

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

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HONDURAS

Striking against the coup

BY SACHA ISMAIL

Thousands of workers are now on strike against the right-wing coup which deposed Honduran president Jose Manuel Zelaya Rosales on 28 June. Meanwhile, the coup regime has suspended civil liberties, attacked workers' organisations and sponsored the murder of political opponents, including two prominent trade unionists.

The regime has used troops to occupy hospitals; tear-gassed workers' demonstrations; ransacked the headquarters of the General Confederation of Labour, one of Honduras' three trade union centres; and shot up the offices of Via Campesina, a rural workers and small farmers' organisation. 200 people have "disappeared".

On 11 July, in the northern city of San Pedro Sula, Roger Bados, former union president at the local cement factory and an activist in the left-wing Democratic Unification party (UD), was shot by a group of men who had entered his home. The same day union activist Ramon Garcia, also a UD member, was taken off a bus and killed. Both Bados and Garcia were prominent opponents of the coup.

The dominant sections of the Honduran bourgeoisie are the driving force behind the coup.

Manuel Zelaya is himself a wealthy rancher, a politician from the right-wing Liberal Party who since his election in 2006 has moved towards a populist stance (though the new president installed by the coup regime, Roberto Micheletti, is also a Liberal). In addition to making links with regimes such as Chavez's Venezuela, Zelaya has committed himself to "social transformation", for instance by raising the minimum wage 60 percent. The spark for the coup was Zelaya's attempt to organise a referendum on a new constitution, which among other things would have allowed him to be re-elected. When the military refused to oversee the vote, Zelaya sacked a leading general and led a march of supporters to seize army-confiscated ballot boxes.

One of the biggest supporters of the coup has been the Honduran Maquila Association, which represents companies producing apparel for brand-name US firms. Obama and Clinton have opposed the coup but refused to refer to it as a coup, in order to avoid the suspension of US military and economic aid to Honduras. If the US government seriously opposed the coup, it would collapse almost immediately.

It is not a question of illusions in the ruling-class populist Zelaya, but of defending the gains and organisations of Honduras' working class and poor. Latin American and Honduran socialists should oppose the coup on the basis of independent working-class mobilisation. And Honduran workers are under the knife — they need the maximum possible international solidarity in resisting.

- www.labourstart.org
- hondurasresists.blogspot.com

IRAQ

Unions press for labour law

BY RHODRI EVANS

According to Iraq Oil Report (4 August), the Ministry of Industry and Minerals has written a memo "advising" its employees to avoid unions.

The move highlights how the consolidation of the Maliki government in Iraq, and of something approaching real government administration in the country, cuts two ways.

The government is more assertive with the USA. It organised celebrations when US troops quit Iraq's cities on 30 June. There was some fudging at the edges of that withdrawal, but the US troops have largely stayed out of the cities since, and are due to withdraw completely by December 2011.

The government is also a government equipped with a decree from 1987 — one of the very few Saddam-era edicts left on the books by the USA after its period of more or less direct control in 2003-4 — which bans all unions in the public sector, where two-thirds of all Iraq's full-time workers are employed.

Iraq's 2005 constitution calls for a new labour law, and a draft is with the Council of Ministers, but meanwhile the 1987 decree stands.

"The Minister advises employees to avoid dealing with any illegal structures of this kind," says the memo. "There are several entities and illegal structures in some of the public companies that claim they are defending workers' rights. They are dealing with these issues in an illegal manner to the limit of causing problems

and chaos which as a result obstructs the production process in those companies."

Oil workers, also public-sector, have faced similar warnings and defied them. The Iraqi Teachers' Union saw off an attack on its organisation (using a different decree) earlier this year.

But the more confident the government gets, the greater the danger. The question is whether Iraqi workers and unions can gain confidence and strength even faster. Encouragingly, oil workers in Basra have threatened to block BP and the Chinese National Petroleum Corp. from entering the big Rumaila oilfield under the terms of a contract recently awarded by the Iraqi Oil Ministry. The workers insist that foreign firms should be involved only in restricted circumstances, monitored by the workers.

Sectarian violence and social conditions in Iraq remain hellish, but still short of the muffled civil-war level of 2006 and the first eight months or so of 2007.

In a hugely oil-rich country, over 31% of the population never have access to safe, clean drinking water, according to the US government's latest report.

Electricity output has increased, but 49% of Iraqis never get an electricity supply they find adequate. Unemployment remains very high. Oil production is down a bit on 2009; though oil prices are now rising, Iraqi government revenues were hit in the early part of 2009 by much lower prices than in most of 2008.

Nevertheless, the consolidation of the government continues. Iraq is in line to take direct control of its oil revenues from the end of 2009 (at present the revenues are still all first paid into a fund held in New York). And Maliki has hinted that for the elections coming in January 2010 he may break from the Shia-Muslim coalition (with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Sadr movement) on whose ticket he was elected in December 2005, instead trying to muster Sunni and secular allies.

Iraqi unions are still pushing for a democratic labour law to give unions legal protection. US trade unionists, organised in US Labor Against the War, are actively backing their campaign. British trade unionists should do so too.

- www.uslaboragainstawar.org

WORKERS OF THE WORLD

ZANON VICTORY

Workers at the occupied Zanon ceramics factory in Neuquen, Argentina, have won a major legal victory. The provincial parliament has voted 26 to 9 to accept that the factory is expropriated and handed over to the workers' co-operative to manage legally and indefinitely.

The workers of the Zanon factory in Argentina occupied the factory in 2001, following a boss's lock-out, and have run it since then under workers' control. The workers renamed the factory FAS-INPAT (Factory without a Boss).

In the UK the No Sweat anti-sweatshop campaign championed the workers' fight to hold on to their factory, and our paper, *Solidarity*, covered the struggle extensively.

Raul Godoy, a Zanon worker, declared: "This is an important chapter in the struggle of the Zanon workers, who have been fighting in the streets for more than nine years. First they tried to evict us in order to auction off the factory. But the workers' struggle and the community pressured the government to expropriate the factory."

200 factories continue to be run under workers' control in Argentina.

EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT

Democratic Senators "friendly" to the US unions have decided to

drop a central provision of a bill that would have made it easier to organise workers.

The so-called card-check provision — which senators decided to scrap to help secure a filibuster-proof 60 votes — would have required employers to recognise a union as soon as a majority of workers signed cards saying they wanted a union. Currently, employers can insist on a secret ballot, and make it almost impossible for the union to win that vote.

In the US the abandonment of card check is being described as another example of the power of right-wing, "moderate" Democrats to block their party's more liberal wing.

KOREAN OCCUPATION ENDS

Ssangyong Motor Company was able to restart production on Thursday 13 August following the workers' occupation that had lasted for 77 days.

Workers were fighting company plans to sack 36% of the workforce.

Police dropped tanks of tear-gas from helicopters on strikers, and helicopter-borne police commandos fought pitched battles with workers in a series of raids to reclaim parts of the factory. Police and company thugs also attacked workers' supporters outside the factory.

More than 100 people were injured in the clashes.

However the police were unable to overrun the section of the factory which contained highly-flammable paints. 500 workers remained defiant, pledged to defend their occupation.

Workers responded to police violence with firebombs, and fired nuts and bolts from slingshots.

The occupation ended following an agreement between the workers and management. The company agreed to keep half the workers at the plant rather than lay them all off. "I am sorry that we could not get a better deal, but I am proud that we fought hard," said union organiser Moon Jae-myong.

However 96 of the 458 workers that turned themselves over to police on the night after the occupation ended were not released. Many are facing criminal charges, including union leaders.

The militant Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and its affiliate, the Korean Metal Workers' Union, are also facing a half-million dollar lawsuit from the police.

MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

103 miners from Tambillo, a small mining village in the region of Coquimbo in Chile, have been on official strike since 1 May.

www.workersliberty.org/node/12906
www.sindicatoscmtillos.blogspot.com

OUTCRY OVER US HEALTH REFORM

Lies, opportunism and the NHS

Gordon Brown and David Cameron have been posing as champions of the National Health Service against the rabid outcry by US right-wingers.

What they gloss over is the fact that both Tories and New Labour have spent decades undermining the Health Service and pushing Britain in the direction of the USA's market-governed health-care system.

Thatcher cut the NHS harshly and encouraged private health care. Blair and Brown have developed a "market" for care within the NHS and given massive handouts to the private sector to "encourage competition".

New Labour's NHS "reforms" have constantly worked to replace public regulation, by elected bodies, with the market. Both New Labour and Tory election manifestos are likely to propose making the NHS an "independent" body with its own constitution, outside of government control.

Both parties have used the American model and employed consultants from the big American health care firms in developing their plans.

When Peter Mandelson and Health Secretary Andy Burnham attack the Tories for promoting the market system typical of the USA, it is pure opportunism. The NHS is safe in neither of their hands.

The marketisation has made the NHS less efficient. Administration costs have already more than doubled from the historic average of 6% of the total budget. But also, and more fundamentally, marketisation makes the whole basis of health care cruel and inhuman.

Michael Moore's documentary *Sicko* exposed that cruelty of the market principle. In the USA, it denies health insurance to some 47 million people!

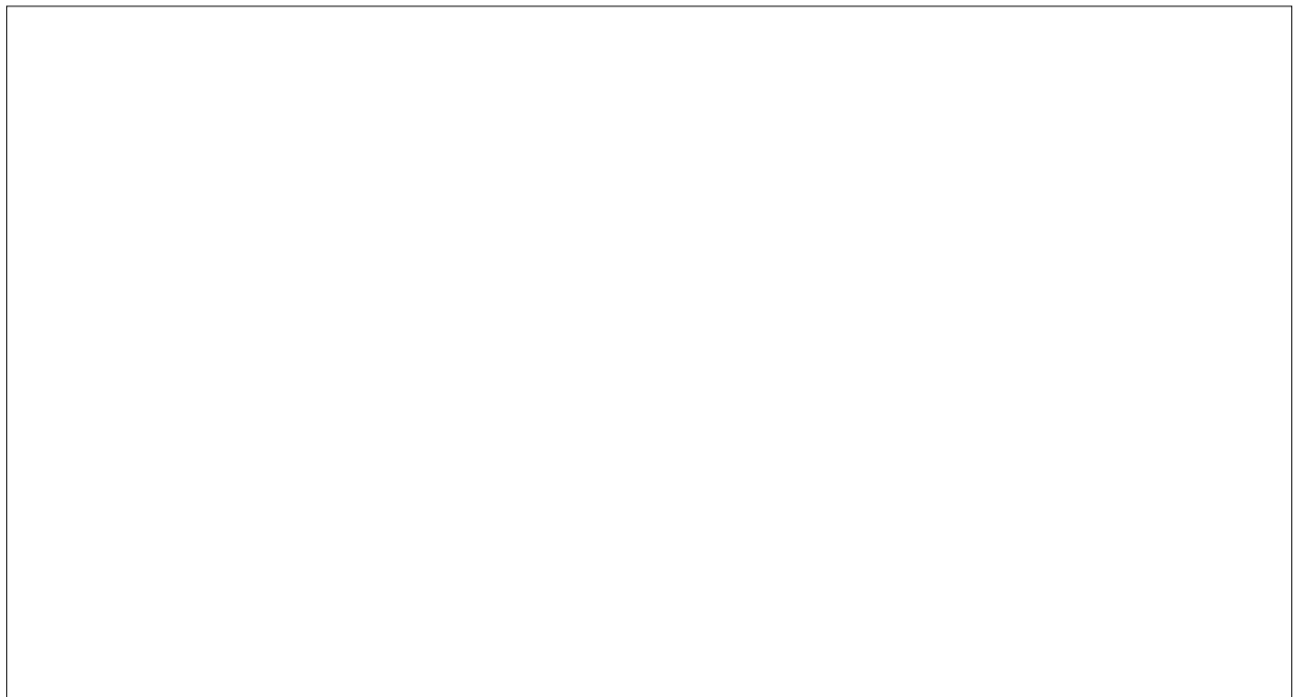
That documentary helped fuel the drive for the limited proposals that President Obama is trying to push through Congress for some social provision of health care in the USA.

Moore held up the British NHS as the alternative. As the world's first universal health care service free at the point of delivery, the NHS has long been the inspiration of health care reformers internationally.

That is why lies and distortions about the NHS have been a staple for right wing Republicans and their Conservative Party allies in Britain. Ironically, New Labour Ministers have responded by speaking out for an "idealised" model of the NHS — the model which health-care unions and campaigners have been defending for years now against New Labour government attacks!

Obama's reform package is very limited. He wants to bring in a limited level of universal health cover on the basis of a compulsory insurance scheme underwritten by the government. Under the weight of attack from the right and the vested interests of the health insurance companies and pharmaceutical industry, he has already retreated some distance.

Right-wingers in the USA have preyed on fears about "big government", raised scares about rationing of care, and claimed that the fate of individuals, particularly the elderly, will lie in the hands of faceless bureaucrats sitting on "death



"NHS Together" rally, November 2007. What are the union leaders doing to save the NHS?

panels". As if it is fair and democratic that "rationing" should be by the well-off getting lavish treatment — in fact, in the USA, often more medical treatment than is good for them — and the poor getting only emergency-room care!

The USA spends far more on health care than any other country in the world — 16 per cent of national income, and the figure is projected to rise sharply — and delivers worse health, across the board, than any other rich country. It has mortality and morbidity rates much worse than the average for rich countries.

NHS spending has risen in recent years to 9% of British national income, but is still below the average for Europe as a whole.

The US leads the world in medical and pharmaceutical research. The rich can get good care there. But even if you can afford a basic insurance policy, or have a union and can get health cover negotiated as part of your work contract, exclusions imposed by employers and insurance companies deny you access to many treatments and services.

Five million more Americans have lost health care coverage in the last year, because of the recession. At the same time access is made more and more difficult by rising premiums. People suffering from chronic health problems such as diabetes or cancer are denied the ongoing care they need, and can fall back only on the emergency room, which is little use for conditions such as theirs.

Even if you have insurance, it can run out. Medical bills accounted for 62 per cent of all personal bankruptcies in 2007.

At the Labour Link conference of the big health service union Unison, in July, union leader Dave Prentis said he would rally other unions to demand a commitment against NHS privatisation in the Labour manifesto for the General Election.

Since then we have heard no more about Prentis's efforts. Unison members should demand that he come good on his promises. Union members everywhere should demand

their leaders fight to restore the NHS as a well-funded scheme of democratic social provision, and to reverse the push towards a US-style market system in Britain.

And, whatever the union leaders do, rank and file activists in every area should organise to defend our health service, through campaigns like "Keep Our NHS Public".

• www.keepournhspublic.com

Help support our work around Vestas

In the last couple of months, the AWL along with many other activities, has played a crucial role in helping to spark and then supporting the Vestas workers' struggle. That activity — travelling to the Isle of Wight, producing bulletins, leaflets, a paper to help spread the word — all costs a lot of money. The activity — and the cost! — will continue in the coming weeks and months.

That is the sort of thing we do as an organisation. Such activities are among the reasons why you should join the AWL. But whether you're a member or not, why not help support us in our work around Vestas by making a donation, or taking out a regular standing order?

If you cannot make it to the Vestas picket line yourself, consider making a donation equivalent to your train fare!

A year ago the Alliance for Workers' Liberty set itself an £18,000 fundraising target. This month, as our fund drive comes to an end, we had in £15,808 and expect to reach our target once we receive money raised by working for the Workers' Beer Company at the summer festivals. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. But that was just to cover what we've already done. The struggle continues...

What you can do:

1. Download a standing order from our website and send to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA.
2. Or send a cheque, made payable to "AWL", to the same address.

TUBE STRIKE

RMT wins limited gains – but what now?

The 10-11 June strike by members of the RMT union on the London Underground has won gains on all three of the fronts it addressed.

London Underground previously wanted a five-year pay deal. It shifted to offering a two-year option, and has now agreed to up it to RPI plus 1.5% in the first year (from 1%) and RPI plus 0.5% in the second.

The RMT has secured jobs or job offers for all RMT members facing compulsory redundancy. The union has also secured improvements to the attendance proce-

dures. For example, the definition of a 26 weeks' maximum warning in future will mean exactly that.

Could more of the union's demands have been won? London Underground workers have once again been hampered by being divided into different unions. The other two main unions, TSSA (some station and office staff) and ASLEF (some drivers) have put up no fight on the issues.

It also must be said that RMT's national leadership has allowed momentum to drain from the campaign. It has allowed

the ballot mandate for "action short of strikes" to lapse so that workers no longer had the option of, say, an overtime ban.

It delayed and delayed about setting new strike dates. It gave the bosses a deadline of 29 July to make concessions or face more strikes, but the date came and went with no declaration from head office.

Of course there was unsureness at rank and file level, too, about further strikes. But without updates or decisions from head office, that unsureness was

bound to increase.

Unions negotiate. But it is possible to negotiate — in fact, it is better to negotiate — on the basis that further industrial action is set to happen unless the bosses concede, rather than on the basis that further industrial action will be set only if and when the union leaders decide that negotiations are hopelessly stalled.

- For more including a 17 August statement on the dispute from RMT Regional Organiser Steve Hedley, see www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk
- www.workersliberty.org/twblog

THOMAS COOK

Lessons of the Dublin occupation

Eighteen Thomas Cook employees, six officials of the TSSA union, and the partner of one of the workers appeared in the Irish High Court last week after they refused to end their four-day sit-in against the closure of the Thomas Cook branch in Grafton Street in Dublin.

Before 31 July, the staff, together with employees in the travel company's other shop in Dublin, had just voted 100% in favour of strike action and action short of strike action in opposition to plans announced by Thomas Cook in May to close its high street shops in the Republic of Ireland. Turnout in the ballot was 84%.

77 Thomas Cook workers were to lose their jobs as a result of 'restructuring'.

And yet in December 2008 Thomas Cook announced a 50% jump in operating profits for the preceding twelve months. It described its average profit margin of 4.2% as "industry-leading",

and predicted that by 2009/2010 annual profits would have increased from £366 million to £480 million.

In 2007 Thomas Cook Chief Executive Manny Fontenla-Novoa was paid £2.89 million. Last year, £7 million. His basic salary went up 34%, from £633,000 to £850,000. In addition to his 'ordinary' bonus he was paid a further bonus of £5 million after the company exceeded "savings targets".

The average Thomas Cook employee has a very different experience: low pay and job insecurity.

