

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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For a secular, democratic Iran **AHMADINEJAD: MURDERER!**

BY CATHY NUGENT

Further street battles between Iranian pro-democracy protestors and the police are expected on 10-12 February, the anniversary of the 1979 revolution. In the latest protests, starting at the beginning of December, nine people were reported killed by the police.

Iranian leftists say the real figure is much higher. Future protests could be met even more violent and bloody repression. The regime has just passed a law enabling political executions to take place within five days.

Will Ahmadinejad's regime fall? Will the Islamic regime itself be overthrown? Will the protest movement link up with Iran's beleaguered independent workers' organisations?

More fundamental questions should also be asked, even if we have no definitive answers. If revolution does happen, what kind of revolution will it be? And what should the Iranian workers do for themselves, what should they demand?

The December demonstrations differed from

those after the fraudulent re-election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2009.

- The protests were more determined, fuelled by anger at political executions and the rape and torture of prisoners. A pattern of continuous date-setting and mobilisation is being set. December's protests started with student demonstrations at the beginning of the month, continued after the funeral of reformist cleric Hussein-Ali Montazeri, and peaked on Sunday 27 December.

- Protestors are less fearful, more willing to fight back against the police and the basij (volunteer vigilantes for the state).

- The protests have spread to many more cities outside Tehran.

- There are more working-class people on the streets.

- Slogans have been directed at the Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei — that is, at the regime itself.

- Underlying economic conditions are also fuelling the protests. Inflation is higher than the official figure of 15%. The government is set to

Killed on the streets. Sunday 27 December 2009

remove subsidies from staples including fuel. Price hikes will hit better off workers and the "middle class", who will not qualify for government compensation.

If this movement can overthrow the regime, and we must hope it can, it will in the first place be a political revolution led by one section of the Iranian ruling class against another.

Roughly, one section is grouped around the so-called "millionaire mullahs" and "reformist" Islamist-capitalist politicians, against the current ruling bloc, based on the capitalist property and wealth held by the Revolutionary Guard and the Iranian state itself and fronted up by the populist political organisation of Ahmadinejad.

The "reformist" ideologues remain deeply committed to an "Islamic Republic" as founded by the 1979 revolution and Khomeini. They do not think the clerics should disappear from the political scene, only that they should have a more "advisory" role.

• *Continuation plus interviews with Iranian socialists, on page 7*

BA DISPUTE

Abolish the anti-union laws!

By DANIEL RANDALL

In early December, cabin crew working for British Airways voted — by a huge majority on a massive turnout — for strike action against job cuts and pay freezes.

BA management went to court and, eventually, they got an injunction against the strike. The union has now announced a further strike ballot starting on 21 January. But it is a cumbersome process — the earliest BA workers will be able to strike is from the beginning of March!

The December injunction was yet another example of how the law can be blatantly used against workers, squashing their “right” to strike.

The BA workers’ union, Unite, had drawn up a programme of 12 days of strike action over the Christmas period, specifically chosen to make sure that all cabin crew staff — who work on extended 12-day shift patterns — were mobilised.

A storm of abuse from all sections of the press followed, denouncing the workers as “selfish”, and accusing them of ruining Christmas. One particularly obscenely demagogic story attacked the workers for potentially ruining the Christmas holiday to New York of a woman terminally ill with cancer. Very little was said about the intransigence of British Airways bosses or the fact that they continued to draw enormous salaries even while they were running the company into the ground.

The bosses’ argument in court, which the judge accepted, was that some of the balloted workers had already accepted voluntary redundancy and so, should not

be considered part of the bargaining unit. According to Britain’s restrictive trade union laws, unions must give employers full details, well in advance, of everyone they are planning to ballot. As BA, EDF and other bosses have shown, any slight irregularity (when dealing with tens of thousands of workers, as with BA cabin crew, that is almost unavoidable) will be seized upon by employers trying to have strikes ruled illegal.

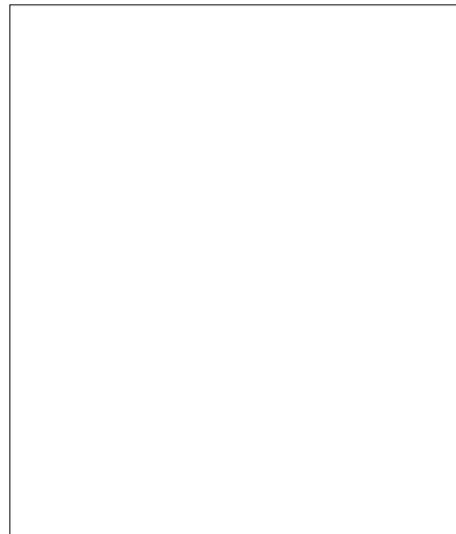
In justifying her decision to grant BA bosses an injunction, judge Laura Cox’s argument focused on how a strike over the Christmas period would have caused maximum damage to BA’s business. The courts are ideologically “on side”, are with the bosses in the class war.

I spoke to John Usher, the Director of the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Trade Union Laws (UCRATUL), about the case. This is what he had to say.

“It’s important to understand that there are two bits of litigation going on; one being the proceedings that the union brought in order to seek to prevent the changes to terms and conditions that the employer sought to impose unilaterally from coming into place. Separate to that was the employers’ application for an injunction in relation to the ballot for the strike designed to bring the employer to the table to negotiate properly.

“There’s nothing surprising in what BA did in seeking an injunction nor in the way the judges have interpreted the law. The United Campaign has consistently maintained that the existing UK law breaches international human rights obligations in relation to allowing freedom of association.

“As with Metrobus, when the employ-



BA workers’ strike was halted by the courts

ers sought an injunction earlier in the year, the result was a surprise to the union to some degree, because the employers’ lawyers pursued a novel approach to establishing that the union breached the UK’s laws. But making novel points in the context of the facts of a ballot and dispute is nothing new. There are more opportunities awaiting employers.

“The use of litigation by employers to defeat action that should be legal under international law has seen a steady increase over the decades since 1979. Whether bosses will decide to pursue litigation depends on the nature of the dispute; if you’re an employer taking proceedings within the context of an ongoing industrial dispute, it’s likely that you’ll make industrial relations worse. But [BA

boss] Willie Walsh wants to hammer the union and use every means he’s got to undermine the union and undermine its relationship with its members.

“In the UK we not only have laws that do not provide fundamental freedoms and human rights but we have a system where the employer can apply for an injunction solely on the basis that there’s a ‘serious issue’; even a half-baked argument by the employer can lead to an injunction.

“It will definitely be the case that every time an organisation like BA gets away with this, it’ll encourage other employers to attempt to get away with it. The unions must challenge these laws wherever they can, including in the human rights arena, potentially in the European Court of Human Rights, but that route will take years. Meanwhile, we have to get the message across that there’s a clear breach of the UK’s human rights obligations leading to exploitation by the employers and increased poverty in the British Isles. We also have to avoid the laws being used to divide the members from the efforts of the union.

“What BA has put out is that the Virgin Atlantic cabin crew are on half the money of the BA workers. They are using UK law to cut the wage of their workers to £15,000 a year. Similarly, the Metrobus case was brought to defeat the union’s attempt to achieve equal pay for bus drivers in London in the face of the various employers undercutting each other in tenders by the only means at their disposal — cutting labour costs. Let us be in no doubt: we are fighting against a race to the bottom.”

• www.unitedcampaign.org.uk

RMT won’t back “son of No2EU”

By COLIN FOSTER

Prospects for a “son of No2EU” coalition for the coming general election look poor. The Executive of the RMT rail union has adopted a policy on the General Election that does not include backing the coalition. The Alliance for Green Socialism has withdrawn.

The groups which took part in the “No2EU” coalition for the Euro-elections of June 2009 — the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*), the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism — have been meeting since then to try to agree on a new coalition for the general election.

RMT rail union general secretary Bob Crow has been taking part in the talks, but not the RMT as such, although the RMT did endorse “No2EU”.

We understand that the chief reasons for the RMT’s lack of support were that the RMT Executive wanted to focus RMT’s election effort on winning the re-elections of MPs in the RMT parliamentary group (all Labour) and felt there was not enough broader trade-union support for the coalition venture.

RMT activists are not unhappy with the Executive decision, but they are unhappy with the fact that there was no broader discussion in the RMT — virtually none over the whole seven months that “son of No2EU” talks have been going on, and virtually none when “No2EU” was being formed, either.

The political groups met again on 7 January but there has been no official announcement about where things stand now with the coalition.

HOON AND HEWITT COUP ATTEMPT

New Labour slips on the ice

By MARTIN THOMAS

Of course the Tory commentators make the most of what they can rake up. But for now they can rake up a lot.

On 11 January Bruce Anderson wrote in *The Independent*: “All of Brown’s Cabinet now want him to lose the next election... If the Labour Cabinet could decide the outcome of the election in a secret ballot, there would be an overwhelming vote for a Cameron-led minority government, which they would hope to overthrow after they had sorted themselves out”.

The attempt by ex-ministers Geoff Hoon and Patricia Hewitt on 6 January at a palace coup within the Labour Party left both Gordon Brown and his ultra-Blairite enemies weaker. The winner was even great disarray at the top of New Labour.

A credible attempt at a coup would have got a sizeable number of MPs signed up before going public, and would have a named alternative leader.

But Hewitt is leaving politics at the general election — to turn to her very lucrative company directorships. Hoon is at present still on course to stand again for Parliament, but may want out too. He wanted the EU foreign minister job, but got nowhere near it. He had serious trouble in the MPs’ expenses scandal. After he resigned as a minister in June 2009, the *Telegraph* wrote: “Mr Hoon may well now be tempted to leave Parliament at the next election. Along with his wife, Mr

Hoon is thought to have amassed a sizeable property portfolio worth more than £1.7 million”.

It looks as if the ultra-Blairites chose Hoon and Hewitt to front the coup because, politically, those two had nothing to lose.

David Miliband had something to lose, and lost it. He waited seven hours before commenting on Hoon and Hewitt (lame official excuse: his press officer was away; in the meantime his brother, also a minister, the more “Brownite” Ed Miliband, had said desperately that he was sure that David Miliband backed Brown) and then came out with the weakest repudiation possible.

Brown is pretty certain to stay leader until the General Election, and David Miliband is politically damaged. But demoralisation in the New Labour elite is so acute that on 10 May the Blairite Peter Watt — general secretary of the Labour Party until November 2007, when he resigned over dodgy donations, and still, so he says, a Labour supporter — was in the right-wing *Mail on Sunday* with the first part of a serialisation of a new book entitled, in *Mail*-speak rather than Blair-speak: “My Story Of Betrayal And Cowardice At The Heart Of New Labour”.

Generally parliamentary political parties pull together in the run-up to a general election, shutting away differences. After the famous resignation from the Labour government in April 1951 by Aneurin Bevan, Harold Wilson, and John

Freeman, over prescription charges and military spending — a resignation that would in hindsight be seen to have started of “Labour’s high tide” in terms of ferment in the local Labour parties — the rebels kept quiet through the subsequent Labour Party conference and until after the September 1951 election.

But the New Labour elite’s disarray has gone beyond that. Watt tells the *Mail* that “Brownite” minister Douglas Alexander said: “You’d imagine that after ten years... complaining about Tony [Blair], we would have some idea of what we are going to do, but we don’t seem to have any policies”.

“Blairite”, “Brownite” — what’s the difference in policy? For now the Blairites are angry about what the media has called Brown’s “class war” demagoguery — the loose talk about “Labour investment versus Tory cuts”, the token taxes on the rich, the jibes at Tory toffs. All those years spent wooing the City, and now he does this! The ultra-Blairites are more angry about it than the City toffs themselves.

According to Fraser Nelson, editor of the Tory weekly *The Spectator*, “Mandelson and Darling have still not forgiven [Brown] for his reckless Budget, ramping up debt”.

A Tory election victory now seems more likely than ever. If the unions and labour movement activists want a serious fight against the Tories, they will have to call the New Labour elite to account and move to get a functioning Labour Party again.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Ten lessons from Copenhagen

The Copenhagen climate talks were an utter failure. But what lessons should climate activists draw from the experience?

1. *The realities of global geopolitics.* Capitalist rivalry between the existing US hegemony and the emerging challenger China shaped the failure of these talks. The other states danced to tune of one or other of these powers. The split in the summit was not primarily between rich and poor countries. The real divide is within global capitalism, between the ruling capitalists and their states on the one side and the weak, beleaguered but potentially powerful forces of the global working classes, the labour movements and their allies on the other.

2. *No trust in Obama.* The US announced before the talks that no binding treaty would be possible because of congressional arithmetic. But when Obama arrived, he offered only 4% cut in emissions by 2020 and enough loopholes for this to amount to nothing. For all the rhetoric he is still at the beck and call of US fossil fuel capital. He was happy to override even the limited “democratic” processes that exist at the climate talks. The US labour movement needs to untie itself from its role as a satrap of the Democrats and build its own political party.

3. *Don't be afraid to criticise China.* China is ruled by a Stalinist totalitarian government, which believes it can best safeguard its continued rule by expanding its fossil fuel-based economy. It is the rising imperialist power of the 21st century. It was the Chinese government that vetoed the 80% emissions target cut for advanced economies, and the 50% figure globally and even talk of an emissions peak by 2020. It is woolly third worldism to fail to criticise China. Only a Tiananmen-style worker-led popular movement in China can avert the social and ecological disaster that will engulf both the Chinese people and millions of others.

4. *Don't ignore the cover provided for China by India, Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Sudan and other states.* None of these regimes has a coherent alternative; rather they reject the US bloc only to embrace the Chinese camp. They are not allies of labour movements anywhere, not least for what they do to their own workers.

5. *The European Union was hapless.* It formally had the most progressive position of the advanced economic blocs going into the talks. But the EU did not table its big offer of a 30% cut in emissions by 2020. Like the UK government, it made noises in the right direction on targets, but was unable to force an agreement. More significantly its own plans are neoliberal to the core – market mechanisms like emissions trading will not do the job and will come at enormous expense for workers.

6. *There is a massive democratic deficit – even with the main UN process.* The official talks excluded more and more observers until it became largely a jamboree of existing heads of state and their entourages. And then the US-China-India-Brazil-South Africa Accord parachuted over the top of two years of negotiations and 15 years of dialogue. Climate change is a global problem that cries out for a cooperative commonwealth of socialist federations; instead it has a broken-backed regime of quarrelling thieves.

7. *The repression will get worse.* The thousands beaten and arrested in Copenhagen shows that the bourgeois states barely tolerate peaceful protest when it comes to climate change.

8. *The limits of NGOs.* Years of lobbying, partnership and cajoling governments amount to very little leverage when it mattered. The NGO road to salvation is the road to nowhere – get some real politics.

9. *Don't retreat to utopia.* Many climate activists will be tempted to turn away from politics, turn away from activism, and instead create “liberated spaces”, communes or alternative lifestyles. But to “go local” now is to turn away from the real task of building a global movement to take on the states and the capitalists they represent. To change the world it is necessary to take power – meaning to take the power away from the bourgeoisie, not coexist with them.

10. *Turn to the labour movement.* The labour movement was partially represented inside the official talks and

outside on the demos in Copenhagen. Often bureaucratic and quiescent, it may not look like the obvious force to turn to on climate change. But it is the necessary force to affect change.

Workers are the main victims of climate change globally – just as they are exploited by the capitalist system that drives climate change. This gives workers a tremendous self-interest in combating climate change – strong enough to overcome sectional fears about jobs.

And workers have tremendous economic and political power when organised – the power to halt produc-

The environmental movement needs a change in direction

tion but also the power to create a collective, democratic planned system of production that can cut emissions while maintaining decent living standards for all. The Vestas struggle and countless strikes and occupations this year give tiny glimpses of what is possible.

What's needed is an international working class-based climate movement. Such a movement needs tribunes – agitators to organise, galvanise and fight. The official climate process lies in tatters. But a resurgent socialist movement can turn the tide. Working-class power is the main necessity after the failure of Copenhagen.

Help us raise £25,000

You value the political work of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. You like our newspaper *Solidarity*. You appreciate our contribution as socialist activists in the unions, environmental movement, in anti-fascist campaigning. You will therefore want to make a contribution to our new fighting fund. We want to raise £25,000 by the end of 2010, to help us expand our work. We have no rich backers, we constantly rely on our supporters and our readers to help us.

Can you help us?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college (contact our office for details);
- Can you give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to “AWL”, account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- You can donate directly, online – go to www.workersliberty.org and press the donate button.
- Or send cheques made payable to “AWL” to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA. Or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank, to directly with your bank (account details as above);
- And contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

Thanks

Over Christmas and the New Year we received £250 from Joe, £50 from Les and two new standing orders making a total for the period of £534. Our fighting fund running total now stands at £1818.

THE BOSSES

Unions should fight for snow-days to be paid

By DARREN BEDFORD

Penny-pinching bosses are contriving a whole range of methods to make sure workers, rather than profits, take the hit during the cold weather.

According to the Federation of Small Businesses, British employers are out of pocket to the tune of £600 million as a result of the snow and ice, with up to three million workers thought to have missed at least one day of work. And, according to figures quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*, more than 2,000 companies could go bankrupt as a result of the conditions.

Fortunately for the bosses, they are legally able to either dock pay or holiday time if workers miss work as a result of being physically unable to get to their workplace due to the weather. A guide to "employment rights" on the BBC website — written by Richard Nicolle, partner in Denton Wilde Sapte's employment practice — says that docking pay is "an option" for bosses, but advises against it on the basis that it is "likely to be seen as draconian".

A more common response has been to deduct missed days from employees' holiday time, which large-scale employers such as Tesco, Asda, Marks & Spencer and HSBC have already said they will do.

Unfortunately, there has been a meek response from the trade union movement, with few public statements from key union figures and little widely-available advice.

The RMT rail union has a better record than some. In the heavy snowfall of February 2009, it helped force a climb-down from London mayor Boris Johnson, who eventually agreed not to dock tube workers' pay. This time, RMT general secretary Bob Crow has commented that "it would be an absolute outrage if employers penalised staff through docking pay as a result of severe weather. Employers that take that kind of draconian action have no place in a modern society, and are a throwback to the worst excesses of the Victorian mill-owners."

