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From the editors

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Autumn 2009

A quarterly review of revolutionary politics and theory

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THE DRAMATIC impact of the recession on jobs and pay has highlighted the state of working class organisation and its ability to resist these attacks. This issue of our magazine leads on an assessment of the trade union movement's response to the crisis – do the rash of unofficial actions and occupations this year signal a new mood of resistance or are they isolated and defensive struggles?

We also come back to the vexed issue of left unity and ask is the latest attempt to cobble together a left electoral alliance really the way to take the struggle forward?

On the international scene we look at the ongoing instability in the Islamic Republic of Iran and try to trace the roots of the divisions amongst that country's rulers – divisions that offer the chance for revolutionary change.

Two other articles look at workers' struggles in Argentina and Cuba. One looks at the outcome of the long running occupation of the Zanon ceramics factory while the other stresses the importance of the Guantanamo workers in the 1959 Cuban revolution.

Our feedback section carries an interview with a member of the New Anti-capitalist Party on its bid to remodel the French far left as well as a response by Christine Duval that asks whether the NPA may be drawn towards electoralism despite its role in recent mass struggles.

Finally, we return to the analysis of the recent traumas in the world capitalist economy through a critique of a new book from the SWP's leading economist Chris Harman.

The Editors

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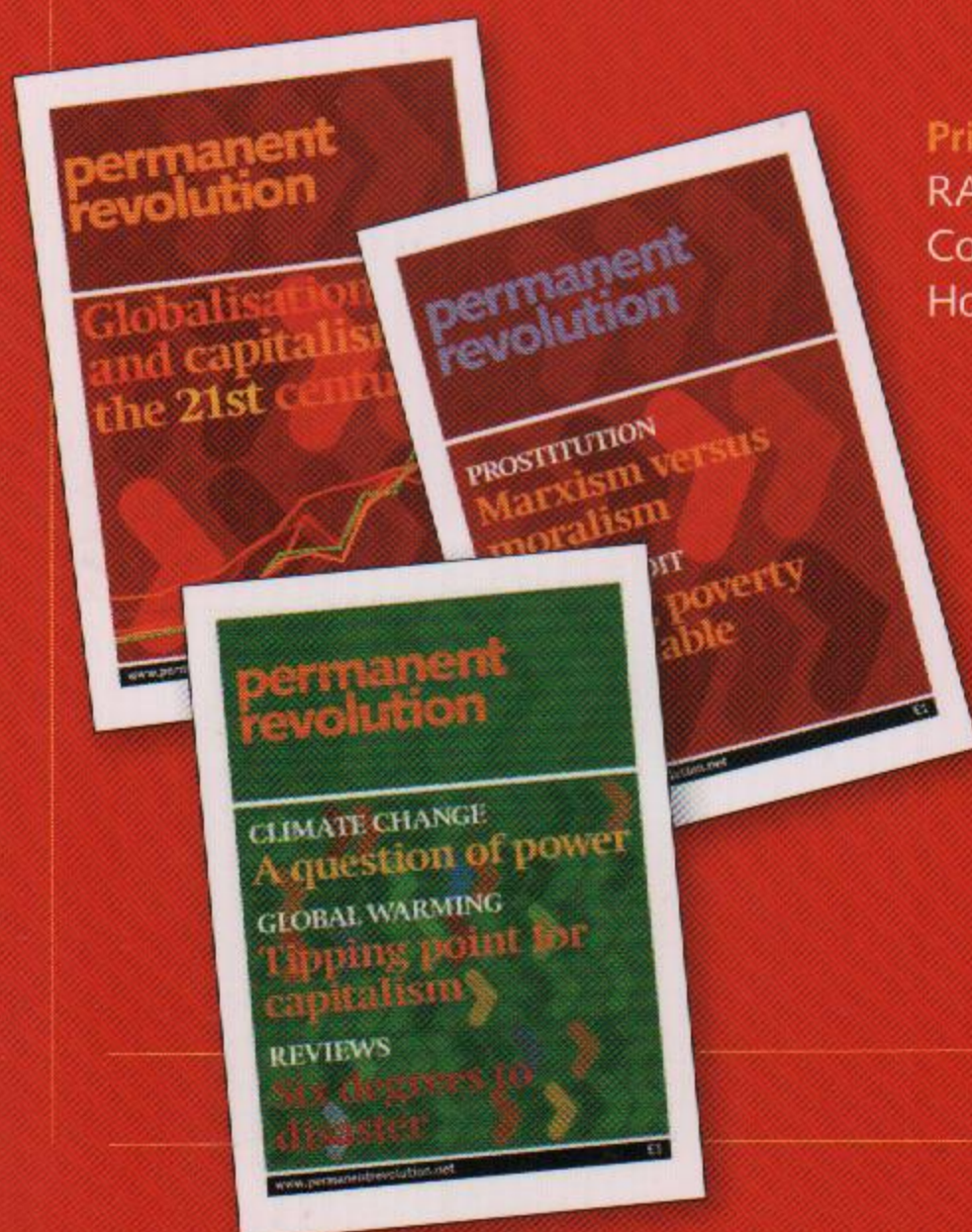
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BRITAIN

We will not pay for their bonuses with our jobs and pensions

AS PARTY conference season approached, the three main pro-business parties – Labour, Tories and Liberal Democrats – competed with each other on how they were going to cut public spending. The purpose was to tell the electorate – in Margaret Thatcher’s favourite phrase – “there is no alternative”.

There is certainly no alternative as far as the policies of the main parties are concerned. Labour leaders squirmed around trying to explain how their cuts will be much kinder than those of the Tories and explaining that this was the “real choice” facing voters.

The Tories then accused the government of hiding its planned cuts, while staying silent on their own proposals. The whole debate is being framed by the two main parties as one of “honesty” because they both want to keep quiet about the actual impact of the cuts they both plan to make.

The Lib Dems meanwhile, speaking in the comfort of knowing they will not form the next government, were more forthright, giving a list of cutbacks which included the Trident nuclear submarine programme, NHS IT systems, Tax Credits, public sector pay rises etc.

Everyone, it seems, is agreed that such is the parlous state of public finances, with the public deficit heading to 12%, that government expenditure needs to be slashed.

The bosses have trillions of pounds tied up in deposit accounts, property and pension pots, all of which should be subject to a steeply progressive wealth tax

As the *Financial Times* put it, “a consensus exists on the need to shrink the state.”

Yet look at the figures more closely. By 2010 the UK government will be spending 52.4% of GDP, a figure that has brought cries of horror from politicians and commentators. In fact many European nations spend more – equivalent figures are France 56.4%, Belgium 54.3% and Sweden 57.3%. They do it by raising more taxes. So there is an alternative to cutting education, health, pensions and public sector wages.

Of course, you can raise taxes in different ways – you can tax the working class and the poor, as proposals to raise VAT to 20% would do, or you can tax the rich, something

socialists fight for. After all they have trillions of pounds of wealth tied up in deposit accounts, property, valuables, yachts, pension pots and the like, all of which could be taxed through a steeply progressive wealth tax.

Another question the “consensus” passes over is why the public debt has grown so quickly. In mid-September *The Guardian* published a useful diagram of public spending showing where the money is going in 2008-09 and the percentage increase on the previous year. While most government departments showed single digit increases – health was up 8%, the Department for Children and Schools up 4%, Work and Pensions up 8% – Treasury spending was up a staggering 49,891%!

This eye-watering increase was, of course, the result of the bucket loads of money the government has poured into the banks – £650bn in government guarantees, £400bn purchasing bad assets, £200bn in cash support, £290bn in re-capitalising and buying up bankrupt banks. Over £1.5tr is estimated to have been spent bailing out the bankers, a figure equivalent to 94% of a year’s UK GDP. No wonder government spending has risen.

But it is not the bankers and the City that are being asked to pay back the debt, it is being demanded from public sector workers and by the slashing of services that workers depend on.

By 2014 the annual interest paid on the UK debt will rise to £60bn as a result of this spending, the equivalent of the entire annual education budget. And we can add to this the burgeoning costs of PFI schemes which are now being paid back by hospital trusts and local authorities. A recent study by the University of Edinburgh valued the 149 PFI hospitals at £12.7bn; the NHS will end up paying £70.5bn for them, often to the same banks that the government has just bailed out!

And dramatic cutbacks are on the way, whatever Labour says about protecting frontline services. According to the *Financial Times* review of government spending plans, this “promises to be the most savage period of public expenditure restraint since that of the mid-1990s, and to continue for longer.” Instead of the 4% to 5% increases that have taken account of inflation and pay increases over the last decade, a leaked Treasury document shows that Labour plans a 9.3% cumulative cut for all departments other than health.

This means real cuts, which is why all the major parties are calling for a wage freeze in the public sector. And as inflation will undoubtedly increase over the next few years this will mean real and deep wage cuts.

If the Tories get in next year they already have plans

for an emergency budget where they will push through even more drastic cuts, blaming it all on the mess Labour has left them in.

The working class, the trade unions and the community organisations must be mobilised now to fight this

“consensus” on cuts. We must say, “make the bankers and the rich foot the bill for this crisis – hands off our services, hands off our pay”. Whichever party wins the next election, the fight to defend public services must start today.

AFGHANISTAN

The war NATO cannot win

IT IS not every day that a senior military commander of the British army quotes Leon Trotsky, leader of the Red Army during the Russian Revolution. But in May this year, speaking of Britain's role in Afghanistan, General Sir Richard Dannatt – the outgoing chief of general staff – re-cycled Trotsky's warning that “you may not be interested in this war, but this war is interested in you”.

Dannatt was justifying Britain's war against the Taliban as the front line in the war to protect British citizens from international terror. But Trotsky's aphorism could just as easily be taken as a symbol of the way the Afghan war has crept stealthily into the foreground of the people's consciousness in this country during the last year.

In the first five years following the British and US invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001, as part of the post 9/11 war on terror, a mere five British soldiers were killed in combat. Then in 2006, as British forces were directed to Helmand province in the south to take it back from Taliban control, it all went pear-shaped. By mid-September this year 214 British soldiers had died at the hands of the Taliban.

This summer the media went into compliant overdrive to drum up support for “our boys” against a backcloth of flag-draped coffins arriving home. The Tory-dominated media tried to turn growing hostility to the war into a campaign against Labour for not supplying the troops with enough high quality equipment.

But millions of people continue to ask the question; what is it all for? Time and again the clear majority of people polled do not want more troops to join those already there. And this disillusion is not confined to Britain but is reflected in all countries with forces in Afghanistan.

The government has constantly tried to link this war to the “fight against terrorism at home”. In an article in August, Labour's Defence Secretary Bob Ainsworth said once again: “We are fighting there to protect our national security. We are confronting the Taliban-led insurgency to prevent terrorists returning to that country.”

But, as many have pointed out, the idea that al-Qaeda needs a “secure base” from which to launch terrorist attacks is ludicrous. First, the Taliban were always uneasy hosts of Bin Laden's forces in their country, and not part of its messianic ambitions to bring Islamic rule to the western world. They have always been more concerned with kicking foreigners out of their country. And since

2001, al-Qaeda does not issue orders from some hideaway to its operatives. It is a highly decentralised, largely self-sustaining movement dispersed across the world.

One reason it is self-sustaining is that it can rely upon a steady flow of recruits from around the world that are angered by the killings of civilians carried out by British and US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The UN reported last February that 2008 saw a record number of Afghan civilians killed, more than 1,200; 881 of them officially blown apart by coalition air strikes.

It is the occupation and war that is causing the threat to British security and spawning terrorism. Unconvinced by their own official reasons, the government has piled up layer upon layer of other reasons as to why Britain is fighting the Taliban. One day it is “to lift the war-torn country out of poverty”. The next day it is “to fight the growth of the world opium trade” based in Helmand.

On further reflection it appears to be to get young girls into school. Occasionally it is a fight that “NATO can't afford to lose”, meaning the most powerful imperialist military alliance in the world cannot be seen to fail. Most recently, the excuse was to ensure voting in the 20 August elections, was “free from intimidation and fear”.

The fact that as few as 2,000 of 80,000 eligible people voted in areas of the Helmand apparently under safe British control says it all – both about the ineffectiveness of Britain's military strategy and the failure of its political goal of winning over the bulk of the Afghan people away from the Taliban's influence, control or intimidation.

The fact that NATO is left propping up a deeply corrupt, hated and hemmed in Karzai government in a war it cannot win, is becoming more widely accepted among military leaders. They are now thrashing about trying to find a new strategy, hoping to buy off some of the Taliban through giving them regional power and training a huge Afghan army to do some of the fighting.

The Taliban are deeply reactionary forces who have already once ruled the country with an Islamic dictatorship that brutally oppressed women and destroyed human rights. The disgrace is that the 2001 invasion and ongoing war has boosted them again. This will not change until the US and NATO forces get out of the country and let the Afghan people decide their own fate.

Join the demonstration to demand British and NATO troops get out of Afghanistan, London 24 October.

UAF AND EDL

Kick the fascists off the streets – no platform!

➤ JUST A matter of months after the British National Party (BNP) won two MEPs in the Euro elections, the English Defence League (EDL) – a gang of Nazi thugs – have been on the march. Twice they have visited Birmingham. They have threatened to march in Luton. Manchester is next up, with the EDL planning to march there on 10 October.

The EDL is a bit like the old Combat 18 – a violent wing of fascism that pretends to be independent of the BNP but one that everyone with half a brain knows full well is the tooled-up, street fighting wing of that party. Check the mug shots from the demo photos if in doubt.

During their attacks in Birmingham the EDL smashed up a bus, assaulted black and Asian passers by and tried to beat up counter protestors. Fortunately, on both occasions they failed. They were met by determined resistance from Birmingham socialists and anti-fascists. The community mobilised, even while community leaders told people to stay and home, to avoid trouble and do nothing. The message was “rely on the police”.

Don't rely on the cops

Unite Against Fascism (UAF) put forward tactics that, despite the best intentions of consistent anti-racists in its ranks, served to undermine and demobilise the opposition to the Nazis. Salma Yaqoob, a leading councillor for the Respect Party, demanded that the council ban the EDL demonstration and sought to build a broad, non-political, cross-party front against the Nazis.

She stressed that whereas the EDL did not obey the niceties of agreed marching times and locations, UAF worked with the

police “before, during and after” the EDL march. It was only due to the spontaneous determination of mainly Asian youth, bursting through lines of UAF stewards and the police, that the EDL were driven away the first time.

Salma Yaqoob and UAF were determined there would be no repeat. Before the second EDL

The SWP are right to call for a direct mobilisation against the fascists, but they need to quickly realise that calling for state bans is a disastrous tactic

demonstration, they demanded that the police and the council ban the demo, built a “unity carnival” far from any possible confrontation in an attempt to divert the opposition from confronting the fascists.

When the anti-fascist carnival was banned by the council, it opposed any mobilisation in order to maintain “unity”.

They were prepared to allow the EDL to march through Birmingham unopposed rather than break their hoped-for but unrealised alliance with the Tories, Liberals and New Labour. What sort of anti-fascism is this?

Two days before the second EDL demonstration the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) finally saw sense. With UAF refusing to act, they called a mobilisation.

Actually there was already one underway. Fortunately, anarchists, socialists, anti-fascists and Asian youth, were not prepared to wait around until the SWP made up its mind whether or not to heed the advice of UAF to stay away from Birmingham town centre and leave the EDL to strut their stuff. The

sporadic resistance on the day was more than enough to send the EDL packing again.

Manchester

In Manchester the SWP and UAF seem to have learnt nothing from the experience of Birmingham. At a meeting on 8 September, the UAF chair defended the decision of UAF to absent itself from the streets in order to “maintain unity”. UAF in Manchester resolved to call for a state ban with every member of the SWP present supporting that resolution. The UAF chair proposed, just as in Birmingham, that UAF organise a carnival well away from

any threatened confrontation with the EDL. Unlike in Birmingham this was too much for the SWP, who insisted that they would confront the fascists if they sought to come to Manchester.

The SWP are right to call for a direct mobilisation against the fascists, but they need to quickly realise that calling for state bans is a disastrous tactic in fighting fascism. It has nothing in common with militant anti-fascism. Indeed Chris Bambery, a leading SWP member, explained why in *Socialist Worker* back in 2001:

“We cannot rely on the ruling class, whatever liberal noises it makes, to stop the Nazis. This is especially true over the question of banning the Nazis. It seems an attractive option – after all, how better to get the Nazis off the streets – but the experience is that such bans have nearly always been used to stop the left mobilising. The 1936 Public Order Act was rushed through after 100,000 workers stopped the British Union of Fascists marching through the East End of London at Cable Street. The police

had made a determined attempt to clear the way for the fascists but were defeated by mass mobilisation. A Tory government promised the new law would stop the fascists. In reality it has been used against trade unionists and the left.

Bans have been used to demobilise the anti-fascist movement. What is happening under New Labour is worse than that. The bans are primarily aimed at preventing anti-fascist and anti-racist activities. It reached a new low in Welshpool, where the BNP staged a 'Red, White and Blue Festival', when Anti Nazi League activists were individually banned from the town, an exclusion zone was created round the town, and police said nobody would be allowed through unless they produced a BNP membership card! Anti-fascists are then presented as the problem."

(pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr255/bambery.htm)

Given the SWP's current wobbling over state bans we would suggest Bambery tells the SWP to stick with the line he outlined back in 2001. But that would probably mean breaking with the organisation the SWP took the lead in founding - the UAF. It is by no means certain the SWP will do this. But it should, and quickly.

UAF - the unity of the graveyard

David Cameron, the Tory leader, is a member of UAF. He didn't turn out to oppose the EDL in Birmingham. Salma Yaqoob, the Respect councillor, is a member of UAF. She didn't turn out to oppose the EDL in Birmingham. Peter Hain, the former New Labour minister, is a member of UAF. He didn't turn out to oppose the EDL in Birmingham.

UAF seeks to build broad non-class, cross party, coalitions to oppose fascism. Above all they want to be respectable. So they have consciously sought out politicians and reactionaries from the bosses ranks to try and bolster their credentials. Funded by the trade union bureaucracy, UAF employs

many SWP apparatchiks.

Under the circumstances it is literally more than their job's worth to fight for a militant and socialist strategy in UAF. Unfortunately, the political concession made in founding this organisation, now threatens to poison its founder.

The EDL have broken the rules of the game. The BNP's search for respectability fooled some into thinking that old style anti-fascism was out of date. Many on the left wrongly began to suggest that an orientation to the working class self-defence and self-organisation were no longer the way to smash the Nazis. By marching, by taking the battle to the streets, the EDL have exploded the entire strategy of the UAF, and exposed the contradictions in the SWP and the right wing of Respect almost overnight. UAF have failed the test of struggle.

Under the circumstances it is even more remarkable that in spite of everything the anti-fascists still drove the EDL from the streets and scored a major victory. This will be what is needed in Manchester and anywhere else the EDL target.

Free speech for fascists?

Some groups like the CP or Weekly Worker think that the fascists have the right to their opinion, that they should have the

Anti-fascists need to organise independently of UAF. We certainly can support their actions, provided we are not bound by their leadership's decisions

right to free speech and democratic freedoms. They think that the fascists should be allowed a platform to spread their ideas.

Socialists and anti-fascists on the other hand have fought to impose a position of no platform for fascists for many decades. Ask yourself what is the content of the fascists' "free speech"? They propose and organise

vicious unprovoked assaults on black and Asian people. In 2000 the Oldham riots began after Nazis broke down the door of a pregnant Asian woman's house and assaulted her and her family in her own home. The EDL want to do the same thing in Manchester.

Democracy and free speech are not the real issue; the real issue is racist violence by fascism, the suppression of all democracy by fascism and their ability to build themselves up so they can actually start carrying out these attacks. We have to smash them before they become powerful. That is the lesson of Italy in the 1920s, Germany in the early 1930s and Spain in the late 1930s. We don't want to repeat the nightmare of those two decades.

Socialist answers

Anti-fascists need to organise independently of UAF. We certainly can support and participate in their actions, provided we are not bound by their leadership's decisions to avoid confronting the fascists. Nor should we be dependent on them for intelligence or organisation.

We need to re-iterate that fascism will be defeated by independent working class organisation, by the self-activity of the working class people, lesbian or gay, black or white or Asian, women or men, working or unemployed, in every working class organisation, uniting

together to drive the Nazi scum from the streets.

We call on all who oppose fascism to join us on 10 October to keep Manchester a Nazi-Free Zone and to support mobilisations in any other town and city where the Nazis - in the guise of either the BNP or the EDL - try to take the streets.

Bill Jefferies

VESTAS

From the balcony to the blockade

THE TWO week occupation of the Vestas wind turbine plant on the Isle of Wight was an inspiration to all those who care for the future of the planet. In those days in late July/early August the determination of a dozen or so men to risk arrest, conviction and loss of redundancy money in order to try to keep the factory open brought hundreds of supporters down to the factory gates to join the tent camp. Thousands more people across the UK joined local days of action, raised money and support in their workplaces and union branches.

In order to cut carbon emissions we need massive investment in renewables like wind, wave and solar energy. And if we are serious about doing it on a scale and in a timeframe that holds out any hope of stopping runaway global warming then we cannot afford to let factories and jobs like those at Vestas go to the wall.

In all likelihood the Vestas occupation would never have happened without "outside agitators". It was to the credit of supporters of the Workers Climate Action that in June a group of them went down to the Isle of Wight on hearing of the plan to close the factory and establish contact with the workers and the East Cowes trades council.

By leafleting in Newport town centre and at the factory gate they were able to place the idea that something could be done to prevent the closure. The socialist and trade union movement on the Isle of Wight is not that strong and it was absolutely the right thing to do to take the arguments to the workforce from the outside, while encouraging the workforce to make its own decisions and not bouncing them into an action they were not convinced of.

Once the action was underway

the RMT to its credit took up the workers' cause. It stepped in to recruit and provide union backing to the Vestas workforce. Bob Crow did more than just give moral support to the action, visiting the plant several times. Before long the RMT was effectively in control of the occupation through the newly

Blockading a factory from the outside and preventing the components being shipped out requires widespread solidarity from other trade unionists

recruited stewards. Once this happened, the nightly factory gate meetings, which were meant to be the means of discussing strategy, in effect became little more than report back sessions.

Eviction

On 4 August the courts on the Isle of Wight issued an eviction order. Although the 200 or so supporters immediately marched back to the plant on rumours of an immediate attempt by bailiffs, it soon became clear that there was no real intention of resisting the bailiffs when the time came. The RMT stewards from among the Vestas workers made this clear, as did the national leadership of the RMT. When the bailiffs did arrive a few days later, the occupiers left with minimal resistance.

Obviously, it's difficult for a dozen occupiers to secure the factory properly and defend it from the larger security and police forces, and of course there was a serious chance of arrest, fines or worse. It may even have put redundancy payments at risk. But

the decision to leave meant that the dispute lost much of the initiative gained.

The advantages of staying inside and resisting eviction were obvious. While the occupation continued Vestas were not able to get their hands on valuable equipment (not least Mold 8 which they want to ship to the USA), which gave the workforce leverage over the bosses. Plus the occupation could have been a beacon for the whole labour movement, which is being knocked sideways by the recession, and where in too many cases workers (and their union leaders) are not putting up a fight or are sacrificing

pay in order to stay in a job.

At any point the occupation could have been reinforced by other Vestas workers not named in the eviction order, or even non-Vestas workers from among the supporters outside. The borders of the factory were not secured at all. But the political will to keep the occupation going was not there.

Solidarity strike action was also vital but not really on the RMT's agenda. The bargemen agreed not to ship the finished blades out of the factory. But the RMT needed to organise political strike action of their members (starting with the Portsmouth ferry workers) to put pressure on the government to step in and save the jobs.

This was another important aspect of the dispute that needed to be pursued with vigour; Labour was highly vulnerable as it claimed to be "leading the fight" against climate change yet refused to challenge the bosses closure plans. The obvious demand, raised by the workers, was to nationalise the company outright and integrate the company into a planned expansion of wind-power across the country -

this would have led to job creation not destruction.

After the occupation ended the workers and supporters on the ground in the Isle of Wight have turned to trying to prevent Vestas' bosses moving the 11 blades and other equipment (worth more than £750,000) out of the factory and onto the river barges at the back.

But blockading a factory from the outside and preventing the components being shipped out requires widespread solidarity from other trade unionists as well as mass action from supporters. This would have been much easier if the occupation had been sustained and reinforced.

Although the move out of occupation was a step back, the fight is not over. A core of activists including Vestas workers and supporters are continuing to struggle. Some attempts to move equipment have been frustrated. In the middle of September protesters occupied a crane on Southampton docks being used to load the Vestas blades. In an action typical of New Labour Britain the occupiers fighting for jobs were threatened with being charged under the Terrorism Act if they did not come down off the crane!

The workers are continuing to take their arguments to trade unions and communities across the country. These sorts of struggles are exactly the kind of direct action that is needed to tackle both unemployment and climate change. Climate camps and stunts in the city raise publicity, but at the end of the day we need to take control over these industries, take them out of the hands of the bosses to stand the best chance of saving the planet from environmental, social and humanitarian disaster.

Labour's green wash exposed

In the same month that the workers launched their occupation of the Vestas plant, the government launched its white paper – the Low Carbon Transition Plan. In it Labour say they will create at least 400,000 jobs over the next ten years in the

low-carbon sector, with the aim that by 2015 business should be employing one million workers in this sector.

But the current reality is rather different.

➤ In March Shell pulled out of wind, solar and hydro-power claiming that they were not economic (it can make more money extracting oil from the massively polluting coal tar sands in North America).

➤ BP then cut 620 jobs in its solar energy division, and Scottish Power owner Iberdrola has so far cut half of its green investments this year.

➤ The developers of the London Array in the Thames Estuary, planned as the biggest offshore wind farm in the world, are considering pulling out on financial grounds.

➤ Even one of Britain's most efficient wind farms, in Cumbria, may be knocked down to make way for a nuclear power station.

The government made it clear from the outset of the Vestas occupation that they were content to let the company close the Newport and East Cowes factories and see nearly 600 workers out the gates forever, never mind the hundreds more in supply industries locally and those in shops who depend on people being in work and having money to spend.

Vestas manufacture turbines for onshore wind farms, and up to now there has been little demand in the UK – proposed developments have met with massive obstruction from largely Tory-backed NIMBYs. The government white paper made it clear that they planned to expand offshore wind farms as part of the renewable mix rather than invest in the onshore turbines that Vestas make. So Vestas argued that there was no commercial case for keeping the plant open in the UK. In response, climate change minister Ed Miliband, made lots of noise about how sad it was, but conceded that Vestas bosses were making a

WHAT WE NEED

Green nationalisations now!

➤ IN THE UK the Campaign against Climate Change in the UK is demanding a 10% cut in emissions by the end of 2010, a million green jobs by the end of 2010, a ban on domestic flights, a 55 mph speed limit and the scrapping of the roads programme and an end to agrofuel use (using land to produce biofuel instead of food).

Although limited, these are demands that we should support, but even to achieve these demands we need a mass movement in the trade unions, on estates, in communities and colleges to force the government to act.

A key demand to achieve even these goals is the immediate nationalisations of the energy and transport industries. They need to be taken over, without compensation and placed under

the control of the workers and communities. Only in this way can we ensure that carbon reducing measures benefit the mass of the population not the rich and the multinationals. The closure of the Vestas plant and wholesale retreat of the big energy monopolies in the UK from developing non-polluting industries and technologies re-inforces the importance of this demand.

EVENTS

17 October Mass action in Nottinghamshire against Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal-fired power station:

www.thegreatclimateswoop.org/

5 December Campaign Against Climate Change demonstration 12.00pm, Hyde Park, London

12 December Demonstration in Copenhagen – for transport see: www.campaigncc.org/node/223

understandable decision “based on sound commercial principles”.

To hell with commercial principles. Firstly any government serious about climate change would overrule Tory planning committees where it was clear local prejudices were being pandered to over the need to reduce carbon emissions. Secondly by taking over the research, development and production facilities of Vestas and using state backed investment, a new company could be used to develop turbines for offshore use.

The fact is this government would rather pour billions in to propping up its city banking friends than invest in preventing climate change. Once again Labour bows before the free market, a market that is incapable of tackling the urgent issue of climate change.

In 1939-40, faced with the threat of war, the British government did not hesitate to take command of the key sectors of the economy in order to turn Britain into a planned war economy: production of private cars and household goods gave way overnight to tanks and guns. In short, industry was reconfigured more or less overnight because the political will existed to make it happen, shoving aside all protests about private

property, commercial decisions.

The threat of run-away climate change is a global emergency and we are running out of time. Every single job in this sector has to be defended and built upon. Instead the government relies on the market to sort out the problem: carbon trading to determine a “market price” for pollution, commercially run nuclear power plants, tenders for theoretical carbon capture plants. The result has been prevarication, delay and a growing climate emergency.

Only an emergency plan, linked to central national planning, that rationally puts it all together all the necessary industries, and has all the levers in the hands of democratic and accountable bodies, can possibly have a hope of squaring local community concerns about “unsightly” wind farms with the urgent need for decommissioning coal-fired plants. Only such an energetic and socialist approach to tackling carbon emissions can offer a solution to the climate emergency

Kirstie Paton

Messages of support to savevestas@googlemail.com
For more information go to <http://savevestas.wordpress.com>

change is happening now.”

She is right. Global warming is not a theoretical possibility, it is a reality. Faced with mounting evidence of this reality, world leaders will meet in Copenhagen in December to discuss a new international treaty to tackle climate change. The United Nations Climate Conference, COP15, will bring together environment ministers from 192 countries to try and agree a replacement for the Kyoto protocol which expires in 2012. What are the issues?

The first is the extent to which the countries will commit to reducing their emissions, with binding targets. This is the major challenge for the richest countries, and will be resisted particularly strongly by the USA, Australia and Canada. Latest predictions show that to avoid a dangerous 2°C increase in temperature there need to be massive cuts, and soon. Economist and government adviser Nicholas Stern argues that the target should be a 90% cut in global emissions by 2050.

But even more important than the long term target is short term actions, and there is little chance of getting the world leaders to agree anything approaching what is needed. It is far easier for them to adopt an ambitious goal for 2050, or even 2020, because they know they will not be in power then and someone else will be blamed. Getting them to commit to a cut of 10% by the end of 2010 is both more important and more difficult because it means they actually have to do something.

Some countries, including the UK, have adopted legislation that includes specific targets, but the USA's attempt to do the same appears to be stalling. Obama's draft Bill was supposed to be discussed in Congress in September but has been put back to later this year and therefore it is unlikely to be agreed before Copenhagen, if at all. The bill is being held hostage in the US Senate by senators from coal producing states. That means the USA will not be able to sign up to a specific target when they get to Denmark in December.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Campaigning around Copenhagen

➤ IN SEPTEMBER two ships completed a voyage never previously managed by a commercial cargo vessel. They went from South Korea to Siberia and on to Rotterdam by way of the infamous Northeast Passage that, because of ice, has thwarted numerous expeditions from the 16th century onwards. The route is more direct than the usual sea journey from Asia to Europe (through the Suez and Panama canals), and knocks more than

3,000 miles off the journey.

While shipping companies and Russian businesses celebrate the opportunities ahead, the achievement signals bad news for the planet. “This is not a cause for celebration but cause for immediate action,” said Melanie Duchin the Greenpeace Arctic Expedition leader. Unprecedented reductions in the volume of ice in the Arctic have opened the route up to vessels without the need for ice-breakers. “This is further proof that climate



This leads to the second issue, namely the balance between rich industrial countries and the expanding economies of developing world. China and India will refuse to sign up to a slowing down of their expanding emissions unless the USA agrees to an absolute cut. The USA in turn has said that it expects China, India and other expanding economies to take major steps – refusing to acknowledge the need of these and many less developed countries for more industrial growth and a greater share of the world's emissions.

