

Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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an injury to one is an injury to all

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SUSSEX UNIVERSITY

Reverse the boycott Israel policy - fight for positive solidarity!

BY IRA BERKOVIC

The University of Sussex Students Union is due to hold a second referendum on whether to implement a boycott of Israeli goods in SU outlets. The boycott policy was passed by an earlier referendum at the end of October by a margin of 562 to 450. However, a group of students has now gathered the 150 signatures required to reopen and rerun the vote.

Supporters of the boycott have said that they see themselves as part of an international BDS — boycott, divestment and sanctions — movement, intended to apply sufficient economic, moral and political pressure on Israel to force it to observe international law.

While the desire to “do something” about Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians is the beginning of political wisdom on this question, not every tactic is helpful. Some can be counterproductive.

Boycotts promote the idea of consumer, rather than class, power. The tactic “exceptionalises” Israel (where are the campaigns to boycott China, Russia, Sri Lanka or indeed the USA; states which are brutally repress another people?).

Boycotts have a potential danger of being extrapolated in the direction of anti-semitic witch-hunts; if the aim is to economically and politically undermine the state of Israel, why stop at boycotting directly produced Israeli goods? Why not boycott all those linked to Israel, in whatever way? And, as the majority of the world’s Jews do support the existence of an Israeli-Jewish national entity in some form, why not simply boycott Jewish (or “Zionist”) goods and people altogether?

The campaign at Sussex will have negligible positive impact. Unless it has taken to stocking industrial quantities of oranges or hi-tech weapons systems, it is very unlikely that the Sussex student union shop stocks Israeli goods to any economically-significant degree. What the campaign seems to tell activists is that, rather than making positive, direct solidarity with working-class and other progressive forces struggling against occupation in both Israel and Palestine, they should spend time and energy fighting for changes in the consumption habits of UK wholesalers and shoppers.

If similar activist resources had instead gone into supporting initiatives like the Democracy and Workers’ Rights Centre in Ramallah or the joint Israeli-Palestinian Workers’ Advice Centre, how much greater an impact could they have had on the actual struggle for national liberation and social justice in Israel/Palestine?

When the referendum reopens, socialists and other class-struggle activists at Sussex should combine a campaign for a vote against the boycott with a campaign for positive solidarity with radical forces struggling against the occupation on the ground. It is those campaigns that will have a real impact; boycotts are, at best, a diversion and, at worst, a dangerously counterproductive trap.

POST-16 EDUCATION

Cuts which pave way for big business

BY ED MALTBY

In the university and higher education sector 800 jobs have already been lost. 600 jobs have already gone in further education colleges. Across the two sectors, a further 5,000 jobs are under immediate threat, the great majority in higher education. But these cuts represent only a “first wave” of likely cuts. As the recession bites, we can expect more.

The cuts are being made by local university and college managements, rather than by central government dictat. The way they are being made indicates some general long-term priorities the capitalist class has for the education sector — making it acceptable and profitable for big business.

Several institutions are making cuts to staff budgets in order to preserve prestigious building projects. At Leeds University, for example, an Olympic swimming pool and a showy “pavilion” are under construction even as the lec-

turers’ union UCU reports that 736 jobs may be axed under a planned 10% budget cut.

At University of the Arts London, over 15 courses are to be cut under an “efficiency plan” — courses that do not fit with the new business model the management is adopting. But a multimillion pound development in central London goes ahead.

As elsewhere, UAL’s management are from the private sector with no background in education. Rector Nigel Carrington is a former director of the McLaren group.

At some colleges (but not everywhere), staff and students are putting up stiff resistance. Students have organised demonstrations at Sussex, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham with mass meetings organised at many more colleges, and a short-lived occupation at London College of Communications.

The crucial task for these campaigns is to organise on a national level as well as on a local basis; and to organise students

and campus workers into a single campaign, where each group can depend upon the other’s strength.

Education Not for Sale and other student campaigns and student unions are supporting the National Convention Against Fees and Cuts which will be taking place in University College London on 6 February. In the run-up to the Convention, activists will be meeting locally to plan the convention and link up their campaigns.

The next northern regional planning meeting of anti-cuts activists will be taking place in Sheffield University Students Union, in the Satpal Ram Learning Centre, at 12 noon on Saturday 12 December. All students and workers campaigning against cuts in the sector are welcome!

For more information about the Convention Against Cuts and Fees, and on the fight in the education sector in general, contact education.not.for.sale@gmail.com

ROYAL PARK OCUPATION, LEEDS

This is our building!

BY PATRICK MURPHY

Local community campaigners in the Hyde Park district in Leeds recently occupied the site of a school building in an attempt to save it for their use.

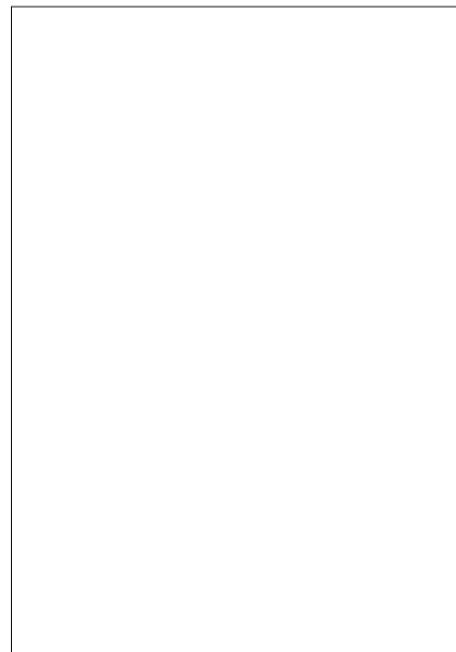
The school, Royal Park Primary, was closed five years ago against the will of a popular local campaign. There were two previous attempts by the local authority to close the school which were defeated by parents, school workers and local activists. During the campaign, in one of the most deprived areas in the city, the campaigners were able to demonstrate the building was extensively used by the local community including for English language classes for Asian women.

When the axe finally fell the council promised that the building would be maintained for community use. But they have failed to live up to this promise, leaving the building to fall into disrepair.

Fed up with waiting for the council and worried at the worsening state of the building, members of the community gained access to the school, started an occupation and began to carry out their own repair work. Broken windows were replaced, rubbish cleared. A huge banner was hung outside the building reading: “Royal Park School Reclaimed”.

As we go to press the occupiers are due for eviction. Not before a winter fair was held in the grounds attended by hundreds of local people.

The main purpose of the occupation seems to have been to put pressure on the council to repair and reopen the building and to ensure that it really is preserved for community use.



The campaigners have also helped to ensure that plans to change another old school building in the area (Leeds Girls High) into apartments were withdrawn.

The occupation has proven hugely popular and been a real boost to the local area. The education authority recently published plans to close the one remaining high school in this area and the local NUT branch are already discussing with the Royal Park occupiers a community and staff campaign to keep it open. The willingness of these campaigners to take direct action has transformed overnight the confidence of a much wider layer of people in their ability to defend local services against attacks.

www.royalparkcommunity.info

Plotting and scheming against benefit cuts

On 14 November, just as the government was introducing “Work for your Benefit” pilot schemes, members of twenty-three different groups from around the UK met in Manchester to share information and plan resistance to government welfare reform.

The meeting set up some working groups to plan action and agreed to meet again in April 2010.

Full report on demands of the campaign will soon be on www.workersliberty.org and in the next issue of *Solidarity*.

To stay in touch join the discussion list here:

<http://groups.google.com/group/noto-welfare-abolition>

More information: hackneyunemployedworkers@gmail.com

A Workers’ Plan for the Crisis

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COPENHAGEN CONFERENCE

Capitalist governments won't save the planet

The Copenhagen conference on 7-18 December will be a disappointment on a gargantuan scale. Whatever agreement is reached next week, it will not turn the tide in time to significantly reduce emissions.

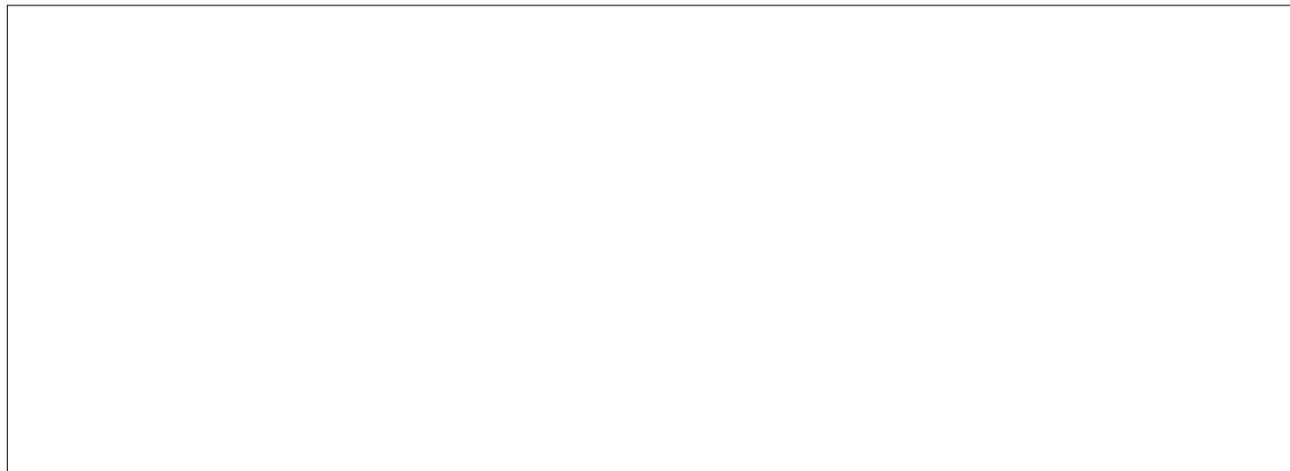
Research into the physical science has reinforced the urgency of action on climate change. A group of leading scientists, heavily involved in climate research through the official IPCC process, has published *The Copenhagen Diagnosis*, an updated synthesis of the latest findings. The scientists argued there is acceleration of melting of ice-sheets, glaciers and ice-caps in the Arctic, Greenland and elsewhere and rapid Arctic sea-ice decline. They say that sea-level predictions have been underestimated and need to be revised: by 2100, global sea-level is likely to rise at least twice as much as projected by the IPCC just two years ago.