Unions should turn Crow's sentiments into action; they should create worker-focused Q & As and briefings to make sure workers know exactly what their legal rights are and how to stand up for them if their employers dock pay or holiday time.

Little initiatives such as this can contribute towards the long-term rebuilding of workers' confidence in their abilities to stand up to their bosses... so that the next time three million workers stay away from work it'll be through our own political initiative rather than because of the weather.

NHS

Cuts mean filth

By A LONDON NURSE

Before Christmas there was a lot of fuss in the press about dirty hospitals. The new NHS inspection body, the Care Quality Commission, had highlighted shocking issues at Basildon University Hospital — dirty commodes, curtains, and equipment; blood stains on trays. How common is this experience and why does it happen?

Take the ward where I work. We pass all such inspections with flying colours, yet some of the problems highlighted in the CQC report we've experienced too.

For the most part we have pre-announced inspections. We know what the inspectors are going to look at — the underside of commodes, and whether or not mattresses leak. Inspectors get a snapshot, they see a perfect ward. But most of the time conditions are different. Managers only go round unzipping mattress covers when they know what's coming. Generally they don't emerge from offices.

No-one wants to be treated on a filthy ward, and people don't want to nurse in a filthy environment either. Most of my colleagues prefer to keep patients and their surroundings clean.

But it's a fact of life that caring for sick people is an extremely messy business.

To clean up all the bodily fluids that

are produced by the ill, it is necessary, more than anything to have lots of highly motivated cleaning staff. Staff who are employed by the hospital, who are well paid, and who feel part of a team working for a cleaner hospital.

Another thing that might help would be for the NHS to stop cramming patients in up to the rafters.

In some countries in Europe they aim for less than maximum bed occupancy, because it's hard to do things like clean a bed properly when there's someone occupying it!

It's hard to isolate infectious patients when all the side rooms are already full.

But in today's NHS, where Trusts get paid per procedure, a filled bed equals "efficiency" equals greater income. Leaving beds empty makes no financial sense to Trust Boards which monitor financial health almost as much as the health of their patients.

So what can socialists do about the ongoing problems in our hospitals? It's a crazy twisted system that the NHS operates within — until the logic of seeing illness as something that can be made profitable is challenged, then bizarre priorities will continue to mean that tick-box forms take precedence over investing in cleaning staff.

In the meantime, workers organised in unions continue to campaign against the contracting-out of staff, and the general

cuts that are looming.

Socialists need to support and lead campaigns against cuts in the NHS. The poorest paid staff, in this case cleaning staff, are always among the first to suffer, and in this case it is clear the patients cannot afford for that to happen.

Tougher management, divided workers

have a lot of industrial muscle. I'd like to see the company books before I could say if we get what we deserve.

Has the economic crisis affected your workplace/industry in a particular way? Has it affected the way workers think about their jobs?

Our bosses at Stagecoach made a lot of people redundant last year; they said it was because of the recession. Nobody believed them — we reckoned it was to increase their profits. There is a feeling amongst a lot of the workforce that they are happy just to have a job, but if there was some way to effectively have a go at management they would do it.

Do you enjoy your work?

I've had a lot of jobs on and off the railway, and as long as the train, the signals, the passengers, don't break down, this one is pretty good.

What are your bosses like?

Stagecoach are a tougher bunch than the last lot. They got rid of most of the junior managers that they inherited from the previous franchise owners because they didn't fit the company mould. That said, the new lot of junior managers are okay. Unsurprisingly, during disputes they follow the company line, which is always pretty hard faced.

Brian Souter, the head of Stagecoach, has actually driven buses himself when one of his bus companies was on strike, and that is what is expected of all managers. When one of the previous local

managers complained about what he was being asked to do during a dispute he was told to do it or clear his desk. That's indicative of Stagecoach's management style. I think that a lot of workers haven't faced up to that yet.

What unions are there in your workplace? Do they do a good job?

There are five unions at my workplace. In ascending order they are: ATCU (Associated Train Crew Union) which in this area at least seems to have usurped TSSA (Transport Salaried Staffs' Association) as the union you join when you don't want to go on strike.

Then there is Unite, which is busy divisively recruiting members from other unions. ASLEF only represents drivers, and I think it punches below its weight industrially.

Finally there is RMT, which is the union I'm active in. RMT members have born the brunt of management attacks. We don't often have any clear cut victories but I think things would be a lot worse if the bosses didn't always have to consider how RMT members would respond.

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

To have one union for all railworkers. Having workers divided into different unions on the basis of their grade only helps the bosses. If we had a single union for the whole industry, we could fight for a levelling-up of pay and conditions for all workers, whatever their grade.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

End of the line for PPP?

By JANINE BOOTH, SECRETARY,
RMT LONDON TRANSPORT
REGIONAL COUNCIL

A decision by the PPP Arbiter in December may prove to be a fatal punch to private infrastructure company Tube Lines and the whole “Public-Private Partnership” set-up on London Underground.

The New Labour government imposed the PPP at the very end of 2002, despite widespread opposition. PPP organised the Underground’s infrastructure into three groups of lines, and transferred them to private consortia known as Infracos, two to now-defunct Metronet, one — the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines — to Tube Lines.

Metronet collapsed in 2007, and Tube Lines has now hit trouble, falling well behind schedule with its upgrade of the Jubilee line’s signalling, causing closures to the line which are trying passengers’ patience. PPP Arbiter Chris Bolt, an “independent” government appointee, has blamed this on Tube Lines itself, mainly for signing a contract for the work with another private company, Thales, before knowing the detail of the project.

The Arbiter had to decide what Tube Lines’ costs should be for the second 7½-year period of the 30-year PPP contract, due to begin on 1 July this year, and therefore how much London Underground will have to pay Tube Lines in fees. During this period, Tube Lines will have to continue to maintain the infrastructure of all three lines, upgrade the Northern and Piccadilly lines’ signalling systems, and refurbish 38 stations, far fewer than the 100 it was originally required to improve because it underpriced this work in its original bid.

Tube Lines reckoned that this work would cost it £5.75 billion, London Underground reckoned much less, £4 billion; the Arbiter calculated £4.4 billion.

This leaves London Underground with a worrying funding gap of £400 million, but Tube Lines with a potentially devastating one approaching £1.5 billion. The Arbiter also ruled that Underground stations and lines should close to allow access to carry out improvement works for far less time than Tube Lines had demanded (15.5 million Lost Customer Hours for minor closures rather than 35.6 million), causing it further difficulties.

So who will pay? Even if Tube Lines paid, the public sector would reimburse it through higher charges, and London Underground and Tube Lines agree that “it would be better value for money for TfL [Transport for London] to raise additional finance than for Tube Lines to do so”. But the government argued the case for PPP on the basis that the private sector could raise the money needed to maintain and improve the Tube more easily than the public sector could! Intentionally or not, this view undermines the whole case for PPP.

Although the Arbiter’s report may speed the collapse of Tube Lines and the return of its work to the public sector, this does not mean that the Arbiter is a friend of workers and passengers. The Arbiter supports Tube Lines’ recent cuts to safety inspections of track and escalators. He also wants the workforce to be more “flexible” by working across all three lines rather than just one, and the response team to have fewer workers.

Tube Lines’ troubles come despite the very generous terms of the PPP contract. PPP guarantees a high rate of profit in the projected costs, and expects an Infraco to follow only Good, rather than Best, Industry Practice. It allows for not just inflation but “differential inflation” (real prices going up faster than official figures show) and even for the risk of differential inflation being higher than expected! PPP protects the Infracos from losses if their risks fail, but allows them to pocket the proceeds if their risks pay off.

Despite their failures to deliver quality improvements to schedule, the Infracos

have benefited handsomely from PPP. The Arbiter has caught Tube Lines paying secondment fees to its own shareholding companies — Bechtel and Amey — way above the usual rate. When Metronet collapsed, its Chief Executive walked away with his pockets full while the public-sector Transport for London inherited 95% of the failed Infraco’s debt, setting the scene for the landslide of cuts that now threatens to engulf London’s transport.

The London Underground PPP is an indictment of New Labour, whose turn away from the working class in search of credibility with capital has been not only unprincipled but a spectacular failure.

But even if PPP collapses and the Underground’s infrastructure is fully re-integrated into the public sector, two big dangers remain: firstly, further attacks on workers and passengers due to the debt and the cross-party consensus on the need for public spending cuts; and secondly, that the Tories simply privatise the re-integrated London Underground. Then we may find out that that there is something worse than PPP.

Tube pay offer accepted

By AN RMT MEMBER

Many RMT reps and members have been shocked at the union’s decision (23 December) to accept London Underground’s pay offer.

The union executive accepted the offer the day after a ballot result in which over 3,000 members voted for action short of strikes against it, and a majority even for strike action. Until then the RMT had said the offer was “unacceptable”.

For the Executive to take this decision without even trying to consult or secure a mandate from the members or reps is very undemocratic.

Obviously, the other tube unions’ refusal to fight had a very negative effect. But RMT’s potential to win more was squandered by foot-dragging and other mistakes from the union’s leadership.

Unless we examine the failings in the leadership of this dispute, we are doomed to repeat the same mistakes.

1. We need to go into disputes to win them. We can’t have another one or two days’ strike and then stop.

2. A union should not argue for a Yes vote just on the basis of loyalty or “for the union”, but on the issue and the strategy in question at the time. Union members need to feel they have a sense of ownership over what it does.

3. We can no longer win disputes with one day of action, then a deal cooked up behind the scenes, or just the threat of strikes. We need to fight hard, to go for it, take several days’ action.

4. We should not allow a dispute to drag on all year. We should act quickly, effectively and decisively: if we win, great; if we don’t, then move on — not drag on.

5. We need to assert democratic structures through which members and reps get to give opinions, and which the national leadership must listen to.

Statement from Workers’ Liberty teachers on the NUT deputy general secretary election
www.workersliberty.org/node/13485

UNITE ELECTION

Bayliss makes a right-wing pitch

By DAVID KIRK

This year the two million trade unionists in Unite will get to elect a single general secretary who will replace Derek Simpson and Tony Woodley in 2011.

So far there are four candidates: Les Bayliss, Simon Dubbins, Len McCluskey and Jerry Hicks. But none of these candidates look as if they will transform the union or respond to rank-and-file-led militancy.

A majority of activists in Unite call themselves part of the “left” (although this often means mostly support for the Stalinist regime in Cuba and subscribing to the *Morning Star*). Consequently all of the candidates bar Simon Dubbins proclaim themselves left wing. But what does that amount to?

Simon Dubbins, the un-elected Head of International Affairs for Unite, does not seem to have much chance of winning. The candidate most likely to get the support of the right wing of the union is Les Bayliss.

Bayliss is an Assistant General

Secretary from the Amicus side of the union. He is being supported by the “Simpsonite” Workers’ Uniting Group. He has been described as Simpson’s enforcer. That may or may not be unfair but the objectionable nature of his platform is undeniable. Together with the usual noises about a “strong union” and standing up for members, he openly stands for a “strong disciplined leadership” rather than an accountable democratic leadership.

Bayliss has said: “We need to think about where the union wants to be. Skilled, professional, technical workers stick with the union historically — we are the traditional home for such workers and we need to continue to be.” Politicians and bosses “need to know that we are serious and that it’s going to affect the economy when we take them on and we need majority membership in significant industries to do that.”

In a union which still suffers from racism, sexism and craft chauvinism on the shop-floor, this is “dog-whistle” politics, playing to the most reactionary elements in the union. Bayliss is not interested in organising unskilled, “margin-

al”, migrant or women workers.

Len McCluskey is another Assistant General Secretary, but from the TGWU side of the union. He has been criticised as being a “mini Tony Woodley”. He does indeed represent continuity from the Woodley regime and support for the “organising agenda”. He also pledges to decentralise this organising to the local level, and make sure 10% of subscriptions go directly to the local branches.

This is all far better than Bayliss, though still a very long way from the root-and-branch democratisation the union needs.

McCluskey overwhelmingly won the backing of the United Left group at a hustings. The main argument for socialists backing McCluskey is to keep out Bayliss and to avoid splitting the broad left organisation and vote.

Jerry Hicks should in some ways be the obvious choice for socialists in Unite. He was a victimized union rep at Rolls Royce. He has pledged to take an average worker’s wage and to democratise the union. He won 39,000 votes at the Amicus sector General Secretary election last year and came second. There

are problems and holes in his platform, but it is clearly better than McCluskey’s.

If the Hicks campaign represented a pole to unite a new left grouping ready to fight for a rank-and-file-led union, the problems and holes would matter less, but some things Hicks have done make it difficult for his candidacy to become such a pole.

Hicks went to the state run certification office to force a General Secretary Election on Unite. He made unfounded and damaging allegations about the union in his personal statement to members. And he staged two foolish walk-outs at the United Left hustings.

Members and supporters of Workers Liberty in Unite make the main focus of our work a campaign for a radical reformation of Unite into a fighting, democratic tool of the organised working class. To do this we need to cohere the left around the basic principles of rank and file industrial militancy.

What we say about this General Secretary election will have to stem from this perspective. We welcome comments.

WORKPLACE BULLYING

Winning respect at work

By IRA BERKOVIC

"Work is, by its very nature, about violence — to the spirit as well as to the body... It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us." Studs Terkel.

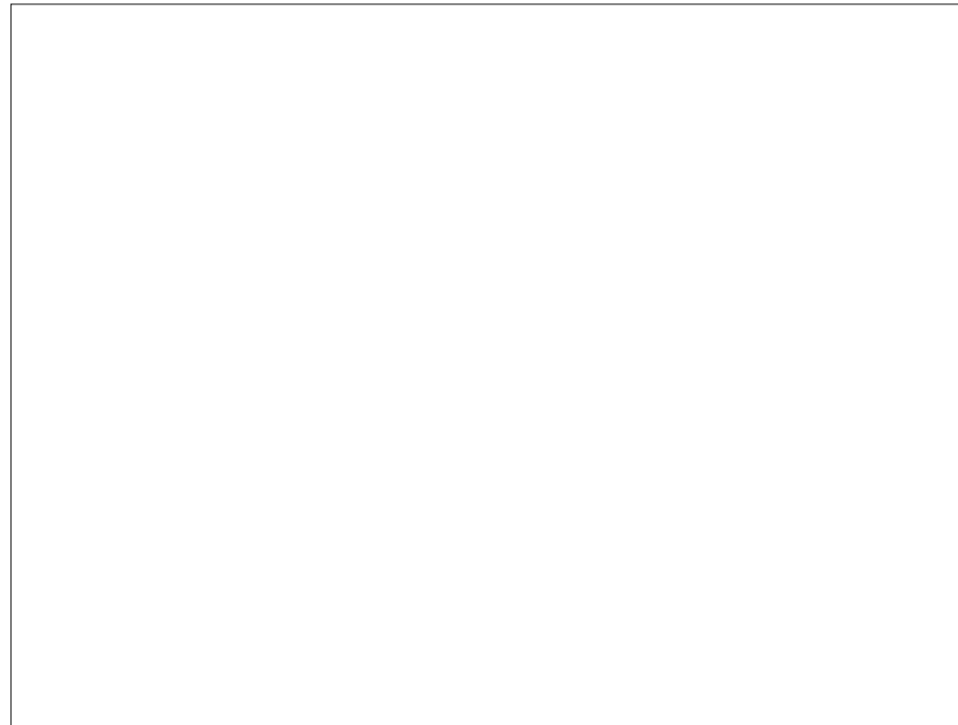
Bosses have always used harsh discipline and authoritarian measures to keep their workers in line. In a context of economic crisis, management bullying has intensified as bosses claim that harsher sickness and absence policies, staff cuts and workload increases are all necessary parts of the belt-tightening demanded by the "new austerity". What is "bullying" and how can we fight back?

A National Union of Journalists study estimates that 25% of adult workers have been bullied within the last five years. A University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology study undertaken earlier this decade found that 11% of workers had been bullied within the last six months. Clearly it is a big, widely perceived problem, and for this reason alone, it is worth looking at in more detail.

Some managers are pleasant and friendly. Some workplaces, often thanks to years of trade-union effort, are fairly civilised. But the capitalist system of production for profit breeds bullying like a swamp breeds plague.

However much the manager wants to be decent, her or his job is always to grind enough out of workers to yield the company a competitive profit. The manager may be bullied herself or himself to keep them to that priority. If the company doesn't want to make profit a priority, then sooner or later capitalist competition will force it to do that.

The public services are being pulled into line with private-sector norms by contracting-out and by deliberate gov-



ernment moves to introduce private-business-type management into them.

Management bullying may take the form of a systematic clampdown, planned from the top; or of seemingly quirky and individual bossiness.

What exactly does "bullying" cover?

While definitions vary across different organisations, most agree that workplace bullying can involve verbal or physical abuse or intimidation used by employers against workers, as well as subtler forms such as the setting of unattainable targets and the placing of unreasonable expectations. Bullying can be used to create an atmosphere of fear and demoralisation in a workplace, against which workers feel powerless to speak out.

But we are not powerless. While establishment thinking tells us that bullying is

Management bullying is intensifying

an individual issue to be dealt with one-on-one, through "official" channels or even through litigation, we believe that — like all workplace issues — bullying is a class question and should be fought collectively.

Workers' Liberty members in various trade unions are discussing the possibility of launching a cross-union campaign to equip workers with the ideas and tactics to stand up to the bosses' clampdown.

The solidarity of workers across sectors, unions and industries — as well, crucially, as solidarity within a workplace — is vital. As one trade union activist involved in a successful workers' campaign against bullying in East London put it, "the campaign was built through lots and lots of meetings. There was never any doubt from membership that it was a collective issue. Even the people who weren't directly affected by the bullying were firmly behind it. They wanted to stand up for their colleagues. There was a very solidaristic atmosphere, which was difficult for [our bosses] to understand. They'd never encountered that before."

Unfortunately, not all trade unions see it that way. Public sector union Unison's "Bully Busters" campaign focuses almost entirely on winning compensation for union members once they've already been forced out of their jobs due to bullying. But to beat authoritarian bosses and management clampdowns, collective organisation and resistance needs to take place right where the problem is; in the workplace. And if trade unionists are worried that standing up to bullying bosses might leave their unions isolated in a given workplace, they should take heart. The same east London worker:

"The bullying wasn't just about individual managers being unpleasant to individual members of staff. It was a specific tactic used by management to drive out the longer-serving, better unionised staff. Unfortunately for them, though, it had the opposite effect; we started the dispute with 33 union mem-

Walthamstow Academy: when workers stood up to bullying bosses

In March 2009, a two year-long campaign against management bullying at Walthamstow Academy resulted in a strike ballot.