Other issues to be discussed will be a commitment (and money) to invest in low-carbon technologies, the preservation of carbon sinks such as forests, and support for "adaptation" in the countries worst affected by existing climate change; many countries like Bangladesh will be inundated by rising sea levels.

The environmental movement is focusing all its attention on this conference, with the aim of achieving the best possible treaty and using the opportunity to pressure governments into taking action. Thousands of lobbyists will be there from the major campaigns and charities each with their own or shared demands.

While it is important to join the protests and demand that governments take action, we should have no illusions in these capitalist governments coming to an agreement that can curb carbon emissions to the level needed. Their free market solutions have already been shown to fail.

The experience of implementing Kyoto is a prime example. While it has been in place global emissions have grown not fallen, up 38% worldwide between 1992 and 2007. The level of CO₂ in the atmosphere is now 387 parts per million. Two years ago the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report recommended that levels needed to stay below 450 ppm to avoid dangerous global warming. Most scientists now agree that this is wrong, and that the levels need to fall to around 350 ppm to be sure. That means heading as quickly as possible for an end to carbon

emissions, and implementing measures to absorb CO₂ currently in the atmosphere (though re-forestation for example).

The mechanisms put in place to try and reduce emissions, primarily based on carbon trading, are all based on the market, and have so far proved a major source of profit for the polluters rather than a lever for reducing outputs.

It would be wrong to think that the market can never lead to a reduction in emissions, although it would undoubtedly be too slow to prevent dangerous climate change. With sufficient regulation these schemes could put a price on carbon emissions and eventually lead some companies to shift to lower carbon alternatives in order to increase profits. So the problem is not that the market is inevitably ineffective, rather it is the way in which in which it works that is the problem.

The market approach effectively privatises the atmosphere, and then hands out shares with the value of the right to pollute. This creates a market and trading occurs, with those who don't need all their

emissions vouchers selling them, and others buying them. It can allow rich countries to offload their carbon reductions onto poor countries while doing little to bring down world emissions.

We need to make Copenhagen a focal point for actions and demonstrations, demanding that more is done to tackle climate change. We know that existing governments and the UN institutions will always favour the rich nations and powerful business interests, and we need to counter this with calls for an emergency plan to decarbonise the economy while addressing the poverty and inequalities that exist worldwide.

Such a plan will not come out of the Copenhagen talks, but must be developed by workers' and poor farmers' organisations worldwide and include demands such as the nationalisation of energy and transport under workers' control, with massive investment into the technologies that can replace carbon-based economies and improve living standards.

Helen Ward

GREEN NEW DEAL

The Greens and Labour: too little too late

THERE HAS been much debate recently among climate change campaigners and some political parties about the need to launch a "Green New Deal". This has been most clearly outlined so far by the Green Party. The idea is to tackle the threat and impact of global warming with a programme of public works which would create massive numbers of "green jobs", at a time of economic recession.

The name harks back to a reform programme originated by US President Franklin D Roosevelt between 1933 and 1936. In the wake of the Great Depression he pledged himself to "a new deal for the American people", that would give

work to the unemployed, reform business and financial practices and to lead to economic recovery.

It was a clear example of state-backed intervention to try and rebuild an economy and reduce unemployment. Not surprisingly, the New Deal was vigorously opposed by the right wing in the USA, including many in the Democratic Party itself. For Roosevelt it was a populist move that he referred to as "more than a political campaign – it is a call to arms".

This phrase is certainly applicable to today's need to fight climate change. In their July press release the Green Party liken

Roosevelt's "100 days of law-making" to the "100 months or less time we have left to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases at before we hit the a potential of no return". They continue, "the most serious global crisis since the Great Depression calls for serious reforms the like of which has not as yet been considered by politicians".

So what do they propose, and how will it be done? Their main proposals are as follows:

- A bold new vision for a low-carbon energy system, that will include making "every building a power station".
- Creating and training a "carbon army" to provide the labour for a vast environmental reconstruction programme.
- Establishing an "Oil Legacy Fund" paid for by a windfall tax on the profits of the energy companies. Other financial innovations to include Local Authority Green bonds, and green family savings bonds.
- Ensuring more realistic fossil fuel prices which include the cost to the environment, to help create economic incentives to bring alternative fuels to the market. This will provide funding for the Green New Deal and safety nets to those vulnerable to higher prices via rapidly rising carbon taxes and revenue from carbon trading.
- Minimising corporate tax evasion by clamping down on tax havens, and corporate financial reporting, hence providing much-needed public finance.
- Re-regulating the domestic financial system. This would include cutting interest rates across the board. This is designed to help those borrowing to build a new energy and transport infrastructure.
- Breaking up the discredited financial institutions that have cost so much public money in the credit crunch. The de-merged units would be split into smaller banks.

On an international level the following is proposed:

- Allowing all nations far greater control over domestic monetary policy and fiscal policy.

- Setting a formal international target for greenhouse gases that keeps future temperature rises to as far below 2°C as possible.

- Giving poorer countries the opportunity to escape poverty, without fuelling global warming, by helping finance massive investment in climate change adaptation and renewable energy.

Socialists certainly support some of the above measures, for instance the creation of a "carbon army", a windfall tax on energy companies, cracking down on corporate tax havens and green investment in poorer countries. But ultimately

The government's plan has been criticised as falling short of the level of cuts scientists are demanding, and being virtually impossible to achieve in such a short period of time

this is a programme which doesn't even begin to tackle the seriousness of the situation which they claim to address.

Although many of the demands are excellent, it is certainly is not a "call to arms" to fight climate change. For a start it is aimed at governments rather than the workers and poor farmers around the world who have most to lose if climate change continues to accelerate as at present.

This is not surprising, since the Green Party, is firmly in the camp of reformist parliamentarianism and does not represent any break from the political status quo, however green and radical some of its ideas might sound. In a recent Guardian interview, Caroline Lucas, leader of the Green Party was asked if she was anti-capitalist. She replied:

"The label I would prefer is that we are progressive and care about the environment". She also went on to say that "we're not anti-markets, we're not saying everything should be in common control. We want to see well-functioning markets, but we don't want to see the kind of capture by huge corporate interests

that we're seeing at the moment. We want to see a much stronger social and redistributive agenda."

Climate change activists will not find any radical or socialist answers in the Green New Deal. Like Roosevelt's programme on which it is based, it remains firmly embedded in reforming capitalism to tackle a crisis.

Labour's plans

In July the government announced details of its Low Carbon Transition Plan. This so-called energy revolution aims to

reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020, and aims at an overall cut of 80% by 2050. Government ministers hope that the huge array of measures and targets will rapidly cut energy use in homes, transport and industry.

The hope is to put Britain in pole position as a carbon cutter ahead of the crucial climate change negotiations in Copenhagen at the end of the year. Building on the measures announced in the April budget, the main pledges are as follows:

- 40% of electricity to come from low-carbon sources, including nuclear power, by 2020
- £3.2bn to be invested by energy companies to improve the poor energy efficiency of UK homes
- Smart electricity meters in every home by 2020
- Support for ultra-low carbon cars
- Cash for households which generate their own energy
- The creation of 400,000 green jobs

The White Paper is expected to become law by the end of the year. Every government department will be forced to provide detailed plans for cuts in the next few months. The

energy and climate Secretary, Ed Miliband stated that "every business and community will need to be involved. The scale of the task is enormous."

At the forefront of the government's plans are giant offshore wind parks. The renewable energy industry will be given £120m to develop offshore wind technologies and £60m will go to marine energy. In addition, planning laws will be changed to make it easier to build onshore wind farms, and all new coal-fired power stations will have to be equipped with some degree of carbon capture and storage (CCS) by 2020.

The government expects British companies to profit from the transition to a low carbon economy, claiming "huge opportunities for UK business to take part in the £3tn low-carbon market that will employ more than one million people in the UK by 2015". Among environmental groups, Greenpeace Executive Director John Sauven welcomed the "creation of thousands of green jobs which will make Britain a more prosperous country".

Miliband has promised to meet over 30% of Britain's green energy targets with wind and other renewables by 2020 (this is in fact down from a commitment of 32% in the budget). Wind energy currently provides less than 6% of Britain's electricity while solar and tidal power provides virtually nothing. He has resisted CBI demands to give nuclear power financial support; he wants more nuclear stations but the private sector will have to build them.

Overall there will be a fall in the contribution of nuclear power in generating electricity, from the current 13% to 8% by 2020. Likewise coal will provide only 22% of energy generation in 2020 compared to 32% at present.

The government plans to meet its wider carbon reduction targets with extensive use of "clean coal", with four CCS demonstration models being built in the UK, and the first plants up and running by 2014 - a highly optimistic scenario

for an untried technology.

The government's plan has rightly been criticised by many as falling short of the level of cuts scientists are demanding, and being virtually impossible to achieve in such a short period of time using the market mechanism that Labour is committed to.

But there are more serious criticisms to be made. For instance, the government can use carbon offsetting overseas to meet its targets if emissions are not cut sufficiently in the UK. As the director of the World Development Movement commented "this is a dangerous get-out-of-jail-free card which could be disastrous for the climate and for the world's poorest people. The government has to be completely committed to reducing our emissions here in the UK."

Commenting on the dangers of carbon offsetting, George Monbiot said that it "makes sense if you are seeking a global cut of 5% between now and forever. It is the cheapest and quickest way of achieving an

insignificant reduction. But as soon as you seek substantial cuts it becomes unfair. Yes, let us help poorer nations to reduce deforestation and clean up pollution. But let us not pretend that it lets us off the hook."

Monbiot has also highlighted the findings of two recent papers in Nature magazine. These supersede the recommendations of the International Panel on Climate Change upon which the government has based its figures. It seems that the timing and the rate of an 85% cut in emissions by 2050 is crucial. To deliver a good chance of preventing a global rise in temperature of 2°C (the target announced to much fanfare at the recent G8 Summit) we will have to cut global emissions by around 10% by the end of next year and by 25% by 2012! This is certainly not going to be achieved if the government's current plans are adopted by Britain and the other richer nations.

Pete Ashley

NUS

Build a real, fighting student movement!

THE NATIONAL Union of Students (NUS) has abandoned its support for free education paid for by central taxation. Its recently launched "Blueprint" for higher education funding, proposes replacing debt repayments with a 20 year graduate tax.

What's the difference? According to Aaron Porter ("Vice President Higher Education) the NUS is ensuring that it is "listened to". Porter and his co-author NUS President Wes Streeting, have sold the principle of free education in exchange for "seizing the political initiative." But vacuous New Labour rhetoric never paid the rent.

That the National Union of Students has abandoned its commitment to free education - let

alone the question of universal grants - is the inevitable consequence of its leadership by New Labour's next-generation bureaucrats. They have ensured that little has been done to counter the defeat after defeat suffered by students since Tony Blair's victory in 1997, most notably the introduction of £1,000 fees back in 1998 and then, in breach of a New Labour Manifesto commitment, the start of capped variable fees ("top up fees") in 2006.

Top up fees passed by just six votes in parliament. Labour MPs feared that a loss of this particular vote combined with the publication of the Hutton (Iraq war) enquiry's findings just one day later, would jeopardise the existence of the Labour government.

A student who had the misfortune to enter university in 2006, would have graduated this June. They would have been part of the first generation of UK students saddled with a debt in excess of £20,000. The impact of top-up fees has been felt by students in a very tangible way, with an 86% rise in students working full-time in addition to their studies.

Furthermore, for all Labour's talk of "widening participation", still

Considerably less is spent on each student today than in the 1970s prior to years of spending slashes suffered under four successive Conservative governments

only 71.8% of students attending the prestigious Russell group of universities are state educated (and state, in this bizarre reckoning, includes independent grammar schools), compared with 97.2% of those attending the Million+ Universities, many of them ex-polytechnics.

The elite universities, the Golden Triangle of Oxbridge and London, and to a lesser degree the Red Brick institutions, still remain the preserve of Britain's elite. At London Metropolitan University, which ranks low in the league tables, there are more black students than in all 20 Russell Group universities put together.

This autumn will see a review of higher education funding. With two-thirds of University Vice-Chancellors demanding a lifting of the cap and with cross-party support, it seems likely that the cap on fees will be raised, perhaps to £5,000, possibly to even more. If the cap is indeed raised, the inevitable consequence will be a two-tiered education system, with the more prestigious universities charging the most. Oxford will cost substantially more than Oxford Brookes; Liverpool more than Liverpool Hope. Widening participation will be out the window.

Aaron Porter argues the NUS Blueprint has found, "credibility across the political spectrum" – hardly any great achievement when that spectrum stretches from David Cameron to Gordon Brown. This time round Porter stresses, unlike the last two reviews of higher education funding, there's a real possibility of the NUS having a representative on the funding committee.

But then, what difference will

this make? The undeniable truth is that in abandoning its commitment to free education and clouding this reprehensible move in rhetoric about "not standing on the sidelines", "engaging in the decision making process" and "really representing students' interests", NUS has sold out a generation.

This year, the number of students able to access higher education was capped and over 100,000 students – the vast majority of them with perfectly acceptable grades – will not be able to enter the university system at this time. Many were seeking a way to make it out of the recession in one piece.

For all the government's song and dance about awarding an extra 10,000 places, many universities – including nearly all of those in the top 30 of the league tables – refused to take them, as extra funding wasn't offered to cover these places. As a consequence of all this, less than a week after the start of Clearing (the process where students fight for the remaining spaces on degree courses), nearly every single space was taken. A process that normally takes a month, was completed in little more than a week.

It's not only students who are suffering. Wide-ranging staff cuts are being implemented at

universities across the country. The University of Wolverhampton, for instance, is set to make one in eleven of its staff members redundant. Back in July, the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) declared that almost half of the universities planning staff cuts at that point in time, had failed to meet legal requirements that the job losses would not disproportionately affect women, black and disabled staff members.

London Metropolitan University, which is proposing some of the highest job cuts to compensate for three years of over-funding from the government which it now has to pay back, is also getting rid of its nursery, which will have a hugely detrimental affect on both female staff and students. Across the country, universities are saving money by reducing student contact time and streamlining courses.

The blame for all this, of course, lies with the Labour government and its hollow commitment to have 50% of school leavers attend university. It set this target without setting aside the funds for such a goal. Rather, Blair and Brown have squandered money on war and banking bail outs, while spending a considerably smaller percentage of its GDP on higher education than Mexico, Belgium, Korea and the Slovak Republic to name but a few.

Considerably less is spent on each student today than in the 1970s (prior to years of spending cuts suffered under four successive Conservative governments, 1979-97), meaning the student experience really has become about quantity rather than quality.

Higher education shouldn't be about getting a certain quota to complete a three-year degree, anymore than it should be about denying tens of thousands of able students places at university; anyone who wishes to and is able to go to university should have that opportunity.

Labour's approach to widening participation is meaningless, while it continues to sacrifice quality state secondary education. When 50% of A-level passes achieved by private school students are A grades,

compared with only 20% in the state sector, it's clear that money can still buy entry into the most prestigious universities.

And who knows how many working class students might be put off attending university if the fees cap really is raised? How many poorer students will have to balance their desire to avoid debt with their educational aspirations?

The left, still hopelessly divided, needs to wake up and smell the coffee. Porter and Streeting's feeble efforts are nothing when compared with the threat of the Conservatives' proposed attacks on public services.

The Eton Boys of Cameron's shadow cabinet, will have no qualms about the fully fledged privatisation of higher education if they can get away with it.

Student activists need to use the period now, before the general election, to build up networks of socialists and anti-capitalists prepared to resist the forthcoming onslaught, to combine with the unions and working class and rebuild a real, fighting, socialist student movement from the bottom up.

Vicky Thompson
University of Manchester

action. Time and time again the NUT group asked the national union to back action. None was ever sanctioned.

Whilst the most extensive attack by the IEB was a staff restructuring "proposal", it was preceded and accompanied by a series of other attacks. It became increasingly clear to NUT members that the IEB, on behalf of the local authority, was acting according to a definite plan, one aimed at imposing its control over staff and weakening possible sources of resistance.

Workload spiraled as a result of various management initiatives, a strict dress code for staff was imposed without consultation, lesson observations became both more extensive and more punitive, capability procedures became more of a threat in the school – and indeed were used to pressure one teacher into resigning.

A particularly stark example of the IEB's methods was the victimisation of the NUT rep, Adrian Swain, who was sacked for refusing to adhere to the imposed dress code.*

The NUT group was completely committed to strike action to achieve the "unconditional reinstatement" of their rep (a commitment that was shown by the overwhelming Yes vote achieved in the union's indicative and formal strike ballots). Their wishes were ignored. Instead Tim Harrison, the London Regional Official, and Alex

NUT

St Paul's Way School: anatomy of a defeat

AT THE end of the summer term 30 teachers, most of them NUT members, left St Paul's Way Community School in Tower Hamlets. Amongst those who left were the whole of the NUT Committee at the school.

They did not leave for better jobs, for new challenges. They left because they were defeated. As a result the teachers who stayed returned in September to a situation in which union membership had been halved and an emboldened management simply ignored NUT policy on class size, meeting times and lesson observations.

How did a well-organised and often highly combative union group and school end up in this position?

Certainly, teachers at St Paul's Way were subject to a sustained onslaught by management, one that was waged over several years and conducted with particular determination after an Interim Executive Board (EB) took control of the school in the autumn of 2008.

This onslaught expressed, in microcosm, the key elements of the neoliberal offensive against state education: jobs, conditions, union

organisation, and progressive educational methods were all attacked. In addition, the IEB made clear that its objective, central to the neoliberal project, was to privatise the school – in this case, through the creation of a Trust.

The ferocity and wide-ranging nature of these attacks do not of themselves explain the scale of the defeat that occurred: the attacks could certainly have been resisted and thrown back. NUT members at

A particularly stark example of the IEB's methods was the victimisation of NUT rep, Adrian Swain, who was sacked for refusing to adhere to the imposed dress code

the school had stated on many occasions their readiness to fight the attacks with extensive strike action.

The most debilitating factor in the situation, one that created intense demoralisation and pessimism amongst members, was the refusal of the union to sanction

Kenny, ELTA Secretary and a leading "left" in the union, cut a deal with the local authority – Adrian would be offered another job or a financial settlement but not be allowed to return to St Paul's Way.

Adrian was told that the union was ending the dispute and that he should accept the deal. Whatever

spin has been put on the outcome of this affair, particularly by Kenny, the reality was clear: the union had allowed the employer to remove a trade union rep from a workplace. The failure of the NUT to defend one of its reps was a green light to the IEB to proceed with further attacks – and this is precisely what happened.

Two weeks after the union ended the dress code dispute the

By calling off the action the union had allowed the authority to achieve one of its key objectives – to drive out those teachers with a commitment to trade unionism

headteacher revealed the staff restructuring plans. These plans represented a “devastating threat to jobs, conditions and educational provision”, as an NUT group resolution put it, with over 20 possible redundancies and a requirement for staff to be interviewed for their own jobs.

The day after the proposal was revealed the NUT group called on the national union to “ballot us immediately for discontinuous sustained strike action with the aim of securing the withdrawal of the restructuring proposals in their entirety. This must be a formal (i.e. NOT an indicative) ballot, which will enable us to take strike action early in the summer term.”

The determination expressed here, the commitment to resistance, was reflected in the activism of NUT members and the NUT Committee. An appeal for support was sent to branches across the union and distributed by supporters (significantly, from Hackney and Greenwich associations rather than ELTA) at NUT Conference.

Local estates were leafleted with details of the campaign and a successful mass lobby of the council offices was organised early in the summer term. This dynamism continued throughout the term and a joint public meeting was organised with UCU members from

Tower Hamlets College who also faced cuts in jobs and educational provision – and who are currently engaged in a hugely important and inspirational indefinite strike against these cuts.

Despite the wishes of NUT members at St Paul’s Way, those whose jobs were actually on the line, the NUT Action Committee, meeting at Conference, refused to issue a strike ballot. The delays and

blocks to action that had been seen in Adrian’s case were about to be repeated. The local authority, at a meeting with an NUT delegation that included Harrison, Kenny and left Executive member Kevin Courtney, promised not to issue redundancy notices that term.

This offer was clearly a ploy to head off action: the key aspects of the restructuring plan, and the threat that they posed to members’ jobs, remained intact. The union officials, though, leapt at the offer and turned its attention to attempting to secure concessions during the consultation meetings on the new structure. The NUT group, however, doggedly continued to demand strike action.

A ballot was finally issued in June, three months after the restructuring proposal had been announced! By this stage some NUT members, fearing the union would not defend them, had opted for individual solutions and decided to leave the school at the end of term.

Moreover, while the union officials delayed, the atmosphere in the school had become ever more poisonous and oppressive. Management bullying was rife and regressive educational changes were imposed in a crudely authoritarian way. The ballot result was an impressive 91% Yes vote for action on an 83% turnout. Despite

this result and the obvious commitment to strike action, the union HQ sought to limit action as much as possible. Eventually it informed Tower Hamlets council that there would be two days of strike action at the end of the summer term and two days in the autumn.

Less than a week after this announcement the Action Committee recommended suspending all strike action! In doing so it claimed that the authority was prepared to make a significant concession: it would delay by a term the issuing of redundancy notices. In other words, the authority was using exactly the same ploy as it had used earlier in the term and the NUT officials were going along with it – again! The reaction of NUT members was a mixture of intense anger and incredulity. The union had not achieved its objective, an agreement that all staff would be assimilated into the new structure, and yet it wished to call off action.

The NUT rep, Ammar Al-Ghabban, described what happened when Alex Kenny attempted to sell this thoroughly rotten deal to a meeting of the school NUT group:

“Today, our school union group met to consider the offer. Forty people were present. All of those present dismissed the offer as derisory and voted for the strike action to go ahead. There were no votes against and no abstentions, just total commitment to the strikes going ahead. People clapped after the votes were counted and the result was announced.”

What happened after the meeting, however, was pure treachery. Again Ammar described what happened:

“The Action Committee was informed about the meeting; the points that people passionately made and the vote at the end. Four hours ago, I was informed by Alex Kenny that the Action Committee have decided to pull the strike. I am devastated. All of our members are devastated.”

NUT members were clear that they had been sold-out by the national union. This was the view



not simply of the leading activists in the school group but of the membership as a whole. They had been left defenceless, so far as official action was concerned. The ballot would not be live in September, the threats lodged in the restructure remained and further attacks were on the way.

For most NUT members this was a clear defeat – and it is in the context of this defeat that even more NUT members decided to leave the school. By calling off the action the union had allowed the authority to achieve one of its key objectives at St Paul’s Way – to drive out those teachers with a commitment to trade unionism or community comprehensive schools, and thereby weaken opposition to the proposed Trust.

How in the battles ahead – over cutbacks or privatisation, for instance – do we prevent defeats of the kind described above? Certainly what happened at St Paul’s Way provides a graphic illustration of the trade union bureaucracy’s capacity for sabotaging a struggle. These betrayals flow from the very nature of the bureaucracy: it mediates between the workers and the bosses and derives its material privileges and social prestige from this role.

As result it seeks to control disputes, to emphasise protracted negotiation, to limit rather than facilitate action – approaches seen clearly in the actions of NUT bureaucrats like Tim Harrison. A key task of militants must be to wrest control of disputes away from this bureaucracy, to ensure that rank and file members decide when and how to fight. Inevitably this will involve collisions with the bureaucracy and the need for unofficial action.

Often unofficial action will be the only alternative to defeat and demoralisation. Indeed those of us who were active at St Paul’s Way should have raised the need for such action more forcefully and earlier in the dispute but knowing this would undoubtedly led to our suspension or expulsion from the union it was not a course to be entered into lightly.

We need a rank and file

movement that has as its objective the transformation of the union (indeed all unions) from top to bottom. Such a movement would seek to ensure that all officials were elected, recallable and paid the same wages as those they represent, that all struggles were controlled by union members – not the officials – through strike committees and mass meetings.

The situation at St Paul’s Way also exposed the weakness and vacillation of some of the leading NUT lefts. Alex Kenny, for instance, is national convenor of the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA), the main left current in the NUT. During the dispute, however, his practice, as opposed to his rhetoric, was often indistinguishable from that of the bureaucrats – and many of the school NUT members hold him equally responsible for the defeat that occurred.

The STA is a classically broad leftist organisation and Kenny’s practice reflects this. For the STA the key priorities are capturing and

holding onto union positions, proposing left resolutions at the NUT’s yearly conference and supporting certain national campaigns. Some of this activity is important but it is no substitute for strong NUT groups, militant action and for a union built from the base up. The STA is not a fighting rank and file organisation, it fails to hold its leaders to account and as a result it can be used by individuals as a stepping stone to a position in the union bureaucracy.

St Paul’s Way was a militant and fighting NUT group. It was one of the few workplaces able to shut down in protest the day Bush and Blair launched their war against Iraq. It is a scandal that an Association like ELTA, controlled for decades by the left, could allow it to be defeated.

Dave Gay

* See www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2632 and www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2765

EDUCATION

Lewisham Bridge School – direct action does pay!

ON 23 April, in opposition to our children being decanted from Lewisham Bridge Primary School, three parents occupied the roof of the school. The decant meant the school day would start an hour earlier, children would be bussed a mile and a half and there would be no parental contact with class teachers.

All this despite the fact that Lewisham Council had not gained planning permission for their planned 3-16 school to be built on the site and despite the fact that English Heritage had given the building grade II listed status. Added to this, for the last three years parents and the local community had voiced their objections at every consultation and

every public meeting.

We decided we’d had enough. Inspired by the recent occupations of their factories by the Visteon workers in Enfield, Basildon and Belfast, at 7am that morning we went on the school roof. By 9am four more parents had joined us and three parents stayed on the ground below handing out leaflets and asking passers-by to sign the petition to bring the children back, our first demand was “Lewisham Bridge here to stay. Bring our children back!”

On day two, to our total surprise six Visteon workers arrived from their occupation in Enfield and addressed the inaugural meeting of Hands off Lewisham Bridge. They then joined us on the roof. A week

later six of the Belfast Visteon workers came to visit us and invited us to visit their occupation and join their contingent on the Mayday march in Belfast. The solidarity and support from Visteon was infectious.

Over the next few months, we visited the Belfast occupation, regularly talked with parents from Save Our Schools Glasgow, visited the parents of Barrow in Furness and the school kids who had walked out on strike, went down to the occupation of Charlotte Turner, a Greenwich school occupied by parents facing closure.

We heard from the dispute at St Paul's Way NUT, had regular contact and support from students from Goldsmiths who are also facing the privatisation of their college by Lewisham council, went down to a strike at Haggerston school, visited the Vestas occupation and spoke at the Tower Hamlets strike. Everywhere we went it was clear that the message of we need to take direct action against the bosses attacks was a popular one.

Council retreat

So why did we win? The Lewisham Council Chief Officer's Report entitled "PSF Prendagast Vale; Implications of Listing Decision" explains how it was a combination of the legal challenge to the council, through the listing of the school building, and the resistance of activists through the occupation and refusal to be evicted by the police which proved an intolerable combination for the authorities;

"The decision to close Lewisham Bridge and decant the children to the Mornington Centre has been opposed by a group of parents and activists, on 23 April 2009 protestors moved into unlawful occupation of the premises by camping out on the roof of the toilet block of the site, the council issued proceedings and in June obtained an order for the possession of the site forthwith, the protestors have not complied with the order and the eviction has not yet taken place."

The report continues:

"Any application to secure listed building consent would be controversial and making a convincing case extremely difficult in addition there could be serious reputational consequences if the council was to support demolition in the face of the recent listing... It is clear that a group of parents and activists are opposed to the council plans for the new school at this site, this opposition may continue despite any decision to move the children back to Lewisham Bridge."

The decision to go for the English Heritage listing was key in providing legal support for our action. We should be prepared to use all legal means to put obstacles in their way. But in the end those who create the obstacles can just as easily side step them. After all they make the rules in order to control working class people and communities.

Labour and Greens together

English Heritage is now working closely with Lewisham to ensure their new build goes ahead. But as the council report recognises resistance will continue, and could well be successful after our victory in winning the return of the school to its existing site.

After all Lewisham's elected Labour mayor Sir Steve Bullock is only following the orders of his party; imagine his shock and surprise, when the very people who he thought were on his side upheld the listing. When Ben Bradshaw, the New Labour heritage minister, made his decision to retain the listing he knew that the government could not afford the embarrassment of the backlash that would have occurred. The council's failed eviction attempt had made the news across London and was featured on BBC GLR the whole morning. It even received the support of right-winger Chris Woodhead the former OFSTED chief.

The parents defiance on the eviction day showed the council what we were made of as the bailiffs left, tails between their legs defeated and humiliated. The very act of fighting back changes the

balance of forces. Organised resistance is empowering to both those who actively take part and to those who are indirectly affected.

The Green Party claim to be an alternative to New Labour, to care about local communities, to support ordinary people, to be concerned about the environment. Well maybe everywhere else except Lewisham and London!

Sue Luxton, a local Lewisham Green councillor, was clear right from the beginning. "Give up," she said. Don't fight New Labour. The decant is the best you can get. Accept the neo-liberal privatisation of education. Alongside Darren Johnston the leader of the Greens on Lewisham Council and representative of the Greens on the London Assembly, Sue and five other Green councillors voted to support the decant, to oppose the parents demands for the return of their children and do everything in their power to defeat the local community and defend New Labour.

Neoliberal education

Lewisham Bridge's battle is only a small part of a much larger battle to save community schools and comprehensive state education. The government is clear it wants an extension of privatisation of education. The recent white paper has set out plans for an acceleration of this agenda. They want more schools to become academies. The excuse that it was about bringing more resources into education was never anything more than a fig leaf. As the recession bites, and their target for academies slip, they have abandoned the token £2m that sponsors had to pay to get their grubby hands on a school. Now a sponsor just has just to prove their "commitment to children".

How did KPMG - an accountancy firm in the City - do that? Or Lord Harris of Carpetright? Or Reg Vardy of Vardy PLC? How does an accountant, a carpet salesman or a car salesman provide evidence (something that this government is so fond of) to prove their commitment to children? Now the government have been clever and

enticed universities and colleges into becoming sponsors. Surely they have already proved their commitment to education.

Take Goldsmiths University for example, a college close to Lewisham Bridge, with many students who supported our campaign. It has one of the most prestigious education departments in the country. Its research and analysis of education methods and theories are highly prized in the academic and educational world.

Yet when Goldsmiths management announced last year they wanted to manage three schools in Lewisham the Education Department opposed that proposal. Why? Because the department understand that the academies scheme has nothing to do with education but everything to do with introducing market mechanisms into our schools.

New Labour believes that a child will learn better if parents have to compete for school places. In contrast the education experts at Goldsmiths understand that by handing over accountability of our schools to a private organisations there is a grave danger that educationalists will lose control of the curriculum. And this will hit them too as their teacher training programme is geared to training teachers not market mechanics. There is an alternative way to running schools, an approach based on democracy and accountability, not balance sheets and targets.

Despite the pockets of determined resistance and well-written articles in the Guardian opposing the government's academies and privatisation programme, these attacks are multiplying. In Barrow-in-Furness, following the defeat of the parents campaign against privatisation, as of September 2009 there are no state secondary schools. Barrow parents know that in a few years the primary schools will be next.

Local fire fighting is necessary. Local communities should join together and resist the attacks on our local services. But we shouldn't fall into the trap of believing that our issues are unique.