Several vulnerable elements in the climate system, such as continental ice-sheets, the Amazon rainforest and the West African monsoon "could be pushed towards abrupt or irreversible change if warming continues in a business-as-usual way throughout this century".

Recent global temperatures demonstrate that warming continues and is human-induced. Over the past 25 years temperatures have increased at a rate of 0.19°C per decade. The reason for continued warming is surging greenhouse gas emissions. Global carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuels in 2008 were nearly 40% higher than those in 1990.

The report concludes that "the turning point must come soon". If global warming is to be limited to a maximum of 2°C above pre-industrial values, "global emissions need to peak between 2015 and 2020 and then decline rapidly". To stabilise climate, a very low carbon society with per capita emissions under 1 metric ton CO₂ is necessary by 2050.

Barack Obama has announced that the US could agree to cut emissions by a modest 17% below 2005 levels by 2020 pending congressional approval — but



Demonstrating against climate change, 5 December 2009

this is only 4% below 1990 levels. Given its responsibility both historically and at present for emissions the US should be singled out for criticism. This is far too little, too late from the world's hegemonic power.

China has announced it would set a "binding goal" to cut CO₂ per unit of GDP (known as "carbon intensity") by 40-45% below 2005 levels by 2020.

Much of the left and NGOs involved in climate change issues are soft on China out of misplaced "third worldism". China is now the largest world emitter and irrespective of who buy the goods it pumps out, unless China also makes the transition to a low carbon economy in the next generation, efforts elsewhere in the world will become increasingly irrelevant. Socialists should not pull our punches in criticising the totalitarian ruling class that runs China for its own, market-driven ends — exploiting millions of workers and peasants in the process.

Although the hypothesis of human-caused climate change is now well supported by evidence from direct observation, past evidence and complex computer models, there is no sense in which uncertainties are completely eliminated. Instead, Hulme argues that "science — especially climate change science — is most useful to society when it finds good ways of recognising, managing and communicating uncertainty". Some of this uncertainty "originates from an incomplete understanding of how the physical climate works", while other sources "emerge from the innate unpredictability of large, complex and chaotic systems such as the global atmosphere and ocean". A third category of uncertainty "originates as a consequence of humans being part of the future being predicted".

Hulme states that there are three limits to science that must be recognised. First, "scientific knowledge about climate change will always be incomplete, and it will always be uncertain. Science always speaks with a conditional voice, or at least good science always does". Second, "we must recognise that beyond such 'normal' scientific uncertainty, knowledge as a public commodity will always have been shaped to some degree by the processes by which it emerges into the social world and through which it subsequently circulates". Most importantly, "the separation of knowledge about climate change from the politics of climate change — a process that has been described as 'purification' — is no longer possible, even if it ever was. The more widely this is recognised the better".

This is a far more adequate basis on which to approach climate science. We do not fear the truth or indeed uncertainty. We can defeat the sceptics. But what we really need to do is defeat the powerful political forces of capital that stand behind them — as well as the other bourgeois forces that accept the climate science but want to deal with it by neoliberal free market policies.

CAPITALIST COMPETITION

Getting an international agreement on climate change, as with world trade or anything else, is fatally impeded by capitalist competition.

All of the fractions of capital are united by their rapacious hunger for profit, but like a band of thieves they fall out over the spoils. Climate change is just the latest terrain in which these battles are being fought out.

International agreements are also likely to fail because the bourgeois system consists of competitive states, with different capacities and different interests — and subject to different pressures from the particular ruling capitalist classes that they represent. Sometimes institutional arrangements can push these forces together — but as trade talks have shown, these are still limited and weighed in favour of the most powerful. And there is no global architecture for enforcing climate laws, however strongly worded. The bourgeoisie cannot represent the general, universal interest on climate change because its "executive committees" are themselves riven with conflicts and divisions.

The capitalist governments propose some measures — but all are governed by neoliberalism.

The commodification of atmosphere, the enclosure of the biosphere, and the imposition of a market for carbon, are the central mechanisms proposed by the masters of the universe to tackle climate change. It is clear what this means: make the transition to a low carbon economy profitable for capital, while making the working class pay for it.

The European Union's Emission Trading Scheme will make some capitalists £50 billion richer by 2012 according to official estimates. Some capitalists have used the permits to help themselves through the economic downturn, rather than switch to less polluting technologies, as the market was supposed to signal.

A report by the Global Humanitarian Forum this year estimated that climate change is already killing over 300,000 people a year across the globe, with over 2.8 billion people living in areas of the world prone to floods, storms, droughts and sea level rise. These effects will only grow in the coming decades.

In the UK, the recent floods in Cumbria indicate the effects here and now of climate change. On top of this, the government's Low Carbon Transition Plan states that energy bills will go up by at least £125 a year, every year — that is by at least 10%, so the private energy firms can restructure for climate change. That's on top of the average 16% per year rises in fuel bills in each of the last four years, brought on fluctuations in the fossil fuel prices — driven at least four million people in the UK into fuel poverty (i.e. people who spend at least 10% of their income to keep warm).

The same capitalists and their servants who caused the climate crisis are launching an attack on working-class living standards in order to pay for the mess they created.

Continued on page 4

"Climate scepticism", science and politics

The hacking of e-mails from the University of East Anglia's Climatic Research Unit (CRU) shows that climate scepticism is not dead. It also shows that scientists are fallible and not beyond reproach. However the issue is not primarily a matter of science — which is already widely established — but rather of politics.

Much of the early literature on climate change neglected to spell out the deeper social and political issues: once the science was proven, the politics would automatically follow. This "scientism" approach still characterises many NGOs and green campaigners. However it is not possible to read off adequate politics directly from "the science". This is because of the nature of science, and the need for climate politics to examine the drives behind emissions, understand the social impacts of climate change and the political decisions taken to combat it.

Climate scientist Mike Hulme rejects the traditional, "positivist" view of science in his book, *Why we disagree about climate change*. His view of science is one where "facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent". He is thus a realist on the IPCC, which is not a self-governing body of independent scientists, but rather a hybrid or "boundary" organisation between government and scientists.

Capitalist governments won't save the planet

From page 3

WORKING-CLASS RESPONSE

Working class people are doubly affected by global warming — by the physical impacts of droughts and floods, storms and heatwaves — and by the neoliberal climate politics of their rulers. But this means that working class people have a direct material interest in tackling climate change, to avoid being its principal victim.

And workers are the largest and most powerful social force, increasing bound together by globalisation into interdependent circuits of production and exchange. The working class has the power to stop the system in its tracks and to create a new, collective, democratic political economy that combines meeting human needs with climate protection.

Some of the answers to CO2 reduction — such as a cheap integrated public transport system — will make instant sense to most workers. Others — such as green energy under workers' control and the workers' reconversion plan — need to be discussed and debated in the labour and ecology movements. But such issues are magnified in their importance as we live through economic crisis.

Why should steel plants close down when we need wind turbines and tidal power stations? Why do car plants close when they could be converted to producing recycling technologies?

A working class-based climate movement, binding together the best of the organised labour movement with the new layer of ecological activists is an immediate necessity. Socialists should throw ourselves into the demonstrations, discussions and actions over the coming weeks to help make that movement a living reality.

IN BRIEF

Following two 24 hour strikes, cleaners who work on Eurostar trains and for Carlisle Cleaners have won

- a 6% pay increase effective next year and another increase totalling nearly 10% over 13 months.

- an agreement that the London Living Wage would be a benchmark for future pay agreements.

- an agreement on bullying and harassment of staff, a mitigation of the redundancy programme, and to discuss pensions and sick pay in the next round.

On 23 November Leeds Streetscene (refuse) workers voted to accept the council's latest offer and go back to work after a 12 week-long strike.

The vast majority (but not all) of the workers' pay will not be cut at all. Some will gain under the terms of the deal. However the deal includes promises on "productivity" levels — likely to cause further struggles down the line. As will the council's plan to privatise Streetscene services.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Vote yes for action on pay!

BY AN RMT MEMBER

Our members on London Underground are balloting on whether or not to take action to improve a pay deal from management — an offer of 1.5% this year and 0.5% next. The ballot result is due on 21 December.

POST

Management concessions but no progress on big questions

BY ED MALTBY

Royal Mail management in London have started to make small concessions to postal workers, agreeing in some units to "re-sign" jobs — that is, to allow workers to choose which tasks to sign up to. Previously management had been unilaterally allocating duties.

This is a real concession, and marks a change from London management taking advantage of the Interim Agreement, and the stopping of the strike, to continue ferocious assaults on workers uninhibited. It appears that management reacting to pressure of tougher talk from the CWU, and a rebuke to Royal Mail management by ACAS.

However, Royal Mail have not shifted in their general position on the future of the postal service. They are still insisting on large-scale job cuts and re-structuring

in the future.

They know they can afford to make a lot more concessions on local disputes and unilateral changes, because since the strikes were called off, they have had an upper hand on the question of the longer-term future of the post.

On 20 November the London Divisional Committee of the CWU called on the Postal Executive to reinstate strike action. The LDC made the call under pressure from members furious at continued management attacks. However the call was not directly the product of an independent rank-and-file initiative.

As one London postal worker told *Solidarity*, "They [the LDC] recognised that in London they would have to call for strikes or risk being very unpopular with membership, in a very direct way". The call prompted Billy Hayes to make a statement a few days later effectively

saying he would want to see the strikes restarted if management did not make any concessions.

The real but limited concessions that management appear to be making in London seem to serve the purpose of taking the pressure off the Postal Executive to call fresh strikes; and to give Royal Mail bosses more leverage in demanding the union concede job cuts.

Postal workers cannot rely on winning vague "tough talk" by the bureaucracy. Nor can they cannot rely on wildcat local strike action to deliver victory on a national level. Postal workers need a rank-and-file organisation in their union. The first step to creating a politically independent rank-and-file platform is for reps and activists at the shop-floor level who oppose the leadership's undemocratic, social-partnership approach, to start meeting and publishing a postal workers' bulletin.

CIVIL SERVICE UNION ELECTION

Vote Mark Serwotka but...

BY A PCS MEMBER

The election for the General Secretary (GS) of the civil service union PCS has begun. **AWL members in the PCS are recommending a vote for Mark Serwotka, the present incumbent.**

Our recommendation for such a vote is not because we are not uncritical of him; on the contrary.

In 2009 he was paid a gross salary of £85,421; resulting in pension contributions of £24,669; he also received Additional Housing Cost Allowance of £1,347; an additional Housing Cost Supplement of £449 and a beneficial loan interest of £748. According to the last set of union accounts he donated £4,000 to the fighting fund.

