

**An injury to one is an injury to all**

# Solidarity

**& WORKERS' LIBERTY**

Volume 3  
No. 121  
8 November  
2007  
30p/80p

**British, migrant,  
white, black:**

**WORKERS,  
UNITE!**

BY GERRY BATES

“**B**RITISH jobs for British workers”. A UK Independence Party slogan? British National Party? National Front? Right now it comes from Labour prime minister Gordon Brown. At the TUC conference in September, Brown talked about “British workers”, “British jobs” and “British living standards” (don’t mention the 2% public sector pay limit...) with such unashamed nationalism that even a few union general secretaries felt compelled to rebuke him. Now he has upped the ante.

At the end of last month, after the Government admitted that it had underestimated the number of migrant workers in Britain by hundreds of thousands, Brown tried to fight back with a straightforward appeal to xenophobic bigotry. “British jobs for British workers”, a slogan used by the BNP in the 1980s and the NF in the 1970s, became an official part of Government policy.

*Continued on page 2*

**Don't let Brown and  
the Tories divide us**

# World credit spiral hits nemesis

BY MARTIN THOMAS

**“Y**OU can expect”, writes US economist Nouriel Roubini, “that the ongoing credit crunch will get much worse in the year ahead and its fallout will spread from the US to Europe and throughout Asia and the globe. Trillions of dollars of securitised assets that were sliced and diced in the long food chain of securitisation are now at some risk. The first crisis of financial globalisation and securitisation is only at its beginning stage”.

At one end — the starting end of this crisis — two million poorer US households are likely to lose their homes in the coming months because, with interest rates higher and credit tighter, they can no longer meet the payments on their mortgages.

At another end, the bosses of Merrill Lynch and Citigroup have lost their jobs (though they, unlike the people losing their homes, get huge pay-offs). Their companies have had to “write down” billions — admit that a lot of the financial paper they are holding is worth only a fraction of what they had previously valued it at. And the Government is still pouring billions into a big hole in Northern Rock’s finances.

According to Roubini, and many others, that process of “writing down” has a long way to go yet.

Karl Marx identified the core paradox here

in *Capital* volume 3:

*The credit system appears as the main lever of over-production and over-speculation in commerce solely because the reproduction process, which is elastic by nature, is here forced to its extreme limits, and is so forced because a large part of the social capital is employed by people who do not own it and who consequently tackle things quite differently than the owner, who anxiously weighs the limitations of his private capital in so far as he handles it himself...*

*The self-expansion of capital based on the contradictory nature of capitalist production permits an actual free development only up to a certain point, so that in fact it constitutes an immanent fetter and barrier to production, which are continually broken through by the credit system.*

*Hence, the credit system accelerates the material development of the productive forces and the establishment of the world-market. It is the historical mission of the capitalist system of production to raise these material foundations of the new mode of production to a certain degree of perfection. At the same time credit accelerates the violent eruptions of this contradiction — crises — and thereby the elements of disintegration of the old mode of production.*

*The credit system... develops the incentive of capitalist production, enrichment through exploitation of the labour of others, to the*

*purest and most colossal form of gambling and swindling...*

The recent background is a strategic choice made by world capital in the late 1970s and early 1980s. We explained in *Solidarity* 3/118:

*As a reaction to the crises of the 1930s, up to the 1970s credit and banking was quite closely regulated in the big capitalist economies. That was the era of “managed capitalism”, the era when social-democrats smugly imagined that capitalism was becoming more and more “socialistic” every year.*

*The crises of the 1970s produced the opposite reaction to those of the 1930s. Economies were deregulated and privatised — initially, mostly, as a ploy to meet more intense global competition and to turn the blade of that competition against the working class.*

*Those measures “worked”, as slicker credit set-up generally does for capital, to make the system more flexible and agile. But they also store up vast instabilities.*

Financial crises like those of 1987, 1991-2, 1997, and 2001 made many experts demand re-regulation. But by then there were vast vested interests tied to deregulation, and vast amounts of brain and computer power being put by high finance into getting round what regulations did exist.

*The rich do a lot more trading of bits of paper representing (ultimately) entitlements to future profits or interest payments than they used to, and they do it more globally. The*

*ratio of global financial assets to annual world output rose from 109% in 1980 to 316% in 2005 (and 405% in the USA).*

*The processes are more complicated and opaque — and have become still more complicated and opaque in recent years. A new sort of bit of paper, called “credit derivatives”, has expanded from zero ten years ago to \$26 trillion today.*

*The mortgage lenders do not just hold on to your mortgage agreement and wait for your repayments. They convert a bundle of mortgage agreements into a “financial asset” and sell it on, thus getting their cash quicker.*

*This is the world, as journalist Martin Wolf puts it, of the “clever intermediaries, who persuaded [some people] to borrow what they could not afford, and [others] to invest in what they did not understand”. (*Solidarity* 3/118).*

And who — and this is what matters for them — collect fat fees from the process. As a result, *nobody knows* today how much of the financial paper that financiers are holding is worthless, and where the worthless paper is. As a further result, the whole credit system tends to seize up.

Pundits started talking about capital having miraculously developed a “Goldilocks economy” just after the 1991-2 crisis. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

## Rally against BNP invite!

BY MIKE ROWLEY, RUSKIN COLLEGE, OXFORD

**T**HE “Oxford Union Society” — a debating society which was once the stamping ground of Tony Benn, Michael Foot and Paul Foot, but now populated by upper-class adolescent morons whose idea of a high-profile speaker is the model Jordan — has organised a “free speech debate” on Monday 26 November. The people whom they have invited to speak in favour of “freedom of speech” are Britain’s two best-known neo-Nazis: Nick Griffin, leader of the British National Party, and David Irving, the “historian” and convicted Holocaust denier.

Such a “debate” would be more of a fascist rally than an argument for genuine freedom of speech. Its organisers seem to see it as an entertaining freak-show that might attract them a bit of publicity.

The BNP, which is currently trying to establish a presence in colleges across the country, is of course delighted. We are not, of course, overly concerned that any of the audience will be converted by Griffin and Irving’s absurd and hateful rhetoric; but they will use the event to claim that students are interested in hearing their views and treat them as valid.

The Oxford Union Society still has a certain prestige associated with the name of Oxford University, and the propaganda value to fascists of their being allowed to speak there is significant.

Under normal circumstances socialists are for the fullest freedom of speech — censorship is inimical to the workers’ movement. And we do not favour laws or government decrees to ban even fascists. But the Oxford Union’s invite raises other issues.

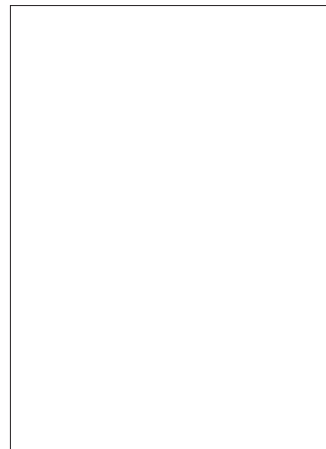
Firstly, fascists use any opportunity to speak as part of their ongoing campaign to violently smash the workers’ movement and all progressive organisations, along with freedom of speech itself.

Secondly, when fascists are allowed to disseminate their propaganda the level of racist and homophobic incidents, including violent ones, always rises, and the fascists themselves often commit acts of violence. The last time fascists spoke at a university, in Manchester, the Student Union Equalities Officer and several visibly Muslim students were physically assaulted.

The BNP must not be allowed to get a foothold in our colleges.

Thankfully there is a general determination to stop Griffin and Irving speaking here. An organising meeting on Monday was supported by Oxford University Students’ Union, the university Jewish and Islamic Societies, the university Labour Club, Oxford and District Trades Council, Unison, the T&G at the Cowley works and all local Labour Party organisations. The meeting heard from the co-chairs of Unite Against Fascism, but the anti-fascist campaign is being worked out democratically by these local organisations.

Local trade union community and student



Nick Griffin

organisations, councillors and even Andrew Smith, Labour MP for Oxford East, have come together to campaign on the issue. The only notable exception is Evan Harris, Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, who has a “distinguished” record of defending academic racists.

He feels so strongly about the “right” of Griffin and Irving to speak at Oxford University that he has agreed to speak in the “debate” on the same side as them! This, he says, is because he opposes censorship; but that, to put it kindly, makes no sense.

It is not “censorship” to deny someone an invite to speak in the Oxford University debating society. The invitation of fascists and Holocaust deniers to such a platform by a gaggle of irresponsible posh twits could only be hailed as a blow for freedom of speech by a complete idiot.

Pressure is being put on the Oxford Union Society to cancel the invitation. If it is not cancelled, there will be a mass demonstration outside the Oxford Union Society from 7pm on 26 November. Keep fascism out of universities and out of our cities!

## Workers unite!

From front page

The Queen’s Speech (6 November) announced a new “points system” for migrants from outside the European Union. This means that people with wealth, or advanced qualifications of the sort more easily gained by those from a well-off family background, get in. The less well-off are kept out. There will be a compulsory English test. You will be tested if you come from Colombia or India, but not if you come from France or Sweden. This has rightly been dubbed “lace curtain racism”. (It also comes at a time when the Government is cutting English as a Second Language provision.)

The left must condemn Brown’s appeal to bigotry. But it is also important to grasp New Labour’s lying and hypocrisy.

As a party which serves the British capitalist class, New Labour wants more migrant labour in Britain — skilled and unskilled. That is why most new jobs created here since 1997 have gone to migrant workers.

“British jobs for British workers” is demagoguery. It would be illegal under EU law, as the Tories and others have pointed out, and anyway impossible to implement without reverting to a siege economy. No serious capitalist demands it.

What can Brown achieve by the slogan? The denial of proper rights for asylum-seekers or of rights which would allow migrant workers to assert their rights and get organised. They want a steady flow of migrant labour, but one firmly under capitalist control. At the same time, they aim to appeal to disillusioned white working-class voters, and win the competition with the Tories for “middle-class” right-wingers. Hence their contortions and doublespeak on immigration.

By his blundering, Brown has opened the door to a Tory offensive on immigration, welfare reform and a whole range of issues. In our counter-attack, the left must be very clear.

We must oppose economic nationalism, the points system, language tests and the rest of it. We must demand open borders: the repeal of all anti-immigration and asylum legislation. And we must fight for the labour movement to organise all workers, British-born or migrant, legal or illegal, in resistance to this anti-working-class government.

## Defend the Harmondsworth 4!

Public meeting called by No Borders London. 7pm, Tuesday 13 November, at the Institute of Race Relations, 2-6 Leeke Street, London WC1X 9HS (near Kings Cross)

In November 2006 detainees at Harmondsworth immigration detention centre protested against conditions inside the centre and their treatment by the guards.

The centre was damaged and the detainees were moved to other detention centres and prisons.

Three detainees were charged with criminal damage and a further detainee was charged with conspiracy to cause criminal damage.

The trial of the “Harmondsworth 4” is due to start in January. This public meeting is to discuss how we can support them before, during and after the trial.

E-mail: harmondsworth4@riseup.net / noborderslondon@riseup.net

# No to war, no to the Islamic Republic!

US Vice-President Dick Cheney is reported to have thought up a clever scheme to launch an attack on Iran. In this plan, Israel will bomb an Iranian nuclear installation, Iran will respond by launching missiles at Israel, and this will serve as the pretext for an American attack.

We don't know whether there is any substance to such rumours. On one level, military action against Iran sounds implausible: could anyone really be that crazy? The commissars of US imperialism are aggressive, for sure, but they operate within a partially rational framework of "national" i.e. US ruling-class interests. Why would they want to bring down the roof on their heads, particularly after the disaster of Iraq?

On the other hand, similar considerations weighed against an invasion of Iraq in early 2003 — but the presence of George W Bush in the White House, the 9/11 attacks and the easy collapse of the Taliban regime after a couple of weeks' bombing in 2002 had strengthened the hand of the neo-con ideologues to the point where they were able to hegemonise the ruling factions.

George Bush is still in office, but only for another year. The Republican Party may well lose the next presidential election, which will mean the (in some cases demagogically anti-war) Democrats controlling the presidency, the House of Representatives and the Senate for the first time since 1994. Some neo-cons are whispering of the need for action "before it is too late". Even if they do not persuade the administration to stage a ground invasion of a country four times the size of Iraq, with three times the population, they may be able to get some form of military action, perhaps similar to the bombing campaigns against Serbia (1999) and Afghanistan.

Even limited action against could quickly

escalate into a large-scale, bloody war. As Israeli leftist Uri Avnery puts it:

*Even "smart" bombs kill people. The Iranians' first reaction to an American attack would be to close the Straits of Hormuz, the entrance to the Gulf. That would choke off a large part of the world's oil supply and cause an unprecedented world-wide economic crisis. To open the straits (if this is at all possible), the US army would have to capture and hold large areas of Iranian territory. The short and easy war would turn into a long and hard war.*

*There can be little doubt that if attacked, Iran will respond as it has promised: by bombarding Israel with the rockets it is preparing for this precise purpose. That will not endanger Israel's existence, but it will not be pleasant either.*

*...I am ready to predict with confidence: whoever pushes for war against Iran will come to regret it. Some adventures are easy to get into but hard to get out of.*

*The last one to find this out was Saddam Hussein. He thought that it would be a cake-walk — after all, Khomeini had killed off most of the officers, and especially the pilots, of the Shah's military. He believed that one quick Iraqi blow would be enough to bring about the collapse of Iran. He had eight long years of war to regret it.*

Preparing the labour movement and activists to resist war on Iran is thus a matter of urgency.

A major roadblock here is the politics which informs the leadership of the Stop the War Coalition dominated by the SWP and its erst-

*Iranian women protest for their rights*

while comrades in Respect. Instead of opposing US imperialism in the name of solidarity with workers, women, students and other democratic movements in Iran, they make pro-Islamic Republic propaganda, desperately looking for ways to excuse repression by the Ahmadijhad regime. At the recent Stop the War conference, they denounced their political critics from Iranian exile socialist groups in the most virulent terms.

The SWP's effectively pro-Islamic Republic stance not only betrays Iran's left opposition, but means support for a state with active regional imperialist ambitions of its own. No effective movement against war on Iran can be built on this basis. No to war, no to the Islamic Republic!

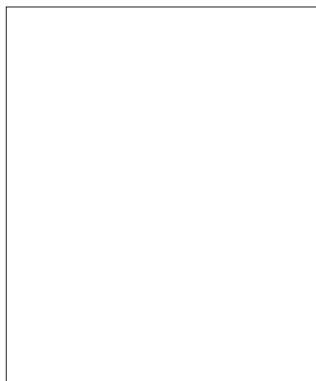
## A democratic response to the de Menezes killing

THE successful prosecution of the Metropolitan Police for negligence in the July 2005 shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes has dramatically highlighted the unaccountability of the police and the lack of democracy in the justice system.

Jean Charles de Menezes was shot dead on a London Underground train on 22 July 2005, the day after a foiled series of terrorist attacks on London and two weeks after the 7/7 bombings. Trailed by police on his trip from his home in Tulse Hill, which included two bus journeys, de Menezes was followed down the escalator at Stockwell station and shot with minimal warning by firearms officers. The Met's defence was that de Menezes had been mistaken for terrorist suspect Hussain Osman, who lived nearby.

Immediately after the killing of de Menezes, the Met were apologetic about having overseen a "tragic accident". They then embarked on a character assassination of their victim — for instance falsely claiming that de Menezes had vaulted the ticket barriers at the Tube station and run away from police operatives.

In court, the police's defence lawyer, Ronald Thwaites QC, embraced a panoply of



*Ian Blair, Met Police Commissioner*

side arguments. He told jurors at the Old Bailey that de Menezes' urine contained traces of cocaine; that he "moved in an aggressive and threatening manner", and "behaved suspiciously" in the seconds before his death; and

the QC asked rhetorically "did he fear he might have some drugs in his jacket and want to get them out and throw them away when he was challenged by the police?".

The defence used a photo-comparison of de Menezes and Hussain Osman to the jury. This was characterised by the prosecution as a cynical fabrication, the light levels and perspective having been altered to make the two men look more alike.

In the end the £3.5 million investigation and trial uncovered serious inadequacies in police planning and co-ordination. Unfortunately the guilty verdict does not mean that police powers will be curbed — the fine of £175,000 will be paid out of public funds. Leading police officials and the government, who backed up the pathetic lies and squirming away from responsibility by the Met, have washed their hands of the affair. Metropolitan Police commissioner Ian Blair will not even resign.

But the de Menezes affair is not an isolated tragedy. The failings of the police hierarchy do not lie with the aberrant individuals who lead it, but with the distribution of power and the control of violence within society. It is not just Menezes. Speeding police cars kill 40 people a

year with little comeback.

The police exist to back up the rule of the capitalist class. Anti-working class, racist and anti-youth prejudice runs throughout their hierarchy. They hold a monopoly on the legal use of violence. Crucially, for their own preservation, they are largely autonomous from democratic control. And that is why they can routinely operate "above the law".

Ian Blair's resignation might help counter the ideological weight of the police, people's belief in their neutrality. But that is all. In the here and now we need to campaign for a thorough-going democratisation of the justice system — for elected bodies to oversee the operations of the police, with the power to "open the books", to get behind police secrecy and to challenge the arbitrary use of violence.

In the early 1980s some Labour councils attempted to use Police Authorities (only partly and indirectly elected) to hold the police in check. For instance the South Yorkshire Police Authority denied the Chief Constable the right to use council money to attack pickets during the 1984-85 miners' strike. However they were stopped in their tracks when the High Court intervened on the Chief Constable's side. Ultimately the Police Authorities proved to be talking shops with no "teeth".

Justice Henriques told jurors at the Old Bailey that "the police are not above the law". But unless there are directly elected bodies that are genuinely able to hold the police to account, leading police officers, in cahoots with the government, will be under little pressure to obey even the most basic norms of justice and honesty.

[www.solidarity-online.org](http://www.solidarity-online.org)  
[solidarity@workersliberty.org](mailto:solidarity@workersliberty.org)

Editor: Cathy Nugent

# Post ballot: vote no!

From back page

In the union leadership there was a problem of illusions in the Labour government. Some people in the leadership genuinely believed that Gordon Brown was going to intervene and do something positive. I think it was a turning point in the dispute when they realised that Brown would not do that.

We haven't got an old-fashioned traditional right-wing leadership in the CWU. It is a soft-left leadership — and people with some record of leading industrial disputes.

But in this dispute they never got their heads round the political angle. I don't think there was much of a strategy, all the way through. They were dealing with things one at a time.

Billy Hayes [the CWU general secretary] doesn't want to confront the Labour government, and with Dave Ward [CWU deputy general secretary, and the leading official on the postal side] you have an industrial militant with no politics.

Things have changed in the Post Office. We're used to having a bit of action, then the management do a deal with us. But now it is different. It was a difficult dispute, no doubt about that.

In fact, on flexibility, the deal means the union agreeing to most of the imposed changes — the changed start times, the abolition of Sunday collections, and so on. I've never known an agreement with so much in it of the union agreeing to imposed changes after they've been imposed.

It couldn't have been worse if we had refused to agree and just let management try to impose those things unilaterally without union agreement.

The union leadership have separated off the pensions issue from the "Pay And Modernisation" deal (though in fact the Executive was told that it was all linked: we couldn't have the "Pay And Modernisation" deal without also agreeing the framework for the negotiations on pensions). That separation helps them, because there is a lot of anger on the pensions even from people who go along with the "Pay and Modernisation" deal.

The most honest account of the pensions deal came from Ray Ellis, the official who negotiated it. He said: it's not a good deal, but it's the best we can do with the money the Government will make available.

The leadership emphasises that you will still be able to retire at 60. But if you do, your pension will be reduced. It is not clear how much.

At present, you can retire at 60 on 50% of pensionable pay. That will go down. There may be more feeling to reject a deal on pensions than on the "Pay And Modernisation". The timetable for agreeing the details on pensions ends in January, and there will be a separate ballot on that then.

The 27 October meeting [to organise for a no vote] was organised not by me but by Dave Chapple and Pete Firmin. I think the group will reconvene. It was a good meeting, a good start, but it's still a weak formation. The people involved are all branch activists, but they are not seen in the union as key branch activists.

There isn't really a coordination of the CWU branches that are calling for a no vote. Some of the branches that are going for a no vote would be hostile to anything they saw as a left group in the union.

It's partly the long-term weakness of the left on the postal side of the union. There is a CWU Broad Left, but it's almost all on the telecom side of the union. We've been in a position for a while on the postal side where Dave Ward has a majority on the Postal Executive, and there is a weakness in the branches compared with five or ten years ago.

• cwurankandfile.wordpress.com

# Defend Karen Reissmann!

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

ON Monday 5 November psychiatric nurse and chair of the Manchester Community and Mental Health branch of UNISON, Karen Reissmann, was sacked by the local mental health trust. Karen's crime was to have spoken out publicly as a trade unionist against a reorganisation of mental health services that would have led to cuts. The four charges for which she was found guilty were:

- When she was interviewed in December 2006 and criticised the transfer of NHS work to the voluntary sector, she brought the Trust into disrepute;
- Telling people that she was suspended and what for;
- Protesting her innocence;
- Allowing the press to print information, some misleading, about her case.

This is a direct attack on the rights of trade unionists to campaign against job and

service cuts and against victimisations. The mental health workers are determined to fight both.

They have already held two three day strikes in support of Karen and from 8 November 150 workers in community mental health and crisis resolution teams will go on indefinite strike, with a further one day strike of all members of the branch scheduled.

The strike has the support of service users. At an 80 strong lunchtime rally in Manchester Town Hall, Paul Reed of the users' network said he supported the strike because users were worried that if the reorganisation went through, they would lose the regular personal attention from nurses they knew. Instead the nurses would just become "drug pushers", appearing less often just to administer medication.

