

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



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For a workers' government

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What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

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Defend Dale Farm

Tories in Essex have voted to spend up to £8 million evicting more than 90 traveller families from a site at Dale Farm in Crays Hill.

The decision was made by Basildon Council on 14 March at a packed meeting, despite opposition from Labour and Lib Dem councillors.

There have been legal battles over the site since the first families occupied the area in 2001.

Opponents said the decision, which commits a third of the council's annual budget, could lead to more job cuts and make children and elderly people homeless.

Bailiffs will begin to clear the site after a 28-day legal order is imposed.

Police will also have to spend up to £10 million on an operation around the eviction.

This is a vicious attack on a well-established travelling community, fuelled by prejudice. Against people who have nowhere else to go.

CAMPAIGN

There are plans to set up Camp Constance — a camp of supporters of Dale Farm in resisting eviction — from 9 April.

If you can commit to helping with this, either as an organisation or an individual, whether for a stint at weekends or to be on call, please email savedale-farm@gmail.com. Expertise is needed particularly in legal observation and communications.

• See <http://dalefarm.wordpress.com/contact> for a map and directions to the site. There is also a Facebook group "Dale Farm Solidarity".

AWL news



Student election battles

Student union elections are currently taking place at universities across the country. Following the wave of student action last winter, there have been many more left slates of candidates, organised by anti-cuts activists, though the cooling of the political temperature has meant relatively few victories.

There have been some bright spots, mainly in London, such as the left's victory at traditionally conservative Royal Holloway, and a decisive takeover of UCL Union by the left after two years of building a powerful anti-cuts base. In many universities where left candidates did not win, they received a strong vote. Results are not yet in for University of London Union, where left-winger Clare Solomon is standing for re-election as president, but faces a strong right-wing campaign.

Workers' Liberty members led the left/anti-cuts slate at Hull University, and we are also standing as sabbatical officers at Leeds, City, Westminster and Liverpool. Liverpool University AWL's Bob Sutton told us about his campaign:

"The response has been overwhelmingly positive. A lot of students didn't realise the Guild played no

role in the protests and walkouts last year; it didn't even meet to discuss our response to the Browne Review. People understand a lot more would have been possible if our union had worked to build and generalise the action. Students are also very bothered about what cuts will mean for their courses and teaching, and want a strong response to that.

"Beyond that we're raising bigger questions such as are the cuts really necessary, and putting free education back on the agenda.

"One of our best campaigners got involved after getting a leaflet. His mum's been messed around by the NHS over getting funding for her treatment, and it's affected his studies, so the anti-cuts message really hit home with him.

"There are big job cuts planned at Liverpool Hope. The unions are balloting for action and tomorrow [16 March], when we rally outside the Liverpool University senate to oppose a rise in fees, we'll have a student comrade from Hope speaking.

"Our UCU branch will be speaking too, and we're mobilising students to support their national strike over jobs and pensions next week."

Egyptian women right to protest

By Vicki Morris

On 8 March, International Women's Day, a few hundred women and their male supporters gathered in Cairo's Tahrir Square to demonstrate for women's rights.

The demo had been well publicised. Billing it as a Million Women March was over-optimistic, but the organisers wanted to echo the calls for a million man (person?) march during the campaign to oust Hosni Mubarak.

And there certainly should be a million person march for women's rights in Egypt.

Egyptian women face many of the same problems of women around the world and particularly in developing countries; but they have additional problems peculiar to north Africa. For example, more than 90% of Egyptian women have undergone Female Genital Mutilation, that is the painful and harmful "surgical" removal of their clitoris. That percentage is lower among younger women but despite legislation against it the practice is still popular in the south.

The organisers of the 8 March demonstration, including a group called Women for Democracy and the Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, many of whom had participated in the recent revolution, made the case that Egypt's democracy will not be complete until women enjoy equality.

However, the response to the women demonstrators, including from ostensibly pro-democracy demonstrators holding other protests in the Square, was shocking and disappointing.

The demonstrators found themselves in heated arguments with onlookers and, ultimately, a number of women were chased across the Square and assaulted, physically and sexually.

Women participants in the recent Egyptian uprising testified to the important role played by women then, and their sense that gender barriers came down for a while in the Square.

That, it seems, was only a temporary liberation; sexual harassment returned to "normal" rife levels on the evening of the celebration of Mubarak's departure (CBS journalist Lara Logan suffered a sustained sexual and physical assault in Tahrir Square that night). The events on 8 March show that more gains for women will be

hard won.

Participants have been soul searching to work out "what they did wrong": should they have waited till they could be sure of larger numbers before protesting? Were they wrong to engage in arguments with onlookers? Will they be perceived as opportunistically raising "minority" demands that risk splitting the democratic mass movement at a critical time? Crucially, were some of their demands "provocative"?

Women for Democracy raised two key demands:

- Egypt's constitution should be secular.
- It should be possible for a woman to become president.

These two demands seem to have been particularly offensive to the hostile crowd. But they are entirely reasonable demands and, moreover, Egyptians need to fight for the democratic space where such demands can be raised.

The demands were also timely: on 19 March Egyptians are being asked to vote on a constitutional amendments hastily drawn up by the military regime now in power. Across the political spectrum, many observers are saying they should be rejected (the Muslim Brotherhood is supporting them).

The constitution as a whole is currently suspended pending amendment. Democrats are calling for the removal of the article which cites sharia law as a basis for the constitution; quite apart from other considerations, Islamic law should not be the basis for law in a country where Coptic Christians are around 10% of the population.

While having a woman president is not the key demand in gaining women's liberation, the proposed constitutional amendments are also objectionable in that they are so worded as to make it clear that the president is assumed always to be a man.

This insult, coming right after a magnificent democratic revolution in which women played a full part, is a potent symbol of women's inferior status in Egyptian society.

• Egyptian Center for Women's Rights http://ecwronline.org/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1&lang=english

• More on strikes and solidarity: Egypt Workers' Solidarity. www.egyptworker.org

New social protests in Iraq

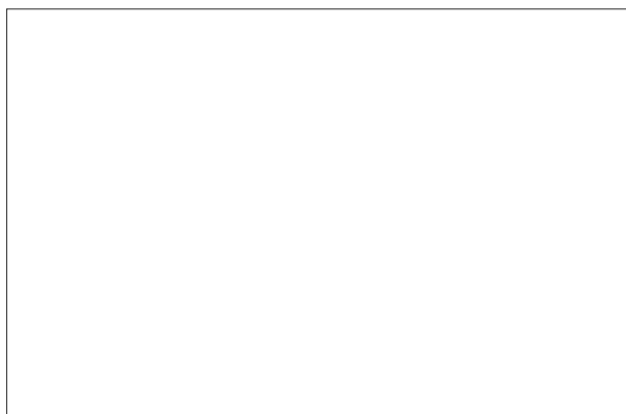
Martin Thomas spoke to Falah Alwan (FWCU), Toma Hamid (WCPI in Australia), and Mansour Razaghi (Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union in Australia who has been in close touch with the Iraqi unions) about recent protests in Iraq.

FA: On Friday 4 March there was a very rough curfew imposed by the authorities to stop people from attending the demonstration in Tahrir Square, Baghdad. But despite that around 15,000 attended. It lasted until 5.30pm and after that they started shooting the demonstrators. One of our comrades was injured by a bullet, and another one was injured in Samara, and a number of unemployed were attacked by Maliki supporters and arrested.

The main demands were for an end to corruption and real freedoms and real democracy, and to provide jobs, services and electricity. Also demands for the sacking of the governor of Baghdad and other officials in the Maliki government.

There was another demonstration on 8 March, International Women's Day. [There have been others since this interview].

There has also been a series of strikes. The first one was a one-day sit-in of chemical industries in Basra. The main demands were for payment of security benefits and a call for the freedom to organise. This is an advanced step for workers. The administration of the chemical plant, as usual, called army and police to surround the enterprise to prevent workers from



11 March demonstration, Tahrir Square, Baghdad

going to the city to demonstrate.

There was a strike in textiles in Baghdad, for the same demands. The unions there say overtly that without calling for a general strike they cannot call for freedom to organise. They want a statement from our federation. Unfortunately their strike lasted only five days after the administration promised to pay security benefits.

The leaders of the workers called for a general meeting of the workers' leaders to start a new step of workers' struggle and for their right to organise in the public sector.

The third strike was for two days in Ur enterprises in Nasiriyah. This enterprise includes the three main factories: aluminium, cable and textiles. Again, the strike was for safety benefits and to call for an end to the "self-financing" system of the enterprise — a form of privatisation.

There was a demonstration of university cleaners in Babylon for higher wages.

There was a new model of mass struggle in Samara after the 25 February protest. The FWCU and others created a model of masses' councils. They divided the city into 15 quarters to be represented by

delegates. These councils pressure the government and the authorities, the occupation.

This is the first time workers in the public sector have called for higher wages and the right to organise.

TH: A lot of new "committees of mass protest" are established — mainly in Baghdad — but they are trying to establish branches in other areas and suburbs, universities, factories etc. In Baghdad they are publishing a paper called "Uprising Diary". It is not clear who started this [or what its links are to the strike and workers' movement].

Their demands are very radical. Some of the demands say: "security and safety; abolish anti-terrorism law (which is used to arbitrarily arrest and detain people); immediate closure of all secret prisons; immediate release of all political prisoners; set a minimum wage of 500,000 dinars (US\$400) a month; pensions for all; unemployment benefit; improve the rations distributed every month as part of oil-for-food; subsidised fuel prices; electricity for the entire country; increase all public sector wages in line with inflation; house homeless children; respect

civil rights; end corruption; give politically-dismissed workers their full rights; abolish the law of self-finance; respect civil and individual freedoms in university and colleges; immediate recognition of freedom of strike, organisation and association; abolition of the death penalty and all forms of torture.

MR: Those demands are really good but in my own experience those demands are not well-rooted inside the workers' movement. It seems that these demands are coming from an intellectual elite outside the workers' movement.

FA: There are dozens of committees in the demonstrations, because it is a big movement. There is not just one committee.

We have discussed [how to overcome repression]. We talked about continuing the workers' struggles inside the factories and organising workers' activities inside their neighbourhoods and in other cities. We need to have strategies for people's neighbourhoods, factories and universities, to continue the struggle there.

In Iraq the armed forces are more like a militia imposed by the government, in co-ordination with the occupation. It is not an institution, so the Iraqi army is ready to attack the people.

TH: The army is split along sectarian lines and other loyalties.

In Anbar, for example, they are more pro-Awakening Councils, and in Baghdad some are in favour of Maliki and other sections are under the influence of Moqtadr al-Sadr.

Continuing turmoil in Yemen

By Mark Oborn

Last weekend, in Yemen's capital Sana'a, police attacked opposition demonstrators with gas and live rounds, killing several and bringing the total number of deaths during the recent round of protests to more than 30.

Islamists seem to be increasingly visible in the previously non-party and mainly secular opposition movement in the capital. A radical cleric — once an ally of the president — Abdul Majid al-Zindani, has joined the protests. He is calling for an Islamic

caliphate.

Elsewhere in Yemen various currents, with differing programmes, contend with the weak central government.

In the south a secessionist movement is strong; in the north the state and a Shia sect have a long-running conflict that often breaks out into open war.

Yemen's president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, in power for 32 years, is increasingly isolated and desperate.

A well-used tactic is to blame Jews and the West for interfering in Yemen's affairs. On 1 March Saleh told an audience at Sana'a university, "There is an operations room in Tel Aviv

that aims to destabilise the Arab world," adding, "It is all controlled by the White House." Saleh failed to remind the audience that he received \$300m of American aid last year.

