

An injury to one is an injury to all

Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY

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CAPITALISM IS CRAZY

**Private
profits,
social
losses**

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CRASH PAGE 3
NORTHERN
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Iranian regime murders student activist: protest to free our comrades!

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND, NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

IN December last year, several dozen left-wing Iranian students were arrested for organising or taking part in action on 16 Azar (7 December), Iran's traditional "Student Day" of protest. Since then, many more activists have been arrested in a continuing crackdown, and one of the detained has now been murdered by the police of the Islamist regime.

On 6 January, 27 year old law student Ebrahim Lotfollahi was arrested in front of Payame Nur University in Sanandaj, the capital of Iranian Kurdistan, minutes after finishing an exam. Nine days later his family were informed that he committed suicide in prison, dying due to "suffocation".

Ebrahim's brother, Esmail, saw him two days after his arrest and reported that he was in good spirits and expecting to be released shortly. He says the idea that Ebrahim committed suicide is simply not plausible.

When the authorities informed the family of his death, they added that he had already been buried; when the family visited the grave, they found that it had been covered with concrete - to prevent exhumation and autopsy.

There are similarities between this case and that of another student, Zahra Bani Yaghoob, who died in prison last October after the morality police arrested her for taking a stroll with her boyfriend. Officials also claimed that she committed suicide, but her family say that her body was severely bruised and that there was blood in her ears; they are convinced that she was murdered.

In the last two weeks, repression against student activists, and in particular members of the left-wing Azadikhah va Barabari-talab (For Freedom and Equality) alliance, has been stepped up, with dozens of new arrests bringing the known total to more than fifty. (Meanwhile, three students from Tehran Polytechnic have been acquitted by a court and formally cleared, but security and prison officials have refused to release them.) Even the officially tolerated "Islamic associations"

of 37 universities have protested, issuing a joint statement in which call for an end to harassment against the student movement.

Almost seven weeks have now passed since the initial arrests; in that period, families have been permitted only one short visit with their children; a number have also had their houses raided and searched and family members questioned.

Solidarity with the Iranian students is vital for the left, for two reasons.

As consistent democrats, socialists should make solidarity with these brave fighters for democratic and human rights (their slogan: "nothing can stop us"), regardless of their politics. What good is the socialist internationalism if it does not mean raising a storm of protest against the Islamic Republic's brutal repression of the students — if we do not do everything we can to prevent other Iranian activists suffering Ebrahim Lotfollahi's fate?

These general considerations are strengthened by the fact that most of those under the knife are not only democrats but socialists, or at least influenced by socialism. Their protests

have been against not just the sharp edge of theocratic repression, but the regime itself; against a US-Iranian war and the militarisation of Iranian society; for the liberation of political prisoners; and for the unity of students, workers and women in the struggle for political and social democracy. Socialists in the west who hesitate before an idiotic fear of weakening the struggle to prevent a US attack on Iran should be reminded as sharply as necessary: these are our comrades and they need our support!

• For more information, see the website of the "Seeking Committee to Free the University Students" 13azar.blogspot.com (though the English section is not as well updated as the Farsi one)

• Workers' Liberty students are campaigning to free our Iranian comrades. Part of our campaign is an attempt get one of them, Anoosheh Azaadbar, elected as Honorary Vice-President of NUS. For more information or if you want to help us campaign, get in touch: volzunga@gmail.com

The arguments for nuclear don't add up

BY STUART JORDAN

HAVING already announced his plans to build a new generation of nuclear power stations in November 2007, Gordon Brown has just completed a "consultation" on the issue and officially announced the "new" energy policy! A policy which, surprise, surprise, proposes up to twenty nuclear power stations, which will start coming on line around 2017.

The government plan is for the power stations to be financed through private enterprise but there will be plenty of public money to bail out the companies if they get into difficulty. While New Labour tries to make a business case for nuclear, they are finding it hard. In reality there is not a single nuclear power station in the world run by a private company.

In his announcement to the Commons, John Hutton, argued that public money had to be available to nuclear providers in order to create a "level fiscal playing field" with other energy providers in the fossil fuels and renewable sectors. Not for the first time, public money will top up the profit margins of private shareholders.

Why is the government so keen on nuclear? According to Hutton, nuclear power is the key to staving off climate change: "The entire life-cycle emissions of nuclear — that's from uranium mining through to waste management — are only between 2% and 6% of those from gas for every unit of electricity generated," he says. Apparently we also need "energy security" to reduce our dependence on Islamist or Russian regimes. And we also need to plug the "energy gap" that is likely to occur with the decommissioning of several power stations.

Leaving the specific problems of nuclear aside (see *Solidarity* 3/119) these arguments do not really add up. While the "energy gap", "energy security" and "climate change" are like noble causes, the planned proposals do little or nothing to solve them.

Even the most optimistic of guesses have the first of the new nuclear power plants coming online in 2017. The only comparable example this decade, Finland's Olkiluoto 3 reactor, is already two years behind schedule. By the time we get a lightbulb's worth of electricity out of these reactors we would be in the middle of the energy gap and all things being equal more dependent on all sorts of fascist

regimes, with fossil fuel prices escalating.

By 2017 there should already have been massive cuts in our carbon emissions if the planet is to avoid irreversible climate change.

That has to mean a massive investment in renewables, energy storage and carbon capture technology. For this technology to be effective we would need a giant international supergrid spreading throughout Europe and North Africa, to offset fluctuations that occur with weather changes and which would cause a smaller grid to collapse.

The current nuclear policy runs very much against the internationalist logic. If everyone followed Britain's lead and went nuclear, global uranium deposits would run out in less than 10 years. Sadly, the climate change issue is being used to shore up narrow nationalistic sentiments at the expense of an international solution.

The nationalism inherent in the nuclear policy is further revealed when we focus on the maniacal element of Brown's nuclear programme — the £70 billion Trident replacement project. Remind ourselves of the family connections involved — Brown's brother is a major lobbyist for the French nuclear company, EDF — and we see public policy guided by self-interest, short-sightedness and nepotism.

Unfortunately the leaders of Britain's largest trade union, Unite, has welcomed the energy plan in a statement echoing Brown's "British jobs for British workers" TUC speech.

Now more than ever we need a rank-and-file movement to wrest control of the unions and the labour movement away from the short-sighted demagogues playing dangerous political games with the future of the planet.

Nottingham students fight for free speech

BY CHARLIE SALMON

STUDENTS at Nottingham University are calling a demonstration for 23 February against attempts to quash their rights to protest and organise. One student has been arrested and others banned from the library for failing to ask permission to demonstrate and circulate petitions.

Shortly before the Christmas holidays, administrators called in the police after students from the Palestinian Society refused to disband a small protest on campus. One student was arrested (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZLwtit8GXM for a video of events). But this is just the most extreme example of the bureaucratic measures deployed against voices of dissent — with the effective consent of the right-wing-dominated student union.

If students wish to circulate a petition, leaflet or hold a campaign stall they must seek authorisation. The criteria for accepting or refusing requests is not published and no reasoned explanation offered to students. But even if such information were available, the very idea that students should seek permission to protest is grotesque.

Activists are planning a firm response. About 900 students have already pledged support for the campaign and a recent organising meeting agreed on a number of measures to overturn these rules culminating in the protest on 23 February. Students from Manchester and Sheffield universities have already pledged support along with local trade unions and activists in Nottingham.

• For more information contact ENS activist Teodora Todorova at lqyztat@nottingham.ac.uk

**NO SWEAT STUDENT WEEK OF ACTION AGAINST SWEATSHOPS
11-18 FEBRUARY**

Take action for workers' rights!

This is the third annual No Sweat campus week of action, with an anti-sweatshop speaker tour and meetings, actions and events in towns, universities and colleges across the country. Whether you want to organise a mass meeting or a mini-picket, a film showing, fashion show or anything else, get active in this week of action!

Supersize My Pay

In New Zealand, since 2005, thousands of mainly young fast food workers have waged an innovative campaign called Supersize My Pay. Low-paid Starbucks workers organised in the Unite union (<http://www.unite.org.nz>) walked off the job and formed a picket line. They were joined by workers from other low-paying fastfood restaurants. And they won!

During the week of action, Michael Treen, Supersize My Pay activist with Unite, will tour UK cities including Oxford, Brighton, Norwich, Cambridge, Hull, Nottingham, Sheffield, London, Leeds and Glasgow to tell us how they did it.

www.nosweat.org.uk or email admin@nosweat.org.uk or more details

Private profit, social losses

WILL the stock-market crash that took place on 21 January continue, or ease? We don't know. But what about the monolines?

The monolines? They are a fairly specialised part of the financial sphere. Yet their current crisis could have huge repercussions. That is how capital works. Hiccups in the tricks and speculations of tiny cliques of financiers can wreck the livelihoods of millions.

In early 2007, low-security, high-interest mortgage lending in the USA went into crisis. By the end of 2006, those "subprime" mortgages totalled about \$1.5 trillion, of which \$600 billion had originated in 2006 alone.

A lot of people had taken out mortgages they couldn't afford in the hope that house prices would keep soaring and so they would be able to get a new mortgage, based on an increased value of their house, to pay off the first mortgage. As soon as the house-price spiral slowed, they were sunk.

By early 2007, 15% of those mortgages were in foreclosure or sixty days or more in arrears of payment.

Why did that sectoral crisis spread? The mortgage companies had gone in for clever high finance. Rather than just holding on to the mortgages and waiting for the regular payments to come in, they reaped their profits faster by "bundling" the mortgages into pieces of financial paper — certificates promising to pay such-and-such a rate — and selling them on.

And then those hundreds of billions of dollars of paper value had spread through the system by further trading, and by new pieces of financial paper in turn being based on them, so that no-one knew where the dubious credit was, or who would suffer if the bubble burst.

That is why the "subprime" crisis was followed in late 2007 by the bosses of huge investment banks like Merrill Lynch and Citigroup losing their jobs, after their companies had to "write down" billions — i.e. admit that much of the financial paper they were holding was worth only a fraction of previous valuation.

But eventual losses are likely to be much greater than those "write-downs". That is where the monolines come in.

Financiers are not fools. If they buy dodgy paper, even offering high returns, they want some insurance. Monolines are companies which, for a fee, insure bonds.

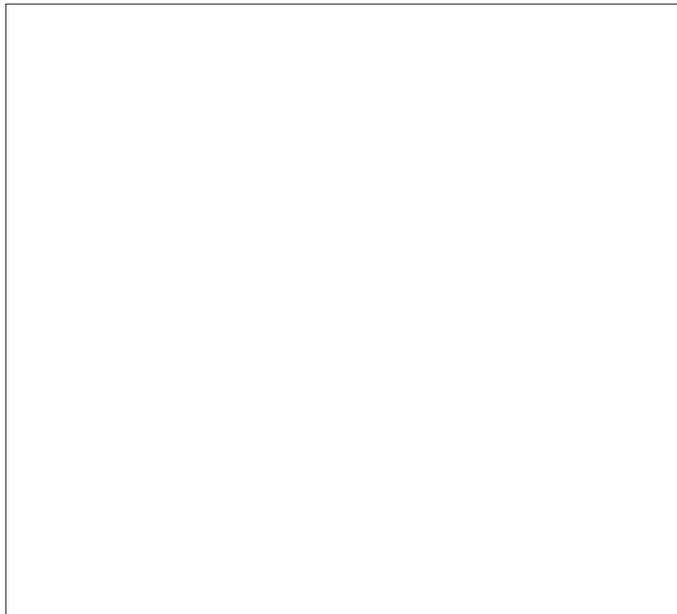
They used to insure bonds issued by small local authorities. It was fairly safe business. In recent years, they have started insuring much more exotic bonds, some based on the mortgage-based bonds.

They have suffered large losses, and now the financiers are not sure that the insurers are sound. On Friday 20 January, the second-biggest monoline in the USA, Ambac, lost its triple-A (i.e. "very safe") rating.

The *Financial Times* quotes a financier's comment that this "has opened up a very nasty scenario. Financial institutions may very well face another hefty round of write-offs, which would reduce their future potential to extend credit to business, thus causing a vicious spiral to develop".

Another financier said: "There are no public markets open to the monolines in their quest to raise capital... The only solution that would enable triple-A ratings to be retained now is a coordinated bail-out by banks and/ or politicians".

ALL this is rooted in the very nature of capital. A capitalist boom means rival capitalists racing to be first to grab the expanding loot and get into position to stamp on the slower ones. By its nature, it breeds debt-bubbles, speculation, unsustainable floods of investment in particular areas, and down-



right swindles. (Remember Enron, which went down in the wake of the dot.com crash!)

As Marx put it: "The whole process becomes so complicated [with a developed credit system]... that the semblance of a very solvent business with a smooth flow of returns can easily persist even long after returns actually come in only at the expense of swindled money-lenders and partly of swindled producers. Thus business always appears almost excessively sound right on the eve of a crash... Business is always thoroughly sound and the campaign in full swing, until suddenly the debacle takes place".

Once credit has been shown to be over-stretched, it shrinks; and when it shrinks, speculation that previously might have been sound now in turn becomes "excessive". No capitalist can afford to offer easy credit when others are tightening. The "debacle" comes at a point when many business failures or outright swindles have developed and had been hidden only because of easy credit.

The credit squeeze snowballs, and beyond the financial markets into trade and production. Fewer capitalists make new productive investments. Workers are laid off. Both capitalists and workers cut spending. And so production lurches down another round of the spiral.

ON top of the basics, the last 20 or 30 years have added something new. As a reaction to the crises of the 1930s, up to the 1970s credit and banking were quite closely regulated in the big capitalist economies. That was the era of "managed capitalism", the era when social-democrats smugly imagined that capitalism was becoming more and more "socialistic" every year.

The crises of the 1970s produced the opposite reaction to those of the 1930s. Economies were deregulated and privatised — initially, mostly, as a ploy to meet more intense global competition and to turn the blade of that competition against the working class. Those measures "worked", as slicker credit set-ups generally do for capital, to make the system more flexible and agile. But they also store up vast instabilities.

The ratio of global financial assets to annual world output rose from 109% in 1980 to 316% in 2005 (and 405% in the USA). The

processes are more complicated and opaque — and have become still more complicated and opaque in recent years. A new sort of bit of paper, called "credit derivatives", has expanded from zero ten years ago to \$26 trillion today.

A recent survey finds: "The Recent Period... more [financial] crisis-prone than any other period except for the Interwar Years. In particular, it seems more crisis-prone than the Gold Standard Era, the last time that capital markets were globalised as they are now". (Franklin Allen and Douglas Gale, *An Introduction to Financial Crises*). The Asian-centred financial crisis of 1997, and the dot.com bubble-bursting which started in March 2000, were both substantial crises, although they did not become full global slumps.

Three factors might restrain this crisis. First, increased rates of exploitation have pushed industrial profit rates fairly high, and so industrial firms have some protective fat. In the UK, in fact, the average profit rate was 16% in 2007 quarter 3, the highest since the current run of statistics started in 1965. Usually, profit rates sag in the later stages of a boom, before any actual crisis.

Second, Citigroup and Merrill Lynch were able, on 15 January, to replenish their shaky reserves with \$21 billion invested mostly by the governments of Singapore, Kuwait, and South Korea. Oil states, and manufacturing-exporter Asian states, have vast stocks of dollars available to lend. According to *The Economist* magazine, so-called "sovereign wealth funds" based in poorer countries have put a total of \$69 billion into restoring the reserves of big Western investment banks.

On the same sort of lines, China and other big export-surplus countries are still buying US Treasury bonds, and so the economic turmoil in the USA has resulted in only a gentle relative decline of the value of the dollar compared to other currencies.

As economist Brad Setser puts it, "the world's central banks aren't adding to their [dollar commitments] because they want more dollars. Rather, they fear the consequences of stopping".

Towards the USA, the rest of the world, with its huge dollar holdings, is like the bank in Maynard Keynes's saying: "If you owe your bank a hundred pounds, you have a problem. But if you owe a million, it has".