Karen Reissmann deserves the support of all trade unionists. Hers will be a test case for whether we are able to oppose publicly the new regime of market-led "reforms" in

public services being pushed by the government. It will also be a test for whether UNISON and the rest of the labour movement can give effective support to that fight.

The union branch expects to be able to pay very substantial hardship pay to all strikers and will be sending delegations of strikers around the country to speak to other trade unionists and raise money. Already there have been significant promises of money from a number of branches. But more will be needed.

If you want to make a donation please send to "Manchester Community and Mental Health branch UNISON" c/o union office, Chorlton House, 70 Manchester Rd, Manchester M21 9UN.

Or if you want a speaker at your next union meeting please contact union@zen.co.uk or 07972 120 451.

A Saturday demonstration is also planned in Manchester, probably on 24 November.

• More: [www.reinstate-karen.org](http://www.reinstate-karen.org)

## CIVIL SERVICE

### Strike action halted by executive

PCS members have voted 67.6%, on a turnout of 33.6%, in favour of continuing the campaign of industrial action, but action is being frustrated by the union's national leadership.

This ballot results comes as senior civil service management offer the union talks on better procedures for dealing with "surplus staff". In addition, they have indicated that they may agree that issues such as hours and leave be determined at a civil service-wide level rather than locally as at present.

On 1 November, PCS's Socialist Party-dominated National Executive decided that in light of the talks no national strike action should be taken this year. Given that a number of departments are on the verge of issuing compulsory redundancy notices, the union requested that during the period of talks no notices be issued. This request was unsurprisingly turned down. The other side never stops fighting the class struggle, even if we do!

With the emphasis off national action, the Executive is urging local Groups (the PCS industrial sector that carry out local bargaining) to take action.

We have warned in the past that asking the Groups to take action, supposedly in support of national aims, was a mistake. Things have now got worse with the local Groups now being asked to fight over what are in essence local issues. In other words the national campaign has come to a halt.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Unison rally

ON Tuesday 6 November 1,500 council workers demonstrated outside Birmingham town hall in protest at a 'single status' pay deal which will affect 40,000 staff.

Although purportedly intended to even out pay gaps between men and women, many women and many of the lowest paid workers will be hit hardest by the new contract. Many staff will lose around £6,000 from their annual pay packets, and one admin worker will see as much as £10,000 — half of her salary — slashed.



About 5,000 people demonstrated in London on 3 November in support of the NHS, on a demonstration called by the TUC, Unison and other health unions.

The unions seem to have done very little work with local NHS campaigns: the demo was made up almost entirely of trade unionists. However, they also mobilised very few of their own members. At a time when many small towns have had thousands-strong demonstrations against NHS cuts, this was a shocking missed opportunity.

Regions and branches which have seen significant disputes or anti-cuts campaigns recently produced a disproportionately high turn-out. But the official line was that this was a "celebration" of the NHS, with the main slogan "I ♥ NHS", and no mention of cuts, privatisation or defending services.

Overall, 12 percent of council employees will suffer pay cuts, with many others forced to work longer hours for the same wages. Both these staff and workers who stand to gain from the deal attended the 6 November protests, holding placards with the slogan "shove the pay structure — shove flexibility" — it is feared that the new pay and hours are a means of softening the council up for privatisation.

But the unions at the council have promised a response to the 'single status' pay offer. Unison and Unite will be holding a mass rally on 1 December and are planning to ballot their members for strike action.

## Yes vote but no strike

THE public service union Unison's ballot of its members in local government for action to improve their 2.475% pay offer produced a small majority for action, but the union's Local Government Executive, meeting on 29 October, decided

by a large majority to accept the offer and not to call action.

According to Unison's official announcement: "The ballot closed last Friday, 26 October, and saw 144,719 valid ballot papers returned, with 74,631 members (or 51.6%) voting for action and 70,088 (48.4%) voting against. The committee... overwhelmingly voted for a statement which read: However, in all the circumstances, including the narrowness of the majority and the size of the poll, this result does not constitute the basis for viable industrial action to break the government's pay policy."

Even a small majority for action is surprising given:

(1) The official material with the ballot paper argued formally in favour of action, but put most of its emphasis on talking up the size of the concessions the employers had already made and the difficulties of action.

(2) Unison's backdown in health

(3) The CWU leaders making the postal workers' dispute peter out. The turnout is also not as low as feared, though many local government workers did fail to get ballot papers because of the postal strike.

# More testing, more tracking, more tension

BY PATRICK YARKER

At the turn of the year Labour announced a significant change to school-testing arrangements for students aged 11 and 14. Under the new scheme students are to be "tested when ready". But will the scheme solve the problem of the old tests for students and teachers — stress and demotivation and lessons which are designed to "teach to the test"?

In 2004 pressure from parents and teachers forced alterations to testing-arrangements for seven-year olds, granting primacy to teacher-assessment and giving teachers greater say in the timing and content of the National Curriculum (NC) tests their young students would face. The current changes have been implemented on the government's terms.

Under them, students will be "tested when ready" rather than at the end of a Key Stage. A student will be deemed "ready" when in their teacher's opinion the student's work indicate they have moved from their current NC level to the next-higher level. The government expects all students to move "up" by at least two levels between the ages of 7 and 11 (Key Stage 2) or between 11 and 14 (Key Stage 3).

The Government claims that the new-style tests will be shorter than current SATs, but will still allow students to show they meet the demands of the NC level they are attempting to secure. Ten local authorities have begun to pilot the new system. If the pilots are judged a success, the new arrangements will be applied across English state-schools. Sooner rather than later old-style end-of-Key-Stage SATs will go.

"Testing when ready" might seem an advance on the current increasingly-discredited system of end-of-Key Stage testing. But it will mean more tests more often, with the inevitable consequence of more test-reading, more teaching-to-the-test. Increased use of NC testing within the Key Stage (alongside a host of other data-generating tests) will confirm the subordination of teacher-assessment and strengthen the features of the current assessment-system which serve to reduce students and their manifold complexities as people and learners to numbers, grids and graphs.

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH NATIONAL CURRICULUM TESTING?

The original NC-testing regime, implemented at the beginning of the 1990s and first revised in the face of a massive teachers' boycott in 1993, has been eroded significantly over the years. "National" testing is a myth. Scotland has its own assessment system, and that in Northern Ireland is different again. Wales diverged from the English set-up in 2004, and the Channel Islands are beginning to go their own way. NC testing is a legal requirement only in England's state schools; a majority of private schools have never involved themselves in NC testing, nor does the National Curriculum apply to them.

As the yearly round of school-testing has continued, evidence has built up to indicate that the current system generates undue stress and anxiety among students and works to demotivate the lower-attaining. Testing narrows the education all students receive and involves week after week of going over old ground in preparation for the tests, rather than enabling teachers to engage students with new aspects of the curriculum.

Studies suggest that NC testing works to lower rather than raise educational standards, notwithstanding the initial surge in the proportion of students reaching given NC levels year on year. New Labour made a great deal of political capital out of this "success", claiming it vindicated their dictatorial National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, whose intention was specifically to increase test-scores. But much of

this "success" appears now to be down to better test-preparation and increased teaching-to-the-test.

Teachers have felt compelled to replace educationally-beneficial activities with such test-reading partly because test-scores are used by the media to compile "League Tables" of schools. Public perception of primary schools is importantly affected by how their students do in the KS2 tests. "League Tables" (and hence NC testing) are seen by government as essential in underpinning their agenda of so-called "parental choice", a misnomer since overwhelmingly schools select students through a range of mechanisms and at best parents can express a preference for the school they wish their child to attend.

In this environment ministers welcome the pressure "League Tables" place on schools. Along with NC testing they are supposed to drive up standards. The potential for League Tables based on students' test-performance to skew the education children receive and narrow the curriculum is recognised internationally. So powerful is it, and so detrimental to good schooling, that some countries (such as Ireland) outlaw the practice of compiling even "unofficial" League Tables of school results.

Here the government routinely rejects any criticism of the current system of League Tables, tests and centralised targets (whereby the minimum percentage of students in each school who will attain at a given NC level is established by the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and schools are required to do what is necessary to meet that target.) The system has delivered political gains for New Labour across most of the last ten years. Ministers point to large percentage rises in the proportion of students attaining at given levels in Reading or Maths test.

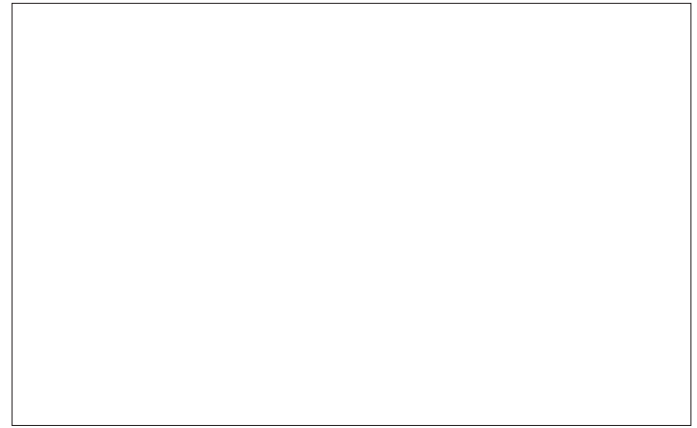
However, increases in student test-attainment now seem to have stalled, with around a fifth of eleven-year-olds over the past two years falling short of the level the government wants them to reach. This can be presented in the media as a failure of government policy. This lies behind the government's motive for changing the current system and attempting to focus attention not on the yearly cohort as a whole but on the "progress" of individual students "up" the NC levels.

## THE "PERSONALISED LEARNING" MYTH

"Testing when ready" meshes with talk about "personalised learning", spun as enabling teachers to suit the curriculum to the needs of the individual student. In reality this personalised learning will use a variety of tests to push the student into pre-determined categories ("gifted and talented", "under-achieving" etc) and construct for the student their "appropriate" trajectory through the system. (Government policy documents actually speak of "the right trajectory" for a student, as if their future learning and development were predictable on the basis of past performance in tests.)

Testing in this context is claimed to be benignly diagnostic. It will reveal student-needs and ensure that the student is on-track. You might think that this was the teacher's job, and moreover something teachers were well-placed to do since they spend the most time in sustained contact with students. But government sees teaching as mere delivery, and pays lip-service to notions of teacher-assessment while continuing to undermine it.

Policy documents require that teacher-assessment be both capable of firm translation into NC levels and directly linked to pre-stated teaching-objectives. Genuine teacher-assessment on the other hand is likely to be a less hard-edged, more complex and nuanced process, rendering a more rounded and thorough, though always provisional, account of student capabilities.



NC testing is designed to present students in accordance with predetermined norms. It makes use of the apparently "objective" nature of numerical data to give a version of the student which cannot be authoritatively countered and is regarded as summative. Students will be pigeon-holed for their school career. It seems to me unsurprising that many students feel alienated from an education-system which persists in one-sidedly telling them in no uncertain terms exactly what they are.

The re-constituted NC testing arrangements are also likely to refine and embed the hierarchising effects of NC testing. These work to label students by so-called "ability". More tests more often will reinforce not only the current widespread practice of grouping students into so-called "ability" sets, but boost calls from the Tories to return to a thorough-going "streamed" system.

The new arrangements may help underpin the "rationing" of educational opportunities, whereby scarce resources (such as teacher-time) are directed towards students who are perceived to be around the borderline of important benchmark-levels. These students are deemed to be "worth" more than others because their performance is seen as critically affecting a school's League Table position.

## AGAINST TESTING

OPPOSITION to NC testing has been stymied within the teaching-profession since the failure of the NUT's attempted boycott in 2003. Academic criticism, however, continues.

The current Primary Review, directed by Professor Robin Alexander, is the most wide-ranging and in-depth investigation into Primary Schools since the ground-breaking Plowden Report of forty years ago. More than thirty interim reports are to be published ahead of the final Report, and the first of these have begun to appear. Some of these papers re-state powerful evidence criticising NC testing. For example, they point to the persistent wide gap between high and low-attaining students, a problem known for several decades and left unremedied by New Labour's policy of tests, targets and League Tables. Further evidence of test-induced stress (some of it reported by children's charities) has been brought to light, and the government's version of what constitutes "standards" in schools again shown to be damagingly narrow.

Right-wing media elements have picked up on some of these criticisms and used them to peddle a mendacious version of contemporary primary schooling, in which students continue to be failed by "incapable" teachers and government half-heartedness. The *Sun* even claimed that because one in five children did not secure a level 4 in their KS2 Reading SAT in 2007, this means that a fifth of children are leaving Primary School unable to read!

In fact, 93% of eleven-year olds attain at Level 3 on their NC Reading test this year, indicating that they can read at least in line with expectations for nine-year olds. What some students "failed" to show in their NC test was the ability to read for inference and deduction. But that doesn't mean they might not be able to do this in other contexts.

Those disseminating the materials from the Primary Review will need to continue to make clear that primary schools are doing well by their students in a range of ways, and could do even better if government paid heed to the range of criticisms and alternatives being put forward.

The Primary Review won't conclude for another year, but already it is producing material which re-affirms the way New Labour, building on Tory ideas, has done harm at great expense to the education of school-students. Teachers continue to suffer under policy-diktats and the drive by DCSF to micro-manage classrooms.

The left has been slow, in my view, to generate and sustain an adequately integrated and compelling alternative discourse around the purposes and means of (primary/secondary) education. While important campaigning has continued in opposition to academies and trust schools, for example, and in support of Teaching Assistants as they struggle for decent pay and conditions, we have found it difficult to renew and then consolidate our version of what education is for and how it should be put into practice.

There is an urgent need to renew our challenge to the currently-dominant discourse in (school) education. This entails re-thinking for example notions of "ability" and "differentiation", for even a commitment to "mixed-ability" teaching can conceal a view of students as basically and unchangeably either bright or average or "less able".

We need also to understand the debate around "assessment for learning" and its implications for how students involve themselves in their own learning, and intervene with our own more radical and emancipatory vision of democratic education.

Almost twenty years on from the implementation of the National Curriculum we ought also to be arguing for giving curriculum development back to teachers, and re-asserting the view that teaching is not just a set of skills and competencies. There are doubtless many other areas where the left can and should be making more of the running.

The Primary Review continues. Its reports and evidence are available online. The Review's director has invited contributions. Comrades, especially those with children attending primary school, should add their views, and encourage their children to do the same.

• [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)

# Israel threatens Gaza

BY DARREN BEDFORD

ISRAELI Defence Minister and ex-Prime Minister Ehud Barak has announced that Israel is getting closer to a large-scale incursion into Gaza with "every passing day". Recent weeks have seen Gaza — which relies in the Israeli state for half of its electricity and almost all of its fuel — have its fuel supply cut, and a plan to cut off its electricity was only aborted following intervention from the Israeli Attorney General Menachem Mazouz.

This kind of collective blow, dealt out to Palestinians in Gaza as a whole, further exposes the careless brutality of the Israeli state. Mainstream NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and even the United Nations have condemned the sanctions as completely unacceptable.

Ostensibly, Israel's renewed operations and sanctions against Gaza are aimed at stopping the near-daily rocket attacks from Hamas against Israeli military positions, but actions like this will only serve to rally people behind the Islamist government in the area. Israeli peace organisation Gush Shalom commented that "with our own hands we are uniting a

million and half people against us, in bitterness and hatred".

Reports indicate that Hamas has been rearming recently and has entrenched itself in heavily populated areas, suggesting that any Israeli invasion would be a messy affair that would necessarily involve the slaughter of civilians. Already, at least four Palestinians have been killed, and more injured, by Israeli rocket strikes that have missed their targets. The heavy-handed and collective blows Israel has already dealt out to Gaza in the form of sanctions must be seen as part of its long-term, sub-imperialist project to completely subjugate and atomise the Palestinian people. The sanctions, which also prevent the transportation of certain goods in and out of Gaza, have also already led to the death of at least one man — Nemer Mohammed Salim Shuhaiber — due to being unable to access necessary medical treatment.

There are clear lines in this situation; a powerful capitalist state, backed by the biggest imperialist powers on the planet, with a first-world economy and a first-world military, is engaged in the more-or-less colonial oppression of a national group. But none of this necessitates that socialists support the Hamas government of the area or their rocket

attacks, or pretend that they represent any kind of progressive force. Hamas is a violently reactionary organisation, the majority of which remains committed to a project of destroying the Israeli-Jewish national entity by any means necessary.

Although socialists should support the right of the Palestinian people to resist Israeli occupation, including militarily, Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli military positions cannot be divorced from its reactionary religious fundamentalist project. The Israeli state's actions do not mean that Israeli-Jews, who also represent a clear national group, are somehow an illegitimate presence in the region or that they should not be entitled to national rights. The existence of organisations like Gush Shalom and large anti-occupation and anti-war demonstrations in the past, show that Israelis can be mobilised against their government and in support of the Palestinians.

Now, more than ever, socialists must look to a "third camp" in Israel/Palestine. This does not mean some point of equidistance between the Israeli military and Hamas, and it is not to imply that the forces in that conflict are in some way matched or equivalent. The third camp in Israel/Palestine is that of working-class, democratic and radical organisa-

tions on both sides that want to support the Palestinian people on the basis of democracy and independence without wanting to threaten the national rights of Israeli-Jews. It is only that camp that offers fundamental hope for the future. Only that camp can unite Palestinian and Israeli workers on a basis that can push the conflict beyond "solutions" based on ceasefires and geographical carve-ups between reactionary forces on both sides. That camp is currently weak; our job is to strengthen it.

Alternative focuses for "campaigning" — consumer-focused actions like boycotts or perhaps marching through London waving "we are all Hezbollah" placards (as some leftists did when Israel attacked Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006) — are political blind alleys, nurturing reactionary forces and potentially bolstering to the ideology of anti-semitism. They also offer absolutely nothing in terms of practical support to the innocent Palestinians at the sharp end of Israel's belligerence.

As Ehud Barak cries crocodile tears for the consequences of the re-invasion of Gaza that he may sanction, the labour movement internationally must redouble its efforts to positively support the Palestinian people.

## Osanloo and Madadi receive long jail sentences

BY PABLO VELASCO

Two leaders of the Iranian bus workers' union have been given long prison sentences for "acting against national security", according to reports from Iran.

Mansour Osanloo, the president of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Vahed Company was sentenced to five years' imprisonment for "propaganda against the system and acting against national security", while Ebrahim Madadi, the vice-president was sent down for two years for "acting against national security".

Parvaneh Osanloo, Mansour Osanloo's wife vowed to fight these unjust sentences. She said that doctors had recommended six weeks to three months of medical care and complete rest for her husband after his emergency eye surgery. However Evin prison's general ward environment is not hygienic and sanitised and there is no proper facility for sick prisoners.

She said that Osanloo has already been in jail for about 13 months in total, but didn't know if this period was going to be considered. She added that judiciary authorities do not listen to lawyers and Osanloo's lawyers did not have full access to his file. Mansour Osanloo has been facing numerous charges and different files have been opened against him.

Parvaneh Osanloo added that when Osanloo was kidnapped and taken to Evin prison, a new file with additional charges were opened against him. Those charges were withdrawn, although there might still be other opened files.

Protest via the LabourStart website at [www.labourstart.org](http://www.labourstart.org)

## Workers against the Saudi regime

Yayha al Faihi fled Saudi Arabia in 2002 after he was sacked from his job with British Aerospace for trying to organise a workers' meeting to discuss new contracts. He has continued the struggle for workers' rights in Saudi Arabia ever since. Sacha Ismail spoke to him at a Socialist Youth Network demonstration coinciding with the state visit of Saudi King Abdullah.

Can you tell us about your campaigning?

I have continued to campaign peacefully for workers' rights. What Saudi workers want is the right to negotiate - but the regime will not even grant this. They have no interest whatsoever in granting any workers' rights.

Do you have contacts inside Saudi Arabia?

I maintain links with worker activists inside the country, through internet chat rooms, for instance. It is very difficult, but we do what we can, mostly just distributing information. Recently the Saudi minister of labour abolished Article 75 of the Saudi labour code, which provided some job security. The powers of this article have been broken up among other articles, making them much weaker. It will be easier to sack workers; employers will be able to say, do as well tell you or starve.

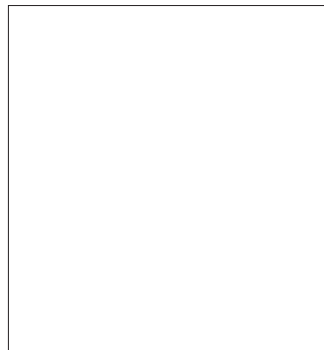
Yet most Saudi workers are not even aware this has happened. We are trying to let them know.

Are your contacts native Saudi or migrant workers?

Saudis. Migrant workers are in an even more difficult situation. But I have been encouraging my contacts to try to contact and organise migrant workers, from places like Pakistan, the Philippines and Africa. The situation in Saudi is very bad; elsewhere in the Gulf, things are more liberal and you hear of protests. In UAE, recently, there was a strike of migrant workers over immigration regulations and work conditions. But in Saudi Arabia there is no space at all.

What other issues do workers in Saudi Arabia face?

One very important issue is healthcare. If a worker gets sick and needs a major operation, he will often be sent home and his contract terminated. If anything bigger than basic medicine is required, employers will not want to pay it. And in Saudi Arabia you have to pay for healthcare - despite the oil wealth. 90% of national income goes to 10% of the population.



King Abdullah recently came to Britain on a state visit

How do you feel about King Abdullah's visit to Britain?

No matter who is in power in Britain, this special relationship continues. They call it a "healthy relationship", but that is the exact opposite of the truth. It is a disgrace.

What is the attitude of young people in Saudi Arabia?

Some students have tried to organise meetings in their universities, but they face the same problems as workers. It is very difficult for youth to do anything. You must

remember that Saudis are generally very ignorant of their rights, or in some cases have greedy, individualistic attitudes. But the main thing is the repression. When I lived in Swansea, I used to attend the branch meetings of the Socialist Party every week. If workers tried to do something like that in Saudi Arabia, the emergency rooms would be full of mutilated bodies! There is a regime of terror.

