

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 213 3 August 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

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**In East Africa
92 million
people
struggle to
survive; tens
of thousands
starve**



**In the USA a
rich minority
consumes
70 times the
income of
millions of
East Africans**

See page 5

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

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

By Martin Thomas

The "Hain report" on Labour Party democracy has been published (or at least a "summary report" has been: it is not clear whether any fuller document will appear later). It is disappointing. Union and Labour activists need to fight a rearguard action to salvage what can be salvaged at Labour Party conference in September 2011.

The report¹ has now gone to Labour's National Executive Committee. Jon Lansman, joint secretary of the Labour Party Democracy Task Force², which has been campaigning for the review to democratise and open up the party's conferences so that Labour becomes "a living, breathing party", says that the report will "disappoint, big-time"³.

Even worse, the rule changes which Labour's National Executive will put to the Labour Party conference this year, following the report, will not be revealed to union and constituency delegates until a few days before conference, or maybe not even until the conference itself⁴.

The unions affiliated to the Labour Party, in their joint submission^{5,6} to the review (24 June), were also disappointing in many ways, but did propose some positive measures.

At its meeting on 23 July, the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy Executive recommended the following motion to trade union branches and committees:

This notes the current ongoing "Refounding Labour" consultation and the response already submitted by the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO).

We welcome TULO's constructive proposals to increase the number of affiliates and individual members (e.g. with subscription rates which are more graduated on the basis of income) rather

Labour leaders want more of the same. Unions must demand democratic change

than to dilute the influence of members by creating a new category of "registered supporters" who could claim some membership rights (e.g. voting in leadership elections) without having any real commitment to the party, or making any financial contribution.

We call on our union's representatives to speak and vote accordingly, and also to defend members' interests in the following areas:

1. Local organisation. We welcome TULO's recognition of the need to retain Labour Party structures that allow meaningful input into the politics and policy of the party. We will defend the right of local union branches to send delegates to constituency General Committees.

2. Policy documents. Conference should be given options and allowed to vote in parts. Affiliates and CLPs should be allowed to move amendments.

3. Motions to conference. We strongly endorse TULO's recommendation to remove the restrictive "contemporary" criterion which currently leads to

numerous motions on issues of genuine concern being simply ruled out of order. Motions passed at conference should be incorporated within the party's policy documents.

4. Leadership responsibility. As the TULO submission makes clear, "if we are serious about giving members a voice, then we need to accept the freely made decisions of conference as legitimate party policy".

5. Conference voting. We support the current evenly balanced system in which votes are equally divided (50/50) between CLPs and affiliates.

6. Conference arrangements committee. This committee should continue to consist of representatives of CLPs and affiliates only.

7. National Executive Committee. The NEC is the party's governing body between party conferences. It should retain its full responsibilities. The current NEC structure gives under-representation to individual members and over-representation to MPs. We support the TULO proposal to increase the number of CLP seats (elected on a national basis) and in ad-

dition to reserve two seats for election by members in Scotland and Wales respectively.

8. Joint Policy Committee. In accordance with TULO's recommendation, this powerful body should either be democratised (with proper representation for CLPs and affiliates) or abolished.

9. Leadership elections. We defend the right of our union's levy-payers to vote in leadership elections. We also defend their right to have a full range of candidates to consider. We therefore oppose the current ability of MPs to keep off the ballot paper candidates who may have substantial support in the country at large. The right to make a meaningful nomination should be extended to CLPs and affiliates.

10. Parliamentary selections. A sitting MP is guaranteed a place on the shortlist and should have no reason to fear an open selection contest. TULO proposes that a sitting MP should in future need, in order to achieve automatic reselection, at least 66% of affiliated and branch nominations. This would be an improvement on current rules.

11. Rule changes. Any proposed rule changes should be circulated well in advance of conference and voted on one by one.

The TULO submission makes the point that "we cannot treat our members as a force to be tamed or ignored". We now call on our union representatives to argue forcefully for the points above in order to make the Labour Party properly responsive to our members' legitimate and vital interests.

Links:

1. <http://labourdemocracy.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/hainreport.pdf>
2. <http://labourdemocracy.wordpress.com>
3. <http://www.leftfutures.org/2011/07/refounding-labour-attacks-union-influence-and-will-disappoint-members/>
4. <http://www.leftfutures.org/2011/07/nec-member-fears-a-pre-conference-fix/>
5. <http://labourdemocracy.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/tuloresponse.pdf>
6. <http://labourdemocracy.wordpress.com/2011/06/26/unions-submission-to-the-hain-review/>

South Australia's unions do what Britain's unions should have done

South Australia's unions have just done what Britain's unions should have done before 2003 at the latest: sacked the right-wing Labor premier.

Unions have been campaigning to oust Mike Rann as Labor leader for some time. Wayne Hanson, state secretary of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), the most conservative of Australia's big unions, moved a motion at the South Aus-

tralian Labor Party conference to demand Rann resign.

"The reason why the Labor Party was established was because the unions [knew] we needed to elect our own representatives to parliament to make the laws that cared for workers and their families..."

"But in South Australia today what have we got? The complete opposite.

"Our Party... belongs to us and we're going to take

it back. The unions formed Labor to legislate for workers".

Now, with Rann's opinion-poll score slumping, the Right faction in the State Parliamentary Labor Party has conceded. Rann has been asked to stand down in favour of Parliamentary Left faction leader Jay Weatherill within the next six weeks.

If Rann resists, and he may, it looks likely there will be a vote among state Labor MPs.

Rann has made himself unpopular with the unions and with the public by budget cuts.

Weatherill is from the official "Left" faction, but that doesn't mean much in Australian Labor politics. To really "reshape Labor", the unions must keep their independence from Weatherill and put sharp demands on him.

• Full text: www.workersliberty.org/node/17184

After Murdoch scandal?

By Sinead Asch

Someone once famously described the outbreak of World War One - how the powers, one after the other, were drawn into it. They were, he said, like mountaineers, roped together. First one fell, then another, and soon they were all falling, pulling each other into the abyss.

The Murdoch press scandal in its effects on British public life is a little like that. First came the discovery that the phone of the murdered schoolgirl Milly Dowler had been hacked, that some messages had been deleted, with the effect that the police and her parents thought she was still alive and using her phone.

Where before people had not been all that concerned with the revelations that some of the royal wastrels had had phones hacked, the Dowler case caused widespread outrage. Suddenly the moral ground shifted under the feet of the arrogant and overconfident Murdoch press. Politicians of the three main parties, who had continued to court the likes of Rebekah Brooks and the Murdoch family, had their self-preservation instincts aroused. Their dealings with the Murdochs were now being put under the public spotlight.

Prime Minister Cameron had hired Coulson, a former *News of the World* editor, as his spin liar-in-chief, even after it became plain that he must have been implicated in illegal phone tapping. People are still asking Cameron why.

Then it came out that other papers too, Murdoch's competitors, had most likely used the illegal snooping methods for

which the *News of the World* was being pilloried. The *Mirror* papers, and, it is rumoured, the very moral *Daily Mail*. Most likely others, too.

Then the focus shifted to corrupt relations between top police officers and the Murdoch press. It had caused scarcely a ripple in public life when, years ago, Rebekah Brooks admitted, before a Parliamentary Committee, that payments had been made to the police for information. Not so in the new climate. *News of the World* has closed down. Rebekah Brooks has been forced to resign, along with top police officers.

The Murdoch empire is being scrutinised in the USA in the light of the British revelations, and may yet be forcibly broken up.

Ed Milliband, after two decades in which the Labour Party leadership had publicly licked Murdoch's boots, was emboldened to launch a frontal attack on the Murdoch empire. Not brave, and very late, but nonetheless welcome.

Those still clinging to the mountain rocks feel the dead weight of those who have fallen into the abyss pulling on them. Cameron may yet be dislodged. A Royal Commission has been set up to enquire into

the press.

The truth is that sections of the British ruling class have long regretted, some of them publicly, letting "foreigners" get a stranglehold on the British media and on British public life. Privately, the politicians who bowed to Murdoch must have resented the relationship. This, some of them now think, is the time when it may be "practical politics" to do something about it.

The British press is so world-class-awful that there is plenty of scope for reform. Not any sort of revolution, but reform. One of the remarkable things in the public discussion is the paucity of root-and-branch criticism of the system that allows Murdoch, in Britain's plutocratic "democracy", to control the opinion forming and opinion shaping media.

Even if they were all lily-white slaves to the letter of all the laws, such a situation would be an outrage against democracy. Most likely it will continue to be an outrage against democracy.

What we need is a publicly-owned press with airtight guarantees of the right of reply and correction. That, we will not get as a result of the present crisis.

"Media workers need a culture of solidarity"

Mike Jempson, the Director of The MediaWise Trust and a senior lecturer in journalism at the University of the West of England spoke to *Solidarity*.

The Murdoch scandal confirms what a lot of us have said for a long time – that there's a very unhealthy relationship between people in positions of power, including the police, and the media.

Nothing that's emerged from the scandal has shocked me, with the possible exception of the statistic that of the Metropolitan Police's 45 press officers, 10 previously worked for News International.

We've been advocating on behalf of the people most affected by unethical journalism but the PCC has refused to accept that practices like phone hacking go on, and not just at News International newspapers. Those practices have been going on for years, most often in pursuit of sensational headlines, and very rarely to investigate serious criminal activity or expose abuses of power.

I'm hopeful that the Lord Leveson enquiry and the submissions made to it will lead to change. The scale of the scandal makes it practically impossible for the present system to be sustained. But there are dangers in terms of what might replace it.

For example, Ed Milliband was talking about a system of regulation similar to that in place for doctors or solicitors. That would mean licensing journalists and that is inimical to genuine press freedom.

There are other models worth considering, such as

the one proposed by Clive Soley in his Freedom and Responsibility of the Press Bill in 1992. He proposed a body at one remove from both the industry and parliament, and underpinned by statute. It would have to be part publicly-funded and part industry-funded, but would both examine press misbehaviour and also defend press freedom.

Converged technologies and ownership means broadcast and online media should now be regulated on the same basis as print. There needs to be more lay representation and representation for working journalists.

DEREGULATION

The roots of this scandal lie in the Reagan and Thatcher administrations' campaigns for deregulation across the board.

The right-wing libertarian approach which equates regulation with a lack of freedom is very dangerous; you get unsafe products on the market, a dismissal of consumer concern and you remove the possibility of workers having any meaningful contribution to the industry in which they work. Their campaign inevitably involved smashing any system of solidarity that existed amongst workers.

Journalists have had a long hard struggle to win back union recognition since the Wapping dispute and the last miners' strike. When I was a young journalist, I felt able to stand up to my editor if I was being asked to do something I felt was wrong, I knew my colleagues would back me up.

That's because a culture of solidarity existed; that needs to be rebuilt.

What did she leave us with?

By Louise Gold

Amy Winehouse seemed to walk willingly into the mould of rock'n'roll cliché, but what is her legacy?

Her songs were largely self-penned, so credit is due for that. And having listened back to a few of them in the last week, some of them are very good; she really could sing. But, in the end, is her undeniable talent the thing that allowed her album sales to rocket or her image to sell magazines?

No. Winehouse's assets to the industry also included a rather shaky sexuality, which strutted around on spindly legs, and made me feel like a mother watching a child tentatively take their first steps before they fall and the inevitable scrapes and bawling ensue; her vulnerability, which I suppose created the slippery slope, and allowed the paparazzi to take photos of a wandering Amy at different times in blood-stained ballet pumps and bare-foot wearing a bra; a propensity for taking drugs and abusing alcohol, which allowed her story to remain live and her album sales to remain high.

Amy Winehouse was, as much as any of us, exploited as a commodity. Yet she had her wealth and success as a musician, and while death is usually the great equaliser, in this case death has done to her what it can't do to the rest of us: death will immortalize her music and celebrity. But it all feels rather cheap.

One positive legacy may be added pressure for greater funding and support for rehabilitating drug and alcohol users. The last specialist NHS rehabilitation centre for young people closed down last year.

One can only hope that the untimely death of a star will create the kind of ground swell of support needed to see change in this area.

But, as was rather crassly pointed out to me recently, if the many rehabilitation units needed were reinstated, Amy Winehouse would probably have rejected their attempts to "cure" her.

Is Ireland becoming a proper bourgeois republic?

By Tom Cashman

If you've been following the news from Ireland you will be aware that the 26 counties are throwing off Rome rule and becoming a republic, a proper modern capitalist secular republic.

The latest investigation into child abuse in the Cloyne Diocese has revealed that the Vatican has been advising the Vicar General of the diocese that the joint State-Church guidelines on reporting sexual abuse are optional.

This is the third diocese to be exposed for systemic abuse.

The UN initiated an investigation into the "Magdelene Laundries" concentration camps for girls and young women who had babies out of

wedlock, runaway domestic servants and young girls beyond parental control. Notoriously children and young women in all these categories in Ireland were quite often victims of rape by those in authority over them. These were institutions totally under the control of religious orders which inmates voluntarily entered for their protection. But if they left, the police arrested and returned them to the "homes".

The big change is that the state has gone on the offensive against the Church.

Fine Gael Taoiseach Enda Kenny said that the Vatican's behaviour was disgraceful and that "The law of the Land should not be stopped by a crozier or a collar." Socialist Party TDs and the chairman of Fine Gael, Charlie Flana-

gan, called for the expulsion of the Papal Nuncio and Kenny has not ruled out closing the Irish Embassy to the Holy See.

Labour Party leader and Tánaiste, Eamon Gilmore, told the Papal Nuncio that he wants the Vatican to explain its behaviour, he described the Vatican's interference in Irish affairs as "absolutely unacceptable" and "inappropriate".

He said "I want to know why this state, with which we have diplomatic relations, issued a communication, the effect of which was that very serious matters of the abuse of children in this country was not reported to the authorities."

Both governing parties are hinting fairly broadly that the new dispensation will mark the end of "The Seal of the Confession", that priests will not be ex-

cused from reporting confessed crimes to the Garda.

Eamon O Cuiv (Fianna Fáil) said that the feeling of anger and disgust was shared by everybody and that Fianna Fáil would support any initiative to ensure it never happened again.

Mary Lou MacDonald of Sinn Féin shared the general repulsion but emphasised the failure of the state not the church.

There is nothing surprising in the revelations, the sexual abuse was never really hidden and the beatings and psychological torture were completely open and were the declared policies of the institutions concerned. Many religious orders have already withdrawn from their old roles following other scandals but this could mark the end of the policy of subcontracting

Facebook is not an organising tool

Eric Lee



A decade ago, it was not easy to convince some on the left to begin using net-based tools to communicate and organise. Today, we run the risk of becoming over-reliant on some of those tools, most notably Facebook.

This is not the first time I (or others) have addressed the weaknesses of Facebook. Much of what has been written has described theoretical possibilities of things going wrong. For example, Facebook could — in theory — close down any group, page, cause or event you might set up without warning or explanation or right of appeal.

We had a case a few years ago of Facebook shutting down a group organising casino workers in one of Canada's Atlantic provinces — simply because the owners of the casino asked them to.

But those examples were rare, and the risks seemed remote, and increasingly trade unions and campaigning organisations began to use Facebook to organise their events and activities.