A recent government survey of rates of pay ranked the travel trade at 295th out of the 350 professions surveyed. Sweeping the streets is a better-paid job than selling holidays.

A survey conducted last year found that rates of pay for a travel sales consultant varied from £10,000 to £12,500, or £14,000 for consultants with a qualification. (The average UK salary is £29,000.)

Another survey, conducted last year by the *Travel Weekly* magazine, found that 12% of travel trade employees had a second job as a matter of financial necessity. A further 48% said that they were seriously considering taking a second job. The magazine has described rates of pay in the travel trade as "appalling .. a scandal ... a culture of low pay."

Surveys of travel trade staff have also found job insecurity to be a major concern. The wave of shop closures triggered by the takeover of My Travel cost 2,800 jobs, and the closure of a Glasgow call centre another hundred.

TSSA — which, after a fashion, is recognised by Thomas Cook — had been campaigning against the proposed shop closures in Ireland for three months.

Apart from balloting for industrial action it had organised demonstrations and publicity stunts, as well as threatening to call for a consumer boycott.

Thomas Cook's response was to bring forward the date for closing its two branches in Dublin from the end of August to the end of July.

According to one worker at Grafton Street, a team of managers turned up early in the morning of 31 July and told staff to take their belongings and leave as the store was being shut down with immediate effect. The staff's response to this instruction was to begin their sit-in.

Like at Visteon, the demand was a

decent redundancy package rather than a reversal of the closure.

The day after the sit-in had begun Thomas Cook obtained a High Court injunction ordering staff to leave. Staff voted to ignore the High Court order.

Confronted with the workers' defiance, a High Court judge ordered their arrest. At 5am the next morning, 4th August, the Gardai turned up at the shop and arrested all the occupants.

Brought before the High Court the same day, the twenty-five gave a commitment not to interfere or trespass at Thomas Cook premises. Referring to the distress to staff and their families which had been caused by Thomas Cook's actions, the judge decided not to impose a prison sentence or a fine.

The ending of the sit-in was followed by short-lived talks between Thomas Cook and the TSSA in London in an attempt to reach agreement on a redundancy package. The breakdown of the talks was followed by a decision by the TSSA to take the dispute to the Irish Labour Relations Commission.

From one point of view, the sit-in lasted only four days and had limited demands. But that is to miss the significance of the workers' action.

The sit-in and subsequent refusal to abide by the High Court's injunction represented an act of defiance — not just of the employer's 'right' to manage (and sack), but also of the willingness of the state to back up the employer class.

Since Thomas Cook took over My Travel it has axed 3,000 jobs. But in this case workers refused to accept that its decisions must be obeyed unquestioningly. When managers turned up to shut down the shop, it was they who found themselves out on the street.

The reason why the sit-in did not last longer is straightforward. Thomas Cook acted much quicker and more ruthlessly than have other employers confronted with an occupation.

And the fact that it was workers in the retail sector who did all this underlines the significance. The retail sector generally has a low level of unionisation, little tradition of militancy, and certainly no tradition of staging sit-ins.

An alliance of the employer, the courts and the Gardai defeated the sit-in. But it is the workers who staged the sit-in who can hold their heads up high.

MAINLINE RAIL

National Express workers step it up

Workers at the National Express East Anglia train company are stepping up their fight over pay, conditions and reorganisation with their third 48-hour strike set for Thursday and Friday of this week (20 and 21 August).

Members of the RMT and Aslef transport unions struck solidly for the second time last week. Workers in the TSSA union are set to join them this week. This feature of the action — cross-union collaboration — has been enormously positive.

The strikers are defiant in the face of a concerted media attack, which is spewing out the bosses' lies. Meanwhile there are no signs that management are prepared to settle.

"Unison Four" banned from office

Unison NEC member Glenn Kelly and three other officers of London branches have been banned from holding office.

The four activists, all Socialist Party members, had been accused of distributing a leaflet which contained "discriminatory material" at the 2007 Unison conference. The leaflet questioned why a third of branch motions were omitted from the agenda.

Unison's own investigation accepted there was no racist intent.

Instead of dropping the action Unison charged the four with a breach of rules for questioning the decisions of the Standing Orders Committee, the body which authorises agenda items.

Glenn Kelly and Onay Kasab have been banned from union office for three years; Brian Debus for five; and Suzanne Muna for four.

- More at www.stopthewitchhunt.org.uk

A Workers' Plan for the Crisis Capitalism's crisis and how the labour movement should respond

32 pages including:
Understanding the crisis •
"Bosses' socialism" vs
workers' socialism • How the
fight for reforms can transform
the labour movement • How
to fight for jobs, homes and
services for all • Organise the
unorganised, renew the labour
movement • The fight for a
workers' government

£3 waged, £1.50 unwaged
from PO Box 823, London,
SE15 4NA.

17 SEPTEMBER DAY OF ACTION

Vestas: spread the solidarity!

What you can do

- Set up a local Vestas workers' support group, involving trade unionists, environmental activists, and socialists.
- Organise a visible demonstration of solidarity, especially on the next national day of action, 17 September.
- Send a donation from your trade union or other organisation, or make a personal donation, with a message of support: cheques payable to Ryde and East Wight Trades Union Council, 22 Church Lane, Ryde, Isle of Wight, PO33 2NB.
- Send a motion to your union leadership demanding they actively back the Vestas workers and their demands. This is particularly important in Unite, Unison, GMB, and CWU. Demand those unions' leaders add their signatures to the letter of support put out by sixteen union leaders on 4 August: www.workersliberty.org/vestasletter
- Contact local Labour Parties, and ask them to follow the Isle of Wight Labour Party in backing the workers. Ask them to demand Energy Minister Ed Miliband come to the Isle of Wight to meet the workers.
- Lobby your MP and get her or him to sign "Early Day Motion" 1925, put down by John McDonnell MP in support of the Vestas workers. If the MP is Labour, contact local Labour Party activists and Labour-affiliated unions, and urge them to put pressure on their MP.
- Contact energy minister Ed Miliband. His phone number in his Doncaster constituency is 01302 875 462, and at Westminster, 020 7219 4778. Flood him with calls for the Government to take over the Vestas factory and keep it producing, under new management.
- Send messages of support from yourself or your organisation to savevestas@gmail.com.
- Come to the protest outside the Vestas factory — Monks Brook, St Cross Industrial Estate, Newport, Isle of Wight.
- If you are a member or sympathiser of the AWL, send some money to finance the work of our comrades in the Isle of Wight — for their travel and food, and also to help us produce leaflets and other materials to help the struggle. Many thanks!

The last day of the occupation

By COLIN FOSTER

Vestas bosses and the Government continue to stall in face of the struggle by the Vestas wind turbine blade workers on the Isle of Wight against the closure of their factories.

But the ripples of support for the workers continues to spread out. In mid-August, international messages of support have arrived from Chile and Australia. New local support groups are being set up.

As labour movement meetings get back into gear after the July-August holiday period, the support can continue to grow. The next national day of solidarity, on 17 September, can be bigger than the last one on 12 August.

Workers occupied the bigger factory, in Newport, from 20 July until they were evicted on 7 August, and continue a picket outside the factory.

The Government has been forced into talking to Vestas workers and the

union, RMT, which they have joined since starting the occupation (before then Vestas bosses suppressed all union organisation).

Climate change minister Joan Ruddock met workers and union officials on 6 August and offered warm words but a stonewall opposition to nationalisation and no definite commitment to do anything at all. The Government has told the RMT that it will continue talks.

Vestas bosses postponed the redundancies from 31 July to 12 August, and Vestas boss Ditlev Engel has said that the company will consider revoking its decision to sack eleven of the workers in the occupation and cancel their redundancy pay. But on 14 August Vestas paid outstanding wages and redundancy money into the bank accounts of other workers, obviously hoping to get the issue behind it.

Vestas still has to get its "clean-up teams" into the factories in Newport and East Cowes, and it still has to remove a number of unfinished blades and equipment it wants to sell or move

elsewhere. The workers are maintaining a picket, and the blades and much of the equipment can only be moved by way of barges, at high tide and, at Newport, across a public cycle path. Determined picketing on the "marine gate" at Newport, and on the waterfront at Cowes, can block the Vestas bosses' plans: activists should be on the alert to join the pickets when the workers call for them.

The Government still has to try to win a general election, and deal with the glaring contradiction between its refusal to nationalise Vestas — Britain's only wind turbine blade factories — and its claimed commitment to expand renewable energy and green jobs.

We can not let job creation, and the transition to renewable energy production that we need, rest on the short-term business decisions of private companies whose guiding principle is profit.

We need to act collectively, in our collective interest, which includes taking over plants and industries where private owners cannot or will not deliver the change we need.

Workers' Climate Action conference, 10 October

Climate change is a class issue

The Workers' Climate Action network is meeting for its second conference on 10 October 2009 in London. Over the last year, we have been active in the environmental and labour movements advocating class struggle activism as the key battleground in the fight against ecological destruction.

Our involvement has meant the Climate Camp has given its solidarity to the London Underground tubeworkers in their dispute over pay, conditions and jobs. Their solidarity in turn has raised the question of free (or very cheap) public transport as a necessary step towards an ecological future. We have spoken to the RMT young members' conference, building an awareness of working-class environmentalism and the need for fighting rank-and-file trade unionism.

Most significantly, we have played a key role in agitating for and helping the factory occupation and picket of the Vestas wind turbine factory at St Cross near Newport on the Isle of Wight. This dispute has shown very clearly the contradiction between a capitalist-run economy and our efforts to prevent ecological destruction. It shows the explosive potential for a class struggle environmental movement, to

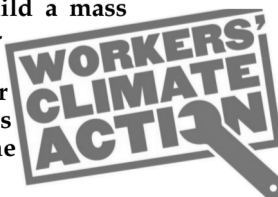
take on the bosses and save the planet.

This conference will be an opportunity to share the skills and the lessons learnt over the last year, especially at Vestas. We are inviting trade union activists from public transport, aviation, energy, construction, car and higher education industries to discuss the issues in their industrial sectors, how they are responding to the economic crisis and how we can build a platform for the ideas of "worker-led just transition". We also invite activists from the environmental movement to come and discuss how to translate their skills and approaches into a struggle rooted in the terrain of working-class organisation.

The experience at Vestas must be built upon and replicated again and again in order to build a mass working-class ecological movement.

Check out the website for model motions for union branches and for the latest details of the conference. Creche available.

• workersclimateaction.wordpress.com



ORGANISE, DEBATE, UNITE IN ACTION!

Building the broader campaign

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Chairing a Vestas workers' rally in Ryde, Isle of Wight, on 15 August, Mike Godley, one of the workers who occupied the Newport factory from 20 July until evicted on 7 August, read out web postings which attacked "outsiders" in the campaign.

The postings claimed that socialist and other activists who have come to the Isle of Wight from the mainland had manipulated the workers.

To great applause, Mike Godley refuted the attacks. The socialists and environmental activists have been welcome, he said, and they have provided valuable help to a struggle which continues to be the Vestas workers' own.

Before the Vestas campaign started, no socialist or environmental-activist groups were visible on the Isle of Wight. Activists from the Alliance for Workers' Liberty arrived on the island on 15 June, to leaflet and talk with workers at the Vestas factory gates, and to make contact with the not-very-strong local labour movement. (Vestas had blocked union organisation in its factories). With other Workers' Climate Action people, the AWLers built a public meeting, jointly sponsored by Workers' Climate Action and Cowes Trades Council, on 3 July.

From soon after that, as discussions among workers about a factory occupation developed, members of the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) from the mainland started spending time on the island.

From the first hours of the occupation, on 20 July, the roundabout outside the Vestas Newport factory front entrance became a gathering-point for workers and supporters. Local people from a range of backgrounds joined the crowd.

A group of four Climate Camp activists arrived for a day on Wednesday 22 July, and made a very useful contribution. As time went on, more climate-camp and other environmental activists arrived, especially after the Big Green Gathering set for 29 July was cancelled. The biggest single influx of mainland supporters, a contingent of 25 socialists, anarchists, and environmentalists from London, was organised by Workers' Climate Action on 7 August, the day the occupiers were evicted.

Five main elements (with many over-

laps and exceptions) have made up the roundabout "community": workers; local supporters; AWL; SWP; and climate-camp people. It has done well at combining diversity with unity in action.

The SWP at Vestas has been in a different mode from at the Codnor anti-BNP protest which you will read about in this issue of *Solidarity*. It has worked chiefly at proving itself the "best builder" of the campaign, putting much energy into leafleting and organising for demonstrations of support on the island, and using contacts through the Campaign Against Climate Change (where SWPers hold leading positions) and the unions to set up solidarity meetings round the country.

AWL members have done a lot of leafleting and visiting workplaces too. Climate-camp activists, on the whole, have been less interested in that sort of activity, but they have made a contribution which the socialist organisations, at our present level of development, probably could not have made.

It was the first four climate-camp activists to arrive who organised the first successful "rush" through the police lines to get food to the occupiers, on Wednesday 22 July. At that time the Vestas bosses and the police were trying to block all food supplies.

Climate-camp and other non-violent-direct-action people have organised many other successful actions, most spectacularly the occupation of the roof of the East Cowes Vestas factory from 4 to 14 August. Soon most of the workers active in the campaign recognised that prejudices about these people maybe being "eco-terrorists" were misplaced. The courage, imagination, and skills of the environmentalists are making an irreplaceable contribution, helping to enlarge the workers' (and maybe some socialists') tactical ideas — and doing it with very few arrests.

Such cross-fertilisation of workers' and environmentalist struggle is one of the main aims of Workers' Climate Action, a group in which AWL has been active from the start.

One of AWL's chief concerns throughout has been to promote and help facilitate self-organisation: self-organisation of the workers initially interested in occupying; election and organisation of a committee by the workers outside the

factory; organisation of a Families and Community committee; organisation of local support groups in the different towns of the Isle of Wight; general meetings of supporters, or supporters and workers, at the roundabout.

To our mind, organisation is not just organisational. It is political. The way the working class transforms itself from a scattering of atomised individuals, each one largely powerless in the market economy and in the workplace, into a force, is by organising, discussing, and establishing an independent collective purpose and will. Self-organisation does not happen automatically. Workers have to be convinced of it.

Organisation requires collectively-decided direction. So we have also tried to assess things, without defeatism but soberly, at each stage in the campaign, to deduce best policies, and to promote debate around them.

At the same time, we have tried to educate ourselves and others, with reading and discussions about lessons from working-class history.

None of that stops us from having friendly unity in action with activists who have other priorities.

When we proposed having general meetings at the roundabout, a couple of climate-camp activists first responded: "What's the point? The SWP goes leafleting, we do the cooking. Everyone is happy doing what they want. Why have meetings?" But once the meetings started, the climate-camp activists were very constructive. There has been more of a problem with the SWP, often quick to say: "No more talking! There's leafleting to be done! Let's go!"

SWP

At Vestas, the SWP has made a good positive contribution. The deficiencies of the SWP here as a serious socialist group are not lapses such as any group is bound to make, but limitations of the SWP at its best.

It has been much more concerned about using its SWP machine to prove itself the "best builder" than to argue for or promote wider working-class self-organisation. Few of its leaflets and speeches at or around the roundabout have got much beyond a combination of

a few populist ideas: capitalism bad, bankers bad, anger good, SWP brilliant.

The whole method is typified by the SWP's current "big campaign", pushed at Vestas as elsewhere, to get people along to a demonstration at Labour Party conference on 27 September which was originally called by the college lecturers' union UCU as a lobby for "jobs, education, and peace" but has been re-branded by the SWP as "Rage against Labour".

Rage against Labour? The Tories and UKIP dislike Labour. Obviously this is meant to be a different "rage". So the SWP clarifies, by stressing specific, reasoned objectives? No. The organised socialists, the SWP, are less specific about their aims and strategies than the UCU union bureaucrats! They just want to be the "best builders" of general "rage".

The SWP has ventured distinctive ideas at Vestas on three main occasions. For 29 July, the first court hearing on the Vestas bosses' move to get a possession order, they effectively advocated a general strike on the Isle of Wight: "every bus worker, every council worker, every worker on the ferries [to] show up at the courtroom instead of going to work". Such talk just fills the space for proper strategic debate with unrealistic noise.

The Vestas workers and the RMT got talks with the Government on 6 August. Workers' representative Mike Godley initially reported back, rather despondently, that as far as he could see the Government was sympathetic, doing all it could, but ineffective. SWPer Jonathan Neale told the factory gate rally that we were "halfway to victory" and needed only to clinch the commitments.

At a strategy meeting on 10 August, shortly after the occupiers were evicted, the SWP moved prematurely to shift the focus off picketing and onto a "long campaign" of meetings and demonstrations round the country.

In all three cases, the SWP soon retreated: explicitly recognising that illegal strike action would be difficult to get and should not be counted on; registering that the Government had actually committed itself to nothing; reaffirming the importance of the pickets. But no self-criticism, no direct and open discussion. *Socialist Worker* has airbrushed AWL and Workers' Climate Action out of its reports on Vestas; and the SWP has quietly "briefed" its members with an inaccurate history (claiming AWL got "out of our depth" with local union officials, and needed SWP to rescue the campaign!)