What support have you had from the British trade union movement?

I have had lots of contact. But so far people have not done much. I am not too critical: people face a lot of pressure, and British workers have their own problems to fight. But you should understand that what is happening in Saudi Arabia is a catastrophe. We need a broad perspective, internationalism.

What should activists in Britain do?

Be more ambitious. Rail workers in Wales, London and elsewhere have said they will take action in support of Saudi workers. I hope this will go ahead. British has the greatest trade union movement in the world, and Saudi workers need its support.

For a longer interview with Yahya, see [www.workersliberty.org/node/5101](http://www.workersliberty.org/node/5101)  
To contact Yahya e-mail [workers\\_cry\\_saudi@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:workers_cry_saudi@yahoo.co.uk)

## NO SWEAT ANNUAL GATHERING 2007

It's time again for the No Sweat annual gathering, taking place on 1-2 December. This year the theme is "beating big brand exploitation", with the following sessions:

- Red Politics or Product Red? How to Take on Exploitation (Discussion)
- Taking on Water Privatisation and Child Labour in India (Slideshow and talk by Richard Whittle, author and activist)
- China the Olympics and Human and Workers Rights (Discussion with TUC, Amnesty International & Playfair)
- Christmas High Street Campaigning (Ideas and planning with No Sweat & Labour Behind the Label)
- London Olympics and Workers' Rights (UNITE construction worker activist speaks)
- Migrant Workers Speak (GMB & UNITE migrant worker activists tell their story)
- Iran on the Brink (Discussion, Iranian activists share their perspectives)
- The Corporate Plunder of Iraq (Film and discussion with Iraqi trade unionist and anti privatisation activist)
- Black Gold (Film showing and discussion)

The event is being held Saturday 1 and Sunday 2 December at the T&G building, 128 Theobalds Road, nr. Holborn Tube, central London. Tickets for one day cost £6/£3 concs, or £10/£5 for the whole weekend. For more information on the agenda and to book tickets see [www.nosweat.org.uk](http://www.nosweat.org.uk)

# France: students occupy, strikes from 13 November

BY ED MALTBY

**F**RENCH students are uniting with workers to organise a mass opposition to President Sarkozy's offensive on health, pensions, asylum seekers, the right to strike and education (see *Solidarity* 3-119).

Since the end of October mass meetings have been held at more than twenty universities all over the France. Almost all of these meetings have voted for a programme of direct action in support of workers on strike against the government's reforms. Students are calling for the repeal of recent laws on education funding and foreign students.

Numerous universities have been occupied, including Paris-Tolbiac and Rouen, with administrative offices blockaded at Dijon.

The movement is calling for the repeal of the Law on the Autonomy of Universities (LRU), which is the government's agenda of privatisation-by-stealth in Higher Education. The LRU concentrates power in the hands of university directors, encouraging them to operate like CEOs, and increases their power to bypass the elected university council on issues like hiring and firing staff, opening and closing departments and laboratories, and deciding on sources of funding. Democratic bodies in

universities are reduced in size and undermined by the law.

At the same time, the government is encouraging universities to compete for funding from private enterprises.

Finally, the government has increased the emphasis on universities being first and foremost providers of skilled workers for industry.

The law was voted on and passed very quickly over the summer holidays, to try to avoid student mobilisation against it. Unfortunately the largest student union, UNEF has essentially agreed to everything in the law. The bureaucrats in charge of UNEF are terrified of another mass struggle like the CPE movement breaking out, and are determined to nip grassroots student activity in the bud.

The organising work has therefore been left to radical activist networks, smaller unions and revolutionary groups like the LCR. Even without involvement from UNEF, the national student co-ordination in Toulouse on the 30 October attracted delegations from 21 universities. Even at this early stage in the movement ordinary students are attending mass meetings and voting for radical action in their hundreds.

But the government is on the offensive too. Many universities have been pre-emptively shut by ministers, and student activists are

students from organising, and attempts were being made to reopen it... These announcements were met with great cheers. Vague news from the provinces was also read out, but reports were still confused and uncertain.

Wider issues were discussed as well — how students had to support striking workers. As one student from Tolbiac put it "we must warm up the room for the railway workers!"

While anarchists spoke about the need to create communal kitchens in the university and devise impregnable barricades, to allow for a longer occupation, socialists stressed the need to descend into the streets to march and picket alongside workers.

Towards the end of the meeting, a bloc of about thirty students opposed to the assembly arrived to take part in the vote at the end. They made no arguments or interventions from the floor...

The vote was taken: 250 voted for, and 70 against a strike.

Many students were taken aback at the speed



*Railworkers were among those who participated in the 18 October strikes across France*

subject to more arrests and more aggressive police intervention than was seen during the CPE.

The movement which is currently underway in universities is unlikely to be an isolated

student affair. The need for student-worker unity is at the forefront of the minds of students, who are turning out in droves to support picket lines and union demonstrations, in particular the last big one on the 18 October. "This is not just our revolutionary socialists being optimistic", a young member of the LCR told me, "in the general assemblies, students with no activist background are talking about the need to support the strikes. After the CPE, people understand how important it is."

It looks like student general assemblies directing actions, of university occupations and blockades of the transport system, could now be used to support a major strike wave which is brewing for the coming month. For the first time, a "reconductible" strike (where workplaces hold general assemblies every evening to vote on whether to continue the strike the following day) has been declared by the union leaders in transport on 13 November, and in several other industries, including teaching and local government unions for 20 November. Labour movement activists are talking about 2007 being a replay of the events of the 1995 strikes and the 2006 student movement all in one go, with students and railway workers leading the way!

## Wednesday 7 November

**I**HAVE just returned from two successive occupations of Parisian universities. On Wednesday night a general assembly was held in a large lecture theatre in the Sorbonne (Paris IV). Around 300 students were in attendance, in a huge wood-panelled room with a grand piano in the corner, and remained in session for around three hours. As students filed into the university from the street, they were all checked by security guards. There had been security and police posted on the door for some days, and the authorities had been reminding leading activists from the CPE movement, via email, that they were being watched.

The meeting (amid great noise throughout, frequently interrupted by applause, cheers and raucous heckling) heard reports of action from other campuses in Paris were heard: Paris VIII had voted to blockade on Thursday, Paris I (Tolbiac, the historically most radical faculty) had been closed by the administration to prevent

of the proceedings — that after only one large general assembly the faculty was to be occupied. Many commented that it was too soon. I raised this charge with one of the leading unionists, who agreed that it was a small, rather silly action, but that a strike had after all been voted for, that this blockade would help to make propaganda for building another, larger general assembly later, and that the authorities wouldn't have the will or the resources to take serious action against the participants.

The crowd reassembled for a smaller meeting where a plan was arrived at — to create a media buzz by provoking the administration to close the Sorbonne for a short period on Wednesday, before leaving en masse to support the expected occupation of Tolbiac, which was judged to be important for student morale nationally. To this end, banners were hung out of windows, and several tons of classroom furniture was piled up in the central courtyard. The strikers were ejected by the CRS at about 11 o'clock with no arrests...

# Life underground for a Pakistani socialist

BY FAROOQ TARIO, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE LABOUR PARTY PAKISTAN

**O**N 3 November 2007 I was in Toba Tek Singh, a city around four hours from Lahore, attending a preparation meeting for our fourth national conference due to be held in the city on 9-11 November.

On hearing the emergency has been declared I decided to travel to Lahore (where I live). This was against the background of my three arrests in three months and 23 days spent in jails and police stations. The Labour Party Pakistan has become a target for the military regime because of our active participation in the lawyers' movement. Several comrades have been arrested.

As I arrived in Lahore I heard that police had raided my house and were looking for me. My partner Shahnaz Iqbal told me that I was not home and would not be at home because I know that I would be arrested.

I was given a few mobile phone SIMs and was advised not to use my regular mobile number.

All of the private television channels were off the air. There was only official television, broadcasting the official propaganda.

After midnight, General Musharraf came on the official television... with his usual demagoguery about the national interest and "Pakistan first". He told us that he has removed the chief justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan because his decisions have

promoted terrorism and suicidal attacks in Pakistan... [The truth is] he had imposed the emergency rules to prolong his power period and to avoid the Supreme Court decision that might be against him.

Next day ... I put on my regular mobile telephone, forgetting that I am underground. There was immediately a call from a friend and I replied to him. This was a mistake.

I was told by my friend to change my location immediately. I went to a park three kilometres away from where I was staying and spoke to some comrades on my new telephone and discussed the political situation. I called my family. My daughter and son asked me not to come home and told me that they are okay.

A meeting of the Joint Action Committee for People's Rights was called at the office of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan to discuss a strategy to oppose the dictatorial measures. The chairperson of the Commission Asma Jahangir was already detained at her house. Her office called me to tell the comrades to come for the meeting. I told them I would not be there and that if the police saw me they would immediately arrest me.

Khalid Malik, director of the Labour Education Foundation, and Azra Shad, chairperson of the Women Workers Help Line, were among around 70 people who went to this meeting. Comrades who were a little late for the meeting saw police everywhere around the HRC office. They contacted

people inside on the phone to tell them to be ready for the arrests. So the laziness of three comrades saved them from being arrested!

Police went inside and broke the doors. They asked women to leave and men to stay to be arrested. They were all bundled away to the nearest police station.

This incident shows the intensity of the police brutality and the [goal of the] military regime to silence any opposition voice. It was the first time since the establishment of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan office in 1986 that police have entered the building. It was considered to be a safe place and that police would not dare to enter.

In the evening I made another mistake on my regular telephone. Bad habits die hard. I spoke to a journalist from a private TV channel about the arrests. I immediately realised my mistake and left where I was to stay at another one for the evening. As I arrived at the new place I received a call around 11.30pm that police had entered my home and looked for me everywhere. The next morning my partner told me the police had come with some intelligence officers in plain clothes. They ordered her to open the door. When police entered my home, only my daughter (13), son (7) and my partner Shahnaz were at home. The police opened every room, cupboards, bathroom, and went to the rooftop. They were desperate to arrest me.

I was upset after hearing the news but did not call home for security reasons. It was

hard, but I had to be patient, I was told by my friends.

Today is Monday. We have decided to bring out the weekly paper *Workers' Struggle* on time and today was the last day of the paper production. We did not work at the usual office of the paper. We brought the equipment, computer and printer and so on, to a new place to work together.

We five together worked on the paper. I wrote the main article... I used a new telephone line to hear about the arrests of lawyers all over the country. More than 700 have been arrested. Police entered the Lahore High Court building for the first time in history and arrested the lawyers after severely beating them up. I was writing about a new history of police atrocities under a military dictatorship.

We decided to fight back against the military regime and to organise the movement. It was agreed that I will not come out in the open but will be active in organising the movement until my arrest at my post. We will not accept the dictatorial measures, we will organise demonstrations and will ask comrades to be ready for more arrests.

Here I am sitting in an internet cafe at 6pm to write this. I had to travel over 20 kilometers to reach my place for this evening.

**More information email**  
labourpartypk@yahoo.com, or visit  
www.laborpakistan.org or  
www.jeddojuh.com

National Union of Students calls special conference within next month to shut down democracy

# We need student unions which fight!

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND (NUS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE, PC)

ON Sunday 4 November, a meeting was held at Birkbeck College in London to launch a united campaign against the attacks on democracy included in the "Governance Review" of the National Union of Students. Attended by 50 student activists and student union officers — including members of Education Not for Sale, Workers' Liberty, the SWP, Socialist Students, the Young Greens, and a variety of independents — the meeting discussed the nature of the attacks within the context of years of NUS inaction and mismanagement, began to plan a campaign against them, and elected a steering committee to take things forward.

ENS members proposed that our statement, advocating a vision for the student movement and positive proposals as well as defensive slogans, be adopted by the campaign. With the SWP having mobilised a fairly large number of their members for the meeting, that was voted down 14-24 with eight abstentions. The SWP is sticking to the idea that positive proposals will endanger the fight to defeat the Governance Review — missing two key points.

Firstly, the campaign as a whole adopting a particular platform does not mean that people have to agree with every dot and comma to work with it — as anyone who has ever been involved in any sort of activism knows. Even if they don't put their name to a particular statement, no one opposed to the Governance Review proposals is going to vote in favour of them on the grounds that they disagree with some aspects of the campaign against.

Secondly, and more fundamentally, it is clear that we cannot run an effective campaign unless we tell the truth about NUS's current shortcomings. For the leadership to be able to present opponents of the Governance Review as essentially conservative would be fatal. In particular, we do not mobilise any significant number of student activists if we fail to make clear that we are not defending the status quo.

The meeting adopted the slogans "Defend NUS democracy", "Defeat the Governance Review" and "For a democratic, campaigning NUS". While we came up with the last of these and thus welcome its adoption, we would make the point that it needs to be filled with some definite content — since, after all, no one in NUS would disagree on paper with the need for it to be democratic and campaigning.

We will continue to work within the campaign, arguing against a purely defensive stance, for a positive vision and for concrete demands to win a democratic, campaigning, political NUS. ENS supporters Sofie Buckland (NUS NEC) and Daniel Randall (NUS NEC member 2005-2006) were elected to the steering committee, as were a number of others who have worked closely with ENS. Steering committee meetings will be open to all activists to attend and speak at, and we hope to be able to publicise the first one soon.

As the meeting heard from Dan Swain of NUS Steering Committee (in effect NUS's conference arrangements committee), it is certain that an Extraordinary Conference to push through the cuts will now go ahead, since the right-wing majority on the NUS Executive will have little difficulty getting the requisite 25 member unions to call one, although so far only seven requests have been formally made. The Conference will take place on 29 November or 4, 5 or 6 December. The immediate focus for student activists is now to pass motions in their unions mandating delegates to vote against the review, and to get themselves delegated if they can. We will demand that unions that have not yet had their elections hold a cross-campus ballot to elect delegates. We need just over a third of the vote to reject the constitutional changes.

For activists at universities where getting delegated or passing motions will be difficult (because of right-wing or inactive students' unions, for example), resisting the review will involve educating people on your campus about what it means for NUS and organising from

ground-up to exert pressure — for instance by holding open meetings, collecting signatures on the ENS-launched statement, circulating information among campaigning societies, writing articles for student newspapers and websites, and holding demonstrations and actions to mobilise activists and put pressure on your union executive.

Although the focus of the NUS democracy campaign is on persuading delegates and student union officers of the immediate need to vote against the proposals, a real campaign to defend and extend NUS's democratic structures must draw in ordinary students not already involved in their (often moribund) students' unions. We shouldn't miss this opportunity to communicate to a wider layer of people the need for a democratic, fighting union that actually wins for students, and we mustn't mirror the tactics of NUS's rightwing by ignoring student activists on the ground.

What you can do:

- Sign the statement in opposition to the Governance Review changes, the Extraordinary Conference and for a democratic, campaigning NUS — see [www.free-education.org.uk/?p=397](http://www.free-education.org.uk/?p=397)
- Get delegated to the Extraordinary Conference and to next year's annual conference by running in your SU elections, or demanding your SU holds elections for the Extraordinary Conference if it doesn't plan to

- Putting a motion to your SU to oppose the Review — see the ENS website for model motions
- Holding a meeting on your campus — get in touch for a speaker
- Circulating the ENS statement as a petition among activists, campaigning groups to raise awareness of the changes

**For help or more information get in touch with Sofie Buckland, [sofie.buckland@nus.org.uk](mailto:sofie.buckland@nus.org.uk)**

ALTHOUGH ENS welcomes the launch of a united campaign against the Governance Review, we have some concerns about the behaviour of the SWP

comrades and others at the launch meeting. Despite spending much of the day talking about the need for a broad campaign (as a defence of their position that the campaign should have no positive proposals for NUS democracy), the SWP-led majority voted down the nominations of Communist Students and Socialist Students comrades to the steering committee in a shockingly sectarian manoeuvre. (Their leadership also opposed the election of ENS supporter Daniel Randall, but many SWP members broke ranks and voted for him anyway, so he got on.)

The justification from Rob Owen, the SWP member on the NUS Executive, that such groups represent nothing in NUS, is demonstrably false in the case of Socialist Students. In any case, it is proved spurious by the SWP's support for two members of the tiny, Stalinist Student Broad Left group being elected to the committee. SBL only weakly oppose the review, failed to vote against the entire document on the NUS executive, and in the case of NUS Black Students' Officer Ruqayyah Collector, who was a member of the review board, failed to raise the alarm while it was being put together.

Do the SWP think them worth having on board because they too support the position of a purely defensive campaign, and because they will be a reliable ally against ENS, if not against the NUS right-wing? And wasn't the exclusion of socialist opponents motivated purely by sectarian factional vitriol?

Despite repeated attempts by ENS to meet with Rob Owen to discuss a democratic structure for the open meeting (which he had agreed at the ENS gathering on 21 October), Rob cancelled the planned meeting and blocked any discussion until two and half days before 4 November, when he sent out an agenda and proposed slate to ENS convenor Sofie Buckland and the Young Green's Aled Dilwyn Fisher.

The agenda had no ENS speaker in the planning session (later changed at the last minute after we protested) and no process for submitting motions, counter proposals or alternative nominations for the committee.

This led to a farce towards the end of the meeting, with the SWP chair Alys Elica Zaerin claiming the ENS proposal to adopt our statement was countered not, rather than an addition to the SWP's (bland but mostly acceptable) motion on the activity of the campaign, and that people couldn't vote for both. After twenty minutes ridiculous wrangling over the order of voting and which proposals constituted amendments, the SWP successfully defeated both our amendments — for the steering committee to draft a motion agreeable to all rather than accepting the outdated and politically lacking one from "Respect", and for the ENS statement to be political basis for the campaign. Of course, it is not unreasonable for the majority of meeting to vote for their own views; it is their procedural methods that we object to.

Perhaps worst of all was the process of elections for the committee, in which additions to Rob's slate of ten had to gain a majority of the whole room to get elected — which is how the SWP were easily able to exclude Communist Students and Socialist Students, especially after five extra SWP members turned up right at the end of meeting purely in order to vote.

Meanwhile ENS and other comrades who very politely asked SBL member Ruqayyah Collector to confirm her political affiliation when standing for the committee were accused of witch-hunting (!); we hope this isn't an indication that the campaign will be closed to political honesty and debate.

ENS welcomes the launch of the campaign, and will continue to work within it, pushing positive demands as well as opposing the review. We raise these criticisms in the spirit of political openness, not as a sectarian attack, and we hope SWP comrades will respond. Meanwhile we argued for and won open steering meetings, where anyone can attend, speak and put proposals (though only the elected committee will vote), and hope that currents on the NUS left who were excluded from the committee will attend these meetings and continue to work within the campaign.

# Labour and union left debate

BY RHODRI EVANS

ALTHOUGH "RE-LAUNCH to achieve workers' representation" — that is what supporters of *Solidarity* will be arguing at the conference of the Labour Representation Committee on 17 November.

The Bournemouth Labour Party conference decision to ban motions from unions and local Labour Parties at future conferences completed a full shut-down of the Labour Party's living political link of accountability to the labour movement. It has forced every socialist who has taken the life of the Labour Party seriously — and every socialist should have done, because for over a hundred years the life of the Labour Party had been the centre of the political life of the British working class — to reassess.

*Solidarity* supporters will argue that the LRC should "start to work as a broader Workers' Representation Committee" and appeal to other socialists to join in creating "an axis to bring about re-composition in the socialist and labour movement".

Straight away, in the months up to the 2008 union conferences, the LRC must campaign in the unions to reverse the Bournemouth decision. Looking further ahead, it should "campaign to win Trades Councils to join in the formation of local workers' representation committees, as local affiliates of the Labour Representation Committee... Local committees will be encouraged to adopt a flexible approach, utilising whatever means available, to secure working-

class political representation".

We will also argue for the LRC to back the initiative by the rail union RMT for an independent working-class slate in next year's London mayor and GLA election, if the RMT goes ahead with it.

The conference will hear other views. John McDonnell, who challenged for Labour Party leader to succeed Tony Blair, is the Labour MP most active in the LRC, which also has the affiliation of five trade unions (CWU, ASLEF, Bakers; RMT, which has been expelled from the Labour Party; FBU, which disaffiliated) and many union branches.

Like us, he believes a change of direction is necessary. He has written: *The vote to close down democratic decision making at the Labour party conference... demonstrated that the old strategy is largely over...*

*The Left has the difficult task of accepting and explaining to others that the old routes into the exercise of power and influence involving internal Labour Party mobilisations and manoeuvres have largely been closed down. We have to face up to the challenge of identifying and developing new routes...*

But for "new routes" he proposes, to put it unkindly, a sort of "hippy syndicalism". *New social movements have mobilised on a vast array of issues ranging from climate change, asylum rights, to housing and arms sales...*

*The Left needs to open itself to co-operation with progressive campaigns... The main politi-*

*cal parties are increasingly seen as irrelevant... There is an opportunity for exciting, frenetic activity capable of creating a climate of progressive hegemony which no government could immunise itself from no matter how ruthlessly it closes down democracy in its own party.*

So we don't need political parties any more? So workers should renounce any idea of having our own party which can create a workers' government, and instead aim no higher than "creating a climate" to restrain hostile governments?

McDonnell gets the term "hegemony" from the 1920s/30s Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci, the agency for socialist hegemony was the revolutionary party, "the Modern Prince", leading the workers, who in turn would lead other oppressed social groups and layers. But for McDonnell, diffuse movements can lead the party?

Of course mobilisations like the anti-global-warming camp at Heathrow in August are important. The trouble with McDonnell's argument is that it can de-focus the LRC from the specific work which it (and at present no other body) can do in the unions, and leave LRC supporters in the local Labour Parties just joggling along with no perspective other than waiting for "progressive" gas emissions from diffuse campaigns to warm them.