As a leading NUT activist put it in a press release at the time, "there have been complaints from members [about management bullying] for a long period. We have had many meetings at the school, conducted surveys, engaged the employers, the United Learning Trust, in many discussions, both at the school and at their HQ in London. The result has been that the NUT has grown from 35 members at McEntee [the name of the school prior to it becoming an Academy] to 52 members now.

"Whatever we tried, the complaints from members about bullying emanating from the management style of the head teacher continued. No one should underestimate the devastating effect that a bullying head teacher can have on individual staff. Threats of procedure, criticism, victimisation, and recrimination destroy confidence, and without confidence performance declines and stress related illness beckons."

Despite constant time-wasting and delaying tactics from management, the workers in the school maintained their commitment to dealing with the issue collectively at workplace level rather than through atomising processes of arbitration and tribunal.

Before the strike took place, the headteacher resigned her post and the management offered the NUT a resolution to the situation that the union felt satisfactorily addresses the problem. Their experience shows that workers are at their strongest when they act collectively, and that even the threat of collective workplace action can make it very clear to a bullying boss that they are not welcome in a workplace.

bers and ended up with 54. All the members of other unions joined our union because they could see we were the ones prepared to stand up to management."

A cross-union campaign to stand up to the bosses' clampdown could provide workers with the confidence they need to resist management bullying, as well as putting in place networks of workplace activists that could be mobilised to stand up to other elements the bosses' attempts to make workers pay for their crisis.

"We need a national rank-and-file campaign"

The London Transport Region of the transport union, the RMT, has policy on this issue:

In many workplaces, whether private companies or public services, employers are persecuting workers with increasing harshness. Employers are doing this through:

- strict and punitive sickness absence policies;
- petty discipline clampdowns;
- cutting staffing levels and increasing workload;
- "performance management" and numerous targets which are arbitrary and/or very hard to achieve;
- constant pressure, scrutiny and micro-management;
- harassment and discrimination.

This constitutes management bullying of workers, and along with matters such as pay, hours and pensions, is a major issue for workers.

Workers facing this bullying need the support of strong trade union organisation. We want to give workers effective representation and to boost their confidence to stand up for themselves. We also want to encourage and support workers in fighting back, and to raise the profile of this important issue. To do this, we need a national, cross-industry, rank-and-file-led campaign to resist management bullying.

We therefore resolve to initiate such a campaign on a broad basis, linking up trade unionists from different industries, unions and geographical areas. We ask union branches and other rank-and-file bodies to sign up to this call. The signatories are committed to supporting each others' work on this issue, and to working together to provide information, resources, training, events and actions to stop management bullying.

IRANIAN SOCIALISTS INTERVIEWED

Where is Iran going?

Nasrin Parvaz: “Echoes of 1978/79, but the lessons have not been learnt”

It's not easy to guess which direction the current movement will take, but every time there's a religious or social gathering, there's an uprising and protests.

Some of the people involved are “green movement” supporters, but a lot of that is to do with the lack of a credible alternative opposition. The next big upheaval may be around 10-15 February, the anniversary of one of the key movements in the 1978/79 uprising [collapse of the Pahlavi dynasty]. There is a feeling that what's going on now is an echo of that.

People are attacking the Islamic Guard; they hate the regime. But there's isn't much mass organisation outside the “green movement”, which is why you're getting a lot of the protest expressed in religious terms. There is an echo of 1978/79, but some of its lessons, about the role of organised religion in politics, have been forgotten.

The regime said eight people died on the last big demonstration but we know that it was probably over 50. Thousands were arrested. Killing people in the streets and arresting demonstrators is the approach of the regime. Mousavi [the main “green movement” leader] is asking the regime to calm down; “green movement” leaders are worried about an upheaval they can't control. They're telling people not to attack Islamic guards. Mousavi wants to use official and parliamentary means to unseat Ahmedinejad.

Mousavi and other “green movement” leaders represent a faction of the ruling-class. If Mousavi becomes president, he won't be much better from the point of view of workers' rights. He's just as pro-free-market. The “green movement” is now calling for a general strike, although that call isn't having much grip yet. Thousands of working-class people are involved in the protests, but as individuals rather than as a class.

Workers are struggling; there are lots of disputes in various workplaces

around economic issues. But the workers' movement is very heavily repressed. Last month, the Islamic Guard very brutally blocked a march of women workers demanding the back payment of wages. Because of this repression the workers' movement is very fragmented and not organised enough to intervene in the opposition movement as an independent force.

Azar Majedi (Worker-communism Unity Party):
“The protests can bring down the Islamic Republic: we need a workers' alternative.”

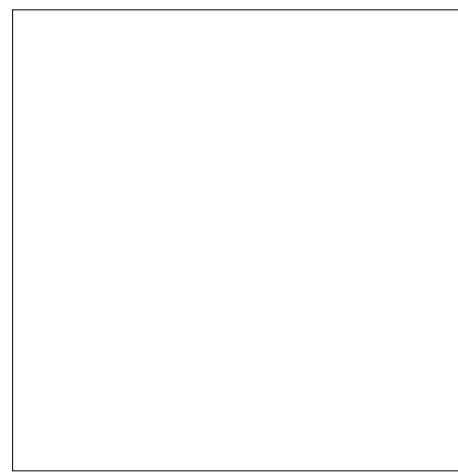
The recent protests are a continuation of the mass protests which began in June. The regime did not succeed in crushing the movement.

The difference now is that the balance of power has shifted in favour of the people. The protests will continue and will expand and deepen; they have already radicalized a great deal. This movement is for the overthrow of the Islamic regime and for freedom, equality and prosperity for all. It will not stop until it is resolved.

State violence against the movement has escalated. There are cases of running people over with police vans, beating them up to death and many arrests. On the protests around Tasooa and Ashura [religious holidays] people fought back openly. They clashed with the security forces, in some cases succeeding in disarming them, overturning police vans and freeing some of the detainees.

A few political prisoners have received death sentences and some have been executed. In the Islamic parliament, Majlis, they are passing a bill to treat anyone who is arrested in a demonstration as a *Molhed*, meaning someone who is against the God and Islam, whose punishment according to Islam is death.

The protests aren't necessarily dominated by the politics of Mousavi and the “green movement”. To understand the dynamism of the recent political uprising



A policeman is held by the crowd. He has had a green scarf put on his head

in Iran, we must look at the contradictions of this regime, the nature of the tensions between the two factions of it and the people's aspirations. Since the Islamists took power they resorted to suppressive methods, and from 1981 the Islamic regime began a very brutal, massive suppression. It is estimated that in the 80s more than 100,000 people were executed in its notorious prisons after being subjected to brutal torture.

Moreover, poverty and economic destitution has reached unbearable levels. According to official reports of the Central Bank (a very conservative estimate), more than 50% of the population lives under the poverty line.

In the past few years there have been many workers' protests, mainly to demand back-pay or to oppose closures and job losses. Some moves for building workers' syndicates [unions] have begun as well. Many workers' leaders have been arrested, tortured and imprisoned. There is news of escalating workers protests in past weeks, although there have not been any political strikes.

Workers are individually active in the protest movement, but as a class, or organised force, they have not entered the political scene yet. But I believe this day will not be too long away. The women's liberation movement and movements amongst the youth — which are fighting for genuine social liberation and secularism — are also very strong.

in the recent past against such things as the non-payment of wages, their strongest independent leaders, e.g. among the Tehran bus workers and the Haft Tappeh sugar workers, have been arrested and imprisoned. Because of the repression it is hard to gauge how decisive that repression is, and what reserve forces underground workers' movements have and in any case the workers' protests are quite separate to the movement “on the streets”.

That said, experienced working class activists will remember Mousavi as Khomeini's prime minister in the worst days of the war with Iraq, and they will remember how reformist Khatami, as president from 1997 to 2005, continued the absolute repression of the working-class in the factories and workplaces.

Behind the reformist leadership's ideology are capitalist interests and a deep hostility to the working-class. As Iranian academic Behzad Yaghmaian explains (about the reformists in 2002) “The official language of rights and participation excluded the wage earners as a specific group with a defined collective interest and rights. A civil society was to be built without the institutionalisation of workers' rights. The narrowness and limits of

In this context, Mousavi is not a real alternative for the people. He is one of the founders of this regime, a close ally of Khomeini, and the prime minister in 80s at the time of mass murders in the regime's prisons.

Mousavi has said it many times that he wants to maintain the Islamic Republic and wants to return to its early days; we all know what these “early days” meant to the people — death and brutality. Very early on in the current protest movement people were chanting “Mousavi is an excuse; the whole regime is our target.”

The majority of the people want to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Therefore, their aspirations and aims go against the state-reformist movement or the so-called green movement's leadership. Mousavi and co. are becoming ever more irrelevant to the current political protest movement in Iran.

I am confident that the Islamic regime will be gone as a result of this movement. However, the main question for the working class is who and what will replace the existing regime.

What we, the Worker-communism Unity Party, fight for is a workers' revolution to overthrow capitalism and bring about a socialist republic. If the workers' alternative does not materialise, another counter-revolution will come to power and we could witness another bloody period like the past thirty years.

It is of vital importance that all freedom loving, equality seeking individuals and organisations, the socialists and communists internationally support people's political movement in Iran against the Islamic regime and for freedom, equality and prosperity for all.

What is happening in Iran can change the lives of not only millions in Iran, but also affect greatly the region and the international scene. The immediate result of it would be the demise of political Islam and the Islamist movement internationally, a consequence of which would be more freedom and less inequality for women under the rule of Islamism. And if we organise a workers revolution in Iran and overthrow capitalism, this would open up a great window to the demise of capitalism in the 21st century.

the official movement for civil society, and the neglect of wage earners and their independent institutions, resulted in the continuation of the old regime of labour at the point of production, and ultimately, fear and intimidation in the society at large.”

Against Iranian “reformism” — that is, political Islamism in a different form, with its social programme of exploiting the workers — we want Iranian socialists, though they are very isolated, to be able to argue clearly and effectively for the immediate, necessary, political fight — for the Islamic Republic to be smashed, not reformed, not even pushed to the limits of an Islamist definition, but completely dismantled.

In its place there needs to be a genuinely secular and consistently democratic political system that includes not only free speech and human rights but the workers' right to organise independently. In that fight for secular democracy, workers can organise independently, develop their economic struggles alongside the political, and grow strong enough to pose and win support for socialist aims.

Our job is to give solidarity against the repression, but also especially to help the workers and the socialists.

For a secular, democratic Iran

From front page

It is not inconceivable, especially if UN economic sanctions are imposed, and the “cold war” over Iran's enriched uranium intensifies, that the two ruling-class factions will make a deal.

Either way the “Islamic Republic” will have to deal with a mobilised population.

Wider social layers, and campaign networks with different political impulses, are represented in the broader movement on the streets. But even as the protestors make their brave stand for “social justice” or for thoroughgoing human rights and democracy (however they define it), organised political leadership is dominated by the intra-capitalist conflict.

The reformists with their limited but clear programme — for such things as re-run elections, freedom of the press and the right to demonstrate — are a powerful force operating in an inchoate movement made up of “networks”: cyber-run social networks, NGOs, student and

women's rights and human rights organisations, and reformist political and religious groups. Those networks are popular, effective and organised, but, as one commentator put it, they look like (and are) more of a “flash mob” than a disciplined party.

Iranian liberals and human rights activists claim the “Green Movement” leadership — of Mohammad Khatami, Mehdi Karoubi and Mir-Hossein Mousavi — is “accidental” and therefore has a limited organisational grip on the movement. But it is the only fully “formed” important political leadership. And some left forces like the Stalinist Tudeh Party are explicitly backing the “green” leadership.

The independently organised working-class movement (the unions and non-Stalinist socialists), the only social force which has the potential to create an overall society-wide alternative to Iranian reaction and capitalism, is very weak. While workers have protested and struck

EDL IN STOKE, 23 JANUARY

“We need to carry our work against BNP to the working-class estates”

By a Stoke anti-fascist

There is a strong Stoke division of the EDL, based around Stoke City supporters, and unofficial Stoke City internet message boards are full of talk about their mobilisation in the city on 23 January.

The link between certain Stoke City supporters (the “Naughty Forties”) and the fascists has existed for a number of years, and has been documented in past issues of *Searchlight*. The BNP deny that they are in any way linked to the EDL, but in practice the local EDL supporters are also BNP supporters. For example, Shaun Grimsley, who recently stood for the BNP at a by-election in Cannock Chase, is also a self-confessed Nazi and an EDL activist.

There have been some tensions in the local BNP recently. Alby Walker, the leader of the BNP group on the City Council, recently resigned unexpectedly. Walker was seen as a “moderate” (in BNP terms), and is likely to be succeeded as leader by hardline Nazi Michael Coleman.

NorSCARF is the North Staffordshire Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, which was originally founded in 1977 to oppose the National Front. We are an autonomous local anti-fascist campaign covering Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Staffordshire Moorlands. We have links with both *Searchlight* and the UAF: there is no separate UAF group in the area.

NorSCARF has close links with the trade union movement through the North Staffordshire Trades Council. NorSCARF is quite unusual in encompassing all strands of anti-fascist opinion within a single organisation, and of course the kind of debates going on inside the anti-fascist movement generally have been taking place within NorSCARF.

How to relate to the disaffected working-class people attracted to the BNP and the EDL is, of course, the big ques-

tion. NorSCARF are aware that to date we have been simply firefighting, and that we do need to carry on serious sustained work in the working-class estates where the BNP have made inroads.

One of the particular problems we face in Stoke-on-Trent is the fragmentation of the political scene. The City Council is made up of at least nine separate political groups, including several distinct groups of “Independents”, including some politically close to the BNP.

In this year’s May elections, the BNP are defending three seats. However, seven more are vulnerable to a BNP win (these are wards which have previously elected BNP councillors, or where the BNP has come second). In the worst scenario, the BNP could win all these seats.

Adding these ten to the six not standing for re-election this time, that would increase the size of the BNP group to 16 — the largest single group on the Council, with more councillors than the Labour Party. They would become the official opposition to the current ruling coalition of Tories and Independents.

From a personal (rather than a NorSCARF) perspective, I would add that the Labour Party are barely credible as an opposition. There is an internal war within the party locally, whereby the Blairites (mainly located in Stoke South constituency) are trying to purge the party of the old left (mainly located in Stoke Central and Stoke North), with the assistance of the party’s regional organiser.

A number of very experienced former councillors, including a former leader of the Labour Group, have been prevented from going on the party’s panel of candidates. Only eleven prospective candidates have been approved, despite the fact that there are twenty wards in the City. The Labour Party will therefore not even be able to stand a candidate in every ward.

• **23 January: assemble with NorSCARF 12.30pm, outside NORSACA, Lindsay Annexe, Cannon Place, Hanley ST1 4EP**

BARKING

“We have to offer an alternative”

Lee Waker, Labour councillor for Dagenham Village Ward and a CWU activist, spoke to *Solidarity* about fighting the BNP in Barking & Dagenham, where BNP leader Nick Griffin will stand in the General Election.

The responsibility for the growth of the BNP in Barking and Dagenham lies with the Labour government and its policies.

The BNP has grown on the back of issues of housing, job opportunities and job security. We must confront and combat their growth but we have to look at the underlying reasons. Many young people look to the BNP out of disgust at the three main parties. The BNP come across as if they’re something new and saying something different. It’s not that young people in this area are firmly racist; there is a strand of racism here which has always been there, but that’s not the fundamental reason.

Young people are probably more tolerant than the older people but they’re at the sharp end of the attacks. Barking and Dagenham is the NEET [young people Not in Education, Employment or Training] capital of England; getting a house and a job is a big issue, as jobs are scarce and low paid. There’s been no major council housing builds in 30 years, and the majority of council stock has been sold off.

The problem with mainstream anti-fascism is that it’s based solely around pointing out how bad the BNP are. People in campaigns like *Searchlight* and UAF are well-intentioned, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions. It’s a kind of middle-class moralising that doesn’t offer any positive alternatives to people’s problems.

We try and offer a socialist alternative through the Labour Party and as public representatives. The councillors in Barking and Dagenham are very much “old Labour” and still believe in publicly owned services. We run a campaign for more social housing in the borough which is quite successful. We had a good lobby of parliament in October. It looks like we’re going to get a few hundred new builds, but of course that only scratches the surface.

This is an ex-industrial area and the docks and car plants have all gone. A culture of trade unionism has gone too. It’s similar to the situation in the north where the BNP has grown in ex-mining areas. Economic conditions are driving fascism, and many people in Barking don’t see the Labour Party as an alternative, especially with the likes of Margaret Hodge [Barking’s Labour MP], who’s supported every right-wing move the government has made.

It’s difficult to know whether the BNP have a real chance of winning a parliamentary seat. They are serious about it, and have a better chance than ever before. However, some voters may be less inclined to vote BNP in a general election than other elections. What the Labour Party does can affect things;

Margaret Hodge’s comments at the last election were particularly unhelpful. It comes across to the public that Hodge and people like her have given up on the people of Barking, and they’ve opened the door to the BNP through the oxygen of publicity. The dangers of fascist parties gaining a foothold are clear and there is a risk that in the meantime attacks on ethnic minorities or trade union activists will go up.

I know some people on the left think that socialists shouldn’t have anything to do with the Labour Party, but it’s the only show in town here. The far-left doesn’t have a presence, so we have to work in the Labour Party and argue for socialism there. But we need to offer something different to the policies of the government and the other parties. I was elected to the council because I said I’d be a representative for working people in the area and I have fought tooth-and-nail for their interests.

In May 2006, I know there were lots of people in this ward that would have voted for the BNP, but they didn’t. We gave them an alternative based on representation and fighting for their interests and we were the only ward in Barking and Dagenham to stop a BNP candidate becoming a councillor. In May 2010 we aim to return three councillors by making sure we put our electorate first.

