and not just by your own relatives. (p148) The working classes are more altruistic because they have to be, there are fewer doctors where most sick and ill people are – unlike in Italy where doctors are allocated to

areas on the basis of need.

Britain's birth rate is declining and the population is aging – a terrible catastrophe, as we cannot afford to support old people we are told. Dorling instead argues that longer life expectancy is a cause to celebrate – women don't die in childbirth anymore, major diseases no longer kill people off in huge numbers, "the challenges of an aging population are better than the challenges of TB, measles, polio, the fight for the vote, for the welfare state, for women's rights, for state education." (p201)

The problem is not that there are too many old people. In fact humans have evolved in order to provide grandmothers to help out younger families via the menopause. (p293) It is not that there are not enough resources to care for the old and sick but that resources are distributed unevenly.

Dorling takes apart the pay and bonuses of Bob Diamond the Barclays CEO and compares his obscene consumption to the £11 a day a married pensioner gets. People in Japan and the rest of Europe start work later in life, retire earlier and live longer than we do. (p209) But it is the US model

of "work till you die" that Britain is heading towards.

Dorling on the other hand calls on us to "change how we view aging as well as immigration if we are all to have a better future." Older people are a resource, as are immigrant communities which revitalise areas that are otherwise dying as they did in the northern mill towns in the 1950s and 60s. Where immigration is not encouraged areas stagnate.

But economic emigration should not be enforced either – with youth unemployment in Britain steady at around a million since the 1980s, our society should offer better than just showing young people the door as we are unwittingly now doing. Do we want to be a country like Singapore, with huge wealth inequality but a very low infant mortality rate – because pregnant migrants are required to leave? Revolutions and invasions equalise societies, states Dorling: Japan and Germany have no aristocracy, France has a written constitution. Britain's last successful invasion was 945 years ago and our revolution 360 years ago. Maybe it's time to shake things up again.

Alison Hudson

Where do the wealthy bury their hoards?

TREASURE ISLANDS, TAX HAVENS AND THE MEN WHO STOLE THE WORLD

Nicholas Shaxson

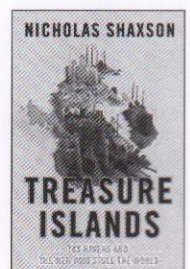
Bodley Head / 2011 / £14.99

TREASURE ISLAND by Robert Louis Stephenson is a tale of pirates, buried gold and bloodthirsty robbery on the high seas. *Treasure Islands* by Nicholas Shaxson is about far greater crimes.

It is an important book for several reasons. It contains many, sometimes shocking, facts about the scale of tax avoidance by multinational corporations,

showing that the whole network of tax havens, "offshore" and "non-domiciled" residents is not an ugly canker on the face of global capitalism but a central, organic part of its body.

Shaxson also shows how it is not just about these firms evading taxes; it's about evading any regulations, responsibility or accountability that leads to the systematic looting of trillions of dollars of resources from the global south. It's about the corrosion of democracy and human rights all across the world. The chief executives of banks and





corporations may not wear eye patches or have hooks at the end of their arms but, as Shaxson demonstrates, they cause far more death and destruction than Billy Bones or Long John Silver.

The early part of the book shows how the whole world of offshore accounts originated. In the early part of the twentieth century "tax exile" meant just that: the rich moving abroad to avoid taxation.

Not only have the banks and corporations caused the financial crash, they shielded their money from paying for almost any of the consequences of their actions!

For example, the Vestey brothers – meat traders from Liverpool – moved to Argentina in 1915 to avoid paying any taxes at all.

Decades later they wanted to return to Britain and got lawyers working on an elaborate system of trusts to enable them to live in the UK but still pay virtually no tax. An investigation in 1980 showed their family paying just £10 in tax on £2.3m profits.

Due to the legal ploys of the Vesteyes and others "offshore" now is not so much a place but a legal fiction that allows huge corporations to not only avoid tax but escape financial regulations and, often, any scrutiny at all.

This is how it works. A company registers its business in a territory where tax is either very low or non-existent. Nothing need be produced in that territory, nothing sold, no one with any operational connection to the company need live or work there. But, by filling in a few forms and handing over a small fee, suddenly the company can avoid paying billions of pounds worth of tax.

Shaxson's book is nothing if not topical, especially in the light of the biggest cuts since the Second World War being pushed through by the Con-Dem coalition. Shaxson shows how the rich often pay virtually no tax, recalling the quip of billionaire

New York hotelier Leona Helmsley, "Only the little people pay taxes." Of the largest 700 businesses trading in Britain about one-third pay no taxes at all, with many other companies paying virtually zero.

For example, in 2006 Del Monte, Dole and Chiquita, the three largest banana companies trading in the UK, paid only £120,000 tax despite having a £375m turnover – a tax rate of 0.0003%!

Similarly, Britain's billionaires in 2009 paid £15m tax on £126bn of wealth, which comes in as a tax rate of 0.004% on the interest earned from their wealth. It is daylight robbery, protected by a small army of lawyers and accountants.

As Shaxson points out, these are only the figures we know about. The fabulously wealthy keep their funds and businesses secret and away from public gaze using libel laws to sue any investigation that attempts to pinpoint wrongdoing. In 2008 there were over 154 actions of which the defendants won precisely none.

Of course, these represent only actions taken. The very existence of these laws is intimidating enough; few dare to print stories or carry out investigations into the shady dealings of the rich in the first place.

The amount of wealth squirreled away and income hidden could easily pay for the budget deficit several times over. The City of London Corporation is a major source of tax avoidance by large corporations, holding around £2tr in offshore (often untaxed or extremely low taxed) accounts (that is £2,000bn or 25 times the total of the savage cuts to public spending). The richest 1,000 people hold £330bn worth of wealth (in 2010, now up to £395bn in 2011).

However, being registered offshore has far more pernicious effects than merely tax avoidance, significant though that is. It allows banks to escape government regulations that force banks to hold reserves against the deposits they take. As Shaxson argues, this allows banks to increase their profits six-fold or more without any real benefit to production: "Nobody has made a better or cheaper widget and banking has not become suddenly more efficient." (p93)

In fact, the very opposite has happened. The expansion of offshore unregulated banking through Jersey, the Cayman Islands, the City of London and US markets directly fuelled the financial crisis of 2007-08, with bad debts and subprime loans crashing the world economy and pushing it into recession.

So not only have the banks and corporations caused the financial crash, they have shielded their money from paying for almost any of the consequences of their actions! Even more, it leads to situation where "Investors hold veto power over national governments and the real lives of millions of people are determined by . . . a bunch of speculators." (p73)

This affects the working class of all countries, with those of the global south paying a particularly high price. Shaxson quotes William Walker, a finance executive from the Cayman islands, who admits that the 1,400 or so companies registered in his offices "don't require too much work – just signing occasional documents and perhaps holding two meetings a year. We funnel a lot of money from . . . Latin America, of course . . . in breach of their governments' exchange control regulations." (pp119-120)

Shaxson's final conclusions are less impressive than what he reveals about the financial world. He calls for greater financial transparency and accounting and taxing fixed assets of corporations.

Fair enough. But only the organised power of millions of people on the streets in demonstrations and strikes against

the cuts, will lead to any possibility of wresting back the loot from the men who stole the world.

Treasure Islands is a valuable treasure trove of information and sometimes shocking facts which give the lie to those who claim there is no alternative, and help to

arm activists with the facts, to make you angry and determined to defeat the power of the corporations and take it into the hands of working class men and women whose coffers have been so cruelly looted.

Jason Travis

Explaining the crisis in the financial system

**SOCIALIST REGISTER 2011:
THE CRISIS THIS TIME**

MRP / 2010 / £15.95

THE 2011 edition of Socialist Register is dedicated to the global economic crisis of 2008-09, and consists of fifteen essays scribed by Marxist and left authors, experts mainly in political economy. It covers crisis theory, financialisation and neoliberalism and the impact of the crisis on welfare, pensions, families. It also looks at the recession in Europe and Japan, making it a weighty academic volume.

Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin set the scene in their introductory chapter on crisis theory and its application to "the crisis this time". They ask whether the lessons of the credit crunch will be a turning point in the way the left think about crises, or will they cling to their, "propensity to see a permanent over-accumulation crisis whose consequences have been consistently delayed by special circumstances like war, waste or bubbles"?

Panitch and Gindin's quote neatly encapsulates what passes for orthodox crisis theory on the Marxist left and shows how such orthodoxy contrasts with Marx's insight that permanent crises do not exist. Thus downplaying or ignoring the multifarious counter-tendencies to the falling rate of profit - heightened exploitation, technological innovation, new labour markets - that properly

explain the dynamics of capitalism.

A theory of crises - deep structural crises such as the first great depression of the late 19th century, the 1930s or the 1970s - cannot be over-generalised. It must account for distinct historical conjunctures but at the same time avoid descending into eclecticism. This is a tall order, and the complexities of the argument run as a thread through many of the articles.

So for example; was this crisis a typical cyclical crisis intensified by finance or something more profound? To what extent did the build-up of global imbalances

The recent credit crunch was a finance-led systemic crisis but was not simply the latest phase in an interminable juggernaut capitalist disaster movie

presage the coming crisis? - a question that also taxed mainstream economists before 2008.

Perhaps Alfredo Saad-Filho's conclusion that it's a crisis in neoliberalism, not a crisis of neoliberalism, would accommodate most the views here. The limitations of financialisation have been exposed but it is integral to globalised capitalism and will continue to be: finance is neither detached from the real economy

nor the outcome of a coup against productive capital.