Socialist Appeal (a splinter of the old Militant Tendency) wants the Labour left to continue after Bournemouth exactly as before. Its latest



# Abortion review Liberalisation... but without strings!

## Get out on the streets!

Laura Rogers and Rebecca Galbraith sent a longer version of this letter to the Abortion Rights campaign

**O**N Saturday 20 October we went to Parliament Square expecting to be part of a counter-demonstration to the anti-abortion, anti-women rally; instead we were the demonstration. Where were you? Abortion Rights, as the biggest, best supported, "official" pro-choice campaign, it's time to up the fight!

On Saturday religious reactionaries and anti-abortionists were moved to mobilise 1000 people to commemorate the passing of the 1967 Abortion Act. Their "funeral march" for the six million pregnancies terminated since, showed the most grotesque lack of respect and empathy for ordinary women everywhere and an outrageous ignorance of the real choices we may all have to face. That this went unchallenged is shameful.

This anniversary should be our platform for change; it is unbelievable that the opportunity has not been fully taken to defend and extend women's rights. The result of Abortion Rights' decision not to organise public demonstrations means that in the fortieth anniversary year there was only one pro-choice demonstration — a 300 strong march organised by Education Not for Sale Women and Feminist

Fightback. If Abortion Rights, with its affiliated trade union or student organisations, had either supported this march or called one of its own, it would certainly have been larger. Where is this pro-choice majority that Abortion Rights claims so proudly to hold? Why were only two people present on Saturday to support the millions of women who have made a legitimate choice?

By including Tory MPs on your platform you are forced to fight a politically self limiting campaign. This kind of campaign cannot raise the demands necessary to provide working class women with a true choice. To call for a living wage, publicly funded childcare and a strong NHS is neither extreme nor radical — it just doesn't fit with a Tory agenda. Your campaign is not only quiet it is cowardly.

Our presence should be in the hospitals, in the schools and in the streets of our local communities. Abortion Rights you should be organising a high profile, militant campaign to assert our rights to choose. We want a national demonstration to rival that organised by the National Abortion Campaign, forerunners of Abortion Rights in 1979, that mobilised 60,000 people. We want pickets, counter-actions, a real fight. It is time not only to defend the rights of women already won, but to make some progressive, positive demands of our own.

to put their names to the report. Their Minority Report contradicted the majority findings and put forward a series of what amount to anti-choice, anti-women policies. Dorries and Spink accuse the Science and Technology Select Committee of being "hijacked" by "powerful vested interests" in the "abortion industry". Their response is a reminder of the kind of views held by some "members of the house".

Thirdly although the review does not advocate a reduction in the time limit, it does nothing to advocate an increase in the accessibility of abortions for women after 14 weeks.

The British Medical Association, who gave evidence to the committee, warned that "changes in relation to first trimester abortion should not adversely impact upon the availability of later abortions." But Dr Vincent Argent, who gave evidence to the select committee, has proposed on Radio Four to make the abortion law more liberal under 16 weeks, but tougher there after. While he was not calling for an overall reduction in the time limit, he was recommending that the only proviso for abortions after 16 weeks should be "grave risk to physical or mental health" of the woman, i.e. no so called "social reasons".

Many of the circumstances in which women seek late abortions would be ruled out: women who don't know they are pregnant, who think they are menopausal, who are too frightened to acknowledge their pregnancy any earlier, or whose circumstances drastically change. However, Argent also said that agencies such as the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, or other, more expensive, private agencies may still provide abortions in these circumstances. As far as he was concerned if private clinics want to do late abortions, fine, their choice, but screw everyone who can't access this or pay!

This approach backs up the nasty political consensus already in place. Already the NHS does not often do late abortions. Doctor Argent was frank about the fact that many NHS doctors already refuse abortions after 14 weeks and that many hospitals have arbitrary cut off points at 18, 16 or even 14 weeks. Some people will be willing to go along with this consensus

in exchange for the liberalisation of early abortions; it will hit hardest at the most vulnerable.

Finally while the call to allow "suitably trained and experienced nurses and midwives" to carry out abortions makes a lot of sense, there are criticisms of how it will be implemented. The development of Early Medical Abortion allows for an easily-administered procedure. Increasingly its availability could help cut down the damaging wait that many women currently have to suffer. But the situation is complex. Nurses are often best-placed to deliver person-centred care to patients. But nurses should not be left vulnerable to exploitation. The new service should not be approached as a money-saving scheme for the NHS. It needs adequate investment in training and support.

The early abortion recommendations do not address the problem of finding doctors who are willing to deliver late abortions; nor do they do anything to alleviate the current injustice of the "NHS postcode lottery" where a woman's access to an abortion is dependent on her geographical location. We cannot just fight on the basis of legalities; with the increasing privatisation of the NHS there are no guarantees of service provision or accessibility.

**• If you want to get involved in organising direct action please come along to the Feminist Fightback planning meeting on Sunday 9 December. For more details please see [www.feministfightback.org.uk](http://www.feministfightback.org.uk).**

On 3 March Education Not for Sale Women held a torchlit demonstration for abortion on demand

BY REBECCA GALBRAITH

**O**N 29 October the Commons Science and technology committee published a review of the 1967 Abortion Act. They made three main recommendations:

- Upholding the 24 week time limit for abortion;
- Removing the need for women seeking an abortion to get two doctor's signatures;
- Allowing nurses to perform first trimester abortions.

Around the review there had been a drive by the anti-abortion lobby and a small handful of highly vocal MPs, mainly men, mostly Tories, to chip away at abortion rights. They will not be pleased with these recommendations.

An end to the "two doctors' signatures" clause and the implied improvement in accessibility of early abortions are especially positive move forwards for women. However, there is still a lot to fight for.

First of all there is no guarantee that the majority of MPs will concur with the review's

women's liberation! The findings of this review will be used to inform MPs debating an amendment to the 1967 Abortion Act, as part of the Human Tissues and Embryos Bill. The committee ruled out examination of ethical or moral issues surrounding abortion time limits, saying it would take evidence on new medical interventions and techniques that may increase the chances of survival of premature infants. This reduces the argument surrounding time-limits to one of "foetal viability"; the rights of the woman remain unacknowledged. If medical advances meant, for instance, that a foetus was viable at 16 weeks our position should not change, an abortion at 16 weeks and beyond should still be a woman's right.

And the report itself states, "Because we recognise what the science and medical evidence can tell us is only one of the many factors that are taken into account when legislating on this issue, we have not made any recommendations as to how MPs should vote." Social, ethical and moral issues will certainly not be excluded from the main debate; the pro-

choice movement cannot delude itself that there is a significant contingent of MPs feminist in ethics or morality.

And was much controversy within the committee itself, culminating with two Tory MPs, Nadine Dorries and Bob Spink, refusing

redoubles their efforts when they forget their aim". Graham Bash would have us act that way, but with much less than fanatical energy. The aim was to turn the structures of working-class accountability in the Labour Party against the leadership? To make the Labour Party, or least a large part of it, a vehicle for working-class representation? That road is closed, says Bash. What then? Why, continue the same perfunctory efforts, and redouble the condemnations of those who try something more energetic!

*None of this should be read as a call to leave the Labour Party and make yet another attempt to form a socialist sect...*

Graham Bash recommends a call for "a real, broad-based party of Labour, democratic and accountable in its structures and capable of representing all those that are struggling against New Labour..."

A call on whom, by whom? Who will drive forward and organise round this "call"? In the current subdued state of the unions, no-one can suppose that a new party will emerge instantly merely by being "called for". It will have to be fought for, and over a fairly long period. Don't we need the socialists to organise into an active

recommendations; it is possible that the already limited access to late abortions will become further restricted in exchange for a more liberal approach to earlier abortions.

Second the committee's brief was to do with science — it had no mandate to look at the issue in terms of women's choice, let alone

editorial says exactly the same thing as it has been saying for decades: *Labour needs a Socialist programme including nationalisation of the banks and financial institutions and the nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy under workers' control and management. The first task is to reclaim the Labour Party.*

So oblivious is Socialist Appeal that it hasn't even carried a report or a website comment on the Bournemouth decision, let alone an assessment of it. Nor did it noticeably campaign against the rule-change in advance of Bournemouth.

*Labour Left Briefing* is a bit less oblivious. Its editor Graham Bash has written: *Bournemouth 2007 may well turn out to be a decisive moment in the degeneration of the Labour Party... It marked "the end of the remaining structures of accountability in the party".* Bash cited, without demur, Alan Simpson's assessment of the change as "irreversible". It has "fundamentally undermined the capacity of the Labour Party to be a vehicle for working class representation..."

Try something else? Not Graham. A fanatic, wrote George Santayana, is "a person who

# ates Bournemouth

# How India threw off British rule

The following text is a speech by Sacha Ismail given at Workers' Liberty's London forum on "Sixty years since Indian independence". The other speaker was Sarbjit Johal from South Asia Solidarity, see [www.southasiasolidarity.org](http://www.southasiasolidarity.org)

THE BBC, the Mayor of London, museums, schools, many parts of the establishment, are commemorating the 60th anniversary of Indian independence, but in their own way — basically by celebrating the cultural commodities of present day India. This is both a boon to bourgeois New Labour-style "multiculturalism" and, with India becoming one of the world's most important economies, a smart business decision. The left and the labour movement need to have something different to say.

India is a country of hundreds of millions of people that for more than a century was exploited and oppressed by the ruling class of our country, with the support or acquiescence of at least a section of the working class too. The story of its people's struggle for independence, and of the Indian workers and peasants who fought within that struggle for social as well as national liberation, is an inspiration; it is a vital part of international working-class history, not least for the British working class. Understanding this story is crucial to understanding the class struggles of South Asia today.

## HOW BRITAIN RULED INDIA

THE patterns of Indian society today are, of course, shaped by what the Indian ruling class has done since 1947.

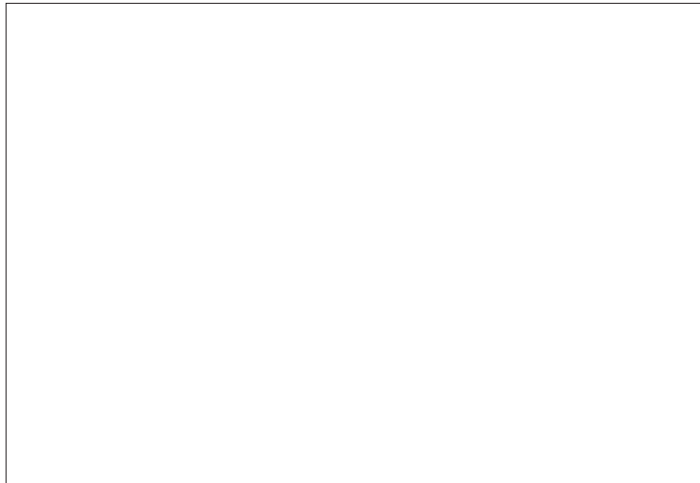
However, they are also rooted in two centuries of British rule.

Before 1857, British rule in India was exercised not by the British state as such, but by the East India Company, which over a long period, beginning in the 1750s, established military control or indirect domination over most of the subcontinent. In 1857, what the British empire christened the Sepoy Mutiny, but could more properly be called the Indian rebellion, occurred. It was an uprising of Britain's Indian troops, which in some areas developed into broader popular revolt.

There are debates about the extent to which this rebellion was in the modern sense a revolution or national liberation struggle, but it was certainly very significant. After 1857, Britain took precautions against further instability by reorganising the bits of India it controlled under direct rule.

The India which Britain conquered from the mid-18th century was not "underdeveloped" by the standards of the time. The Mughal empire which administered it was in decay and decline; its common people were poorer in Europe, though by a much smaller margin than today. However, its handicraft trades also made it the world's great industrial export centre. Far from being a barren territory needing to be developed, for the various European imperialists who attempted to conquer it — Dutch, Portuguese, French and eventually British — it was a great treasure-house waiting to be looted.

Enormous amounts of wealth were pumped out of India into Britain's country houses, board rooms and government departments, and into the homes of retired army officers, shareholders and bondholders. According to more conservative estimates, this flow took out of the country more than a quarter of the resources otherwise available for industrial development.



*Pupils at the East India College in Haileybury train to be administrators of the Empire*

Meanwhile, in order to secure its hold over India relatively cheaply, and thus with only a small Britain garrison (during its drive to put down the 1857 rebellion, the number of British troops numbered in the thousands, as against 160,000 US troops in the relatively tiny country of Iraq today) Britain built an alliance with sections of India's wealthy classes, at the expense of the peasantry. This is how Karl Marx put it in 1853:

"In Bengal, we have a combination of the English landlordism, of the Irish middle-men system, of the Austrian system, transforming the landlord into the tax-gatherer, of the Asiatic system making the state the real landlord. In Madras and Bombay we have a French peasant proprietor who is at the same time a serf and a sharecropper of the state. The drawbacks of all these various systems accumulate upon him without his enjoying any of their redeeming features... Eleven twelfths of the whole Indian population have been wretchedly pauperised..."

Agriculture stagnated. According to

**India is a country of hundreds of millions of people that for more than a century was exploited and oppressed by the ruling class of our country, with the support or acquiescence of at least a section of the working class too.**

economic historian Angus Maddison: "From the beginning of British conquest in 1757 to independence... per capita income... probably did not increase at all. In the UK itself there was a ten fold increase in per capita income over these two centuries. Average life expectancy was only 30 years in 1947."

At the same time, India's handicraft industries were destroyed by the transformation of the country into a captive market for British factory production. Between 1780 and 1850 total British exports to India rose from £386,000 to £8 million. In 1850, cotton manu-

facture employed one eighth of the British population and accounted for one twelfth of the national revenue; India provided a quarter of its market. For instance, between 1818 and 1836, the amount of cotton twist exported from the UK to India rose by a factor of more than 5,000. By 1870, 21% of all Britain's overseas capital stock was in India.

The result was the ruining of many important Indian cities and mass starvation. Marx again: "The English cotton machinery produced an acute effect in India. The governor-general reported in 1834-5: 'The misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of the cotton-weavers are bleaching the plains of India'."

## SOCIALISTS AND INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

WHAT was Marx's attitude to British rule in India? He was, as one would expect from the quotations above, unremittingly hostile to it. He chronicled the barbarity of British rule in India, describing it as a "bleeding process with a vengeance" and "hideous idol drinking from the skulls of the slain".

At the same time Marx's view was more complicated than that. He believed that, despite itself, Britain was laying the foundations for a "social revolution" in India by introducing capitalist development. As well as breaking down the structures of the old society, British rule introduced elements of a new one. The authorities built factories and, eventually, railways, a development which Marx saw as highly significant:

"The ruling classes of Britain have had, till now, but an accidental, transitory and exceptional interest in the progress of India. The aristocracy wanted to conquer it, the moneyocracy wanted to plunder it, the millocracy wanted to undersell it. But now the tables are turned... You cannot maintain a net of railways over an immense country without introducing... industrial processes... The railway system will become, in India, truly the forerunner of modern industry."

Did Marx conclude from this that British rule would benefit the mass of people or should be supported? Quite the opposite. In fact, the progressive element of British rule existed mainly in the fact it prepared the way

for its forcible overthrow by something better.

"All the English bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, depending not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people. But what they will not fail to do is to lay down the material premises for both... The Indians will not reap the fruits of the new elements of society scattered among them by the British bourgeoisie, till in Great Britain itself the now ruling classes shall have been supplanted by the industrial proletariat, or till the Hindoos themselves shall have grown strong enough to throw off the English yoke altogether."

There have been some very stupid attempts over the years to depict Marx as a pro-imperialist. But this is simply nonsense. Marx's attitude to the Indian people is demonstrated vividly by the fact that, when the International Working Men's Association received a request in 1871 to establish a branch in Calcutta, the General Council insisted that the applicants be "instructed of the necessity of enrolling natives in the association".

Marx's attitude, combining support for economic and social development with opposition to imperial violence and political

**There was a cross-fertilisation between British and Indian radicalism. Many British radicals learnt to hate British imperialism and capitalism through their reading about or contact with India, and many Indian activists came to Britain and were radicalised through contact with movements here.**

oppression, was absorbed by the best elements of the international socialist movement that developed during the course of the 19th century.

In Britain, for instance, the early Marxists, and chief among them Henry Hyndman of the Social Democratic Federation, made support for Indian independence a central part of their politics. When the debates between right-wing supporters of colonialism and left-wing opponents of it took place in the Socialist International at the start of the 20th century, the left cited Marx's support for Indian liberation, as well as the national struggles of Poland and Ireland, as exemplary.

There was also a cross-fertilisation between British and Indian radicalism. Many British radicals learnt to hate British imperialism and capitalism through their reading about or contact with India, and many Indian activists came to Britain and were radicalised through contact with movements here. Britain's first non-white MP, for instance, was Dadabhai Naoroji, a Parsi campaigner for Indian independence who, though elected as a Liberal, steadily moved to the left until he joined the Socialist International.

Naoroji spoke at the International's 1904 Congress, where he stated that "the fate of India rests in the hands of the working classes". This tradition continued into the 20th century with figures like Shapurji Saklatvala, the Communist Party-supporting

Labour MP for Battersea. Saklatvala was the first person to be arrested during the General Strike, after he called on soldiers not to fire on striking workers.

#### LATER HISTORY

**M**ARX'S warning was apt. In addition to the poverty and misery it brought for the majority of the population, India's industrial development proceeded only very slowly under British rule. British capitalists saw no need to move their factories there; Indian capitalists had no government of their own to provide protection and aid for new enterprises. In fact, the British state positively discouraged Indian capitalists because it saw them as potential competitors to British business.

India had a spurt of industrial growth during World War One (during which many thousands of Indian soldiers died to help British imperialism), stagnated after the war and had another spurt in World War One. By 1947, India had a bigger native bourgeoisie than any other "Third World" country. Nonetheless, it had been made "backward" and "underdeveloped", for want of better terms, in a way it had not been in 1757.

To remain cheap, British rule in India had to educate and train a layer, small in relation to the population but big in absolute numbers, of Indian officials. The growth of bourgeois-educated and bourgeois-wealthy Indians helped to produce a nationalist movement, Congress, founded in 1885 — at first studiously non-militant and smiled on by the British authorities, later more militant and in conflict with them.

After World War One Congress was led by Mohandas Gandhi. His campaign is still cited by many liberals as a model of how to win political change by non-violent methods of passive non-cooperation.

In fact the movement for independence — from the mass demonstration at Amritsar in 1919, which turned into a massacre when British troops opened fire, to the naval mutinies, general strikes and peasant rebellions of the two years preceding independence — was driven forward by the militant action of workers and peasants: many of them influenced by revolutionary-democratic, anti-capitalist and socialist ideas. The achievement of Gandhi and those like him was not to create this movement, but to damp it down and channel it towards bourgeois and petty bourgeois politics, as well as into passive and inert forms of protest.

Gandhi was clear about the class meaning of this: "In India we want no political strikes... We seek not to destroy capital or capitalists but to regulate the relations between capital and labour. We want to harness capital. It would be folly to encourage sympathetic strikes."

Or again: "I cannot ask officials and soldiers to disobey... If I taught them to disobey I should be afraid that they might do the same when I am in power... when I am in power I shall in all likelihood make use of those same officials and those same soldiers".

Though Gandhi was assassinated by Hindu communalist fanatic in 1948, the Congress governments which ruled India after 1947 did indeed use those same soldiers and officials against the Indian working-class and other popular movements whenever they considered it necessary.

#### PARTITION

**B**RITAIN had, quite unashamedly, used divide-and-rule tactics in India. After the 1857 rebellion, groups which had been on the whole less rebellious, for instance the Sikhs, were carefully favoured and selectively recruited into the army. (The Sikhs tended to side with the British because they were angry about Muslim soldiers from Bengal helping to conquer Punjab!) Britain fostered Muslim support by posing as a protector against the (real) forces of Hindu obscurantism, by sponsoring institutions such as the Muslim university at Aligarh and by setting up separate Muslim electoral rolls with a wider franchise than the Hindu ones.

The climax of this approach came with the

**Any possible popular movement reaching across the communal divide to stop the violence was frustrated. The anti-revolutionary politics of India's various "communist" parties have been a powerful factor in shaping the country's politics to this day**

events of partition as India gained its independence. In 1947, the British government, knowing it was defeated and hoping to minimise its losses, cut and run, partitioning India to give the Muslim League movement, which it had built up as a rival to Congress, its own Muslim state, Pakistan. Communal violence killed a million people, made ten million refugees and left a vicious legacy: three wars between India and Pakistan, bloody conflict in the disputed territory of Kashmir, communal strife in India, and Islamism in Pakistan.

The artificial nature of the Pakistani entity also laid the basis for the national oppression, and eventually in 1971 the liberation struggle, of what is now Bangladesh. In the 1971 war

at least a million people were killed by the Pakistani regime.

The leaders of the big bourgeois parties professed horror at the violence, but through their communalist politics they had helped to prepare it. Even some of the leaders of the more secular Congress had always linked India's national cause with Hindu symbols and concepts. The relatively strong Communist Party of India, and the movements it dominated, were prevented from playing a significant role by their popular front politics, dictated from Moscow. Not only did the CP put its faith in the Muslim League and Congress leaders to solve the communal conflict, it demobilised mass mobilisations against capitalists and landlords, for instance halting in its land agitation in Bengal, for far of alienating the "national bourgeoisie".

Thus any possible popular movement reaching across the communal divide to stop the violence was frustrated. The anti-revolutionary politics of India's various "communist" parties have been a powerful factor in shaping the country's politics to this day.

#### TODAY

**I**N India today, four hundred million people live on the equivalent of less than dollar a day. Something like a third of all the people in the world who live at that extreme level of poverty are in India. 39% of Indian people, and 52% of Indian women, are illiterate (2001 figures). One child in eight dies before the age of five.