This is a national strategy, driven by the GATT agreement, which seeks to enable private companies to have access to public services.

The GATT agreement in 1995 paved the way for commoditisation of education, health and housing. The public sector became another "market" for business and so far has been extremely profitable. We need a co-ordinated strategy to stop these measures. The fight back must include teachers, parents and students. Together we are strong.

In spite of the success of Lewisham Bridge, parent power alone is not enough. The one thing that was missing from our campaign, which would have made victory much easier, was solidarity industrial action from the NUT. The NUT in Lewisham, in spite of some teachers coming to support us, delivered no action from the teachers in the school itself. That is not just a problem of the NUT locally, but nationally.

Where was Christine Blower, the NUT president during the struggle

a Tory one. The Tories will not ease up on the gas. Far from it. They are ready to put their foot to the floor.

Despite the NUT's official line of opposition to academies and trusts, despite parents voicing their objections, the government is getting away with their divisive programme and the teaching unions are letting them.

Lewisham

In Lewisham the fight goes on and we have a victory under our belt. The children will return to the school in November but the council are determined to carry out a feasibility study for a new private school. They intend trying to squeeze their square peg into a round hole. This is the determination and arrogance of profit not the motive of providing the best for working class children. Every Child Matters as long as they are gifted, talented and rich!

The action at Lewisham Bridge shows that there is an alternative to

Parents have occupied schools. School students have walked out. The NUT and other education unions need to support them with strike action

of parents across the UK, in Barrow and Glasgow and Lewisham and Greenwich and Wigan and Atherton? Why wasn't she calling for a ballot to strike? These are political attacks on education. We must take political action. This is an ideological attack on education, which must be met by workers in our schools getting organised, and being determined in resistance.

Parents have occupied schools. School students have walked out. The NUT and other education unions need to support them with strike action. We need to follow the example of Haggerston, Tamworth and Tower Hamlets College. These attacks will change the face of education for years to come. The next government will most likely be

the neo-liberal market-driven policies that New Labour is forcing upon us. We do not want our children to be turned into commodities or consumers of education. Education is about empowering young people so that they develop their full potential to take part in a vibrant, free society. Teachers and lecturers provide the scaffolding for students in order that they can explore ideas in a safe and caring environment. It is not about controlling young people and punishing them when they don't fit in or conform to the rules and regulations. It is about defending state education and fighting for the real socialist education we need for all our children's futures.

Eleanor Davies

The British working class and the recession: resignation and resistance

A series of militant struggles against plant closures and job losses – Lindsey, Visteon, Vestas – marked the first half of 2009. It led some on the left to declare that a major turning point has been reached in the fightback against the recession. But, as George Binette documents, the sharp downturn has yet to spark a mass upsurge in resistance

TWO SEPARATE but related waves of unofficial strike action, complete with “flying pickets”, unfolded in the first half of 2009 in Britain’s engineering construction industry; both centred around sackings at a Lincolnshire oil refinery, both involved wildcat action by several thousand other workers at more than 20 refineries, power stations and industrial sites across Britain.

The spring and summer months witnessed the occupation of two of the three factories owned by the car parts manufacturer, Visteon, a spin-off of Ford’s global empire. Ultimately, the occupiers won a substantial boost in redundancy payouts, though no saved jobs.

In June Unite members at the Linamar factory in Swansea secured the reinstatement of their victimised convenor after a show of overwhelming support for indefinite strike action. By late July the sit-in by a small section of the previously unorganised workforce at the Vestas wind turbine plant on the Isle of Wight had become a focus for national media attention and solidarity activity among both trade union militants and climate change campaigners.

Also in June, the RMT, which played an important role in the Vestas occupation and unionised over 200 of the workers, went on to stage a two-day strike on London Underground. This eventually secured concessions on compulsory redundancies. The union has also been involved in several skirmishes with regional rail privateers around Britain.

In education teachers in the NUT mounted a success-

ful campaign of resistance through strike action in July against compulsory redundancies at Haggerston secondary school, while UCU lecturers at Tower Hamlets Further Education College launched an indefinite strike in late August over job and funding cuts.

September saw another indefinite strike get underway as refuse collection workers in Leeds walked off the job in opposition to swingeing pay cuts, associated with the implementation of a "single status" pay package. Meanwhile, in Royal Mail a long-running war of attrition and one day stoppages over the restructuring and threatened privatisation of postal services has finally led to national strike ballot.

A "new wave"?

A September editorial in Socialist Worker declared there was "a new spirit of militancy spreading across the unions" and hinted that the impact of the defeats of the 1980s and 90s were now behind us. Are we seeing a new militancy and a resurgent trade union movement led by rank and file action? Or is this wave of strikes the "normal" response of workers faced with the impact of a sharp recession?

However inspiring and instructive these recent fights have been, militant opposition to a widespread employers' offensive to slash jobs and labour costs have remained very much the exception over the course of the past year, a period that has seen unemployment rising remorselessly. Concession bargaining and "givebacks" by the unions have been at least as common as militant fightbacks, especially in private manufacturing, Honda, Nissan and JCB being prime examples and at British Airways and BT.

A widely publicised demonstration in May in Birmingham, called by the Unite union to protest at the loss of manufacturing jobs, attracted at most 7,000 protesters, even with the backing of the odious Digby Jones, former head of the Confederation of British Industry. Many times more had marched through the same city at the start of this decade when the Rover car plants faced the prospect of closure. Today there is no movement remotely equivalent to the Right to Work marches or the TUC-backed People's March for Jobs of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Thus far, at least, even with the examples of resistance cited above, the response of the trade union-organised working class – itself a much smaller proportion of the total workforce than 30 years ago – has been muted, whether in comparison to the levels of resistance reported in several other countries or in Britain itself during the early 1980s.

Should we be terribly surprised by this? On balance, no. Despite the frequent assumption that economic crisis breeds working class militancy, there has never been a simple correlation, much less a causal relationship, between economic slump and a rising tide of resistance. Indeed, an examination of strike figures during recessions in Britain from the late 1880s onwards indicates that the number of strikes almost invariably falls.¹ Indeed statistics show that it is periods of economic expansion that tend to fuel the growth of industrial struggle, as workers feel confident to push for wage raises and better conditions.

The contrast between Britain and other advanced capitalist states can be overstated, but it is undeniably the case that Britain has not witnessed the phenomenon of "boss-napping" and militant occupations which became almost commonplace in France in early 2009. Nor the months of factory occupations that South Korea has seen, with workers defying brutal military assaults. Or, for that matter, the 100,000 strong protests seen in the late winter and early spring on the streets of Dublin, which very nearly led to a general strike.

Against the backdrop of a remorseless rise in unemployment over the course of 2008 levels of industrial action were not terribly different from those in 2007

Beyond the occasional headline reports of protest and resistance, the government's own statistics appear to confirm an image of relative passivity. Of course, official statistics, however accurate and detailed, tell only a part of the story, but we ignore the evidence they provide at our peril. While revolutionaries must not yield to an intellectual pessimism that breeds despair and paralysis, its antidote is not to be found in a gung-ho optimism that sees in each and every strike or workplace occupation the "end of the downturn" or the harbinger of imminent working class revolt.

A partial upturn in strikes

So what do the official statistics tell us? Against the backdrop of a remorseless rise in unemployment over the course of 2008, levels of industrial action were not very different from those recorded in 2007, that is, the final 12 months of a prolonged economic upturn. According to one analysis published this summer, the number of days lost to employers through strikes in 2008 totalled some 758,000, something of a dip from the previous year. According to author Dominic Hale:

"The [2008] total is higher than the average number of working days lost per year in the 1990s (660,000). However, it is considerably lower than the average for both the 1980s (7.2 million) and the 1970s (12.9 million). The total of 144 stoppages in 2008 is marginally higher than the 2007 total of 142. . . . The number of stoppages has fallen sharply since the 1980s when the average annual number was 1,129. The average number in the 1990s was 273 per year. There were 511,200 workers involved in labour disputes during 2008; this compares with 744,800 in 2007. The number of workers involved is higher than the average number involved in the 1990s (201,600) but below the average in the 1980s (1,040,300)."²

Strikes in "public administration", largely involving members of the PCS in central government departments and UNISON members in local government across England, Wales and the north of Ireland, accounted for more



than four out of five days lost. A further 14% of days lost resulted from strikes in the education sector. A total of 28 stoppages in transport industries added up to 24,800 working days.

Despite the media focus on a "white collar recession" which has ravaged financial services, the real downturn has been in manufacturing employment which shrank dramatically from late 2007 onwards. Each week in 2008

highly regarded sources of pay analysis, noted in a letter to The Guardian:

"The data for April 2009, using figures not seasonally adjusted and excluding bonuses, shows earnings growth of 2.5% in the private sector and 3.3% in the public sector, consistent with IDS research on pay settlements. In the private sector, the official figures show manufacturing (where most freezes are) at 1% and private services at 2.9%."³

Meanwhile, recent developments in the public sector refute the notion that its workforce has been cosseted against the impact of the recession. In early September three unions (UNISON, the GMB and Unite), which between them organise the majority of local authority workers, numbering more than 800,000 across England and Wales, announced that their members had overwhelmingly consented to a pay deal entailing just a 1% "rise" for the vast majority of council workers.

In a joint official statement the union officials charged with negotiating with the local authority employers said: "Acceptance of the offer comes at a time when our members are facing daily threats to jobs and services. They are providing vital council services with the threat of redundancy constantly hanging over them. This vote reflects that threat." Just don't expect us to lead any strikes, then!

State of the unions

But the crucial question for socialists is, how do such, often unelected, full-time officials sell deals that amount to real pay cuts with little more than a murmur of opposition in the big three unions, which account for 60% or more of the TUC-affiliated union membership?

There are several parts to the answer to the question "how do they get away with it?" The combination of structural change in British capitalism – itself in no small measure a product of working class defeats – combined with significant lasting changes in the law, has substantially altered the balance of forces between the main contending classes in favour of the bosses.

Meanwhile, within the organised working class movement itself the effects of neoliberal counter-reform have strengthened the dead hand of bureaucracy. The successive rounds of anti-union legislation of the 1980s and 1990s, left largely untouched by New Labour, have meant protracted delays in initiating official action, which is now the all but exclusive remit of union full-timers. There has also been a much enlarged role for lawyers accompanied by vastly greater difficulties for militant activists in arguing for solidarity action and overtly political strikes.

While the sort of business unionism that became the norm in the post-war USA has shallower roots in Britain, the degree of casual collaboration with the employers and their Human Relations lieutenants has risen sharply.⁴ Still more notable has been the unwillingness or inability of the unions affiliated to the Labour Party to obtain meaningful concessions from the government when the party's reliance on union funding has actually increased dramatically in the last five years.

Trade union density in Britain peaked just as the Thatcher era dawned in 1979. After a dramatic expansion

Generalisations about changing patterns of pay growth or contraction are notoriously problematic due to the uneven pattern of unionisation across the economy

seemed to bring news of still more job losses across manufacturing industries; yet the total number of strike days across the whole of manufacturing industry fell to fewer than 7,000 – down from more than 15,000 the year before – and the lowest total on record.

Resistance and strikes from those in work clearly relate to the perceived threats of ending up on the dole like millions of others. Since the first quarter of 2008 both the proportion of the population aged 16-64 in paid work and the number of people in employment have fallen. The number of advertised vacancies has fallen sharply. The numbers of unemployed people, the unemployment rate and the claimant count have all shot up. All told some 600,000 people lost jobs in 2008 alone (see box) Such a backdrop would hardly seem likely to create an auspicious atmosphere for fights over pay.

Pay in the recession

Average earnings, both including and excluding bonuses, increased by 2.5% in the three months to June 2009 compared with the previous year. This figure suggests the lowest annual growth rate in earnings since comparable records began in 2001. Even so, this average figure was ahead of official estimates of the inflation rate over much of the same period. By late spring 2009 the annual rise in the Consumer Price Index was below 2% and the Retail Price Index was negative.

In fact, generalisations about changing patterns of pay growth or contraction are notoriously problematic due to: the uneven pattern of unionisation across the economy, the differential impact of the recession on various sectors of capital, the persistent reality of skills shortages in certain industries and the varied responses of organised sections of the working class to those attacks that have been unleashed by the employers.

What is clear, however, is that despite the defeats suffered by the organised working class over the past 30 years, the type of wage stagnation that has characterised the US labour market since the early 1980s has not been evident in Britain. As Alastair Hatchett and Ken Mulkearn of Income Data Services (IDS), one of the most

in the 1970s of both union membership and organisation among white collar workers in the private as well as the public sector, more than half of the total labour force was at least nominally unionised. Nearly 12.2 million workers belonged to TUC-affiliated unions in 1979.

Three decades later and the proportion of the workforce in unions has roughly halved, although the hemorrhage of members has lessened since 2005. The most recent official figure, based on the Labour Force Survey, indicates a union density, of 27.4% with approximately 6.5 million members (more than 90% of the total) in TUC-affiliated unions. There was a fall of some 125,000 between 2007 and 2008 and according the TUC's annual report that was due to be released in mid-September there has been a further overall fall in the last year. Combined membership of the 61 TUC affiliated unions reportedly fell by about 300,000 in the year to January 2009 to just over 6.2 million.⁵ With unemployment continuing to rise we can expect further falls in membership.

Across the private sector fewer than one worker in six

(15.5%) was in a trade union, while in the public sector union density stood at just over 57% in 2008. The decline in the proportion of workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement has proved even more dramatic over the past 25-30 years, with barely one in three workers covered by a collective agreement, compared to more than 80% at the start of the 1980s.

Though less well documented than the fall in overall union density there has also been a parallel decline in shop stewards' organisation with the ratio of members to lay representatives worsening dramatically and many stewards' posts going unfilled year after year even in supposed union bastions. On the one hand, this means that there is often no transmission belt between union headquarters and memberships at large, but it also means there are often no organised poles of opposition at workplace or branch level to full-time officials.

While quite a few on the Marxist left continue to see in the aftermath of the "credit crunch" a latter day replay of the 1930s Great Depression, the worst of the recession

Table 1: Membership in the 20 largest TUC affiliates, 1997-2008

Union	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	1997	2004-08 difference	1997-2008 difference
Unison	1.34	1.33	1.31	1.31	1.30	1.38	+3%	-2%
Amicus (then Unite)	1.95	1.94	1.2	1.2	1.18	1.52	n/a	-21% (1997-2006)
TGWU (then Unite)	1.952	1.941	0.777	0.807	0.82	0.891	n/a	-13% (1997-2006)
GMB	0.590	0.576	0.575	0.572	0.6	0.718	-2%	-18%
USDAW	0.356	0.341	0.31	0.34	0.31	0.29	+8%	+23%
PCS	0.305	0.311	0.313	0.311	0.295	0.266	+3%	+15%
NUT	0.283	0.270	0.255	0.246	0.238	0.188	+19%	+50%
NASUWT	0.265	0.251	0.248	0.246	0.224	0.166	+18%	+60%
CWU	0.237	0.240	0.244	0.241	0.258	0.275	-8%	-14%
UCATT	0.129	0.129	0.121	0.113	0.111	0.112	+16%	+15%
UCU	0.117	0.118	0.116	0.115	0.114	0.107	+3%	+9%
ATL	0.121	0.118	0.113	0.112	0.109	n/a	+11%	n/a
Prospect	0.103	0.102	0.102	0.104	0.105	0.108	-2%	-5%
RMT	0.078	0.075	0.073	0.071	0.067	0.06	+16%	+30%
Community	0.067	0.067	0.067	0.07	0.07	0.091	-4%	-26%
EIS	0.06	0.059	0.057	0.056	0.054	0.05	+11%	+20%
FBU	0.045	0.046	0.047	0.049	0.051	0.055	-12%	-18%
Equity	0.036	0.036	0.036	0.037	0.036	0.035	0%	+3%
POA	0.036	0.036	0.035	0.31	0.034	0.027	+6%	+33%
CSP	0.035	0.035	0.035	0.035	0.035	0.029	0%	+21%
Annual Totals	6.159	6.094	6.072	6.345	6.032	6.365	-3%	-3%
Total TUC membership	6.538	6.471	6.463	6.452	6.424	6.756	-3%	+3%

Source: G Gall, "The State of the Union Movement Today", University of Hertfordshire Centre for Research in Employment Studies, August 2009 p2 adapted from TUC Annual Directories (1998-2009).

LABOUR MARKET

Unemployment continues to rise

THE EMPLOYMENT rate for people of working age was 72.7% for the three months to June 2009, down nearly a percentage point from the previous quarter and down 2% over the year. The total number of people in employment for the three months to June 2009 was 28.93 million, down 271,000 over the quarter and down 573,000 over the year.

The unemployment rate was 7.8% for the three months to June 2009, up by 0.7% over the previous quarter and by 2.4 over the 12-month period. Officially, the ranks of the unemployed rose by 220,000 over the quarter and by 750,000 over the year, reaching 2.43 million by June.

The claimant count, which measures the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, reached 1.58 million in July 2009. It has not been higher since May 1997, the month New Labour came into government. The count rose 24,900 over the previous month and by 709,000 over the year.

The number of redundancies in the three months to June 2009 was 277,000, a fall of some 9,000 over the previous quarter, but still marking an increase of 150,000 from the same quarter in 2008.

There were 427,000 job vacancies listed in the three months to July 2009. This was the lowest figure since comparable records began in 2001 and marked a decline of some

26,000 over the previous quarter and 203,000 over the year from July 2008. Most sectors have shown falls in vacancies over the second quarter of 2009 with the largest decline occurring in finance and business services (down 13,000).

The inactivity rate is an estimate of the proportion of people of working age, who have dropped out of the official labour market. The inactivity rate rose to 21% for the three months between April and June 2009, up 0.3% over the previous quarter and an overall rise of 0.1% over the year. The number of economically inactive people of working age rose by 127,000 over the quarter and by 83,000 over the year to reach 7.95 million.

Table 2: Union density by Industrial Sector (1995-2008)

Year	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08
Agriculture/forestry/fishing	7.4	8.6	9.0	12.3	9.0	10.5	8.8	8.9	9.3	n/a	8.5	9.0	7.9	7.0
Mining/quarrying	35.8	37.7	32.1	29.9	36.2	31.8	25.3	23.6	28.0	27.3	21.2	23.5	23.1	18.6
Manufacturing	32.7	31.2	30.4	29.9	28.5	27.7	27.2	26.7	26.2	24.6	24.8	22.2	21.8	20.4
Electricity/gas/water	67.0	61.6	62.7	57.7	52.4	53.9	53.4	50.5	47.4	46.9	47.9	49.3	45.6	41.7
Construction	26.2	25.5	21.8	20.6	21.1	20.1	19.2	17.5	18.9	16.7	15.7	15.8	15.5	14.5
Wholesale/retail	11.4	10.8	10.8	10.9	11.7	11.4	11.7	11.3	11.7	11.5	11.0	11.1	11.3	11.9
Hotels/restaurants	8.1	6.8	7.2	6.7	6.2	5.4	5.4	5.9	5.4	5.0	4.2	5.6	4.9	5.3
Transport/storage/comm	48.8	47.6	45.7	42.5	42.2	42.5	42.2	41.5	42.3	41.3	42.2	41.2	40.1	39.2
Financial intermediation	37.2	36.4	33.7	31.1	30.2	29.9	27.0	27.2	25.9	26.6	24.4	24.3	22.3	20.8
Business services	13.3	12.8	11.7	11.3	11.4	10.3	10.6	10.6	11.0	10.5	10.1	10.0	10.2	10.0
Public admin/defence	58.8	60.7	62.8	60.7	60.7	59.4	59.3	59.5	56.9	56.2	57.1	57.3	56.8	55.8
Education	56.1	54.9	54.8	53.8	54.1	54.0	53.2	54.7	54.8	54.9	56.0	55.1	55.3	54.1
Health, social work	48.1	47.2	47.2	46.1	45.0	46.3	44.7	44.9	44.4	43.8	44.2	43.4	43.4	40.7

Source: G Gall, "The State of the Union Movement Today", August 2009 p5

does appear to be at an end. Even so, unemployment will continue to rise well into 2010 and all three of the main parties have made it plain that the public sector workforce must suffer considerable pain to cover the cost of the multi-trillion pound bailout of the banks. In short, the stage is set for intensified attacks and potentially sharper conflict.

The period ahead

How will the unions respond to these inevitable attacks? In surveying the likely shape of working class resistance we have to start by taking account of the legacies that bear down on today's trade unionists and the workforce as whole. As ever, those who shall make history do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing and the recession has undoubtedly made the terrain of struggle that much more inhospitable for many.

But if on top of the de facto pay freezes, large scale job cuts, a longer working week and attacks on other terms and conditions, including pensions, are in the offing for the public sector workforce then there might be some good reasons to believe that the real upsurge in struggle will come in 2010 and beyond.

Union density is no guarantee of combativity, but public sector workforces remain much more unionised than their private sector counterparts and there is some evidence that there has been an upturn in recruitment to UNISON in 2009, not least among younger workers. This is all the more remarkable given the fact that there has been no national campaign of note waged by the union since the disappointing local authority pay strikes across England and Wales in July 2008.

The more generalised character of the threatened attacks also creates the possibility of a much broader response, involving far larger numbers of workers across wider geographical areas. While the media and employers have frequently sought with some success to put public sector workers against service users, there is also the enhanced potential for alliances between local tenants and service users likely to be hit by cuts, which again opens up the prospect for generalisation of struggles.

In some cases, as in the campaigns to save primary schools in Glasgow and Lewisham, parents may kick-start campaigns where union support is either weak or absent, though successful resistance on a large scale to closures and privatisations will almost inevitably entail

strikes and occupations involving workers in the directly affected services.

Of course, there can be no way of knowing in advance what level of spontaneous resistance forthcoming attacks may provoke. What is, however, certain is that such resistance will face not only the obstacles imposed by the employers and the state, but a variety of forms of opposition from existing union leaderships, particularly in the three big-

Those who shall make history do not do so in circumstances of their own choosing and the recession has made the terrain of struggle much more inhospitable

gest unions, with the anti-union laws serving as a pretext for delay and inaction, however strong the evidence of members' willingness to fight.

There can be no pretending that "the left" is in control of any of these unions. The challenge for militant activists is clear in UNISON, the GMB and Unite, the main props of the Labour government. But there are also lessons to be learned from the experience of ostensibly left leaderships in other unions such as the PCS. There an emphasis on capturing existing union structures has yielded little or no fruit for the rank and file while failing to transform the unions into vibrant democratic organs of struggle that are truly fit for purpose.

Out of the coming struggles the challenge is to build the horizontal networks within and between unions whose members are on the frontline of attacks, to make workplaces multiple centres of resistance.

ENDNOTES

1. J Kelly, *Trade Unions and Socialist Politics*, Verso 1988, p 275
2. D Hale, *Economic & Labour Market Review*, June 2009
3. The Guardian, Letters, 7 July 2009
4. For example, a 3 July article in *The Guardian* described a meeting of union leaders and their traditional foe (in the shape of human resources directors) at the TUC in central London. The aim was to bring the often warring sides together for a friendly debate on the future of union and employer relations.
5. *The Guardian* online, 11 September 2009.



LEFT UNITY

For better or for

IN MAY 2009, with the British National Party's storm troopers elected to the European Parliament, Britain's principal socialist organisations, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP) together with the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), launched variations on a call for left unity. The Communist Party of Britain (CPB) joined in with its own call later on.

The reason for these four calls for unity from four very different organisations was clear: the Euro elections and the collapse of the Labour vote had not resulted in any sort of meaningful advance of the left. On the contrary, the results confirmed that the Tories will win the next election.

For the first time in British history a fascist party has made a serious electoral breakthrough in a national election and the political, organisational and numerical weakness of the left in Britain has been brutally exposed.

The scale of the setback that the Euro elections represented is revealed by the votes cast. This election cannot be dismissed as an irrelevance. In one sense it was a better guide to the state of the political nation than a general election. It was an election in which all of the most conscious political people in Britain – from the party activists through to the active supporters, i.e. all those who think politics is important enough to be actively involved in – voted.

Those who abstained in this election – an abstention that many of them knew would aid the fascists – cannot be assumed to be somehow politically advanced. True, they were fed up with Labour. But they failed to understand the decisive political significance of a Tory victory and a fascist breakthrough.

The most class conscious people in the labour movement voted Labour, SLP, No2EU or SSP. Together they totalled 2,718,515 people. These people are the active core, or active supporters of the labour movement. This was the "bare bones" working class vote, stripped of the radical middle classes who voted Liberal or Green. The most "conscious" people on the right voted Tory, UKIP, BNP and English Democrats. Together they totalled 7,920,019. The active members or active supporters of the right and far right

outnumber us to the tune of 5.25million. That was the ugly reality behind the European parliament result.

There were plenty of people on the left who consoled themselves with talk of percentages, "good starts" and so on. After all, as the Socialist Party and Bob Crow claimed, 153,236 for No2EU candidates was surely a creditable vote for a brand new party that faced a media blackout.

A simple comparison shows the problem with this kind of thinking. Most people did not have a clue who the English Democrats were, didn't get a single leaflet from them and missed their election broadcast. Yet these rabid nationalist reactionaries mustered almost twice as many votes as No2EU – and they got one of their members elected as Mayor of Doncaster. Why did they do so much better than No2EU? Partly this was because of the inherent problems with No2EU as a left alternative (see Permanent Revolution 13 for a critique of No2EU) and partly because of the general weakness and marginalisation of the left.

One schematic hope would be that a Tory government will provoke widespread resistance to attacks. Workers reined in by bureaucrats in Unison, Unite and the GMB who are fundamentally loyal to Brown will be let loose should the Tories come in. Resistance will spiral and the balance of forces will change. The political consequences of such widespread action would be to reinvigorate activists, boost the left and redraw the political map once again.

The reason this is a schema is that it does not take account of the very real weakness of organisation, the scarcity of committed activists and the impact of two decades of new realist/service unionist ideology across the movement. After all, if fights are provoked by attacks then why has the generalised response – faced with the terrible attacks on jobs and pay in this recession – been to accept pay cuts and negotiate redundancy packages (see article in this issue)?

The truth is that Visteon, Lindsey, the London Underground strikes, the Royal Mail strikes and the parents' struggles against school closures are examples of resistance amongst either the best organised unions or the angriest communities. They are not the norm across the movement. That will not change overnight even if a Tory government

Table 2: Union de

Year

Agriculture/forestry/fishing

Mining/quarrying

Manufacturing

Electricity/gas/water

Construction

Wholesale/retail

Hotels/restaurants

Transport/storage/comm

Financial intermediation

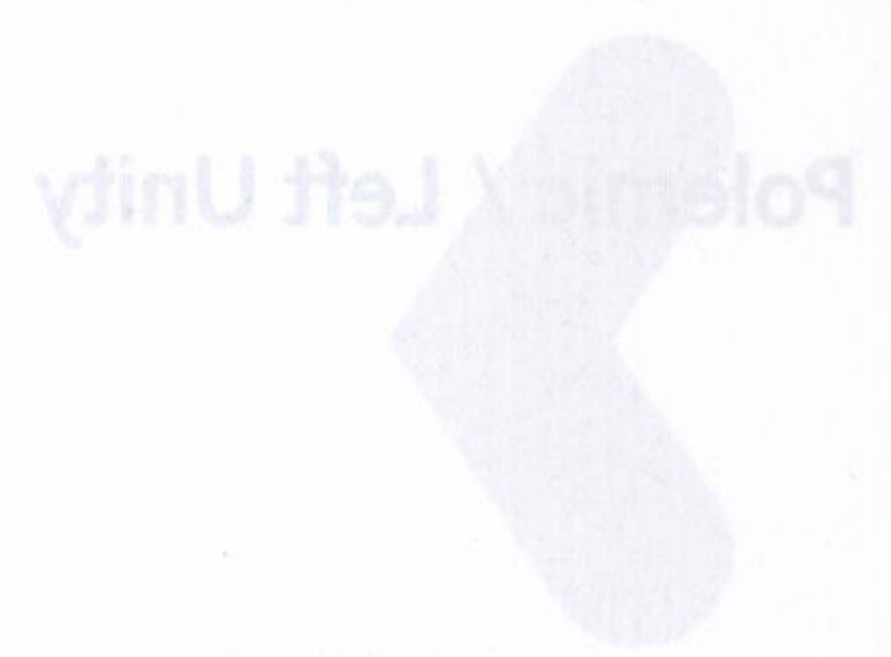
Business services

Public admin/defence

Education

Health, social work

Source: G-Call



Only a few months ago the fragments of the British left were sending each other sweet scented letters and proposing engagement, if not marriage. But all of a sudden, writes Mark Hoskisson, love no longer seems to be in the air

worse?

comes in. Of course, there might be a revolt – and that would be excellent. But the left must prepare for the most likely development not the most preferable one.

The victory of the right in the elections will have an impact on the Labour Party and the unions. It will, eventually, lead to a change of leadership in the party. However, between now and the general election, it will produce a massive drive for unity around Gordon Brown's leadership of the Labour Party. That is why arch-Blairite Hazel Blears has issued a grovelling apology for her earlier attack on Brown. The calculation at the highest levels of the party is that a leadership challenge now, in advance of the election, will guarantee annihilation at the polls.

A unity drive and an attempt to salvage something from the election will, on the other hand, enable a smooth transition to a new leadership and a renewal of Labour in opposition after the election. And that is what the Blair and Brown factions have agreed upon. That is why Brown has survived the calamity. Behind this calculation lies the belief that a deal can be struck between the factions after the elections and a new leadership axis, palatable to the union leaders, enthroned.

If all goes according to plan this will happen without any irritating challenge from the left. And if the union leaders are given sufficient promises within this process then all could go according to plan. The left cannot mount a serious civil war inside the party after electoral defeat next year in the way the Bennite-led movement did in the early 1980s. There is still less prospect of them being able to do very much at all if the key union leaders and the Labour leaders maintain their alliance. Only a split between the emerging Johnson/Miliband new leadership and Woodley/Simpson/Prentis in the union bureaucracy could open up a real space for the left to be able to make any advances.

Such a breach with the union leaders is unlikely. The union leaders know the Tories will undo the entire network of government/union co-operation that has underpinned the period since 1997. They know that their already slender rights will come under renewed attack from a Cameron government. They are also aware of how weak

rank and file organisation is and will fear that even if they authorise a fightback against Tory attacks the troops may not respond with the sort of determination that was shown by workers in the first seven years (1979-86) of the last period of Tory rule.

This all means the union leaders will stress unity now, to try to preserve a Labour government, and stress unity after the coming defeat to help reshape Labour into a credible electoral alternative as quickly as possible. They will sanction a period of protest – today against the impact of the recession and probably against Labour MPs who have been tarnished in the expenses row, and later against the Tories – but they will not put forward a perspective of widespread class action.

The union leaders will stress unity now, to try to preserve a Labour government, and after the coming defeat to help reshape Labour into an electoral alternative

They will have a say on the complexion of the new leadership and they will be promised a new deal by that leadership that they can sell to their members. A quicker than expected return to economic growth will strengthen their conviction that this is the right approach and that a Labour government under Johnson and Miliband has a fair chance of regaining ground without having to sit out another 18 years of Tory rule.

In response to these possibilities – and the fact of the fascists' growth – the idea of left unity appeared to gain currency.

The SWP put out an open letter that argued: "... we do believe we have to urgently start a debate and begin planning to come together to offer such an alternative at the next election, with the awareness that Gordon Brown might not survive his full term."