Ten members of parliament from the ruling party have resigned. Some key tribal leaders have announced their support for the anti-Saleh movement. On 28 February the opposition coalition rejected the president's offer of a unity government and chose to join the protests instead.

However, if Saleh does resign it is not clear that what comes after will be better.

Wisconsin anti-union bill rammed through

By Sacha Ismail

When our last issue went to press, there was speculation about a compromise in the battle over union rights taking place in the US state of Wisconsin, allowing Republican governor Scott Walker to push through cuts in exchange for abandoning his attack on collective bargaining.

This would have been logical for the ruling class: "remove organised labour from the fight in order to conquer the rest of the working class", as the US socialist group Solidarity's Wisconsin blogger put it.

Instead, on 9 March, Republican legislators split the "Budget Repair Bill", removing the fiscal elements so as to avoid the quorum which Democratic state senators undercut by fleeing to Illinois. The union-busting measures passed on 10 March, leading to a revival of protests.

Almost instantly, thousands of workers and supporters besieged the state Capitol, leading to a brief reoccupation. The firefighters' union withdrew almost \$200,000 from the M&I Bank, a major contributor to Walker's election campaign, forcing it to close for a day.

School students organised walkouts. And on 13 March 100,000 people protested in Madison. Workers were joined by hundreds of farmers driving in on their tractors.

It is, of course, much harder to repeal a law than to prevent it passing. The anti-union law goes into effect on 25 March; the danger is that the movement will now ebb away.

Many union officials are trying to shift the emphasis onto an electoralist fight to recall Republican legislators and Walker himself from office. This is plausible, since they are now dramatically unpopular. But it means demobilising the direct action struggle, and relying on the big business-dominated Democrats, who are not certain to repeal all of Walker's attacks even if they come to office.

At the other end of the spectrum, US socialists report that there is a widespread "buzz" around the idea of a general strike to force the repeal of the anti-union law. Madison's equivalent of a trades council has voted to prepare for a general strike, and "general strike" is what protesters chanted when they reinvaded the Capitol.

Saudi troops out of Bahrain!

By Dan Katz

The unstable stand-off between the Sunni Muslim monarchy and mainly Shia opposition demonstrators in Bahrain broke down over last weekend.

The mass protest movement demanding democratic reforms erupted over a month ago. Alarmed, the state backed off — temporarily — following the killing of seven protesters in a failed clampdown.

On Sunday thousands of protesters attempted to enter the financial area of the capital, Manama. The police reacted with great violence, shooting with rubber bullets, tear gas and live rounds.

There was also fighting at the University of Bahrain in the southern city of Sakhir.

Bahrain has a fake-democratic political system which discriminates against the Shia majority and leaves real power in the hands of the monarch. Although some oppositionists have stressed the non-sectarian nature of their movement, demands for democracy have a potentially additional — and explosive — sectarian aspect in Bahrain.

And there appears to be a widening split in the opposition, between those calling for reform within the existing framework, and others demanding the abolition of the Sunni monarchy.

Leading Sunni politicians have begun calling

for martial law.

On Monday Bahrain's crown prince Salman bin Hamad al-Khalifa formally asked its neighbours — led by the reactionary Sunni Islamist monarchy of Saudi Arabia — for help. Abdulrahman bin Hamad al-Attiya, the secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the regional bloc that includes both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, expressed "full solidarity with Bahrain's leadership."

A Saudi official said about 1,000 Saudi Arabian troops had arrived in Bahrain on Monday, and the UAE said it had sent 500 police officers. 150 Saudi armoured troop carriers, ambulances and jeeps crossed into Bahrain via the 25 km causeway that separates Bahrain from Eastern Saudi Arabia.

The Saudi rulers are worried about Bahrain's opposition movement spilling over to Shia in its own Eastern Province, the centre of its oil industry. About 15% of the Saudi population are Shia, and any manifestation of opposition is dealt with brutally.

In addition, the US's Fifth Fleet is based in Bahrain. The US considers Bahrain's rulers as important allies, and has not condemned the Saudi intervention.

No good can possibly come from the foreign policy of the right-wing, sectarian Saudi state which poisons everything it touches. Foreign troops out of Bahrain!

How Twitter is like a horse



Eric Lee

Later this month I've been invited to debate some of the leading online campaigners in Britain on the role of new media in the revolutions taking place in Middle East.

The organisers are calling it "Activism vs Slacktivism" and no, I don't understand what that means either. But I do know the organisations that will be up on the podium with me — including Amnesty International and Oxfam.

I was invited because I'd written something in the *Guardian* recently challenging the idea that what happened in Egypt could be called "the Twitter revolution". What I actually wrote was this: "While the media has reported on social networks such as Twitter and Facebook as revolutionary

methods of mobilisation, it was the old-fashioned working class that enabled the pro-democracy movements to flourish."

Apparently I am now seen as something of a techno-skeptic. It's an interesting position to be in as for so many years I was regarded by those who knew me as a techno-enthusiast.

And yet my position on these issues has not changed.

In preparation for the debate, I was asked to contribute a paragraph summarising my view. This forced me to think about things and to boil down my thoughts to just a few sentences.

And here's the core of what I said: "Social media are like the horse that Paul Revere rode the night the American revolution began. Without a fast and robust horse, Revere could never have sparked the rebellion. What we remember about that night in 1775 is not how effective the horse was at its job, but the messenger — Revere himself — and the message that he carried."

In other words, what matters in countries like Egypt and Tunisia are people and their ideas. Social class matters.

Grassroots organisation matters. Inequality, exploitation and injustice matter. These are the things that drive revolutions.

The web, email, social networks, text messages, microblogging are all tools. They are great tools — but like Paul Revere's steed, they are only tools. Revolutions can succeed without them, and revolutions can fail even when these tools are widely available.

It's true that having cheap, reliable and incredibly fast communications is a real asset to a revolution that is taking place. But what we are seeing now in parts of the media is a fetishisation of those tools. This is often the work of journalists and pundits who really don't have a clue what they are talking about.

For those of us who actually engage in politics, who don't just observe but know a thing or two about how to mobilise people, all this talk about a "Twitter revolution" comes off as complete tosh.

• Debate details: <http://fairsay.com/debate>

Libya, solidarity and imperialist intervention

A debate from the AWL website

Chris Reynolds' on intervention in Libya (*Solidarity* 3/196) is one of those strange articles that the AWL produce due to a confused position on imperialism.

Imperialist powers, like Britain, are pushing for a no-fly zone for an obvious reason: to control Libya's oil. As socialists we should oppose this. We should support the Libyan rebels and working class of Benghazi and Tripoli in opposing Qaddafi. An imperialist imposed no-fly zone would certainly not be in the interests of the Libyan revolution or freedom for Libya's workers and poor — it would help an elite rule on behalf of imperialism.

On the one hand [the article] argues that US or UK intervention deserves no positive support. But then asks is it our job to oppose it and answers — no. Well, actually, yes! We should be for the arming of Libyan rebels, including surface to air missiles but no to any imperialist troops, planes or weapons under imperialist control.

Jason

And who would hand over surface to air missiles to the [Libyan rebels] except armies under imperialist control?

The "Libyan revolution thinks increasingly" that a no-fly zone is a good idea. Why? Because their lives are at stake, and they can see an "imperialist imposed no-fly zone" might stop them being wiped out.

We don't call for a no-fly zone because we don't want to take responsibility for it (it would not be under our control, it would come as part of an overall bourgeois policy...) On the other hand, if the imperialists do something to stop the "Libyan revolution" being murdered (for their own reasons, of course), why would we denounce them?

Mark

Should we be organising, or supporting, or telling other people to attend, protests like Stop the War's which are focused on "no imperialist intervention!"? They can tell themselves that somehow they would not, if they succeeded, be stranding the Libyan rebels without a hope. But that's self-consoling nonsense, isn't it?

(The peculiar twist to it is that what's actually happening is that imperialism is *not* intervening to stop Qaddafi).

There simply isn't much we can do. But one thing we can do is not make it our sole point of principle to denounce imperialism for doing what they're actually not doing anyway.

And we can build solidarity with the left and the workers' movement in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere, to try to limit the terrible consequences of a Qaddafi victory.

Clive

It is important to build solidarity with the left and organised workers in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia.

Without a much more militant workers' movement there is not much the left here can do. However, there are people, Libyan exiles, going to Libya going to free Benghazi. We can continue to demonstrate on the anti-Qaddafi demonstrations and we can make sure that any Stop the War protest, or at least [a] contingent is clearly in solidarity with the Libyan revolution. That would be hard to do if we don't go on the demonstrations — are the AWL comrades suggesting not getting involved?

It is perfectly understandable that Libyan rebels who are being bombed by Qaddafi ask for help in taking out his planes. They are right to do so. The important point is to have any such technology, expertise and assistance under the control of the Libyan rebels not imperialism. You say this is unrealistic. Maybe so. But the point of large demonstrations on the streets would be to say, "Hands off the Libyan revolution! Imperialist troops out of Libya!"

The whole point of being socialists is to battle within the working class for ideas... [That] struggle whilst not promising any quick fixes is not insignificant or forlorn.

Jason

There are times when it makes sense to mobilise against imperialist invasion even though the immediate effect, if we are successful, would be to leave a dictator in power. Take Iraq. The "pro-war left" were right, on a certain level, to say that if the anti-war movement succeeded Saddam would be left in power.

But we were right to participate in the anti-war movement, with our own anti-Saddam slogans, nonetheless, because there remained a realistic possibility of a movement of the Iraqi people themselves against the dictator, and stopping the war then didn't mean permitting massacre; and because the war which was about to happen was one of full-scale invasion and occupation of Iraq.

If what was on the table now was another full-scale invasion and occupation we would be right to oppose it again. But surely the dominant fact right now, Cameron's posturing notwithstanding, is that imperialism is not intervening at all.

If the US etc *were* to set-up a no-fly zone, whatever that might mean in practice, it would be reasonable to make general comment on how imperialism isn't to be trusted, warn against further involvement, and so on.

But *campaign* against it — try to stop it? Rather than facing up to our weakness, that is simply to construct an ideological fantasy, pretending we can "stop imperialism" and assist the Libyan revolution.

If Qaddafi is stopped that would be, all other things being equal, good from the point of view of the revolution in the rest of the Middle East.

Clive

In the event of an imperialist intervention e.g. US planes entering Libyan airspace it is quite likely that US troops would follow. In that circumstance it would be important to raise the slogan — it would be a matter of being against the clamouring for US/UK control of oil resources.

Currently, the main focus of international workers' solidarity is to support the Libyan rebels, against Qaddafi. Under the circumstances [what is needed] is volunteers and arms from neighbouring Arab countries and where possible donations from collections amongst exile communities and solidarity groups here.

If the US etc. imposed a no-fly zone it would be important to demonstrate not only in solidarity with the Libyan revolt but also for no imperialist troops in Libya and for any military aid to be strictly under the control of the Libyan rebels.

Jason

Western military intervention isn't my answer to the existing problem.

I don't have the means to impose my answer. But it seems to me the least I can do is not seriously try to stop the one thing which today, tomorrow or the day after might save lives and prevent Qaddafi from re-establishing his power over the whole of Libya.

I don't have to buy into any ideological claims the Western powers make, or lose sight of who and what they are.

Clive



Letters

We are entirely at the mercy of a gang of Bushites and finance capitalists so it is absolutely essential, under the present circumstances, to reject the AV system.

A "yes" vote is Clegg's last opportunity to salvage any honour from propping up this dangerous state of affairs. We have the duty to deprive Clegg of that honour. A "no" would mean a good chance of splitting the Liberals. Vote NO to AV and build the extra-parliamentary opposition.