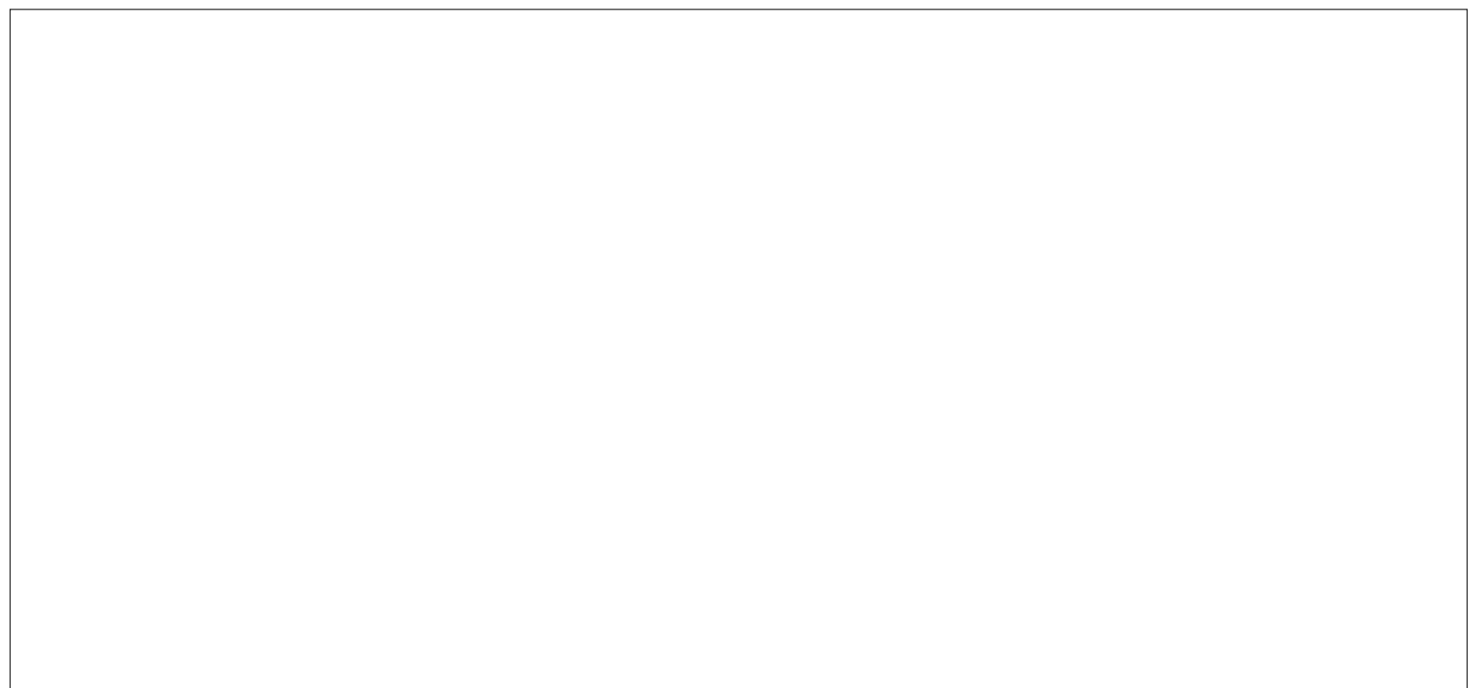
The Green Party's response has been poor. The Green Party Trade Union Group turned up with a stall for a day or so, and a few individuals who happened to be members of the Green Party have come to the roundabout, but that is it.

SOCIALIST PARTY, LIB-DEMS, LABOUR

Smaller left groups (including some, e.g. Socialist Resistance, who make a big deal about their commitment to environmental politics) have done little about Vestas. Maybe you can put that down to lack of resources.

With the Socialist Party you cannot. Though not a large group, the SP has areas of strength in nearby Southampton and Portsmouth.

The SP turned up in some numbers for Vestas rallies and demonstrations for a



All together at the rally outside the occupation

The story so far....

28 April: After telling workers, in 2008, that they planned to re-fit the factories in 2009 to produce larger blades with a better production process, the Danish based multinational Vestas announces instead that it will close the Isle of Wight wind turbine blade factories, the only such factories in Britain..

15 June: Workers' Liberty activists arrive in the Isle of Wight to start leafleting and talking to workers about the Vestas factory closure and ways to resist it.

3 July: Workers' Climate Action and Cowes Trades Council call a public meeting to discuss campaigning against the closure of the Vestas factories.

Two weeks starting 6 July: A minority of workers begin to discuss action. As the conversations spread, the idea grows that there are alternatives. Meanwhile public campaigning against the closure continues on the streets of the Isle of Wight.

Wednesday 15 July: Government publishes a White Paper calling for 7000 extra wind turbines in Britain in coming years. (3000 are currently operating or being installed).

Monday 20 July: Vestas management hear about the conversations and try to forestall action by threatening workers. 7.30pm: workers decide that they should move before the management try further pre-emptive action, and occupy the St Cross factory.

From Tuesday 21 July: Vestas bosses tell all other workers, at Venture Quays as well as St Cross, to stay home (on full pay) instead of working. Workers rally outside the St Cross front gate. They elect a committee to organise their campaign. Management make repeated empty threats against the occupiers. They also refuse to let in food. Support comes in from FBU, Unison, CWU, GMB, PCS, and especially from the leaders of the Portsmouth RMT branch, which organises the Portsmouth-IoW ferries.

Wednesday 22 July: A Families and Community Campaign is set up to back the Vestas workers.

Thursday 23 July: The Vestas story reaches the front page of the national press (the *Independent*). Ed Miliband writes an evasive letter to the *Guardian* about Vestas. Vestas bosses start supplying food to the workers, but serve summonses for a court hearing on 29 July for a possession order. RMT leader Bob Crow comes to Vestas and offers RMT lawyers to help the workers.

Friday 24 July: Many Vestas workers join RMT so that it can represent them with the Vestas bosses. 300 people march from Newport town centre to the St Cross factory.

Saturday 25 July: Vestas bosses start giving the occupiers hot food.

Tuesday 28 July: Vestas bosses issue notices of dismissal to eleven workers.

Wednesday 29 July: Court hearing on Vestas bosses' claim for a possession order. Case adjourned to 4 August.

Saturday 1 August: Police and Vestas bosses allow RMT to take extra food into the factory. (However, this proves to be a one-off).

Monday 3 August: Workers' Climate Action activists show solidarity with workers by supergluing themselves to block the entrance to the government Department of Energy and Climate Change. The TUC puts out a statement calling on the Government to intervene to save jobs.

Tuesday 4 August: Sixteen union leaders publish a stronger statement of support: leaders of Unite, Unison, GMB, and CWU are not among the sixteen. Vestas bosses win their "possession order" in court. Activists occupy the roof of the Vestas factory at Venture Quays in East Cowes, and use its prominent waterfront position to display solidarity banners.

Thursday 6 August: Climate change minister Joan Ruddock meets RMT and Vestas workers (and TUC and Unite reps). She offers warm words but no commitment; claims that Government tried to buy the Vestas factories, but Vestas refused. Government agrees to continue talks with RMT.

Friday 7 August: Occupiers evicted, despite Workers' Climate Action mobilising 25 activists from London to join the Isle of Wight picket from 3am. Occupiers remain defiant. At the 6pm rally at the St Cross factory gate, they call for the pickets to be continued and built up into a blockade.

Saturday 8 August: Workers and supporters, marching from a rally in Newport town centre, briefly reoccupy the factory grounds.

Sunday 9 August: Well-attended meeting of Vestas workers and supporters in Newport debates strategy for the next phase.

Monday 10 August: Workers and supporters start a presence at the back gate of the Newport factory. Vestas bosses responded by erecting fences all across the back of the factory.

Wednesday 12 August: National day of action. Five rallies on the Isle of Wight; meetings and protests all over the country; Workers' Climate Action activists occupy South East England Development Authority offices.

Friday 14 August: The East Cowes occupiers come down from the roof. Back pay and redundancy money goes into workers' bank accounts. The workers continue the campaign with a continued picket, a demonstration in Ryde on 15 August, and plans for a national day of action on 17 September.

Monday 17 August: Vestas brings in its "clean-up" team, but workers picket the factory gates in protest. Workers and supporters stage "sit-in picnic" protest at local Job Centre

Tuesday 18 August: Vestas bosses announced their latest financial results. They expect revenue to rise by 20% to 7.2 billion euros this year, and the operating margin (of profit) to be between 11% and 13%.

No Nimbyism here

short while, then quit. Like AWL and SWP, they promoted their own papers and leaflets. Fair enough. Unlike AWL and SWP, they showed little interest in leafleting and so on for the broad campaign.

Maybe the SP leaflets were so insightful that this matters little? On the contrary, they reflected the idea that "Marxism" means switching off your brain and using stereotype phrases like "mass action" as cure-alls. For example, when climate-camp activists got food to the occupiers, and thus forced the Vestas bosses to start providing food, the SP rebuked them. It should be done "not through short-term stunts, but by mobilising hundreds of people... to put pressure on everywhere we can". Aha! Now we know the answer to the problem of no dinner in the St Cross factory! Mass action, "everywhere".

Mostly, the SP leaflets were about urging us to vote SP, or for some coalition including the SP, at the coming general election. The cited grounds: that workers need a "political party [that] has sent its leaders to the picket and stands shoulder to shoulder with the Vestas workers".

On that criterion, the SP comes out no better than the Lib-Dems. One local councillor — a maverick Lib-Dem, but a Lib-Dem — has been very active supporting the pickets. The local Lib Dem parliamentary candidate has turned up from time to time, offering vague sympathy. The Lib Dem parliamentary front bencher for Energy, Simon Hughes, came to the picket line, and (initially, at least: I think later debate swung opinion) got a favourable response from some workers and some climate-camp activists. One of the most active climate-camp people from the mainland at the roundabout is a Lib-Dem councillor in her home town.

Yet this is the same Simon Hughes that boasted when standing for London mayor that he would see off the RMT; the same Lib-Dem party that has policy to ban all strikes in "essential services"; the same Lib-Dem party that is positioning itself to form a coalition government with the Tories in case of a hung parliament.

Oddly, when workers' committee members were questioning Simon Hughes, and local Tory MP Andrew Turner, they addressed them as representatives of "Government", despite both representing opposition parties. Hughes and Turner did not contradict them much, since they do not disagree much with Government policy on

Vestas. But that a view of "Government" as a sort of joint affair of all the parties, more or less indistinguishable in their distance from everyday life, seems plausible shows how far democracy in Britain has withered.

The Labour Party has never had a strong presence on the Isle of Wight. The Isle of Wight [IoW] parliamentary constituency has always been Conservative, Liberal, or Lib-Dem. The Labour vote there has dropped as low as 2.4% (1983), and has recovered only to 17%.

The local Labour Party has related to Vestas as if it is overwhelmed with shame about the Labour government. The most active among IoW trade unionists in support of the Vestas workers has been Unison local government branch secretary Mark Chiverton, constantly helpful, frequently on the picket line. He is also the local Labour parliamentary candidate; but he never mentions that when speaking to campaign meetings.

Richard Howard, the Portsmouth RMT branch secretary who has given tireless and vital help to the workers, especially in the first days of the occupation, is also an active member of the Isle of Wight Labour Party. You would not know that unless you questioned him closely.

Ryde Trades Council secretary Tony Kelly, also very active in support of the Vestas workers, is a member of the Co-operative Party, a shadowy "little-sister" party whose main political activity is to co-sponsor Labour parliamentary candidates (as "Labour and Co-op"). Again, you wouldn't know it.

Geoff Lumley, the one Labour member on the county council, moved the motion on the council to back the workers. But then he accepted a Tory amendment to blur the motion. The local Labour Party has given a big donation to the workers' fund, and brought its members to the demonstrations; but when the Labour Party banner was brought to the roundabout, it was quickly removed, apparently because of a hostile reaction. A Lib-Dem banner managed to keep its place there longer, though that too was eventually removed.

The Vestas campaign should feed into a broader battle for jobs, for workers' rights, and for green policies, on the island. For that, a socialist organisation on the island is needed, one that can set itself to studying and educating as well as agitating, and one that promotes the self-organisation of a broader local labour movement and working-class unity in action.

Erecting the fences

AN ARGUMENT WITH JOAN RUDDOCK

Why wind turbine production should be publicly owned

BY JOAN TREVOR

Joan Ruddock MP, Climate Change minister, agreed to meet supporters of the Save Vestas campaign during her constituency surgery in Deptford, south London, on 7 August, the same day that the last Vestas occupiers left the plant on the Isle of Wight.

She was standing in for Ed Miliband, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, who was away in Brazil lecturing them on their responsibilities as a developing nation to mitigate climate change — but that's an aside.

The previous day Ruddock had met two Vestas workers together with union officials from the RMT, Unite, and the TUC.

Q: What has the government done to save the jobs at Vestas?

R: I'll tell you what I told a delegation of Vestas workers, the RMT, Unite, the TUC yesterday. We've done a lot. Months ago we had notice of the potential closure. We asked Vestas, what help can we give you as a government?

There was no help that we could give them. They did not want money. They wanted to move the factory for their own commercial reasons. Let me tell you about their product. The blades they make are 40 metres long, they are not suitable for use in the UK...

Q: But they can convert the factory to make blades that are suitable...

R: They can convert the factory. There was discussion about that. The workers told us that until recently the conversion was going to go ahead. I don't know the details of why that did not go ahead.

It is not just here, they have made a large number of people unemployed in Denmark as well, where they are based.

Q: Why not nationalise the plant? You have stepped in to nationalise the banks because there was a need to shore up the financial system. The government has set very high targets for expanding renewable energy, and very high targets for cutting carbon emissions. Is that not a similar emergency that would justify the government stepping in?

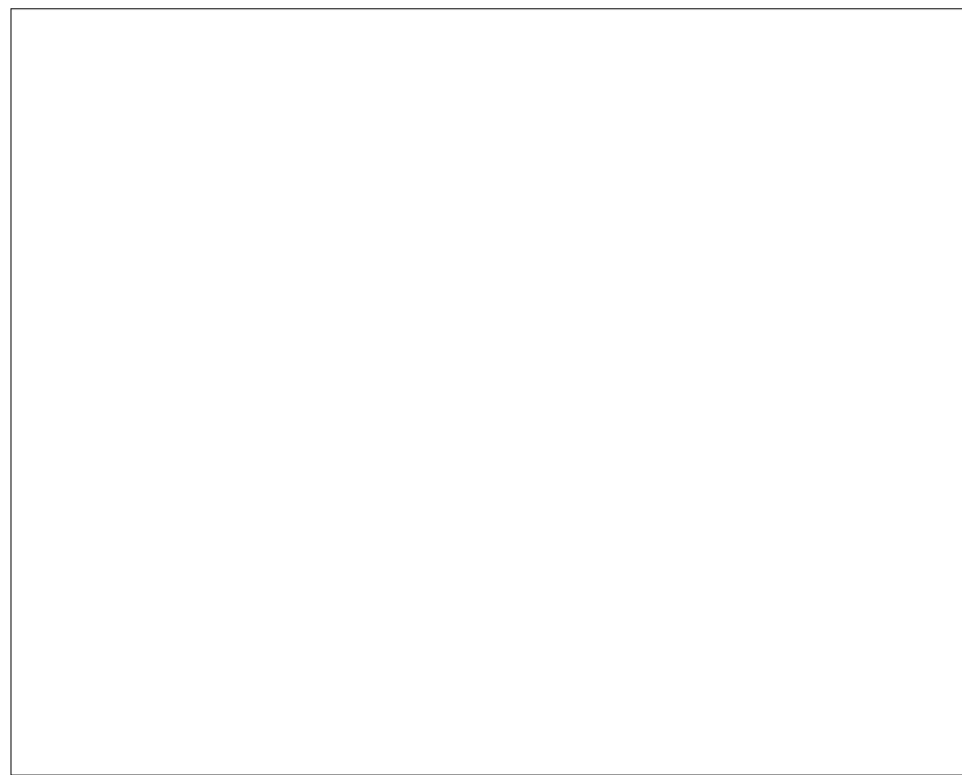
R: It's not up for sale! We can't just nationalise a whole company.

Q: Not the company, the plant. We cannot let meeting the targets depend on the business decisions of private companies. We will not meet the targets if we do that...

R: We will meet these targets!... We are not going to nationalise. You have a different model.

We have offered Vestas £6 million to develop the R&D facility on the Isle of Wight. That will be 150 jobs — it's not 600, but it is something. Vestas will accept £6 million for that.

We will meet the targets on the present model of letting the market do it. We do agree on the general point of keeping manufacturing jobs in the UK. We are



having ongoing discussion about how we keep and develop the skilled manufacturing jobs here.

Q: Closure of the plant is devastating for the Isle of Wight employment situation which is already bad, with 100 applicants for each job. What will you do to save this community?

R: We have set up a taskforce, with the South East England Development Agency, we are putting in place the support structures, and continuing to work to maximise business start-ups. Vestas might keep the plant and reopen again when conditions are right.

Q: Why should progress rely on business decisions of private firms?

R: You all have a different philosophy from me about what is the best way to produce jobs.

Q: Can we subsidise travel between the Island and the mainland, so that young people can have more mobility? Travel is very expensive at the moment.

R: I don't know, that is not my department.

Q: You have a belief in the market — that's your philosophy. But what about being practical? Have you done a feasibility study into whether it would be better economically overall to nationalise the plant?

R: There has not been a feasibility study because we are not going to nationalise, because we are sticking to our principles.

Q: Your belief in markets is like a religious belief.

R: We live in a market economy, all the advanced economies think the same.

Q: We live in a mixed economy, there is a lot of state intervention in the economy and the balance shifts back and forth depending on politics. These companies do not do what they do out

Outside Minister Joan Ruddock's surgery

of a love for the people who make the profits for them. They go where profits are highest. What do you think should happen to the workers who occupied, who drew our attention to this issue?

R: We will look at all the issues raised by workers about their jobs. I've asked my opposite numbers in the Department of Work and Pensions to look at what can be done for the workers.

Q: Will you undertake a feasibility study?

A: It's not appropriate! The government does not want to be producers of wind turbines, and we did not want to be bankers.

Q: Not even to save the environment?

Q: The Tories nationalised Rolls Royce...

R: That's another story...

Q: Nationalisation is what happened with East Coast Mainline. You nationalised it while you look for another buyer. Can't you do that with this plant? Nationalisation doesn't have to be like the nationalisations of the 1970s.

A: We are pulling out all the stops — short of nationalisation!

Ruddock's basic argument is that the capitalist market can provide the solution to climate change. She says that not nationalising Vestas is a matter of "sticking to our principles"!

The government claims that the shift that we need to make to using renewable energy, including wind energy, is best achieved by helping the market in renewable energy to grow, and private companies involved in this sector to make profits.

"The market" is really only the right of capitalist companies to seek maximum profits where they can. Companies like

BP can shift into "renewables" if that looks more profitable, or out if it doesn't.

The government is prepared to juggle with taxes and to offer incentives, such as the £6 million it gave to Vestas to invest in research and development on the Isle of Wight. But if the market does not allow companies like Vestas to make as much profit in the UK as they can make elsewhere — eg, Colorado, USA, where most of the "Isle of Wight" work is going, and the government's attempts to bend the market fail, then that's it. The government will not nationalise the industry or take on the development of renewable energy in the public sector. That, for Ruddock, is "principle"!