The big cities have millions living on the streets, begging, scratching a life from odd jobs. Most poor people live in the countryside; India has had more land reform laws than any other country in the world, but they have not been effective. Hundreds of millions of people still live in conditions not far from Europe's Middle Ages.

At the same time, India's secular political culture has partially broken down, with the rise of large-scale communal violence, most commonly carried out by the Hindu nationalist far right against Muslims.

Would it therefore be right to conclude that independence, and the fight for it, were all a waste of time? For socialists, the answer must be: of course not.

When India won its independence, a country of many hundreds of millions threw off foreign rule. It was evidence that tyranny does not last forever, and that oppressed people can rise up and seek to control their own destiny. The Indian people defeated and began the break up of the most powerful empire in the world, and laid the ground for the independence struggles of many other nations.

And while India is still marked by the signs of imperial torture and underdevelopment, things have changed since independence. Decisions about the Indian economy are now made, in so far as they can be under the world

#### *A regiment of the British Army in India*

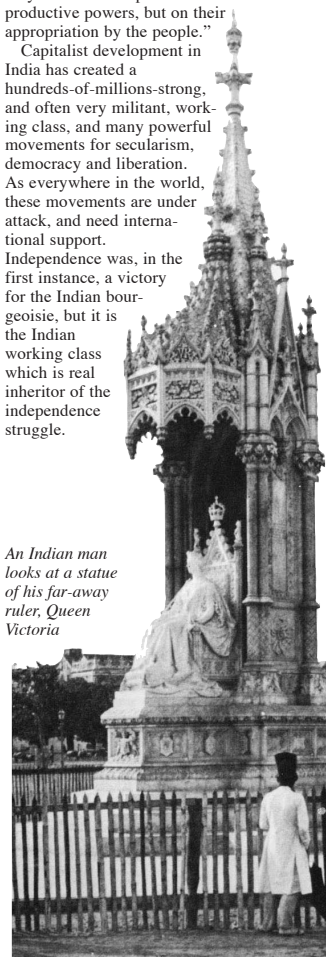
capitalist market, in India, not in European capitals. India is not a colony, or a semi-colony, of anyone. One result is that the Indian economy has grown staggeringly. This in turn has meant real changes for millions of people - life expectancy is no longer 30, as it was when the British left, but 68.

The fact that the benefit to the Indian people has not been more extensive is not because independence was worthless, but because of the nature of the capitalist system, which cannot fulfil the needs of the majority. To quote Marx again: "All the bourgeoisie may be forced to do will neither emancipate nor materially mend the social condition of the mass of the people, which depends not only on the development of the productive powers, but on their appropriation by the people."

Capitalist development in India has created a hundreds-of-millions-strong, and often very militant, working class, and many powerful movements for secularism, democracy and liberation. As everywhere in the world, these movements are under attack, and need international support.

Independence was, in the first instance, a victory for the Indian bourgeoisie, but it is the Indian working class which is real inheritor of the independence struggle.

*An Indian man looks at a statue of his far-away ruler, Queen Victoria*



# SWP: now break from Galloway's politics!

BY RHODRI EVANS

THERE will be two Respect conferences on the weekend of 17-18 November: an SWP-Respect conference at Westminster University, and a Galloway-Respect (officially, Respect Renewal) conference at the Bishopsgate Institute.

Moreover, according to the SWP, Galloway faction supporters have changed the locks on the Respect office, thus excluding the SWP from it.

If there were any doubt about it before — and for a while now, there hasn't been, really — there isn't now. Respect has split, and the immediate question for those in and around Respect is which side to take.

For SWP members, there is a second question. Even if they side with the SWP against Galloway, as they should, they have to ask: who got us into this mess? Why aren't the SWP Central Committee fighting Galloway politically rather than just by ham-fisted appeals to loyalty? Can we, or should we, ever trust this Central Committee in future?

The rumour-mill has it that 40 people have been expelled from the SWP, across the country, for siding with Galloway. Whether that is true or not, it must be certain that some dozens, at least, will follow Nick Wrack, Kevin Ovenden, Rob Hoveman, and Jerry Hicks towards Galloway. It must be possible that they will not be content with just burying themselves in Galloway-Respect, but instead will form an "excommunicated" or "heretical" SWP-line group, such as exists in many countries, working within

Respect. (Might they also merge with the rump International Socialist Group? Maybe).

Judging from the coverage in the *Morning Star*, my guess that Galloway-Respect might draw in the Communist Part of Britain (CPB) was wrong.

The SWP has published a Central Committee statement endorsed by their emergency conference on 3 November.

It is a miserable statement. It does at last cite some politics in the Respect split:

*Opportunist electoral politics began to dominate Respect... For such people their model of politics was that increasingly used by the Labour Party in ethnically and religiously mixed inner city areas — promising favours to people who posed as the 'community leaders' of particular ethnic or religious groupings if they would use their influence to deliver votes.*

*This is what is known as Tammany Hall politics in US cities, or 'vote bloc' or 'communal' politics when practiced by all the pro-capitalist parties in the Indian subcontinent. It is something the left has always tried to resist. We seek people's support because they want to fight against oppression and for a better world, not because they stand for one group.*

Indeed, the left has always argued against communalist politics. But, excuse me, who was out on the streets distributing leaflets for George Galloway in the June 2004 elections headlining him as "a fighter for Muslims" and as someone who had always "stood up for the Muslim people"? The SWP!

By launching Respect, the SWP renounced that long left-wing tradition of arguing against communalist politics, and became promoters of

communalism.

SWP members should not be pharisaically bemoaning the bad "such people" who unaccountably "began to dominate Respect", but indicting their own Central Committee for the fact that "opportunist electoral politics began to dominate"... the SWP! And indicting the CC for recoiling not out of principle, but only when the opportunism fails to yield the hoped-for gate receipts!

Equally bad in the SWP CC statement is the playing-dumb "who'd have thought it?" line on Galloway now.

"We never imagined he would suddenly blame us for resisting those who were pushing sections of Respect in the direction of electoral opportunism."

"Some Tribune of the People!", they exclaim now. "He achieved the dubious record of being the fifth highest earning MP, after Hague, Blunkett, Widdicombe and Boris Johnson, with £300,000 a year".

Lack of imagination? We can all suffer from that. But to see Galloway for what he was back in 2003-4 required no imagination, only a willingness to observe facts. The SWP CC's reply to that is in effect that they chose to deny or ignore facts.

*We said what mattered at that moment was not what he might or might not have done in the past (i.e. the available facts about Galloway) not what the level of an MP's salary was. The key thing was that he had been expelled from New Labour as the MP who had done more than any other to campaign against the war.*

Actually, on the war, the difference between Galloway and, say, John McDonnell or Jeremy

Corbyn or other decent, respect-worthy left Labour MPs, lay not in doing more but (a) in being deliberately boosted (along with the MAB) on the big anti-war demonstrations by their SWP organisers; (b) in not being decent and respect-worthy. Specifically, in having a record of close ties with Saddam Hussein's hideous regime for nearly a decade before the invasion. In the facts! In "what he had done in the past"!

Why didn't New Labour expel Galloway before 2003? Maybe because the British secret services hoped to use him as a "back channel" for information about the internal workings of Saddam's dictatorship, or a link to dissident elements within the regime top brass. (Galloway himself says that he was approached by the British secret services to work for them, but he refused.)

In any case, despite New Labour's typically bungled handling of the "trial", it is clear that they chose to expel Galloway because of his Saddam links rather than just because like many MPs — much more troublesome to New Labour on social issues than Galloway had ever been — he had opposed the invasion.

The SWP CC knew all this. In discussions in the Socialist Alliance's leading committee, it was plain that they knew the truth about Galloway. Members of the SWP: the root of the Respect fiasco is that the SWP CC chose to lie to you, and that it has a political method which says that lies to your members and to the working class on matters of political principle are fine so long as you expect "gate-receipts" from them.

## Pro-Ahmedinejad speech provokes walkout at Stop the War conference

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND

THE Stop The War Coalition conference on 27 October featured Somaye Zadeh from the SWP-led group Campaign Iran telling us that "the lies about Iran" aren't true.

These "lies" include that the Iranian regime is undemocratic (Ahmedinejad was voted in with a large majority — never mind the widespread evidence of ballot-rigging or the fact that you can only stand at all if you're a male Islamist!), that it persecutes gay people (despite "problems with homosexuals", sex changes are allowed: how progressive) and that it's oppressive to women (more women study at university than men, so who cares about legal dress codes, chastity laws and the religious police?)

Zadeh also cited the existence of a democratic opposition in Iran as evidence that the regime is not so bad — rather like citing the Tianamen Square protests to demonstrate the democratic credentials of Chinese Stalinism!

For a video of Zadeh's speech, posted without comment, see the Stop the War website — [stopwar.org.uk](http://stopwar.org.uk)

This ridiculous apology for the Iranian government was justified on the grounds that Somaye is herself an Iranian refugee, and that by telling the truth about Iran, anti-war activists would be playing into the hands of the Western governments who may attack it.

After some heckling from Workers' Liberty, the CPGB and members of School Student Against the War, Oxford Stop the

War member Zaid Maham shouted "You stupid bloody bigots — fuck off!" extremely loudly at the school students. This prompted a walk-out from some SSAW members, disgusted by the debate and at the chair's refusal to condemn Maham's bullying.

Around 250 people attended the conference at Friends' Meeting House, Euston, though the percentage of voting delegates was unclear. As the National Union of Students National Executive recently voted to affiliate to the coalition, albeit with the rider that we stand up for our position of solidarity with Iranian workers, women and students within it, I had the dubious pleasure of being a delegate.

The conference began with a discussion of the exclusion of the CPGB student group Communist Students, and the CPGB-led Hands Off the People of Iran campaign. A speaker representing the "officers" explained that the campaigns' aims ran counter to those of Stop the War; somewhat odd, as the only possible "clash" in aims is HOPI and Communist Students' position of support for Iranian workers and students. (Why is NUS, which also supports grassroots democratic movements in Iran, not excluded? Clearly because such a move would mean more trouble than it is worth for the Stop the War leadership, while the CPGB is a much easier target.)

Unsurprisingly, with the "officer recommendation" being to vote for, and an audience packed with SWP members, the exclusion passed, with only about 40 votes against.

It's worth noting the SWP's vitriol against the Iranians who were there repre-

senting HOPI. Stop the War is willing to make all kinds of allowances for the reactionary clerics and bourgeois politicians it invites onto its platforms (including Tories) — Michael Ancram was invited to speak at the "People's Assembly" in March, but is quite happy to denounce anti-war Iranian socialists who fled to Britain to escape the torture chambers of the Islamic Republic.

After some opening remarks from speakers including Lindsey German (claiming, in a class-blind fashion, that Muslims have the worst housing, schooling and jobs... religion, rather than class and within it ethnicity, seems to be the new determinant of social position for the SWP), the conference moved on to speaker sessions.

The session on Iraq saw speakers like Seamus Milne and John Rees hailing the glorious unified (mythical) national resistance in Iraq, glossing over market-place bombings by insinuating they were the actions of US/UK forces, seeking to sow discord. Motions calling for "victory to the resistance" were subsequently voted down, on the orders of the SWP-controlled committee — presumably because the SWP's desire for a British popular front with Liberal Democrat MPs and the like on board temporarily trumped its support for a popular front with Islamists in Iraq.

The second speaker on Iran, after Somaye Zadeh, was from the Committee for Defence of Iranian People's Rights (CODIR), and he was markedly better, arguing for solidarity with trade unionists, students and women in Iran. He received a standing ovation from the left of the hall, with the remaining three quarters looking on in stunned silence. It seems that CODIR

is linked to Tudeh, the Iranian "communist" party. Noteworthy that the campaign of one of the most craven Stalinist parties in the world is miles to the left of the SWP! A motion completely ignoring democratic struggles in Iran was passed, and support for the Hands Off the People of Iran motion voted down.

Finally we moved on to the rest of the resolutions, rather confusingly taken with one speech for, one against (if available) and then all voted on at the end. I suspect this was an attempt at undemocratic manoeuvring by the leadership, who declared their support either way as we raced through the voting.

The motion on a full cultural, academic, financial and sporting boycott of Israel passed with only a dozen or so votes against. I spoke against, explaining that we need positive solidarity with the Palestinians, not the classless and ultimately anti-semitic logic of the boycott. Needless to say, you could hear little of my speech due to heckling (from the moment I said I was a member of the AWL), and after I finished, Andrew Murray condemned me from the chair for "outrageous" accusations of anti-semitism. (Though I hadn't accused anyone of anti-semitism, but of supporting a proposal whose logic is anti-semitic. Meanwhile, unqualified accusations of racism and Islamophobia thrown at the AWL are fine, clearly.)

The conference ended with a speech from George Galloway (who pointedly sat about four places away from SWPer Chris Nineham on the platform). A brief student session with three Respect members on the platform simply reiterated the need for a day of action against war in Iran. Strangely enough, Respect members called for occupations of colleges on the day of any attack on Iran — which would be extremely good, but occupations are a tactic they refuse to work for or promote against fees, for grants, or on any bread-and-butter issue.

In summary: the political degeneration of the Stop the War continues. The need for a broad but principled anti-war movement that looks to working-class action and combines opposition to an attack on Iran with support for Iranian workers, women and students is clearer than ever.

# Respect in Tower Hamlets

BY JOHN BLOXAM

THE first act of the four SWP-allied councillors who have split away from the main Respect opposition group in Tower Hamlets was not to launch a high-profile campaign aimed on any of the many issues which affecting workers in the borough — for instance the threatened transfer of council housing to an ALMO. After the SWP's noises about breaking from the "ineffectiveness" and "communalism" of Respect in Tower Hamlets, surely this would have been an appropriate course.

Instead it has been widely reported that the new group of Respect (Independent) councillors — Ahmed Hussain, Lutfia Begun, Oli Rahman and Rania Khan — have begun talks with the Liberal-Democrat councillors to form a new opposition coalition! So the theory goes, the Respect (Independent) four, together with the Liberal-Democrat's six councillors would then become the largest opposition group inside the council replacing the old Respect group, and with this would be entitled to a publicly funded political worker. It is claimed that a Liberal Democrat councillor would lead the group.

However, Rahman denies that any coalition is on the cards, and says that he has only met with the Liberal Democrats in order to ensure "effective" council functioning.

The Respect council group were first elected in May 2006 and it was always a politically incoherent combination, with some people clearly joining Respect in order to become councillors. In the course of the first 18 months one of their councillors resigned and another defected to New Labour. It was also a group exclusively based on the Bengali community and dominated by communal politics.

It followed directly from the politics of Galloway's election campaign, with its court-



Respect councillor Oliur Rahman, depicted here, had his window smashed just days after he resigned the whip. He fears that this was no coincidence.

ing of Bengali businesses and emphasis on getting out the Bengali vote and being the "best fighters for Muslims".

The background explains the total lack of profile and effectiveness of Respect as a group.

As individuals the councillors may have done good work for particular constituents — as any political party! — but as a group they were never to be seen working consistently and with any drive on any particular campaign. Their main public face came through the letter-writing skills of Rob Hoveman who would regularly dash off missives to the local press attacking New Labour on national issues such as Iraq and defending Galloway's record.

I am involved in an important dispute between the council and council house leaseholders (50% of all council properties are

leasehold). Respect has turned up now and then, made some promises, but have then been conspicuous by their absence. Even within the Council Chamber they cannot deliver on a promise to expose the details of what New Labour lavishes on private consultants. They said they would and then nothing more was heard.

There will be more of the same from the seven remaining Respect councillors closely allied with Galloway. And the four Respect (Independent) councillors? Being a socialist councillor and upholding socialist values means first and foremost getting stuck into working class campaigns and acting as a clear tribune for that class. The Respect (Independents) will presumably have less communalism than the old Respect group, but their track record in the council inspires little confidence.

## What now for the left?

**Pete McLaren was the secretary of the Socialist Alliance before the heavy involvement of the SWP in 2001-3, and is now secretary of the continuing Socialist Alliance group.**

RESPECT was never going to succeed. In the original Socialist Alliance, back in 2002-3, when it was first mooted that the SWP was in discussion with people from the mosques, George Galloway and so on, we said that it was such an unlikely alliance that it would never succeed - too many divergent interests.

Personally I agree with getting as broad an alliance as possible, but not at the expense of socialist principles, which is what Respect was.

Still, I think the split is a setback for the left, and I'd like to put that on record. I don't know what side I'd be on if I were inside the row. It's too confused.

But it shows the need for a mass-based new federal organisation which doesn't worry too much about differences from the past.

What now? I expect the rump of Respect will continue as Respect without any political support outside the non-SWP, non-socialist element of Respect. As for the SWP - well, it's a very interesting question what they will do.

They've pissed off almost everybody else on the left. Some of us, myself included, will try to build bridges, but it won't be easy.

The split reminds me very much of what happened in the Socialist Alliance. What the Galloway side are suggesting has happened in terms of SWP malpractice is just like what happened in the Socialist Alliance in 2001-4. There are parallels.

I still think the SWP are basically on our

side - I think the members of the SWP are socialists - but I feel stretched in saying that.

None of this surprises me. The SWP does seem to take popular fronts and then, if they can't control them, they get rid of them.

**Mike Davies is secretary of the Alliance for Green Socialism, a body that was involved in the Socialist Alliance.**

WHEN Respect was first set up, it was an unholy alliance between the opportunist SWP and some fairly nasty elements like the Muslim Association of Britain, leavened by a few decent people. The question is not what went wrong, but how long it was going to take for it to fall apart in the way it has.

I feel sympathy for the small number of decent people who went along in the hope that something might come of Respect.

What will the two groups do now? They'll diverge in acrimony, they'll fight a bit. I would guess that the SWP will revert to being the SWP until it creates a new front, and the Muslim contingent will keep the Respect name, but that's a guess.

Lessons? For those involved in Respect: if you're going to engage in politics, you need to have political principles rather than sheer opportunism. For the rest of the left: steer well clear of the SWP. I don't think I need to say steer clear of the MAB.

**Declan O'Neill was treasurer of the Socialist Alliance**

I HAVE not been a member of Respect since the 2004 conference, when the complete betrayal of any democratic socialist perspective by the Respect leadership

became apparent. It was not so much the policies adopted, bad as they were, as the clear message that dissent would not be tolerated, and that no challenge to the backroom deals which had led to Respect's formation would be allowed.

It may have taken Alan Thornett and others a few years longer to recognise this reality. It is perhaps a bit late for them to say (2 November): "We need a new organisation as soon as possible which will start to address these issues and create the condition to unite with those from the Labour left, the trade union left and the activists of ecological and climate change campaigns which can present a political alternative to the betrayals of New Labour".

I only hope that the Left will learn some lessons from the current debacle, but to be honest I am not very optimistic.

**Clive Heemskerck was the leading representative of the Socialist Party within the Socialist Alliance in 2001.**

FOR any new broad formation to be successful it is crucial it has an open, welcoming and federal approach. Federalism was adopted by the early Labour Party, enabling it to bring together many different organisations and trends, preserving the rights of all to organise and argue for their particular points of view. Unfortunately, Respect, despite calling itself a coalition, has a centralised structure which bears no resemblance to a coalition or federation.

## Why I left the Socialist Workers' Party

BY BECKY CROCKER

I JOINED the Socialist Workers Party at their Marxism summer school in July 2005. It was around the time of Make Poverty History and the G8 protests and I had come to realise that the solution was getting rid of capitalism - and that's what the SWP said they were for. Having become very politicised and impatient to do more than individual activism, I was convinced of the need to join the party, to become part of a bigger whole.

But in the SWP there was never any hint that the members contributed to what the group did or said. It was just decreed from the central office in London that we in the York branch should turn over all our efforts to building Respect. We did not have any branch meetings, discussions or paper sales, only monthly public meetings. Although the branch claimed to have a dozen members, most people had been burnt out by the Stop the War movement, and in any case being a member was very passive. Just being a paper member of the Great Revolutionary Party was doing your bit.

**One comrade said that since we're not in a revolutionary period, we don't need to talk about it or build for one.**

Furthermore, there was no connection between our everyday activity and the idea of working-class revolution. Their explanations didn't ring true with what I understood about Marxism. One comrade said that since we're not in a revolutionary period, we don't need to talk about it our build for one, which is how they rationalised the not-very-left-wing, not-very-working-class Respect. They claimed that this fitted with Trotsky's conception of the united front, but having recently read his stuff on Germany that didn't really ring true for me.

However, I met an AWL comrade and got involved in No Sweat.. At first the "anti-imperialism" of the SWP, seeing something progressive about terrorism and excusing 7/7, had made me wary of the AWL. But the AWLers I met were serious trade unionists serious about working class politics, even at a time when everyone tells you that Marxism is dead. In contrast the SWP claimed that the AWL were too "orthodox" in following Marx, whereas in fact "everything had changed" since 9/11 and everything had to be re-evaluated, an idea which I never accepted.

Here was an organisation where being a member wasn't a passive thing, a group which stood for consistent working class politics. After four months in and around the SWP, I decided to join Workers' Liberty.

# When “militant” sloganeering meant promoting communal war

The last three issues of *Solidarity* have carried Sean Matgamna's series about the British left and the events in Northern Ireland in 1968-9 — arguably the biggest internal crisis the British state has seen since the early 1920s. The last article (*Solidarity* 3/120) summed up the turning-point debate at the National Committee of IS (forerunner of the SWP) in January 1969, and the initial positions mapped out by the IS/SWP majority and by the Trotskyist Tendency within IS (forerunner of *Solidarity* and Workers' Liberty).

THE beginning of IS's turn to “Irish work” was characterised by the confusion and instability which we examined in the last article. It would not improve. Through all the shifts and turns that were to follow, IS continued to flounder.

The political collapse of August 1969 was prepared for by eight months of thrashing about.

