

An injury to one is an injury to all

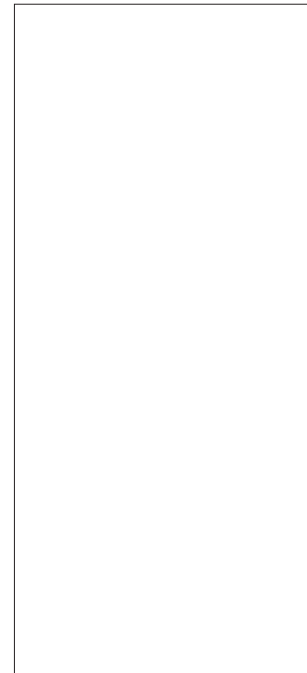
Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



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FREE TIBET!



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Let Mehdi Kazemi stay!

BY DAVID BRODER

MEHDI Kazemi is a 19 year old gay man being threatened with deportation to Iran. His case has hit the headlines because he would be in almost certain danger of arrest and execution if the government sent him back to his homeland. Furthermore, the threat hanging over him exposes the racism and homophobia of the immigration controls system.

Mehdi originally came to London to study English in 2004, but in April 2006 he learnt from his uncle that his boyfriend back in Iran had been arrested by the authorities. Under torture he had been forced to reveal the names of his lovers, and was then executed.

Fearing for his own life should he return to Iran, Mehdi applied for asylum in Britain. However, his claim was refused. The Home Office say Iran does not systematically persecute LGBT people (although more than 4,000 gays and lesbians have been executed since the Ayatollahs seized power almost 30 years ago), and furthermore said that they are safe as long as they are "discreet" about their sexuality.

The outrageous slander of "indecency" against the many victims of the regime (why should they have to hide themselves away?) is not much good for Mehdi Kazemi, whose

name is known to the Iranian government after his boyfriend's torture.

Refused asylum in Britain, Mehdi attempted to claim sanctuary in Holland, but a Dutch court ruled that it was a matter for the British government, since applying for asylum in two EU member states is not allowed. Given the massive outcry in the media (most notably in the *Independent*) and the notoriety of Mehdi's case, the British government did however announce on 13 March that it planned to "review" his deportation.

But Mehdi is far from safe. The government does not want to create a precedent of giving asylum to LGBT people from states where they are persecuted. It is sticking by the racist idea that even if asylum in Britain is someone's only hope of survival, they have no right to settle here because they are a foreigner. No doubt the readers of the *Daily Mail*, to whose fear-mongering the government is so keen to pander, would be greatly unsettled by the idea of an "influx" of gay people from the Middle East.

At the moment there are many similar cases to Mehdi's — such as those of Pegah Emambakhsh (a lesbian woman who does not want to be sent back to Iran) and the teenager Jojo Yakob, living in Scotland, who has already been so tortured in a Syrian prison that he spent 20 days in a coma. He

later escaped from jail and fled abroad, but now may well be sent "home".

In 2004 the gay man Shahin Portofeh was sent back to Iran even after drawing great attention and sympathy to his case by sewing his eyes and mouth shut. As soon as he arrived at Tehran airport he was arrested and given two days of beatings, before a trial where he was sentenced to 60 lashes. Even after that punishment, he faced another court appearance where he was likely to be sentenced to death, although fortunately he was able to avoid that punishment.

We demand the abolition of these racist and homophobic immigration controls, and say that everyone should have the right to settle where they please. But we also campaign around some individual deportations, which is why on 22 March we will be supporting the Middle East Workers' Solidarity protest opposite Downing Street (starting 2pm) demanding that Mehdi Kazemi be allowed to stay in Britain. The demo is also supported by the National Union of Students' LGBT campaign, Feminist Fightback, the International Alliance for Solidarity with Workers in Iran and Hands Off the People of Iran.

• Galloway and Mehdi Kazemi, see page 19
• Middle East Workers' Solidarity: www.unionsolidarity.org

Campaign action

• At the Stop the War demonstration on 15 March, the Middle East Workers' Solidarity campaign gave out leaflets for the 22 March Mehdi Kazemi protest and copies of the four-page news bulletin *Workers in Struggle*.

• Help us raise £2000 to support Iran's socialist students

Current total: £630
Members of Workers' Liberty and campaigns we are involved in have agreed a target of £2000 to support Iran's socialist student movement, many of whose leaders are currently in prison. We are coordinating the fundraising with young Iranian socialists from the Freedom and Equality group currently living in the UK.

So far we have raised £300 from last year's summer music festivals, £150 from a Feminist Fightback social on International Women's Day and £180 from collecting on the 15 March Stop the War demonstration.

To make a donation, or to help us with fundraising, please get in touch.

Freedom and Equality is a group of socialist students opposed both to war and sanctions and to the Ahmdeinejad regime, and many of their number are among the 81 students in prison following December's protests at campuses across Iran.

"Direct contact with Iraqi unionists is our reason for being"

Kathy Black spoke for US Labor Against War (USLAW) at a meeting at Melbourne Trade on 12 March. Riki Lane summarises her speech.

USLAW is a rank and file initiative, not an official wing of the AFL-CIO. Its achievements are quite historic.

It now has almost 200 affiliates, representing three million workers. They have managed to avoid the "hardhats versus hippies" syndrome of the anti-Vietnam war movement, and to turn out a contingent of 4,000 unionists to a major anti war demonstration.

They have affiliates in both the AFL-CIO and the split off "Change to Win" federation; they have managed strong resolutions through national union leaderships and the AFL-CIO convention, and are seen as a legitimate voice in the labour movement.

At the heart of USLAW, their "reason for being", is direct personal links with Iraqi unionists. This is unique in the US anti-war movement — nobody else has that access to raw, unfiltered information from inside the civil resistance to the occupation and sectarian militias.

USLAW sent two US unionists to Iraq in 2003, when it was still relatively safe, then toured them around the US. They have conducted two tours to the US by Iraqi union leaders. Personal contact with Iraqi unionists, hearing of their immense bravery in face of huge difficulties, really brings home the message to US unionists.

Saddam's anti-union laws remain in force under the occupation and the Iraqi government, making it illegal to organise in the public sector. There have been hundreds of raids or assaults on union offices and leaders by sectarian militias, death squads and the

occupation forces. At least twelve union leaders have died — all but one at the hands of squads and militias, and one by a US soldier in an apparent accident.

Despite the immense hardships — lack of water, electricity and food, and the constant threat of bombings etc — Iraqi unionists are amazingly optimistic about the possibilities of a positive future.

USLAW has raised significant amounts of money to assist Iraqi unions through supporting organisers and providing computers etc.

The biggest appeal from the Iraqi unions is for overseas supporters to help end the occupation immediately. None of the unions they work with (FCWUI, GFIW, Oil Workers) now see any benefit in the occupying forces staying on in Iraq. None of the unions supported Saddam, and would say "thanks for getting rid of him, but you need to leave."

The other major issue is to help oppose privatisation, especially of the oil industry. The media in the US and Australia give virtually no coverage to Bush's 18 "Benchmark laws", which are his prerequisites for troop withdrawal. The Benchmark Oil law has been approved by the Iraqi cabinet (for over 12 months), its been sent to the Parliament, but they have not yet acted on it. When the media do mention this law, it is always framed as a positive modernisation, but it is never mentioned that it gives foreign corporations control of exploration and development for decades.

Looking at US politics, an important force in the anti-war movement is Iraq Veterans Against the War, which now has 42 chapters, including on US military bases, and even has several chapters in Iraq. They are holding "Winter soldier hearings" in Washington DC for the 5th anniversary of the war — March 13-16 — and have managed to convince all

other groups in the peace movement to have no competing nationally organised activities at that time.

Given the extended tours of duty for US soldiers — some have had up to four deployments of a year — it is increasingly hard for the US Army to recruit. They have lowered their requirements — increasing the age limit, the range of acceptable medical conditions and the numbers of immigrants who are not US citizens.

The focus for the anti-war and labour movements is now in the elections. There is a campaign to get Congress members to sign up to a no vote for any money not connected to withdrawal of US troops — almost 100 have done so. USLAW managed to get their anti-war material included in an AFL-CIO election slideshow.

The war has receded as a central issue in recent months as the number of US deaths has declined, the mortgage crisis has spread, and the economy has got worse — people are losing their homes and their jobs, which also means their health insurance. The labour movement is very motivated in this election to get rid of Bush and the Republicans — its powerful machine is in full swing to get Democrats elected. US labor is split on Barack Obama or Hilary Clinton — neither is perfect, but either would be much better than McCain.

The main message: anti war activists need to make direct links with Iraqi unionists. USLAW will help broker those relationships with Australian activist and unions.

Taking up this message in Melbourne, AWL activists are looking to work with an existing workers' solidarity campaign, Australia Asia Worker Links, which has recently expanded its area of coverage to include the Middle East and Iraq.

TEACH-IN FOR REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS!

Feminist Fightback is following up on 2007's torchlit march for abortion rights and our continuing campaigning for full reproductive freedom with an abortion rights teach-in, 12 April, at London School of Economics. Sessions will include how to campaign: a practical workshop; Imperialism and Motherhood — race, empire and reproductive freedoms; Getting your message across: making the pro-choice case; The current situation: NHS, law, state provision, internationally; Planning for a national day of action.

This event is aimed at feminists, trade unionists, students, school students and others. Come and learn more about the historical and current situation, develop campaigning skills, and get involved in a militant pro-choice campaign.

• 12 April, 12-5pm at Clement House Building, London School of Economics, London, WC2A (Holborn tube).

More information — 07971 719 797 rebecca.galbraith@yahoo.co.uk

Free Tibet! Back China's workers and oppressed

SINCE 10 March, Tibet has been convulsed by protests against Chinese rule. The arrest of a small group of monks attempting to demonstrate on the site of a failed 1959 uprising against China has led to protests by many thousands of Tibetans, and a major crack down by China's Stalinist-colonial regime.

On 17 March, thousands of paramilitary police were massing in the capital Lhasa and other areas of unrest ahead of an ultimatum for protesters to hand themselves in or face "severe punishment" — but the arrests had already begun. Hong Kong journalists were ordered to leave Lhasa, and foreign reporters have been expelled even from Tibetan areas of China's other central Asian provinces. Already the government has killed dozens of people (13 according to its figures, about a hundred according to Tibetan exiles). We have every

reason to fear that China is preparing for a massacre, particularly given its brutal record in Tibet.

Socialists have no regret for the feudal, theocratic Tibetan society which the Chinese occupation set out to destroy. We hold no brief for the Dalai Lama's government in exile. What we do believe is that the Tibetan people have a right to self-determination, to determine their future free from foreign control. That is the only basis on which any meaningful democracy is possible, and on which the class struggle in Tibet can develop freely.

Self-determination means the withdrawal of Chinese forces from Tibet, and independence if a majority want it. It means solidarity with the protesters who have ignored the pacifistic dogmas of "their" religious leaders in order to bravely rise up against Chinese rule.

Some on the British left will hesitate to

support the Tibetans, caught in a world view in which China, if not quite socialist, is at least a progressive alternative to US imperialism. It is the duty of socialists worthy of the name to expose the Chinese regime for what it is: a brutal imperialist power whose ferocity against its colonial subjects is matched only by its hyper-exploitation of the working class at home.

In 1917, when the Russian workers overthrew the Czarist autocracy, they smashed the walls within which Tsarism had imprisoned tens of millions of oppressed people, and inscribed the right to national self-determination on their banner. That is the tradition in which we want the left to stand.

Stop China's oppression! Free Tibet! Back the workers and oppressed against the Stalinist regime!

A new lurch into crisis

IT is now "arguably the worst financial crisis in seven decades", according to Gillian Tett in the *Financial Times* (18 March).

On 17 March the US investment bank Bear Stearns went under. It had been credited as worth \$18 billion only months ago. Right up to the collapse its bosses claimed it had plenty of cash to meet its commitments.

Actually, the banking business was worth much less than nothing. J P Morgan paid \$230 million — petty cash in bankers' terms — to take it over, about \$800 million less than the physical value of Bear Stearns' offices, and that only after getting a \$30 billion credit guarantee from the US central bank, the Federal Reserve.

The question now is, who else has gone bust behind public assurances that all is fine? Who else may go bust as impressive-looking bits of financial paper turn out to be worthless? And how far will the ripples spread into trade and production?

As the *Financial Times* puts it: "What we are witnessing right now is not just a collapse of faith in one single institution (namely Bear Stearns), or even an asset class (those dodgy subprime mortgage bonds). Instead... a loss of trust in the whole style of modern finance, with all its complex slicing and dicing of risk into ever-more opaque forms".

The boss of Deutsche Bank, Josef Ackermann, is quoted by the FT as putting it more pithily: "I don't believe in markets' self-healing powers any more".

On one level, this crisis exhibits the basic DNA-coding of capitalism: the fact that economic life is dominated by the feverish quest for ever-higher profits by a few brings "bubbles", over-extension of credit, speculation shading over into downright swindles, and eventual crashes.

In several one ways, it is also something new in the history of capitalism.

One: all capitalist crises involve the unexpected. But this one is qualitatively more opaque. Gillian Tett in the *FT* again: "Banking has become so complex and opaque in recent years... that when shocks occur in one obscure corner of finance this creates all manner of unexpected chain reactions".

Capitalist corporations trading internationally in a world of sharply-shifting exchange rates and interest rates do financial deals to lay off the financial risks. On the other side of those transactions, financiers make profits by taking on the risks and charging commission.

Financial capital has come to feed much more off consumers, rather than industry, than ever before. Even quite poor people have credit cards and mortgages; in fact, many poor people depend on their credit cards to buy essentials.

The finance companies that issue the "risky" credit cards and mortgages then do further financial deals to "sell on" the risks; and again, financial whizzkids who fancy themselves at high-wire walking make profits by "buying" the risks. In the USA last year, 19.3% of household income went to interest payments on consumer debt. That's a lot of money for financiers to feed on. The risk spreads through the system, opaquely.

Two: one measure of the opacity is that the capitalist authorities, although very alarmed, cannot agree on what to be alarmed about.

The US Federal Reserve, cutting interest rates ultra-low and shovelling bucketloads of credit into the banks, plainly thinks that inflation and the relative decline of the dollar are secondary problems, and the chief danger to address is that of credit implosion and "deflation" (falling prices) such as prostrated previously ultra-successful Japanese capitalism for the whole of the 1990s.

The European Central Bank, and others,

think inflation is a real danger.

Some experts (and the Federal Reserve would seem to agree) regard the decline of the dollar as benign (helping US exports).

US economist Fred Bergsten tells the *Financial Times* (19 March) that "there are no signs of significant spillover [of trouble] from the United States to China, India..." and "their continued strength" will limit the US slowdown. On a different page of the same *FT* (19 March) China's prime minister is reported as saying that he is "deeply worried" and that "2008 might be the most difficult year for China's economy".

China keeps its currency not exactly tied to the dollar, but relatively close to it. The decline of the dollar has thus generated 8.7% inflation in China. If China loosens its link with the dollar, however, Chinese exports will become more expensive in a US economy already weakening...

The Chinese government continues to pump its spare cash into New York, although it loses by holding wealth in declining dollars rather than other currency. If it stops pumping, then the dollar will decline faster, and the Chinese government loses further on wealth it already holds in dollars. Is that motive sufficient to keep it pumping?

Three: a moderate slowdown of profits or even of production, and a general increase in the debt burden of non-financial businesses, usually precedes any serious crisis. This time it's different.

The last four years have seen faster capitalist growth, worldwide, than any similar period in the last 30 years. Even for 2007, with the credit crisis which is now exploding already well under way, growth was relatively good.

Profit rates are fairly high; most, though

not all, non-financial businesses have debt burdens which are low relative to revenues.

The usual first stage of crisis — non-financial businesses finding it difficult or expensive to get credit for new investments, so cutting back and sending the investment-goods industries into a tailspin — as yet looks remote.

But the financial implosion could well hit at industry by another route, historically unusual. So far the tightening of consumer credit has been minor. It could become major, and sharply cut consumer spending. Consumer-goods industries could drag down investment-goods industries, rather than vice versa.

Whatever the future in detail — and Marxist theory allows no better short-term predictions than ordinary academic economics — the crisis will shine a spotlight on some basic features of capitalism.

On the irrationality of a system which puts the broad economic decisions in the hands of a gang of speculators focused on short-term gain. On the contradiction between production being through ever-wider networks of social cooperation, and the gain and the decision-making power going to those speculators. On the flagrant inequality which the system generates when in expansion, and the equally flagrant inequality of "rescue" moves in crisis (\$30 billion credit to help out J P Morgan, but nothing for people in the US losing their houses, or Northern Rock workers losing their jobs).

There will also be other lessons. To help us learn them, with this issue *Solidarity* is starting a series of interviews with Marxist economists on their assessment of the crisis and their broader understanding of the current stage of world capitalism (page 15).

PUBLIC SECTOR

Driving examiners strike

THE pay and jobs disputes in the Department for Transport (DfT) continue. Following a one day strike on 29 February by seven of the eight bargaining units within DfT, staff in the Maritime Coastguard Agency (MCA) took a day of action on 6 March. The union in DfT has followed this up with targeted action in the Driving Standards Agency. This targeted action will mean that administrative staff take a half day's strike on 20 March. Driving examiners take a 2.5 hour strike on the 20th and a 1.5 hour strike on the 25th. The union calculates that this action will nearly have the same impact on the agency's work as a full day strike. More industrial action is planned in March. To keep up to date visit www.pcs.org.uk/dft

Change in tactics needed

ON 17 and 18 March PCS members in DWP took two further days of strike action. Since December 2007 they have been out for four days.

The dispute has been triggered by the imposition of a three year deal which means that in year two and three (i.e. in 2008 and 2009) large numbers of staff will not see an increase in their basic take home pay. Given inflation, therefore those staff are having imposed on them a cut in real living standards.

An extra twist to the dispute has been the recent announcement that DWP propose to cut 12,000 staff and 200 offices in the next three years; this is on top of the 30,000 staff cut already. Whilst supporting the need for a fight, supporters of the independent Left (IL) — an activist group in the union — are demanding a change in tactics. Having one or two strike days separated by long periods of inactivity is not going to win. IL is campaigning for selective action alongside national action.

Amazingly the Socialist Party, the ruling group in DWP and in PCS, actively oppose such tactics, mainly because the idea of selective action is associated with the IL. Now, in parallel with the dispute there are elections in the DWP. The IL is standing a full slate against the SP. The IL needs to win because members desperately need a change in tactics.

NORTHERN ROCK

Job cuts planned

HAVING been bailed out by a £25 billion government "loan", then nationalised (sort of), stricken bank Northern Rock is seeking to speed up repayment and a move back to the private sector by... cutting jobs, of course. More than 2,000 workers are facing redundancy, with the Unite union focusing on ensuring these are voluntary, not compulsory.

Northern Rock currently employs around 6,000 people — these cuts represent an entire third of the workforce. It seems that although the government can find hefty subsidies, loans and safety nets to protect shareholders' investments, when it comes to rescuing the work of 2,000 people, neither the money nor the political will are there. Perhaps the board of Northern Rock ought to consider a pay cut...

Off the Rails

The latest edition of quarterly pamphlet **Off the Rails**, a platform for rank-and-file rail workers, includes articles on pensions, unfair dismissals, French railworkers struggles, women's rights and organising migrant workers. It's written by railworkers for railworkers.

To subscribe send £5 payable to "WL Bulletins" to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA, or see workersliberty.org/offtherails

SHELTER

Bosses back down

AFTER two days of strike action, bosses at Shelter, an organisation providing services to the homeless, have agreed to put "on hold" their plans to cut workers' pay and conditions.

The bosses made the concession at a meeting with TGWU-Unite shop stewards on Monday 17th. The dispute now goes to negotiations at the official conciliation service ACAS, and further strikes planned for 19 and 20 March have been suspended.

Workers unused to striking, in a sector unused to strikes, have shown that the solidarity they displayed in the strikes on 5 March and 10 March, and in the prospect of further strikes on 19-20 March, can win victories.

Not, of course, until they had been given a sharp lesson in capitalist ways by the Shelter bosses, who are trying to shift the organisation from a charity to something more like a contractor bidding for public-sector contracts. The Shelter bosses had given themselves big pay rises and a lavish refurbishment for their main office in London, while proposing to cut wages and conditions drastically for ordinary Shelter workers.

Supporters of the Shelter workers should remain vigilant in case the bosses prove obdurate in the talks at ACAS. But a first victory has been won.

RAIL

Fight casualisation!

BY A TUBEWORKER

TALKS about the casualisation dispute are still going on, TSSA has had a thumping 81% Yes vote in its ballot, and RMT's ballot papers are in the post.

It seems that management made some concessions, including withdrawing planned changes to the "refusal to work on safety grounds" procedure and kicking the ticket office cuts into the long grass. This shows that we can make them step back just by threatening strikes — and that tells us that we can win even more by keeping the threat open, and more still by actually striking.

There are perils for trade unions in pursuing a dispute based on a "shopping list" of demands — not least that management may cave in on one demand dependent on the union caving in on another. That said, this dispute's demands are closely linked, and sometimes we don't have the luxury of fighting on one issue at a time. If management attack us on several fronts, we have to defend ourselves on all those fronts.

LUL could back down on eight of the nine demands if they like, but if they hold firm on, say, replacing station staff with security guards, then we should still strike. Security guards on stations at night means loss of supervisor jobs and no qualified railway staff on hand to help other grades in the event of an incident. That's why drivers must support the RMT strike ballot. If you have a one-under, security alert, signal remaining at danger, PEA ... then you'd expect to have a station supervisor available to help. Under LUL's plans, you won't.

It is good to see ballots going ahead, but union leaders have been sluggish. Local reps have felt frustrated by a lack of updates. Leaders need to get members on a war footing, but don't always look like they are on a war footing themselves. One way to help turn this around would be to set up a rank-and-file strike committee to organise publicity, talking to staff, responding to management's propaganda etc.

Our priority now must be to get the biggest possible Yes vote in the RMT ballot, and to make sure that union officials do not back down on our core principles — no staff cuts, no casualisation, LUL work to be done by directly-employed LUL staff.