The contrast with the government's attitude to the banking sector is stark. The financial system must be shored up, even if that means nationalisation. But the climate? Leave that to the market.

Ruddock insists that the UK will meet its targets for CO2 reduction by continuing on the tracks that it is going down now. But the figures so far do not bear that out.

Ruddock's statement that the government does not want to make wind turbines or run banks begs the question, what does the government want to do? On this trend, it is only a matter of time before Ruddock states that the government doesn't want to run hospitals or schools either. The government will regulate private trade, and commission public services, and that is all.

In other words, vital services will only be provided as, when, and how they make a profit for private companies.

Companies relying on public contracts will obviously try to get away with providing as little as they can for the money they are paid. Meanwhile, when the government accepts private companies as partners it implicitly takes the side of those companies in any disputes it has with its employees.

That is very clear in the Vestas dispute. Of all the questions that we asked Ruddock, the one she seemed most hostile to answering was whether the government should press for reinstatement of the Vestas workers who were sacked for occupying their plant.

All she would say was that she would talk to her opposite numbers in the Department for Work and Pensions. About what? The workers getting the dole they are entitled to anyway, without her talking?

Vestas workers are adamant on that: they want to continue making wind turbine blades, but do not want to continue working for Vestas. They want to work for the good of the whole community instead, in a nationalised plant, with a management accountable to them.

They can see that "the market" will provide neither decent jobs nor the necessary transition to a sustainable economy. Joan Ruddock cannot because she has blinded herself with New Labour "principle".

THE OCCUPIERS

“Together we can be much stronger”

Ian Terry is a worker in the finishing shop at the Newport Vestas factory, and was one of the occupiers

Id say that the views I have now have always been there, but now I've see the chance of a fightback, rather than giving up. I've always thought the way things are run was wrong, but before, I'd never seen a chance for people to stand up together and change things.

It's a matter of organising workers to stand up for themselves. The anti-union laws are against us, but the numbers are in our favour, and we have to make sure we get those laws changed.

The main priority now is building people's confidence, highlighting to people that they are not on their own, and that together we can be much stronger.

I knew, working for Vestas, that the management were wary of unions. I don't think I realised just how important

unions are. After the miners were smashed in 1984-5, a lot of people's confidence in unions went down. But there are still good unions out there, willing to organise the workers and take up the fight for them.

Unite, I think, has been poor because it is too closely affiliated with Labour. They didn't want to rock the boat.

But that can't be all of it. You've had unions affiliated to Labour who have supported you well, and unions that aren't affiliated to Labour who haven't. Isn't it also a question of the degree of democracy and accountability in the union, and the strength of the rank and file?

Yes, you have to make sure the people making the big decisions in the unions can understand the workers' struggles rather than being paid big salaries. The same goes for politicians, doesn't it? They'd be reined in a lot more if they

were in the same economic position that we're in. At present there is obviously a big gap between the full-time union officials, and the lives they're able to live, and the workers they represent.

In this campaign, a combination of many different reasons to fight has brought everyone together. People have started to realise that everything is affected by the rule of profit — how profit dictates how things go.

The reason why Vestas have been able to do what they've done is that the mar-

ket is run for profit, not for people. As in the unions, the people at the top are comfortable. They don't have to think about the people who are being affected by job losses or wage cuts. Human beings aren't brought in to the equation.

When industry is run for goals other than profit — when it is run for the usefulness of the things it builds and the good of the people it employs and of the environment — that is much better. More money would be delivered back into the community.

We've had support from all different types of people who I'd never thought would support us, people who don't even know us. It's been really good. And they all get along together, they're all pulling towards the same objective.

Those of who came from the mainland came because we saw Vestas as part of a bigger battle about jobs, about workers' rights, and about the future of the planet...

You're spot-on about that. That's what has brought a lot of people to support us. People can see that from the point of view of the future of the planet, it's dire closing places like this.

I'm glad I went into the occupation, even though so far I've lost money from it. If I'd done nothing and just walked away, then six months down the line, and for the rest of life, I'd be kicking myself, thinking about what we could have done. It comes to a point where you have to stand up and fight for what you believe is right.

If you don't stand up and fight, you just get pushed around.

Now we have to keep up the pressure on Vestas and a lot of pressure on the Government — keep everything going, build on what we have already achieved, make it bigger and bigger.

We have to get everybody, nationally, to pull together, for us and for themselves. If workers stick together in the future, and we all stand up and support each other, then we can change things.

You've seen different unions reacting differently in this campaign...

I joined Unite before the occupation, purely in order to have legal assistance. But then Unite didn't turn up at all, for a long time, and when they did, they weren't that interested. Unite people had been told not to get involved.

RMT did turn up, and have been a lot more militant. It's a question of the relation between what you say, and what you're actually willing to do.

“We're doing something for the future”

Chris Ash is a worker at the East Cowes Vestas factory, and was one of the occupiers in Newport.

The last three weeks have not just changed my views, but changed my life. Before, I was just a normal worker. I came into work, I did the job. I didn't really care what I was building. I got paid and I went home.

Now I understand that we're doing something for the future, for our kids and our grandkids. It's going to help change the future of the world if we can get this factory nationalised or we can keep it open.

I have no regrets about taking part in the occupation. I'm proud of myself and what I've done. Everyone calls me a hero. I don't feel myself to be a hero, but I certainly wish I could do it all over again with what I know now.

I think a lot of unions have got involved in this because it is a green issue. They haven't been able to speak out before because they need the workers to step in. It has brought a lot of unions together, where before they were just out for themselves.

We need to build up a lot more support, and get a lot more people campaigning to push the Government and the councils.

Wind turbines are important for the future. We're certainly not giving up the fight.

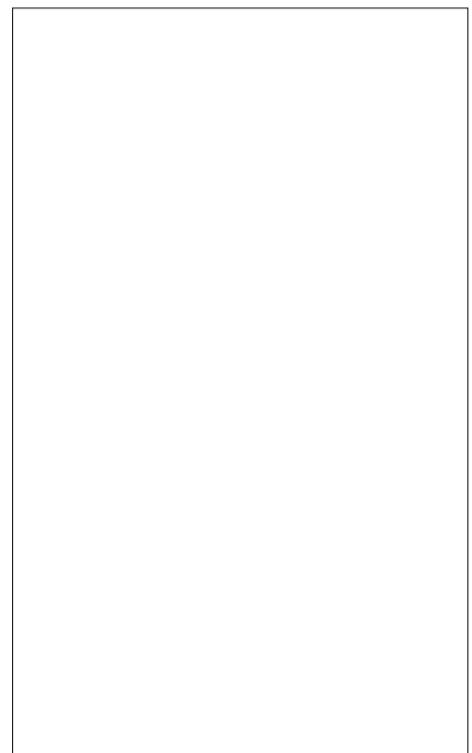
I didn't know much about socialist and environmental activism before. I thought it was a matter of "tree-huggers" and "eco-warriors". Now I have a lot of respect for the campaigns and the actions of the people who have come to help.

I've worked for the company for three years. You get treated like rubbish. To the management, you are just a number; you're not an individual. You get screwed over at every opportunity.

In the occupation, they sent us our termination of contract notices with a slice of pizza. When they served the injunction, they went round posting it through people's letterboxes, harassing people's families. They made no attempt to talk to us directly.

When I first came across people talking about resisting the closure, I didn't think much of it. I only got involved in the two or three weeks before the occupation. I think a lot of other workers' views changed in the same way.

We came to be friends rather than just colleagues, to stand together and to look out for each other. It's brought the island closer together. Five of the other people who were in the occupation I didn't even know before, and now I would count them among my best friends.



“Build on what we have achieved”

Mark Smith is a worker in the finishing shop at the Newport Vestas factory, and was one of the occupiers

Without a doubt, the last three weeks have changed my view of the world. Firstly, on the question of unions. I'd probably never work at a place that didn't want a union, or I'd be very wary of it.

Debating how to save the planet

BY BOB SUTTON

On 26 August hundreds, more likely thousands, of activists will execute a mass land squat somewhere inside the M25 and set up this year's Camp for Climate Action.

There are four themes for the camp this year:

- Education, through a programme of over 100 workshops;
- Sustainable Living, demonstrated the physical infrastructure of the camp;
- Direct Action, training for and executing the physical obstruction of the processes that drive climate change;
- Movement Building.

This year's location was not chosen to target a specific industry or installation (as locations have been for the past three summers). After the massive shocks endured by world banking this year, the location has been chosen to demonstrate that the global ecological crisis is rooted in "the economic system", with the City of London at its centre.

Workers' Climate Action is calling on trade unionists and working-class activists to come and help build the camp and build a movement to fight the destruction of the planet.

The mass organisation and democratic structures on the scale shown by the camp are something to be learned from. Taking these methods into the wider workers' movement is one of the key ideas behind the setting up of the Workers' Climate Action Network.

The amount of training in direct action at the camp is unparalleled. The schedule includes daily mass action training in which people can learn how to use their numbers to overwhelm police lines as well as more specific skills. In the coming period of increased class struggle, and the examples of police violence we have already faced, the occupations, and the success of more imaginative and militant tactics has shown that knowledge of such things is something our movement will need.

Just as we have at previous camps at Heathrow and Kingsnorth, and throughout the past two years, WCA

activists will be arguing that we should build on the broadly anti-capitalist politics of the camp and that we should understand that it is people's relationship with what they need to live and produce that shapes society. We see climate change as a question of class struggle — Who runs the workplace? Who runs society?

The solidarity built, the exchange of ideas, and probably most of all the events of the past year, have already amounted to a sea change in the way many in the environmental movement relate to class politics

Many workers and supporters from the campaign to stop the closure of the Vestas factory plan to come to the camp in a contingent from the Isle of Wight, looking to share the experience of their struggle, learn new skills, build links, and gain support for their campaign.

Workers' Climate Action will be holding four workshops, all over the bank holiday weekend:

- **Sunday 30 August 10.30-11.30: Women and the miners' strike.**

This workshop aims to demonstrate that the ideas of workers in struggle can be transformed. With conscious solidarity, divisions in the working class can be overcome.

- **Sunday 30 August 14.30-16.00: Workers' Climate Action: climate change is a class issue**

A basic introduction to the ideas and activity of the WCA network.

- **Sunday 30 August 16.30-18.30: Visteon, Lindsey, Lucas and Workers-Led Just Transition.**

How do we relate to the most socially and environmentally damaging industries? Can workers take control and transform their workplaces?

- **Monday 31 August 16.30-18.30: Vestas — the fight to save a wind turbine factory**

An account of the workers' factory occupation and campaign — fighting not just over jobs or pay, but over a technology we need to save the planet.

- www.climatecamp.org.uk
- workersclimateaction.wordpress.com

THE STUDENT

Our generation needs the future jobs

Lanah Moody is a student at Ryde High School. Her father Justin Moody was one of the occupiers at the Newport factory.

The last three weeks have been incredible. I've not really had anything to do with environmental activists and all the political groups before, and it has opened my eyes. Reading the socialist papers, I now know that we don't realise how much happens, all over the world, that we don't hear in the mainstream news.

And I've seen how hypocritical it is, the way the Government is running the country.

My dad did talk to me about it before he went into the occupation, but at first I didn't really know what to think about it. The first few days were absolutely mad. And now the campaign has spread much further, all across the world. It has even been mentioned in the *New York Times*.

Now we have to keep going, keep spreading the word, getting in more people, making the campaign stronger, coming up with new ideas. We can't just let it fade away. We have to be persistent.

All of my friends basically agree. At the end of the day, it's our generation that depends on the future jobs. We're all wor-



ried that we may have to move off the island. The campaign has made people re-think everything. A couple of my friends have helped me with leafleting. I'm going to try to make sure that some of them come to some meetings with me and come to understand more of the politics involved.

I've always wanted to get into politics anyway, so this has been my way in, learning by intuition. There haven't been any political groups or environmental groups on the island before, but there should be.

THE WORKER

Working together gets things done

Tracey Yeates is a worker in the finishing shop at the Vestas Newport factory, and a member of the RMT workers' committee

The last three weeks have taught me that if people work together, we can get things done, and we can, as a group, make a change. Perhaps before I would have turned away. I think it's changed me as well as my opinions.

I've come to realise how much of a bad employer Vestas were. Before, I tended to believe what the management said and not what the workforce was saying. But now that is changed.

What's made the difference? I suppose at the start it was because you, the activists from outside, showed us how we could do something. Then we had our own way of doing things. If everyone puts their own unique bit in, it makes a bigger picture, doesn't it?

With Vestas, it is the first time I've ever worked for a company. I was always self-

employed before, and I worked on my own — I was an area manager for Betterware UK — so I looked at things a different way. It suited me when the children were younger, because I could work from home, but then when they grew up, I looked for something else, and since I'd always been green-minded, I came here.

I don't believe the company should be allowed to do this. They have no regard for their workers or for the community.

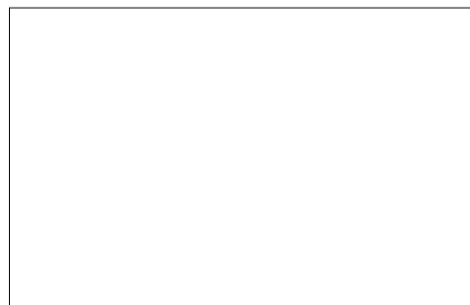
It's difficult for me to say how this has changed my view of unions, because my husband used to be an active trade unionist, a TGWU branch official, at Ford in Southampton, and it seemed to me like he was always out on strike.

The RMT seem to be quite well-organised. My husband is a prison officer now, and he is in the POA. They don't seem to be well organised or have any clout.

Myself, I don't think I would work again for an employer that didn't have a union. I would definitely make sure I was in a union before I worked anywhere else.

Now, we've got to make sure that the lads who were in occupation get reinstated. That has got to be number one priority. I want to see green jobs on the island, of some sort — if it can't be Vestas, then somebody else.

I worry for the future of the island community. We already have an ageing population here. As jobs go, young families will move away, and before we know it, schools will be closing



Using our skills to support the workers

Jacqueline Sheedy was one of the activists who occupied the roof of the smaller Vestas factory in East Cowes from 4 to 14 August.

When I came to the Isle of Wight, I wanted to use the skills and commitment I have to support the workers. We found that the workers really wanted to get that East Cowes building occupied in some way, so it was a way we could support the workers.

I'm glad we did it. I had a great time. Up on the roof, the days passed very quickly. That is partly because everything took a very long time — even walking from one place to another, because it's a sloping roof.

We brought lots of books up to read, but we never had time to read them. We had workshops on various skills, like knot-tying. We tied pallets to the side of the roof, so that we could have somewhere flat to sleep. At the end we had a computer and an internet connection up there.

We collected masses of rainwater in a tarpaulin, we heated it in black bin-liners, and on the day of the Cowes Week fireworks, I was able to have a shower with that water. It was the most memorable shower I've ever had!

Most of all, we spent lots of time talking. It was a real mixture of people up on the roof — some, like me, who had been activists for a long time, and some much newer activists.

I've been an environmental and social

justice activist for about 20 years. I'm not affiliated to any particular group.

It excites me that workers can take action in their own workplaces as they have done here. We felt that there are certain things that we, with our experience, can bring to a campaign like this, and we wanted to be part of it.

We learned a lot of the intricacies of the campaign when we were up on the roof. We would talk to the managers, from the

roof, almost every day. In fact we discovered that we had more common ground with them than we thought, in opposing the planning laws and Nimbyism that stop wind-turbine development.

After we came down, we went to the constituency office of Andrew Turner, the local [Tory] MP. It was just shocking. He says that he is really into green energy, but he doesn't like wind turbines because they are ugly.

From the roof, we could see the beautiful Solent, but on the other side of the coast there is a huge oil refinery. The Government can get away with building oil refineries and things like that all over the place, yet you can't build a wind farm!

People have just got to change their attitude to wind turbines, and drop this idea that they are ugly and a blot on the landscape. What do they think is going to happen in 20 or 30 years, when climate change takes hold even more than now.

Quite a lot of people were slightly disappointed that we came down, because they know how the media works, and they thought the media would use it to say that the campaign is over. When the boys came off the balcony [at the Newport factory], they said the campaign was over.

It's total rubbish. The campaign is now in a new phase. Workers are going round the country and inspiring other workers and activists to take action. As for me, I will go to Climate Camp and talk to other activists there about my experience about how we can build on this coalition and support other workers in their struggles.

THE TRADE UNION AND LABOUR PARTY ACTIVIST

A catalyst for the island

Mark Chiverton is secretary of the Isle of Wight Unison local government branch, and the Labour prospective parliamentary candidate for the Isle of Wight constituency

We've had good support for strikes and industrial action on the island before, but certainly not this kind of campaign. This is unique, both in its national and international profile, and in the sheer courage, persistence, and commitment of the Vestas workers themselves.

We need to continue to build support, and get more island people involved.

This campaign can be a catalyst for some very positive things on the island. It shows that a group of relatively unorganised workers can achieve great things. A key lesson is that the unions need to be organising and recruiting more, and not just in our traditional areas of strength; and rebuilding links through Trades Councils.

Our local Unison members have been very supportive. We have had quite good numbers attending rallies and demonstrations, and beyond that a huge amount of interest and support behind the scenes. There's been no criticism at all of the branch's position of support for the Vestas workers.

We need to keep up the pressure on the local [Tory] council and the Government. The local Labour Party can have a role to play here.

In some ways it has been a difficult time for the Isle of Wight Labour Party. We have had large numbers of people at the

demonstrations, as well as working behind the scenes to get channels of communication to Ed Miliband, but it's been embarrassing for the Isle of Wight Labour Party to be in a position where the Government comes out with a commitment to lots of new green jobs but won't save the wind turbine blade factories from being closed.

The Isle of Wight council and the local [Tory] MP have been lamentable in terms of pandering to Nimbyism.

The Government has invested strongly in terms of research and development, but in terms of manufacturing jobs, the response is inadequate. I'd like to see public ownership of the Vestas factories to tide production over until such a time as wind turbine demand picks up.

If the Government is set against that strategy, I think it's essential that there is

urgent dialogue between the council, central Government, and the business community, to make sure that the Isle of Wight can continue to show a strong level of employment in green jobs and can preserve the skills that the Vestas workforce has got.

