

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

IRELAND VOTES "YES"

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ENGLISH
DEFENCE
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KEEP THE TORIES OUT, BUT DON'T TRUST BROWN

BY JILL MOUNTFORD

I am standing in the general election in the south-east London constituency of Camberwell and Peckham, against New Labour deputy leader and loyal New Labour hack Harriet Harman. I am standing to assert a workers' voice in politics and build the fight for a workers' government.

Shadow Chancellor George Osborne says he wants £23 billion of cuts. Yet this huge figure, involving deep cuts in the public sector and a massive attack on the living standards of millions of workers, will take him only one sixth of the way towards his stated goal of halving the deficit.

In other words, this is the tip of the iceberg.

There are *vast* cuts to come, unless we stop them.

The debate between the three main parties is limited to exactly how deep the cuts should be, and yet some opinion polls show that a majority of people oppose all cuts. That majority, or large minority, cannot express itself easily, because with the rise of New Labour the working class has lost even the limited political voice it once had.

We need to insist that the labour movement mobilise workers and communities to oppose every cut. We need to demand that the bosses and the rich are taxed to pay for the jobs and services people need, and back our demands up with a serious campaign of both political and industrial action that can win. We need more working-class

socialist candidates prepared to stand up and fight for these things.

Our goal should be a workers' government — a government based on the organisations of the labour movement which serves the working class as New Labour has served the bosses and the rich and the Tories, with renewed brutality, plan to.

In other constituencies, where there are not solid socialist candidates, we should vote Labour, but also fight for the unions to reassert themselves against Brown and Darling. Candidacies like mine give a chance to express that message clearly.

The Tory conference this week makes our campaign even more urgent.

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FIGHT ALL THE CUTS!

NEW SEX WORKER LEGISLATION

“Everyone will be less safe”

BY JORDAN SAVAGE

The Policing and Crime Bill which is set to come into effect this November, will, among other things, outlaw “paying for [the] sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force”.

The Bill must pass through the House of Lords once more before it becomes law. Based Swedish legislation. The overall effect of the new law could be to criminalise everyone who purchases sex and make sex work much less safe.

Catherine Stephens works as a prostitute dominatrix in London. She disavows everything the Bill claims to provide:

“Everyone in the industry will be less safe, and it will play into the hands of traffickers: people will be less inclined to report trafficking to the police, because it will mean that they are confessing to a crime. Things will be driven underground.

“With brothel closure orders, it will be less safe; police will have the power to close brothels on suspicion only, and this will drive the industry underground. It will be impossible to police, owing to the marginalising effect that the legislation will have. We will start to see establishments opening briefly and moving on. We will be unable to call the police if we

find ourselves in difficult situations.

“All legal protection is being taken away from us. We are calling for the decriminalisation of sex work. We will not be happy with a situation like that in Nevada, where prostitution is legal but sex workers are not allowed into town alone or after five o'clock at night. Decriminalisation would allow us to operate safely and to be protected by the law without legislation that restricts our personal freedom.”

The International Union of Sex Workers (IUSW) also reject the Bill and they are concerned about the vague wording of the Bill. A spokesperson told *Solidarity*:

“This would be the first British legislation on the sex industry that actually referred to coercion, violence, abuse or exploitation. However, in the House of Lords Committee stage, the government changed the Bill again to refer to ‘exploitative conduct’ rather than ‘force, deception or threats’. If legislation is created using vague terminology (threats not relating to violence, any form of coercion or deception) then the way the law is applied will be decided by case law.”

The IUSW is doubtful that this apparent fine-tuning of the legislation will have any practical impact on the way that the law is enforced, saying: “it is still largely at the whim of the police.”

The criminalisation of sex workers’ clients in Sweden has failed to combat people trafficking. Non-Swedish nationals who have been “picked up” by the police have been deported before being allowed to give statements, and their clients have been unwilling to testify as witnesses for fear of arrest.

The IUSW are particularly concerned about the effect that the legislation will have on migrant workers:

“As some of the most vulnerable people in the sex industry, migrants and victims of trafficking will be hit first and hardest. This law will increase the exclusion of migrant workers — if the presence of migrants raises the likelihood of being raided, brothels and agencies that attempt to operate safely will not offer them work, forcing migrants to accept worse working conditions.”

The IUSW are still lobbying the House of Lords to try to stop the legislation.

Belinda Brooks-Gordon has published a detailed analysis of the government document *Paying The Price: A Prostitution Consultation Document*. In her study she highlights the fact that when the government began to formulate proposals for a new system for addressing sex work in the UK, the only models they considered were various versions of “criminalisation” and the Dutch model, which legalises prostitution in specific areas.

The German model, which is in fact the only legislation to have come in since the European Convention on Human Rights and to conform to that convention, was never looked at.

Dr Brooks-Gordon told *Solidarity*: “The biggest success of the Swedish model, at least in the eyes of the government, is that it cleared sex workers off the streets. What they don’t tell us is where these people went. Some have been displaced from Stockholm and Malmo to other cities, and some have moved indoors and begun advertising on the internet instead, which means that they are unable to vet clients in advance.

“None of us want to work alone, but these people are being forced to. They have been deprived of the safety and camaraderie that a shared work environment used to give them. Sex workers themselves will be subject to arrest under the new legislation if they contact a colleague on behalf of a client. It is a case of female government ministers [such as Harriet Harman] wanting to be seen to be doing something for women without taking full account of the effect that their legislation will have on many women’s lives.”

• The IUSW petition to the Prime Minister is available here: <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/defersexworkbill/>

CONSERVATIVE CONFERENCE

What the Tories are planning

BY AMINA SADIQ

The Conservative conference has confirmed what we can expect from a Tory government: deep cuts, attacks on the working class, and radical right-wing politics.

The £23 billion of cuts Shadow Chancellor George Osborne will take Osborne only one sixth of the way towards his stated goal of halving the deficit.

In other words, for all Osborne’s spin about openness and honesty, this is the tip of the iceberg. Listen to Jonathan Loynes of the Capital Economics consultancy: “It is clear much deeper spending cuts, probably involving huge cuts in public sector employment will be needed.”

Public sector workers will be the first, “soft” target in a more general assault on working-class living standards.

Osborne’s proposals include:

- A pay freeze for five million public sector workers, with only frontline workers and those earning less than £18,000 excluded.

- A cap on pension contributions for highly paid public sector managers. Given that Cameron has talked about ending the “pension apartheid” between public and private sector workers, this is clearly the softening up for a general gutting of public sector pensions.

- Bringing forward the raising of the state pension age to 66, from 2026 to 2016 for men and 2020 for women (this has been billed as a way to affording a restoration of the link between pensions and earnings).

- Cutting back child trust funds and child tax credits for what the Tories call the “middle class”, but actually hitting many working-class families.

Meanwhile, Shadow schools secretary Michael Gove has outlined plans to fur-

ther disempower local authorities, and impose even more central control over schools, with micromanagement to the degree of insisting that all schools divide their students into ability-based sets.

He wants to give every school the right to become an academy, and create 20,000 extra school places by enabling charities, religious groups and businesses to set up schools — with all the obvious consequences. He wants to impose uniform and military-style discipline and to stop excluded children from appealing against their exclusions.

Elsewhere in the right-wing madhouse, we had ex-army chief Richard Dannatt slated for a peerage and a role in the Cameron government — and a row about Michal Kaminski, the far-right Polish politician who heads the group including the Tories in the European Parliament. Kaminski’s homophobia and anti-semitism have resulted in protests to the Tories from even quite moderate LGBT and Jewish organisations.

Cameron initially “branded” his Tory part as the “heirs of Blair” and sometime tried to position himself to the “left” of New Labour (not hard). But the economic crisis has reshaped the Tories, “re-Thatcherising” them.

The only way to stop them is class struggle. Not the pathetic pseudo-class warfare issuing from the likes of Derek Simpson, who jokes about champagne and the Bullingdon Club while white-washing New Labour’s government of the rich — but a serious political and industrial campaign to stop the bosses’ attacks and pass onto the offensive.

Calais hunger strike

BY ANNIE HANKSHAW

Migrants in Calais are on hunger strike in an attempt to win asylum in France.

The migrants, who are from Afghanistan, Egypt, Palestine, Sudan, and elsewhere say they are will strike until western countries offer them asylum. They are also demanding that no migrant in Calais is readmitted to Greece, Italy or Malta (where they fear immediate deportation).

The hunger strike follows the destruction of the migrants’ camp in the town by the French riot police. The camp of makeshift tents and shelters, known as “the jungle”, was built by migrants after the French government closed the Red Cross camp at Sangatte in 2002. That closure and the recent police repression were encouraged by the British Labour government.

“The world is ignoring us so we are making our suffering public”, says Benjamin, 38, an asylum seeker from Iran. The strike is taking place in the port, where “Tourists... will be forced to see our lack of freedom until Western governments work together to offer us somewhere to build a new life safely.”

Migrants are arrested everyday, and released after four to six hours as police attempt to break the strike through harassment tactics. Some have been held for as long as two days.

Activists from the No Borders campaign have joined the migrants in their strike. The migrants have issued an international call for more people to join the strike in solidarity.

• Messages of support can be posted at calaishungerstrike.wordpress.com

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM WINTER 2009

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www.workersliberty.org or email office@workersliberty.org for more information

FOR WORKERS' UNITY ACROSS EUROPE

Ireland's Lisbon result is not a defeat for the left

On 23 September thousands of GM workers from Germany joined Belgian carworkers to demonstrate in Antwerp against threatened job losses.

With capitalism more and more international, that sort of workers' unity across borders is more and more necessary. Yet Tony Woodley, joint general secretary of Unite, the main union representing GM (Vauxhall) workers in Britain, has made it his chief complaint that current plans are more favourable to German than to British GM workers: "Unite's concerns over Magna's plans are growing as it becomes clear that the cuts will not be shared fairly across GM's EU plants. Some 50% of the UK workforce would lose their jobs, while only 16% in Germany would go..."

That approach — where each national group of workers is called on first to worry about whether another national group is getting a less bad deal — can only divide workers and help bosses.

A sizeable part of the British trade-union movement, including the RMT rail union and the Unison public services union, still has a knee-jerk hostility to the European Union. The hostility is often expressed in talk about the European Union being capitalist, neo-liberal, and pro-privatisation. Since Britain is more uninhibitedly capitalist, neo-liberal, and privatising than any other major state in Europe, and would not be any less so if it were outside the EU, that can only be "the good reason".

Turn and twist as you like, support for getting Britain out of the EU, or reversing or stalling EU integration is not a reworded form of opposition to privatisation. It is what it is: support for higher barriers between nations. It is nationalist.

Ireland's vote on 3 October for the Lisbon Treaty confirms the conclusion. Did it mean that the Irish elec-

torate had moved sharply to the right? Not at all.

The Irish government's cuts and plans to bail out the bankers are as unpopular as ever. Polls show just 11% happy with the Fianna Fail/Green coalition government, and 85% dissatisfied.

Fianna Fail, the party which has dominated Irish politics since the 1930s, now ranks in the opinion polls with a lower core vote than the traditionally weak Irish Labour Party.

British politics shows us that opposition to the Lisbon Treaty is not a left-wing cause. The main anti-Lisbon party in Britain is the Tories.

The Lisbon Treaty is a scaled-down version of the draft European Union constitution which was dropped after a referendum in France rejected it in May 2005. Essentially it streamlines EU decision-making to make it manageable with the EU's expansion to 27 member states, and a little less opaque.