Management have a game plan for the 2012 Olympics and beyond: they want a defeated workforce willing to do what we're told. For them, the best way to achieve this is to have a small core of "flexible", overworked LUL staff, supplemented by agency staff who they can pick up and drop as they choose.

We can either let them do this to us, or we can fight. Hobson's choice, really!

• workersliberty.org/casualise

Giving them the measles

BY ED MALTBY

A LARGE teachers' strike has been called for Tuesday 18 March in France, with teachers in many schools voting to strike indefinitely. As the preparations for this are underway, the JCR (the LCR's youth wing) has been mobilising to get word out to lycées (roughly equivalent to post-16/FE college) students, at a time when the organisation has identified expansion into that age group as a priority. I spent a day touring lycées in the south east of the city with two other comrades from my branch, handing out an A4 youth bulletin called *La Rougeole* (*The Measle*: online archive of PDFs here: <http://jcr-red.org/spip.php?rubrique19>). It was an instructive experience, for me and all student members of the AWL.

I was used to leafleting universities, and picket lines during the postal strike — but this was bad practice for leafletting colleges. The students time their arrival very tightly, and all arrive within a ten-minute window. Very few hang around outside before or after the bell sounds, even to smoke, so you have to be much more punctual. This also requires a certain amount of research and preparation beforehand, finding out the start times and break times of colleges in your area, and planning a route. We all had the morning off work or study, so we found two colleges that started an hour apart, and then dropped by the LCR local to do some photocopying before going to a third for morning break and lunchtime.

The reception of the bulletin was positive. People were especially eager to read it, naturally, because it carried news of a day off lessons. But more importantly, there was a lot of political awareness about the strike and the central complaints and demands in it, which the bulletin drew out well and elaborated on — around classroom overcrowding, teacher layoffs, and course cuts or dumbing-down, in vocational courses especially. Patient work by local comrades meant that both the organisation and the bulletin itself were recognised by many students.

This isn't just significant as a measure of success — the familiarity of the LCR made it much easier for us to strike up conversations, take a few emails, and sell papers.

Of course, in this respect, the French have two important advantages that we don't — firstly, the massive public profile of the LCR. They stood Olivier Besancenot for President and recently stood numerous lists in municipal elections in Paris, polling around 5% in both elections, and the LCR and Besancenot maintained a very high media profile during the strikes and the LRU movement.

Secondly, the political culture of students in lycées was already quite high — a lot of the young people who spoke to us had taken part in blockades of their college during the autumn strike wave, and some came over to boast of their exploits. But nevertheless, organisation in lycées has been neglected by the JCR. The organisation, dominated by university students, seriously missed a trick in failing to relate properly to the lycée blockades and student walkouts of 2007 and is now trying to capitalise on this radicalisation before it's too late, by recruiting members in post-16 education.

The outing wasn't in itself anything special, although we did get a few contacts. We didn't single-handedly organise action committees in any colleges — we just carried on long-term work.

But this kind of work is model practice for comrades here, and if you have a free morning the same time every week, it's really very easy: establish a route between different colleges and a timetable of when people will be outside, and print some materials.

The part that is harder to get right is producing a leaflet that chimes with students' situation — which is where I think *La Rougeole* and back issues of our own *Bolsky* can serve as inspiration. If we in the AWL are serious about expanding into further education "from a standing start", rather as the JCR are trying to do, then it would be worthwhile for us to consider launching one national or several local youth bulletins.

Under attack from immigration controls: trade unions and communities fight back!

Saturday 29 March 2008 from 10.30 am
SOAS, Malet Street, London WC1

• Speakers include John McDonnell MP, trades union activists and organisers, people who have successfully fought back against the immigration system and from a broad range of migrant communities

• Workshops and plenary sessions with plenty of time for discussion. Creche, please book in advance

Suggested donation: £50 pounds for trades unions, £25 pounds for other organisations. Send money and registration details to: Immigration Conference, Dean O'Hanlon, RMT, Unity House, 39 Chalton Street, Euston, London NW1 1JD.

Cheques to Finsbury Park RMT, clearly marked "Immigration Conference" on the back. www.29thMarch.org.uk
e-mail contact: davidlandau9@aol.com

The Beijing Olympics and class struggle

BY PAUL HAMPTON

THE Olympic spectacular in August this year is likely to be another step on China's march towards great power status. For sure the media will marvel at the incredible stadia, the clean streets of the capital and the immensity of the country.

So spare a thought for the workers on Beijing's Olympic construction sites, working for about US\$5 a day, often not getting paid until the end of the year and sometimes not at all. To bring the sporting showpiece to the world, workers are toiling at least ten hours a day. They don't get weekends off, nor any paid holiday, and most have no contract or medical insurance. Workers get nothing from the state-run ACFU "trade union", which scarcely even bothers with these sectors.

But for international socialists, the great hope is to see the emergence of the social forces in China that have the potential to transform the country from the bottom up — namely the Chinese working class.

A new report by the *China Labour Bulletin* (CLB) makes one thing clear: the struggle of the working class goes on, it develops, it deepens and it poised to breakthrough the totalitarian straitjacket of Stalinist state capitalism.

After decades of economic growth at around 10% a year, the Chinese working class has grown enormously. At the end of 2006, official figures estimated the national workforce at 764 million, with an urban workforce of 283 million. In private enterprises there were some 64 million workers — but the big growth area has been migrant workers.

Official figures estimate that there are 120 million migrant workers in China's major cities, plus an additional 80 million rural workers employed at enterprises in their own villages and towns. The massive growth of migrant labour is doubly significant, as it has taken place against the backdrop of the huge shake out of workers in state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

According to the Chinese government, during the seven-year period from 1998 to 2004, SOEs laid off six out of ten workers, some 30 million people. Between 1998 and 2000, seven to nine million workers were laid off each year. This repositioning of the Chinese working class has had significant consequences. Whereas in the early years of the 21st century many of the most bitter disputes were waged by the traditional working class in the state sector, these workers have now been joined by the ever-growing numbers of private sector and illegal workers.

Official figures registered 317,000 labour-dispute cases in 2006, of which 14,000 were collective labour disputes involving 350,000 workers. Similar figures were seen the previous year. This may well underestimate the real scale of class struggle going on in China.

Broadly, two distinct types of disputes have been taking place. On the one hand, workers in



Walmart workers in China are unionised — by the state

the state owned and former state owned firms that have been privatised have taken action, while on the other workers in the new private sector firms have also stepped up their protests. Protests by workers during and after the restructuring and privatisation of SOEs have been the core component of worker unrest since 2000.

Some of these protests have taken place during the restructuring of the SOEs. In June 2005, over 400 workers at the Wuxi Commercial Building in Wuxi city struck to oppose the company's restructuring. In mid-August, several thousand workers from the Chengqing Special Steel Company blocked the streets, demanding redundancy payments.

Several thousand workers at the Chengdu Engine Factory, a military enterprise, went on strike in July 2005. In September 2005, more than 300 workers at the Zhongyuan Measuring Instrument Company in Sanmenxia city went on strike in protest at the company's restructuring proposal. In November 2005, thousands of construction workers from four state-owned construction companies in Shenzhen protested in the streets.

In January 2006, nearly 100 workers at the Qianjiang Chiyu Group in Hubei province staged a sit-in at the municipal government office to demand an investigation into alleged corruption during the company's restructuring. In March that year, several thousand workers at the Yunnan Textile Plant in Kunming went on strike because only managers were permitted to attend a meeting about the company's restructuring process.

But some workers have carried on protests well after SOE restructuring has taken place. Struggles have taken place demanding new jobs, or better compensation. Some laid-off workers have demanded either re-employment at their former enterprise or to be granted formal retirement. For example, in 2005, several hundred

laid-off workers at the Jingmen Petrochemical Company initiated a four-month protest demanding the restoration of their jobs, and more than 200 workers staged a sit-in at the front gate of the renamed North Heavy Industry Group, demanding their jobs back. More than 10,000 laid-off workers from the Anshan Steel Group protested demanding the restoration of their jobs and several thousand unemployed workers originally with the Shengli Oil Field blocked the oil field management offices for several days, demanding a dialogue with company managers.

Others took action after managers renege on promises made during restructuring. In February 2005, more than 100 teachers employed in schools engaged in a sit-in at the Sichuan Petroleum head office in Chengdu, carrying signs saying "peaceful protest" and "hunger strike." In October of the same year, more than 400 workers staged a strike at the An County Paper Factory in Sichuan over the continued failure of the county government to pay economic compensation and social security expenses promised. In May 2006, more than 700 retired teachers from kindergartens and vocational schools, attached to what were originally SOEs in Yunnan Province, staged a sit-in at the front gate of the provincial government office.

In the private sector, by far the most important source of conflict between labour and management has been the non-payment of wages. In August 2005, nearly 600 workers from the Baoying Shoe Factory in Guangzhou blocked the streets in a protest over wage arrears going back for months. In September of the same year, more than 100 workers from the Zhiye Shoe Factory in Guangzhou took to the streets demanding that the factory pay their back wages. The next month, more than 200 workers from the Yongxiang Shoe Factory in Guangzhou blocked the path outside the factory gates, demanding their wages.

Around 140 workers from the Pushu Clothing Company in Hangzhou staged two protests in December 2005 demanding to be paid. And 300 workers at the Longgang district Jinbao Factory in Shenzhen staged four separate street blockades in April 2006.

Apart from non-payment of wages, another cause of worker protests has been low wages or management embezzlement of wages. In 2005 alone, nearly 1,000 workers at a factory in Shenzhen printing Hong Kong periodicals protested at management's "fake" wage increase and 300 workers from the Qinghai Motor Factory in Guangzhou blocked the streets, demanding an increase in pay.

In June, 3,000 workers at the Futai Wool Knitwear Factory in Guangdong launched a strike over low wages. The following month, nearly 1,000 workers at the Meixing Shoe Company in Guangdong went on strike to protest management's cutting their wages. At the same time, more than 500 workers from the Toshiba Dalian Company went on strike as the management increased the production line speed while paying low wages.

Workers have also taken action when employers have blatantly violated labour laws and regu-

lations. In June 2005, more than 20 workers unfurled a banner at the Beijing headquarters of the Siemens Corporation protesting layoffs of workers and unfair treatment. In November that year, over 3,000 workers at Del Coro Co Ltd. (a wholly-owned Italian company) in Shenzhen went on strike in protest at the beating of several workers' representatives who had asked for an audit of wages by the Italian manager. In April 2006, several thousand workers at Ruifeng Timber Co Ltd. in Shenzhen attempted to present a petition to Chinese leaders, protesting at the company's compulsory overtime system.

Health and safety strikes have taken place — not surprising in a country where in 2006 there were a staggering 15,000 workplace deaths — a third of them in coal mining. In March 2005, nearly 5,000 workers at a jewellery factory in Guangdong staged a three-day strike, demanding independent medical examinations after 12 workers were diagnosed with suspected silicosis.

Perhaps most significantly, urban workers employed in the private sector have increasingly used strike action to protest management abuses. For example in 2005, several hundred workers at the newly privatised Chengdu People's Department Store in Sichuan went on strike and protested at the municipal government office against the management's violations of their rights, and at beatings, chastising and searching them arbitrarily.

Management pay at the expense of workers was at the centre of other disputes. In July 2005, more than 3,000 workers went on strike at the Changba Lead-Zinc Mine in Longnan county, Gansu. Nearly 6,000 employees at the Feiya Textile Company in Anhui province, went on strike for five days in October-November that year, in protest at the growing wage gap between workers and management. And in February 2006, nearly 1,000 workers at the Heze Cotton Textiles Factory in Shandong province went on strike over low pay.

The new factor in the last few years of Chinese workers' struggles is the increase in the proportion and number of protests by migrant workers.

Migrant workers in private enterprises most commonly demanded payment of wages in arrears, salary increases, and improved working conditions. Low wages were the reason for the strikes in September 2005 by 30,000 workers from more than ten Japanese-invested enterprises in the Dalian development zone. Workers used the concentration of enterprises to their advantage: because factory buildings and worker dormitories adjoined each other, it was easier for workers from the different companies to communicate with each other. When workers heard of the successful strike at the Toshiba factory, news spread quickly and workers at other companies went on strike with similar demands. It is clear that such widespread strikes could not have occurred without some kind of planning and organisation.

And other strikes have gone beyond wage struggles and included the right to organise.

Some 16,000 workers at the Japanese-invested Uniden Electronics Corporation in Shenzhen went on strike for three days to demand the establishment of a trade union in April 2005. This was the fourth strike since 2000. Unfortunately, because it was the ACFU that was recognised, workers have not won independent representation. That was proven when management was allowed to nominate the union officers!

The *China Labour Bulletin* report concludes that, "workers in China increasingly share a common interest and face a common adversary. Indeed, the situation in China today is analogous to the pre-unionised period in Western industrialized countries where workers were routinely exploited by industrialists and factory owners. The trade union movement grew as a response to that exploitation..."

The report is right. Socialists must do everything we can to support Chinese workers' struggles — and hope that they celebrate the Olympics by striking out on their own independent road. • *China Labour Bulletin* (CLB), *Speaking Out: The Workers' Movement in China* (2005-2006), December 2007

www.clb.org.hk/en/files/File/research_reports/Worker_Movement_Report_final.pdf

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- Iran and Iraq: what do "imperialism" and "anti-imperialism" mean?
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Why the left should not back Obama

BY BARRY FINGER

THE inconclusive outcome of the Democratic Party primaries to date suggests an increasing certainty that the nomination process may only resolve itself during the August convention. The so-called "super delegates," the skeletal deposits of the party — its elected officials and functionaries — may have the decisive say. Under that scenario, the convention portends the ugly spectacle of a Democratic Party in disarray, torn between democracy and bureaucracy, and unable to unite should the result depend on the popular vote tally.

The Democratic National Committee is scrambling to avoid this nightmare, but to do so requires bringing back into play the voters of Michigan and Florida, who were essentially disenfranchised by having moved up the date of their primaries against the will of the DNC and by the fact that this de facto disenfranchisement was nominally agreed to by all the candidates. The DNC is broke and cannot finance new primaries. Caucuses, which are cheaper, favour Obama. The existing delegate selection from these states — based on a process which was to be assigned no weight — favours Clinton, who not only left her name on the ballot, but campaigned in those supposedly uncontested arenas. But it is seen for these reasons as undemocratic.

Certainly the enthusiasm among the progressive wing of the Democratic Party for Barack Obama, a compelling writer, an inspiring speaker with a story that seems to define the American experience, is understandable. Indeed, the symbolic significance of an African-American so close to the presidency in a country whose politics is so fundamentally scarred by racism cannot be underestimated. This enthusiasm seems to have upturned the usual justification on the part of progressives and leftists for voting Democratic. No longer is the zeal for the DP based primarily on the abhorrence for the Republican administration; no longer is the justification offered defined largely in the negative, by the nature of the reactionary opposition.

Sadly, this grassroots ardour is also based on a studied ignorance of Obama's political record. And where the wilful suspension of disbelief cannot be reasonably invoked, neither can coherence.

The *Nation* magazine, the premier outlet for progressive American opinion, enthusiastically endorsed Obama in terms more consistent with a rejection. "This magazine has been critical of the senator from Illinois for his closeness to Wall Street; his unwillingness to lay out an ambitious progressive agenda on healthcare, housing and other domestic policy issues; and for post-partisan rhetoric that seems to ignore the manifest failure of conservatism over the past seven years."

MoveOn, the liberal pressure group, has jumped on the Obama bandwagon without making a single demand upon his campaign, warning of the danger, evidently trumping all other political considerations, that the super delegate vote may subvert the popular will in favor of Clinton. One can only wonder, why? One might reasonably rest assured that Obama's PAC, which has donated almost three times as much to the super delegate campaign funds as Clinton's, will give the latter a literal run for the money in buying delegate votes.

On the Iraq war, which presumably motivates a good deal of youthful support, Obama — while opposing the vote that justified the war, a vote taken before he was in the Senate — supports in effect, if not in word, a lengthy occupation. He declared his intention to pull out combat troops by 2009, but vowed to keep a residual presence, estimated at 60,000-100,000 troops, in the region to carry out counter-terrorism activity and to safeguard "American," that is elite, vital interests in the region.

He is unwilling to withdraw the sizeable force of armed American "contractors," but favours having them subject to American law.

He stated his intention of beefing up the American military by 100,000 recruits.

In 2005, Obama voted to reauthorize the Patriot Act, allowing for the wholesale eavesdropping on the American public under the guise of fighting terrorism.

While declaring his admirable intention of changing the mindset that got the US into Iraq, his foreign policy advisors are part of the familiar roster of careerists from whom "new thinking" basically means a return to pro-war multilateralism.

Obama opposes single-payer health care, which cuts duplicative, overhead administrative costs and applies those savings to cover the uninsured, for one which maintains the centrality of the private insurance industry. He seeks to mollify the right by making health care more affordable without creating a government mandate, the very mention of which is an anathema to Conservatives.

On the issue of free trade, Obama is on record opposing the amendment to the 2005 Commerce Appropriations Bill that would have prohibited US trade negotiators from weakening US laws that provide American workers with safeguards from unfair foreign trade practices. Obama, like Clinton and the Democratic Party in general, is utterly incoherent on trade issues.

On the other hand, a party incapable of fostering working class solidarity and power domestically could hardly be faulted for being unable to seek and advance international agreements on that basis as well. They simply answer to a different set of class priorities.

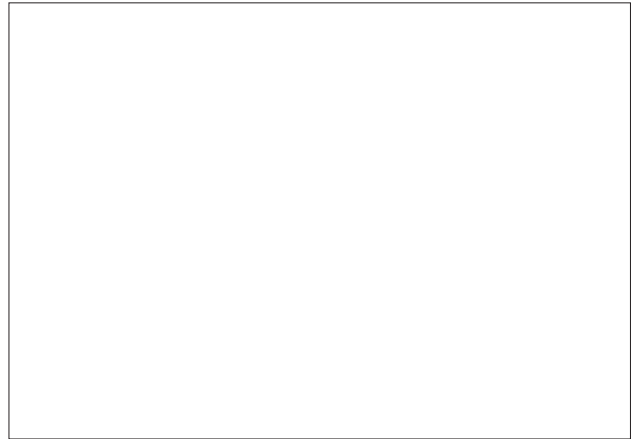
Obama supports the death penalty, despite its disproportionate impact on black people and the poor. In 2006, he voted with Republicans to build 700 miles of double fencing along the Mexican border, although today he states his willingness to find a different solution.

The larger problem, whether with Clinton or Obama, is a permanent mindset of political accommodation, if not outright capitulation to the right, so that the country can "move forward." It does not matter whether this is called "triangulation" or "redefining the centre." These are all buzzwords justifying cross-ideological political unity, in which the left is supposedly strengthened by that candidate who can forge the stronger progressive coalition required to tip the scales incrementally in its direction.

That, at least, is one strategy for the left. This is the strategy that is touted as realistic, starting where the masses of people actually are, not where socialists would wish them to be.

Michael Harrington, the great propagandist for re-alignment, defended the vote for Carter on this basis in 1976. There was an "infinite possibility" that great strides could be made, he argued, "on full employment, national health and issues like that." The conditions for a Carter victory, he asserted, were "the conditions for working class militancy, and the militancy of minority groups, and the militancy of women, and the militancy of the democratic reform movement." In fact a stunning Democratic victory did occur. Carter's party took the White House, the Senate and the Congress.

What transpired? Not national health insurance. Not a repeal of Taft Hartley. (Carter attempted to break the 1978 coal miners strike by invoking Taft Hartley.) Not a meaningful full employment bill. (The Humphrey-Hawkins full employment bill that finally passed was so riddled with provisos and exceptions as to be meaningless.) We did get airline and natural gas deregulation. We did get government imposed real wage cuts in the guise of fighting inflation. We did get tax relief for the wealthy. Corporate PACs and business trade association PACs for the first time began to outspend labor in the



Barack Obama: close to Wall Street

Democratic Party and did so by four to one. As observers at the time put it, Corporate America became the majority stockholder in the Democratic Party.

Disaffection with the Democratic Party led to a new phenomenon — what was later to be known as the Reagan Democrats. If the class interests of the white working class males could not be defended by the Democrats in full control of the federal government, the Republicans could and did make the not so subtle appeal to defend and advance their caste privileges at the expense of Blacks and women. Holding the line against social progress became the bywords of Republican populism; not class war, but caste war in the service of defending capitalism by fracturing the unity of the exploited and oppressed.

The Republicans captured a good portion of the white working class who turned their backs on the Democratic Party, including the organised section, on this basis and put into practice a little bit of their own re-alignment strategy, one that proved immensely more successful than the Harrington version. That identity politics evolved in the teeth of this resurgent racism and sexism was the altogether predictable, if equally ineffectual, response of those whose hard fought victories remain even today in jeopardy by the continuous barrage of right-wing political and ideological assaults.

The rise of the populist right is not a political application of the law of unintended consequences. The Democratic Party is a slow death for those who wish to check the growth of the right in this country. Class struggle is the core of socialism, and history is rich with demonstrations for those who are willing to learn as to how perilous it is for the working class and the oppressed to remain tied to a capitalist political apparatus. Left wing alternatives cannot come from the Democratic Party, which as a defender of the power structure either capitulates to the right or creates the type of half-measures which add to the public frustration at problems that remain festering. Progressive alternatives can only come from those mass movements who have no stake in the preservation of the status quo and are therefore free to fight it.

Socialists exist today as a political propaganda group in the United States. We are not and have no immediate prospects of offering a political alternative in terms of getting elected to office on a national political level and satisfying the political needs of the oppressed and exploited. Any campaigns which socialists might participate in, such as the Greens and Nader might run, are for the purpose of propagandising our point of view and of raising a militantly anti-corporate program in a broader milieu and on a national

level to demonstrate the ineffectual and self-defeating nature of working class support for the Democrats.

The Democratic party still remains a symbol of popular appeal to mass sections of the American population, even more so after the particularly disastrous years of the Bush administration. It is obvious that the working class cannot transition from a capitalist party to a socialist ideology overnight. Yet the abysmal approval ratings given to the ineffective Democratic congress is indicative as to how fast that appeal might sour should the Democrats capture the White House and fail to deliver, as we have every right to expect, on the promises and heightened expectations that their victory would raise.