The consequences would be on quite another scale from anything seen so far. The USA has a huge trade deficit. Without that being balanced by the inflow of investment money from Asia, the USA would see a dramatic drain of dollars, and a collapse of the relative value of the dollar. But the dollar is still the keystone of world trade. A collapse of the dollar would mean an implosion of world trade.

All these countervailing factors are, however, limited. Nouriel Roubini, a US economist who has been warning about the credit crisis much longer than others, and has had his warnings confirmed pretty well so far, summed up his conclusions on 21 January: "First, the US recession will be ugly, deep, and severe, much more severe than 1990-1 and 2001. Second, the rest of the world will not decouple from the US".

In the USA, housing starts are already down 38% (from December 2006 to December 2007), house prices are slumping, and recession is clear. On 22 January the Federal Reserve cut its "federal funds" interest rate to 3.5% — the same as the USA's rate of inflation, meaning that you can (or rather, banks can) borrow effectively interest-free in the USA. Further cuts by the Fed will mean it effectively giving money away ("negative real interest rates", as in the 1970s).

THE UK has not had an actual recession since 1990-2. Manufacturing went into recession in 2001, but not the whole economy. People under the age of about 30 generally have no living memory of a recession.

That is not because, globally, the system has become more stable. It has not. In large part it is luck. Capital got a big boost in 1989-91 from the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe and Russia; the UK, uniquely well-connected to the markets of both the USA and continental Western Europe, has done relatively well in capitalist terms.

But the "successes" of UK capital could well contribute to crisis hitting harder here than in other countries. For example, "private equity" banditry — where capitalists borrow money to buy out companies, chop them about, and then sell them off again a few years later at a higher price — has been proportionately bigger in the UK than even in the USA. It depends on high levels of debt and quick returns.

A study of "private equity" published in November 2006 by a Greenwich University researcher quoted officials as saying even then that these deals "make companies more vulnerable to swings in the economy" and even that "the default of a large private-equity-backed company is increasingly inevitable".

The vastly disproportionate place of international high finance in the UK economy — "financial and business services" are now reckoned at 30% of the economy — also makes the UK more vulnerable.

Jack Straw seems to feel more of a need to theorise than other New Labourites.. In a recent Fabian lecture he repeated the argument he made at the time of Labour abolishing Clause Four (its nominal commitment to public ownership and to "the workers by hand and brain") in 1995.

"The choice at elections was often presented as one between competing whole life systems. No more. In the key ideological battle of the twentieth century, western liberal capitalism emerged the clear winner... Some of the argument now is more shades of grey, more technocratic, more about the means than ends".

Western capitalism was of course the winner against Stalinism. But against socialism? No! Capitalism is not the only "whole life system" possible, nor even tolerable. It is a limited, inherently inhuman and destructive, system.

The capitalist state today

The insurance society of the ruling class

AN editorial in the *Financial Times* (21 January) summed up well the Government's new plan for the collapsed bank Northern Rock.

"The plan is this. Northern Rock will issue billions of pounds in new bonds... and repay its debt to the Bank of England. Private investors will [take over the bank]. And to make it work the bonds — all £30 billion or so — will carry a government guarantee..."

"The package amounts to a subsidy [from the Government to the Northern Rock shareholders and its putative buyers] and it may be worth billions of pounds..."

"[But] the political attractions are obvious. The Government would avoid nationalisation, which would have an uncomfortable left-wing sound to it..."

It's a vignette of post-1980 capitalism. Everything is privatised. The market is Heaven. But there is a priest sedulously fleecing the flock to maintain the welfare of the Gods who inhabit this Heaven. Namely, the Government.

Vast areas of the economy are "socialised" by regulation. But the Government regulation serves mostly to guarantee the profits of the private operators and contractors.

It is neither free market, nor public ownership serving public interests, but the State as guarantor for capital. Marx once wrote that the State was an "executive... committee for managing the affairs of the whole bourgeoisie". It is now also an insurance society for the bourgeoisie.

Take another example: the railways. The railways were privatised in 1994. The Tory election manifesto of 1992 had declared: "Competition and private ownership are the most powerful engines of economic efficiency, innovation and choice... Companies which looked inwards to Whitehall are now listening to their customers and shareholders."

"We will end British Rail's monopoly. We will sell certain rail services and franchise others".

13 years on, there is no flowering of "efficiency, innovation and choice" on the railways. Railworkers' jobs and conditions have been cut, services are poor, fares are often exorbitant. But the Government subsidy to passenger railways now runs at nearly £5 billion (2005/6), or 51% of their total revenue. For British Rail in the late 1980s the subsidy was 25% of revenue.

Christian Wolmar, an expert on rail privatisation, says that even those figures do not say it all. They do not "show the right position because Network Rail's borrowing is not included. That has been increasing at about £2 billion per year and will clearly never be paid back".

To be sure, the contractors and franchisees compete, and sometimes companies lose franchises. Sometimes franchise-holders go bust, as Railtrack did in 2002. But the Government

made sure that Railtrack bosses and shareholders got a good pay-off.

If the private contractors do well, they pocket the profits, and the Government tells us that, for the market to work, winners must be allowed to win. If they run into trouble, then, as with Northern Rock, the Government will help out the big shareholders.

Lawyers, accountants, consultants and so on make huge profits from the processes of franchising and contracting-out, without any risks at all.

Another example is the Private Finance Initiative, under which new schools and hospi-

tals are built with finance from private-sector companies, which then pocket a yearly "repayment" for 30 years or more.

This is nothing like the "free market" of the economic textbooks, since the "market demand" and the repayments are effectively guaranteed by the Government. Yet, as of 2006, the PFI contractors were set to pocket £150 billion for outlays of £43 billion.

As extras, the PFI contractors can impose huge charges for small repair and renewal jobs. And, on the side, accountants, lawyers, and consultants enrich themselves.

From a world in which many basic indus-

tries and services were run directly by the state — actually according to the overall interests of the national capitalist class, but at least notionally with some public accountability — we have moved to one where those industries and services are controlled by an oligopoly of competing giant multinationals. Each Government's role is redefined as making its national economic arena advantageous for the operation of those multinationals.

What is wrong about it is not the multinationality, but the profiteering and the debasement of government. Northern Rock is yet another example.

Open Ken's books, but don't back Boris!

THE knives are out for Ken Livingstone. He is targeted by the main London paper, the *Evening Standard*. He is the subject of a sustained smear campaign — he's a drunk, a secret "Trotskyite". Some of his advisors run a careerist mafia, which for god knows what reason calls itself Socialist Action. We in *Solidarity* are no friends of Livingstone, but all of this is like the Tory candidate of whose election campaign this assault is meant to serve — ridiculous!

Now Channel Four has done a hatchet job on the future Lord Ken of Newt Hall.

But "The Court of Ken", Martin Bright's *Dispatches* film on Ken Livingstone (Monday 21 January) was very disappointing, lacking both perspective and coherence.

Based largely on the testimony of former GLA employee Atma Singh and other former associates like Marc Wadsworth, the programme "revealed" that Livingstone employs John Ross, Simon Fletcher, Mark Watts and Redmond O'Neill and other members of Socialist Action as a "coterie of unaccountable advisers" on £120,000+ salaries a year.

Singh, himself a former Socialist Action member, "revealed" that until 2000 they used to meet in the Cedar Room pub in Islington and used a printer's shop in Hackney. All of this is well-known — and rather misses what should be the political target — what Livingstone and his friends have been doing for/to workers while running London, why they should get these inflated sums etc.

All the red-baiting, with wild claims that the ex-Trots are bent on introducing "city-state" socialism in London (under the noses of the bourgeoisie across the water from City Hall!), is frankly laughable given their pro-business record in power for eight years.



The programme contained nothing on Livingstone's climbdown on rail privatisation — which was the central question on which he was elected in 2000. It said nothing on the privatisation of the East London line or indeed on his relationship in general to big business in the capital, never mind on his shameful attitude toward rail workers taking strike action.

The "hard-left conspiracy" story, as well as the not-very-secret disclosure that Livingstone drinks whisky during work time, also obscures the more substantial points made in the film about Livingstone's use of public money.

The programme stated that Livingstone spends a lot of money on foreign trips and cultivating relations with overseas states like China, Cuba and Venezuela, including three-quarters of a million travelling business class and staying in posh hotels in India.

The London Development Agency, "Ken's Piggy Bank" spends, nearly £600m on sustainable development and regeneration. Between 2003 and 2006 it gave £1.8m to organisations that then liquidated or failed to file accounts.

The programme claims that half the revenue from the congestion charge is spent on operating costs, and so there is much less

left available for improving public transport. On top of that, apparently cars and buses are slower than before, despite 15% less traffic.

Livingstone apparently spent £23m on advertising and PR as well as £31,000 on a report on Islamophobia in the media, and more on promoting some very unpleasant people such as Islamist cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi. He also spent £14,000 on research by another Socialist Action member, Ann Kane, which was used to attack Trevor Phillips' record during his bid to become chair of the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights. However the problem here is more the politics promoted by Livingstone rather than spending money on reports.

The most serious legal allegation made by programme was that in the 2004 election, GLA civil servants (such as Singh) were asked to work for Livingstone's campaign, by writing articles, raising money and organising supporters.

All these matters are important for the labour movement. We should call for a workers' enquiry into the allegations. Open the books!

For us there is also the bigger picture. For Bright and others on the neo-con left/ex-left, Livingstone is a disappointment, someone who once brought hope but has since gone wrong. For us, Livingstone has always been a venal careerist and these allegations come as no surprise. But in the forthcoming mayoral election the choice will unfortunately most likely be between Livingstone, warts and all, and Tory buffoon Boris Johnson. This film, lacking any kind of positive, coherent alternative, largely ends up feeding the right.

• *The strange history of Socialist Action - see p12*

Call to unite workers against BNP

BY PETRA HALL

MORE than 100 people attended the regional conference that took place in Nottingham on January 19th called by Nottinghamshire Stop the BNP and sponsored by a number of trade unions and campaigning organisations in the Nottingham area and other parts of the East Midlands.

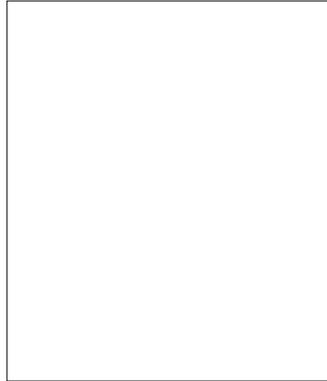
The conference was called to discuss a campaign to stop a repeat of the 2007 BNP "Red, White and Blue festival" in Codnor near both Derby and Nottingham.

It attracted significant representations from a number of unions particularly the FBU from Lincoln, Loughborough, Derby and Leicester. FBU delegates came even from as far away as Gloucester.

The conference decided to continue to organise against BNP events as the Notts Stop the BNP campaign had done in October when it peacefully blockaded a meeting of the BNP that was to be addressed by their party leader Nick Griffin, thereby preventing it going ahead.

The conference agreed to continue to "actively seek out and work with black and minority ethnic communities including Muslims" and to "collaborate with religious organisations against racism and against the far right" but "at the same time (to) be explicit in ... (its)... support for the rights and liberation of LGBT people and the rights of women including the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion."

A speaker from the successful Kirklees campaign gave examples of the way women from the Muslim communities, normally not encouraged to take part in political actions could be drawn into political action both



Unite Against Fascism demonstration

generally against racism and for their own interests.

The Midlands TUC spokesperson, Alan Weaver, and Christine Shawcroft of the Labour Party National Executive argued that the focus had to be on getting the major "credible" parties elected against the BNP. However most delegates spoke against becoming defenders of the government's or of other parties' records.

The conference agreed, without any votes being cast against, to recognise that the actions and policies of the Labour Government had in fact created the environment that had helped the BNP grow. It noted that BNP growth had resulted from "the

downgrading and destruction of channels for political representation through the Labour Party" and "the failure of ... unions to act as a pole of attraction for workers angry at the way society is run". It also accepted that "it is an essential aspect of effective anti-fascist campaigning ... that we

- encourage genuine non-racist action for working class interests on housing, employment and welfare rights as well as

- promote non-racist democratic working class organisations, such as trade unions, to organise around such issues."

The campaign noted a split in the BNP which had led to many leading BNP figures locally, including Broxtowe councillor Sadie Graham, leaving the BNP and setting about forming their own party. It was noted that this new party looked as though it was going to be essentially the same as the BNP with the same racist policies, the same connection with individuals and organisations promoting race hate and having Nazi histories. The meeting decided it would deal with this new "party" in the same way as it does the BNP.

A call was made from the conference to call for a major mobilisation against any attempt to repeat the 2007 BNP Red, White and Blue festival in the region including

- demanding that councils block permission for any repetition of this event;
- calling on trade unions to refuse to do any work that might facilitate the BNP event
- calling on thousands of local people to join the campaign in filling the surrounding area in mass protest should any such event take place in 2008.

The organisations represented at the conference will now need to make representations to national anti-fascist organisations,

in particular those with extensive trade union backing like Searchlight/ Hope not Hate and Unite against Fascism. A campaign is needed that is independent of the government and other capitalist parties, mobilising the trade unions and working class communities against both racism and the causes of racism. Such a campaign could send the BNP and the Voice of Change split from the BNP back into the political margins.

But that will require an end to the "lowest common denominator" politics of the major national campaigns and their conciliation on the one hand (UAF) to religious reactionaries such as in the Muslim Council of Britain or on the other hand to supporters of the government as seen in the Hope not Hate campaign.

The Nottingham conference showed that such politics are not necessary to create a vibrant campaign. In fact the experience of the Nottinghamshire campaign over less than 10 months showed that a desire to revitalize critical political life in working class communities is essential for the success of any anti-fascist campaign.

- A mass leafleting of Brinsley by over 20 activists on the day following the conference informed local residents of the mutual Nazi allegations being made by each side of the current internal BNP civil war, and called on Brinsley people to demand the resignation of Sadie Graham as Broxtowe councillor. Great pleasure was taken in delivering a copy of the leaflet directly to Sadie Graham's door, to the anger of a group of burly men who came out of the door but decided to take no action against the large group of anti-fascist leafleters.

Brown offers millions for shareholders and pennies for workers

From page 16

The Government is trying to build on its victory in 2007, when, despite millions of litres of talk from union leaders about "coordinated action", it got more or less what it wanted with only piecemeal and half-hearted resistance or (from some unions) with no resistance at all.

Public sector unions should:

- Mobilise to resist, and build solidarity around the sections that take action, rather than using "coordination" as an excuse to postpone action into an ideal future;
- Demand pay agreements guaranteeing that wages beat inflation;
- Fight for a minimum wage of at least £8 an hour in the public sector, including for "contracted-out" workers; organise the unorganised;
- Insist on the right to negotiate wages freely (instead of having settlements imposed by the Government, as with teachers and health workers) and refuse multi-year deals;
- Aim for common settlement dates and "levelling-up" across the public sector.

A DWP union activist writes: *We are now heading for a one day strike on 31 January. At the time of writing we don't know whether*

the strike will go ahead.

This is because the union executive in the Department (dominated by the Socialist Party) is desperately signalling to management that it does not want to go ahead with the action.

It asked that the Department agree to go with the union to ACAS, and in return they will call the strike off. That did not work, so now the union leadership has written to the DWP Secretary of State, Peter Hain, asking for the ACAS meeting.

DWP might agree to meet PCS. If so, the strike will not take place. Or, DWP bosses may calculate the current SP tactic of one or two day strikes separated by a month or months of no action will not hurt them enough that it worth even going through the formalities of a meeting in order to head it off.

Either way the current tactics are highly unlikely to win rate of inflation pay awards for 2007 and in the coming years. Gordon Brown has set his stall out. To break his three-year wage-cut policy requires different tactics, including selective action in areas with economic clout and more effective overtime bans (many parts of the DWP are run on overtime).

IN BRIEF

Burslem strike continues

AROUND 600 postalworkers and other trade unionists took part in a national demonstration called by the Communication Workers' Union in Stoke on 19 January. Over a hundred CWU members at the Burslem office have been on strike since 18 December in support of twelve victimised colleagues suspended by Royal Mail management last September.