Recently, I've come across two concrete examples in daily life of the risks we take when we do this.

One is a Facebook group I set up for a campaigning organisation. I noticed one day that it was blocking me from adding new posts to the group's "wall". A message pops up headlined "Oops!" and informs me that "Something's gone wrong. We're working to get it fixed as soon as we can." And it's been that way for weeks.

I wrote to Facebook technical support to report the bug, but got no reply at all.

Not only can't I post any new items to the group, but all the old ones have disappeared. About two years worth of weekly archived posts.

And if I want to write to all members of the group to tell them that the wall is no longer there, well, that option seems to have disappeared as well.

So I have a group with a few hundred members that I can no longer communicate with, and no place to get help.

The second example is another group, a much larger one with several thousand members. Its wall is functioning well — but I can no longer send messages to its members, or even see who they are or how many of them are members. And again, there is no place to go for help — we don't pay to use Facebook, and they're under no obligation to provide any kind of support.

In both cases, I have websites and mailing lists independent of Facebook, so I can communicate with most (but not all) of these people. And those websites and mailing lists use open source tools which I can edit and control, and are backed up regularly by me.

Am I suggesting that we stop using Facebook?

Not at all. But we rely on it at our peril. We run the risk of being cut off from the very people we think we are communicating with, and not only when some employer gets angry and demands that our groups be shut down.

Sometimes the problem is simply a technical one — "oops" — but this is just as difficult to deal with.

We need to have our own tools, websites, blogs, mailing lists, and social networks, which we control and which we can back up.

That's the easy part. The hard part is we need to convince our audiences to use those tools, and not rely on Facebook as a way of staying in touch with us.



Facebook closed a Canadian casino workers' union website

Can we talk to the police?

Letters



In *Solidarity* 191 Sofie Buckland asked whether socialists should back police fighting cuts in their service, concluding we should not (<http://alturl.com/nzcz8>). A debate on this has developed on our website — extracts below.

[The police] are workers in uniform. To say so is an objective statement, not a political position.

The fact that we can all tell angry stories about how crap the cops treated us doesn't alter the currently necessary work that the police also do every day — roles that will still need to be fulfilled in a society where working-class interests finally rule.

"Winning over individual police is a case of persuading them not to be police any more" is just lazy, short-sighted and useless. You want to get any cop who is prepared to discuss socialist ideas seriously with you to leave his job? You want to remove a potential ally from the police until you've whittled the service down to just the hard-nut anti-working-class *Express* readers who are its reactionary back-bone? It is more intelligent to make any links we can with politically progressive cops and encourage them to organise for an independent, rank and file union. I don't mean that we should trust cops or support them when they play an oppressive role in our communities.

You can also come up with proposals for how working-class communities might organise to defend their own homes and businesses against theft and violence in the here and now.

Theo

Sure if someone nicks my car, I'll probably phone the police. Proving what?

What a worker does, while they are at work, is not of no consequence. The police are used by the ruling class against the working class, not only on our protest marches and during strikes, but routinely — brutally, often randomly — on the estates and streets. The police understand their social role, and its consequences.

We don't want decent young people to join a force that requires them to be routinely unpleasant and (perhaps) violent towards workers, youth and the poor. We know that they will either be spat out or, if they stay for any length of time, become corrupted.

In the normal course of events being a policeman/woman is not compatible with membership of our group — it puts you on the wrong side of the class struggle.

It also means that police unions should not be thought of as part of the labour movement. We would oppose POA motions for bringing back the death penalty; we would also oppose demands from police unions for better wages. Why? Because we don't want to improve the morale of the people who will line up against us!

In special circumstances we might change tack. The Sandinistas supported a pay claim of the vile Nicaraguan police force in 1979 — not because they had changed their view of the police as torturers and thugs — but because they wanted to split the state, or paralyse part of it.

Mark

When I say socialist I mean just a working-class person who recognises class society and would prefer a more democratic and egalitarian one.

I can think of four cops like that who I've met. Interested to know where you draw the line though: soldiers? Court workers? Prison officers?

I didn't say we should support their Police Fed demands or have illusions of any kind about them. But we should encourage the best elements in the ranks to split from their bourgeois commanders.

Theo

In the context of our discussion, it is necessary to exclude at least two groups from the category of "real workers". First, real managers, i.e. people with substantial control over the labour process.

Second, people who are a direct part of the repressive functions of the state. Benefits workers, firefighters, MoD staff etc., are workers; police, army, prison officers, and immigration officials who are directly responsible for throwing people out of the country are capitalist cops.

Gradations? Yes. Police are the last, often, to break in times of big struggle. Conscript armies are weaker than professional. And in some countries police are nearer to being "normal" workers than in the UK (i.e. the norm is shorter stints, less professionalised than UK).

Mark

Class divisions are replicated in the state forces, such that rank and file operatives — squaddies and PCs — have a working-class experience in relation to their commanders, and are recruited from the working class.

They are also treated as expendable pawns by their employers and they also experience solidarity within their ranks. Although isolated from their communities by their special role, many of them still keep important links with friends and family. There is a contradiction in their position.

Some are recruited because they already have bullying, reactionary tendencies, but many join for much more mundane or even initially idealistic reasons.

The hearts and minds of rank and file cops are ground that we can contend, without compromising our own safety or clarity. At present, "they" are not actually one homogeneous, monolithic entity which we must all fear.

When two comrades from the Scottish Socialist Party stood in front of the pushing crowd at the Gleneagles G8 Summit shouting "Leave the police alone! They are workers in uniform!", I was one of the people pushing. But I also told riot cops in quieter moments that when they took our side the rule of the rich parasites they were defending would end, and I urged them to start organising.

Theo

The basic demands of the left run in flat contradiction to the sort of things rank and file police might well want.

For example, abolish special police units like the TSG; abolish Special Branch; abolish the secret state (MI5, MI6, etc); disarm the police (take their guns, CG gas, tazers from them); direct election of boards with operational and budgetary control over police forces; making sacking police guilty of racism or corruption much easier.

That flat contradiction must tell you something about the nature of the police.

Mark

Thoughts on left unity

C S Page — a young, unaffiliated socialist — attended the SWP's 2011 Marxism Festival. Here are his impressions.

A few weeks ago, I attended the Socialist Worker Party's Marxism Festival. Despite the fact that I disagree with some aspects of the SWP's political programme and some of their methodology, I approached the Festival with an open mind, and mainly as an educational opportunity.

I enjoyed parts of it. Yet the unifying feature was that as soon as I left each lecture, on my way to the next talk or to Bookmarks bookstore, I'd be stopped by an earnest young person in a yellow t shirt, who would thrust a leaflet at me. "Join the SWP!" they would say. I would politely decline.

The fact that the SWP is trying to recruit new members does not bother me. All political organisations want to expand, after all. What does get me, though, is that Marxism 2011, despite its educational veneer, felt like little more than a SWP recruitment event.

We were given often-fascinating titbits of information, compressed into hour-long sessions. Such brief spells of learning were completed by the simple message, spoken or unspoken, that to learn more, the only thing you needed to do was join the SWP.

I don't hold a grudge against the SWP... many of its members are my firmest and closest comrades. What annoys me about "Marxism", and what eventually drove me away from the festival, was a feeling of sectarianism.

This is not a problem unique to the SWP — whilst many leftist groups claim to be willing to work with other groups, it is striking how often they fall to fighting and petty name-calling. [A fact] even more tragic when we consider that now is the time when the left is needed the most.

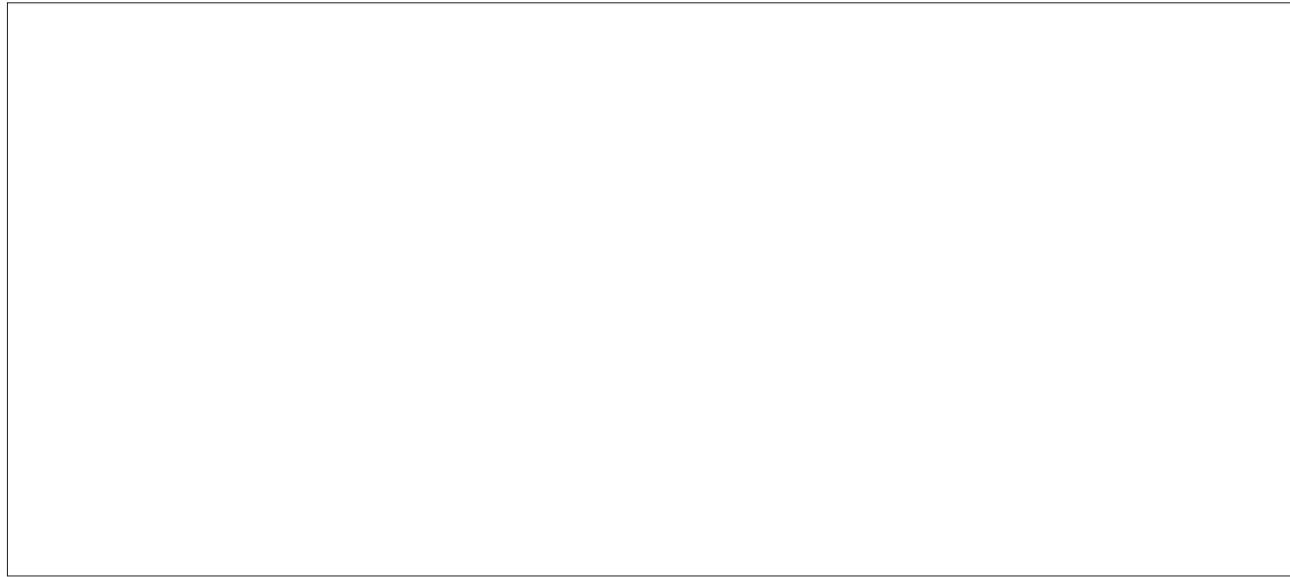
We face public sector cuts, the opening of the health service and education to the free market, and disgraceful measures levelled at the disabled and women. Events in Greece and Spain show us that popular sentiment is swinging against the tired, irrational ways of capitalism. Now is the time for building a popular movement, and the structure and skill of the fragments of the left provide a valuable asset for doing so. If only we could resolve our differences...

Back to "Marxism 2011". At such a gathering the fragmented left might have been able to thrash out their differences, and embark on a discourse aimed at building unity. Such a debate, held before the eyes of those 3,000 or so people who attended "Marxism", would have accomplished much more than simply educate — it would have resolved age-old differences.

Instead of being pestered to join the SWP, the masses could have been inducted into something more than that — into a popular left wing movement, a unified left.

• Full text : www.workersliberty.org/node/17166

Capitalism leaves people to starve



Somalis fleeing drought and famine

The average household of four in the USA's top one per cent spends \$3 million a year on luxuries.

In famine-stricken Somalia, more than half the population of nine million live on less than \$1 a day.

Each one of those rich households in the USA, if it limited itself to necessities, could spare enough to double the income of almost one million Somalis.

The richest one per cent in the USA — three million people — consume between them 70 times as much as the entire income (consumer spending, public services, investment, the lot) of 92 million people in Somalia and Ethiopia.

The richest one per cent are fighting hard, and almost surely with success, to keep the big tax cuts which president George W Bush gave them, even at the cost of risking an economic implosion for the USA if the US government goes over its credit limit.

Tens of thousands among the 92 million people in east Africa are starving. Hundreds of thousands have fled, to Kenya or elsewhere, to try to avoid starvation.

The richest one per cent reckon their hard stance will persuade the US Congress and President Obama to adjust the US budget by cutting social security and Medicare spending for the US poor. The top one per cent already spends 20 times as much on consumer goods and services as the average US household — the top 10% does half of all the USA's consumer spending — and thousands of times more than average Somali or Ethiopian households. But it still wants more.

People in east Africa have been pushed into starvation not only by drought, but by a two-thirds rise in world food

prices since 2009. The flipside to that price rise is swollen profits for the giant agribusinesses which dominate world food markets, many of them US-based.

Among the richest one per cent — in the USA as in other countries — virtually none does any work producing anything useful. If they work hard, it is at outsmarting each other and grabbing bigger shares of the cream.

Among the people in east Africa, almost all work hard at producing everyday necessities.

They are hindered by the failure of governments to develop the wells and irrigation necessary in areas with erratic rainfall, and by the growing annexation of the best land by cash-crop production for export, which enriches only a few, and erratically.

Just a tiny sliver from the income of the richest one per cent, 1.4%, would double the overall income of Ethiopia and Somalia, and pay for irrigation, communications, and public services which would revolutionise their economies. An even tinier sliver of the income would save thousands from starvation now.

But the rich few hold on to their loot with a grip of steel; and they have power, a hundred times more power, than the many poor. The rich few run with the grain of the economic system, and the many poor have to fight against it.

That is capitalism. No system of social and democratic control over economic life would ever allow thousands to starve to death when just hours away, with modern communications, other people gorge on luxuries.

Capitalism means control over economic life by the priorities of profit, not by any social and human priorities.

Somalia: blighted by Islamists and US meddling

In 2005, the USA scraped together an alliance of warlords which it hoped would rule Somalia from the capital, Mogadishu.

Somalis despised the warlords, and the majority helped the Islamists of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) to oust them in 2006. The UIC offered peace to Mogadishu for the first time in 15 years, and established its rule in most of southern Somalia.

An Ethiopian invasion of Somalia, sponsored by the USA, began in December 2006. It displaced more than a million people and killed close to 15,000 civilians. Eventually Ethiopia was compelled to withdraw the bulk of its troops from Somalia, but millions were left displaced.

A new civil war then opened between factions of the UIC. One, backed by the African Union and based in Mogadishu, has focused on maintaining its international backing and keeping its privileges in Mogadishu. It has done nothing about the food problems arising from Somalia's drought.

Another, al-Shabaab — originally the youth wing of the UIC — has declared its affiliation with al-Qaeda. It preaches about establishing a strict Islamic state. It has failed to put in place even the most limited public services in the areas it controls, and has reneged on the permission it briefly gave to international aid agencies to deliver food to the starving.

It has stopped the local population from organising municipal governments and working with charities to deal with the drought.

The African Union, the UN, the EU and the USA, all preoccupied with geo-strategy, continued to describe the famine as just a drought until 18 July, when it was no longer possible to conceal the deaths of almost 80,000 people from starvation.

The workers, peasants and nomads of Somalia need to create their own democratic government, capable of feeding the people and defeating the warlords and Islamists.

[This article uses information from an article by Abdi Ismail Samatar on al-Jazeera.]

Popes of the market curse the USA's poor

Standard and Poor's, Fitch, and Moody's have got their way. Three relatively small New York finance companies have strong-armed the mighty US government into big cuts in social spending.

Standard and Poor's, Fitch, and Moody's are the "ratings agencies" which had threatened to mark down the US government's IOUs (bonds) to less than 100% good-as-gold. Their threat was so powerful that it pulled into line both the right-wing "Tea Party" Republicans who *wanted* a financial panic so that they could force even bigger social cuts, and Obama and the Democrats, who preferred smaller cuts and reversal of the tax cuts for the rich brought in by George W Bush.