The potential for oppositional politics will not materialise immediately or spontaneously. It must ultimately be sustained by the experiences of the working class and the oppressed fighting outside the electoral arena. But that does not mean that we must build our movement first and thereby acquiesce to the argument that the masses are not ready to break with the Democratic Party. No realignment socialist would in principal object to that. But the time to break, for them, never comes.

In answer to that logic it must be pointed out that trade unionists of the past were not ready to sit-down and strike, before they sat down and struck. The civil rights movement was not ready to boycott and sit-down, until boycotted and sat down. The anti-war movement and the feminist movements were not ready to march until they marched. The only way to build an electoral movement that breaks with the Democratic Party is to break with the Democratic Party.

The Greens and the Nader movement will not be the final shape of the new party that needs to evolve if our aspirations are to be met. Their purpose for us as socialists is as a vehicle to begin to chip away at the ingrained habits of electoral submission, to overcome the psychology of oppression by raising the demand that we can liberate ourselves. The fight to organise against the corporate dominated state, to redirect national resources to fight against poverty and to curb the cycle of perpetual war that enriches the military-industrial complex and the two major parties — in short — the fight to break the cycle of dislocations and distortions which have beset millions of working class Americans in the global economy requires an electoral vehicle of a new type.

Left unchecked the logic of continued support for the Democrats will continue to drive the working class either away from politics altogether or into the sorts of political rage and frustrations which can be more readily harvested by the right.

Anti-Tamil terror in Sri Lanka

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

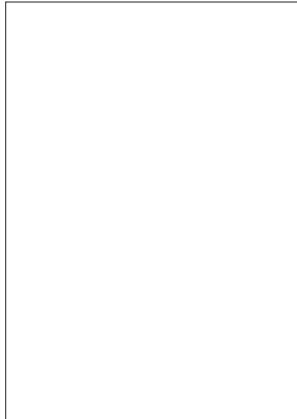
THE national conflict in Sri Lanka, so little reported in the mainstream UK media, is visibly deepening. In 2006, the recently elected president Mahinda Rajapakse in effect ended a ceasefire agreement brokered by the Norwegians in 2002.

The Sri Lankan Army launched an offensive on the east of the island to wrest control from the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE), successfully capturing all its strongholds there. 220,000 people fled the area between April 2006 and March 2007, and their land was seized by the military for the establishment of free trade zones; most of these Tamil people still live in temporary shelter. Maybe 4,000 people were killed in this period, and throughout the small island, with a population of some 20 million, two million are internally displaced. In August 2006, the government shut down the A-9 motorway, isolating 600,000 Tamils in the Jaffna peninsula, and has maintained an iron grip on the island with seemingly permanent emergency laws and ever more draconian anti-terror measures allowing indefinite detention without trial.

Three Tamil MPs have been killed under Rajapakse, all critics of the government; the latest, Maheswaran, the only Tamil MP ever elected in the north from the main opposition party, was gunned down on New Year's day this year. Maheswaran was due to report to parliament on 8 January about evidence he had of the Eelam People's Democratic Party's involvement in abductions and extrajudicial killings. The group's leader, Douglas Devanda, is a close ally of the president. Other outspoken MPs have had their security removed either as a threat, or in the case of Maheswaran, a direct prelude to their assassination. The co-founder of the Civil Monitoring Commission, Mano Ganesan MP, still faces this fate for recording and exposing the litany of human rights abuses perpetrated by all sides.

In the face of mass opposition, Rajapakse had to withdraw his notification of October last year banning the publication of information about the war, yet in the last year 14 journalists have been killed and many newspapers, radio and TV stations have been shut down. Despite criticism of the government from all quarters being routinely branded as support for terrorism, protests against harassment of media workers spread last week to the main state run television company. After the fifth such attack by government goons last Friday, workers planned a protest for the Monday and were locked out of their premises by the state authorities; they then staged a sit in at Independence Square.

Following a 20% increase in military spending in last December's budget, amounting to 30% of the entire annual government income, and the official and unilateral withdrawal from the peace agreement on 3rd



President Rajapakse

January, the government's only strategy now is to attempt to wipe out the LTTE once and for all, stepping up the increasingly hollow patriotic rhetoric, with pledges to do so by June, then August, then the end of the year.

Whatever the prospects of this, what is certain is that the misery of all the people of the island will become more intense, especially the Tamil population. Last December 18,000 troops were deployed in the Tamil areas of Colombo and ended up detaining over 2,000 Tamils, most of whom were released after even the most extreme of Sinhalese chauvinists deemed the operation to be excessive. Earlier in the year non-resident Tamils in Colombo were rounded up to be evicted to Jaffna, though most were released and later invited back by Rajapakse.

Underlying and connected to this war-mongering is an economy and ruling class in crisis, with Rajapakse seemingly willing to take things to the brink.

Inflation is the highest in south Asia, reaching 24% late last year. 40% of expenditure services the high interest debt accrued through years of war. The prices of basic food commodities and fuel have increased, as all around the world. However, December's budget reintroduced import taxes on basic goods to fund the war, taxes that it had been forced to scrap the March before under pressure from an increasingly angry working-class.

Trade with the US, which accounts for 40% of exports, is threatened by the developing US recession, and diplomatic relations between the two countries are at a low, with the US cutting off military aid and publishing a scathing dossier on human rights abuses recommending UN monitoring, which

it refused to withdraw after its ambassador was summoned and reproached.

The Sri Lankan government has managed all the same to find ready donors who raise no such stipulations on democracy and human rights. China, seeking resources and influence along the sea routes, in direct rivalry with India, has increased its assistance fivefold to nearly \$1 billion, building a new motorway, a new port in Rajapakse's home town and developing two power stations.

This clearly worries the Indian ruling class, who are also angry at the procurement of arms from Pakistan; India's contributions have grown to nearly \$500 million this year despite cutting off direct military support.

Similarly, last November 27, on the LTTE heroes' day, while security was stepped up across the capital, Rajapakse was meeting the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; Iran has pledged some \$1.6 billion in credit, mainly to purchase Iranian oil.

February 4 marked the 60th anniversary of Sri Lankan independence from the British empire. The ceremonies, a grotesque display of military might, was a grim stage-managed affair boycotted or avoided by all the opposition, and excluded any mass participation or celebration. Indeed, the capital was essentially a place of siege by the Rajapakse police state.

It's worth recalling the prescient words of a Trotskyist leader Colvin de Silva at the time in a statement entitled "Independence Real or Fake", even though he later — in a mammoth betrayal — joined the chauvinist and capitalist government:

The essence of this change lies not in any passage of Ceylon from colonial status to the status of independence, but in the change-over of British imperialism in Ceylon from

methods of direct rule to methods of indirect rule... The native exploiting classes of Ceylon have been handed over, well high completely, the task of administering British imperialism's interests in Ceylon. British imperialism has retired into the background, although it has not in any sense abdicated."

The government pushes forward with layoffs and plans to privatise water and sell off the electricity board to foreign companies. What little growth the country has achieved increases the gap between rich and poor. Some trade unions have warned that this year will be one of militant class action. There have been strikes among postal workers, health workers, on the plantations and on the docks, but the majority of unions are tied to the government or other parties supportive of the war. The ultra-chauvinist party of the Buddhist monks has called on trade unions to suspend all action to support this year of decisive war.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty last week signed the appeal issued by the NSSP, the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International (see www.workersliberty.org/story/2008/03/17/socialists-across-world-declare-solidarity-sri-lankas-tamils), in solidarity with the beleaguered and harassed Trotskyist movement in Sri Lanka, speaking out against war and chauvinism in defence of Tamil rights, fighting for working-class union against a ruthless capitalist government in crisis.

In the a future issue of *Solidarity*, we will publish a more in depth history and analysis of the politics of Sri Lanka that have led to this current horrific state of affairs. Please contact me at brent@workersliberty.org to discuss how socialists can develop solidarity work here in the UK with Sri Lankan socialists.

Left gains in France

THE French Parti Socialiste (PS) has defeated President Sarkozy's right-wing UMP party in local elections. In the same poll, the revolutionary socialist LCR made small but significant and impressive gains.

Since his election last year, Sarkozy has been battered by waves of working-class action — by rail workers, civil servants, students and more recently strikers in the private sector too. Now the working class has delivered another blow at the ballot box (unfortunately using the soft, blunt weapon of the PS). Rouen, Amiens, Metz, Strasbourg, Toulouse, Reims, Caen, St-Etienne and numerous smaller municipalities fell to the

PS. A number of government ministers were among the casualties, for instance Xavier Darcos, the education minister defeated as mayor of Périgueux in the South West.

Perhaps even more significant were the results for the LCR. The lists it stood or participated in with others did significantly better than in previous elections. (The only note of caution to be sounded here is that in some places the lists seem to have been a bit of a hodge podge politically; e.g. one involving Breton nationalists.)

According to the LCR website, over half of the 200 lists it backed got 5% or more of the vote in the first round of the elections, while 34 got more than 10%. In the second round, seven lists got more than 10%. In the shipbuilding town of Saint-Nazaire in the North West, the LCR list got 17% of the vote. More than 50 LCR candidates have been elected.

France's other main far left group, Lutte Ouvrière, has not only refused to involve itself in the LCR's call for a new anti-capitalist party on the grounds that it would be insufficiently revolutionary; it also rejected the invitation to organise joint slates in the local elections, instead organising a number of joint lists with the PS and the Communist Party. Activists in LO's now-expelled minority faction explain this bizarre veering between sectarianism and opportunism as an attempt for the group to maintain itself now that it has lost the political initiative to the LCR. (In 1995, LO achieved won two million votes in the presidential elections, but since then it has isolated itself by refusing to initiate or get involved in any attempt at working-class regroupment. In the last presidential it won 1.9% against 4.1% for the LCR, and unlike the LCR it is not growing significantly.)

More soon.

US West Coast dockers protest against war

BY JACK STAUNTON

THE International Longshore and Warehouse Union conference in San Francisco has passed a motion "calling on unions and working people in the US and internationally to mobilize for a 'No Peace No Work Holiday' on May 1, 2008 for 8 hours to demand an immediate end to the war and occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan and the withdrawal of US troops from the Middle East".

Their strike call is reminiscent of the actions taken at the outbreak of the war in Iraq by train drivers in Motherwell and Italian dockers who refused to transport

arms, as well as the May 2007 teachers' pickets of docks in Oakland. There have been moves in the past for the ILWU to take such action, but they have always been voted down. Anti-war sentiment on the docks has been batted down by the Bush administration — for example when the dockers were the target of "anti-terrorist" repression, as police fired supposedly "less than lethal" munitions point blank at an antiwar protest on the Oakland, California docks, injuring six longshore workers and arresting 25 people

However, it is somewhat unclear as to whether the workers' action actually constitutes a strike and whether they will be "paralysing" the West Coast docks. They appear to have an arrangement with management for a training day each month, which is

sometimes used for political activity, for example a recent day of action for Mumia Abu-Jamal on death row. At the ILWU conference some workers said that they should hold a 24 hour strike, the union leaders restricted it to the usual eight hours use of "training" time.

Nevertheless, the clarion call they have put out to the international workers' movement shows the possibility of workers' action against war and strikes to undermine our armed forces. Working-class anti-war activity must be seen as part of our solidarity with workers in the Middle East, showing as it does that the international working class is an independent force which can fight together against what US/UK imperialism is doing in the Middle East.

Reject the review — fight for real democracy!

BY DANIEL RANDALL

IT has been some time since there was any meaningful link between the real struggles faced by the working class majority of students and the debates that took place at the annual conference of what is, officially, their union – the NUS. This year that disconnection will be as acute as ever, and (more significantly) we may see the end of the potential to ever reconcile it.

If the new constitution that will be voted on at this year's conference – the result of a profoundly undemocratic "Governance Review" – is ratified, NUS will essentially be voting to abolish itself. Conference will be abolished, the National Executive

Committee broken up, and the very limited channels that currently exist by which an ordinary student might intervene in the life of their national union all but concreted over. NUS conference 2008 may be the last in history.

This is not a sudden development; it is the logical endpoint of decades of savage attacks on NUS democracy that have gone hand-in-hand with a largely successful policy offensive by the union's Blairite leadership against the semi-radical paper policies it was forced to adopt by activist pressure at conference. Unless the left can win in Blackpool, British students will from 2008 be faced with a "union" that has no conference, no real democracy and policy against free education.

For the sixteen year-old FE student work-

ing part-time in McDonalds or Starbucks, for the refugee student facing ESOL cutbacks, for the university students seeing their courses cuts and their departments closed to make room for vocational courses geared towards churning out workplace-fodder and for all the other working class students who make up the bulk of NUS's membership, these changes will be disastrous. But the bigger tragedy is that these students, the people who will potentially be hit hardest by the lack of a representative organisation capable of helping them fight for their interests, probably do not know these changes are taking place.

They probably do not know that NUS conference is taking place. They may not know that the NUS exists at all as anything

more than a logo on the back of a discount card.

The worst effect of the right-wing assault on NUS democracy and policy is not that it has become progressively harder for revolutionary socialists to get policy passed or for members of Trotskyist groups to get elected to NUS committees. The worst effect has been to widen almost beyond repair the enormous rift between NUS (and its structures and campaigns) and any significant proportion of its membership and their struggles.

AWL members will intervene in this year's NUS conference, alongside others in the Education Not for Sale network, to attempt to defeat the new constitution. If we fail, then any prospect to close that rift may be lost for a long time.

Near-win for left at NUS Women's Conference

BY LAURA SCHWARTZ, NUS WOMEN'S
COMMITTEE, EDUCATION NOT FOR SALE

THE success of ENS Women at this year's NUS Women's Conference (13-15 March) in passing radical left-wing policy and mobilising a significant number of conference delegates around socialist feminist politics, is testimony to the hard work of our activists both within NUS and outside it with Feminist Fightback over the last two and a half years. So is the result of the election held at the conference for NUS National Women's Officer. Our candidate Sofie Buckland very nearly won the election, getting 29 votes against 33 for Labour Students' Katie Curtis.

Sofie's activist record persuaded a number of first-time delegates not only to vote for her, but to sign up to get involved in ENS Women and Feminist Fightback's campaigns. Cat Smith, a third, soft-left candidate, supported by the Socialist Action front "Student Broad Left", got 15 votes and did not get through to the second round. After Cat failed to call for a second preference vote for Sofie, only 8 of her supporters transferred their votes. Had they not taken this disappointingly sectarian approach, Sofie would have won.

As always, the most important reason for attending the conference was to argue for our politics, make contacts and persuade others of the necessity of a socialist feminism based on anti-capitalism and class-struggle. We successfully proposed policy committing NUS Women's campaign to a No Borders position and mandating the committee to organise a picket of Serco (Feminist Fightback organised such a picket on International Women's Day), as well as donate £100 to both the All African Women's Group and the Trade Union and Community Conference Against Immigration Controls. This was a significant achievement – in 2006 we were laughed down by members of Labour Students for even daring to raise the idea of No Borders. We also voted to support asylum-seeker and nursing student Flores Sukula in her struggle for access to education.

In another indicator of the shifting political terrain in the campaign, we won recognition of the right of sex workers to organise, that sex work is labour, and that criminalisation harms sex workers. Current NUS Women's Officer Kat

Stark is now mandated to sign the Safety First petition against the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill, which seeks to further criminalise street workers, and to support the International Union of Sex Workers and the English Collective of Prostitutes. Our campaigning around this issue over the last year meant that women's conference held two workshops prior to the motions debate in order to discuss and clarify the issues. As a result, the debate was informed and intelligent, with much less hysteria about allegedly whitewashing prostitution.

We also passed policy against privatisation in further education, and in favour of further direct action initiatives on reproductive freedoms to complement the parliamentary lobbying carried out by the Abortion Rights campaign. Unfortunately, Bryony Shanks from Student

Broad Left and Cat Smith spoke against holding a national demonstration for abortion rights this year.

Unfortunately also, its right wing around Labour Students managed to defeat our proposals to campaign for a living, non-means-tested grant for every student and to oppose the NUS leadership's democracy-destroying Governance Review. They were not brave enough to bring their own motions on these issues, with the result that last year's policy for universal grants still stands and the campaign has no official policy on the Governance Review!

"Violence against women" was a much-used phrase at the conference and many motions were passed on this theme, particularly with an internationalist perspective. ENS Women are in favour of an internationalist feminism which

makes solidarity with women fighting for their rights all over the world. However, some of us were concerned that a VAW-centred perspective, combined with an emphasis on women's rights abuses in developing countries, can at times lead to conceptualising women as eternal victims, and can perpetuate racist or pro-imperialist ideas amongst western feminists. We want to continue further discussions on this.

ENS Women also held a thirty-strong fringe meeting on "Is women's liberation possible under capitalism?". As a result of the meeting and our other activities at the conference, a number of activists expressed an interest in getting involved in ENS Women and Feminist Fightback.

If you would like to get involved in ENS Women, get in touch:
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Election results show possibilities

THERE have been interesting election results in a number of university student unions over the last couple of months.

The SWP/Student Respect have lost control of their two strongholds, Manchester University and SOAS in London. In the former, which they have run for several years, the left slate which they led narrowly lost general secretary and a number of other key positions to a Labour Students/Lib Dem/Jewish Society lash up. It seems, however, that the SWP sealed their own fate by refusing to work with more independent minded elements of the left and alienating many left-wing activists. A number of left-sounding officers not linked to Respect have been elected; we will have to see how this develops.

In SOAS, with an outgoing SWP finance and communications officer (the equivalent of president), a non-Respect left slate lost the position after the Islamic Society ceased to support the left and decided to go into business on its own account. The left did, however, win the impor-

tant sports and societies sabbatical position, women's officer and a number of others. Again, we will see; but it is clear that Respect is no longer in the saddle.

In both cases, the strategy of taking over student unions on the basis of an alliance with very left-wing Islamic societies seems to have eventually backfired on the SWP.

However, at Goldsmith's College in London and Essex University, Respect and other left-wingers have made big gains. In Essex, which has a left wing tradition but whose student union has for years been a bastion of the right wing, the left slate Viva Essex! ran a dynamic campaign which won a huge majority on the exec and every sabbatical apart from president – and then won that after spectacular fraud by the Blairite incumbent was revealed.

(Congratulations to the president-elect, Dominic Kavakeb of the SWP.) Although the right wing kept the presidency, there is also now a left majority at Goldsmith's.

At LSE, Green Left activist and Education

Not for Sale supporter Aled Dilwyn Fisher has been elected general secretary by a big majority, while at Cambridge ENS won sabbatical women's officer, came second in a number of other elections and took a big slice of the NUS conference delegation. Cambridge ENS looks well placed to make gains in the union next year. Sussex remains left-led, with a Socialist Party comrade elected Finance Officer.

At Edinburgh the Labour Students clique which runs the union has only held on by attempting to disqualify the soft left (but still left) candidate for president. The result still is not confirmed.

The great majority of student unions are still led by right-wing bureaucrats; and the left-wing ones tend to be in universities at the posher end of the spectrum. Nonetheless, all this is a reminder that students will respond to vigorous campaigns to defend and extend their rights, and that the task of transforming student unions into the fighting organisations we need is not impossible.

Student unionist victimised over anti-militarism

FROM EDUCATION NOT FOR SALE —
FREE-EDUCATION.ORG.UK

ON 5 March, a 300-plus strong general meeting of UCL Union passed a motion proposed by socialist activist Sham Rajyaguru, president of UCL's Stop the War Society, to ban the Officer Training Corps, University Royal Navy Units, University of London Air Squadron and all other military organisations from freshers' events and other union-sponsored events, union premises, and student-run media. Now the right of the union has responded by suspending left-wing General Secretary Sam Godwin.

Military recruiters currently have access to nearly all freshers' fairs, and about half of British military officers are recruited through university-based military organisations.

As the motion passed put it: "...because the British military under the Labour Government is currently engaged in an aggressive war overseas, for the Union to use its resources to encourage students to join the military or participate in military recruitment activities at this time would give political and material support to the war."

The same meeting also passed a motion to twin UCL Union with the secular student unions of Al-Quds (West Bank) and Al-Azhar (Gaza) Universities.

The right-wing press, including the *Sun* and the *Daily Mail*, have responded furiously to the vote to ban military recruiters (as, of course, has the Government). They have tried to present the vote as stemming from hostility to British soldiers rather than the military as an organisation, ignoring — naturally — the fact that the proposers of the motion are socialists who support soldiers' right to organise for their rights against their commanders.

Meanwhile, the right wing in UCL Union has begun mobilising to undermine democracy. An unnamed UCL Union spokesperson gave both the *Sun* and the *Mail* a quote describing those who had voted for the ban as "hard core" (whatever that means) and the decision as "silly".

Now the right wing have gone one step further by organising the suspension, on supposedly disciplinary grounds but without charge, of union General Secretary Sam Godwin, a left-winger active in the campaign to defend NUS democracy who prominently supported the anti-military motion. Sam has been replaced on the key constitutional committees of the union by a former chair of Conservative Future.

For an online petition to defend Sam (which includes a space for messages of support), see ipetitions.com/petition/defendsamgodwin

1968: Vietnam solidarity and the British left

FORTY YEARS ON, BRUCE ROBINSON EXAMINES THE MOVEMENT AGAINST THE VIETNAM WAR IN BRITAIN AND THE ROLE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT IN IT.

MARCH 17 1968. 20,000 gather in Trafalgar Square for a rally and march to the US Embassy in protest against the US war in Vietnam. The Square is full of the flags of the National Liberation Front (the "Vietcong"), who, only weeks previously had launched the Tet Offensive that had taken a largely rural guerilla war into the cities of Vietnam, getting as far as the gates of the US Embassy in the capital Saigon. Someone throws red dye into the fountains to symbolise the blood shed in the war. Police move in but are resisted — a policy of "no arrests" means demonstrators try to snatch back those arrested from the police.