Therefore he has a remuneration package of £108,634 (£112,634 before the fight fund donation has been deducted). This compares to an "industry" in which 60% of full time permanent civil servants earn less than £25,000 (source: the PCS). Mark Serwotka's pay is too high, and it shows just how far he has drifted from

his activist roots.

That said, his opponent in the election, Rob Bryson has pledged to take all of the money and not donate any money back.

We support Mark because we recognise that Rob Bryson's campaign is based on opposition to the union properly sticking up for members. He will oppose what we support, the need for a campaigning union. He will actually, if privately, welcome what we oppose, for example the PCS leadership's spin and its on/off approach to national pay that sees us in a worse pay position than when Mark Serwotka was first elected.

Rob Bryson has made clear in his election literature that he wants to do deals with the Government. Given that the Government, whether New Labour or Tory wants to slash the civil service then he is advocating accepting the cuts. Mark Serwotka is opposed to these slash and burn proposals.

Therefore in the context of a two horse race, and given the pedigree and racing form of the runners, we are in favour of a vote for Mark Serwotka.

Redundancy payment setback

The Government has announced changes to the civil service compensation scheme. This scheme regulates compulsory and voluntary redundancy and early retirement. Some concessions have been made; in particular the redundancy cap for those earning £15,000 or less has been increased so they will get a higher pay out than before. The concessions were forced by an unprecedented negative response to the staff consultation exercise. That said, most civil servants will still be worse off under the new scheme.

The PCS will now have to take legal action claiming that staff have reserved rights to redundancy entitlements already accrued i.e. if you have ten years service up to the time of the changes in the compensation scheme, then your redundancy payment should be calculated using the current rules rather than the new ones. But even if the union were to win that case, those with little service would gain little, and it leaves open the position of new entrants.

Under the two tier pension scheme agreed by the union, those in the newer pension scheme are not covered by the civil service compensation scheme in any case. At present we don't know what arrangements have been made for them.

our living expenses are going up. It also lags way behind what our workmates in other railway companies are getting. ASLEF members should vote "no" to the offer.

RMT's industrial action ballot comes after a painfully long wait since the early-October reps' meeting which voted for more action.

Whatever happens the rank and file of both unions need to reclaim this dispute from the head offices, and to unite to win a better deal.

London Underground has made a revised offer on medical redeployment that only applies to 25 drivers and 25 staff from other grades. It does not actually guarantee an alternative job to those

OBAMA'S AFGHAN "SURGE"

A bloody escalation

BY ROSALIND ROBSON

Barack Obama's decision to send a further 30,000 US troops to Afghanistan, coupled with a (conditional) commitment to begin withdrawing troops in 18 months' time (a political concession to Democrats and an increasingly war-weary American public) has been described as a "gamble". That puts it charitably.

The US's strategy for Afghanistan — a massive overall increase of NATO forces, including an extra 500 British troops — has some of the elements of the 2007 military "surge" in Iraq. That was about damping down conflict long enough allow the building up of the local army and police and the bodging together of a political settlement.

The Iraq surge ended with something like what the US ruling class wanted. In fact, before the "surge" started, a section of the Sunni "resistance" had become war-weary, discontented with Al Qaida, and willing to ally with the USA in the hope that the US would act as arbiter for them against the Shia majority. The different sectarian militias fought each other to a standstill. None could win outright. They subsided.

At any rate, since late 2007 there has been increased stability in Iraq — at the cost, for the people of Iraq, of authoritarian government, corruption, and continuing lower-level sectarian violence.

In late 2008, the US had to retreat on its demands for a deal which would have made the US military an effective parallel government in Iraq for the indefinite future, and sign the text under which it had to withdraw its troops from Iraq's cities in June this year.

The US ruling class is not happy with Iraq's course today. But at least it offers the US some prospect of extricating itself, over time (US is due to withdraw in August 2011), without catastrophe. By now, the US asks for no more than that in Afghanistan. Can't it get it through the

"surge"? Not likely!

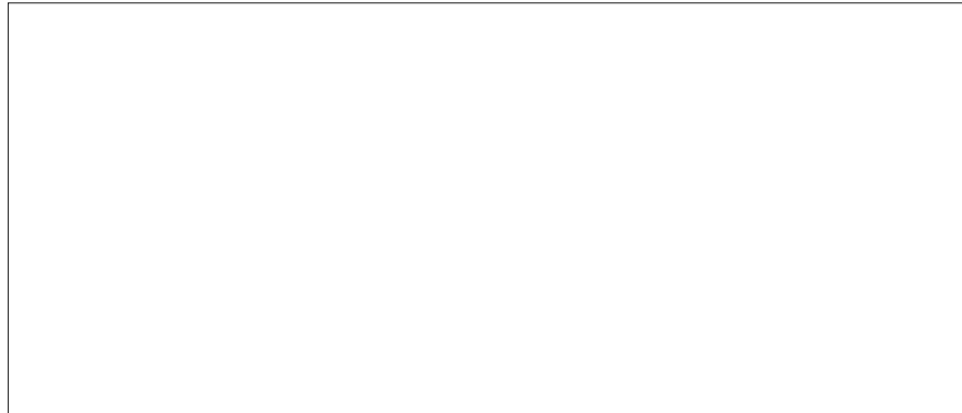
Why not? The central reason is that the Taliban can withdraw to Pakistan, or maybe other parts of Afghanistan, whenever the US tries to "secure" an area in the southern, Taliban-dominated, part of Afghanistan. Then, unless the US can develop workable Afghan central administration willing to collaborate with the US and stand up against the Taliban — it has been trying to do that for eight years, and failed — the US only has two options in each area. It can stay and try to impose US military rule on the local population, stirring up resentment, and tying down vast numbers of troops indefinitely. Or it can withdraw and see the Taliban return.

- The troop increase, coming so soon after August's fraudulent presidential vote, will only further undermine the shabby political structures set up in the wake of the 2001 invasion.

- Obama says he wants to avoid the high civilian casualties from US bombing which have pushed so many people in Afghanistan into supporting or tolerating the Taliban (of course, the Taliban are hated and feared too). How? The US will now have about as many troops in Afghanistan as the USSR deployed during its brutal 10 year occupation. How can the USA, with arguably even less solid Afghan allies than the USSR had, succeed without heavy bombing, sure to bring civilian casualties?

- The insurgents in Afghanistan are not just Taliban or jihadist "hardliners" but also power brokers in Afghan's tribal society — people in the Pashtun population. It is a Taliban-tribal nexus which is organising the conflict, not al-Qaida, and not a patchwork of competing militias. The USA does not have the option of playing off one "resistance" militia against another which it had in Iraq.

All that must call into question the US-UK's goal of a negotiated deal with "moderate" Taliban. Saudi-brokered talks with the Taliban and Karzai officials had stalled. Even "moderate"



Karzai — now an unreliable ally

Taliban are more likely just to wait until the US gets so war-weary that it has to leave.

- The US reportedly intends to go round central government, by giving money direct to local provincial political leaders. There is talk of merging local militias into the regular army. Both plans will strengthen warlord rule and boost powers rival to the central government. That might make sense in the short-term. In the long run it contradicts the US's strategy of building up a strong central state capable of holding Kabul against the prospect of Taliban takeover.

- The US does not have a reliable ally in Karzai as head of central government. His government is corrupt from top to bottom. The US says so itself. But the US has no alternative.

- The "war in Afghanistan" against the Taliban in the south and east of the country now extends into vast territory over the border into Pakistan. The Pakistani government is weak, and its military another unreliable ally for the US. As long as Pakistan's regional conflict with India remains important, and as long as the Islamist elements in the military dominate, Pakistan's campaign against the Pakistani Taliban in the border regions will not be as decisive as the US wants it to be.

The signs are that Obama has, in spite of his stated intentions and probably his wishes, committed the US and its allies to a long and protracted war in Afghanistan and increasing pressure to become further embroiled in a military campaign in Pakistan. According to the *Guardian*, in the last two years over four and a half thousand Afghan people ("civilians") have been killed by both sides. That death toll will continue to rise.

An escalation of the war is, of course, what the Taliban want. The prospect of an intensified Taliban-led insurgency, and NATO response, is terrifying and not just in Afghanistan. The daily suicide bombings in Pakistan's cities will continue.

Our job is to hope and work for the strengthening of any democratic, critical political culture in Afghanistan and Pakistan — solidarity with women's groups, for instance, and solidarity with trade unionists and socialists in Pakistan. We do not put any trust in a bodged-together US-UK-NATO surge. To paraphrase General David Petraeus, the US is now in a situation where it will have to "kill and capture its way out of an insurgency". The US-UK-NATO forces should withdraw.

FRANCE: MIGRANT WORKERS' STRIKES

Demanding rights and regularisation

BY MICHAEL ELVERTON

Migrant workers in France have stepped up their campaign of strikes and occupations. Nearly 6,000 workers are now involved in a strike wave that has spread from Paris out into Oise and Orléans, demanding rights at work, regularisation papers, and a fairer system for regularising migrant workers.

The step-up in action follows a recent government circular offering to make minor changes to the immigration system. The strikers considered new criteria for regularisation (secure legal status) were considered to be too restrictive by the strikers, who voted to reject the "deal". One union activist told *Solidarity*, "Some conservative elements in the CGT [union federation] tried to present it as a

great victory but were quickly silenced by outrage from other CGT activists and the sans-papiers strike delegates themselves — because they can read too!"

The strikers have adopted the tactic of occupying a temping agency and bringing isolated sans-papiers workers from other workplaces to join the strike there. This tactic enables the strikers to identify places where migrant workers work, and build up networks through which those new workplaces can be organised. As the movement spreads out to other cities in the provinces many of the migrant workers who had come to Paris from the provinces to take part in the movement will return to their original places of work to conduct agitation there.

The French headquarters of the ISS cleaning contractor is, as we go to press, occupied. In total around 1,800 work-

places have been affected by the strike, and roughly 30 workplaces are under occupation. As soon as one occupation is cleared out, the workers go to occupy another.