The leader of the RMT Bob Crow declared:

"We now need urgent discussions with political parties, campaigns and our colleagues in other unions like the CWU to develop a political and industrial response to this crisis."

The Socialist Party-led Campaign for a New Workers Party (CNWP) decided to call and raise the round of betting when former Labour MP and SP/CNWP leader Dave Nellist said:

By putting themselves forward as advocates of unity the SWP are manoeuvring to get themselves a place at the table if larger forces come together

"We always knew the process for establishing a new working class party, if done seriously, would take time. Whilst we have a sense of urgency and hope there will be a substantial number of independent working class candidates at the next election, which will be at most nine or ten months away (or perhaps even sooner), such is the importance of the political rebuilding work we are engaged in then, then it's better it's done well than just quickly."

Last but not least, the CPB finally pitched in, via an article from Rob Griffiths in the Morning Star, which urged:

"The Communist Party is clear that a Tory victory will ensure that the ruling class offensive will be released with full force. In many constituencies, the labour movement and the left will therefore have to campaign for Labour candidates, keenly so for social-democratic and socialist rather than New Labour ones.

But the left and non-Labour affiliated unions should also seek to unite around socialist and progressive candidates in other seats, where there is no danger of a Tory victory and where Labour is being misrepresented by a warmongering, police-state privatiser. The Communist Party calls for a united front of left and labour movement organisations to lift the level of popular and industrial struggle in Britain and to hammer out, if possible, a common approach to the forthcoming general election." (25 August)

It is interesting that in the first three of these statements the word "urgent" is used in one form or another. Consult any dictionary you like and it will tell you that urgent means something that demands immediate action. Far from there being immediate action, a full four months have elapsed since the May elections. Not even rudimentary unity – that could have begun to help the component parts learn to work together and trust each other – has been established.

While the fascists revelled in their success, the left issued several rival calls for unity and then began a feud over which was the right one.

An important part of the reason for this failure lies in the type of unity that all four organisations are suggesting – electoral unity. The problem is we have been here

before, all too often, from the Socialist Alliance (2000-04 then wound up by the SWP), through Respect (2004-08 then split by the SWP), through to No2EU (set up with no democratic forums by the RMT, CPB and SP). And in Scotland there was the wrecking of the Scottish Socialist Party by an internecine feud that seemed to owe more to scandals and leadership infighting than to political principles.

When you look back at these formations and see their charred remains littering the political landscape like burnt out huts, you can understand why both the proponents of the latest round of unity, not to mention the other smaller left groups and independents, are sceptical. Electoral unity hasn't worked. Leaving aside George Galloway's one-off triumph in Bethnal Green in 2005 on the back of the powerful anti-war movement, faction fighting and miserable voting returns have been the prevalent features of "unity" over the last decade. And no one is prepared to forgive and forget.

One reason for the SWP's Open Letter for unity was its concern at the development of No2EU. It recognised that the SP has strengthened itself in the last period and, by participating in No2EU, got itself in with the RMT. The SWP will also have noted that the CPB – which they originally hoped would join the now deeply divided Respect – is in this alliance. And this alliance is a far more likely partner for Mark Serwotka and the PCS, who ran an extremely energetic and very political campaign against the fascists in the elections, than the shrunken SWP.

By putting themselves forward again as the advocates of unity the SWP are manoeuvring to get themselves a place at the table if these larger forces come together to consider what they do in the general election. That is why the SWP's call is being made now and being framed as a call for a united left election campaign, not a united left organisation.

But hopes for the success of this approach have faded fast. The SP replied by telling the SWP that they did not believe them. Hannah Sell wrote, defending the terms and conditions of the No2EU coalition, which she labelled a federal approach to unity:

"But this is not the position the SWP took in the past, in both the Socialist Alliance and Respect. The Open Letter does not say if you have since changed your approach. The experience of ourselves and others on the left is not encouraging."

Others in the SP have criticised what they called the SWP's "rule or ruin" approach to previous unity initiatives.

The SWP have responded insisting they are genuine about unity, but Chris Bambery hit back at the SP by claiming that the January strikes at the Lindsey Oil Refinery were marred by nationalism and dismissing the No2EU vote as a failure. And all of this has meant that the SWP's letter has been turned into the type of petition they use on their weekly town centre stalls – a means of getting names and addresses of potential contacts.

To be fair to the SWP the No2EU model that Hannah Sell defends was both politically and organisationally flawed. Politically it was tarnished by nationalism and Little Englandism. Organisationally, it was as bureaucratic as they

come – no open meetings, no transparent decision-making and no democratic forums in which decisions could be debated before being taken. This hardly gives her the moral high ground when criticising the SWP's own past misdemeanours.

Moreover, the SP themselves have voiced concern over the democratic deficit that existed in No2EU. It did not concern them sufficiently to make them call for a fundamentally different approach, but it has introduced a note of caution into their statements, issued via the CNWP. Dave Nellist's words, quoted above, bear repeating. He does not evince any real hope that there will be a united left organisation in place for the election. Instead he expresses the "hope [that] there will be a substantial number of independent working class candidates at the next election".

Likewise, Hannah Sell, in her reply to the SWP, says: "The RMT is now discussing a trade union list for the general election (obviously not under the name No2EU). The best way forward would be for all socialist forces, including the SWP, to work to develop this initiative."

So, from a united electoral organisation the emphasis is switching to a trade union list which the SP think will need to be supported and developed presumably as a step towards a new mass workers' party.

Whether or not a trade union list could become a step towards a party is a fair enough point of discussion. It would obviously depend on a number of things. Could trade unionists who are in parties or groups stand and freely espouse their own programme as well as any agreed for the list? Could the policies and tactics of the campaign be discussed by the union memberships through democratic forums rather than behind closed doors by national leaders? How would a trade union list relate to working class communities, immigrant and migrant workers' groups and local campaigns? Would it be open to participation from non-union members?

The answers to such questions would provide a clue as to whether or not there was real intent on the part of the RMT leadership to move towards a new united political organisation. The signs are not good. There are rumours that something will be announced at some point, but there is no clear indication that anything resembling a democratic socialist electoral coalition, let alone a democratic united socialist organisation, is on the cards. And frankly, something announced from on high on a "take it or leave it" basis is unlikely to motivate many beyond those who rallied around No2EU – which in truth was not many.

So what's happened – why has the urgent unity called for back in May not come about? The answer may well lie with the CPB which, despite its small size, exercises considerable influence in a number of unions.

The article by Rob Griffiths, quoted above, obviously represents the end of a long process of discussion in the CPB following the No2EU experiment. It takes as its starting point the need to recognise that what is needed is not a new united organisation – electoral or otherwise – but a new united way of working and a new electoral strategy.

Rob's article makes some good points about the need for the left to unite in action in campaigns, communities and unions to fight the bosses – what he calls a "united

front of left and labour movement organisations". But at the core of the article is a statement that the CPB now does not favour building an electoral alternative to Labour in the general election. Rather it proposes to support a whole number of broadly defined social democratic Labour candidates while also supporting, "socialist and progressive candidates in other seats" where their vote would not let the Tories in or where the sitting Labour MP is an unreconstructed Blairite.

In a nutshell this means not challenging New Labour

The fallout from this is likely to leave the SWP's call for unity as just that – a call. It is likely to see a patched together list of candidates in a limited number of seats

at the polls, but only challenging New Labour candidates in safe Labour seats probably via the RMT's trade union list.

Faced with the prospect of a Tory general election victory, the CPB have pulled back from the idea of a No2EU generalised challenge to Labour and have, through their influence on Bob Crow and other union leaders, effectively knocked on the head the idea of anything other than a limited trade union list of candidates.

This, by the way, is not because the CPB agree with the idea of using critical support for Labour as a means of winning reformist workers over to revolutionary goals by going through the experience of how reactionary reformism can be when in power. No, it is because at the core of their strategy for change – still and despite everything that has happened under New Labour – lies the idea of evolutionary change through a left wing Labour government, but now with an add-on insurance policy that if this does not transpire, at least we will have prepared the ground for a new organisation by standing some independent union candidates.

What this looks like is as if two wings of the CPB – traditional Labour-oriented wing and new party wing – have reached a compromise deal. Rob Griffiths expresses this deal well:

"Out of unity in action will emerge the solution to the crisis of political representation in the working class in Britain, most likely through either reclaiming the Labour Party or re-establishing a mass party of the labour movement."

The fallout from all of this is likely to leave the SWP's call for unity as just that – a call. It is likely to see a patched together umbrella list of candidates in a limited number of seats. What it will not see is the birth of a united left organisation. Which is why love is no longer in the air and why events at which the left have been gathering over the summer, like the National Shop Stewards Network in June and the Unite United Left meeting in September, have seen the urgency of unity replaced by the old routine of bun fighting!

Does all of this represent a missed opportunity to renovate the left, recreate a mass socialist influenced labour movement and the fertile soil for the growth of revolutionary consciousness? Yes – because to most people out there it will not be understood in terms of subtle shifts of position and perspective. It will be one more item of evidence that while the fascists seem to be able to get their act together enough to win two MEPs and over 50

Any new coalition organisation should be explicitly socialist and class-based and agree an action programme on the key issues to focus the fightback

local councillors, the left are busy pressing self-destruct buttons.

Which is why, despite the chicanery that has ensued following the first calls for unity back in May, we restate the key elements of what we believe is the right way to proceed towards building real left unity.

If a united socialist organisation, or even a more limited socialist electoral coalition, is created we do not believe it is the answer to the working class' problems. As revolutionaries we are duty bound by principles of basic honesty and decency to tell people what we believe – that a revolutionary party, committed to the overthrow of capitalism, is needed. But we do regard the creation of a united socialist organisation or coalition as a potential step towards rebuilding a sizeable socialist movement. To that extent we would regard it as a step forward for the workers' movement.

We would make clear that we accept participation in such an organisation on a minimal programme of socialist demands while retaining our right to put forward our own views and answers to those questions left unanswered by the programme of the coalition. We would follow Marx's advice to Bracke in the famous letter prefacing his Critique of the Gotha Programme:

“Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes. If, therefore, it was not possible – and the conditions of the time did not permit it – to go beyond the Eisenach programme, one should simply have concluded an agreement for action against the common enemy. But by drawing up a programme of principles (instead of postponing this until it has been prepared for by a considerable period of common activity) one sets up before the whole world landmarks by which it measures the level of the Party movement.”

Marx worked to prevent the new party agreeing a programme because the revolutionary one couldn't be won. He was for a minimal programme of action so that com-

mon activity could increase the scope for revolutionary ideas. Revolutionaries should approach a new left coalition in the same way.

Any new coalition or united left organisation should be explicitly socialist and class-based and agree an action programme on the key issues to focus the fightback against whoever forms the next government. It must elevate the centrality of workers' action above all else. But it is just as important to bring real new forces into any new organisation. They can act as a real counter-weight to the existing left groups and their apparatus. A new organisation needs to be bottom-up: it needs strong local groups if a national coalition is to be stopped from travelling the same path as the Socialist Alliance and Respect. It should wage a campaign against the top-down mentality that predominates amongst the centrist left.

It should champion the drawing in of activists from the local unions, campaigns, from the climate campaign, from the anti-fascist campaigns, from the colleges etc. It should argue that prior to the formation of any national coalition there should be a three month campaign in every locality to build local Socialist Coalitions. Potentially sympathetic unions like the RMT, FBU and PCS should be asked to finance meetings, rallies, activities, local conventions. Their premises should be made available to local members to produce leaflets, websites, Facebook campaigns, text messaging drives, local meetings, socialist events, open “surgeries” for local communities telling people what socialist MPs would do and acting as organising centres for local struggles, campaigns and individuals issues.

These activities should all be aimed at creating vigorous and large local groups that can find a voice that is strong enough to shout down the petty bureaucrats in the sects and the not so petty bureaucrats in the unions if they try to turn the coalition into a passive vote gathering machine for themselves. We should try to build active socialist coalitions, oriented to the class struggle and centred on action in the run up to any national organisations being set up. Only that way will be able draw in forces to make any new coalition or united organisation a meaningful answer to the political crisis that has led to the election of two fascist MPs and that is likely to see the return of a Tory government next year.

Alongside this revolutionaries should continue their efforts to try and turn the fragmented forces of resistance into a network – especially in the unions – with all those who are or have been in struggle to become champions of the idea of struggle within the movement. Such militants working closely with any united left organisation or coalition (if it comes about) can help ensure that the idea of organising the working class for a fightback now is kept at the forefront of any moves towards left unity. And if that happens then left unity can become a stepping stone towards the building of the revolutionary party that the working class both needs and deserves.



AHMADINEJAD AND THE ELECTIONS

Iran's simmering crisis

The regime of President Ahmadinejad looks secure; the opposition has been cowed and a new hard-line government is in place. But this stability is deceptive, says Stuart King

IN JUNE more than one million people took to the streets of Tehran to protest at what they believed was a stolen election. In one sense all elections are "stolen" in the Islamic Republic of Iran, because all the potential candidates are carefully vetted by the religious leaders on the Guardian Council. In the recent elections a few hundred hopefuls were whittled down to just four. One of these, Mir Hossain Mousavi, a former economics minister, suddenly became a real threat to the stability of Iran.

This was not because of his politics – if he had not been a trusted supporter of the Islamic Republic he would never have been allowed to stand – but because he clashed viciously with outgoing President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in front of millions on Iranian TV. Suddenly masses of people realised there was a split amongst their rulers; there was going to be a fight.

Millions of youth and students, workers and poor, women angered at their repression, intellectuals and even reforming clerics joined the campaign in favour of Mousavi. Not because they necessarily agreed with his programme for change, which if anything was pro-market and neo-liberal, but because it was a chance to be rid of the hated Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad was, and is, a hard-line conservative, a staunch supporter of dictatorship who insists that all sectors of society must conform to strict Islamic codes laid down by the government and clerical establishment of Iran. Students and youth had particular reasons to hate him, as they had been the subject of intense repression during his previous four years in office.

Arrests, harassment and beatings have been common for anyone who challenged the strict rule of the Islamists. Students who called for more democracy and cultural freedom were visited in the night by thugs from the Islamic militia. Youth who preferred listening to western music or TV, women who broke the strict Islamic dress code or

workers who organised strikes for better pay or stolen wages – all felt the wrath of the Islamic state. For gay men and lesbians it was even worse. They were imprisoned and even executed; many were pressured into surgical sex re-assignment.

A country in uproar

When Ahmadinejad was declared the winner in highly dubious circumstances the country exploded. Youth poured onto the streets to protest and were joined by all sections of Iranian society that wanted to be rid of Ahmadinejad and his regime. More than a million people marched in the major cities across Iran. Every night the streets of Tehran echoed to cries of “Death to the dictatorship” shouted from the rooftops.

Mousavi had to run to catch up with the mass movement, to try and keep some level of control. After some hesitation he appeared at mass street protests that pushed him into calling for a re-run of the election. He was soon joined in voicing this demand by another reformist presidential candidate – the cleric and former parliamentary speaker, Mehdi Karroubi.

The Islamic regime was thrown off balance at first, promising to look at the election complaints. But soon it launched a ferocious counter-attack, using not only the police but also the armed thugs of the Basij militia, a three million strong force organised to protect the dictatorship.

Universities were stormed, students and protestors killed in their dormitories and shot on the streets. The numbers of deaths, probably between 30-70, will never be known exactly because the families of the victims have been intimidated into silence. Thousands more were arrested, beaten, tortured, and sometimes raped in prison. By the end of June the demonstrators had been beaten off the streets.¹

Having thrown back the mass protest, the government then turned on the leaders of the opposition. The Supreme

The underlying causes of the Iranian crisis of June have not gone away, indeed they have been exacerbated by these events. There is a deep crisis of the Iranian state

Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khameni, who had backed Ahmadinejad throughout the crisis, joined him in an onslaught on the opposition. Mass arrests took place of those who in the past had supported reform and those in Mousavi's “Green Movement”. Some were accused of being in league with the British and US Embassies, others of promoting the protest movement.

By August a series of mass “show trials” were underway. In one TV extravaganza 200 accused people were shown on TV admitting their “guilt” and asking for forgiveness. One of the best known reformers, Saeed Hajjarian, had his confession read for him – he was paralysed and in a

wheelchair, having survived an assassination attempt in 2000. Other conservative clerics called for the arrest of even more senior “oppositionists” including two former presidents, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Muhammed Khatami.

The trials and threats were designed to terrorise the opposition into silence. Once Ahmadinejad had been inaugurated as president and his government overwhelmingly confirmed by parliament in September, these threats became less strident.

Why the protests were defeated

The government had survived its most serious revolutionary crisis since 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic. The mass protest movement faced two interlinked problems that it was unable to overcome. Firstly, while the movement was primarily an anti-Ahmadinejad one, focused around the slogan “Who stole my vote?” everyone knew the beneficiary of any re-run election would be Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Mousavi represents a wing of the ruling class in Iran that wants to “modernise” the economy. A victory for Mousavi would have meant an attempt to privatise state industries and reduce subsidies on basic goods. Crucially, it would have led to a re-orientation of Iran's economy towards the west – in the form of joint ventures with loans from the World Bank and IMF. None of this appealed to the major force in Iranian society that could have tipped the scales in favour of the protests – the Iranian working class.

The workers, in particular the oil, gas, car and transport workers, had the power to paralyse the country and the economy and bring the dictatorship to its knees. But to go on strike, to organise mass strike action, blockades and occupations, meant risking not only livelihoods but lives. Not surprisingly, few were prepared to make this sacrifice for a politician who offered nothing to the workers except privatisation and job insecurity. The workers in their vast majority stayed on the sidelines of the protest despite their sympathy for the demonstrators and students.²

To breakdown this reticence the political leadership of the protests would have to have been taken away from the pro-western reformists. The movement would have needed to strive not just to annul the election and secure a re-run but fight to dismantle the whole rigged electoral system. This would have meant raising the demand for a new constituent assembly and a new constitution – a demand to put an end to the ability of the Supreme Leader and Guardian Council to block the people's will.

Such demands – to dismantle the Islamic Republic as it was established in the early 1980s – would have immediately led to a break with Mousavi and his ilk. To reach out to the workers such a struggle would also have needed to offer solutions to their burning social and political demands – freedom for the jailed trade unionists, freedom to organise in trade unions, for job security, a decent living wage protected from Iran's rampant inflation, an end to discrimination against women and homosexuals.

A revolutionary constituent assembly was needed, convened and protected by the masses themselves, something that could only have come about by the defeating of the



Basiji militia and its Revolutionary Guard allies on the streets – and that in itself would have demanded a general strike and insurrectionary struggle.

The radical wing of the movement, primarily the youth and students who organised the protests through mobile phones and internet, did not have the time, the political experience or the revolutionary organisation to develop such a programme for the movement. They were thrown onto the defensive by the government onslaught, particularly the attacks on the universities. It quickly became a matter of surviving the onslaught and keeping the protests going rather than having the time to develop links with the workers' movement, a movement which itself has been heavily repressed and weakened in the last period.

Yet the underlying causes of the Iranian crisis of June have not gone away; indeed, they have been exacerbated by these events. There is a deep crisis of the Iranian state that is both economic and political.

Splits in the ruling class

The regime that emerged out of the 1979 revolution was a particular type of clerical dictatorship. The broad coalition of clerics, democrats, socialists and trade unionists that overthrew the Shah quickly disintegrated as its clerical wing took control of the political process. In 1980-81, in the midst of an invasion of Iran by Saddam Hussein's Iraq, a reign of terror was launched, first against the Marxist left, then the trade unions and finally against anyone in favour of a bourgeois democratic constitution.

Out of this counter-revolution, directed by Ayatollah Khomeini and the clerical movement around him, came a constitution that defined the purpose of the state as creating the "conditions under which may be nurtured the noble and universal values of Islam". To ensure this happened, unelected religious institutions – the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council – were given the ultimate authority over national affairs. But these reactionary bodies sat alongside a popularly elected president, parliament and municipal authorities. This seemingly democratic aspect of the Islamic Republic conferred legitimacy on the state in the eyes of the people. But it also set up a potential clash between institutions whose power derived from different sources.

In Khomeini's view the people were "deficient" and they needed to be "perfected" and this was the task of the clergy. To prevent conflicts between the elected and unelected parts of government all candidates to the elected institutions are carefully vetted by the Guardian Council to prevent anyone who might challenge the system from standing.

But such a system does not prevent debate, argument and factions within the Islamic framework. Indeed the modern history of the Iranian state since 1979 has seen a variety of factions within its ruling class vying for power and putting forward alternative political and economic policies. There is even a powerful Expediency Council set up to mediate between the different parts of the state when clashes threaten to undermine the stability of the system.

And there have been serious clashes. In 1997 Muhammad Khatami surprised the conservative clerical estab-

lishment when he was elected president at the head of a reformist coalition with more than 69% of the vote. He promised greater cultural freedoms and diversity for the press and media. His election led to a blossoming of dissent, new newspapers and political reform movements. His victory in the presidential election was followed by further success in parliamentary and local elections.

But his attempts at reform of the state machine were immediately blocked by the Supreme Leader and the con-

Iran's oil production is second only to Saudi Arabia and by 2006 it was bringing in between \$40-\$60bn a year, providing 60-70% of the government's income

servatives who controlled the Guardian Council. The Basiji and Revolutionary Guards were used to repress demonstrating students while Khatami looked the other way. The judiciary, a bastion of clerical reaction, launched attack after attack on newspapers and journalists. Papers were closed, journalists and reformers charged, beaten up and imprisoned.

Legislation that attempted to remove the powers of the Guardian Council to exclude candidates in elections and to veto any legislation were blocked. And finally in the run up to the 2004 elections Khatami's supporters in his Second Khoradad movement were excluded from the candidate lists, guaranteeing a victory for the conservatives.

Millionaire mullahs

By this time Khatami's disillusioned reformist coalition had fallen apart. The movement had offered little to the growing Iranian working class. Most of Khatami's economic reforms were designed to make Iranian capitalism more competitive and to build bridges to international finance. Measures he introduced in his second term – simplifying foreign exchange controls, giving extra protection for foreign investors and establishing some private banks – received praise from the IMF as measures that laid the basis for further liberalisation of the economy.

Indeed Iran's economy grew fast during Khatami's two terms in office. The rising price of oil, especially during the first years of the new millennium, gave a massive boost to the economy. Iran's oil production is second only to Saudi Arabia and by 2006 it was bringing in between \$40-\$60bn a year and providing between 60-70% of the government's income.

Much of this was recycled to the state banks and then loaned at low interest rates to fund new investment. As a result the Iranian economy was one of the fastest growing in the Middle East, with regular GDP increases of 4-7% in the early part of the decade.

Since the 1979 revolution the Iranian economy has been highly statified. The new constitution forbade foreign concessions for firms or individuals but allowed joint

ventures. Something like 60% of the economy is directly controlled by the state and successive governments have followed a strict "import-substitution" policy, where foreign imports are heavily taxed or banned outright, and Iranian manufactures given preference.

Financed by high oil revenues, this policy has been pursued with some success, especially in the car industry. Joint ventures with Peugeot-Citroën, Renault, Hyundai and Nissan have made Iran the eleventh largest car manufacturer in the world, employing half a million workers, the state owned Iran Khodro being the largest car manufacturer. The industry has moved beyond assembling imported parts, producing many components itself.

The main beneficiaries of this capitalist expansion have been those who control and support the Islamic state: the clerics, their families and supporters, and the Bazaar merchant class. Leading clerical figures like Hashemi Rafsanjani have become fabulously rich since the revolution. His cousins, nephews, brother-in-laws and sons have fingers in every lucrative pie from the pistachio export trade to building Tehran's subway system.

Then there are the huge semi-governmental organisations known as bonyads ("foundations") that control around 15% of the economy. Having their origins in the expropriated businesses and property of fleeing capitalists and supporters of the Shah, these supposed charities are actually massive business conglomerates, and are responsible only to the Supreme Leader.

They are exempt from taxes, get preferential treatment on loans and access to foreign exchange and are able to call on the repressive organs of the state to deal with business rivals. They are a massive source of money, bribery and patronage for the clerical class and its Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) allies.

The IRGC themselves have become a powerful business enterprise, on the model of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. They control a multi-million business empire covering everything from laser eye-surgery clinics to car manufacturing, from oil- and gasfield development right

High unemployment, job insecurity and poverty wages are the norm for most workers in Iran. In many industries, such as textiles, child labour is rife

through to black market smuggling. And they are not averse to using force to pursue their lucrative businesses; in 2004 they occupied the new Imam Khomeini airport and ousted a Turkish-Austrian company that had won the tender to run it beating, in the process, an IRGC-owned company.

For the technocratic and neoliberal wing of the Iranian ruling class this complex and opaque structure of Iranian capitalism is highly inefficient. It distorts the market, encourages inefficiency through stifling competition and promotes corruption.

The state's restrictions on imports and the trade blockade enforced by the USA breed massive smuggling and tax avoidance. This inefficient capitalism, and the low productivity that goes with it, is only kept afloat by the huge inflow of oil dollars, an income that can fluctuate wildly as Iran discovered in the 1980s and 1990s.

The ambitions and quarrels of these powerful interest groups and cross-cutting fractions of the ruling class have to be kept under control via the system of checks, balances and repression that is the Iranian state. It is little wonder that coalitions of these different groups come together, and fall apart just as quickly, within the hobbled parliamentary system.

The most important rule of the Islamic Republic is that these differences and divisions are not allowed to threaten the stability of the state. They have to be contained within the rules of the system, as outside of it waits a deeply discontented and rebellious population.

The failure of Khatami's populism

As the reformist movement collapsed around Khatami a new figure entered the scene of Iranian politics in 2005 – Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the former mayor of Tehran. Ahmadinejad ran in the 2005 presidential race as the "outsider" against Rafsanjani. He scorned the rich and promised to "put the oil money back on the people's sofreh" – the traditional cloth for dining on the floor.

Ahmadinejad made the most of his working class background and his service in the IRGC. He assembled a coalition of the Basiji/IRGC, the Mosques and the poor and working class in the cities and rural areas. It was a populist coalition versus the well-financed campaign of the super-rich Rafsanjani, and Ahmadinejad won convincingly.

But the new president faced the same problems as the reformists once in power. Most of his promises ran into the sand, opposed by powerful class interests in parliament. The Supreme Leader kept Rafsanjani as the head of the Expediency Council, giving it sweeping new powers to check any dangerous populist excesses from the new president.

While Ahmadinejad failed to deliver improvements to his poorest supporters, he did strengthen the role of the IRGC within the state and bolster and re-arm the Basij militia. His hardline Islamist policies and repression of what was seen as "western depravity" in dress codes or behaviour made him a hated figure amongst students and youth.

He also called for a return to the roots of the revolution of 1979, emphasising the continued threat from the Great Satan, the USA, and from Israel. He intransigently pursued Iran's right to develop its nuclear industry against international threats of dire consequences if uranium enrichment was not halted.

Like the reformist Khatami before him, after four years in office and having failed to deliver on his promises, Ahmadinejad's coalition began to fall apart. While the clerical capitalists continued to enrich themselves the working class saw no benefits.

Indeed it was Ahmadinejad's unprecedented public attack on Rafsanjani's "corrupt family" during the recent

election campaign that signalled that there was a serious split in the ruling class. And it was this perceived division that gave the masses the confidence to pour onto the streets and challenge what they saw as a stolen election. Such events have to be avoided at all costs but the growing social tensions in the country and within the regime make this increasingly difficult.

High unemployment, job insecurity and poverty wages are the norm for most workers in Iran. In many industries, such as textiles, child labour is rife. In 2005 the poverty line was set by the government at \$320 a month, but the minimum wage was set at \$130!

An estimated 40% of the population live below the internationally recognised poverty line. Inflation continues to rise, currently at 28%, and independent trade unions are suppressed and strikes attacked. At the same time the average rate of nominal profit in manufacturing was a staggering 16-19% between 1995-2003, the latest figures available.³

The social crisis has other symptoms as well. An estimated 300,000 women in Tehran are involved in prostitution in order to earn a living and to gain some sort of independence from the crushing discrimination and imposed drudgery of the home. There is also a growing drug problem amongst sections of society especially the youth, and tens of thousands of the most talented students emigrate every year because of unemployment and despair at repression at home.

The economic difficulties faced by the regime led to the introduction of petrol rationing in 2007 which provoked widespread opposition and riots. While this measure was taken as much for strategic as economic reasons (Iran does not have sufficient refinery capability to meet the current demand for petrol and sanctions on petrol imports are on the horizon), it underlines the dangers for the regime of popular economic unrest.

While allowing the capitalists to pay poverty wages, the conservatives have attempted to buy off opposition by heavily subsidising basic staples like fuel, bread and sugar. These subsidies now consume 20% of the country's GDP, an unsustainable amount if oil prices fall and remain low.

Future struggles

The last wave of workers' struggles coincided with the end of Khatami's presidency and the election of Ahmadinejad. In 2004-05 a wave of strikes took place involving construction workers, car workers, teachers and transport workers. Many attempted to form new unions and were heavily repressed. Ahmadinejad's populist programme and promises to improve living conditions were no doubt influenced by this rising tide of resistance.

Five years on little has changed for the workers. A new generation of militants have experienced both the bankruptcy of the reformist approach to changing the state and now the empty promises of the populists. They have witnessed the heroic struggle of the students and youth last June and no doubt learnt some lessons about the repressive forces they will face when they themselves take on the regime.

The Islamic regime itself remains deeply divided; nei-

ther of the two major factions appears strong enough to impose its will on the other and internecine conflict is likely to break out again in the near future. It is vital that this time a powerful alliance is built between the workers' movement and all those who have an interest in ending the dictatorial Islamic regime especially the students, women and youth. Together they could take advantage of another split in the regime, and together

The Islamic regime itself remains deeply divided, neither of the two major factions appears strong enough to impose its will and conflict is likely to break out again

they would be powerful enough to take on and defeat the reactionaries and their militias.

An added factor is the pressure from imperialism. Despite its quagmire in Afghanistan and its debacle in Iraq, US imperialism remains determined to re-assert its control over its former semi-colony. US strategic interests mean that Iran cannot be allowed to develop as a regional power that is hostile to US dominance in the most important region on earth.

The supposed development of nuclear weapons plays the same role as weapons of mass destruction did in Iraq. It will be used as an excuse if the USA feels it is strong enough to overthrow the regime and replace it with a more compliant one. This is why every worker and every socialist must oppose calls by President Obama and the United Nations to impose new sanctions against Iran.

Such pressure can have one of two effects. It could exacerbate the tension between the two ruling factions in Iran, if one side decides to denounce the other for recklessly leading the country to the brink of war. Or, more likely, it will be used by the Islamic Republic to rally all factions and classes behind it, set aside their differences and stand up to the Great Satan.

Intervention will have the opposite effect to the one that some liberals hope for. It will strengthen all the reactionary forces in Iran, especially the IRGC, and put off the day when the Iranian dictatorship will be overthrown. That is something every socialist, democrat and internationalist will want to prevent.

ENDNOTES

1. See: *Iran: first round to Ahmadinejad?* 24/6/09 www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2749
2. This is not to agree with those, even on the left, who denounced the demonstrations as largely middle class. Hundreds of thousands of workers participated in the marches alongside the students and youth, but to attend the mid-week demonstrations meant striking and coming as an organised block. By and large this did not happen on any scale, although hospital workers in Tehran, seeing everyday the injured and dead, joined the demonstrations collectively.
3. Statistics in this section are largely taken from A Malm and E Esmailian, *Iran on the Brink*, Pluto, 2007, and Roger Howard, *Iran in Crisis*, Zed Books, 2004

The working class in the Cuban Revolution

In most histories of the Cuban revolution the role of the working class and the trade unions gets little attention. This is a mistake, argues Steve Cushion, because they played an important role in the destruction of the Batista dictatorship between 1956 and 1959.