For Panitch and Gindin this crisis, unlike the previous three, "was not caused by a profit squeeze or collapse in investment due to overaccumulation; in the US in particular profits and investments had recovered strongly by the late 1990s" and "It was only after the financial meltdown that profits and investment declined." While this certainly captures the essential upward trend in profit rates, it is not strictly accurate. Profit rates slowed from 2007 onwards before collapsing after the fall of Lehman's at the end of 2008. They have subsequently recovered strongly. More importantly, the missing link in their analysis is the absence of the world's second largest economy - China.

Hugo Radice explains how the Keynesian methods pursued by governments to avert financial meltdown did not represent a break with neoliberalism but rather, temporary measures to ensure its survival, with austerity the bourgeois response to any lingering statist ideas. He has little time for Robert Brenner's emphasis on competing nation-states rather than the imperatives of accumulation (Brenner is not a contributor here)





as the profit rate minus the interest rate. The profit rate is the return on active investment – producing and selling goods and services – and the interest rate represents the return on passive investment, the safe alternative (e.g. US Treasuries). His profit rate is “earnings before interest” (a portion of the advanced capital may have been borrowed) and the subtracted interest rate is the interest equivalent on all the advanced capital. Data comes from the US government national accounts.

He charts the growing gap between productivity and real wages – rising exploitation – since Reagan. A second chart shows the bell-shaped trend in interest rate (three month Treasury Bills) peaking at around the same time. Put these two movements together and we arrive at the rate of profit-of-enterprise showing a steady decline from post-World War Two to 1982, followed by its rise to levels similar to the early 1960s during the “long boom”.

This corresponds to the long term trend in profitability that this journal has calculated by a different method. Shaikh’s rate of profit is based on the capital stock. If he’d included wages, their relative decline vis-à-vis profits would have made the rise in profitability even more marked. Similarly, financial corporations could have been included. Finally, it’s not clear whether low interest rates drive profitability or vice versa. Nevertheless, his is a straightforward method and is another example of a Marxist economist who, having worked the data, does not subscribe to the four-decade stagnationist approach to global economics.

The neoliberal mantra on deficits is firmly demolished in Karl Beitel’s article. For example, there is little correlation between higher public deficits and either inflation or higher interest rates, the alleged crowding out of private investment. After 2008 the US did not embark on a programme of public works like Roosevelt’s New Deal because this would threaten to unwind the gains won by capitalists since the

1980s. One could go further, as many governments are positively attacking the welfare state, attempting to extend the reach of neoliberalism. The reserve currency status of the dollar is secure in the medium term and China has neither the desire nor capacity to launch the renminbi as a serious international alternative. True superpower status for China, perhaps only ten years away, would alter the picture.

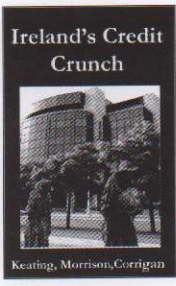
Riccardo Bellofiore et al plot the development of the EU and the strains within the euro emanating from longstanding partition. Germany and northern Europe with persistent export surpluses (termed neomercantilist), Italy and France in the middle, and Spain, Portugal and Greece in the third group with weak capital export sectors. Despite all the useful detail, reducing the EU’s problems to a pan-European stagnation of wages and overcapacity over the last three decades is an over-generalisation.

Other articles discuss more specific aspects of the crisis and there are many useful nuggets of

information scattered across the collection. To give just one: governments and corporations have options for raising funds whereas workers are not so fortunate and only so many hours can be worked in a day, hence the sensitivity of the US mortgage market to interest rate rises that tipped over a heavily leveraged financial system.

In summary, the recent credit crunch was a finance-led systemic crisis but was not simply the latest phase in an interminable juggernaut capitalist disaster movie. This crisis was a product of a particular phase of globalisation but not the end of it. Those on the left that believe “capitalism” and “crisis” are virtually synonymous in a post-Lehman Brothers world – and that there is little need for much more to be said – are plain wrong. Next year’s volume from Socialist Register will extend the analysis to the emerging economies that are now driving global growth. It too should be a worthwhile read.

Graham Balmer



The Celtic Tiger’s pain – boom to bust in Ireland

IRELAND’S CREDIT CRUNCH
Keating, Morrison, Corrigan
Resistance Press / 2011 / £6.00

IRELAND’S CREDIT Crunch is a detailed, almost day-by-day account of the collapse of Ireland’s property boom and the subsequent recession, by three supporters of Socialist Democracy in Ireland.

The authors show that Ireland’s recession was as deep as the deepest slumps in capitalist history with a peak to trough GDP decline of around 20%, unemployment doubling and investment falling by 42%.

In analysing the domestic component of the crisis, they show

that at the peak of the housing boom Ireland built half as many houses as were built in the UK – a country 15 times the size; building accounted for 15% of GDP and 13% of the workforce.

But they also situate the Irish boom and bust within the new period of globalisation, which opened with the collapse of the Stalinist states in the early 1990s. They contrast the early phase of the Celtic Tiger boom in the 1990s with the later phase from the new millennium on.

They show how the first phase was a result of an influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) and growth in manufacturing, whereas the second phase was a result of

disinvestment and a property bubble.

A minor quibble relates to their use of figures. They seem overwhelmingly dependent on the left and daily newspapers. Their statistics for Irish FDI, taken from Socialism Today, are wrong. (p16) These FDI figures can be readily accessed direct from the UNCTAD website so there is no reason to rely on second hand information. Paradoxically, the correct numbers would have strengthened their argument, underlining the scale of the collapse of FDI from 2004 to 2006. Hence when the property bubble burst there was little or nothing underneath to support the economy as it collapsed.

The Irish authorities responded by guaranteeing deposits of investors and establishing the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA). NAMA sought to save the Irish banks and the property speculators by creating a "bad bank" in which to park their bad debts.

The losses would be paid for by demanding a "haircut" on the value of these loans from the private investors. Except, of course, the whole thing was a giant con. The government overpaid for the debts and it was the state (i.e. taxpayer) which took a haircut. As a result they overloaded the state with bad loans and demanded that the working class pay the difference.

The authors explain how the Irish Congress of Trades Unions (ICTU) accepted the government's demands, allowing anger to dissipate, through mass, but literally aimless set-piece marches, aimed at continuing their social partnership with the government.

The book concludes with an action programme outlining many of the key demands that socialists should advocate in response to the crisis.

There are a few omissions from the book. The major omission is an analysis of the changes to the labour movement which explain the working class's quiescence. Certainly the social partnership is mentioned but why, given the historic scale of the crisis, was there

so little resistance? Will the acceptance of the austerity continue, with emigration providing a safety valve as in the past, or will the cumulative effect of the cut backs spark resistance?

This is important as it relates to the next omission – how to bring the action programme to life, to transform it from a series of good ideas to something fought for by the masses. There is little or no analysis of the left either. There seems to be a disconnect between the cogency of the economic theory and the political solutions to the problems it elucidates.

The reader is left with the feeling that there is a very deep and comprehensive analysis of the credit crunch, a programme to meet the demands of the workers, but no explanation of how the workers will be won to its demands.

Neither is there any perspective. What is likely to happen next year in the view of the authors? Will the crisis deepen? Will the recession get worse? Will there be a recovery based on inward investment?

All in all an interesting read but with important questions left unanswered.

Bill Jefferies

Shining a light on the new scramble for Africa

THE NEW SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA
Padraig Carmody
Polity / 2011 / £15.99

THE NEW Scramble For Africa is both timely and apt. Africa today is in play like at no time since the late 1900s. This original phase of modern colonial imperialism left the poisoned legacy which continues to shape it now. China's ongoing transformation into an imperial player in its own right, shapes the current struggle for Africa's immense natural wealth between a rising imperialist power and the old.

The form of that struggle is altered by the nominal political independence of contemporary Africa's states, compared with the direct colonisation of the original "grab for Africa", just over a century ago. Today the colonists do not, themselves at least, directly engage in chopping off people's hands, tarring their feet or robbing mothers of their new born babies.

Nevertheless, proxy wars, environmental degradation and a warped "development" geared to the need to strip these countries of their natural wealth ensures that

poverty and oppression remain the lot of the mass of workers and poor, while the parasitic and autocratic national elites enrich themselves from the substantial crumbs dropped in the latest imperial squabble.

Padraig Carmody's book therefore fills an important niche, examining how globalisation over the last two decades and particularly since the turn of the millennium, has sought to control Africa's oil, fish, coltan (a critical raw material for mobile phone technology), land, diamonds, gold and finally its small but rapidly growing internal market.

Carmody examines the diverse methods of the various old powers like France, which retains 60,000 troops in Africa, the UK which uses its old imperial links to promote its arms sales, and the US whose arms expenditure remains larger than the next 40 or so of its rivals combined. He looks at how they are being challenged in the continent by new powers, notably China, but also India, Brazil and Russia.

Carmody is torn between, on the one hand a kind of economic materialist account of how the strategic interests of rival





imperialisms and domestic African ruling classes determines economic developments, and on the other, a developmental analysis that essentially amounts to some wishful thinking about what the poor "need" from the capitalists in order for development to take place.

This weakens the rigour of the work, which exposes the various conflicting material interests of the rival parties, but then debates the developmental utility of various policy options. As if there was ever a

some \$120m in ransom money, strongly reviving the local economy.

In contrast, Chinese capitalists have pulled out from investments in local manufacturing due to relatively strong, independent African trade unions.

In Nigeria residents have to take big risks to syphon oil from major pipelines at the rate of thousands of barrels a day, while the politicians, the highest paid in the world, gorge themselves on bribes from the major oil companies.

war is ruled out is certainly true for the moment, but certainly not true for the medium term, as China's rapid growth puts it on a collision course with the world's established superpower in the next decade or so.