Tim Thomas, London

The *Morning Star* newspaper should be consigned to the museum of human barbarity, not promoted by a rag-bag of MPs, greens, nationalists and Stalinists.

The Houses of Parliament is entertaining a motion promoting one of the last relics of Stalinism. Early Day Motion 1334 currently has 68 MPs signatures. It notes that the *Morning Star* is apparently "the only socialist daily newspaper in the English language worldwide" with "strong links with the trade union movement". The motion "welcomes the different light it shines on news and current affairs than that of

other dailies" and calls on the BBC to feature it "regularly as a matter of course in broadcast newspaper reviews".

All the left Labour MPs have endorsed the motion. So has Caroline Lucas, plus some Lib-Dems, Plaid Cymru and other nationalists. In a letter to the *Morning Star* (9 February) Keith Flett, writing as president of Haringey TUC, referred to the paper as "our FT". The *Morning Star* comparable to the house organ of the international bourgeoisie? Laughable if it were not so utterly ridiculous.

The idea that the *Morning Star* is some sort of "paper of the left" is wretched. It is the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of Britain, the principal detritus of British Stalinism. Take its weekend issue 12-13 March. It contains half a page on the decisions of the CPB Organisation Committee. The paper is peppered with adverts for the CPB's Communist Review, CPB meetings on the "Capitalist Crisis — the Communist Response", its fighting fund and local meetings — topped by an advert for a lecture by the Stalin Society on "International Working Women's Day and the enormous advances made in the Soviet Union". A feature advocates a full boycott of Israel, a review the virtues of the GDR, while a letter supports the anti-imperialist credentials of Qaddafi.

Add this to the usual apologia for Chinese, North Korean, Vietnamese and Cuban Stalinism and you have pure poison, a running sore that infects the British labour movement. Our duty is to denounce the *Morning Star*, not sponsor it.

Klement Guevorkian, London

Fight now or lose the NHS!

“Stealth privatisation.” A “plan to dismantle the health service”. That is what Lib Dem peer and long ago Labour minister Shirley Williams, calls Tory Minister Lansley’s Bill to reorganise the National Health Service.

The Chairman of the British Medical Association has publicly denounced Tory plans for the NHS. On 15 March a 600-strong emergency conference of doctors voted to reject it and called on the Coalition government to withdraw it.

Most doctors agree with Williams that the Tory-Lib Dem Coalition is out to finish what Margaret Thatcher began in the 1980s — dismantling the NHS.

Lansley plans to lift the cap on private beds in NHS hospitals. He is encouraging non-NHS “providers” to muscle in and cream off the lucrative sections of healthcare.

Doctors say that giving GPs the disposition of 80% of the resources of health care provision will bring chaos. Inside that chaos, privately provided market-driven health care will advance.

This in time will reduce the NHS to the role of safety net provider for the poor with chronic diseases, those who would not be lucrative prospects for commercially-driven healthcare-for-profit companies.

This Bill is an enormous step towards something more like the unfair and murderously incompetent American system of “health care”.

There is overwhelming public rejection of the proposals. Last weekend the Sheffield Conference of the Lib Dems voted to reject the proposals.

The labour movement knows already what the Tories are doing, if not until now the details of how exactly they plan to go about it. For the labour movement now, the White Paper must be an alarm bell and a bugle. The alternatives before us are clear.

Either: the Tories and Lib Dem-Tories like Clegg, Alexander, Huhne and the hypocrite Cable, will be allowed to proceed with their dismantling of the NHS.

Or: the labour movement will mobilise itself and act to stop them, putting itself at the head off the large masses of non-labour movement people who reject the Government’s plans for the health service.

Act now, or we lose the NHS, the greatest achievement of the labour movement and the reform socialists in over a hundred years of working-class political activity.

The lunatic proposals to put profit in command of health provision in Britain is an issue that can put the labour movement at the head of the big majority of the people of Britain against the government. It will allow socialists to explain to the labour movement exactly what is wrong with this entire capitalist system.

What the Coalition plans to do is an outrage against political democracy, a slap in the face for democracy. They did not put these plans, or anything like them, before the electorate in the 2010 general election nine months ago. Cameron’s bland “caring” Tories didn’t do that, and neither did the junior-Conservative leaders of the Lib Dems. Nor did they put it in the Coalition agreement.

In the last months of the Labour government the Labour Party managed to raise something of an alarm about what the Tories would do if they won the election. Working-class memory and gut-instinct helped deprive the Tories of a Parliamentary majority. A lot of people sensed that a Tory government in this economic crisis would be as destructive as Thatcher’s government was in the crisis of the mid-80s.

The electorate did not give the Tories a majority. But the Lib Dems did and do. Nonetheless, in defiance of the electorate, they are proceeding with their plans.

What they are doing is known to be what most people in Britain do not want. What most people reject. What they will, given a labour movement lead, fight to stop.

March on 26th is not enough!

Absent from the demonstration outside Lib-Dem conference in Sheffield last weekend was Unison, the biggest public sector union.

The leadership of the union is so hostile to the left they insist on only supporting campaigns that they lead. That means the union is absenting itself from even the most basic labour movement activity.

Yorkshire and Humberside region for example have banned branches from affiliating to the local anti cuts campaign.

Meanwhile members are loosing their jobs and having their terms and conditions smashed.

It will take more than an “official” big demonstration on 26 March to reverse that.

The rank and file within Unison need to do what they can to coordinate united action against cuts and NHS reforms and expose the bankruptcy of the leadership.

But the issue goes much deeper than the question of political democracy. It raises the question of human equality. At the most basic level.

Healthcare, by definition, is a matter of life and death. Inequality in healthcare is inequality in the right to live and stay alive and healthy for as long as possible.

The then Labour government set up the NHS 63 years ago. The reform socialist Nye Bevan, who set it up, wanted it to guarantee universal, equal, state-of-the-art healthcare to every citizen, free to the user.

The Coalition is, deliberately and cold-bloodedly, albeit stealthily, trying to replace that system with one — market regulated healthcare — in which life and quality of life are things money, and only money, can buy. In which the lack of money condemns the sick to stark inequality — to lack of access to the best medical underpinning of life and quality of life.

It is a brutal assertion and underpinning of inequality. It is an attempt to reimpose market-regulated inequality in an area where the labour movement had secured, in the original NHS, the right to healthcare irrespective of inequalities in wealth. To reassert the privileges of money. Of the raw penalties inflicted on those who do not in a market-regulated society have enough money to pay. In this case to pay to stay alive and to stay healthy. And at the most fundamental level.

That outrages the feelings and beliefs of most people in Britain. On that level, even the Tories profess in general to believe in equality, and “equality of opportunity”. So, of course, and most stridently, do the Lib Dem-Tories who make this Coalition government possible.

That is why they are going about it by “stealth privatisation”.

They know they will not get away with it, if there is sharp, stark public awareness of what they are trying to do.

That is why if the labour movement spearheads and organises resistance — resistance, refusing to go along, not talk and protest in mere words — we can mobilise a sizeable majority of the public, including forces and groups normally way beyond the reach of the labour movement. Trade union action — occupations against closures of hospitals or parts of hospitals; Labour-controlled councils refusing to cuts; strikes — can be such a spearhead.

POLITICS

The problem of the labour movement, faced now with the urgent need to resist the Tory drive to privatise the health service, is in the first place, a political problem. This Tory-led government is, obviously, political: it concerns itself with the overall running of society and with administering it. So too must any challenge to their right to do what the health Bill proposes to do. We need an alternative government.

Plainly we need a workers’ government. A government by and on behalf of the working class and the broader category of working people in Britain. A government that looks out for its own people, serves them, strikes at their enemies — what this government of millionaires is doing for its own, for the capitalist ruling class.

The Labour Party is right now the labour movement’s alternative to rule by the big and little Tory parties. We need a workers’ government; and our in situ alternative to the current government is a government of the Labour Party, only nine months out of office! That is the measure of our political problems in opposing, defeating and replacing the Cameron-Clegg government.

We must fight back despite that. In the course of the fight-back socialists must work to renew the labour movement.

For sure even the lack-fire, lacklustre, lack-conviction Labour leader, Ed Miliband, is an improvement on Brown and Blair.

But Miliband’s Labour Party, even though it is the only alternative which the labour movement has for now, remains a lambent and unsatisfactory alternative. Rooted in the past, and perfectly justified by the experience of the New Labour governments, many socialists choke on such a conclusion. “Leftist” disdain of the Labour Party is one of the great assets the Labour leaders have in this situation. It is a great weakness of the would-be left.

Only largescale, mass working-class action can defeat this government. And socialists are always concerned with the mass movement of the working class, no matter what level it is on at a given moment. We cannot in the short term go out and build a better labour movement. We have to relate to the one we’ve got.

The Labour Party remains, despite everything, the party of the unions. Socialists, like the labour movement faced with the Coalition government’s assault, have to start from where we are.

Socialists and trade unionists should turn their back on self-defeating snobbery towards the Labour Party. The unions need to reclaim the Labour Party. They need to use their strength in the party to restore and reshape it. For instance, the old power of the constituency parties needs urgently to be restored.

We must campaign in the unions for an urgent move to restore the old Labour Party, as a necessary part of organising resistance to the vandal Coalition.

We should not wait on such a restoration but take every action possible to us now. The trade unions, with their seven million members, have the strength to smash “stealth privatisation”. We can bring down this filthy government by millionaires on behalf of millionaires!

We cannot afford to wait on the leaders. If the leaders won’t lead then the rank and file must. Time is short.

The consequences will be terrible for the working class if we fail to fight the outrage to democracy, human equality and plain human decency that the Lansley Tory-Lib dem would make law.

Japan and the nuclear debate

With maybe tens of thousands dead and with more aftershocks and even another earthquake to come it is hard to imagine how Japanese people can rebuild their lives. If readers know of, or have ideas for, concrete labour movement solidarity please let us know.

The earthquake and subsequent explosions at the Fukushima nuclear power plant have prompted a debate about the safety of nuclear power. That is all good.

There should be no going back to “business as usual” with nuclear power. The terrible events in Japan have raised serious questions about how nuclear power is run under capitalism.

For instance, should nuclear power stations be built in earthquake prone areas? Japanese plants were said to be earthquake resistant. They turned out not to be.

Why have the Japanese authorities evacuated people within a 12 mile radius of Fukushima if, as they say, there is no serious prospect of serious radiation leak? It may be down to reasonable precautions but there needs to be absolute transparency about such decisions. This is people’s lives and health!

Both these failings are to do with prevailing capitalist conditions. And right now 350 new nuclear power stations are planned worldwide. Alternatives to fossil fuels are necessary but it should not be left to “the market” to decide what is possible — including whether or not “renewables” such as wind and solar have the capacity to be that alternative.

The left needs to participate in this urgent debate.

“Storming heaven”

The Paris Commune came out of the Franco-Prussian war (July 1870-January 1871).

After the defeat of the French forces by the Prussian army at Sedan on 1 September 1870 the French Emperor, Napoleon III resigned and a Republic was set up after mass demonstrations in Paris, calling for the Third Republic.

With the Prussians marching upon Paris, a newly established “Government of National Defence” was organised.

On 20 September 1870, the Prussians began a siege of Paris which would last for four months. When, in October, the French government began negotiations with the Prussians, the Parisian workers rose up and established a revolutionary government which was suppressed a month later.

At the end of January 1871 Paris was surrendered to the Prussians. But the population remained armed and only a small section of the capital was actually surrendered.