The ratings agencies have intervened powerfully in the eurozone crisis, too. Greek government IOUs (bonds) have had no chance of being rated good-as-gold, but the European Union, the European Central Bank and the eurozone governments laboured hard to avoid having the IOUs labelled "in default" (outright rubbish).

Why are Standard and Poor's, Fitch, and Moody's so powerful?

Because, in capitalism, the market is god. The market god

Tea Party demonstration during the budget talks

sometimes speaks more directly, though just as brutally, as the gods of old religions. Sometimes, as when it's a matter of the trustworthiness of IOUs, the market god needs Popes, Ayatollahs, Bishops, or High Priests to speak for it.

For IOUs, the ratings agencies serve as the Popes of the market god. As with the Pope in the Catholic Church, so with the ratings agencies in the Market Church (capitalism) there is a public convention to see them as infallible even

though privately everyone knows they are human.

Like a Pope preaching anathema to infidels after he has been found out collaborating with the Nazis or conniving in Vatican financial misdeeds, the ratings agencies are revered now only three years after they were shown up in 2008 as having rated lots of bank IOUs good-as-gold when in fact they were dodgy. The agencies' mistakes were a big factor in the 2008 crash.

The governments agree to treat the ratings agencies as the voice of the market god because they think that agreed fiction is necessary for "market discipline" to work — just as an agreement to hear the Pope as inspired by god is necessary for the Catholic Church to work.

Actually, over \$5 trillion of the US government's \$14.3 trillion IOUs are "I-owe-me"s — debts owed to other bits of the USA's public authorities, the Federal Reserve, the USA's social security fund, and so on. There was no real problem about increasing the USA's legal debt limit.

The debt limit row gave the ratings agencies the chance to step in as the voice of the market god, and to enforce social cuts for the poor in a USA where inequality has already been spiralling for decades.

Norwegian massacre: the deadly logic behind Breivik's race war

By Tom Unterrainer

By bomb and by bullet, Anders Behring Breivik delivered mass murder upon Norway. Breivik's lawyer says he thinks his client is probably insane. But Breivik's actions were based upon a cool, considered and in their own terms "rational" political calculation.

On the afternoon of Friday 22 July, a car bomb exploded in the governmental heart of Oslo. Positioned near the office of the Labour prime minister and the offices of the Norwegian Labour Party, the bomb caused considerable damage. A short time later, reports emerged of gunfire on the island of Utoeya, the site of a Labour Party youth camp.

Dressed as a policeman, Breivik calmly hunted down and murdered scores of people on the island. He did so meticulously, selecting a type of ammunition designed to explode inside the human body and putting bullets through the heads of those "playing dead" in the hope of avoiding murder.

Breivik was well prepared in other ways. As the massacre commenced, he posted a fifteen hundred page "manifesto" on the internet. This document helps to trace Breivik's evolution from a socially conservative Christian to the radical right-wing murderer he became.

NORWAY

Norway is a modern, Western liberal democracy. It has an extensive welfare state with free universal health care, heavily subsidised higher education and a robust social security system.

In 2010, the country had the highest human development index in the world. The country has an estimated GDP per capita of \$53,269 and a 3.6% unemployment rate, compared to \$35,289 and 7.6% respectively in the UK.

Historically dominated by the Labour and Conservative parties, the present government is a "Red-Green" coalition between Labour Party, the Socialist Left Party and Centre Party.

As with other Scandinavian, and most European countries, Norway has an organised extreme right-wing and fascist political scene. Unlike its neighbours, they are tiny manifestations with no public presence.

Of Norway's estimated

population of 4.9 million, there are 500,000 immigrants. Of these 500,000, Pakistanis are the largest non-European minority. It is the Pakistani, along with Somali and Iraqi, immigrants that held Breivik's attention.

What concerned Breivik and motivated his right-wing politics was not the state of the Norwegian economy. He and other extreme right-wingers could not point to a divided and obviously corrupt government. They did not and cannot pose themselves as substitute leaders and national saviours of a wrecked and decaying social order.

In the place of appeals to traditional extreme right-wing and fascist dogma, has grown a fixation on the preservation of "national identity". These spurious appeals are set against what is portrayed as a creeping, institutional undermining of the "foundational structures" of this 'identity'. The basis for this "undermining" is specifically Muslim immigration, although more "sophisticated" adherents to this viewpoint trace the problem back much further.

Aided and abetted by "multiculturalists" and "cultural Marxists" in government Muslims (i.e. anyone from Middle Eastern or Asian backgrounds) and their "Islamic" faith are slowly but surely taking over. This belief motivated Breivik's attack on the ruling Labour Party.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

In this world-view there is a highly organised conspiracy with hazy motivations from the top to the bottom of society.

The reality of the bombing of the World Trade Centre, the lives murderously stolen and the destruction wrought upon New York breathed life into the idea. The existence of small but highly organised Islamist clerical-fascist organisations — Al Qaeda being the most obvious — and the barbaric atrocities they commit are the "winner takes all, we told you so" justification for this anti-Muslim racism.

In the UK, both the British National Party and English Defence League have used such ideas to mobilise significant support.

In the oh-so-liberal Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party was delivered into coalition government.

In no-less "liberal" Denmark — where the na-

tional flag is joyously waved at all opportunities — a significant right-wing political group, the Danish People's Party has 25 seats in parliament.

In Norway, the "Progress Party" came second in the 2009 parliamentary elections. This party calls for greater restrictions on immigration but is essentially a social conservative grouping. As such, it doesn't offer a political home for the likes of Breivik.

So what do you do if you're convinced that Muslims are attempting to "colonise" Europe? What do you do if you believe that this "colonisation" heralds "catastrophic consequences" for non-Muslims? What course of action do you take if you are politically marginalised and ignored?

There is only one course of action open to you: political terror. But this was not political terror as martyrdom. Breivik's life was not taken for the "good of the cause". His actions and the preservation of his life seem deliberate. According to his manifesto, the murders were a "preparation phase" for "armed struggle" to come. The "armed struggle" he envisions will be a race war. A war of the "West" against Muslims. A war to ethnically cleanse Europe. A war of national

and racial preservation.

Breivik's race war is the "rational" conclusion of the logic operating at the heart of wide-spread anti-Muslim racism. This same logic operates in the politics of both the BNP and EDL.

Whether we can short-circuit this logic (in either its micro or macro forms) will be a test of independent working-class politics both in Britain and further afield. The fragmentation of the BNP and the ever-rightward moving trajectory of the EDL — its fractures, splits and disputes included — pose fundamental challenges.

Against the Breiviks, the Wilders, the Griffins and the Robinsons we pose the real and necessary prospect of working-class anti-racism and anti-fascism.

Against those who buy even a little of the anti-Muslim racism these characters thrive upon we pose the real history of the world and the real history of our class.

Against the conspiracies and racial hatred, we pose the material realities and contradictions that govern and form reality.

Against those who demand race war, we say unite as a class and fight exploitation and oppression in whatever manifestation.

Silvio Berlusconi and Giulio Tremonti

Italy: power, corruption and debts

By Hugh Edwards

In last May's administrative elections, and a national referendum that followed, tens of millions of Italians gave an unequivocal thumbs down to Silvio Berlusconi. So general and widespread was the feeling of triumph and hope that many believed an Italian "spring" was in the offing.

However so far there has been only increased misery and a mounting sense of helpless desperation. This was magnified dramatically by the money markets' flight from Italian treasury bonds, revealing the stark truth about the Italian economy and its jerry-built financial system.

Under pressure from the Northern League's Umberto Bossi and Roberto Maroni to regain lost public support, Berlusconi proposed a budget to axe large swathes of public services, health and education, which would cut taxes, protect and favour the commercial, artisanal and professional classes.

Berlusconi's budget sharpened an already smouldering conflict with "superminister" of the economy, Giulio Tremonti, whose austerity programme has won him credit with the national and international bourgeoisie as being the only figure reliable enough to run the country.

Tremonti faced his boss down, and from that moment the credit the money markets had in the Berlusconi government slowly began to dry up.

The process was exacerbated by the revelations of several more scandals of widescale corruption involving government figures, judges and executives; an official report revealed that 89 of the deputies and senators in the Italian parliament are criminals, on remand or

under investigation, while a further nine have had their sentencing timed-out.

The bulk of the cases involve fraud, bribery and/or association with one or other of the mafia. The bulk of them belonged to the government. Facts further underlined by more data from the regional assembly of Sicily, where one in three of the 95 or so representatives were incriminated.

Right now there are at least two major criminal investigations against members of the regime — apart from the three involving the boss himself!

The links between the business world, public admin, and judiciary in vast networks of corrupt association are redolent of both the "bribesville" scandal of the early 1990s which brought down the Christian Democratic government and the conspiracies of the powerful Masonic lodge of P2 in an earlier period.

Something of the same-sorts of things are going on now, underlined by the fact that the new deal hammered out a few weeks ago in Brussels around Greece's debt has failed to reassure the markets that the Berlusconi regime has a future and that the chronically stagnant economy is not heading for recession. Now another €48 billion worth of cuts has been announced — supposedly to restore balance to the public finances by 2014.

Meanwhile the interest the country is now paying on its debt — around 6% — instantly puts it in debt by another €20 billion, unsustainable if it were to continue for any appreciable length of time.

Now also comes news that Tremonti is himself at the centre of a growing scandal involving a fellow deputy and a business company offered favours.

The Italian ship is heading for the rocks.

US budget cuts: the class war is back

On Monday 1 August Democrat and Republican members in the US House of Representatives voted through a cuts package of more than \$2 trillion over the next 10 years. The deal ended weeks of wrangling that could have resulted in the US defaulting on its debts.

But these huge cuts at the state level follow cuts, and attacks on unions at a federal level. The following editorial* from the July-August edition of *Against the Current*, the journal of US socialist group Solidarity, describes the political lines of those attacks.

The full frontal assault on public workers and their unions in one state after another — stripping collective bargaining rights and dues check-off, slashing wages and pensions and health benefits, abolishing seniority and tenure for teachers, mandating yearly decertification votes, threatening jail terms for strikers — is as massive and instantaneous as it was unexpected by the labor bureaucracy and many union members. To say “the class war is back” is an understatement.

In our home state of Michigan alone, 40 anti-labor laws have been enacted or are pending. Those already passed through the Republican-dominated legislature and signed by governor Rick “smart nerd” Snyder include “Emergency Manager” statutes giving state-appointed managers license to eliminate union contracts and even dissolve the elected governing bodies of financially distressed school districts and entire municipalities.

The Republicans on the whole serve a single master — corporate capital.

In some cases, as in the notorious case of Wisconsin governor Walker, they even work directly for bil-

lionaire fractions of the ruling class like the infamous Koch brothers. Union-busting legislation is literally drawn up in the offices of rightwing think tanks funded by these super-rich sponsors.

The [Democrats’] overriding loyalty is to corporate capital, especially its largest donors from Wall Street and the hedge funds — and to the capitalist system. The higher up the party leadership, the stronger the discipline imposed by capital.

Yet the Democrats can succeed only by delivering benefits to their key voting base — labor, the African-American and other communities of color, women seeking gender equality and reproductive rights.

There are occasions... when Democrats at lower levels act honorably, especially in response to the pressure of mass movements — and the fact that the destruction of public sector unions threatens the party’s funding base. The 14 Wisconsin state Senate Democrats who left the state, blocking the quorum necessary to pass Governor Walker’s union-smashing law, showed real courage and fighting spirit.

The record of the Democrats in power, however, is appalling and demoralising to their support base. But the biggest lessons about politics [under Obama], of course, are EFCA — the Employee Free Choice Act, dumped in an unmarked grave without even a decent burial — and Health Care Reform.

In a period of capitalist decline and crisis — as opposed to the boom times of growth and prosperity — it’s really true that “you can’t serve two masters” with fundamentally opposed class interests, and so this is a game that Democrats will usually lose. But movements that attach themselves to the Democrats at such a time will al-

ways lose.

Even while the intensity and pure viciousness of the rightwing assault on labor creates almost unbearable pressures to back the Democrats as “the only alternative,” the real-life need for independent politics is greater than ever.

WHAT NEXT?

The game-of-chicken over a government shutdown around the federal budget ended, for the moment, with a highly praised “bipartisan compromise” that hacks away billions from medical programs for children and the poor — those who need them most. It’s a taste of what’s to come in the next war over raising the federal debt ceiling.

Backed by ideological centers like the Peterson Institute and Cato Institute, the right wing is preparing a frontal assault on Social Security, on the pretext that “the next generation can’t afford the burden of Baby Boom retirees,” that “only the truly poor really need Social Security” and all the rest of it.

Obama and the Democrats... are getting ready to offer “reforms” that will further weaken working people’s confidence that Social Security will be there for them in the long run.

Social Security is neither in “crisis” nor the cause of the deficit. It has produced consistent surpluses for decades, which are used to subsidise US capitalism’s assorted wars, tax reductions for corporations and the rich, etc.

Far from a “failed government program,” it is the most successful one ever, and can be funded permanently by lifting the artificial ceiling on incomes taxed to finance it — which is precisely why it’s now in the reactionaries’ crosshairs.

The attack on Social Security is a quite deliberate, frontal assault on the notion that society’s members bear any kind of collective, organised responsibility for each other. “Your Health Care, Your Problem” was a sign seen at Tea Party rallies trashing the health care reform. It’s an ideology with some appeal to relatively better-off, mostly white working

people — until the attack directly hits them.

The right wing offensive faces contradictions, however. The Republican sweep of the House of Representatives in November, 2010 occurred before the party was quite “ready for prime time.” The Tea Party fringe, with its insistence on lunatic cuts that even the Republican leadership knows would be ruinous, presents a challenge to party discipline. Some of these same elements’ fanatical commitment to cutting things like Planned Parenthood and public broadcasting... may generate a big public backlash.

The bigger contradiction is that the savagery of the state-level assaults on public sector workers has stirred up, at long last, a massive labor response.

THE RESISTANCE

The fact is that the new [anti-union] laws are now on state statute books, aside from the legal challenge in Wisconsin over the blatant way the Republicans rammed it through.

There are recall initiatives in Wisconsin and per-

haps elsewhere against some of these legislators, and that’s entirely to the good. It’s still to be seen whether these recall drives can retain their momentum and unseat the reactionaries — and if they do, whether the next set of elected politicians will aggressively repeal the union-busting laws or set about “negotiating” over them.

This attack demands radical, new independent politics, not a recycling of the same old lesser-evil corporate politics.

Today’s battle isn’t one that the unions can win on their own, especially in the shriveled state of organised labour. A new, massive worker-led popular movement is the need of the hour.

Saving public education, for example, requires deeply rooted teacher-parent-community alliances; it can’t be done by the teacher unions alone.

Where public employees’ strikes are met with firings and jail sentences, the entire labor movement and communities will need to rally behind them.

The stark reality is that the present political and legal climate — and the state of unions themselves in both public and private sectors — leaves workers with few effective tools to defeat the rightwing assault. New tools for resistance will have to be creatively forged in the midst of struggle itself, always a difficult problem.

Millions of people, including many who actually voted for these Republican governors, now see through the lying propaganda of the fanatical privateers and budget-slashing “free-market” fundamentalists.

It’s not just that class war is back — it’s that more and more people can see and feel it.