The background to this action is the CWU postal executive's vote to call off national action over pay, pensions and jobs and leave discussions over new "flexible conditions" to local negotiations. This has left local managers attempting to push through new working arrangements, knowing they will be backed by national Royal Mail management.

More militant officers who resist will be most likely to be subjected to these attacks. The bosses know the CWU will only fight branch by branch, rather than with national action. This a point was made by the Burslem strikers who lobbied the recent meeting between CWU leaders and national Royal Mail management.

At the rally at the end of the demonstration — addressed by General Secretary Billy Hayes and Postal Deputy General Secretary S Dave Ward — the strikers and their reps made clear their determination to continue the strike until their colleagues are reinstated. They stressed the importance of maintaining the financial support they have received, and winning the planned ballot of the 1,500 postalworkers in other North Staffordshire CWU branches.

As they argue, without extending the action and putting further pressure on Royal Mail, the tremendous solidarity the strikers have

shown, may become isolated and those who have been victimised will be forced to rely on lengthy employment tribunals where they can only win compensation, rather than reinstatement.

Matthew Thompson

Vote for action!

Canary Wharf: London Underground management have sacked two Canary Wharf Station Supervisors over some missing KitKats!

STATION staff often have to put up with commercial promotions on the stations, and it has become the norm for staff to get a few goodies in return for co-operation. Now this has become a sacking issue!

Any Underground worker could be next in line in this discipline clampdown, so it is important that all rally round these sacked staff. Their union, RMT, is balloting for action in defence of one of the sacked workers who is a member. The other worker is in the clerical union TSSA. Unfortunately, so far there no news of action from them.

Defend Giles Henry

LONDON Underground has sacked a worker at London Bridge over an alleged incident with a customer. But the company's only "evidence" against Giles is the say-so of a different customer who admitted there was no violence involved, but speculated that there might have been!

RMT is balloting members for industrial action. Vote Yes!

More: www.workersliberty.org/tube

Abortion rights — weak response from MPs

BY AMY FISHER

ON January 16, a parliamentary rally organised by Abortion Rights packed out two committee rooms with over 300 people. Speakers included various MPs and Lords from all three parties, the TUC women's officer, an adviser to Ken Livingstone and the Fawcett Society.

In the usual mould of such meetings the platform was full and speeches took the majority of the time, leaving little for contributions from the floor. Activists were told of the parliamentary threat and the possibility of a victory in repealing the "two doctors" rule when the Human Fertilisation and Embryology act passes and assured that the support for abortion rights crosses the "parliamentary divide".

The most radical speech of the evening came (surprisingly) from Diane Abbott, denouncing the anti-choice lobby and explaining they're motivated by hatred of women, not concern for children (she highlighted their lack of interest in child poverty and the welfare of asylum-seeking children).

When speakers from the floor got a chance, they were almost all more activist-focused and posed more radical demands. A Green Party member raised a few heckles when she claimed they're the only party with a pro-choice "line" on abortion rights — despite the complaints of staunch Labour hacks, this is technically true as the three main parties all allow a free "conscience" vote in the Commons. Various contributions posed the need for direct action, which thankfully appears to (finally) be listened to by Abortion Rights — they're staging a picket of Ann Widdecombe's forthcoming anti-abortion speaker tour on 6 February.

Questions raised by Feminist Fightback activists about unity with the trade union movement, mass direct action and demands around real choice for working class women (living minimum wage, free universal childcare, ending NHS privatisation etc.) were not picked up on by speakers replying to the audience, and still appear a step too far for a cross-party lobbying campaign. The move to direct action is a positive step however, and socialist activists should intervene on demonstrations with our own demands for reproductive rights.

Feminist Fightback organises

THE second Feminist Fightback open steering meeting saw women from across the trade union and student movements discuss direct action on abortion rights, a pro-choice teach-in and plans for international women's day.

It was decided that the picket of the Christian Medical Foundation should use the slogans "Don't turn back the clock on reproductive freedoms" and "women deserve choice" (a spin on the CMF's declaration that "women deserve better" than abortion). We'll be picketing outside the CMF headquarters from 4pm, moving to Borough High Street at 5pm to leaflet the public.

Other suggested pro-choice action included

organising a teach-in day on reproductive rights, covering issues from sex education to international solidarity, with workshops and debates. Watch this space for more.

We also discussed International Women's Day, and plan to go along to the "Million Women Rise" demonstration against violence against women, to join in but also to spread awareness about International Working Women's Day, it's history and why it matters. A joint seminar with the Organisation for Women's Freedom in Iraq was also proposed — more soon.

Get involved — www.feministfightback.org.uk feminist.fightback@gmail.com or ring 07815 490 837.

ABORTION RIGHTS ACTIVISM

Don't Turn Back the Clock on Reproductive Rights!

Feminist Fightback picket of the Christian Medical Foundation

Friday 25th Jan 4pm, 6 Marshalsea Road, SE1 1HL London (nearest tubes London Bridge and Borough High Street)

The Christian Medical Foundation is lobbying the government hard over the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill currently being discussed in parliament, in favour of reducing the time limit on abortions. The Christian Medical Foundation was recently exposed when at least eight of its members gave evidence to the government Inquiry by the Science and Technology Committee into the future of abortion law in Britain which claimed that abortion harmed a woman's health — without disclosing their membership of the CMF.

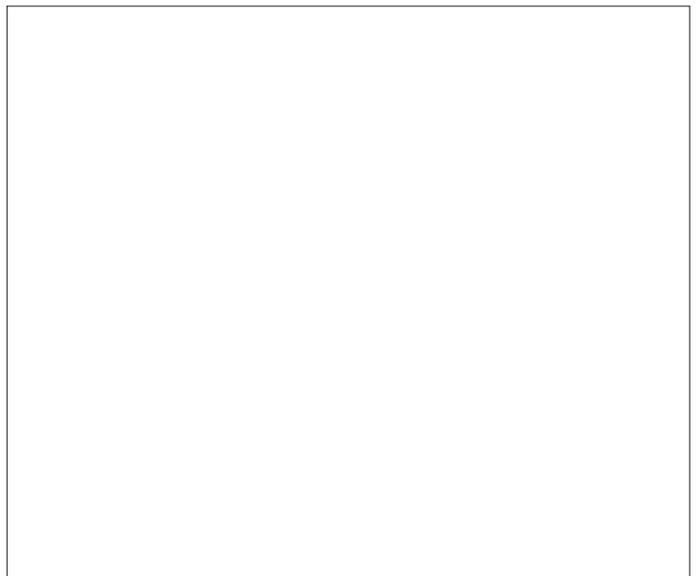
The CMF also hosts the minority report produced by the Conservative MP Nadine Dorries who has also in the past introduced a Bill to cut back the time limit.

For more information call Laura on 07890 209479 or email laura_schwartz2003@yahoo.co.uk

Protest at anti-choice roadshow

Tory MP Ann Widdecombe is touring the country spreading anti-abortion propaganda with the charity "Life". Join the protest! Called by Abortion Rights — www.abortionrights.org.uk

Outside Central Hall Westminster, Wednesday 6th February, 6.30pm, subject to police permission



ENS activists on the small October 2006 NUS demonstration - the left must unite to reorient NUS towards actual campaigning!

The SWP and left unity — the case of the student movement

BY SACHA ISMAIL

LIKE it or not, the SWP is the biggest group on the socialist left. Any attempt to unite will necessarily involve them, or at least substantial numbers of its activists. Nowhere is this more true than in the student movement, where the AWL has some experience of practical unity with the SWP.

As well as having regular contact with a fair number of SWP activists on campuses, we know a number of their student organisers and have undertaken joint campaigns with them as a group. Between 1998 and 2002, for instance, a major surge of anti-fees activism helped us persuade them to work with us and our allies in united left slates for elections to the NUS National Executive (which take place every year at NUS conference). Our unity drew in broader forces than either group could mobilise alone, and resulted in a stronger profile for the left in national student politics. Thus in 1998 and 1999, at a crucial time for the fight against fees, Campaign for Free Education chair and AWL member Kate Buckell came very close to winning NUS president.

This unity broke down as a result of the SWP's turn towards the politics of reactionary "anti-imperialism"; from 2004 to this year, they refused to even discuss unity with us, preferring to cooperate with the (so-called) Student Broad Left, a front for the Stalinist Socialist Action group, who share much of the SWP's politics on Iraq, Palestine and so on.

In 2007, at a meeting called by an independent left activist to discuss unity, the SWP declared that unity with the AWL was inconceivable and in effect walked out. The result was that at NUS conference there were two left slates for NUS executive, one organised by Education Not for Sale and another by "Student Respect" and Student Broad Left. Clearly this was not ideal, but the SWP precluded any other outcome.

This year, however, things are different. The SWP has been chastened and, to a limited extent, sobered up by their split with

Galloway; meanwhile, they have had to work with the AWL and ENS in the campaign to defend what remains of NUS democracy from the leadership's drive to abolish it. As a result, they are much more willing to engage. We have had extensive talks about whether, given our work together on ground to fight for NUS democracy, unity at a national level is possible.

Unfortunately but not surprisingly, the SWP students have not entirely changed their ways. They still insist on involving Student Broad Left; in fact, they have gone as far as championing Ruqayyah Collector, the SBL-supporting NUS Black Students' Officer who, in addition to not being very left-wing, simply declared her candidacy last year with no attempt to discuss it with or make herself accountable to the wider student left. Nonetheless, because the AWL believes unity is important, we have supported ENS in persevering with the discussions (at the time *Solidarity* went to press, it was still persevering!)

We will see what happens: it looks very possible that the SWP and Student Broad Left will scupper the hope of unity by bureaucratic stubbornness. Nevertheless, progress which would have been unthinkable a year ago has been made — for instance in persuading the SWP, and through them, SBL that the programme for a slate would need to include a clear statement of solidarity with workers' and other democratic movements in Iraq and Iran. Even if a slate does not happen, these discussions will help us in the bigger task of debating with and persuading SWP members in our colleges, workplaces and cities.

In any case, whatever the outcome, they have proved that the SWP post-Galloway is a somewhat different creature from what it was before — and that revolutionaries should not duck the vital task of engaging it to help re-educate its membership about what Marxism is and is not.

• For the latest on left unity in NUS see Education Not for Sale www.free-education.org.uk

US primaries: vote-herding for the Establishment

BY BARRY FINGER

The current exercise in “participatory” democracy, the American primaries — in which the public “selects” its Team leaders is a particularly squalid show. It combines, at least on the Democratic side, the inspiring promise of shattering the social barriers of blacks and women to the highest echelons of political office with an insipid scam of “change” and “hope” carefully crafted to withhold the power to put reforms into practice in ways that strengthen the political force of the working class and the oppressed at the expense of the Establishment.

The Democratic nominee for President will most likely be determined by February when huge voting blocks of large states will weigh in. This frontloading process, sold as a small-d-democratic initiative, reinforces the imperative to candidates of quickly raising huge sums of money to become and remain competitive — to buy television, radio and print ads; and to hire “political strategists”, advertising hucksters and an army of liaisons to the corporate world where candidates audition and sell their viability as corporate assets.

It minimises the power of social movements whose natural advantage is not fundraising but mass mobilisation and reduces them to vote fodder. Most tragically, it cynically conditions large chunks of the poor and the working class, as well as their spokespersons, to strategise reflexively within the system, to dismiss as unrealistic those candidates such as Dennis Kucinich or even John Edwards, who present even modest anti-corporate agendas.

Hillary Clinton is the candidate of corporate liberalism at home and empire abroad. She shies away from no business sector in her bid for the nomination — not big insurance companies, pharmaceuticals, defense contractors or Wall Street hedge fund moguls. Unions have endorsed her in droves, despite her having placed known union busting consulting firms in positions of prominence within her campaign.

Clinton began her career as a corporate lawyer and once famously said that you cannot be a lawyer without working for banks. She is inextricably bound to her husband’s administration, which shredded the federal safety net for the poor, reversed customer safety regulations that would have prevented the sub-prime meltdown now wreaking havoc on the working class, ended what was left of public control of the airwaves clearing the way for a few mega-corporations to consolidate their hold over public opinion, and passed free trade legislation without a scintilla of worker protection thereby accelerating the global race to the bottom.

There is not a modicum of difference between Clinton and Barack Obama, touted by the media as the “agent of change”. Neither is for national health insurance, although both present programs for increased access to medical care. Neither questions the foundations of imperial foreign policy. Neither is for defunding the war in Iraq, or for complete withdrawal of troops. Neither offers a meaningful program to eliminate Taft Hartley, which limits union power and fractures working class solidarity. Neither has a programme to address poverty, to provide decent jobs and ensure livable wages. Neither is for the public financing of elections.

Where socialists and leftists actively seek divisiveness, press to raise awareness of class and social differences in domestic and foreign policy and urge the exploited to act on that awareness, Obama’s clarion call is to “move beyond partisan differences”. Neither Barack nor Clinton offers the left an opportunity to advance one step in transforming the oligarchic American state where a tiny, privileged elite controls money and politics.

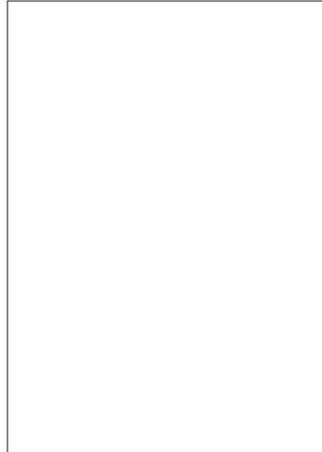
Sadly, Dennis Kucinich, the most decent and solidly left leaning candidate, correctly indicts the Democratic Party in terms that portend his own future political capitulation to the “will” of the Democratic nominating process. “What I see is that the Democratic Party abandoned working people and paradox-

ically they are the ones who hoist the flag of workers every two and four years, only to engender excitement and then turn around and abandon the same constituency. This is now at the level of a practised ritual”. Rather than break with a party institutionally wedded to the system by building a mass progressive alternative, Kucinich will no doubt exercise his influence over the Democratic Party left — and those outside the DP for whom his candidacy inspires — to remain steadfast and actively work for the pro-corporate candidate the Democrats ultimately agree to run.

The tragedy of the Democratic Kuciniches is that, having fully recognised the problem, they nevertheless remain, at the end, vote herders for the Establishment. They fear nothing more than the accusation of having acted as spoilers for the rightwing. Yet without sustained pressure from insurgent movements independent of the Democrats, the entire political centre invariably drifts to the right as it has for decades since the demise of the civil rights movement and the New Left.

As for the Republicans, John McCain presents himself as something of the Republican Hillary Clinton, an experienced manager of the status quo without the elitist social baggage of the zelig-like Mitt Romney or the manifest incompetency of the Bushites. Yet it is Michael Huckabee and Ron Paul who are the real anomalies and who deserve some scrutiny for what they represent.

Huckabee is a religious primitive with respect to science, and to women and gay rights. Still, he has raised the flag of plebianism within his party. He famously quipped that the difference between Romney and himself is that Huckabee reminds people of the fellow they work alongside, while



Barack Obama

Romney reminds people of the boss who laid them off. Huckabee rales against corporate greed and the economic inequality, which shakes the Republican establishment and invites reprimands that his economic populism would be more suited to the Democratic Party. Nevertheless, his actual programme consists in little more than the replacement of the hated Internal Revenue Service with a national sales tax.

Ron Paul presents himself as a “pro-Constitution” libertarian. His opposition to Empire and spirited defense of individual

rights against an intrusive state have earned him some misplaced support as a “left-Jeffersonian” within the ranks of politically untutored students and youngish professionals. This relatively privileged sector is ever self-assured that they — and therefore all “worthy individuals” — can and should be able to privately handle social adversity and retirement without the assistance of any the “nanny state”. He offers the prospect of a trans-ideological left-right coalition. But a closer look at his actual platform is rather chilling.

Beside the usual nut wing defense of the gold standard and opposition to every social program, including Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, workers’ compensation, unemployment insurance, federal disability insurance, etc. Paul also opposes the Food and Drug Administration, the Post Office and virtually any market regulation.