Socialists have good reason to prefer a democratic EU constitution to the Lisbon Treaty — a constitution decided by a democratic constituent assembly, giving sovereignty over EU decisions to an elected assembly, and levelling up workers', democratic, and social rights across Europe. We have no reason to prefer the status quo to the Lisbon Treaty.

Like almost all EU documents, the Lisbon Treaty restates the EU governments' joint commitment to what they all pursue separately — market capitalism and privatisation. That does not make a vote against the Lisbon Treaty any sort of blow against privatisation or market-oriented policies.

Yet in June 2008, when in a first referendum the Irish electorate rejected the Lisbon Treaty, *Socialist Worker* wrote: "Irish voters have dealt a decisive blow to attempts to create a corporate, militarised European Union (EU) superstate". (So... we'll just have separate

and competing corporate, militarised European states! Why would that be better?)

Socialist Worker and *The Socialist* used to be open about demanding British withdrawal from the European Union. Over the years, quietly, they have dropped that demand, but its ghost still haunts them, making them read every setback for EU integration as a triumph for the working class.

Describing the 2008 drive for a "no" vote as "the left campaign", *Socialist Worker* claimed that "the real fault-line in the campaign was between those who favour a neo-liberal pro-business model and those who want to fight to achieve a more social, just and peaceful Europe".

The *Socialist* also saw Ireland's June 2008 "no" vote as "an important setback for the big business interests and the political elite who control the EU", centred on "issues of privatisation and workers' rights".

Likewise, when France rejected the original draft EU constitution (of which the Lisbon Treaty continues the essentials) in a referendum in May 2005, *Socialist Worker* hailed "a decisive defeat for this attempt by the ruling classes of the continent to hard-wire free market policies into European society"; and *The Socialist*, "a massive blow to the pro-big business politicians in France and Europe".

If all that was right, then the 3 October vote meant the people of Ireland decisively submitting to militarism, neo-liberalism, privatisation, and denial of workers' rights. Fortunately no such defeatist conclusions are justified. And the triumphalist conclusions about May 2005 and June 2008 were equally wrong.

The labour movement should reject such confusion and focus clearly on building workers' unity across the European Union.

A socialist voice in the election

As regular *Solidarity* readers will know, Workers' Liberty will be standing our comrade Jill Mountford as a candidate in the next general election, in the south east London constituency of Camberwell and Peckham.

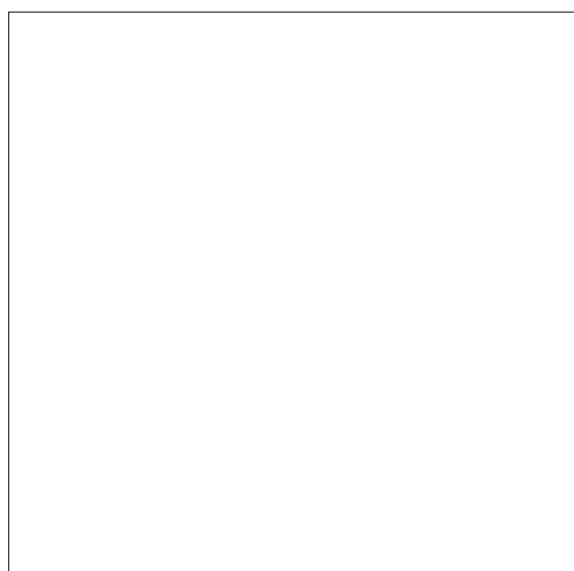
We chose Camberwell and Peckham for two main reasons.

First, because it is a mainly working-class area whose inhabitants face problems like unemployment, low pay and cuts in services.

Second, because its current MP is Harriet Harman, Labour Party deputy leader and loyal New Labour hack. Jill is standing on a socialist program of fighting for jobs, homes and services for all; for a workers' voice in politics; and for a workers' government, based on the labour movement and serving the working class in the same way New Labour serves the bosses and the rich.

Despite widespread cynicism about "official" politics, elections are still a chance to talk to hundreds and thousands of workers and others about how society is run and what is wrong with it. For revolutionary socialists, this is not an alternative to struggles in the workplace and in communities, but one way to help give those struggles political expression. Anything else means giving the bosses' parties, and the bourgeois clique who run the Labour Party, a monopoly on using elections as a political platform.

Since the campaign began, we have organised regular stalls, leafleting, selling papers and talking to hundreds of people. We have organised a debate with



Out campaigning in front of an advert for an "instant cash" loan sharkshop; this is the only kind of trade booming in Peckham!

speakers from the local Labour Party and Green Party. We have begun to contact trade union branches to speak to their organisers and activists about the campaign.

As the campaign progresses, and as the election gets nearer, we will be stepping up this kind of work. The

more people who take part, the stronger our socialist voice will be — so please get in touch and get involved!

• jill@workersliberty.org
07904 944 771

Facebook group: "Support our socialist candidate in Camberwell and Peckham"

STOP THE CUTS

Library cuts stopped

BY ELAINE JONES, WIRRAL TUC, PERSONAL CAPACITY

On 1 October Wirral Council announced that all 11 of the libraries that were to be closed would now stay open. This is an important victory for the Wirral Against the Cuts campaign and shows that it is possible to win local anti-cuts campaigns.

The victory was down to those of us who organised mass meetings, leafleted estates, collected petitions, demanded an inquiry, told the councillors and MPs that we wouldn't vote for them if they made cuts, organised demonstrations and lobbies and refused to go away.

We were able to force a government inquiry and we co-ordinated the input into it.

The campaign helped set up "save the library committees" at eight of the libraries, and we co-ordinated submissions into the inquiry. Where the local campaigns were strong we knew their submissions would be okay, where they were weaker, especially in the working class estates, we helped people organise.

The Labour group and the Liberals are very unhappy. They made the announcement before the findings of the government inquiry were made public. It now looks likely that the inquiry will be halted and the report not published. They now want to avoid criticisms of their "strategic asset review" being made public.

But they are out for revenge and have published plans to privatise parks, allotments, the crematorium and golf courses. Hopefully this victory will mean people will be confident to take part in the next campaign.

We knew Wirral was going to be a model for other local authorities who are "re-organising" their library provision. To that we have said: if you try to make cuts and privatise local services, expect a battle.

The Tories are trying to take credit for the victory when they said campaigning wouldn't work and the inquiry was a waste of time. They have also voted for all the other council cuts.

So Wirral Against the Cuts campaign will hopefully now be in a stronger position to fight both Labour and Tory cuts and begin to build a political alternative.

Construction workers reject recommended deal

BY RHODRI EVANS

Engineering construction workers have voted to reject a new two-year pay-and-conditions deal despite a recommendation to accept both from union officials and from their national shop stewards' committee.

The deal was rejected 53% to 47% among Unite members. We do not know the figures in the other union in the industry, GMB.

According to engineering construction workers who spoke to *Solidarity*, the vote against the deal was fuelled by a new spate of contractors using sub-contractors with whole workforces temporarily "posted" from elsewhere in Europe to undercut the existing union agreement. Workers want tighter commitments from the bosses.

Union leaders have responded by calling for "further talks". Les Bayliss of Unite said: "Recent events at engineering construction sites at Lindsey, Staythorpe and Uskmouth have infuriated construction workers and as a result our members in the industry have rejected the employers' latest offer."

"It's now time to return to the negotiating table to thrash out an improved offer".

And Phil Davies of GMB: "The members want more progress on the skills and unemployment registers and they want to copper-fasten the pre-award audit to screen out employers who plan to undercut the agreed rates and terms and conditions."

"The employers' offer of working parties on the registers is seen as jam tomorrow and the members no longer trust the employers to deliver... The next step is to go back to the employers to see if they are up for further talks."

The fact that the things that have "infuriated" workers are going on now must mean that further strikes of the sort seen in January-February and June are possible.

In previous talks the unions failed to win a demand for a register of unemployed workers in the industry that employers would have to use to fill vacancies. The bosses said that would illegally discriminate against non-UK workers, and agreed to set up a working party with the unions to consider establishing a "voluntary" database of unemployed staff.

The "register" demand would be an adaptation to the engineering construction industry of something that unions won and established for many years, in times of greater strength, in industries

like printing and the docks. Some on the left have criticised it as a disguised form of "British jobs for British workers".

There is no indication that immigrant workers living in Britain would be unable to get on the register; but, in an industry as international as engineering construction, it could be argued that making it difficult for workers to apply from other countries for jobs in Britain is "protectionist". The answer to that problem might be for Unite and GMB to seek agreements with construction unions in other countries for reciprocal access for workers to unemployed registers in different countries.

The core grievance, however, is not about individual workers migrating or even moving temporarily to take jobs in engineering construction in Britain. It is about sub-contractors "posting" in whole workforces, a gambit that cannot make sense for bosses unless as a means of undercutting union agreements.

Meanwhile, the *Financial Times* reports that the recession has had a big impact on the engineering construction industry, with the number of large construction projects this year cut by nearly half — from 20 in January to 12 in August. But a number of large projects, notably power stations, are lined up for future years.

Royal Mail

From back page

As organised scabbing and the use of casual and agency staff increases, the union will be faced with a difficult task.

Although the natural instinct towards casual workers being used to undermine union workers' pay and conditions is hostility, it is only by organising these workers and bringing them into common struggles that the labour movement can hope to end management's tactic of playing casuals and permanent staff off against each other.

Organising casuals and workers working for private delivery companies (and fighting for their conditions to be levelled up to Royal Mail standards) is essential for a long-term strategy.

As the national strike develops, wider labour movement solidarity will become essential. "Some workers have a bit of a sectional attitude about the postal service; they think they can just go it alone without anyone's help. That's why there's never much effort put into producing or widely distributing literature for the public to explain why we're on strike. But local solidarity and support committees can be important; other trade unionists just need to get down to the picket lines, explain that they want to help and show what solidarity they can offer."

Student convention

On 21 November University College London Students for Free Education will host a National Convention Against Tuition Fees for anyone who thinks higher education should be free for all. Michael Chessum, one of the organisers, spoke to *Solidarity*.

The "mainstream" seems to have forgotten free education. NUS and the LibDems have abandoned it (or their leaderships have, anyway), so it's absolutely vital that we get it back on the agenda.

Part of that is about struggling against marketisation, fees and cuts at a local level, but it is also about having a national platform that can attract meaningful attention and co-ordinate, or at least galvanise, that movement on a national level. The Convention is aimed at providing a space for all of that. In order to do so it's got to be big and have backing from individual student unions from across the country. It will most certainly include plenaries on "the case for free education" and means of funding it, workshops discussing the way forward, entertainment and maybe a debate.

We, the organisers, are a broad coalition of societies and activists of various stripes — we've got no "hidden agenda" and we're of no "faction".

We need sympathetic student unions,

independent campaigns, established groups and — most importantly — individuals to be there. The UCL Campaign's biggest success last year was drawing on support from people who had never engaged in this kind of politics before; they're the key to our movement's strength! We're willing to work with anyone who shares the aims of the campaign, and, ultimately, those aims are inherently radical and will become more so as the recession hits.

It is for the conference to decide what comes out of it! But I'd certainly hope that we'd build for something bigger — perhaps a national demo. And we're going ahead with some kind of "declaration".

I'm sure the issue about what to do about NUS is something that will come up at the conference (we're planning to hold a workshop focusing on it). Although the Governance Review changed the situation inside NUS, the biggest disincentive to leaving NUS remains the liberation campaigns — and if people decided to leave they would have to be in meaningful number and strength. We shouldn't underestimate the fact that some unions — UCLU included — might not be able to follow.