• **New anti-fascist campaign: www.workersliberty.org/node/13580**

HARROW, 13 DECEMBER

Far-right flop conceals anti-fascist shortcomings

By Joan Trevor

Sixteen AWL members were among 200 anti-fascists who turned out to stop the far-right in Harrow on 13 December. By ourselves we would have outnumbered Stop Islamisation of Europe (SIOE) who staged an anti-Muslim demonstration outside Harrow mosque.

Despite boasting that they would mobilise 1,500, extending invitations to other far-right groups, in particular, the English Defence League (EDL), on the day SIOE was exposed as amounting to not much more than one man, Stephen Gash, his website, and his Danish friend Anders Gravers. For on the day, about 15 of them turned up. For two hours, in the cold, they stood forlornly at one end of the car park in front of Harrow Civic Centre, protected by masses of every sort of police you could imagine — including dogs.

The day was a PR disaster for the far-right. However, that is more down to their failings than to the successes of the forces ranged against them. A number of questions confront us starkly.

In September, when the SIOE first tried to march in Harrow, they were deterred by a crowd of at least 1,000 young people, mainly of Muslim background, mobilising from the area.

In December, the mosque warned young people to stay away, and reassured them that the police and mosque stewards would “protect the mosque”. They even asked anti-fascists not to mobilise a counter-demonstration. Partly the mosque was acting out of fear for its public image, because in September a small number of skirmishes between the police and Muslim youths stole all the headlines.

In fact, the role of the police was to facilitate a provocative, anti-Muslim protest, and they enacted it very well.

There was never any risk that the mosque was under threat of attack but every chance that Muslims would be demobilised, and they were.

To judge from the small numbers of young people turning up, who were not connected with the anti-fascist left, the call to stay away made by the mosque was widely heeded.

Meeting afterwards on 16 December, the local AWL group discussed drafting an open letter to the mosque leaders, questioning their tactics. The Muslim community cannot afford to be quiescent when they come under attack — political and physical — from the far-right.

If the EDL had turned up in any numbers — as we know from Leeds, Manchester and Nottingham, they can — far from being able to stop the far-right, with our numbers we would ourselves have been vulnerable to attack by them. We would have been in the disastrous position of relying on the police for

protection.

In the build-up to the event, the AWL put effort into persuading trade unionists to join the counter-demonstration. We started too late, but the response was still very disappointing.

Trade unionists have anti-racist and anti-fascist politics but it is time that they turned out on demonstrations to show to the far-right that they are outnumbered.

The UAF hastily set up a local group in Brent and Harrow and held some local meetings to discuss tactics, before the September and December demonstrations. But both in September and December their mobilisation and politics were lacklustre.

On the day, they simply stressed, over and over again, the “unity of the community”. The unity of black and white, people of all faiths and none, against the far right is good, but it does not address why the far right has grown, and cannot stop it from growing further.

ISLAM4UK AND EDL

Mobilise against both

BY GERRY BATES

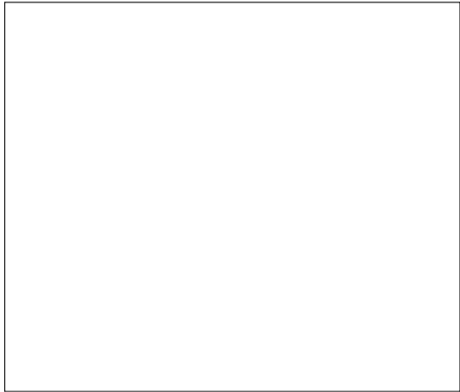
After announcing a “March 4 Sharia” in London on October 31 (and then calling off at the last minute), Anjem Choudary’s Islam4UK — a far-right descendant of al-Muhajiroun — recently pulled another bluff by announcing and then cancelling another action, this time in the small Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett.

The march was banned, and that ban was swiftly followed up by a legal proscription on Islam4UK as an organisation.

Islam4UK chose the town as it is the location of a parade to honour British troops returning from Afghanistan, as well as two soldiers — Aidan Howell and David Watson — killed in fighting. As with the 31 October action, the English Defence League called a counter-protest. The BNP also weighed in, grotesquely appropriating anti-fascist language and vowing that Islam4UK “shall not pass”.

The ban on Islam4UK is not a measure socialists endorse (state bans on politico-religious “extremists” are easily turned against left-wing “extremists” in periods of heightened struggle), but neither should we be leaping to Islam4UK’s defence.

Islam4UK’s announcement looked like a provocation. It generated an enormous amount of publicity for them, with senior government figures — including Alan Johnson and Gordon Brown — speaking out to condemn them. The



Anjem Choudary from Islam4UK

press outcry has made Islam4UK appear to be a substantial force rather than the small group of marginal obscurantist bigots they are.

Regardless of their size the left should have something to say about them. The fact that a far-right religious communalist organisation is able to assert itself and generate so much publicity in this way is troubling.

Even those sections of the left such as the SWP who have attempted to make common cause with Islamists cannot deny that Islam4UK are a straightforwardly reactionary outfit whose opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is inseparable from their medievalist vision of an Islamic-theocratic world.

The fact that the proto-fascist EDL and the fascist BNP have positioned themselves as the main centres of opposition to Islam4UK makes the situation even more depressing; the threat they pose in terms of the imposition of ferociously

reactionary politics is far greater than that posed by Islam4UK, and they will certainly attempt to use the situation to whip up hostility and hatred not only against Islamic fundamentalism but against all Muslims and other ethnic minorities.

The stakes are too high here for the left to prevaricate. When Workers’ Liberty, along with socialists from the Iranian and Iraqi refugee communities as well as some individual anarchists, called for a counter-counter-action against both the mobilisations of Islam4UK and the EDL on October 31, we were denounced by SWP members as “racists” and accused of lining up with the EDL. But if the working-class left fails to mobilise independently against both the white nationalist far-right and the religious bigotry of Islam4UK, we will be abandoning the terrain to forces that seek to divide our class on the basis of ethnic or religious identity.

What is needed on the streets of every town and city in the UK is a visible, organised working-class left that takes a stand for workers’ unity on the basis of consistent anti-racism, anti-fascism and anti-capitalism. It is to that left and to those ideas that which we must win both the disaffected white workers taken in by the racist demagoguery of the BNP and the EDL. To that left too we must win the many young people in the Muslim communities increasingly attracted to Islamism as the only ostensible source of radical opposition to the wars of the British government and the racist attacks which those communities face.

NOTTINGHAM CONFERENCE

Linking up the activists

BY JACK YATES

Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP group, together with similar organisations, is planning a conference some time in March to create a network of groups, national materials and resources for the upcoming struggles against the BNP and EDL.

We need a working class campaign against racism and fascism. This means campaigning to mobilise the working class, through trade unions and community campaigns, on the basis of their own politics. This means building open, democratic political and organisational structures where they do not exist.

For organised socialists, this means educating and organising those around us in the confidence that our ideas can beat the racists and fascists back.

In its current form Unite Against Fascism (UAF) is incapable of fulfilling this task. There are, however, local groups emerging around the country that reject the approach of UAF and the other “official” anti-fascism of “Hope Not Hate”. These groups, though not politically united on all issues, share a common commitment to organising dif-

ferently, discussing politics and building effective campaigns.

You could have hoped that the UAF conference, due in London on 13 February, would help tackle the issues. But when is a conference not, in fact, a conference? When it’s largely controlled by the Socialist Workers Party, of course.

The opening weeks of 2010 should be an opportunity for mature, rational reflection and preparation for the urgent task of preventing the British National Party from getting an MP. Anti-fascists, socialist organisations and the unions should be able to discuss and debate why our movement has failed to stem the growth of the BNP and failed to win their supporters — close to a million of them at last June’s Euro elections — to working class politics.

But on 13 February there will be no motions, there will be no real debate, there will be no meaningful votes or holding to account. The UAF conference will be yet another rally. Such unaccountability would not be tolerated in a pub quiz team, and should not be tolerated in a largely trade union funded campaign.

That the 13 February conference will be like that is a consequence of the real and legitimate divisions amongst anti-

fascists — and the socialists involved — and the readiness of the trade union officialdom to unquestioningly outsource such necessary activity.

It is also a measure of the lack of democracy and transparency that persists at the heart of the SWP. UAF’s biggest asset, and its only real objective reason for continuing existence, is the funding it enjoys from national trade unions. If the success of such a campaign were measured by the existence of actual grass-roots, on-the-ground democratic organisation, then UAF would surely score poorly. But the problems extend well beyond the organisational.

UAF stands for “uniting everyone” — be they David Cameron, a religious reactionary or trade union activist — who opposes the BNP. For socialists, such “unity” is politically meaningless. UAF is a popular front. The nature of the campaign leaves the sharp political ground coveted by the BNP — their racist appeal to workers, their criticisms of New Labour, the effort they put into community work — uncontested.

We need a different approach to combating the BNP and groups like the racist English Defence League.

• See nottmstopbnp.wordpress.com for more information.

IN BRIEF

Tories play a “race card”

In a depressing piece of political jockeying, David Cameron has played a race card, with a sweeping pledge to cut immigration to “tens of thousands” (down from around 200,000 a year).

He has said he will cut immigration to the levels of the 1980s.

He could get near that only by trying to ensure hardly any migrants at all are allowed into the the UK.

- No skilled workers would be allowed in. This idea cuts across British capitalism’s continued need and desire for particular groups of migrant workers; but, for now, Cameron won’t let that worry get in the way of trying to woo BNP and UKIP voters.

- UK border controls would become even tighter. This cuts across the Tory pledge to scrap ID cards. Never let a contradictory policy get in the way of right-wing propaganda!

- Significantly fewer refugees would be let into the UK. In a world of increasing inequality and military conflict, that would be more inhumane even than New Labour’s horrible record on asylum rights. Never let concepts such as human solidarity get in the way of being racist!

These days few mainstream politicians talk in so many words about Britain being “swamped” or that immigrants should be “sent back”, but that is the mentality which Cameron is courting and encouraging.

- **Protest against border controls! Saturday 23 January. From 2pm at St. Pancras Station, London.**

The Tories made society more unequal, and so have Blair and Brown

The richest 10% own 44% of all wealth in the UK. They own, of course, the great bulk of the shares and other financial assets in private hands; they also, less obviously, own the big majority of the wealth held in pension-fund assets.

Quite a lot of people outside the top 10% may own a house. But the top 10% hold about 37% of real-estate wealth, too. Inequality of income has also been rising. Its big jump came in the 1980s, with the Thatcher Tory government. But since 1997 inequality has continued to rise, more slowly, and mostly driven by runaway rises for the very well-off.

New figures from the Institute of Fiscal Studies also tell us something about “average income”. The average individual adult income in the UK in 2007-8 was £487 a week, £25,324 per year.

Not too bad? But if one person has a million pounds, and 999 have nothing, then there is an “average” of £1000 per person which tells you nothing about the plight of the 999. “Average” (mean) income figures have the same problem: a minority on very high incomes ups the average.

The median income — the figure which 50% of adults are below, 50% above — was £393 per week, £20,436 per year. And the mode — the most common income level — was about £300 per week, or £15,600 per year.

Socialist candidate Jill Mountford to stand against Harriet Harman in Camberwell and Peckham

Don't sit out the general election!

By SACHA ISMAIL, SOUTH LONDON

In many ways, the coming general election does not seem an inspiring one for socialists and militants. Faced with the choice between a discredited, right-wing, anti-working class Labour government and a revived Tory party, some will be tempted to sit it out. Things are made worse by the fact that there are few left Labour candidates, and that the main "left" coalition outside Labour (the "son of No2EU" effort) looks very thin and shaky politically.

Do not despair, however. There is something positive you can do in this election.

As regular readers of *Solidarity* will be aware, Workers' Liberty member Jill Mountford is standing in the south London constituency of Camberwell and Peckham — against New Labour deputy leader Harriet Harman.

Jill is everything that Harriet Harman is not. A socialist, feminist, trade unionist and welfare state activist over twenty five years. She is a workers' candidate, not a servant of the rich like Harman. She is pledged to take only the average worker's wage, donating the rest to labour movement and campaigning organisations.

She stands for a workers' government, a socialist government that serves our class as New Labour and the Tories serve the bosses.

Because there will be so few socialist candidates in this election, the working class will be denied a political voice — and during an economic crisis when it needs such a voice more than ever. We can begin to change that situation through campaigns like Jill's in Camberwell and Peckham.

There are at most four months left until the election. Use them to help us build the fight for a workers' voice in politics!

- We will be doing regular stalls, leafleting, canvassing, public meetings and other events. If you want to help with the campaign, get in touch: 07904 944 771 or email awl@workersliberty.org

Can we get a working-class alternative to New Labour and the Tories?

Workers' Liberty election meeting

3pm, Saturday 23 January
Sceaux Gardens Tenants' and Residents' Association Hall
Sceaux Gardens, Peckham Road, London, SE15

COPENHAGEN

Climate action

Daniel Rawnsley reports from the protests at the Copenhagen climate summit (7-18 December)

Workers' Climate Action activists at the Copenhagen climate summit marched in to the entrance hall of the 18th-century Odd Fellow palace, where the multinational wind turbine manufacturer Vestas was holding a drinks party, with banners and a megaphone. We remained there for around half an hour, chanting slogans and handing out leaflets to partygoers.

Eventually Danish police arrived, without any of the event organisers confronting us first, and the protest was forced outside. We continued to use the megaphone to voice our opposition to Vestas' appalling record on workers rights and demand the re-instatement of workers who occupied the Vestas wind turbine blade factory in the Isle of Wight in July-August to try to stop the bosses shutting it down. Speakers included Ian Terry, one of the occupiers from the Isle of Wight.

Vestas had tried to make the most of the summit to get publicity for themselves, with posters, billboards, and even a turbine outside the conference centre advertising their brand.

But mostly protest in Copenhagen was severely hemmed in by the police.

Empowered by a new "anti-hooligan" law, Danish police were able to make mass pre-emptive arrests, declare marches to be illegal at any point (a march against police brutality was banned), and take violent action to break up large gatherings of people.

The police made mass arrests on demonstrations, holding activists in steel cages and, some claim, attacking them with pepper spray. The Candy Factory, a privately owned space in which activists were working on bikes which were to be used on a demonstration, was raided without a warrant and one individual was arrested for having a multi-tool which incorporated a knife.

Still, the organisers of the Wednesday 16 December "Reclaim the Power" demonstration seemed unwilling to recognise that a confrontation with the police was necessary. Organisers argued that it was important to remain peaceful so as not to detract from giving a voice to the global south. A "flood of humanity" was advocated, a force willing to take down and climb over fences, but never inflict harm on others.

Activists were advised to look for "the gaps between the police". On the day, of

course, there were no gaps between the police.

The march was split into four blocks: the main march (blue block); a more radical section that would split off at some point (green block); a group on bicycles who would distract the police (bike block); and those who carried out their own actions alongside the demonstration (autonomous block).

The green block was arrested en masse at their meeting point; the bike block had had most of their equipment confiscated the previous night. Police searches early in the morning meant that most activists had little protection against tear gas and batons.

Yet when I shouted at the police, one activist — who herself had quite obviously been beaten and pepper sprayed — confronted me. She told me that the police were just doing their job. It was the way they fed their families. We had to calm the situation down.

Shortly afterwards, the police stormed the sound truck and arrested all those on it who had been stewarding the march. The last I heard, they were facing charges of incitement to cause a riot.

Of course I don't advocate violence against the police for its own sake; Yes, a great many police officers are working-class people doing an exceptionally horrible job without the right to form a union. But ideas are carried by people. A clash of starkly -opposed ideas results in a clash of people. And the people that we clash first are often the police.

The "Reclaim the Power" demonstration was unprepared for the clash. The aim was to break in to the conference centre and hold a separate forum there, but activists were not prepared for the unavoidable confrontation with the police.

Most of the mobilisation for Copenhagen from England was from the Climate Camp. That meant imagination, energy, and courage, but also, I think, some political problems.

An action on 13 December called by Climate Justice Action, an international network to which Climate Camp is affiliated, aimed to shut down Copenhagen harbour for a day — but independent of any co-operation with the workers there.

CJA centred a lot of attention on what I thought was, at times, a "class-blind" sympathy for the global south (poorer countries). Yes, we want to bring campaigning groups, social movements and community and workers' organisations from the global south in to the movement against climate change. However, CJA takes little note of the class distinctions in

The Vestas jobs battle

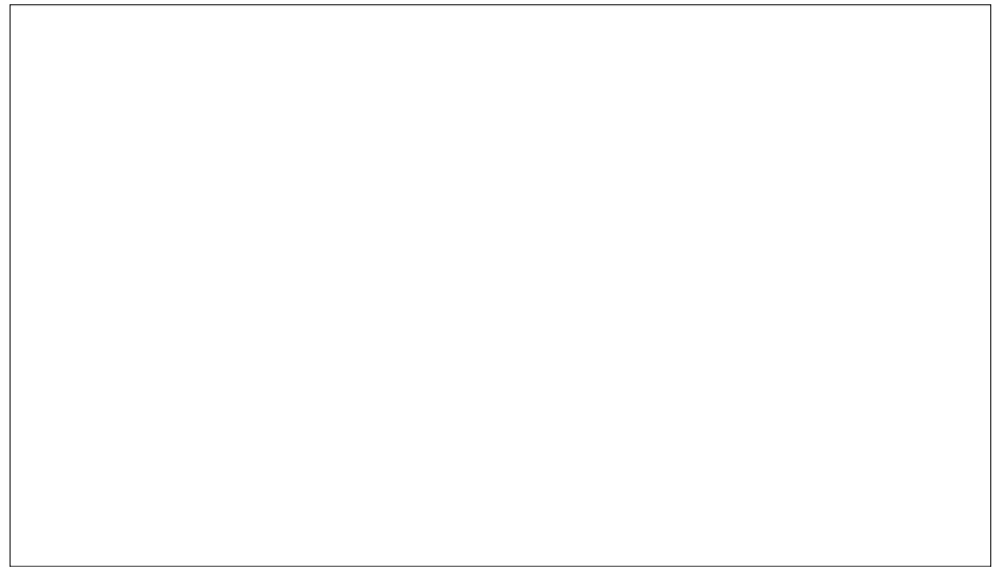
The struggle that took place on the Isle of Wight in summer 2009 to prevent the closure of the Vestas wind turbine blades factory was a struggle with many lessons for working-class socialism. In the first place it showed that workers can and will fight — even when they are unorganised and have no history of militancy.