Along similar lines Paul repudiates the right to an abortion, gay rights, affirmative action — that is all “collective rights” — and the extension of any social services and citizenship privileges to unregistered immigrants.

The purpose of the American military is not, for Paul, Empire, but protection of the border against invasion by foreign hordes from the south. He is now known to have had a bone chilling history of racist rants, including past support for such luminaries of “white power” as David Duke.

It is a rather heartbreaking commentary on American politics that some well-known leftists, including those associated with *CounterPunch* magazine, have actually made the case for a Paul-Kucinich alliance.

• Abridged. Full text www.workersliberty.org/node/9851

Debate: socialists should vote Democrat

Sacha Ismail’s article on the election (*Solidarity* 3-124), prompted this response from Eric Lee

TO write, as Sacha Ismail does, that US “Republicans and Democrats are... almost identical in policy terms” betrays either a startling ignorance of American politics or a form of ultra-leftism...

To put this as clearly as I can: on every single policy issue that concerns American voters, regardless of their class, Democrats and Republicans come down on different sides.

If you want abortion to be safe and legal you vote Democrat. If you want US troops withdrawn from Iraq within our lifetimes, you vote Democrat. If you want labour laws to be changed so that it becomes easier for unions to organise, you vote Democrat.

This is something that every single trade union in America understands, and that the vast majority of socialists and progressives understand as well. In all recent national elections, those socialists which took the view that there is no difference between the parties — the view that Sacha takes — received only a handful of votes.

The Socialist candidate for president in 2004 received 0.009% of the vote. I think that there are more socialists and progressives than that — and I think they voted, as most socialists have done for the last 70 years, for the Democrats.

Sacha goes on to say that there’s been “a certain amount of fuss” around the candidacy of John Edwards. What a condescending, patronising tone... What there has been is a groundswell of support on the left and in the unions for a candidate who the mainstream media has largely been ignoring and who is being outspent ten-to-one by his celebrity rivals.

To say that Edwards’ background as the son of a mill worker is irrelevant (even though it

informs his views on a whole range of issues) but then to say his career as a trial lawyer, and the wealth he accumulated, is relevant is a bit unfair.

Either you care about the man’s biography or not. In any event, Edwards’ success as a trial lawyer did make him rich — but it also gave him valuable experience doing battle against greedy corporations.

And to ignore the incredible transformation of Edwards that has taken place since 2004 is unforgivable. Edwards has undergone an RFK-style epiphany. Edwards [has] set up a centre to research poverty, and became a leading activist in support of union organising drives across the US. Which is why it should come as no surprise that most of the state affiliates of the giant SEIU, the union most committed to organising, have backed him. As has some of the biggest unions in the country, including the Steel Workers.

Instead of mentioning any of this — even to criticise it — Sacha has chosen to mention yet again the infamous Edwards \$400 haircut. Welcome to the Republican Party — that’s their style, not ours. If you disagree with Edwards’ policies, make your case. But don’t slump into the gutter of Fox News.

To dismiss Edwards’ policies with a shrug — “they go nowhere near solving problems” — is utterly irresponsible. What aspects of Edwards’ plan to guarantee health care for every American do you not agree with? Surely you know that the Obama plan is far worse, and that the alternative is a Republican president and Congress who are happy with things as they are...

What about Edwards’ support for the Employee Free Choice Act, which would remove considerable barriers to union growth? Or his plan to end poverty within 30 years? Or his views on tax? His promise to kick corporate lobbyists out of the White House? Or his

compelling vision — borrowed from the foremost American socialist of the late twentieth century, Michael Harrington — of there being “two Americas”? No room in the article to mention any of that, let alone critique it. (But there was room to mention the haircut.)

To say that socialists cannot support “any Democratic candidate” (even Kucinich?) because it means giving up the task of building an independent voice for workers in the US — what does that mean? I thought that trade unions were independent forces, tools used by the working class in its struggles. Edwards’ commitment to unions is absolutely clear, and if elected president (presuming he sweeps in a Democratic majority in Congress) unions are likely to experience their biggest period of growth since the 1930s.

Or did Sacha mean that if we vote for Democrats, we delay the creation of a genuinely revolutionary socialist party? Sacha ends his article by pointing out that American workers are indeed capable of forming a proper labour party. And he gives as proof of this — the Labor Party formed in 1996. With over 2,000,000 affiliated trade unionists, no less. Wow — why bother to vote for bourgeois Democrats when we’ve got this two million strong labour party to vote for? Except — this labour party existed on paper only, and Sacha knows that. It’s dishonest to pretend otherwise.

Today, every socialist I know in America and many progressives as well are enthusiastic supporters of the Edwards campaign, as am I. There are real issues at stake here, and people’s lives on the line, and to spew out far-left nonsense about “pick-the-millionaire”, blind to the differences between, say, John Edwards and George Bush, is irresponsible and foolish.

• Full text of Eric’s article: tinyurl.com/387cc9

• Sacha’s article: www.workersliberty.org/node/9841

Pierre Lambert

June 9, 1920 – January 16, 2008

Pierre Lambert, leader of what for a long time was the biggest force in French Trotskyism, died on 16 January 2008 at the age of 87. His organisation — now called the “Workers’ Party”, and about to relaunch itself as the “Independent Workers’ Party” — has in recent years focused most of its efforts on the “defence of the [French] Republic” and a call for French withdrawal from the European Union. In the 2007 presidential election it ran Gérard Schivardi as “the candidate of the mayors”. But there is more to the history.

This is a translation of excerpts from an article by Vincent Présuney. The full text, in French, is at workersliberty.org/node/9889

LAMBERT came to the fore as one of the organisers of the trade-union work of the PCI [French Trotskyist organisation of the time] from 1945, with Daniel Renard and Marcel Gibelin. With hindsight, it is clear that that trade-union activity was one of the aspects of the struggle of the post-war PCI which left more lasting results...

Expelled from the CGT [the main French union confederation, Stalinist-controlled] in 1950, and becoming a health-insurance scheme employee and then, quite soon, a full-time official of Force Ouvrière [FO, a smaller confederation], Lambert came to organise a network of trade-union activists who were anti-Stalinists but supporters of trade-union reunification on the basis of class independence, with a paper, *Unity*.

This paper had an impact in the CGT and among Communist Party activists, and had financing, in part, from the embassy of Tito's Yugoslavia...

An ironical formula from an old comrade sums up well what Lambert was then: the “contact man” of the organisation, a type not necessarily important in himself, and certainly not a theoretician or a political analyst, but an organiser who made

contacts and turned them to advantage, as with Alexandre Hébert [an anarcho-syndicalist and FO official], with (temporarily) André Marty when he was expelled from the CP, and with the Algerian national leader Messali Hadj... The talents of the “contact man” were decisive in order not to fall into total isolation from the real French workers’ movement...

But the PCI progressively began to revolve around Lambert personally, to the point that after 1958 it could be called “the Lambert group”. Other strong personalities were eliminated: Danos and Gibelin in

1953, Bleibtreu and Lequenne in 1955; and Daniel Renard would fade away.

1958 was the decisive year, because the working-class defeat represented by De Gaulle's seizure of power and the establishment of the Fifth Republic, and the rallying to De Gaulle of Messali Hadj, who was being targeted by the Algerian FLN [another nationalist group, by then stronger], but whom Lambert had presented as the “Algerian Lenin”, were heavy blows for the group.

The physiognomy of the leading group of what would be the OCI was shaped in a lasting way in those years, and Lambert was the central figure. It was based on two pillars.

There was a group of a few dozen activists at the end of the 1950s, then a few hundred at the end of the 1960s, based on a solid Marxist and Trotskyist education, enriched by the contribution of intellectuals like the historians Pierre Broué and Jean-Jacques Marie and the theoreticians Stéphane Just and Gérard Bloch... with campaigns in defence of activists, trade-unionists, and intellectuals persecuted in Pinochet's Chile, in the USSR, or in China...

Pierre Lambert held together that “group” and at the same time was the key figure in the second pillar, a trade-union/club network which became the official opposition, in alliance with the leadership, in FO, and also had a presence in the FEN [the teachers’ union federation, outside both CGT and FO].

Progressively, the “first pillar” (construction of a revolutionary party) would be adapted and sacrificed to the “second pillar” (the bureaucratic/club network of which Lambert was the centre), but probably without a preconceived plan.

That development proceeded at the same time as the OCI became one of the big organisations of the “far left” at the end of the 1960s. In the second half of the 70s, it became the biggest numerically, reaching a peak of about 6400 activists in 1982.

In the far left, the OCI was then the “anti-ultra-left” organisation, advocating the workers’ united front, defending traditional trade unionism, literally saving the existence of student unionism by sustaining a “UNEF Unité Syndicale” network around which UNEF-ID [at that time the biggest student-union organisation in France] would be formed in 1980, and rejecting talk of “power in the streets” and “sexual revolution” at the cost of taking on a falsely “Puritan” or even macho profile...

An anti-capi

BY DAVID BRODER

AFTER winning 1.5 million votes in the April 2007 French presidential election, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire launched a call for a new “anti-capitalist party” to bring together activists from across the spectrum of the far left in a joint organisation.

This unity effort in some ways echoes the LCR's previous efforts to turn to other parts of the left, for example in their support for former leading Communist Party member Pierre Juquin in the 1988 presidential election. At present it is unclear what exactly the LCR plans to do — bring together the revolutionary left, or just everyone to the left of the Parti Socialiste's Blairite leadership? Nothing has been settled as yet, although the debates at the LCR congress on January 24-27 are sure to shed more light on the matter.

However, in practical terms the most important issue at stake in any left regroupment is the LCR's relationship with Lutte Ouvrière, the other prominent Trotskyist force in France. Their lack of unity has been a political hot potato for four decades, with occasional joint slates in municipal and European elections failing to mask the animosity between the two organisations. Much in the same way as past unity offensives have collapsed, the prospects for LCR-LO cooperation here appear dim, with the majority at LO conference eschewing the idea of a new party.

It seems that all the LCR can really hope for at this point in time is to win over some individual activists, the anarchist Alternative Libertaire group, the French section of the Committee for a Workers' International and a fraction of LO dissidents.

Many of the criticisms which Lutte Ouvrière's conference document levels against the LCR's project are fair comment. It decries the idea of an “anti-capitalist” party rather than one which has a working-class led socialist revolution as its explicit goal. Whatever the claims of the biggest faction in the LCR leadership, Marxists do not believe that our politics can be summarised as opposition to capitalism and big corporations. Marx's Communist Manifesto is full of polemic against “conservative socialists” and “petty-bourgeois socialists” who oppose capitalist development but are not in favour of posing a positive working-class based alternative.

LO further criticise the LCR as politically soft and accuse it of not educating its members and periphery adequately in the Marxist tradition. Instead, says LO, the LCR demagogically panders to “anti-neoliberal” sentiments which lack real political content. Similarly, they attack the LCR for not learning the political lessons of Trotsky's critique of Stalinism — as amply displayed by the LCR's veneration of Che Guevara and the Cuban regime. Furthermore, we could point out that although the LCR is the lone force calling for a new party, revolutionary socialists in the LCR are softening their politics for the sake of constructing a pseudo-“united front” with a largely non-existent right wing — mirroring previous ventures like the Scottish Socialist Party, the Portuguese Left Bloc and so on. The mass “anti-capitalist” party is a construct without a real base.

However, the flaw in Lutte Ouvrière's analysis is to abstract from their somewhat accurate criticisms of the LCR's political culture the idea that working together in the same party is impossible. Although expressing a general sympathy for the LCR's aims and the idea of organising activists, LO's fundamental problem with the “anti-capitalist” party appears to be that it would not have the regimented cadre structure of Lutte Ouvrière by which the old hands channel their political outlook (supposedly the direct continuation of Leon Trotsky's ideas) down to the less experienced membership. LO's line seems to be that the “new party” is all right for kids, but not for real proletarians like themselves.

“Although we wish for its success, [the

proposed party] is not what we want to create and that's why, while we watch this initiative attentively and sympathetically, we refuse to participate in building it”

A significant factor in LO's attitude to the LCR's project is its own organisational culture, which tolerates little dissent and seeks to recruit only those activists who are already in full agreement with the leadership line. The minority tendency which publishes *Convergences Révolutionnaires*, more sympathetic to collaboration with the LCR, is not allowed to recruit new members to LO and has limited space to publish its views.

In its polemic against the LCR, Lutte Ouvrière takes a patronising and elitist tone. For example, it describes setting up a party which recruits activists who do not define themselves as Trotskyists as “turning your back on Trotsky's teachings” but further adds that “of course, you could describe yourself as Trotskyist and not actually be one!” — a category which purportedly includes the membership of the LCR. It is impossible to reason with the Lutte Ouvrière leaders on this score — their claim to be the sole inheritors of Marxism, Leninism (“no-one knows any more what “Leninism” means”) and Trotskyism, coupled with their rigid organisational culture and belief that non-LO activists are “turning their back on all the ideas” of socialist revolution is hardly conducive to comradely debate or joint work.

Indeed, rather than making proposals to the LCR to outline its conditions for unity, the LO leadership has taken an attitude along the lines of “we wish you all the best if you want to do your thing; but your suggestion isn't the same as what we want, so no thanks”. As the LO conference document puts it:

“If we were to say that we hope that it succeeds... it is only because not everyone can be revolutionary and Trotskyist, but many people, particularly young people, want to fight the injustices of the present social order. Some people get involved in NGOs to help underdeveloped countries; others work closer to home helping illegal immigrants and homeless people; others are simply outraged by what the government does and want to oppose in which ways they can. It would be a good thing if, even though not revolutionaries, these people could find a significant organisation ready to act and which shared some of their ideas.”

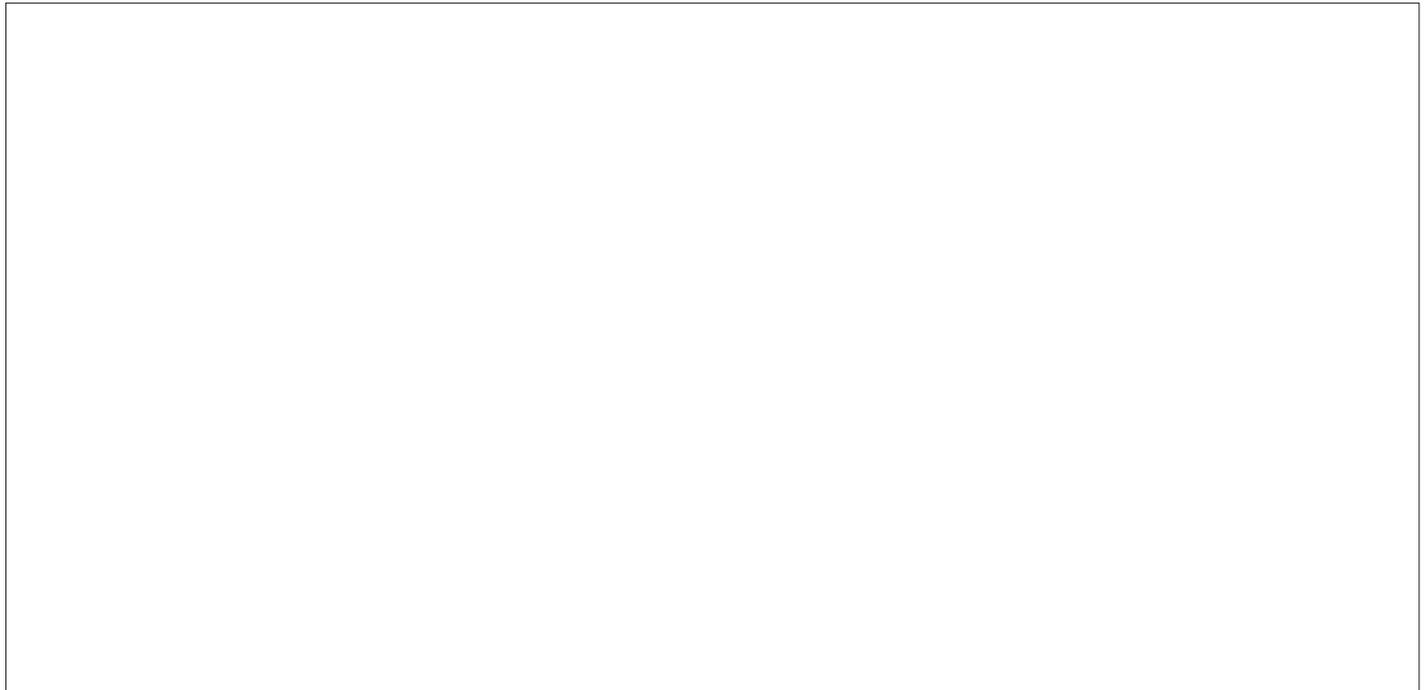
The LCR are not seen by LO as comrades taking part in a common struggle against capitalism, but characterised as akin to liberals and do-gooders who want to “make a difference”.