The strikers have begun to organise a rank-and-file network independently of the leaderships of their unions. One SUD union activist explained to *Solidarity*: "It's like Lenin said, one week of general strike is a better education than any congress. There are about 170 representatives of the different strike committees around France who are learning very rapidly how to lead a strike. They are representing their struggle to the media, navigating union structures, and sharing information out horizontally between workplaces rather than only communicating via official union structures. They have begun to organise their own migrant workers reps' caucus. That's not

an anti-union move, it is just a logical demand of the situation on the strikers."

In addition to the reps' network that has grown up, a complicated proliferation of organisations are supporting the strike. The migrant workers' organisations have grown up on the back of traditional migrant collectives, whose initial purpose was, in the words of one activist "a sort of collective way of managing their poverty, a support structure".

In addition to the migrant collectives and the trade unions, a variety of community campaign groups and NGOs are offering help to the strikers. That level of self-organisation and general social mobilisation through a number of different channels is what is giving the migrant workers the strength to continue after a month and a half of bitter strikes.

Vestas: story of a battle

Sometimes struggles come along that help us learn, or relearn, many basic and valuable lessons about what it means to be a working-class activist engaged in the fight for socialism. The struggle that took place on the Isle of Wight in summer 2009 to prevent the closure of the Vestas wind turbine blades factory was such a struggle.

It taught us, against ruling-class myths about the non-existence of class or the passivity of working people, that workers can and will fight — even when they are unorganised and have no history of militancy.

It taught us that organised socialists and other class struggle activists can play a vital role in catalysing key struggles; without the work of Workers' Liberty members and others in the Workers' Climate Action network — who spent weeks on the island distributing factory bulletins, talking to workers, and building a campaign — the occupation may never have happened.

It taught us that workers' struggle can connect a wide variety of issues and can ultimately pose a vision of a different form of society. The Vestas workers' campaign linked the immediate issues of the jobs crisis and climate change to present the case for a society controlled democratically in the interests of the working-class majority, not run irrationally in the blind interests of profit — unconcerned for the welfare of either humanity or our planet.

Those lessons, and others, are all fundamental to developing an understanding of how working-class struggle can change the world and the possibilities for a different form of society it offers. *Workers' Liberty's* new pamphlet — “The Vestas jobs battle: How wind turbine workers became a power” — aims to reaffirm those lessons for those who were directly involved in the campaign and spread them throughout the working-class and environmental movements so that those who were not directly involved will have a chance to consider them. Containing numerous testimonies from Vestas worker-activists, campaign supporters and others — as well as *Workers' Liberty's* Marxist analysis of the dispute, more often than not written and distributed on-the-spot at the protest camp outside the factory — the pamphlet is an invaluable resource for any activist who wants to learn the lessons of Vestas and, crucially, wants to ensure that when the next similar struggle emerges it will end in victory.

• £3.50 (p&p free), from PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques to “AWL”. Or buy online at

www.workersliberty.org/pamphlets

A postscript

After four months as the hub of the Vestas solidarity campaign, the “Magic Roundabout”, made up of protestors camping on the roundabout outside the main Vestas factory, was evicted on Friday 27 November.

Following the arrival of bailiffs occupiers were left to hastily pack away their belongings, but were able to put up some resistance.

The “magic roundabout” came into being to maintain a 24 hour picket and as a place to house the solidarity activists who were arriving on the island with their tents and camping gear. Very soon, with the help of a band of practically-minded Climate Campers, the camp, recycling materials from the industrial estate, was operating with a functioning kitchen, sound system, wood burner and water supply. Over the next four months, this industrial estate became alive with the colour, music and vibrancy of working-class solidarity.

The protestors say they will continue their fight to win redundancy money for the workers who occupied the factory in July-August.

• Longer report: www.workersliberty.org

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM

How to fight capitalism and the left

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

Members, supporters and friends of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty gathered in London over 28-29 November to discuss “How to fight capitalism?”

With sessions ranging from introductory discussions on Marxist ideas to in-depth debates on the capitalist economy and its future, the weekend was geared towards re-arming and equipping revolutionary socialists with ideas for the battles to come. This focus is all the more important given the continuing capitalist crisis, the rising influence and power of rightwing ideas and political movements and the prospect of significant political change at the next general election.

For Mathias from Frankfurt, Germany, this was his first experience of such ideas: “This was my first big socialist event. It was really stimulating and I’m planning to learn more about socialism. I liked the meeting on Trotsky. Paul Hampton, the speaker, was very interesting and convincing.”

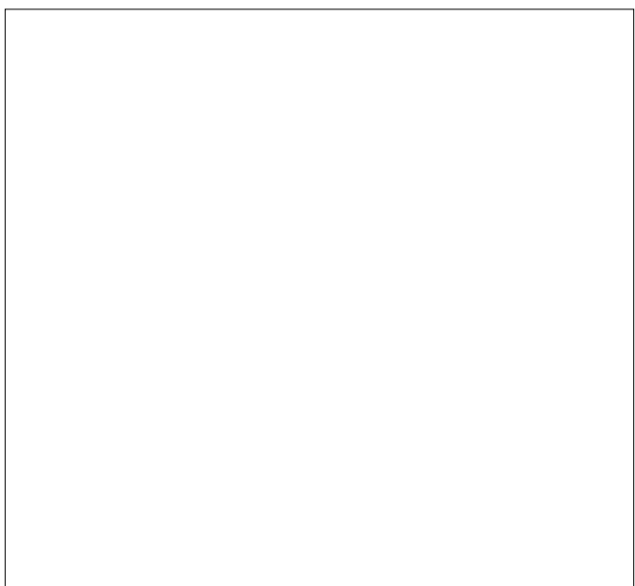
“Peter Thomas’ session on Gramsci was also very interesting, especially because of the ideas about pedagogy and learning.”

“The introductory sessions were the most useful for me, but I also enjoyed the discussion on the Socialist Workers Party. It was difficult to follow — it’s a specifically British topic — but it was useful to hear about the differences between socialist groups.”

Combining an understanding of socialist fundamentals, political differences on the left and more in-depth and specific topics is vital if we are to understand what we — revolutionary socialists — actually are. We need to learn from the mistakes and victories of the past and prepare ourselves for the challenges ahead.

Dave from Leeds commented: “Sean Matgamna’s introduction to the discussion on the fall of Stalinism in Eastern Europe both demonstrated the power of the AWL’s ideas and analysis — Marxism — and showed the necessity of standing against the stream of ideas, both left and right. What we said and did around 1989 was unpopular, it contradicted both ‘leftwing’ and rightwing ideas. We upset many people on the left who thought that the Stalinist states were truly socialist and people on the right for contesting the idea that socialism had ‘failed’. We were unpopular for saying what we said but we were right to do it.”

“In many ways, we’re in the same situation today: faced with a disorientated and discredited left, we



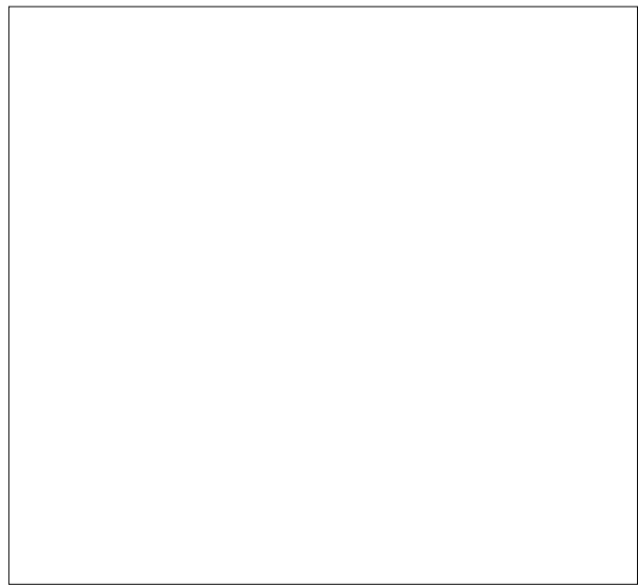
Muayad Ahmed (Worker-communist Party of Iraq) discusses the tasks facing the labour movement in Iraq

attempt to find a clear way ahead; faced with an onslaught from the right, we continue to propose and defend basic socialist ideas.”

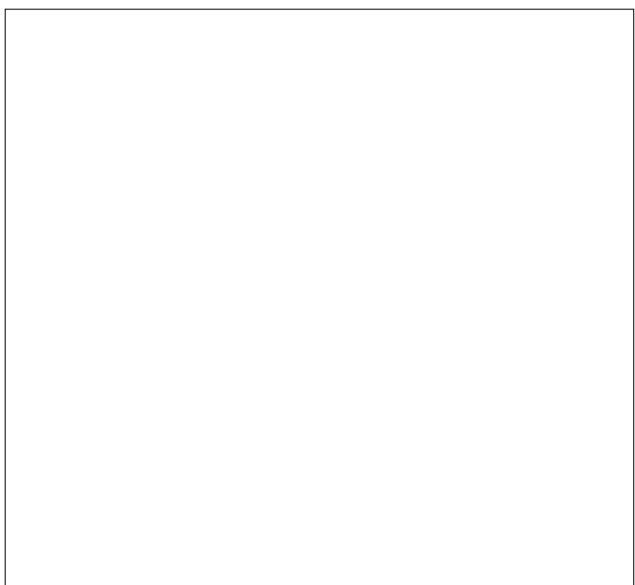
Dave also attended two debates between the AWL and people to our right: “The debate on ‘Is class struggle out of date?’ showed that the emperor really has no clothes. I was quite worried about what the person from the Institute of Ideas would say. These former Marxists appear to have quite worked out ideas, but what they proposed in place of class struggle politics amounted to accepting a right-wing agenda.”

“Another debate with the Labour peer and one-time Marxist Meghnad Desai was extremely interesting. Desai is a bit of a contradiction: a member of the House of Lords who still thinks we can replace capitalism. Despite everything, he had some interesting things to say about how we can see elements of the socialist future in the capitalist present.”

Both the ‘Institute of Ideas’ (IoI) and Meghnad Desai are examples of how Marxist ideas and theory, once uncoupled from the logic of class struggle, degenerate. For the IoI and its intellectual gurus — grouped around Frank Furedi — there is no longer any content to the class struggle. In re-forming themselves as a political current they have placed themselves as “defenders” of the bourgeois status-quo. Whilst Furedi and his followers no longer make reference to the possibility of a socialist future, Desai does.