The author uses the example of Zambia to show how China and India are extending their influence. Zambia is a major recipient of Chinese aid and investment – to a level which dwarfs India – with a very rapid acceleration from 2006 on as China seeks to exploit Zambia's copper reserves.

There is an abundance of facts and source materials quoted. Unfortunately, this often weighs down the text, which seems to follow the contemporary academic fashion of the "literature review", apparently requiring the citation of every diverse opinion no matter how stupid or irrelevant. Against the author's better intentions, this frequently makes it difficult to establish what he thinks himself and hinders the development of a coherent argument through the course of the work.

Nevertheless, Carmody's book provides a very illuminating insight into imperialism's second scramble for Africa, shows how it both shapes the rivalries of the day and points to more serious conflicts in the future.

Brian Johnson

Aid, support for autocratic governments and concern for human rights are all held up as key principles ... until the point where morals start to affect business

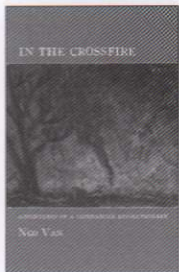
serious choice. Imperialism both degrades and develops the economy of Africa and the raw materials boom of mid-term globalisation undoubtedly accelerates the opportunity for capitalist development.

But the good of society is quite besides the point for the multinationals and their governments: money talks for them and the more the better.

Over and over again Carmody demonstrates the hypocrisy of the imperialists' feigned concern for democratic rights and their feeble attempts to differentiate themselves from their undemocratic Chinese rivals. The distribution of aid, support for autocratic governments and nominal concern for human rights are all held up as key principles ... until the point where morals start to affect business.

Carmody provides some illuminating examples of the distorted forms through which African small producers have fought for their rights. Somali piracy is a direct product of the looting of the fish resources by imperialist mega-trawlers. The despoilation of the sea meant that Somali fishermen, unable to catch their normal yields turned to piracy, and as a result have won

Carmody has a penchant for the Chinese government's fables used to conceal their foreign policy objectives. The colour of the cat doesn't matter as long as it catches the mouse, apparently. He notes that China is reticent about a direct confrontation with the US at present due to their overwhelming military superiority and the continued close economic ties between the two powers. His assertion that this means a Sino-US



Against Stalinism and imperialism in Vietnam

IN THE CROSSFIRE

Ngo Van
AK Press / 2010 / £18.00

NGO VAN was a Vietnamese revolutionary, active in his native country in the 1930s and 1940s and in his adopted country, France, until his death in 2005. He wrote widely on a range of political issues but was especially well known for his works on Vietnam and his trenchant

opposition to the triumph of Stalinism in the land of his birth.

During his time in Vietnam Ngo was a supporter of Trotsky's Left Opposition and later the Fourth International, but after his move to France in 1948 his criticisms of Trotskyism caused him to break with the movement. As a worker in France in the 1950s he moved towards a kind of left "council communist" position, operating through various workers' circles

rather than in a party.

He explains that after reviewing the history of both Bolshevism and Trotskyism, "I developed a total distrust of anything that might turn into a 'machine'." (p2)

The closing chapters of the book trace this evolution in fairly general terms, but the core story of these memoirs is the struggle in Vietnam from 1926 to 1948, a struggle against imperialism, capitalism and Stalinism.

Elsewhere, in "Revolutionaries they could not break" (1995) for example, Van subjects the events of these decades to a more detailed political analysis. But "In the Crossfire" is more of a personal account, a reminiscence of how it felt to be part of a movement, a class war prisoner and an exile.

The mood of the book reflects the autobiographical approach. Van developed into a fine painter and always maintained a love of poetry – and the book has an elegiac feel to it. Leaving Vietnam is described in these terms:

"I had left my country in the spring of 1948. The heartrending pain of a loving mother silently enduring the permanent departure of her prodigal son! . . . The tears of a 12 year old girl holding her little brother in her arms! The old tree drifting down the river can never return to its native land." (p183)

Van's portrait of childhood in Vietnam is laced with stories that link superstition and religion with the practical savvy of the peasant:

"I came into the world one night in 1912, toward the end of the Year of the Rat. The village custom was to allow a lapse of time before registering a birth, so that if the infant was carried off by evil spirits the parents would be spared having to revisit the registrar to declare the death of their newborn. So I was officially born in April 1913." (p17)

The gentle and personal style makes the book an easy, but still absorbing read. But the raw material of Van's life as a revolutionary activist in Vietnam is anything but gentle. The struggle he waged to organise the working class brought him into direct conflict with the country's French

colonial masters. His commitment to socialist revolution as an immediate objective brought him into conflict with the Stalinists. Both landed him in trouble. Both exposed the criminal lengths his enemies went to in their quest to destroy revolutionary influence amongst the masses.

At his workplace, the Descours and Cabaud metal products store, Van had hidden a banner in preparation for widespread agitation for a general strike. This

It was this determination that maintained the popularity of Trotskyism in Vietnam and enabled it to sink significant roots in the working class

was in June 1936, a time when France had elected the Popular Front government and when mass strike action and factory occupations had swept that country. Van was already a Trotskyist by this time, a member of the clandestine League of Internationalist Communists.

Growing working class unrest in Vietnam was leading to the formation of action committees across the country and the call for the convention of an "Indochinese Congress". In response the Popular Front government showed itself to be every bit as vicious as its conservative predecessor in the fight to preserve the French empire. The strike wave that the action committees organised, as well as the committees themselves, were brutally repressed. Van found himself incarcerated on the orders of the Sûreté.

From 1936 to 1939 Van was in and out of prison as the French authorities cracked down not only on the clandestine groups, but also on the better known Trotskyist organisation of Ta Thu Thau around the paper, La Lutte.

The La Lutte group had, for a whole period, collaborated in an electoral front with the Stalinists. This ended when, on orders from

Stalin and Ho Chi Minh outside the country, the Communist Party broke with La Lutte in 1937 and denounced their former allies as fascists. But, despite imperialist repression and the manoeuvres of Stalinism, La Lutte the group won three seats in the Colonial Council elections of 1939 while the Stalinists won none.

The fate of the Trotskyists inside the colonial prisons was not a pretty one. Torture was commonplace. Conditions were

primitive. Hunger, disease and death took their toll. And yet the prisoners refused to give in. They used every opportunity to organise, to get their messages of hope to the outside world, to demonstrate that whatever repression was meted out they were ready to carry on the fight.

And it was this determination that maintained the popularity of Trotskyism in Vietnam and enabled it to sink significant roots in the working class. And under that influence strikes swept the country in 1937, including a general strike on the rail network, uprisings amongst the peasantry and strikes in the Arsenal. A Sûreté report commented:

"The influence of revolutionary agitators sympathetic to the Fourth International has increased in Cochin China, particularly amongst workers in the Saigon-Cholon region . . . The workers are supporting the Trotskyist Party more than the Indochinese Communist Party." (p87)

And this despite the fact the main leaders of the "Trotskyist Party" were in prison.

To deal with the threat the colonial rulers simply stepped up their repression. They were helped by the turn of the Vietnamese





Stalinists who, in May 1937, defended the Popular front government carrying out the repression and declared the Trotskyists – both legal and clandestine – as “those twin brothers of the fascists”.

While this had little effect on the influence of the Trotskyists in the south, in the north Stalinism was stronger and began to build up its machine that would eventually be used to liquidate the finest and

This event marks the beginning of the final part of Van's tale. The Vietminh expected to be rewarded for their collaboration by being invited into a popular front government. The victors had quite different plans. While they could not defeat the Vietminh in the north they were determined to hang on to Cochinchina in the south, especially its great capital, Saigon.

The Vietminh declared a

foreigners a pretext to attack our sovereignty.” (p126)

In the weeks that followed Saigon was engulfed by a mass rising. But while the Stalinists evacuated their forces from the city – effectively beginning the guerrilla war that was to last until 1975 – the Trotskyists continued to attempt to build up working class resistance to the imperialist re-invasion, continued to fight for socialist revolution and, amazingly, enjoyed enormous success, especially through the Go Vap streetcar workshops “workers’ militia”.

The resistance of these fighters was only undermined by a Vietminh order to its own forces to cease all hostilities with the British and Japanese troops and only fire on French troops. The British had released and were using Japanese troops to quell the Saigon rising. Tragically, as Van recounts, this partial ceasefire, was a disaster:

“This enabled the French to break through the resistance at Ba Chieu, Binh Hoa and the Binh Loi bridge and on the Hang Sang road towards Thi Nghe. At the Thi Nghe bridge around two hundred Trotskyist fighters from La Lutte were massacred.” (p131)

As the rising in Saigon faltered and fell to the superior firepower of the imperialists the Trotskyists found themselves being massacred by the Vietminh as well as the French. The Stalinists were determined to wipe out their great rivals, as a means of securing negotiations with the imperialists by demonstrating that they were “reasonable”.

The efforts to stop the imperialist advance failed miserably, but during their retreat they murdered every revolutionary socialist they could find. Their later hegemony in the struggles that engulfed Vietnam was not won by arguments in front of the masses but by bullets in the heads of those the masses listened to.

After that defeat Van left Vietnam. But he did not abandon the cause of the working class. He recognised that the Vietnamese working class had suffered a defeat, but one manufactured in Moscow

The Stalinists were determined to wipe out their great rivals, securing negotiations with the imperialists by demonstrating that they were ‘reasonable’

most resolute of Vietnam's revolutionary fighters.

The onset of the Second World War did not mark the end of French rule in Vietnam. The colonial administration was aligned to Pétain and the French fascist regime in Vichy. As a result it was tolerated by the Japanese and was only dispensed with from March to August 1945 when the Japanese empire, now facing almost certain defeat at the hands of the allies, took over direct rule.