On 8 February rigged elections to a National Assembly were held. The Assembly was meant to ratify the terms of “peace”. An enormous clerical and monarchical majority was the result.

The “National Assembly”, with Adolphe Thiers as the

chief executive — scared of the revolutionary mood in Paris — wanted to overthrow the Republic and disarm the armed workers. It deposed Paris as capital of France and transferred the government to Versailles.

Meanwhile in Paris a Central Committee of the National Guard was created — to resist reaction. On 18 March Thiers attempted to disarm Paris and sent the regular army into the city. After fraternisation with Paris workers, led by working-class women, they refused to carry out their orders.

Elections were held on 26 March and a Paris Commune was proclaimed, taking over from the Central Committee. The Commune was to be both the legislature (law maker) and executive, responsible for carrying out the new laws.

The majority of representatives were working class and were socialists of one sort or another — insurrectionary left Republicans who were followers of Louis Auguste Blanqui; as well as members of the International Working Men’s Association (the First International) who in France were mainly influenced by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and many were (out of line with Proudhon’s views) trade unionists. A small

number of bourgeois Liberals and Radicals were also elected.

One of the first acts of the Commune was to grant a complete release from all rent from October, 1870, to July, 1871. There were to be many other acts in the interests of proletarian Paris. But there was never one clear manifesto.

Meanwhile the Assembly consolidated its army, strengthened by several regiments of released prisoners of war from Germany.

By the end of March all the “moderate” members of the Commune had resigned and the “respectable” population had left Paris.

On 1 April Thiers officially declared war on Paris. His attacks on Paris culminated in the mass slaughter of a “bloody week” in May. On 28 May the Commune fell.

In the next issues of *Solidarity* we will look at different aspects of the Commune. We begin with documents from the highpoint of the Commune’s all too brief existence. These documents were translated and printed in *The Communards of Paris 1871*, edited Stuart Edwards and selected by Jill Mountford.

Eye-witness account, 18 March

The women and children were swarming up the hillside in a compact mass; the artillerymen tried in vain to fight their way through the crowd, but the waves of people engulfed everything, surging over the cannon mounds, over the ammunition wagons, under the wheels, under the horses’ feet paralysing the action of the riders who spurred on their mounts in vain.

The horses reared and lunged forward, their sudden movement clearing the crowd, but the space was filled at once by a backwash created by the surging multitude.

Like breakers, the first rows of the crowd came crashing on to the batteries, repeatedly flooding them with people.

The artillerymen and cavalymen of the train were holding their own with brave determination. The cannons had been entrusted to them and they made it a point of honour to defend them.

The women especially were crying out in fury: “Unharness the horses! Away with You! We want the cannons! We shall have the cannons!”

The artillerymen could see... in the face of such resistance all advance was impossible, but still they did not falter.

Soldiers who had deserted their regiments shouted at them to surrender, but they stayed in the saddle and continued to spur their horses on furiously.

A National Guardsman... shouted “cut the traces”!

The crowd let out great cheers. The women closest to the cannons, to which they had been clinging for half an hour, took the knives that the men passed down. They cut through the harness.

The artillerymen found themselves cut off their mounts... and surrounded by groups of people inviting them to fraternise.

They were offered flasks of wine and meat rolls.

The cannons had been retaken. The cannons were in the hands of the people.

An extract from an eye-witness account of the events in Montmartre on 18 March, 1871: d’Esboeufs, La Verite sur La Commune par un acien proscit.

The 11th arrondissement

The 11th Arrondissement was one of the most revolutionary districts. Its leaders believed the Republic needed social reform and greater control over the state by the citizens. Five of its seven candidates got elected to the Commune.

Below is the text of an election poster — a Statement of Principles of the Republican, Democratic and Socialist Central Electoral Committee of the 11th Arrondissement.

...The Revolution is the march of the peoples of the world for equal rights and duties.

In the Democratic and Social Republic this equality becomes a reality. Solidarity must reign among all men. The law must be a progressive embodiment of universal justice. The people must assert the rights and regime where this sovereignty can be exercised; therefore no majority may decide to replace it by any other form of government. If this were ever to take place it would mean no less than suicide for the people and the enslavement for future generations, along with the complete destruction of our natural, legitimate and inalienable rights which cannot be impeded or restricted:

1. The right to live;
2. Individual freedom;
3. Freedom of thought;
4. Freedom to assemble and associate;
5. Freedom of speech, of the Press and of all forms of expression;
6. Free elections.

The violation or attempted violation of any of these rights is legitimate grounds for insurrection. The Democratic and Social Republic should not and does not recognise any form of monarchy, since it delivers in the fellowship of the people of all lands as individuals.

Politics. The state is the people governing themselves through a National Assembly composed of representatives elected by universal, organised and direct suffrage and subject to removal. The people reserve the right to discuss and ratify all institutions and fundamental laws.

Work Production and Distribution. The while system of work should be reorganised. Since the aim of life is the limitless development of our physical, intellectual and moral capacities, property is and must only be the right of each one of us to share (to the extent of his individual contribution) in the collective fruit of labour which is the basis of social wealth.

The Nation must provide for those unable to work. Public Office (Responsibility). The officials of the republic must be responsible at every level for all their actions. All public, national and communal offices should be temporary,

elective and accessible to all, subject to a test of ability. All posts are to be re-numerated.

The plurality of functions is an offence against the entire Nation or one of its members and will be subject to the severest penalties.

National Defence. It is the duty of all citizens without distinction to defend the national territory.

Justice and Judiciary. Justice should be available to all; it will therefore be free for both defending and prosecuting parties.

All misconduct will be punished proportionately to the extent and consequences of the damage caused.

The jury system will be instituted in all courts.

Human life shall be considered inviolable, and no one shall be allowed to offend against it except in self-defence.

The aim of the penal system shall be the reform of the criminal.

Education. Education should be social. Secular and compulsory elementary education must be universal. Secondary and specialised education will be available to men and women citizens free of charge, on the basis of competitive and ordinary examinations.

Freedom of thought is the natural right of every individual; the various forms of worship will therefore be the entire responsibility of those who practice them. The separation of the churches and the State must be total. It is forbidden to practise any form of worship in public.

Taxation. The burdensome and vexatious fiscal system of numerous different taxes collected in a multiplicity of ways must be abolished. State revenue will be ensured by the levy of a single, progressive tax on all citizens in the form of an insurance premium. This tax will be collected at a local level and will be based on annual income. Each individual commune will control its share of the tax and will be responsible for its collection.

These are, in brief, the principles to which we are committed. We now call for the necessary reforms and political, legislative, financial and administrative measures to carry them into effect.

We look forward to a future where every citizen will exercise his rights to the full and be conscious of his duties, where there will be no more oppressors or oppressed, no class distinctions among citizens and no barriers between the peoples of different nations.

Since the family is the primary form of association, all families will join together to form a greater family, the Nation, and all nations will unite in a superior, collective entity, Humanity.

...After six months of hunger and ruin, caused by internal treachery more even than by the external enemy, they rise, beneath Prussian bayonets, as if there had never been a war between France and Germany and the enemy were not at the gates of Paris! History has no like example of like greatness! If they are defeated only their "good nature" will be to blame... the present rising in Paris — even if crushed by the wolves, swine and vile curs of the old society — is the most glorious deed of our Party since the June insurrection [1848 revolution] in Paris. Compare these Parisians, storming heaven, with the slaves to heaven of the German-Prussian Holy Roman Empire.

Karl Marx, 12 April 1871

Organising women's work

The new movement was so unexpected and so radical that it was beyond the understanding of professional politicians, who merely saw it as an insignificant, aimless revolt.

Others have tried to belittle the spirit of the Revolution by reducing it to a mere demand for "municipal rights", for some kind of administrative autonomy.

But the people are not taken in by the illusions perpetuated by governments, not by so-called parliamentary representation; in proclaiming the Commune they are not demanding certain municipal prerogatives but communal autonomy in its greatest sense.

To the people the Commune does not merely signify administrative autonomy; above all it represents a sovereign right of the community to create its own laws and political structure as a means to achieving the aims of the Revolution. These aims are the emancipation of labour, the end of monopolies and privileges, the abolition of the bureaucracy and of the feudalism of industrialists, speculators and capitalists, and finally of the creation of an economic order in which the reconciliation of interests and a fair system of exchange will replace the conflicts and disorders begotten by the old social order of inaction and laissez-faire.

For the people of the Commune this is the new order of equality, solidarity and liberty, the crowning of the communal revolution that Paris is proud to have initiated...

Today it is the duty of the commune to the workers who created it to take all necessary steps to achieve constructive results... Action must be taken and it must be taken fast. However, we must not resort to expedients or makeshift solutions that may sometimes be appropriate in abnormal situations but which only create formidable problems in the long

run, such as those resulting from the closure of the National workshops in 1848.

...The Commune must abandon the mistaken ideas of old, it must gather inspiration from the very difficulties of the situation and apply methods that will survive the circumstances that first led to their use.

We will achieve this through the creation of special workshops for women and trading centres where finished products may be sold.

Each arrondissement would open premises where the raw materials would be taken in and distributed to individual women workers or to groups according to their skills. Other buildings would receive the finished products for their sale and storage.

The necessary organisation for the application of this scheme would be under the control of a committee of women appointed in each municipal district.

The Commune's Commission of Labour and Exchange could organise the distribution of raw materials to the arrondissements from a vast central building.

Finally the Finance Delegate would make a weekly credit available to the municipalities so that work for women can be organised immediately...

A proposal for the organisation of women's work from a printer member of the Commission of Labour and Exchange

Paris as festival

Would you believe it? Paris is fighting and singing! Paris is about to be attacked by a ruthless and furious army and she laughs! Paris is hemmed in on all sides by trenches and fortifications, and yet there are corners within these formidable walls where people still laugh!

Paris does not only have soldiers, she has singers too. She has both cannons and violins; she makes both orsini bombs and music. The clash of the cymbals can be heard in dreadful silence between rounds of firing, and merry dance airs mingle with the rattle of American machine-guns.

Paris would indeed be a strange sight for someone suddenly finding himself in our midst... At every stage he would come across some astonishing spectacle. Where he might expect to see a people in mourning, roaming grief-stricken among the empty streets and squares of their depopulated city, instead he would find them peacefully going about their affairs, bent, according to their fancy or the time of day, on either business or pleasure...

No better reply could be made to our stubborn enemies' ceaseless cannonade than the refrain that a thousand voices intone every night in the music halls of Paris:

"The peoples of the workers are brothers to us,
Our enemies are the Versaillaise."

This is an abridged article written by the symbolist poet Villiers de L'Isle-Adam under the pseudonym Marius for the Commune paper Le Tribun du Peuple.

Co-operatives

The only way to reorganise labour so that the worker enjoys the product of his work is by forming free producers' co-operatives which would run the various industries and share the profits.

These co-operatives would deliver Labour from capitalist exploitation and thus enable the workers to control their own affairs. They would also facilitate urgently needed reforms in techniques of production and in the social relations of workers as follows:

- The diversification of work within each trade to counter the harmful effects on body and mind of continually repeating the same manual operation;
- A reduction of working hours to prevent physical exhaustion leading to loss of mental faculties;
- The abolition of all competition between men and women workers since their interests are absolutely identical and their solidarity essential to the success of the final and universal strike of Labour against Capital.

And therefore;

- Equal pay for equal hours worked;
- A federation of the various sections of the trades on a local and international level to facilitate the sale and exchange of products by centralising the international interests of the producers.

The general development of the producers' co-operatives calls for:

- Propaganda and organisation among the working masses; every cooperative member shall therefore be expected to join the International Working Men's Association;
- Financial aid from the State for the setting up of these co-operatives in the form of a social loan repayable in yearly instalments at 5% interest.