Speeches over, the march sets off and takes over the entire width of the street. Near the front a contingent from the German SDS, considered more skilled at street battles than the Brits. Marchers with arms linked chant "Victory to the NLF", "Hey, Hey LBJ [US President Johnson], how many kids have you killed today?" and, in honour of the Stalinist leader of North Vietnam, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh" — accompanied by jogging up and down.

Reaching Grosvenor Square, the front of the march heads through the police cordon and privet hedges and makes for the Embassy, meeting lines of police with arms linked. Waves follow pressing harder. From two other sides of the square, lots more police, including horses, randomly lay into anyone they can, even those watching from the sidelines. There were over 250 arrests.

The marchers divided into the determined who wanted to storm the embassy and those such as myself (on my first demo) who just wanted to show our opposition to the Vietnam war. One marcher wrote "The March Vietnam demo... was a great turning point. We went on that in the same spirit of [pacifist] CNDism, some people even had kids with them... We were astonished, amazed, couldn't really believe it was happening here in England when the police... started to push us in on three sides." For me the demonstration came as quite an (exciting) shock that made me think not merely about the role of the police but also more deeply about the politics of the Vietnam war and whether just calling for an end to it was enough.

The war in Vietnam had led to world-wide mobilisation because many people who had not previously been involved in politics reacted to the nightly news bulletins showing the pulverisation of a small country and its people by the world's strongest and most technologically advanced power. In Britain there was added disillusionment with Wilson's Labour government, which, despite the war, remained a close ally of the US. The movement around the war was to be central to the British events of '68 and their impact on the left.

The Grosvenor Square demonstration had been called by the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign (VSC), which had been set up by in July 1966 by what was to become the International Marxist Group (IMG), acting through the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation. It rejected the line, peddled by the Communist Party, for "Peace in Vietnam" (and accordingly the CP did not support it), instead calling explicitly for victory to the NLF over America. (A discussion of the politics of the campaign is too big a topic to deal with here.) By 1967, its main forces alongside the IMG were the International Socialists (IS — forerunners of the SWP) and various Maoists who departed in '68.

Where next after March 17th? At one level, the answer for activists was given by the sequence of events across the world that brought renewed action on the streets of London: the May events in France, Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech, the attempted assassination of German student leader Rudi Dutschke, the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia and the continuing war in Vietnam. All this — and the growth of militant student action in the UK and

internationally — could be wrapped up in vague ideas of a new revolutionary wave and "student power", supplemented by talk of the need for a "worker-student alliance". In 1968 the "dramatic effects [of events] outdo each other, men and things seem set in sparkling diamonds, ecstasy is the order of the day." (Marx)

This inchoate "revolutionism" was best reflected in the paper *Black Dwarf* edited by Tariq Ali, assisted by some of the gurus of New Left Review who had written of "Red Bases" in the universities, IMGers and various independent leftists. Headlines in early issues included: "Students: The New Revolutionary Vanguard", "Don't Demand, Occupy" and "We shall fight, we shall win, London, Paris, Rome, Berlin".

These ideas reflected both the great strengths and weaknesses of the movements of '68, — and not just in the UK: the strengths were a passionate solidarity and activism and a willingness to challenge all aspects of the status quo; the weakness a certain naivete and the absence of a strategy whereby the "movement" could be brought into productive contact with the only force that could make "revolution" a reality — the working class.

This was a product of both the political and organisational weakness of the Trotskyist left. Gerry Healy's Socialist Labour League and *Militant* both stood back from the movement. The SLL notoriously issued a leaflet, *Why we are not marching*, to the 100,000 strong Vietnam demo on October 27th. (Why? Because the march was, they claimed, just a stunt to distract attention from the SLL.) *Militant* were there, with a few paper sellers, but buried deep in the Labour Party — not a very popular or worthwhile place to be in '68. The IMG, which effectively controlled the machinery of VSC, adapted to the ultra-left and student-power orientation of the milieu. Only the IS (which the AWL's predecessors joined in '68) actively sought to shift the student and anti-war movements towards a more long term strategy of linking up with trade union struggles.

These differences were felt within the Vietnam solidarity movement, particularly in the build-up to the October 27th demonstration, which was to be probably the largest march since 1945. While local ad hoc committees mobilised for the march, its goals and the more long term development of the movement were debated.

Firstly, the Maoists insisted on going to Grosvenor Square for a repeat of the March march, rather than the rally in Hyde Park proposed by the majority of VSC, who felt nothing would be gained by another confrontation with the police. Otherwise the debate was about how the march would contribute to the broader politicisation of '68.

By taking over the streets, showing where political power really lay? By linking the Vietnam War to broader issues and movements in Britain and across the world? Or simply by carrying on marching in solidarity with the Vietnamese, leaving the other issues to the revolutionary groups?

The issue could not be resolved. Nobody (apart from sections of the press and ruling

A protestor in Grosvenor Square, 1968

class) seriously believed the march could lead to an attempt at revolution or the seizure of buildings. But where next? The impasse reflected the broader problems of the movements of '68. Militancy and imagination alone wasn't going to lead to revolutionary change. In the event, October 27th was a successful anti-climax: successful in terms of numbers and atmosphere, but an anti-climax in that it was ultimately just a demonstration and none of the political problems had been dealt with.

Afterwards, VSC declined rapidly, occasionally reviving, as at the time of the invasion of Cambodia in 1970. Its end as an active coalition was sealed at the memorial meeting called for Ho Chi Minh, who died in October 1969.

Amidst a string of eulogies, Chris Harman of IS pointed out that we should also be critical of Ho, because in the late 40s he had been responsible for the massacre of the Vietnamese Trotskyists. (Would the Harman of 2008 have done this, I wonder?)

At this point, the platform fell apart. The Communist Party and official North Vietnamese speakers left the platform, a voice from the audience shouted "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh. How many Trots did you do in?" and Bob Purdie of the IMG, supposedly a Trotskyist group, declined to support Harman when he spoke next. The VSC coalition was well dead and buried...

The collapse of movements that had been focal points in the course of '68 was not unique to Britain. The left student movements in Germany and the US — both called SDS — both fell apart in 1969, with major splits between Maoists and groups moving towards 'armed struggle'. In Britain, the fallout from '68 was more benign, perhaps because of a rising tide of trade union struggles.

Those who remained radical either got involved in specific campaigns such as squatting or the women's movement, or alternatively joined one of the revolutionary organisations, usually one that had oriented positively to the movements of '68. IS went from 450 in 1967 to over 1,000 by the end of 1968, while undergoing a "turn to the class" and abandoning its previous opposition to Leninist organisation. It was at the time a relatively open organisation that offered most to those who saw the need to go beyond the enthusiasms of '68.

By contrast, the IMG, which was much closer to the common student-oriented politics of the year and was also central to the VSC, grew much more slowly until later in 1970.

The rise and decline of the movement against the Vietnam war in Britain provides lessons that find more recent echoes in the "anti-capitalist" movement and the movement against the war in Iraq. One cannot continue indefinitely mobilising people on issues without giving them a political perspective and linking them to the social forces that can make their aspirations reality. Otherwise, no matter how large, militant or imaginative, they will drift away.

Similarly, hard political issues (whether the past of Ho, or the need to oppose the Islamists in Iraq) cannot be wished away in the interests of a fake unity.

Pushing education beyond capitalism

Handing over schools to business spivs?

BY LIAM CONWAY

GORDON Brown and Ed Balls will continue to accelerate the academies programme. The fake concern Balls expressed about some schools flouting admissions procedures acts as sand in our eyes as he and Brown increase selection through academies, trust and foundation status.

Local authorities currently face a terrible choice. If they include an academy in their bid for funding under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme, it will be built with no charge to the authority but at a £35m cost to the taxpayer.

State schools will be given away at knock down prices to any two-bit entrepreneur who thinks they know how to run schools better than trained professionals or democratically elected local councils.

Take David Samworth for example; the man penciled in to take ownership of Sherwood Hall Upper School in Mansfield. A quick peek at Samworth's CV and it soon becomes clear that this guy should stick to making sausages, pork pies and pasties.

The Samworth Church Academy is due to open in September but, so far, staff at the school have had very little consultation on how the new school will be built let alone operated.

Evidence from an academy run by Samworth and the church in Leicester suggests parents as well as staff might need to know more and soon. The school has a fully operational Anglican church on site, offering a complete range of religious services, including funeral services. Earlier this year a funeral was held during the school day, with the coffin passing through parts of the school building.

A supposed selling point for religious schools is the ridiculous idea that they perform better than others. There is no evidence - other than cooking admissions, which they have done with government connivance - to support this view.

Another supposed selling point is the notion that this form of Christianity is inclusive. But Sherwood Hall Upper School is already inclusive and is not trying to "promote Christian values" in the way that the Leicester academy does. The Bishop of Wakefield made it absolutely clear how inclusive such schools are when he said of a proposed church controlled academy in Halifax,

"the school is there to offer an education to those who wish particularly for an education that is Christian."

Schools should not promote Christian, Muslim, Hindu or any other religious values. They should teach Religious Education in a way that recognises the role of religion in people's lives and the importance of belief, religious and non-religious. How can a school claim to be truly inclusive when it promotes a specific set of religious values?

Samworth himself is also closely associated with the Midlands Industrial Council, a secretive organisation whose president, Sir Anthony Bamford, was knighted by Thatcher in 1990. Given the cash for honours scandal surrounding New Labour it shouldn't be long before Samworth becomes Lord Ginster. Sir Cyril Taylor, until recently head of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trusts believes people like Samworth sprinkle gold dust on schools.

Taylor believes the likes of Lord Harris, the carpet magnate, who runs several academies, is a shining example of the positive benefits of business sponsors. Harris, says Taylor, "phones his stores to see what the sales figures are, he calls his schools to find out what the attendance figures are." Truly inspirational!

Evidence from across the country shows that academies are not good employers, but the growth of academies, as well as the less publicised growth of foundation and trust schools is threatening to end any form of democratic accountability in our education system.

The NUT has produced some excellent materials on academies to help local campaigns of opposition, including the excellent booklet, "Academies - beyond the spin". But much more of a national lead is needed if we are not to be overrun by these monstrosities. With some noteworthy exceptions, largely resulting from the excellent work of the Anti-Academies Alliance, parents, students and NUT activists, local campaigns against academies have not succeeded in stopping them.

The action on pay gives teachers a big opportunity to campaign against privatisation in a way that we have been unable to do until now! We need a national campaign, led by the national union, if we are to seriously dent New Labour's love affair with academies and the marketisation of education.

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire W. B. Yeats

There has to be selection because we are beginning to create aspirations which society cannot match. In some ways this points to the success of education in contrast to the public mythology which has been created. When young people drop off the education production line and cannot find work at all, or work which meets their abilities and expectations, then we are only creating frustration with perhaps disturbing social consequences. We have to select: to ration the educational opportunities so that society can cope with the output of education. We are in a period of considerable social change. There may be social unrest, but we can cope with the Texteths. But if we have a highly educated and idle population we may possibly anticipate more serious social conflict. People must be educated once more to know their place.

Anonymous senior official at the Department for Education and Science (1984) quoted by Brian Simon in *Bending the Rules: the Baker Reform of Education* (1988).

BY PATRICK MURPHY, DIVISION SECRETARY, LEEDS AND NATIONAL EXECUTIVE WEST YORKSHIRE (PC)

AVAST chasm separates modern capitalist notions of what education is all about from the ideas of socialists. At bottom the purpose of schools in liberal capitalist societies has been to teach us to "know our place". As the needs of the economy and the type of workforce required has changed, so too has the education system, but in the last analysis it has been concerned to train rather than educate.

Learning for its own sake - that is something reserved for the few, in private schools or some of the old state grammars.

We are socialists and we think that education should let young people know their potential rather than their place, it should be a force for self-liberation rather than imprisonment. We are also realists, though, and we know that as long as we live in a society where all the means of producing wealth are owned and controlled by a tiny and powerful elite, the formal school system will never properly serve the majority of children.

Since 1979 Conservative, and then, shamefully, New Labour governments have worked hard to tear up what progress had been made in the post war period and impose a return to a narrow functional Gradgrind curriculum. This assault has been based on the gross lie that the comprehensive model "failed" compared to the old selective system. It failed to receive the political and financial support necessary to let it flower, but even without that it provided a more positive experience for working-class children than the spirit-crushing secondary modern.

All socialists have a role to play in defending and enriching state-provided comprehensive education. There is, however, a central and irreplaceable role for those people who are at the "chalk-face". AWL teachers are concerned

not only with the defence of our working conditions and pay, but also with developing an alternative vision of education and fighting for a school system fit for our children and young people. At the workplace, in the unions and in the community we fight for free, high quality and well-resourced education for all.

As teachers we are all members of the largest trade union, the NUT, not only because it is the largest but because it is the only one to have a relatively democratic structure. In common with the majority of British trade unions at the beginning of the new millennium, however, it has been led by people who believe that militant combative unionism is dead and that the only way to survive in the future is to convince the employers that we pose no real threat.

That outlook has taken a considerable bashing in the last few years, and it has been particularly discredited in schools. Social partnership, as it is called, is the current fashion across the trade union movement. In education it has delivered only pay cuts, super-exploitation of underpaid support staff and the dilution of the teaching work-force.

The NUT has remained outside this social partnership, and that is very much to its credit. The current union leadership has been very keen to insist, however, that it is this particular form of social partnership they oppose rather than the concept as a whole. We are opposed to social partnership in principle and counterpose to it social solidarity and independent militant trade unionism.

There are two left groups in the NUT, the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Union (CDFU). They have separate histories, but they both fight on similar issues. The union leadership is fond of denouncing all this as factionalism but the truth is that they too have their organisation; it is called, with a double dishonesty, the Broadly Speaking. It is no less assertive than the others, but it is less open and more secretive.

For the most part the existence of these organisations is no more than the inevitable and perfectly healthy coming together of like-minded activists to ensure a hearing for alternative directions in a very large union.

Workers' Liberty teachers are members of both the STA and the CDFU, largely as a token of our long-held belief that they should merge. There is no good reason for the existence of two separate left groupings in the NUT. It is a luxury which often costs us and the members dear, and we are ardently in favour of left unity.

Even more indulgent is the periodic decisions of two of the main socialist organisations to opt in and out of these broader groups. The SWP are currently back in the STA after years of self-imposed exile. The Socialist Party, however, have gone off to do their own thing.

In a more sober and serious-minded left the need for a common approach and a drive to build a rank and file movement across the union would take priority over such short-termism.

Socialism is more than just a vision of a better society. It is the name given to the movement built to make it a reality. In the words of the Irish socialist James Connolly "we carve out the world of which we speak".

education socialist limits

A different type of trade unionism

BY NICK RAINE, SOUTH NOTTS JOINT
SECRETARY (PERSONAL CAPACITY)

This conference comes at a crucial time for trade unionists both in education and across the Public Sector. Both the NUT and UCU are balloting members over the government's 3 year pay cut, which will hopefully lead to the first national strike over pay for a very long time.

At the same time, other Public Sector unions are involved in similar disputes. As NUT activists we need to seize the opportunity to unite and act with other unions who are fighting the same battle against an increasingly hostile and aggressive government.

However, activists will know the problems we face with the NASUWT/ATL in education. For years, the presence of three teaching unions has been detrimental to our members' interests — now it could be disastrous for all teachers.

The recent capitulation of the NASUWT in the face of the pay cut was the latest in a long line of betrayals of the teaching profession. Social Partnership has had appalling consequences for teachers' pay and conditions as well as eroding union solidarity and democracy.

The NASUWT's disgraceful "opinion poll" of members best exemplifies this. After remarking that teachers had had a "better deal" than other workers, the NASUWT sent out a confusing

"opinion poll" giving their members several choices of potential action with little direction. Only 14,000 voted. According to the NASUWT, 67% of their members were "dissatisfied" with the pay cut. Chris Keates' response has been to do nothing.

This betrayal follows NASUWT support for the loss of UPS4 and UPS5 pay scales, a move which leaves one third of teachers stuck on UPS3 and unable to progress. On top of this, the "Social Partnership" backed the replacement of MAs (Management Allowances) with temporary TLRs (Teaching and Learning Responsibilities) slashing the pay of 30,000 teachers.

They also backed Performance Related Pay and the introduction of unqualified and underpaid Teaching Assistants who are now regularly teaching classes up and down the country at great cost to our children's education and our members jobs. This has been achieved by ensuring over worked members are ill-informed after selling them out behind closed doors.

As NUT activists we need to fight this. Using the Pay Campaign we need to make sure that NASUWT/ATL members are aware that there is a different type of trade unionism and that unions can be democratic, independent and ready to stand up for their members. We now need to actively recruit NASUWT members in to the NUT to join our fight for better pay, conditions and job security for all teachers.

Together we are stronger!

We are union activists organised in the teachers fraction of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. In our schools, local union branches and in the structures of the National Union of Teachers we are engaged in the fight not only to defend what remains of the comprehensive model from New Labour and Tory attempts to destroy it but to win genuinely equal and free education for all.

That requires the devotion of a large part of our time and energies. It means linking up with our comrades in the student movement who fight against fees and for free education beyond school. It means making connections with socialists throughout the labour movement who are fighting for a welfare state based on need and a democratic trade union movement unshackled from the draconian

union laws imposed on us in the 1980s.

Ultimately it means taking on the wider question of who should rule society and how; the question of government.

Whether through the remains of the Labour left, the Labour affiliated trade unions or the emerging electoral challenges to New Labour we are for a new kind of government. We are for a "Workers' Government", representative of, and accountable to, the people and organisations who created it and put it there.

We would ask people who read the material here and like what they read to contact Workers' Liberty teachers, discuss these ideas with us and to consider joining us in that fight for a free education system in a classless society.

• Contact: awl@workersliberty.org

Get a life — building action on workload

BY PAT MURPHY, LEEDS NUT (PERSONAL
CAPACITY)

If you ask teachers what the worst aspect of their job is, a very big majority will point to excessive workload. We know this because they have been asked by trade unions and by academic researchers on a regular basis.

In particular, research commissioned by government to identify why so many people leave the job consistently shows that workload is a crucial factor. Teacher trade unions are aware of the importance of this issue but have taken two diametrically opposed paths in dealing with it.

The NASUWT and ATL have taken the route of social partnership. They made an agreement with the government and local authority employers in 2003 which promised some reductions in workload in return for an acceptance that the school workforce would be "remodelled" so that support staff would do some of the things teachers do.

The actual result of this agreement has been that support staff who have not been trained and are not being paid enough are being expected, in more and more cases, to teach classes. In addition 30,000 teachers who once received additional payments for taking on extra responsibilities have lost them, and this is expected to rise to 50,000 by the end of this year. The workload concessions gained by this are fairly minimal. Teachers have a guaranteed 10% planning and preparation time (PPA), and a legal limit on the annual amount of cover has been introduced. Increasingly the evidence is that these measures have had little or no real effect in reducing workload.

The School Teachers Review Body (STRB) conducts regular surveys of teachers' working and teaching hours. The 2007 survey found that teachers and head teachers in primary schools

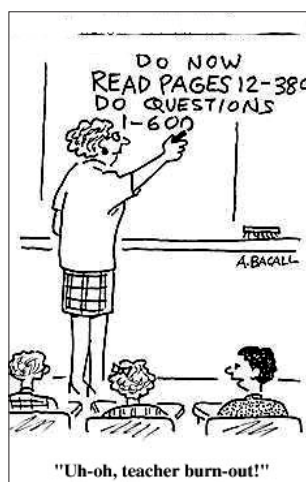
saw a rise in working hours from those recorded in 2006. The hours worked by teachers in special schools rose for the first time since 2000. The 2006 survey made the remarkable admission that the workforce reforms had achieved "no statistically significant difference" to teachers' working hours. The social partnership route has demonstrably failed to deliver for the workforce, though it has delivered a cheaper and more exploited labour force for the employers.

The NUT has taken a different approach to workload. Mainly on the grounds that the concessions made as part of the remodelling agreement were unacceptable, we stayed out of social partnership. Every child should have a qualified teacher in every class - that has been the NUT principle. As far as workload is concerned, the NUT drew up detailed set of guidelines in 2005 which covered the full range of issues including class size, meetings, planning, lesson observations, bureaucratic tasks. These were rolled out to local divisions and associations who were encouraged to submit requests for strike action from individual schools.

While this approach is light years better than that of the NASUWT and ATL, it does have problems. The most serious is the reliance on members in individual schools to take action alone.

Workload is a national problem requiring a national approach. Members in small schools where the NUT may be a minority union need, where possible, to be able to benefit from the collective strength of the union. It is very often the case that teachers who are weighed down by excessive meetings and demands for planning or observations are willing to do something, but are not prepared to strike.

The impact of these problems can be seen in the fact that a very small number of requests for action have come to the union's action sub-



committee, despite a genuine attempt to encourage them. Most of the requests that have come in have been from secondary school members resisting proposals to reduce their lunch break. The good thing is that these requests have been agreed and the disputes have generally been successful in defending conditions.

The reality is, however, that the most serious workload problems are in the primary sector, and the union still has not found a way to tackle these. In Leeds we have tried to develop a strategy which can generate some action in primary schools to fight back against excessive and unreasonable workload demands.

We consulted primary school activists and

looked at our casework records to identify the priority areas of concern for members. It was very clear that these were meetings, requirements to hand in planning, and excessive lesson observations. We surveyed a huge sample of members on their attitudes to action on these areas, and got huge support.

One of the keys to this is that we offered the option of non-strike action, i.e. refusal to attend more than one meeting per week, to hand in short-term planning or accept more than three observations per year.

We went to the national union seeking support for a city-wide ballot of primary members. The response was supportive and positive in principle, but cautious about the detail. We were told that any dispute would legally be with individual schools rather than with the local authority, and that separate ballots would have to be held in schools where there was support for it.

The revised plan we came away with was to identify those primary schools which had problems with these workload areas, offer them support for non-strike action and seek to coordinate the ballots and the action so that we have a collective programme of workload action.

We are now working with a group of about 14 primary schools to explore whether we start co-ordinated action in the summer term. Any action will be a step forward in the campaign to reduce workload. Any success will be used to roll the action out to other schools.