This proved to be a crucial period for Vietnamese Stalinist, now organised as the nationalist Vietminh. Following Hitler's invasion of Russia the Indo-Chinese Communist Party suspended all elements of class struggle and subordinated everything to a struggle against the Japanese. They aligned with bourgeois nationalists and enlisted the direct support of the allies.

In one of the great ironies of history Ho Chi Minh, who became America's arch enemy, was, during the war, one of its most ardent allies. Under the protection of US Special Forces he developed the Vietminh into an effective guerrilla support army for the Allied war effort.

Following the Allied victory British forces arrived in Vietnam.

provisional government of the south in Saigon, alongside various bourgeois nationalist parties under the leadership of the Stalinist Tran Van Giau. The masses of Saigon responded on 25 August with a mass demonstration.

While this was designed by the Stalinists to bless their ascension to power, the masses, under Trotskyist leadership, had very different ideas. As the demonstration unfolded their strength was revealed by the overwhelming support for their call for “All Power to the People's Committees” as against the Stalinist slogan of “All Power to the Vietminh”.

Events moved quickly. The British, under general Gracey, arrived on 6 September. The Vietminh called for them to be welcomed. The Trotskyists continued their fight to develop soviet power. Gracey immediately threw out the “provisional” Stalinist government – in preparation for the return of direct French colonial rule. Instead of uniting against Gracey the Stalinist declared:

“An irresponsible group [the Trotskyists] has called on the population to demonstrate [against Gracey] at the Saigon market place with the demand of ‘arming the people’, thereby giving the

and executed in Saigon. The working class had demonstrated its revolutionary character and potential. Sections of those claiming to lead it had demonstrated the opposite.

Many histories use objective assessments, they ask us to make objective evaluations. They don't

beckon us to make personal choices. The great strength of this book is that its personal character provides an insight into the unfolding struggle in Vietnam that makes the reader ask the question, "what would I have done if I had been in Van's place?"

Mark Hoskisson

A valuable contribution to labour history

**FROM DAVITT TO CONNOLLY:
INTERNATIONALISM FROM BELOW**

Allan Armstrong

Introbrel Publications / 2010 / £7.99

THIS BOOK is a valuable addition to the literature on the history of the labour movement in the UK in the latter half of the nineteenth century. It focusses on the political career of Michael Davitt, sometime Fenian and subsequently independent radical who, as the author explains, constitutes a bridge between that earlier Irish movement, which was, as Marx and Engels observed, a "lower orders" one, and James Connolly's Irish Socialist Republican Party, founded in 1896.

In passing, the book has some interesting reflections on Charles Stewart Parnell, Keir Hardie and David Lloyd George, among others. It also situates the whole march of events in the context of British imperialism's politics moving from the advocacy of free trade to what the author calls "high imperialism" – Rudyard Kipling could be taken as a representative spokesman of the latter, but one could also instance Cecil Rhodes, Joseph Chamberlain and a number of other prominent personalities.

Allan Armstrong is a long time member of the Scottish Socialist Party and of the Republican Communist Network platform within it. He delivers attacks on, inter alia, the "left unionist tradition". The comrade writes:

"In particular, the SWP, Alliance for Workers' Liberty and the CPGB/Weekly Worker, brought this tradition into the SSP. Those remaining in the CWI, forming the International Socialists, adopted a left nationalist approach on paper towards Scotland, but remained essentially left unionists in practice... Today, after a major internal crisis [l'affaire Tommy Sheridan], both the SSP and the breakaway Solidarity face strong pulls in the form of left nationalism and left unionism, accompanied by tendencies to populism. Socialist

What Armstrong documents in considerable detail is Davitt's role as a radical operating not only in Ireland but also in England, Scotland and Wales

republicanism remains a significant force only in the SSP." (pp18-19)

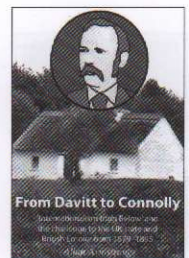
Perhaps because the work is a historical one we are not given a characterisation of what Allan Armstrong understands by "socialist republicanism". However, reading between the lines, it would appear to consist in a political project aiming at the destruction of the British state and its replacement by socialist republics in Scotland, England, Ireland and Wales.

Particularly valuable is the picture which emerges of Michael

Davitt. It is easy to dismiss Davitt as a political operator active on the Irish stage only. Such an evaluation is miles away from the truth. The Irish Free State in its early years was keen to promote this travesty: it issued a commemorative stamp honouring Davitt as one of the "national heroes" but was silent about his radicalism.

Likewise the standard left wing work in English on Irish nationalism, Erich Strauss's *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy*, leads the reader to see Davitt as an Irish political figure pure and simple. What Armstrong documents in considerable detail is Davitt's role as a radical operating not only in Ireland but also in England, Scotland and Wales, in pursuit of "internationalism from below". In part this was forced on him by the pro-bourgeois influence exercised by Charles Stewart Parnell, who was anxious to distance himself from the aspirations of poorer tenant farmers, landless labourers and industrial workers in Ireland.

Parnell's politics were tailored to the aims and objects of the "strong farmers" and the emergent Catholic Irish bourgeoisie. (see pp31-2) Davitt's strategy was, in principle,





an interesting criticism of his tactics see p42.

Parnell gained the upper hand, only to see his power destroyed by the revelations in the O'Shea divorce case. (pp128-9) Davitt soldiered on, but he showed a propensity to ally with "Lib-Lab" politicians - e.g. by appearing on the same platform as the Welsh miners' leader William Abraham ("Mabon"). (p82) The baton passed to James Connolly. On this the final chapter of the book details the activities of the newly-formed Irish Socialist Republican Party.

This chapter, like the rest of the book, is excellent: it is marred only by an uncritical reference to Connolly outlining "the role of primitive communism in Ireland up to the seventeenth century". (p161) Alas, this view of Connolly's finds no support at all in the Irish law tracts. The subject is ably discussed in Andy Johnston, James Larragy and Edward McWilliams work, Connolly: a Marxist analysis. (Irish Workers' Group, 1990)

The book contains a useful bibliography, an index and a fine selection of pictures, including one of the Liberal Irish Secretary William "Buckshot" Forster - so

called because he advocated the use of buckshot rather than cartridges against those resisting eviction, on the grounds that it was "more humanitarian" (p50) There is even a picture of the notorious Captain Boycott - assuming one wants one.

This book is evidently part of a larger historical research project. The publishers advertise four volumes (available on line at www.internationalismfrombelow.com) for 2011:

1. The historical development of nation-states and nationalism up to 1848.
2. The world of nation-states and nationalism between the Communist League and the early Second International (1845 - 1895).
3. Revolutionary social democracy, nation states and nationalism in the age of the Second International (1889 - 1916).
4. Communists, nation states and nationalism during the international revolutionary wave of 1916-21.

If the quality of scholarship in these works turns out to be of the same high order as that in "From Davitt to Connolly", then we are in for a treat.

Chris Gray

world - in Iran, Burma, Serbia and, most recently, Egypt. Some of these claims have certainly been challenged.

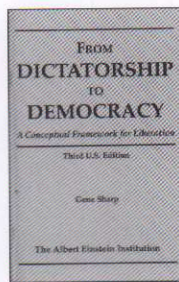
The idea that the book helped "bring down" Mubarak, for instance, has been flatly denied by some Egyptian activists. Hassam el-Hamalwy, of the Revolutionary Socialists of Egypt, has commented that in the movement against the Mubarak regime it was the struggle of the Palestinians that "was the major source of inspiration, not Gene Sharp, whose name I first heard of in February after we had toppled Mubarak already."

A more fundamental point, however, is simply that for this reviewer at least, there is almost nothing in the book to recommend it. Its approach and implicit political programme do not amount to a "framework for liberation". Its generic character means, moreover, that we are provided with very little information about specific struggles and the book has a peculiarly closed and bloodless quality to it.

Sharp's political programme appears to be a purely a bourgeois democratic one. There are no references to workers' councils or the struggle for socialism, no recognition of the anti-capitalist nature of working class liberation. In fact, class plays no part in Sharp's arguments. Resistance to dictatorship, it seems, will be carried out by the "population" or the "democrats". The unique power of the working class to paralyse an economy and state, as a class, gets little attention.

There are two main ideas presented repeatedly in the book. Firstly, according to Sharp, non-violent action is essential in the struggle against dictatorship because the use of violence would "shift the struggle to one in which the dictators have an overwhelming advantage (military warfare)." Non-violence, then, is a "key to success and must be maintained despite provocations and brutalities by the dictators and their agents".

Secondly, there is the argument that dictators "require the assistance of the people they rule, without which they cannot secure



A guide to action that disarms the struggle

FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY - A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR LIBERATION

Gene Sharp

Housmans / 2011 / £5.95

GENE SHARP is an influential figure within a certain milieu - those who support the idea of non-violent action to achieve political change. Apparently during the revolution in Egypt, at least according to Wikipedia, some opposition groups in Tahrir Square read and passed round Sharp's list of 198 non violent "weapons" in Arabic.

Active for almost 60 years, he is for some the "Clausewitz" of non-violent warfare.

From Dictatorship to Democracy, reprinted several times and translated into over 30 languages, is intended as a manual, a practical guide to "how to destroy a dictatorship and prevent the rise of a new one." As such the book concludes with an appendix that lists the "methods of non-violent action" mentioned above.

In this edition the book's preface makes some extremely large claims about its impact on democratic resistance movements around the

and maintain the sources of political power." The aim must be the "withdrawal of popular and institutional cooperation with aggressors and dictators" which will diminish "and may sever . . . the availability of the sources of power on which all rulers depend." At its most developed the withdrawal of cooperation would lead to "massive shut-downs of the society, general strikes, mass stay-at-homes, defiant marches" and a situation in which the dictatorship "would disintegrate before the defiant population".