*Abridged. Full text here: www.solidarity-us.org/current/node/33080

Resisting bosses’ greed in China and South Korea

By Gerry Bates

China’s people and its media have defied state censorship to condemn the government’s development drive, which is coming with a terrible cost.

After a high-speed rail crash on 24 July which killed 39 people, questions are being asked about the real motivations behind projects such as the high-speed railway and the Jiaozhou Bay sea-bridge, which opened in late June

2011 despite fears that it was not safe.

In the immediate aftermath of the rail crash, the Chinese government appeared unwilling to respond to questions about the incident and attempted to prevent the national media from probing too deeply into what had happened, leading to accusations of a cover-up. The high-speed railway was also involved in significant controversy earlier in the year when a state audit revealed corruption and em-

bezzlement by its financial backers. The clear signal is that, for the Chinese government, “development” is not aimed at improving the lives of Chinese people but at improving the finances of the country’s super-rich and improving the state’s position as a major world-player in international trade.

China’s flagship newspaper, *The People’s Daily*, (usually supportive of the state) said that China does not need economic growth that is smeared in blood.

China’s workers, without whom projects like the high-speed railway and the Jiaozhou Bay bridge could never have been built in the first place, hold the key to overthrowing a state power that puts profits and prestige first and human life second.

In South Korea, Police used water cannon and tear gas against 10,000 Korean workers and their families marching to a Hanjin Heavy Industries shipyard on July 9-10.

Kim Jin-suk, who was sacked by the company in 1987, and who is now a leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, has been occupying — 35 metres up in a shipyard’s crane since January — to protests against job losses.

Arrest warrants for union leaders have been issued and some 50 supporters have been arrested and released. The company is suing for 5.3 billion won in damages. Under Korea’s Penal Code 314, or “Obstruction of Business”, com-

panies are allowed to file criminal charges and seek imprisonment or damages claims against individuals and unions taking legitimate industrial action.

The dispute started in December, when Hanjin workers walked out in protest against the planned layoff of 400 workers. The company, in turn, closed the shipyard.

•See www.labourstart.org for more details and an email urgent action appeal.

Qaddafi must go!

By Dan Katz

On Wednesday 27 July Britain became the latest state to recognise the rebel National Transition Council (NTC) as the “sole [Libyan] governmental authority”.

30 countries, including the United States, have now recognised the NTC. UK Foreign Secretary, William Hague declared, “This decision reflects the National Transitional Council’s increasing legitimacy, competence and success in reaching out to Libyans across the country.”

In London a Libyan diplomat was summoned to the Foreign Office to be told all Qaddafi officials must pack their bags and leave.

The NTC had been complaining that many of the financial promises made to it by foreign governments at the start of the civil war had not been met. Recognition allows the British government to unfreeze £91m in assets from a Libyan oil company. Austria also plans to free \$1.7bn.

Backed by airstrikes, the anti-Qaddafi fighters have been making military progress on three fronts – around Brega, west of Misrata, and south of Tripoli in the Western mountains. The military-diplomatic stranglehold on Qaddafi is producing shortages in Tripoli; for example, residents queuing for petrol need to wait a week to fill up.

Qaddafi’s regime was subjected to extensive sanctions in the 1990s, and it has now reactivated the old smuggling routes it used then. Much of Qaddafi’s petrol now comes through Algeria — although the rebels seem close to cutting the road routes being used.

The western powers had been concerned about the reliability of the NTC and the possible presence of Islamists among its fighters. They calculate the rebels will win, sooner or later, and are now manoeuvring to shape the settlement

and Libya’s future.

This week William Hague suggested Qaddafi may not have to go into exile should he leave power — saying it was a “question for the Libyans”.

Since it is difficult to see how internal exile could work it seems that the British — and others in Western governments — are signalling to Qaddafi that the details of his departure are negotiable.

The West does not want a rebel victory following fighting on the streets of Tripoli. The Western states want some sort of negotiated end – as one diplomat put it, candidly – not a black and white ending, but something “a little grubbier”.

The day after Hague recognised the NTC the top rebel military commander, Abdel Fattah Younes was murdered. NTC minister Ali Tarhouni claimed he was killed by members of the Obaida Ibn Jarrah Brigade, an Islamist group.

No doubt the British government is both alarmed and embarrassed by the killing. Tory Defence Secretary Liam Fox declared that as Libyan democracy developed the militants would “have to be marginalised”. He spelt it out: “The key to the Libyan resolution will be whether or not the close circle around Colonel Qaddafi recognise that he will sooner or later have to leave power. When the penny drops that that is inevitable, then you’re likely to see the sort of change in the political momentum that we’ve been looking for.”

The struggle for democracy activists in Libya will be to ensure that it is the change they’re looking for — the complete overthrow and dismantlement of Qaddafi’s regime — that wins out, and not the negotiated escape-route their fairweather “allies” in the British government appear to want to offer the tyrant.

Working-class protest sweeps Israel

By Shlomo Anker

The last few weeks have seen the most powerful protest movement in Israel’s history on issues not relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On 30 July, a series of huge demonstrations took place across the country, involving 150,000 people (Israel’s population is slightly over one tenth of the UK’s). The movement has been so powerful that it has won words of support from centrist Kadima party, and even prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu has conceded some ground. Kadima, like all liberals, love to “vote with the wind.” They jump on the band wagon when they see a movement has public support. The fact that such heartless opportunists are supporting the protests is proof of their power.

It started when a small group set up tents to protest the poor housing situation in Tel Aviv, on the highly expensive Rothschild Boulevard. The media, which in Israel tends to be a little less anti-protest than the British media, quickly reported on these events, and other direct action protests mushroomed dramatically. Many people who are active in other struggles joined in setting up tents at Rothschild Boulevard, to the point where the protest dominated this major street in central Tel Aviv.

Some in the media claimed that the protesters were all middle class, called them cry babies, spoilt kids, etc. Some may be the children of middle-class parents, but privilege has not necessarily trickled down. In reality these protesters, many of whom work for the minimum wage or just above, are very much working class.

The focus at this point was on housing. Tel Aviv residents suffer similar problems to those in London, and Netanyahu is a disciple of Thatcherism. As the movement has grown, the focus has broadened to take in other demands around education, healthcare and other social services. Activist Daphni Leef said: “We do not want to replace the government, we want much more than that — to change the rules of the game and say loud and clear: Social services are rights, not commodities.”

After the first few days of these direct actions, a demon-

stration was called in Tel Aviv for 24 June, attracting 20-30,000 people. On that day the protest movement replaced the Israeli-Palestinian war as the main focus of the news. The trade unions publicly came out in support of the movement and helped to organise a new series of protests. Most people expected a similar turnout to 24 July, but this time 150,000 came out – the equivalent of a million demonstrators in Britain. The movement has seen protests of 8,000 in Haifa and 10,000 in Jerusalem. In cities like Nazareth, protests have involved both Jews and Arabs.

The exact political opinions of those who began the movement are unclear, but at this stage there is not an immediately apparent overlap with activists in the anti-Occupation movement. However, some members of the Anarchists Against the Wall group have taken part in the tent city protests.

In the big demonstrations, a number of Israeli revolutionary socialists have come out of the woodwork. A far-left exists in Israel (the Committee for a Workers’ International, led by the Socialist Party, has a section there, named Ma’avak, and other groups also operate) but left groups tend to be focused on the Palestinian issue. It is mainly due to the role of Hadash, Israel’s largest left-wing organisation (at the centre of which is the ex-Stalinist Communist Party), that red flags and other socialist imagery have been seen on the demos. Some of the chants have been revolutionary, and a headline in *Ha’aretz* used the word “revolution” to describe the movement.

The Meretz party, (essentially liberal social democrats), were also present. But the average protester seems to have been the young Israeli who is at best semi-political, not a member of any group and shaky on the Palestinian issue. Whenever the country is attacked by a bomb or missile, they tend to get scared and retreat into their right-wing tortoise shell, and give at least passive support to the government against the Palestinians. But when the situation is calmer, this mass of the secular Jewish population leans left on this question too.

How the Palestine issue and the current movement will interrelate remains to be seen.

Egypt: rev

By Clive Bradley

It is six months since the fall of Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak, and in that time, although intense struggles have continued throughout the Arab world, especially in Libya and Syria (probably the two most repressive Arab states), as yet no other dictators have fallen.

Egypt remains, however, central to the future of these revolutions: it is the most populous Arab country, with the most developed political culture. In the last six months, a whole range of new political parties have come into being; extremely sophisticated political and ideological debates have taken place; and the most important, if not the first, genuine workers’ movement of the Arab “East” has come into being.

On 8 July, Cairo’s Tahrir Square, symbol of the January revolution, was reoccupied by protestors in a new “day of rage”, and many of them are still there. The demands of these new protests reflect the growing impatience of the mass movement with the military government that removed Mubarak. Key revolutionary demands have not been met — most important, the repeal of the Emergency Laws that have been in place since Mubarak came to power, in 1981 — or, like the prosecution of the Mubarak family and others from the old regime, are proceeding only very slowly. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), which has ruled Egypt since February, has inevitably proved unable to address the profound underlying economic issues which underlay the revolution. Mass unemployment continues; workers have very low wages and are often not paid at all.

The military government, indeed, has introduced new repressive laws — and has continued to arrest activists — some 10,000 — many of whom are tried by military courts even though they are civilians. The abolition of this system is another demand of recent protests.

But the army’s ability to impose its will is curtailed. New repressive laws were used to arrest workers from the Petrojet company protesting outside the Ministry of Petroleum. The workers were tried in a military court and found guilty — but only received suspended sentences.

CONSTITUTION

One issue which was studiously kept out of the July demonstrations, however, was that of the constitution — debate about which had dominated national politics for the previous few months.

Parliamentary elections had been scheduled for September — though they have now been delayed. The new parliament will select a 100-member body to draw up a new constitution.

Most of the liberal-left, and more radical forces, have argued against this system, insisting instead that the constitution be written before elections. Their concerns have been three-fold: first, to make sure that newer parties have time to organise properly (especially in local areas) before elections take place; second, that the new constitution clearly defines the army’s role, ensuring that it withdraws from politics; and finally — connected to the first — that the Muslim Brotherhood, the best-organised political party and likely to be the largest in parliament, isn’t able to dictate the new constitution.

The Brotherhood, which has been extremely close to the military government, eventually decided to support the July protests.

If one feature of the broad movement now is a growing impatience with the SCAF, the other is growing divisions within the movement itself. Some of the youth movements which emerged during the revolution are suspicious of, or hostile to, political parties as such.

In Tahrir Square, for example, some semi-anarchist groups tried to prevent a meeting being held by the Workers Democratic Party — on the grounds that political parties are the problem.

But this event perhaps underscores another, deeper division — activists’ attitudes to the continuing struggles of the new workers’ movement.

What tipped the balance in February was escalating national strike action — especially in the Suez canal area, with its key economic role. Strikes have continued unabated since; and an entire, new labour movement has been born.

Perhaps 150 new, independent unions have been created. Some of these are relatively small caucuses in huge workplaces; but many are mass unions in the most important industries and workplaces — such as the textile plants in

revolution reignites

Syria: regime sinks to new low

By Dan Katz

The Syrian state under Bashar al-Assad used tank fire and heavy machine guns on Sunday 31 July as the army overran barricades erected by the citizens of Hama. 500 000 had marched in Hama on Friday 29 demanding “the regime must go!”

Shooting wildly, soldiers attacked mainly peaceful demonstrators who — amazingly, bravely — ran into the firing from the ramshackle barriers, demanding the tanks stop. The Syrian National Organisation for Human Rights estimates 142 people died on Sunday in Hama and three other Syrian towns.

It seems the regime wants to break the protests before the start of the month of Ramadan on 1 August. They fear that Syrians will use daily attendance at Mosques during Ramadan to step-up protests.

The demonstrations have been growing; on each Friday during July one million have marched.

HAMA MASSACRE

Hama is a conservative Sunni town of 800,000 in the west of Syria. It was the site of a notorious massacre in February 1982 when Assad’s father, Hafez Assad, put down an Islamist rising, killing 20,000 people.

According to the campaigning organisation Avaaz, the regime has now butchered 1634 people during the four and a half months of the pro-democracy uprising. Avaaz claims a further 2918 people have disappeared. Thousands have been arrested and many tortured.

The regime says “armed gangs”, who have been “vandalising public and private property”, are responsible for the violence. In fact the violence is being orchestrated by the military and secret police, flanked by pro-regime, sectarian gangs called Shabiha (Ghosts). The press attaché at the US embassy in Damascus described the government’s version of events as, “completely delusional. They are making up fanciful stories that no one believes.”

Without any sense of irony — given their own poisonous interventions in the affairs of Lebanon, Palestine and Israel — the Syrian state has complained about foreign interference in its internal affairs.

Although there have been no major splits in the government forces there have been regular, smaller-scale defections as troops refuse to fire, or switch sides. To overthrow the regime a significant rebellion in state forces must take place.

Although Western governments have condemned the crackdown in Syria, and imposed sanctions, there have been few protests from Arab states.

Scores of Syrians protested outside the Arab League office in central Cairo last week demanding the pan-Arab organisation oppose the state’s violence.

Slogans included: “We condemn Arab silence at what is taking place in Syria.”



Army forces attempt to clear out Tahrir Square as Egypt’s protest movement revives in opposition to the military government

Mehalla al-Kubra north of Cairo and the Suez Canal. Some workers who were not even organised by the old state-run unions are part of this new movement.

In Sadat City, on the outskirts of Cairo, a largely non-unionised workforce was one of the lures provided by the state to foreign investors. Now 50,000 workers — in textiles, iron and steel, and ceramics — are represented by eight new unions and a city-wide labour council, which have joined the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions.

In the Suez Canal itself an extremely militant strike has been going on for six weeks — involving sit-ins and confrontations with the army. Workers in subsidiary companies of the Suez Canal Authority have been demanding parity with their public-sector equivalents (a 40% raise), bonuses and better benefits.

NATIONAL INTEREST

The bourgeois parties, and some of the revolutionary youth movements, hold that these workers’ demands and struggles are divisive and “sectional”, and should be restrained in the “national interest”. The truth is, for a worker who has not been paid in two months, “restraint” is impossible.

As yet the new workers’ movement, although it has proven itself a real force in national politics, has no political voice of its own. There are initiatives in that direction, notably the already-mentioned Workers Democratic Party (whose main activists seem to be from the Revolutionary Socialists group, but which does include important workers’ leaders).

Such initiatives are very new, and financially-restrictive laws make it unlikely they will be able to participate in the forthcoming elections.

Polls still suggest the Muslim Brotherhood will be the largest group in the parliament — although one poll, at least, indicated the Brotherhood could only rely on 15% of the vote. The Brothers — anxious to reassure, in particular, the Obama administration, have promised not to field candidates in more than 50% of seats. (The elections involve an extremely complex system, part of which is PR).

In practice it’s not clear what this will mean. The Muslim Brothers have officially formed a party — the Peace and Jus-

tice Party; but there are in total five parties which have emerged from the Brotherhood in the past months (in addition to the Centre Party — a split in the 1990s). These new parties seem to be at serious loggerheads with each other, indicating, perhaps, a crisis in the movement.