THE CUBAN revolution that put an end to the Batista regime is widely seen as emerging from a rural guerrilla struggle, but the Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio (M-26-7), which organised that campaign under the leadership of Fidel Castro, placed the general strike at the heart of its approach to overthrowing the Batista dictatorship.

The Cuban working class is commonly seen as being politically inactive throughout the period of the Cuban insurrection. However, while the workers in Havana were relatively quiescent, the further east one looks, the more evidence of working class political opposition can be found, particularly in Guantanamo.¹ Here, a group of railway workers, members of the M-26-7, organised a five-day railway strike to support the Granma landing in 1956, a province-wide general strike in protest at the murder of one of their leaders in 1957 as well as many shorter actions to defend the economic interests of the rail workers.

They recruited telephone operators to record police conversations, while train crews smuggled arms to the guerrillas in the hills. The largely ignored activities of these railway workers from Guantanamo provide us with an outstanding example of the connection between armed struggle and the mass working class action required for a successful general strike against a vicious dictatorship.

Batista and the employers' offensive

Cuba in the 1950s was ruled by a brutal regime, headed by Fulgancia Batista. It is common to view this regime as made up of a small group, Batista and his cronies, intent merely on enriching themselves through corruption, a clique which gained the support of the United States by accommodating to their anti-communist foreign policy agenda in the period of the Cold War.

While this is true, it only tells half the story. The Cuban economy in the 1950s was faced with a crisis of profitability and productivity and Cuban and US capital would only be able to retain their profit margins if they could reduce

Cuban workers' ability to resist attacks on their wages and employment levels. This meant taking on, and breaking, a well-organised trade union movement with a strong tradition of militant economic and political struggle.

The employers' obsession with productivity is described in the 1951 Report on Cuba compiled for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This report identifies the resistance of workers to mechanisation and other productivity measures as the main problem facing the Cuban economy. Francis Truslow, principal author of the report, states:

"Employees strongly resist mechanisation and cost-cutting methods. 'Featherbedding' is encouraged and the discharge of employees for legitimate cause made difficult or impossible.² With labor still making wage demands, it is believed that in many cases they have reached the limit that employers will tolerate."³

The report argues that increased productivity would attract investment, promote diversification and thereby produce jobs. Underneath the pious rhetoric calling for greater co-operation between management and labour lies the concrete proposal to make dismissal of employees simpler, faster and cheaper.⁴ The chronically high level of unemployment deeply affected the consciousness of those in work and job security was always the prime concern of unionised workers.⁵

At the start of the 1950s, Cuba had the highest percentage of unionised workers in Latin America,⁶ but the main federation, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba (CTC), was completely bureaucratised and dependent upon its relationship with the government, with most disputes settled by the intervention of the Ministry of Labour rather than by direct action or collective bargaining. The CTC bureaucracy, headed by general secretary Eusebio Mujal, was utterly corrupt and, in 1948, had defeated the communists and gained control of the trade union machine through a mixture of gangster violence and government patronage.⁷

After the 1952 coup, Mujal became Batista's loyal collaborator⁸ and, in return for this collaboration, the government gave the mujalistas generous bribes and obliged employers to deduct trade union subscriptions from workers' wages by means of a compulsory check-off. Nevertheless, the mujalista bureaucracy was still under considerable pressure to deliver benefits to ordinary workers to prove that they were at least as effective as the communists they had replaced.

Given the strength of the trade unions, there had been little possibility that the Truslow report could be implemented by an elected government; rather it required an authoritarian regime to enforce its proposals which, at least in the short term, could only result in a considerable increase in the already chronic level of unemployment. The army coup that brought in the Batista dictatorship in 1952 was widely seen in this light at the time. To quote the British Embassy:

"... during the Prío regime when many observers considered that the workers were receiving better treatment than the economy of the country could in the long term afford."⁹

and:

"I am more and more convinced that the basic reason for the Armed Forces having staged the revolution was their utter disgust at the growing and unrestrained power of Labour".¹⁰

The majority of reformist politicians represented the capitalist interests that needed productivity increases and this interpretation of the nature of the Batista dictatorship is born out by their behaviour in scrambling for jobs in the new government.¹¹ Those who did not compromise with the dictatorship increasingly focused on

The CTC bureaucracy reached an agreement with the government without consulting the strikers, despite the continuing strength of the strike

constitutional rather than social questions and limited their activity to issuing manifestos in favour of reconciliation,¹² thereby losing influence with most workers whose main interest in the 1940 constitution was the labour protection articles.

The working class response

By the end of 1954, financial problems that resulted from the drop in sugar prices in 1953, pushed the US owned Ferrocarriles Consolidados, the railway company that operated the network in the eastern end of the island, to announce 1,550 redundancies and a 20% wage cut. This was an important turning point in the development of working class opposition to Batista as, despite rank and file workers resisting to the limit of their ability, they were finally defeated.

There were two militantly waged strikes, in December 1954 and February 1955, that forced the government to declare a truce. However, at the end of May, a report recommended an 8% wage cut, forced retirements, scrapping the collective agreement and the lengthening of working day along with extensive service cuts.¹³ Within 48 hours, starting in the city of Guantanamo, a strike paralysed the whole network, 10,000 workers in all. This time the full force of the state was moved against the workers, while the CTC leadership condemned the strikes out of hand.

The strikers replied by completely shutting down the towns of Camaguey, Guantanamo, Morón, Nuevitas, and Santiago. Given that the army was rounding up train-operating and signalling staff and forcing them to work at gunpoint, it was difficult for them to publicly demonstrate and picket. In a pattern that was repeated in other industrial disputes of the time, this public role was taken over by women, either railway office workers or the families of the strikers, who also played a leading role in setting up neighbourhood solidarity committees.

Batista refused to publicly meet union representatives, while the police, army and secret policemen started rooting workers out of their houses and forcing retired workers

back to work. The CTC bureaucracy reached an agreement with the government without consulting the strikers, despite the continuing strength of the strike and growing solidarity from other workers. In return for a few minor concessions, they accepted the 8% cut, 600 redundancies and signed a no-strike agreement thereby placing the strikers outside the law.¹⁴

The government increased their physical attacks on the workers and, amid the demoralisation caused by the

by large US corporations since Spanish colonial days.¹⁸ While, by the 1950s there had been an increase in Cuban ownership, there had been a parallel process of integration of the Cuban bourgeoisie into US capitalism.¹⁹

The ruling class in these circumstances was very small. However, despite the extreme division of wealth, a middle class did exist and they felt resentful at being excluded from power. Many of them, particularly the students, felt that their prospects would be improved by an economy run in the interests of local industry. This nationalist middle class required a mass base to advance such policies and, given Cuba's gross economic inequality, that programme had to address the country's social problems if it was to attract support from the impoverished peasants and workers. This gave Cuban nationalism its particular nature as a mass popular movement arguing for economic nationalist policies to develop local industry, arguing that this would increase prosperity and employment prospects.

This argument attracted considerable working class support, with the close relationship between the Cuban bourgeoisie and US imperialism leading many workers to see the national question in class terms. However, this did not lead to the posing of socialism as an alternative, merely to seeing the ruling class as "traitors". Indeed there was no organisation in Cuba in the 1950s advocating a socialist perspective for the revolution; the nearest was the Partido Socialista Popular (PSP), as the communist party was known, which restricted itself to uncritical and unbelievable accounts of life in the Soviet Union under Stalin – an approach calculated to get the very notion of socialism a bad name.

The PSP supported a stage-ist approach to politics which required the establishment of a "bourgeois-democratic" regime before a start could be made along the road to socialism.²⁰ During the early 1930s the Cuban communists increased their influence and membership by its support for workers in the sugar industry from 1930 to 1933 and thereafter played an important role in the Cuban trade union movement.²¹ It was, however, taken by surprise when, in 1933, a Havana bus drivers' strike turned into a revolutionary general strike. The PSP tried to settle the strike in return for concessions from the government but when the strike continued nevertheless and successfully brought the government down, the communists lost much of their credibility.

The Comintern's policy of calling for popular fronts – alliances between the working class and "progressive elements" in the bourgeoisie – caused Communist Parties internationally to pursue "national unity" against fascism and imperialism, while minimising the significance of the class struggle.²² In common with the other Communist Parties of Latin America, the PSP did not support armed action, calling instead for the setting up of a Frente Democrático Nacional to unite the whole opposition in a popular front to resist Batista using legal means.²³

Unfortunately for them, most of the rest of the opposition was as anti-communist as it was anti-Batista and the call fell on deaf ears. Having been falsely accused of complicity in Fidel Castro's 1953 attack on the Moncada barracks in Santiago de Cuba, the PSP was also a victim of the gener-

When they went on strike at the end of 1955 the sugar workers defended themselves and set up road blocks, burnt cane fields and occupied town halls

sell-out, the strike was defeated. In the days that followed, many of the leading militants were dismissed.¹⁵

The defeat of a well-organised strike by an economically powerful group of workers with considerable experience in industrial activity made a group of militants in Guantanamo realise that, unless the Batista regime could be militarily defeated, they would no longer be able to defend and advance their conditions and wages. Neither would they be able to regain control of their own trade union while Mujal and his cronies had the support of the state.

From the start of the dictatorship in 1952, Guantanamo had been a centre of intense opposition to the Batista dictatorship but the limitations of peaceful methods were becoming obvious when faced with such a level of repression. So, shortly after the strike, Frank País, regional co-ordinator of the M-26-J visited Guantanamo and was introduced by a local student, Enrique Soto, to Octavio Louit, a railwayman who, in September 1955, agreed to form the local branch of the revolutionary organisation, an endeavour in which he was helped by another railway worker, Antonio "Nico" Torres.¹⁶

Trotskyists, Stalinists and the national democratic revolution

Torres was an experienced working class militant who had been an active member of the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR) from 1934 until it finally disappeared in the late 1940s and had been instrumental in building the POR's most important working class base in Guantanamo.¹⁷ Long before its final demise, the POR had departed from any attempt to implement an independent working class programme and had adopted a policy of supporting and entering militant petit bourgeois nationalist groupings. The decision of the Guantanamo ex-Trotskyists to join the M-26-7 therefore was a logical progression and occurred just in time for them to intervene in a major sugar-workers' strike.

The Cuban economy was totally subordinated to the interests of the sugar industry which had been dominated

ally increased repression, despite condemning Castro as an adventurist. Their newspaper was closed down and the remaining Communists were purged from the CTC.²⁴

With their wholehearted adoption of the rhetoric of national unity, the Cuban Communist Party's "bread and butter" approach to trade unionism did not offer a socialist alternative to challenge the hegemonic nationalist politics. As a result they remained content with tailing other, more militant nationalist currents.²⁵

One such grouping was the M-26-7 whose 1956 programme spoke of democracy, social justice and economic independence.²⁶ Thus, while there were considerable differences in the tactics by which the PSP and the M-26-7 proposed to implement their programmes, there was no great difference in the basic politics behind these programmes, with a shared concern for economic justice, national independence and an end to corruption.

Both groupings also sought to unite the Cuban "people", a nebulous term that included workers, peasants, the unemployed, small businessmen and professionals along with patriotic industrialists. However, because the M-26-7's tactics for the revolutionary overthrow of Batista centred on a general strike, they differed markedly from the PSP in stressing the need to combine that strike with an armed insurrection.²⁷

Cuba's sugar workers

In the wake of the defeat of the railway workers, it was this combination of strike and armed action that attracted the militants in Guantanamo. Their own experience was confirmed later in 1955 as the regime managed to defeat other workers' resistance to the employers' productivity drive in the banking and telecommunication sectors, as well as by various groups of factory workers and finally by breaking a bitterly fought sugar workers' strike.

Cuban sugar workers had a militant history and, in addition to forming the most important Cuban trade union, they had set up soviets and armed militias during their 1933 strike.²⁸ The seasonal nature of their employment militated against stable trade union organisation, with membership numbers fluctuating widely according to the time of year, but this saved them from the dangers of conservatism that are inherent in traditional skilled trade unionism.

Thus, for example, sugar workers had a tradition of cane burning as a tactic for enforcing their demands. However, the fragmenting effects of the seasonal harvest cycle were offset by the fact that most of them lived in communities in which they formed the overwhelming majority, thereby reinforcing workplace solidarity with community backing at times of industrial struggle. In many ways, despite the apparent dissimilarity, the sugar workers tradition of struggle and their vital place in the national economy gave them a similar leading position in the life of the Cuban labour movement that mineworkers occupied in Europe.²⁹

When they went on strike at the end of 1955 and found themselves faced with a level of repression only previously used to attack militant students, the sugar workers defended themselves and set up road blocks, burnt cane

fields and occupied town halls and city centres; actions that resulted in hundreds arrested or wounded, with several strikers being killed.³⁰ This confrontation destroyed many illusions and convinced a significant minority of workers that there was no longer any reformist solution to their problems.³¹

Revolutionary resistance in the unions

The defeat of the class struggles of 1955 confirmed the decision of the Guantanamo railway workers. The first step in their reorganisation was to build a clandestine workplace-based cell structure, each cell composed of a member responsible for co-ordination, one for sabotage, one for fund raising, one for propaganda and one for mass action such as strikes and demonstrations. Each cell member, apart from the co-ordinator, recruited up to 10 others to help with the work. The combination of mass action with sabotage was crucial to their concept of "Sindicalismo beligerente", an approach that led telephone workers to cut phone lines, sugar workers to burn fields and railway workers to derail scab trains during strikes.

In a manner common to effective rank and file organisation everywhere, it was necessary to undermine the influence of the trade union bureaucracy and to this end, the M-26-7 cells started to organise short strikes and go-slows over any issue that came to hand, often stoppages of only 5 or 10 minutes, which nevertheless proved extremely disruptive to the railway timetable while minimising the possibility for victimisation. As a result of this muscle-flexing during 1956, they were able to extend their organisation to other industries in the Guantanamo region, most noticeably to the workers in the US naval base at Guantanamo Bay, so that by the end of the year they were in a position to graduate to more ambitious activities.

During 1955, Fidel Castro had been released from prison and had gone to Mexico to train a rebel force with the inten-

TIMELINE

March 1952 Fulgencia Batista launches military coup which overthrows the Auténtico President Carlos Prío Socarrás. Military government is established and 1940 constitution suspended.

July 26 1953 Fidel Castro, a member of the youth wing of the nationalists Ortodoxo Party, leads attack on Moncada barracks to seize arms. Attack fails, many executed, Castro imprisoned.

May 1955 Castro and other political prisoners freed under amnesty from Batista. Castro moves to Mexico where he founds July 26th Movement (M-26-7) still within Ortodoxo Party. Joined by Ernesto Che Guevara.

1957 Growing struggles against Batista. Sabotage by M-26-7 in cities led by Frank Pais and Faustino Perez. Pais assassinated 30 July 1957.

April 1958 revolutionary general strike called by National Directorate fails, communists (PPS) excluded from organisation of strike.

End 1958 Growing disintegration of Batista forces. Guevara advances on Havana.

1 January 1959 Week long general strike in Havana, Batista flees, guerrillas take capital on 5 January.

February-May 1959 Coalition government formed with leading bourgeois figures.

tion of returning to Cuba and begin a guerrilla uprising. The intention was to land on the south coast from a small boat, the now famous Granma, at the end of November 1956. Frank País was charged with creating a diversion by means of an armed assault on various police and army establishments in Santiago. He in turn instructed the M-26-7 group in Guantanamo to prevent military reinforcements reaching Santiago from the Guantanamo region.

In Guantánamo itself the strike was total on the railway, the electrical plant, the aerodrome, the banks and buses, with most shops and businesses shut

This they achieved by a spectacular railway strike during which the whole network at the eastern end of the island was paralysed for five days, all the more impressive because the workers raised no demands other than to make it clear that they were acting in support of their comrades in Santiago. The rest of the town managed to maintain a general strike for a couple of days, while the workers in the processing plant of the Ermita sugar plantation, where the M-26-7 had two active cells, successfully attacked the police barracks on the plantation.

As a result of the success of the strike in Guantánamo, Torres, now a wanted man, was made chair of a commission charged with rolling out the workplace cell structure nationwide and spent the next year criss-crossing the island with this objective. Meanwhile in Guantánamo, the leadership of the M-26-7 was taken over by another ex-Trotskyist, Gustavo Fraga, who worked on the US naval base.

There was a considerable M-26-7 grouping amongst the US base workers, but their role was less one of direct militant action, and more of supplying the rebels in the mountains. Raising funds, as well as pilfering clothing, food and petrol were their initial activities, but, discovering that some of the ordinary US sailors were sympathetic to the rebels, they quickly found sources of arms and ammunition, which the train drivers were able to help smuggle out.

Fraga himself, not only co-ordinated militant action in the Guantánamo area, he also ran the M-26-7 explosives factory in a garage in the city. He was killed there in an accidental explosion while preparing home-made bombs to support a general strike in August 1957 following the murder of Frank País in Santiago.

Frank País, now the M-26-7 national co-ordinator of action, was based in Santiago from where he was working both to promote the movement's clandestine operations and to organise support for the guerrillas in the nearby Sierra Maestra mountains. His murder at the end of July 1957 by a local police chief produced a general strike in the province of Oriente, of which Santiago was the capital; a strike which was probably the biggest public demonstration of opposition during the entire Batista dictatorship.³²

Wherever the August 1957 strike is mentioned in the literature, it is characterised as "spontaneous" and this spontaneity is confused with lack of organisation and political direction. However, this betrays a lack of understanding of how much more real organisation is required to produce a "spontaneous" strike than one formally called by the bureaucracy; an interpretation confirmed by interviews with militants involved in the strike.

Miguel Angel Yero, an activist in the M-26-7 Sección Obrera, describes how he and his comrades went to Frank País's funeral with the idea of initiating some action, if at all possible. On seeing a large turnout of Santiagueros very many of whom shared their anger, they started to shout for a strike. The call was taken up and the 60,000 people at the funeral marched through the town, calling workers out of their factories, offices and shops until the town was paralysed in a strike that lasted five days.³³

An established unofficial network of M-26-7, Communist Party and independent militants operated in Oriente which was able to spread the strike to the rest of the province, including a shutdown of the railway network.³⁴ However, Octavio Louit, who left Santiago to co-ordinate action in the centre of the island, maintains that, while there was support amongst the workers of Camagüey and Las Villas for the strike, state repression prevented its extension to other regions.³⁵ Efforts to launch a strike in Havana on 5 August were unsuccessful outside of a few traditionally militant sectors such as public transport, due in part to some swift action by the mujalista bureaucracy.³⁶

In Guantánamo itself, where Frank País was well known and respected, the strike was total on the railway, the electrical plant, the aerodrome, the banks and buses, with most shops and businesses shut; all of this was accompanied by bombings of bridges and power lines and armed skirmishes with the police and rural guard. The brutal behaviour of the forces of repression helped spread the strike as the army broke open shops that were shut and threw their merchandise into the street, giving a propaganda coup to the rebels who ensured that the soldiers were the only ones engaged in looting.

The explosion in the M-26-7 bomb factory was a blow to the movement, as they not only lost some important militants but also a considerable stock of weapons. Yet it served to prolong the strike and deepen bitterness against the regime since the first act of the police on arrival at the scene was to shoot dead two neighbours who were trying to help put out the fire. But with Guantánamo the only city remaining on strike by 9 August, the national leadership of the M-26-7 ordered a return to work, fearing the army was planning to make an example of the town.

The 1958 general strike

Impressed with the impact of the August strike, Fidel Castro called what he hoped would be a triumphant general strike on 9 April 1958. This strike, which received almost no working class support, was a complete disaster and cost the lives of many of the movement's best underground activists. Batista's chief of police issued an instruction: "No wounded, No prisoners".³⁷

The failure of the 1958 general strike largely resulted

from the M-26-7's essentially military view of the general strike.³⁸ The rebel leadership decided to keep the date of the proposed action secret, only telling militants in Havana on the morning of 9 April itself. If the date was secret, the fact that a strike was planned was not, Fidel Castro having announced their intentions when he made his declaration of "Total War" on 12 March. Thus forewarned, the government had suspended the constitution and placed the army and police on a war footing, while the CTC bureaucracy had stepped up its anti-Castro propaganda, issuing threats that any worker supporting the strike would be dismissed and that the union would not support them. To this end, the CTC drew up lists of suspected militants for the police and the employers.³⁹

Most workers on the other hand were taken completely by surprise when the call came at 11am on 9 April and were thereby denied that feeling of ownership of and involvement in a strike that is so essential to success. The police and army, supported by a pro-government militia, the Tigers, roared through the streets discharging their weapons. The poorly armed M-26-7 militia were unable to wrest control; indeed, most were not even in a position to defend themselves. In these circumstances, most workers found it impossible to leave work and the strike failed, leaving the government free to introduce a reign of terror.

The workers reorganise

The process of picking up the pieces began with a meeting on 3 May at Los Altos de Mompié in the Sierra Maestra. From the point of view of working class involvement in the insurrection, two important decisions were taken; one was to give the guerrilla struggle priority; the other was to appoint Nico Torres to overall leadership of the workers' section of the movement, now renamed the Frente Obrero Nacional (FON).⁴⁰

The new FON leadership's change of style was immediately apparent with the issue of a manifesto in May 1958 that took responsibility for the fiasco, while still maintaining that a general strike was the most efficient way to defend and extend workers' rights as well as "curbing the sinister despotism that is strangling our republic".⁴¹ The manifesto finished with a list of demands that mixed the economic and political in a way that is clearly designed to link the need for revolutionary change with workers' immediate concerns.

The other decision taken by the M-26-7 at Altos de Mompié, to give priority to the guerrilla struggle, while at first sight looking like a turn away from the tactic of a general strike, in fact produced the conditions that would make such a strike successful.

Faustino Pérez recalls in a later interview that one of the reasons for the failure of the 9 April strike was that workers would not strike without adequate armed support.⁴² The turn to a more militaristic approach by the M-26-7 was not taken with a view to rectifying this inadequacy, but it did have that effect in the longer term. Going on strike in Batista's Cuba could be a life or death decision and workers had to feel some confidence in their chances of survival and in the possibilities of successfully gaining a result.

In the summer of 1958, however, the guerrillas still had to beat the encircling forces of Batista's army which outnumbered them enormously. The army and police, while they had demonstrated ruthless efficiency when shooting down poorly armed students or unarmed striking workers, were not nearly so determined when faced with well-trained and politically motivated guerrillas who rapidly gained the military upper hand in the second half of 1958. There was a parallel growth in financial support coming from workers through late summer and autumn, as well as the increase in membership of the FON, which has been estimated at 15,000 by the end of the year.⁴³

The Communist Party did not finally commit itself to supporting the armed struggle until November 1958 and then the FON was formally merged with the PSP front organisation Comité Nacional de Defensa de las Demandas Obreras (CNDDO)⁴⁴ to form the Frente Obrero Nacional Unido (FONU).⁴⁵ This new organisation adopted a 12-point programme that called for a 20% wage increase, for opposition to mechanisation along with other measures against unemployment, for an end to racial discrimination, for social protection for women, children and the unemployed, for the reinstatement of victimised workers, for trade union democracy, the end to the compulsory check-off, and for the reinstatement of the 1940 constitution.⁴⁶

This last demand meant much more to workers than a desire for political democracy, about which they proved largely indifferent, for the 1940 constitution contained important employment rights that they had lost under the Batista regime.⁴⁷ While these demands reflect the immediate interests of the working class and would cost the employers a considerable sum to implement, there was nothing here that in any way challenged the capitalist basis of the economy.

On 8 December, in the Sierra Cristal mountains above Guantánamo, Torres convened, in the name of the FONU, a congress of workers' delegates that endorsed the 12-point programme as well as formally repudiating the mujalista control of the CTC. This was subsequently endorsed at the

In the summer of 1958, however, the guerrillas still had to beat the encircling forces of Batista's army which outnumbered them enormously

First National Conference of Sugar Workers in Liberated Territory held on 20-21 December in the area controlled by Camilo Cienfuegos.⁴⁸

During this period there was little or no industrial action, as most workers saw little point in risking their lives and livelihoods in advance of the increasingly likely military victory of the rebel army. The more militant could always satisfy their impatience with sabotage or going to the mountains to join the rebel army. The flight of Batista on New Year's Day 1959, however, would give rise to the need for more active mass participation.

The 1959 Havana general strike

Those members of Batista's general staff who had been left behind were plotting with the US ambassador in a last minute attempt to prevent the rebel victory and, despite swift re-deployment of the columns commanded by Guevara and Cienfuegos to Havana, there was a danger that an army coup could have split some of the middle class support away from the M-26-7 and prolonged the civil war.

The strike provided such powerful evidence of the overwhelming popularity of the rebel cause that the army chiefs quickly abandoned their plans for a military coup and most fled to avoid popular vengeance, a path followed by many CTC bureaucrats.

The importance of the support given to Batista by the CTC bureaucracy should not be underestimated as control of the formal trade union structures had given the regime a certain legitimacy in its early days. However, Mujal's abuse of that control finally made him the second most hated man in Cuba after the dictator himself. The class struggles of 1955 exposed the inadequacies of the mujalista leadership of the trade unions and won support for the rebels, but that support could not be taken for granted and the workers would not support a strike in 1958 that they could see was suicidal.

ENDNOTES

1. This downplaying of the role of the working class in the Cuban revolution comes not just from right-wing historians who seek to portray the Cuban revolution as a type of putsch carried out by a small band of guerrillas, but from some on the left as well. The SWP/IST tendency also downplays the role of the working class in Cuba because it would not fit in with their schema of deflected permanent revolution. Mike Gonzales, for example, argues that, The nature of the guerrilla struggle and its leadership by the 26 July Movement under Castro meant that no mass organisations or organs of workers defence had grown in the course of the revolutionary war, Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution (2004) p.101. This is patently not the case, as this article shows.
2. Truslow, Report on Cuba (also known as the Truslow Report) (1951) p.10
3. Ibid p.136
4. Ibid p.388
5. Pérez, Cuba (2006) pp.224-230
6. Sims, Cuba (1992) p.217
7. Stubbs, Tabaco en la periferia (1989) pp.161-164
7. Spalding, Organized Labor in Latin America (1977) pp.227-238
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9. FO 371/103390 - AK2181/1 (1953) Trade unionism in Cuba
10. FO 371/97516/7 - AK1015/33 (1952) Mujal's relationship with Batista
11. Osa, En Cuba III, 1952-4 (2008)
12. 4 Ibarra, Fracaso de los Moderados (1994) p.2
13. Carta Semanal (15th June 1955), Diario de la Marina (8th June 1955)
14. Bohemia (28th August 1955), Diario de la Marina (7th July 1955)
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16. Coma, El Movimiento 26 de Julio en Guantanamo (1981) pp.15-19
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Nevertheless, when confronted with a favourable military balance of forces, the organised working class were more than ready to give active support to the revolutionary process and, in so doing, ensured the final victory of the M-26-7. The general strike of January 1959 must be seen as one of the final decisive moments in the overthrow of the dictatorship.

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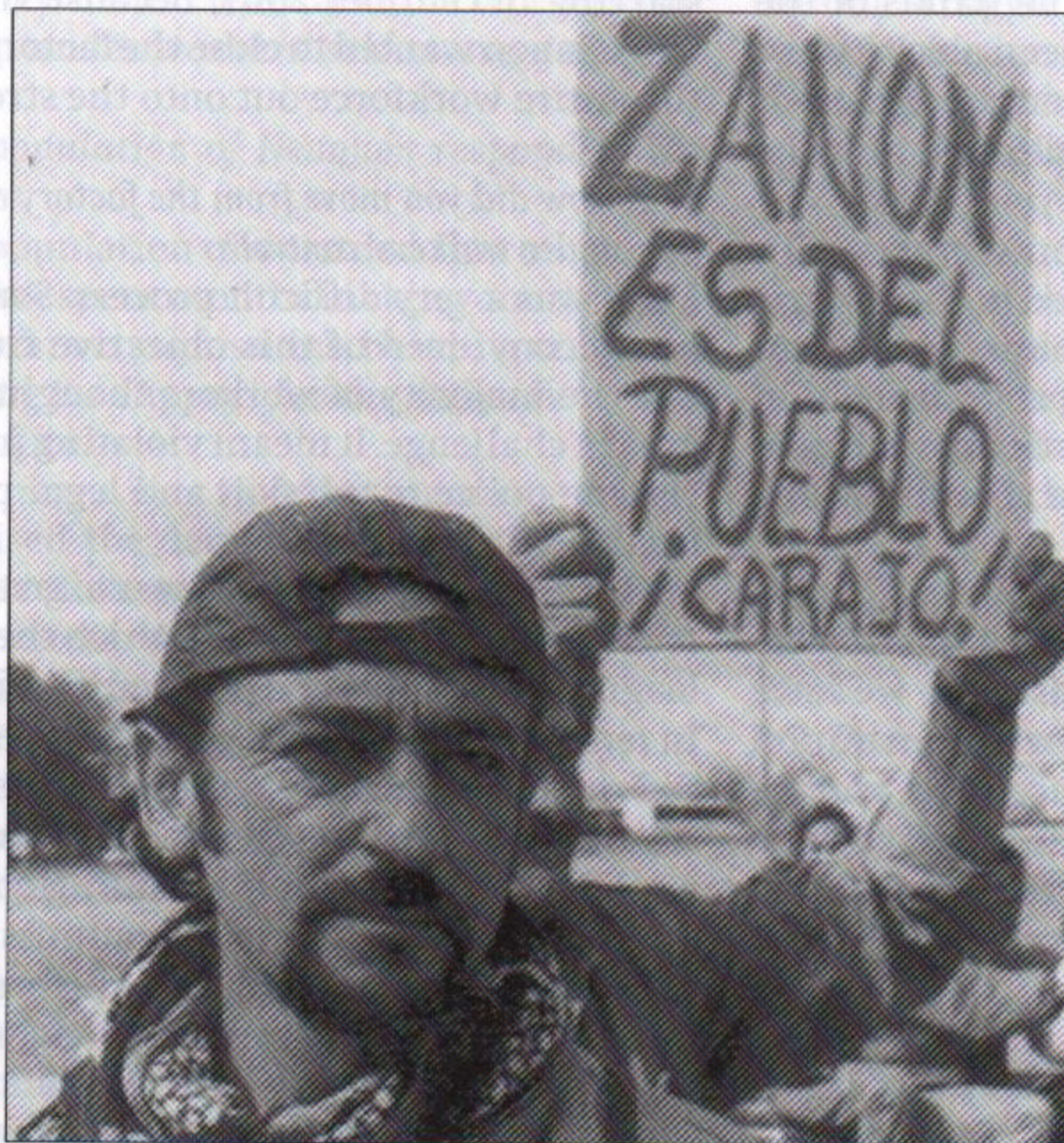
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 27. García-Pérez, Insurrection and Revolution (1998) p.72
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 33. Torres-Hernandez, Huelga de Agosto (1977) p.5
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 36. PCC, Historia del movimiento obrero cubano (1985) pp.333-4
 37. Cabrera, Sagua la Grande escribió su nombre en la historia, (1959) pp.36-39&122-3. It is worth noting that the strike was successful in Guantánamo where the recently established guerrilla second front in the nearby Sierra Cristal mountains, led by Raul Castro, was able to engage the local army units and protect the strikers.
 38. Sweig, Inside the Cuban Revolution (2002) pp.44-5
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 40. Tennant, Dissident Cuban Communism (1999) p.302-319
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ZANON OCCUPATION

“If we can run a factory, we can also run a country”



In August the ceramics factory Zanon in Argentina was expropriated after eight years of workers' occupation. As workers in Europe occupy their own factories to fight the crisis Zanon's experience holds many lessons.