I'm not sure what an alternative federation of student unions would mean if it were inside the NUS.

• ucl.free.education@gmail.com

Eurostar strike suspended for talks

Cleaners working on Eurostar, members of the RMT railworkers' union, will hold further strikes if talks with bosses prove unsuccessful.

Six strike days are to be scheduled between 3 October and 1 November and will follow two solid strike days held last month.

A strike scheduled for Friday 2 October was suspended when the RMT and Carlisle Cleaning Group who employ the cleaners agreed to go into negotiations at ACAS. The cleaners are asking for the London Living Wage (£7.60), sick pay and an end to bullying-by management. We will know by Thursday 8 October whether the ACAS talks have been successful. If not, the cleaners will press on with their schedule of strike action and will be looking for our support.

Tower Hamlets college win

Strikers at Tower Hamlets College returned to work on Friday 25 September, after winning major concessions from the college.

According to Tower Hamlets UCU branch secretary Richard McEwan: "There were no compulsory redundancies. We saved the mentorship scheme that has helped over 700 young people to grow in confidence and study at uni-

versity. We saved over 300 Esol places, helping people to learn English and join the community. We stopped all the compulsory redundancies in admin, support and youth work. We stopped cuts to A level hours. We doubled the VR offer and we saved learning mentors who provide vital one to one support for students".

Fight the public sector pay freeze!

BY A CIVIL SERVANT

On 6 October Alistair Darling, the Chancellor, announced that he was writing to the public sector salary review bodies calling on them to “freeze the pay of 40,000 senior public servants in 2010-11. And he recommended that about 700,000 middle-ranking public servants, including doctors, dentists and prison officers, get a rise of between 0 per cent and 1 per cent”.

Later the same day shadow Chancellor George Osborne announced the Tories’ pay freeze. In 2011 he wants all public sector workers, except for those earning less than £18,000 a year, to have their pay frozen.

The pay freeze plans mean that in the run-up to an election both Darling and Osborne want to seem “tough” on the Government’s budget deficit, and are happy about making public sector workers bear the brunt of that “toughness”.

Neither of them wants to tax the rich to make good the gap, neither of them is willing to dare say that in fact the budget deficit could continue for a while without disaster (though it arguably could), and

Alistair Darling: competing with George Osborne on tackling the budget deficit

Osborne wants to show that he will move to cut the deficit quicker and more harshly than Darling.

Beyond that the details of their plans are unclear. Also unclear so far is the trade-union response.

The Treasury website carries no detail at all of Darling’s pay freeze plan. Does he intend to squeeze the “Treasury remit”

for civil service pay? Is he just going to recommend to pay review bodies that they freeze pay or limit rises, or will he refuse to abide by pay review body recommendations if they do not comply?

Does a pay freeze mean no increase in existing pay schedules, or a freeze on existing workers receiving the “increments” they would normally get?

The BBC says that “Mr Darling’s announcement does not affect teachers, nurses and police officers who are still subject to three year pay deals which come to an end next year. A Treasury source told the BBC the pay freeze will override the final year of a three-year pay deal for senior public sector workers. This means the salary rise expected next summer by GPs, judges, NHS managers and the heads of quangos will not now go ahead”.

Osborne’s announcement raises similar questions. Will he suspend the pay review bodies and replace them by a compulsory freeze? Will he suspend the current pay-negotiation system in the civil service (something like 200 different bargaining units), which the Government officially says is outside Government control?

PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka said: “Rather than playing the disgraceful political game of who can be the toughest, the government and the Conservatives should be dealing with the gross unfairness and inequality of pay in the civil service and its related bodies”.

Unison general secretary Dave Prentis, reacting to the Tory pay plan on his union’s website, says “The Tories have shown that the only time they are able to take tough action is when squeezing every last penny from the working classes.” Of course, when the Labour Party does the same thing Prentis is not so forthright! But if this declaration means that Prentis and other Labour-affiliated union leaders will act to defend their members’ standards of living — if cut by the Tories — then that is good. We shall see.

Public sector workers, except for those at the top, have seen their pay squeezed over the last few years. Unison had nothing much to say about it.

Whether we are to have a Labour pay freeze, a Tory pay freeze, or Labour or Tory not-quite-freeze, we need a fighting rank and file response.

The first strike against the new austerity

BY DAVID KIRK

Leeds City Council Street Scene workers have been on all-out indefinite strike since 7 September. These workers include street cleaners, depot staff, and household refuse collectors, all of whom are facing wage cuts of up to £6000 a year.

The pressure of the strike may be beginning to tell on the council. They have finally agreed to talk to the unions. As I write on 6 October, the strike continues into its fifth week.

Refuse collectors could see their wages falling to a little over £12000 a year. Many of these workers risk losing their homes as they lose up a third of their wages.

The councillors’ response to the almost entirely solid walk-out by GMB and Unison members is to do everything they can to break the strike.

They refused to talk to the unions while the strikes continued.

Private contractors like PHS Group have been used to bring in blackleg lorries and scab labour. These lorries have at times been escorted by the police through the city centre, even if often they do not have the manpower to collect anything but a token amount of waste.

The leaders of the Tory-Lib-Dem council have accused picketing workers of intimidation and other crimes.

Now a senior executive of the council has announced that refuse collection is to be put out to tender and that the strike has “scotched” the chances of any in-house bid.

The workers answer the cheap tricks and dirty tactics of the council with strong picket lines, impromptu marches and the inescapable sight of litter caking the city streets. Ad hoc actions in support of the strike have ranged from gluing wheelie bins shut and low-level sabotage of scab lorries to dozens of bags of rubbish being piled on council leader Richard Brett’s front garden.

This last action led to a night-time police raid on a house. The cleanliness of

Cllr Brett’s drive is obviously a serious security matter!

In the last couple of weeks the Labour Party in Leeds has opportunistically used the refuse workers’ struggle to bash the Liberal Democrats. Ed Miliband has called for the strike to be settled.

Unison has called for trade union branches and others to support the workers with donations to the strike fund and by putting pressure on Lib -Dem councillors by leafleting their wards and surgeries. The unions have arranged benefit gigs and a demonstration on 17 October in Leeds city centre.

However the unions have not called for wider solidarity actions against the employment agencies being used to recruit scab labour. No doubt the stewards’ reluctance is down to the anti-trade-union laws, which were framed to defeat

many a struggle before they have begun. Lessons can be learned from recent actions like the engineering construction strikes which showed how these anti-worker laws can be broken successfully.

The council’s excuse to slash the pay of the refuse workers was that they were implementing the Single Status Agreement to bring in equal pay for female-dominated and male-dominated manual council jobs. Their answer to inequality was to extend the women workers’ pauper wages to the Street Scene workers as well.

A previous strike by GMB refuse collectors in Leeds last year disgracefully ignored the poor wages of their fellow workers and argued instead that the refuse workers, jobs were higher skilled and more arduous than jobs done by women workers. This time round, it

seems the unions presented a plan to the council to level the other workers’ wages up to be the same as the Street Scene workers. Although this is a vast improvement in strategy, no attempt appears to have been made to link the Street Scene workers’ struggle with that of other low paid council workers.

Council leaders and chief executives across the country desperate to impose swingeing cuts on services, wages, jobs and pensions are watching this struggle closely. If the refuse workers are broken, hundreds of thousand workers in less organised cities will face massive attacks on their wages and conditions. The first major battle against the “new austerity” is being fought in Leeds. The entire labour movement must do much more to ensure it is the refuse workers that emerge victorious.

Not fit for purpose

BY LYNNE MOFFAT

Birmingham city children’s social services have been found “unfit for purpose” as child deaths in that city hit the headlines.

I cannot be the only social worker to have read that statement and thought, “too bloody right, we’ve been saying it for years.” The current round of adverts for social work depict a glossy picture which is very far from the reality of the best social work teams at the moment. The report by the Scrutiny Committee in Birmingham shows how different.

The report raises many issues, including cramped and inadequate working conditions for overworked and stressed staff, inadequate or non-existent supervision and support for staff, high case-loads, high vacancy levels, and surprise, surprise... high sickness levels. But while the report may be accurate, it had little to offer in terms of solutions.

Firstly the problems in Birmingham Social Services, as elsewhere cannot be uncoupled from the reality of the society we live in, the poverty, inequality, and violence that prevails. Social workers interviewed by the BBC have made it clear that they feel unsafe going into many of the places where the families they work with have to live.

Secondly we have dismantle the current system. The combination of relentless targets, IT-driven performance management, underfunded privatised services, bureaucracy, and high thresholds for intervention, along with high workloads, poor morale and a devaluation of traditional social work skills, results in a system that has let the vulnerable in our society down, again and again. Hard enough for experienced qualified social workers to deal with, but in Birmingham, one third of the social work staff are unqualified: poorly paid and poorly trained. Yet they have responsibility for safeguarding vulnera-

ble children.

Something has to change. Even in our profit driven society, there is a recognition that children have rights and deserve to be protected from abuse. The existing system cannot do this.

To achieve even the minimum safeguarding service for vulnerable children, massive investment and change in management culture will be necessary. Yet we now face further degradation of services as we brace ourselves for huge cuts.

To prevent more tragedies, and to fight for a social services system that is “fit for purpose” a concerted fightback throughout all social service departments is urgently needed. Unison members need to go beyond the rhetoric of their union, and actively organise to protect services, and fight against the crippling performance management tick-box culture. This is the only way to empower social workers to provide the services needed to protect children and support families.

RATCLIFFE-ON-SOAR CLIMATE SWOOP

Building alliances with power workers

By DANIEL RANDALL

In the run up to the “Climate Swoop” at the Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, due to take place on 17 October, Workers’ Climate Action supporters in Nottinghamshire have been writing and distributing a bulletin for Ratcliffe workers.

The bulletin the purpose and perspective of the Swoop, and argues that there are links between exploitation of the planet and exploitation of workers by the power station’s owners, e.on.

Despite e.on bosses pocketing massive salaries, workers at Ratcliffe have been offered a derisory 1% pay increase this year. The bulletin promises support and solidarity from the environmental movement if Ratcliffe workers take action over pay.

Historically, the annual Camp for Climate Action (“Climate Camp”) has

taken place alongside a mass direct action against a particular target (Drax, Heathrow and Kingsnorth); this year’s separation of the action from the Camp is a new, potentially risky, strategy.

There have also been some political problems surrounding the Ratcliffe-on-Soar action that have not been fully overcome. Initially the action focused on “shutting down” the power station’s operation for a given period, but as activists raised concerns about the political legitimacy of group of environmental activists unilaterally shutting down someone else’s workplace, emphasis shifted towards “blockading” the plant, and terms such as “convergence.” Activists are now being asked to attach themselves to one of several “blocs”, each of which has a different mission.

This diversity of tactics is positive, as it means the action is still accessible to anyone who is uncomfortable with the “shut

down” approach, but such diversity can also allow some to avoid having the tough arguments about whether such a “shut down” is the right thing to do politically.

But the Swoop is an important action. The environmental movement is increasingly the primary pole of attraction for radicalised young people interested in broadly anti-capitalist ideas, and the instinct to target, in a public and high profile way, an exploitative multinational corporation such as e.on, is a good one and one that revolutionary socialists share entirely.

Another positive aspect of the Swoop is the work that has been done around “worker engagement”. The idea that relating to the struggles of workers in frontline industries should now be a key issue for the environmental movement is gaining a real grip — thanks in no small part to the work of Workers’ Liberty

members involved in Climate Camp and to the work of the Workers’ Climate Action network. Worker engagement is no longer treated as an afterthought, and increasingly is seen as something more fundamental than more general “outreach” or “public relations” strategies.