The most significant of these is the Egyptian Current Party, formed by 4,000 (mainly) youth expelled by the central leadership. These are Brotherhood activists who were involved, for instance, in protests against Israel’s war in Gaza and who have been, it seems, influenced by the secular left.

They believe in a separation between religion and politics, which represents an enormous break with the politics of the parent movement.

International unions slam Egypt’s government on workers’ rights

On 21 June the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) wrote a letter of protest to the acting Egyptian prime minister, Essam Sharaf, denouncing Decree No. 34 — drafted and approved by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces — which criminalises strikes and protest actions.

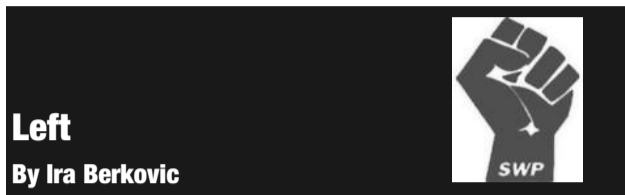
The ITUC describes the Decree as a “backward step,” that would “lead to legal disaster.” An ITUC report of 28 July, surveying Egypt’s labour laws, comments: “Exemptions from certain labour provisions in export processing zones, combined with poor enforcement of the law, have resulted in rights abuses and poor working conditions there. Furthermore a law passed by the new government in March 2011 denies the right to strike.”

The government that emerged from the Egyptian uprising is opposed to workers’ rights and the workers’ movement. The ITUC complain that child labour is widespread: “There are between 2.7 million and 5.5 million working children, amounting to 6 -13% of children aged 5-14, and the worst forms of child labour are common.” Moreover, “forced labour is a serious problem.

The government has been slow in reacting to cases of forced labour and trafficking.”

Activists carry the coffin of, amongst others, Ibrahim Qashoush, a firefighter from Hama who wrote poetry and songs in support the uprising. His throat was cut out by pro-regime forces.

Workers: unite to smash EDL



The English Defence League plans to march through Tower Hamlets in East London (an area with a large Asian, mostly Muslim, population) on 3 September. As racist violence has been a feature wherever the EDL has held large mobilisations, working-class activists in Tower Hamlets and beyond need to organise to confront the EDL and prevent them from marching. Unfortunately, that is not the strategy on offer in Tower Hamlets right now.

We need a direct-action anti-fascist movement based on working-class, socialist politics that can physically confront the far-right in the streets and provide a political alternative for disenfranchised workers drawn to the EDL or BNP.

What we have instead from the left in Tower Hamlets is a second-time-as-farce recapitulation of the Stalinist popular fronts of the 1930s. These were anti-fascist initiatives launched by Communist Parties across Europe which aimed to unite workers' organisations with "progressive sections" of the ruling-class — anyone from senior religious figures to eccentric aristocrats to liberal bosses.

In contrast, Leon Trotsky proposed "united front" tactics — seeking unity only with organisations *within* the working-class, reformist and revolutionary. Trotsky argued that, as fascism grew on the despair and misery created by capitalist economic policies, it could not be fought in alliance with the people responsible for those policies.

Sadly, even the Socialist Workers' Party, Britain's biggest "Trotskyist" group, has forgotten the lessons of that period. The campaign to build the "No Place for Hate" demonstration (a "celebration of diversity" planned for the day of the EDL's march), led by Unite Against Fascism (which is controlled by the SWP) is courting religious figures and the local bourgeois political establishment.

While it is impressive that the campaign mobilised more than 500 people for a rally in Whitechapel's London Muslim Centre, the list of speakers (bishop after imam, rabbi after bishop...) shows the campaign is not being given working-class or socialist content by its nominally socialist leaders.

The campaign needs more democracy: currently there are no regular, open meetings giving local activists an input into the organisation of the event. There is no space to debate strategy, to question the "celebration of diversity" backed by local religious and political officialdom. No chance to argue for a militant counter-demonstration to stop the EDL from marching. Meanwhile the other main anti-fascist organisation — Searchlight/Hope not Hate — are calling for a ban on the EDL marching. Bans (by the local council in this case) are not the way to oppose the far right.

Many people in local Asian communities are religious and the mosque will represent a socio-political centre of gravity for them. But the same was true of the synagogues in the 1930s when Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts threatened to march through the Jewish East End. Then the Independent Labour Party (who, rather than the Stalinist Communist Party, were the real builders of the movement that led to the Battle of Cable Street) related directly to Jewish workers on a class basis and appealed to them to unite with non-Jewish workers to confront the fascists, even if that meant breaking with their conservative religious leaders.

Predictably, the SWP campaign is attempting to invoke the spirit of Cable Street in its publicity. But in reality it is closer to the policy of the Communist Party — which, until it was forced by external and internal pressure to u-turn, planned to oppose the fascist threat by holding a popular-frontist rally in Trafalgar Square.

Unless similar pressure can be applied in Tower Hamlets, the "No Place for Hate" event will be the modern echo of that rally; a cleric-dominated proclamation of why workers should line up behind their bosses to resist racism.

If the EDL are to be physically confronted on 3 September, those of us who believe class politics and direct action are needed will have to organise independently.

Last August's rout of the EDL in Bradford, where AWL members, anarchists, and other independent anti-fascists linked up with local Asian youth (defying advice from the mosque and Muslim councillors to limit themselves to "peaceful" — passive — demonstration) to drive the EDL out of town, showed that working-class Muslims usually have better instincts than the conservative religious and political leaders of their communities with whom the SWP insist they must unite.

The voice of power

Martyn Hudson reviews *The Stranger's Child* by Allan Hollinghurst

It would be odd if book reviews in socialist newspapers spent much time reviewing novels about obscure dead aristocrats. It would look like the usual *Independent on Sunday*, *Sunday Times* or *Observer* books pages which are chock full of pastoral, aristocratic, nostalgic publications of dubious literary worth.

The ubiquity of this kind of stuff has led to writers like James Kelman largely boycotting literary events and festivals and the kind of bourgeois literary diet which is the staple of the assumed reading public in the UK — those who speak "with the accent of the cultural elite in this country, the middle to upper-middle-class RP voice, the voice of authority, the voice of power".

This reflex has led to new fictional directions, exploring subaltern voices of which the most successful have been Kelman himself on the Scottish working class, John Berger on peasant and migrant voices, and John McGahern on Irish rural labour. Yet these writers have come from the margins, the fringes of the British isles. Metropolitan working-class voices have been paradoxically heard less.

It might be argued that in the metropolitan crime fiction of people like David Peace and others the urban working class experience has found its voice — certainly in the US the greatest current exponent of the voice of working-class communities are crime writers like Dennis Lehane and Elmore Leonard.

Yet we would fall into a trap if we admired only "prole" fiction and didn't pay any attention to the best of the kind of literature which gives a hearing to the ruling class voices of the immediate past. This is not about just "understanding the enemy", but to recognise that no part of human experience is alien to us and in understanding the historical elimination of declining class formations, we more fully understand the kind of world that we want to bring into being.

Am I pointing to Alan Hollinghurst as some kind of second rate Nancy Mitford or Waugh style novelist? No. Hollinghurst is one of the great stylists of the English novel. An openly gay writer, he addresses the frictions and fissures in homosexual experience as it is filtered through the British class system even if most of the time it is as a middle-class observer of the vagaries of ruling class sexual mores.

His 2004 Booker Prize-winning *The Line of Beauty* dis-

cussed sexuality and its moral repercussions in the context of a thinly disguised Tory grandee family and from the observation point of a young student. It was a masterpiece of precision and honesty — matched only in these isles by Colm Toibin's similar analysis of homosexuality and the Irish class system — which is stylistically comparable.

The Stranger's Child is very different to *The Line of Beauty* in context if not in tone. It recounts the story of a grand aristocrat, Cecil Teucer Valance, who visits the suburban family home of his lover George. Over a weekend he writes a long poem about the house called *Two Acres*. He subsequently dies in the First World War and the poem and the weekend pass into literary legend.

The rest of the novel follows the consequences of that weekend in the respective fates of the families of Cecil and George. At points throughout the narrative the lost and hidden truths of that weekend reveal themselves.

It seems to me that there are three issues of great significance dealt with here.

First, the attempt to eliminate the historical experience of homosexuality in official records of the 20th century. The attempt of Queer Theory to readdress that history is largely doomed because of the self-censorship of the historical protagonists. Linked to this is an attempt by Hollinghurst to understand the nostalgia that the First World War seems to have for novelists.

Second, the book witnesses the historical destruction of architectural and literary Victoriana and its accompanying morality and the class structure that created it. The final victory of the suburban schoolboys in the novel and their penetration into the secrets of the lordly classes signify a clear shift in the class system of Britain in the 20th century — bank clerks becoming poets as one character describes it.

Finally, Hollinghurst attempts to address a clear question — in what sense does the culture of the British ruling class brutalise, cage, and ultimately morally and physically destroy its own children? Just because the working class is the class with radical chains that will destroy capital doesn't mean that the revolution will not bring liberation to all humanity. The emotional slavery of the characters in the novel testify to the worth of a liberatory politics of sexuality and class which is relevant to all of us.

Speaking truth to power is the task of emancipatory politics. Speaking truth about oneself when you are part of the class that has political and cultural power is something else again. Hollinghurst has made those voices live in the very act of their dying.

Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln

Dan Katz reviews *An Unfinished Revolution: Karl Marx and Abraham Lincoln* by Robin Blackburn

This book is available for a bit more than £8 on Amazon, which makes it a bargain.

The author — Robin Blackburn — is a former editor of *New Left Review*, and has previously written two good books on slavery (*The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery* and *The Making of New World Slavery*).

Unfinished Revolution is divided into two sections: a 100 page introduction, followed by 150 pages of documents. It is a long time since I bought a new book which includes a section of historical writings — in this case from Marx, Engels, Lincoln and others. It makes a good change to find a writer who thinks readers should study historical sources.

Blackburn's introduction is interesting, but is an odd political shape. He starts by contrasting Lincoln with Marx — but can't go too far because Lincoln is assassinated at the end of the civil war, in April 1865 (and the period of post-war Reconstruction does not end until 1877). The last section of Blackburn's essay is a brief overview of the development of the working class movement in the wake of the American North's victory.

Blackburn makes one claim which seems wrong, and — more important — fails to make one criticism of Marx which should be made. The two are connected.

The false claim is this:

"Marx and Engels were often uneasy about the narrow mindedness of their American followers, but they were themselves partly responsible for this, since they had not yet developed a conception of the different character of trade unions on the one hand and political parties on the other." This seems, at the very least, a little harsh; by the late 1860s Marx and Engels had been discussing the question of trade unionism for more than 20 years.

Marx and Engels had been the first major figures in the socialist movement "to adopt a position of support to trade unions and trade unions on principle" (Draper, *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*, Vol. 2), waging a war on sectarians in

the movement. And, on the other hand, recognising the limitations of trade unions, Marx urged the unions towards politics. As early as 1853 Draper quotes Marx from the *New York Tribune* expecting unions to carry their work over into political action.

I think Robin Blackburn is right to criticise Marx and blame him, to some degree, for the narrowness of his US supporters — but not for the lack of a clear idea of the difference between trade union and political action (as Blackburn notes, this was not true in Germany or France, where Marx discussed the question, with clarity, at length).

Rather, the criticism should be different. Right the way through his writings on the US civil war Marx failed to clearly differentiate his supporters, and the workers, from Lincoln's camp. And the clearest evidence for this is the open letters Marx wrote for the First International to Lincoln in January 1865 and to his successor, Andrew Johnson, in May 1865 (both printed in this book).

The letter to Lincoln — a cautious war leader against slavery and an enthusiastic advocate of capitalism — begins, "We congratulate the American people on your re-election", and continues, describing Lincoln as the "single-minded son of the working class" who had led his country through a "matchless struggle for the rescue of an enchained race." At this time that Lincoln was battling radicals in his own party over the rights former slaves should expect in Reconstructed southern states.

There is not much sense in Marx's writings of the need for differentiation inside the Northern camp. The reason appears to be this idea, at the end of Marx's letter to Lincoln: "the American war of Independence initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American anti-slavery war will do for the working classes."

Marx appears to be saying: first the war over slavery, then the workers. He would have done better to remember his own conclusions following the revolutions of 1848: for working class independence.

The school that practises educational apartheid

By Patrick Yarker

In the early 1980s, Crown Woods School was London's largest comprehensive. It had a thriving Sixth Form. It had a "farm" which students tended, and a Rural Studies course. It had a ham radio set-up. Unusually for a state school, it even had a boarding wing. Over two thousand students were on the school's roll. They came from a wide area of South-East London, and spoke between them several dozen different languages. But the students of the class of 1981 could have been no more apprehensive walking through the school's entrance-foyer to start the school year than I was. Crown Woods was my first teaching-post.

The school I knew and worked in for almost twenty years has recently ceased to exist. Its entrance-foyer, classrooms, labs, gyms and workshops will shortly be razed to the ground. In its place, newly-built at a cost of £50 million and financed by a PFI scheme, Crown Woods College has opened.

The College is distinguished not only by new modern facilities, but also by a way of seeing and treating students fundamentally hostile to the values of comprehensive education which the school I knew had helped pioneer. The ethos of Crown Woods College exemplifies instead the values of edu-business and the marketisation of organised learning. It is now a school for our regressive times.

Crown Woods College presents itself as four schools in one. Each "mini-school" has a discrete set of buildings, open spaces, staff hierarchy and organisation, and student population. In its publicity the school says this approach is akin to the US system of "schools within schools". But the guiding principle at Crown Woods College is not to do with the creation of smaller, more autonomous learning-communities. It has nothing in common with the movement for Human Scale Education, whose hallmarks are democracy, fairness and respect.

Crown Woods College adopts an old strategy, the nub of which is academic selection. Cohorts of students are divided up on the basis of test-scores achieved at Primary School and teacher-predictions about future test-scores. This mechanism purports to ensure that each mini-school contains students only of broadly-similar "ability". There is therefore a mini-school for the "able", another for the "average", and a third for the "less able". (The fourth mini-school is the Sixth Form.)

Classification and selection continues within each mini-school, sub-dividing the already-segregated populations of each into "ability-streams".

The College will call this a method of grouping students. In fact it is how the institution has decided to regard students, and to make them known to themselves and each other. It is also a lesson for the students about how they should understand the world and what is possible in it.