We also believe that in the social order of the past women's work has been particularly subject to exploitation and therefore urgently needs to be reorganised.

...It is to be feared that the women of Paris will relapse under the pressure of continuous hardship to the passive and more or less reactionary role that the social order of the past had cut out for them. This would endanger the revolutionary and international interests of the peoples of the world and consequently the Commune.

Taken from the Address from the Central Committee of the Women's Union for the Defence of Paris and for Aid to the Wounded to the Commission of Labour and Exchange.

THE BURNING OF THE GUILLOTINE

Citizens, We have been informed of the construction of a new type of guillotine that was commissioned by the odious government — one that it is easier to transport and speedier. The Sub-Committee of the 11th Arrondissement has ordered the seizure of these servile instruments of monarchist domination and has voted that they be destroyed once and forever. They will therefore be burned at 10 o'clock on 6 April 1871, on the Place de la Mairies, for the purification of the Arrondissement and the consecration of our new freedom.

Seizing factories

On 16 April the Commune decreed that trade unions might take over any factories which were closed down because their owners had left Paris for the safety of the provinces during the war against Prussia.

The idea that workers' co-operatives should replace capitalist production went back to the beginnings of the French labour movement, to the utopian socialist theorists of the 1830s; during the 1848 revolution more than 300 meetings on this subject had been held in different factories.

The co-operative idea was very common in the French section of the International. The strong anti-state element of French socialism, for example, Proudhon's writings, and the close links between anarchism and workers' organisations, meant that the aim was not nationalisation, state control over areas of the economy, but the formation of independent producers' co-operatives. The State in Paris now meant the Commune and it was called upon to give aid in starting up such co-operatives.

Jean-René Chauvin (1918-2011)

By Olivier Delbeke

Jean-René Chauvin died on 27 February 2011. Thus the number 201627, tattooed by the Nazis on Jean-René Chauvin's forearm when he was deported in 1943, will no longer testify to the barbarism of the past century.

Jean-René Chauvin had survived time spent in several concentration camps (Mauthausen, Auschwitz, Buchenwald), places where forced labour should finish you off in a short time. Escaping from exhaustion, illness, the deadly fights for a crust of stale bread and even an assassination plan fomented by the Stalinist cadres of one camp, Jean-

Defend May Day!

By Esther Townsend

The Tories are scrapping our jobs, benefits and public services. Now they plan to scrap May Day bank holiday and replace it with a "UK Day".

For socialists May Day is more than maypoles and Morris dancing — it is International Workers' Day.

The idea of a workers' day began around the demand for the eight-hour day — Australian workers in 1856 coincided a strike with demonstrations, meetings and entertainment. The idea quickly spread to other countries — 1 May 1886 strikes were held throughout the US, including Chicago where twelve were shot dead by police, and organisers were later arrested and sentenced to death. In 1890 the Second International named May Day International Workers' Day. The initial demand of the eight-hour day was eventually won but May Day continued.

May Day has been a bank holiday in the UK since 1978 and the Tories now intend to replace it with a nationalistic autumn celebration. Tourism minister, John Penrose, argues this will stretch the tourist season beyond the summer, as part of "practical, not political", government plans to bring four million additional overseas visitors to Britain over the next four years, creating 50,000 jobs.

Is it really surprising that as the ConDem coalition attacks the welfare state and strengthens the anti-trade union laws they also attack working-class history and culture in favour of their big British society?

Internationally May Day is an opportunity for protest and direct action against capitalism. Major demonstrations and celebrations are usual in Russia, the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong, Spain, Italy and elsewhere.

2009 saw the biggest ever French demonstrations and in Berlin, following street parties, dozens were arrested amid violent clashes with the police.

London's first May Day march in 1890 drew more than 200,000 workers and radicals, among them Friedrich Engels. Now it's lucky to muster a few hundred. We've allowed May Day to become an easy target, and the unions have done little to defend it.

TUC general secretary Brendan Barber merely said the change will "disrupt people's schedules and create more red tape for employers". He mentioned that it could be a move to pacify Tories who dislike May Day's left-wing associations, but highlighted its importance as a historical "British" celebration.

History is important — it allows us to remember and learn the lessons of past struggles; to celebrate those who fought before and see what will be necessary to achieve revolution. May Day plays a central role in this.

Rosa Luxemburg said, "when better days dawn, when the working class of the world has won its deliverance then too humanity will... celebrate May Day in honor of the bitter struggles and the many sufferings of the past".

We face a devastating attack on our public services, our jobs and our class: it is now more important than ever that we take the opportunity that May Day offers to celebrate our history and to continue the fight for working-class liberation and socialism.

René carried out the battle of memory, notably in producing his book *A Trotskyist in the Nazi Hell*, and in underlining the numerous features shared by the system of the Nazi concentration camps with that of the Gulag.

With the death of Jean-René, we see the departure of one of the last witnesses of a generation who embodied the possibility of victory against reaction, of remaking October, of defeating Franco, the possibility of stopping, through socialist revolution, a new world war more murderous than the previous one.

This generation had joined Trotsky in the 1930s without having known directly the retreat of the revolution at the very heart of the Third International with the defeat of the Left Opposition in Russia in 1928. Despite its ardour, its political determination to fight capitalism, in its "democratic" variant as well as its fascist, as well as Stalinism, this generation was beaten by the Second World War even if that didn't necessarily signify its physical death.

Jean-René Chauvin was born in 1918 shortly after the end of the war. His old father was a Guesdist leader of the SFIO [Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière — the French section of the Workers' International, the name of the Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party), from 1905 to 1970], a regular at the congress of the International before 1914, who was always amazed by the dominant role played from outside in world affairs by an isolated émigré by the name of Lenin.

From high school, participating in the Young Socialists at Bordeaux, Jean-René sympathised with the Gauche Révolutionnaire [Revolutionary Left], a left-wing tendency in the SFIO, led by Marceau Pivert, but it was the impact of the civil war in Spain and the announcement of the August 1936 Moscow trials which led him to Trotskyism. All his life he retained the air of a young man. However, his political journey of more than 75 years in the camp of revolutionary socialism saw many events that should make one old before one's time.

POST-1945

Besides the trauma of deportation, Jean-René knew the tragic fate of Trotskyism coming out of the bloody event of the past century which was the Second World War. Whereas the Fourth International had been launched in 1938 on the expectation that, in the following 10 years, in the tumult of the world war which was coming and of the revolutions which would follow it, not a stone would remain undisturbed of the traditional organisations, the reality of the post-1945 years was quite otherwise.

Instead of the collapse of Stalinism, we saw its extension beyond the frontiers of the Soviet Union across the eastern half of Europe while, in Asia, it subjugated hundreds of millions of people in several countries (China, North Korea, North Vietnam).

In place of drawing adequate conclusions from this in recognising this defeat of the working class along with the maintenance of Stalinism and capitalism, complicit in this new division of the world and in the wiping out of the workers' movement, all the while staying simultaneously ferociously hostile to each other, the Trotskyist movement after Trotsky proceeded to a self-destructive rationalisation in decreeing that there had been no defeat.

On the contrary, it affirmed that there had been an unin-

terrupted extension of the world revolution to the extent that one saw the appearance of armed movements fighting Western imperialism with AK-47s and other Soviet military supplies.

Jean-René Chauvin took part, with Yvan Craipeau, in the majority abusively qualified as "right-wing" which briefly led the PCI (Parti Communiste Internationaliste [International Communist Party]), the French section of the Fourth International, in 1947-1948. This leadership could not resist disenchantment, despite the wave of strikes of 1947, among them the famous Renault strike. The PCF proceeded to have the upper hand for a long time, until its place was contested by May 1968.

The Craipeau tendency refused this rationalisation, leaning on the dogma of "degenerated workers' state" which denied that the period opened by 1917 had closed.

It sought to influence larger sectors, notably among the Young Socialists who at the time experienced a very promising push to the left (NB: the career of Pierre Mauroy, now at the heart of the Socialist Party, began by the repression of this push to the left of the Young Socialists, and the exclusion of the "dangerous" Trotskyists...)

The conditions at the time did not permit the "right" leadership of the PCI to hold, with a party pulled about by the challenges of the new world situation and the triumphal continuance of Stalinism. There was the debacle of, for some, the ephemeral adventure of the RDR (Rassemblement Démocratique Révolutionnaire, Revolutionary Democratic Assembly). In those years, even if political success was not on the cards, Jean-René, hardened by his bitter experience of the Nazi camps, took part in the activity of denouncing the Stalinist camps.

At the start of the 1950s, with the struggle against the Algerian war, the birth of the PSU (Parti Socialiste Unifié [United Socialist Party]), and the activities of the Revolutionary Socialist Tendency at its heart, that generation prepared May 1968.

After the PSU, it was the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) but this organisation, which Jean-René would participate in over several decades, would never be the legitimate heir of the POI of 1936, scattered by the test of the war, nor even of the PCI of the Liberation, weakened in 1948 before going dark in the crisis of 1952-53. Jean-René thus retained a label of independent Trotskyist despite several spells in the LCR.

In recent years, the sectarian-electoralist evolution of the LCR, now the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), symbolised by the figure of The Postman (Olivier Besancenot), will always see Jean-René and some other "old Trotskyists" reminding us of the ABCs of the workers' united front against the right and the MEDEF [Mouvement des Entreprises de France — similar to the bosses' Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in the UK].

After the death of Wilebaldo Solano last September, the death of Jean-René Chauvin marks the passing of the generation which had to carry the Fourth International, which was founded by Trotsky for victory "within 10 years" and not just for holding out and looking on.

Grim route to Iraq

By Tim Thomas

"Route Irish" is Ken Loach's take on the Iraq disaster.

Fergus, played by Mark Womack, is a hired killer (or "contractor" as they prefer to be called), seduced by easy money (£10,000 a month) and working for a smooth ex-army outfit fond of status objects and weekend golf.

He enlists a friend of his but this friend is killed after objecting to the murder of a family of Iraqis, a massacre of the innocents.

Loach follows Fergus's dangerous voyage, mainly in the form of skype and mobile phone texts, to discover the facts of the murder. This is his bleakest film since *Family Life* in the early 1970s.

None of the characters have much benevolence, they are all edgy and only use one adjective. It might have helped if the posttraumatic stress disorder Fergus is said to suffer from was not so understated.

The plot is strong, the dialogue extraordinarily realistic

and the Iraq war sequences immediate in their simplicity but there is no chink of light, only massacres, waterboarding and golf.

Socialists lash up with Galloway

By Ann Field

The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party Scotland (SPS) have thrown in their lot with George Galloway in order to create a new electoral bloc for this year's Scottish elections, its chosen name: "George Galloway (Respect) – Coalition Against Cuts".

"Galloway, etc." is no more than a mechanism to try to get Galloway into Holyrood: the only candidate with even a half-realistic chance of being elected is whoever stands as number one on its list for the Glasgow regional seat. That candidate will be Galloway himself.

This will be a new experience for SPS members. From 2004 until 2007 the SWP acted as Galloway's bag-carriers in Respect until 2007 Galloway split the party, and walked away with the name "Respect", two SWP full-timers and a few SWP members.

One of its candidates will be SPS member and anti-cuts activist Brian Smith. Smith makes great play of the need for Labour councillors to fight the Con-Dem cuts by following in the footsteps of the Militant-controlled Liverpool City Council of the 1980s which, he claims (albeit falsely), defied the Tory government of Margaret Thatcher. In fact, they "fought the Tories" in words and in reality made a rotten deal with them during the 1984 miners' strike. They have lied about what happened ever since.