While it would be fantastically optimistic to expect a similar outcome from WCA leafleting at Ratcliffe to the one from WCA leafleting at Vestas, such workplace-based agitation is essential if a genuine and lasting alliance between the climate movement and energy sector workers — that is, the people fundamentally capable of taking control of and restructuring the most polluting industries — is to be built and maintained.

• www.workersclimateaction.com/2009/09/29/wca-the-great-climate-swoop (the text of the WCA bulletin)
www.climatecamp.org.uk/actions/climate-swoop-2009 (the Swoop website)

Cutting waste at “the coalface”

Darren Bedford recommends the Labour Research Department’s *Unions and Climate Change* pamphlet.

Don’t let the uninspiring foreword by TUC General Secretary Brendan Barber put you off the Labour Research Department’s pamphlet on “unions and climate change”. It provides a wealth of facts — and some useful pointers for action — that working-class environmental campaigners can use to develop their struggles.

The pamphlet is mainly focused on potential roles for “green reps”, and places particular emphasis on measures that such reps can fight for management to take in order to decrease emissions and wastefulness within individual workplaces.

Statistics show, for example, that almost 50% of workplaces have taken no action whatsoever to reduce emissions resulting from car travel. Only 8% of employers provide significant subsidies for public transport use, meaning that many workers are financially penalised for taking the environmentally-conscious step of travelling to work by means other than their car. Some workplaces have made a botched attempt to improve the situation by charging for parking spaces — which, again, penalises workers rather than incentivising them (as public transport subsidies would).

Although the pamphlet includes sections on international agreements and the idea of “just transition”, it is principally focused on demands to be fought for in individual workplaces, and contains substantial anecdotal reports from union activists about bosses’ frequent resistance to even discussing the question.

Climate change and environmental activism often involves dealing with the biggest of big questions, and the focuses of this pamphlet could seem myopic compared to a struggle like Vestas. But they are, in their own, no less important and no less implicitly anti-capitalist.

Just as Vestas highlighted the need for a social system that responded to what was socially and environmentally necessary (jobs and renewable energy) rather than profit, so this pamphlet makes an articulate, if at times a little veiled, case for workers’ control.

The pamphlet quotes a UCU rep who reported that “when we have raised our members’ concerns about excessive heat in the workplace, we have been told its our fault for leaving computers switched on.”

When PCS members in the civil service tried to open windows to reduce overheating, bosses insisted on turning the air conditioning up instead (thereby increasing emissions).

The point, of course, is that it is workers — the people on the shop-floor, and the office floor, the people who make workplaces, and indeed society, function — who can develop and put into action the solutions to environmental waste in the workplaces. Bosses will always bend first to the will of profit.

Struggles around the issues the pamphlet highlights, as well as struggles for workplace green and environmental reps to be given the same legal recognition and facility time as other reps, should accompany “bigger” struggles — for a massive expansion of the renewable energy sector and the renationalisation of the railway, for example — in the coming period.

Vestas workers discuss next steps

By DAN RAWNSLEY

The Vestas wind turbine blade workers on the Isle of Wight have called a meeting for Friday 9 October to discuss the future of their campaign.

Vestas, a big Danish-based multinational, announced the close of their blade-manufacture operation on the Isle of Wight — the only sizeable one in Britain — on 28 April. The workers occupied the Newport factory from 20 July to 7 August to stop closure, and then blockaded it until the blockade was broken up by large numbers of police on 22 September.

Mark Smith, one of the Vestas occupiers, told *Solidarity* that prospects on the island for unemployed workers are grim. Many are “stuck on training programs with no guarantee of a job at the end”. Workers need a general campaign for jobs on the island — green jobs, unionised jobs, jobs on decent pay and conditions, and jobs with openings for young people.

Despite the fact that the occupation and the blockade only delayed the closure a couple of weeks, they rejuvenated the labour movement on the island at this meeting. The 9 October meeting could make sure something solid and more permanent comes out of that, by deciding to move on to a general campaign and to rejuvenate the Trades Councils on the island as a vehicle for that.

The rejuvenation of the Trades Councils can be done either through drawing many more delegates into the existing joint Cowes/Newport Trades Council — which sponsored the first meeting to discuss resistance to the Vestas closure, back on 3 July — or maybe by merging the Trades Councils into a “county Trades Council”.

A livelier central Trades Council will bring all the organised workers on the island together into a coherent labour movement. It will create a central pool of activists capable of acting rapidly and more readily in unison with one another.

Where there is a threat to the working class, the Trades Council must be in a position to see this threat coming, discuss it, and organise a fight around it.

It could also start discussing a workers’ plan for the island, proposing socially-valuable uses for many of the offices and factories now lying empty.

A model for that was given by Lucas Aerospace workers in the 70s when, threatened with redundancies, they worked out a plan for using their factory to produce things such as dialysis machines in place of its previous military contracts.

A Conservative victory is likely at the next general election, and with it an even more anti-worker government than New Labour, waging war against public services. The island’s only tax office is already threatened with closure, and a schools reorganisation currently in train will cut jobs too.

Workers’ control is the key to cutting energy waste

LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

What the media failed to report

A long-time Labour Party activist reports on some of the things at Labour Party conference which didn't reach the newspapers or the TV coverage.

The Labour Party leadership put a lot of effort into trying to stop the rule change to have the 55 constituency Labour Party (CLP) delegates to the National Policy Forum elected by the membership at large rather than by a few hundred CLP delegates at national conference.

Pat McFadden, Chair of the Labour Party National Policy Forum, was having delegates called out of the hall to meet him so that he could pull them into line, yet in the vote we had a 55%-45% majority for the rule change among the CLP delegates. We thought we might not. The last rule change slightly opening things up for the constituencies, the one in 2003 to allow them four contemporary motions to conference, was passed by the union votes with a majority of CLP delegates against it.

The unions voted 79% for the NPF rule change. According to René Lavanchy of *Tribune*, Downing Street's objection to the rule change was: "It'll let the left in".

Why do they think that? In recent years, CLP delegates to annual conference have generally proved more malleable than CLP members at large; to have the 55 NPF delegates chosen through an extra filtration makes them more docile again.

The wider ballot is likely to produce a result more like the ballot for constituency members of Labour's National

Executive, where the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance holds four out of six seats. The constituencies have 55 representatives in the NPF and the unions have 30. The NPF's total membership of 184 also includes the 32 members of the National Executive, 22 regional reps, plus ministers, MPs, MEPs, etc. The rule change increases the chance of getting minority reports from the National Policy Forum to allow real debate at conference.

But we have to make the rule change work. It is not automatic. The powers-that-be are not going to sit on their hands. They will be organising to win those ballots for NPF reps.

The other big constitutional issue was about restoring contemporary motions. Since 2007 the unions and CLPs have not been allowed to submit contemporary motions. We have only been able to submit "contemporary issues", which are discussed, not voted on, and shunted off to the NPF.

In the run-up to conference, the affiliated unions, through the Trade Union Liaison Organisation (TULO), pressed for the restoration of motions. In the end the leadership agreed a compromise. A review of the question of motions, and of the whole party structure, will be held between the General Election and the 2010 Labour Party conference. And the National Executive report accepted by conference added that the NEC had "consulted with the Conference Arrangements Committee"; if the 2010 conference restores motions, then "issues" submitted to that conference



Peter Mandelson: the standing ovations for him were "disturbing"

will retrospectively become "motions".

There are a lot of other issues which I think are important to push in the run-up to 2010 conference, including the right to amend National Policy Forum documents and a loosening of the requirement that motions be strictly "contemporary", a requirement that in the past has licensed the Conference Arrangements Committee to rule many motions out of order. It is important that motions of contemporary concern are not restricted to topics reliant on particular events occurring in the six weeks before the deadline.

The conference passed two emergency motions. One from the rail unions ASLEF and TSSA said that the East Coast mainline should be kept as a public company and not returned to the private sector. Another, from the CWU, said that the Government must take responsibility for sorting out the Royal Mail pension fund deficit. The platform

allowed both to go through without anyone voting against.

Generally, the conference could have dissolved into complete demoralisation, and it didn't.

At the fringe meeting organised by the biggest unions, Dave Prentis of Unison said that we must insist that the manifesto includes no plans for further privatisation of the Health Service. That's a negative way of putting it, when I think we should be talking about positive things that should be in the manifesto, but the unions were showing a slight measure of independence from the leadership.

Then you had a standing ovation for Peter Mandelson! I suppose conference delegates were grateful he took the fight to the Tories, and did it in an accomplished manner. But it was disturbing that he got that applause.

According to Mandelson, the difference between Labour and the Tories is that the Tories are going to make cuts, and Labour is going to... make kindly cuts. In fact, cuts in public services will be one of the big battlegrounds of the coming months.

Alongside the right-wing populist rhetoric against teenage single mothers and so on, there was a bit of anti-banker rhetoric from the platform. But it was more on the lines of promising to sort out the bankers' bonuses than of talk about controlling the investment and lending policies of the banks themselves.

The trouble is, the message from the top table was not "we can win if we change", but that we can win as we are,

The surprises in the small print

MARTIN THOMAS COMMENTS ON THE CONFERENCE

Foul right-wing populist attempts to catch votes by promising to be "tough" with teenage single mothers or parents of troubled kids. What should be a conference being used instead as a showcase for a series of glib, shoddy speeches from ministers.

A standing ovation for the "Prince of Darkness" who almost killed the Labour Party in the late 1990s, Peter Mandelson, just because he made some jibes against the Tories. No clear opposition to Mandelson's line that Labour should differ from the Tories by making "caring" cuts while the Tories just make cuts.

The headline news from Labour Party conference was much what you would expect from a Labour Party where the leadership, over 15 years, has squeezed almost all life out of the membership, shamelessly courted the billionaires, and worshipped capitalist market mechanisms.

The small print, however, had some small surprises. A few months ago it looked as if the last weight in the heavy lid which the New Labour clique has put on top of democratic voices from the unions and local Labour activists — the banning from Labour Party conference of motions from unions and local Labour Parties, initiated in 2007 — would be confirmed at this conference. There was no sign of a move by unions against it.

In fact, however, the unions did move. They called for the restoration of

motions. They did not go as far as forcing a vote on the issue at the conference. Finally, at an emergency National Executive meeting, they accepted a compromise. The right to put motions, and a range of other party-structure issues, will be reviewed in 2010, and reinstatement of motions then will be retroactive, meaning that motions are debated at that very conference. But the unions moved.

At the same time, the top Labour leaders gave every sign of demoralisation. On the day the Labour conference opened, the *Observer* had Chancellor Alistair Darling saying that the Labour leadership had "lost the will to live", and the *Sunday Times* had Peter Mandelson saying that if the Tories win the next election he will seek a government post under them.

Many of the middle-class careerists in the ministers' offices and the think-tanks who have formed the praetorian guard for Blair and Brown since 1994 may jump ship after the probable heavy Labour general election defeat.

Talking to *Solidarity*, veteran Labour Party democracy campaigner and National Executive member Pete Willsman was categorical. "That's all sorted. We'll have motions back in 2010". Willsman's judgement is not to be sneered at. The unions are now solidly for restoration of motions. Next year's conference — after (probably) a big Labour election defeat — will be more unruly, without the pressure to rally together for the coming general election which has shaped this one.

The unions also pushed through, against strong opposition from the

Labour leadership, a rule change to have the 55 constituency Labour Party representatives on the National Policy Forum directly elected, rather than chosen from among the constituency delegates at annual conference. This is a recalibration rather than a reversal, but it increases the chance of minority reports from the National Policy Forum which will allow real debate at future annual conferences.