Jill Mountford tells the story of the 1984-5 miners' strike. She was joined by Dave Douglass (NUM, author of *Stardust and Coaldust*)



Can we replace capitalism? Meghnad Desai (author of *Marx's Revenge*) debated the AWL's Daniel Randall

Capitalism: the left we left we need

Sean Matgamna speaking in the closing session:
“How to fight capitalism”

Learning from each other

demics are open to debate and used to defending their positions. Simon Mohun’s contribution to the debate on “When does capitalist change direction?” is one such example.

Simon based his exposition on charts of long-term swings in the rate of profit. He pointed out some problems in how the calculations are made and demonstrated that the rise in profit rates up to 2007 would have been even bigger if pay-outs to bosses nominally counted as “wages” were instead counted as profit.

Some members of the AWL would disagree with the idea that long-term swings in the “rate of growth of profit” are central to understanding the economic crisis. Firstly, nobody can say what the rate should be, what capitalism’s preferred rate is etc... Secondly, this measurement played only a minor role in Marx’s analysis of capitalism and capitalist crisis. We were able to have a valuable debate with Simon and the other economists even though we disagreed. We wish the same was true for our comrades in other revolutionary organisations.

Together with re-asserting our basic ideas and looking for in-depth analysis of capitalism in crisis, the AWL places the lessons of near and distant class struggles at the centre of our analysis.

Sessions on the recent postal dispute and the 25th anniversary of the miners’ strike were held together with five discussions covering the apparent demise

of the “anti-capitalist movement” and the growing “green movement”, along with a session on the Iraqi labour movement.

Neither of the first two phenomena had or have deep, organic roots and links with the organised working class. The Iraqi labour movement was either ignored or attacked by the dominant campaign against the Iraq war. The perspective of the AWL is that taking such campaigns into the labour movement is vital: but it is not a one-way street. The organised political left must also accept lessons from and learn how to mobilise the labour movement.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty is committed to political clarity and the class struggle. The left cannot make a choice between the two and cannot — as so many do — reject both. In analysing contemporary capitalism, learning the lessons of the class struggle and asserting our core socialist politics we hope to build both our own organisation and strengthen the workers’ movement. We believe our organisation is special because our ideas can change the world. So, why not get in touch to discuss with us how we think that is possible?

A Saturday night gig took place alongside IFF. Artists included Glasgow-based rappers Skribbo (right) and Loki (left)

But again the logic of class struggle is absent and his analysis is reduced to spotting trends in the development of capitalism that point to such a future.

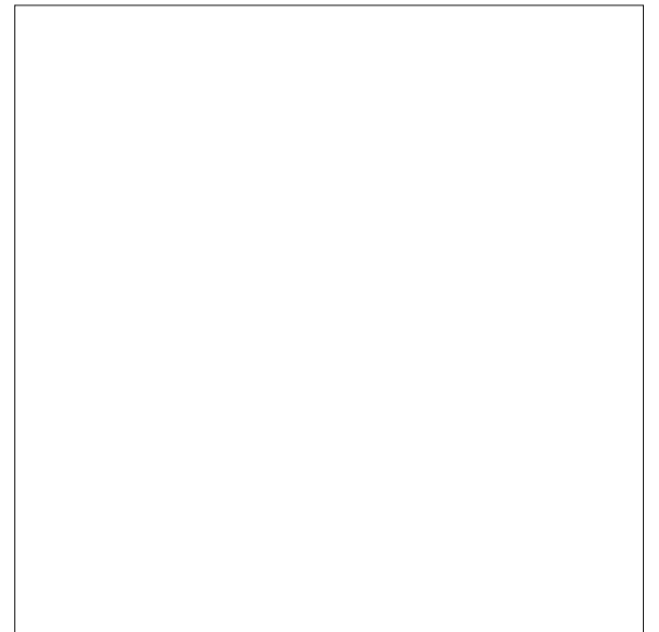
Analysing the dynamics of capitalism need not be sterile. In fact, it is vitally important.

Max from Sheffield attended two meetings about the capitalist crisis given by academic Marxists together with AWL members. “I enjoyed the discussions on the role of finance and its increasing influence on both capitalism and our individual lives. Dick Bryan showed that even if we think things are complicated now, the way in which capital is likely to adapt to the crisis will make things even more complicated.

“Dick’s explanation of the potentially increased role of derivatives in post-crisis capitalism implies a new aspect to class struggle. What will happen if more and more of us are forced to act as individual financial operators in order to obtain basic services like health care? How will the left respond to these attempts to atomise our class even further? These are big questions that we need to address.”

Max also commented on the increased number of academic speakers at this event: “I was initially worried about the number of academics on the agenda. I was hoping for an event orientated around planning what we did next. Despite these worries, I thought the contribution made by the economists in particular was vital.”

Unlike the majority of organised socialists, aca-



Janine Booth displays a replica banner of the Poplar council fight — the subject of her book, and her talk at IFF

Help us raise £25,000

At this time of year the bourgeois papers often produce a “review” the news. A warmed up meal of quizzes, celebrity gossip, photos and quotes is duly dished up.

Our review of the year would be somewhat different! We would say that, despite the economic crisis and the passivity of the official trade union movement in the face of job cuts, in spite of the escalation of war in the world, this has also been a year of tentative hope. Who would have predicted the occupations at Visteon and Vestas? The mass demonstrations on the city streets of Iran are not over yet. Our job is not to just to “report” the facts but to champion and critically evaluate the struggles that are now surfacing, and at the same time not lose sight of the overall picture, its difficulties, and its political obstacles. Whew! is that all?

Well, in doing that job, *Solidarity* and the organisation which produces it, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty, can only abide by one simple guideline —

because we have no ready-made formulas and no powers of Marxist prediction. Our rule is as Leon Trotsky once proposed “To face reality squarely; not to seek the line of least resistance; to call things by their right names; to speak the truth to the masses, no matter how bitter it may be...”.

So “speaking the truth” is what we try to do in the pages of this paper. That’s not something you’re going to get in the Murdoch press. If you like what you read please send us a donation.

Solidarity and the AWL has launched a new “fund drive” of £25,000 and got off to a great start at Ideas for Freedom where we raised £1084. Since then we have received a further £200 from a comrade in Australia.

Can you help us? Take out a standing order. Donate via our website or by post. Take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell. Join the AWL. Email us at awl@workersliberty.org or call 020 207 3997.

REVIEW

Stalin is back

BY DAVID KIRK

"Education is a weapon whose effects depend on who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed." Joseph Stalin

In Britain genealogists can be found in your local library. In Russia they can end up behind bars. This was one of the many illuminating and worrying facts in John Sweeney's brave but flawed documentary (*Stalin's back?* BBC2 2 December) about the way Stalin's reputation is being rehabilitated by the current Russian regime.

Sweeney traveled to the Stalinist theme park of Gori in Georgia, met veterans in Volgograd (better known as Stalingrad), met survivors of famines in the countryside and visited the only preserved Stalinist slave labour camp in Perm. Along the way he revealed that those who research and record the fate of Stalin's victims can be arrested and threatened. Charities that look into Stalin's crimes can be closed down. Critics lose their jobs.

More insidious still is the way history is being rewritten and taught to young people. In 2007 Vladimir Putin made a speech in which he promoted "positive history" — a history with all the difficult and dark bits taken out. Now the official history text-book used in schools leaves out the gulags, forced labour and the crushing of the oppositions inside the Communist Party in the 20s and 30s.

This version of history presents the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact as unavoidable and the break-neck industrialization of the 30s as painless rather than built on slavery and exploitation.

This is history made to fit the nationalist and authoritarian swagger of the current regime

The rehabilitation of Stalin isn't solely at the government's behest. A "cult of Stalin" remains deeply embedded among many working class Russians. But this is where the presenter becomes unstuck. He falls into the frankly offensive idea that Russians are naturally pre-disposed to tyrants and despots.

A softness on, even admiration for, the brutal crimes of the Stalinist empire is what we can expect from Russia's new ruling class. Putin and many other senior politicians learnt their politics in Yuri Andropov's KGB. However widespread nostalgia among the people for Stalin and his regime can only be explained by the catastrophic collapse of living standards for the vast majority of Russians in the 1990s.

The regime which collapsed in 1991 was not a decayed or degenerated workers' state (as "orthodox" Trotskyists liked to believe), but a vast parasitical bureaucracy presiding over an economy where the workers had no control. But this system, for its own reasons, did provide a basic level of housing and welfare. Once gangster capitalism took over, that threadbare safety net went.

The result was millions of premature deaths, entire regions of the country laid waste. Lacking a genuine working-class alternative, people ended up attracted to Stalinist myriad shades of murky brown in the post-Soviet political swamp. In this situation a lash up of ultra-nationalism and neo-Stalinism makes perfect sense; militarism, patriotism, autarky, anti-semitism, anti-intellectualism and brutal authoritarianism are shared themes in both fascism and Stalinism. Most groups don't go as far as the Hitlerite "National Bolshevik Party", but post-Stalinist-Stalinism now dominates much of political life in Russia — from the rump communist parties to the ruling United Russia Party and beyond, to the far right.

Yet there is another Russia; this is the Russia of Antifa (anti-fascists), anarchist and libertarian Marxist youth movements. Some engage in brutal streetfights against both fascists and the Putin-worshipping Nashi youth movement. It is the Russia of those fighting for LGBT rights against murderous homophobes. Young Russians face a fight in the classroom and the lecture theatre to create a truth-telling history to replace that of the ruling class.

CEGIELSKI FACTORY, POZNAN

Class struggle in Poland

On 27 November Ed Maltby attended a small protest in front of the Polish Embassy in London in solidarity with workers and trade union activists who have been sacked from the Cegielski factory in Poznan.

The Cegielski plant is one of the best known factories in Poland. It produces various types of engines. This summer 20 per cent of workers of the factory were sacked.

On 23 October four thousand of workers demonstrated in Poznan against the layoffs in Cegielski.

The protest was organised by the Industrial Workers of the World. Bartek, a Polish comrade who is a member of the IWW and the Polish Anarchist Society in the UK, spoke to Ed.

We were demonstrating at the Polish Embassy because our comrades from the Workers Initiative union in Poland have been suffering repression from the Cegielski management and also from the government.

The government plans to completely privatise the Cegielski plant and other factories connected to the plant — which means closing Cegielski and a massive reduction in the workforce. The Workers Initiative union was the only union inside the plant that opposed all management plans from the beginning and fought inside factories and on the streets of Poznan city.