In December 1968 and January 1969, as we have seen, IS adopted three demands on Ireland: troops out, no British military equipment to the B-Specials, end British subsidies to Northern Ireland. One of the oddest things, which no-one seems to have commented on at the time, was that there was no plank or slogan in favour of civil rights in Northern Ireland! But what were IS's politics on Northern Ireland, and on Ireland, at the beginning of 1969?

It wanted British “withdrawal” — withdrawal of troops, subsidies, and involvement with the Six Counties sub-state: that was the strongest thing in the programme IS put forward.

It wanted a united Ireland? That was anybody's guess! The resolution on Irish self-determination carried against IS's Executive Committee at the January 1969 National Committee meant a united Ireland to the NC majority, and was so understood and argued for at the NC by its mover (the present writer).

But, while “self-determination” appeared on lists of demands, it was interpreted and construed in their own way by those who had argued and voted against it at the NC. Self-determination for Ireland as a whole? That, you see, argued John Palmer (in *International Socialism* journal), allowed for the possibility of a future coming together of the two Irish states.

Point 4... has the advantage that it allows for a possible decision by the whole people of Ireland to merge the two states on the basis of some degree of autonomy for the Protestants...

The idea did not disappear that only under socialism, only in a socialist workers' republic, would a united Ireland be desirable or even (given Northern Protestant opposition to it) possible.

How did it all fit together? Britain was told to withdraw — subsidies, troops, arms. As I showed in the last article, the demand for withdrawal of subsidies was a proposal to expel Northern Ireland workers, Catholic and Protestant, from the British welfare state. Taken as a whole, as serious proposals and not just as noisy inconsequential agitation, the three demands were a call for the expulsion of Northern Ireland from the United Kingdom. The expulsion not only of the Catholics, who had not wanted to be in the Six Counties state in the first place — though in 1969 not many would have said they didn't want the advantages of the British welfare state — but also of the Protestant two-thirds of the Northern Ireland population, who said they were British and emphatically did not want to be pushed out of the UK.

But did IS want an independent Six Counties (this side of socialism)? An independent bourgeois Six Counties?

The EC policy as expressed in the “Sean Reed” article, which simultaneously in its “demands” wanted the cutting off of all British connections, while in its text it argued that there

could be no united Ireland short of socialism, meant exactly that — if it is taken that they said what they meant and meant what they said.

Did IS advocate an independent Six Counties explicitly? No, and the EC would have denounced anyone who said that their demands meant that in substance as “a slanderer”.

They themselves did not cogently sum up

**The IS EC were initially both too nationalist and not nationalist enough. They were “sectarian socialists” in making a socialist Ireland the precondition for Irish unity, but that didn't stop them denouncing us for “telling the Irish what to do” when we advocated a workers' republic.**

what they were saying, and chose to operate with discrete slogans and demands whose implications were never faced; but the slogans as a whole drew a definite picture. It would be characteristic of the IS EC's political operation throughout 1969 that they raised and played with “demands” and “slogans” which implied things they did not want and may not have understood.

## ANALYSIS AND SLOGANS

THE simple truth is that though the EC and the organisation it controlled operated in politics and used ideas as political “tools”, it did not pursue political objectives. It neither pursued the political education of the organisation and its periphery, including its sympathisers and quasi-members in Ireland, nor concerned itself with practical political objectives such as, for instance, promoting working-class unity in Northern Ireland, or at least avoiding sharpened polarisation.

Instead of political objectives, the IS EC had appetites and desires. They wanted their own organisation to thrive and grow, and believed it could do that best by ingratiating itself with certain “constituencies” — Irish workers in Britain and the militant civil-rights youth in Northern Ireland (in the first place, the Belfast

leaders of People's Democracy). They chose their politics with that crude criterion primarily in view.

They operated shallowly, on the surface of events — not centrally concerned to analyse the situation in Northern Ireland and understand its forces and logic.

In the first eight months of 1969 IS's leaders didn't have politics of their own — an independent analysis and responsible slogans and proposals based on it. They adopted other people's politics according to their calculations about what would serve their organisational purposes best. That is what they did in the discussions before and at the EC discussion in December 1968, and at the January 1969 National Committee.

Irrespective of who was right at particular turning points, that was the difference between the EC and the Trotskyist Tendency. We tried to understand the overall situation and the way things were going, and the overall interests of the working class in the situation. That is what we were trying to do, and it was from that position that we interacted with and criticised the EC and commented on its political activities (some of which, at the time, I found simply incomprehensible: for example, the early opposition to making the Workers' Republic a plank in IS's political work among Irish workers in Britain).

## WRITING OFF THE CHANCES FOR A MARXIST GROUP

THE pseudo-sophisticates and half-wise people running Irish work and the EC, the Trotskyist Tendency were obstreperous doctrinaires clumsily fumbling with slogans and getting under the EC's nimble small-political feet as they worked to expand IS's influence and membership.

Tony Cliff, throughout most of his life, was a political kleptomaniac. That is probably how the group came to be saddled with the mid-1950s Connolly Association Stalinist aberration of calling for an end to subsidies, for the expulsion of the Northern Ireland working class from the British welfare state.

Expecting that the eruption of Northern Ireland, and the unprecedentedly sympathetic and intense media coverage in Britain of the Catholic movement, would rouse a lot of Irish workers settled in Britain, the IS EC put together, with the help of Gery Lawless, a platform designed to appeal to the almost universal Catholic nationalism of those workers. At the

same time they tried to keep the door open to those in Northern Ireland who would recoil from a united Ireland involving the Catholic-priest-heavy 26 Counties — to keep in step with the layer of militants around People's Democracy.

At first — it would soon change — IS was wary of limiting its catchment area with the Irish in Britain by brandishing a commitment to a socialist workers' republic at them.

The IS EC were initially both too nationalist and not nationalist enough. They were “sectarian socialists” in making a socialist Ireland the precondition for Irish unity, but that didn't stop them denouncing us for “telling the Irish what to do” when we advocated IS propaganda for a workers' republic. They denounced us too, at first, for “pre-empting” the future when we rejected the existing Six/26 Counties division and talked of self-determination.

One of the keynotes of the IS EC discussion in December 1968 and of IS's subsequent Irish work was Gery Lawless's statement that “the resources for a revolutionary Trotskyist group in Ireland were very small”. That, in 1968! It was an astonishing judgement. Perverse. An alluvial flood of student radicalism was replenishing the left everywhere. In Ireland the student radicalism was already connected, on the streets and against the police, to the explosive issue of Northern Ireland Catholics' second-class citizenship.

The first of what would be a succession of clashes between Catholic Derry's working-class youth and the police, due to culminate in the fierce fighting of August 1969, had already occurred when the IS EC met to decide the group “line”.

Perhaps most astonishing of all was that none on the EC disagreed with Lawless's prostrate pessimism. No one did.

Events would soon show how stupid this view was; and how senseless was the fear of alienating Irish workers in Britain by talking about James Connolly and the workers' republic. In a few months the young MP for mid-Ulster, Bernadette Devlin (later McAliskey: elected in April 1969) would win wild applause at meetings of Irish workers in London — organised by IS and reported in Socialist Worker — at the mere mention of the Workers' Republic and Connolly.

Nonetheless, the initial pessimistic judgement shaped IS's campaign. Here certain aspect from the background of the Irish Workers' Group is important, and we need to look briefly at that.

RUC in Bogside, 12 August 1969

## "FIRST RECRUIT — THEN THE PROGRAMME"

At the Annual General Meeting of the Irish Workers' Group in mid-September 1967, a document called "Preamble to the Constitution" and entitled "Towards an Irish October" was moved by its author, me, and seconded by Gerry Lawless. It had caused controversy between the Trotskyists in the IWG and some of the IWG people who were in broad agreement with Tony Cliff and IS, because it defined the IWG as the nucleus of a revolutionary party in the Bolshevik and Fourth Internationalist tradition,

## No independent Six Counties state was remotely possible. Even if created, against the strong wish of its majority to remain tied to Britain, it would dissolve into Catholic-Protestant civil war.

and committed us to building such a party. One of the IS people, Tony McFarlane, who seems to have soon faded out of politics, wrote a last-minute critique of the preamble's account of what the IWG should build, just before the AGM, and I wrote a last-quarter-minute reply which was distributed only at the AGM. More or less everybody at the AGM, where the sizeable IS segment of the IWG was badly under-represented (every member was entitled to participate) voted for the preamble. I no longer remember if the IS people voted against, abstained, or (it is not impossible), with reassurances perhaps, voted for it.

I won't here try to untangle the whys and wherefores, but to the great surprise of our side in the IWG, the question of the "party", on which there had been "agreement" in September, emerged as an issue in the faction fight of October and afterwards.

It took the odd form of an insistence in writing by Gerry Lawless that since, according to the theorising of the Mandel-Pablo International, of which Lawless was a platonist supporter, a "revolutionary party" had not been required in the making of the Yugoslav, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Cuban revolutions, a revolutionary party was not *always* necessary. (He was responding to a criticism I had made of his "operational" politics, which I thought were at odds with the decision of the AGM).

Sometimes, Lawless wrote, a "blunted instrument" — for example, in the Chinese case, a peasant-based Stalinist party — would be enough to ensure the victory of the revolution. The "blunted instrument" formula was that of the 1963 congress of the Fourth International.

Posing it that way was, of course, a mystified and mystifying attempt to deal with the fact that in these alleged "working-class revolutions", in China and so on, the working class played no part. As I insisted when replying to Lawless in the Internal Bulletin, the working class immediately felt under the repression of the totalitarian Stalinist state, and found itself in something "closer to the Orwellian nightmare" than socialism. (I will deal with that argument in an appendix on the IWG).

The only sense, in terms of our work, of Lawless insisting that a revolutionary party is not always necessary, was that that idea applied to our situation in Ireland too. A revolutionary party wasn't necessary. Lawless had gone over to the side of those who had objected to the definitions and objectives set out in the preamble, which he had seconded at the AGM.

At the root of that was the pessimistic assessment of the prospects for a revolutionary party in Ireland which he expressed at the December 1968 IS EC. In the IWG discussion, the most explicit and clear-cut exposition of the view on the party question that was emerging in what we called "the anti-Trotskyist coalition" was presented in writing by Mick Johnson, a Dundalk man of eclectic and vaguely Maoist (but honestly held and expounded) politics, who would soon become, and remain, a member of PD.

He defined and defended the approach to organisation-building that at that time was Tony Cliff's and, in substance, that of the IWG faction organised by Gerry Lawless. The approach to building a revolutionary organisation advocated by Mick Johnson, theorising from Lawless's practices and probably from

what Cliff had done with IS up to that point — that was the approach of the socialist leaders of PD in Belfast and of IS's Irish work in Britain.

I quoted Johnson and commented in an article for the IWG Internal Bulletin.

*Johnson considers it impossible to build a Party on the Trotskyist programme "from the ground up". "So long as we" (?) "know where we are headed, surely the principled, i.e. realistic, tactic that holds out a prospect of early success, is to draft a programme which will appeal to the people we hope to recruit."*

*Comrade Johnson: "It is time enough to talk about and insist on membership being conditional upon Marxist political principles when we have several hundred or better still several thousand members — when the time comes when we are politically effective". How can the programme have an effective organisation built on ignorance of the programme?*

*To begin with, the overt programme must be about the level of the people to be recruited. "The new members are educated and the struggle — day to day — is conducted not so much along the lines of the programme but along the lines of the 'mental' programme of the communists who form the nucleus — and educating the members step by step in this direction."*

*It can be arranged that the programme be revised at intervals to suit the development of the consciousness of the Group members — but not so much as to alienate the prospective recruits. "To talk about building a party (out of Fianna Failers, Republicans, Catholics) on a programme based on a set of ideas which goes directly contrary to and contradicts everything they believe in — against their prejudices, experience is unrealistic". "It is well known that a qualitative change in effectiveness takes place in a group when a certain numerical level is reached." "First the large group — then the programme."*

*Mick Johnson mixes up the programme, derived from a strict Marxist analysis of objective reality and working class objective interests, and propaganda and agitation, which is necessarily partial, necessarily slanted and angled, and on the level of those they are aimed at. (Though with the single prohibition: that propaganda and agitation can never violate the programme, meaning that there is a strict limit to actual concessions of substance that we can make for the sake of being intelligible to our audience. It means that we recognize that a whole range of people — Republicans, Fianna Fail-ers, Catholics [en masse] — are outside our range on their own terms).*

*If we find ourselves fighting side by side with them, then in particular we must make no concessions to their ideas... We slant our material, agitation, and propaganda, towards the audience as a means of making more effective our war on their conceptions — not of accommodating to them...*

*The cornerstone of the Leninist conception of the party — and of the proletarian revolution — is the fact that the class struggle takes place on the ideological front, to maintain and develop the scientific working class, world view, as well as on the political and industrial fronts...*

JOHNSON'S (and Lawless's, and Cliff's) idea, that is, when it came down to it, manipulative politics, was the approach adopted by the IS people in Northern Ireland who led the early PD. Or, they might argue, the approach imposed on them by circumstances.

They dissolved their "Young Socialists", itself a loose and politically ill-defined group, into the very amorphous PD, which at first did not even have any formal membership: casual drop-ins to meetings had voting rights.

The IS/Lawless side of the IWG split had survived only a few months and then dissolved, but the people on that side of the faction fight were all involved in the activity in Northern Ireland and in IS's work in Britain. They were by no means always at one. In the political nature of the "current" — or whatever one wants to name it — it would have been surprising if they were. Eamonn McCann was seriously at odds throughout 1969 with the approaches both of IS and of the PD leading group around Michael Farrell and Cyril Toman. Nevertheless, deliberately or otherwise, the attitude to the party question of their IWG faction dominated until after August 1969.

In 1969 in Britain, the picture was complicated by the fact that Cliff and IS had in the meantime, between the IWG split and the

explosion in Northern Ireland in October, become "Leninist". One reason for the conflict in IS on Ireland before August 1969 was that Cliff and Palmer, and their client and ally Lawless, operated in Irish politics according to their politics of the time before their "return to Lenin".

## AN INCOHERENT POLICY

IN their calculations of what, politically, would best serve them organisationally, Cliff and Palmer put themselves politically in the hands of Lawless. It was Lawless's politics that dominated IS's campaign — right down to an unmistakable advocacy, in *Socialist Worker*, of civil war in the lead-up to August 1969.

Lawless didn't control anything, as he would discover when — responding to events as the gut-Catholic-chauvinist he was — he disagreed with Cliff about the deployment of British troops in August 1969. But for the time being it suited IS to go with him.

To return to IS's policy as it was in January 1969 — taken as a whole, it meant advocacy of the expulsion of the Six Counties from the UK (though they didn't call for that in so many words), and at the same time maintaining the Six Counties as an entity until a socialist Ireland might make unification desirable to the Protestant workers. It was "partitionist" this side of a socialist Ireland, and, simultaneously, "Unionist" in the Northern Ireland meaning of the term, for there would be a pro-Unionist majority in the Six Counties entity.

In fact, of course, no independent Six Counties state was remotely possible. Even supposing it was created, against the strong wish of its majority to remain tied to Britain, it

## Socialists had to explain the class question and the socialist, working-class viewpoint. But the situation had already been defined in terms of creed, and the underlying conflict of national identity shaped everything

would dissolve into Catholic-Protestant civil war. IS's "policy" was an incoherent mish-mash.

We will now trace it in the pages of *Socialist Worker* and in the activities of IS through 1969.

## McCANN: A LURCH TO THE LEFT

THE 25 January 1969 *Socialist Worker* carried a report "from Eamonn McCann in Derry" under the strapline: "The civil rights movement in Ulster has reached the parting of the ways", and the headline: "The way forward for Irish socialists — unity of all workers against Orange and Green Tories" (their emphasis).

What exactly the headline had to do with Northern Ireland realities and with the civil rights movement was not obvious. In fact McCann was consistently on the left and working-class-oriented wavelength, and at odd with both People's Democracy in Belfast and IS. He criticised the "withdraw subsidies" idea in *New Left Review*.

"Two weeks ago", McCann reported, at Newry, there had been an attempt to occupy public buildings and clashes with police. Youth had burned police tenders, ignoring the advance of the moderate leaders to back off when met by a police barricade.

"Newry was a classic case of a moderate leadership vainly attempting to siphon off and channel the militancy of the rank and file in a 'safe' direction.. The moderates' line is that the Government, in allowing this to happen, has successfully discredited the civil rights movement". There was talk of purging the movement of "entrists" and "revolutionaries".

The left must now: "define the political differences with the moderates. A more militant-than-thou stance is meaningless unless we communicate to the rank and file what it is we are being militant about.

"The problem is that, given the history of religious sectarianism, it is difficult to get across the point that the struggle is an issue of class, not creed. (And articles such as Paul Foot's [*Socialist Worker*, 21 December] in which he examined the unemployment problem in terms of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' towns do not help".

The fact is that most of the grievances of the Catholics — many of which they shared to some degree with Protestant workers — could have been expressed in terms of class. The mobilisation could have taken the form of a socialist working-class campaign. The precondition for that would have been an effective socialist movement.

McCann was writing when the issues were, and had long been, expressed as Catholic grievances. Socialists had to explain the class question and the socialist, working-class viewpoint. But the situation had already been defined in terms of creed, and the underlying conflict of national identity expressed as creed shaped everything.

"The left", continued McCann, "should make demands that demonstrate the line of class division and direct a considerably greater

## Workers' Liberty pamphlets

- A workers' guide to Ireland £1
- Marxism and religion (Jan 2006)
- Taking socialism onto the shop floor
- Communist Party factory bulletins (March 2006)
- Nine days that shook Britain — The 1926 General Strike (May 2006)
- Iran — revolution and counter revolution 1978-9 (June 2006)
- The betrayal of the Spanish workers' revolution 1936-7 (Sept 2006)
- What is the Third Camp? (Oct 2006)
- The other history of American Trotskyism (Nov 2006)
- For a workers' voice in politics — John McDonnell for Labour leader (Dec 2006)
- The 1707 Act of Union and the rise of the Scottish working class (Feb 2007)
- What Trotsky on Mexico can tell us about Venezuela and Chávez (March 2007)
- 1917: Revolution for freedom and equality (April 2007) £1
- Solidarity, yes! Boycott, no! Why supporters of "two states" should not join the "smash Israel" boycotters (June 2007)
- Trotskyists and the creation of Israel (July 2007)
- Leon Trotsky: a Spartacus of the 20th century (August 2007) £1
- How can we best help the Palestinians (October 2007)
- Marx's telescope: Grundrisse, capital and the revolutionary class, a briefing for anti-capitalists (October 2007)

50p per issue unless otherwise stated, post free.

£8 for all sixteen issues.

Write to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to "AWL".

proportion of its energy and activity towards the Protestant workers’.

It should therefore “deliberately shatter the facade of ‘unity’ within the civil rights movement. The Catholic middle class leadership cannot support socialist demands, which pose as great a threat to themselves as to the open enemies of civil rights”.

Their civil rights “unity” is itself sectarian. “They relegate or ignore class demands and therefore rule out the achievement of the unity socialists should be interested in at this point — unity of our class against its enemies, Green and Orange.”

**The “problem” for the Northern Ireland left with civil rights was a bit like the “Irish” joke in which a man asks for directions and is met with the response: “If I were you, I wouldn’t start from here”**

“Unless the link is made we will continue like the Grand Old Duke of York: moving towards battle, realising as we approach the front line that the ‘enemy’ is largely working-class Protestants, deciding that strife between workers as a bad thing and pulling back in confusion.

“Those leading our side cannot and will not tolerate appeals to the ‘enemy’ on the only basis that holds any hope of success — on the basis that as workers, they have to suffer unemployment, low wages, bad housing, high rents, and disenfranchisement in local government elections”.

The truth was that posing those things first as issues of civil rights for Catholics had cut off the left Catholic activists from the Protestant workers with similar problems. In any case, this was utterly economic.

Its core idea is that “material interest” questions — housing, jobs — were the “real” issues. They were major issues, surely, but the “constitutional question”, the conflicting identities (British/ Irish, Protestant/ Catholic), were “real” too.

In relation to the civil rights movement, McCann’s approach came down to attempting to redefine what was against its own nature. There was a seeking for a sort of “transitional demand” focused on the civil rights movement. It was the approach which would be developed by the Militant tendency (forerunner of the Socialist Party).

“The instinctive militancy of real socialists will, in the nature of Northern Ireland society, achieve its greatest immediate response among the Catholic working class. We cannot wipe out the last trace of religious bitterness from working-class consciousness overnight.

“The voices of ‘moderation’ will cry to the heavens about the danger of bloodshed and civil war. Our answer must be that it is ‘moderation’ and ‘liberalism’ which, down through the years, prevented any assault on the system that provokes the possibility of civil war”.

Here McCann slipped from one thing to another. What he wrote was perfectly true and

very important. But that did not change the consequences of what he described, or make the danger of civil war any less. Redefining Catholic civil rights agitation as a start-point for socialist propaganda and agitation did not make it any more palatable to Protestant workers. And to succeed the middle-class “moderate” leaders of the civil rights movement, other leaders “representing” the Catholics (the future Provisionals) were in the wings.

“The ‘moderates’ and ‘liberals’ are desperately struggling to keep control of a movement that, under their leadership, has done nothing to lessen sectarianism. And it is they who wish to expel the only people and ideas that might successfully realise struggle along a non-religious basis”.

That issue of *Socialist Worker* was a major lurch to the “left” — and, all in all, towards greater incoherence. In fact it was a “one-off”. McCann’s article was a sort of political high point. McCann would disappear as a writer from the pages of *Socialist Worker* for many months, with, as we shall see, one exceptional “appearance”. The main *Socialist Worker* writer on Ireland in the next few months would be “Sean Reed” (Gery Lawless).

#### FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO... WHERE?

It should be emphasised that the Trotskyist Tendency felt itself closer to Eamonn McCann than to anybody else in the Northern Ireland movement. We said so, in *IS and Ireland* for instance.