Obviously actions that can create widespread political dislocation and paralysis, such as the general strike, are vital in the struggle against a particular regime. Their use, though, does not mean that the regime will simply "disintegrate". Force and violence will almost certainly be needed, a reality that applies not only to the overthrow of a regime but in defence of some of the actions, like the general strike, that Sharp mentions.

To invoke the idea of the state's coercive power as an argument against the use of violence by those struggling against a regime is, to say the least, misguided. At its worst it will disarm – literally – the masses before an often ruthless enemy. Of course the repressive apparatus of the state, with its armed forces and police, is immensely powerful. It exists to defend the interests of a ruling class and will react with fierce brutality if it perceives a threat to those interests – as can be seen recently in the murderous responses to demonstrations in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen.

To suggest that non-violent action is somehow the most appropriate way of dealing with such repression is delusional. The record of ruthless dictatorships in Burma and China for example, shows that mass protest on its own, without organised self-defence and offence, ends in bloody massacres.

Clearly just organising and arming demonstrators against police and security service attacks is not sufficient to overthrow such dictatorships. Tactics have to be

developed and used to break up the oppressors' army, to encourage the rank and file soldiers, and young officers, to turn their weapons against their generals and high command. Determined action on the streets, the violent smashing of the security services, as happened in Tunisia and Egypt, is part and parcel of such a strategy. It gives

confidence to the soldiers to revolt.

To rule out the "violence of the oppressed" is to disarm ourselves in the face of repression. Only an armchair Clausewitz could have written it. The reality of the struggle from Burma to Libya exposes its uselessness as a strategy for liberation.

Dave Gay

Malcolm X – separating the man from the myth

MALCOLM X: A LIFE OF REINVENTION

Manning Marable

Allen Lane (UK ed.) / 2011 / £30.00

SADLY, THE author Manning Marable died within days of the publication of his massive and often masterful biography of Malcolm X. Marable finally succumbed aged 60 to complications from sarcoidosis, just as he was struggling to complete a book that had become a driving obsession for the prolific African-American academic.

The idea of a study of arguably the most charismatic and ceaselessly controversial figure in the past century of African-American history had first gripped Marable in the late 1980s, when he was using *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as a text with university undergraduates in Ohio.

He had begun to observe significant discrepancies between the life depicted in the text, written in no small measure by the liberal Black Republican journalist, Alex Haley, and a number of more or less established facts about the man born as Malcolm Little on 9 May 1925.

The genesis of the idea, of course, coincided with the rebirth of interest in and identification with Malcolm X embodied in the rise of Public Enemy's militant hip-hop, the Spike Lee directed biopic released in late 1992 and the partial

commodification of the legend with the marketing of baseball caps (Bill Clinton saw fit to sport one!) and other memorabilia with the "X" brand.

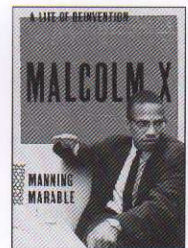
But the project lay dormant for nearly a decade as Marable climbed the academic ladder, establishing a prestigious Institute for Research in African-American studies at New York's Columbia University, spatially very close to, yet a world away from, the Harlem of the late 1950s and early 60s, where Malcolm's reputation as a firebrand preacher for the Nation of Islam (NoI) reached its zenith.

Embarking on the project of reconstructing Malcolm X's life, Marable encountered numerous obstacles, not least the continued denial of access to thousands of pages of evidence transcribed in FBI and New York City police files, compiled mainly from phone tapping over the course of a decade.

The author describes his breakthrough as when he "finally realised that critical deconstruction of the *Autobiography* held the key to reinterpreting to Malcolm's life."

So, through the process of sifting demonstrable fact from fiction (self-serving or otherwise), Marable concludes that the *Autobiography* rather exaggerated the criminal exploits of Malcolm in his "Detroit Red" persona of the early to mid-1940s, spent mainly in Boston and New York.

Whether this was altogether





Malcolm's choice will never be clear since the book was published posthumously and in parts doubtless reflected Alex Haley's desire to sell an American (albeit Black American) tale of redemption.

Marable delves into the lives of Malcolm Little's parents – a dark-skinned father from Georgia (by then under the de jure apartheid of Jim Crow lynch law) and a light-skinned mother born in the then

by 1920 and some 21,000 sympathisers packing New York's Madison Square Garden for a UNIA convention the following year.

With the movement's rapid disintegration over the course of the ensuing decade, Garvey's followers drifted in radically different directions. Some moved leftwards and others became associated with a variety of Muslim-influenced sects and cults including

reliance and self-esteem, wedded with the notion of armed self-defence attracted a small but significant minority of African-Americans. This also explains the ostensibly inordinate interest that J Edgar Hoover's FBI took in the NOI in general and Malcolm in particular long before his infamous "chickens coming home to roost" interview, conducted in the wake of the November 1963 assassination of John F Kennedy.

The aftermath of this episode led to Malcolm's effective excommunication from the NOI and the escalation of an incipient feud with elements both loyal to the leadership of Elijah Muhammad and others keen on paving their own path to succession at the top of what had become a lucrative business empire.

This feud would culminate in Malcolm's assassination in February 1965, most probably in collusion with elements in the New York City police, if not the FBI, but Marable is not keen on promoting conspiracy theories that cannot be backed up by credible evidence.

Like others before him, Marable discerns a significant political shift on Malcolm's part even before his departure from the Nation, a shift that evidently accelerated during the last year of his life. Some on the left may be disappointed that Marable did not afford more consideration to Malcolm's relationship with George Breitman in particular and the Socialist Workers Party (US) more generally.

While not altogether absent from the book, the discussion takes up fewer than a thousand words in a tome of 589 pages. At the same time, however, Marable makes it clear that Malcolm, and indeed a number of his aides within the Muslim Mosque Incorporated, had decided to develop an entirely different approach to an overwhelmingly white far left.

In this same period, Malcolm also emerged as a trenchant critic of western intervention in post-colonial Africa and as an advocate of armed struggle against apartheid, though there is little to suggest that his critique of US

Inevitably, Marable must compare and contrast Malcolm with the other leading African-American political figure of the same period, Martin Luther King

British colony of Grenada. Earl Little formed part of the first wave of the 20th century African-American diaspora from the former Confederate states to the north east and mid-west.

In the case of Earl Little this would even lead to a stay in Canada, where he met Malcolm's mother, Louise, in Montreal. Remarkably it was in this predominantly French-speaking city, dominated by Anglophone finance capital, that both became heavily involved with the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), the movement founded by the Jamaican-born racial separatist and early Black nationalist, Marcus Garvey.

Their devotion to "Garveyism" would shape the couple's existence together and cause them to lead an almost nomadic existence over the next decade that would eventually bring them to Lansing, Michigan, near Detroit after an arson attack drove them and their rapidly growing young family from their Nebraska home before Malcolm's fifth birthday.

Marable documents the extent to which Garveyism became, for however brief a period, something approximating a mass movement in many American cities with as many as 100,000 UNIA supporters spread across 800 branches internationally

what became the NOI.

The book features a salutary reminder of the extent to which the Ku Klux Klan or broadly similar white supremacist terror groups, such as the Black Legion, achieved significant followings and influence on the outskirts of major northern cities such as Detroit.

While conventional historical accounts of the World War Two period have largely depicted a nation with an unprecedented sense of common purpose, the reality of urban black America between 1941 and 1945 shatters this image of national consensus.

In addition to the well-documented Detroit uprising of June 1943, which resulted in 34 deaths and another 700 injured, Marable recounts that six weeks later Harlem would explode after the shooting of a uniformed black soldier by a white cop sparked widespread rioting.

Given the de facto segregation of African-American populations in virtually all northern cities and the sharp decline of what influence the US "far left" had among black workers and intellectuals with the onset of McCarthyism, it is understandable that the message emanating from the Nation and other black Muslim groups struck a resonant chord.

The messages of black self-

capitalism at home had gone beyond a moralistic one.

Inevitably, of course, Marable must compare and contrast Malcolm with the other leading African-American political figure of the same period, Martin Luther King, who like Malcolm X died from an assassin's gunshots at the age of 39, but whose legacy has been more easily sanitised by the US establishment. These two giants, who despite blemishes to their posthumous reputations have retained iconic status, met but once in their lives for a few minutes in 1964.

Unlike Malcolm, who came from an itinerant working class/lower middle class background and gained more than a passing acquaintance with poverty and street crime, King emerged from an established middle class household of respected churchmen at the heart of black Atlanta.

After a fashion, both would attend university in Massachusetts. In King's case at Boston University to complete a doctorate in divinity, while for Malcolm there was no degree but an intense autodidactic period in the library of the Norfolk prison colony.

Marable concludes that the two men, though representative at one level of diverse strains of black consciousness (integrationist v separatist) cannot be reduced to polar opposites, nor at the same time seen as merely two converging points on the same continuum.

We can merely speculate, if only Malcolm had lived, as to whether their paths would have, in fact, converged as King moved leftwards with overt opposition to the Vietnam War and calls for a poor people's movement, and Malcolm became increasingly open to the use of the ballot box to achieve reforms, seeing African-Americans as holding a potential balance of power within the US electorate.

If both were alive today they would be in their 80s. Perhaps one or both men would have become thoroughly incorporated, venerated figures of a multi-racial establishment. But I somehow doubt that in a decade which has seen an

African-American occupy the White House that either would have bought into Barack Obama's vision of an America where "race doesn't matter".

Race indeed matters very much, when US troops continue to occupy Afghanistan, when successive US administrations do Wall Street's bidding and nearly one in every four African-American males winds up in jail or on parole.