The union had gained quite wide support. That resulted in one of its members, Marcel Szary, being elected as a workers' representative for three consecutive terms: in 2003, 2006 and 2009.

On November 3, 2009, a court found Marcel Szary guilty of organising and leading three wildcat strikes at Cegielski in 2008 and he was sentenced to a fine of 3,000 zł (730 euro).

Not only did the state prosecution demand the punishment of Szary, but so did the bosses at the plant — they wanted a ban on him from holding a workers' representative position in any plant. The court ultimately decided to limit the punishment to a financial fine.

In mid October 2009 the WI union at Cegielski plant saw a massive surge of new members as a result of the growing conflict and radicalisation of the workforce. Management allowed the union to appoint four new stewards at the plant. A few days after, all of them were sacked.

One of the WI demands on the picket was to reinstate the sacked trade unionists immediately. What we know is that after negotiations management decided to allow them back to work. All fired workers were also members of the strike committee established by WI during the industrial dispute that started in August 2009. The other demands were to stop repression of the union activity in a plant, stop privatisation plans and halt redundancies.

What difficulties do trade unionists in Poland face? What measures are the government and the bosses taking against trade unionists?

The two biggest union federations — "Solidarnosc"

23 October demonstration in defence of Cegielski workers

and OPZZ — are both connected with political parties and are co-operating with big business. They are not really fighting for workers' rights and not defending them against capitalism in Poland. Many of their members are hard working people misled by union bosses.

Only non-conformists, militant unions like Workers Initiative, are really standing up and to defending working class people. Radical, anti-capitalist unions have always suffered repression, both from the government and the bosses.

If you have family it's really hard when you are sacked, or if you have to go to jail only because you are trying to organise and fight for workers. Capitalists always have privileges from government and they will use all kind of measures against the workers.

It is very popular in Poland now to use private security guards against striking workers. They are acting like police or even worse. They employ any brutal methods against workers (for example there were riots in Ozarów when police and private security guards clashed with workers occupying a factory on 28 November 2002).

Given the history of Stalinism, is it difficult to argue for revolutionary politics in Poland?

After many years of state rule by a "workers'" party, words like "working class", "socialism" and "left", have really negative meanings in society's consciousness. Union leaders like Lech Walesa are recognised as figures who brought capitalism and independence for Poland. Peoples are feeling really disappointed in unions and left-wing parties.

On the other hand, society is starting to recognise the negative effects of capitalism and mass privatisation. Workers have no one who can defend them and they trust no bureaucratic unions and no political parties. That is why they have to start to organise themselves.

What can trade unionists do to support workers in Poland?

The first and most important thing is they must show class solidarity and show the Polish workers that they are not alone in this worldwide class conflict. Cooperation and real support can do a lot.

Does the Workers' Initiative see itself as an alternative union, or does it work inside the existing unions? If it sees itself as an alternative union, why is this?

The WI union is not working inside any other unions. It is a completely independent union based on anarcho-syndicalist principles, made by truly working class people. WI stands against the model of organisation offered by bureaucratic unions because these are corrupted and not representative of working people. Only unions based on self-organisation and direct democracy, made by workers and for workers, can be a real alternative to the capitalist hierarchical model of economy.

<http://www.ozzip.pl/english/20-latest-news/926-cegielski-factory-in-crisis>

Democracy, capitalism and the left in India

A presentation by Indian Marxists Jairus Banaji and Rohini Hensman, from Ideas for Freedom winter 2009, a weekend of socialist debate and discussion hosted by Workers' Liberty on 28-29 November.

JAIRUS BANAJI:

From a left-wing point of view, it's important to emphasise that there's always been a lack of class politics in India. That's one of its most distinctive political features.

There are hundreds of reasons as to why that is the case, but that obviously makes a statement about the left in India in a very big way. It also raises the issue of what a class politics would mean in the context of a society that's as complex and fragmented as India is.

I want to try and tie up the three themes of democracy, capitalism and the left; what Rohini will do is concentrate more on the labour movement, and the potentialities of a new kind of labour movement emerging in an Indian context.

Traditionally, the Indian political landscape has been dominated by a strong centre. I mean that both in the sense that we have a relatively strong central government which has to co-exist with state legislatures, state governments, in an effectively federal set-up, but also in the sense that politically, the centre has been quite strong in India. The last two elections have shown the strength and resilience of centrism in India.

That centrism, represented by the Congress Party, was severely challenged in the 80s and 90s. One form in which that challenge culminated was the horrific massacres we saw, for example in Bombay in 1992. These were right-wing massacres, pogroms against Muslims. Then we saw a similar action in Gujarat on a very big scale in 2002. Most recently violence spread through the tribal areas in Orissa which was sparked off by the assassination of a right-wing religious leader.

The Marxist-Leninists [Maoists] claimed responsibility for the assassination, but the backlash took the form of large-scale communal violence — Hindu communal violence — against mainly Christian tribal communities in Orissa.

The nationalism of the Congress Party is very strong, and has an ambiguously unifying power, but it also creates a backlash against itself, in the form of regionalism on the one hand and communal Hindu nationalism on the other represented by a party called the BJP.

The point to note about the strength of centrism, of Congress nationalism, is that it has never been effectively challenged from the left. It has always been effectively challenged from the right. In a sense, it looked at one stage as if the Indian political system was going to settle down into a fluctuation between far-right Hindu nationalism, which is communal in character and targets minorities such as Christians and Muslims, and mainstream centrist Congress nationalism — as if the whole of India's political future was going to be an endless oscillation between these two alternatives.

The last two elections demonstrate the resilience and relative strength of centrism within India politics. The BJP is a complete shambles today. It's been disintegrating and expelling leaders; that crisis was precipitated by the fact that it did disastrously in the last set of national elections, in May this year.

THE LEFT AND STALINISM

The left in India is fragmented. It's divided, and it's never seriously understood what class politics is all about.

The division of the left began in the 1960s when the Communist Party of India (Marxist) split off from the Communist Party of India. That was a division that was largely bound up with the Sino-Soviet split. Then the CP(M) divided further into the CP(M) hardcore and the CP(ML), which the endorsement and backing of China at the time.

Left party politics was represented in India by these

India's new capitalism: the Ambani brothers, who divided the business they inherited when they fell out

three streams. The CPI was largely pro-Congress and pro-Russian. The CP(M) is an ambivalent party that started off favouring China but then veered back to Russia. It sometimes denounced the CP(ML) as "not true Maoists".

The CP(ML) has always had a putschist political character. They believe in guerilla warfare, and are largely rooted in the tribal areas of India which run from the northeastern tip of the country into the central heartland of the country, the Deccan.

The most substantial base that they've had historically has not been in Bengal, but in Andhra Pradesh, where the first split with CPI was largely a split between the CPI and the potential CP(ML). In other words, the CP(M) was never significant in Andhra; it was always the ML. Their social base is in destitute tribal communities, the most neglected and oppressed strata of Indian society.

Their official status under India law is "scheduled tribes" — STs, as they're called — and the ML tendency has rooted itself in those parts of the country. The resurgence of the ML in the last ten or fifteen years is bound up with the expansion of capital into those areas.

Capital is looking for new internal frontiers, and the bulk of mines are located in the area. There's been a process of effectively state-supported dispossession, which is a key factor underlying the resurgence of a new generation of the ML, a new generation of Maoists in these tribal areas.

So the left has been historically divided, and secondly, none of the broad blocs within the left has ever escaped the political history and tradition of Stalinism. They are all Stalinists. If you walk into a CP(M) office in Bengal today, you'd see huge portraits of Stalin on the wall. They quote Stalin in their literature. Stalin is a major figure and icon for them.

The CPI is less Stalinist in its mode of functioning, but it's also the least significant politically of these forces. The CP(M) is the largest of the left parties. It has exercised power in terms of actually controlling state governments, and it's the best funded of the left parties. It's also the most Stalinist. The ML has had its own internal fragmentation, which reflected what was going on in China.

I can't think of another left movement anywhere else in the world that has been so firmly wedded to Stalinist politics. When there was an abortive military putsch against Gorbachev, the CP(M) actually sent a telegram

to the army elements involved in this congratulating them on their success in restoring the proletarian revolution!

These groups literally slaughter each other; not the CPI so much, but the CP(M) and the CP(ML) literally murder each other's cadres in Bengal today. That is the shambles that they have reduced themselves to.

CAPITALISM

Meanwhile, there have been sweeping changes in the corporate sector in India.

The distinctiveness of the Indian social formation is the peculiar strength of domestic capital. Traditionally it took the form of large business houses but in the last fifteen years it's become a bit more complicated.

Some of the old business houses have disappeared. New and very powerful business groups have appeared since the 1980s. Key among them is the Ambani Group. Their flagship set of companies is called "Reliance".

They dominate the oil industry and the private sector, they dominate telecom. They started off as a textile business but diversified into petrochemicals, and from there went into oil and from oil into telecoms. They control state governments and influence central government policy.

The 1990s saw liberalisation in India. 1991 was the beginning of new economic reforms, and that was an enormous spur to the expansion of these sectors of domestic capital. But they first smashed the unions, and eroded union strength for a period of fifteen to twenty years before the turn to liberalisation. Through the 1970s, there was a gradual erosion of union strength. The big textile strike in Bombay in 1982 was effectively broken by the mill-owners. The liberalisation of 1991 was preceded by this sustained attack on organised labour and on the unions.

Today, only around 7% of the Indian labour force is organised into unions. 93% are unorganised. That's partly the result of that war of attrition by management against labour. The chronology doesn't start with liberalisation. 1991 was not the commencement of the class war against organised labour; it went way back into the 70s.

The capitalist restructuring follows that period of smashing the unions, of dismantling unions power. The restructuring of Indian capital is no longer concentrated on the workplace but concentrated on corporate structures and the relationships between them. Mergers and acquisitions, which weren't known in the 70s, took off in a big way in the 1990s. The globalisation of Indian business, the outward drive of Indian business into other markets, also started.

The big difference that liberalisation makes is that it sends out a signal to big business that the government is willing to cooperate with them in a very close partnership.

It's this partnership between business and government that defines the whole of the 90s. The media became a major force in that process. There is not a single television channel or newspaper which is not controlled by one of the business houses or business groups. You used to have independent journalists writing for the mainstream press; you don't after the 1990s.

All journalists are on contract, and some of the best journalists are left to fend for themselves in terms of freelancing. The complexion of the Indian media has become uncritical, slavish and servile. We just do not have the kind of media where serious political issues can be debated in any way. That is one of the main upshots of liberalisation.