But we were also conscious, from early in 1969, that things were heading towards an explosion, and we would try to relate to it and anticipate it.

The “problem” for the Northern Ireland left with civil rights was a bit like the “Irish” joke in which a man asks for directions and is met with the response: “If I were you, I wouldn’t start from here”.

As McCann said, civil rights per se by definition tended to be a “sectarian” issue. It is clear — if only looking back — that a civil rights mobilisation of Catholics could not be other than sectionalist. That is not at all to blame the Catholics, any more than pointing to the negative consequences for unity between black and white workers of the mid-1960s “ghetto uprisings” one would blame the US blacks, or conclude that socialists should not have taken their side.

We did side with the US “ghetto uprisings”; we were right in that, and right in siding with the Catholics in Northern Ireland. But by 1969 a “sectarian” framework was already defined by all the things implied in the demand for civil rights. The issue could not be “redefined” by “class” propaganda, or by an attempt to use “civil rights” as a code for broader things that also involved the interests of Protestant workers, as a sort of algebraic “transitional demand” which in the unfolding of a movement would open up more advanced possibilities than minimal civil rights.

The PD militants for civil rights could not “seize” the civil rights movement from its natural leaders and redefine it. By their extra militancy they could and did only introduce elements which in the circumstances polarised Catholic-Protestant, Nationalist-Unionist antagonisms even more.

The ultimate “militant civil rights movement” would be the Provisional IRA, addressing itself to the core civil right the Catholics lacked, national self-determination, that is, to the question of partition. The Trotskyist Tendency tried

to address that issue too, as we will see when we get to mid 1969 in the narrative.

Things could in life have been “defined” differently if, for instance, over the previous two or three decades, a comparatively strong Northern Ireland Labour Party had taken the lead with the general class approach which Eamonn McCann denounced the civil-rights “moderates” for not giving and for, in their nature, being incapable of giving. They could not be “defined” differently in the heat of the civil rights mobilisations after 1968, and especially not by small groups of socialists.

#### REVOLUTION BY REDEFINITION?

IN SW on 1 February 1969, “Sean Reed” (Gery Lawless) wrote under the headline “Northern Ireland Tories Split Wide Open”.

Brian Faulkner and Billy Morgan had resigned from the cabinet of Northern Ireland Unionist prime minister Terence O’Neill. The article was would-be fly-on-the-wall insider stuff.

British prime minister Harold Wilson had vetoed moves against O’Neill and insisted on civil rights or “British intervention”.

“If the civil rights campaign is not brought to heel soon”, wrote “Sean Reed”, “there is every danger that it will rapidly go beyond the limits laid down for it by the present middle-class leadership and transform itself into a movement capable of threatening the very existence of Ulster Unionism”.

The focus on the “middle-class” nature of the civil rights leadership, and the use of “Tories” as a synonym for the Unionists, was an ideological lie that would be central to *Socialist Worker*’s coverage of Northern Ireland. But the argument was nonsense.

The Catholic civil rights movement was going to threaten the existence of Unionism? It might, and the IRA would, shatter the existing Unionist structures. It could not threaten the existence of Unionism as such, rooted in the

**Militancy is a central value for socialists, but not the only one; and in certain situations, some types of militancy threaten the fundamental interests of the working class. It is a matter of judgement, and of the possibilities in a given situation.**

hard fact of Northern Ireland’s Protestant majority. That sort of confused “half-thought” would dominate *Socialist Worker*.

“Sean Reed” continued: “The irresponsible ‘moderate’ leaders of the civil rights movement will use O’Neill’s troubles [in his own party] as yet another excuse to call a truce with the Tories...”

He knew what must be done. “This danger must be countered by a programme to keep the civil rights movement on the streets. The class content of the civil rights demands must be made clear, and the movement must acquire its own means of publicity to end the need for relying on the Tory press, whether Green or

Orange”.

The “programme” is militancy, demonstrations! The civil rights demands have a class content? In fact the “class content” was, even for Catholics, buried in the civil rights focus and formulation of the issues.

On 8 February “Sean Reed” wrote under the headline: “Northern Ireland: No Electoral Truce!” O’Neill had called a Northern Ireland general election (to be held on 24 February). “It is common knowledge that a majority of the rank and file members of the local Unionist constituency associations are in support of William-Craig-style fundamental Unionism”.

The Northern Ireland General Election would indeed mark a turning point for Northern Ireland — and for the left.

#### WHEN MAXIMISING MILITANCY IS A SNARE

IS’s approach through 1969, up to August, and with the exception of McCann’s article, was based on maximising, applauding, and wooing “militancy”.

Militancy surely is one of the proper central values of socialists. It means anger and resistance to oppression, people rousing themselves out of apathy and fatalistic acceptance.

The Communist International in 1920 established a fundamental distinction between different sets of nationalists in oppressed countries; among those subscribing to the same basic ideas and goals, it valued the *revolutionary* nationalists — that is, the militant, combative, active ones, who fought imperialism — and the others, the compromisers, the patient bearers of burdens, the “reformists”.

And yet there is more to it. In certain situations, such as those of delicate population balance and the interlacing of peoples and fragments of peoples, the militants will be the most narrow-minded and the most heedlessly chauvinistic, or simply the most thoughtless and most ignorant.

A case in point is the discussion among South Slav socialists on the attitude to take to the first Yugoslav state (between the two World Wars). It had been set up as a federation of nations dominated by Serbia, which had been with the victors in World War One, but also including Croatia, which had been part of Austro-Hungary. Should socialists work to modify the federation, towards real national equality within it, or seek to disrupt it by developing the revolutionary nationalism of, say, Croatia?

The leadership of the Yugoslav Communists in the early 1920s wanted the first approach. The Comintern was concerned to disrupt Yugoslavia, militarily the strongest state in the region, the ally of France, and therefore a threat to the Soviet Union in the event of war.

The Croatian nationalists which the Communist Party allied with, calling them “a national-revolutionary peasant movement”, were the Ustashe, would would organise a murderous Nazi-puppet Croatian state in World War Two.

The fate of Yugoslavia in the 1990s shows that “reform”, if it could have been arranged, would have been better than that sort of “revolutionism”. Militancy is a central value for socialists, but not the only one; and in certain situations, some types of militancy threaten the fundamental interests of the working class. It is a matter of judgement, and of the possibilities in a given situation. In 1969 IS made fantastic misjudgements or, more to the point, had no use for overall judgements.

## WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with “social

partnership” and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

#### WE STAND FOR:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers’ unity against racism.

- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



# Excalibur and the last stand

**MATTHEW THOMPSON REVIEWS THE LAST LEGION**

**T**HE *Last Legion* is an unusual film. It deals with the late Roman Empire and the nominal last emperor of the West, the juvenile Romulus Augustulus.

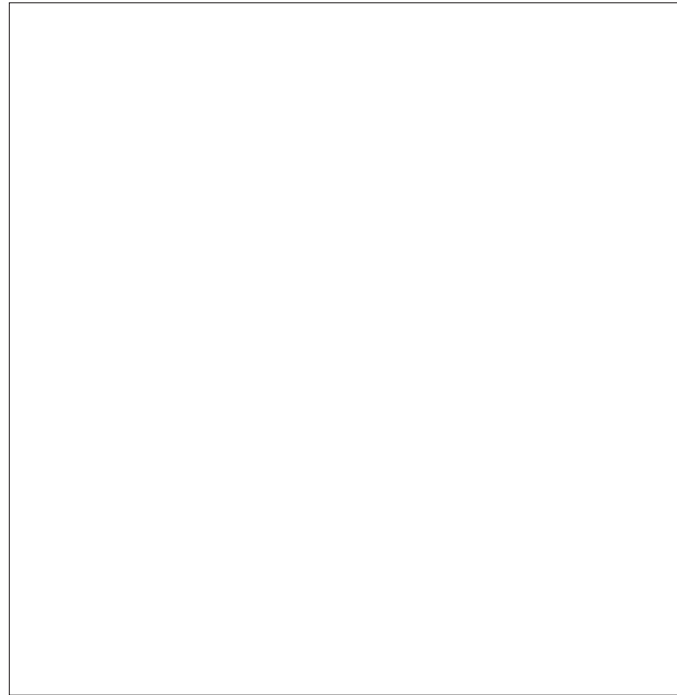
The 1964 epic *The Fall of the Roman Empire* and the similar *Gladiator* both follow the eighteenth century historian Edward Gibbon in seeing the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 AD as marking the final decline of Rome. Yet the Empire survived for another three centuries, divided between east and west and engaged in a constant struggle to defend its borders.

By the late fifth century, the Western Empire had been reduced to Italy and a foothold in southern Gaul. Vandal fleets operating from conquered North Africa and Spain controlled the Mediterranean. Trade and agriculture declined as civil war, famine and disease decimated the population.

Without a citizenry of free peasants and artisans from which the legions had been drawn, taxation had to be raised to pay for a mercenary army who used their power to proclaim a succession of puppet emperors. The abdication of Romulus Augustulus in 476 AD and the decision of the Senate to transfer the imperial insignia to the Eastern Emperor in Byzantium marked the end of a process of economic and military decline rather than a sudden collapse.

*The Last Legion* captures this volatile situation although, being a Hollywood film, it distorts history for effect. The Ostrogoths are predictably presented as barbarian invaders despite having been granted land in return for military service and subsequently converting to Christianity (albeit to Arianism, the heresy that Christ was a lower order of being than God).

Whereas the real Romulus was pensioned off to his family's estate in southern Italy, the film has him travelling to Britain where the plot



fuses with the beginning of the Arthurian legend.

The swordfighting scenes are impressively swashbuckling and combined with some comic touches. The idea of a last band of warriors continuing to fight when the rest of their comrades have been killed clearly resonates

with the fate of socialism in the twentieth century and Natalia Sedova's description of Trotsky as "the last fighter of an annihilated legion". The film's makers are to be credited for an overdue portrayal of an obscure yet decisive period in European history.

## Heroines of revolution

Amy Fisher went with the London socialist feminist reading group to see *Heroines of Revolution*, a play by the New Factory of the Eccentric Actor.

**I**N a tiny community hall in Kentish Town, the play was performed moving around the room, with no separation between the audience and the actors. The play was a series of scenes from revolutionary history, with speeches and diary excerpts from well-known, and less well-known, women revolutionaries.

It was a genuinely entertaining evening; I was moved aside at various points by Rosa Luxemburg and Vera Zasulich, and given the part (denoted by a badge) of a little known Bolshevik woman. Audience participation was encouraged, particularly at the end with a rousing chorus of the Internationale in Russian, then English.

But despite the fun, the politics of the play were all over the place. The first scene showed socialist students in Zurich toasting male revolutionaries and giggling about how great it was to be in the movement before hearing they had been recalled to Russia by the Tsar. A few of us exchanged concerned glances at the silly, fluffy way these women were portrayed — as unserious, and in love with Bakunin as if he were a popstar.

Fortunately the rest of the portrayals weren't as superficial, but the politics didn't get much more serious. We saw scenes of La Pasionara both in the Spanish Revolution and in Moscow in 1941, neither of which addressed her Stalinism. Tina Modotti was shown praising Stalinist Russia, in between scenes of Luxemburg and Constance Markiewicz. One of the revolutionary women was a female soldier from the American war of independence (bit odd mixed with so many socialist women). Aung San Suu Kyi was lauded near the end — again, strange to highlight a bourgeois (if heroic) politician amongst radicals and socialists.

The message seemed to be that it's worthy when women rebel, regardless of their politics — a little patronising, perhaps, suggesting that our politics are above discussion or reproach because we've been so brave to fight for anything in a male-dominated world.

Although a scene at the end briefly mentioned little-known Bolshevik women who died at their posts, or never wrote anything that survived to be lauded today, the play also seemed to largely ignore ordinary women organising against capitalism, or more recent revolutionary movements. If it's bad that the history of rebellion is mainly concerned with male heroes, surely we can't right that by just adding some female heroines to their ranks!

And besides that, the play missed some much more important, and politically better, female "heroines" — despite discussing the suffragettes, Sylvia Pankhurst wasn't mentioned at all. And there was Emma Goldman, whose politics were a hundred times better than La Pasionara's?!

All in all, it was fleetingly quite pleasant to stand in a tiny room in Kentish Town and sing the Internationale surrounded by representations of (some) socialist women on a Friday night. But politically, the play left a slightly bitter after-taste.

# Mixing business and politics

**DAVID BRODER REVIEWS GORGEOUS GEORGE BY DAVID MORLEY**

**G**IVEN his colossal ego, z-list celebrity status and continuing admiration of Stalinist politics, it is hard to imagine a better candidate for biography than George Galloway. However, those who deduce from David Morley's chosen title, "Gorgeous George", that the book is irreverent or cutting will be greatly disappointed.

Much of the biography is a narrative of Gorgeous George's alleged financial improprieties. It reports the legal wranglings but draws no conclusions. It does not ask why a supposed "workers' representative" would refuse to draw only a workers' wage. Morley does devote some pages to the Respect popular front but ignores the many critics — leftist or otherwise — of this project.

Yes, it is funny to think of the Galloway we all know and love as the twinkle-eyed young man who dreamt of being Foreign Secretary and devoted his youth to organising Dundee Labour Party (having failed to get elected to the heady heights of local councillor). But the scores of pages about the personalities, intrigues and business ventures of Labour in Dundee during the 70s and 80s are of scant interest to anyone serious about politics.

Indeed, Morley clearly has minimal understanding of socialist ideas and groups — he describes Galloway as a "Marxist" and "working class hero" (as with Fidel Castro), whereas in his lexicon "Trotskyites" are not "Marxists". This bold allegation is never explained, nor his flat denial that Galloway is a Stalinist.

Morley tells us that the now defunct Workers' Revolutionary Party — who received over £1 million in payments from Colonel Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein in exchange for fingering communists in the Middle East — "are so extreme in their revolutionary views that even members of the left describe them as 'left-wing loonies'." Loonies maybe; but what stung them to sue us for libel in 1981 is that we *denied* they were left-wing.

Neither is the writer interested in Galloway's failure to join the Socialist Campaign Group while a Labour MP, or his claim to be "not as left wing as you might think", both severe indictments of his socialist credentials. Morley ignores Galloway's continuing dismay at the collapse of the monstrous USSR regime, "the saddest day of my life".

Morley does however defend Galloway's 1994 audience with Saddam Hussein, in which he told the Iraqi tyrant "Sir, I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability". He swallows Galloway's claim that this address was intended to the whole Iraqi nation — an analysis which jars somewhat with the fact that in the same meeting Galloway gave the dictator a sickly tribute about meeting Palestinians who had named their sons Saddam.

Even if Galloway were "saluting" all Iraqis, the fact that he would say this to the man who monopolised the country's political life and butchered his opponents was a slap in the face for Iraqi socialists, Kurds, democrats, trade unionists, etc.

And while Galloway's pretentious mannerisms — Cuban cigars; wearing a coat over his shoulders with his arms out of the sleeves, like

a mafia don, ready for a lackey to remove it for him; his pompous sloganeering about Saddam Hussein and Hezbollah — are fine targets for comedy, Morley steers well clear of farce. He instead peppers the book with his own lineers:

"Singers of the stature of Tony Christie had played [at the Labour Club], though whether he knew that some of the gate money was going to the Labour Party, or cared if it might have been on its way to Amarillo, we'll never know".

Morley is very much telling Galloway's side of the story. Even though he is a "maverick", a "firebrand", and is "controversial", Galloway is presented as principled and essentially benign, not like the yes-men in Cabinet who he might have emulated if he were a careerist. Yet Galloway has never been other than a politician, and his politics are far from socialist. He is a carbuncle on the public image of the left, and the SWP/Respect would do well to break with him politically.

Morley did get an interview with SWP leader John Rees, who makes a clear-as-mud case for workers' management:

"It might be that if you ask about renationalisation you get one answer, but if you ask about continued privatisation you get a very different one, and certainly it isn't hard to imagine that two steps down the road people may say: 'Well, if privatisation isn't working then we have to discuss public provision in some form.' Neither they nor we want to have the old nationalised industries return, but we do want democratic public provision of essential services, and I would say there is a very, very large constituency for that view."

# "All power to the soviets!"

This week is the exact 90th anniversary of the Russian workers' revolution of November 1917. Since the fall in 1991 of the Stalinist regime which eventually overwhelmed the workers' government and made a counter-revolution in the 1920s, more has been available to researchers in the west. Some new books have advanced our understanding of the revolution. None, however, can match the exciting exposition of the course of 1917, in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. Written in 1930, Trotsky's book presents a fascinating study of the ebbs and flows of a complex class struggle. All students of the Russian revolution should begin their studies with Trotsky's great masterpiece. The following extract is taken from the last chapter and is an account of the Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets which met on 25-26 October in Petrograd.

IN Smolny [Institute] on the 25th of October the most democratic of all parliaments in the world's history was to meet. Who knows — perhaps also the most important.

Having got free of the influence of compromiser intellectuals, the local soviets had sent up for the most part workers and soldiers. The majority of them were people without big names, but who had proved themselves in action and won lasting confidence in their own localities. From the active army it was almost exclusively rank-and-file soldiers who had run the blockade of army committees and headquarters and come here as delegates. A majority of them had begun to live a political life with the revolution. They had been formed by an experience of eight months. They knew little, but knew it well. The outward appearance of the Congress proclaimed its make-up...

A grey colour prevailed uninterruptedly, in costumes and in faces. All had worn out their clothes during the war. Many of the city workers had provided themselves with soldiers' coats. The trench delegates were by no means a pretty picture: long unshaven, in old torn trench-coats, with heavy papakhi [tall hats] on their dishevelled hair, often with cotton sticking out through a hole, with coarse weather-beaten faces, heavy cracked hands, fingers yellowed with tobacco, buttons torn off, belts hanging loose, and long uncoiled boots wrinkled and rusty. The plebeian nation had for the first time sent up an honest representation

made in its own image and not retouched.

The statistics of this Congress which assembled during the hours of insurrection are very, incomplete. At the moment of opening there were 650 delegates with votes: 390 fell to the lot of the Bolsheviks — by no means all members of the party, but they were of the flesh and blood of the masses, and the masses had no roads left but the Bolshevik road. Many of the delegates who had brought doubts with them were maturing fast in the red-hot atmosphere of Petrograd.

How completely had the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries squandered the political capital of the February revolution. At the [first] June Congress of Soviets the Compromisers had a majority of 600 votes out of the whole number of 832 delegates. Now the compromiser opposition of all shades made up less than a quarter of the Congress. The Mensheviks, with the national group adhering to them, amounted to only 80 members — about half of them "Lefts." Out of 159 Social Revolutionaries — according to other reports 190 — about three-fifths were Lefts, and moreover the Right continued to melt fast during the very sitting of the Congress. Toward the end the total number of delegates, according to several lists, reached 900. But this figure, while including a number of advisory members, does not on the other hand include all those with votes. The registration was carried on intermittently; documents have been lost; the information about party affiliations was incomplete. In any case the dominant position of the Bolsheviks in the Congress remains indubitable.

A straw-vote taken among the delegates revealed that 505 soviets stood for the transfer of all power to the soviets; 86 for a government of the "democracy"; 55 for a coalition; 21 for a coalition, but without the Kadets. Although eloquent even in this form, these figures give an exaggerated idea of the remains of the Compromisers' influence. Those for democracy and coalition were soviets from the more backward districts and least important points...

In the name of the Bolsheviks a Moscow delegate, Avanesov, moves that the presidium be elected upon a proportional basis: 14 Bolsheviks, 7 Social Revolutionaries, 3 Mensheviks and 1 Internationalist. The Right immediately declines to enter the presidium. Martov's group sits tight for the time being; it has not decided. Seven votes go over to the Left Social Revolutionaries. The

Congress watches these introductory conflicts with a scowl.

The Congress greeted its presidium with enthusiasm. While the factions had been assembling and conferring, Lenin with his make-up still on, in wig and big spectacles, was sitting in the passage-way in the company of two or three Bolsheviks. On the way to a meeting of their faction Dan and Skobelev stopped still. Opposite the table where the conspirators were sitting, stared at Lenin, and obviously recognised him. Time, then, to take the make-up off. But Lenin was in no hurry to appear publicly. He preferred to look round a little and gather the threads into his hands while remaining behind the scenes.

THE verbal battles of the two camps were extraordinarily impressive against a background of cannon-shots. Martov demanded the floor. The moment when the balance is still oscillating is his moment — this inventive statesman of eternal waverings. With his hoarse tubercular voice Martov makes instant rejoinder to the metallic voice of the guns: "We must put a stop to military action on both sides ... The question of power is beginning to be decided by conspiratorial methods. All the revolutionary parties have been placed before a fait accompli ... A civil war threatens us with an explosion of counter-revolution. A peaceful solution of the crisis can be obtained by creating a government which will be recognised by the whole democracy."

A considerable portion of the Congress applauds. Sukhanov [historian of the revolution and critic of the Bolsheviks] remarks ironically: "Evidently many and many a Bolshevik, not having absorbed the spirit of the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky, would have been glad to take that course." The Left Social Revolutionaries and a group of United Internationalists support the proposal of peace negotiations. The Right Wing, and perhaps also the close associates of Martov, are confident that the Bolsheviks will reject this proposal. They are wrong. The Bolsheviks send Lunacharsky to the tribune, the most peace-loving, the most velvety of their orators. "The Bolshevik faction," he says, "has absolutely nothing against Martov's proposal." The enemy are astonished. "Lenin and Trotsky in thus giving way a little to their own masses," comments Sukhanov, "are at the same time cutting the ground from under the Right Wing." Martov's

proposal is adopted unanimously. "If the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries withdraw now," runs the comment in Martov's group, "they will bury themselves." It is possible to hope, therefore, that the Congress "will take the correct road of creating a united democratic front." Vain hope! A revolution never moves on diagonals.