Galloway has a rather different line on the record of the

An older politically corrupt "friendship" on the Scottish left: Galloway and Tommy Sheridan

Militant-led Liverpool City Council.

In his autohagiography *I'm Not The Only One* he describes the Militant councillors as "Trotskyist entrists working parasitically within the Labour Party" who pursued "gesture politics" and "kamikaze acts such as refusing to set a municipal rate or otherwise breaking the law" on the basis of their "starry-eyed, far-out, far-left fantasies."

The alternative recommended by Galloway was "a posture of militant opposition but stopping short of political

suicide in order to live to fight another day." The truth is that even in words George Galloway was never a left-wing Labour MP.

Then there is the very contemporary issue of the uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and other Arab countries.

In a recent debate in the pages of the *Guardian*, Galloway again hailed the prospect of Erdoğan-type governments in these countries: "I welcome the imminent victory of the Islamic movements in Egypt and Tunisia, which I think will provide very good government on the Turkish model."

Do the SPS and SWP share Galloway's enthusiasm for a victory of the Islamic movements in Egypt and Tunisia?

Where does "Respect — George Galloway" stand on the traditional socialist demand for a workers' MP on a worker's wage?

The Socialist Party used to call for a new workers' party for the millions not the millionaires. Perhaps its sister-party in Scotland is now having second thoughts about the wisdom of that slogan.

For decades the SP (Militant, the Revolutionary Socialist League) were the most rigidly bone-headed kitsch-Marxist dogmatists. It's an old story that when such an organisation loses its certainties — the Socialist Party did with the collapse of the USSR and the Blairite hijacking of the Labour Party — then they become politically disorientated and politically indiscriminating.

Their subordinate alliance with Galloway is an example of that disorientation.

Galloway, Gaddafi and other dictators

By Dale Street

On the "Respect" website, George Galloway tells an anecdote that neatly sumps up the politics of the man the Scottish far left has, in "Respect — George Galloway", chosen as its standard bearer. George Galloway complains that people are mixing up their dictators.

"Last week at a breakfast in Dubai, an Englishman munching his halal sausages said: 'Your mate's getting a hard time in Libya isn't he?' — though YouTube is groaning with films of me denouncing Gaddafi over many years. Of course, he could have been getting his Arab dictators mixed up, or — worse — confusing me with Tony Blair."

The ignorant sausage-muncher should have known that when Galloway uttered the immortal words, "Sir, I salute your courage, your strength, your indefatigability and I want you to know that we are with you, until victory, until Jerusalem," it was at a meeting with Saddam Hussein, not Muammar Gaddafi.

He should have known that when Galloway wrote that a military commander who had seized power in his country in an army coup "seems an upright sort to me and should be given a chance," he was referring to Pakistan's General Musharraf, not Libya's Colonel Gaddafi.

He should have known that when Galloway praised a Middle East dictatorship as "the last Arab country, the fortress of the remaining dignity of the Arabs," praised its ruler as "the last Arab ruler," and told the victims of the dictatorship that they were "a free people," he was speaking of Bashar al-Assad's Syria, not Gaddafi's Libya. (1)

He should have known that when Galloway referred to a country in the grip of a reactionary dictatorship for the past three decades as a country which "has only been a democracy for thirty years but (which) has come a long way in that thirty years," he was referring to the Iran of the mullahs, not to Gaddafi's Libya.

He should have known that when Galloway joked with a dictator's son about Cuban cigars, weight loss and hair loss, and promised him, "we're with you, till the end," he was socialising with Uday Hussein, not Saif Gaddafi.

And, really, the sausage-muncher should have known that there are two, simple, criteria in deciding whether or not a dictator is or is not a "mate" of George Galloway: "anti-imperialist struggle" and "achievements".

And what exactly is "anti-imperialist struggle"? Contrast what Galloway has had to say about Gaddafi (not his "mate") with what he has had to say about Syrian dictator Al-Assad (a man of "dignity") and you will understand.

Speaking in 2008, Galloway dismissed Gaddafi as "just another Arab dictator". Why? Because he had abandoned the "anti-imperialist struggle":

"Gaddafi has betrayed everything and everybody. He turned away from the justified struggle of the Arab people against Zionist occupation and against imperialist domina-

tion of the region. He has lost any respect which any struggling people had for him...

"...in the past he took an Arab stance, even if it was more in words than in deeds. But now he is just like all the rest. ... He was terrified of American power. But he should have waited because the uprising in Iraq has broken the American power...."

By contrast, Syria was "lucky to have Bashar Al-Assad as her president" because that dictator had kept Syria in "anti-imperialist struggle":

"Syria will not betray the Palestinian resistance, she will not betray the Lebanese resistance, Hizbullah, she will not sign a shameful surrender-peace with [Israel], and ... Syria will not allow her country to be used as a military base for America to crush the resistance in Iraq." (2)

Earlier this month Galloway returned to the same argument: "The government of Syria for a long time has pursued a policy of Arabness. Of Arab nationalism, of Arab dignity, of support for the Palestinian cause, material support for the resistance, rejection for the foreign occupation of Iraq. And a refusal to bow before the foreign powers." (3)

Al-Assad is "the last Arab ruler".

"ACHIEVEMENTS"

The second criterion, the more nebulous one of "achievements", is easiest understood by contrasting Galloway on Saddam Hussein with Galloway on Gaddafi.

In his semi-autobiography *I'm Not the Only One* Galloway wrote: "Just as Stalin industrialized the Soviet Union, so on a different scale Saddam plotted Iraq's own Great Leap Forward. ... He is likely to have been the leader in history who came closest to creating a truly Iraqi national identity, and he developed Iraq and the living, health, social and education standards of his own people."

Gaddafi can boast of no such achievements:

"Where did the money (from the sale of oil) go? Well, of course, much of it was stolen by the Gaddafi family and clique around him. Corruption was absolutely rampant and endemic. Other parts of the fortune were spent on hare-brained schemes and divvied up and handed round various other dictators." (4)

So, to put it in terms so simple that even an English sausage-muncher could understand: some dictators are truly "Arab", truly "anti-Zionist" and truly "anti-imperialist" and can also boast of "achievements" and those are George Galloway's "good dictators". The others have sold out and have no achievements to their credit.

This is a morally abhorrent exercise in nonsense which owes everything to Stalinism and nothing to socialism (or even anti-imperialism, in any meaningful sense of the word).

There was nothing "anti-imperialist" about Iraq's invasion of Iran in 1980, its campaign of genocide against its

Kurdish minority following the war against Iran, or its invasion of Kuwait in 1990. These were the actions of a sub-imperialist power, i.e. one seeking to establish regional domination.

Similarly, Syria's support for Hizbullah and the "Palestinian resistance" has nothing to do with "anti-imperialist struggle" and everything to do with Syria's anti-Islamic chauvinism and its own regional ambitions.

Galloway's attempts to contrast Saddam's "achievements" with Gaddafi's lack of achievement is in terms of facts equally absurd.

Like Gaddafi, Saddam plundered the country's wealth (where does Galloway think the money came from to pay for all his palaces?), squandered it on "harebrained schemes" (such as the invasions of Iran and Kuwait), and also allowed some of it to be used to finance and, of course, reward the political activities of apologists for his dictatorial rule.

There is, however, a political method in Galloway's madness. That method is Stalinism.

Apologists for the now defunct Stalinist Russia argued that there was no repression in the country. Or, if there was repression, then it was a necessary evil arising from the threat of imperialist aggression.

And Russia's regime was "progressive" because it was modernising the country.

Galloway adopts a similar approach to the supposedly "good" Middle East dictators: they might not be democratic, but at least they pursue an anti-imperialist struggle. And they might not be egalitarian, but at least they are building a modern economy.

But this distinction between the Saddam/Al-Assad variety of dictator and the Gaddafi variety is an entirely spurious one. Outside of a residual Stalinist mindset, it makes no sense at all. And from a socialist perspective it is simply repugnant.

(In fact, in terms of bloodshed, slaughter, war and genocide it could easily be argued that Gaddafi's own record, notwithstanding his own achievements in these matters, is pretty modest compared with that of Saddam.)

And what about Galloway's new Scottish partners? Privately they might agree with what I have written here, or most of it.

So what are they doing as the political bag carriers of this vicarious Arab and Islamic chauvinist mouthpiece for murderous dictators and open advocate of a united Arab invasion of Israel?

1. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/770/re104.htm>
2. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/770/re104.htm>
3. <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/the-revolutionary-384622.html>
4. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUIXvd6nEb&feature=related>

Bolshevism and democracy

The following report by Irving Howe of a debate on the record of Bolshevism is taken from the US Trotskyist *Labor Action*, the paper of the Workers' Party. The debate between Max Shachtman of the Workers' Party and Liston Oak, managing editor of the *New Leader*, took place in New York on 8 November 1946. The *New Leader* was a right-wing social-democratic journal. Liston Oak had been a member of the Communist Party of America.

This debate took place on the 29th anniversary of the Russian Revolution — the first in history in which the workers established their own government. The principles of the great October revolution remain the principles on which the Workers' Party stands.

LISTON OAK

Liston Oak, who spoke as a Social Democrat, began his speech with an admission that there were great differences between Leninism and Stalinism, but asserted that Lenin and Trotsky had used similar "dictatorial" methods as has Stalinism, and that the Stalinist regime was the "logical outgrowth" of the "one-party dictatorship established by the Bolsheviks."

Oak saw Bolshevism as a kind of terroristic conspiracy on the part of a tiny, disciplined minority group, ruthless in its fanaticism and readiness to resort to violence, and unscrupulous in the means it used to reach its ends. Though Stalin is "cruder" than Lenin, he said, they are both in the Bolshevik tradition, Stalin continuing the amoral methods of Lenin. Stalinism is the result, in Oak's view, of the unwillingness of the Bolshevik leaders to work with or unite with any of the other socialist groups in the Russia. Having established a minority dictatorship, Oak continued, the Bolsheviks could only resort to terror and thereby pave the way for Stalin.

To buttress his case, Oak quoted from Social-Democrats like Kautsky and Plekanov, who were opposed to the Bolshevik revolution; from Marxists like Luxemburg who support the Bolshevik revolution even though disagreeing with certain of Lenin's tactics; and from Trotsky's early writings at the turn of the century in which he polemicised against Lenin. Oak attacked Lenin's conception of the party as leading to a conspiratorial clique of "professional revolutionists" who seek to manipulate the masses as if the generals of an army. The Social-Democratic or Menshevik conception of a party, on the other hand is, he said, a loosely-knit democratic organisation.

Oak supported the pre-Lenin policy of the Bolsheviks which called for a coalition government with the bourgeois parties. (What was amusing about this, though Oak didn't seem to notice it, was that it was Stalin — who Oak now professes to hate so heartily — who favoured this policy which Lenin denounced upon arriving in Russia.)

Oak then denounced the Bolsheviks for illegalising the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, though he did not mention why this was done. He denounced, further, the dissolution by the Bolsheviks of the Constituent Assembly which had been elected several months before the Bolshevik Revolution and represented the pre-revolutionary sentiments of the masses when they were still hesitant about supporting the Bolsheviks.

Turning to our day, Oak rejected the conception of revolution, which he believed would inevitably fall under Stalinist control, and came out in favour of gradual reforms since he considers that capitalism still has certain progressive functions to fulfil.

MAX SHACHTMAN

Max Shachtman emphasised the historical background against which the debate was being held: "Capitalism is bankrupt. To support it is equivalent to the suicide of society... What is Bolshevism? Bolshevism is the planned and organised attempt to mobilise the working class to take over state power in its own interests in order to sue its political supremacy for the purpose of establishing a classless society."