In the opening paragraph of the book's epilogue, Marable asserts:

"A biography maps the social architecture of an individual's life. The biographer charts the evolution of a subject over time, and the various challenges and tests that

the individual endures provide insights into the person's character. But the biographer has an additional burden: to explain events and the actions and perspectives of others that the subject could not possibly know, that nonetheless had a direct bearing on the individual's life."

Through a combination of exhaustive research and consistently lucid prose, Manning Marable carried that metaphorical burden with both rigour and aplomb, and for this both current and future readers of the biography owe him a debt of intellectual gratitude.

George Binette



DEBATING THERMIDOR: MARK HOSKISSON

Lenin and the Soviet Thermidor: a reply to Stuart King

AN UNDERSTANDING of the political essence of the events in eighteenth century France is crucial to understanding the character and stages of the political counter-revolution that engulfed the young Soviet regime in the twentieth century. But the events were not identical and the analogy is approximate rather than exact. The consequences of the French Revolution for nineteenth century Europe were very different to those of the Russian Revolution for the world revolution in the twentieth century.

This is why a critical balance sheet of the early history of the Russian Revolution needs to address the fundamental issues of twentieth century communism – why did it usher in a century of defeat, which included an interlude of barbarous fascism and closed with the collapse of the state it created? Why did it end with the very name of socialism becoming associated with a bureaucratic murder machine? Why was Trotsky's heroic struggle against Stalin defeated so easily by the bureaucracy with all the negative consequences this has had for the modern revolutionary left?

Stuart King's critique of the article, "The Red Jacobins", seems to have another objective: to exonerate Lenin of any responsibility for the bureaucratic counter-revolution that unfolded in Russia through the 1920s.

Stuart concedes that Lenin (and Trotsky) made mistakes, but maintains that these mistakes do not implicate either of them in the onset of Thermidor in Russia. He writes, "Looking at Lenin's policy and actions in the 1920-23 period disproves Mark's thesis."

This assertion demonstrates that Stuart hasn't yet understood the specific character of the Soviet Thermidor. It was not at the outset a full blown counter-revolution that

overthrew the existing state and ruling faction. It was a decisive counter-revolutionary blow against the Bolshevik Party's ability to hold that state and ruling faction to account. Lenin was the key leader in 1921 fighting to carry through the policy of freeing the state apparatus from democratic accountability to the party.

This was exemplified in the ban on factions, but not limited to that ban. It included a host of anti-democratic measures which circumscribed the freedom of oppositionists to organise within the Bolshevik Party and finished off what remained of workers' democracy in the trade unions and soviets.

There is no documentary evidence from Lenin's writings that he believed these actions were temporary. Trotsky later suggested they were, but at the time the blow was delivered it was envisaged as a move with no set time limit or pre-conditions for its reversal. That is why Lenin never demanded it was lifted even during his later anti-Stalin campaign, referred positively to its effect in defeating the

Unity in action in a party is premised on a fundamental guarantee – the right of all members to organise to remove the leadership of the party

Workers' Opposition at the 11th Congress and why it was strengthened there. It is why all of the later oppositional factions regarded it as sacrosanct right up to the 1927 struggle by the Left Opposition.

The essential feature of the 1921 ban on factions was that it removed the one remaining means for successfully challenging the

apparatus. It was not about disputes over this or that platform but over the right of the members to do what Lenin had threatened to do in April 1917 – use factional rights to bring about the removal of the existing leadership. The capacity of an opposition to overthrow the existing leadership was the decisive right taken away in 1921.

Oppositions could continue to voice their opposition within (increasingly narrow) prescribed limits. But they could not organise against the apparatus. The rationale for this, as stated openly by Lenin, was that because the party was now effectively the executive committee of the state, a split in the party ranks on factional grounds threatened to split the government. Such a split, or even the threat of such a split, was deemed unacceptable in 1921.

This was a Thermidorian blow because it arrested the ability of the last nationally important vestige of the working class organs of power forged in 1917 – the mass democratic revolutionary party – to drive the revolution forward. It was contrary to the interests of the revolution – counter-revolutionary by any definition.

Counter-revolution comes in many guises. Not all of the clothes it wears are blood-soaked. We have seen many examples of democratic counter-revolution which

demonstrate this. The counter-revolutionary essence of an action is that it eliminates the ability of the masses to shape their own destiny. The Soviet Thermidor, which began in 1921, did just this.

In Russia the onset of Thermidor opened a period of reaction that rapidly resulted in the marginalisation of Lenin himself. He moved into opposition from his

sick bed. It saw the humiliation and defeat of Trotsky twice over, alongside the uninterrupted consolidation of the centralised bureaucratic machine. It began the process which led to the untold suffering of millions of workers and peasants who were henceforth excluded from having a say over the fate of their own country. It ended with the regime of Stalinist terror.

Detailed analogies with France are interesting but don't really help in our elaboration of a definition of the Soviet Thermidor. The organs of popular democracy that Thermidor in France put down did not exist in Russia by 1921 on any mass scale and did not have to be put down by the party (Kronstadt excepted). What did have to be put down was the threat of any organised, factional opposition within the party (the Red Jacobins) because the party had to be, as Lenin repeatedly stressed, totally united.

Lenin's offer to put a couple of Workers' Opposition members on the Central Committee (which had ceased to be a significant body, met only every two months and had been replaced as the real leading organ by the Politburo and Orgburo by 1921) was a straightforward manoeuvre. Minorities on leading bodies are all too often used by ruling factions as hostages in return for the loyalty oath of the minority faction's members.

Unity in action in a party is premised on a fundamental guarantee – the right of all members to organise to remove the leadership of the party. The removal of this right was the decisive moment of Thermidor in Russia precisely because the party was the state. The right that was being removed was the right to hold the government (the party leadership) to account and organise to remove it. The eradication of that right was the decisive blow struck against the forward movement of the revolution in Russia.

Stalin was the beneficiary of the 1921 crackdown. And no matter how many people attended Left Opposition meetings, the inability of Trotsky to defeat a man who went on to kill millions and trample the

concept of socialism into blood and mud was a direct product of the fateful year of 1921.

And this, at least in part, stems from Trotsky's flawed analysis of that degeneration and Thermidor. Stuart remarks, "One can see why the Bolsheviks saw the relevance of the analogy with Thermidor. They rightly associated it with any tendencies within the revolution aiming to throw back the working

name of the soviets, it is also possible to backslide into Thermidorian positions even with the banner of communism in one's hands."¹

The idea that Thermidor can be either a violent revolt or can "creep up in a more peaceful way" is an astute insight into counter-revolution from within. It can happen "even with the banner of communism in one's hands". The

Thermidor is carried through by leading elements within the party. It is aimed against others in the party. It proceeds by instalments. It opens a period of reaction

masses, putting an end to the forward movement of the revolution."

Actually the Bolsheviks' discussions are not recorded anywhere so we cannot be entirely sure what the Bolsheviks were saying in the early 1920s. Trotsky did discuss the concept, but not in 1924. His use of the term as part of his opposition to Stalin appeared in late 1926 (November) and was more fully explained in the summer of 1927 in his article entitled "Thermidor".

This article sets out Trotsky's view of Thermidor as capitalist counter-revolution. This incorrect understanding of the concept limited its value in the fight with Stalin. Trotsky nevertheless makes useful comments about the way in which Thermidor can take place. He suggests that the Kronstadt rebellion was a form of Thermidor (clearly identifying himself with its suppression). But he also recognises that Thermidor can be a less violent, stealthy process:

"The Kronstadt form of Thermidor was an armed uprising. But under certain circumstances a Thermidor can creep up on us in a more peaceful way. If the Kronstadters, party and non-party elements together, could backslide towards a bourgeois regime with the slogan of soviets and in the

consequences of Thermidor by stealth are different to a full blown violent capitalist counter-revolution. As Trotsky puts it:

"At the top, at the helm, there seem to be the very same people, the same speeches, the same banners. The day after Thermidor the victorious participants were confident that nothing catastrophic had happened; they had simply dealt with a group of 'ex-leaders' who had become confusionists, disrupters and 'objectively' accomplices of Pitt, the Chamberlain of that day. But down below, deepgoing rearrangements of the class forces had taken place."²

Trotsky makes the observation that:

"Thermidor is a special form of counter-revolution carried out on the instalment plan through several instalments and making use, in the first stage, of elements of the same ruling party – by regrouping them and counterposing some to others."³

As for the distinction between Thermidor in France and in Russia, and the fact that he was in opposition while Robespierre was in his grave, Trotsky notes, "what is involved here is the technicalities, and not the political essence of the process."⁴

Trotsky's explanation of the process of Thermidor is very useful



in developing our own understanding of it. Despite mistakenly believing that it meant the transfer of power to the bourgeoisie, he recognised essential elements of the process – most importantly the idea that it involved a re-arrangement at the top and would be directed against

the period of reaction Lenin broke with revolutionary communist organisational principles and embarked on the road of bureaucratic centralism. He pursued this course because he believed it was the only way of preserving the regime and that only the regime could defend the

to, that a “bourgeois stage of development” was necessary. The variant was novel, given that a working class revolution had established a Bolshevik government. But its essence was the curtailment of independent working class political power.

Under the phase of state capitalism that followed 1921 the bureaucracy grew and prospered. Lenin’s “policy and actions” in this period strengthened the material base of that bureaucracy.

Thermidor in the party meant that the bureaucracy could no longer be checked and undermined by organised opposition from within. *The specific character of Thermidor within the Russian Revolution was bureaucratic reaction in the party.*

Thermidor was both a stroke and a process. It was both a decisive act by the party leadership in 1921 to formally ensure that it would not face an organised challenge from within its own ranks and also opened up a period of reaction lasting from 1921 to 1932 and the consolidation of Stalin’s Bonapartist rule.