The Right Wing immediately violates the just-approved initiation of peace negotiations. The Menshevik Kharash, a delegate from the 12th Army with a captain's star on his shoulders, makes a statement: "These political hypocrites propose that we decide the question of power. Meanwhile it is being decided behind our backs ... Those blows at the Winter Palace are driving nails in the coffin of the party which has undertaken such an adventure ..." The captain's challenge is answered by the Congress with a grumble of indignation.

This demonstration of the Right Wing does not cow anybody, but causes alarm and irritation. The majority of the delegates are too sick and tired of these bragging and narrow-minded leaders who fed them first with phrases and then with measures of repression...

[The right seem to withdraw...]

Martov's declaration, hostile through and through to the Bolsheviks, and lifeless in its arguments, condemns the revolution as "accomplished by the Bolshevik party alone by the method of a purely military plot," and demands that the Congress suspend its labours until an agreement has been reached with all the socialist parties. To try to find the resultant of a parallelogram of forces in a revolution is worse than trying to catch your own shadow!

But it was necessary to put up a resistance to Martov. This task fell to Trotsky. "Now since the exodus of the Rights," concedes Sukhanov, "his position is as strong as Martov's is weak." The opponents stand side by side in the tribune, hemmed in on all sides by a solid ring of excited delegates. "What has taken place," says Trotsky, is an insurrection, not a conspiracy. An insurrection of the popular masses needs no justification. We have tempered and hardened the revolutionary energy of the Petrograd workers and soldiers. We have openly forged the will of the masses to insurrection, and not conspiracy ... Our insurrection has conquered, and now you propose to us: Renounce your victory: make a compromise.

With whom? I ask: With whom ought we to make a compromise? With that pitiful handful who just went out? ... Haven't we seen them through and through. There is no longer anybody in Russia who is for them. Are the millions of workers and peasants represented in this Congress, whom they are ready now as always to turn over for a price to the mercies of the bourgeoisie, are they to enter a compromise with these men? No, a compromise is no good here. To those who have gone out, and to all who made like proposals, we must say, "You are pitiful isolated individuals; you are bankrupts; your rôle is played out. Go where you belong from now on — into the rubbish-can of history!"

"Then we will go!" cries Martov without awaiting the vote of the Congress.

THE red marshals employed the short delay accorded to them with complete success. A new wind was blowing in the atmosphere of the Congress when its sitting was renewed. Kamenev read from the tribune a telephonogram just received from Antonov. The Winter Palace has been captured by the troops of the Revolutionary Military Committee; with the exception of Kerensky the whole Provisional Government with the dictator Kishkin [the man whom the provisional Government had appointed as military chief] at its head is under arrest. Although everybody had already learned the news as it passed from mouth to mouth, this official communication crashed in heavier than a cannon salute. The leap over the abyss dividing the revolutionary class from power has been made.

Driven out of the Palace of Kshesinskaia in July, the Bolsheviks have now entered the Winter Palace as rulers. There is no other power now in Russia but the power of the soviets. A complex tangle of feelings breaks loose in applause and

## 1917

Who fears to praise Red Seventeen?  
Who quails at Lenin's name?  
When liars mock at Trotsky's fate  
Who adds his, "Theirs the blame"?  
Cain-Stalin's knave, or bourgeois slave  
Will scorn the Old Cause thus,  
But honest men and women  
Will raise a voice with us.

We praise the memory of the dead,  
Of Lenin's friends long gone  
Who led the workers in revolt:  
An army, not a throng.  
All, all are gone, but still lives on  
The cause of those who died  
And honest men and women  
Remember them with pride

They rose in war-torn blood drenched days  
To help set workers free  
Their own lives fed the living blaze  
That challenged tyranny:  
But bourgeois might half-vanquished right  
Some fell in disarray,  
Others spun 'neath Stalin's gun  
— And we strive still today!

We work to free all those who live  
In bourgeois slavery  
And glory in the names of those  
Who fought for Liberty.

'Trenched bourgeois might won't vanquish right  
But fail and go astray.  
And honest and women  
Will speed them on their way!

Yes, we dare praise Red Seventeen,  
We honour Lenin's name.  
Though cowards mock the old Red fight,  
We're still in Trotsky's game!  
Though Stalin's knaves and bourgeois slaves  
Will scorn the Old Cause thus,  
Yet honest men and women  
Still voice this faith with us.

We hail the memory of the free,  
Of Trotsky's 'durate few  
Who fought in France, Spain, Germany,  
Who fought in Russia too.  
Though all are gone, they still live on,  
Their cause won't go away  
And honest men and women  
Still sing their song today.

Then here's their memory, may it be  
For us a guiding light  
That shows us workers' liberty  
And teaches us to fight.  
Through good and ill continue still  
The Cause that thrives unseen,  
That brought the bourgeois tyrants down  
In Nineteen Seventeen!

SM

This is patterned on John Kells Ingram's "The Memory of the Dead", which is better known as "Ninety Eight" — 1798, the year of rebellion in Ireland. 1917 goes to the tune of Ninety Eight.

shouting: triumph, hope, but also anxiety. Then come new and more confident bursts of applause. The deed is done. Even the most favourable correlation of forces contains concealed surprises, but the victory becomes indubitable when the enemy's staff is made prisoner...

The unhappy Mensheviks selected this moment to draw attention to themselves. They had not yet, it seems, withdrawn. They had been considering in their faction what to do. Out of a desire to bring after him the wavering groups, Kapelinsky, who had been appointed to inform the congress of the decision adopted, finally spoke aloud the most candid reason for breaking with the Bolsheviks: "Remember that the troops are riding towards Petrograd; we are threatened with catastrophe." "What! Are you still here?" – the question was shouted from all corners of the hall. "Why, you went out once!" The Mensheviks moved in a tiny group towards the entrance, accompanied by scornful farewells.

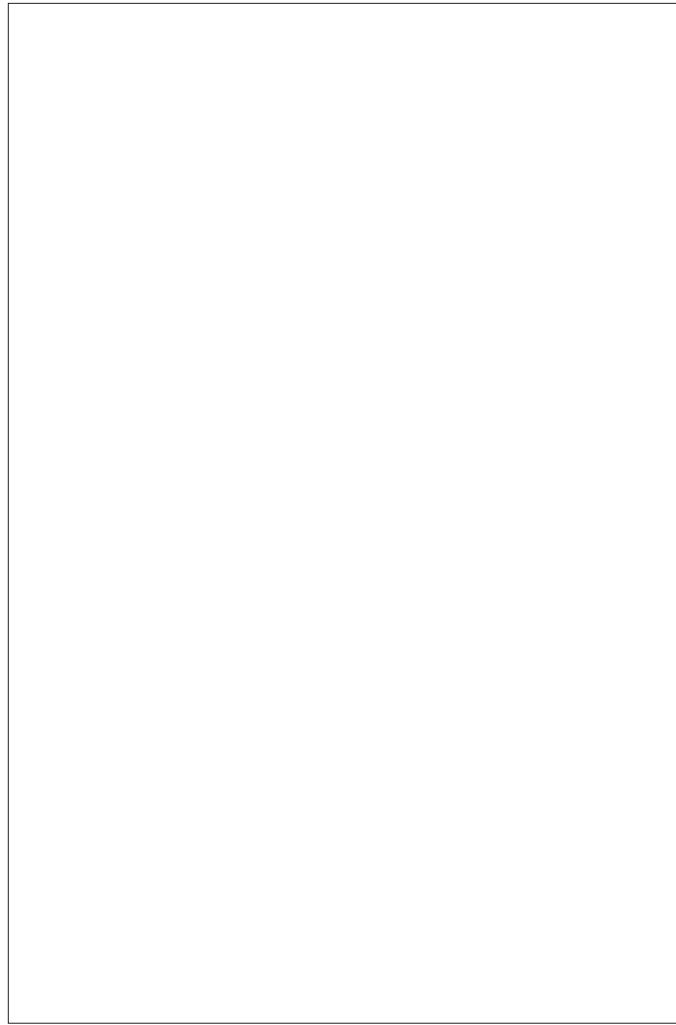
Lunacharsky at last got a chance to read a proclamation addressed to the workers, soldiers and peasants. But this was not merely a proclamation. By its mere exposition of what had happened and what was proposed, this hastily written document laid down the foundations of a new state structure. "The authority of the compromiser Central Executive Committee is at an end. The Provisional Government is deposed. The Congress assumes the power..." The Soviet Government proposes immediate peace. It will transfer the land to the peasants democratically, establish control over production, promptly summon the Constituent Assembly, guarantee the right of the nations of Russia to self-determination. "The Congress resolves: That all power in the localities goes over to the soviets." Every phrase as it is read turns into a salvo of applause. "Soldiers! Be on your guard! Railway workers! Stop all echelons sent by Kerensky against Petrograd! ... The fate of the revolution and the fate of the democratic peace is in your hands!"...

**T**HE session finally came to an end at about six o'clock. A grey and cold autumn morning was dawning over the city. The hot spots of the camp-fires were fading out in the gradually lightening streets. The greying faces of the soldiers and the workers with rifles were concentrated and unusual. If there were astrologers in Petrograd, they must have observed portentous signs in the heavens.

The capital awoke under a new power. The everyday people, the functionaries, the intellectuals, cut off from the arena of events, rushed for the papers early to find out to which shore the wave had tossed during the night. But it was not easy to make out what had happened. To be sure, the papers reported the seizure by conspirators of the Winter Palace and the ministers, but only as a passing episode. Kerensky has gone to headquarters; the fate of the government will be decided by the front. Reports of the Soviet Congress reproduce only the declarations of the Right Wing, enumerate those who withdrew, and expose the impotence of those who remained. The political editorials, written before the seizure of the Winter Palace, exude a cloudless optimism...

... So now Smolny became the focal point for all functions of the capital and the state. Here all the ruling institutions had their seat. Here orders were issued and hither people came to get them. Hence a demand went out for weapons, and hither came rifles and revolvers confiscated from the enemy. Arrested people were brought in here from all ends of the city. The injured began to flow in seeking justice. The bourgeois public and its frightened cab-drivers made a great yoke-shaped detour to avoid the Smolny region.

A steady flood of people poured along the sidewalks of the adjoining streets. Bonfires were



*Petrograd demonstration 1917: the banners read, "Down with war", "Down with Ministers-Capitalists" and "All power to the soviets"*

burning at the outer and inner gates. By their wavering light armed workers and soldiers were belligerently inspecting passes. A number of armoured-cars stood shaking with the action of their own motors in the court. Nothing wanted to stop moving, machines or people. At each entrance stood machine-guns abundantly supplied with cartridge-belts. The endless, weakly lighted, gloomy corridors echoed with the tramping of feet, with exclamations and shouts. The arriving and departing poured up and down the broad staircase. And this solid human lava would be cut through by impatient and imperative individuals. Smolny workers, couriers, commissars, a mandate or an order lifted high in their hand, a rifle on a cord slung over their shoulder, or a portfolio under their arm.

The Military Revolutionary Committee never stopped working for an instant. It received delegates, couriers, volunteer informers, devoted friends, and scoundrels. It sent commissars to all corners of the town, set innumerable seals upon orders and commands and credentials – all this in the midst of intersecting inquiries, urgent communications, the ringing of telephone bells and the

rattle of weapons. People utterly exhausted of their force, long without sleep or eating, unshaven, in dirty linen, with inflamed eyes, would shout in hoarse voices, gesticulate fantastically, and if they did not fall half dead on the floor, it seemed only thanks to the surrounding chaos which whirled them about and carried them away again on its unharnessed wings.

Never since the creation of the world have so many orders been issued – by word of mouth by pencil, by typewriter, by wire, one following after the other – thousands and myriads of orders, not always issued by those having the right, and rarely to those capable of carrying them out. But just here lay the miracle – that in this crazy whirlpool there turned out to be an inner meaning. People managed to understand each other. The most important and necessary things got done. Replacing the old web of administration, the first threads of the new were strung. The revolution grew in strength.

During that day, the Central Committee of the Bolsheviks was at work in Smolny. It was deciding the problem of the new government of Russia. No minutes were kept – or they have not been preserved. Nobody was bothering about future historians, although a lot of trouble was being prepared for them right there. The evening session of the Congress was to create a cabinet of ministers. M-i-n-i-s-t-e-r-s? "What a sadly compromised word! It stinks of the high bureaucratic career, the crowning of some parliamentary ambition. It was decided to call the government the Soviet of People's Commissars: that at least had a fresher sound. Since the negotiations for a coalition of the "entire democracy" had come to nothing, the question of the party and personal staff of the government was simplified. The Left Social Revolutionaries minced and objected. Having just broken with the party of Kerensky, they themselves hardly knew what they wanted to do. The Central Committee adopted the motion of Lenin as the only thinkable one: to form a government of Bolsheviks only... [The Left SRs would enter the government in December].

**T**HE Congress opened its session at nine o'clock in the evening. "The picture on the whole was but little different from yesterday – fewer weapons, less of a jam." ... This session was to decide the questions of peace, land and government. Only three questions: end the war, give the land to the people, establish a socialist dictatorship [i.e. socialist rule: Marxists like Trotsky considered all variants of capitalist rule, from the parliamentary to the fascist, to be bourgeois "dictatorship"]. Kamenev began with a report of the work done by the presidium during the day the death penalty at the front introduced by Kerensky abolished; complete freedom of agitation restored; orders given for the liberation of soldiers imprisoned for political convictions, and members of land committees; all the commissars of the Provisional Government removed from office; orders given to arrest and deliver Kerensky and Kornilov. The Congress approved and ratified these measures.

Lenin, whom the Congress has not yet seen, is given the floor for a report on peace. His appearance in the tribune evokes a tumultuous greeting. The trench delegates gaze with all their eyes at this mysterious being whom they had been taught to hate and whom they have learned without seeing him to love. "Now Lenin, gripping the edges of the reading-stand, let little winking eyes travel over the crowd as he stood there waiting, apparently oblivious to the long-rolling ovation, which lasted several minutes. When it finished, he said simply, 'We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order.'"

... That initial statement which John Reed puts in the mouth of Lenin does not appear in any of the newspaper accounts. But it is wholly in the spirit of the orator. Reed could not have made it up. Just in that way Lenin must surely have begun his speech at the Congress of Soviets – simply, without unctious, with inflexible confidence: "We shall now proceed to construct the socialist order."

But for this it was first of all necessary to end the war. From his exile in Switzerland Lenin had thrown out the slogan: Convert the imperialist war into a civil war. Now it was time to convert the victorious civil war into peace. The speaker began immediately by reading the draft of a declaration to be published by the government still to be elected. The text had not been distributed, technical equipment being still very weak. The congress drank in every word of the document as pronounced.

"Suddenly, by common impulse," – the story will soon be told by John Reed, observer and participant, chronicler and poet of the insurrection – "we found ourselves on our feet, mumbling together into the smooth lifting unison of the Internationale. A grizzled old soldier was sobbing like a child. Alexandra Kollontai rapidly winked the tears back. The immense sound rolled through the hall, burst windows and doors and soared into the quiet sky."

Did it go altogether into the sky? Did it not go also to the autumn trenches, that hatch-work upon unhappy, crucified Europe, to her devastated cities and villages, to her mothers and wives in mourning? "Arise ye prisoners of starvation! Arise ye wretched of the earth!" The words of the song were freed of all qualifications. They fused with the decree of the government, and hence resounded with the force of a direct act. Everyone felt greater and more important in that hour. The heart of the revolution enlarged to the width of the whole world.

"We will achieve emancipation. The spirit of independence, of initiative, of daring, those joyous feelings of which the oppressed in ordinary conditions are deprived – the revolution had brought them now ... with our own hand!" The omnipotent hand of those millions who had overthrown the monarchy and the bourgeoisie would now strangle the war.

The Red Guard from the Vyborg district, the grey soldier with his scar, the old revolutionist who had served his years at hard labour, the young black-bearded sailor from the Aurora – all vowed to carry through to the end this "last and deciding fight." "We will build our own new world!" "We will build! In that word eagerly spoken from the heart was included already the future years of the civil war and the coming five-year periods of labour and privation. "Who was nothing shall be all!"

All if the actualities of the past have often been turned into song, why shall not a song be turned into the actuality of the future? Those trenchcoats no longer seemed the costumes of galley-slaves. The papakhi with their holes and torn cotton took a new aspect above those gleaming eyes. "The race of man shall rise again!" Is it possible to believe that it will not rise from the misery and humiliation, the blood and filth of this war?

## Subscribe to Solidarity!

**Individuals: £15 per year (22 issues) waged, £8 unwaged.**

**Organisations: £35 large, £22 smaller (5 copies)**

Name .....  
Address .....

Organisation .....

European rate: £20 or 32 euros in cash.

Send to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to "Solidarity". Or subscribe online at [www.workersliberty.org/solidarity](http://www.workersliberty.org/solidarity)



# workers' liberty & Solidarity

## Trade-unionists and socialists targetted in clampdown Support the left in Pakistan!

BY CATHY NUGENT

**W**HY did Pakistan's military ruler General Musharraf risk millions of dollars in military and other financial aid from the US and EU by declaring martial law on 3 November?

He probably knew there was little chance of Pakistan's major donor countries (the US and the UK) doing more than weakly threatening to cut that aid. In the short-term, to a large extent, the US and UK are inhibited by their reliance on Pakistan in the region — not least for logistical help with NATO operations in Afghanistan. A guarded promise from Musharraf (5 November) to go ahead with National Assembly elections in January was enough to see the US and UK back off.

In any case Musharraf has long wanted a concerted drive to arrest, neutralise or otherwise brutally intimidate Pakistan's "liberal" opposition — the lawyers, human rights activists and media people that trouble him. Trade unionists and socialists have also been targetted (see page 7).

Musharraf's stated reason for setting cops onto lawyers and putting judges under house arrest is that they are interfering with the army's ability to bring to justice Pakistan many and various Islamist extremists. Only a power-obsessed anti-democrat of the tallest order could be capable of such breath-taking hypocrisy.

Musharraf is out to get people like Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry because they want to stop him and the military from staying in power. Last March Chaudhry ruled that any "re-election" of Musharraf as President by the National Assembly (which Musharraf achieved last month) would be illegal; at Chaudhry's instigation the Supreme Court were about to make the same ruling again.

There is more to this crackdown, some of which we can only speculate about. It could be that Musharraf and sections in the army, do not trust or want the recent (US-backed) deal with the Pakistani Peoples' Party (PPP) to share power after the election. Will the PPP accept the military's dominant role in politics? The fact that the PPP, which has so far not called its people out onto the streets, does not seem a threat, may be immaterial to Pakistan's ruthless military rulers — if they are feeling nervous about their position.

And there are much greater threats to Musharraf's personal position and that of his brothers in braid.

Pakistan's armed forces are now a colossal enterprise of different branches, including two separate intelligence agencies, and all sorts of direct and indirect interests in the Pakistani economy. Throughout Pakistan's history the armed forces have been a constant, holding together Pakistan's fragile state, backing up and overthrowing civilian governments, holding together by force a complex and conflict-ridden society. Those conflicts are worse than ever.

The growth in the dominance and effectiveness of the Islamist jihadists in the regions bordering Afghanistan and ongoing Sunni-

Shi'a clashes are just part, a big part of the picture. There have been workers' strikes (at Unilever for instance) and student protests. And to this must be added, above all, a conflict that threatens to develop into full

scale civil war in Balochistan.

This year the government has used increasing force against largely secular Balochistan nationalists. Chief Justice Chaudhry (himself from Balochistan) pressured the government

to release people arrested in the conflict, many of whom have not been heard of by their families for many months. Musharraf has also joined up with Islamists in an attempt to marginalise the nationalists and secularists in both of the two main peoples of the area, the Balochi and Pashtun. His Islamists of choice? The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F). And this group is a major ally of the Afghan Taliban!

The military are pragmatists when it comes to holding onto their own power and putting a lid on people fighting for greater autonomy. Of course they will back the Taliban in order to save their own position! Probably there are sections of the military who agree with backing the Taliban.

And the western powers? They have, up until now, stayed friends with these purveyors of violence because "putting a lid on it" — even if it involves giving direct or indirect support to the Taliban — might create some stability in the region, and therefore better conditions for capitalist exploitation. (In Balochistan, pumping out gas reserves).

Right now Pakistan's military are unlikely to want to give up much power. That is bad news for the workers, democrats, and trade unionists in Pakistan. Socialists in this country urgently need to organise solidarity.

**Dave Warren on the "vote no" campaign in Royal Mail  
"I've never known a deal  
where the union has agreed  
so many changes after  
they've been imposed"**

**Dave Warren is a member of the Postal Executive of the post and telecom union CWU. He opposed the deal with Royal Mail endorsed by a majority of the Executive on 22 October, and has been campaigning for a no vote in the ballot on the deal which runs between 9 and 27 November. He spoke to *Solidarity*.**

**S**O far about 20 CWU branches have taken a position to oppose the deal. Flexibility is a very big issue for many members. If it were a straight pay deal, there would not be the same opposition. The pay deal is a 5.4% increase from October: £175 to cover the period from April (where the pay deal was due) to September (but that is money already earned in a bonus scheme which is now being wound up); and another 1.5% from April 2008, dependent on flexible working.

In the Mail Centres, to be honest, there is already a fairly high

degree of flexibility, but it is a bigger issue in deliveries, both indoors and outdoors. There is an attitude in deliveries of "I've got a job, I'll do it, but if you want me to do something extra, you'll have to pay me extra".

The flexibility is all about saving money for Royal Mail, so in fact it will mean that the pay is worse than it looks in the headline figures.

The management, in their material on the deal, have acknowledged the link between pay and flexibility, so that is helping us a bit on the no vote. The union leadership's line is that the deal isn't brilliant, but it's the best we can get.

To the members they are saying: thank you for your support; the action brought management to the negotiating table. There will be flexibility, but we will negotiate it. They don't go much into detail, but instead emphasise the headline figures in the deal.

*Continued on page 4*