"If," continued Shachtman, "it can be proved that Stalinism is the natural and inevitable product of Bolshevism then you will have proved that the working class cannot take and hold socialist power and that any attempt to do so can lead only to its degradation under totalitarian dictatorship. I say this because Bolshevism is the only road to working-class power and socialism."

Shachtman then proceeded to an historical examination of Bolshevism. The truth about it has been obscured first by the propaganda barrage by the bourgeoisie which would identify it with dictatorship, he pointed out, and secondly by the Stalinists... who would also identify it with dictatorship. He traced the origin of the Bolshevik movement in

Lenin

Russia, its struggle to overthrow the Tsarist autocracy, its demand for democratic rights for the Russian masses. He differentiated Bolshevism, which placed its faith in the working class and peasantry, from the Mensheviks who wanted a coalition with the liberal capitalists. And he further pointed out that the actual experiences of the Russian revolution confirmed the Bolshevik point of view, and showed it to be in harmony with the most profoundly democratic aspirations of the masses — for that is why the masses turned to Lenin.

The Bolshevik Party attacked by its enemies as dictatorial, was in reality a highly disciplined organisation for it was serious in its objective to destroy Tsarism and capitalism; but at the same time it was the most democratic organisation in history, for in no other party was there such freedom and fullness of discussion, such intellectual loyalty toward scrupulous regard for the rights of minorities. Only the Stalinist debasement has misled people to identify Bolshevism with internal party dictatorship.

"You will not find one party in modern times," stressed Shachtman, "in which there was such free discussion, such rich and fruitful interchange of ideas... The whole internal history of Bolshevism is a history of free discussion and debate, not conducted in a dark corner, but openly, in the press of the party itself!" Shachtman laid particular stress on this last phrase.

"You need only read the works of Lenin," continued Shachtman, "to see reflected there the vigorous, rich and fertile intellectual life, the favourable atmosphere for the development of revolutionary thought, that always prevailed in the Bolshevik party. Read these words and see if so much as a seed of Stalinism can be found in them!"

Shachtman then pointed out that on three essential touchstones of democratic and socialist standards the Bolshevik party was unsurpassed; its attitude toward national minorities; its attitude toward imperialist wars; and its attitude toward revolutions. He noted how the Bolsheviks granted freedom to Finland as soon as they acquired power and then made a devastating contrast with the behaviour of the English Social Democrat, Arthur Henderson "who sat in the British Cabinet as Privy Councillor when the British bombed and shelled during Dublin the Easter uprising of 1916 and murdered the Irish socialist martyr James Connolly!"

Shachtman, by this time going full guns, launched into a contrast between the war records of the Bolsheviks — who denounced World War One as imperialist and spread no illusions about it among the masses — and the war record of the Social-Democrats, each section of which supported its own imperialist rulers. "There is your road to socialism," he turned to Oak, "To the stars through Hohenzollern and Churchill!"

Shachtman contrasted the attitudes of the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks toward the Russian Revolution itself: how the former wanted to limit it to a democratic capitalist state unable to solve any basic problems, while the latter pushed through to state power. He challenged Oak to tell the audi-

ence what the Mensheviks and SRs did during the civil war, how they worked with international capitalism against the young workers' state.

Shachtman proceeded to show how Bolshevism and Stalinism were mortal enemies and complete opposites; how Stalin had launched a campaign of extermination against the old Bolsheviks; how, in fact, many of Oak's Menshevik heroes had become belated supporters of Stalin; and how Oak himself had during the war supported an alliance with the Stalinist totalitarianism.

"We say," concluded Shachtman, "Stalinism grew out of Bolshevism only because the social democracy destroyed the hopes of the isolated Russian Revolution by trying to keep capitalism alive in Europe. The central lesson in the rise of Stalinism is not the abandonment of Bolshevism but the abandonment of reformism and insistence on the struggle for international socialism."

REBUTTALS

In his first rebuttal, Liston Oak stressed a few main points:

1. He argued that if the Bolsheviks had formed a coalition with the "other socialist parties" they would not "have had to resort to minority violence."

2. He quoted from documents of early opposition groups in the Bolshevik Party in the early 1920s which stressed the danger of bureaucratism in Russia.

3. Any party, he asserted, which seizes political power and identifies itself with a class, "as did the Bolsheviks," finds it necessary to suppress all opposition. "Totalitarian organization leads to totalitarian society."

4. He cited the Kronstadt rebellion against, and its suppression by, the Bolshevik government "as evidence of the undemocratic nature of Bolshevism."

5. He denied that the Social Democrats were responsible for the failure of the European revolution after the First World War, asserting rather that it was the Bolsheviks who split the working class movement and thereby helped perpetuate capitalism.

6. He asserted that capitalism still had a future in certain places, one of which is "the backward countries which need capital investments."

REBUTTAL LASHES MENSHEVIK ACTIVITY

In turn, Shachtman drove home the following main points in his rebuttal:

1. The Bolsheviks were not responsible for splitting the socialist movement; it was split by the Social Democrats who supported their imperialist war machines and put such revolutionary socialists as Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg in jail. It was this division which split the socialist movement — this division between support of and opposition to imperialist war.

2. The reasons no coalition was formed with the "other socialist parties" when the Bolsheviks assumed power are:

(a) the masses of workers abandoned the ineffectual Mensheviks and came to the Bolsheviks;

(b) the masses of followers of the Social Revolutionary Party followed its left wing which did participate in the Bolshevik government; and

(c) the Mensheviks and SRs were opposed to the workers taking power and when the civil war came they supported the foreign intervention against the workers' state.

3. The Constituent Assembly was dissolved by the Bolsheviks because it no longer represented the sentiments of the masses, having been elected before the revolutionary wave which rose to its crest in the October revolution. It gave way to the more representative Soviet of Workers' Deputies which supported the Bolshevik government, even though convened by Mensheviks.

4. There was only one party after a while in Russia, not because the Bolsheviks so desired it, but because every other party took up arms against the workers' state. Shachtman cited detailed evidence of how the Social Democratic government in Georgia concluded an agreement with Germany on June 13, 1918 and a few months later with Britain to use their troops against the Bolsheviks.

5. He ridiculed Oak's argument that capitalism still had some future and inquired whether his theory that it could help "backward countries" was what led to the British Labour Party government's scandalous behaviour in Greece and Palestine.

6. He summed up by stressing the democratic and revolutionary character of Bolshevism, its loyalty to the idea of working class liberation and its lessons for our time.

In his final rebuttal Oak rephrased his point of view in more general terms, constructing an abstract argument about totalitarian means and ends.

Lib-Dem protest: build a political campaign!

By Max Munday

The Liberal Democrats at their Spring Conference in Sheffield (11-14 March) were safe enough — both politically and physically — behind the security barriers.

The police presence was enormous at the demonstration on Saturday 12 March with around 1,000 cops and horses manning fences, a mobile metal riot wall-barrier.

All this — a largely passive protest of 3-5,000 — cost £2 million to local people. An outrage to a city slashed by cuts.

Following a mostly quiet march, protestors massed outside the City Hall compound and heard a multitude of speakers, including some trade unionists and several SWP members.

No one listening left without being told several times how bad the cuts were and how we hated the

symbiosis of Tories and Lib Dems.

They would, however, have been forgiven for thinking that the meandering and rather aimless words of Len McCluskey came from a provincial vicar rather than the leader of two million workers in the union Unite who are facing economic assault.

Whilst some union branches mobilised, most did not; there was a bigger presence from Suffolk regional CWU than Sheffield Unison's health branch — despite its massive size and £37 million being cut from the local NHS.

Much of the organising for the day came from Right to Work/SWP and during the protest focussed on how angry people were through two major themes: calling Lib Dems "scum" and demanding a General Strike.

Is this enough? Will the London demonstration on

26 March with its inevitable flags, rousing polemics and samba bands be enough?

The Anarchist Federation didn't seem to think so and its report glorified a small group of protestors' "bail-in" of some high street shops whilst rubbishing Trotskyists selling their group's papers.

So where do we stand? With the SWP and its endless speeches, chanting and exclusive focus on demonstrating? Or do we just revel in the mischief of the black ninja-style figures of the Anarchist Federation?

The answer is neither! Workers' Liberty unashamedly thinks that ideas and political direction matter.

Our contribution to a strategy for the working class to defeat the cuts focuses on the coordinated strike action that all unions should throw their weight behind; an approach that draws on the solidarity of

service users and communities, and forces Labour councillors to refuse to implement these cuts.

Overall, we know that a government based in the workers' movement complete with industrial and community control over the economy is necessary to replace the sham democracy of jostling politicians.

Other alternative strategies focus on "sending the

Government a message", but being "heard" by the Government is useless unless it is backed up by a movement that compels its unions to mobilise its members and its Labour-link to actually defeat this attack.

The protest at the Lib Dem Conference reinforces a historic truth: the right have always known what the left thinks. It's time to make them care.

For example, in Barnet, where Barnet Museum and Church Farmhouse Museum in Hendon are both due to have their funding axed, a competitive element has crept in to the campaigns of each. In fact, the philistine Tory council doesn't care about either. We will all benefit by joining our campaigns and making the general case for the value of public services.

We can beat cuts!

Wirral TUC relaunched Wirral Against the Cuts in order to campaign against closures of care homes.

We leafleted care homes, organised meetings, and a lobby of the budget meeting, and one of the users of the Fernleigh centre who we met put in for a legal injunction.

The Fernleigh centre is the only centre providing support and respite for those with mental health problems.

Now Wirral council have backed down and Fernleigh is to stay open for at least 12 months.

We need to let people know that it is possible to win precious small victories by organising campaigns such as this.

Elaine Jones

Public health cuts mean shorter lives

Oxfordshire's Health Scrutiny Committee is being lobbied by unions and service users to order the Primary Care Trust to launch a full public consultation on public health cuts.

Oxford is a city of extremes: men and women living in the working class estates of the city die seven and six years earlier than those a few miles away in affluent areas of Oxford.

Over the last five years the NHS Public Health Directorate has put together specialist teams to improve life expectancy for working people. Now the PCT, to save cash, proposes that these teams are sacked without even consulting with the communities they serve.

Mark Ladbrooke, the Unison convenor for Oxfordshire PCT, explains: "The PCT hoped to slip this closure under the radar by announcing the job losses in an internal document to staff but our union members and their clients were having none of it. They contacted the union and we discussed these plans with local councillors and MPs. Service users and fellow health professionals rushed us messages of support."

Rape-services X Factor

Cambridgeshire's ruling Tories are running a "Participatory Budgeting Project" for Violence Against Women and Girls projects in Cambridgeshire. Residents can vote for which VAWG projects get funding of up to £3,000 — and which get nothing.

Cambridge Rape Crisis is the only specialist VAWG organisation who has gone in for the vote (to avoid similar organisations

competing). The service is a lifeline to women and girls who have experienced rape and sexual abuse. Funding will enable them to start running face-to-face counselling again.

It is disgusting that essential services are put up against each other for public vote, and women's organisations pitched against each other.

Let the Home Office know how you feel about "participatory budgeting" using this survey:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/KD5KHZC>.

PETITION WARS
Where there is not a generalised working class fightback against the cuts, the users of individual services under threat can find themselves competing against the users of equally valuable services down the road also threatened with the axe. The result can be petition wars.

RMT: young union members get organised

By an RMT member

RMT Young Members held their largest ever conference on 25-26 February.

Fifty delegates might not sound a lot for a union of 80,000 members, 11,000 of whom are under 30. But four years ago there were just nine delegates. Young RMT activists have worked hard to build the conference over recent years; this reflects increasing participation of young RMT members.