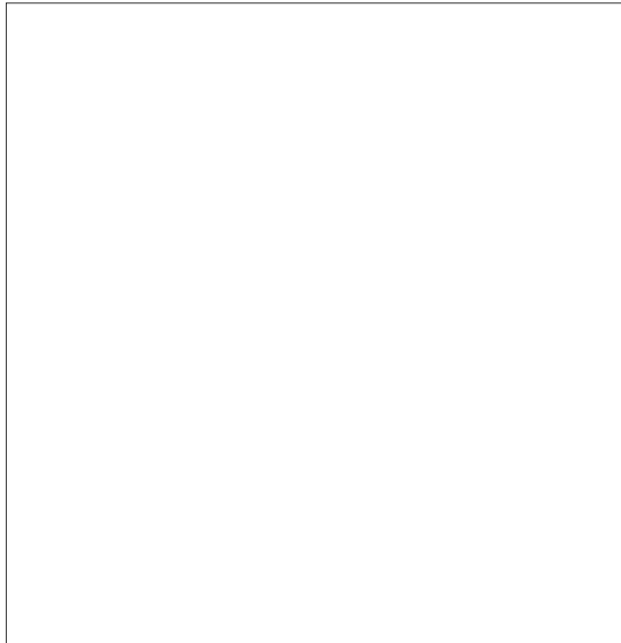
KNOW YOUR PLACE

This approach to education is hierarchical, fixed and unchangeable. Know your place and make the best of it. This approach to student-grouping and all it implies re-invents or raises from the dead the discredited notion of "general academic ability" promulgated by certain powerful educational psychologists and members of the Eugenics Society in the 1920s and 1930s and used to justify a triple-track system of state education after World War Two. It is precisely what the original comprehensive school movement stood against and worked to replace.

Pioneers of comprehensive education exposed in the 1950s the way grouping students into "streams" in Primary school for all their lessons prevented many from being fully educated. At Secondary level the debate tended to centre less on streaming than on individual subject-setting by so-called "ability" as against "mixed ability" grouping. The latter policy was held to create less homogenous classes, with educational and social benefits. Changes to student-grouping required changes to pedagogy, and recognition that teaching, if it is to be effective, cannot be reduced to "delivery".

It also required the involvement of teachers in decisions about the school's curriculum-offer. If teaching is not "delivery", still less is it "delivery" of content teachers have had no hand in deciding. The role of students in helping each other learn, the nature and centrality of student-talk (rather than teacher-talk) in the classroom, the significance of more democratic approaches to all aspects of the life of the school: the movement for comprehensive education would inspire and stimulate these and many other new ways of improving schools.

Crown Woods College now sets its face against all this. Students in each mini-school outside the Sixth Form, sorted by so-called "ability", wear distinctly-coloured uniforms and go through their school-day separated from the rest of their peers. They do not share lunchtimes. They do not share educational activities. They do not share futures, at least in



Crown Woods College headteacher Michael Murphy says "Schools are essentially business".

the eyes of the College. Colour-coded according to a specious view of their relative educability, students understand the hierarchy is at work which imposes itself on every aspect of their educational experience. The College's prospectus tells them as much:

Ashdown is a school where... students follow a ... curriculum consisting of a... range of both academic and vocational qualifications. At KS3 learning will be skills-based with a... focus on literacy and numeracy...

Students at Delamere School will achieve outstanding academic success and develop into highly ambitious, creative, confident and happy individuals...(Crown Woods College Prospectus)

Differentiating students at eleven by so-called "ability", segregating cohorts of students on this basis, keeping them apart in separate colour-coded buildings and distinguishing them by colour-coded uniforms enacts and enforces a despairing approach to human learning.

It finds itself on the erroneous notion that each child is born with a fixed quantum of innate educational "ability" or "potential" which can never be exceeded. Broadly speaking, the child is held to be from the start "bright" or "average" or "less able" in any and all situations, contexts and company, and that nothing can be done to alter this.

The originators of this view disdained euphemism and deployed terms such as "defective", "dull", "feeble-minded", and "backward" to describe those nowadays badged as "less able". They claimed to know what the calibre of mind of each student might be, and to have devised the appropriate set of educational experiences for it.

But their tests, like all such tests, construct what they purport only to reveal. In doing so they condemned cohorts of students determined to be for ever "low ability" to a much narrower set of educational experiences than their peers were offered. They ensured certain students were taught in less imaginative and creative ways than others, and were prompted to aspire to a more restricted future. Crown Woods College is implementing this view afresh.

RESEARCH IGNORED

There have been more than fifty years of research into the nature and effects of grouping students according to 'ability' as constructed by tests and in line with a deficit-model of children, one which would judge them by what they supposedly cannot do at a given age. The damage streaming and setting inflict, and the social purposes such grouping-methods serve, have been made very clear.

The most impoverished students, and those for whom English is not a first language, are over-represented in bottom streams and sets.

Boys are over-represented in bottom and top streams and sets, girls in middle ones. Those at the bottom tend to be taught by the least experienced staff. Expectations for what these students might achieve are lower than those for members of middle or top streams or sets.

Girls in top sets or streams put themselves under overly-intense pressure to achieve highly, sometimes with dangerous consequences.

Those in bottom sets and streams, alienated by the administrative actions of the school, generate their own oppositional culture, and often feel themselves to have been psychologically imprisoned for life by being labelled "less able". Movement between streams and sets is minimal, despite assurances to the contrary.

The tests by which students are sorted into streams or sets are riddled with class, gender and ethnic biases, discriminating against particular groups. The effect of streaming and

setting on exam-results is negligible, if it exists at all.

One thing is well-known, though. These grouping-practices stigmatise, de-motivate entire cohorts of students, and generate and perpetuate inequities. Hence they have been deemed unlawful in, for example, Sweden, and contested in courts in the USA.

The educational outlook materialised in the buildings, organisation, uniform, curriculum offer and pedagogical approach at Crown Woods College ignores this wealth of research. In the words of Michael Murphy, the Headteacher, (as reported by the *Independent* when he took up his post) the best the College may offer the child is the chance to "fulfil its potential". Note the use of the impersonal pronoun. At Crown Woods College, where the child's potential has been determined before she or he starts, the child is an "it".

When he first took up his post, Michael Murphy said that: "Schools are essentially businesses." Interviewed (in the *Guardian*, July 25 2011) about the newly-opened College he had the same outlook. He offered nothing on educational grounds to justify his segregationist approach. Instead he quoted Margaret Thatcher about the unignorability of the market. Creating a mini-school exclusively for those deemed "very able", and ensuring they are sealed off from contact with their "less able" peers, is supposed to appeal to a certain kind of parent.

EDU-BUSINESS

Businesses have certainly been closely involved in creating Crown Woods College.

Balfour Beatty and G4S are partners in the PFI scheme which financed the new and segregated sets of buildings. Balfour Beatty was fined £5 million in 2009 for being party, along with other firms, to rigging the bidding-process for, and deceiving local councils over the costs of, public service projects. A year earlier, the company was forced by a Serious Fraud Office investigation to hand over £2.25 million of "unlawful proceeds" gained from irregular payments in relation to a prestigious construction-project in Egypt. Similar examples of corrupt practices occur regularly through the company's past.

G4S is the world's largest private security firm. In this country it runs four prisons, three immigration removal centres, and hundreds of police cells. It was until recently responsible for deporting people whose asylum-applications had been refused. G4S lost this lucrative government contract following the death of Mr Jimmy Mubenga, who was subjected to life-threatening and ultimately fatal restraint techniques by three G4S employees as he was being deported. Last year, a record year for complaints against the company, forty-eight claims of assault were lodged against its employees, of which three were upheld. Two claims of racism were also upheld.

In business the bottom line is all. If Crown Woods College is, as Michael Murphy urges, essentially a business, exam-results are its bottom-line. The current Head took over Crown Woods School in September 2000. The school had been designated as "failing" by OFSTED and placed in Special Measures. Crown Woods had been the first school to mount a successful legal challenge to the results of an earlier inspection. It had taken OFSTED to the High Court. It also had a member of an OFSTED inspection-team removed for making a racist remark. In each of the four years prior to Mr Murphy's appointment the school's headline A*-C GCSE results outperformed the Local Authority average. In each bar one of the six years following the appointment of the new Head, the school's A*-C GCSE results were worse than the Authority average. Even in the single year (2002) when these results exceeded the Authority average they failed to match the best equivalent score from the four years before Mr Murphy took over. OFSTED inspection-reports in the first decade of the new century noted that the school's exam-results were below average, or well below average, until at least 2006. On the other hand they commended the Headteacher's leadership and vision for the school. Michael Murphy has described his management-style as autocratic, not consensual (in the *Evening Standard*, 5 January 2001). He was reputed to be the highest-paid state school Headteacher when he took up the post at Crown Woods, making £92K in his first year there. His current earnings, despite the underwhelming record of headline GCSE results, are reported (by the *Daily Mail*) to be £171k. This is significantly above the maximum level of £112k an inner-London Headteacher supposedly may earn according to the published pay structure.

New Labour praised setting, and the Coalition government loudly demand more streaming. A recent Institute of Education report found that 17% of Primary students in England are now streamed. Governments of all stripes deepen social division and waste the talents of generations by adherence to the pernicious doctrine of fixed innate "ability".

Crown Woods College stands as a monument to an increasingly-divided and unequal society, and one whose state education system is being re-structured to intensify those divisions and inequities.

How the press moulds “public opinion”

In this 1951 review of John Brooks’ novel, *The Big Wheel*, American Trotskyist James P Cannon discusses the bourgeois press, the way it shapes public opinion and corrupts the writers who churn out its lies and misrepresentations.

What would people think about the larger questions of general interest and concern if they were free to make up their own minds; if they got full information and heard all points of view, and were not pressured, badgered, bulldozed and blackjacked into thinking what they are supposed to think?

If the reference is to the state of affairs in the police-ruled and regimented domain of Stalinism behind the Iron Curtain, it will be recognised at once that this question is in order. When one source controls all agencies of information and instruction and uses them to serve special interests, it is pretty hard to tell what the people really think, or would think if they had access to all the essential facts and had a fair chance to decide for themselves.

But how do things stand with regard to the shaping of public opinion in the United States, which according to the self-righteous critics of the Stalinist regime, enjoys diametrically opposite conditions of unrestricted democracy? Just what does this free and fair democracy, the necessary premise for which is full information and free criticism from all sides, look like in practice in this marvelous country of ours? From a close-up view it doesn’t look so good. People’s minds are brutally bludgeoned and one-sidedly manipulated there, too, as can be demonstrated by an examination of the news and information factories of the country and the methods by which they mold public opinion.

Convincing testimony on this point is adduced in an important novel about life and work on the staff of a widely read national news and picture magazine. The book is *The Big Wheel* by John Brooks, first published in 1949. Mr Brooks brings impressive credentials to his task. He has served on the editorial staffs of several large magazines, including *Time* and the *New Yorker*, and he knows what he is talking about. His book radiates authenticity from every page.

Taking advantage of the greater freedom offered by the novel form in these days of increasing censorship and witch-hunt suppression, the author brings information and depicts reality excluded from expression in other mediums. The truth, nowadays, must disguise itself as fiction. You can come closer to getting honest information about contemporary society in fiction than anywhere else.

The Big Wheel presents a composite picture of the inner workings of such so-called news magazines as *Time* and *Life* and the people who work there. The fictional name of the publication is *Present Day*, “the bright, four-colour purveyor of a popular culture that had all the answers, and behind the facade a staff of tortured and doubting men who feel that half of what they did was dishonest.” *Present Day* like all the popular magazines of mass circulation, fat with advertising and expensive illustrations, is engaged in the business of slanting the news by the omission of some essential facts and the exaggeration of others under guise of objective reporting.

The technique of *Present Day* is somewhat different from that of the press in totalitarian countries, but it is no less effective in poisoning the wells of public information. The press behind the Iron Curtain monopolized by the Stalinist party-state lies outright, secure against any contradiction by anybody. The technique of the so-called free press of democratic America — in reality the monopoly of a small group of financial interests — is subtler, trickier and more hypocritical. *Present Day*, as the author depicts, it bludgeons the minds of people with the systematic misrepresentation of reality, betrays them with half-truths which are the most treacherous of lies.

One of the central episodes in the book deals with the “editing” of a series of dispatches from Eastern Europe. They were written by Struther Carson, a noted correspondent who retained the habit of reporting what he saw, while “avoiding responsibility for what happened to his dispatches between the time they came over the trans-oceanic cable and the time they appeared on the newsstands” under his by-line.

Barring this compromise with conscience — a gravely serious one to be sure, but even at that he was 50 percent better than his editors, being, only 50 percent crooked — “the instincts of a thorough, honest and fair-minded reporter were still with him”. His report was “calm in tone, but let the facts fall where they might; it pandered to nobody’s prejudices”. But by the time it got into the magazine, it was a different story altogether.

The device by which the dispatches went into the editorial hopper as one thing and came out something else is related in the account of the editorial conference on the matter. “It needs serious work on it, of course,” says one of the editors in charge of fouling things up. “Rambles badly, Dick. Got to cut it down. Part about religious freedom in Yugoslavia. Got to go. Dull.”

Mohammed Mossadegh, Prime Minister of Iran and *Time* magazine man of the year in 1951. No doubt they managed to forget all that when he was overthrown in CIA-sponsored coup in 1953.

“Isn’t that pretty important?”

“No. Now about the trouble with Polish visa. Kind of fascinating. Got to build it up. Elaborate. Set it off so nobody misses. Add a few sentences there.”

“Military strength in Russia. Build that up. Get stuff out of files here. Stick it in.”

The narrator, who was a green man on the staff, demurred at this butchery of an objective report, but it didn’t do him any good. The editor just grinned and said: “Take it easy, will you? You’re getting all steamed up about nothing. What the devil, it’s only another story... Hell, we’re not saints up here. We’re in business.”

Further: “Listen, it’s just routine editing. Mostly cutting things out, not much putting anything in. The piece as it stands is too long, see? It rambles: it needs tightening up. It’s not exactly a revolutionary assignment, Dick, asking a man to do some cutting.”

That was the way they cut up Struther Carson’s unprejudiced report of what he saw in eastern Europe and made it fit its conception of what he should have seen,

Hatchet jobs of this kind on every item and article in every department, fashioned *Present Day* into a club to beat public opinion into the desired shape, and gave the editor-in-chief the self-satisfaction of a man of accomplishment, a man with a mission. “It’s a good and important job we’ve got, Dick molding people’s minds, shaking them out of their ruts and putting them onto the path into the future.” By the “future” the editor meant more of the present: more of “Our Way of Life” extolled by the magazine, a “way” generally recommended by its beneficiaries to its victims.

THE WORKERS

***The Big Wheel* does more than describe the mechanics of [the] devious enterprise. It is a novel and its major theme is people. The author introduces us to the literary craftsmen who work on the assembly line of this misinformation factory, and lets them speak for themselves about the motivations which bind them to their grimy trade. The dialogue reveals their philosophy of life — if you want to call it that.**

They are all conventionally educated men, presumably instructed in the basic precept of the Christian doctrine that it’s a sin to tell a lie, and the more cogent Yankee supplement that honesty is the best policy from a practical standpoint. But in their case the instruction didn’t take. The world-weary cynics on *Present Day* are convinced that the lie runs faster than the truth and pays better, too.

The staff members couldn’t answer back or dispute the plain talk they were subjected to. As one of them said to another. “You know how easy we all are to replace. They could an entire new staff up here by tomorrow morning, and a good one. Ever see the lines waiting down on Thirty-Seven, in personnel?”

Where do they get the people to man the staffs of the great magazines where news and culture are processed and squeezed into slick, neat packages for the masses? From what ranges and feed lots are the literary cattle rounded up and shipped to the market? Quite a few of them, especially

on such publications as *Present Day*, regarded as “probably the leading force against communism in this country”, are graduates of the radical movement which had offered the compensation of working for the truth, but where the pickings otherwise were slim.