I'd call on other Labour Parties across the country to come on board for this campaign. I know a number of Labour MPs have signed an Early Day Motion [supporting the Vestas workers, initiated by John McDonnell], but it would be good to see one or two Labour MPs come to the island and talk to the Vestas workers.

It is very important for the credibility of the Labour Government that it responds positively to this campaign. Huge sections of the thinking public see the Government's stance on green jobs and on Vestas as a contradiction.

I'm sceptical about the Lib Dems claiming to support this campaign. I think they are quite opportunistic, saying different things in different places and at different times. I would recognise that one or two local Lib Dem activists have spent a lot of time on this campaign, but I believe that the wider labour movement needs to be spearheading the campaign.

I want to see a Labour government rather than a Lib-Dem government, but I want to see a very different sort of Labour government from this one — one that is in touch with its grass roots and one where there is much more vibrant and active grass-roots and trade-union campaigning which it responds to positively.

• Photos: Kirstie Ray

THE LOCAL ACTIVIST

Keep the campaign fresh

Jackie Hawkins is a local environmental and peace activist

What's most surprised me over the last three weeks is that people have remained solid, that they have stuck together and not drifted away.

The main priority now is new ideas; keeping the campaign fresh so that it does not stagnate; staying positive and keeping in mind that we can win.

In the Isle of Wight, the [Tory] council have an "eco-island" policy, and keep bleating on about how they want it to be a world-reknowned green island. They should grasp this opportunity and keep the factory open, as well as bringing more green jobs to the island.

This campaign has got a community together. All sorts of people have contributed by donating food or equipment for the picket.

I'm hoping that when the planning application for [wind turbines on] Cheverton Down comes up in October, we can outnumber the Nimbies. I would like to see a lot of people turn up at County Hall that day.

In the last couple of months, there have been a lot of socialist and environmental activists coming from the mainland to support the Vestas workers. What do you make of what we've done?

It's been great — something I've wanted to see for a long time. The island is a very conservative area. I don't mean only politically conservative: people tend to be wary of mainlanders.

I was nervous at first, because I'm originally an outsider myself, and I know the attitudes you can encounter. But in fact the people from the mainland have been very well received. I haven't heard any negative comments. That's brilliant, absolutely brilliant.

This is not just an island issue. It's not just nationwide. It is international. Yesterday I heard that we'd had support from young people in Australia.

It's fantastic, the way it has gone international. Maybe the revolution is going to start on the Isle of Wight. I wouldn't have dreamed it.

SOCIALIST ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Fighting for working class politics

BY RICK DENTON

The AWL is standing Jill Mountford against New Labour's Harriet Harman in the general election. Our election campaign continues to roll on, as the local AWL branch leaflets and runs stalls across the Peckham and Camberwell constituency.

Peckham has an acute housing problem, exacerbated by a recent major, fatal fire in an unsafe council block. On many local estates unemployment runs at 30%, with many other workers on minimum wage jobs.

Housing, pay and jobs are the key issues workers raise with us. The branch sold a large number of the recent issue of *Solidarity* with a heavy emphasis on the Vestas occupation, as we explained how workers could fightback to save jobs.

There is widespread hostility to politicians in general, and to Labour in particular. We have met very few workers who can name any real benefit from the New Labour government. The majority have no idea who their MP is.

We have also noticed a significant increase in the numbers of workers willing to stand and talk to us.

The local campaign plans a public debate, "What sort of government do we need?" on Thursday 8 October. Speakers will include Jill Mountford and Cllr Gordon Nardell, a Labour leftwinger. The Green Party and Respect, who are also standing in the constituency, have been invited to speak.

To help our comrades phone 0207 207 3997. Or email office@workersliberty.org.

IRAN AFTER THE ELECTION PROTESTS

The repression continues

Iranian socialist Nasrin Parvez was imprisoned for eight years by the Iranian regime during the 1980s. She spoke to *Solidarity* about why British socialists should make solidarity with Iranian political prisoners and workers.

The situation for Iranian political prisoners is very bad, getting worse. For example though they say they have shut down Kahrizak detention centre (outside Tehran) but they have not.

People are beginning to talk about how they have been raped in prison, following the June protests. This development started after a letter on the subject was issued by (opposition cleric) Mehdi Karroubi, calling for an enquiry. Rape has always happened in Iranian prisons and many people committed suicide because of their experience. But before now people did not talk about it, people didn't have a voice. [There have also been some demonstrations about the issue in Iran recently].

Internationally people are beginning to do something about it. For instance the friends and family of Zahra Kazemi, a dual Iranian-Canadian national, who was raped, tortured and murdered in 2003 after taking photos of Evin prison. There was a big cover up. They are pressing for the Canadian government to sue Iran in the International Court of Justice in the Hague.

They are still arresting people. 5,000 people have been put in jail in the last two months. Very many people, hundreds, more, are still missing. And they are trying to extract confessions. This is terrible, no matter who it is being done too (including former members of the Islamic regime).

On 19 August Iran will execute 21 year old Behnood Shojaie who committed a murder during a street fight in Tehran when he was 17. [Iran is the world leader in executing juveniles].

Our protest on 11 September, calling on the International Labour Organisation not to recognise Iran is important (see box). In the first place because a lot of workers are in prison. But also denying people the right to organise is a violation of human rights. If workers cannot organise they cannot defend themselves. For 30 years the Islamic regime has been trying very hard to stop workers from organising.

If the ILO decided not to recognise Iranian representatives [they are always from the government] this would give Iranian workers some hope. They will see that an international organisation has some sympathy

with them.

The Iranian government has signed all these ILO conventions (including one on gender equality!) but not implemented any of them. And they have not been punished. Why? It is because the governmental people in the ILO all want to carry on working with each other. And they do not care what is going on in Iran, what is happening to the workers, to the people.

But the ILO is not the same as the UN, because the international trade unions are involved. We might, by making this protest, get the trade unions to open their eyes. If the ILO is not for the workers' benefit then it is useless.

The least thing that European trade unions can call for is the same rights for all workers all over the world. No matter where they are born, no matter what work they do, workers need the same rights and the same wages. Global capitalism needs workers in Iran to be as exploited as they are. We should not let that happen. The cost of living in Iran is the same as it is in Europe. Yet wages are much much lower. If workers in Iran had the same wages as European workers, it would benefit everyone. European workers would not lose their jobs to "cheaper workers".

Trade unionists and trade unions, not just the left, need to put pressure on their international organisations, and build a campaign around this issue of equality, justice and rights.

Solidarity with Iranian Workers

Protest outside Iranian Embassy, Princes Gate, London, SW7 1PT
Friday 11 September 4.30-6.30 pm

- For the right to join and organise independent trade unions in Iran
- The International Labour Organisation should stop recognising Iran as a member state
- Free jailed trade unionists and all political prisoners

Deeper into the mire

From back page

When the Taliban ruled in the capital, Kabul, 1996-2001, they were widely hated, and never able to extend their rule to the whole of the country.

When the US bombed Afghanistan, after the Al Qaeda attack on the World Trade Centre on 9 September 2001, the Taliban quickly fled from the advancing troops of the Northern Alliance (Afghan warlords backed by the USA). On all evidence, the celebrations by the people of Kabul as the Taliban fell were genuine. Kabul's population has increased sizeably since then. The USA's announced plan was that aid from rich countries would rebuild and restabilise Afghanistan.

So what went wrong? Why do we think Workers' Liberty and *Solidarity* were right in 2001 to oppose the US-led war, despite our total opposition to the Taliban? Why is the Taliban so much stronger now?

Part of it is to do with developments in Pakistan, but much is to do with US policy in Afghanistan.

Out of the relatively small amount of non-military assistance that was sent to rebuild this bombed-out country, almost half wound up as profits for big contractors like Dyncorp, Louis Berger Group, and KBR. They were building substandard schools and roads, and clinics with no doctors. There was much talk about "nation building". More literal "building" — of decent schools, roads, and clinics — would have been better.

Arrogantly supposing that after a quick blast of US military force, every country in the world will just nat-

urally gravitate to a US-model market economy, the US military bombed lavishly, killing many civilians. They forgot that Afghanistan has always resisted foreign conquest, whatever the benign promises of the conquerors, and has never really even had effective central government.

Obama has talked about a different approach, but it is unlikely to be more than bits of "too little, too late". Even assuming the election goes as the USA wishes, what will the US troops sent to Taliban-dominated provinces like Helmand do then? Retreat and let the Taliban take over again? Or try vainly to establish permanent US military rule in the area, "fronted" by a few pliant Afghans?

Karzai says he wants to negotiate with the Taliban if he wins the presidential election. Rashid thinks that is possible.

"Many of the Afghan Taliban, the commanders and rank and file, are fighting for a whole variety of reasons that have nothing to do with global jihad, Al Qaeda, or even wanting to seize power. A lot of them are fighting because they're fed up with the lack of progress in their areas because of the destruction caused by American bombing. A lot of them may be getting paid by the Taliban. All sorts of things.

"These are the sort of categories that people today call the 'moderate Taliban'. They're not necessarily moderate, but they are people who are fighting for local grievances that could be addressed..."

It is not likely to happen, though, because the

Taliban's first demand is for a timetable for withdrawal of US troops; the USA will not agree; the Taliban, feeling themselves stronger, have little incentive to retreat on that demand; and Karzai depends a lot on US support.

Malalai Joya, the most outspoken of the few women elected to Afghanistan's parliament in 2005, says: "Like many other Afghans, I risked my life during the dark years of Taliban rule to teach at underground schools for girls. Today the situation of women is as bad as ever. Victims of abuse and rape find no justice because the judiciary is dominated by fundamentalists. A growing number of women, seeing no way out of the suffering in their lives, have taken to suicide by self-immolation..."

"Some say that if foreign troops leave Afghanistan will descend into civil war. But what about the civil war and catastrophe of today? The longer this occupation continues, the worse the civil war will be".

In many other situations, this argument that a civil war following occupation will only be worse the longer the occupation continues is an evasion, a device to avoid thinking about awkward facts. In this case, the balance of evidence, from the last eight years, is that it is probably true.

The troops should withdraw from Afghanistan. Socialists in Britain should give maximum solidarity to the women's movement and other democratic forces in Afghanistan, and solidarise with the defence of the cities against rural-based ultra-Islamists

HARRY PATCH

A human understanding of war

BY BRUCE ROBINSON

Harry Patch, the last surviving British soldier to have fought in the First World War, died aged 111 in July. Conscripted in 1917, he went “over the top” at the Battle of Passchendaele, in which half a million men died on both sides. It was probably only his being seriously injured and taken out of the front line that enabled him to survive the war and live to such a great age.

For many years, Patch did not talk about the war, working as a plumber and acting as a fireman in the Second World War. Only when he was one of the last remaining soldiers and aged 100 did he begin to talk about his experiences.

The person who emerged into the spotlight was someone who hated war, which he described as “organised murder” and the result of quarrels between politicians, who should have fought it out amongst themselves rather than causing the death of millions. “The First World War, if you boil it down, what was it? Nothing but a family row. That’s what caused it. The Second World War...Hitler wanted to govern Europe, nothing to it. I would have taken the Kaiser, his son, Hitler, and the people on his side and bloody shot them. Out the way and saved millions of lives. ‘Tisn’t worth it.”

It is unclear whether Patch was an absolute pacifist, who would not have fought under any circumstances. But it is clear that he wished to commemorate the First World War in a non-militarist and deeply human way, not restricted to those who fought on the same side.

He met a German veteran of the war and, in a recent BBC film, can also be seen placing a Cross of

Remembrance on a German war grave. This was not merely a gesture of reconciliation but a recognition that the soldiers on both sides had faced the same fate and shared a common humanity.

I found this particularly moving as my two grandfathers fought on opposing sides on the Western Front. One in the British Army won the MC for killing Germans. The other won the Iron Cross for killing Brits or French (which did not save him from getting murdered by the Nazis).

Patch’s death faced the British establishment with a problem. As the last soldier, he had to be commemorated, but his views and clearly expressed wishes for his funeral (where his coffin was carried by British, French, Belgian and German soldiers) meant that he could not just be treated like any other prominent soldier and given a military funeral.

Gordon Brown, who has the ability to strike the wrong note by repeating a cliché on almost any occasion, talked about Patch “fighting for our freedoms”. Yet during the First World War many British soldiers — not to mention women or many peoples of the British empire — would not have had the right to vote. And on returning from the war, many of them were thrown on the scrap heap without jobs or the promised “homes fit for heroes”.

It is appropriate that the last survivor of the First World War should have been someone who used his longevity to speak of the horror and pointlessness of that war. Even if we have a more radical view of why the war happened, Patch deserves recognition and respect as someone from whom it elicited a human understanding rather than nationalist or militarist hatreds.

SIEGFRIED SASSOON

After war, a new world?

Siegfried Sassoon is best known as a “war poet” of the First World War. But after the war he became involved in the Labour Party, and covered union issues as a journalist. He was the literary editor of the Labour newspaper *Daily Herald* for a brief period in 1919, and continued to write poetry.

Before the end of the war Sassoon was converted to leftist and anti-war politics by H G Wells and other literary lefts. In 1917 he refused to return to the front, writing an anti-war manifesto, *Declaration Against War*. “I am making this statement as an act of wilful defiance of military authority, because I believe that the War is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it.”

Sassoon avoided otherwise certain court martial after an intervention from his friend Robert Graves. Instead he was pronounced to have had a nervous breakdown (how else to explain being against the war?), and was sent to a psychiatric hospital for officers. But, feeling guilty at leaving behind men under his command to die in and outside the trenches, he returned to active service.

Sassoon’s post-war poems dealt with his and other veterans’ attitudes towards the war and the peace, the new conditions of exploitation created by the capitalist class in the 1920s. Britain was in no way the “land fit for heroes” promised by Lloyd George. The veterans faced unemployment, homelessness, and no state help if they were disabled.

Such conditions gave rise to a veterans’ movement; one veterans’ group was the National Union of Ex-Servicemen. Their manifesto clearly identified their

cause with that of the broader working-class movement: “We are ex-Service men, but we are also Workers, and we realise that our general interests are identical with that of our fellow workers.”

Sassoon was a fellow-traveller in the left of the movement. Less than a decade after the end of the war, the politics of the veterans’ movement (and of Sassoon) became more moderate. For those still involved, it became less about fighting for better conditions (e.g. pensions), and more about coming together to share wartime experiences. Groups like the British Legion, conservative and patriotic, came to dominate.

In the few years immediately following the war, however, there was a political contest between the left and the right in the veterans’ movement. Some of that was promoted by people like ILP leader Philip Snowden, who as a pacifist had opposed the 1914-18 war. Sassoon helped Snowden in his campaign for re-election in Blackburn in 1918 (which he lost).

In *To Those Who Fight for Labour*, published in the *Daily Herald* on 4 January 1919, Sassoon recalls the electoral defeat of the previous month and looks forward to future success.

The poem, *Everyone Sang* (April 1919) is according to the poet, a vision of the socialist revolution. Possibly one can see how Sassoon who, came from a very wealthy background, does not, even then, entirely identify with the labour and socialist causes; nonetheless the poems express the mood of the time — when ordinary soldiers, returning from the barbarism of war, wanted to fight for a better world.

Cathy Nugent

To Those Who Fight for Labour

Now when the shouting and the strife are ended
And each man’s voice upon the darkness dies,
Remember you have toiled for something splendid
And keep the vision stainless in your eyes:
Be faithful to yourselves and those you fought for —
Great hearts and general hopes and patient hands:
Swear that you’ll never lose the ends you’ve sought for
Till Brotherhood unites the martyred lands.
Now when Reaction’s blood-stained flags deride you
And the old ignorant gods for an hour prevail,
All that is noble and strong is ranked beside you
And you are crowned with victory though you fail.

Everyone Sang

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields; on-on-and out of
sight.

Everyone’s voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away . . . O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing
will never be done.

CUBAN REVOLUTION

Guevara the economist? Workers short-changed

Paul Hampton reviews *Che Guevara: The Economics of Revolution* by Helen Yaffe (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

A late night meeting of the Cuban leadership towards the end of 1959. Fidel Castro looks around the room and asks for “a good economist” to become the president of the National Bank of Cuba. Half asleep, Ernesto “Che” Guevara raises his hand. Castro replied with surprise: “Che, I didn’t know you were a good economist”, to which Guevara exclaimed: “Oh, I thought you asked for a good communist!” (Yaffe 2009)

This apocryphal story, told by Osvaldo Dorticós, president of Cuba from 1959 until 1976, serves to indicate the apparently accidental nature of Che Guevara’s involvement in running the economy of the Cuban state.

Guevara is better known as a leader of the guerrilla army that overthrew the hated dictator Batista at the end of 1958. Guevara played a leading role in the reconstruction of the Cuban state, including the training of the Rebel Army and the creation of the G-2 security apparatus. I’ve discussed Guevara’s Stalinist politics previously — see “No hero of ours” (*Solidarity* 3/57, 2004) and “How should Che Guevara be commemorated?” (*Workers’ Liberty* 1/43, 1997)

Helen Yaffe’s book argues that Guevara’s “most significant contribution remains largely unknown”, and that, “his life and work as a member of the Cuban government from 1959 to 1965 have received scant attention from historians, social scientists and other commentators”. Guevara was appointed Head of the Department of Industrialisation in the National Institute of Agrarian Reform (INRA) in October 1959, becoming Minister of Industries (MININD) from February 1961 until 1965. He was also briefly President of the National Bank of Cuba in 1959-1960.

The claim of neglect is not entirely true. A collection of articles on Guevara’s economics, *Man and socialism in Cuba: the great debate* edited by Bertram Silverman was published in 1971, while the Mandeliste Trotskyist Michel Löwy produced a short but glowing tribute, *The Marxism of Che Guevara: philosophy, economics, and revolutionary warfare* in 1973. More recently, the Cuban government itself has also made use of Guevara’s legacy — particularly during the Rectification period in the late 1980s. In this context, Carlos Tablada’s *Che Guevara: Economics and Politics in the Transition to Socialism* (1989) covered some of the same ground.

Nevertheless Yaffe’s book contains new material that merits discussion. It is the product of a PhD thesis, involving 60 interviews with nearly 50 of Guevara’s closest collaborators. It reviews Guevara’s so-called “great debate” about economic planning in the mid-1960s, but also lesser known elements, such as his critique of the Soviet manual of political economy.