The left, in Britain and the US in particular, has characterised this entire period as one of "neo-liberalism". I have some problems with that characterisation. Obviously from one point of view, this is neo-liberalism; the opening up of markets, the expansion of markets elsewhere, and the emergence of a new regime of

Continued on page 10

accumulation. Welfare expenditure and public expenditure are all being cut back in various ways.

But “neo-liberalism” seems to imply that there was something there that was worth defending in the first place, that in the 60s, 70s and 80s there was something equivalent to the NHS here that was worth defending. But in India there was nothing of that sort of thing. There was the Public Distribution System in India, which was important. But we never had a health service in India, you don’t have subsidised housing schemes. Aspects of the social wage which were under attack by neo-liberalism from the 80s onwards didn’t exist in India to start with.

The attack on organised labour began well before 1991. The unions had already been dismantled when the economic reforms began in 1991, so the causality is not exactly as it’s often made out to be, where neo-liberalism is the original sin. Even the public sector has, to a large extent, retained its dominance. It hasn’t necessarily been privatised. Private business has been allowed to expand into new areas which were formerly reserved for state capital.

Given the strength of nationalism within Indian political culture and the variety of forms it’s taken — from the secular, multicultural nationalism of the Congress to the fabrication of a Hindu nationalism which the far-right identifies with — to argue for class politics is to argue against the stream. To argue for a form of internationalism which we have never seen the left arguing in India. There’s never been internationalist class politics, or politics focusing on the working class as an agency of political and social transformation. There’s never been a vision of that from the Indian left. The working class is there in the rhetoric of the Indian left — everyone will pay lip-service to the workers and the proletariat — but it isn’t there in terms of the focus of the work that the left does.

ROHINI HENSMAN:

I’ll say something about the challenges facing the labour movement first, and then something on the initiatives that have been taken.

The greatest obstacle to organising is the number of “informal” workers in the labour force. By “informal”, I mean that they are unregistered, workers whose status is not recognised, and whose employment is not registered.

There are many subdivisions, but there are three major ones. One is those who belong to the so-called “unorganised sector”. That is defined in Indian law as enterprises or establishments which employ less than ten workers (if there is electric power) or less than twenty workers without electric power. These are not formally registered or regulated.

The workers have no legal rights which can be enforced. Companies have employed various stratagems in order to put as much of their production as possible into this unorganised sector, so that their workers are completely “informal”. Sometimes it’s as crude as dividing a workplace up into segments, each of which contains less than twenty workers, or sub-contracting to small-scale enterprises. That’s one of the ways they broke the unions - by sub-contracting out work to this unorganised sector so the larger workplaces were broken down.

The second subdivision is workers who are “temporary” or “casual”. They might be working for ten or fifteen years in the same place, but they’ve never gained any formal status. Artificial breaks in employment are engineered so that they never complete the 240 days after which they’re supposed to get regular status.

The third way, very prevalent even in the public sector, is something called “contract labour”. It actually means “no-contract labour”, because these workers have no contract with anyone. They are hired through a labour contractor. The contractor is the one who interacts with the employer. Workers are rounded up by this contractor, and the wages are paid through the contractor.

These workers are basically employees without an employer; they are not officially employees of the contractor or of the principal employer. There are certain protocols about how they are meant to be treated, but in practice neither the contractor, nor the principal employer adheres to these. The contractors take a huge amount of money from the principal employers which never gets passed on to the workers.

“Informal” workers have tried to organise, and a few have succeeded. But the basic problem of organising here is that with these small-scale units, the company can dismiss workers and they will not be able to prove that they were even employed in the first place.

Alternatively, in many cases the company closes down and shifts to somewhere else, or even reopens in

Indian workers rally: until the formation of the New Trade Union Initiative, most trade unions in India were party-linked.

the same place with new workers. These workers have no redress. Unions have tried to take up these cases but with very little success.

In the garment industry in Bombay, for example, which is extremely fragmented, workers at the ground level are almost unorganisable because of this. If they try to organise, they’ll lose their jobs.

MOST OPPRESSED

There are slightly more upbeat elements, though. Some of the initiatives that’ve been launched are amongst the most oppressed sections of the working class.

They were launched around the early 2000s and were the culmination of long struggles. One was called the “Right to Food” campaign, which started in 2001/2002. There was a huge scandal because the food supplies of the Public Distribution System — which is supposed to distribute basic foodstuffs like rice and wheat to those below the poverty line — were accumulating to such a degree that they had no space to keep the food, and a few kilometres away there were people literally starving.

This campaign started demanding the right to food, but it became a right to work campaign — demanding either employment or unemployment benefit. That was quite a huge campaign, and in 2005 it yielded a government act, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

It was very modest, but it guaranteed at least 100 days employment per year for one person in each household. That doesn’t sound like much, but for people on the edge of destitution it has proved to be a lifeline. These people have job-cards, they have become registered, and they’ve become a new constituency for organising which some agricultural unions have taken up.

The second was the “Right to Information” campaign, which was a grassroots rural initiative. There had been various government programmes for the employment of the rural poor, but these were run through contractors and had been dogged by terrible corruption.

For example, they had a list of 100 workers to whom they had given payment, and not a single one of them would have actually been paid. The workers in these programmes who were supposed to get the money launched this agitation for the right to know how much money was being given.

Various other things were supposed to have been done — drains dug, houses built, and so on — which were not done. In 2005, they got a Right to Information Act.

There have been huge attacks on it, as there have with the National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme. There have been physical attacks on people who have been trying to get information about these welfare programmes and trying to enforce the payment of wages to workers and so on. People have liter-

ally been murdered.

The third one was the Forest Rights Act, which gives rights to people in the forest belt — mainly tribal peoples — who are amongst the poorest of the poor. They’re limited rights, but they include for example rights to cultivate land instead of being displaced. That’s one of the huge problems that they face, and that’s why they’ve become the base of the Maoist movement. The state basically deprives them of their land, livelihood and homes and they have nowhere to go. This Act was won by huge organising amongst these people, which gives them some rights both to the commons and to the produce.

Another move, which started in the organised sector, has been “employee unionism”. The main unions have always been party-linked, which has huge pitfalls because it means that ultimately the interests of the workers are sacrificed to the interests of the party. It also means enormous fragmentation, because they are so many parties in India. Workers who belong to the more advanced sectors decided that they didn’t want to be part of this, and formed their own unions at the workplace or company level. These are unions formed and led by the workers themselves, which include clerical sector workers as well as factory workers.

There are some which involve management as well, and some which were started by management, but the majority are extremely independent and extremely militant.

Workers in Bombay formed the Trade Union Solidarity Committee in order to gain more strength. This was a sort of informal coordination. It was very ad hoc, but it survived because there was a need for it.

Around the turn of the century, when other workers were also getting fed-up with the ways in which the party-linked unions were letting them down, the idea of grassroots unionism began to spread, and there was an attempt to bring these bodies together into a national federation.

Ultimately, this was done through a process of very broad-based discussions and debates; controversial issues such as religious minorities, gender, caste, equality issues — all of these were brought into the discussion. The New Trade Union Initiative was not formed until 2006, but it’s done extremely well. It’s attracted unions from a number of sectors — the agricultural sector as well as urban workers — and it is going into new sectors like the forest workers.

One of the NTUI’s strong points is that it has an internationalist outlook. For example, when we had the World Social Forum in Bombay in 2004 they had a very strong presence there, and they have links to unions elsewhere.

: [More on the NTUI: http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv12n2/ntui.htm](http://www.revolutionarydemocracy.org/rdv12n2/ntui.htm)

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NOTTINGHAM 5 DECEMBER

EDL shows its strength

BY DANIEL ANGELL

The English Defence League staged one of their largest demonstrations to date in Nottingham city centre on 5 December, drawing up to 500 of their members.

Although smaller contingents of the organisation were scattered across the city centre throughout the day, the group assembled at around 1pm — staging a rally. Union Jacks and “No to Sharia” flags were waved aggressively as members chanted and shouted “we want our country back”.

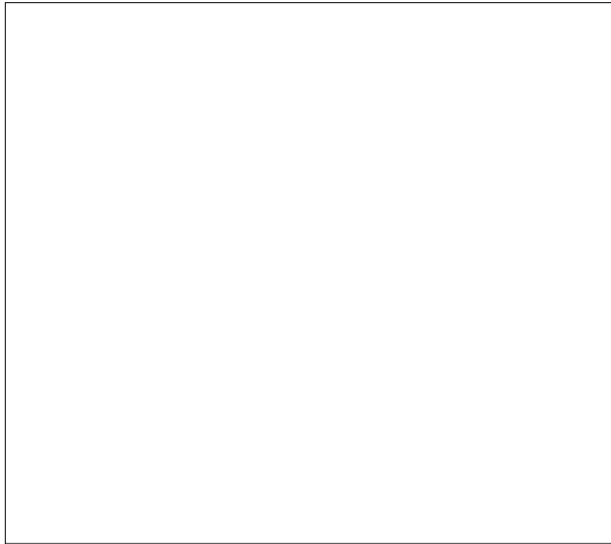
The sheer size of the demonstration is enough to send alarm bells ringing. This was not a pathetic turnout of bigoted knuckleheads, as occurred in Glasgow last month. This was a well-organised demonstration, matching or possibly beating numbers drawn at Leeds and Manchester, and with obvious attempts to further whip up racial hatred.

Activist attempts to directly confront the march to Nottingham Castle were faced with a charged and combative EDL, and were let down by yet another failure from those unwilling to take direct action. Separate mobilisations by Notts Stop the BNP and Unite Against Fascism attracted a total of up to 600 people, but the UAF contingent in particular remained fixed on over-cooperating with the police. A shocking level of obedience within UAF/SWP ranks shattered the possibility of mass militant confrontation.

At the start of the day members of the SWP and loosely affiliated UAF sympathisers were half a mile away from the EDL frontline. Just as they did in Leeds UAF missed the chance, by design, of presenting a useful and effective united front. It opted instead for a march up Friar Lane, stopping off for a bit of music within a loose police kettle, followed by a march back down again.

By the time the EDL had staged their main demonstrations, UAF had been ushered back down to where the main counter-protest had originally begun. Minutes later a large group of the EDL had also made their way back to this place, Market Square. They were confronted by a handful of Asian youths before the police forced a wedge between the two opposing sides. UAF remained static behind their lines, refusing to assist in forcing back the EDL.