In contrast to this sectarian approach, the Lutte Ouvrière minority have welcomed the LCR's new unity offensive and called for LO to use the opportunity to have a debate about what party the revolutionary socialist left needs. Even if not in agreement with the specific proposals of the LCR, or even its broader politics, LO should say what kind of left regroupment it is in favour of and what positive suggestions it can make to potential allies. After emphasising the need for unity in the face of Sarkozy's attacks on pensions and jobs but criticising the LCR's lack of specific perspectives, the LO minority comment:

“It is precisely in order to overcome these problems that both in terms of eventually creating a new party and in terms of intervention in struggles in the here and now that we recommend regular and systematic meetings between the LCR and LO at every level, starting with the leaderships. If we haven't already, now is time to make contact.”

At this level, it is rather hypocritical of Lutte Ouvrière to insist on their version of Trotskyist purity, given their electoral pacts with reformists and indeed their past “party-ist” adventures. For example, during the general strike of May 1968 their forerunners Voix Ouvrière set up a co-ordination group with the Parti Communiste Internationaliste and Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires, the two ancestor organisations of today's

Revolutionary socialist party for France?



Anti-Sarkozy demonstration, Paris, 2007

LCR. In the aftermath of those struggles, LO looked to form a broad left force comprising not only these Trotskyist forces but also Maoists and the left-social-democrat Parti Socialiste Unifié.

In the struggle against Sarkozy's attacks on the working class, which are supported by the Parti Socialiste, French workers need a party of their own to give political expression to their struggles. The important question here is that the party has a clear goal of organising the working class as a class, and explicitly seeks to lead other sections of society opposed to the rule of capital in a struggle to replace it with socialism, so any given programmatic differences should not be erected as

barriers to unity. In a party which, unlike Lutte Ouvrière, allowed for free and full debate, it would be possible to bring together people with different viewpoints yet still engaged in common struggle.

While revolutionary socialists should always be open about their politics and educate their activists and followers about their ideas, insistence on homogeneity, ultra-“hard” organisational discipline and bureaucratic exclusion of those who are not deemed to be the correct brand of “Trotskyist” is no means by which to argue for Marxist ideas in the labour movement. It can only serve to cut off the self-proclaimed revolutionary elite as a sect.

French revolutionary left discusses “new party”

BY CHRIS REYNOLDS

The French revolutionary left is discussing the formation of a “new party”. An important milestone in that discussion will be the congress on 24-27 January of the LCR (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire).

The LCR is linked to the “orthodox Trotskyist” current of thought of writers like Ernest Mandel; its best-known figures today are Olivier Besancenot and Alain Krivine.

Three sets of “theses” are to be debated at the congress. Like the AWL, but unlike most other would-be Trotskyist organisations, the LCR is open about its debates, and lets its minorities explain their views to the outside world.

The majority on the outgoing LCR committee — platform A — wants a new party which will be a regroupment of revolutionaries, from below. There seems to be a real chance that they can pull off something which, though far from a mass party, will have a higher profile than any revolutionary socialist organisation in Europe since the 1970s.

Platform B wants something more like the German Die Linke, a left-reformist party with revolutionaries within it, formed by alliance with groups from the orbits of France's decaying Communist Party and Socialist Party.

Platform C is a small offshoot of platform B, in the same political ballpark but differing on some important points of analysis.

The realistic hopes of Platform A are for the adherence of Alternative Libertaire (a small semi-Marxist anarchist group, in the tradition of Daniel Guérin), of the minority faction of Lutte Ouvrière (*Convergences Révolutionnaires/ L'Étincelle*), of the Gauche Révolutionnaire (small French sister-group of the Socialist Party here), and of a decent number of currently-unaffiliated individuals. (Lutte Ouvrière itself has made clear that it will not participate).

The political basis that A proposes for the new party is a bit vague, but no vaguer than the LCR itself, and indeed in some respects more left-wing than the LCR is at present. The new party, says A, should “counterpose, against managing existing institutions, the perspective of a workers’ government”.

Here the influence of the LCR's left wing, Démocratie Révolutionnaire, which has joined Platform A, is visible. But the theses don't expand on the idea.

A major gap in the theses (to my mind) is the lack of anything about united-front policy in France, i.e. what the “new party” — obviously still a minority force, even if the LCR does win a lot of new young activists — will do in relation to the existing labour movement.

Nevertheless, it should be a serious step forward if the LCR can pull it off.

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The story of the Blues

"The Blues? It's the mother of American music. That's what it is — the source." — BB King

PETER BURTON BEGINS A SERIES

EUROPEANS involved in the slave trade stripped as much culture from their human cargo as possible but music was so deep rooted in the African men and women that it was impossible to tear it away from those who survived the horrific journey.

In West Africa, where the slaves came from, every ceremony was celebrated with singing and dancing and the music went with them to work into the fields of North America.

Initially the music took the form of Negro spirituals and field hollers. What came to be known as "the Blues" drew on both forms and spread throughout south USA as itinerant songsters carried what they learned from place to place and entertained people for a profit.

After the failure of Reconstruction in the ten year period after the end of the American Civil war, institutionalised racism defined the South. After Union troops left white supremacists moved quickly to maintain their power structures. "Jim Crow" segregation laws spread to 14 states in the period between 1890 and 1910. This meant so-called "separate but equal" facilities enshrined by the US Senate in law in 1896.

Of course facilities were far from equal. And racist laws were backed up with weekly lynchings. Grinding poverty and shifting seasonal employment affected black people the most. Fiercer competition for jobs in the depression of the 1890s meant racism took this particularly brutal form.

What came to be known as Blues music grew up in this transition period from a slave plantation economy to a sharecropper plantation system of smaller farms based on debt bondage. Black sharecroppers would in theory own a share of land but given that tools, clothes and accommodation had to be paid to the landowners from the share very few actually owned any land. Most ended up owing the landlord more than they received from the work.

In 1894 there were massive strikes in the North over unemployment. The jobless were on the move. In response the Democrats wound up supporting segregation in the South — share cropping peonage, railroad construction using black labour, and convict-lease to landowners predominated.

It was this mixture of unrealised hope from the end of slavery, continued real oppression and a greater possibility of individual freedom of expression that led to the creativity of the Blues.

Initially the black church was an outlet for black frustrations, with many black musicians such as the Reverend Gary Davies and Son House being preachers as well as musicians. Blues and Gospel developed along parallel lines. But the Church proved inadequate as a protector, and with the prospect of industrial work in the north two major migrations north took place at the outset of both world wars.

The music reflected and articulated the emotions that went with the oppression and now, the dilemmas of staying with kin in oppression in the South or moving North away from family to look for work. The music was a safe means of escape. It eventually became universally popular as people the world over identified with the hopes and frustrations of the blues men and women.

Blues lyrics tended to avoid direct reference to oppression because that could mean death. Instead oppression was expressed in coded lyrics and dissatisfactions of specific aspects of life, or stories of heroes like John Henry and Stagolee.

Early blues musicians did not create with a mass audience in mind, so it was very personal and resonant in sound. The rural south of America lacked good transport and communication links and there were no obvious fortunes to be made by the bluesmen. They made livings as farmers and played for tips on Saturday nights. These circumstances meant the blues were partly a product of folklore, word of mouth and one-to-one tuition with borrowing of links and styles between the bluesmen.

The Blues really thrived in the Delta region of Mississippi, where work was particularly hard — sharecropping, building levees to hold

back the river, cutting timber and building railroads to carry crops to new markets; mining towns, tobacco plantations, work camps and prisons. The Blues thrived in the places that black workers went to relax — the saloons, gambling dens, brothels, Saturday night parties and fish fries. It was shunned by the Churches, both because of where it was performed and the subject content of much of the lyrics. Many Churches denounced it as "Devil's Music"

Improvisation reflected a need in these kinds of places for images of strength against adversity. It was also encouraged by some landowners and work gang leaders on the levees and railroads, as it improved productivity (Some gang leaders even gave instruction on call-and-response work songs)

The legend about the blues being heard first by band leader and composer WC Handy in a railroad station in Tutwiler is worth

retelling. Handy recounted it in his book: *Father of the Blues*:

"A young man approached him carrying a guitar. His clothes were rags, his feet peeped out of his shoes. His face had on it some of the sadness of the ages. The singer repeated the line three times, accompanying himself on the guitar with the weirdest music I had ever heard. The tune stayed in my mind". "Going where the Southern crosses the dog" — the bit of lyric Handy made out — referred to a railway intersection.

Arguments rage over when this actually took place — 1895, 1903 or even 1905 — and whether it was the first time anyone had ever heard the sound, a sound whose range came to cover the poetic, frank discussions of sex (often just spoken about instead of sung), wails, moans and humming. Vocals reflected the artist's feelings of anguish, and the guitar wailed along, sometimes hard and visceral, sometimes soft and playful.

The when of Handy's encounter is not important. What is important is that band leaders like Handy started to incorporate the sound into their sets as the sound proved popular and profitable, and in the 20s the phonograph replaced sheet music allowing for recorded sound. Initially the records were sold as "race" records and were only bought by blacks, until a more open and democratic radio changed this in the fifties.

The first blues singers to record were women, most notably Ma Rainey and the "Queen of the Blues", Bessie Smith. They were backed up by the top jazz musicians of the time, Louis Armstrong, King Oliver and Jelly Roll Morton.

Portable sound recording equipment in 1925 led the companies to send out talent scouts to record in the major cities of the South, in motel rooms, churches and auditoriums and even prisons. Communist Party members Alan and John Lomax were key figures in recording many of the early blues men and women.

Guitars would be purchased by black musicians from pawn shops, as they were eager to escape sharecropping, making tips on corners or in bars. The guitar replaced the banjo, as the instrument of choice as it suited the singers' vocal range meter and distinct blues notes. Distinct geographical areas produced skilled players with sounds specific to the region — Texas Blues, Piedmont blues and Delta sounds. The latter sound transferred northwards with economic migration, principally to Chicago, where it would evolve into electric blues.

Bessie Smith

A rich black man makes jokes

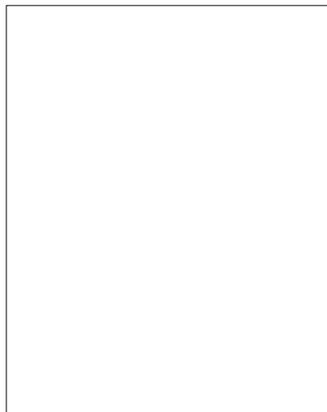
Justin Baidoo went to see Chris Rock at the Hammersmith Apollo

CHRIS Rock's first tour to the UK was sold out within two hours despite minimal publicity; the Apollo was brimming and people had paid to stand up at the back of the theatre. Was the interest justified?

Chris Rock has been billed as the funniest man alive. He was made (in)famous for his sketches "How not to get your ass kicked by the police" (uk.youtube.com/watch?v=uj0mtxXEGE8), and his stand up joke on black people vs. niggaz. In truth, his trademark jarring yet endearing voice gives his commentary added humour, despite highly controversial and at times venomous content.

Rock set the diverse London crowd roaring with laughter when he said he was shocked that Barack Obama was a believable black Presidential candidate that hadn't been assassinated yet. He also expresses his shock at George Bush screwing up the Presidency so badly "that Americans don't even want a white man as President no more".

Rock touched on class when he talked about how he grew up hating rich kids and their



ungratefulness, and how a part of him now hates his own kids, as they are rich. He also had an excellent sketch on the injustice of 30

minute lunch breaks and the miserable nature of low-paid work.

But, though his observations on race and class are comical and honest, his political views are not particularly left-wing. His unashamed love for strippers and the raunch culture that is now prevalent, and his reliance on sexist stereotypes to explain his views on how to please women, had the fewest laughs of the evening.

On race, he said that although he is now a very rich black man, most white people still wouldn't want to trade places with him. He still suffers racism. Although he shares a neighbourhood with prominent black R&B star Mary J Blige and Hollywood actor, Denzel Washington, he was disgusted to find out that his white neighbour was just a regular dentist. "For a black dentist to be that rich he'd have to invent teeth!"

The most disappointing aspect of his performance for me was that he recycled a few jokes from previous standups and lacked more satirical content. Though he has received the black comedy torch from Richard Pryor, it was a mediocre debut for "the funniest man alive".

Realistic and dirty

City of Vice, a new drama series about the Bow Street Runners, is now being shown on Channel 4 (Mondays, 9pm). Cathy Nugent interviews Clive Bradley, the writer of the most recent episode, which deals with molly houses — clubs where gay men and transwomen could meet each other.

Where did the ideas for the series come from?

The idea to base a series on Henry Fielding's experiences as a magistrate came from the director and producer (Justin Hardy and Rob Percy) whom I worked with on *Harlot's Progress* [about Hogarth, also made by Channel Four]. They asked me to write it and I wrote three of the five episodes.

The ideas for the individual episodes came from different sources. I knew something about the Molly Houses before I wrote about them, and I did all the subsequent research. The idea for episode five came from our historical advisor, Hallie Rubenhold — she is the leading authority of 18th century prostitution. That's about an investigation into a high class brothel, the Temple of Venus.

The first episode (about a serial killer who targets prostitutes) is based on a real life case. Other episodes had to be entirely fictional, because there wasn't enough detail in the records.

Despite the series title, not all the episodes are about vice. One is about an armed gang called the Royal Family and I especially enjoyed writing this. It's based on a real gang and a real event. The gang break out one of their gang members from Gate House prison [in Westminster]. He's called Tom Jones. Without giving anything away, Tom Jones, who is a radical, gets to have a political argument with Henry Fielding.

What's special about this period in history?

I think this is a very interesting, intrinsically interesting, period. It has a resonance with today. For instance we see here the birth of a "gay" (although it's anachronistic to call it that) subculture.

The period also sees the beginnings of a liberal sensibility. London has been rebuilt since the fire and is now starting to grow. Trade is growing. The old pre-capitalist systems of social support are breaking down. There is a middle class intelligentsia and they want to do something about the consequences of social change. John Fielding himself was involved in setting up a home for "fallen women". The introduction of the first proper police force, the Bow Street Runners, has to be seen in this context. It is the new desire for "regulation".

Before this time there was no police to speak of; there were people who were employed to watch out for trouble, called thief takers. But they were often thieves themselves, drunks and generally no good. There were also parish constables. The system was very chaotic.

The Bow Street Runners started with six paid police. The Fielding brothers, I don't know why, really thought this would be effective. The Bow Street Runners worked with the parish constables and gradually extended their forces. If all else failed the state called in the army, but our series doesn't depict that particular reality!

In the episode centred on a Molly House, a man servant, a proletarian, is given refuge in the club. Who were the clubs for?

The clubs were mostly for artisans, the petty bourgeoisie of London. They were clubs, not brothels by the way, as it is sometimes assumed. Later on in the century there



The real Henry Fielding

was a growth in male prostitution, but not at this time. There is a lot of literature now about life in these clubs; we know they were set up above shops and bars, but we don't know their exact location. The most famous, Mother Clap's, was probably at Saffron Hill.