“You know,” said [the editor] Masterson — who was an old “ex-radical” himself — “you know we still take some of our best men from the little magazines.” Such publications as *Present Day* are crawling with one time radicals and dissenters who have “learned their lesson” that opposition to the existing social system is tough going, and now devote their talents, and the smattering of knowledge on social questions they picked up in the radical movement, to opposite ends.

I once knew a man, a writer with an exceptional style and considerable reputation who was better acquainted with Marx than most people who think they have “read” him. He knew all the ins and outs of the labor movement, and even wrote understandingly about the Moscow Trials of the Thirties from the revolutionary standpoint of their victims. It seemed, for a time, that the good cause had found a powerful new champion. He soon tired of that, however — it wasn’t getting him anywhere in his profession. When I argued with him that his writings could have a great influence on the younger generation, and urged him to write more on the great theme of socialism — indeed, to devote his whole talent to revolutionary journalism he answered me wearily: “Where am I going to publish it? No magazine or paper of large circulation will take such writings.”

Soon after that conversation, he turned around and began to write on the other side of the social question. He had no trouble in finding publishers for that kind of stuff. The more he prospered the more conservative his writing became. He finally ended up as a publicist in the right wing of the Republican Party, and died there not long ago. I knew him well, and sometimes wondered where he went when he died.

Renegacy has become a paying profession in the United States in recent years, especially among the intellectuals. But what do they get for it, after all? According to the testimony of the characters in *The Big Wheel*, they get bigger apartments than they really need, and more money to spend on other superfluous things which a writer with a “mission” — if he really has a mission — would disdain even if he could afford them. Thoreau did all right in a one-room cabin he built himself.

SERVING THE RICH

In the United States of America, the press is absolutely free. That’s what the Constitution says. But there’s a catch to it. All the instruments and agencies for the dissemination of news and opinion — the big magazines and newspapers, the motion-picture companies and radio and television stations — are owned and controlled by a small minority of the rich and privileged and used to serve their special interests.

They differ in their methods and techniques. Some are crude and vulgar; others are slick and subtle. Sometimes they argue and quarrel over secondary issues. But on the main questions of social implication they all tell the same story and sing the same song. The world of capitalism is the best of all possible worlds, sacrosanct and unchangeable. Its true name is “Free Enterprise”, the national poetic version of which is “The American Way of Life”. This way of life has the unique distinction of being good for everybody, for the majority of the exploited as well as the minority of the exploiters.

Of course, you are free to dissent if this contention violates your sense of logic and knowledge of the history and prehistory of man, or contradicts your personal interests as one of the exploited. You can even write an article to this effect if you want to. But you can’t publish it in any of the monopolised publications which reach the millions. That’s the gimmick in the formal, constitutional freedom of the press in the United States as of today. This kind of free press is 99 percent fraud. There is no honest, objective reporting of all the news. It is all one-sided. There is no real free play of opinion and controversy. No real freedom of choice.

In face of all the systematic misinformation and calculated demagoguery with which the people are bombarded by the monopolised press, how will they ever learn the truth and find the means to act on it in their own interest? The struggle between the truth and the lie appears to be an unequal one at this stage of the game, and to some it may appear to be a hopeless struggle. But that is not really so.

The truth has great allies. The falsifiers and distorters of social reality overlook one small detail: the reality does not therefore cease to be. Sooner or later the contradiction between the misrepresentations and the reality must lead to an explosion...

• Abridged. Published in four articles in *The Militant* (newspaper of the Socialist Workers’ Party (US)) May-June 1951.

The Workers' Committee

J T (John Thomas) Murphy was a Sheffield metal-worker and, in 1920, became a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain. He was involved in the shop stewards' movement which arose during the First World War. He went on to be involved in the CP-initiated National Minority Movement, one of the most significant mass rank-and-file movements in British labour history.

Murphy was jailed in 1925 for seditious libel and incitement to mutiny. From the mid-1920s, when the Stalinist counter-revolution in Russia began to spread across Europe's Communist Parties, Murphy took the wrong side and backed Stalin and his regime against critics such as Leon Trotsky. Murphy himself later fell foul of the Party and was expelled in 1932.

In this and our next issue *Solidarity* will serialise Murphy's best known work, the pamphlet *The Workers' Committee* written in 1917. Although written at a time when the shape of British industry and the British working-class were both very different from what they are today, we believe the pamphlet still has a huge amount to teach us.

It explains how the conflicts and tensions between grassroots members of a trade union and union officialdom manifest themselves in day-to-day struggle and how they can play out on the shop floor. And it gives guidance on what political and organisational forms are necessary to give maximum power and democratic control over struggle to rank-and-file workers. Murphy's advice for shop stewards is more direct and useful than the "organising agendas" they will receive from their unions today.

In 1917 Murphy was a member of the Socialist Labour Party (some of whose members helped form the British Communist Party). At its inception, in the early 1900s, the group was influenced by the ideas of American Marxist Daniel De Leon. De Leon combined revolutionary socialist propaganda with syndicalist ideas and asserted that industrial unions could, in and of themselves, organise to become the framework of future working-class rule as well as a source of counter-power within capitalist society. *Workers' Liberty* thinks this misunderstands the need for political organisation. Nonetheless, the syndicalists' emphasis on industrial, all-grades unions and democratic control of the unions from the shop-floor level up can inform our fights in trade unions today.

In a period in which our unions are heavily bureaucratized and undemocratically controlled by people whose lifestyles and material interests are closer to the bosses than the workers they are supposed to represent, the question of how we can build democratic workers' organisation is vital if we want our unions to be fit for purpose in the fights ahead.

One of the most noticeable features in recent trade union history is the conflict between the rank and file of the trade unions and their officials, and it is a feature which, if not remedied, will lead us all into muddle and ultimately disaster.

We have not time to spend in abuse, our whole attention must be given to an attempt to understand why our organisations produce men who think in the terms they do, and why the rank and file in the workshops think differently.

A perusal of the history of the labour movement, both industrial and political, will reveal to the critical eye certain tendencies and certain features which, when acted upon by external conditions, will produce the type of persons familiar to us as trade union officials and labour leaders.

Everyone is aware that usually a man gets into office on the strength of revolutionary speeches, which strangely contrast with those of a later date after a period in office. This contrast is usually explained away by a dissertation on the difference between propaganda and administration. That there is a difference between these two functions we readily admit, but that the difference sufficiently explains the change we deny. The social atmosphere in which we move, the common events of every-day life, the people with whom we converse, the struggle to make ends meet, the conditions of labour, all these determine our outlook on life.

Do I feel that the man on the next machine is competing for my job? Do I feel that the vast army who have entered into industry will soon be scrambling with me at the works gates for a job in order to obtain the means of a livelihood? My attitude towards the dilution of labour will obviously be different to the man who is not likely to be subject to such an experience.

Now compare the outlook of the man in the workshop and the man as a full time official. As a man in the workshop he feels every change; the workshop atmosphere is his atmosphere; the conditions under which he labours are primary; his trade union constitution is secondary, and sometimes even more remote. But let the same man get into office. He is removed out of the workshop, he meets a fresh



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Officials have the power to rule whether a strike is constitutional or unconstitutional, and accordingly to pay or withhold strike pay. [This] allows small groups who are, as we have already shown, remote from actual workshop experience to govern the mass and involve the mass into working under conditions which they have had no opportunity of considering prior to their inception. The need of the hour is a drastic revision of this constitutional procedure which demands that the function of the rank-and-file shall be simply that of obedience.

This is reflected in all our activities. We expect officials to lead, to shoulder responsibility, to think for us. Hence we get labour leaders, official and unofficial, the one in office, the other out of office, speaking and acting as if the workers were pliable goods, to be moulded and formed according to their desires and judgement. However sincere they may be, and we do not doubt the sincerity of the majority, these methods will not do.

PARTICIPATION

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Thought is revolutionary: it breaks down barriers, transforms institutions, and leads onward to a larger life. To be afraid of thought is to be afraid of life, and to become an instrument of darkness and oppression.

The functions of an Elected Committee, therefore, should be such that instead of arriving at decisions FOR the rank-and-file they would provide the means whereby full information relative to any question of policy should receive the attention and consideration OF the rank-and-file, the results to be expressed by ballot.

Now we have shown some of the principal defects in the constitutional procedure, we will show how these defects have been and are encouraged by defects in the structure.

The ballot box is no new thing, every trade unionist understands the use of it, yet we find that when there is an election of officers, for example, or a ballot on some particular question, rarely more than 40 per cent vote; that means there are 60 per cent who do not trouble. Being vexed with the 60 per cent will not help us. An organisation which only

stimulates 40 per cent to activity must be somewhat defective, and it is our duty to find those defects and remedy them.

A ballot is usually taken in the branches, and the meetings are always summoned meetings, so we will consider now the branch as a unit of the organisation. It is usually composed of members who live in certain areas, irrespective of where they work, and irrespective of the turn on which they work.

These are important factors, and account for a great deal of neglect. Men working together every day become familiar to each other and easily associate, because their interests are common. This makes common expression possible. They may live, however, in various districts, and belong to various branches. Fresh associations have therefore to be formed, which at the best are but temporary, because only revived once a fortnight at the most, and there is thus no direct relationship between the branch group and the workshop group. The particular grievances of any workshop are thus fresh to a majority of this members of a branch. The persons concerned are unfamiliar persons, the jobs unfamiliar jobs, and the workshop remote; hence the members do not feel a personal interest in the branch meetings as they would if that business was directly connected with their every day experience. The consequence is bad attendance at branch meetings and little interest. We are driven, then, to the conclusion that there must be direct connection between the workshop and the branch in order to obtain the maximum concentration on business. The workers in one workshop should therefore be members of one branch.

Immediately we contemplate this phase of our difficulties we are brought against a further condition of affairs which shows a dissipation of energy that can only be described as appalling. We organise for power and yet we find the workers in the workshops divided not only amongst a score of branches but a score of unions, and in a single district scores of unions, and in the whole of the country eleven hundred unions.

Modern methods of production are social in character. We mean by this statement that workmen of all kinds associate together, and are necessary to each other to produce goods. The interests of one, therefore, are the interests of another. Mechanics cannot get along without labourers or without crane drivers; none of these can dispense with the blacksmith, the grinder, the forgemen, etc., yet in spite of this interdependence, which extends throughout all industry, the organisations of the workers are almost anti-social in character.

They keep the workers divided by organising them on the basis of their differences instead of their common interests. Born at a period when large scale machine production had not arrived, when skill was at a greater premium than it is today, many have maintained the prejudices which organisations naturally cultivate, while during the same period of growth the changes in methods of production were changing their position in relation to other workers, unperceived by them. With the advent of the general labour unions catering for men and women workers the differences became organised differences, and the adjustment of labour organisations to the changes increasingly complex. The skilled men resent the encroachments of the unskilled, the unskilled often resent what appears to them the domineering tactics of the skilled, and both resent the encroachments of the women workers. An examination of their respective positions will reveal the futility of maintaining these sectional prejudices.

Consider the position of the skilled workers. They have years of tradition behind them, also five years apprenticeship to their particular trade. The serving of an apprenticeship is in itself sufficient to form a strong prejudice for their position in industry. But whilst the skilled unions have maintained the serving of an apprenticeship as a primary condition of membership, industrial methods have been changing until the all-round mechanic, for example, is the exception and not the rule. Specialisation has progressed by leaps and bounds. Automatic machine production has vastly increased. Apprenticeship in thousands of cases is a farce, for even they are kept on repetition work and have become a species of cheap labour. Increasingly are they set to mate men on piece work jobs, and although producing the same amount of work receive only 50 per cent of the wages received by the men. It will be thus clearly perceived that every simplification in the methods of production, every improvement to automatic machine production, every application of machinery in place of hand production, means that the way becomes easier for others to enter the trades. So we can safely say that as historical development takes away the monopoly position of skilled workers it

Continued on page 14

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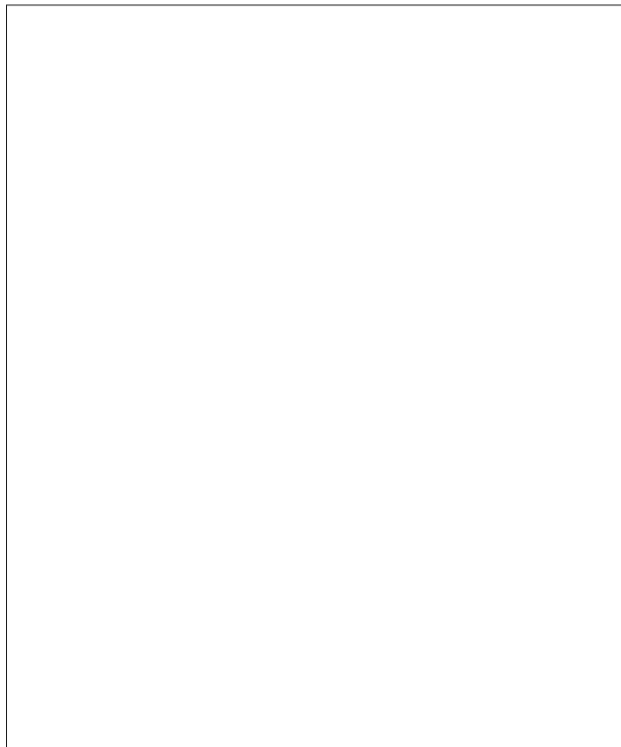
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How the AWL's democracy works



By Sacha Ismail

The AWL's annual conference takes place on 22-23 October. As a relatively small organisation, the conference is open to all members; but because we have grown substantially in the last year, this will be the first conference many AWLers attend.

The way our conference works tells you something about the kind of organisation Workers' Liberty is. We want the maximum possible democratic control by an active, alert, educated membership. For us democracy is not just a pleasant notion; it's the essential condition for an organisation which can debate and hammer out ideas, and orient and re-orient itself in the class struggle.

No constitution or set of written rules can, by itself, guarantee democracy. A democratic culture is necessary. Nonetheless, we think written rules are important, both to help develop that culture and as a check on violations of

democracy.

Read our constitution at www.workersliberty.org/constitution

The AWL National Committee has agreed five main topics for this year's conference: general perspectives; branch activity; trade union work; students; and the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East. Any comrade will be able to submit amendments to the documents drafted by the National Committee; submit alternative documents on these topics; or propose additional topics for debate.

As we put an emphasis on ongoing education, we don't want people to come to conference and take a snap vote. In the two months prior to it, there will be a series of regional and local pre-conference discussion meetings at which members discuss and debate the documents and issues.

As well as debating and voting on perspectives and policy, the conference will also elect a new National Committee. The NC meets every five or six weeks; it elects a smaller Executive Committee (EC) which meets weekly and takes decisions in between NC meetings. Conference is the sovereign body of the AWL, which can over-rule the NC; the NC can over-rule the EC (and elect new people to it at each meeting, just as the conference elects a new NC).

At our conference new members will experience both our democratic structures and our democratic culture in action.

Tower Hamlets cleaners win

By a Unison rep

There are 26 PFI (Private Finance Initiative) schools in Tower Hamlets. The cleaning, caretaking and maintenance services were outsourced many years ago to G4S, the huge security corporation. It's one of the biggest companies in the world and its Chief Executive, Nick Buckles, is one of the highest-paid bosses in the country.