Wlodek Flakin interviewed Raul Godoy

RAUL GODOY (born 1965) works on the varnishing line in the ceramics factory Zanon in the Patagonian city of Neuquén in Argentina. He is also vice president of the Union of Ceramics Workers of Neuquén (SOECN). He played a leading role in the workers' struggle at Zanon in 2001-02 which ended in the occupation of the factory by the workers. Since 2002, the Zanon workers have been producing under workers' control and have renamed their business FaSinPat ("Fábrica Sin Patrones" – factory without bosses).

WF: Zanon is known in many parts of the world because the Zanon workers have been producing under workers' control since 2002. Can you say a little about the factory?

RG: Zanon is the largest and the most advanced ceramics factory on the continent. We mostly produce ceramic tiles, and these are exported to more than 25 countries. As many as 1,500 people could work here. Currently, 470 workers keep the factory running.

WF: What was the factory like until 2001? Had there already been a special tradition of struggle?

RG: In Zanon there was virtually no tradition of struggle. The factory was opened in 1980, i.e. under the military dictatorship, and from the beginning there was iron control over work discipline. After the fall of the dictatorship a union was organised, but it was controlled by the trade union bureaucracy. The union leaders always had agreements with the company: if the owner Luigi Zanon wanted to fire five workers, he would announce 20 layoffs so that this union could "save" 15 jobs. Later, when we had occu-

pied the factory, there were several eviction attempts by scabs and thugs – amongst their ranks we saw these union bureaucrats!

WF: What were the first steps in the workers' struggle in 2001/02?

RG: In 2001, a situation that had been developing for years finally exploded. In our case, we took over the Internal Commission [roughly comparable to a shop stewards' com-

works with us today. Daniel had financially supported his family, especially his mother, because his father and his brothers were unemployed. Daniel was a temporary worker when he died. We fought for the rights of all workers – whether permanently employed or not – and Daniel took part in every strike, in every assembly, in every demonstration, in spite of his precarious status. That is why he is a symbol of our struggle to this day.

WF: How did it finally come to the occupation in 2001?

RG: In 2001 the Argentinian economy exploded, with a brutal fall in the GDP that meant thousands of factory closures and millions of layoffs, and also the expropriation of the savings of thousands of small savers. This provoked some truly revolutionary days that brought down the government of President De la Rúa and created a number of militant movements: unemployed workers blocked roads (the "piquetero" movement), "people's assemblies" were established in large cities, workers occupied their factories etc. In our case, there was an occupation, starting in October 2001, because the highly indebted Luigi Zanon wanted to close the factory and throw almost the entire workforce out onto the street.

WF: How did you move from the factory occupation to production under workers' control?

RG: It was a very difficult process. Some of us were absolutely convinced of this objective from the beginning. But the majority of workers thought this would be too great a challenge. It meant violating private property and risking police repression and legal prosecution (which occurred in the end).

Our position at that time was to go through this experience and respect the pace at which the majority of our colleagues were willing to proceed. For five months we were in tents outside and inside the factory. But in this time we did not just sit around with our arms crossed. We set up a number of working commissions: a press commission, a solidarity commission including colleagues from various organisations, a security commission which defended the occupation and was later transformed into the factory guards, a women's commission including workers from the factory as well as wives, mothers and daughters.

This created a spectacular level of workers' militancy. A number of activists gained experience which later formed the foundation for organising workers' control. During this strike, we began to sell the stock in the warehouse to get our back pay – and when the warehouse was empty, at the workers' assembly on March 2, 2002 we decided to resume production.

WF: How has the factory without bosses functioned since then?

RG: From the beginning, it has been based on direct workers' democracy. The whole workforce is organised in a kind of workers' council. There is a coordinator for each department, elected by his/her colleagues and with a recallable mandate, and also two or three general coordinators who are elected by the general assembly.

Every month there is an assembly of all the workers which makes all the important decisions; this applies to

"During this strike we began to sell the stock in the warehouse to get our back pay, and when the warehouse was empty we decided to resume production"

mittee – PR] in 1998, taking it out of the hands of the union bureaucracy. Because we hadn't been able to meet publicly, we had organised soccer games on the weekends to win over our colleagues for an opposition list for the commission.

The Internal Commission was able to put a brake on firings and suspensions, and we participated in the general strikes that were called by the trade union federations. But in these protests, we had our own programme that was different from that of the bureaucratic apparatus. In 2000 we also took over the then the local ceramics workers' union, SOECN.

WF: And you're now the union president?

RG: I held that position for several years. But we have adopted a very democratic constitution for our union which stipulates that all functionaries receive an average workers' wage and that all functions are rotated periodically. So now another colleague is the president and I am the vice president.

WF: It was the death of a Zanon worker that brought a qualitative leap in the workers' willingness to fight. Can you say something about him?

RG: Daniel Ferra, a worker in the factory, died on July 16, 2000 in the arms of a workers' delegate. He died because medical equipment required by law was not available in the factory. This event triggered the first "wildcat" strike, which we led as the newly elected union leadership. During this "strike of nine days," we blocked the factory for nine days with tents and pickets outside the gate. At this time, the Women's Commission was born and there were also the first road blockades. We had the backing of nearly 100% of the workforce. It was the first time in the history of the factory that a strike of this magnitude took place; it was the first time that the workers acted as a unit. This was the real beginning of the process, because this is when the workers realised that in the eyes of the company we are only numbers.

Years later, when the factory was put under workers' self-management, we called Daniel's mother, and she still

economic and social questions, questions of production, questions of politics etc. But even mundane things such as the length of our lunch breaks are decided in the assembly. There is full freedom of expression and of tendencies. Resolutions are adopted by a simple majority vote.

WF: How has the union changed in the course of these protests?

RG: In reality, our union's programme had already become more radical before the crisis. We made our policies, which were clearly based on class struggle, more profound: for unity in the ranks of the working class, for permanent employment for all workers on temporary contracts, for equal pay for equal work etc.

Given the current capitalist crisis, we have again made our programme more profound: we say that the capitalists have to pay for the crisis. If a company claims that it is suffering from the effects of the crisis, we demand the opening of the financial accounts for the last few years to inspection. And if the businessmen say they can't do that, then we say that they should leave and the workers can start up production under workers' self-management.

WF: How did the population of Neuquén respond to the occupation?

RG: Very well. The population understood that our struggle was legitimate. We spent months making our struggle known via the different commissions, handing out flyers and bulletins, asking for support for the strike fund and explaining the conflict.

Even more important was that during our struggle we have always raised the demands of all workers and poor people, not just of ourselves, and this helped create a big solidarity movement. We've always maintained that the factory belongs to the working-class and poor communities of Neuquén and we've made a huge number of donations to hospitals, schools, and homes for homeless people, and this has solidified the alliance with other workers and the whole community.

WF: You collaborated especially with the movement of unemployed workers, the piqueteros. How did this work?

RG: A truly revolutionary alliance was created. It had enormous potential because it united those who are always divided by governments, businessmen and trade union bureaucrats. In Neuquén we built, on the initiative of the ceramics workers' union, a Regional Coordination that united the ceramic workers with unemployed people from various piquetero movements, workers in the public health sector, teachers, students and leftist parties. Each time they tried to evict us, there were large mobilisations against it in the city.

This unity meant quite specifically that when we were able to create new jobs at Zanon – the workforce has grown from 271 at the time of the occupation to 470 today – these jobs went to unemployed colleagues from various piquetero movements. Today, these colleagues are working with us as security guards.

WF: Was there also collaboration with the indigenous peoples in the region?

RG: Absolutely. We showed that the relations between workers and the oppressed are not based on the logic of exploitation but rather on social criteria. We respect the rights of the indigenous peoples and we support their demands for recognition and their struggles against the oil companies, etc.

When most of the suppliers boycotted us and did not sell us the raw materials we needed to manufacture ceramics, the Mapuche people, via their confederation, approached the factory and put their land and their clay at our disposal so we could continue working. Now we have a line of ceramics products called "Mapuche" and the individual products are named after the most militant Mapuche leaders.

WF: During 2001-02, there were hundreds of occupied businesses in Argentina. What did the Zanon workers do as part of this movement?

RG: We worked continuously for the coordination of every workplace which had been recuperated or was in the middle of a struggle. We traveled the entire country, we visited each business and we organised several large national meetings. But the government tried in its own way to co-opt this emerging movement.

We of Zanon used the slogan: "If they attack one of us, they attack all of us." We called on all organisations, regardless of differences in evaluations and tactics, to unconditionally defend every occupied business against any kind of eviction or repression, and to fight for a national expropriation law to legalise all the workers' self-management projects.

WF: In Argentina, there are hardly any occupied businesses left today. Why has Zanon survived while so many other businesses failed?

RG: There are several reasons for this. The government worked very hard to pacify this militant movement. It drip fed its support for occupied businesses, but even then only if they had already been abandoned by their owners. They were supported by organisations who over time

“The expropriation is only a partial solution, but it is one that allows us to continue the struggle for our ultimate goal, the nationalisation of the factory”

adapted to the official, "kirchnerist" [supporters of former President Néstor Kirchner – PR] policy. (Incidentally, this is the same process of co-option that many piquetero organisations, people's assemblies, trade unions and even human rights organisations underwent.)

In our case, there was always a militant workers' self-management based on class independence. Our policy has always been to seek cooperation with other sectors of the working class engaged in struggle. But we knew that no project of workers' self-management can work well in a



country that has millions of workers who are unemployed or earn poverty wages, or in a capitalist market where we have to compete with large corporations which in contrast to us have access to huge amounts of capital. That is why we have always fought for the expropriation of the factory and for nationalisation under workers' control.

“Our project of workers’ self-management which has lasted more than eight years is an example of the power of our class. It shows what workers are capable of”

WF: A few weeks ago, the parliament of the province of Neuquén voted for the expropriation of the factory. How did this come about?

RG: On the night of 13 August, parliament voted to expropriate the factory and transfer it to our cooperative FaSinPat [“Fabrica sin Patrones” – factory without bosses]. In the afternoon before the vote, more than 3,000 people demonstrated outside the parliament building. Among them were representatives of militant workers from across the country, for example from the subway in Buenos Aires. Although the Patagonian winds were blowing up to 60 kilometres [40 miles] an hour, hundreds of us held out in front of the parliament until the early morning hours when the result of the vote was announced.

WF: Does this mean your demands were satisfied?

RG: Not quite. The expropriation law stipulates that the province will pay 23 million pesos [about \$6m, £3.5m – PR] to the creditors of the former owner. We believe these debts were made by the Zanon family and should not be taken over by the state.

The expropriation is only a partial solution, but it is one that allows us to continue the struggle for our ultimate goal, namely the nationalisation of the factory. At least now there will be no more eviction attempts and legal problems – in the last eight years there have been five attempts to evict us.

We want Zanon to be put definitively at the service of the population. But it is a giant step forward that a capitalist like Luigi Zanon has had his property taken away.

WF: What is your ultimate goal?

RG: We demand nationalisation under workers' control so that we can run the factory at full capacity and create many new jobs. We need a public works programme, because the province of Neuquén alone needs at least 40,000 new homes. A nationalised ceramics factory could be an important part of the solution to this problem.

WF: You are a Zanon worker and a leading member of the union, but also a member of the Trotskyist “Party of Socialist Workers” (PTS). What role has your party played in this struggle?

RG: I believe that the PTS has played a fundamental role. Many battles in the past have been lost due to a lack of

perspective and strategy. It was fundamental that we knew, from historical experience, that we had to introduce a number of key demands into the struggle: the opening of the financial accounts, direct democracy with freedom of tendencies and the occupation and the expropriation of the factory.

This not only gave us a concrete programme but also an organisational framework to make our struggle known across the country – in various sectors of the working class and in the universities – and get support for our strike fund. Our workers' self-management did not spring from thin air – we relied on the experiences of different struggles, both victories and defeats of many generations who have sacrificed their lives over the past 200 years for the cause of the workers.

WF: In recent months we have seen a number of factory occupations in many different countries. Normally, these actions last only a few days or weeks – but there are also cases, especially in France, where the bosses are kidnapped. What lessons does the experience of Zanon offer for these occupations?

RG: It is good news that workers, at the beginning of a new historical crisis of capitalism, are radicalising their methods of struggle, just as the capitalists and the governments are. The ruling classes are radicalising their methods, and that means millions of unemployed, millions of people starving, it means layoffs, suspensions, repression and persecution against those who struggle. The ruling classes are radicalising their methods in the form of wars and military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq or against the Palestinians. Such phenomena will occur more and more in the coming years.

But we also need to radicalise our alternatives. This means demanding that the capitalists must pay for the crisis in concrete terms: accounts must be opened so that the workers and the public can see what the profits of these companies were like over the last five years. Factories which close or throw hundreds or thousands onto the street must be expropriated and placed at the service of the local population. But this is only a beginning: it is also about the demand for a programme of public works to provide housing for homeless families. We need to say “Basta!” [“Enough!”] to the various current government schemes for rescuing companies because they amount to nothing other than guaranteeing the profits of the capitalists.

WF: What is the meaning of the experience of the Zanon workers in the context of the capitalist crisis?

RG: Capitalism is rotting, but it won't topple itself. It has to be toppled. All it has to offer is more misery and barbarism. The workers, and especially those of us who want to fight against the exploitation of man by man, have to defend the rights of the workers and the poor population – but more than anything else, we have to present an alternative.

From this point of view, I think that our project of workers' self-management which has lasted more than eight years is an example of the power of our class. It is a small laboratory that shows what workers are capable of. For years, those in power have told us that we have

to resign, or at most fight for crumbs; they have told us we have no alternatives, and they've implanted so much scepticism in the movement that many left wing or radical organisations have curtailed their programmes and their objectives.

This new crisis is an enormous risk because it will have terrible effects on our living conditions. But at the same time it's a great opportunity for our class to fight for the end of the capitalist system.

WF: When you began the occupation in 2001, surely you didn't expect to spend eight years inside. What do you expect in the coming years?

RG: Our motto has always been: If we can run a factory, we can also run a country. These nine years of struggle have confirmed all my militant convictions. In the 15 years that I have worked in this factory, I was able to observe the political development of my colleagues.

At the beginning there was a generalised apathy, a terrible corporatism, an attitude of "save yourself if you can", an enormous individualism, and above all a lot of scepticism. This mood remained for years because of ongoing attacks by the company, betrayals by the union bureaucracy, etc.

But as soon as the situation changed in the factory, the humour, the courage, the morale changed as well - these very workers, who a short time before seemed like sheep, launched a struggle that to this day has an historic character.

But this didn't simply result from the dynamic of the struggle: it was necessary that in every assembly and even in every conversation we argued and fought for a revolutionary strategy. At the beginning, the workers did not understand this - they even rejected it explicitly - but in the heat of the crisis and the struggle, this programme and this strategy was accepted fully.

This battalion of workers has turned a programme that has been elaborated by several generations of workers in countless battles into a living reality. But we still have a difficult task ahead of us. Other sectors need to take steps like we have. For this, it is important that our experience is made known more widely.

In my view, above all we need a political leadership of the workers - a real general staff - which can fight for this perspective in Argentina and around the world.

Wladek Flakin, from the independent youth organisation REVOLUTION, Berlin - www.onesolutionrevolution.org



POLEMIC

Capitalism's death throes?

Chris Harman is a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. His latest offering on capitalist crises, argues Graham Balmer, combines useful background material with a dogmatic refusal to trace the roots of the current crisis back to a period of strong economic growth



ZOMBIE CAPITALISM

Chris Harman / Bookmarks / 2009 / £15.99

CHRIS HARMAN'S *Zombie Capitalism* is a combination of the many articles he has written over the years and *Explaining the Crisis*, his previous major economic work, published a quarter of a century ago.

In *Zombie Capitalism*, Harman, the SWP's leading economics theoretician, has produced a comprehensive introduction to the SWP's economic analysis but leaves little space for alternative interpretations by other Marxist and Left economists, a feature of *Explaining the Crisis* that made it such a fruitful reference.

Nevertheless, any substantial work by Harman is worthy of serious consideration, not least as a result of his pre-eminent status amongst Marxist/leftist economists. Larry Elliott, *The Guardian's* left Keynesian economics editor, referred favourably to it recently in predicting the immanent collapse of the Chinese economy.

Harman points out in the introduction that *Zombie Capitalism* has had a long gestation. The Great Recession of late 2008 intervened during its drafting and Harman's analysis of the origins of this global economic crisis is perhaps the most interesting part of the book, illustrating both the strengths and weaknesses of his analysis.

Harman traces the growth in finance and debt that presaged the outbreak of the crisis in the summer 2007, to be followed a year later by the collapse of Lehman Brothers and a devastating credit freeze which turned a financial

crisis into a broad economic one. The financial/debt bubble could never be sustained but why did the dramatic growth of the unproductive financial sector with its labyrinthine financial instruments, spiralling borrowing and lending, and rising asset prices develop in the first place?

Harman is an orthodox Marxist economist in that he appreciates the centrality of the rate of profit for capitalism; the Great Depression and the end of the long post-war boom in 1973 are both practical demonstrations of Marx's famous "tendency of the rate of profit to fall" (TRPF), described principally in the third volume of *Capital*.

Alongside the US academic Robert Brenner, Harman considers the period from the onset of crisis in the early 1970s to the present as one of chronic stagnation. This period includes not only the crisis-torn 1970s and 1980s but continues through the 1990s and 2000s until today. Ironically while Harman rejects the idea of long waves of economic development, this is one long wave that seems to go on forever and always in the same direction... down.

This assertion rests critically on the idea that global rates of profit have never recovered from their low points of the early 1980s. From this mistaken premise the logic flows: the recent financial bubble must have been the response of capitalists to a lack of profitable investment opportunities in the productive sector; "world capitalism would not have become dependent on the bubble had profit rates returned to the levels of the long boom" and "financialisation provided a substitute motor, in the form of debt, for the world economy".

This forms the core of his analysis. Although he is happy to supplement it with a dose of under-consumption – the idea that crises can develop because of a lack of aggregate demand in the economy – the “debt bubble” was a form of “privatised Keynesianism” which was “central in ensuring [the productive sector] had markets that neither its own investment nor what it paid its workers could provide”.

Given the importance of the rate of profit to his analysis he provides little detail – two charts and a few figures over a couple of pages – to prove his claims for stagnant profitability. A reader unfamiliar with the debate would be forgiven for believing that few dispute Harman’s account of the trend in the rate of profit.

In fact the opposite is the case; all major studies by both capitalist sources, like investment banks, Goldman Sachs, UBS, JP Morgan or Morgan Stanley and a variety of Marxists confirm that profit rates up to 2007 recovered to levels not seen since the mid-1960s.

One of Harman’s charts is from Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy’s paper, *The Real and Financial Components of Profitability*. This is a very technical paper and various methods are used to calculate the rate of profit in the post-war US, but its summary does anything but support Harman’s assertion. They state that:

“... the profit rate of the nonfinancial corporate sector displays the now familiar pattern in three phases: (1) the rise into the 1960s bulge; (2) the decline from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s; (3) a recovery to the levels of the 1950s.”

A second chart from Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, shows the profit rate rising from the early 1980s but never returning to the levels of the long boom. Brenner bases this assertion on profit figures for domestic manufacturing in the US, Germany and Japan. Brenner’s figures show low profit rates as he excludes all those sectors of the economy in which profit has grown particularly fast since the rapid advance of globalisation in the 1990s.

He ignores profits from investments abroad which now accounts for a third of US profits, from the parasitic financial sector which now accounts for a fifth of US profits, and from executive remuneration, which has doubled as a proportion of GDP over the last two decades. Finally, both sets of data finish in 2000, before the strongest period of global profit growth in 2003-07.

Harman, reading from a chart by US Marxist Fred Moseley, “Is the US Economy Heading for a Hard Landing?”, writes;

“Moseley shows a bigger recovery of recent profit rates, but his calculations still leave them at a high point (in 2004) as only marginally above their lowest points in the long boom.”

But this is not Moseley’s own interpretation of the data. In the same paper Moseley writes:

“It has taken a long time, but the rate of profit is now approaching the previous peaks achieved in the 1960s. ... The last several years especially, since the recession of 2001, has seen a very strong recovery of profits, as real wages have not increased at all, and productivity has increased very rapidly.”

Furthermore he adds:

“And these estimates do not include the profits of US companies from their production abroad, but include only profits from domestic US production. If the profits from overseas production of US companies were added in, it would appear that the recovery of the rate of profit is pretty much complete.”

Of course, this only applies to the period up to 2007. Profit rates peaked in late 2006, before marginally declining up to the autumn of 2008. They then fell very rapidly

Harman notes, more than once, that investment in the major imperialist developed economies has remained historically low over the last two decades

during the financial crisis last winter, although remaining at levels well above their nadir in the 1980s, before recovering from the second quarter of this year.

This journal has previously calculated a post-war US rate of profit that concurs with Moseley. In addition however, it has emphasised that the rise in global profitability has been even more striking in the emerging economies, notably China. Harman acknowledges in the introduction that he removed much of the empirical data to make the book more accessible, but well-presented data can clarify the argument. Given that his entire analysis revolves around the correctness of this point, data is no optional extra in proving his argument. If he is wrong on this, then the whole thing collapses.

Harman notes, more than once, that investment in the major imperialist economies has remained historically low over the last two decades. Harman attributes this to low profitability, claiming that capitalists have failed to invest as a result of low profit rates. In fact there is no direct link between levels of profit and levels of investment. In the 1950s when profit rates were at their highest, investment levels as a proportion of GDP were relatively low.

High productivity meant that machines were cheap. As profit rates fell through the late 1960s and 1970s, investment rose as capitalists sought to offset rising labour costs by replacing workers with machines and as falling productivity caused machines to become relatively more expensive.

Harman views the long boom through rose tinted spectacles at times. He calls recessions of the period “growth recessions”, but it is not the case that there was consistently high non-residential fixed investment throughout the period.

Although Harman accepts a “productive element” to the dotcom bubble of the late 1990s, it was still “based on speculation”. Indeed, the US stock market was marked by “irrational exuberance”, in Alan Greenspan’s words, as telecom and hi tech shares saw their prices vastly exceeded those warranted by company profits.

But the bubble was an outgrowth, an overextension, of an investment boom which vastly raised productivity due to

the ICT revolution, the roll out of personal computers and the rapid introduction of the Internet. The technical basis of capitalist manufacturing was revolutionised, reducing the cost of labour and capital and increasing profit rates.

Harman, throughout the book, pays scant attention to the impact of productivity in revolutionising the means of production and raising profit rates. And for good reason; he has never accepted that the cheapening of the elements of constant capital (something Marx explained

Harman's figures that indicate profit rates have been falling in China over this period of rapid expansion are on his own admission dubious and contradictory

repeatedly – see Capital Volume 3 Chapter 5 for example) can, through increasing productivity, lower the cost of machinery, factories, offices, raw materials and so forth – and act as a very important countervailing tendency to the tendency for profit rates to fall.

This limits the breadth of his analysis and as a result he stresses just two central countervailing tendencies that can either impede or even reverse the fall in profitability. Firstly, he points to increases in the rate of exploitation – either by increasing hours, cutting wages, etc. or through productivity gains in the consumer goods industries which cheapen the cost of living for workers and leave more profit for the capitalist.

Secondly, through crises which destroy or devalue large chunks of capital, something which, he claims the concentration and centralisation of capital – fewer and bigger companies – has diminished, as the number of companies deemed “too big to fail” has limited the ability of capitalism to rejuvenate itself through this means.

But in his haste to prove the intractability of stagnation, has Harman overlooked other factors that could, sometimes unexpectedly, provide a fillip for capitalism?

Not surprisingly, the collapse of Stalinism in the USSR, China, etc. is a blind spot for Harman. The precise nature of these economies is now an historical question, but the IS/SWP tradition of state capitalism has been a grave impediment in analysing the global economic impact of the restoration of capitalism in the previously centrally planned economies.

The “bankruptcy of whole states – notably the USSR, with a GDP that was at one stage a third or even a half that of the US”, (obviously these entire states were not too big to fail) is a passing comment in a passage on corporate restructuring in the West.

Tony Cliff, in the original version of state capitalism, substituted international military competition for economic competition, but Cliff did not view the USSR within its boundaries as capitalist. On the other hand, Harman did. Hence Harman saw its demise as little more than a shift from one form of capitalism to another – from state to market.

Harman plots the development of China from Mao to the present and acknowledges its tremendous economic growth, but believes that over-investment – in many sectors, not just exports – and low employment growth has exerted a downward pressure on profitability.

He quotes the IMF: “Even compared to Korea and Japan during their boom years, the ratio [of investment to GDP] in China today looks high.” He might have added that China, as part of its fiscal stimulus package, is today embarking on a programme of investment in infrastructure – transport and power – that is one of the greatest in the history of capitalism.

Such rapid investment can often result in an economy “over-heating” – the Chinese government was taking counter-cyclical measures to dampen down property speculation before the sub-prime crisis broke in 2007 – but this is a far cry from the chronic over-investment, excess capacity and an unsustainable rate of accumulation.

Harman downplays the growth of the Chinese working class over the last three decades, but even his quoted figure of a 3.5% annual increase in urban employment means that it has doubled over the last two decades. And he is really not fond of the idea that the entry of China and the other third world nations into the global economy has doubled the size of the labour force that is exploited by capital. Wonder why?

Harman's figures that indicate profit rates have been falling in China over this period of rapid expansion are on his own admission dubious and contradictory and are at odds with his own argument about the relationship between high profitability and investment. If falling profitability accounts for falling investment in the west. Why does falling profitability account for high investment in the east?

In fact all serious empirical studies of Chinese profitability (Goldman Sachs, UBS, OECD etc) demonstrate that it surged after the turn of the millennium. It was this surge of profits which funded the US credit sub-prime boom. As he explains himself:

“Along with the similar surpluses made by Japan and the oil states, [China] provided the lending which enabled US consumers and the US government to keep borrowing until the credit crunch of the summer of 2007.”

But how could it have exported its surpluses if there was no surplus to export?

Earlier in the book Harman describes well the critical role of the credit system within capitalism; how it sucks in the mass of profits and redistributes them for investment, with financial institutions mediating between productive capitalists in the process of borrowing and lending. He shows how much financial capital takes the form of paper claims on future profits (Marx's “fictitious capital”), often only tenuously linked to production, which is the only sector of the economy that creates new value from labour. A precarious “shadow banking” system develops, always ripe for speculation – and implosion.

The problem arises when he attempts to relate the growth in cheap money and financialisation to profitability. He explains that:

“The rate of interest has often been confused in mainstream economic writings with the rate of profit. But in

fact the level and direction of movement of the two are quite different.”

And that:

“Since the profits of productive capitalists are the major source of the funds for lending, a high rate of profit will encourage a lower rate of interest. On the other hand, if profits are low, more productive capitalists will themselves want to borrow and this will exert a pressure for interest rates to rise.”

So the interest rate is determined by the supply and demand for loanable funds; if profits are high ample funds will be available and interest rates will be low, if profits are low, then vice versa.

So Harman's professed on-going stagnation-regime of low profitability implies a high rate of interest. And, indeed, during the 1970s and 1980s when profits were low interest rates were high. But since the advent of globalisation in the early 1990s, global interest rates have been historically low over the last 15 years. It is Harman who is hopelessly confused. His contention that recent bubbles must be the result of economic stagnation and low profitability is refuted by his own theory.

It is blindingly obvious that the vast pool of surplus profits made in China this century (called a “savings glut” by the bourgeois economists) and made available to the financial markets in the G7 caused interest rates to be low (reflecting the excess supply of money).

This in turn allowed for and underpinned the massive extension of credit (and debt) to firms and households hitherto denied access to it (such as low income families seeking their own homes in the USA). This inner connection between boom and bust completely escapes Harman.

Zombie Capitalism has a broad scope, covering several other areas of interest, such as the basics of Marxist economics, theories of imperialism, the state and globalisation, and the environment as a further limit to capital. But none of that is really what it is all about. Harman fails because on his central contention, around which his entire argument revolves, that profit rates fell in the period up to 2007, he is simply wrong.

And as a result the most important and contentious economic arguments contained in it disappoint given the dramatic changes in world capitalism since his last book all those years ago.



INTERVIEW

The French Anti-Capitalist Party – the story so far

Franck Gaudichaud is a member of the www.rebellion.org collective and the chair of Latin American studies in a French university. His PHD analysed Chilean popular movements during the Allende government. Franck is an active militant of the New French Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA). He spoke to Andrés Figueroa Cornejo of the Movimiento de los Pueblos y los Trabajadores (MPT) during a recent visit to Chile.

PR: *What is the state of the labour movement in France today?*

FG: There are six trade union federations. Over recent decades the CGT split into the “right” and “left” “centres”. This was an expression of the rising hegemony of the Communist Party within the trade union movement. For example, in 1981 we saw the appearance of SUD – a new more radical, dynamic and youthful centre which organised the most badly hit and precarious sectors of workers: the rail workers, public sector workers in health, education and the post, the unemployed, immigrant workers . . . They are looking for political unity around clear class politics.

Separate from this there are two positions within the radical left: those who persist in trying to change and reorientate the CGT to class positions from within and those in SUD who wish to construct a new class struggle trade unionism. I should point out that there are many good rank and file trade unionists, both in the private and public sectors, in the CGT too. In the regions, further away from the bureaucratised national leadership of the CGT, both centres joined forces around united strikes.

Today there is a sharpening of social conflicts in Europe but there the big union federations play the role of a brake on the movement and on convergence. In France we have just experienced a series of

very intense class struggles. There were occupations of important factories such as Continental and Caterpillar, a series of kidnappings of bosses and management chiefs in factories who had sacked workers and relocated to boost their profits further . . . Currently in one company (Molex) there is talk of the staff taking the plant over under workers’ control.

This exceptional level of combativity has scared the bourgeoisie and the Sarkozy government in equal measure, not least when, at the same time, in Guadelupe the LKP collective led a magnificent general strike for 44 days, supported by the whole population of the island! The media attempted to hide this but it still had a huge impact in France; people said – yes it is possible to unite and win against the Sarkozy government.

Disgracefully, despite being sister countries, few in Latin America knew anything about the struggle in Guadelupe. In France the big federations have been completely abandoned by the rank and file. In

“Strategically, we affirm the need for independence of class and in relation to the state and its institutions, which wish to trap, mould and dominate us”

the last three months there have been three one-day general strikes and on 19 March more than three million workers took to the streets while millions more went on strike.

However, the union leaderships put forward no perspectives to take the strikes forward nor any initiatives to draw together those sectors in struggle: to create unity between public and private sector workers, between those with

permanent jobs and casual workers, between French and immigrant workers. On the contrary, when university staff faced government privatisation measures, we went on strike for three months; there were occupations of the cities, of the campuses, we organised coordinated mobilisations – all undeniable facts – but we were not able to reach out beyond this. There was no generalisation of the struggle, despite the high levels of conflict.

This demonstrated the established left’s total lack of any alternative. The PS was silent – completely absent – during all these months of social conflict. It is easier to explain this situation when we see that Sarkozy is putting into practice a part of the PS’s neoliberal programme (regarding pensions, the universities, increased flexibility in the workforce).