"Sodomy" was a hanging offence. But by this time juries did not generally find people guilty of the "crime". The lesser offence of "attempted sodomy" was used. Why did the juries do this? Probably because they really thought other peoples' sex lives were none of their business. There was a loosening up of sexual mores.

What did you make of the Fielding brothers?

John, who was ten years younger than Henry, seems a formidable, austere character. All we know about him is that he looked up to Henry. Everything else we show is fiction!

Henry is interesting, a libertine, a polymath. One of the great themes of detective fiction is the "detective as an artist". Fielding of course was a real detective and a real live artist. His writing is lively and warm. I like him.

As a magistrate he really wanted to "clean up" the criminal justice system which was very corrupt. He paid his runners, so they would be impartial, less corruptible. He wanted things to be fair.

Why do you think period drama, or even period detective fiction is so popular right now?

Detective fiction has always been very popular. Every year there are very many ideas for TV cop shows being developed. The special thing about our show is that it is set in 1750! Of course anything English, and anything in costume, is popular in the US, where TV shows are sold, and Channel Four in particular does very well over there. But that doesn't account for the popularity over here of course.

Detective fiction has always been used to discuss "issues", it is a "way in" for the audience, or the reader. And I think there is a tendency now in the UK to make period drama, historical fiction, on TV, more contemporary and edgy, or in our case, realistic and dirty.

He's not there

BY DAVID BRODER

I MUST admit, I'm no Dylanologist, so I was not particularly upset by director Todd Haynes' decision to merge Suze Rotolo and Sara Lownds into one character, nor the fact that *I'm Not There* is far from a biography of Dylan. However, while the film has an excellent score (unsurprisingly, it features lots of Bob Dylan tracks) and features some memorable performances from the six actors representing the singer-songwriter's different personas, it feels like a simple homage rather than offering any particular insight.

Central to the appeal of *I'm Not There* is its jigsaw-like composition. The film is not presented as a biopic, and it is not chronological — instead Haynes splices together fragments featuring "Dylans" from different eras, none of them called "Bob Dylan".

There is Marcus Carl Franklin, who sparkles as a wandering 11 year-old African-American Woody Guthrie devotee. Christian Bale plays two roles — an early '60s folk-guitar star Jack Rollins and then a washed-out evangelical preacher in the late '70s. Heath Ledger (who died on 22 January) is a late '60s actor increasingly alienated from his wife (played by Charlotte Gainsbourg), misogynistic and self-obsessed. Cate Blanchett, like Bale performing an "impression" of Bob Dylan, has the leading part in *I'm Not There* as "Jude", the confused Dylan who "betrayed" folk music and his own "principles" in favour of playing electric guitar. The other two actors — Ben Whishaw as poet Arthur Rimbaud, and Richard Gere as a disguised Billy the Kid — put in unremarkable performances, with Gere's part particularly incoherent and rambling.

The contradictions of Dylan's political side, and similarly his "turn" to electric, are of some prominence in the film, mainly in Blanchett's performance. Haynes shows fans disgruntled by Dylan's behaviour, yet the star

is himself puzzled by accusations of hypocrisy. A BBC reporter repeatedly tries to get Blanchett's "Jude" to admit that he has changed, but "Jude" doesn't see why his critics are so bothered, why they don't ask such searching questions of their own political sincerity, or why they won't appreciate his music for what it is. "Jude" does not take this bad press seriously and, looking up to a statue of Jesus Christ being crucified, he shouts "Do your early stuff, man!" He says that the lyrics don't change anyway.

Although some protest songs can be moving, there is a lot to be said for Haynes' sceptical attitude to the critics of Dylan's "turn". The standard left critique of Dylan for "selling out" or "betrayal" is crude and concedes a lot of ground to the Stalinist notion of "good art" as that which is on-message, rather than what is strong aesthetically. Given that Dylan's politics were at most a general concern for the oppressed and anti-war sentiment, and he was never an activist, what precisely was there for him to "betray"? Even political people should not just judge culture as if it were a political instrument.

However, apart from Marcus Carl Franklin's scenes, which are mostly early in the film, and Blanchett's cultured impression of Dylan, much of the film is soggy and inconsequential. Several performances show Dylan as aloof, and he often appears pretentious rather than pensive, but the film is wary of taking its subject head on and largely aims at veneration. This kid-gloves attitude to the ageing legend appears to echo the widespread acclamation for Dylan's pisspoor 2006 album *Modern Times*, despite its homages to such artists as Bing Crosby and Memphis Minnie.

I had eagerly anticipated going to see *I'm Not There*, but to be truthful it left me a little cold. Yes, Cate Blanchett's impression of Dylan is eye-catching, but the film has very little new to say about Dylan, and its 2 hour 15 minute running time seemed excessive when so much of the film has no direction.

The strange history of Socialist Action

AS WE WERE SAYING

“Exposed” in the current right wing campaign against Ken Livingstone, as the underground group central to Livingstone’s “team”, Socialist Action have always been a weird collection of individuals. Right-wing and strangely apolitical when Martin Thomas wrote this history in February 1991 (Socialist Organiser 476), they are much more right-wing today.

IT is a long story, and there isn’t space for it all here. Even a short outline has to go back to 1971, when John Ross, the chief ideologue of Socialist Action today, joined the International Marxist Group.

The IMG was a small, dim group. Its chief distinguishing thought was enthusiastic speculation about the revolutionary socialist qualities of movements such as Castroism in Cuba and the NLF in Vietnam. It had done good work in building the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, and, like all the left groups, it had grown in the agitation of the late 60s. And it was, in general terms, Trotskyist.

But it was floundering. It was narrowly student based, at a time when industrial militancy was rising. It was involved in, or ran, a vast range of campaigns, none of which ever seemed to come to much.

And then came Ross. A student at Oxford University, he had been a Maoist and then a “bright young thing” in the SWP (then called IS). In fact, though he denies it, he joined the IS as a scout for Reg Birch’s Maoist group and stayed! During a spell in hospital he was recruited to the IMG. Gathering around himself a group of students and ex-students who likewise fancied themselves as intellectuals, he quickly kicked the old leadership of the IMG into the sidelines and took over the group for his so-called “new thinking”.

The “new thinking” was as nearly as possible the opposite of Socialist Action’s current approach. The error, it declared, of all previous Trotskyism and of the old leadership of the IMG was to make “calls to action”. In truth the job of Marxists was to make rounded general propaganda.

The IMG’s members reoriented to industrial struggles, using social security advice through

Claimants’ Unions as their means to make contact, avoiding conflict with militants by avoiding “calls to action”, and making general propaganda.

The new thinking worked as a means for reorienting and managing the group; or at least it worked for a short while. In the summer of 1972 Uganda expelled its Asian community. The Tory government honoured the Asians’ British passports and admitted them to Britain. There was a racist backlash. The IMG’s paper commented: “Asians: Big Chance for Left”.

The reasoning was that the racist backlash created a big need for general socialist propaganda. (Analogy: “Black Death: Big Chance for Doctors”).

At this time many of Ross’s former allies rebelled. Over the next few months a big opposition developed in the IMG.

Its chief agitation was for the IMG to adopt the “call to action” General Strike to kick the Tories Out. This was a commonplace slogan of the left in those days of high industrial militancy against the Tory government; and, in my view, a confused slogan too. Nevertheless it gave the anti-Ross faction a clear and unmistakable banner.

Ross responded by outflanking the opposition. In early 1973 he took up General Strike to kick the Tories Out as his own slogan, and started denouncing the opposition for their “social-democratic” misunderstanding of it!

Only in a group where the activists’ basic Marxist education and critical faculties had been first softened by the years of speculation about the “world revolutionary process”, then overwhelmed by hundreds of pages of philosophical mumbo-jumbo about the “new thinking”, could this bizarre turn have been possible. Only in such a group could Ross’s combination of manic energy, low ingenuity, high pretence, and utter shamelessness in the use and abuse of ideas have qualified him for leadership.

That turn set the pattern for 12 years or so. Constantly stealing marches on an increasingly punchdrunk but usually uproarious opposition, Ross led the group through a series of wild political cavortings.

By the time of the miners’ strike in 1985 the

faction fighting had become more complicated. As well as the “traditional” anti-Rossite opposition there was a new faction, co-thinkers of the Socialist Workers Party in the USA (no relation to the SWP Britain), whose chief plank was political identification with a “new leadership of the world revolution” to be found in the Sandinistas, the Cuban government, and the ANC in South Africa.

The “traditional” opposition insisted on some critical distance from those forces, and stressed more serious work in the Labour Party. (After being largely sidelined by the big Labour Party struggles of 1979-81 — in the 1979 election campaign it ran jointly with some smaller groups, a state of anti-Labour candidates called Socialist Unity — the IMG had dissolved and regrouped around a newspaper in the Labour Party, Socialist Action).

The whole bizarre history is a lesson on the need to build a Marxist left wing in the labour movement based on clear ideas and strict political accounting.

Ross’s faction maintained control by tacking between the two other factions, allying first with one and then with the other. Then he outflanked them both, simultaneously.

He insisted on 100% uncritical support of Scargill in the miners’ strike, and declared that the miners’ leadership was part of a new class-struggle vanguard worldwide, together with the ANC, the Sandinistas, and various Labour left groupings (Black Sections, Women’s Action Committee, Campaign Group of MPs). Thus he could be more pro-Sandinista than the SWP cothinkers and more Labour Party oriented than the other opposition!

This ideological manoeuvre did not hold the group together, but it did enable Ross to keep control of Socialist Action while the two oppositions flaked away — the SWP cothinkers to form the Communist League, and the traditional opposition to launch International, then Socialist Outlook (then ISG).

Motivated by its new ideology, the group round Socialist Action, at this point [1991]

very small, has squirrelled its way into many leading positions in the ancillary staff of the broader Labour left. Carol Turner, for example, was secretary of Labour CND, and that gave her the basis to become secretary of the Committee to Stop War in the Gulf [in 1991].

The broad reformist left is usually short of quartermasters and aides de camp, and no one fills those jobs better than revolutionaries possessed by an inner vision which tells them that the reformist campaign is, in its secret essence, the stuff of revolution. Socialist Action [does this with] the production and distribution of Campaign Group News for the Campaign Group of MPs.

The whole bizarre history is a lesson on the need to build a Marxist left wing in the labour movement based on clear ideas and strict political accounting.

In their outward form, Ross’s enterprises have been attempts to build such a left wing. In reality they have been the opposite; to borrow an image from nuclear physics, they have been the “anti-matter” of Marxist politics.

A Marxist left wing is the memory of the labour movement. Activists grouped together only organisationally, without a theoretical basis, have only their individual experience to go on; they lack the discipline of having to spell out collective ideas at each stage, compare what’s said today to what’s been said in the past, analyse mistakes, learn lessons; they are easily swayed by the ebbs and flows of amorphous left opinion.

Far from being an antidote, a contribution to forming a continuous memory, the Ross grouping has worked to wipe out even such consistent memory as honest and serious individuals without theoretical baggage or the aid of a collective might have.

All the twists and turns have been basically bright ideas for organisational advantage. And the theoretical uproar surrounding them has served not to put the gambits in broad context, or to provide a framework for evaluating them, but to obscure, thwart and derail even the most elementary commonsense practical evaluation.

Instead of theory illuminating practice, and practice checking and exposing errors in theory, theory has been subordinated to perceived practical advantage, and practical judgement subordinated to manufactured theoretical mumbo jumbo.

BY JACK STAUNTON

ON 19 January Housmans bookshop in King’s Cross was packed with around fifty people coming to hear Loren Goldner speak on the recent history of the militant South Korean working class. Goldner, a left communist and a former Schachtmanite talked about modern labour movement activism in the face of rapid economic development, and the post World War Two era and the labour movement’s attitude to the Stalinist state in the North.

The South Korean labour movement has long faced difficult circumstances. Immediately after the end of World War Two, with Japanese troops replaced with American occupiers and the local yangban landowner class discredited by their collaboration with the Japanese, a popular labour movement set up workers’ councils to assert its authority. These councils, dominated by Stalinists and sympathetic to Kim Il-Sung, were broken up by the government and its American backers at the end of 1945.

After the 1950-1953 Korean War came a period of “stability” for the South Korean bourgeoisie, with a series of authoritarian regimes savagely repressing all dissent. The country was in these years no “tiger economy”.

Until the early 1970s its economy was actually weaker than that of North Korea. Democratic struggles such as the student movement which brought down president Rhee Syngman in 1960 found it difficult to maintain influence in the face of repression.

Park Chung-hee seized power in 1961 and held onto the presidency for eighteen years.

Park Chung-hee’s presidency saw massive industrialisation and the development of South Korea from a backward peasant country to a modern power. A former member of the Stalinist Workers’ Party of South Korea, he was no friend of the working class, and regularly employed “states of emergency” to buttress his authority. But although he managed to keep a lid on the labour movement and student activists, the fight for democracy would explode after his 1979 assassination by the head of the Korean CIA. The first flashpoint came in May 1980 with the Kwangju Commune, where unions and students fighting protesting against a military coup occupied the impoverished south-western city of Kwangju. Solidarity strikes and demonstrations broke out across South Korea, but the army moved into Kwangju and regained control, killing thousands of people in the process.

But the labour movement was only just getting started. A fierce wave of strikes over the 1987-90 period saw workers’ wages increase of around 25-30%, and an assertive working class won a significant extension of democratic rights. The newly-formed organi-

sations of the labour movement would stand the working class in good stead for future confrontations — a December 1996 move by the government to make it easier to sack workers, implement more casual contracts and delay official union recognition was met by a general strike in the car-building and ship-building industries, which soon won support in the public sector and other industries. The government backed down, only to reintroduce the law a few months later.

The resulting casualisation of labour presents a major obstacle to the South Korean labour movement. Some 60% of the labour force are on 90-day contracts, with the “elite” stratum of the working class who enjoy job stability representing just 10%. Goldner reported that there are as many conflicts between regular and casual workers as there are between bosses and workers in general, with regular workers at Hyundai breaking up the picket lines of casual workers who they believed to pose a threat to their jobs.

Workers’ unions in South Korea also face organisational difficulties. The government regularly uses troops and police to break up picket lines, although three-year compulsory military service means that most workers are fairly militarily proficient — Goldner said that

there were even cases where strikers had won pitched battles with the forces of order and seized their weapons.

The speaker also touched on the subject of Korean unification. While the semi-Stalinist leaders of the trade union federation and the Democratic Labour Party take a positive view of the politics of the murderous North Korean police state, the South Korean bourgeoisie see a window for economic expansion in the North. Although the local bourgeoisie is unwilling to repeat the West Germans’ experience of having to subsidise the East after unification — and so is opposed to unification — it is increasingly able to set up factories just north of the border and thus take advantage of the cheap labour costs of North Korean workers, who are denied any political or organising rights by the Stalinist government. Loren Goldner said that North Koreans working for South Korean companies like Samsung earn just 1% of the wages of equivalent workers in the South.

Over the last twenty years South Korea has seen militant strikes, displaying the power of a young working class to secure itself organising rights, make democratic gains and win high wages. But the workers’ gains are precarious. Over the last five years, under president Roh Moo-hyun, one thousand worker activists were arrested, and the Korean Confederation of Trade Union expects that the figure will be ten times higher under the new right wing government. Casualisation and attacks on union activity are rampant, and hard-won democratic rights are never safe. Such are the challenges which the international labour movement faces in an aggressive period of neo-liberal change.

The ups and downs of Korean labour

IS/SWP on Northern Ireland in August 1969

The collapse of “troops out”

Part eight of a series on the Northern Ireland crisis of 1969 and the left. Previous articles at

www.workersliberty.org/node/9816

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

PART 1: EVENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

ON the night the troops took to the streets in Derry and the fighting there ended, Belfast erupted into the most serious Catholic-Protestant street warfare since 1935 (at least). The British army was then, on 15 August, put on the Falls Road, and on the 16th, in the Crumlin Road area.

On 19 August, the British Army formally took control of the RUC, including its reserve force, the B-Specials. The Specials were instructed to hand in their guns to central depots. There was talk already of the Specials being “phased out”. The Hunt Commission was set up to review policing in the Six Counties.