We will bring the same approach to secondary and special schools too. It is important to understand that there is nothing about this approach that can't be adopted by other areas. It is also important to see this not as an alternative to calls for national action, but as a way to develop the current NUT workload campaign into a more effective instrument to engage and defend members.

Education: the world's biggest industry

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

"Teachers are proletarians. Indeed, it has been some time now since a significant number of teachers owned their own means of production; in order to survive they sell their labour power..."

Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labour: Workers' Movements and Globalisation since 1870*

THE significance of teachers as workers has increased in Western capitalist economies in the post-war period. Mass education and the work of teachers within the "education industry" has become the lynchpin in an economy dependent upon workers with high levels of "knowledge": "Like textile workers in the nineteenth century and automobile workers in the twentieth century, education workers (teachers) are central to the process of capital accumulation in the twenty-first century" (Silver).

Capital has its sights set on penetrating the education sector for two reasons: the potential profits available from direct exploitation, and the drive to regulate and control the outputs of this vital sector of the economy. The onward march towards Academy and Trust schools provides a market lever for more drastic developments to come. Such changes will ultimately result in unrest, but we should not assume that this unrest will find spontaneous organisational expression. The question of union organisation — what sort of union, representing what sectors of the education industry — is vital.

Beverly Silver argues that "teaching" as a labour process is different from other sectors of industry in that the role of a teacher is independent from a chain of other workers.

As long as students arrive in the classroom at the appointed time, teachers can carry out their "work". The action of one teacher (for example strike action or sickness) does not have an immediate knock-on effect on other workers — the labour process will not grind to a halt.

But the picture in British schools is increasingly at odds with this view. Whilst it's true that in everyday situations teachers work in an atomised way, isolated in their own classrooms, more and more of us work with teaching assistants, "learning mentors", "academic coaches" and a whole host of other support staff. These non-teaching co-workers are becoming gradually more important. This fact alone suggests that in future any mass industrial action by teachers will have an effect on other groups of workers — other points in the labour process.

Another difference between education work and other forms of production is the relative autonomy of individual sites of production. Say for instance that haulage drivers take industrial action — the impact of their strike will cascade throughout industries directly dependent on the transport of resources. Cut off the supply chain and eventually production is disrupted.

Education work has different dependencies: if one school is closed by strike action, there is no automatic knock-on effect. The neighbouring schools can function perfectly well. If all secondary schools went on strike, primary schools could function quite happily.

Whilst education workers are not significantly divided on the technical division of labour (as outlined above), they are on the social division of labour: "Whereas the raw material inputs that go into textile or automobile production can be stored for the duration of a strike, the same cannot be done with the raw material inputs of the education industry" (Silver) — young people cannot be stored in metal containers until the strike is over! A national teachers' strike would affect large parts of the social division of labour "disrupting family routines and making it difficult for working parents to do their own jobs."

Any prolonged industrial action by teachers would therefore have two effects — one immediate, one more long term. Parents of very young children (a significant section of the workforce) may well be forced to stay away from work.

The second effect would only come into play with "exceptionally long and/or frequent strikes in education... fears have been raised about the

longer-term impact of teacher labour unrest on the final product — that is, students' educational accomplishments as well as their proper socialisation as citizens" (Silver).

The last instructive difference between education workers and others is the relative imperviousness of teachers to "technological fixes".

Whilst other sectors of production and some service industries experience the effects of an expanding and contracting workforce and the introduction of technology that replaces human activity, teachers do not. As the education industry expands, more teachers are employed.

British schools have seen an explosion of technological aids (lap-tops, interactive whiteboards, the internet etc...) to work, but this technology cannot replace the work done by teachers. So any increase in productivity cannot come through the development of new machinery/technology to increase output — productivity is increased by the intensification of work. Despite new workforce agreements, many teachers have experienced a massive increase in workload in the past ten years. We can expect to see many more attempts to increase our workload in the years to come.

The economy of education work indicates an increased industrial weight for those employed as teachers. But as teachers and trade union activists we are not just interested in protecting our pay and conditions. We do not oppose the privatisation of education simply because we fear being made to work harder for less pay.

This government runs Britain on a "country as commodity" basis where the primary aim is to impose economic and social policies that attract business. The education system has been consistently attacked and education work rationalised and regulated (through performance management, targets and inspections) to ensure a flow of "appropriately skilled" and compliant workers and to attract investment.

Like a bird chirping to attract a mate, New Labour has pushed through the Academy programme and other liberalisations to attract its natural partners, big-money capital. They aim to denude education of its potential to liberate, nurture and culture the minds of young people. For this reason more than any other, we should recognise and mobilise our ever-increasing collective power.

If only children did have those choices

End the rule of SATs!

BY PATRICK MURPHY

THE Cambridge Primary Review — arguably the most important review since Plowden in 1967 — calls for an end to national testing and a complete re-think of current primary practice.

- The evidence shows:
- limited gains in reading skills at the expense of pupils' enjoyment of reading;
 - increases in test-induced stress among pupils;
 - a narrowing of the primary curriculum in response to the perceived pressure of testing;
 - the limited impact of the national strategies on both reading standards and the quality of classroom discourse on which higher-order learning depends;
 - a much bigger gap between high and low attaining pupils than in many other countries;
 - narrow definitions of 'standards' which have been adopted.

In short we have a test-driven curriculum in which the children of the working class families are the biggest losers.

The sharp "improvement" in SATs results between 1995 and 2000 was achieved not by any improvements in learning, but by teaching to the tests. Schools focused on getting the right answers rather than helping students to think and talk. According to a recent report in the *Guardian* "higher-order learning", i.e. the ability to connect different ideas and draw conclusions from evidence, is neither encouraged nor measured. So long as pupils know how to do the right thing to pass the tests, little else matters. And now it turns out that up to one in three pupils have been given the wrong marks in primary tests anyway.

Is there any sign that the government will learn from any of this? Not likely — indeed as the *Guardian* says, "ministers are planning to press ahead with new tests for primary school children which can be taken at any point during the school year — something critics believe will only add to pupils' stress, while adding nothing to their learning."

Indeed the Government plans to extend the testing and target setting frenzy to children of nursery age. The Early Years Foundation Stage has appeared almost unannounced, but child minders will certainly be aware of its crack-pot notions.

As Armando Iannucci reported in the *Observer*, the targets include the obligation to make sure each three-year-old "understands that s/he can expect others to treat her or his needs, views, cultures and beliefs with respect" and that the child "interacts with others, negotiating plans and taking turns in conversation".

This is twaddle, but is typical of a government in tune with the needs of the market but not children. Against all the evidence about the dangers of formal education methods the government plunders on.

As Iannucci says, "mainland Europe has a much better literacy rate than the UK and holds off reading and writing lessons until aged seven and up. Here, some deluded nincompoop, whose job it is to improve literacy among children, has concluded that the only way to do this is by doing the exact opposite of a large mass of the world that has a better literacy rate than us... It suddenly turns every nursery teacher, kindergarten supervisor, child-minder, parent or grandmother just baby-sitting into a state functionary legally obliged to perform mandated tasks and compulsory writing assessments on children who've just managed to stop dribbling."

In dealing with a government that is clearly a

playground short of a school it is surely long past the time for teachers to take matters into their own hands by once again considering a boycott of SATs, which are at the heart of this target-setting madness. A new boycott could effectively spearhead the Union's defence against the excessive workload experienced by members and driving many teachers out of the profession.

So much of the target-driven agenda is set by SATs and the obsession with National Curriculum levels. Workload action must be a priority for teachers in the wake of the failure of the 2006 workload ballot to provide any noticeable protection for teachers.

Boycotting SATs must surely be should be part of a generalised campaign against the whole direction of government policy — now proven in report after report to be a disaster for all involved in education.

Push back the "new management"

BY TIM HALES

I AM a local officer of Leeds NUT. One of our biggest sources of casework is workplace bullying. It is also one of the most depressing and frustrating aspects of our work because it is very difficult to protect individual members from systematic intimidation by school managers, and the problem grows like a malignant tumour.

Recently I found myself sitting in the reception area of a Leeds secondary school staring at a wallposter which stridently proclaimed the legend "The power of me can tackle bullying in Leeds". In the previous weeks I had frequently sat in traffic jams and stared at this worthy message writ large on the backs of buses etc. Usually it left me pretty numb, but on this particular occasion it enraged me.

I was waiting to meet a member who has been bullied to the point of resignation by her headteacher, a serial abuser of his staff and the blue eyed boy of the local authority. Yes, they do know about him. They studiously ignore his appalling behaviour because he represents the kind of manager who can seriously kick ass and lick those feckless classroom workers into line. He is not the only one.

This endemic and rancidly stupid attitude costs this country dear. Research by the

University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology indicates that over one third of all stress related illness is directly attributable to bullying in the workplace. Bullying costs employers 80 million working days per year and up to £2billion in lost revenue. Work related stress illness costs the UK an estimated £3.8 billion per year.

I'm not too bothered about the cost to the employers. I am bothered about the human costs to our members.

Thousands of employees who lose their confidence and self respect, who often lose their livelihoods and who suffer serious mental damage and even physical illness. We can't protect these members and we can't deal with the problem on a piecemeal casework basis. Successful actions for damages are too difficult to achieve and too rare to positively affect the deep rooted culture of bullying.

As trade unionists we have to take on the responsibility of shifting attitudes to this oppressive culture. We need to promote an attitude of collective self defence in every school, every hospital, shop, workyard and factory. Through every kind of workers' action we need to force bullies to change their behaviour and demonstrate to employers that systematic intimidation and humiliation are not acceptable management tools.

Iraq's cycle of violence

FARYAL VELMI REVIEWS THE BATTLE FOR HADITHA, DIRECTED BY NICK BROOMFIELD

NICK Broomfield's latest cinematic offering dramatises a particularly brutal and harrowing chapter in the five year history of the U.S occupation of Iraq.

The film depicts the events of 19 November 2005, when a battalion of U.S marines went on a murderous rampage, killing 24 men, women and children in revenge for the death of a fellow soldier by a roadside bomb.

Broomfield, who has made his name primarily as a documentary film maker, employs the same documentary ethic not only in the way the film has been shot (an improvised script and hand held cameras), but also through the use of non-actors who have direct experiences of the war in Iraq.

Elliot Ruiz is a 22-year-old former Marine who had been, when he was 17, the youngest Marine deployed to Iraq. He plays Ramirez — the psyched up and trigger happy instigator of the shooting spree. Due to Ruiz's ability to tap into his own personal experiences in Iraq, a great depth of emotion is bought to his performance. He presents to us a complex character who, although has been made "numb" by his experiences in the "arsehole of the world", i.e. Iraq, is still haunted by his murderous acts and even regrets them.

The victims of the atrocity are also primarily played by war refugees from Baghdad (the film was shot in Jordan where they fled). In fact one of the cast members, who plays a grief stricken mother who witnesses her two sons being shot by the Marines, has lived through a similar tragedy — her son was killed by the insurgency.

PETE BURTON CONTINUES HIS SERIES ON THE BLUES

THE American sheet music publishing industry produced a lot of ragtime music.

By 1912, the sheet music industry had published three popular blues-like compositions, precipitating the Tin Pan Alley adoption of blues elements: *Baby Seals' Blues* by "Baby" F. Seals (arranged by Artie Matthews), *Dallas Blues* by Hart Wand, and *Memphis Blues* by W. C. Handy.

Handy used his formal training as a musician, composer and arranger to popularize the blues by transcribing and orchestrating blues in an almost symphonic style, with bands and singers. He became a popular and prolific composer, and billed himself as the "Father of the Blues". However, his compositions can be described as a fusion of blues with ragtime and jazz, a merger facilitated using the Cuban habanera rhythm that had long been a part of ragtime; Handy's signature work was the *St. Louis Blues*.

In the 1920s, the blues became a major element of African American and American popular music, reaching white audiences via Handy's arrangements and the classic female blues performers. The blues evolved from informal performances in bars to entertainment in theatres.

Blues performances were organised by the Theater Owners Bookers Association (also known as Tough on Black Asses) in nightclubs such as the Cotton Club, and juke joints, such as the bars along Beale Street in Memphis. This evolution led to a notable diversification of the styles and to a clearer division between blues and jazz. Several record companies, such as the American Record Corporation, Okeh Records, and Paramount Records, began to record African American music.

As the recording industry grew, country blues performers like Bo Carter, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Lonnie Johnson, Tampa Red and Blind

Her tears in the film are for real.

The film charts how the Iraqi families' attempt to carry on with life — in the case of one family, celebrate a coming of age ceremony for a young boy — is savagely interrupted. No aspect of life in Iraq can be spared from the violence and bloodshed that has engulfed the country since the invasion.

The film also follows Al-Qaida's paid insurgents — an ex army man and a young C.D. seller — as they plant the bomb. The men are not Islamist ideologues — in fact one is partial to an alcohol drink — but are portrayed as fed up citizens who want to rid their country of the US occupation and earn some US dollars in the process.

The cycle of violence is graphically illustrated by the film: the presence of US troops resulting in roadside bombs planted by insurgents, US troops violently meting out punishment and murdering innocents and their actions inspiring other waves of insurgency.

Like Ramirez, the bombers also express regret at the carnage and at the actions of the insurgents who exploit it. "I have feeling that we may get someone worse than Saddam", one of them rues.

The invasion and occupation of Iraq, like the Vietnam war before it, has provided film makers in last couple of years with a rich vein of human tragedy to tap into. *Battle for Haditha* follows a number of other films like *Redacted* by Brian De Palma, *In the valley of Elah* by Paul Haggis, *Rendition* by Gavin Hood.

However, it is Broomfield's raw and visceral take of a calamitous day that will in years to come serve as a potent reminder of the sheer brutality unleashed on the Iraqi people by the war and occupation.

Using "white flight" to promote racism

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

MIDDLE class producers at the BBC have conveniently rediscovered the working class in order to make a series that attempts to drive a wedge between workers. The vile advert designed to build some hype around the "White" series depicted a bulldog man's face being progressively blacked out by foreign words.

Is the white working-class becoming invisible? If it is, suggests the BBC, it is because of that thing "multi-culturalism"? Or perhaps it's immigration? What's the difference anyway?

The series opened with a documentary minutely the death-whimpers of a working-man's club in white-only Wibsey, somewhere near Bradford. Like watching paint dry, it was difficult to feel much of the saccharine emotion that so moved our patronising American guide as he followed and wallowed in the demise of a committee unable to organise a piss-up in their brewery.

Is it really surprising no one wanted to hang around a literally dying group of small-minded and utterly defeated people, however tightly knit?

Callous? Perhaps a little, but any natural affinity I might have had for a worn-down and dispirited working-class community was gradually erased by the growing annoyance at the slow but persistent stream of pathetic people indulging squalid bigotries, in between the odd, selective recollection of the community's real history of strength and working-class solidarity, combativity and creativity.

Is it just scapegoating on their part, or is there some greater meaning that I've missed?

I'm aware of many of the reasons for white working-class disillusion and despair, and it is true that the white working-class in the UK has been significantly defeated and now sold down the river by New Labour, especially in terms of health, housing and education and workers' rights. It is also true enough that the BNP, with more than a little help from the BBC during the series, is increasingly positioning itself as the real fighters for white workers. This reality should be broadcast, but the two programmes I saw, *Last Orders* and *White Girl*, missed the point entirely.

Last Orders wantonly excluded any Asian perspectives, because after all we are truly swamped with the images and voices of working-class Asians in the media, but then again, there's no Asian working class, only Muslims and Pakis.

It is a disgrace that the sense of personal entitlement of some of the people in the documentary came less from being a worker, or part of a class of workers, but the feeling that they had a natural and automatic right as a race to more than the Asians were getting. You got the sense that Asian people shouldn't have the audacity to pick at the crumbs until they have been distributed among indigenous whites.

Even *White Girl*, which seems to have been taken by some as a flattering portrayal of Muslim people, given the contrast with the broken family of protagonists, was racist in a different way as far as I'm concerned.

The real story was actually a hackneyed domestic drama; only this white working-class family drama played itself out against the backdrop of soft-focus, shimmering Mohammedans: Muslims who all have wise words to impart before they vanish back into their lanterns; smiles for everyone and beautiful, mesmerising scripts circling the insides of their mosque domes.

So clean, so caring, they were half-formed characters without any depth or contradictions — essentially just a foil for the real white people, however lacking they may be in community.

Are we grappling with something fundamentally complex? I actually don't think so. Do large layers of white working-class people feel swamped? Probably. Are they being screwed over? Yes.

But any real comparison of life chances and material wealth shows that white workers suffer no disadvantage in reality compared to the persistent and growing poverty of migrant groups.

Is immigration a problem? It certainly is an issue; the BBC has resuscitated the fascist Enoch Powell as a prescient visionary, speaking sanity in the face of a sleepwalking liberal left. The series and the corresponding "debate" it has precipitated are nothing new. The problems of capitalism are here again attributed to immigrants, using the cipher of "multiculturalism".

The attack on multi-culturalism, in this context, is not the defence of secularism, is not an appeal for working-class unity and solidarity against capitalism; it is the promotion of a racist explanation for low wages, unemployment, privatisation and a growing sense of alienation and despair with this increasingly crisis-ridden capitalism — a destructive and hateful illogic that through its own course will lead to rivers of blood, if left unchallenged.

times referred to as "The Guitar Wizard." Carr made the then-unusual choice of accompanying himself on the piano.

Boogie-woogie was another important style of 1930s and early 1940s urban blues. While the style is often associated with solo piano, boogie-woogie was also used to accompany singers and, as a solo part, in bands and small combos. Boogie-woogie style was characterized by a regular bass figure, an ostinato or riff and shifts of level in the left hand, elaborating each chord and trills and decorations in the right hand. Boogie-woogie was pioneered by the Chicago-based Jimmy Yancey and the Boogie-Woogie Trio (Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson and Meade Lux Lewis). Chicago boogie-woogie performers included Clarence "Pine Top" Smith and Earl Hines, who "linked the propulsive left-hand rhythms of the ragtime pianists with melodic figures similar to those of Armstrong's trumpet in the right hand".

In the 1940s, the jump blues style developed. Jump blues is influenced by big band music and uses saxophone or other brass instruments and the guitar in the rhythm section to create a jazzy, up-tempo sound with declamatory vocals. Jump blues tunes by Louis Jordan and Big Joe Turner, based in Kansas City, Missouri, influenced the development of later styles such as rock and roll and rhythm and blues. The smooth Louisiana style of Professor Longhair and, more recently, Dr John, blends classic rhythm and blues with blues styles.

In 1942 James C Pelisto (AFM) organised a ban on the record labels to secure more royalties for the musicians. Decca settled 12 months later and new independent labels like Savoy, Aladdin and Modern sprung up in New York, Chicago and L.A. Two consequences of the strike were that singers like Frank Sinatra became as famous as band leaders like Henry James and Tommy Dorsey, and the new labels then specialised in black jazz, Blues and Gospel.

The Pre-War Blues

Blake became more popular in the African American community. Sylvester Weaver was the first to record the slide guitar style, in which a guitar is fretted with a knife blade or the sawed-off neck of a bottle. The slide guitar became an important part of the Delta blues.

The first blues recordings from the 1920s were in two categories: a traditional, rural country blues and more polished "city" or urban blues. The 1920s blues songsters became highly influential in the post-war period. Lonnie Johnson was so influential on Lonnie Donegan that Donegan adopted his name, "Lonnie". Donegan, the founder of skiffle in Britain, became an icon for Paul McCartney and many British bands.

Country blues performers often improvised, either without accompaniment or with only a banjo or guitar. There were many regional styles of country blues in the early 20th century.

The (Mississippi) Delta blues was a rootsy sparse style, with passionate vocals accompanied by slide guitar. Robert Johnson, who was little-recorded, combined elements of both urban and rural blues.

Along with Robert Johnson, influential performers of this style were his predecessors Charley Patton and Son House. Singers such as Blind Willie McTell and Blind Boy Fuller performed in the southeastern "delicate and lyrical" Piedmont blues tradition, which used an elaborate fingerpicking guitar technique. Georgia also had an early slide tradition.

The lively Memphis blues style, which developed in the 1920s and 1930s around Memphis, Tennessee, was influenced by jug bands, such as the Memphis Jug Band or the Gus Cannon's Jug

Stompers. Performers such as Frank Stokes, Sleepy John Estes, Robert Wilkins, Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie used a variety of unusual instruments such as washboard, fiddle, kazoo or mandolin. Memphis Minnie was famous for her virtuosic guitar style.

Pianist Memphis Slim began his career in Memphis, but his quite distinct style was smoother and contained some swing elements. Many blues musicians based in Memphis moved to Chicago in the late 1930s or early 1940s and became part of the urban blues movement which blended country music and electric blues.

BESSIE SMITH

CITY or urban blues styles were more codified and elaborate. Classic female urban or vaudeville blues singers were popular in the 1920s, among them Mamie Smith, Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Victoria Spivey. Mamie Smith, more a vaudeville performer than a blues artist, was the first African-American to record a blues in 1920; her *Crazy Blues* sold 75,000 copies in its first month.

Ma Rainey, called the *Mother of Blues*, and Bessie Smith, sang "... each song around centre tones, perhaps in order to project her voice more easily to the back of a room." Smith would "...sing a song in an unusual key, and her artistry in bending and stretching notes with her beautiful, powerful contralto to accommodate her own interpretation was unsurpassed".

Urban male performers included popular black musicians of the era, such Tampa Red, Big Bill Broonzy and Leroy Carr.

Before World War Two, Tampa Red was some-

The Irish Workers' Union and the Catholic Church

I HAVE read with interest — and some amusement — Sean Matgama's history of the "Irish debate" in IS and elsewhere on the left in the period from the late 1950s to (presumably) the early 1970s. I will not comment on the series as a whole until it is completed. However I would like to comment on the most recent in the series dealing with the Irish Workers' Group and — more specifically — its predecessor, the Irish Workers Union.

Sean's account is broadly correct. But it is ludicrous to assert that the IWU enjoyed sympathy from from Irish Catholic clergy or some "unidentified" part of the Irish political establishment. There is not a fragment of evidence for this and Matgama offers none. To the extent that either of these social groups were remotely aware of the IWU, they would have regarded it as more extreme and dangerous than the Connolly Association which — although wedded to the Stalinist view of

history — enjoyed close links with respectable even middle of the road forces in the Labour party, including in Parliament.