These small stirrings could well yet come to nothing. A new Labour leader will probably be elected in 2010 after a general election defeat. He or she will have authority and credibility — not as much as Blair had in 1994, or even as Brown had in 2007, but some.

All of the contenders, even Jon Cruddas, who is trying to "re-brand" himself leftwards, come from the New Labour stable. (Cruddas was an aide in Blair's office between 1997 and 2001). They are all likely to want to try to rebuild Party membership, but also all quite likely to try to hi-jack the promised review of party structures so as to circumvent today's little whispers of democracy, and to drive things even more in the direction of Labour becoming like the US Democratic Party.

But why are the unions beginning to stir, in a small way? Because they fear the coming Tory cuts, feel obliged to mount some opposition to them, and are anxious to nudge Labour into coming forward as at least a quarter-credible political alternative to the Tories for the labour movement. Will those pressures continue after the general election? Yes. In fact they are likely to increase, with

Tory cuts underway rather than promised, and the Labour Party in opposition, so more malleable. There will be, or at least should be, a struggle.

From the desk of George Parker of the *Financial Times* the conference looked different from how it looks to us on the left. Mocking rather than impressed or startled, Parker saw this:

"Labour this week rediscovered the joys of class war. The prospect of taking the fight to the Tory toffs and their banker friends has put fire back in the party's belly..."

"Mr Brown's celebration of City ingenuity and Lord Mandelson's endorsement of the 'filthy rich' have been airbrushed out of history. Mr Brown... claimed the [financial collapses of September 2008] were the death throes of... a free market, immoral approach to capitalism that he attributed solely to the Conservatives.

"Whatever the credibility of this approach, it opens up lines of attack on the Tories — and the well-heeled leadership of David Cameron and George Osborne — which Labour will deploy relentlessly in coming months..."

"Crude attacks on the wealthy and the sight of trade union barons ripping up copies of *The Sun* are the kind of thing Tony Blair thought he had eradicated from the Labour party... But Mr Brown believes the financial crisis has changed the public mood".

If we can open up the unions sufficiently that more of that mood filters through politically, then the Labour leader to follow Brown may not have things all his or her way.

Who are the English Defence League?

By CHARLIE SALMON

Bursting onto television screens and newspapers in the wake of a racist provocation-turned-riot in Luton in May this year, the embryonic forces of what now constitute the English Defence League have maintained a steady presence in the media and on the streets. But who are the EDL?

The rise of the English Defence League (EDL) has in fact been a contradictory phenomenon. The media prominence is out of all proportion to the actual numbers involved in and on the periphery of the EDL. It is all the more surprising given that the organisation appears to be an entirely internet-based.

Most accounts of the EDL maintain that it was forged in the wake of a tiny protest in Luton against Royal Anglian Regiment troops returning from Afghanistan. The story goes like this: in March this year a handful of supporters of the clerical-fascist Al-Muhajiroun organised a publicity stunt at the parade for returning troops; this outraged the local community who in turn organised their own protest denouncing “Muslim extremists”. The EDL snowballed from there.

In the real world the truth is very rarely as simple as this. The hastily formed “United People of Luton” (UPL) group, whose pro-troops demonstration, that descended into a riot, was not an organic response. At the core of this group and organisations like “March For England”, which readily supported UPL, are known supporters of the far-right and fascist groups. The important added ingredient to the real story is the central role played by Luton football hooligans — the “Men In Gear” or “MIGs” — and the networks they operate within.

BNP CONNECTION

The grouping which now calls itself the “English Defence League” makes many claims for itself. They continue to deny any links with the British National Party — claims reciprocated by Nick Griffin.

They claim to oppose the use of violence — despite facts to the contrary. They insist that they are non-racist, simply opposed to “extremists”. The widely reported facts demolish these claims. More important, for anti-racists and anti-fascists, is to understand exactly what the EDL represents, why they are so dangerous and what we do to stop their activity.

The mutually hostile exchanges between British National Party leaders and EDL spokespeople are hard to fathom. All the more so when it turns out that key members of the EDL are also BNP members.

Chris Renton, Davy Cooling and Matt Unsworth are all prominent EDL activists and listed BNP members. Renton has been visible at EDL actions in Birmingham, Cooling is known to have links with football hooliganism and Unsworth made special efforts to recruit racist musicians to EDL events.

Also a quick scan of the BNP’s website will show you just how obsessed they are with Muslims and mosques. Along with

advertises for “It’s Cool to be White” t-shirts, the website carries stories warning of the dangers of Pakistani immigration and the threat to free speech posed by Islam. The BNP uses anti-Muslim prejudice and racism to organise itself and attract new supporters. So does the EDL.

But the BNP’s current political strategy is at odds with the approach taken by the EDL. Where the BNP is happy set up stalls in town and city centres, petitioning against immigration or the building of a new mosque, the EDL is much happier staging a direct racist provocation outside said mosque. This is exactly what they attempted in Harrow last month when a handful of their members were humiliated by massive opposition.

Where the BNP will use images of burkha-clad women on election leaflets to garner racist support, the EDL plan to don burkha-style headgear at their upcoming Manchester action.

Both the BNP and EDL appeal to a pervasive anti-Muslim sentiment in society, and share the same racist impulses. But the BNP has shelved the street-level agitation and violently confrontational style adopted by the EDL, in favour of a bid for mainstream political positioning, to build mass support. In fact Griffin and the BNP envisage a future “civil war” for control of the country but characterise the current period as one of “quiet revolution”. The activities of the EDL are creating a bit too much noise for Griffin’s liking.

Griffin and his second-in-command Simon Darby have posted a number of discussions on BNP blogs and websites where they have criticised the EDL for being a “non-white” organisation, claimed EDL demonstrations are a provocation by state security forces, and, more recently, that they are were coordinated by “Zionists”. They are working hard to discourage BNP members from becoming involved with the group.

The EDL works equally hard to distance itself from the BNP. At demonstrations in Luton and Birmingham, EDL supporters have carried placards stating “We are not BNP”. Alan Lake, a businessman who has offered to finance EDL activities and publicity, has demanded the group continues to distance itself from the BNP.

But what do these demands say about Alan Lake? Does his and the EDL’s hostility to the BNP make them any “better” than Britain’s largest fascist organisation?

According to reports in the *Guardian* and on the “Hope Not Hate” website, Lake has attended meetings and conferences organised by the Swedish Democrats. The SD has its roots on the Swedish far-right, has worked closely and modelled itself on Le Pen’s Front National but has recently moved to distance itself from the more extreme elements, expelling some members. The SD remains a far-right, nationalist party.

At the conference, Lake spoke enthusiastically about the emergence of the EDL claiming: “We [the British far-right] have a problem with numbers. We have an army of bloggers but that’s not going to get things done. Football fans [sic] are a potential source of support. They are a hoi polloi that gets off their backsides and travels to a city and they are available

before and after matches.” He spoke of the EDL as a “street army” in the coming battle against Islamisation.

Lake’s agenda — an agenda almost certainly shared by the core of the EDL — is to urgently prepare for and instigate racist confrontations. The BNP share the same ultimate goal but are engaged in a very different strategy. The direction of the EDL will appeal to those on the far-right who either disagree with Griffin’s “moderate” positioning or who have become frustrated with the results.

Many fascists will consider the election of a phalanx of councillors and two MEPs as steps forward for their movement, but yearn for more direct action against their enemies. This is what the EDL offers. It could very well become a centre for the re-grouping of Britain’s hard-core fascists, with a ready made “army”.

FOOTBALL HOOLIGANS

Individual football hooligans and the growing number of sympathetic “firms” are the EDL’s most important potential asset.

The Luton hooligan firm, the “MIGs”, were centrally involved in the first outburst of activity. Previously the “MIGs” has acted as foot-soldiers for the tiny local branch of the BNP.

In an effort to distance themselves from the negative “public image” of hooliganism — all too risky when you’re headed for the big time — the BNP leader banned the group from public meetings. This caused some disquiet amongst local BNP supporters.

Barry Taylor, a former BNP member claims in a leaked document that: “A lot of the activism and support in Luton was due to a group of friends known as the MIGs. When Nick Griffin made a visit to our area in February 2007 the MIGs were not invited. Subsequently they discovered that they had been excluded... These men had previously represented about 50% of the available workforce for Luton” (*Searchlight*, September 2009).

This is evidence that relations between football hooliganism and the organised far-right, fascists and racists endures.

The history of football hooliganism dates back to the 1800s. The first recorded example took place in Derby in 1846 where two troops of dragoons were called in to put down a riot. Since the 1880s, pitch invasions became commonplace.

These and most of the subsequent examples of hooliganism had no political motivation, did not involve racism and were not harnessed by wider political movements. Most sociologists consider football hooliganism to be one made up of two separate phenomena — “spontaneous” and low-level disruption caused by drunks or over-excited fans, and orchestrated stand-offs between organised gangs.

During the 1970s and 1980s there were many large-scale confrontations and the establishment of permanent organisations, or “firms” of hooligans. This period coincided with growing racial tensions and the formation of larger and more stable fascist organisations like the National Front. The National Front and its periphery, with their common commitment to

racist street violence, forged connections.

At this time some degree of racial and effectively political differentiation opened up between fan bases. For instance, two clubs in the same city could have two very different bases of support — one overwhelmingly Catholic, the other Protestant. Obvious political/sectarian differences over Ireland were played out in exchanges of abusive chants and physical confrontations. Fans in a part of the country with a very low proportion of ethnic minority populations faced with a fan-base in a newly multicultural city would fight it out in a similar way. Such arenas were, and continue to be, attractive hunting grounds for organised racists and fascists.

Some of the newly formed “firms” were explicitly set up as “white-only” and with specific right-wing politics, often led by National Front supporters. Others had sympathies and affiliations to the anti-racist movement and even socialist organisations. In other words, hooliganism is not automatically associated with the extreme right and reaction.

Throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s organised groups of socialist football “hooligans” confronted NF supporters and attempted to stop them organising racist attacks before or after matches. Some of this activity is described in the book *No Retreat* by Dave Hann and Steve Tilzey.

The wave of football hooliganism, dubbed “the English disease”, was largely quashed in the wake of large-scale rioting and deaths. Increased policing and police intelligence work within the firms played a part, and the police continue to monitor and control rival crowds. If the EDL, which already has a number of firms affiliated to its “Casuals United” network, can attract more support or inspire new, sympathetic firms, then we could see a return to regular, large-scale clashes.

Two final aspects of the involvement of organised football hooligans.

Football matches and fixtures — especially where longstanding rivalries between fans exists — provide a convenient organisational timetable for activity. The mass following that football enjoys provides a ready-made recruitment ground.