It would report early in October, recommending that the RUC should be disbanded, should no longer carry side-arms. The B-Specials, which functioned as a Protestant-sectarian militia, should be abolished and replaced by a British Army part-time regiment, the Ulster Defence Regiment, in which Catholics as well as Protestants would be involved. There was a commitment given that the Special Powers Act would be abolished as soon as things quietened enough for that.

This was a deluge of reform, unleashed finally by the proven political bankruptcy and breakdown of the Orange state. Northern Ireland Prime Minister James Chichester Clark and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson issued the “Downing Street Declaration” committing both the British and Six-County governments to a thoroughgoing reform of the Northern Ireland body politic.

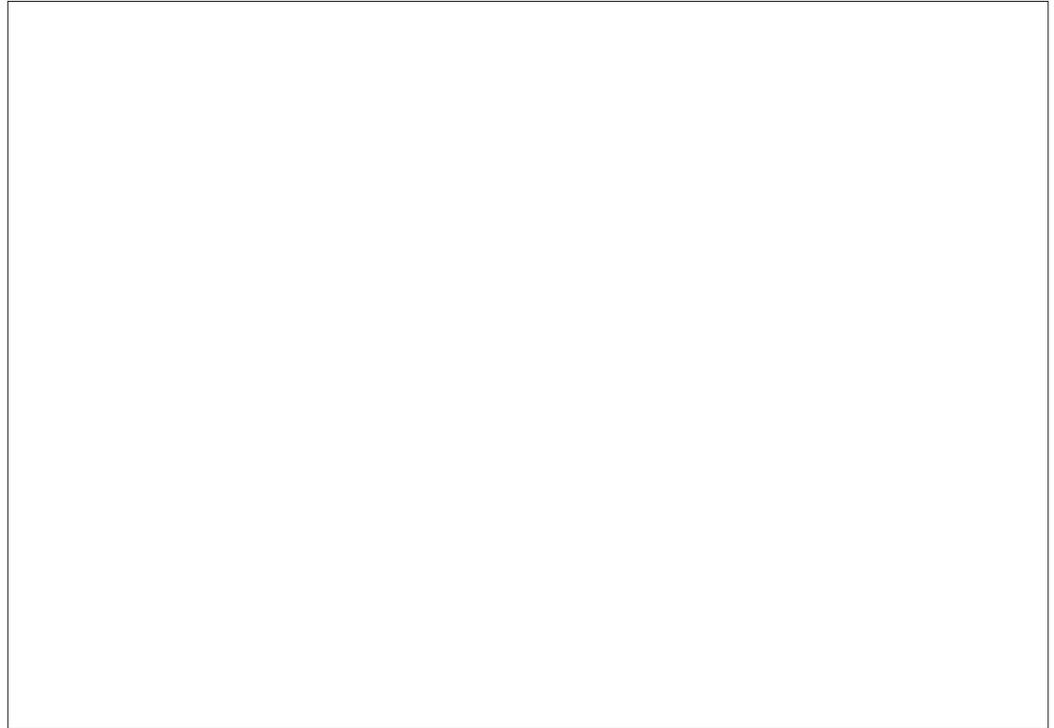
It was an out and out victory for the Civil Rights Movement — for its explicit demands.

The Northern Irish revolutionary left — Michael Farrell, Eamonn McCann, Bernadette Devlin and others — had been trying to redefine “civil rights” as a synonym for the socialist transformation of society — “real” civil rights, it was said, involved housing, jobs, the whole of society. It was what the old Social Democrats, long ago in the 19th century, had done with democracy, defining themselves as democrats for everything in society, including the economy — “social democrats”. The left in Northern Ireland presented themselves as, so to speak, “Social Civil-Rights-ists.”

This notion was quickly relegated to the political margins (though in Derry in the 1970 General Election, Eamonn McCann would do very well on a general working class socialist platform). In the great crisis, the left had had nothing distinctive to say, except Bernadette Devlin’s appeals to the Protestant workers, which in the circumstances, nobody, including Protestant workers, could take seriously.

What had come centre stage during the crisis was Ireland’s two-headed “National Question”. The issue of the Protestant-Unionist British-Irish of North East Ulster was wrapped up, as in a nest of Russian dolls, in the broader Irish question; and that took an artificial form given to it by the inclusion of a big Nationalist-Catholic minority in the state that was supposed to resolve the Irish majority-minority problem, the Six-County sub-state. The breakdown in mid-August proved that Northern Ireland was a failed entity — a “failed state.” It would remain a failed state all through the subsequent “troubles”.

Taoiseach Jack Lynch had raised the basic issues; so in his own way — fear of Southern intervention, fear of a general Catholic rising to subdue the Protestants — had Chichester



Troops in 1969. Right, troops being welcomed

Clark.

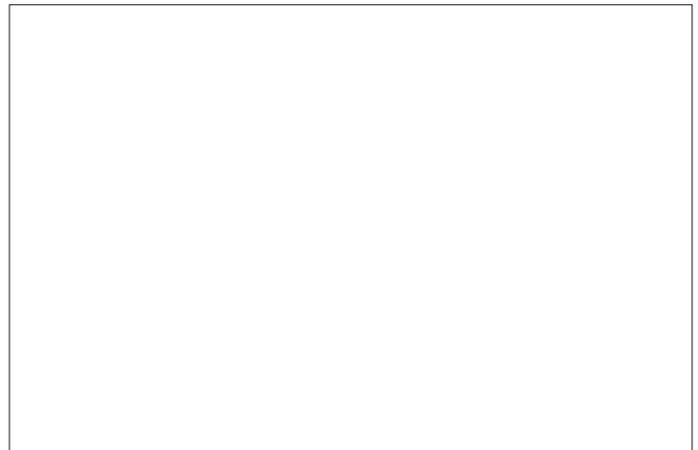
Not the “social” civil rights that the socialists wanted to push forward came to the fore, but the “national” civil rights of the Catholics — at least those who were the majority in near-half the land area of the Six Counties — and in general the conflicting Unionist-Nationalist claims to self-determination.

During the crisis, PD had been eclipsed by the Republicans in Belfast, and also by NICRA. It was NICRA Chair, Frank Gogarty, not his equivalent in PD, Michael Farrell, who called out the demonstrations throughout Northern Ireland.

In his 1976 book, *The Orange State*, Michael Farrell presents NICRA and PD acting as equal partners in calling out the solidarity demonstrators, but there is little or no sign of that in the press then — a press that normally carried statements from PD and Farrell, and did carry PD’s appeal for British intervention on 14 August.

After the crisis, PD, and in its wake, *Socialist Worker*, became a political satellite of the Republicans, adopting their ideas, for instance, on economic nationalism — the discarded once-upon-a-time policy of the long-time governing party in the South, Fianna Fail. As we’ll see, IS followed PD-following-the-Republicans into utopian-populist economic nationalism, for a while, both in *SW* and in the pamphlet *Struggle in the North* which it published (through Pluto Press, then starting up as IS’s publishers: its first publication was Farrell’s pamphlet, in December 1969.) We will examine the pamphlet in a later article.

In the interregnum between the breakdown of August and the end of the barricades period, the report of the Cameron Commission, on the disturbances at the beginning of the year in Derry, came out. It blamed PD for its “provocative” militancy, but that was to be expected. It did more. It painted a damning,



and true, picture of how PD functioned. The group, which had no organisational structures, and no defined membership, was manipulated by a small group around Farrell — to use the terms Mick Johnson had used in the IWG (see part three of this series) by those who knew the “full programme” which was the secret guide of the organisation. After that, PD could not go on in the old way.

The general changes in the situation from mid-August, combined with the Cameron Report, compelled PD to change or cease to exist. A “new” PD would emerge, a small socialist propaganda and agitation group, operating as a satellite first of the “Official” Stalinist-led Republicans, and then, after 1971, of the Provisionals. This redesigned PD would immediately repudiate the ICRSC, which IS had created specifically to be “in solidarity with PD”, as too right wing!

Though peace settled in for a while in Northern Ireland with the coming of the

British Army, the Catholic areas of Derry and Belfast kept their barricades up. One of the prevalent fears was that those who had fought back against the RUC would be prosecuted. They feared the use of the Special Powers Act.

In fact, almost immediately, with the ceasefire, people were being arrested under the Special Powers Act, in operations sometimes involving the British Army in tandem with the RUC. People were prosecuted for what they had done in the crisis: Bernadette Devlin would get a six months sentence in Armagh jail for her part in the defence of the Bogside.

Between August 14 and the second week in October, the barricades, and attempts to get them down by the politicians and the Catholic Church leaders, would be central to Northern Ireland politics.

Continued on pages 14 and 15

PART 2: IS, APRIL 1970

IS's leaders suddenly dropped a previously vocal opposition to British troops in Ireland at the point where the Army took control of Northern Ireland's streets (14-16 August 1969).

The best way to introduce the reader to the discussion on Ireland that took place in IS in the following eight or nine months is to present a description of part of that discussion written at the time (in the IS internal bulletin) by John Molyneux.

Molyneux is one of the few (I guess) present-day members of the SWP who were also members of its distant ancestor, the International Socialists (IS). He has been a prominent writer for *Socialist Worker* and other SWP publications. Molyneux recently came out in limited opposition to the present SWP leaders and stood for the Central Committee — a rare event in the authoritarian SWP.

By contrast, IS was a democratic organisation, all in all, during the political turmoil that engulfed it on Ireland for those eight or nine months.

Molyneux was one of those who came to oppose the IS leaders on the troops, having supported them at first.

Here, in an article published in the IS internal bulletin, he describes IS conference discussing Ireland. He writes as an IS loyalist, albeit on this question a critical one. He bases himself heavily on the sort of politics which IS had been using before mid-August. Essentially, he argues that the nationalists of all Ireland could deal with the Protestant-Unionists.

"It may be useful for IS members to cast their minds back to exactly what happened at conference

... The one thing the debate didn't achieve was political clarification. In part this was because of insufficient time, in part because those arguing for the 'withdraw the troops' slogan did not put their case very well, but mainly it was because certain leading members of the group resorted to demagoguery and histrionics rather than arguing their case.

Should some comrades doubt the validity of this accusation I would remind them of some of the 'arguments' used on this occasion.

Comrade [Paul] Foot wanted to know where all these people calling for troop withdrawal were last September [at the IS conference then] and how come there is all this militancy now? The answer, comrade, for many of us, is simply that then we accepted your arguments, and now we don't. We trust we have the right to change our minds.

Comrade Foot also wanted to know what these people were doing with sophisticated arguments about agitation and propaganda when the matter was really quite simple, i.e. for or against pogroms. If the matter is really that simple perhaps comrade Foot could tell me why when, before the debate, I asked comrade Cliff what our current position on the troops was he said "we are for withdrawal, of course" (meaning at the propaganda level).

No, the agitation/propaganda arguments were raised not by us, but by comrades Harman, Marks, Palmer, etc. In fact on the basis of what he said, comrade Foot's position can only be interpreted as one of support for the troops, while his whole speech was delivered in tones of righteous indignation.

Comrades Harman and Cliff were not much better. Harman's main points were that it is not enough to just repeat the ABCs of Marxism over and over again, and that to call for troop withdrawal is 'petty bourgeois' heroics.

But in fact the opposition were not arguing the formalist case that since we oppose imperialism, and since we are for a workers' republic, we must raise the withdrawal slogan. The opposition was arguing that this slogan could have played a progressive role in the struggle, and that failure to raise it leaves IS in a position of confused and ambiguous tailism.

It is the ABC of Marxism. The 'petty bourgeois heroics' point was highly misleading for no one on the opposition side indulged in any heroics, or in any accusations of cowardice. Comrade Cliff used the 'cups of tea' argument, i.e. the families of Derry and Belfast welcomed the troops so we cannot call for withdrawal. If one applied this argument to such questions as immigration control, the First World War, or in times past to various colonial adventures, it is clear the kind of position one would arrive at.

A large part of comrade Palmer's speech was also conducted at the 'braver than thou' level, though in this case it was mainly 'I know people who are braver than thou'. We were treated to a series of emotional stories about men who had spent years in British gaols [and were not calling for troops out], all of which was quite irrelevant as no one was making any accusations of cowardice.

... Going over those arguments like this would be mere pedantry were they simply accidental asides to the main points of these comrades' speeches, but they were not. They were, on this occasion, the mainstays of their case, and, by the atmosphere they generated, hindered rational discussion of the group's position.

Conspicuous by their absence at Conference were some of the arguments used to justify our position, which... were more serious than much of the stuff we were treated to in the debate. Firstly that the Catholics needed a breathing space in which to arm themselves, which was provided by the troops.

This argument was dishonest because it was very obvious that it was extremely unlikely that the Catholics would succeed in arming themselves. It was also obvious that the presence of the troops, far from facilitating this, would make it very difficult.

What is more, as the Trotskyist Tendency [forerunners of the AWL] pointed out, the Catholic workers would only get arms were there an immediate and urgent need for them, i.e. a struggle going on. IS never answered the question of how arms were to be obtained but put forward the slogan 'Open the Southern arsenals', knowing full well that this was merely a propaganda demand which could not be realised.

Secondly, there was the agitation/propaganda argument which was explained at great length... I accept the distinction between agitation and propaganda as an abstract argument but would argue that its concrete application in this case has led to a failure not just to agitate against the troops but to make any propaganda against them.

I am aware that the early articles in *Socialist Worker* contained escape clauses in the small print as it were, and we have often

used such phrases as 'socialists never had any illusions about British imperialism and its objectives in Ireland', but the fact remains that over the months we have completely failed to carry out any systematic propaganda against the troops.

Until the issue of 2 April [1970], *Socialist Worker* carried no articles analysing the concrete activities of the troops. The Marks/Palmer reply to Workers' Fight [the Trotskyist Tendency] in the *Internal Bulletin* carried no analysis of the current situation, or of what sort of things the troops have actually been doing, nor did comrade Palmer's report at Conference, which in fact did not even mention the troops.

Thus we have not even at the propaganda level made any preparations for the struggle with the troops which must come sooner or later. In this we have failed not merely our Irish contacts but also those British workers who read our literature. Is this failure accidental, or is it due to a desire to avoid the troops question... Has our fundamental analysis of the situation in Northern Ireland when the troops went in been right or wrong?

I believe that is has been wrong and that the crucial error has been, when dealing with the question of the troops, to argue as though Northern Ireland were a separate isolated country. An analogy used by both Marks and Palmer neatly illustrates this way of thinking.

If a group of our comrades, they say, were set upon by a much stronger force of fascists and the police intervened, we would not call for the police to withdraw. However, to apply this analogy accurately to Ireland, our small group of comrades would have to have a much larger force of friends asleep just round the corner who might well be roused by the sound of battle.

Had the troops not gone in, there was surely the possibility of volunteer forces from the south coming to the aid of the Catholics in the north, thus not only practically raising the question of a United Ireland but also completely undermining the regime in the south. Unless we take the position that Ireland is one country there is no possibility of workers' power there in the foreseeable future. Once we take the position that Ireland is one country in relation to the troops it is clear that there is a third alternative which can be counterposed to the troops or massacre dichotomy.

In the light of this perspective the argument that trusted PD comrades weren't calling for withdrawal of the troops so we shouldn't either is not very impressive precisely because from the outset PD has had a tendency to regard Northern Ireland as a separate unit. This has manifested itself in a number of ways.

There was PD's reluctance to take a position on the border... There is the naming of their newspaper 'Northern Star', and there is the position taken by Mike Farrell in 'Struggle in the North' on Southern Irish troops as an alternative to British troops. Farrell seems to suggest that this extremely unlikely eventuality would be even worse than British troops, which I think is tantamount to recognising the border this side of socialism.

The main disadvantage of our position is that it puts us completely in a tailist position, in particular tailing the IRA [the pre-Provo split IRA, who backed the British troops in August 1969 and then the Stalinist-led

"Official" IRA] and makes it impossible for us to play an educative leadership role on the nature of the troops. In addition to this we end up never quite saying what we mean. It is also becoming abundantly clear that regardless of who was right or wrong last August, or even at Conference, that we must change our line soon."