THE ASSUMPTION OF SOCIALISM

Yaffe assumes that Cuba is socialist and has been so since the early 1960s. This assumption sets the framework for the assessment of Guevara. However she does not make the case that Cuba is socialist. The reason why is very simple: it is not possible to define Cuba as socialist without abandoning the central tenets of Marxism.

Socialism for classical Marxists and for the AWL means the self-emancipation of the working class. It means that the working class acts consciously for its own interests. It has its own forms of struggle — strikes, workplace occupations etc; its own organisations — unions, committees, its own party; and it creates own particular forms of democratic rule, e.g. workers’ councils (soviets). This is not a pipe-dream or an ideal — it is the reality of the high points of decades of workers’ struggle from Russia in 1917, when workers took power, to Poland in 1980. And there was a

precedent in Cuba in August 1933, when embryonic Soviets were formed in 36 sugar mills, along with workers’ militias, food committees and land distribution.

The July 26 movement (M26J) was simply not a working class movement. The M26J was self-declared as “Olive Green” in 1959, with a moderate bourgeois programme and a largely petty bourgeois and déclassé leadership heading a peasant army numbering a few thousand. It was headed by a Bonaparte figure in the shape of Fidel Castro. The movement did involve other forces, including in urban areas. The M26J had its own trade union front (FON), but its attempted general strike in April 1958 failed in most places.

In the revolution of 1958-59 there were no Soviets, no dual power, no factory committees and no workers’ party. The general strike called by Castro at the beginning of January 1959 took place after Batista fled and his army had disintegrated. It helped forestall a military junta backed by the US, but the strike was in reality closer to a holiday to celebrate the fall of the dictator.

No socialism is possible without the conscious, active role of the working class. There is no “unconscious socialism”, no workers’ state, however “deformed” or “degenerated” created without the agency of the working class. There are no “blunt instruments”, no locums or substitutes capable of making socialism as replacements for the working class. The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself. Or else it is not socialism.

If the Castroites did not lead the working class to power, then the social formation that exists in Cuba is not socialism but a class society. The key question in any society is how the surplus product is pumped out of the direct producers. Under socialism, the surplus product would be democratically controlled by the working class. If the working class does not rule politically, it does not rule at all. This is the fundamental dividing line in determining the class character of Cuba.

What sort of class society was created in Cuba? In my view it was Stalinism, on the model of Stalin’s rule in Russia after 1928, but also China from 1949, Eastern Europe 1945-89 and Vietnam. Cuba since 1960 has been a class society with a Stalinist form of exploitation: the state owns the means of production, and a totalitarian bureaucratic ruling class controls the state and extracts the surplus product from workers and peasants. In other words the direct producers are exploited directly, with the state providing the means of subsistence in return for absolute control over the product.

This is not a capitalist mode of exploitation, though Stalinist societies do tend to evolve towards capitalism, given their material backwardness and the pressure from the world market.

Yaffe’s abject failure to engage with this reality is a fundamental flaw of the book. Her assumption is not only made about Cuba — the persistent references to “the socialist countries” suggest she also believes societies like Stalin’s USSR went beyond capitalism.

NATIONALISATION IN CUBA

How far Cuba was and is from socialism is indicated in Yaffe’s book, which inadvertently reveals the meaning of nationalisation under Castro.

In 1960 Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir visited Cuba, around the time that the sugar mills were nationalised. Yaffe recounts the tale, recalled by Orlando Borrado Díaz, Guevara’s deputy from 1959 to 1964.

Borrado was called up during the night by Guevara and told that they needed to find 200 people by nine the next morning to run factories and sugar mills. The need was desperate: legislation had been rushed

through in a special night-time cabinet meeting in the face of increasingly acrimonious actions by the US.

Borrado said: “I nearly had a heart attack! Where were we going to find them? I only knew about three people with any accountancy experience. Half an hour later Che called me again and said Fidel had an idea, a solution. There was a boarding school with 200 youngsters aged between 15 and 20 years old, training to be teachers...”

“Fidel said: ‘We will nominate them as managers of the factories’. I was shocked! Minutes later Fidel called to tell me to go the school to wake them up even though it was the middle of the night. He arrived at 4am. The students went mad with joy, throwing their things up in the air.” (Yaffe 2009)

Yaffe argues that the unions in the sugar mills supported this action. However the episode indicates that the workers had no control over the process. The incident also shows the Castroites’ contempt for workers — the job of administration was given to some unqualified outsiders, while the workers were not considered capable of taking over the running of the industry.

The “planning” process was bureaucratic, top-down with at most an opportunity to rubber stamp decisions made from above. Interviewed by Maurice Zeitlin in 1962, Guevara was asked: What role do the workers take in the actual creation of the national economic plan? Guevara answer was candid but revealing: “They take no part in the creation of the first plan. After the first plan has been worked out by the Central Planning Commission, the specific plans are sent to the enterprises, and from there to the factories, and in the factories to the assembly of workers, where the factory plan is discussed. Here the workers discuss the possibilities of the plan for the factory and send the revised plan back up for approval, and then it becomes law. In this way the workers have a voice in the plan of the factory, but not in the national plan.” (Bonachea and Valdes, *Che: Selected Works of Ernesto Guevara*, 1969)

NO WORKERS’ CONTROL

Yaffe argues that workers did have some say at factory level. She cites the Committees for Spare Parts set up in 1960, as the first workers’ committee established in industry.

In 1961, Advisory Technical Committees (Comités Técnico Asesor – CTAs) were set up in every work centre and every nationalised industry. Finally, “Production Assemblies generalised the active role of the CTAs among the entire workforce. They involved a meeting of all the workers, advisors, technicians, engineers and administrators linked to each workplace, at quarterly, if not monthly intervals.” Yaffe argues that “a minimum of 70% of the workers must participate or Assemblies had to be cancelled. Trade unions, the party and other mass organisations were responsible for mobilising workers to participate”.

However these bodies were also little more than top-down schemes, like Japanese quality circles and code-termination (mitbestimmung), designed to involve workers in their own exploitation. They were widely criticised at the time, including within Cuba, something Yaffe conveniently overlooks.

Again, Guevara’s own testimony bears witness to the real state of affairs. Speaking on *The People’s University* TV programme on 30 April 1961 he said: “In other words, the leaders of the country in close identification with their people consider what is best for the people and put that into numbers, more or less arbitrary though, of course, based on logic and judgement, and send them from the top down: for example, from the Central Planning Board to the Ministry of Industries, where the Ministry of Industries makes the corrections it deems appropriate since it is closer to certain aspects of real life than the other offices.

“From there it continues downward to the enterpris-

She quotes an article in *Trabajadores* from July 1961, in which Guevara outlined two distinct responsibilities for the unions: to promote the goals of the government among the workers and to defend the immediate material and spiritual interests of the workers. However she quotes the main emphasis — increasing production. Guevara wrote: “The trade unions are intimately linked to a rise in productivity and to work discipline, two pillars in the construction of socialism... the superior weapon of the working class, the strike, is precisely the weapon of the violent definition of class contradictions, which cannot occur in a society on the path towards socialism.”

A similar ambivalence was illustrated in Guevara’s interview with Zeitlin. Asked, can the workers strike, if they feel it is necessary? Guevara answered: “I believe yes! We maintain, that a strike is a defeat for the government and for the working class. For example, we had a 24-hour strike — which was solved politically as all strikes must be. The strike occurred 14 months ago. Now there are no strikes.” (Bonachea and Valdes 1969)

Yaffe says nothing about the effective suppression of independent trade unionism in Cuba by the Castroites. In November 1959, they imposed Stalinists on the CTC union federation, and in the following months purged most of the union leaders, including M26J supporters elected after 1959 (and not hangers from the Batista period). The government imposed Lazaro Peña as general secretary of the CTC in 1961. Peña previously held the position when the Stalinist party (PSP) was in alliance with Batista between 1938 and 1947.

However the book does reveal unintentionally the real nature of industrial relations in Cuba under Guevara. He organised for a new salary scale to be introduced in 1964. All wages were grouped into eight categories and there was a 15% differential between the eight hourly wage rates. (2009) Yaffe made a big fuss of this in *The Guardian* last year (20 June 2008), arguing that Cubans had long experienced wage differentials. The point entirely missed is that these wage scales were imposed from above; they were not the product of collective bargaining but rather of top-down diktat.

TWO APPROACHES TO BUREAUCRATIC PLANNING

Yaffe like others ascribes exaggerated significance to the debate in Cuba between 1963 and 1965 involving leading members of the Cuban government, and some European intellectuals.

The discussion ranged over the role of the law of value, the way planning was organised, and about the place of material and moral incentives.

On the one side were those who supported the Soviet Auto-Financing System (AFS), which meant “financial decentralisation for enterprises which functioned as independent accounting units responsible for their own profits and losses and, in the case of INRA, was similar to the *khozraschet* model of cooperative farms in the USSR”. On the other was the Budgetary Finance System (BFS) advocated by Guevara and operated by his ministry. (Yaffe 2009)

Both sides took their cue from Stalin: the former from his last article on economics (1952); the later from his political economy during the 1930s. Both adopted a mistaken view of the law of value as operating initially under “simple commodity production”, a logical construct and/or historical period suggested originally by Engels at the end of his life but not found anywhere in Marx’s economic writings. The problem with this approach is that it treats the law of value as principally a theory of prices. But Marx accepted that actual prices are not simply determined by values (i.e. quantities of socially necessary labour time) even under capitalism. In fact Marx’s real insight, derived from his exposition of the value-form, was to uncover exploitation beneath the veneer of equal exchange under capitalism. Yaffe appears unaware of these discussions.

Yaffe is convinced that Guevara’s view was right. “Guevara stated that ‘value’ is brought about by the relationships of production. It exists objectively and is not created by man with a specific purpose. He agreed that the law of value continues under socialism. Guevara insisted that commodity-exchange relations between factories threatened transition, via ‘market socialism’, to capitalism. He stressed central planning and state regulation as substitutes to such mechanisms. Cuba, he argued, should be considered as one big factory... Guevara believed that a socialist country’s task was not to use, or even hold the law of value in check, but to define very precisely the law’s sphere of operation and then make inroads into those spheres to undermine it; to work towards its abolition, not limitation.” (2009)

Under the BFS, cost-cutting not profit was the key to evaluating enterprise performance. BFS enterprises did not control their own finances. They could not get

bank credit. However she concedes that “the origin of the BFS lay in the capitalist corporations of pre-Revolution Cuba”. Yaffe goes as far as to say that “Guevara’s vision was of Cuba Socialista as a single factory operating under what today is known as Just in Time techniques to achieve the greatest possible efficiency, via rational organisation, maximum returns on investments and a focus on quality.”

Perhaps Guevara’s critique of the USSR as heading for capitalism had some traction. However the BFS was also a bureaucratic, top-down system of planning, with no democratic means through which workers could exercise their power. Some of the differences were exaggerated. Yaffe concedes that others were cosmetic: “Guevara insisted on changing the titles of various functions to dissociate them from capitalist concepts... So profit is renamed ‘record of results’.” The debate was actually between different forms of bureaucratic planning within different Stalinist states.

MORAL INCENTIVES AND VOLUNTARY LABOUR

Yaffe also discusses the significance of Guevara’s advocacy of “moral incentives” in production. She argues that for Guevara, voluntary labour was “not obligatory”.

This is rather naïve. Even TUC figures for the British economy estimate that five million workers are doing over seven hours unpaid overtime a week. It also contradicts Cuban reality. Yaffe states that by 1964, trade unions in the Ministry of Industries “agreed to accept 40 hours’ pay for a 44-hour working week”, what she laughably calls “creating another form of voluntary labour”.

Guevara also considered “socialist emulation” to be a fundamental component of the BFS. Super-productive workers received material rewards including cash, but mostly goods such as refrigerators, housing, vacations and travel to Eastern Europe. He also believed that people were more inspired to participate in emulation by the example of outstanding workers. Yaffe cites the case of Reinaldo Castro who became famous in the 1962 sugar harvest for hand-cutting 11 tons a day in nationwide emulations. In 1963 he cut 25 tons in eight hours and the following year was named National Hero of Work. (2009) The problem for Yaffe is this kind of labour discipline is indistinguishable from Stakhanovism during high Stalinism in Russia in the 1930s.

It was the absence of workers’ democracy, workers’ control and workers’ self-management that made these methods appear necessary in bureaucratic Cuba. Sam Farber made the key political point about how a real socialist society would deal with these issues: “Classical Marxism, besides assuming that socialism would take place in a society with a relatively high level of material abundance and cultural advancement, emphasised not ‘moral’, but what could be called ‘political incentives’ that involved democratic control of the economy, polity and society, including the control of the workplace by the workers.

“According to this approach, only by participating and controlling their own productive lives would people become interested and responsible for what they do for a living day in and day out; that is, only thus would they get to care and give a damn. In this sense, workers’ democracy was seen both as a good in itself — people taking control of their lives — and as a truly productive economic force. (“Visiting Raúl Castro’s Cuba”, *New Politics*, 43, 2007)

Yaffe also makes a defence of another form of work discipline in operation in Cuba, namely labour camps. She argues that the Rehabilitation Centre at Guanahacabibes was not really coercive, because Guevara’s ministry “sent only management personnel there, not production workers; second, going there was optional”.

She admits that Guanahacabibes was an extension of the hard labour camp set up by the Department of Education of the Rebel Army on Cayo Largo in 1959 for soldiers under reprimand. From mid-1960 the armed forces ministry set up a work camp at Guanahacabibes and sent soldiers there as a form of punishment. They were joined by students who had abused foreign scholarships and been expelled from socialist bloc countries. In 1961, Guevara began sending MININD directors to Guanahacabibes to assist the labour force, as did other ministries. “The men slept in the open air until they had made tents, then wooden huts, then houses of cement and iron.... A report in November 1962 listed 56 people there under sentence...”

Guevara said in January 1962: “To Guanahacabibes are sent people who should not go to prison, people with more or less serious failings of revolutionary morality with the simultaneous sanction of removing

Guevara in 1964

es, which makes other corrections. From the enterprises it goes to the factories, where other corrections are made, and from there to the workers who must have the final say on the plan.”

He went on to say: “I was reading a little news sheet we have here. It’s hardly worth mentioning, but it’s a Trotskyist newspaper whose name I’m not sure of. [Voice in background tells him it is *Voz Proletaria*.] It criticised the Technical Advisory Committees from a Trotskyist point of view...”

“The trouble in fact with the Technical Advisory Committees is that they were not created by mass pressure. They were bureaucratically created from the top to give the masses a vehicle they had not asked for, and that is the fault of the masses. We, the ‘timorous petty bourgeoisie’, went looking for a channel that would enable us to listen to the masses’ voice. That is what I want to emphasise. And we created the Technical Advisory Committees, for better or worse, with the imperfections they very likely have, because they were our idea, our creation, that is, the creation of people who lack experience in these problems. What was not present at all, and I want to stress that, was mass pressure...” (Guevara, *Cuba’s Economic Plan*, in George Lavan, *Che Guevara Speaks*, 1967)*

Yaffe’s fallback is to blame the context. As she put it: “It must be recognised, meanwhile, that the persistently punitive US blockade, terrorist attacks and political machinations against Cuba have limited the feasibility of decentralising management to the Cuban masses. It has been necessary, therefore, to integrate workers from the masses into the central apparatus of government. The decentralisation to which Guevara aspired has not yet been achieved.”

This is entirely disingenuous. The absence of workers’ democracy makes workers *less* likely to defend the government in the face of US aggression. And workers’ democracy is the essence of socialist relations of production, the very oxygen that permits the working class to rule itself and to administer a modern economy, with a division of labour and specialisation. The persistent absence of workers’ self-management is concrete proof that Cuba is not any kind of socialism.

GUEVARA ON THE WORKING CLASS

Yaffe attempts to argue that Guevara’s attitude towards the working class was somehow different from the rest of the regime.

themselves from their posts. In other cases it is not a punishment but a kind of re-education through work. The work conditions are hard, but not bestial... no one should go to Guanahacabibes who does not want to go, leave and work somewhere else." (2009)

Apparently, when one of the founding members of the Department of Industrialisation, Francisco Garcia Vals, was sent there, Guevara visited every weekend to play chess with him and ensure that he understood the reprimand. (2009)

Yaffe argues that the history of Guanahacabibes as a "rehabilitation centre", and one involving hard labour, "presents a conceptual challenge", "raising the spectre of the harsh reality of such camps in other socialist bloc countries". It does much more than that.

In an economy where the state was the main employer, the "choice" to work somewhere else rather than go to the camp was hardly a free one. More significantly, Guanahacabibes has to be put into the context of hundreds of other prisons where convict labour routinely takes place, producing clothing, construction, furniture, and other factories as well as agricultural camps at its maximum and minimum security prisons. It also needs to be put in the context of the military draft of 16 to 45 years olds, and the deployment of recalcitrant workers in the Military Units to Aid Production (UMAP). These all represent forms of systematic exploitation, oppression and coercion by a state that dominates its population.

GUEVARA, CRITIC OF STALINISM?

The supporters of Che Guevara maintain that he somehow broke from Stalinism in his last years. They cite his remarks about the USSR after the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and his view that Russia had imperialistic relations with the Third World.

Others such as Ernest Mandel have gone further, stating that Guevara and the revolutionary leadership were some sort of "unconscious Trotskyists". I have previously argued that Guevara may have become disillusioned with the USSR, but far from becoming a Trotskyist he instead moved closer to the Maoist variant of Stalinism. Yaffe's book provides some proof of this. Guevara stated in December 1964:

"There are some useful things that can be taken from Trotsky's ideas. I believe that the fundamental things which Trotsky based himself on were erroneous, and that his later behaviour was wrong and even obscure in the final period. The Trotskyists have contributed nothing to the revolutionary movement and where they did most, which was in Peru, they ultimately failed because their methods were bad. Comrade Hugo Blanco, personally a man of great sacrifice, [had] a set of erroneous ideas and will necessarily fail."

He added: "In many aspects I have expressed opinions that could be closer to the Chinese side: guerrilla warfare, people's war, in the development of all these things, voluntary labour, to be against direct material incentives as a lever, a whole set of things which the Chinese also raise..." (Yaffe 2009)

Further proof of Guevara's lasting commitment to Stalinism is also found in Yaffe's book. Between 1965 and 1966, Guevara made critical notes on the *Soviet Manual of Political Economy*, whilst in Africa. The notes were smuggled back into Cuba by his wife Aleida March, who passed them onto Borrego, who kept them under lock and key for forty years. (2009)

Although it is true that the notes were not written for publication, nor were they brought together as a text, it is fair to say they reflect Guevara's thinking close to the end of his life.