Workers' Liberty's new pamphlet — "The Vestas jobs battle: How wind turbine workers became a power" — aims to reaffirm those lessons for those who were directly involved in the campaign and spread them throughout the working-class and environmental movements.

Testimonies from Vestas worker-activists, campaign supporters and others as well as the AWL's Marxist analysis of the dispute.

- £3.50 (p&p free), from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques to "AWL". Or buy online: www.workersliberty.org/pamphlets

ivists challenge Vestas



Vestas tried to get publicity for itself

Yes, but how?

those countries, sometimes championing their leaders as much as the oppressed peoples.

On Wednesday 16 December, the day activists attempted to break in to the conference centre, part of the plan was to have delegates walk out of the conference centre to meet us. In a meeting before the action we were told that delegates from two South American nations would walk out in order to take part, but for security reasons their identities could not be revealed.

What if these people had been representatives of Hugo Chavez's Bonapartist Venezuelan regime? There was little effort by CJA to pick apart class distinctions or to understand the global south as anything more than a homogeneous bloc by CJA. This can only lead to an underdeveloped engagement with independent movements in the global south, and, in effect, a patronising attitude towards those movements.

CJA states its goals as:

- To promote and strengthen the rights and voices of indigenous and affected peoples (including workers) in confronting the climate

- To highlight the critical role of biodiversity in weathering the climate crisis, and to defend the existence of all species.

- To expose the roles of false and market-based climate "solutions" as well as corporate domination of climate negotiations in worsening the climate crisis.

- To advance alternatives that can provide real and just solutions to the climate crisis.

- To both sharpen our understanding of, and to address, the root social, ecological, political and economic causes of the climate crisis toward a total systemic transformation of our society.

- Our network is committed to working with respect, trust and unity towards these goals.

The inclusion of "workers" in the first point illustrates the positive role class-conscious activists have played in this movement through groups like Workers Climate Action. The clause about "exposing the roles of false and market-based climate 'solutions'" also demonstrates some understanding of the root cause of climate change being capitalism.

A "total systemic transformation of our

society"? Good. But I could experience a total systemic change of my breakfast from cooked to cold, and it would still be breakfast. A "total systemic transformation" of capitalism could mean just more centralised government control over energy production — still be capitalism, only this time state-owned. Or "total systemic transformation" could mean worse — like "primitivism", a programme of returning humanity to pre-industrial technologies.

CJA does not call on any specific force or agency to carry out its demands beyond itself, and the governments it puts pressure on. For example, the call for "alternatives that can provide real and just solutions" could be made in a way which accentuates workers' agency and points to a new society. It could mean workers taking control of their work-

places to carry out changes which make them socially useful and ecologically sustainable.

Equally, it could mean a very top down process in which government research creates new technologies that are implemented without the involvement or consent of those working with these new technologies.

The emancipation of the working class, even its emancipation from the destruction of its land, homes, and lives by capitalist-created climate change, must be the act of the working class itself. Our task as socialists remains to push this idea in the ecological movement through groups like Workers Climate Action.

Though the politics of the ecological movement are still broad, and in some cases contradictory, there is a lot of good to be taken away from Copenhagen.

The declarations of the "people's assembly" held outside the conference centre, though quickly put together and a hodgepodge, raised solidarity as a guid-

ing principle. A representative from the Canadian Union of Postal Workers gave an impassioned and well received speech to the assembly, calling for more union banners on the march and setting this as a challenge to activists.

The kind of conference-hopping activism that inevitably comes to the fore at these events is important to be involved in. It is a good thing when wherever the leaders of capitalist governments meet on such a scale they are met with mass demonstrations and civil disobedience. Activists can return home with new international links, new ideas and new tactics.

However it is in the day-to-day political work we do that we can begin to mount an effective attack on climate change and the capitalist system that causes it. This fight is engaged in through things like solidarity with Heathrow airport workers, through agitation around workplaces like Vestas and through our continued involvement in and arguments with the ecological movement.

"Workers are the power and strength we need"

Vestas occupier and activist Ian Terry who was in Copenhagen to speak at the Klimaforum and take part in Workers' Climate Action activity against Vestas, spoke to Dan Rawsley.

You spoke in the Klimaforum on left alternatives to capitalism. How do you feel the meeting went?

There seemed to be a lot more interesting conversations coming from the floor than the panel. It is good that a lot of people from different backgrounds and from all over the world were coming together and recognising that the climate issue is a left issue. But it felt like there was an absence of the Danish left.

You were the only person from the platform to discuss the importance of overthrowing capitalism. Do you feel this is a problem?

I see it as a problem in that they're not so militant about the ideas, but as I say, it was quite clear from the demonstrations that the green movement is an anti-capitalist movement.

How do you feel about the march to the Bella

have numbers and everything they need. It would've been nice to keep everything a lot more central for everyone.

What sort of action do you think activists in Britain need to take now to develop the fight against the climate crisis?

We need talks between different groups, trade union and socialist groups and green groups. They should solidify their bonds and help each other on different disputes. The key, the only way we will solve this problem, is making sure we engage workers everywhere, north and south of the globe.

In the People's Assembly people were discussing how we need to do outreach and that as a movement it's easy for us to preach to the converted and not try to get to the people who seem less receptive. In reality coal workers and oil workers aren't the enemy; it's the companies and the exploitation that capitalism breeds.

Workers are the power and strength we need; as consumers we haven't much control over what happens, the only power we have is to withdraw our labour.

PEOPLE'S CHARTER

Why right-wing MP backs the Charter

By IRA BERKOVIC

The People's Charter, a document launched mainly by people around the Communist Party of Britain and *Morning Star*, has succeeded in securing the backing of a substantial section of labour movement officialdom. It has been officially endorsed by the TUC.

Workers' Liberty has made criticisms of the Charter. We think its demands are timid and limiting. We think the idea of a "people's", rather than workers', charter undermines the necessary and immediate task of reasserting the notion of the working class acting in politics as a distinct and independent force.

The Charter website suggests just two things to do with the Charter: get people to sign it, and vote for MPs who back it. But working-class political representation is not about voting for individuals who subscribe to vague Charters, but rather about candidates who are accountable to workers' organisations and who fight for working-class political interests.

As if to illustrate the point in bright colours, the Charter's current backers include three Liberal Democrat MPs and... maverick right-wing MP Bob Spink, who was elected as Tory, defected to UKIP, and now sits as an independent.

We asked Bob Spink why he'd signed the Early Day Motion in support of the People's Charter.

Spink told us that "pigeon-holing politicians left and right is more difficult these days, especially one who is independent by choice and therefore able to make up his own mind on each issue as it is seen. (Sometimes I get it right, sometimes not, but I work for the people not a party).

"I am right wing on issues like foreign policy, defence, economy, and law and order and left wing on

social justice, education, health, environment, development, etc. Show me an injustice and I will try to fight it. Show me political correctness and I will rebel. I have been fighting for pensions on many fronts for many years as I have for our independence in Europe. All this is why I voted against the Tory whip so many times when I still hung on, sadly believing I could change them from within, I was wrong, they are getting worse not better!

"I see nothing wrong in working for a fairer society, some take far too much: bankers, footballers, stars, while others get too little. Society has got the distribution of wealth out of balance at the moment and with the inevitable Tory Government in a few months things will only get worse. I still want to encourage and reward hard work and contribution of course, but we really must care better for those who genuinely need our help.

"I was a union member in my earlier working days ... I sincerely guess I come from a greater 'poverty and problem' background than most people have ever known. I do think it was a sound motion, moving in the right direction, though not totally right, it was worth signing."

It's worth digging a little into Spink's political background.

Spink is a former corporate fat-cat of almost caricature proportions who was first elected as a Tory MP in 1992. In 2005, he took out an advertisement about immigration in a local paper in his Essex constituency which read "which bit of 'send them back' don't you understand, Mr. Blair?" He is on record as a strong opponent of abortion and a strong supporter of the reintroduction of the death penalty.

When the Tories withdrew the whip from Spink (or when he left the party, depending on whose side of the

story you believe), he joined UKIP, only to leave them some months later. The "union background" he refers to is hard to find any details of, but his time spent as a Management Consultant and Director for various large corporations, including Bournemouth Airport (for whom he was a non-executive director from 1989-1993) is a matter of public record.

So what does Spink's support tell us about the People's Charter? Clearly, the majority of its backers are not right-wingers like Spink and it would be wrong to generalise from the support of one maverick. But the fact that Spink felt that it was at all possible for him to support the Charter project must surely indicate some weaknesses with the approach.

What is needed is not a series of soft-left platitudes that even people like Spink can support, but a positive project for working-class political representation that works within the unions to get them to assert their collective strength in order to found a party of labour capable of drawing a clear class line in politics between genuine workers' representatives and the likes of the Charter's Liberal and right-wing supporters.

The Loftus affair and the left in the unions

By ED MALTBY

The behaviour of Britain's two biggest revolutionary socialist organisations where they have trade-union positions is coming to resemble more that of the old Communist Party than any of the best elements of the Trotskyist tradition both the SWP and SP claim affinity with.

Jane Loftus, President of the Communications Workers Union and the SWP's [Socialist Workers' Party's] most prominent trade unionist, recently resigned from the SWP after she supported the Interim Agreement that brought the big strike movement over jobs and conditions in Royal Mail to a halt.

The SWP's paper, *Socialist Worker*, denounced the Interim Agreement as "leaving the door open for a further wave of attacks". "Members of the SWP's central committee met Jane", so *Socialist Worker* reported (24 November), "and asked her to reflect on her position". As a result she resigned.

The SWP has recently expelled members of its Left Platform for such things as private emails to other members deemed to be "factionalising", but it did not expel Loftus.

Maybe Loftus's support for the Interim Agreement was a sudden lapse? Not so. In 2007 Jane Loftus voted against the sell-out deal that ended the major strike wave of that year, but (unlike, for example, left-wing Executive member Dave Warren) refused to campaign against the deal.

Socialist Worker denounced the deal, but did not criticise Loftus. Indeed, the *Postal Worker* paper, produced by the SWP, toned down its criticisms of the deal, compared to what *Socialist Worker* was saying.

In December 2003, Loftus voted in favour of the "Major Change" agreement in 2003 which ushered in another round of cuts and speed-ups. She claimed the priority was "unity with the rest of the Executive"!

Again, *Socialist Worker* opposed the deal but did not criticise Loftus. The contradiction was resolved by a softening of the SWP's attitude in the offices.

As a postal worker reported for *Solidarity* back in 2003, "When SWP member, Mark Dolan was elected as Area Deliveries rep in North London a couple of years ago he promised to 'stand up for delivery members and stop Management forcing our members to take out unacceptable workloads... We should fight for no job

losses, no four hour deliveries, maintaining two deliveries'. Today, Dolan is at the forefront of touting the 'Major Change' agreement around the sub offices of North London, with its 'headcount reduction', 3.5 hour delivery span and 'Single Daily Delivery'. Offices that were reluctant to help managers' plans are being encouraged to 'get involved'."

Earlier in 2003, at the peak of the movement against the invasion of Iraq, Workers' Liberty supporter Maria Exall brought an amendment to the CWU executive, calling for the union to declare no confidence in Tony Blair. It might well have passed, and caused significant political turmoil within the Labour Party.

Loftus scuppered the amendment by withdrawing the (uncontentious) motion it was attached to.

Why, when the SWP had "Blair out!" on its posters and placards? Loftus said that she had consulted with leading SWPers and been told to "maintain the unity of the left". In other words, not to embarrass CWU general secretary Billy Hayes, who was then speaking with the SWP on Stop The War platforms.

Although the 2009 Interim Agreement was widely opposed by rank and file postal workers, Jane Loftus was not quite alone on the left in supporting it. The Socialist Party's paper *The Socialist* ran articles backing it. Why?

It looks as if the reason lies with the SP's thinking that the way to a new workers' party lies with getting trade union officials signed up to back-room electoral projects like "No2EU". They may have hoped to get the London divisional committee of the CWU, or even assistant general secretary Dave Ward himself, in on the "son of No2EU" project for the general election.

The Socialist Party ended its Socialism 2009 rally, in November 2009, with a two-hour long series of speeches given almost entirely by trade union general secretaries. One of these was Brian Caton, general secretary of the Prison Officers' Association, who has recently joined the Socialist Party.

While Caton is undoubtedly sincere in his socialist politics, he appears to be functioning just as he did before he joined, as a highly-paid trade-union official representing the sectional interests of prison officers, who are arguably as much agents of the violent machinery of the state, akin to police, as ordinary workers.

Again, there is a precedent: the SP's decision in

BOOK

Materialism vs creationism

Bruce Robinson reviews *A Critique of Intelligent Design: Materialism versus Creationism from Antiquity to the Present* by John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York, Monthly Review Press

1 50 years after Darwin's *Origin of Species*, religious opponents of the theory of evolution are attempting to gather forces around the idea of "Intelligent Design", the very old idea that nature and humanity are the products of some form of divine creation and purpose.

Claiming that Darwinism is just one (incorrect) theory among many, its proponents are fighting battles in the US and to a lesser extent in Britain to get Intelligent Design taught alongside evolution in schools as a theory of equal scientific worth.

Foster, Clark and York, as Marxist theorists of nature, aim to combat religious ideas by "creating through social means a [broad] materialism-humanism" that overcomes the alienation from nature and society that is at the root of their appeal. In this book they seek to expose the broader aims of the Intelligent Design theorists, place them in the context of a 2,000 year long war between materialism and creationism, and refute their ideas by means of a view of nature that casts materialism in the framework of dialectical thinking.

They begin by examining the nature of the ID project, which follows what its proponents call a "wedge strategy" in which their ideas on science and evolution are the thin edge of a wedge that goes ever broader in combating materialism and secularism in politics, morality and all fields of thought in order to bring about the hegemony of Christian ideas. No compromise which advocates two non-overlapping spheres of science and religion (as advocated by Steven Jay Gould and moderate religious evolutionists) is acceptable to them as they recognise that once science is allowed to define its own sway, god can only be reduced to an ever smaller role.

Thus Foster, Clark and York write that "the intelligent design movement can be described as more theological than scientific, more political than theological."

The book then traces the conflict between materialism and creationism back to Ancient Greece and the philosopher Epicurus, whom Marx described as the "greatest representative of Greek enlightenment", "the atheist philosopher par excellence", who banished the

gods from influence over the material world, instead emphasising the role of contingency and freedom from pre-ordained purpose.

Epicurus' ideas resurface in debates about the presence of divine design in science during the Enlightenment and also influenced Marx, who wrote his doctoral thesis on him. Foster, Clark and York then examine the anti-religious and scientific ideas of the three thinkers, who, alongside Epicurus, are the demons of the "wedge" theorists: Marx, Darwin and Freud. The atheism of Marx and Darwin's gradual disillusionment with religion both resulted in practical attempts to free humanity from the need for it — for Darwin through science and for Marx through revolutionary politics. While much of this historical material in the book will be familiar to readers of Foster's "Marx's Ecology", it is here recontextualised to confront the arguments made for Intelligent Design.

The closing chapters take on the scientific views of ID advocates, particularly the idea that natural selection cannot explain the great complexity of physical attributes such as the human eye nor the relatively rapid emergence of certain species.

Drawing particularly on Gould's work and dialectical concepts of contingency and emergence, they both demonstrate the mechanics of how these things are

possible within an evolutionary framework and show that "evolution clearly has no direction or purpose" so that "humans were not somehow meant to exist [and] that "evolution does not 'progress'". They expose the slipperiness of the ID arguments where god is switched on or off as an explanation for particular natural phenomena, depending on whether they are considered to be good or evil!

The *Critique* is a valuable reminder that Marxism requires science to fight religious reaction and that we cannot allow our social critique of the role of science to obscure its value in understanding nature — one key to combating the theories of the creationists. At the same time Marxism also has a distinctive contribution to make to that centuries old fight in terms of an uncompromising atheism, a philosophical standpoint that enables a better conceptualisation of scientific data and an ability to draw together the threads that connect nature and society.

By showing this and providing ammunition against one current (if long-standing) expression of regressive religious ideas, Foster, Clark and York have performed a valuable service, both theoretically and in pointing to the immediate danger posed by Intelligent Design advocates.

RAGE CAMPAIGN

Swearing is not anti-capitalism

By JOE FLYNN

Reading the lyrics of the rock band, Rage against the Machine, was probably my first real exposure to radical ideas. My 13 year old self would doubtless have viewed the victory of the band's 'Killing in the Name' in a chart race for Christmas number one against manufactured karaoke drivel like the X Factor as a triumphant prelude to the imminent revolutionary destruction of capitalism. Assuming there still are some 13 year olds somewhere in Britain who feel the same today, I am happy for them.

I don't, however, feel the same sense of euphoria that it seems many friends of my generation do. The smug, muddleheaded consumerism that sees this as some kind of wonderful symbolic bloody nose for Simon Cowell and co is problematic for a number of reasons.

A lot was said about the song representing rebellion. In a very, very vague sense this may be true, but in fact 'Killing in the Name' is politically one of the band's weakest tracks. Influenced by the Black Panthers, Rage are anti-capitalist, anti-police and Third Worldist in outlook. 'Killing...' is about racist police, true. But it is most notorious for containing a stream of obscenities at the end of the song, and any honest appraisal must admit this is the main reason why it was chosen for their campaign.

"Swearing in our lower classes was the result of despair, embitterment, and above all, of slavery without hope of escape...The struggle against 'foul language' is an essential condition of mental hygiene just as the fight against filth and vermin is an essential condition of physical hygiene." Leon Trotsky (*Pravda*, 16 May 1923)

The desire to tell Simon Cowell, the police or even capitalism to fuck off isn't especially progressive, it is more an expression of blank apathetic hatred. A small minority of consumers who bought 'Killing...' this Christmas may go on to explore Rage's more political work and be radicalised. But it will be a tiny minority. The main reason to be happy about the song getting to number one is that it is musically so much better than the usual Christmas pap.