Is an emphasis on 1921 an exaggeration, is the concentration on the ban on factions an over emphasis? According to Stuart yes – because essentially everything carried on more or less as before. But this is simply not true. The Workers’ Opposition were hounded. Dissidents were driven from the party. Most important of all opposition to the regime was equated with counter-revolution and crushed. This was the “lesson” of Kronstadt that Lenin repeated endlessly. Lenin made clear all opposition needed to be dealt with by rifles.

Within the party, regardless of his toleration of platforms, Lenin’s opposition to organised factions – without which platforms could easily be disorganised and defeated by the apparatus – had a terrible impact. Opposition to the line became identified with opposition to the revolution. Factions were not merely stigmatised, they were ruthlessly broken up by a party organisation controlled by Stalin

Factions were not merely stigmatised, they were ruthlessly broken up by a party organisation controlled by Stalin and his supporters – with the blessing of Lenin

“ex-leaders”. Thermidor is carried through by leading elements within the party. It is aimed against others in the party. It proceeds by instalments. It opens a period of reaction. It is counter-revolution from within the revolution.

All of this counts against Stuart’s assertion that my article “changes the definition of Thermidor itself – he confuses its starting point with its end point, or rather fails to see it as a process, ‘counter-revolution in instalments’ as Trotsky correctly describes the phenomenon.”

Everything is a process, even a revolution. Everything happens in instalments, even a counter-revolution. But that does not mean we cannot identify key moments within the process – and recognise that some moments can be more decisive than others. So, in what way is it confused to recognise the moment of the first instalment?

Does such a recognition of 1921 as the opening of Thermidor mean that Lenin was a counter-revolutionary? The customary defence of Lenin is that his action was the only means of saving the regime in the face of white guard reaction. But the regime and the revolution are not always and necessarily the same thing. And the regime needs to be accountable, normally to the masses, in extraordinary circumstances to the party members in the ranks.

At the point where he pushed through the measures which began

revolution. He was wrong. The maintenance and extension of party democracy would have been the correct choice as it could have led to the revival of democracy throughout society.

But by opting for bureaucratic centralism instead Lenin’s actions in 1921 and 1922 directly benefited Stalin and the burgeoning Thermidorian apparatus and were of no benefit to the masses, either inside or outside the party.

On his sick bed Lenin realised the gravity of his errors and waged a belated and delimited struggle to offset the reactionary course of development he had set in motion. This demonstrates that while Thermidor had begun, the reaction it had set in motion was still a process. But the process starts somewhere. There is a first stroke which unleashes counter-revolution by instalments.

The political context of Lenin’s decision was his explicit return to the programme of stage-ism. By 1921 Lenin ceased to believe that socialism was feasible in backward Russia as an immediate goal – the dictatorship of the proletariat had to be embodied in the dictatorship of the party to oversee a stage of state capitalism in the economy that Lenin regarded as essential to the revival of the Russian economy.

Lenin abandoned his position as outlined in *State and Revolution* and returned to a variant of the strategy that Stalin had long held

and his supporters – with the blessing of Lenin.

One example of the scale of such control was the existence of Uchraspred. It dealt with the allocation of party members to different areas. Its operations were overseen by Stalin. In its report to the 10th party congress in 1921 it stated that it had been responsible for the transfer or appointment of 42,000 party members. This was a lever of punitive control inside the party and over the members.

The growth in importance of the Control Commission was another example of bureaucratic centralism. While the historic leadership of Bolshevism, the Central Committee, was reduced to irregular meetings (every two months) it was organs like the Orgburo and Politburo, which conducted all party affairs and became the instruments of the imposition of the new “unity” line decreed in 1921. These bodies had, in 1920, been taken over by Stalin’s men, a “process” that led, again with Lenin’s support, to the unprecedented situation in a collective party where in 1922 a single general secretary was appointed to oversee all aspects of party affairs. The secretary appointed was Stalin.

Stuart paints a picture of Lenin in 1921 as someone waging a fight against the growth of bureaucratism. He suggests that the article on the Red Jacobins mistakes the use of invective and temporary internal exile, and so on, as actions borne of frustration by Lenin at the problems caused by the crisis of 1921 rather than as a means of preventing the workers from reasserting their own direct control over the party. Stuart quotes approvingly Daniels’ claim that the expulsion of Miasnikov was “the only incident after the Bolsheviks became a party that Lenin actually expelled a prominent member.”

Lenin’s failed attempt to expel Shlyapnikov, losing by one vote from the required two-thirds majority and on the condition that Shlyapnikov dropped any future opposition activity, was the exception rather than the rule. Lenin oversaw the expulsion of

countless communists during the 1920/21 period. Miasnikov was the most prominent, but as Miasnikov remarked himself, it was only his notoriety that had saved him from a worse fate.

The party purges may have been nominally aimed at the bureaucrats and place servers but many troublesome communists were removed alongside them. The expulsions at the bottom were shaping the party – re-arranging the correlation of forces as Trotsky later expressed it. And in what direction were they shaping them?

According to Stuart in 1920/21 Lenin was frustrated with the bureaucratism of the party and wanted to educate workers to come forward to help resolve its problems. If that is true why did Lenin not re-evaluate his 1921 position in 1922? By the eleventh party congress it was clear that the key features of the crisis of 1920/21 had passed, the period of retreat was over, in Lenin’s own words, the danger to the regime was ebbing, the economy was growing, the famine was ended. Why then did the eleventh party congress strengthen the bureaucratic

members. The party was fused with the most repressive organ of the state and as Carr notes this had mainly a political significance:

“It is not unfair to say that the main difference between the Cheka and the GPU was that, whereas the former directed its activities exclusively against enemies outside the party, the GPU acted impartially against all enemies of the regime, amongst whom dissident party members were now commonly the most important.”⁶

As for the notion that “internal exile” was more benign than in the later period, that merely proves that the counter-revolution had gathered considerable pace by the late 1920s. But its first instalment began after 1921. Stuart quotes the example of Tomsky being exiled and brushes over it as though this was a minor episode. Tomsky’s exile to Turkestan was far from minor.

His “crime” was that he failed to oppose an amendment to the Bolshevik’s trade union resolution to the All Russian Trade Union Congress of May 1921 at the pre-congress Bolshevik fraction meeting. The amendment reintroduced to the resolution the

Normal proletarian democracy was now at odds with the needs of the regime and anyone who failed to carry out this line was quickly bundled out of Moscow

measures that had been introduced in 1921 rather than reduce or even remove them? Why did Lenin address the congress with the call “to punish strictly, severely, unsparingly the slightest breach of discipline”?⁵

The congress went on to pass a resolution that made the work of the control commission a more or less continuous purge commission. By 1923 (but before the first defeat of the Left Opposition) the twelfth congress passed a resolution directly linking the work of the control commission and the work of the GPU with regards to party

following standard Bolshevik formula which had been deliberately omitted from the Central Committee’s new 1921 draft:

“But party organisation should be particularly careful to apply normal methods of proletarian democracy in the trade unions, where most of all the choice of leaders should be made by the organised masses themselves.”⁷

Tomsky’s failure to stop the amendment that re-inserted this into the resolution for the congress led to his denunciation at the Bolshevik fraction which Lenin had



specially (and unusually) attended. Tomsy was reprimanded for allowing this basic communist principle to be put back in to the resolution. He was removed from the presidium of the congress, criticised by the Central Committee and at a re-convened fraction meeting the clause was once again deleted from the resolution. A special commission of investigation was set up. It was chaired by Stalin. It decided that Tomsy should be sent to the typhus ridden region of Tashkent in Turkestan.

By allowing this to happen, by playing a role in ensuring this happened, Lenin was carrying into life the programme of the 10th Party congress – dissent was outlawed if it had any practical consequences whatsoever. Normal

Thermidor in the party had done its job. It had given Stalin control over a bureaucratic apparatus. It had given him this with Lenin's blessing

proletarian democracy was now considered to be at odds with the needs of the regime and anyone in the party who failed to carry out this line was quickly bundled on a train out of Moscow.

Perhaps though the struggle against counter-revolution that Stuart suggests was a key element of Lenin's approach between 1921 and his stroke in May 1922, manifested itself outside the party – with an attempt to revive soviets, build up workers' control in industry, encourage local initiative and combat the growing and clear threat of capitalist restoration that NEP had created.

The problem is that Lenin's policies for ensuring that NEP was successful did not put a premium on democracy. Workers' control was specifically excluded in the enterprises. The unions, by 1922, had been ordered not to interfere in the administration of the factories. The need for specialists led Lenin to turn away even further from the

basic precepts of "State and Revolution" and rely more and more on the aid of "technicians".

In the period after 1921 NEP spread from the countryside to industry in the towns and cities. Industries were effectively denationalised (leasing spread rapidly). State subsidies were withdrawn and the discipline of commercial accounting by enterprises was introduced and strictly adhered to regardless of its impact on working class welfare. Industrial enterprises were combined into trusts run by specialised managers or leased to former owners.

State regulation was frowned upon. "Communist interference" in industry was discouraged, at Lenin's insistence, by replacing

communists with specialists. Lenin went so far as to describe the reintroduction of strict accounting in industry as "a transition to commercial principles".

These methods were replicated in finance too as the government moved to stabilise the rouble and balance its budget. The economy was opened up to foreign trade. And the unions were incorporated ever more into the machinery of the state with the express purpose of ensuring that working class disquiet could be channelled safely away from revolt and become more like the collective bargaining typical of capitalist countries.