PR: *How is the left hoping to stave off defeat by neoliberalism?*

FG: We are at the beginning of a long and historic process of constructing an anti-capitalist “pole” in France and across Europe. Since 1992 and within the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), which I used to be a member of, we said that, faced with a new period characterised by global reorganisation of neoliberal

capitalism, the social-liberalism of the traditional left and the collapse of bureaucratic socialism, it is necessary to create new movements, a new political organisation, and to debate a new programme for human emancipation.

We felt that we could no longer remain tied to dogmatic principles – theories that have no connection with reality – and that above all we have to respond to people’s real

problems. But yes, we also have to rescue the best of the history of the workers' movement and the international revolution. It is also necessary to pay attention to the new generation of social militants who appeared around the world in the last cycle of class struggle and who have legitimate criticisms of the parties of the left.

PR: *What is the relationship between the anti-capitalists and the French Communist Party?*

FG: The argument which the PC uses to justify co-governing with the PS in hundreds of municipalities and regions is that it is necessary to create a "left majority". We wish to create a popular majority, changing from a rank and file left to an anti-capitalist movement. We said that to create a genuinely anti-capitalist left it is necessary to ensure that it is completely independent of the PS, of social-liberalism and of the dominant institutions. But the idea of forming an anti-capitalist party is not an end in itself. The party is simply an instrument for emancipation, an instrument in the service of that goal (hopefully a transitory one). It tries to give representation to the social struggles, to the youth, those in temporary work, to organised workers, public sector workers etc.

PR: *What is the origin of the NPA?*

FG: Since the 1970s we have failed to organise an anti-capitalist pole "from above", that is to say, to create a basis for a fusion agreement between the various organisations of the revolutionary left. Therefore, the LCR adopted the line "from below", the politics of the open door, the creation of rank and file committees across the country to give birth to a new party. We concluded that the LCR was ready to disappear, to dissolve itself and that it was the moment to take a qualitative and quantitative leap.

It was a big gamble, a very risky decision to put an end to a dynamic and growing organisation of 40 years standing, a decision unheard of in recent history. In the presidential elections our

spokesperson, the young postman Olivier Besançon, got more than a million votes and in the elections of 2007 he got 1.5 million (4% compared to the PC's 1.9%). In addition, in 2005 we built a big united popular campaign for a "no" vote against the ultra-liberal European constitution. All these factors confirmed the existence of a real potential, the LCR's responsibility to try to respond to the enormous gulf between the

"It was necessary to transcend the principles, the sectarianism, to overcome the particular identities and forge a common anti-capitalist one"

organisations of the radical left and the level of social combativity.

In 2007 we made a public call for the formation of a "new anti-capitalist party", a process that took a year, up to the congress of February 2008, through a process of discussions in hundreds of rank and file committees open to all. Right from the start the ex-members of the LCR were a clear minority in the committees, and that was the intention, in order that the results of the debate would prove to be genuinely the property of the rank and file: there was no attempt to resurrect the LCR, but rather to construct a new anticapitalist left.

PR: *How are the anti-capitalist committees organised?*

FG: In the first place the committees are formed on a geographical basis and there are now 400 nationally. There has been a process of organisation and coordination by sector or region. In these committees there are ex-PC militants, ex members of the Socialist Party, libertarians, but above all, many trade unionists, independent class fighters, youth, anti-capitalist militants, radical ecologists, feminists without a party. For example in my committee there are two ex-

militants of the LCR, and the other 12 have nothing to do with our party of origin. There were less than 3,000 members of the LCR in 2007. Today there are more than 11,000 within the NPA: there has been a quantitative and qualitative leap.

PR: *How did the initial constitution of the NPA come about?*

FG: The process was very rich, a lot of debate and, of course, difficulties

because of the existence of diverse organisational and political culture. It was necessary to transcend the principles, the sectarianism, to overcome the particular identities and forge a common anti-capitalist one. You have to remember that environmentalists or libertarians joined the new organisation and they had a fairly negative view of parties and the forms of power (and this can be understood knowing the history of the 20th century). There were other people without a political party culture too. We had to put everything on the table, without sectarianism: our conception of the party, of anti-capitalism, of social transformation, our theoretical references, everything... and it has been a very healthy collective exercise, of direct democracy, of discussion with thousands and thousands of people in the country.

PR: *How were the founding principles of the party discussed?*

FG: A national, coordination committee was formed that drafted common texts for debate. In one year everything was discussed and thousands of members made amendments and as a result, we arrived at a main text setting out the fundamental principles of the NPA. Another document about the



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national and international political situation was drafted and a text on statutes and organisation. (See: www.npa2009.org/node/24).

The dynamic consisted of a to-ing and fro-ing of conclusions from the base organisations and the national committee. With thousands of amendments! Therefore the national coordination committee grouped the amendments by theme in order to agree the positions and when agreement was reached, to send the remaining points of conflict back to the committees for further discussion. Meanwhile, we had a national meeting with delegates from all over France in the middle of the year, regional meetings of the committees until finally the Founding Congress in February 2009, where even when there wasn't a consensus, we simply voted on different proposals.

PR: *What aspects were most debated?*

FG: Some 800 elected delegates participated in the congress representing more than 9,000 members. There were also international delegations present from more than 45 countries from all continents and hundreds of observers and European and

us from the authoritarian "socialisms" of the 20th century. The strategy for revolution and power was also debated, internal organisation and democracy. And about how to participate in the next elections.

PR: *What were the main agreements?*

FG: Clearly we established that we don't want either bureaucratic or dictatorial socialism. Finally we claimed the concept of "socialism of the 21st century", that appears to be a broad concept that opens the avenues for discussion. The strategic problem still isn't settled. To illustrate this in very broad terms, some comrades are closer to the Bolshevik model, others have a position of gradual, interrupted breakdown, others claim the mantle of Louise Michele and the Paris Commune or Rosa Luxemburg... There are many nuances with respect to the NPA. We haven't resolved everything, such as how are we going to overthrow capitalism (nobody knows!), but if we are in agreement that will be the basis for self-organisation of the popular classes and forms of the mass general strike. Of course we have general common positions

reserve the right to popular self-defence. Now, with Sarkozy's government, we are living through a phase of strong repression in France, of police control of working class urban districts, the loss of fundamental liberties, of rising state xenophobia. Concretely we are in conditions of defending demonstrations, strike pickets. But we are thinking of developing our "security commission" and "training" more.

PR: *How is the NPA structured?*

FG: If we want to transform society in a radical way, we have to change ourselves... In the NPA there exists absolute gender equality, in all instances: one man, one woman. Internally, as well as in electoral campaigns. The committees are the sovereign base of the NPA. They are geographical, at the city or department level, but they can also be by economic sector (by company or professional activity). The committees choose a leadership at the departmental or regional level that co-ordinates and centralises the political work. The national leadership elects about 30 people, charged with the daily work of dealing with organisational matters or relations with the press. This is all done under the control of the CPN and the committees.

It is a collective leadership, without a general secretary, composed in its majority of young militants and workers (between 25 and 40-years-old). From there come the spokespeople. There is the right to form internal tendencies, including factions as a guarantee of the expression of internal democracy. The votes are proportional to this.

This is how it functions internally, always with the criteria of autonomy of the local committees, but following the national co-ordination. Above all our statutes approve the removal of leaders as well as the rotation and accountability of them under members' control. Almost all are workers and involved in activity. We want to avoid the processes of bureaucratisation or of leaders disconnected from reality.

“There are many nuances with respect to the NPA. We haven't resolved everything, such as how are we going to overthrow capitalism (nobody knows!)”

international journalists. The themes most discussed were, for example, the name! What would we call ourselves? Revolutionaries, anti-capitalists, socialists, the left, radical ecologists? There were more than 400 names proposed by the committees. And in the end Congress voted on eight and the name NPA won, that is to say the original provisional name.

Other essential political discussions were about the concept of "socialism of the 21st century" and "eco-socialism": two concepts we claim principally to distinguish

linked to the indispensable socialisation and control of the chief means of production, breaking with bourgeois institutions, and putting an end to the model of unsustainable productivism, etc.

PR: *Is there a debate about the use of violence?*

FG: For us, violence and terrorism come, historically, from the state and the ruling classes. Among others, we cite in our founding statement the Chilean example and the coup of 1973. Because of this we

RESPONSE

The NPA and the strike wave

FORMED JUST over six months ago, the NPA has already been incurring the wrath of leaders of the main French union federations. The party has been denounced by the leader of the CFDT for sticking its nose in issues that apparently don't concern it – defending workers faced with mass lay-offs and factory closures! This summer, the CGT, the CFDT and FO all refused an invitation to attend a summer school held by the NPA – the debate the NPA proposed was a burning one for French workers: "What strategy for the current struggles?"

France, more than any other European country, has been rocked by militant resistance to the plans of both government and bosses to make workers pay for the economic crisis. In March, three million workers from both the public and private sector went on strike and took to the streets, declaring that they would not pay for the crisis that the bosses system had caused.

Since then, there have been a series of highly militant struggles in factories across the country, particularly in the auto-sector. As bosses have tried to cut their losses by threatening to close factories, make massive lay-offs and cut working hours, workers have responded by strike action, blockades and occupations, and in some cases by taking the management hostage in order to force them to the negotiating table.

The increased militancy of the working class, fuelled by the recognition that they and their children are being hung out to dry whilst the bankers and bosses continue to rake it in, has led to increased tensions between the rank and file of the unions and their leadership, in particular within the CGT.

One local union rep, Xavier Mathieu from Continental tyre company, who led a militant occupation against the closure of his factory, castigated the CGT leadership for leaving their struggle

isolated and refusing to defend workers who were taken to court for carry out direct action. Mathieu described Bernard Thibault, head of the CGT, as scum (racaille) live on a radio show for his refusal to solidly back the workers of Continental.

The union bureaucrats are running scared. More than anything they do not want to jeopardise their place at the negotiating table with Sarkozy. Thibault is currently trying to get the government to organise a national conference with the worthies of the French state to discuss industrial policy, or rather to work out how to contain workers' anger in return for a few crumbs of the huge cake handed to the banks.

Seeing NPA activists turning up at occupations and strike committees arguing for action that can disrupt this strategy, has clearly rattled them. In response they are digging up the 1906 "Amiens Charter" which sets out the distinct and separate roles of unions and political parties and is a bedrock of French bureaucratic reformism.

Distracted by electoralism?

The NPA has rightly said that the union leaders are holding back the movement by refusing to go beyond 24-hour strikes, leaving local struggles isolated. The minor victories that have been achieved – minor because workers have squeezed better redundancy packages out of the bosses rather than saving their jobs – are the result of the militant direct action of the workers themselves. What is lacking is a national coordinated fightback to save all jobs under threat, by strike actions, occupations and solidarity action. The union leaders won't organise this, so rank and file trade unionists alongside socialist activists need to do this themselves, thereby challenging the hold of the bureaucrats in the workers' movement.

It may seem contradictory, but despite the NPA's enthusiastic participation in the recent wave of workers' struggles, there are signs that the party may get sidelined by electoralism. Next year there will be elections to regional assemblies. Over the summer the NPA put their name to a joint statement with the Parti de Gauche (PdG – a left reformist party), laying out their proposal to put together an electoral alliance made up of the parties to the left of the Parti Socialiste (PS).

The NPA's relationship with the PdG led to a heated debate at its founding Congress which overwhelmingly rejected the proposal of the right wing around Christian Piquet to present a joint slate with the PdG and the PCF at the European Elections.

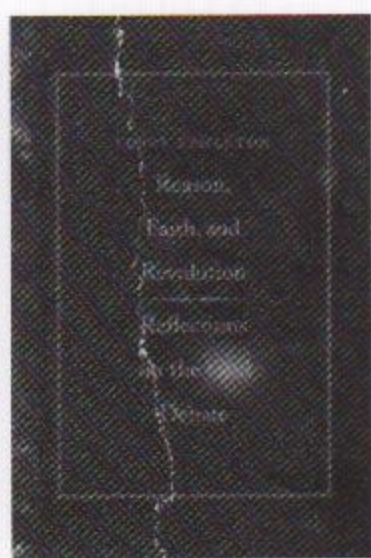
The resolution did not rule out future electoral alliances, and now it seems that ambiguity is leading the NPA down the wrong path. Rather than seeking alliances which blur programmatic lines, and which overlook the role played by leaders of the PdG and by the PCF in supporting the PS in regional assemblies, the NPA should be mobilising militant workers to put forward candidates of struggle in the elections next year.

Ultimately the fate of workers' candidates will depend on the balance of class forces. By intervening in the current struggles with a clear programme of immediate and transitional demands, creating the forms of organisation that can unite the struggles and promote class hegemony, general political consciousness within the French working class will be considerably heightened.

This kind of intervention is crucial if French workers are to save their jobs and resist the whole raft of attacks that Sarkozy has up his sleeves.

By Christine Duval

For Christina Duval's report on the founding congress of the NPA see www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2730



Eagleton forgets agency in critique of 'Ditchens'

REASON, FAITH AND REVOLUTION
Terry Eagleton
Yale University Press / 2009 / £18.99

TERRY EAGLETON is Britain's most famous Marxist literary critic. Most recently he was involved in a polemic with Martin Amis over Islamophobic and racist remarks in an article "The Age of Horrorism", a dispute which had added venom as Amis was appointed as a lecturer to Manchester University as Eagleton, a real lecturer, was let go.

Eagleton's book is a continuation of this argument albeit with a slightly wider and largely different target. This time it is aimed at "Ditchens", his choice amalgam of Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, who have recently attacked the latter day religious revival in their works "The God Delusion" and "God is not Great" respectively.

Eagleton aims to show that the liberally bilious diatribes of the aforementioned Ditchens are symptomatic of a whole trend – the espousal of a mechanical liberal rationalism, which not only traduces religious thought, but is a cover for a more general creed of a crass scientism over "faith". And certainly he succeeds up to a point. But for all its erudition, Eagleton tells us precious little about the relationship between religion and society today.

The book is based on a series of four lectures delivered in the USA. They are written in Eagleton's very own amusing, self-knowing and consciously learned style. He wears his wit on his sleeve. The trouble is, short as it is – the book runs to less than 200 pages – this sleeve is way too long.

What is missing from Eagleton's narrative is any sense of agency. The point of philosophy is not only to understand the world but to change

it. Eagleton for all his claims to Marxist socialism never mentions the working class, once, anywhere, in his book.

Indeed he concludes that "the distinction between Ditchens and those like myself comes down in the end to one between liberal humanism and tragic humanism." (p168) In other words it is really no difference at all. The debate is about as enlightening as the counting of angels on a pin.

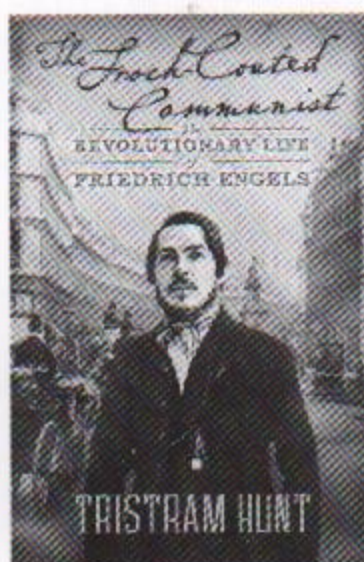
Eagleton says Christianity is all about love. Ditchens says its all about hate. Eagleton says: "I shall confine my discussion to that [Christian theology] alone, on the grounds that it is better to be provincial than presumptuous." (p3) Conceding that he knows nothing about other religions, but something about Christianity, he

nonetheless claims that "Radical Islam generally understands exceedingly little about its one religious faith." (p141)

Eagleton argues that all politics is based on "faith", with the stroke of a pen disposing of the difference between materialism and idealism, object and subject, science and superstition. He even claims that: "What happened was not that science gradually exposed the fallacies of myth and religion." (p77) – blithely ignorant or deliberately ignoring the struggle of science against the established church. It makes the reader wonder why Thomas Huxley bothered to act as Darwin's Bulldog in his fight to defend the theory of evolution by natural selection in the face of attacks by the Anglican church in the 1860s.

Eagleton has no scientific, materialist or indeed objective basis for his "Marxist" beliefs. There is no point to this book, other than to show off his wit and occasional wisdom to his academic colleagues.

Bill Jefferies



A superior account of Engels and his life's work

THE FROCK-COATED COMMUNIST; THE REVOLUTIONARY LIFE OF FRIEDRICH ENGELS

Tristram Hunt
London / 2009 / £25.00

WHEN ENGELS died in 1895 he left more than £2m in stocks and shares in today's money. In the cellar of his grand Primrose Hill four-story house he had £20,000 pounds worth of fine wines and more stored with his merchant.

Unconcerned that this wealth compromised his communist convictions, he argued that "the stock exchange simply adjusts the distribution of surplus value already stolen from the workers" and that it was possible to both

dabble on the stock market and be a socialist. He promised a "fine reception" for anyone who came to him seeking an apology for being a boss of a manufacturing firm.

Despite this evident wealth, one cannot put a price upon the legacy Engels left the international working class movement. Leave aside the fact he provided the financial underpinning to allow Karl Marx to work uninterrupted for 30-plus years on their theoretical and organisational projects; Engels made outstanding contributions himself to the scientific development of Marxist doctrine as well as devoting tireless years to the smooth running of the Second International.

The new biography of Friedrich Engels by Tristram Hunt centres its narrative around the contradictions in Engels' life. As a Marxist scholar, Engels made lasting contributions in many fields: the origins and nature of women's oppression; military tactics; the philosophical foundations of Marxism. With Karl Marx, Engels fashioned the distinctive ideology of communism in the 1840s out of the eclectic mish-mash of radical democracy, petit bourgeois anarchism and utopian socialism which influenced the early working class movement.

Hunt clearly relishes Engels' bourgeois bohemian nature – a devoted German revolutionary, who can enjoy his increasing wealth while guiding the infant working class political movement.

Nevertheless, the life he had to live, especially his twenty years in Manchester as a partner in his father's textile firm, was full of contradiction, contradiction that he often had to cover over through petty lies and outright deceptions inherent in leading a double life. He was forced to conceal much of his activity and inflammatory writing from his family in Germany as well as his associates in business and philanthropy.

The fact that he participated in bourgeois society (Engels was a member of the Cheshire hunt) while not being of it, took its toll on his physical and mental health over time, especially as he endeavoured to keep two domestic homes running in Manchester so he could continue to live with his life-long companion Lizzy Burns (and then her sister Mary, after Lizzy's death), Irish working class women, who he could not easily integrate into the bourgeois world he was forced to inhabit. But the Burns sisters were Engels' point of entry into the working class communities of Manchester and Salford, without which Engels' understanding of and empathy for the working class would have been incomplete.

Although he lived a life of contradictory pressures and bourgeois habits, Engels was highly respected by the leaders of the international labour movement.

When the huge revival in working class militancy erupted in the London dock strikes of 1889 Engels' views were eagerly canvassed. When he delivered the closing speech to the 400 delegates of Socialist International Congress in Zurich in 1893, aged 73, he was

Engels provided at least £35,000 a year at today's prices until Marx's death, to enable Marx to keep up a middle class lifestyle, especially for his three daughters.

The bare bones of Engels' life have been covered before – perhaps best in English by Gustav Mayer in

The bare bones of Engels' life have been covered before – perhaps best in English by Gustav Mayer in his 1930s biography. Yet Hunt's is the superior effort

rapturously greeted as the co-founder of Marxism and one of the architects of the European workers' movement.

Among the people sharing his wine cellar in North London through the 1870s and 1880s were the leadership of European socialist parties and trade unions, especially on open-house Sundays when 122 Primrose Hill rocked to good natured debate and carousing until the small hours.

Guests like Wilhelm Liebknecht and Karl Kautsky from Germany were putting together the largest mass working class party of the 19th century, made up of the people that Engels had exploited directly while a partner in the textile firm Ermen and Engels between 1850 and his retirement in 1869.

Hunt's book is a sympathetic, even warm, account of Engels' life and work, even though Hunt is neither a Marxist nor a historical materialist.

He pays full tribute to the unstinting generosity of Engels towards the many who sought his help: the legion of German revolutionary émigrés who found themselves penniless on English shores after 1848; and again he supported many refugees after the collapse of the 1870 Paris Commune and the ensuing bloody repression.

Above all Hunt details the lifetime of financial support for Marx and his family – the very reason he undertook to work in Ermen and Engels in the first place.

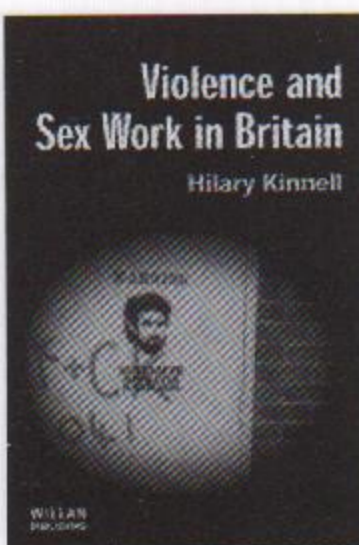
his 1930s biography. Yet Hunt's is the superior effort. The years of Engels' upbringing in the stultifying religious atmosphere of the Rhur under his father's heavy direction, his initial rebelliousness and above all the social and political climate of the Rhur in the 1830s is brilliantly conveyed by Hunt.

But even better is the way Hunt explains the intellectual evolution of Marx and Engels in the 1840s, at first in collaboration with and later in fierce opposition to, the ideas of the Young Hegelians. In many ways this tome does a better job than David Riazanov's 1930s biography of Marx and Engels in setting the lives of the two founding fathers of Marxism in an intellectual and social context, clearly setting out their unique ideas of society and politics to a non-socialist audience.

Hunt does a creditable job too in dispelling the charges leveled through the ages by critics of Engels – that he was responsible for importing vulgar distortions into Marx's ideas, such as a mechanical, deterministic view of social change, which "inevitably" led to the crimes of Lenin and Stalin.

Hunt shows how all of Engels' key contributions were made with the knowledge and assistance of Marx before he died in 1883 and that Engels cannot be made responsible for the degeneration of revolutions carried out under banners on which his face prominently appears.

Keith Harvey



The 'silly girls' who get themselves murdered

VIOLENCE AND SEX WORK IN BRITAIN

Hilary Kinnell

Willan / 2008 / £00.00

“AND THEN the silly girl went and got herself murdered”.

This comment was from a magistrate in the West Midlands, talking about Gail Henderson who was strangled while working in Wolverhampton as a street sex worker in 1990. Gail, it appears, only had herself to blame.

But like thousands of other sex workers, she was caught up in the criminal justice system but this system only knew how to punish her, not protect her.

At that time Hilary Kinnell worked in an outreach project for sex workers based in Birmingham, and she knew Gail, who sometimes worked in the area. From that time onwards Kinnell has been documenting violence against sex workers. She has regularly given evidence to the police, politicians and the press about the links between prostitution policies and the deaths of vulnerable women, but disgracefully her arguments have been largely ignored as politicians fall over each other in the race to be “tough” on the sex industry.

Following the media furore over the murder of five women in Ipswich in 2006, Kinnell pulled together all her evidence to write this book. She has attempted to analyse all fatal and non-fatal attacks on sex workers between 1990 and 2006 – primarily focussing on attacks on women. Her grim database, reported in the book, includes 118 murders of sex workers in that period.

The resulting book, although often uncomfortable and harrowing, remains a humane, revealing and passionate exposé of the risks sex workers face. This risk,

Kinnell argues, is not primarily from clients, but a result of institutional prejudice and failure by the criminal justice agencies (and other services such as mental health agencies), together with the enforcement of law and government policies that increase the vulnerability of sex workers.

Kinnell's book starts with a reappraisal of the case of Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper and explodes the myth that continues to this day; namely, that Sutcliffe's intended victims were sex workers. As recently as February 2008 *The Daily Telegraph* referred to the 13 “prostitutes” that he murdered. While Sutcliffe's defence was that he was divinely inspired to murder women who sold sex (i.e. he claimed he was a paranoid schizophrenic), many of his victims were not sex workers. What they had in common was that they were women who were out and alone late at night, and this made them vulnerable.

Of course, many of them were sex workers, so when the first

potential Ripper victim was not considered at the time”.

The report is one long tale of incompetent policing: inadequate systems to deal with the amount of evidence, judgemental attitudes and the almost arbitrary exclusion of evidence deemed irrelevant because of the assumptions and prejudices of police officers.

For example, 14-year-old schoolgirl Tracey Browne was attacked by Sutcliffe in 1975 and sustained serious head injuries, but she was never included as an official victim despite providing an accurate description and photofit.

Byford was blunt: “it is the state that has created the circumstances in which serial killings take place”. Police tactics and attitudes towards sex workers during the Ripper investigation veered wildly between repression and toleration. Women were advised against street work, but then raided if they worked indoors.

But this catalogue of incompetent policing is not the only way that the state was culpable. The criminalisation of sex workers itself obstructed the investigation.

Helen Rytka was soliciting with her sister in Huddersfield the night she died. Her sister did not report her missing immediately because

Kinnell argues that regarding Sutcliffe and other murderers as a client is part of the problem, and is used to tar all clients as abusers and potential murderers

“innocent” victim, 16-year-old schoolgirl Jayne Macdonald, was murdered it was assumed that she had been mistaken for a prostitute. The idea that he was only after sex workers had a major impact on the investigation, and was one of many failings that left Sutcliffe free to murder for such a long period.

An official police investigation into the case, the Byford Report, noted that “the possibility that any unaccompanied woman was a

she feared arrest herself. Consequently, although Helen may not have been found alive, an opportunity to spot Sutcliffe or his car in the area was lost.

Many of these factors continue to operate today, affecting both the vulnerability of sex workers and impeding investigations. Kinnell argues that regarding Sutcliffe and other murderers as a client is part of the problem, and is used to tar all clients as abusers and potential

murderers. She rightly distinguishes maniacs like Sutcliffe from the "genuine clients", the majority of whom understand the contract that they enter and the conventions that surround it.

They accept they are buying a service they are required to pay for, that they pay upfront, that they use condoms, that they do not force acts that are not agreed or paid for. One study of kerb crawlers found that only 0.8% had convictions for sexual or other violence (p.148). Of course some clients become violent: Steve Wright was a "conventional" client for many years before his murder of five women in Ipswich in 2006, but in most cases violent attacks are from men who pose as clients but then assault or rob the sex worker.

In the absence of state protection, sex workers have developed strategies to protect themselves. It is safest to avoid working on the streets – 78% of sex workers who died in violent attacks in Kinnell's study were street workers, even though only 28% of the 50-80,000 female sex workers in the UK work indoors. (p67) Both street and indoor workers develop risk assessment skills as a matter of necessity – looking out for danger signs and unpredictability in new clients, and having "regulars" helps to minimise risk. They become adept at managing client behaviour and learn assertiveness in negotiation.

Government policies, however, penalise the safest method of sex work – working indoors together. The state criminalises this kind of work, using various laws that claim to tackle pimping and exploitation. Women are pressurised by these laws into working alone indoors which increases their vulnerability to violence and to robbery.

Many women are denied the relative safety of working indoors and are forced to work on the streets as a result of the law against brothels. However, here too, safety precautions can be taken: "Working in pairs, one recording the car registration number of the other's client and raising the alarm if she does not return to her usual pitch within the expected time; using

visual clues and intuition to decide whether a client is 'safe'; agreeing the price and place to do business where it is possible to call for assistance if necessary." (p78)

Outreach projects also help by collecting details of potential and actual abusive punters, local

The "crime" the state wants to address is the nuisance of kerb crawlers, the visibility of sex work on the street, the "immorality" that cannot be legitimised

vigilantes, robbers and thugs and sharing these through "Ugly Mugs" lists.

But sex workers and projects are still hampered by policies that are centred around suppression of sex work. When police implement these policies aggressively, through zero tolerance initiatives, for example, they make matters far worse. Such policing disperses women to unfamiliar areas where there are fewer options for mutual protection. Dodgy punters are unfamiliar, projects are no longer in contact and they are often removed from residential areas where other people are around on the streets. Moves to drive sex work out of an area can be motivated by urban regeneration programmes, with upmarket accommodation being developed in formerly run down neighbourhoods.

Michaela Hague was murdered in Sheffield in 2001 a week after police had cracked down on kerb crawlers and forced sex workers out of the university area (previously an informal tolerance zone), where new luxury flats were being developed, moving them to an "old industrial estate with few lights and no CCTV" (p73). Her killer has still not been identified.

Toleration zones have existed in various locations and at different times since the first experiment in Bradford. Some are informal, while others have been deliberately created – usually as a reaction to the murders of sex workers. This

was the case in Edinburgh in 1983 after the murder of Sheila Anderson. "Edinburgh police realised that the lack of trust between them and sex workers impeded their investigation and prevented women from reporting other attacks." (p70). The resulting

"non-harassment zone" lasted from 1983 until December 2001 and was successful in protecting women. In the last full year of operation there were 11 reported attacks on sex workers but this rose to 111 attacks in the second full year after the zone ended.

Kinnell notes that there is no term such as racism that describes the hatred of sex workers but that this hatred is a very real phenomenon. It is felt by the people who move into a red light district, because of cheap housing or the conversion of old factories into loft apartments. They then complain of being harassed by kerb crawlers or offended by the sight of working women.

Depending on their social clout such people will bend the ear of the local Safer Neighbourhood Teams or use community involvement mechanisms until the area is "cleansed" or they will organise themselves into seemingly benign community protests that all too easily morph into violent mobs of vigilantes as in Balsall Heath in the 1990s – when Kinnell worked for the Birmingham Outreach Project.

Kinnell's book clearly demonstrates the limitations of our capitalist criminal justice system. "Prostitutes' lives are not valuable enough for violence against them to be taken seriously" (p107). The "crime" the state wants to address is the nuisance of kerb crawlers, the visibility of sex work on the street, and the "immorality" that cannot





be legitimised and afforded protection because of the threat it poses to the institution of bourgeois marriage and the family.

Vigilantes are exonerated while sex workers are criminalised. Violent men who attack sex workers are often not identified or apprehended, their sentences are often light if they are and they may attack several times but not be adequately monitored.

Kinnell describes the attitudes of state agencies to sex workers as "institutional prejudice", arguing that this contributes to the views of the general population that sex workers are not worth protecting, are to blame for the violence inflicted upon them and, by extension, are legitimate targets.

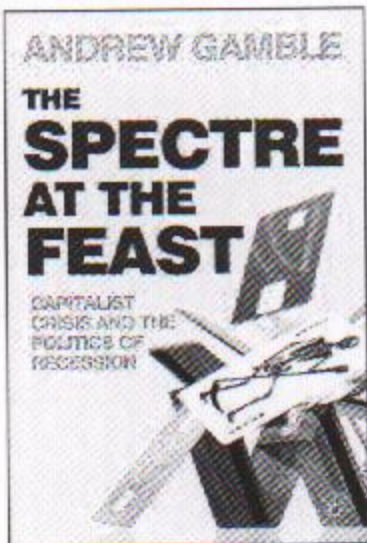
The shocking fact that Kinnell exposes throughout the book is that these attitudes, that often inform government policy, are expressed by those who call themselves "feminist". The women who responded to Sutcliffe's attacks on sex workers in the late 1970s by staging anti-sex work Reclaim the Night demonstrations, including smashing the windows of sex shops and arguing for curfews for all men, have been succeeded by women who see "the main instrument for their solutions [as] the police... the rhetoric of saving abused women and children is a very handy smokescreen to throw around other objectives which have little to do with challenging women's subjection to male dominance under conditions of patriarchy, but have everything to do with managing property values, social values and votes" p29.