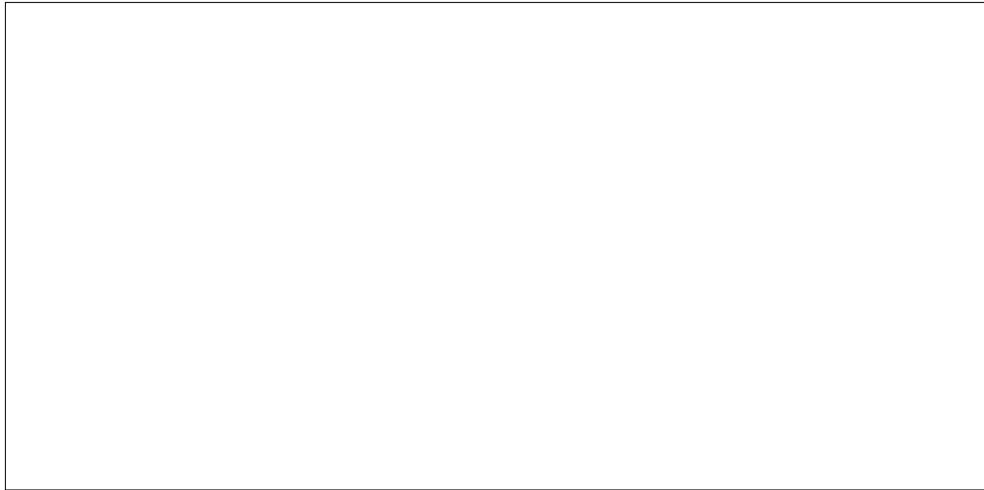
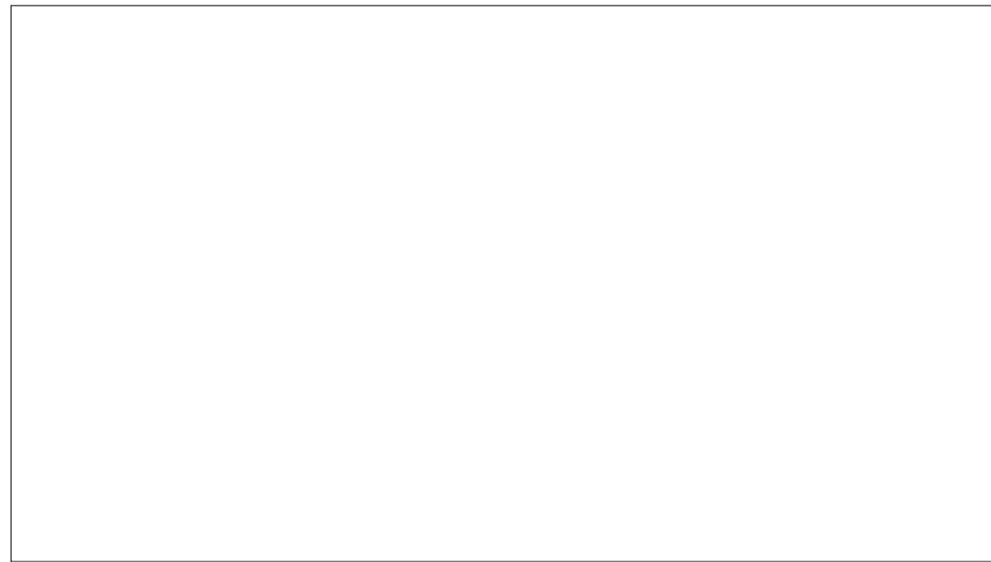
“ANTI-EXTREMIST” OR RACIST?

The “official” EDL story, postings on various supporting blogs and websites, and the placards carried by supporters on demonstrations, insist that that “we are not racist”.

On their website they claim to want to put pressure on the government to act “against extremist Muslim preachers and organisations”.

Further, they state: “We have had enough of our Government ignoring both the problem itself and the cries for action from the majority of those in this country. Instead they promote a politically correct culture which panders to Jihadist preachers...”

“We welcome members from all over the political spectrum, and with varying



views on foreign policy, united against Islamic extremism and its influence on British life. Everyone from those whose ancestral roots are in pre-Roman Britain to immigrants just arrived yesterday will be welcomed into the EDL with open arms as long as they are willing to stand up with us for English values and against Islamist hate.

"Too many English are afraid to stand up and say 'Enough!' because of the fear of being branded 'racist'. We hope to change this. So in short, we invite people of all races and faiths to join us in this campaign to awaken our sleeping Government to face up to and deal with the Jihad in our country, which threatens the very foundations of the freedoms won so dearly for us by past generations."

What are we to make of these claims?

According to the EDL there are mass "cries for action" but instead the government "panders to Jihadis". It is true that clerical-fascist or Islamist groups operate in this country. Some of them — very tiny numbers — do so with dangerous intent, such as the murderers who blew themselves up on London public transport.

Other organisations operate around certain mosques, recruiting young people to a version of Islam significantly at odds with the beliefs of most Muslims.

Others still have formed national organisations like the British Muslim Initiative (the British branch of the 'soft' clerical-fascist Muslim Brotherhood) or the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (which donated money to the legal defence of Holocaust denier David Irving). These groups pose as representative of all Muslims but in fact represent very little.

The most significant external promoters of these groups has not always been the government (their stance on "moderate" Islamism has varied) but also sections of the left who, in the same way as the EDL,

present the BMI and MPAC as "the Muslim community". Most of the "cries for action" have not come from the great mass of society but from the attempts of tabloid newspapers to exploit deep-seated racist prejudice. The EDL is attempting to harness this sentiment for its own violent ends.

The EDL wants support "from all over the political spectrum". They don't care what you think about foreign policy or the NHS. They are "non-political", or so they claim. But with their first statement the EDL has already erected a determining condition for membership or support: hostility towards a government that "panders to Jihadis". So as long as you accept this hostility and are willing to swallow their racism, you can join the protests.

This sort of "minimum platform" — hostility to established powers and laying the blame on minority ethnic groupings — has all the hallmarks of the anti-semitic populist movements which helped foster the growth of fascism in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.

Another similarity is the way in which they seek to unite the "little man", regardless of national or ethnic origin, against the all-powerful elites... so long as these people accept "English values". Note that they don't define what these values are. The trajectory of previous populist movements shows that it takes very little time for this pretence to shatter.

The overwhelming impression left by the EDL's self description is one of paranoia.

They describe a "sleeping government" and "real threats". The EDL clearly has some special knowledge of an imminent and dastardly plot, it wants to share this knowledge, it wants everyone to join the movement. Of course this is a rhetorical device designed to exploit already existing racism and harness it into a racist

street movement.

The EDL does not differentiate between Muslims and Islamist clerical-fascists. The implication of their conspiracism is that the great mass of Muslims are involved in a "plot". Even without the positive proof given by the racist rioting in Luton, it is clear from their own words that the EDL is founded on anti-Muslim prejudice.

EDL "march" in Birmingham

STOPPING THE EDL

To date the main responses to provocations by the EDL have had an overwhelmingly communal character.

There are two organisational factors which have influenced the nature of the counter-demonstrations: 1. The popular frontism of the Socialist Workers Party and its Unite Against Fascism front group and 2. the entirely natural organic impulses of a group under attack.

UAF and its predecessor organisations aim to "unite" anti-fascist sentiment.

The problem is that the basis on which UAF unites people is not based on working class politics. When dealing with the BNP the UAF is crippled by an inability to propose an alternative politics. They simply implore people not to vote "Nazi" and continually repeat Nick Griffin's criminal record.

It's important to expose the BNP and other fascists, but there are limits. Add to this approach the recent trajectory of the SWP and the problems of the popular front are compounded.

Throughout the invasion, war and occupation of Iraq the SWP promoted political Islamist organisations and in so doing misrepresented Muslims. They were able to side-step the hard work of consistently trying to win people — in this case Muslims — to socialist ideas but still maintain the impression that "Muslims are on our side". They did this by putting members of the Muslim

Association of Britain on anti-war platforms and asking imams to announce demonstrations from the front of a mosque.

There is some evidence to suggest that, through UAF, the SWP are pulling the same manoeuvre. Reports from the Birmingham anti-EDL mobilisation suggest that although UAF were present at the start of the counter-demonstration, the main chants and organisational drive came from members of MPAC. The crowd was composed mainly of Muslim youth. When trade unionists carrying the Birmingham Trades Council banner approached, they were mistaken for EDL supporters and had stones thrown at them.

The result of this "franchising out" of political responsibility to a group like MPAC is that the EDL were faced with a crowd of angry Pakistani youth. Not only did this scenario reinforce all of the racist thinking of the EDL supporters — something echoed by the press — but also reinforced the damaging view that "Muslims are isolated". MPAC will have gained some credit and prestige on the day because nobody was united against anything, no matter what the placards said.

The Pakistani youth who turned out to face the EDL should have our support. So too the thousand or more who turned out to defend the Harrow mosque where the EDL proposed to demonstrate. At the same time, an effective campaign against the racists cannot simply tail the most militant sounding or effective looking "leaders" or organisations from the community under attack.

This was the mistake made by many socialist and communist groups in America during the civil rights struggles, where the dominant but ultimately conservative National Association for the Advancement of Colored People was at turns embraced or rejected in favour of the more militant Nation of Islam and other extreme separatist groups. By contracting out the political leadership and organisational work against the EDL to similar groups today, the SWP and those who go along with it are making the same mistakes. More generally the role of the labour movement in representing all workers and defending their interests — not just in the workplace but in society more generally — is brought into question. Without the active participation of socialists as part of the leadership against the racists of the EDL it is unlikely that significant sections of the labour movement will get involved. Without consistent efforts to mobilise politically, on a class basis, against racist prejudice the labour movement will not represent the entire working class.

The challenge posed by the EDL is of fundamental importance. First, because physically confronting them and forcing them from the streets is a necessary act of defence against racism. Second, because to mobilise effectively is to mobilise the labour movement, to make it inclusive and truly representative of our class. Third, because questions about the health and future direction of the socialist left are posed as sharply around these counter-mobilisations as they were around the anti-war movement. Only a consistent independent working-class politics can unite these three necessities.

BOOK

Cold War spies and 80s women

Cathy Nugent reviews *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* by Stieg Larsson

In the final book of his *Millennium Trilogy*, Stieg Larsson turned to the nefarious activities of Sweden's secret state for inspiration. It is the only area of public corruption this one-time editor of the Swedish Trotskyist journal *Fjärde internationalen*, and expert on the European far-right, had not yet exposed.

With *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* Larsson (who died in 2004) produced a political/spy thriller that is more Ian Fleming than John Le Carré. It is not very subtle. The action often owes more to Larsson's political message than the natural flow of the story. Not that this matters very much. It is still a cracking page-turner of a book.

The *Millennium Trilogy* has been praised for its originality (one of the central characters is a young woman with Asperger's Syndrome) and for Larsson's political convictions, not least his feminism. But it is these political convictions that are, for me, the most perplexing aspect of his books, nowhere more apparent than in this last volume.

Since the end of the Cold War Sweden's "secret serv-

ice" — Säpo — has reorganised and become keen to present a public image that is, well, less secret. This is not a purely Swedish phenomena. It is true, for instance, of the British "secret service", whose recently published official history has made the news for "allowing" the author access to (some) classified records.

None of this is a fundamental change of course. The spooks have simply turned their attention to different targets: political Islamism, the far right, anarchists and environmentalists.

Larsson's story centres on a group of spies who refuse to "come in from the cold", who have so much invested in the structures set up during the Cold War that they will defend them, literally, to their dying breath.

Larsson's "detective" character Mikael Blomkvist, an investigative journalist, is determined to uncover the conspiracy cooked up by the unrepentant Cold War spooks. The problem I have with this aspect of the plot is not that it turns on an unbelievable conspiracy (it's a spy thriller after all), but Blomkvist's ready and rather predictable alliances with the "good guys" in the policing and political system.

Of course Blomkvist is not Larsson. Blomkvist makes

the decisions you would expect a leftist-liberal-journalist to make. Nonetheless, I get the impression throughout that Larsson himself believes in bourgeois propaganda about Swedish commitment to free speech and a liberal constitution, as something that is fine and sufficient — as long as it can be defended against the few "bad apples".