This was all part of a strategy by Lenin to use state capitalism as a stepping stone to socialism. State capitalism was incompatible – at least for the time being – with a regime based on workers' democracy. That, above all else, is why the party had to be subordinated to the leadership. Lenin had come full circle from his

1917 position that the Russian revolution had to triumph as a socialist revolution. He had returned to the stage-ist programme of pre-April 1917 Bolshevism: capitalism first, socialism second. His only variation on the old formula was that the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry overseeing the capitalist phase now took the form of a Bolshevik Party dictatorship.

Did my articles, as Stuart claims, underestimate the significance of Trotsky's later struggles against Stalin? Certainly the 1927 struggle was hamstringed from the outset. It involved a bloc with some of the most bureaucratic elements of the party, most notably, Zinoviev. Trotsky's fellow oppositionists criticised him for this bloc.

But what about 1923/24? Does moving the date of Thermidor mean a split with the Bolshevik Party in 1921?

At the risk of entering the realm of fruitless speculation about "what if", this too is not as clear cut as Stuart maintains. The demand of oppositionists like Preobrazhensky, the probable author of the Platform of the 46, that Trotsky publicly join the opposition was precisely because in the period before 1924 the apparatus had not yet finally consolidated its rule.

If Trotsky had united the oppositions with the working class base of the Workers' Opposition and to a lesser extent the Democratic Centralists, then the support of the Opposition by the leader of the Red Army and organiser of the Petrograd insurrection could have made a material difference.

This is precisely the significance of the subjective factor, of agency. The choices that the leaders of the revolution made at this critical juncture mattered. Trotsky opposing the ban on factions, Trotsky aligning with the democratic components of the platform of the Workers' Opposition and Democratic Centralists, Trotsky combining with the other oppositional leaders, Radek, Preobrazhensky, Kollontai, Balabanoff, Rakovsky, Saponoff,

Miasnikov, Shylapnikov and many others would have rendered the ban on factions inoperable. If Lenin had pressed on with it, a new Bolshevik Party based on these leaders could have easily won the majority of the working class and army to its side.

But that question is of purely historical interest. It is an essentially pointless dispute about what might have been. Certainly the position of these authoritative leaders in the class at this time would have provided the material basis for an opposition that could have won, but only on one condition – a consistent fight for workers' democracy and against the power of the burgeoning apparatus/bureaucracy in the party and state, a call for new mass organisations – new or revived soviets, independent unions, rank and file democracy in the party, factory committees – and even a party if necessary was vital to the future of the revolution.

Their failure to materialise killed the revolution stone dead. That is irrefutable. And the attempt of Miasnikov, a well known but incomparably less significant figure, to launch a new party was ruthlessly crushed by the GPU with Lenin's agreement and active support.

But the alternative path of reform chosen by Trotsky, of trying to persuade the party from within, while accepting the terrain of banned factions and severely limited democratic rights was one of futile endeavour. It was a brave but all too easily defeated failure. Stuart nonetheless proposes that this path could have succeeded. He writes, "On the other hand the RCP was wracked with crises, the Platform of the 46 gained a sympathetic hearing and Stalin had to retreat and adopt the New Course."

When the Platform of the 46 was debated the party was already settling its issues in a bureaucratic fashion and the New Course was a product of a bureaucratic response by the leadership to the scissors crisis not a return to revolutionary democracy, still less a product of a genuinely democratic debate. Moreover Trotsky did not sign this platform.

The New Course resolution that Stuart suggests was a change of position forced on to the CC by the pressure of the Platform of the 46 actually restated the position of the 10th congress that workers' democracy: "does not, however, imply freedom to form factional groupings which are extremely dangerous for the ruling party since they always threaten to split or fragment the government and the state apparatus as a whole".

Ruling party, government and state apparatus to the fore – notice the emphasis on these organs rather than on the organs of workers' power. This emphasis was a restatement of the fundamental position of 1921 – preserve the unity of the ruling apparatus. And this is two years on from the "temporary" measure adopted in 1921. This resolution was adopted in a period of economic difficulty but relative political stability. It had nothing to say about soviet democracy but stressed the need to "recruit workers from the bench" into the party – actually paving the way for the Lenin levy. It was in line with every resolution on party organisation passed between 1921 and 1932. And they were the eleven years that it took for Stalin to move from Thermidorian reaction to Soviet Bonapartism.

But also, if the ban on factions was temporary, why did the platform of the 13 in 1926 (the United Opposition) not call for it to be lifted five years on? Why did they call instead for "a regime in the party that will permit all disputed questions to be solved in full accordance with party traditions" – i.e. the tradition of opposing the very existence of factions (the platform charged Stalin and the CC majority with "factionalism")?

And this is a key element of the original argument in the Red Jacobins article – by never recognising the enormity of the mistake in 1921 – the stealthy inception of the bureaucratic counter-revolution against the last vestige of workers' democracy – the later oppositions were disarmed. They were loyal to the anti-democratic measures that were now

being used to destroy them.

Which brings us to the more important point – why did Stalin win? Why was Trotsky unable to transform his support in the ranks into active opposition to Stalin? Why was Stalin's victory relatively peaceful in the 1920s? Why were thousands not on the streets to protest when the leader of the Red Army was bundled onto a train in his pyjamas?

The answer is that Thermidor in the party – from 1921 onwards – had done its job. It had given Stalin control over a bureaucratic apparatus. It had given him this with Lenin's blessing. And it had given him the authority within that party to stigmatise Trotsky as a factionalist. All factionalists were counter-revolutionary – ergo Trotsky was a counter-revolutionary.

In the name of party unity the transition from the Soviet Thermidor to the fully-fledged regime of Soviet Bonapartism – Stalin's regime of terror – began. Understanding how and why that happened is crucial to revolutionaries today who want to build a new party and forge a new world.

ENDNOTES

1. The Challenge of the Left Opposition, 1926-1927, Pathfinder 1980, p259
2. Ibid p259
3. Ibid p 263
4. Ibid p264
5. E H Carr, The Bolshevik revolution 1917-1923 Vol 1, Pelican, Harmondsworth 1973, p217
6. Ibid p 218
7. Ibid, Vol 3, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1973 p323



DEBATING THERMIDOR: STUART KING

A narrow and flawed view of Thermidor

DESPITE ITS length, Mark's reply to my article *The real meaning of Thermidor in the Russian Revolution* (PR18) adds little new to the argument he put forward in PR17.

The charge that the objective of my article was to "exonerate Lenin of any responsibility for the bureaucratic counter-revolution that unfolded in Russia through the 1920's" does not hold up to scrutiny. Anyone reading the section headed "Lenin and Trotsky's errors" will see that I was not trying to exonerate either leader of the revolution. But serious policy mistakes and misjudgements that contributed to the growth of bureaucracy in the workers' state are not the same thing as conscious counter-revolutionary actions aimed at driving the working class from power. This is what Mark is accusing Lenin and Trotsky of by 1921.

Mark has a very narrow and entirely political explanation of Thermidor. He believes the ban on factions in 1921 "was the decisive counter-revolutionary blow against the Bolshevik party's ability to hold that (Soviet) state and ruling faction to account."

Yet one could point to a whole series of other measures that were of equal importance to the bureaucratisation of the workers' state: the break up of the workers' and peasants' government and banning of the Left SRs in 1918, the by-passing and manipulation of the Soviets after 1919, the sporadic suppression of the Mensheviks and other workers' groups between 1919 and 1921, the centralising of the state (as opposed to establishing a semi-state) from 1919, the ending of workers' control in industry and introduction of "specialist management" from 1920.

All these policies, some necessary in a situation of civil war and economic chaos, some disastrously

counter-productive, contributed to the emerging one party proletarian dictatorship and to the "state of siege" mentality that led the Bolshevik leadership to place power in the hands of only a trusted few thousand old guard Bolsheviks. Any one of them could be picked, and have been by anarchists and left communists, as the counter-revolutionary turning point, the Thermidor, of the Russian

It took Stalin's apparatus many years to silence all opposition in the RCP and to be able to use the GPU/OGPU against dissidents inside the party with impunity

revolution.

The awkward fact for Mark is that despite the banning of factions, democratic struggles in the Russian Communist Party (RCP) did not end in 1921 but increased. The fight of various platforms and groupings continued unabated, their ideological and organisational struggles reflected in the Central Committee, the party press, *Pravda*, the RCP conferences and congresses, and in the party cells and districts.

It took Stalin's apparatus many years to silence all opposition in the RCP and to be able to use the GPU/OGPU against dissidents inside the party with impunity. The period 1924-28 was crucial to it, a period Trotsky correctly characterises as Thermidor by instalments.

Mark, to prove his point about the decisiveness of 1921, has to belittle all these struggles as somehow not challenging or trying to change the leadership. The Left and United Oppositions certainly did try, which was why Stalin crushed them and drove them out of the party.

Mark's narrow definition of Thermidor also ignores the economic evidence. He has no answer to why this 1921 "counter-revolution against the working class", which includes apparently the New Economic Policy, actually increased workers' living standards between 1921-28. Whereas, following the real triumph of Thermidor by 1928, there was a dramatic attack on workers' wages and conditions. His timing and analysis is all wrong.

Finally Mark avoids answering my question about the tactical and programmatic conclusions of moving the date of counter-revolution back to 1921 - this could

only have meant arguing for a break with the RCP. For Mark this is "the realm of fruitless speculation about 'what if'".

Yet Mark does have a position. He thinks the "path of reform" chosen by Trotsky was one of "futile endeavour" after 1921. So actually the logic of Mark's position is to abandon the RCP, and the left oppositions in it, and to follow the tactics of Miasnikov, the Left SR's, anarchists etc, in building illegal organisations to fight Bolshevik "tyranny and counter-revolution".



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