"Empty your pockets son they got you thinkin' that/What you need is what they sellin'/ Make you think that buyin' is rebellin'" Rage against the Machine, *No Shelter*, 1998

The next obvious problem with the campaign from a socialist viewpoint was the consumerist aspect of it. Rage have never pretended to be purer than pure and indeed, no socialist with musical talent could be under current circumstances without refusing the platform offered by signing a major record deal. Had Rage never signed for Sony it is unlikely I would ever have heard of them, for example. Even the song quoted above, 'No Shelter', appeared on the soundtrack of a major

Hollywood film, *Godzilla*. But Rage included the lyrics 'Godzilla pure motherfuckin' filler/To get your eyes off the real killer [capitalism]'. Contrast that with their attitude to the Christmas 2009 campaign.

The band claim, and I believe them, that they had nothing to do with the "spontaneous" Facebook campaign to get their song to number one. However, their record company, Sony — also the company behind Simon Cowell and the X Factor — have clearly jumped on the campaign. I feel sad that many very angry people bought several copies of the Rage song with the feeling that this is some sort of protest against corporate power when it transparently isn't. The band failed to make this clear and seem to have uncritically supported the campaign.

This includes their explicit support for the main charity which will benefit from sales of the Rage single-Shelter. Yes — a charity with a proven record of treating its workers with total contempt. This is the problem with taking the view that, when it comes to anti-capitalist activism 'I would never want to put any parameters on who's invited to the party [pun intended, I'm sure]', as Tom Morello of Rage is quoted (uncritically, naturally) as saying in *Socialist Worker*.

Socialists must be focused on the working-class as the class which will emancipate humanity. Please give generously to your socialist group if you want to be "charitable". And no swearing at the dinner table.

Frank Henderson, 1925-2009

By JIM DENHAM

"It is not easy to persist in the struggle, to hold on, to stay tough and fight it out year after year without victory; and even, in times such as the present, without tangible progress. That requires theoretical conviction and historical perspective as well as character. And, in addition to that, it requires association with others in a common party" — James P. Cannon, *Trade Unionists and Revolutionists*, 1953.

I cannot precisely remember when I first met Frank Henderson, but it must have been in 1974 when I was a student member of the International Socialists (IS, was a forerunner of today's SWP) in Birmingham.

IS had just made its "turn to the class" and succeeded in recruiting quite a few industrial militants in important workplaces like the various Lucas plants then dotted around Birmingham, and the various British Leyland (BL) plants. IS had even managed to recruit some convenors and senior stewards, like Arthur Harper at Leyland Drews Lane and Larry Connolly at Lucas Shaftsmoor Lane. The IS was beginning to challenge the Communist Party for dominance on the left of the AEU — then the main engineering union. It all went wrong shortly afterwards, but that's another story.

IS students such as myself were treated as second class citizens at that time, while the IS worker-militants were fawned upon. Not surprisingly, the IS workers tended to be a quite arrogant bunch who didn't have much to do with us students. Frank Henderson — a rank and file militant and shop steward at BL Longbridge — was the exception. He happily associated with the students and freely shared his anecdotes, experiences and witty observations without a trace of the arrogance and bluster that characterised many of the IS workers at that time.

So impressed was I with Frank that when I found myself in the leadership of a student occupation at Birmingham University, I made a point of inviting

Frank to address a meeting of occupying students on the theme of (something like) "student-worker unity." Frank was never a great orator, but his humour, sincerity and quiet passion won over that audience — and won us several recruits to IS as I remember.

A year or two later I started work at Longbridge. By then I'd been expelled from IS and was a member of what's now the AWL. Nevertheless, Frank was a warm and supportive comrade, giving me loads of advice and inside information. There was never the slightest suggestion of factional hostility, even though he'd stayed with the IS when I and many others (including the comrades who'd recruited him) had been expelled.

I worked closely with Frank for about five years at Longbridge and came to regard him not just as a comrade, but also as a friend. People I've met from the Labour Party in Wolverhampton (where Frank and his brother Tommy — also a socialist — lived) have told me a similar story: that whatever the factional differences (apart from Stalinism, which Frank hated, having been beaten up by them in World War Two), most socialists got along with Frank and for many years joined him for Saturday afternoon chats/debates in a Wolverhampton pub, where Labour councillors sat in awe of this veteran Trotskyist.

I believe Frank was recruited to IS in about 1970 or '71: by then the IS was selling *Socialist Worker* on the gates every week at Longbridge. They were also advertising Tony Cliff's book *The Employers' Offensive*, and Frank (who'd been buying *Socialist Worker* on the gates for some time), sent off for a copy. He said later, "I thought this was a fair test for them: if they just send me the book they cannot be serious, but if they are serious comrades they will come round and argue the toss with me."

That's exactly what happened. The IS comrade who visited Frank was Dave Hughes — a middle class comrade who was later expelled and went on to found the IS "Left Faction" opposition and the "Workers Power" group. Dave told me how he arrived at Frank's home and was immediately confronted by the following:

Frank: "Hello. Who are you?"

Dave: "I'm Dave Hughes from the International Socialists."

Frank: "Ah: I have a bone to pick with you lot."

Dave (expecting something about Measured Day Work or the internal goings on of the Sheet Metal Workers' Union): "Well, we don't know that much about Longbridge at the moment, but we want to learn..."

Frank: "No...it's nothing to do with any of that: I notice that you lot call the Soviet Union state capitalist. I think it's more correctly defined as a degenerated workers' state."

Dave (who himself died in 1991) told me that Frank then feigned a loss of interest in IS — another test — before eventually joining. Dave (prior to that first meeting) hadn't the slightest idea that he was dealing with someone who'd been a member of the Trotskyist Workers' International League during WW2.

I last saw Frank a couple a years ago, speaking at a meeting on local history organised in Birmingham by the SWP. I hadn't seen or met him for over twenty years prior to that. I decided not to go over and introduce myself, because:

1. I wasn't sure whether he'd remember me (though still articulate and witty, he was clearly by then an old man and a beginning to get a bit vague);

2. As a member of the AWL, my differences with the SWP had by then become very sharp and hostile and I didn't particularly want an embarrassing confrontation with someone who'd once been a friend.

I now regret my failure to re-introduce myself to Frank: whatever our factional differences, he was an inspirational figure and also a really warm and kindly bloke. He taught me a hell of a lot about socialism and humanity.

Farewell, comrade!

• Frank's autobiography *Life On The Track*, based upon interviews by Matt Perry, is available from Bookmarks.

Daniel Bensaid, 1946-2010

By MARTIN THOMAS

Daniel Bensaid, the leading writer of the LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) and then NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party) died on 12 January, aged 63, after a long illness.

I met him only in his last years, at congresses of the LCR. He worked as an academic, not as an organiser or journalist at the LCR office.

Yet he was without pomposity. At the congresses he spoke rarely but lucidly. He was always willing to consider questions and explain: an interview he did with AWL members Ed Maltby and Vicki Morris at the February 2009 LCR congress is an example. [1]

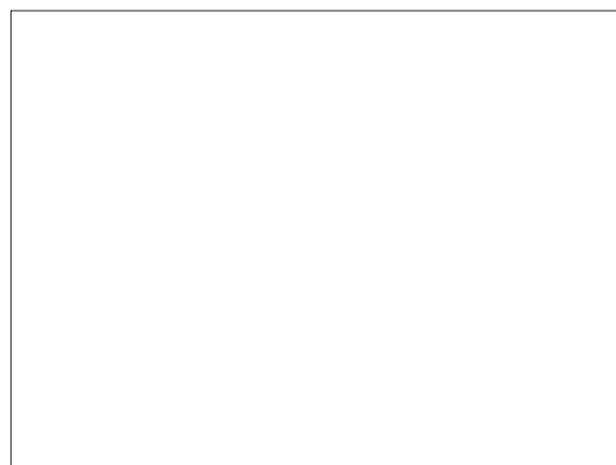
He was a fine and sometimes brilliant writer. Only one of his books is in English: *Marx l'intempestif* (1995), rather clunkily translated as *Marx for our times* (2002).

Alan Johnson reviewed *Marx for our times* for *Solidarity* 3/40 as "the most important book to have been produced by revolutionary Marxism in recent times" [2]. Alan Johnson himself was to renounce Marxism a few years later, and at the time I offered a more critical assessment of the book. [3]

But the book, which like others by Bensaid draws heavily on the writings of the 1930s dissident-communist Walter Benjamin, has much of value in its main themes:

- The centrality of political initiative in the fight for working-class liberation: a rejection of shallow economic or "movement-ist" agitationism. There, he was criticising the LCR's ultra-left "triumphalism" of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

- That history is uneven, criss-crossing, crisis-torn, full of uncertain branching-points and overlapping patterns with different tempos, not a linear process. There, he was criticising the "evolutionism" of the international "Mandelite" "orthodox Trotskyist" cur-



rent of which the LCR was part, which from 1951 through to the 1980s lived on successive reports of a supposed ever-ascending "rise of the world revolution". (In fact, advance of Stalinism).

- That the Stalinist states were "bureaucratic societies", or "bureaucratic collectivist", and that Marxists should take an independent stance rather than rallying to the supposedly progressive "camp" represented by those states. There, he was explicitly rejecting the old "Mandelite" or "orthodox Trotskyist" idea that those had been "degenerated and deformed workers' states", or "post-capitalist".

I thought Bensaid allowed too many old "Mandelite" ideas to subsist alongside his critique, and did not push it through to rigorous conclusions such as would have, for example, scotched the LCR's still-strong weakness for "Guevarism".

Bensaid came from an Algerian Jewish family of Communist Party sympathies which moved from Oran to Toulouse, where after Bensaid's father's early death his mother kept a cafe. He joined the Communist Party youth movement in 1962, at the age of 15, in

response to a police massacre (of maybe as many as 200 people) on a October 1961 demonstration in Paris in support of the Algerian independence struggle.

In the mid-60s, a student in Paris, he was drawn to the Trotskyist opposition within the Communist Party student movement, led by Alain Krivine and others. In and after 1968 he became one of the chief leaders of the Jeunesses Communistes Revolutionnaires (JCR), forerunner of the LCR.

Bensaid was part of a "young Turk" current in the JCR, somewhat impatient with the older Trotskyism, which toyed briefly with the idea of organising for Guevara-type revolutionary guerrilla warfare in France.

His chief comrade in arms then, co-author with him of a book on May 1968, was Henri Weber. Weber too was Jewish, and unlike Bensaid had a background in Jewish politics, in the left-Zionist group Hashomer Hatzair. To what if any degree Bensaid and Weber were responsible for the LCR generally steering away from the root-and-branch Israelophobia of other "orthodox Trotskyist" currents, I don't know.

Weber is still alive, but, alas! as a routine figure in the French Socialist Party hierarchy. Bensaid lived and died a revolutionary; and one capable of learning from mistakes and explaining the lessons in fine and clear prose. In a "ceremonial" article to commemorate the 30th anniversary of May 1968, for example, you can find him writing straightforwardly that the LCR's failure unequivocally to oppose the USSR's attempt to conquer and annex Afghanistan, from December 1979, had been a great and grievous mistake.

Our condolences go to Bensaid's comrades in the NPA, and our hope that they will continue his combination of unflinching commitment with critical thinking.

[1] www.workersliberty.org/node/11988

[2] www.workersliberty.org/node/2491

[3] www.workersliberty.org/node/1477

YEMEN

A state falling apart

Since a Yemen-based al-Qaeda group was blamed for the foiled Christmas day plane attack calls for foreign "intervention" have grown. But, as Dan Katz explains in this background article, such intervention has already begun.

Yemen's population is predominantly rural (73%), young (most are under 15), and poor (National Income per capita was \$950 in 2008; only 40% have access to electricity).

Its oil sector provides 90% of export earnings, and 75% of government revenue, but oil production has passed its peak and output is declining.

The World Bank comments, "living conditions for most of the 22 million Yemenis remain difficult... the situation is particularly dire for women." Female literacy stands at 30%.

Women are not free to marry who they want and some are forced to marry as young as eight. Once married, a woman must obey her husband and obtain his permission just to leave the house. Women are valued as half the worth of men when they testify in court (Amnesty International).

Yemen struggles with a severe water shortage. Almost all of Yemen's water comes from underground aquifers filled thousands of years ago and replenished very slowly. San'a, the capital, a city of two million people, could run dry in as few as 10 years.

Most of the country's arable land is devoted to khat; it uses up approximately a third of the country's water. 90% of men in Yemen and 25% of women chew the leaves.

RIGHTS

In August 2008 officials stated that there were approximately 1,200 political prisoners (HRW).

Yemen retains the death penalty for a wide variety of offences, among them murder of a Muslim, apostasy, prostitution, adultery, and homosexuality. It is one of a small number of states to execute juveniles.

The government holds a monopoly on all television and radio, and bans journalists for publishing "incorrect" information.

Following anti-Jewish riots in Yemen in the late 1940s, tens of thousands of Yemeni Jews were evacuated to Israel.

Jewish leaders in Yemen say that there are now only 370 Jews left in the country, and the number is falling after anti-semitic murders and attacks. This year something like 20% of Yemen's remaining Jews have left. Traditional Jewish villages lie deserted, abandoned by people who now consider the country too dangerous to stay.

NORTH AND SOUTH

In 1962, an army coup ended centuries of rule by Shiite (Zaydi) imam, establishing the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) in north Yemen. The northern state was influenced by Nasser's Egypt.

South Yemen had been a British protectorate until the people fought for and won independence as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) in November 1967. The south lined up with the Soviet Bloc.

In 1989 the Soviet advisers were pulled out of the PDRY, and aid was cut. Demoralised, the south looked for union with the north, which had economic reasons for merger — Yemen's oil is in the south.

The two leaders — Ali Salim al-Baidh in the south and Ali Abdullah Saleh in the north — declared union on 22 May 1990. The elections that followed in 1993 reinforced the north-south division. Electors in the north voted for an Islamist party, Islah, and Saleh's General People's Congress (GPC). In the south they elected Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) candidates.

In April-June 1994, there was a north-south civil war which ended in southern defeat. Jihadis were enlisted by the north to fight the "socialist" south. After the war the authorities in San'a pushed many southern military officers and civil servants into retirement, and replaced them with northerners.

The origins of the current movement in south Yemen "was a series of small-scale protests mounted in 2007 by an organisation of military officers from the south who had been forcibly retired, calling for their rein-

statement and increased pensions. These former officers formed the Society of Retired Military Officers and began a series of sit-ins and protest marches." (*In the name of unity*, Human Rights Watch report, December 2009).

Political Security, Yemen's internal intelligence service, directly responsible to President Saleh, has been responsible for much of the repression directed at the southern movement. Most of the country's media is state run, but non-government journalists have also suffered intimidation.

HRW states that forces "led by the Yemeni Socialist Party but including the local branches of the Islah party, Nasserists, and Ba'athists, used their grassroots networks to mobilise support for the movement. Demands now included more employment opportunities for southerners, an end to corruption, and a larger share of oil revenues for southern provinces."

By mid-2009 the southern movement had begun to demand secession and the re-establishment of a southern state. "There are elites in south Yemen who feel marginalised, but the groups they head represent real grievances of the people. The people want lower prices, better services, and more employment. That is the reason they line up behind the secessionist slogans." (HRW).

In June 2009, the Southern Movement reportedly appointed a five-person "Council for the Leadership of the Peaceful Revolution of the South". Since its birth the southern movement has declared itself opposed to violence to achieve its aims. There has been violence during its protests, but generally following state provocation.

There are increasing tensions between "southerners" and "northerners", who see themselves as culturally distinct from each other.

"Protesters accuse northern businessmen of siding with the security agencies in cracking down on protests, or even actively participating in crackdowns and violence against protesters. The state-sponsored Committees to Protect Unity participated in violence against southerners." (HRW).

The government claims links between the movement in the south and al-Qaeda. Southern Movement leader and former MP Salah Shanfara claims, "We have no links to al-Qaeda and we do not accept any such [violent] talk or position."

Al-Qaeda in Yemen's leader, Nasir al-Wuhaishi, has publicly expressed support for the Southern Movement. However on 22 June al-Wuhaishi was contradicted by Mustafa Abu al-Yazid, a member of the global al-Qaeda group's highest ranking Shura Council and identified as the "general chief" of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Abu al-Yazid denied al-Qaeda's support for southern secession. He stated that al-Qaeda was fighting for the establishment of a unified Islamic state, first in Yemen, then of the Islamic world.

AL-QAEDA

Al-Qaeda is closely associated with Yemen. Osama bin-Laden's father was born in Yemen. The first al-Qaeda action against the US was a bomb attack on American troops in a hotel in Aden, the major port in southern Yemen, in 1992. And in 2000, two suicide bombers in a speed boat attacked the USS Cole in Aden harbour.

Of the 250 prisoners still in detention at Guantanamo Bay, more than 100 are Yemenis, the largest national group.

Thousands of Yemeni mujahedeen who fought against the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s are back in the country. Many are loyal to a former mujahedeen leader, Asker Zuail, who now has a senior position in the Yemeni army.

But a new generation is being won to al-Qaeda, which is establishing itself in the south and east of the country. US media are reporting that there are up to 1000 al-Qaeda members in Yemen.

Unlike those loyal to Zuail, these recruits are said to be influenced by the Jordanian jihadist cleric, Abu Muhammad al-Makdissi. Makdissi insists the Islamists must not help Yemen's pro-Western government. The country's main Islamist opposition, the Islah party, says the same.

In 2008 al-Qaeda in Yemen launched an online magazine, *Sada al-Malahim* (Echoes of Battles), urging jihadists to kidnap westerners to secure the release of

jailed members. In 2008 there were two attacks on the US Embassy in San'a — one with mortars, which landed on a nearby school, and a second involving six suicide bombers.

In January 2009, al-Qaeda's branches in Saudi Arabia and Yemen merged to create al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula — a product of the defeats al-Qaeda has suffered in Saudi Arabia. Now the Saudis are worried that al-Qaeda is using Yemen to regroup and to launch attacks against them; they are particularly concerned to control movement across the porous Saudi-Yemen border.

On 3 November al-Qaeda suspects ambushed a Yemeni government convoy in the Hadramawt region, near the border with Saudi Arabia, killing three senior security men.

On 17, and again on 24 December, Yemeni forces, heavily backed by the US, launched air attacks on al-Qaeda in Yemen. The government claims 34 al-Qaeda members were killed and 30 others were arrested in operations in San'a, Arhab, and Abyan, on the 17 December.

The strike on 24 December appeared to target the home of Anwar al-Aulaqi, a Yemeni-American preacher linked to Major Nidal Hassan, the gunman in the Fort Hood army base shootings in November.