It is true that the original 1959 IWU constitution — written as he says by the anarcho-syndicalist, Michael Callinan — banned from membership both fascists and "communists". However this was opposed by some of us from the start (notably Mike Quilty a building worker member of the *Socialist Review* group, myself (who was to join the SR at about that time) and the late Dick Walsh who co-edited the *Irish Worker* with me. The ban on "communists" was dropped a year later. Although a marginal publication, the *Irish Worker* did briefly enjoy some readership among then (then considerable) Irish building worker labour force in London at that time. Indeed these links were part of the reason why Pat O'Donovan and — briefly — Brian Behan were involved.

The IWU was indeed politically eclectic. It

included both some ex Clann na Poblachta militants and some who were in or around the Irish National Union in London (a dissident republican faction sympathetic to Saor Uladh/Liam Kelly et al.) This may explain why Gerry Lawless and others from the Christie faction gravitated to the IWU prior to its demise and who then attracted some militants — including Liam Dalton (who as Sean Matgama rightly says was politically impressive) — to what morphed later into the Irish Workers Group.

I trust at some time in his series Sean Matgama will spell out clearly what concrete lessons he draws from the whole period for socialists in relation to what developed subsequently in the north of Ireland.

John Palmer

Sean Matgama replies

WHAT I said about the politics of the Irish Workers Union — not being right wing, etc —

should make it clear that when I wrote what I did about the attitude of some priests to it, I was not trying thereby to (so to speak) damn it. Most of what was said by even foul reactionaries like the hierarchy of the Catholic Church about "communism" — Stalinism — was true...

There were some welcoming comments on the IWU in one at least of the Catholic papers. I have notes on it somewhere, which I'll try to dig out within the next few days.

John Palmer should prepare himself for a big belly-laugh: I'll soon be getting to an episode that had for decades gone out of my memory completely — the story of his advocacy, following Mike Farrell, of a closed-off Irish economy.

I hope he keeps his promise to comment on the whole series. Discussion would be good, and it is altogether too rare on the left. More debate: www.workersliberty.org/node/10205

How to argue for "two states"

THE editorial on the crisis in Gaza in *Solidarity* 3-128 seemed to have some faith in the Israeli government's ability to bring about a two state settlement to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. It appealed to the Israeli government to use a proportionate response to attacks and to live up to its democratic ideals. It also talks of a limited level of military response to Hamas's rocket attacks as being unobjectionable self defence.

This view entirely fails to represent why and how socialists should support the self determination of peoples. In Israel and the occupied territories there are two people seeking self determination and independence. In this situation the socialist response must always be to support the self-determination of both peoples while defending the rights of minorities. This is related to the class struggle because if a people have won self determination, the working class of that country are able to face their own capitalist class head on in the fight for a workers' state. However since the ultimate aim of socialists is working class power, meaningful self determination must be achieved at the behest of the workers not at their expense.

Israeli society is a class society like any other and its government represents the interests of Israeli capital. It spouts the language of freedom and democracy while attempting to starve and bomb the people of Gaza, conscripts young Israeli's into the armed forces and treats Israeli Arabs like second class citizens. None of this is particularly out of the ordinary for a bourgeois state.

Meanwhile the Palestinian people in the occupied territories are subject to two chaotic semi states. They have to suffer the corrupt feudalism of Fatah on the West Bank and the vicious attempt at a theocratic regime by Hamas in Gaza. Neither Fatah or Hamas are capable of realising the self-determination of the Palestinian people.

Many on the left see the carnage and oppression of Gaza and feel Hamas should be supported because they are striking a blow against Israel. However the rule of Hamas in Gaza is at the expense of the only force that can fight consistently for democracy, secularism and self determination: the labour movement.

Meanwhile western liberals put their faith in Ehud Olmert's government agreeing to a comprehensive multilateral peace process. This is unrealistic since Israel holds most of the cards and Fatah holds none. Even if Hamas and Fatah come to an agreed negotiating position, and a less hawkish Tel Aviv government is willing to talk, the result will entrench the reactionary elements in power.

Israel is a highly militarised state which cannot be brought to the table by woefully feeble rockets or murderous suicide bombers.

Only the Israeli peace movement and the workers have the ability to stop the slaughter and help the Palestinian people win their freedom. Workers' action against the armament industry, against conscription and against the settlements could force the carnage to end.

David Kirk

Cathy Nugent replies:

DAVID misrepresents the editorial in question, seems confused about some issues about the "two state" demand, and makes an unthought-out objection to Israel's right of self-defence. Unfortunately he does not properly elaborate on this point, but I'll deal with it first.

All individuals, peoples and nations have — in the abstract, or in principle — the right to self-defence. To deny that to Israel would be to make Israel a special case. This is the argument on parts of the left and in western anti-Zionist campaigns — unlike any other country in the world Israel's people must "grin and bear" whatever suicide bomb, mortar shell or homemade rocket is lobbed at it, because, as the argument implicitly goes, it is a "bad nation" with no right to exist. Nobody says that, but that is what the argument come down to.

Or alternatively every military act by Hamas is a pure, totally justifiable one of self-defence.

I do not think we want to make those arguments. We therefore have to accept that Israel has the same right of self-defence in principle as any other country.

David may not object to the principle, I don't know, but he does object to the idea of Israeli military action against the rocket attacks.

The article actually says Israel has the right (in principle) to *attack* those who set off rockets, the Hamas fighters. It is not for us to tell the Israeli army how it might stop Hamas rockets. It might mean military action, it might not. But we categorically deny, argue against and condemn, anything that would do, as Israel does, cause indiscriminate harm to innocent civilians. That alone was the point of the article: to contrast Israel's hypocrisy about self-defence with the tragic results of its actions.

In any conflict or war, socialists would judge what interests are being fought for, how they are being fought for, and work out a precise attitude accordingly. Surely by saying very clearly that Israel's "self-defence" response is entirely disproportionate and basically wrong — the word *use* is obscene: it would have been hard to have put it more strongly — the editorial shows that Israel's actions are not only about self-defence!

But the editorial is making *limited* points — to condemn Israeli atrocity, to point out how appalling Israel's actions are. It is legitimate to write an article with a limited scope. Of course the article could have gone on to point out what Israel is trying to do in Gaza — essentially desta-

bilise Hamas — but that was, I repeat, *beyond the scope* of the article.

Nowhere does the article say that the current Israeli government is likely to bring about a two states solution! We deny it: we say it only pays lip service to the "two states".

The article simply makes the true statement that Israel has the power (that is the potential) to achieve a peace settlement in the Middle East quite easily. Of course it has!

Israel has the key to change. Israeli willingness to withdraw to the 1967 borders is the prerequisite of everything.

This has been tragically true for some decades now and both sides have been very much closer to settlement than they are today. That is one of the reasons why this Israeli government still has to pay lip service to "two states".

What then on the whys and wherefores of the "two states" demand?

David may very well be right in a pessimistic assessment. And maybe only major class struggle, or a huge growth in internal Israeli opposition, or some unforeseeable dramatic change in big power political will, can put a democratic settlement back on the agenda. But it is not true that such a settlement could never happen outside of major class struggle or the near prospect of socialism. It may take that, but we do not know.

Even if there is very little prospect for a two-states settlement right now, does it mean that we should oppose negotiation? David implies yes — such talks right now will only "entrench the reactionary elements in power".

No! Firstly any change in the status quo — that for instance brought about a ceasefire and/or serious negotiations, an influx of medicines and fuel to Gaza — would be better for the Palestinians, would be at least a respite. If the welfare of the Palestinians is our concern we would have to regard that as a good thing.

We also continue to advocate negotiation and two states because it is an essential and enduring part of a democratic settlement in the Middle East.

We did not in fact call on the Israeli government in this article to implement two states. But we might do in other articles, just as Israeli socialists and democrats do. Why? Because we want to make propaganda for that democratic demand.

David seems to have caught something of the anarchist infection of socialists today — the idea that we cannot or should not call on bourgeois governments to implement democratic demands, because they are bourgeois, unlikely to implement the demand, would implement it badly and it is not in any case *their* demand to implement.

In fact socialists have always made such "calls" and made demands on bourgeois governments, and in many dreadful circumstances — in order to organise movements of opposition, to cohere groups of people who share our basic politics, because these demands/calls have the

potential to create mass movements, or because *under pressure* bourgeois governments do act.

All these potentials still exist in Israel-Palestine, even with a weakened, split and, in part, reactionary Palestinian national movement; even with a lying and reactionary Kadima party in power in Israel. They exist because the majority of Israelis and Palestinians still want a two states solution. That is why we ought to continue to pose that demand wherever and whenever we can.

Why a vote for Livingstone?

THE race for London Mayor now underway leaves socialists in a predicament. There is no independent socialist candidate, and a critical vote for the Labour Party appears to be less and less desirable. The AWL current position of supporting the "Left List" headed by SWP-Respect candidates and importantly Lindsey German seems a misjudgement both politically and tactically.

Our experience with the politics of the SWP and particularly recently with Student Respect should be stark warnings that they are willing to compromise their politics and substitute them for vague populism. While German herself maybe a revolutionary socialist, albeit of a skewed nature, the Left List is not based around true socialist politics. While she herself has been on the right side over the tube workers' disputes and against the Met, unlike Livingstone, the loose alliance is nothing that we can support or trust.

The SWP ultimately stopped the RMT standing a slate of their own candidates and thus deprived us of a working class alternative to Labour to fulfil their own sectarian goals. The AWL's consistent policy of a critical vote for Labour has meant that we believe the space we can use to campaign within the Labour Party and its trade union link is still important and we cannot just take the "anti Livingstone for being Livingstone" line on this. The working class and labour movement still exist within the Labour Party, and for Mayor we should very critically support Livingstone.

Steve Wood

Marxists on the capitalist crisis: 1. Fred Moseley

The long trends of profit

With this issue of *Solidarity* we begin a series of interviews (conducted by Martin Thomas) with Marxist economists on the current crisis and the current stage of capitalism. Fred Moseley is the author of a distinctive Marxist account of the decline in profit rates which brought crisis in the 1970s and 80s, one has spawned a whole series of further studies. He is professor of economics at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, USA. His books include *The Falling Rate of Profit in the Postwar United States Economy* (1991), and he edited the English edition of Enrique Dussel's *Towards an Unknown Marx: A Commentary on the Manuscripts of 1861-3*.

THE rate of profit is the key barometer of a capitalist economy, and more specifically it is the main determinant of business investment. The rate of investment is in turn a key determinant of the overall growth of the economy. So, the first main reason why the rate of profit is so significant is its impact on investment spending.

Secondly, the relative proportion of profits and debt payment is a key indicator of the financial health of corporations. If the ratio of profit to debt obligations is low, then the corporations have greater vulnerability to bankruptcy.

Both on the investment side and on the financial side, profit rates are of crucial importance.

There has not been a complete recovery of the rate of profit in recent years. I don't want to overstate it. There are different measures of profit rates, but according to my estimates, which are for the total business sector of the economy, by 2006 the rate of profit was within 10% of its earlier post-war peak.

Mid-2006 was the peak of this current profit cycle. The profit share and profit rate have declined a bit in the last year or so, and the trajectory seems to be down right now.

But there was a substantial recovery in the rate of profit. The rate of profit had declined roughly 50% from the peak of the sixties to the trough of the 80s. At least half of that previous decline — I would say, more than half of that previous decline — was reversed. Today profits are, by almost any measure, a lot better than they were in the 70s and 80s.

Bear in mind also a couple of additional considerations. One is that these estimates are for the domestic US economy. They do not include foreign profits; and foreign profits are an increasing share of total US corporate profits. 30 or 40 years they were less than 10%, today they are 30%. None of that gets counted in the official US government estimates of profit rates.

Some people argue that including those foreign profits is appropriate in terms of gauging the financial strength of corporations, but if you are talking about the impact of profits on investment in the USA, then perhaps profits made in the rest of the world do not have much impact on US investment spending.

Another additional consideration is that these estimates of profits also do not include the salaries of top executives, which are going through the roof, and could more appropriately be considered as part of profits rather than wages.

In sum, I would argue that there has been a substantial recovery of profit rates. Maybe not complete, and we may disagree a few percentage points on the extent, but a substantial recovery.

Another indication with respect to the financial aspect of profits is a substantial reduction in debt obligations in relationship to profits. Those ratios are well down from their peaks, both due to higher profits and also to lower debt, for some corporations, and lower interest rates. So there is less danger of corporate bankruptcy today than ten or twenty years ago.

Those ratios are for the economy as a whole. If you look at the distribution of debt ratios, there is a pretty fat tail at the high debt ratio end. There are a number of corporations, ten per cent maybe, which have very high debt loads, in part because of the junk-bond-financed acquisitions. And particularly in danger of bankruptcy are the home builders, the construction industry. I'm not saying there won't be bankruptcies. But it doesn't seem to be a very widespread threat yet.

Another reason why the threat of corporate bankruptcy might be more serious than it looks is that debt may be underestimated. As we learned from Enron, there are all sorts of accounting tricks to keep debt off the books. We'll find out pretty soon who's holding the debt. As Warren Buffet says, when the tide goes out, you see who's swimming naked.

The financial sector is in much greater danger than the non-financial sector.

BUT accepting that there has been a substantial recovery in the rate of profit, how did this happen? What were the main factors contributing to it?

I would argue that it's basically been the holding down of wages. The average real wage in the US economy is almost the same as it was in the early 1970s. For the average worker, there has been little or no increase in the real wage.

This is in striking contrast to the early post-war period, up through the 70s, when the average real wage in the US economy approximately doubled. That ended in the 70s with an all-out attempt to restore profitability, mainly at the expense of workers.

While real wages were being held constant, productivity increases continued every year — at a somewhat slower rate

during the productivity slowdown of the 70s and 80s, somewhat faster since then, but they continued.

In Marxist terms, that reduced necessary labour time and increased surplus labour time, and therefore increased the rate of surplus value. Over the three decades we're talking about, the rate of surplus value has approximately doubled, from about 1.5 to around 3. Again, that is in striking contrast to the earlier post-war period, when the rate of surplus value increased a little bit, but not much.

That sharp increase in the rate of surplus value has been the main reason why the rate of profit has increased substantially.

It could be interpreted as contrary to what Marx expected: he expected that once the rate of profit had declined, it would take the devaluation of capital and widespread bankruptcies and so forth to restore it. What Marx didn't consider was the scenario we've lived in over the last decades of enough government management and government intervention to put a floor under the economy; but even so it's taken a very long time to restore the rate of profit.

APUZZLE here is that what appears to be a substantial recovery in the rate of profit does not seem to have led to a strong revival of investment. The connection between profit rates and investment seems to have been weakened.

I haven't myself done a lot of work on this, but it seems like businesses are paying out a greater share of their profits as dividends, and using a greater share of profits to buy back their stock. Instead of investing in the expansion of the business, they are enriching themselves.

There's a lot of talk about stock options, and managers who have substantial stock options running the company in a way to maximise the stock price.

So you have a bigger proportion of surplus value going to capitalist consumption rather than investment.

A slower rate of investment spending has meant a slower rate of growth, compared to earlier periods, and that the growth of the economy has become more and more dependent on consumer spending — in part the luxury consumption of capitalists.

But it's hard for workers to increase their consumption with stagnant wages. There have been different ways round that. The first was to have more family members working, and longer hours. But more recently the big one is the expansion of consumer debt — an explosion of consumer debt.

Now that debt has to be paid, and we have a debt crisis on our hands.

The numbers would suggest that the corporations should be more resilient in face of the crises in the financial sector. However, the housing sector and the construction industry will certainly not be resilient. The debt ratios could be understated, due to Enron-type tricks. And there is that "fat tail" of heavily indebted corporations.

The aggregate official numbers which show a healthier financial situation might be at least somewhat exaggerated. And the financial crisis is shaping up every day to look more and more serious.

The banks have responded by greatly restricting lending. If there are corporations out there that are heavily dependent on banks to refinance debt, there could be substantial effects.

The shock that they're going to experience is certainly shaping up to be more serious than what occurred 20 years ago [in the Savings and Loans crisis]. Maybe the sounder financial figures for corporations will not be enough.

As regards estimating profit, the main difference between my estimates and Robert Brenner's, for example, is that mine are for the total economy and his are for the non-financial sector only. The recovery of profits in the non-financial sector is less than for the total economy. Even for the non-financial sector, I'd say it has been substantial — but not as close to full recovery as for the total economy.

Which measure is more relevant and important? An argument could be made that in terms of investment spending the non-financial sector profit rate is the more crucial determinant. I wouldn't argue too strongly for the preferability of the total-economy measure.

And part of the financial profits may turn out to be fictitious — paper profits based on anticipated revenue from financial assets a lot of which are now having to be written down. The recovery of financial profits in the boom time could turn out to have been grossly overestimated.

But even if we accept Robert Brenner's estimates — and I think foreign profits and executive salaries are important corrections to those — there has still been a substantial recovery of profit rates. As yet no large revival of investment spending, so the economy has become more dependent on consumer spending.

WHAT are there unequal profit rates in the financial and non-financial sectors? Part of it may be that the financial profits are partly paper profits as just mentioned.

It's surprising that financial sector profits should rise as a share of the whole, for a couple of reasons. One is that interest rates are low. You would think that would contribute to a smaller

The debt has to be paid

financial share. Secondly, if you look at the figures for debt for non-financial corporations, with less debt there should be lower debt payments from the non-financial to the financial sector.

Financial profits have been more and more coming from the consumer sector — from credit cards and from mortgages and so on. That expansion has now turned into sharp contraction, and financial profits will follow accordingly.

In terms of the long decline in the rate of profit, before the recent recovery, my emphasis has been on Marx's distinction between productive labour and unproductive labour. Productive labour is labour which produces value and surplus-value. According to Marxist theory, that is a fairly broad category, but it does not include two main types of unproductive labour — labour involved in various sales and circulation and exchange activities, including finance, and management or boss labour.

The relative proportions of unproductive labour and productive labour changed dramatically in the US economy in the early post-war period, up to the 70s. The ratio of unproductive to productive approximately doubled over that period; and, from the perspective of Marxist theory, that means a smaller share of the surplus value produced is left over for profits. An increasing share of the surplus value produced by productive labour has to go to pay the wages and other costs of unproductive labour.

When we talk about the rate of profit, in my estimates or in Brenner's estimates, this is always a net figure, only part of the total surplus value produced by productive labour.

The doubling of the relative proportion of unproductive labour to productive labour had a negative impact on the rate of profit and was, best I can tell, the main cause of the substantial decline in the rate of profit in that period. The composition of capital also increased and also contributed, in part, to the long-term decline in the rate of profit, but the increase in unproductive labour seems to have been a more significant cause.

What has happened since then? The ratio of unproductive to productive labour has continued to increase, but at a much slower rate than earlier, and so that factor has had less of a negative impact on the rate of profit. The small continuing negative impact has been more than overcome by the very strong increases in the rate of surplus value.

The financial sector, in the US anyway, is still only a small percentage of the economy. It has increased. How is that increase consistent with the overall proportion of unproductive labour levelling off?

Most of the levelling off has been in the supervisory element of unproductive labour, which the majority of it. The financial sector is climbing up now, but on the supervisory side, downsizing and eliminating layers of middle management have been a big factor.

Also, on the circulation side, the computer has greatly reduced circulation labour. Computer technology has perhaps been the main reason for the slowing down of the increase of unproductive labour, both in circulation and in supervision. You need fewer supervisors when you have computers. You could almost argue that the computer technology was developed to solve the problem of expanding unproductive labour.

In the end, I would say that the current crisis is more of a Minsky crisis than a Marx crisis. The main cause of the current crisis is not insufficient surplus labour in production, but rather excessive risk-taking by financial capitalists in search of higher returns, which was based on the erroneous assumption that housing prices would continue to rise forever. The solution to this crisis has more to do with wiping out a large portion of the accumulated debt of households (and the corresponding assets of financial institutions) rather than the devaluation of production capital and the reduction of wages (although these latter will also happen to some extent). But that is a topic for another discussion.

The London Democrats and the 'Grand Uprising' of 1839

CHRIS FORD BEGINS A SERIES ON THE REVOLUTIONARY WING OF THE GREAT CHARTIST MOVEMENT

"Nonetheless the revolutionary slogans and methods of Chartism are even today, if critically dissected, infinitely higher than the sickly sweet eclecticism of the MacDonalds and the economic obtuseness of the Webbs.In this sense the British working class can and must see in Chartism not only its past but also its future. As the Chartists tossed the sentimental preachers of 'moral force' aside and gathered the masses behind the banner of revolution, so the British proletariat is faced with ejecting reformists, democrats and pacifists from its midst and rallying to the banner of a revolutionary overturn.History is liquidating Liberalism and prepares to liquidate the pseudo-Labour pacifism precisely so as to give a second birth to Chartism on new, immeasurably broader historical foundations. That is where you have the real national tradition of the British labour movement!"

Two traditions: the seventeenth-century revolution and Chartism, from Leon Trotsky Writings on Britain

THE popular image of Victorian consists of scenes of upper class decadence, lower class destitution and a stifling morality. Working people are passive, society is stable, and the best they can hope for is a rich philanthropist to save Oliver Twist from hardship. That is a fabrication, the creation of historical spin doctors.

In truth that the period was full of bitter class struggle, through which efforts were made to create a different society from the modern capitalism then being forged in the industrial revolution. For a decade (1839-48) the establishment was besieged by mass mobilisations for political and social reforms — for the People's Charter.

The Chartist movement was the first national workers' movement. Its traditions and goals stand in stark contrast to the labour movement and leaders we have today.

In 1839 Britain witnessed an unparalleled revolutionary upsurge of the working class. Among the most important figures of the period was George Julian Harney, a founder of the London Democratic Association (LDA), a pioneering organisation of revolutionary socialism.

The LDA has remained all but forgotten by the labour movement, and we even overlooked by the post-war left which rediscovered Chartism. The lack of recognition for the LDA stands in sharp contrast to the figures such as Robert Owen, well recognised for his role in the birth of socialism. The idea that the LDA actually pioneered social revolutionism ten years before Marx and Engels penned the *Communist Manifesto* has barely been considered by 20th century historians.