Guevara argued that after Marx and Lenin, "the fountain of theory had dried up", "leaving only some isolated works of Stalin and certain writings of Mao Tse-Tung as witness to the immense creative power of Marxism". He stated: "In his last years, Stalin feared the consequence of this lack of theory and he ordered a manual to be written which would be accessible to the masses and deal with all the themes of political economy up to the present period." (Yaffe 2009)

Guevara criticised Lenin for the original move towards market mechanisms. He wrote: "In the course of our practice and our theoretical investigations we have discovered the most blameworthy individual with the name and surname: Vladimir Ilich Lenin... Our thesis is that the changes brought about by the New Economic Policy (NEP) have saturated the life of the USSR and that they have since scarred this whole period." (2009)

This seems bizarre. The NEP was a limited opening by an emaciated workers' state recovering from civil war. It's possible to debate the merits of NEP, but the point here is that Guevara misses out the whole period of Stalin's forced industrialisation and collectivisation, where market mechanisms were largely obliterated. Stalin may have permitted them in the last years of his life, but not before presiding over a whole period suppressing the law of value in the USSR.

The *Soviet Manual* criticised Stalin's thesis that commodity production under socialism represents a break on the development of the productive forces leading to the need for direct exchange between industry and agriculture. Stalin, it stated, failed to fully appreciate "the operation of the law of value in the sphere of production". Despite Stalin's responsibilities for embedding capitalist levers, never mind his other crimes, Guevara still regarded him as less reactionary than the authors of the *Soviet Manual*. He wrote: "In the supposed errors of Stalin is the difference between a revolutionary and a revisionist attitude. He saw the danger in commodity relations and attempted to pass over this stage by breaking those that resisted him." (Yaffe 2009)

In any case Guevara did not spurn Soviet backing to Cuba. Guevara's notes also indicate how far he was from revolutionary Marxism, and inadvertently how far Cuba was from socialism.

According to Yaffe, he argued that, "In dependent (oppressed) countries, foreign investment turns the working class into relative beneficiaries compared to the dispossessed peasant class, whose plight they ignore". He also claimed that, "The working class in developed countries do not unite with national liberation movements in a common front against imperialism. They become the accomplices of the imperialists from whom they receive crumbs..." The dismissal of the working class in the main capitalist centres went further: "The working class in the imperialist countries strengthens in cohesion and organisation, but not in consciousness"; and: "Today we describe could describe as the labour aristocracy the mass of workers in the strong countries with respect to the weak ones". (Yaffe 2009)

Guevara also criticised the *Soviet Manual's* claim that under socialism trade unions were important organisations of the masses with the right to monitor the state on completion of work and protection legislation. He wrote that "trade unions appear anachronistic, without meaning" and complained of "the bureaucratisation of the workers' movement" (2009)

Of course, the Soviet "unions" were no such entities

— they were state labour fronts tied to the bureaucracy, just like their Cuban counterparts. However Guevara's rejection of the role of unions under socialism was real enough.

Yaffe makes a great deal of Guevara's prediction that capitalism would re-emerge in the USSR unless it changed course. Of course this is what happened after 1991. But this was hardly a novel prediction in the mid-1960s. Semi-Stalinists such as Paul Sweezy, not to mention the Chinese state after the Sino-Soviet split, also made similar claims.

Yaffe argues that Guevara's outstanding contribution was "to devise a system of economic management that gave expression to his Marxist analysis in practical policies, applying his theory of socialist transition to the reality of 1960s Cuba and its level of economic development". Since she fails to prove Cuba has anything to do with socialism, and in fact indicates the anti-working class character of Guevara's political economy, the book must be judged a failure.

But Yaffe's interest in Guevara has a contemporary echo with greater pertinence. During the 1990s, the Cuban state allowed more space for the functioning of market mechanisms. Some 300 firms linked to the military, such as GAESA, Aerogaviota and UIM were set up, along with semi-autonomous state agencies, including Cubanacan, Artex and Cubalse. The Enterprise Perfection System (EPS), which measures production in capitalist management terms i.e. "profit", was generalised. Joint ventures in tourism, nickel, telephone, oil and citrus, with capital from Spain, Canada, Mexico, Italy, the UK and China were established. And 150,000 small enterprises were permitted.

Although much of this remains, the move towards the market has been heavily curtailed.

In 2003, US dollar payments between Cuban enterprises were abolished and replaced by payments in Cuban convertible pesos. In 2005 financial autonomy was removed from Cuban enterprises and their reserves transferred to the central bank. Yaffe says that the number of mixed enterprises (Cuban state and private/foreign capital) operating in Cuba decreased from 403 in 2002 to 236 in 2006, and accounts for less than 1% of employment. (2009 p.267, p.269)

Yaffe believes that the result of these measures is "a degree of financial centralisation not seen since Guevara's BFS" and is "to limit the sphere of operation of capitalist mechanisms introduced via foreign capital diminishing their impact on Cubans as producers and consumers". (2009 p.269) She denies that Cuba is undergoing a Chinese-style market-opening. In other words she appears to celebrate the stalling of the process as a vindication of Guevara's approach in the earlier period. That the transition to capitalism in Cuba has slowed, stalled even, is indisputable. This is because Fidel Castro has lived longer than most expected. Raul Castro, the chief advocate of the Chinese road, will not press ahead while the Bonaparte is still alive. Guevara's economics are no place of refuge for Cuban workers. They will not find a means to overcome their exploitation in the political economy of mildly dissident Stalinism. Cuban workers will need to break free of such icons and ideas and rely on their own self-organisation to overcome the twin travails of capitalism and Cuban Stalinism.

*According to the US SWP's Joseph Hansen, Guevara went on television the following day to apologise for misrepresenting the "Trotskyist comrades". (*Dynamics of the Cuban Revolution*, 1978). This does not detract from Guevara's assessment of the status of these bodies.

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 the weapon of solidarity.

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

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

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

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

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

ISRAELI POLITICS

Avigdor Lieberman and the Israeli Arabs

By DAN KATZ

Avigdor Lieberman is in the news over corruption allegations. But what does the political grouping around Lieberman represent? And what do Lieberman's number one target, Arab Israelis, think about political developments in Israel?

Avigdor Lieberman leads Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home), which won 15 of the 120 Knesset seats in the February 2009 Israeli general election. Yisrael Beiteinu took 11.7% of the vote and beat Labour into fourth place. During the election campaign the leftist Meretz party likened Yisrael Beiteinu to Le Pen's French National Front.

Lieberman's hard-right policies on security and the country's Arab minority grew in popularity alongside a general swing to the right in an electorate which had backed Israel's assault on Gaza over December 2008-January 2009. During the war Lieberman suggested that Hamas be fought "just like the United States did with the Japanese in World War Two. Then, too, the occupation of the country was unnecessary." His comments were widely understood to be suggesting the use of nuclear weapons, and are typical of his demagogic style.

Lieberman was born in 1958 in Kishinev — then a part of the USSR, now Moldova. His family emigrated to Israel in 1978. At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem he joined a student group linked to the right-wing Likud party.

In the late 1980s he started working with Benjamin Netanyahu. After Netanyahu was elected as Likud leader, Lieberman served as Director General of the party.

Yisrael Beiteinu was founded by Lieberman as a platform for Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union who favoured a tough line in negotiations with the Palestinians. The party won four seats in the 1999 election when Lieberman became an MK (MP). The party's big break came when they took 11 Knesset seats in 2006.

In 2003 Yisrael Beiteinu joined Ariel Sharon's right-wing government and Lieberman became Transport Minister. When Transport Minister he offered to supply buses to drown Palestinian prisoners in the Dead Sea rather than release them as part of an amnesty agreement. More demogogy.

Lieberman was pushed out in 2004 after opposing Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan.

Several months after the May 2006 elections Yisrael Beiteinu joined Ehud Olmert's Kadima-led government.

Lieberman was soon involved in controversy, denouncing Labour Leader Amir Peretz's nomination of a Muslim Arab for the post of Minister of Science. Lieberman called for Peretz's resignation, and Peretz denounced Yisrael Beiteinu as a racist party. Esterina Tartman, then a Yisrael Beiteinu MK, described the proposal to include an Arab in the government as a "lethal blow to Zionism," and suggested, "We need to destroy this affliction from within ourselves."

Yisrael Beiteinu left the coalition in early 2008 in protest at government talks with the Palestinian Authority. About this Lieberman said, "Negotiations on the basis of land for peace are a critical mistake ... and will destroy us."

Yisrael Beiteinu regards the Arab Israelis as an "enemy within".

In March 2009 Yisrael Beiteinu joined Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud-led coalition, taking five ministerial posts. Lieberman is a Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister.

Lieberman supports a form of Two States position which would see Israel's boundaries re-drawn to take in settlements in the West Bank and exclude Arab areas within the current Israeli state. The plan would mean areas such as the "Triangle", gained from Jordan under the 1949 Armistice Agreement, would be transferred to the control of a Palestinian authority. Under the plan around one-third of Arab Israeli citizens would lose their citizenship. Arab Israelis are bitterly opposed to such a proposal.

Lieberman has advocated offering financial compensation in exchange for Israeli Arabs renouncing their citizenship and land. Those condemning his proposals have included Ariel Sharon, who commented, "We regard Israeli Arabs as part of the State of Israel."

In March 2008 a poll commissioned by the Knesset television station, showed 75 percent of the Jewish public supported the transfer of at least some Arab Israelis as part of a peace deal with the Palestinians, including 28 percent who believed all Arab Israelis should be forcibly transferred.

In 2009 Lieberman fought under the slogan "No loyalty, no citizenship" saying, "Israel is under a dual terrorist

attack, from within and from without. And terrorism from within is always more dangerous than terrorism from without." He has suggested that some elected Arab MPs in the Israeli parliament should be tried for treason and then executed.

Yisrael Beiteinu caused outrage in May 2009, when it proposed laws banning Israeli Arabs from marking the anniversary of what Palestinians call the "Nakba" (or "Palestinian catastrophe" accompanying the creation of Israel, marked on 15 May), with jail terms of up to three years for offenders. Inside Israel the initiative met with widespread opposition as it ran counter to Israel's free-speech laws.

Israeli Arabs continue to mark the anniversary. According to the US State Department, on 15 May 2008, around "15,000 Arab Israelis and other activists marched to the former Arab village of Safouriya, now a Jewish community, as part of a demonstration to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel. The procession, which started peacefully, ended with clashes between demonstrators and security forces. The police stated that they acted with restraint and appropriate force after several demonstrators began throwing stones at them, while the demonstrators claimed that the police attacked first. The Israeli NGOs Adalah and the Arab Association of Human Rights (AAHR) released video footage that, according to press reports, showed police beating or kicking some demonstrators in the head and face as they sat handcuffed on the ground."

In May a Ministerial Committee rejected a Yisrael Beiteinu bill stating that those who wish to retain Israeli citizenship would have to declare their loyalty to Israel as a Jewish state. The bill, proposed by Yisrael Beiteinu's MK David Rotem, stated that the oath would include a pledge of loyalty to Israel as a Jewish, Zionist, and democratic state, to its emblems and values, and serving Israel either through military service or through equivalent alternatives. (The law exempts Arab Israelis from mandatory military service. Citizens who do not perform military service enjoy fewer social and economic benefits.)

Yisrael Beiteinu officials said the initiative was important given what they described as the anti-Israel behaviour of Israel's Arab citizens during the 2006 Lebanon War and the recent Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Minority Affairs Minister, Labour MK Avishay Braverman, welcomed the rejection of the bill, saying, "bills such as this one will not be brought before this government or any future government, and sanity will once again play a role in the governing of the state of Israel." Labour continues to be a junior partner in government.

However a more cautiously worded version of the bill was presented in June. This time the text proposes preventing public money being used to support Israeli Arab protests, or funding activities deemed detrimental to the state.

In July Israel's Education Ministry ordered the removal of the word "Nakba" from a textbook used in schools by young Arab children. Education Minister, Likud MK Gideon Saar, stated: "The objective of our education system is not to deny the legitimacy of our state, nor to promote extremism among Arab-Israelis." The word was introduced into a text book in 2007, for use in Arab schools only, by the then Education Minister, Labour's Yuli Tamir.

Jafar Farrah, director of Equality, an Israeli-Arab group said the decision only "complicated the conflict" and called the move an attempt to seek confrontation with Israel's Arab population.

LIKUD AND TWO STATES

Netanyahu was previously Prime Minister from 1996-99. A good deal of the responsibility for the breakdown of the post-93 Oslo peace agreement is his.

The "Peace and Security" chapter of the 1999 Likud Party platform rejects "the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state west of the Jordan river." The chapter continues, "The Palestinians can run their lives freely in the framework of self-rule, but not as an independent and sovereign state."

However Netanyahu is now under real pressure from the new American administration. For his first two months after coming into office, Netanyahu refused to commit to anything other than a measure of "self-rule" (autonomy under Israeli overlordship). Following Obama's Cairo speech (June 2009), Netanyahu finally endorsed a "demilitarised Palestinian state". He continues to state that Jerusalem will be undivided, Israeli territory.

In his 14 June speech Netanyahu stated that West Bank settlement expansions will be limited, and based on the natural growth of the population with no new territories taken in. He did not discuss whether or not they should be part of Israel after peace negotiations, simply saying that the "question will be discussed." Tzipi Livni, leader of Kadima, remarked that Netanyahu does not believe in a two state solution at all. Livni stated that he was faking in response to international pressure.

The current focus of diverging Israeli-US policy is over settlement building. On 17 June Lieberman met Hillary Clinton and had a major row as Lieberman dismissed her demand to end settlement expansion. *Financial Times* described the meeting as "one of the most tense encounters between the sides for several years."

The *Guardian* reported (22 July) that Netanyahu now proposes to remove 23 settler outposts on the West Bank, which will bring him into conflict with his own supporters. Clearly the Likud leader feels obliged to make concessions to the US, while continuing to expand existing settlements.

Both Lieberman and Likud want the US to focus only on the threat of Iranian nuclear weapons.

THE ARAB MINORITY

Around one in five Israelis — 1.3 million — are Arab, who in their majority define themselves as Palestinians, an identity strengthened during the intifadas. Recent polls suggest that only a minority are willing to recognise Israel's right to exist as a "Jewish and democratic state", although a majority want to remain Israeli citizens, rather than citizens of a future Palestinian state.

Such poll findings have been radically affected over the last five years by the Israeli wars in Lebanon and Gaza and the failure to create a Palestinian state. Lieberman's policies address this shift in Arab-Israeli opinion, but in order to make the divisions more acute.

Not only are Arab Israelis a sizable minority, but they are a growing proportion (although the speed of this growth is debated and is possibly often exaggerated). In 2003, the Arab minority was called a "demographic bomb" by Benjamin Netanyahu. Part of the rationale for a "land-swap" Two States "solution" is to maintain a large Jewish majority within Israel.

After 1948 most Arabs remaining in Israel were granted citizenship. The Israeli Declaration of Independence states, "The State of Israel shall uphold absolute social and political equality of rights for all citizens, without distinction of religion, race or sex; it shall guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language education and culture." Later the proclamation reads, "We call, even in the midst of this bloody onslaught... to the sons of Arab people who are residents of the State of Israel to maintain peace and to take part in the building of the State on the basis of full and equal citizenship and on the basis of appropriate representation in all its institutions."

Israel is a bourgeois-democratic state, and its legal institutions and some of its politicians have attempted to be true to the spirit of this declaration, within the limits of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Nevertheless, before 1966 the Israeli Arabs were subjected to martial law, travel permits and curfews. After 1966 most discriminatory legislation was abolished.

However, the US State Department country report (2008) remarks, "Arab Israelis continued to suffer various forms of discrimination in public and private life."

"Arab Israelis were underrepresented in most fields of employment, including government, despite a five-year-old affirmative action program to promote hiring Arab Israelis in the civil service. According to the government, 6.2 percent of government employees in 2007 were Arab."

"A 2000 law requires that minorities have 'appropriate representation' in the civil service and on the boards of government corporations... Of the 55,000 persons working in government companies, 1 percent were Arab."

Yisrael Beiteinu offer reactionary solutions to a growing conflict inside Israel which is not just reducible to a battle for equality within the state.

The suspicions and tensions between the Israeli majority and Arab minority will probably continue to worsen without the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. The current right-wing campaigns which target the Arab Israeli citizens are a logical compliment to their hostility to a rational "two states" settlement with the Palestinians.

A free, democratic and flourishing Palestinian state

AFTER NO2EU

A slate in the general election?

Mike Davies is the secretary of the Alliance for Green Socialism, one of the groups that joined the No2EU coalition at the Euro-elections in June. He spoke to Martin Thomas.

As I understand it, the groups involved in No2EU have been discussing a follow-up for the general election...

The first thing to say is that we don't think of it as a follow-up to No2EU. We think of it as a plan for the general election.

Things look possible. There have been meetings, and fairly soon we'll know whether a joint effort is possible.

Who has been involved in the meetings?

Basically, the people who were involved in the Euro-election campaign [the Communist Party of Britain, the RMT, the Socialist Party, and the AGS]. We want to get an idea of what we might be able to do with the people who have recently worked together. If we can agree on a project, then we would hope to widen it out.

Of the groups that have been involved in No2EU, the CPB has written most about its plans for the general election, in an article by Robert Griffiths in the *Morning Star* of 8 June. He seems to suggest not so much a slate as a "kitemark" operation, in which the People's Charter [launched by the CPB in late 2008] would be used to give a "kitemark" of approval to a variety of candidates, both Labour and others.

I haven't read the article. The CPB have been involved in the discussions, but no, that's not the direction we're going in. If we do something, it will be an electoral coalition, not a kitemark operation.

It will not just be an umbrella, as the Socialist Green Unity Coalition was in 2005. [Candidates from the

Socialist Party, AGS, and AWL ran under different electoral descriptions, but all subscribing to the SGUC as an umbrella with a common basic platform, some common press releases, and so on]. It will be a list under a single electoral registration.

On what scale? That is difficult to say until we have agreed some sort of outline framework. But I'd say, not hundreds of candidates, but not just ten or twenty either.