The fact that the Yemeni state can only make arrests around San'a, and uses air-strikes elsewhere, indicates how weak the government is. The state has control in about a quarter of the country.

The US has increased its military aid from nothing in 2008 to \$70m in 2009, and is pressing the Yemeni government to act against al-Qaeda.

FIGHTING IN THE NORTH

Conflict in Sa'da governorate, in the north of the Yemen on the border with Saudi Arabia, between government forces and an ethnic group known as the Houthis, first erupted in 2004.

There have been six rounds of fighting since then. The most recent, beginning in August, has seen the fighting escalate. The Yemeni offensive is called Operation Scorched Earth and the government is using tanks, rockets, MiGs and helicopter gunships. In total 250,000 civilians are now displaced.

The Houthis have between 2,000 and 10,000 fighters (5 December, the *Economist*) and used a ceasefire after July 2008 to rearm and reclaim territory.

The Saudi air force bombed Houthi positions in November, declaring a 10km exclusion zone inside Yemeni territory, and the Saudis are also blockading the coast to prevent weapons getting to the Houthis. The Houthis have attacked Saudi bases, claiming the Saudis have allowed Yemenis into Saudi territory to attack them from the north.

Both the Yemeni and Saudi governments say Iran is arming the insurgents and training fighters at an Iranian-run camp across the Red Sea in Eritrea. As yet there appears to be no hard evidence to support these claims, and both states have an interest in claiming Iranian involvement.

The Houthi clan is part of the Zaydi sect, a branch of Shia Islam that is unique to Yemen. One in three Yemenis is Zaydi. Although the government is — essentially — Sunni, there is Zaydi representation, including the President.

The Houthi fighters consider themselves mujahedeen. Their slogans are: "Death to America! Death to Israel! Curse upon the Jews! Victory to Islam!" They claim the central government has done little for them and that widespread corruption favours President Saleh's own clan.

The origins of their dispute with the government seems to go back to the first Gulf War in 1990-1 when Saudi Arabia expelled a million Yemeni workers to punish Saleh for backing Saddam Hussein's Iraq. This influx drew recruits into a radical Zaydi cult, known as the "Believing Youth", that had been launched by a charismatic member of the Houthi family, and building on government neglect of the north where the lucrative smuggling trade was badly hit during the row with Saudi Arabia.

The future is bleak for Yemen, which is falling apart under pressure from various reactionary and ultra-reactionary forces, and therefore vulnerable to the power play of all kinds of outside powers.

PAKISTAN

Against both Islamists and empire

The following (abridged) article by Farooq Tariq from the Labour Party Pakistan was first published on the *International Viewpoint* website on 28 October 2009. The conditions he describes — daily suicide bombings by supporters and allies of the Taliban in Pakistan — have worsened. On 1 January a bomb killed 75 people at a volleyball game in North-West Frontier Province.

Once again Pakistan has become the focus of world attention. Every day there is news of the latest suicide attack or military operation, with killings, injuries and the displacing of communities.

With more than 125 police checkpoints in Islamabad, it has become a fortress city. Lahore and other large cities are suffering the same fate: there are police road blockades everywhere. After each terrorist attack authorities issue another security high alert and set up additional barriers. How ironic that, until recently, officials and the media described these “terrorists” as Mujahideen fighting for an Islamic world.

Under immense pressure by the US administration, the Pakistan government has launched a series of military operations in various parts of the country. This has led to an unprecedented wave of killings, with hundreds of thousands more being forced to leave their homes for temporary shelter.

Pushed out of Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks in the US, religious fanatics from different countries have found refuge in Pakistan. They have two aims: to make Pakistan more Islamic and to teach the government a lesson for its close relationship with US imperialism. However the price is being paid by ordinary people.

Religious fanatics are the new fascists. They believe in the physical elimination of their political opponents. Although they may appear to be anti-imperialist, they are not a progressive force. Instead they are an extreme right-wing force that wants to turn back the clock of history.

THE RELIGION OF THE STATE

Pakistan is also known as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Religion is part and parcel of the state. Most of the education syllabus is also coloured with Islamic ideology; even scientific explanations somehow manage to drag in religion. Religion has become a way of life. Every donation to charity ends up in the coffers of the religious institutions.

Although the rationale for the Pakistan state was to be a place for Muslims, it was to be a secular Muslim state. When the state was formed in 1947 the population was not fundamentalist. But as time went on Pakistan adopted an Islamic ideology that today gives these fanatics a more favourable ground for the promotion of their dream of an Islamic country.

At the end of the 1970s, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Washington decided it needed to develop an indigenous counterforce. In order to fight “communism” in Afghanistan, Washington worked closely with Pakistan’s military dictator, General Zia ul Haq, and the Pakistani intelligence service, the Inter-Services intelligence (ISI).

There are dozens of books explaining the rise of Taliban and Mujahideen under the direct guidance of the US, but the ISI had no reason to cut off funding after the Soviet retreat in 1987. The ISI found these jihadis useful in its conflict with India over Kashmir.

There are many religious political parties in Pakistan. Jamaati Islami and Jamiat Ulmai Islam, along with other Sunni and Wahabi political parties, are all for an Islamic revolution. They also give political support to the religious fanatics of the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

However, it is not only the US that are harvesting what they have sown. Numerous Pakistan governments were ready to do whatever Washington wanted them to do out of sheer financial greed. Since 1978 different governments have all been close US allies. This includes 20 years of military dictatorship under Zia (1977-1988) and General Musharraf (1999-2008). These various governments enabled religious fanatics to establish religious educational institutions that have changed the country’s religious culture.

One of the main strategies used by the fanatics to



General Zia ul Haq, architect of “Islamisation” in Pakistan... and friend Ronald Reagan

bring jihad to the youth of Pakistan was through opening religious schools (madrassas). Of the more than 15,000 registered madrassas [in Pakistan], about half are in the Punjab. Experts estimate the numbers are higher: when the state tried to count them in 2005, a fifth of the province refused to register.

The madrassas found a place among the working people, as they were marketed as offering a free education with religious teachings. The failure of the government to provide adequate resources for free public education paved the way for the progress of the madrassas.

Pakistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. The government spends less than 3 per cent of GDP on education. The enrolment of girls is among the lowest in the world, lagging behind Ethiopia and Yemen.

Though madrassas make up only about seven per cent of primary schools in Pakistan, their influence is amplified by the inadequacy of public education and the innate religiosity of the countryside, where two-thirds of the population live. The madrassas are the real breeding grounds for religious fundamentalism.

More than 15,000 registered religious seminaries in the country cater to more than 1.5 million students and more than 55,000 teachers. Before 2002, according to the Religious Affairs Ministry, the number of registered madrassas in Pakistan was not more than 6000. After 9/11, the religious fanatics who left Afghanistan came to Pakistan, and with the help of the two provincial governments run by the religious alliance MMA — North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan — they were able to quickly establish more madrassas. At this time General Musharraf was a partner in the so-called US-led “alliance against terrorism”. He was manipulating both the fanatics and the imperialists.

GOVERNMENT POLICY

The growth of religious fundamentalism was also [aided by] the complete failure of civilian and military governments to solve any of the basic problems of the working class and its allies.

Pakistan’s ruling class has failed miserably to bring about democratic norms. That is why whenever the civilian government has been overthrown by a military dictatorship, the vast majority of the masses have not offered any resistance to dictatorship.

The present civilian government of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has been contradictory in dealing with religious fanatics. In the Swat area, following peace talks, the government entered into agreements with the fanatics to establish Islamic courts. The religious forces were decisively defeated in the general election of 2008. Where in the 2002 general election the fanatics’ parties received 15 per cent of the vote, in 2008 they got less than three per cent.

Just after the 2008 general election, when the masses had rejected the religious forces, instead of a mass mobilisation to end religious fundamentalism, the PPP regime opted for negotiations. This gave the fanatics an incentive to go further: they demanded sharia laws in the Malakand division. This was accepted. The fundamentalists then went further in their attempt to control more areas, therefore giving an impression that they were not far from Islamabad.

In a panic, the regime, with full support of the US,

went for a full military operation in the Malakand division in June 2009. The result was more than 3.5 million internally displaced people and more than 5,000 killings. The present government boasted a military victory over the fundamentalists and then asked people to go back home. But this was not the army’s military victory but a temporary retreat of the fanatics.

[One month later] the fanatics were able to attack the military’s general headquarters.

Saying there was no other option, many liberals in Pakistan have supported the military actions against the fanatics. But no military solution can eliminate the religious fundamentalists. It has been the case in Afghanistan and so too will it be the case in Pakistan. It can only push them to other areas.

SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

The military solution has been presented as an immediate step to the ultimate solution to fundamentalism. It is like the old Stalinist theory of minimum and maximum goals. “Demand minimum to get the maximum” was the philosophy. But there were no measures in between the short-term and long-term strategies.

Similarly with the fight against the religious fanatics. The military solution is a short-term strategy while the long-term strategy requires reforms and more development. The long-term strategy never arrives. This is just an excuse to please US imperialism.

If the fight against religious fanatics is to go forward, it must begin with a revolutionary program. It has to start with the political will to separate religion from the state. It has to deal with the question of the nature of Pakistani state. Religion cannot become the basis of a nation. Pakistan was torn apart by the events of the 1960s and 1970s when Bangladesh came into existence. Now a more severe crisis is erupting in Baluchistan along similar lines. There is strong movement developing that calls for the independence of Baluchistan.

There has to be a concrete programme to fight religious fundamentalism. It has to combine immediately dealing with suicide attacks and curbing the activities of the fascist forces from their strongholds, along with an overall plan of action in economic, political and social development. This should include the nationalisation of religious madrassas and the retraining of teachers. It should include an immediate increase in workers’ wages in both the private and public sector to at least 12,000 rupees a month.

All discriminatory laws must go and all citizens of Pakistan should enjoy equal constitutional status. At present there are several laws that make religious minorities second-rate citizens. The government should be committed to fully back local resistance to the religious fanatics. Civil society organisations in the strongholds of the religious fundamentalists should be given full backing by the state so that they can function. The state must help to strengthen and sustain the local defence committees to fight the religious fanatics.

All trade union rights must be restored in the public and private sectors, with full freedom of speech and assembly. Most of the discriminatory laws are still intact, including blasphemy laws.

The forces of religious fundamentalism organise on an international basis. A fight against them has to be organised at that same level. The US “war on terror” is fueling religious fundamentalism. It is seen as a war on Muslims. The occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan by the imperialist forces is providing the religious fanatics a political justification for their terrorist activities.

Campaigns to end the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, and for no support to the fanatics, can be the basis for a united front of progressive forces internationally. The campaign against religious fundamentalism must be part and parcel of an anti-globalisation campaign by all progressive forces.

We must oppose the occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan and religious fundamentalism. No support to one against the other. The fight between religious fundamentalism and the imperialists is a fight between bulls. There is not much to be gained by siding with one against the other. The goal must be to end the fight altogether and open the space to create an alternative way of living.

Worker-communists decide not to contest elections

BY COLIN FOSTER

Iraq will hold a general election on 7 March 2010 — later than the previously-planned date in January because of delays in finalising the electoral law. Six large coalitions have been announced to contest the election.

“State of Law” is organised around current prime minister Nouri al-Maliki’s Dawa party. The Iraqi National Alliance, around the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Sadr movement, and Fadila. Iraqiyya, around former prime minister Iyad Allawi, former Iraq Islamic Party leader Tariq al-Hashimi, and some ex-Ba’thists. Tawafuq, around “soft” Sunni Islamists.

There is a coalition of Kurdish parties, mainly PUK and KDP, and a new coalition, Unity of Iraq, made up from several splinter groups previously Sunni or Shia aligned.

All the coalitions, other than the Kurdish one, claim to be non-sectarian and for national unity, and all have at least some show of cross-sectarian support.

The Iraqi Communist Party has a list, “People’s Unity”, with some smaller groups. Previously it had allied with Allawi.

The Worker-communist Party of Iraq initially declared it would contest the election, as explained in the interview on this page with WPIraq leader Muayad Ahmed. In mid-December it withdrew, citing undemocratic features in the election law.

Each of Iraq’s 18 provinces will be a “constituency”, electing between 68 and 7 parliamentary deputies by proportional representation within the province. The votes for parties which fail to reach the threshold for proportional representation will be redistributed proportionately to those which do reach the threshold.

There will be “top-up” seats for parties deemed to be under-represented on the basis of their cross-Iraq vote, and a few reserved seats for minorities.

The previous Iraqi elections in 2005 used “closed lists” — people voted for party lists without being told the names of the candidates on the list — but this election will be by “open lists”, with candidates named and an option for voters to choose between individuals as well as lists.

All candidates are required to have a high-school certificate and be at least 30 years old.

A referendum will be held on the same day on the deal about US troops made by the Iraqi and US governments late in 2008, under which US troops withdrew from Iraqi cities on 30 June 2009 and are due to quit Iraq altogether at the end of 2011. If the deal is rejected, then the Iraqi government will call on the US troops to quit within a year (by March 2011) rather than by December 2011.

The Worker-communist Party of Iraq commented: “The system which serves the basic aspirations of the masses in Iraq is the open voting list, regarding Iraq as one electoral district, not granting votes of the parties who have not achieved the minimum quota to any other party, endorsing the age of 18 as the legal age for voting and candidacy, and securing conditions and circumstances suitable to hold elections where no form of blackmail, terrorism and bribed voting takes place”.

Believing the final electoral law to be too far away from that system, the WPIraq reversed its decision to contest the elections. Instead it will campaign to boycott the poll.

Workers’ Liberty and *Solidarity* had argued with the Worker-communist Party of Iraq in 2005 that they should contest the elections then. Marxists should not wait until the ruling parties concede a democratic electoral law; even a small opening to present a working-class alternative to the electorate should be seized. We were pleased when the WPIraq said it would contest the 2010 elections, and the decision to withdraw means, to our mind, a missed opportunity.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki meets the heads of the Iraqi security forces

MUAYAD AHMED, WORKER-COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRAQ

Iraq: “There is a political system, but crisis-stricken”

Muayad Ahmed, a leading member of the Worker-communist Party of Iraq, spoke to *Solidarity* in November, while the Worker-communist Party was still planning to contest the election (scheduled for 7 March).

There was a lot of pressure for “open lists”, so that the names of the candidates are known to the people. That has been agreed on: open lists. And voters can now do their own lists when they tick this person from one list and that person from another list.

The electoral law decided that representatives will be elected on a local level, rather than the whole of Iraq being one constituency. The problem with this is that in Iraq that leads to sustaining and encouraging the sectarian and ethnic divisions.

Some of the other parties have companies running their campaigns. They pay money to these companies to arrange meetings, interviews on satellite TV, and so on. But we will work through our own organisation and our own supporters.

In each city and each locality we will try to establish committees to support our candidates. They will distribute leaflets, newspapers...

There is only one month during which we can distribute leaflets and so on for our election campaign. We will distribute leaflets as you do here, and we will have meetings in the local areas. We want to have a very active and engaged campaign.

Our demands are the demands of the people.

Each Friday, already, we go to Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad. We put out our leaflets and newspapers, and usually we distribute a couple of thousand copies of our newspapers each Friday. People get used to us being there, and they come and ask us for our literature.

We can do the same thing in other areas.

Among the other parties, the old alliances have been destabilised a bit. The Maliki bloc in the government and in the Dawa party is the main force now.

The Islamic Supreme Council have their own alliance with other people. There are others, like Allawi and other secular, nationalist, pro-Western, pro-American people, who are trying to make their own alliances.

The Sunni parties have been affected too. For example, Tariq al-Hashimi [the current vice-president, and former leader of the Iraq Islamic Party, Iraqi offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood] says that he will not make his alliances on the basis of Sunnism.

All the bourgeois parties in Iraq — the Islamic and the nationalists... they don’t have a horizon for establishing a state which can unify Iraq. There is a deep crisis as regards establishing a functioning state in Iraq.

There is a sort of freedom at present. There are deep divisions between different sections of the bourgeois parties, and they are moving, shifting, changing alliances. It is all about how to give shape to the state.

My opinion is that this period is transitional and provisional. I think for the bourgeois parties there are two possible outcomes. Either they can establish a despotic state, Islamic or Islamic-nationalist; or this whole political process will be destabilised and take us to open civil conflict, although not exactly as before.

This transitional period of relative political freedom may not last for a long time. Maybe six months, maybe

two years, I don’t know.

The main parties are all bourgeois, but they are divided and struggling. In this transitional period it is our duty as a worker-communist party to make a big effort to bring in the masses, the working people, to have their say in the process and strengthen their position.

For America, and for the states neighbouring Iraq, stabilisation in Iraq has a definite meaning. It means the sort of state that we have in the region. Iraq is not in outer space. It is in the region.

Also, on a world scale, Iraq is not a metropole. It is in the periphery, and needs to offer cheap labour. A stable state has to be one which can sustain cheap labour in Iraq, and consequently a despotic regime is likely to be maintained.

In our region, we also have Turkey, which is a semi-democratic state.

But in Iraq there are so many divisions and conflicts between the bourgeois parties that the prolonged existence of a semi-democratic parliamentary system in Iraq, like Turkey, is doubtful.

Our aim is to bring the working people into this process. If we can do something in that regard, that will affect the kind of parliamentary system they might get in Iraq.

If we can manage to bring working-class people into the political arena, then we can organise real pressure against the bourgeoisie moving to despotic measures.

In Iraq, every political party is linked with the interests of some other state or states in the region, or the interests of America, or the interests of international political Islam. Every one.

And we are an internationalist party — we have our links with working-class people all over the world.

So there is an intensified political process. I can’t be very optimistic that something like the regimes in South America, or Turkey, will come. But it might be possible.

The Shia parties used to want to have a fully religious state. Then Maliki took, in some ways, another route. He wanted to create an image of himself as representing Iraq and establishing a state based on law.

The Ba’thist regime was based on an Arab nationalist movement that was very strong. For many years pan-Arabism was a very strong movement. Iraq was part of that. The despotic regime of the Ba’thists was based on that. But they imposed themselves as a fascist party, with the support of the West and the oil companies.

The liberals in Iraq — the moderate nationalists like Adnan Pachachi — are very weak. Can that sort of liberal bourgeois party become strong, have a mass base? I doubt it.