Julian Harney said that the LDA had a distinct place in history. The "Democrats went beyond all other parties in the avowal of the extreme but righteous principles of political and social equality. They were Chartists, but they were 'Chartists and something more'." At the start of the 20th century the historian and member of the Social Democratic Federation Theodore Rothstein duly recognised them as the "most remarkable of all the organisations then existing" and Harney as "the first (one may almost call him) Bolshevik".

At the start of the 21st century, as every effort is being made to rule out the working class as an agent of an alternative society Harney's advice about the necessity of "keeping alive and promulgating the principles of which the Association had been the representative" still holds true.

UNITING GENERATIONS OF REVOLUTIONARIES

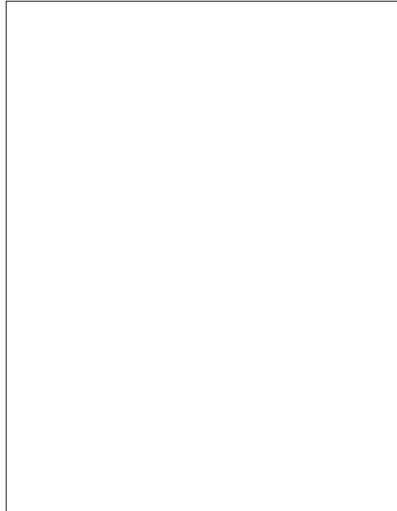
THE London Democratic Association was established on 10 August 1838. It was a reconstitution on a pan-London basis of the East London Democratic Association, formed on 29 January 1837.

The London Democrats who came together in 1837 stood in direct opposition to the moderate London Working Men's Association, led by William Lovett, a founder of Chartism. Lovett was identified with the "moral force" wing of the movement who believed they could secure reforms by "moral persuasion". The LDA objected not only to their reformism but also to their advocacy of class collaboration with the middle-class. In this period the middle class comprised sections of the capitalist class, who despite their economic power and the electoral Reform Act of 1832 remained excluded from access to political power.

The LDA reached a core membership of three thousand, who were overwhelmingly working class. It had an influence far wider than London — with Democratic Associations being formed in at least ten other areas including Leeds, Norwich, Hull, Nottingham and parts of Scotland.

The term democrat in this time was identified with the revolutionary and republican political tradition. The LDA had deep roots, perhaps more than any other body in 1839. It brought together a range of activists, uniting young and old generations.

Allen Davenport, aged 64 in 1839, was a member in the LDA Shoreditch division and had been active in metropolitan radicalism since 1818. Involved in the insurrectionary "Cato Street Conspiracy" he described himself as an "out and out Spencean". The continued influence of the radical ideas of Thomas Spence



George Julian Harney

was ensured by Davenport's publication of a biography of Spence in 1836.

Another veteran was the sixty-five year old Thomas Preston, a member of the Jacobin-inspired London Corresponding Society. He was active with Spence and continued the group after Spence's death in 1814. Preston was directly involved in insurrectionary activity and after the Spa Fields riots was charged with High Treason. He was part of the movement towards a rising in 1820 that ended with the "Cato Street conspiracy" (unlike some of the other conspirators, who were hung, he escaped with a three month sentence in Tothill Fields prison).

Charles Neesom similarly had a lucky escape after Cato Street. An active Spencean, he worked closely with Davenport, was deeply active in early trade unionism, and was active in the Owenite National Union of the Working Classes. Along with the young Harney, Neesom resigned from the London Working Men's Association in March 1838, and at 52 he was founder of the East London Democratic Association with Harney and Devenport.

Along with these veterans there were also: Samuel Waddington (another Cato Street survivor); Henry Ross, who had been involved in the Glasgow struggles of 1819; Thomas Ireland, a veteran of the free press struggles; and James Combe, editor of the *London Democrat*, who also broke with Lovett.

Less known are the pioneer women of the LDA such as Mary Ireland, Elizabeth Turner, Marthya Dymock and Elizabeth Neesom, who became secretary of the London Female Democratic Association formed in April 1839.

Internationalism was prevalent and exemplified in the figures of Polish revolutionaries such as Major Beniowski, a survivor of the 1830 Polish rising, and Martha Schellviethinghoff. United in the LDA was a wealth of experience and thought spanning working class radicalism inspired by the impact of the French Revolution, through the struggles of post-Reform Act England of the 1830s. But if one name more than any other was associated with the Democratic Association, it was that of George Julian Harney.

Harney was an ex-sailor who grew up in the slums of Deptford and Bermondsey. At twenty-two he was already a veteran of the movement. Active around the National Union of the Working Classes he became involved in the "war of the unstamped press", resulting in two sentences in London prisons for distributing the *Poor Man's Guardian*, and a third in Derby goal.

Strongly influenced by Bronterre O'Brien his "guide, philosopher and friend", he was steeped in the thought of the French Revolution. By 1839 Harney had already risen to national prominence in Chartism; he became a bridge between the different generations, and his internationalism allowed a unity of vernacular and international revolutionary ideas.

REVOLUTIONARIES AND RESPECTABLES

Writing on the motives which led to the creation of the LDA, Harney stated: "It is well known to the country that no efficient organisation of the masses has been established in the Metropolis, since the dissolution of the National Union of the Working Classes. True, there are in existence Clubs, Societies, and Associations, professing to represent the Working Classes; but this is a delusion, as evidenced in the simple fact, that these Societies are composed of a select few of the 'respectables'."

The meaning of this repeated repudiation of the "respectables" by the LDA has been the subject of some speculation. Reports of the LDA meetings describe the crowds as "mechanics and labour-

ers", or as "destitute-looking individuals", or of miserable appearance". Whilst accounts by the police spies tend to reflect prejudiced views of the poor, there is no doubt that when Harney talked of the "respectables" he meant those "men raised above the common lot of their order".

Harney believed they "cannot sympathise with their sufferings, and, as a matter of course are unfit, in the days of difficulty and danger, to guide the energies of the people in those bold movements which a nation must make, if that nation would be free".

The LDA still included in its founding Address the statement that: "In the same spirit of pure democracy, we hold out the hand of fellowship to all who will sincerely co-operate with us to achieve the objects we have in view. We exclude no man because he may be wealthy". Unity in ideas was crucial for the LDA, it was not simply about sociological background.

Capitalist society, with its industrial revolution had brought onto the stage two different classes — the working class and the bourgeoisie — with antagonistic interests. But both were engaged in a struggle with the same enemy — the English aristocracy. Until 1832 the bourgeoisie had maintained an tenuous alliance with the working class, resulting the Reform Act of that year, enacted under the real shadow of revolution in the "Days of May".

But the new reformed House of Commons, under a Whig government, had in turn waged an unrelenting class war on the working class in the process of its efforts to reshape old aristocratic England to the needs of capital. The question of relations with the "middle class" was decisive not only in determining a strategy for the day, but a vision of the future.

The London Working Men's Association remained of the opinion that it was necessary to collaborate with the middle class, and placed some importance on maintaining an alliance with the so-called "Radical" group of MPs in the House of Commons as well as Daniel O'Connell's Irish MPs.

According to Harney, the LDA differed "as to the modus operandi; they repudiated all reliance on the middle class and all connection with the shopocracy". The LDA was established to "supply the deficiency hitherto existing of an efficient organisation of the masses, and enable them, through that organisation, to bear the whole weight of their mighty power...".

The LDA deliberately set out to encourage the widest possible participation of the mass of workers as opposed to the elitism which marred many of the moderate bodies. In response to their critics they repounded:

"It will be asked by the 'respectables', 'will you then unite with the immoral and depraved?' No! For the immoral and depraved will not unite with us. But who are the immoral and depraved? You (the 'respectables') say the poor, who seek relief from their cares and sufferings in the public house; but we say the rich who cause this suffering, and consequent degradation, by the oppressive laws and institutions which they have enacted and upheld".

This rebuff was an important distinction between the LDA and the petty bourgeois radicals and the so called moralism of the period. The solution to the problem of alcoholism was to "remove the causes of intemperance by crushing the immorality of the rich (who cause the immorality of the poor), the immorality of oppressing, plundering and murdering their fellow creatures". The LDA had no qualms on meeting in pubs, nor did they demand an expensive shilling a month subscription as the London Workingmen's Association did, but simply a voluntary sum "according to their means".

LDA ORGANISATION

THE organisational form of the LDA was "calculated to carry out and to direct the extensive combination of the masses which we have in view". The structure was one of "divisions subdivided into sections of twenty five — the sections to be directed by a Leader, and each division to return two Tribunes to the Council, who guide and direct the whole". It was a self-governing structure. In the "Council we have provided the members at large with the power of effectually controlling its proceedings, as all members of the Association, present at the sittings of the Council, have the right of voting on all questions brought under its consideration".

The ambition of the LDA was "reducing in practice the beautiful theories of Babeuf, Buonarrotti, Bronterre, &c., by making the Tribunes the deliberators and perfectors of the will of the people, whilst with the people themselves is left the ultimate decision, by their retaining in their own hands the sovereign authority".

There was a similarity to the organisation which was led by the French communists Babeuf and Buonarroti in 1796 in their efforts to defend and extend the French Revolution. The role of their "agents", the revolutionary agitators, has a similarity to the that of the LDA's Tribunes.

However, the organisational ideal of the LDA was not a secret conspiracy like Babeuf's but more like the earlier self-governing Clubs and Communes of the Parisian masses. It seems to have followed the model of an earlier phase of English Jacobinism, in the form of the London Corresponding Society.

In Thomas Preston they had a living link to that body, which also had local self-governing Divisions and delegates who were subject to the right of recall by local Divisions. This self-governing democracy contrasts sharply to the modern day labour movement and many of the socialist sects of today.

The trap of “painting by numbers”

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

What is the socialist movement?... To a contemporary Socialist the socialist movement does not look anything like it did to a [utopian] Socialist in the [18]30s [for whom] future history resolves itself into propaganda and the practical implementation of their social plans... What did the [Marxists] see in it? Above all class struggle, the struggle of the exploited with the exploiters, the proletariat with the bourgeoisie. In addition they saw in it the inevitability of the impending triumph of the proletariat, the fall of the present bourgeois social order, the socialist organisation of production and the corresponding alteration in the relationships between people, i.e. even the destruction of classes, among other things...

If, therefore, for the [Marxists] the whole future history of bourgeois society resolves itself in the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie, all their practical tasks are prompted by precisely this class struggle. Standing resolutely on the side of the proletariat, the new Socialists do everything in their power to facilitate and hasten its victory. But what exactly can they do?

A necessary condition for the victory of the proletariat is its recognition of its own position, its relations with its exploiters, its historic role and its socio-political tasks. For this reason the [Marxists] consider it their principal, perhaps even their only, duty to promote the growth of this consciousness among the proletariat, which for short they call its class consciousness.

The whole success of the socialist movement is measured for them in terms of the growth in the class consciousness of the proletariat. Everything that helps this growth they see as useful to their cause: everything that slows it down as harmful. Anything that has no effect one way or the other is of no consequence for them, it is politically uninteresting.

G V Plekhanov: The Tasks of the Socialists in the Struggle Against the Famine in Russia, 1891

THIS is the second part of a critical assessment of the record of the AWL and its predecessors on Ireland. In the last article I argued that “the fundamental approach was correct”.

That should not be taken as a claim that our politics have been completely adequate. Far from that.

Even in the early 70s, when we put most stress on solidarity with the Catholic revolt, we were publicly critical of the IRA: on the whole, however, we tended to suppress criticism as much as we felt we decently could — and that was far too much.

The basic principles, viewpoint and assessments were, I believe, broadly correct: but we tended to downplay our own assessments, criticisms and politics in deference to a petty-bourgeois nationalist formation because it fitted the Communist International’s category of “revolutionary nationalists” fighting national oppression and imperialism”. It was a variant of what we criticised in others as political “painting by numbers”, instead of from reality. It became a form of self-debilitating political self-boycott.

The decisive shift in the approach of the tendency to this and other questions from the late 1970s and early 1980s — and it was a slow and long-drawn-out shift — was fundamentally a shift of political priorities and, in part, of values. We had tried to act in accordance with the belief that militancy was the cardinal virtue and prime value of revolutionaries. So it is, to use Trotsky’s words, “when the hour for action arrives”.

But the fundamental role of Marxists is to contribute what we can to raising the consciousness of the working class from what it is now to the point where it is ready to displace bourgeois rule. We cannot do that work except by analysing, understanding, uncovering and breaking illusions, facing reality squarely, drawing out the implications, and explaining, in the first place for ourselves and then for as many as we can reach.

In relation to Ireland — and not only Ireland — we too often let that imperative be skewed by considerations of “militancy” and “solidarity” and the desire not to seem to side against the oppressed by way of caveats, awkward questions, unwieldy truths, and dwelling on uncongenial facts of reality.

Though our role had to include militancy, what the working class needed and should have had from Marxists in the 1970s was not mimic or exemplary militancy but... Marxist analysis.

The beginning of all socialist wisdom is that you side with the oppressed. You grasp the fundamental truth that James Connolly expressed thus: to side with the oppressor against the oppressed is the wisdom of the slave.

Siding with the oppressed, with the victims, with the weak, is the natural defining response of serious socialists. At the most fundamental, visceral level, it is what separates us from the visceral right. But it cannot be a self-negating automatic acceptance of the current politics and the political project of the oppressed (which always means: of their present leaders).

The Marxists have to hold to their own overview. Take, for instance, the most painfully complicated case now, that of the

Palestinians. Not to side with them is to be dead to everything that gives life to socialism. But to endorse the programme of their most “militant” and reckless leading organisations — clerical fascists who make their version of the Palestinian cause inseparable from the project of conquering and destroying Israel, and whose tactics very often express that goal and that attitude to their enemies — that, too, is to be dead to socialism as a rational, liberating world outlook.

MY own experience with “paint-by-numbers” anti-imperialism is, I think, salutary. I would never have “voted” for the Provisional IRA war. It made no sense according to my understanding of things in Northern Ireland and in Ireland as a whole.

The first time I heard anyone suggest something like it was in a cottage in Dundalk, in October 1969. All the barricaded areas had been reintegrated into the Six Counties state — sort of. At a get-together of people from a number of political backgrounds to discuss the situation, one man, a mild and often sensible man, but a bit of a Maoist, suggested — with Algeria, Cyprus and Aden in mind — that the next thing was to start shooting British soldiers.

I thought he was a political lunatic. The Catholic-nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, or the Catholic majority in all of Ireland, could not simply conquer, subdue, override the Irish Protestant minority — the majority in the Six Counties. It should not want to. Socialists should not want it to, or want it to try to — still less want the physical-force-on-principle Republican minority to try to. Our job was to educate and to try to unite workers, Protestant and Catholic.

Yet when the Provisional IRA started their war, in early 1971, the new reality thus called into being demanded responses from socialists that could not and should not start from our socialist and Marxist “first preferences”, erected as “sectarian” norms against which to measure evolving political reality.

Then internment in August 1971 threw much of the Northern Ireland Catholic population behind the Provisional IRA, passively so at least.

The Provisional IRA “storyline”, that their war grew out of defence of the Catholics, is not even remotely true. But the needs of the Catholics for self-defence were real: that was what raised and maintained the barricades of August-September 1969. Physical-force-on-principle Republican politicians with their own “agenda”, obsessions, fetishes, and characteristic belief in all-transforming political miracles that could be triggered by violence, inserted themselves into the situation and shaped and reshaped it.

THE Provisionals themselves, as a political formation, started on the long, slow, desperately bloody evolution that has produced the Sinn Féin of today — which is just another in the long line of unprincipled petty-bourgeois and bourgeois politicians evolving out of physical-force Republican “revolutionism”.

In the later 1980s we dropped a defence of the Provo war, just when it began to be popular with the broad Labour left

They have trodden a course long ago traced out to its full implications by many others... by the physical-force Republican politicians and the Irish Republican Brotherhood who fought the War of Independence and then founded and ruled the 26 Counties Free State for the decade after 1922; by De Valera’s Republicans, who fought a civil war against the “Free Staters” led by Michael Collins, and then went constitutional, forming Fianna Fáil, in 1926, and became the government in 1932; by the physical-force Republicans of the 30s and 40s who, led by Sean MacBride, formed a political party, Clann na Poblachta, not electorally successful enough to form its own government but sufficiently so to form a coalition with... the “traitors” of 1922 and the “murderers of Republicans” in the Civil War (1922-3); by the physical-force Republicans of the 40s, 50s, and 60s who, turned Stalinist, became the “Officials” from whom the Provisional IRA split in 1969-70 and then formed “Sinn Féin the Workers’ Party” and had some parliamentary and labour movement success until the revelation, when Stalinist Russia collapsed, that they had been in the pay of “Moscow”...

The successive generations of that political spectrum have travelled in the same circular movement — again and again and again! — for 100 years.

I traced that pattern of Republican politics in *Workers’ Republic* at the beginning of 1967, in an article published (sort of) pseudonymously (under the name of a person who had contributed to it an account of his experiences in the IRA’s 1956-7 campaign). It did not take much prescience to predict what the pattern would be with the next after 1967 in the long chain, “Sinn Féin the Workers’ Party”. To see the pattern now, manifested in the Adams-McGuinness “Republicans” — people who in the name of their “Republic”, year after year for nearly a quarter of a century, did unspeakable things to Protestants, and Catholics too — all you have to do is register what has happened to them and what is happening now. The role they are playing, even though it is played in the Six Counties sub-state rather than in the 26 Counties, is so well-worn and well-known that it leaves Adams and McGuinness little scope for individuality in it.

We knew the pattern. Certainly I knew it. But was it possible just to do a calculation in our heads, and dismiss the IRA war that started in 1971? For us, that was not possible.

WHAT happened in Northern Ireland was a genuine mass revolt, initially for civil rights in general, by people who could not hope to change their conditions of national oppression within a political entity, the Six Counties, that had been deliberately designed to exclude such change (short of a demographic revolution; and the discrimination that forced many Catholics to emigrate worked to check the natural increase of the Catholic minority).

It was a just revolt. The Provisional IRA, with all their peculiarities and their archaic structures and ideas (rooted in the mid 19th century European revolutionary secret societies) were part of the centuries-long continuing history of the Irish Catholic war

of liberation against the hostile British power in whose map we found themselves.

This was not a war we would have chosen or given prior credence to — but it was a war we felt obliged to defend and to explain to the British labour movement.

And the Protestant community — the Northern Ireland majority, of which most Northern Ireland workers were part? The Protestants could be subsumed — in our heads, and in the heads of most anti-imperialist left-wingers — under “British imperialism”. On one level we knew better and tried to take account of what we knew — indeed, what we said in the analytical parts of articles on Northern Ireland events in the papers of the “AWL” tendency — by advocating autonomy for the Protestants within a united Ireland.

Once the Provo war had — at the end of its first year — brought down the Belfast Protestant Home Rule government and forced the British government to reappraise the whole situation, it lost all the little sense it ever made; and when the Sunningdale “settlement” was reached in 1973 by the major Six Counties nationalist party, the SDLP, sections of the Orange Unionists, and the British and Dublin governments, the continuation of the Provisional IRA war was criminal nonsense. Everything that may be presented as the positive result of the Good Friday Agreement was already there in Sunningdale, and in a more flexible form.

Taken as a whole, the Provo war, by aborting the evolution “from above” towards a federal united Ireland within the European Union that was the evident trend of events in the mid and late 60s, has set back the prospects of a united Ireland for decades, and Irish working-class unity for as long.

The IRA was on ceasefire for a year, from the end of 1975, during which an elected constitutional assembly tried to find a new constitution for Northern Ireland that would be acceptable to both Protestants and Catholics. It failed. Then the Provisional IRA resumed its war — for another 17 years.

I found in an old file a detailed analysis of the Northern Ireland situation at the time of the Sunningdale Agreement — an outline of a report to a committee, I think — in which I concluded that the IRA war simply made no sense. And then, against that, I remind myself of what Lenin had written about the Russian Marxist Plekhanov who had first encouraged and supported the uprising of December 1905 in Moscow and afterwards scurried away and denounced it.

And central for us — and, again, to speak of what I know for certain, for me — there was the Comintern’s injunction to support “revolutionary nationalists” against “imperialism”. And we were a British political organisation: “the enemy is at home”. Our group operated in the country that for the Irish had been the imperialist oppressor, predator, and captor through all the stages of social evolution over nearly a thousand years, back to the age of high feudalism. So I continued to support, and to advocate support for, those fighting a war that I thought made no sense!

In serious part that attitude drew on the governing “principle” of the post-Trotsky “orthodox Trotskyists” — that in face of expanding Stalinism, doing monstrous things which included destroying labour movements and jailing and shooting “counter-revolutionary Trotskyites”, but also defeating “imperialism and capitalism”, one must not be “sectarian” and “normative”. (There is a discussion of this in relation to Trotsky on the USSR in the introduction to *The Fate of The Russian Revolution*.)

In the paper *Workers’ Fight* and its successors I tried honestly to analyse what was going on at each stage. I wouldn’t be ashamed to republish some of those articles — except that they all ended in pre-set slogans (“troops out”, etc.) that were for practical purposes impervious to the analysis that preceded them.

As a political tendency we rejected the notion — which came to be shared by the SWP as well as more “orthodox” Trotskyists — that the nationalist revolution would “grow over” into the Irish socialist revolution. I never encountered even a remotely plausible scenario for how this would happen.

Yet we — and again, for certain, the present writer — half-subscribed to one of its key ideas, that the Catholic-nationalist movement in Northern Ireland could be supplemented by and integrated with a working-class socialist struggle in the rest of Ireland; that Republicanism, which was a genuinely revolutionary-nationalist historical current, could be alchemised into a

working-class socialist republicanism. See, for a tortuously unsuccessful attempt to reason that through coherently, the introduction I wrote to Workers’ Fight’s 1973 pamphlet *James Connolly and Ireland’s Struggle for Freedom*.