The company wanted to change the method by which the workers were paid and the date on which they received their pay. The effect would've been extremely drastic in terms of throwing off people's budgeting and personal finances each month. The only outcome of the company's sham consultation was that they offered a bridging loan for workers in August, but the workers were clear that they didn't want to borrow money from their bosses – they wanted to be paid!

At the same time, G4S wanted to introduce biometric fingerprint machines to clock people on and off shifts in three of the schools. The workers felt it was demeaning and showed a complete lack of trust. A sham consultation was held on this issue too

but G4S went ahead and installed the machines anyway.

G4S also employ cleaners and porters at Mile End hospital, and throughout our campaign they tried to play off the hospital workers against the school workers. They've got the biometric sign-ins there already, and G4S told us that the hospital workers were happy with the set-up. They also told us that they'd introduced the new payroll system there and the workers had agreed to it. But when we visited the hospital and spoke to the workers, we found that neither claim was true! We also discovered that G4S had been telling the hospital workers the same lies about the school workers – that they'd already agreed to the new payroll system. It was classic divide-and-rule from the bosses. Reaching out to the hospital workers and building unity with them was essential to what we did.

ALL-OUT

We held a consultative ballot on the two issues and it came back 100% in favour of all-out, indefinite strike action.

We began fighting for Unison to hold a full ballot, and in the meantime we

went into higher-level negotiations with G4S bosses. We held a demonstration outside the negotiation meeting with placards and chanting. It was a visible challenge and affront to the G4S bosses. We chanted at them as they went in, asking them how much they earned each month!

At the meeting, G4S backed down completely on the new payroll system and suspended the introduction of the biometric machines. They haven't dropped the plan entirely but given how determined they were to introduce them (going as far as to install the machines in the workplace), forcing them to hold off is significant. It gives us time to go on a renewed offensive against the plans.

ORGANISATION

Organisation made this victory possible. The workers are isolated, working as individuals or in twos in schools that are often miles apart.

We fought this isolation by making sure reps and organisers got round to each workplace and maintained face-to-face contact with all members about the dispute, making sure they were kept informed and could have a say about where it should

go.

Linking up with the hospital workers was also absolutely key. When you're dealing with outsourcing you need to relate to workers employed by the company you're fighting, wherever they work.

The workers have decided to produce a regular union newsletter for G4S employees locally, mainly focusing on the cleaners, caretakers and maintenance staff in schools as well as the Mile End hospital workers. That's their own initiative, not something that's run by union officialdom. They realise the solidarity and unity that won this dispute needs to be maintained.

The union has grown as a result of the dispute. The union bureaucracy tells us we have to focus entirely on getting our membership numbers up and concentrate entirely on recruiting rather than building and winning disputes. But the best way to recruit people to the union is to show that being part of the union is how you can win things from your bosses.

We fought to win in Tower Hamlets and we've built the union out of that fight. You recruit by organising, not the other way around.

RMT and TSSA to merge?

As two rail unions discuss a merger, AWL members working in the railways industry argue for the maximum rank-and-file democracy in any merged union.

<http://bit.ly/oLNZd>

New grassroots fight in Sheffield Unison

By a Unison activist

A promising campaign has started in the Sheffield City (Local Government) branch of the public sector union Unison.

A group of Unison members, have started the 'Unison Unleashed' campaign to address the branch's problems by restoring democracy and mounting a proper fight against the cuts.

The first step was to gather signatures of around 400 branch members on a petition calling for a Special General Meeting, where members would have the opportunity to hold branch officers to account. This number was well above the number required by the union's rulebook (five percent of the total membership) to force this meeting.

The petition was handed to the branch officers, but a letter from the "Regional Manager" informed those members that there would be no SGM. They were told that there was nothing wrong with branch democracy (even though there has been no AGM for two years, members never hear about when branch meetings are going to be held, and the meetings are often held in their core working hours).

It is a vitally important campaign for the future of the fight against the public service cuts in one of the UK's largest cities. Council workers won't be able to fight the cuts if they don't have a union branch fit for the purpose – a branch that is truly democratic and controlled by rank-and-file members, not useless bureaucrats.

FBU to ballot on pensions?

By Ira Berkovic

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has announced that industrial action in the autumn over reforms to the firefighter pensions scheme now looks "increasingly likely".

Consultation with members is ongoing and the union reports that it is making "preliminary arrangements" for a strike ballot. It would be the FBU's first national dispute since the 2002/2003 pay campaign.

The union is opposed to government plans to increase employee contributions by 3.2%, and increase the pensionable age to 60. Statements from union leader Matt Wrack talk of "when", rather than if, the FBU is going to ballot.

But when the FBU does ballot for action, will it have to do so alone?

Despite new government announcements which outline plans to make public sector workers contribute an extra £1.1 billion to their pensions from April 2012, there is little sign of increased combativity from the biggest unions. With Unison and the GMB, two of the biggest public sector unions, now engaged in scheme-by-scheme negotiations over their members'

pensions, the labour movement's fightback on this issue risks slowing down to a crawl that will see unions more prepared to fight, such as the FBU, left isolated.

The FBU is necessarily restricted to scheme-specific negotiations as they only organise members in firefighter pension schemes. But Unison and GMB, which organise members across a range of different pension schemes (primarily the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) and the NHS pension scheme), could throw a large spanner in the works of the government's plans by demanding central, all-union negotiations to ensure that workers in one scheme are not used as bargaining chips against workers in another.

Activists in Unison and the GMB must demand that their leaders withdraw from scheme-by-scheme negotiations and negotiate centrally for across-the-board concessions from government.

The pensions reforms differ in detail in each scheme but the fundamental drive is the same: a ruling-class attack to make workers work longer for less reward.

Social workers join Southampton strikes

By Darren Bedford

Social workers at Southampton Council will join local government workers' indefinite rolling strikes on 3 August as the Tory-led council continues to push ahead with its cuts programme.

Nearly 500 workers in the social care department will strike on Wednesday 3 August, and Unison members will take a further 6 days' action from 4 August. The strike highlights in particular the insulting £1,400 "market supplement" of-

fered to some social workers, intended to offset the impact of cuts but which the workers' union describes as "part of the problem, not the solution".

Unison branch secretary Mike Tucker said "The extended strike action by social workers demonstrates the depth of the anger over the Council's actions. The industrial action will spread unless the Council negotiates a fair settlement with its workforce."

Strikers and their supporters will rally at 11am on Wednesday 3 August in Guildhall Square.

BBC strike

By a NUJ member

BBC workers took a second day of strike action on Monday 1 August in a battle over job cuts.

National Union of Journalists General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet said: "The NUJ is proud that our members everywhere in the BBC have recognised this threat to their colleagues [...] The latest ludicrous management ploy is to claim that the strike today isn't having any effect.

Clearly BBC management doesn't watch the corporation's output very much."

The BBC's radio and television stations were forced to run repeats of old programmes and, in some places, senior managers were forced to fill in and read the news.

The strike's demand is that management withdraw its plan to cut nearly 400 posts across the UK.

Messages of support can be sent to the strikers at campaigns@nuj.org.uk

Thousands march for Bombardier jobs

By Stewart Ward

Thousands demonstrated on Saturday 23 July to save jobs at the Bombardier train manufacturing plant in Derby.

The demonstration was extremely well supported locally, and the fact that thousands were mobilised at relatively short notice for a demonstration in a location that doesn't host many mass demos is an encouraging indication of the potential for a real campaign to save jobs at the plant.

Some senior union officials from the platform played up the "British jobs" aspect, and spoke of "working with" Bombardier management (the company's UK chairman, Colin Walton, appeared on the demonstration platform). Socialists involved in the campaign will need to make sure it is fought on the class basis of workers against bosses, not on the basis of unity between British workers and British bosses to take jobs away from railworkers in Germany. The rail union RMT, which represents many workers at Bombardier, has released a statement on the issue that makes it clear it



Grandad needs better than "British jobs" campaign

will be fighting the battle on the basis of class, not nationality. Other unions should follow its lead.

AWL members who attended the demonstration report that, while there was clear anger about the potential loss of jobs, there was also a feeling of powerlessness and a hope that demonstrations by themselves might make the government listen or change its mind.

Socialists can give a different kind of hope; a hope that a labour-movement campaign of action, including industrial action by Bombardier workers, can force the government to act.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Heading for the double-dip?

By Chris Reynolds

On top of the public sector job cuts, private-sector industry is cutting jobs too.

On 27 July the bosses' association CBI published survey results showing that most manufacturing employers plan to cut jobs over the next three months.

Until spring this year, manufacturing employment was increasing a bit from its slump levels in 2009. The increase was not enough to validate the coalition government's claim that public sector cuts, by holding down public debt levels and so interest rates, will produce a counterbalancing private-sector boom. But there was an increase. No longer.

Manufacturing bosses are planning to cut spending on new plant and machinery. The Bombardier Derby job cuts are not exceptions, but part of a pattern.

If the government reduces its contribution to effective demand in the economy, and households plagued by debt and redundancies do the same, then the whole economy must go down unless exports boom.

The eurozone crisis and

the US budget crisis make the prospects poor for exports.

Expansion is not the first priority for the bosses. Their first priority is restoring their rate of profit from the hit it took in 2008-9, and taking advantage of the slump to reshape workplaces, wages, and workforces so as to allow bigger profits in a future expansion.

So far, top bosses at the top 100 companies have seen their median earnings rise 32 per cent last year (*Financial Times*, 27 July), while workers' real wages have dropped 2.7% (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 July).

The financial and insurance sector paid £14 billion in bonuses in the last financial year (*FT*, 19 July) — not as high as the £19 billion in 2007-8, before the crash, but heading upwards fast.

The rate of profit — the net rate of return for private non-financial companies — in the UK reached its peak in the last quarter of 2007. It was 15.1%, the highest figure since consistent statistics began in 1965.

With the crisis, it dropped to 10.8% in the third quarter of 2009.

Since then it has risen steadily, to 12.7% in the first quarter of 2011.

Lambeth libraries: strong campaigns can save jobs

By a library worker

Lambeth Council in south London agreed to a deal which will save all the jobs in the library service following the workers announcing strike action against libraries cuts.

Lambeth council wanted a staffing restructure in its libraries which would massacre frontline services and leave 40 people at risk of redundancy. By combining a high-profile public campaign with the threat of strike action, every job in the service has been saved; reading groups, storytimes and enquiry services will continue.

This is a tribute to the unity and determination of trade union members in the libraries, who were ready to strike to defend the library service and protect their jobs.

This is a lesson to every other worker — in Lambeth Council and elsewhere — that to look after your interests you have to be prepared to take industrial action.

Ruth Cashman, Libraries Shop Steward and Lambeth

Unison Assistant Branch Secretary said:

"Lambeth Labour Party could learn a lot from these workers. When they faced the cuts they fought with every tool they had.

"They campaigned and they were willing to strike. They faced the cutters with their heads high and fought not just for their jobs or their colleagues' jobs, but for the right of people of Lambeth to have a decent library service.

"This is not the end of our fight, next year the council will try and cut the library service again. They will disguise library closures by 'handing the libraries over to the community'.

"We think councils should be providing services, like libraries, not looking to cut jobs, cut services and shift responsibility. So next year, we will fight again — but this was a great first step."

Strike action due to begin on Friday 22 July was suspended following management's offer which secured no compulsory redundancies in the section. There is still a live strike ballot in

the section and every detail of the new structure will need to be agreed by a full members meeting before Unison will call off the action entirely.

Solidarity spoke to some of the workers involved in the campaign:

"When [Lambeth Council] announced the cuts, we knew we had two options — fight or lose.

Nearly all of us are in Unison [there is 90% union density in the sector], we know we've got the best union reps and we know more about libraries than the people who wrote that structure. We don't pay our money every month to get cheap car insurance and then lose our jobs, we want a union that will fight. We won because of our union. I've seen it in other departments and other councils, people are losing their job and managers just get on with cutting. They had to listen to us because we won the strike vote and all the libraries were going to shut [on the strike day] unless every job was safe."

Lambeth Librarian

"Management said they were concerned that rolling over when faced with strike action would set a precedent. Let's hope so!"

Unison Shop Steward

"Solid trade union membership, dedicated shop stewards and a sustained public campaign have seen off an attempt by Lambeth council to make 20 librarians redundant.

So if you're not in a trade union I'd go and get yourself a membership form. Up the workers!"

Librarian

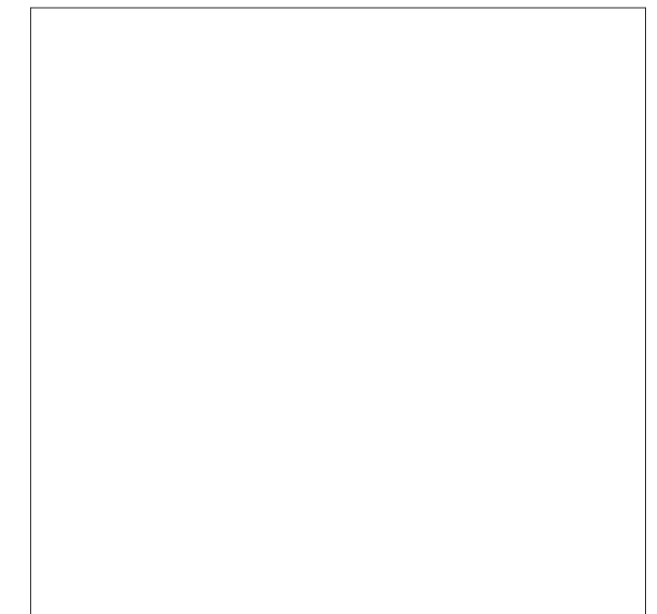
"We had a vote of no confidence in our management and a vote of total confidence in our union reps.

The only question was whether we would win before or after the strike."

Customer Service Assistant

"When a consultant on £500 a day tells you that the council can't afford to staff its libraries, something has gone wrong."

Librarian



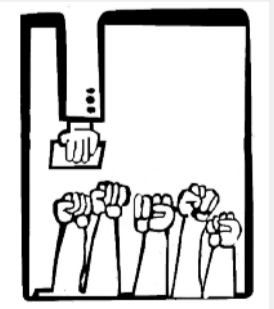
John Pearson, chair of the works committee at Bombardier Derby and Unite member. Job cuts at the Derby factory are part of a UK-wide pattern

Workers' Liberty summer camp, West Yorkshire, 19-21 August

Height Gate, near Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, OL14 6DL

In August, young members and friends of Workers' Liberty will be throwing a summer jamboree in the beautiful hills of West Yorkshire. The event will be a mix of socialism and socialising, with political discussions, activist training, and knocking about in a seasonally-appropriate and outdoorsy fashion. Rumours that we will be re-enacting famous pitched battles between striking workers and cops are sadly unfounded. We will however be discussing topics including the following:

- The mechanics of exploitation: how capitalism works
- The story and lessons of the miners' strike
- Organising at work
- Why is the left male-dominated, what can we do about it?
- Students and class



All this can be yours for the paltry sum of £20, which includes food and crash accommodation. If getting there is a problem, we can help. Spaces are limited though so book now to avoid disappointment.

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