Direct action is still key to the method of how we can push back fascist organisations and stop them “claiming ground” in our towns and cities. We’ve seen the EDL consistently direct torment and violence towards Asian communities, we’ve witnessed them generalise about “Muslims = terrorists” and we’ve watched them stage organised, racist demonstrations. A united front



Police get between anti-fascists and EDL
Photo: Courtney Radcliffe

has never been more needed.

Those affected by the dangers the EDL present cannot rely on an organisation like the UAF. After seven months of mobilisation against the EDL, it is evident that the “popular front” tactics of UAF and the SWP are unsuccessful. A “keeping class politics out of it” type of movement cannot be accepted in counteracting the rise of the far right.

The return of racist street activism is an issue directly affecting working class communities, and it still very much requires a working-class response. The crisis in our financial system has brought about the return of mass unemployment and has forced more and more people into the depths of disaffection. It didn’t take much to see this would lead to a shift in attitudes and pave the way for reactionary far right activities; we saw it coming back in June when the brand new EDL ran riot through the streets of Luton, as the recession took its hold.

This dilemma is exactly why we must continue to fight for houses, services and jobs, and not simply say “love music hate racism” in the hope that populist rhetoric and music alone will somehow make the deep seated problems go away.

Fascism thrives on capitalism’s failings. If the EDL are to be stopped in their tracks before they continue to grow in size and become an even bigger threat, we must fight and win the argument for protection and expansion of our public services, and confront the methods of racist organisations in the cities, on the streets and outside the mosques.

Harrow 13 December

From back page

There was a large police presence, and in the evening some of the youth skirmished with them; this, rather than the fact that a large turnout of anti-fascists had prevented the fascists from marching, was all that was reported on the local media after the event.

This time, as in Manchester, the mosque’s leaders have told “their” young people to stay at home. They have also issued a statement to anti-fascist groups saying they appreciate the support but would we also please stay at home and not “sow discord”. They are confident that the police will be able to protect the mosque.

But as the racists are unlikely to actually attack the mosque, this is not the problem. The problem is that the police will protect the fascists! They will allow fascists and their fellow travellers to hold a demonstration in the middle of an area to intimidate large numbers of black and Asian people.

This is a test of the EDL’s ability to mobilise and we should frustrate the attempt. It would be a disaster if the right wing are allowed to demonstrate unopposed. Unite Against Fascism (UAF) are likely to go ahead with a mobilisation, but if it is on the scale and of the character we saw in September, it will not be near enough.

In September, the AWL’s leaflet called for “jobs and

homes, not racism”, and for the anti-fascist movement to address the social roots of the far-right’s current increase in popularity. We think that is the right approach, and our leaflet got a good response from people in the crowd. We will do the same thing again, but have also set ourselves the task of mobilising as many trade unionists as possible to turn out on 13 December.

That approach is in contrast to that of UAF and Hope not Hate/Searchlight, who advocate trust in the police and state to defend us from fascist demonstrations. Who do not was to “stir up” too much trouble, who want to keep class politics out of the campaign against the fascists.

There is no excuse for trade unionists and socialists to stay at home. Bring your banners and come prepared to show the right that the labour movement will not “let them pass”. Black, Asian and white youth need to see that there is another political pole in society with answers to the problems that confront all our communities.

**Harrow AWL meeting
How to fight fascism
Wednesday 16 December, 7.30pm, Victoria Hall, Sheepcote Road, central Harrow**

OPINION

Stop Nick Griffin in Barking!

As Nick Griffin announced his Parliamentary candidacy in Barking and Dagenham, *Solidarity* spoke to Dave Landau, an independent socialist and anti-fascist campaigner active in the Redbridge & Epping Forest Together campaign.

The BNP is very strong in this part of London; they really believe they’ve got a chance of winning control of the council. I’m not sure they will, but they could certainly become a stronger opposition.

They’ve said they’re going to target Margaret Hodge and John Cruddas [local Labour MPs]. Nick Griffin will be standing against Hodge, but they haven’t decided who they’ll stand against Cruddas yet. They’ll stand Emma Tollage in Thurrock. It looked like Richard Barnbrook [leader of the BNP group on Barking and Dagenham council] might stand for Parliament at one point, but his star has fallen somewhat.

They don’t have public meetings as such in the local area, but they have had large regional assemblies which show their strength and base.

Their other target in the area is Havering; they think they can become the official opposition on the council there. In the European Parliament and GLA top-up elections, they came second in Havering, so they do have a chance. Their problem is finding candidates who haven’t got criminal records. The other thing in electoral terms is an upcoming council by-election in Loughton which has been triggered by a BNP resignation.

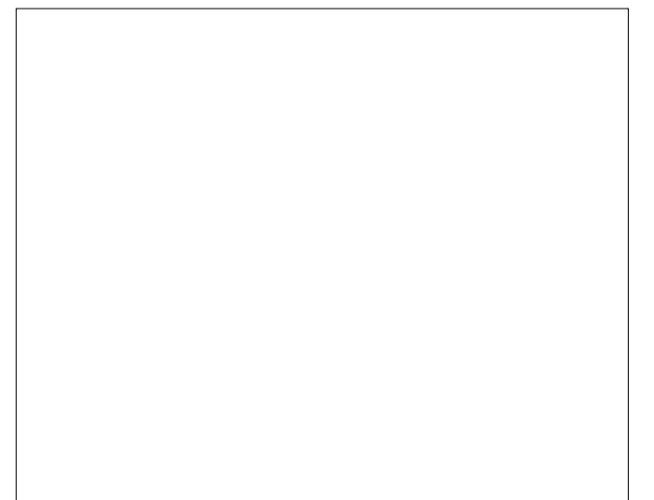
In Barking and Dagenham, the main issues the BNP focuses on and campaigns around are jobs and housing.

In Epping Forest and Redbridge, they’re also picking up green issues, and opposing the development of the green belts.

Immigration underlies it all; that’s their core policy that everything else leads back to. You have to take that question on ideologically, as well as building a viable socialist alternative that can fight on issues like houses and jobs.

We need working-class based political initiatives for that. We also need to take up the “quality-of-life” type issues; when the BNP blame immigrants and overcrowding for building taking place on green belt land, we need to talk about the problem of the large amount of empty housing that already exists. You can give the question an anti-racist, class focus.

Unfortunately, anti-fascist organisations in Barking and Dagenham are rather divided, and the local Trades Council is weak. However, the recent demonstration called by the RMT did attract substantial local trade union support and may provide a model for workers’ organisations take the initiative themselves. They may show a way forward for united action on a working-class basis.



Nick Griffin (left) out and about with Richard Barnbrook (centre)



EDL march again in Harrow, 13 December

The labour movement cannot let them pass

BY JOAN TREVOR

They messed up earlier in the year, in September, but armed with lessons and nerved from their recent successes in Manchester and Leeds, the English Defence League (EDL)/Stop Islamisation Of Europe (SIOE) and fellow travellers are due back in

What we say:

We need a different anti-fascist campaign: an open and democratic "united front", linking up the organisations of workers and the oppressed to confront racism and fascism.

That implies mass mobilisation for physical self-defence, but also — and even more importantly — a fight for the working-class politics and social demands necessary to neutralise the fascists' demagoguery and to undermine their rapidly expanding social base.

Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP is discussing calling a conference in the new year, probably on 13 February. We appeal to all serious socialists, trade unionists and antiracist and anti-fascist activists to get in touch with the campaign and take part.

• <http://nottmstopbnp.wordpress.com>

Harrow, north west London, on Sunday 13 December for another go at the central mosque. That demonstration follows an EDL mobilisation and counter-demonstration in Nottingham on 5 December.

The police have granted permission for a static protest outside the newly built mosque on the main road. The pretext for this protest is not clear: last time it was the alleged support of the mosque for sharia law, which the mosque denied. Then it was a commemoration of 9/11. This time? Plain anti-Muslim prejudice, presumably.

In September the EDL came in numbers too tiny to even attempt to get near the mosque. The counter-demonstration was around 2,000, good, but worryingly disparate. It consisted of a small number of United Against Fascism (UAF) supporters and invited speakers, who remained in a knot throughout the day and evening, around a stall and a megaphone but, alas, very few banners from supporting organisations including the labour movement.

The mosque had organised its own guard of young Muslim men, who tried to persuade young people not to run after suspected sightings of right-wingers but to "protect the mosque".

Young people of Muslim background composed most of the crowd. They were not organised, but seemed to be groups of friends from the area who had turned out to object to the racists' attempted provocation.

Continued on page 11

Iran: protests in the face of repression

BY GERRY BATES

Popular pro-democracy protests have once again flared up in Iran on 7-8 December, with state authorities clamping down hard on activists — many of them students — by using arrests and violent repression.

The actions took place to coincide with the annual commemoration of the killing of three student activists during protests in 1953 against the USA (and also against Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, then the ruling "Shah", who came to power after a CIA-backed coup). The protests seem to be mostly associated with the "green movement", organised around oppositional Islamist politicians. Hundreds of people were arrested as the regime lashes out at a movement it tried unsuccessfully to silence in the wake of Mahmoud Ahmedinejad's highly disputed re-election this summer.

The protests came against the backdrop of the government's programme of arrests, tortures and executions of political activists. Before the demonstration, women involved in a "mothers of political prisoners" organisation were arrested.

The government is also clamping down on Iran's workers' movement. At the end of November, Pedram Nasrollahi and Farzad Ahmadi were arrested for trade union activity in Iranian Kurdistan. Farzad has since been released, but Pedram remains imprisoned in Sanandaj jail.

Several leaders of the Haft Tapeh Sugarcane Workers' Syndicate are also currently incarcerated in Dezfol prison. The struggles of the Haft Tapeh workers, and many others across Iran, focus on issues such as the unpaid. Workers tend to protest inside or outside their workplaces, rather than the streets. International working-class solidarity is vital to support Iranian workers' resistance to an increasingly brutal regime. As Ali Netjai, one of the Haft Tapeh workers' leaders put it:

"Workers have no recourse but to rely on their own resources and create their independent organisation through cooperation with other workers. Whenever workers are facing problems, such obstacles could be resolved only through workers' support and workers' power."

In the new year the AWL plans to join Iranian socialists in concrete action to make solidarity with Iranian workers. If you want to get involved and find out more, contact us.

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