In the North-West, there is talk of an electoral umbrella or kitemark operation involving Green Party people, George Galloway's Respect, the Socialist Party, the SWP, and other groups, around the People's Charter. How do your discussions relate to that?

We haven't discussed that. At this stage, there are any number of things floating around, many of which will come to nothing.

No2EU was explicitly an one-off operation for the Euro-election. Is the new plan for another one-off operation for the general election, or something permanent?

Permanent is a long time. But this is not conceived by the AGS as a one-off operation. No-one has suggested describing it in that way.

As regards the platform for a possible general-election coalition, have you been discussing on the basis of developing from the No2EU platform, or from the People's Charter, or starting anew?

We have been discussing a new platform. It is too early to say how it will turn out. From the point of view of AGS, it will have to include a very significant environmental component.

UNISON LABOUR LINK

Is Dave Prentis serious?

Val Graham was a delegate to Unison Labour Link Forum on 6-7 July and was surprised by the speech which Unison general secretary Dave Prentis made there. Unison Labour Link Forum is the special conference, made up of regional delegates from Unison members who are also Labour Party members, which is supposed to decide Unison policy in relation to the Labour Party. Val spoke to *Solidarity* about the conference.

I was genuinely surprised by Dave Prentis's speech. Last year at Labour Link conference he was still pleading with us to be patient with Gordon Brown, and a motion from my region, East Midlands, calling on Labour Link to be more discriminating in our support for Labour MPs and candidates was the only motion there which failed to get passed.

This year Dave Prentis himself said he wanted a more targeted approach, where Unison money for constituency Labour Parties is much more closely linked to Unison policy.

He also said very clearly that he wanted to reinstate the right for motions to be debated at Labour Party conference. He wanted to get other unions' support for a motion to go forward at Labour Party conference this year on the issue of privatisation.

He seemed to be genuinely angry about what the Labour Government is doing to the Health Service, and ministers' response to him. I think he can see the writing on the wall for the next general election, and is worried about the prospect of a Tory victory. He is also worried about the union coming under pressure from the non-Labour left.

He said that if the Labour Party pursued the same course, and didn't change policy, it was heading for disaster. He was very keen on the unions having a say in the next Labour manifesto, and said that he could not seem himself as supporting a manifesto that did not put "clear red water" between Labour and the Tories on privatisation.

He said he would ask the unions which have disaffiliated to rejoin the Labour Party and be part of a joint

union effort to change policy.

The problem is, he wasn't more specific about any of these things. It was just a statement of general strategy.

I had my hand up to ask him to be more specific about what he planned to do, but there was time only for a few questions, and I wasn't called. All the other questions were as if the strategic ideas had gone over people's heads. In discussion afterwards, it was very difficult to get people thinking about anything other than business as usual.

Dave Prentis seemed to be serious about what he was saying. I can't see why else he would say it. The Labour Link leadership were not pressing him for a strategy. He wasn't coming under any pressure from them.

Whether he can achieve what he proposed, and whether he will put a lot of effort into achieving it, I don't know. I don't know whether we are in another of those situations where a confrontation is set up, and then, when a few concessions are made, the big issues are allowed to slide.

Personally, however, I would like Unison branches to support what Dave Prentis was saying. Having an approach to Labour MPs and candidates that puts pressure on them to support union policies is a key idea. In my region I will be arguing that we give money to constituency Labour Parties only if they agree to hold events jointly with Unison in support of union policy on privatisation.

The question is, are the union leadership, now they see the writing on the wall in big letters, willing and able to make an effort to restore at least some shred of democracy in the Labour Party. I think we should push them to do it, and we should support them if they do.

There is, however, a lot of demoralisation in the union. Unison has given in over pay this year. My feeling is that if Dave Prentis has this strategy, then he really should be fighting for ordinary members to know about it and understand it. But in Unison circulars since the conference we have heard nothing more about the strategy Dave Prentis outlined.

1,500 demons BNP festival of

BY LIAM CONWAY (NOTTS STOP THE BNP
AND CHIEF STEWARD AT ANTI-RWB DEMO)

On 15 August, for the second year running, anti-fascists staged a mass demonstration against the British National Party's "Red, White and Blue Festival". The demonstration, called by the regional TUC, local anti-fascist campaigns and the SWP's Unite Against Fascism group, mobilised 1500 protestors to rural Derbyshire for a day of action against the BNP.

Shortly after the event, BNP deputy leader Simon Darby told the press that they would be considering another venue next year — a sign of their considerable discomfort at the protest.

The RWB is the BNP's biggest annual event, attracting over one thousand members and supporters and drawing in leading fascists from across Europe. The fascists use the event to ideologically solidify existing supporters and to recruit new members. The BNP themselves describe the event as a "family festival" aimed at celebrating the "British" cultural traditions. Judging by the attractions and activities on offer over the weekend — including the opportunity to throw wet sponges at an Obama effigy, and listening to speeches by the Italian neo-fascist Roberto Fiore — the BNP's definition of "culture" is nothing more than white supremacism.

As a result of direct pressure from Amber Valley

Opinion: speaking to local people

In the run-up to the demonstration Amber Valley anti-fascists spent a great deal of time leafleting and explaining their stand against the BNP.

On the march AWL members made an effort to speak to local residents, give them leaflets and sell socialist material. The responses were mixed — Amber Valley is an area of strength for the BNP, and an area without a strong left or labour movement. However the assumption made by some of the marchers that white working class residents are necessarily hostile is counter-productive. There was some shouting at local people who were bystanders — some were fascists, some were not.

In fact it is a middle class reaction — the assumption that white youth with short hair are hostile to our stand.

Sammy Klein

activists on the Home Office, US white supremacist Preston Wiginton was barred from entry to the country to attend the festival.

Anti-fascists began gathering early in the morning in nearby Codnor, with the aim of maintaining a protest as BNP supporters arrived at the festival. Official trade union delegations, local groups and residents mainly gathered at this point.

Speaking from the platform Pete Radcliff, AWL member and anti-fascist activist representing Notts Stop the BNP, told the protest, "We need mass action and build democratic local campaigns with real roots in the working class and broader community." The Notts Stop the BNP campaign marched behind a banner reading "Jobs and Homes not Racism".

Daniel Randall, also an AWL member and speaking to the rally as a student activist, advocated socialist policies to defeat the fascists. To applause Daniel said, "We need to have socialist answers for workers and youth who face poverty, unemployment and a deep-running housing crisis."

An important result of last year's action was the formation of a local organisation — Amber Valley Campaign Against Racism and Fascism — to fight the BNP and again this year local residents and campaigners were given the opportunity to speak out at an open rally run throughout the morning.

At the same time, some hundreds of people organised by SWP/UAF gathered separately to blockade the road leading to the RWB festival grounds. Their actions disrupted the start of the BNP's event, prevent-

strate against of hate

ing supporters and speakers from arriving on time. The pity is that SWP/UAF acted unilaterally, without coordinating with the local campaigns.

Later the main demonstration marched close to the entrance of the festival grounds. After some jostling from UAF, local campaigners from Amber Valley and Derby led the demonstration for the bulk of the procession.

Many marchers joined in chants led by Workers' Liberty stewards. As the march neared the entrance to the lane where the festival was being staged, and joined with a second group of anti-fascists who had been blockading the road, large numbers of black and white youth took up the chant, "The workers, united, will never be defeated!"

As the demonstration was stopped by a police blockade just short of the festival entrance angry marchers surged forward towards police lines.

The police, as we knew they were going to, used massive numbers to protect the BNP festival from any chance of the marchers getting closer. Certainly, after the surge, it became clear to everyone on the demonstration that this was the police's role.

Around a dozen activists were arrested during the day, about half at this point. Four have been charged. There was no violence. The campaigns should call for the charges to be dropped.

One local activist celebrated the protest and thanked those that had come to demonstrate their opposition to the BNP. She said, "The unions and left have made an important step forward today. We mobilised significant numbers to oppose the fascists. Now we need a real, open, democratic and radical campaign at national level."

That's right. Let's take inspiration from this march and the direct action which disrupted the BNP's event.

Organise the fight against racism and fascism

The recent spate of "anti-Muslim" protests, initiated by a group calling itself the "English Defence League", needs to be urgently addressed.

The EDL adamantly denies links with fascist organisations, claims to be "non-racist", and poses as a specifically "anti-extremist" group. The EDL is less than truthful about its real origins and links with groups like the BNP and National Front. They most certainly are anti-Asian racists.

After staging a racist riot in Luton earlier this year and a provocation in Birmingham recently, the EDL is calling further such actions through September and October. The left and anti-fascist groups should

The shape of things to come?

There were around 50 people on the Battersea and Wandsworth TUC sponsored coach heading to the anti-Red White and Blue demonstration. We had just set off when a stone was thrown through the window directly behind where I was sitting. Fortunately no one was seriously hurt. However, despite attempts to get another coach, we were unable to get to the demonstration.

The person who threw the stone was apparently alone and ran off immediately. The fact that he was alone, and it was 6.30 in the morning, suggests to me a targeted attack by a fascist. The fact that this has occurred, and in Brixton, is evidence of the increasing confidence of fascists. It may well mean that we will see more of this sort of thing in the near future.

Duncan

Just what is UAF/SWP doing?

BY PETE RADCLIFF

For most of its existence, since its founding in 2003, Unite Against Fascism (UAF) has done little or nothing. With no democratic structure, and few active branches, UAF is normally only visible around election times.

The UAF has no history of mass pickets of BNP events. Politically, it subsists on "Uniting everyone against the Nazis" — including government ministers and Tory politicians.

UAF has been successful in gathering up trade union support and money. Whilst remaining — obviously, ostentatiously — an SWP front, UAF has been endorsed and tolerated by union leaders as a convenient, tokenistic gesture. UAF affiliation neither disturbs the unions' kowtowing to the government, nor risks pulling them into radical action that might cause them embarrassment. The union bosses can continue to pretend they were fighting fascism — by giving great amounts of money to the UAF/SWP.

To spice up UAF a bit, on marches over the last few years, such as the RWB in 2008 and the Stoke demonstration after that, the SWP has engineered fruitless minor confrontations with the police, usually miles from the BNP. The simple purpose seems to be to make the protests a little more exciting for possible SWP recruits who might attend, and to disguise the fact that UAF had put little work in preparing a more serious protest.

At this year's RWB the SWP made a turn. They now seem to believe that more radical action on the streets will help them to relate to "angry youth".

Sadly, rather than try to persuade UAF's union sponsors that such action could be justified for reasons other than aiding SWP recruitment, the SWP has faced in two directions. At RWB they promised the local TUC that there would be no direct action, but organised it anyway.

Following this "turn", we might have hoped that there was now a possibility of co-operation between UAF/SWP and local campaigns — but no!

At the one meeting that Weyman Bennett of the UAF attended, AWL members in the local Notts Stop the BNP group tried to coordinate a blockade of the RWB festival. We even outlined to Bennett the very same tactic later used by the UAF. No response.

UAF may now claim that it was just adopting the necessary secrecy to make their action effective. But organising effective anti-fascist actions cannot be the secret work of a fraction of the SWP.

What UAF did this year was far better than the UAF did last year — yes! But the turnout was insufficient to hold the streets for long. We need far larger turn-outs if pickets are to get close to doing what they need to do, and shut such events down!

Members and supporters of UAF should demand honesty from the near-as-damn-it unelected leaders of the organisation. They should demand that the UAF/SWP recognises that there are a lot more people "out there" prepared to physically confront the BNP, but they are not prepared to accept them as unelected, unaccountable leaders.

They should accept that democratic anti-fascist campaigns should be built in each locality, with the right to debate the right and wrong way of organising and not just be occasional appendages of the SWP.

They should demand discussion about whether it is right to call for a vote for just anyone — including Lib-Dem, Tory, UKIP — against the BNP.

A serious, united and democratic working-class anti-fascist movement is needed now. Let's start a debate on the left about how to get such a movement. UAF certainly is not it.

mobilise in force to stop them.

The AWL advocates mass mobilisation, direct action and self-defence against racists and fascists. We argue for working class politics. We work to mobilise the broad labour movement, trade unions and other working class organisations.

The EDL have called demonstrations in Harrow on 29 August, Birmingham on 5 September, Luton on 19 September and Manchester on 10 October.

For more on the Luton and Birmingham protests see the Workers' Liberty website www.workersliberty.org

Charlie Salmon

Post: we need a workers' plan!

By IRA BERKOVIC

After a series of local ballots and strikes over job cuts, the post and telecom union CWU is balloting all postal workers across Britain from 9 September.

The CWU's strike call comes in response to what CWU Deputy General Secretary Dave Ward calls an "incompetent management running [the postal service] into the ground." Although the Government has retreated on part-privatisation of Royal Mail, an aggressive cuts programme continues. Mail centres are being shut. Delivery workers are being asked to work longer for less.

The conflict is "unfinished business" following the deal struck to end the postal workers' strike campaign in 2007.

As one postal worker told *Solidarity*: "Many of the current problems arise from management not sticking to the deal we got in 2007, which in my opinion wasn't very good anyway. Many reps and activists felt let down by the deal in 2007, but there are problems with the union's internal democracy."

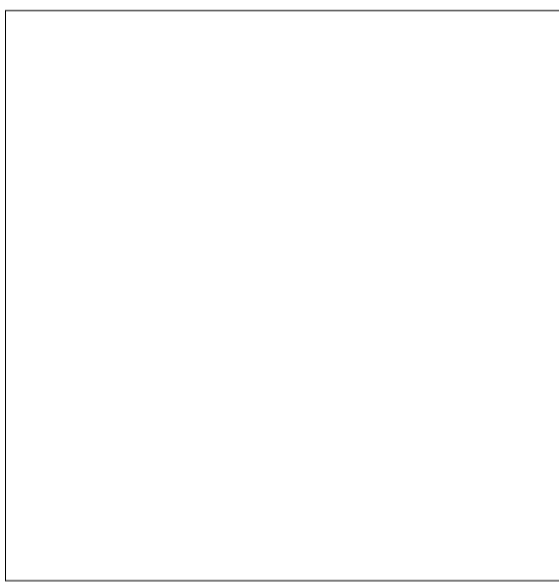
In 2007, Royal Mail agreed to negotiation with the CWU on the "modernisation" which it claims is necessary due to decreased demand for letter post. The union claims Royal Mail is renegeing on that agreement.

The 2007 deal conceded to Royal Mail's demand for "flexibility" and allowed Royal Mail to implement changes locally. Naturally, Royal Mail bosses have been pushing down that road as hard as they can.

In the run-up to the 2007 dispute, CWU leaders billed it as a showdown not only over pay but also over rival "visions" for the postal service. In fact, however, union leaders offered no independent political and industrial perspective from the union. They did not set out a workers' plan for Royal Mail that took as its starting point what postal workers and service-users need.

Now Dave Ward is calling for "a joint CWU/Royal Mail vision" for the future of the service, as if the top Royal Mail bosses could be persuaded by talking into seeing the post as a public service, rather than a business competing in the market. Beyond that, and the negative aim of resisting job cuts, there are no clear positive demands for the strike coming from the top union leaders.

Socialists in the CWU have argued that, rather than developing a "joint vision" with management, the union needs its own, independent perspective that goes on the offensive around the



issues that are at the heart of the dispute.

Royal Mail's proposed cuts — including closures, job losses and speeded-up delivery spans (which expect workers to work harder and longer for the same pay) — are part of an ongoing government project for the public sector, trashing public service in favour of a model of public funds "commissioning" services from market-rival "providers". Already, postal workers are seeing some of the wider political implications behind the dispute.

"The current cuts are seen as Mandleson getting his own back following the withdrawal of the privatisation plan. Although there isn't yet a consciousness that sees this dispute as part of a wider class fightback in the recession, there is a consciousness around resisting privatisation and business-logic."

It's not enough to simply fight defensive battles over the threat to pay and conditions posed by privatisation and marketisation. A wider political perspective is necessary — one that takes on the idea that the postal service should be run as a business, to make profits in a competitive market. Why should any industry be run in the interests of profit rather than human need?

The same CWU activist told *Solidarity*:

"We're fighting on very unfavourable ground, with an extremely hostile employer and a potentially even more hostile one if and when the Tories win the election. But I'm confident of getting a yes vote, and fundamentally the dispute is about defending the post as a public service, and resisting it being run as a business."

AFGHANISTAN

Deeper into the mire

By GERRY BATES

There are now almost as many US and allied troops in Afghanistan as there are in Iraq — 100,000 in Afghanistan, including 62,000 Americans, and 120,000 in Iraq.

For the present those troops in Afghanistan have one overriding immediate aim: to try to make Afghanistan's presidential election on 20 August look plausible.

That it should actually be plausible is more or less ruled out. In a country dominated by warlordism and traditional hierarchical allegiances, votes measure not democracy but who is best at doing deals with power-brokers.

But 2004's presidential election looked plausible, with a 70% turnout. The 2005 parliamentary election looked passable, with 55%.

Ahmed Rashid, author of several relevant books — *Taliban*, *Descent Into Chaos*, and *Jihad* — says in a recent interview:

"This election has sucked up all of the energy of the Obama administration... There's a total preoccupation by the US military and the civilian side to make sure that these elections go through... It will suck up the oxygen from development and from reconstruction".

The Americans, says Rashid, fear "a drastically low turnout of under 30 percent. If it's under 30 percent, there will be appeals by almost everyone to say that this is not a legitimate election, and that we'll need another election".

They also fear a result on the first round that is close enough to require a second-round run-off. "If there is a run-off, you will have this critical six to eight weeks [until October, when the run-off would be held] in which there will be accusations, charges, countercharges, a vacuum of leadership. It will be a very tricky political situation. Anything could happen in that period. There could be assassinations and the Taliban will step up their campaign. Internally, there could be a constitutional deadlock".

The US government is open about its low opinion of the sitting president, Hamid Karzai, but desperately hopes that he wins a clear victory with a plausible vote.

Why might the vote slump from 70% in 2004 to below 30% now? Rashid says that it is because of increased Taliban power.

"The Taliban have gone from saying they'll block the roads to cut off voters from the voting stations, to saying they'd chop off the fingers of anyone with ink on their fingers [a sign that a person has voted]... They've said that [they will] attack the polling stations. None of these things were done last time. They were not strong enough in 2004 to attack polling stations, and they let the elections happen".

Continued on page 12

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