Another perplexing aspect of Larsson's books is his feminism. Larsson is to be applauded for attacking misogyny as he does. But his main female characters irritate me slightly. They are all, uniformly, strong, tough and good, or at the very least "misguided", led astray by evil men. Why does attacking misogyny mean creating an unrealistic picture of "womankind"?

I can only imagine that this is something from Larsson's political training. In the 1980s, orthodox Trotskyism adapted to radical feminism. The key assumptions in this kind of feminism were ones that did not treat women as fully-rounded human beings. Women were always the "victims" of a patriarchal system or impossibly morally pure.

Don't get me wrong, I like tough female characters — and the feminism of the 1970s and 80s inspired some very good tough fictional female detectives — but I want to see some female baddies too.

TV

Gandhi: some ugly truths revealed

Stuart Jordan reviews *Gandhi: The Making of the Mahatma* (BBC2)

This series got off to a good start as an attempt by the bourgeois establishment to de-sanctify the legacy of Mohandas Gandhi, and strips away some of the mythology surrounding him. The man revealed is an incredibly driven politician, who sacrificed his family, his sexuality, and other earthly pleasures, in pursuit of building a mass movement.

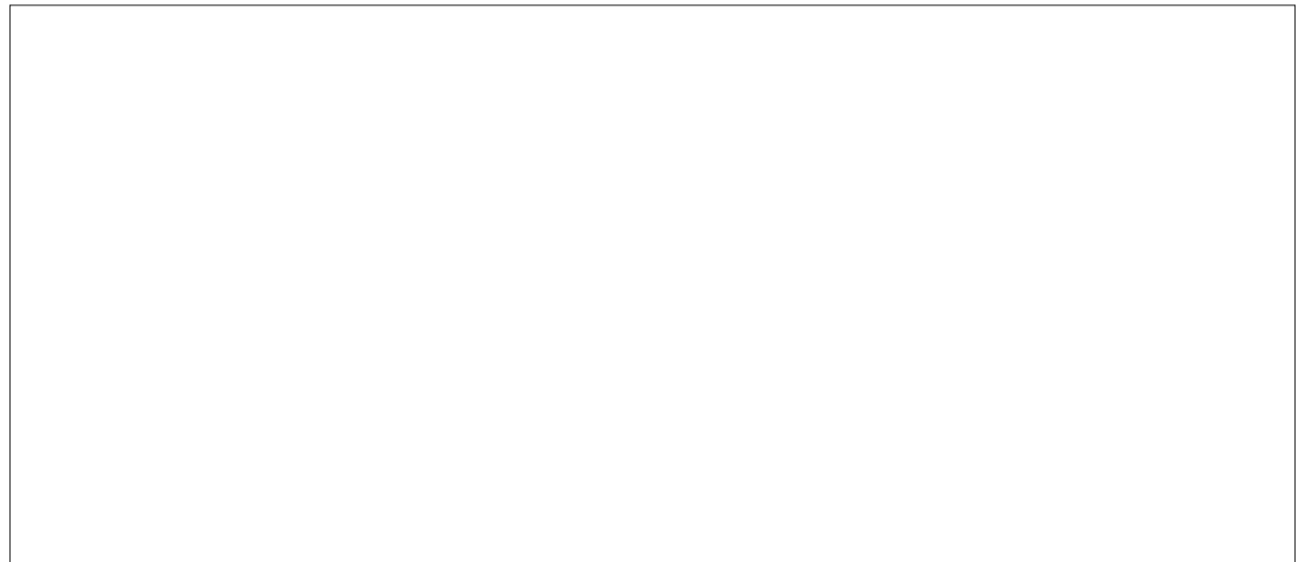
The story of Gandhi's early life (told in the first of the series) shows a different figure from the saintly ascetic of popular folklore. The documentary tells of the time he left his dying father's bedside to satisfy the "carnal desires" he later renounced. It also tells of his first foray into politics where he not only took a racist position towards black South Africans and low-caste Indians, but also sold out all of his comrades. For this act of misleadership he was attacked by a supporter on the way out of prison.

Although the documentary rids Gandhi of his halo, the real-life human being it presents still appears to have almost god-like powers. The documentary completely ignores the historic context in which Gandhi lived. Apart from admitting to some influence by the radical vegetarian scene in London, Gandhi is presented as a figure outside of history who, through force of will-power and satyagraha (literally, grasping the truth), singlehandedly brings down the British Empire. If you believe this story, Gandhi is a *deus ex machina*, born into a political vacuum to bring forth an army of activists.

In South Africa, where he started his political life as a lawyer for Durban's Indian merchant class, Gandhi is portrayed as creating a 9,000-strong movement of arrestable non-violent activists from scratch within a matter of weeks. No doubt the man was a talented political organiser and orator, but a truly secular account would have shown history making the man, rather than the man making history.

It is no surprise that Gandhi's political career starts among the merchant class of South Africa. Here Gandhi develops his own form of reactionary petty-bourgeois socialism that finds no end of support in the upper echelons of the Indian bourgeoisie.

Contrary to the Great Man of History portrayal, Gandhi was very much a product of his time, part of a



Mohandas Gandhi and Indian nationalist leader Jawaharlal Nehru

new movement among India's intelligentsia. They sought a pan-Indian identity based on One World, One God neo-Hinduism and recoiled from the exploitation and alienation of modern capitalism. The documentary makes the bold comparison between his doctrine and modern jihad.

Nowadays, Gandhi's political doctrine of non-violence is taught in schools across the world as an example of how the weak can overcome the strong. However, this rendering of history is a fiction. The British left India for economic reasons, not because they were ground down by decades of satyagraha. It was the militant working class (which Gandhi condemned) and the revolutionary peasantry that played the bigger part in the British decision to leave.

Gandhi's tactics were a failure, born of a failed political doctrine which was not sufficiently secular to prevent the millions slaughtered in Partition. Nor was it sufficiently anti-capitalist to prevent the future millions from dying in India's slums.

Gandhi's story is not one of a hero singlehandedly fighting British imperialism. It is the story of a petty-bourgeois leader, bolstered on the shoulders of the Indian aristocracy. His crackpot political philosophy and leadership must bear some responsibility for the

bloody massacre of Partition. He was the perfect leader for the Indian bourgeoisie, who were quite happy to entertain his self-flagellating philosophy, so long as he kept a lid on the mass movement. Much of his authority rested on the near deification he accorded himself in his "praxis of Truth".

Gandhi synthesised the theological teachings of Jesus and the ancient Hindu sages and thought he had discovered an ancient truth about how to bring about change. But far from rolling back history's web of illusions to uncover timeless truth, Gandhi was a pawn in the game of global capitalist development. His continued legacy is due to the fact that he never really posed a threat to the continued exploitation of the sub-continent.

For the BBC's part, they take God out of the picture, only to champion Gandhi as a flawed but heroic leader of the oppressed, tapping a deep vein of historic truth. An accurate history would have to acknowledge the hundreds of thousands of activists he misled and the hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants that fought their own battles in defiance of his leadership. It would also have to do some honest accounting about the terrors of British colonialism and the abject failings of post-independence India.

BOOK

Whose city is it anyway?

Bruce Robinson reviews *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the 21st Century City* by Anna Minton, Penguin, £9.99

A few years ago, some of us were leafletting for No Sweat outside the Doc Martens' shop in the Triangle shopping centre in Manchester, which is pictured on the front of Anna Minton's book.

After a few minutes, security guards emerged, pointed to metal studs in the pavement and told us we couldn't stand inside that line as it was private property and part of the Triangle. What had previously been a normal piece of public pavement had been given to the owners of the Triangle as part of the "regeneration" of the area following the 1996 IRA bomb. Nothing which might affect business as usual was to be allowed there.

The privatisation of our city centre space, its commercialisation and subordination to the needs of profit and the consequent exclusion of protesters, the poor and anyone who supposedly threatens their "clean and safe" environment is one major theme of Anna Minton's book. It is a policy that is implemented through surveillance and the removal of any democratic accountability for how the space is used.

She also deals more broadly with how urban, housing and crime policy have combined — especially under New Labour — to create fear, inequality, "social exclusion", alienation and dystopia in British cities. Many of New Labour's ideas such as "zero tolerance" for any minor offences such as dropping litter have been adopted uncritically from the US despite increasing evidence of their ineffectiveness there. Minton combines detailed research with visits to and interviews at the locations she describes and provides a forceful polemical account of the impact of these policies on working class lives and their role in degrading the physical and social environments they are supposed to improve.

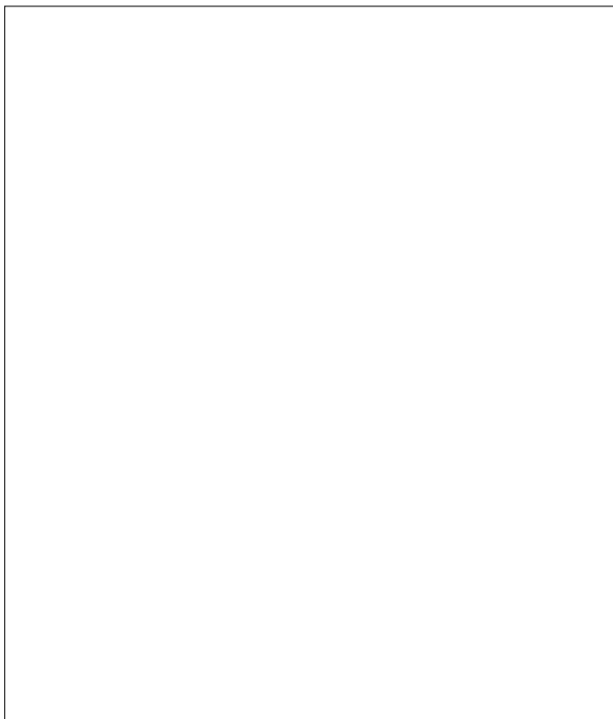
What Minton finds fits well with the ideas of the Marxist theorist of space, Henri Lefebvre. For Lefebvre, the domination of space is central to capital's ability to reproduce itself. This has three effects on the nature of the space itself: capital homogenises, fragments and "hierarchialises" space. The resulting spatial relations both structure and are maintained by the practices of everyday life such as shopping or leisure activities.

Minton finds homogenisation in the shopping malls that increasingly dominate our city centres with only the occasional addition of kitsch decoration to distinguish them; fragmentation in a whole range of social, economic and psychological divisions of space that are bolstered by both government policy and the way the physical environment is changing; and a hierarchy of spaces in what Lefebvre calls "a collection of ghettos... that represents spatially the economic and social hierarchy" ranging from the gated communities of the rich down to council estates considered bastions of anti-social behaviour and in need of the "Respect Agenda".

In Lefebvre's account the state plays a central role in creating and maintaining forms of space and socio-spatial relations. Minton begins her account with the recent history of London's Docklands which was a prototype for a new relationship between the state and capital in urban development in Britain the 80s. A Development Corporation was set up with powers to ignore the normal planning process in the creation of a financial and media city at Canary Wharf, pitched into the middle of long-established working class communities.

One justification was the idea that City wealth would "trickle down" to the locals. However there is little interchange between Canary Wharf and the surrounding area. Workers either commute in and out or live on "secure" private estates. Local resident Pat, interviewed by Minton, commented that things were not affordable for the "locals" and that "local people don't get a look in where jobs are concerned." Asked whether she used the shops in Canary Wharf, she said: "I don't like going there. It always gives me the fear." The borders of a fragmented social space don't always need to be strictly policed to exclude.