(Molyneux's argument about southern Catholics rallying to defeat the Protestants in of the North was not endorsed by the Trotskyist Tendency. As I have pointed out in an earlier instalment of this series, that implied conquest of the Protestants, and begged the question — then what?)

The picture Molyneux paints is that of an organisation led by confused and unscrupulous demagogues. That impression is not lessened if the reader knows that two months after the Conference, the IS National Committee — the National Committee elected at Conference — voted for the same "troops out" position so vehemently denounced at conference. Only two members did not vote for the motion, proposed by the present author: memory suggests that the two

IS suddenly dropped a previously vocal opposition to troops at the point they went on the streets.

stalwarts were Nick Howard and Roger Protz, who, I think, abstained.

Nothing had changed much in Ireland between the conference and the National Committee.

The conference discussion which Molyneux describes, erring if at all on the side of restraint, was held at the beginning of April 1970. There had been two IS Conferences in 1969, and the decisive discussion on Ireland took place at the one held in September, just after the deployment of British troops and IS dropping "troops out"

Opinion in IS had shifted massively. In September 1969 the IS leadership had had a big majority.

At the 1970 conference, the balance of opinion was such that the IS Executive Committee (EC) and its supporters needed to behave as Molyneux describes in order to avoid defeat by the skin of their teeth. They won by only a dozen votes or so.

The Trotskyist Tendency had published a 50-page pamphlet *IS and Ireland* at the end of November 1969. There were debates in branches, some of them open to interested non-members, between, for instance, John Palmer and myself. We can, I think, justly claim that our efforts shifted the organisation.

But events helped us. By April 1970 the honeymoon period between British troops and British government and the Six County Catholics was nearly over. People had had time to reflect on issues which most of those at the September 1969 Conference hadn't had a chance to consider. And *Socialist Worker*, had come to denounce the British Government in ways that pointed to a call for troop withdrawal. In this period, SW's coverage of Irish affairs was mostly written by

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social

partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

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

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

WE STAND FOR:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.

- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

John Palmer, whose attitudes on Ireland were those of a gut-Catholic nationalist, refracted through the opportunist conception of "politics" learned from Tony Cliff and the skills of a mainstream bourgeois journalist.

PART 3: IS, SEPTEMBER 1969

At the September 1969 Conference, opponents of IS's change of line on Ireland were a small minority. The demagogy of the EC and its supporters was a great deal worse than in 1970 — different, perhaps, not only in degree but also in kind.

The atmosphere of the discussion was one of hysteria. The EC and its supporters had burned their fingers badly on Ireland, and they were in disarray and under severe attack on the issue from the biggest "Trotskyist" group in Britain, the SLL. The switch of line from being pseudo-Irish-nationalist loud opponents of Britain and the British Army being in Ireland at all, to being suddenly struck silent, had been sudden and dramatic.

After the September conference *Socialist Worker* would, as Molyneux says, become, in effect, an apologist for the British Army and for the immediate policy of the London government. (The conference had not specifically licensed that turn.)

IS had campaigned against British troops through the earlier part of 1969 on the grounds that troops would help the RUC, the B-Specials, and the Paisleyites repress the Catholics. Now the army was put on the streets to stop open war between the RUC, B-Specials and Paisleyites, on one side, and the Catholics on the other. The army had relieved the hard-pressed Catholics of Derry and Belfast, and been welcomed by them. IS was disoriented — as were the people in Northern Ireland whose lead the IS leaders followed.

When the September conference was being held, Catholic Derry and Belfast were walled off like medieval Jewish ghettos — except that the barricade-walls had been self-created — and had effectively seceded from the Six Counties state. Their (temporary) peace from sectarian war had been secured and was guaranteed by the British army, which had undertaken not to attempt to remove the Catholic barricades by force. (That time round, it never would. The barricades were taken down by agreement.)

Things had worked out pretty much the opposite of what IS had expected.

More that that. PD, the group in Northern Ireland led by associates of IS, had called for British troops (that's what its stance was, for practical purposes). So, more explicitly, had Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann.

Troops were the only possible instrument of the London control called for by both PD and McCann/Devlin.

The sudden IS shift of "line" was good or bad, right or wrong, but for sure it was a shift — the collapse of the politics of IS over the previous year. IS and its allies in Ireland, PD and Bernadette Devlin (around whom IS had spun its politics and its perspectives for "Irish work" since her election to Parliament in April 1969), had gone over to the policy of the Labour Party Tribune left, and of the 26 Counties Labour Party: British government direct rule as the solution, for now at least, of the "Northern Ireland problem".

Going over to the Tribune MPs' policy, IS was suddenly vulnerable to the relentless pounding of the ultra-left SLL (then seem-

ingly going great guns: its paper, which was much bigger and more impressive than *Socialist Worker*, was due to become a daily two weeks after the IS conference, and would do so).

Quite a scattering of SLL drop-outs, in varying states of political dissolution, had by then made their way into the much looser and less demanding IS. One of the leading industrial militants in IS, Tom Hillier, convenor of shop stewards at CAV Lucas in west London, would go back from IS to the SLL as a result of the argument about the troops.

An emergency resolution calling for the restoration of "troops out" as a slogan which came — I think — from the Croydon IS branch was on the agenda. The TT supported that resolution, and for practical political purposes, not least the purposes of the IS leaders, at the conference, it "became" the TT's motion.

IS was very raw and volatile, with a low level of political, if not of conventional, education. The EC's control could not be taken for granted at all.

THE EC's solution to their dilemma at the September 1969 Conference was to amalgamate, under the agenda item "Ireland", a discussion on the sudden switch on the troops with a "discussion" of a long resolution from the Manchester IS branch (politically, from the Trotskyist Tendency).

That resolution was written in July or perhaps June (it predated the division of the Manchester IS branch into a "Cliff" branch and a "TT ghetto" branch, which took place in July). In it I had attempted to sum up the situation in Ireland, the experience of the left in Northern Ireland and of the IS group.

I proposed that in the event of civil war, and as a means of destroying the existing Six Counties state, IS should raise the idea that the Catholic majority areas along the

IS had been advocating Catholic/Protestant civil war. Now they accused us of proposing a bloodbath in Northern Ireland!

border with the 26 Counties, including Derry, should secede to the "Republic". It was an attempt to give some sort of political coherence and objective to those in Northern Ireland caught up in the logic of developing events (and, in so far as the IS Executive Committee's policy reflected that logic, to their politics in *Socialist Worker*).

The EC's strategy was to focus discussion on the Manchester branch resolution, and specifically on "secession". It buried everything else in a flood of demagogy against "secession".

The IS EC, and *Socialist Worker*, had been advocating Catholic/Protestant, Nationalist/Unionist, civil war — a war in which the Catholic South and the Unionist north-east would sort things out guns in hand, and in which IS would be for the conquest of Protestant/Unionist by Catholic/Nationalist Ireland. Now they accused us, with the "secession" idea, of proposing a "bloodbath" in Northern Ireland!

We wanted a massacre, they insisted! There would be population movements, of course. How did we envisage that happening? In cattle trucks, as in Nazi-controlled Europe? It was a "fascist" idea! Of course it was! And the Trotskyist Tendency? Fascists! Fascists in our midst!

A hysterical atmosphere was built up. We were heavily outnumbered and oratorically outgunned. Two members of the EC who had been against dropping "troops out", Duncan Hallas and Roger Protz, were eloquently silent at the conference, while the EC majority turned it into something resembling a revivalist rally, with the TT cast in the role of fascist devil. (Protz was the editor of *Socialist Worker*, though, properly speaking, only technical editor: after his editorial reporting on the January IS National Committee decision on Ireland, he did not shape SW's politics to any noticeable degree).

Is the reader beginning to balk at this description — and ceasing to find what I'm saying plausible? Fascists? Surely that can't be true. Go back and read Molyneux's description of the demagogy at the conference six months later!

I can't at this stage claim to remember the exact content and sequence of speakers. Possibly only one speaker took it as far as calling us fascists. But if so, that idea followed on as the next step from the central theme of the EC speakers: the TT advocated, and therefore wanted, a bloodbath.

The wild instability of IS policy on Northern Ireland, and immediately the latest lurch about the attitude to British troops — that's not the important thing, comrades! The issue is that the Trotskyist Tendency advocates population movements in Northern Ireland — pogroms! massacres! And it wants to move people around — like fascists! They are fascists!

All these things of course could easily be assimilated to the question of the role of the troops. Such horrors were the alternative to IS expressing approval of the troops.

Not everybody said all of these things, but all of them were said, and together they amounted to a piece of mobbing.

No reasonable objection can be raised against the leaders of IS and their supporters at conference picking up a mistake, absurdity, or extravagance made or allegedly made by the Trotskyist Tendency and hitting us over the head with it. It was another matter when hysterical demagogy was used to make discussion of both the troops and what we proposed under "secession" impossible.

The IS leaders dismissed the question of the artificiality of the Six Counties with philistine fear and philistine jeers that rubbished the entire tradition we were invoking — or, if you like, trying in vain and foolishly to invoke — that of Lenin and the Communist International on the attitude to national rights.

That tradition preaches indifference to state boundaries. It says we are for the break-up and realignment of existing conglomerates of peoples when the alternative is forced union (and, in Northern Ireland, the creation of a hybrid monstrosity).

Actually there was a preposterous element of Irish Catholic nationalism in the outrage against "repartition" even if it had been what we were proposing. (It wasn't.) The implicitly Catholic-nationalist indignation against repartition was preposterous because it was coupled with de facto Unionism, and a de facto assumption that the status quo was the best of all partitions of Ireland into Protestant-Unionist and Catholic-nationalist.

THERE is no record of the conference. The written polemics in the IS internal bulletin were guarded and, the perils of the volatile conference having been averted, more sober. The main article, a reply by John Palmer and Stephen Marks to the Trotskyist Tendency pamphlet *IS and Ireland* appeared in January or February 1970 (the pamphlet had been published in November 1969).

I know of only one case where the demagogy got into print — an internal bulletin article by the then prominent Clifflite Andreas Nagliatti, in an internal bulletin of October or November 1971 (I guess), during the build-up to the special conference of 4 December 1971 at which the Trotskyist

Tendency was "de-fused" (expelled). (Nagliatti privately had Maoist leanings, and was in IS — he left in mid-1974, with Roger Rosewell — a cynical careerist. He once gave me a short and unsolicited "friendly" little talk on how to flatter Tony Cliff and "get on" in IS)

What I remember in detail about the accusation of "fascism" is the following incident, which also illustrates the political level of the conference.

At a caucus of the Trotskyist Tendency before I was due to speak — replying on, I suppose, our resolution, or the "troops out" one — Glyn Carver suggested that I reply to the "fascist" charge by recalling that the Stalinists had called the Trotskyists "fascists". I rejected that — in my head or out loud — as demagogy and "beneath" us. Because Stalin had called Trotskyists "fascist", it did not follow that a specific proposal by Trotskyists was not "fascist".

But I must have been hard pressed because, speaking in the floor of the conference, I found myself making that point. The response surprised me. There was loud and widespread applause. It must have involved a far wider spectrum of the conference than those who supported the Trotskyist Tendency on the issue.

Certainly — and I think this is what fixed it in my mind — some of those applauding my demagogic point had also been among those providing the thunderous applause for the Executive Committee's demagogy stating or implying that the TT was "fascist". Had to have been.

Every member of IS had a vote at conference then, and a lot of the conference was young and raw people, many of them students, a few months or a year in politics. They had chosen the "Trotskyist" side in the old disputes with the Stalinists; they knew about Nazi mass murder, not quite a quarter-century in the past and still a matter of everyday reference in British life. They knew themselves to be new, and "Ireland" was a complex question. The IS leaders were the IS leaders. They knew... The TT? Pariahs — the same as the crazy SLL, really. And so on.

There may also have been some demagogy-fanciers there, like judges at a sheep-dog trial, awarding points judiciously. They thought it was a "good point" for me to make, that the Stalinists had called Trotskyist (and Trotsky himself) fascists!

There was inevitably in such an atmosphere a certain joy in mobbing, baiting, pecking at the political chicks that were somewhat different.

And the supporters or members of the Executive Committee were good. Some had had their speaking skills developed and honed in the highest training schools of the bourgeoisie. Two of them at least (Paul Foot and Stephen Marks) had occupied that staging post on the road to conventional political eminence, the presidency of the Oxford Union.

Palmer was in a class of his own as a demagogue. On a good day, given equal time and so on, I could, or I felt I could, "handle" any of the others in a head-bang. Not Palmer!

The political content of their demagogy was not the least foul aspect of that conference. We were discussing a Northern Ireland, where only a couple of weeks earlier the first stage of a sectarian-political civil war had erupted; where the Protestants and Catholics were kept apart only by the Army; where the Catholics of Derry and Belfast had, as one journalist put it, set up their "little free states" — and still maintained them. It was a situation from which, though of course none of us could know it then, there would come an awful slow slaughter of four thousand people in the next quarter-century.

To discuss that in terms where the very notion that there might be bloodshed involved in a proposal must automatically rule out the idea, was demagogic pacifism and pretend-humanism. That those who had preached communal-national civil war - and without ever spelling out what objectives they favoured in that war, leaving Catholic conquest of the Northern Protestants only as something inferred — that they could get away with such demagogy was a comment on the "political level" of the group, and on how seriously people had been reading *Socialist Worker*, beyond the headlines.

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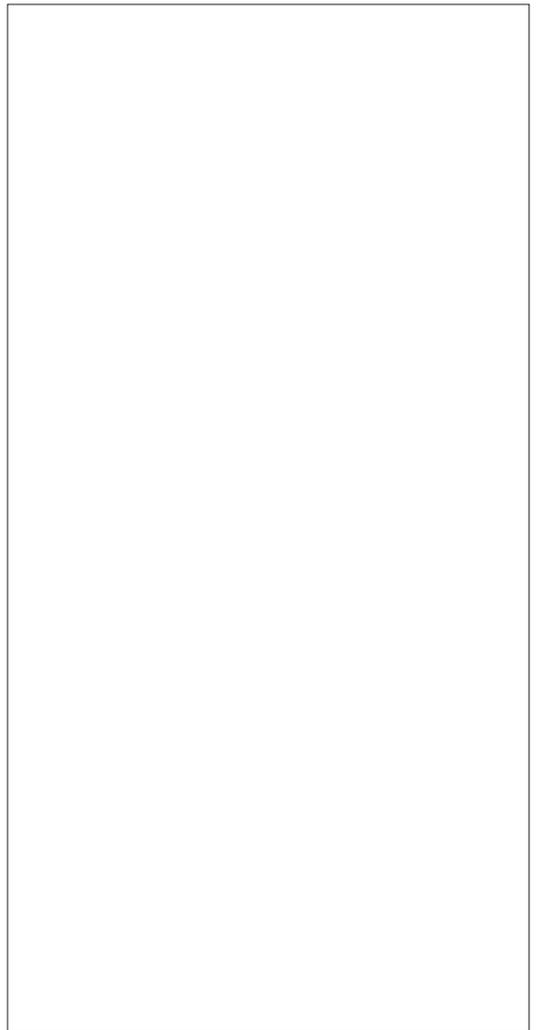


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BY A CIVIL SERVANT

FOR the shareholders and potential buyers of Northern Rock, the Government is all smiles and graces. Another few billion pounds? Yes, sir, of course!

For millions of public sector workers, it is a different story. The Government is insisting not only on a limit of around 2% on pay rises — which, with inflation at 4%, means cuts in real wages — but also on locking that in with settlements lasting three years.

A first blow against that policy is possible on 31 January, when members of the PCS civil service union in the Department of Work and

Pensions may strike against a three-year below-inflation deal imposed on them in November 2007.

PCS members in HMRC (Revenue and Customs) may be striking on the same day; they are currently balloting for action on the issue of job cuts.

On Thursday 24th the Executive of the National Union of Teachers meets, and may decide to ballot teachers for strike action against their real-wage-cut settlement, announced recently and due to be imposed from September 2008.

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