The economic basis for reproducing strong liberal democratic parties in Iraq is doubtful.

In the election one of our main themes will be social security and the payment of unemployment benefit. We will call for freedom of assembly and freedom for the unions.

We are for a system where religion and nationalism are separated from the state and from the education system.

As communists, we say that the only alternative is a

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Iraq

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workers' state. We don't have another alternative as far as the state is concerned.

I think the idea of establishing a provisional government as a precondition for having a political system within which the class struggle goes on in a favourable environment is an error now. We have a political system which is a reality. A bourgeois political system has been established in Iraq. It is a very crisis-stricken system, full of contradictions and conflicts, transitional and provisional, but it is a political system, a "state".

The experience of founding states or re-establishing the states in crisis-ridden and war-torn countries in the so called third world countries, in the last two decades show that Iraq is not very exceptional in that regard, i.e. in building a crisis-ridden capitalist state.

The Islamic Republic of Iran as a counter revolutionary government was not and still is not a free-from-crisis state, it is not and will not be a proper and normal state; but none can deny that it is an Islamist capitalist state.

The Islamo-sectarian and ethnical features of the present Iraqi regime should not prevent us from seeing the capitalist essence of the state that they give shape to in Iraq. It is vital for us as a working-class party to be clear about this in order for us to adopt the correct and effective tactics.

In that political system, we have to stress our class-based views regarding the state. We want a socialist republic. I can't formulate another political agenda instead. We can't have another political system and wait until society is stable.

But people do have a great interest in having a state where religion and nationalism have been separated off, and which is a state like in other parts of the world, where most of the states are secular and not nationalistic in that sense.

I'm not talking now about whether the Iraqi Freedom Congress approach was right or not. For a specific period of time I supported the idea of having a sort of political initiative for six months to establish a

provisional government, and that provisional government to implement a set of reforms.

The idea behind that project was for us to be engaged in the resistance of the people. The country was going through a civil war. It was what we called the dark scenario.

We wanted to establish ourselves as being for the people's rule in the districts. For people being armed and defending their rights, to save the country from the dark scenario.

In fact we couldn't do that. We couldn't organise a mass movement of armed resistance and civil resistance in the districts.

In my personal view the error of thinking about establishing a provisional government as a prelude to a political system is ended. I do not think that is workable.

We have to go forward independently and separately as a political party of working-class people. The Iraqi Freedom Congress, in my view, is not any more a political answer to the current political situation and political reality of today's Iraq. Iraq's political reality is that it is highly polarised on class basis, though the bourgeois camp is dominated by the Islamo-sectarian and nationalist forces, and the working class camp is politically weak.

I don't think the Iraqi Freedom Congress is going to participate in this election. But that is their own decision. The Iraqi Freedom Congress is a separate organisation from our party.

Some people say the bourgeois political parties in Iraq are just spies of other countries. I don't believe that. These parties represent their own specific political interests. They can form alliances with other countries, but it is a matter of mutual interests.

Maliki is linked to Iran but also to American strategy. He plays many cards. Iranian influence is large with many groups. But in the last analysis the political parties in Iraq have their own interests.

Since 2003 every step we have taken has had some effect in the working-class movement. On 6 October there was a demonstration in central Baghdad of at least two thousand workers, protesting for wage increases and other demands at the Ministry of

Industry.

Troops shot in the air and threatened them for a long time, but they stayed there. Some of the leaders and activists on that demonstration were members of our party.

I don't say that the trade union movement is a very strong one. After the collapse of the old regime the working class saw for the first time that they could organise, that they could have their own trade unions. We spread the word among them. It has brought results.

The trade union group linked to the Iraqi Communist Party, the General Federation of Iraqi workers — the TUC is hugely supporting it. We have an independent organisation. We are trying to make it stronger. It is our duty to support our trade union movement. If it has weaknesses we have to overcome them. It is the only way. There is no other way. To defend the demands and the rights and the interests of working-class people you have to have an independent, radical, and very active trade union movement.

Anyone who wants to destabilise that trade union movement, or to make schisms in it, is doing a bad thing. The bourgeoisie is trying its best to take away the content of the trade union movement, and to give it the direction they want. We want to give it another direction.

If we cannot empower the struggles of the workers and the unemployed people and the women and the young people, we can do nothing.

We have many weaknesses. But the movement we have built is still very important.

On the web:

Greece: new struggles, more repression

At the beginning of December there were clashes between the police and protestors in Athens. In an interview, young socialist, Thanos Andritsos describes the background to the protests. www.workersliberty.org/node/13579

50 day strike ends in victory

From the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions in Iraq, December 2009

After one of the longest strikes in the history of the Iraqi workers' movement [50 days], the workers in [the state owned] leather industry achieved a historic victory when the administration agreed to pay safety benefits.

The strength and endurance of the strike... was in the unity and determination of the workers, and their singular focus on their demands and organising.

The lack of response among the organisers and the rank-and-file to the promises made by the administration, and their insistence on making their demands a reality, was a result of valuable experience gained by the workers over the course of long negotiations.

This was a triumph and an eloquent lesson for us workers, which we will be sure to learn from. That lesson is not to respond to any kind of promises which intend to slow or extinguish the movement of

workers. The victory of the workers in the leather industries is the beginning of a new drive for the worker's movement in the public sector and all sectors.

The workers in the Ministry of Industry organised several demonstrations, marches and gatherings to call for [the wages] they were owed. The last heroic demonstration faced the Iraqi security forces, who opened fire on the cornered protesters on 6 October 2009.

Let the victory of the workers in the leather industry push for the building of a broad-based movement towards realising the workers' demands in the entire Ministry of Industry for back pay and safety benefits. Let us work for the freedom to organise and the repeal the laws of Saddam's regime that does not allow for the right to organise in the public sector. Long live the workers' demands for safety benefits! Long live the workers' demands for the right to organise!

NEW Workers' Liberty pamphlet: Sean Matgamna reflects on 50 years in the socialist movement

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WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

2010

The dynamics of the election

By TOM UNTERRAINER

Under the banner of the obvious (“A Year for Change”) David Cameron has ushered his party, the media and “political classes”, if not the rest of us, into full election mode.

The Tories have issued a draft manifesto, scheduled news conferences, the unveiling of posters and new internet campaigns some five months before the expected election date on 6 May. Labour has begun to enter the fray — but unless Brown experiences a Damascene conversion he has little new to say, and none of it positive.

Neither the powers of clairvoyance nor the collective intellect of Tory high-ups is required to appreciate that 2010 will indeed be a “year for change”. But the exact parameters of change are not fixed. Not even the bourgeois press and commentariat are united beyond the firm assumption that Gordon Brown will not be Prime Minister in six months time.

THE ELECTION: MORE THAN A NUMBERS GAME

A central concern for all parties is psephological: the numbers game.

Writing in “The World in 2010” — The *Economist* magazine’s annual peek into the future — political editor Andrew Miller is confident that for the Tories having fewer MPs than Labour during its 1980s low-point, a disadvantageous spread of support (far less clustered than Labour), and a need for a record-breaking swing, are surmountable obstacles. He writes that “the Tories will overcome these high hurdles to return to government after a gap of 13 years. They will be aided by a low turnout among traditional Labour supporters, by the waning of old party allegiances and by the fading grudges against the last Conservative government.”

The *Economist*’s “reasons” for a likely Tory victory are both more interesting and instructive for class-struggle socialists than opinion polls. It’s true that speculation over how big a majority Cameron will secure and whether or not Nick Clegg’s yellow-Tories will be a necessary crutch can be entertaining. It’s absolutely the case that post-election, the political landscape of the Commons will shape politics in the “real world” to some degree. But to make rational sense of what is to come, we must understand how things are now — and why.

A second insight into the dynamics of the coming election is given by Paul Whiteley, an academic from the University of Essex. Interviewed in *Britain in 2010*, the annual magazine of the Economic and Social Research Council, Whiteley predicts a record low turnout, especially in the 18-24 age bracket: “in 1983 just over 70 per cent of the 18- to 24-year-olds voted. If you look at 2005, the last election study we did, it was just over 40 per cent.” The reason for this decline? “Political parties are weakening in the minds of the electorate and in terms of declining membership.” Whiteley and his colleagues think that the decline is “permanent and will continue”.

Statistical sampling and modelling is one thing, but in isolation they tell us little about the real situation. So more widely “there is an incipient ‘crisis of political engagement’ in contemporary Britain” [‘Performance Politics and the British Voter’, Whiteley]. He claims further that “colleagues who worked on the old Soviet Union have identified the pathologies that can arise from over-centralisation, from diktats from the centre, from plans that are dominated from Whitehall. It becomes ineffective. There was a time in Britain, 20 to 40 years ago, when local government was quite an effective elected operation in its own right. It had its own legitimacy. Now that’s all gone. Local government is largely a bureaucracy run from Whitehall.”

POLITICAL ALIENATION

These claims have something of the hysterical rants common to the *Daily Mail* and *Express* about them. But to dismiss such “colourful” phrases outright would be to miss something of the truth.

Writing in the September 1951 edition of *New International*, Max Shachtman analysed the structure and intentions of the post-war Labour government. His article, ‘Aspects of the Labor Government’, picked up on a theoretical consequence of the idea that Russia had become a “bureaucratic collectivist” society: namely that for Marxists, it was no longer possible to



Political structures, and therefore the boundaries of political struggle, have changed under New Labour

view the future of the world as either “capitalist” or “socialist”. New forms of society had and probably would continue to develop.

Most pertinent here is Shachtman’s analysis of how the Labour government penetrated sections of capitalism whilst vigorously staving off independent working-class action: “That the general position of the British working-class has improved under the Labor government is undeniable. That the general position of the bourgeoisie has deteriorated is equally undeniable ... It is they [the ‘labour officialdom’], first and foremost, who have benefited from the economic and political changes effected by the Labour government, just as it is they and not the working class itself that have effected the changes.”

Now Shachtman was writing of a Labour government that undertook the nationalisation of mass industries (mining, for example) and which increased economic regulation significantly above previous peacetime levels. He viewed this as essentially undermining the bourgeoisie and signalling a fundamental shift in the normal patterns of behaviour for a “capitalist government”. No such claims can be made for the “New Labour” governments of Blair and Brown. They have acted without reserve as the champions of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. Where they have undertaken the effective nationalisation several banks, it has been to aid and not hinder the bourgeoisie.

But what Blair and Brown have managed to do — and we see the consequences of it all around us — is fundamentally re-structure the political institutions of British society to both cut off the prospect of effective working-class action and to make the British economy an attractive “venue” for capitalists to do business. The New Labour elite have an unprecedented degree of bureaucratic control. Despite the disruption of the crisis in the financial system and the Tories knocking on the door of Ten Downing Street, they can still exercise this control.

The major negative consequence of this for the ruling Labour clique is the alienation of its traditional “base of support”. It is untenable to claim that for the large majority of workers — who recognise the Tories as outright class enemies and who identify with “Labour” in a general sense — “New Labour” in its most high profile manifestations represents them. Voter turnout will be low and it is this that will in all likelihood be Brown’s undoing.

PATTERNS OF STRUGGLE

New Labour’s restructuring is in part a consequence of the non-combativeness of the unions and has itself had a major impact on the patterns of class struggle.

Take Whiteley’s comments on local government under New Labour. The example of Poplar in the 1920s stands as a textbook example of the combined political might of workers, working-class communities and their representatives in the face of an anti-working-class government, hyper-exploitative employers and greedy landlords (for further information see *Guilty and Proud of It!*, by AWL comrade Janine Booth).

Even where local government-focussed struggles ultimately failed — as in the 1980s — the failure was due to the political inadequacies of the organised left and labour movement rather than the strictures of a bureaucratic government.

In both these examples, independent working class action had a direct link to local and national government. The political demands of our class could be fought for and furthered through these institutions and channels.

Contrast these examples to the patterns of struggle that have emerged around opposition to the “City Academy” scheme. Academies, imposed on what the government labelled as “failing” schools, initially represented an inroad into the education system — one of the largest untapped markets globally — for capital. The English school system has been steadily marketised, whatever the vagaries and ever-changing complexion of those involved — be they “religious” or “philanthropic” — by this government. On direct command from Whitehall, circumventing the political structures of local government but utilising their organisational apparatus, “democratic accountability” and control of this public service has been eroded. Ultimately, it will be destroyed.

And no matter how much political pressure is exerted on or by locally elected politicians, they are have little power to stop such schemes. Direct pressure on central government is necessary. Collective action by education unions across school boroughs is ruled out because such action would constitute a “political strike”. In the few examples where Academy proposals have been defeated, it’s usually been a result of sponsors withdrawing to avoid the embarrassment of “bad press”. Industrial action by the unions in individual schools has added to the embarrassment but there is no evidence to suggest it’s decisive.

Similar changes — chronicled and analysed in this paper — have been forged within the Labour Party itself. Where once local branches and the affiliated trade unions could wield decisive influence over the Labour Party, no such democratic channels exist. The linking “valve” between the unions and Labour has become so degraded as to fundamentally change the relationship.

Whereas in the past the “valve” allowed for affiliated unions to assert working-class politics “upwards”, its main current function is to operate in the opposite direction: allowing for the extensive political marshalling of the trade union leaderships. The link never flowed in just one direction and the balance of forces means it is being used to cement the bureaucratic relations evident elsewhere.

The relationship between the unions and Labour cannot be described as totally reactionary because, however degraded, it remains technically possible to undo the changes. Whether or not this can happen depends greatly on this year’s events.

A YEAR FOR FUNDAMENTAL “CHANGE”?

What will be the consequences of an electoral defeat for Labour on our class? What impact could the Tories have?

The first ten years of Blair’s government presented huge opportunities for the organised working class to exert itself politically: to win demands for a political economy of the working class and to make real, fundamental gains. The opportunities were missed and instead anti-working-class measure after anti-working-class measure was heaped upon us. Our class is now faced with the task of defending itself from further — fundamental — attacks, posed more sharply than in the recent past by the economic crisis.

The election is something of an irrelevance in terms of what the offensive will look like. Both major parties are committed to an economic agenda that will demand massive cuts in public spending — meaning massive cuts in public sector pay and jobs — and to a restructuring of the economy most advantageous for capital. This will mean a worsening of pay and conditions and further job losses across the economy.

But the party politics of the election will almost certainly have an impact on how sections of the trade union movement will operate — especially for Labour affiliated unions. Even those unaffiliated unions like PCS and RMT with — on paper at least — militant leaderships have proven themselves incapable of mounting effective industrial action in the relatively advantageous past.

In the place of coordinated, effective industrial action from the unions nationally we should expect to see — and be prepared to respond to — further such actions as those at Visteon, Lindsey and Vestas. We — the socialists — should argue for and organise where possible rank and file action and initiatives: whether in particular union groups, workplaces and communities. We should ensure that any militancy is turned towards making changes in our movement as a whole. Such moves would make for a year of fundamental change.

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

**NATIONAL CONVENTION AGAINST FEES AND CUTS
6 FEBRUARY 2010 UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON
<http://conventionagainstfeesandcuts.wordpress.com>**

Mandelson's higher education cuts will speed "marketisation"

OCCUPY! STRIKE!

By Ed Maltby

On 22 December Peter Mandelson wrote to the Higher Education funding body outlining nearly £400 million in cuts in higher education for 2010-11. The figure exceeds by £135 million the £180 million cuts and £83 million in "efficiency savings" announced in the 2009 budget.

And in last month's pre-budget report the government announced a total of £600 million in cuts by 2013. On 12 January the Russell Group, the UK's 20 "leading" universities accused the government of bringing higher education "to its knees".

In his letter Mandelson said he wanted to see more business control over education, "fast track" stripped-down degrees, and intensified competition for funding between universities. These structural changes go hand-in-hand with a jobs massacre in the sector. Before Mandelson's latest announcement, the University and College Union calculated that over 6,000 jobs were at risk in Higher and Further Education across the UK. That figure is certain to grow.

Lord Mandelson says he wants to see the creation of two-year degrees. He calls this "diverse provision". In reality it is a way of maintaining a business-friendly skills base in society, on the cheap. It will be paid for in higher class sizes, greater workloads, and a dumbed-down, exam-driven syllabus.

In his letter Mandelson calls for clearer signals from business on what skills employers want in their workers, and for "a mechanism to redeploy funds, on a competitive basis, to those institutions that are able and willing to develop... provision in these key areas". In other words, the government wants to force education institutions to provide

**"Our Vice-Chancellor is working hand in hand with the government to turn our university into a business. As a result the university is facing the biggest cuts in its history. We are determined to stop these cuts by mounting the biggest fightback the university has ever seen."
Tom Wills, University of Sussex Student Union President**

only the courses that businesses want to see, or to have funds withdrawn.

The government has long been building a business-oriented education sector. Last year Education Not for Sale activists disrupted the latest in a series of conferences bringing together business leaders and university bosses, aimed at expanding the influence of business in higher education.

Under the conditions of economic crisis, the government and the capitalist class has become more determined to "reform" education, to strip away everything that isn't essential to business interests and reduce education into a pared-down profit-making implement. The cuts that we are seeing now, and the restructuring that has been taking place since the introduction of fees, are now set to speed up and get more intense and thoroughgoing.

The student movement and the unions that organise education workers have to get themselves in shape — and fast — to resist these attacks. We need unity between staff and students, a realistic programme of industrial and political struggle in the immediate term, and a willingness to take radical direct action. Occupations, unofficial action and secondary action all need to see a comeback in the education sector.

Student fees set to rise

The flip side of the government plan to make cuts and further marketise education is a drive to raise more money through tuition fees and student debt — rather than through progressive taxation.

Since they were introduced in 1997 student fees have been progressively increased and university bosses have been given more choice of what level of fees to charge. Unless stopped, the logical conclusion of this process is a fully variable market system, with cut-price colleges at one end and costly "full-service" universities at the other.

A government review into fees — chaired by Lord Browne, a former Chief Executive of BP and made up of education-sector management consultants, quango chiefs, and a former Rolls Royce boss — is set to conclude that higher education needs higher fees. The Nation Union of Students, under the leadership of the Labour Students careerist clique, having failed to get "student representation" are now at a loss about what to do about this attack on students.

That is why we need an independent rank-and-file movement of student campaigns and fighting student unions that links up with staff unions and creates a national, political voice for free education and against cuts.

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