The conference focused on the fight against cuts. RMT General Secretary Bob Crow described the Government's cuts as an attack on the working class of historic scale: "This will be the first generation

where parents leave behind worse social provision than the previous one."

President Alex Gordon described the devastating effects of 28% cuts to public transport budgets. In Cambridgeshire, public subsidies to bus services are being cut by 100%. Nationwide, there are parallels with Dr Beeching's 1960s axe to provincial rail services, making this "Beeching for the bus industry".

Nearly every hand in the room shot up when we were asked who would be on the TUC anti-cuts demonstration on 26 March.

By the end of the day, 50 enthusiastic young members had been politicised

Education in brief

24 March: strike across post-16 education

University and College Union members in both higher and further will be on strike over the next ten days over pensions, pay and jobs.

University strikes over pensions will take place in Scotland on 17 March, Wales on 18 March, Northern Ireland on 21 March and England on 22 March. Then on 24 March university lecturers across the UK will strike over pensions, jobs and pay, alongside members in further education striking over pay.

The 24th is also the national day of action in defence of ESOL provision.

Bringing in virtually the whole of UCU, this is the most significant industrial action yet seen against the Coalition government. It's outcome is vitally important for the whole movement. Trade unionists, and students too, should mobilise in solidarity.

United action in Tower Hamlets?

Last week we reported that NUT teachers in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets had voted 85 percent for one day of strike action against cuts, and 73 percent for further action in the months ahead.

As we go to press, Unison members are closing a ballot for coordinated action. If it's successful, as we expect it to be, then Tower Hamlets will be the first council to see united action against cuts — quite an achievement given how many barriers the Unison bureaucracy has thrown up to council workers who want to fight.

If all goes well, the first strike day should be 30 March. Trade unionists in London, in particular, should get ready to support the Tower Hamlets strikers.

Action for ESOL has called a national day of action against cuts on 24 March. To find out what is going on in your area: www.actionforesol.org

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Fight these pension cuts!

By a civil service union activist

John Hutton has produced his final report on the future of public sector pensions. But even before the report, according to the TUC, the value of these pensions had been reduced by 25 per cent due to a mix of negotiated changes and the government's arbitrary switch to the Consumer Price Index as a measure of inflation.

But other Hutton recommendations will worsen the situation.

The recommendation to end final salary schemes and increase the Normal Pension Age (NPA) for all staff to 65 will impact badly on existing and future public servants.

Unfortunately public sector unions have already agreed that all new entrants after 2007 would have an NPA of 65. In a Radio 4 interview Hutton

thanked them for agreeing to this!

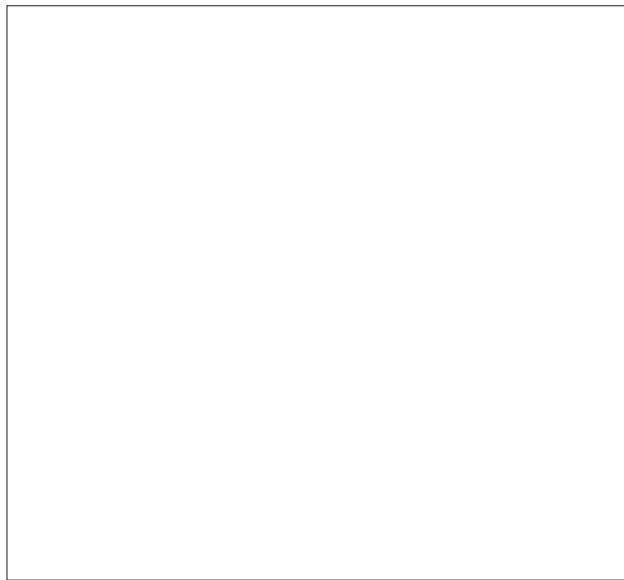
The ending of final salary schemes and their replacement with Career Average Schemes (CASS) takes us into the realm of "known unknowns". Those staff who are not promoted or only get one or two promotions during their career could be better off with a CASS, depending on the accrual rate. That is if the NPA remained 60.

The Hutton report does recommend one good thing — that rights in relation to pension benefits accrued (earned to date) should be protected.

Of course the Government could ignore Hutton's recommendation or they could protect rights in a way that reduces them in practice.

ARGUMENTS What should the unions argue and campaign for?

The key demands have to be on the change in the



indexation measure (over which retired members can be mobilised as well) and increased contributions.

We must insist on fairness. For a cap on the pension earnings of senior managers. The NPA must be 60 for all (55 in certain parts of the public service) and regardless of when a person joined the public sector. We are not in favour of a two-tier work force.

There has to be absolute protection for accrued benefits (subject to the cap on senior management payouts).

Whether future pensions be final salary or not is a matter of technical detail (for example around accrual rights) but we should be clear that the lower paid must get a better deal (in proportionate terms) than those better off.

Pensions should be progressive and redistributive. This could mean guaranteed minimum pensions. Indeed, why doesn't the government use some of the 25% drop in the value

of public sector pensions to craft a better deal for those on lower incomes?

We need to address equality issues such as for (mainly) women who interrupt working with caring responsibilities.

The unions have to take on the argument that the country cannot afford the current level of expenditure on public sector pensions.

We have to attack the notion that people are living too long and this makes pensions "unaffordable". The unions can do this (partly) by bringing out the great variation in death rates; with those on low pay/doing repetitive work having high death rates and lower average age of death than those in better paying work.

The increases in NPA deprive many workers of most (and in some cases, all) of their retirement years.

Finally we have to ally the fight for jobs and service with that for pensions.

Libyan rebels in retreat

By Martyn Hudson

The initial successes of the uprising in the east of Libya gave comfort to those who were looking for the complete elimination of the Qaddafi regime. The taking of cities close to Tripoli gave some grounds for optimism that the uprising, backed by the defection of large parts of the military, would soon move on to take Tripoli.

There are now reports that Misurata has been taken back by government forces and critically Brega may be about to be retaken. Rebel troops in Brega are apparently taking shelter in the old refinery — which Qaddafi's forces are reluctant to bomb as it is the central oil exchange and refinery for the pipelines running from the south.

Brega, with its close neighbour Adjedabia is also the key link on the transport routes between east and west.

Unfortunately Brega is close to the tribal heartland of the Qaddafi regime — Sirte — many in that region support the regime and have benefited from it.

In the zone of "free Libya", since 23 February in the hands of the National Transitional Council, there are hints of significant developments in the civil society — including free newspapers and two new radio stations including "Radio Free Benghazi".

There have been broadcasts supporting the idea of a "Muslim revolution" rather than an Arab or Libyan revolution. However Islamists are only one strand within the uprising and do not represent a majority.

The Senoussi monarchists are in a strong position in Benghazi although their natural power base has been in the tribal areas of Fez rather than in the east or west. They are no nascent Saudi-type monarchy as their religious ideas

are the polar opposite of the Wahhabi. They represent a "constitutionalist" strand in the uprising.

The appointed leader of the liberated areas is Mustafa Abdul Jalil who has some record on human rights, at least verbally, but continued until the uprising as Justice minister under Qaddafi.

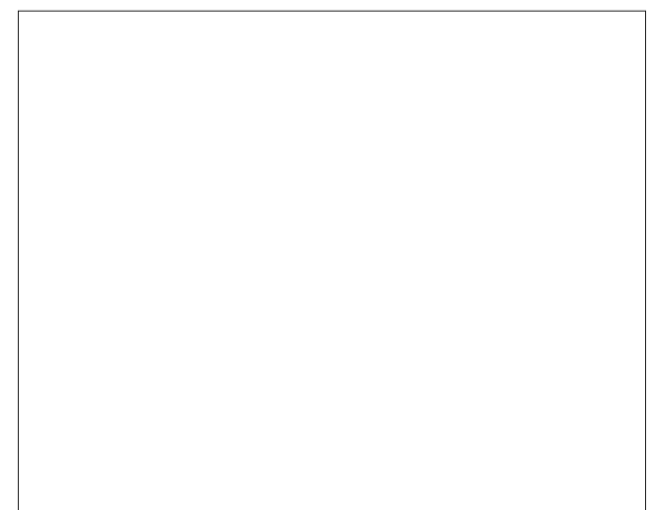
There is said to be a degree of unhappiness in Benghazi at his close association with the old regime and there are certain parallels with politics in post-Ceausescu Romania in his statements such as "Qaddafi alone bore responsibility for the crimes that have occurred". That is patently ludicrous.

Any emergence of workers' organisations in the free zone must exploit any democratic openings but there should be no illusions that the National Transitional Council will do much for workers' rights. Nor for tribal minorities, minority faith groups, migrant workers, and for the large LGBT population in the cities which has been dreadfully treated under Qaddafi.

There will be no "carnival of the oppressed" in the liberated areas, as the Libyan masses look towards military victory, military defeat or a tense and unsustainable stalemate. But there is real hope and excitement in the free cities.

It may be that a potential No Fly Zone could tip the balance in the favour of the rebels — in that sense we should not take a stand against such a policy, even if we would not critically support it with all that that implies.

Let us look towards the elimination of the Qaddafi regime and its crimes. The vengeance of history is more powerful than the vengeance of the most powerful General Secretary, as Trotsky wrote in similar circumstances. Solidarity with the revenge of the Libyan working class!



Unaffordable?

Hutton argues that his proposals are driven by cost and affordability. This is a lie. Indeed buried in his report is the admission that the cost of public sector pensions peaked in 2010-11 at 1.9% of GDP and is expected to fall to around 1.4% by 2059-60.

Hutton repeatedly refers to pensions as a major barrier to public sector reform and private sector involvement in provision. So the real pen-

sions crisis is the lack of decent provision in the private sector.

Rather than seek to address that, by for instance levelling up private pensions to the best public sector provision, ex-Labour minister Hutton wants to bring public sector pensions down to a level that is acceptable to private companies. The same companies which now have their eyes on education, health and other state services.

Commit the unions to act together!

By Pat Murphy, National Union of Teachers National Executive, personal capacity

The Hutton Report contains not much that is new. For instance, the 50% increase in teachers' pensions contributions we already knew about. So during a period when pay will be frozen a newly qualified teacher will lose an extra £50 per month from their salary.

Hutton has also said that the Normal Pension Age should follow the rise in the state pension age. This will be 66 from 2020 and rise to 68 after that. Judging by the NUT's membership, around 40% of teachers are under 35 so a huge cohort of people will have to stay in the classroom until they are nearly 70.

A motion calling for action on pensions will be discussed at the union's Annual Conference in Harrogate at Easter. Soon after, a ballot for discontinuous strike action by all members in the pension scheme should take place. This will involve all state schools including academies, sixth form colleges and centrally-employed staff.

There is a possibility that one or both of the other teacher unions will agree a similar emergency motion to their con-

ferences and the same timetable for a ballot and action. We expect that the college lecturers, who are already balloting on pensions, and the civil service union PCS will also agree to co-ordinate industrial action with us.

But union activists have a role to play here in all the unions. We need to secure a commitment to a specific ballot timetable and action strategy and then that members are mobilised to support the action.

The government have made clear they are not going to be moved by negotiation on increases in contributions and are ploughing ahead with the change to pensions indexation.

On the other hand there are a number of unions who, despite months of discussions and efforts to persuade, cannot seem to see the urgency of this issue. Enough is enough. It is time for those unions with self-professed left leaderships to mount a serious challenge to this attack.

Further delay will embolden the government and reinforce feelings of helplessness among union members. But a move to action will present the wider trade union movement with the fundamental choice — are they going to simply talk about defending pensions or are they going to act to defeat these proposals?