As desperately ill people often fall prey to quack medicine, so situations of prolonged impasse generate the search for, and the belief in, political miracles. The underlying Republican rationale for the Provo war — magic-working violence — is the clearest example of it in Irish affairs. “Permanent revolution” socialists matched them. We formally rejected the full “permanent revolution” fluorescence of nonsense — but we were not entirely free of it, either.

Once the Provo war had — at the end of its first year — brought down the Belfast Protestant Home Rule government it lost all the little sense it ever made.

In the 1970s the Workers’ Fight group “defended the IRA”, the revolutionary nationalists fighting our government, and did it well enough to merit having our offices, then in Islington, raided by armed police one morning in September 1973. We were the only revolutionary socialist group in Britain to have its headquarters raided in connection with Ireland (or anything else). In those days the Special Branch and the police did not batter your door down with sledgehammers at dawn. They came early in the morning, knocked, I let them in, and everything was eerily polite!

I found myself, as the 70s wore on, increasingly unable to write in defence of the Provisional IRA, though I still considered it a political duty. I managed to write a defence of the killing in 1979 of Lord Mountbatten together with members of his family and a local Sligo lad — something I thought gruesome, stupid, and pointless. I invoked the obvious parallels: the British state had not let Roger Casement retire from the British civil service; early one morning in July 1916, they dropped him through a trapdoor in Pentonville Jail with a rope round his neck.

It was easier to write in defence of the hunger strikers in 1981, when ten men were allowed to starve to death by the Thatcher government.

From then, on, finally, I decided I wouldn’t defend the Provo war any more. That led to a protracted series of battles in the organisation, which by then had fused with the group of former SLLers around Alan Thornett (people whose record on Ireland was as I chronicled in a previous instalment of this series). They were as unwilling to think about Irish realities as they have been unwilling since the Provisional IRA ceasefire and the Good Friday Agreement to look back critically at what they used to think on Ireland from the late 70s. (Their remnants are part of George Galloway’s rump “Respect Renewal”).

From the hunger strikes on, our press slowly became much more critical of and distanced from the IRA. After a long internal discussion in 1987, we decided that “troops out” would not be used by us as a slogan on its own. Troops out was part of a political settlement, or it was civil war and repatriation.

In the discussion on troops out in IS in 1969-70 (that is, before the Provo war that we believed compelled us in principle to back the anti-imperialists), we had written: “To say ‘troops out’ with any seriousness demands a concrete alternative, which our propaganda and the call to get the troops out will call into being, first of all by political preparation”. That idea was far from new to us. But the decision to assert our own judgement against the “liberation fighters” was.

THE lesson from our mistakes — and not only for Ireland, of course — is that the first duty of Marxists is to be... Marxists. Our first function is to understand and explain.

The rest, action, militancy, solidarity with the oppressed, follows from that, is regulated by that, and cannot be in contradiction to it.

Solidarity with the oppressed must be on the basis of independent Marxist analysis and politics, not, even by implication, even by complicit silence, of mimicry of the politics of the nationalist or communalist movements of the oppressed, or of the effacement of our own politics. Agitation on specific aspects of a situation must be governed by the overall picture. We should refrain from easy agitational point-scoring, mechanical “opposition”, negative slogans whose actual positive content does not make sense from the point of view of our own programme, at the centre of which is the education of the working class into independent anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist politics.

The approach that any argument will do that will help promote our immediate concerns is not permissible for socialists. Telling the truth is central — and telling the truth includes not deploying “useful” idiocies.

The SWP is the great contemporary practitioner in Britain now of the approach that any argument will do; but the approach starts, like so many of the ailments of the kitsch left, with the Stalinist Communist International, which learned to rationalise from the politics of the Russian Stalinist government, whatever they were at a given moment.

One aspect of this experience is our relations with the rest of the left. At the time of the 1981 hunger strikes and after, the Provisional IRA became popular with the broad Labour left — with people such as Tony Benn, who had remained in the Labour government that, by changing the terms of imprisonment for Republicans in 1976, removing the de facto recognition of them as political prisoners, had triggered the long, long, agonising struggle in the prisons that culminated in the hunger strikers.

In the 1970s, whose who “backed the IRA” were much fewer — the Mandelites, a small group called the RCL (whose crest-fallen remnant is Briefing), and us.

I know of only one case of being called a “Catholic nationalist” or “Catholic chauvinist” during that time. Duncan Hallas of the IS/SWP denounced me in those terms at a meeting in Teesside in late 1973.

We had scheduled a meeting on Ireland. The local press ran a number of pieces to the effect that “the IRA is coming to town”, with the result that we lost the room we had booked in a pub. A local regiment, the Green Howards, was then in Northern Ireland.

The local IS branch was meeting that same evening, and our comrades prevailed on them to “show solidarity”, give us their room and hold a joint meeting. It was an entirely peaceful meeting — no rampaging soldiers or their relatives, not even a larger than expected crowd of curious people! Duncan Hallas, IS’s scheduled speaker, was unhappy and, at the meeting, rattled. He denounced me as a “Catholic nationalist”.

There was a marked contrast in the 1980s. I experienced a small deluge of denunciation for my lack of “anti-imperialism” — for, in effect, not being a chauvinist of my own section of the people of Ireland. I don’t think chauvinism was ever a part of my politics on Ireland in the 1970s, but it remains a fact that my politics then did go with the grain of my basic political and national identity, which on the personal level was and is of fundamental importance to me.

We have a decayed and very inadequate left, which on Ireland has a lot of self-accounting to do. As for the public opinion of “the left”, Marx, quoting the medieval poet Dante at the end of the preface to the first edition of *Capital* volume 1, summed up the only possible attitude for reasoning people: Go your way, and let the people talk.

Trotsky said the same thing, spelled out in more detail:

“To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be; not to fear obstacles; to be true in little things as in big ones; to base one’s program on the logic of the class struggle; to be bold when the hour for action arrives — these are the rules of the Fourth International”.

• Rest of the articles in this series:
www.workersliberty.org/node/10010

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!

Workers' Power back Livingstone

BY SACHA ISMAIL

PARTICULARLY since it expelled the bulk of its founders and trade union activists in 2006, the Workers' Power group has been notable for combining rhetorical ultra-leftism with opportunism and wild political zig zags. Now the r-r-revolutionaries have surprised even the most jaded sectarian-watchers by supporting a first preference vote for Ken Livingstone, rather than Lindsey German of the SWP/Respect, in the upcoming London mayoral elections.

Workers' Liberty is advocating a first preference vote for German and a second preference for Livingstone. While the threat posed by Boris Johnson is real and serious, Livingstone's record is too bad and his links to the labour movement are too weak to override the need to stand independent working-class candidates against Labour. Essentially a front for the SWP, post-Galloway Respect is a highly inadequate instrument for promoting a workers' voice in politics, but in this instance it is the only one we have.

The need to stand candidates against Labour is not something that Workers' Power would, in general, deny. As long ago as the 2004 Euro election, where there was no independent socialist standing, they advocated workers should not vote Labour but instead write "Troops out of Iraq" on their ballot papers. Long before Gordon Brown's abolition of Labour Party conference began the final (though not yet consolidated) destruction of the party's ties to the labour movement, Workers' Power demanded union disaffiliation from the Labour Party. These issues were an important part of the reason for the group's split and the expulsion of what is now Permanent Revolution.

But scratch an ultra-leftist and you find an opportunist. When it looked like McDonnell might get on the ballot paper for Labour Party leader, Workers' Power, having abstained from the struggle, declared that the left should make the contest into a referendum on the future of the workers' movement.

In other words, if they judge the wind is blowing a certain way, Workers' Power bend to get in on the action. Which, of course, is exactly what they are doing here with Livingstone.

The pro-Livingstone article by Jeremy Dewar in the March issue of their magazine does not even attempt to argue that Lindsey German/Respect's faults rule out voting for them; in fact, it does not mention the SWP candidacy at all! This is bizarre but not surprising, since any comparison between the records of German and Livingstone would demonstrate the ludicrousness of Workers' Power's position. Nor does Dewar attempt to locate support for Livingstone in terms of Labour's residual links to the labour movement. Instead he glosses up Livingstone's record and advocates a vote for him in lesser-evilist terms.

"Right wing go for wounded Livingstone," we are told. Meanwhile "a broad coalition of Muslim, African Caribbean, lesbian and gay and trade union forces have rallied behind Livingstone". Sounds good, doesn't it? And don't forget the £7.20 London Living Wage (which is not even paid to most cleaners on the Tube), more "affordable" housing, cheaper buses, Oyster Cards and Livingstone's opposition to war and racism. These are things that any liberal or even conservative populist could have done, yet they constitute the basic justification for Workers' Power's support.

To be fair, the article does go on to indict Livingstone's shocking record, finishing with the usual sort of phrases about the need for "a revolutionary programme aimed at the overthrow of the capitalist system itself and the transition to a socialist planned economy". But, Dewar claims, this goal can best be served by "putting Livingstone back into office."

By putting it in this way, and refusing to even discuss the issue of Respect, Workers' Power evidently hope to benefit from a tide of pro-Livingstone sentiment about to engulf the left. Not very revolutionary, comrades!

Anti-war doesn't mean pro-repression!

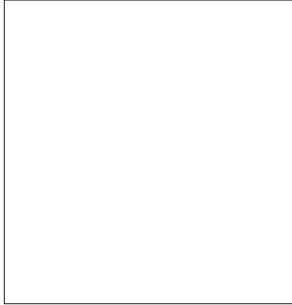
BY JACK STAUNTON

RESPECT Renewal MP George Galloway has been far from sympathetic to the case of Mehdi Kazemi, instead choosing to spew homophobic bile and defend the Iranian regime. Showing his complete contempt for human rights and democracy, he has levelled the ridiculous accusation that people campaigning against the deportation of Mehdi Kazemi are "the pink contingent of imperialism" — even though the protests are against our own government.

The controversy started on 13 March on Channel 5's *The Wright Stuff* chat show, where Galloway said that the papers' coverage of Mehdi's story amounted to "demonisation of Iran", even though Mehdi is himself Iranian. What Galloway did not like was the criticism of the Iranian regime.

Denying that you can be executed for being gay in Iran (thousands of dead suggest otherwise), Galloway claimed that Mehdi Kazemi's boyfriend was executed for "sex crimes against young men". Not even the Iranian government has made this claim, but the contortions of Galloway's rhetoric do not have much time for little matters such as fact or evidence. By all accounts, the "sex crime" in question was "sodomy", a term Galloway himself used on his *Talksport* radio show to describe homosexuality.

After an outcry and an angry statement in the papers by gay rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, Galloway made another appearance on Channel 5 — only to dig himself even deeper. Accusing Tatchell of being a "pink cover for imperialism (which is both untrue



Execution of young gay men in Iran

and deeply homophobic), Galloway said that it was pointless to criticise homophobic laws in Iran since there is homophobia everywhere, from Tehran to Tunbridge Wells. At a meeting at SOAS, he reiterated the point, claiming that people who criticise the Iranian regime's homophobia do not seem concerned by anti-LGBT discrimination elsewhere, such as in US ally Saudi Arabia.

Not only is his allegation totally untrue, but we can also note that Galloway himself does not protest against homophobia anywhere else. For example Galloway did not attend the demo against the Saudi King's state visit this winter.

Galloway's position, at its most "rational", appears to be that we should defend the Iranian government absolutely, because it is under threat of war and sanctions, and that would make everything much much worse. True any

sort of western or Israeli attack on Iran would will have that effect. True, sabre-rattling against Iran will strengthen nationalism in that country and allow President Ahmedinejad to posture as "anti-imperialist", buttressing his regime. We are opposed to all sanctions, bombing "raids" or war.

But it does not follow that we should whitewash the Iranian regime at any point. In the here and now the regime is meeting out death and destruction. The anti-war movement will not deserve a hearing if it does not tell the truth. Galloway cannot have it both ways — he is claiming both that opponents of Mehdi Kazemi's deportation are just a left cover used by British imperialism, but also that we are wrong to protest against the British government for threatening to deport him!

The left will be failing (and currently is failing) in its solidarity effort with Iranians if it does not also support them in their struggle against the theocracy. Practical solidarity with workers', women's, student and — to the extent that they can exist even underground — LGBT organisations in Iran is an extremely important task for socialists at this time of great struggle inside Iran.

But Galloway is not really a socialist. Never on the left of the Labour Party when a member, he displays little interest in workers' struggle and social movements, but instead places his sole political focus on apologetics for various third world regimes which take his fancy, including Iran, Syria and Cuba.

We need a working-class set of politics which takes up liberation issues and democratic questions, not support for this or that Islamist regime which spouts rhetoric against US imperialism.

SSP drifts towards Morning Star

GAZA is "the world's largest concentration camp", something to be compared to "the Warsaw Ghetto under the Nazis." The position of the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories "resembles that of Jews who once lived in the ghettos of Eastern Europe before the Holocaust."

Given that Israel has "internalised many of the oppressive features of Judeophobia," it is "not surprising that the Israeli state itself should already have developed marked Apartheid features." Israel is "a failed state." It is "the unsafest place on earth for Jews."

But "many Palestinians" continue to live "stoically and heroically on the lands wanted exclusively for the Israeli state"

That is what the reader of *Scottish Socialist Voice* (paper of the Scottish Socialist Party) learnt about the Israel-Palestine conflict from a recent report of a "very successful day-school" organised by the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign (SPSC).

The day that the SPSC held its day-school — which, hardly by coincidence, took place the same weekend as this year's Holocaust Memorial Day — the *Morning Star* newspaper carried an article by the SPSC press officer, John Wight, which argued along the same lines:

"The Palestinians are being subjected to much the same methods of oppression today by the state of Israel that were visited on the Jews by the Nazis throughout the 1930s."

Palestinians were described by Wight as "the Holocaust's forgotten victims ... sacrificed upon the altar of the West's continued blind support of that apartheid state otherwise known as Israel."

The article triggered debate on a number of websites, especially on that of "Engage" (the campaign initially launched to oppose calls for a boycott of Israeli academia in what is now the

UCU). In the course of that debate Wight variously argued:

"No apartheid state has the right to exist. Apartheid South Africa did not have the right to exist. Nazi Germany did not have the right to exist. And the apartheid state of Israel does not have the right to exist. ..."

"The state of Israel is a hydra-headed monster, comprising Zionist ethnic cleansers, US imperialists and Arab collaborationist regimes. Arrayed against this monster are the forces of human progress. ..."

"As soon as the scales fall from the eyes of international Jewry with regard to the racist and fascist ideology that is Zionism, the world will begin to emerge from the iron heel of war and brutality in the Middle East. ..."

None of this was criticised in the *Voice*. To be fair to them, turning a blind eye to the left anti-semitism of the SPSC in general, and of its press officer in particular, is in line with SSP policy. For two years running SSP conferences have voted in support of a boycott of Israel and for co-operation with the SPSC.

If the *Voice* is uncritical of left anti-semitism within the SPSC it is positively servile in its adulation of Stalinism in Cuba (but, again, in line with agreed SSP policy).

"Democracy — Cuban Style" read the banner headline across a centre-page spread in the *Voice* after Castro had announced his retirement as Cuba's head of state.

According to the article: "Critics will no doubt continue to denounce Cuba as a one-party state. However, as the above [i.e. the article's description of Cuba's electoral system] should have made clear, this is a claim that makes little sense in the democratic system that exists there."

The article continued: "The Communist Party of Cuba plays no role in selecting candidates,

and given that members of the various institutions of People's Power advertise no party affiliations, talk of political parties does not appear to be coherent in the Cuban context."

Obviously: only the simple-minded would conclude that because there is only one political party in Cuba, and only one political party permitted by law, then that in some way makes Cuba a one-party state! Not at all, according to the *Voice*! On the contrary, it is simply not "coherent" to talk of political parties in the "Cuban context".

Another article in the same of the *Voice* waxed lyrical about the supposed ongoing advances of the Cuban Revolution, now spreading throughout the rest of Latin America:

Such articles would certainly not be out of place in the Communist Party's *Morning Star*.

It was only consistent, therefore, that the same issue of the *Voice* opened its columns to an article by *Morning Star* editor John Haylett urging the paper's readers to fill the gaps between the fortnightly appearance of the *Voice* by reading ... the *Morning Star*!

"The generally more progressive political outlook in Scotland," Haylett continued, "could result in a big increase in readership ... and we're hoping that *Voice* readers will make up a fair section of that readership." After all, the *Morning Star* is the only daily paper which "penetrates the blanket of disinformation about countries such as Cuba and Venezuela."

Haylett, it must be said, is not necessarily wrong in identifying the readership of the *Voice* as a potential target audience for the *Morning Star*. After all, it can sometimes be difficult to tell the difference between the politics of the two papers.

Perhaps the next stage could be a joint *Morning Star-Voice* article advocating withdrawal from the European Union?

workers' liberty & Solidarity

BY PAT MURPHY, LEEDS NUT (PC)

DELEGATES will meet at the National Union of Teachers Conference in Manchester this month (21-24 March) in the middle of the union's first national strike ballot for 22 years. Most activists are expecting a strong yes vote to endorse the union's opposition to a 2008-10 pay deal which offers three further years of pay cuts.

Tory-era trade union laws on balloting have however made it much harder for workers to take part in union ballots and much more likely that they will not even receive a ballot paper. Such conditions may effect turnout in this ballot. Should the ballot be successful, however, the union is planning to call members out on a national one-day strike on Thursday 24 April.

A teachers strike against a below-inflation pay award will be a tremendous boost to all public sector workers facing the threat of pay cuts under the governments plan to limit rises to around 2%. Inflation continues to sit at around 4% with the costs of some major essentials, such as housing and energy bills, surging way ahead of that. While any suggestion of increasing taxes on business or wealthy individuals is dismissed by Gordon Brown, workers who deliver services on which the whole of society depend are expected to accept without a murmur that their living standards should decline. A collective trade union response to this has been long overdue.

Attempts by local government and health workers to force their unions to take a lead last year failed. A positive ballot result and teachers strike on 24 April must be used to revive and re-energise efforts in other public sector unions.

In recent weeks teacher trade unionists have seen evidence of the mood amongst other public sector workers on pay — some of it from an unlikely source. When London NUT organisers opened talks with the police about a march and rally on 24 April they were asked to explain the purpose of the strike day. When they explained that it was to oppose a below-inflation pay award they were told "you can have what you want"! It is likely that the London strike march will go down Whitehall, past Downing Street to Central Hall Westminster.

In Nottingham NUT members took strike action at Bilborough Sixth Form College on Tuesday 11 March over workload and class size. The picket was good and when the Royal Mail van arrived with the post the driver, before being asked, said "no post today for the college then" turned round

and drove off.

Millions of public sector workers are angry at the way they are underpaid, overworked and undervalued. A significant revolt against that by a major union could ignite the generalised campaign of opposition that is sorely needed.

Teachers are likely to be joined in action on 24 April by further education lecturers from the University and College Union (UCU). It is also important that other school-based unions do everything they can to support the NUT action — eg refusing to undertake work normally done by strikers, insisting on closure where health and safety is at risk. Mark Serwotka was quoted in the Metro on 11 March indicating that PCS may name their next strike day for workers in the Department of Work and Pensions as 24 April. Whatever can be done to make this a day of substantial protest at the government's attack on working class living standards should be done.

But 24 April is only the beginning. Further action will almost certainly be needed to win a decent pay rise for teachers. The newly-elected NUT Executive has seen a small but significant shift to the left which should make it more likely that the argument for a new ballot can be won. In reality the chances of this happening depend on two key factors. The first is a successful ballot and a popular well-supported day of action on 24 April. The second would be a clear indication that other public sector unions are prepared to join the fray and build a campaign of co-ordinated action to oppose New Labour's pay freeze.

Delegates in Manchester should send a message to the incoming Executive that, should the one-day strike ballot and day of action be a success, they need to draw up plans for a programme of action after 24 April and co-ordinate that wherever possible with other public sector unions — not just through the TUC but through bilateral co-operation with those unions prepared to join us and through public sector alliances built at the local level. That way we can hope to see the launch of an effective and serious fight-back on public sector pay.

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Stop deporting Iraqi refugees

BY DAVID BRODER

THE first two weeks of March saw dozens of shootings, roadside bombs, car bombs and discoveries of mass graves in Iraq. Five years into the war, the country remains torn apart by sectarian violence, which marks its toll not only in bodies but also in destroyed basic infrastructure, power and supplies shortages and a grave lack of hospital beds. Yet on March 13 it was revealed that the Home Office now considers Iraq 'safe', and will therefore give 1,400 Iraqi asylum seekers an ultimatum — go back, or stay in Britain but with no benefits and no home. They have three weeks to make up their minds.

The claim that Iraq is safe is highly troubling, and displays the government's complete lack of concern for the people it expels from the UK. As if to underline the stupidity of their assertion, the government will also ask them to sign a waiver form which says that the Home Office will take no responsibility for what happens to them or their families once they return to Iraq.

Of course, as everyone knows, millions of Iraqis have been forced to flee from their homes by the invasion and civil war, either to find solace in another community in Iraq among their co-religionists, or to seek refuge in neighbouring Jordan or Syria. The UN estimates that 2.2 million people have escaped from Iraq since 2003 — few of these millions, so desperate as to have to leave their country, would corroborate the government's claim that Iraq is safe.

This is not the first time the British government has deported people to Iraq, although previous flights carrying asylum seekers have headed for the Kurdish north — which except the recent Turkish invasion has been relatively stable — rather than southern Iraq itself. We also strongly condemned those removals, since they are nothing other than part of the Home Office's racist demonisation of immigrants and their constant effort to pander to far-right prejudices against people of Middle Eastern background, no matter how worthy their asylum case.

Indeed, even the 1,400 Iraqi asylum seekers concerned had in 2005 been refused the right to stay in Britain and were only spared deportation because it was impossible to find a plausibly safe route back. They were therefore only entitled to the meagre "section four" state support which includes basic "no-choice" accommodation, three meals a day, vouchers for essential items and utility bills.

No matter whether the government needs to pretend for its own reasons that Iraq is safe and free, we are unconditionally for the right for anyone who so pleases to make the UK their home. We furthermore demand that all immigrants have the same welfare rights as anyone else who lives in this country, and are absolutely opposed to racist two-tier benefits system which keeps people in poverty just because they were born abroad.