Kinnell argues that, as with the police investigation of Sutcliffe's murders, the idea persists that so-called innocent women will not be targeted while sex workers are there to be attacked, the logical conclusion of which is that violence against sex workers should therefore not be prevented. As the prosecution at Steve Wright's trial put it, sex workers are guilty of "provoking murderous rage and encouraging sadistic tendencies in men that would otherwise behave themselves" p247.

Kinnell's book is an uncomfortable but compelling read. The scope of the book means that it does not address reform of the criminal justice system or the police, but the argument for decriminalisation is made clear and undeniable. The current situation is

exposed as barbaric. After all "what kind of society regards physical assaults, rape and murder as useful deterrents against 'anti-social behaviour'?" (p263)

Alison Higgins



From crash to crisis – the curse of capitalism

THE SPECTRE AT THE FEAST: CAPITALIST CRISES AND THE POLITICS OF RECESSION

Andrew Gamble

London / 2009 / £14

➤ A BOOK on the current economic crisis that contains the sentence, "we simply do not know what is going to happen, or how deep or critical the recession might be, or how long-lasting the effects of the global financial crash will be" is not at first sight going to make you want to read it for any insights into the global recession.

Fortunately this statement is not on the cover, but in the last chapter, and the reader that has stuck with Andrew Gamble's book will have found much to educate and stimulate thinking about the capitalist economy.

Andrew Gamble's academic career started in Sheffield University's Politics Department, where in the mid to late 1970s, on the back of his and Paul Walton's excellent introduction to Marx's political economy (*From Alienation to Surplus Value*), he guided a generation of students, including me, in the study of *Das Capital*. Students during the 1970's global capitalist crisis, we were able to understand and act upon our grasp of the root causes of the recession.

In his journey from Sheffield to his current post as Professor of Politics at Cambridge University, Gamble has cast aside his Marxism for a cosmopolitan liberalism, but he remembers enough of it to do a

reasonably good job in presenting an overview of competing interpretations of the causes of capitalist crises in general and this current one in particular.

The second chapter, for example, summarises very well the views of Marx, Hayek, Schumpeter, Polanyi and Keynes on the roots of capitalist crises and the preferred policy responses – from radical state intervention to let-it-rip market fundamentalism.

At the outset Gamble summarises the key causes of the current malaise and here there is nothing too novel about his approach. He follows many commentators in tracing the proximate causes of the credit crunch to the asset inflation in the US housing market and the securitisation of debt instruments founded upon that – particularly sub-prime – market.

But he does rightly make two important points. First, that this bubble is one of a long line of such financial bubbles in the history of capitalism and that they are endemic to it, not some failure of policy. Secondly, he establishes the inner connection between the recent bubbles (including the dotcom bubble of the late 1990s) and the extensive boom in global capitalism centred on Asia in the 1990s onwards. He remarks:

"A second major factor which made the boom possible was the emergence of China, India, Brazil and other rising economic powers in the 1990s. The dramatic leap, in particular, of Chinese economic

growth in the 1990s, propelled by the movement of rural workers into the cities on the eastern coastal strip, made possible a supply of cheap manufactured goods which kept inflation low in rich countries. The high savings ratio in China created large surpluses, which were lent to western governments and western banks, and helped create the credit to allow consumers to continue buying the goods China was producing. The bringing into play of such vast populations in both world production and world trade was a transformative event for the global economy, and helped create the conditions in which the financial growth model could succeed for such a long time, despite the numerous bubbles and instabilities." (p18)

Gamble's main theme in *The Spectre at the Feast* is to draw a distinction between financial crisis and crises of capitalism, as well as the connections between them. The former inevitably arise from the over-extension of a boom in conditions of the increasing independence of the financial sector from the underlying industrial economy; at a certain point a crash becomes inevitable.

But general crises of capitalism are different, rarer and do not inevitably arise out of a financial crash. He argues we have only seen two such crises globally in the last 100 years – the 1930's Great Depression and the 1970's stagflation.

These crises are prolonged ruptures in the whole economy, giving rise to a major collapse in output and employment; but more than this, they are transformative events in politics and ideology, which do much more than leave a few ripples on the surface of society, before normal service is resumed.

President Roosevelt's New Deal after 1932 gradually upended the established consensus on the role of the capitalist state in solving economic crisis; the emergence of neo-liberalism in the late 1970s wrought a full-scale counter-revolution in policy-making too, paving the way for deregulation,

privatisation and a breach in the post-war compromise between the bosses and the labour movement.

Much of the book then is an account of these periods as well as informed speculation as to whether the current post-credit crunch recession will morph into a similar far-reaching transformative period in world economics and international relations.

As indicated earlier, for Gamble the jury is still out. Completed in early 2009 when the recession was taking hold, he clearly sees the scale of the decline involved; but he suggests that the measures already undertaken by EU and US governments as well as those in Asia, would probably be enough to avert a protracted depression-style descent. In this sense he believes a period of 1970s style stagnation, may be more likely.

Indeed, what is interesting about the policy response of the various

Gamble is right in the later chapters to outline the growth and significance of the rise of China and India for world economics and politics

capitalist states during 2008 is what an eclectic mix of policies has been set in train. What we have witnessed is a pragmatic combination of policies from the opposed schools of Milton Friedman – high priest of post-war monetarism – and his nemesis John Maynard Keynes. For example the chair of the US Federal Reserve and Friedman devotee, Bernard Bernanke, injected huge quantities of money into the US economy last year in order to encourage major banks to keep supplying credit to the rest of the economy.

This has been supplemented under Obama's administration by a £750bn fiscal stimulus, a reflationary package to jump start demand that is straight out of the Keynesian textbooks. Broadly similar dual packages have been implemented across the world.

It is thus difficult to discern as yet an emerging rival ideological consensus on a par with the 1930s or 1970s; rather the battle in bourgeois politics is around which elements of the established policies were most to blame for the calamity? After an initial period of defensiveness last year, the market fundamentalists are pushing the view that it was all a failure of the regulators, in that the Federal Reserve's policies allowed money to get too cheap after 2000 and thereby encouraged house price inflation.

For their part the liberal regulators, rightly celebrating the death of the "efficient markets thesis", point to the lax and unenforced regulations that encouraged and rewarded massive risk-taking that contributed to the near systemic meltdown of financial markets last autumn.

Gamble is also probably right to

suggest that the current period has more affinities with the 1970s than the 1930s in another regard. The years of the Great Depression was a time of major transition in international relations. The First World War had failed to resolve the problem of global capitalist leadership; Britain's power and influence were waning but that of the USA had yet to take its place.

The crash of 1929 and after did put a final nail in the coffin of the liberal international order, but nothing emerged to replace it. In the gaps, national protectionism and beggar-thy-neighbour policies won out, sinking the world economy.

Today, the right has gained most from the current turmoil, as insecurity among the working and middle classes mounts and as the working class reformist parties and



trade unions fail to offer a vigorous systematic anti-capitalist alternative.

Yet at a state level protectionist policies have so far been muted, the global economy remains relatively open and the power and initiative of the US (and its subaltern Britain) to act as world leaders for the international bourgeoisie in this crisis is maintained and largely unchallenged.

Gamble is right in the later chapters to outline the growth and significance of the rise of China and India for world economics and politics, but he also right to insist the timeline for this to mature into a major challenge to US dominance is longer than many people assume.

Finally, Gamble's own prescriptions for the current crisis fall firmly in the camp of the liberal and cosmopolitan regulators – those who seek to weaken and harness the financial markets and strengthen the role of the global south in international decision-making bodies.

He fairly summarises the anti-capitalist critique of the crisis, although rather one-sidedly focuses on nationalisation of the financial system as the movement's answer. In itself an important immediate

demand of the left to direct finance to job creation – especially in green technology industries – nationalisation alone does not root out the essential cause of capitalist crises; namely, the private ownership of the main means of production and finance.

Only a set of policies that end this and put the whole economy under the direction of a democratic but centralised planning system, geared towards halting climate change and radically redistributing wealth, can be truly labelled anti-capitalist.

Last winter there was such a huge loss of self-confidence by international business leaders and global capitalist politicians – as well as their scribes and propagandists – that a sizeable, working class party that agitated on the streets and factories for radical anti-capitalist solutions could have gained a mass audience and be better placed now to ensure the architects of the crisis do not get another chance to screw up.

That moment passed, but there is enough material in Gamble's book to arm socialists and anti-capitalists for the arguments that lie ahead.

Mark Abram

Trotskyists and Stalinist agents in Mexico, USA and Europe that allow the deadly plot to come to fruition.

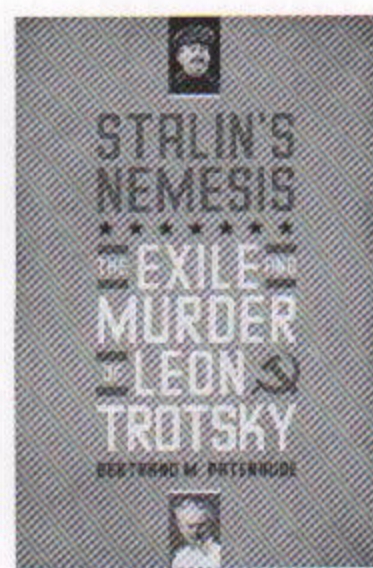
Scattered among the various stories it is possible to detect elements of the bigger picture: why was Stalin so intent on his physical destruction, having exiled him 11 years earlier?

Step by step, between 1923 and 1936, Stalin succeeded in imposing a ruthless dictatorial rule over the Soviet working class, eliminating every vestige of working class democracy and control over the economy and the state apparatus. It began with the bureaucratisation of the Bolshevik Party, and the marginalising and then destruction of all organised political opposition to his plans.

At first he leaned upon the right wing pro-market forces around Bukharin to destroy the left wing led by Trotsky and the Left Opposition; then after that was accomplished – with Trotsky's defeat and the purging of his followers in 1927-28 – Stalin set his sights upon the right and eliminated them as a force within the party and state.

In this process Stalin represented a variety of "bureaucratic centrism"; a trend that sought to consolidate and even extend the centralised planned economy (even over the dead bodies of millions of Russian peasants) but gutted of all workers' democracy. His rise was less a result of cunning and more because he represented a social force – a conservative, tired, bureaucratic elite – that found it easier to rise to the top of a Russia devastated by years of war, counter-revolutionary invasions, and the destruction of much of the economy. Many of the class conscious working class forces that had held this layer in check had been killed and dispersed by their efforts in defending the revolution from attack.

Trotsky was Stalin's revolutionary, internationalist opponent. He defended democracy in the party, the state and economy. He derided Stalin's attempt to "build socialism in one country", in Russia, a backward, isolated country. Moreover, Trotsky's



Cornered in Coyoacán – Trotsky's last years

STALIN'S NEMESIS: THE EXILE AND MURDER OF LEON TROTSKY
Bertrand M Patenaude
London / 2009 / £20.00

FOR SOMEONE so completely out of sympathy with Leon Trotsky's life work – and especially the attempt to forge the Fourth International in the 1930s – Patenaude has produced a compelling account of the Russian revolutionary's last few years, as an exile in Mexico.

A racy opening chapter tells of the failed assassination attempt in

May 1940 by a Stalinist armed gang led by the mural artist David Alfaro Siqueiros. The scale and ruthlessness of the gun attack on Trotsky's villa (in the Mexico City suburb of Coyoacán) is so well detailed that the miracle of Trotsky's survival (along with that of his wife Natalia and grandson Seva) is all the more amazing.

Sandwiched between the opening chapter and the last, which details the successful murder of Trotsky six months later, are several chapters which piece together the jig saw of overlapping networks of

reputation was immense; the leader of the Red Army that defeated the foreign armies after 1918, and Lenin's comrade in arms during the October insurrection. He was the living refutation of Stalin's attempt to re-write the history of the revolution.

By the time of Trotsky's arrival in Mexico in late 1937 Stalin was embarking on the next stage of his counter-revolutionary project – the destruction of all potential points of opposition to him, by physically liquidating the generation of old Bolsheviks – those who could testify to Stalin's long list of crimes at home and abroad.

In addition, Stalin's foreign policy had, since 1935, turned in an explicitly reactionary direction as Moscow openly supported capitalist governments that were prepared to do deals with the USSR, deals that would leave Stalin's Russia "in peace".

Henceforth, any revolutionary struggles in any part of the world that threatened to upset this agreement with foreign powers would be curtailed and if necessary mercilessly crushed – as the left was in Spain after 1936. Many of the agents deployed in Spain to liquidate the left during the civil war (1936-39) would find their way to Mexico, after the defeat of the Republic, ready to assist in the plot to kill Trotsky.

By having Trotsky exiled in 1929 (Stalin was too unsure of his position at that time to have him murdered) he had inadvertently put him out of reach.

At a series of "show trials" in Moscow in 1936-38, which dispatched Stalin's enemies to the grave, Trotsky, in absentia, was demonised as the chief defendant and organiser of the "world conspiracy" to destroy the USSR.

In the end though, and mainly as a result of Trotsky's skilful international campaign to refute Stalin's absurd charges, Trotsky's stock rose in liberal and democratic circles around the world. Much of this work was organised and carried out in Mexico and Patenaude details well the workings of the Dewey Commission,

established to clear Trotsky's name.

It was this success that intensified Stalin's determination to eliminate Trotsky, rather than the objective threat posed by Trotsky's followers in the international workers' movement. The Fourth International, founded in France in 1938, was too weak in numbers and marginal in influence to pose a serious rival to the huge Communist Parties and the now Stalinised Communist (Third

He mines the wealth of material from memoirs as well as the Harvard archives to paint a fascinating portrait of Trotsky's immediate, intimate circle

International.

The worth of Patenaude's book does not lie in any detailed or scrupulous account of the unfolding counter-revolution in the USSR and world communism, however.

Rather, it is the domestic detail of daily life in Trotsky's household that grips: the mounting claustrophobia of a prison-like setting; the petty jealousies of his wife and comrade Natalia as she struggles to keep control over household affairs; the short, passionate love affair between Trotsky and Frida Kahlo; the ups and downs of Trotsky's relationship with Diego Rivera; the devastating effect of the news of the death of Trotsky's son and comrade, Sedov; the succession of, mainly American, comrades sent down by the Socialist Workers Party in the USA to serve as bodyguards, translators, drivers and secretaries.

He mines the wealth of material from memoirs as well as the Harvard archives to paint a fascinating portrait of Trotsky's immediate, intimate circle.

Patenaude does not stick rigidly to the chronological narrative of his time in Mexico. In a series of flashbacks the Stanford academic seeks to throw light upon unfolding events or relationships in Mexico by

reference to events in the Russian revolution, and to Trotsky's previous refuges in Turkey, France and Norway.

A key part of the story of Trotsky's assassination revolves naturally enough around the security surrounding Trotsky, both inside Mexico and just as importantly within the wider Trotskyist movement. Most of the Coyoacán security measures were based on the assumption that the

greatest threat to Trotsky was posed by an armed attack from outside. Indeed, the Siqueiros assault bolstered this view. For most of the time Trotsky was in Mexico house routines were disrupted by ever more building work, the adding of reinforced walls and ever more intricate alarm systems, designed to fend off an attack should it come. In addition there was a permanent detachment of Mexican police stationed outside Trotsky's house to help protect him.

But in the end what proved deadly came from a different direction – a Trojan horse. No amount of guns and steel could prevent the silent assassin, the trusted friend of a comrade, whose confidence had gradually been secured over many months. Ramon Mercader, the Catalan Stalinist, who had operated in Spain under the GPU, was the paid agent given the task of killing Trotsky.

By befriending and courting Sylvia Ageloff, a member of the SWP, while in France and then posing as a businessman in Mexico he gradually got himself well known by members of Trotsky's household, finally earning their trust through a series of occasional favours. He was first introduced to Trotsky four days after the failed Siqueiros assault.



If Mercader had not been successful on 20 August in killing the leader of the Fourth International, then there are grounds for believing that another agent would have got to him at some point, so penetrated by GPU agents was the Trotskyist movement, as Patenaude's book makes shockingly clear.

From the mid-1930 Stalin knew a great deal of the workings of the Trotskyists: the contents of the Bulletin of the Opposition before it was published, drafts of Trotsky's books, Trotsky's archives stored in Paris, and a list of all members outside Russia.

Key to this was Mark Zboroswki, a Ukranian, recruited by the GPU and then planted in the Paris circle of friends and comrades around Trotsky's son, Lyova Sedov. Soon (not least because he could speak Russian) he was Lyova's right hand man and intimate, trusted with all the secrets, taking on Sedov's responsibilities when he was not available.

At the end of 1938 the Russian

spy master Orlov, now in hiding from Stalin in the USA, wrote under an assumed name to Trotsky with intimate details of Zboroswki's role, which Trotsky asked the comrades in New York to take up with the French comrades so it could be investigated. Nothing however happened since the SWP secretary (James P Cannon's) entrusted with the correspondence was also a GPU agent.

In the end not even the strongest walls of a fortified villa could save Trotsky from the intrigues of Stalin's agents and assassins. Perhaps only the much larger growth of the Trotskyist movement in the key centres of the international working class and the consequent weakening of the virus of Stalinism within it, could have guaranteed Trotsky's safety. Possibly the only surprise is that under such circumstances as those that prevailed in his three-year Mexican exile Trotsky was able to achieve so much of value to guide his international comrades.

Clare Heath

improved on rather than copied." The RA's ideal was the classicised art of the High Renaissance and Raphael.

The PRB was dedicated to knocking them of their pedestal. Their art aimed to make their subjects more accessible and real, to paint nature as it was, from real observation, not to produce an idealised version.

In 1850 the first showing of the PRB's new work at the RA was pilloried in the press - *The Times* protested against "the introduction of such a style to English art" (71). The Brotherhood was lampooned in the pages of *Punch* and Charles Dickens savaged the new movement.

This could have been the end for the PRB were it not for a champion it found in the art critic John Ruskin. He rallied to the defence of Millais and Hunt in *The Times* and became an important patron and supporter of the two artists.

Franny Moyle's book takes us through the rise in fortunes of the PRB in a series of biographies, linking together not only Millais, Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ruskin and his wife Effie Gray, but all the women and friends who came into this circle. In so doing she manages to give an important insight into the Pre-Raphaelite paintings, placing them within the romantic attachments and obsessions of the individual painters.

The PRB's models or "muses", Lizzie Siddall, Annie Miller, Effie Gray, Fanny Cornforth, Jane Burden, are central to the dynamic creativity of the group in the 1850s. It is a dynamic that is linked to sexual liaisons between the painters and their models. Yet such liaisons spelt ruin for the women involved if they came from respectable society. Being an artist's model was courting scandal.

As self-proclaimed revolutionaries the group wanted to throw aside the suffocating morals of Victorian England: yet they remained bound by the expectations of their class - and their fear of alienating the establishment that bought their



Desperate Romantics: not just histo-tainment

DESPERATE ROMANTICS: THE PRIVATE LIVES OF THE PRE-RAPHAELITES

Franny Moyle

John Murray / 2009 / £8.99

DON'T BE put off Moyle's book because of the TV series of the same name. While the TV version could well be described as "Carry on up the Royal Academy", the book itself is a serious art history of the Pre-Raphaelites, albeit one that concentrates on the lives, loves and celebrity of the leading figures of the brotherhood.

The book opens with a description of London on 10 April 1848, the day of the great Chartist demonstration in favour of universal male suffrage. John

Everett Millais and his friend William Holman Hunt enthusiastically joined the mass demonstration after a night of frenetic painting - they were finishing their submissions to the Royal Academy Summer Show.

Radical and revolutionary ideas were in the air in 1848 with the great revolutionary upsurge in Europe. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), formed a few weeks after the Chartist demonstration, reflected this in its desire to overthrow the stifling orthodoxy imposed on British art by its pre-eminent institution, the Royal Academy (RA).

Moyle says: "Idealisation and generalisation were cornerstones of the RA dogma. Nature should be

paintings and paid their bills. Marrying outside one's class was still considered shocking. For Rossetti and Holman Hunt the answer was to "educate and improve" their working class models, to make them acceptable for marriage.

It was this contradiction, a class-sexual one, that was to blow the PRB apart. Millais fell for Ruskin's wife Effie while she modelled for him; as a result the Ruskin-Millais relationship was shattered. Holman Hunt went off to the Holy Land to paint, leaving Annie Miller to be "improved". Annie had other ideas and modelled for, and bedded, at least two of the other PRBs including Rossetti. Hunt never forgave him.

Rossetti's relationship and marriage to Lizzie Siddall also ended tragically. Lizzie was drawn to modelling for the PRB because of her growing fascination with art and the art world. With Rossetti's tuition she became a talented painter in her own right – good enough for Ruskin to offer her an annual stipend of £150 for all the paintings she produced.

But Rossetti, despite an engagement and promises of marriage, was a hopeless womaniser. Lizzie developed a depressive illness and became addicted to laudanum. Having lost a baby in 1861, she committed suicide in 1862. It was an ironic end for a woman made famous by Millais' portrayal of her as Ophelia floating to her death.

The original PRB never recovered from these blows. But Rossetti continued the PRB in the late 1850s and 60s with two new recruits, Edward Byrne-Jones and William Morris.

By the 1860s the PRB had achieved its major aim, to overthrow the stifling conformity of Victorian neo-classical art. But in the process they had been co-opted by the very institutions they had set out to overthrow. Millais became a hugely wealthy artist, a president of the RA and was made a Baronet by Gladstone in 1885. Holman Hunt also became a pillar of Victorian society, famous for his

religious paintings.

Even Rossetti, because of the popularity of his paintings, was held in high regard. It was left to William Morris to travel politically in the opposite direction, becoming more, not less, radical as he got older and playing a key role in establishing Marxian socialism in Britain in the 1880s and 90s.

Franny Moyle has produced an interesting book on a group of important artists, situating their work in the context of the social history of their time and placing the personal at the heart of her art

history. This strength in relation to the Pre-Raphaelites is however a serious weakness when it comes to Moyle's coverage of the work and influence of John Ruskin. We are left with a largely personal and probably over-sensationalist picture of Ruskin because of the book's concentration on his fraught relationships with women.

This said Moyle's book is an excellent attempt to place an art movement within its social context, something many a gallery curator could learn from.

Stuart King

Man, machines and many manifestos

FUTURISM
Tate Modern
June-Sept 2009

THIS SUMMER the Tate Modern ran a centenary exhibition linked to the 1909 *Manifesto of Futurism* published by the French paper *Le Figaro*. Futurism was an important European art movement with its strongest following in Italy and Russia.

It was a movement inextricably linked to the rapid pace of industrial development in Europe from the 1890s and was part of a dramatic period of social ferment and criticism in the arts world in the lead up to the First World War.

Italian Futurism was a movement that admired and worshipped speed and dynamism. It found these forces in machinery and electrification, and depicted their impact on urban life approvingly. Many of the leading Futurist painters emerged from a preceding movement, Divisionism, which was the subject of a revelatory exhibition at the National Gallery in 2008.¹

Prominent among these were Balla, Boccioni and Carrà who had constituted the radical left wing of Divisionism. One trend within the

latter had consistently been concerned to depict the lives of the poor and oppressed. Reflections of a Hungry Man by Emilio Longoni, in which a street thief looks from the road at a wealthy couple in a restaurant, was reproduced in a major socialist newspaper, and banned by the state for its incitement to class hatred.

The high point of this radical trend was Carrà's *The Funeral of the Anarchist Galli*,² an incident in which the state tried to prevent workers holding a mass funeral for a victim of police violence.

Narrative depiction was almost submerged under the swirling, confusing movement of an angry crowd waving red banners. It was a far cry from the careful depictions of Longoni, since it incorporated anger and rebellion where Longoni had carefully and accurately shown the need for them.

Carrà's great painting stood at the point of transition from Divisionism to Futurism. The change that was happening was quite small in formal terms and in technique, but decisive in its changing subject matter. In Carrà's work, the driving force, the source of movement and power, is the angry mass of working people





against oppression and death. In the Futurist works of Boccioni and Balla of the same time, the sources of movement and power are electricity and machines. The Tate exhibition brought together a number of works that made it possible to look closely at this transition, in which Futurism subjects the human to external, inhuman forces. A key point in this

Futurism in Russia did not fall prey to the anti-human tendencies of its Italian counterpart, and most Futurists gave at least some support to the 1917 Revolution

evolution is seen in Boccioni's series *States of Mind* in which he depicts, from multiple viewpoints, people torn from each other by the movement of a train.

Boccioni is not unsympathetic to these victims of progress, as he shows through the use of colour and shape, but he evinces no opposition or rebellion. He submits to the superhuman forces of progress, with no conception that the advancement he worships is the result of the labour of the masses.

The new movement developed around the writings of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti. His *Futurist Manifesto*³ was published in 1909 and drew heavily on ideas from Nietzsche and Bergson.

It preached an anti-rational doctrine of violent action, speed and energy. It heaped contempt on all tradition and culture, seeing in these the reasons for Italy's second-rate status among the European powers.

It glorified war as the solution to Italy's problems. Its centres of support were in the northern industrial cities, which had experienced economic growth in the period following Italian unification in 1861, but which were held back by political instability and Italy's weakness in relation to the other imperialist powers.

The Futurist painters responded to Marinetti's manifesto with their

own *Technical Manifesto*, that outlined, in hyperbolic terms, some of the qualities that were to characterise their output – vivid colours, the impact of electric light and urban landscape, overlapping and simultaneous images indicating movement and the interpenetration of space with the moving object. Manifestos in comparable high-flown language

were produced for music, theatre, sculpture, cinema and so on.

Today they seem preposterous, but at the time they provoked outrage. The public meetings at which they were presented were often disrupted and attacked by those who (rightly) thought they were being insulted.

The Futurists found support amongst the workers, as confirmed by Italian communist Antonio Gramsci. In a letter to Trotsky he states that, in the period 1913–15, 20,000 copies of the Futurist journal *Lacerba* were regularly sold to workers, who had also physically defended Futurist events against reactionary violence.⁴

Marinetti led the Futurists into explicit political activity in 1913, opposing the re-election of Prime Minister Giolitti. Despite his going to war with Turkey and winning control of Libya, Giolitti was insufficiently dynamic for Marinetti's taste.

Having taken the plunge into politics, the Futurists campaigned against Austro-Hungarian control of Italian speaking areas, and then in 1914 against neutrality in the World War. These activities involved them in active collaboration with the irredentists, and Marinetti established a political relationship with Mussolini.

Many of the Futurists, including Marinetti himself, enthusiastically

enlisted in the military. This departure of talent, and the resulting fatalities (including Boccioni) combined with the splitting off of the Florence Futurists, led by Carrà, effectively ended the first phase of Italian Futurism.

The Tate exhibition did not deal with Marinetti's regrouping of the Futurists after the First World War. It is clear that the Fascists had adopted many of the Futurists' attitudes to the radical transformation of Italy through the politics of the physical violence that they were very capable of deploying. Marinetti set up a Futurist Party, in an attempt to keep pace and sought opportunities to co-operate with Mussolini.

He and his associates were in fact involved in the first ever act of fascist violence in April 1919, when they terrorised and beat up socialist workers demonstrating in Milan and then went on to burn the offices of the socialist party daily, *Avanti!*.

He hoped that Mussolini could be persuaded to adopt Futurism as the artistic and cultural policy of the Fascist state, but he was to be disappointed. Mussolini sought to re-establish the grandeur of imperial Rome by means of monumental buildings in neo-classical style, and so looked favourably on the neo-classicists of the Novecento group. He made it clear he had no intention of adopting any one art tendency as the "state art".

A stimulating section of the exhibition dealt with Futurism in Russia, where the movement followed a very different political trajectory. Russian avant-garde painters responded to the Futurists' new methods of depiction of movement and simultaneity by placing them in the field of their own experience.

Instead of the Italians' trains and tramcars, they showed such slower-paced engagements between man and machine such as Malevich's *The Knife Grinder*,⁵ and Goncharova's *The Cyclist*.⁶

Human power was still the driving force. While the Cubists

were beginning to discover the invigorating power of African art, the Russian avant-garde was already exploring their heritage of popular prints or Lyubok as well as the bold colours and stripped-down compositions of the numerous peasant traditions across Russia.

Consequently, Futurism in Russia did not fall prey to the anti-human tendencies of its Italian counterpart, and most of the Futurists gave at least some support to the 1917 Revolution.

There were, however, echoes of some of the Italian provocations, such as the manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste*, signed in 1917 by Mayakovsky and others which demanded that Russia should "Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy etc etc overboard from the ship of modernity".

There was nonetheless an element of machine worship in the revolutionary culture. It arose out of frustration with the economic backwardness of Russia. Alexei Gastev, the worker-writer, and sometime Bolshevik, often came very close to Italian Futurism's dreams of life transformed by mechanisation.⁷

But even in this instance the Russian experience differed from the Italian. As Richard Stites has capably argued, Gastev and the other enthusiasts for a machine-based utopia were motivated not by submission to the machine, but by the wish to make use of it to take control of their lives, to rise to the level where they could make their own decisions and no longer be dictated to by poverty, shortages and disorganisation.

The Tate exhibition was a bold attempt to place the development of Futurism in its European context. In my opinion, however, the art history was treated too independently from the social and political history that surrounded it.

The latter formed one of the most important periods of war and revolution, when artistic ideas and attitudes could not fail to be confronted by more basic, "infrastructural" forces. To understand how these social forces impacted on the intelligentsia, and

why Futurism took such different paths in Italy and Russia, a good starting point is the section on Futurism in Trotsky's book *Literature and Revolution*.⁸

My second criticism of the exhibition is that, having set itself such a broad agenda, it then restricted itself mainly to the visual arts, excluding most futurist poetry, drama, music and other forms.

This is a mirror image of a problem of Trotsky's *Literature and Revolution*, where his chapter on Futurism is almost completely limited to the literary forms of Russian Futurism, with virtually nothing about its impact in visual art.

This said, in a London summer disappointingly short of good exhibitions, Futurism at the Tate Modern was certainly the highlight.

JJ Plant

ENDNOTES

1. Reviewed by John Plant in Recent Exhibitions, *New Interventions*, Vol. 13, No. 1
2. Accessible via www.moma.org/collection
3. See Umbro Appollonio, *Futurist Manifestos*, Tate Publishing, London, new edition 2009
4. In 1922, when preparing the series of articles for *Pravda* which were eventually to be collected and translated as *Literature and Revolution*, Trotsky asked Gramsci for comments on Italian Futurism. It is available in English in *Revolutionary History* Vol. 7, No. 2, 1999, Gramsci A., "A Letter to Leon Trotsky on Futurism".
5. artgallery.yale.edu/pages/collection/popups/pc_modern/details9.html
6. In the exhibition catalogue, and also in the Goncharova section of the valuable website www.russianavantgard.com
7. For more on Gastev see Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, Oxford, 1989, and also a *New Interventions* pamphlet in preparation, with Bogdanov's commentary on Gastev's place in proletarian literature.
8. L Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, Haymarket Books 2005.

Bookshops where you can buy Permanent Revolution

Edinburgh

Word Power: 43 West Nicolson Street, Edinburgh EH8 9DB, Scotland

Glasgow

Barrett Newsagents: 267 Byres Road, Glasgow G12 8TL

Liverpool

News from Nowhere: 98 Bold Street, Liverpool L1 4HY

London

Bookmarks: 1 Bloomsbury Street, London WC1B 3QE

Housemans Bookshop: 5 Caledonian Road,
Kings Cross, London N1 9DX

Southampton

October Books: 243 Portswood Road, Southampton SO17 2NG

Dublin

Books Upstairs: 36 College Green D2, County Dublin

Berlin

Schwarze Risse: Gneisenaustr. 2a, U-Bhf Mehringdamm