Docklands has become the model for the administration of city centres. Increasingly land, property and



New York Reclaim the City movement

control over space in city centres are moving from public to private hands, which Minton sees as a regression to the early 19th century before there was accountable local government. Thirty-four streets in central Liverpool have been handed over to the private Liverpool One development while one street in Manchester pictured in the book has since totally disappeared under the expansion of the Arndale Shopping Centre. Control has passed to management companies such as "CityCo" in Manchester, chaired by developers.

Further down the hierarchy, control is with managers who are quite clear about their goals. One told Minton: "Bugger democracy. Customer focus is not democratic... The citizen is a customer and the aim is to respond best to the needs of the customer." Another was explicit that this means exclusion of those who don't fit this vision or come with money in their pockets: "High margins come with ABC1s [the rich, professionals and better-off sections of the working class], low margins with C2DEs. My job is to create an environment that will bring in more ABC1s."

This is done by creating a "clean and safe" space in which certain people or activities are pushed out by private security guards backed up by the police and CCTV surveillance, and, on the other hand, by feelings that the shops are too expensive or that, like Pat in Docklands, her sort of people are not welcome.

One concern running through "Ground Control" is that the sort of policies being adopted to increase people's feelings of safety and security are having the opposite effect of increasing fear of crime, even when the statistics show crime is actually falling.

Minton, following the American urbanist Jane Jacobs, attributes this to the gradual disappearance of organic communities in which the natural flow of people through streets creates a safe social environment.

She writes that "the link between security and segregation is most pronounced at the extremes of the social spectrum, in very wealthy or very deprived areas." One expression of this is the spread of gated communities where the well off use physical means to banish the supposed danger. But ideas such as "Secured by Design" and "Defensible Space", based on the idea of reducing crime by marking out clearly the ownership of space and building security features into housing designs, are now ubiquitous and insisted on by police and insurers. They serve to fragment space further, increase suspicion of others, especially outsiders, and make homes look like fortresses.

At the same time, the government's Pathfinder programme consists of using compulsory purchase to buy up and pull down perfectly good, largely Victorian terraced houses on grounds of "market failure". There is pressure on those who wish to remain to leave so what were previously working-class communities now con-

sist of streets of boarded-up houses due to be demolished.

While there are some areas where people no longer wish to live due to general industrial or urban decline, the motivation behind Pathfinder is largely economic. Thus in some parts of Liverpool, where the council has given responsibility for development of the Pathfinder areas to private building firms, the locations chosen are thought to be highly desirable.

As the housing market has crashed, the economic motivation for Pathfinder has waned. Minton comments that "The problem with a policy which displays an excessive reliance on the market is not only that it disregards people's lives but that when the market is down, it all but grinds to a halt." This has happened throughout our cities where speculative development during the boom has ground to a halt leaving silent construction sites, empty built properties or homes being repossessed by mortgage lenders. Minton concludes that the emphasis on private housing and individual ownership has led to a housing crisis and to many people being forced to live in unacceptable conditions.

So what does happen to the C2DEs, the people excluded from buying their own house or enjoying the consumerism of our city centres? One Edinburgh children's worker told Minton "It's strange where the boundaries are... it's complete apartheid... there's 20% of the population who have a completely different life and that percentage is growing all the time." Minton adds: "Although those who live nearby will be dimly aware of these enclaves, fast turning into ghettos, they will avoid them at all costs and live a life as separate from these places as the 'different planets' in Disraeli's *Sybil*... When I visited places with hardly any shops or buses, let alone a pub or bank, I saw the kind of poverty I had never seen before in Britain."

Minton also describes how these policies are "creating a physical environment which reflects the stark divisions of the city, creating homogeneous enclaves, which undermine trust between people, heightening fear." New Labour, aided by the media, prey on this sense of fear even as they claim to undermine it by introducing measures to control behaviour such as ASBOs, the "Respect Agenda" and dispersal orders. The "behaviour modification" approach neglects the root causes and therefore fails to work while in turn creating more fear.

So what are the alternatives? Minton's proposals are at a number of different levels. Her suggestions include the micro-management of space to create "shared spaces" more amenable to the sort of street activity envisaged by Jacobs; encouraging the sort of unplanned use of spaces by artists and others without the ability to pay the market price that has happened in areas such as Hoxton; and the reclaiming of space to create the sort of public places such as found in the piazzas of European cities.

These proposals however are marginal to addressing the basic issues the book raises and often problematic themselves — for example, fashionable "alternative" bit-by-bit development can often be the prelude to gentrification. Minton does however also raise the broader political issues. She sees, as a prerequisite, the reassertion of the public as against private capitalist interests as the basis for deciding on the future of our cities. "The only way the privatisation of every aspect of the city can be halted is by slowing the transfer of land and property to large private landlords."

Ground Control raises many issues to which the left needs to give a response. With the exception of local campaigns against particular planning decisions and "Defend Council Housing", it has not taken many of them up in practice. Nor has it translated the theoretical insights of Marxists such as Lefebvre and David Harvey into concrete political demands.

Resistance and the appropriation of "counter-spaces" advocated by Lefebvre — as practiced by the Goths, skateboarders and various teenagers who, despite much hassle from officialdom, socialise on Saturdays behind the Triangle in Manchester — needs to be supplemented by a strategy that deals with the more long term issues such as the sorts of urban spaces and housing we want to see. A movement to assert our "right to the city" (Lefebvre) is much needed. *Ground Control* provides much of the ammunition such a movement needs.

AS WE WERE SAYING

Workers unite, east and west!

In mid-1984, during the year-long miners' strike, the *Sunday Mirror* printed an account of an interview with Solidarnosc leader Lech Walesa in which Walesa appeared to side with Margaret Thatcher against the miners. *Socialist Organiser* (forerunner of *Solidarity*) commented. A translation of this article appeared in the underground Trotskyist press in Poland in 1984.

The *Sunday Mirror* headlined the piece "Why Scargill is wrong — by Lech". Quite a lot of Solidarnosc's friends in Britain were shocked and its opponents, semi-opponents and outright enemies — of whom there are a very large number in the British labour movement — seized on the article. It is cited again and again by labour movement activists to condemn Solidarnosc.

What did Walesa say? That is less clear than the *Sunday Mirror's* headline suggests but I will quote the *Sunday Mirror*.

Walesa is quoted as saying:

"The miners should fight, but with common sense — not with destruction. Because whatever is destroyed has to be rebuilt. I disagree with any violence. The workers should demand the maximum, but not at the risk of bankrupting the employer."

Also: "Go into the matter carefully and assess how much one can squeeze. But without destroying. It is forbidden that ambition takes precedence over hope. Trade union activists should lock away their ambitions. They should calculate on their computers how much they can get but, I repeat, not at the sake (sic) of destroying the structure."

The journalist then says that Walesa expressed "much respect" for Margaret Thatcher and quotes him: "With such a wise and brave woman, Britain will find a solution to the strike."

Now it is by no means impossible that Walesa would condemn trade union "violence" or produce this rather vapid philosophising on realistic trade unionism. And he may well, because of her strident rhetoric against the USSR, Poland's overlord, think Margaret Thatcher is wise and brave.

These views would identify him as right wing or soft left if he operated in the British labour movement.

But for many on the left it isn't a matter of disagreeing with Walesa. They question Solidarnosc's right to exist. They seize on things like the *Sunday Mirror* article to support the grotesque idea that the entire Polish labour movement is reactionary or "counter-revolutionary". They adopt a soft, tolerant or even friendly attitude to the Jaruzelski regime which has been trying to destroy the Polish independent trade union.

Lech Walesa may — or he may not, as we shall see — have given the *Sunday Mirror* the comments which were used against the miners. We know for certain that Jaruzelski has sent scab coal to help Thatcher, increasing by three times Poland's exports of coal to Britain since the miners' strike began.

So Walesa may have made a few Neil Kinnock-like comments to the *Sunday Mirror* criticising miners' violence and Arthur Scargill's ambition. The conclusion does not follow that Jaruzelski — who gives Thatcher scab coal — was therefore justified in banning the Polish trade unions and attempting to destroy them!

Solidarnosc miners in Silesia sent [UK miners] a message:

"The underground Provisional Co-ordinating Committee of Silesian miners sends you fraternal greetings and our support and solidarity for your struggle for the right to work.

"We will do everything possible to support your struggle, including in action. The protest we have sent to the Polish government and Parliament is an initial measure taken in support of your struggle."

And the Inter-Factory Network of Solidarnosc in the Warsaw area:

"The slave labour of the Polish miners serves to break the resistance of the British miners.

"British miners! In the prevailing conditions of terror, the Polish workers' movement is at present not in a position to undertake protest actions. But you may be certain that we are in solidarity with you."

David Jastrzebski, president of the Solidarnosc committee in Upper Silesia, sent this letter "to the striking miners of Great Britain":

"Our organisation sends you full support for your struggle. We are full of admiration for your stance and your unfailing willingness to struggle. We believe you will achieve your goals.

"Neither the British government's mounted police charges nor its truncheon blows, any more than the Polish junta's tanks or rifle fire, can break our common will to struggle for a better future for the working class.

"We appeal to all members of Solidarnosc to support your struggle. Only the international struggle of the mass of workers can decide our fate."

To Arthur Scargill personally Jastrzebski wrote:

"Allow me to send you the expression of my support and my enthusiasm. For many weeks you have represented the interests of your trade union with dignity.

"At the same time I ask you to consider our own difficult situation — activity which is clandestine and under totalitarian threats — which means that there are many things we cannot resolve rapidly, often for security reasons.

"In the coming weeks we will send you greetings from other organisations [of Solidarnosc] which support your struggle.

"I wish you the best and above all victory. I ask you to send our greetings to all British miners and our best wishes.

"Personally. I am convinced that thanks to the attitude of your trade union victory is within your grasp."

In any case, to repeat, whatever Walesa might say against "violence" or against Arthur Scargill is irrelevant to the right of the Polish workers' movement to exist.

Our duty to defend its right to exist cannot depend on the opinions of one of its leaders — or of Solidarnosc itself.

There are many in our own unions and in the Labour Party who condemn the miners and would like to cut Arthur Scargill's throat. We denounce them of course — and we organise against them. Only a suicidal maniac would conclude that trade unions, because they are led by right-wingers, forfeit their right to exist. Yet that is the underlying idea of those who pounce on Walesa's interview and say "We told you so" about Solidarnosc.

Walesa is quoted saying things against a section of the British labour movement — therefore it is right for the Stalinist dictatorship to destroy the Polish labour movement? It is preposterous.

Solidarnosc is a great working class mass movement, which had ten million members when it was outlawed in December 1981, 18 months after coming into being.

It is a unique movement. Never before have independent trade unions emerged in any Stalinist state.

Such a movement will span an immense range of opinions as ours does. The British labour movement has Labour Party right wingers, Liberals, SDPers, Tories, racists, some fascists and... Stalinist supporters of foreign anti-working class dictatorships like Jaruzelski's.

Our movement — unlike Solidarnosc — is led by a quite distinct caste of materially privileged bureaucrats. We propose to change it politically, reconstruct it, democratise it — not help the "reforming" Tories put it down.

Nor can it make any difference that industry is nationalised in Poland and Jaruzelski can perhaps claim to be defending nationalised property.

For socialists, nationalisation is a means to an end, not the end: the end is socialism. The liberation of the working class from capitalist exploitation and from state tyranny.

Nationalisation is necessary for socialism, but it is not socialism, nor the only condition for socialism!

In the Stalinist states nationalised property is controlled by privileged bureaucrats by means of a state tyranny over the people which is unparalleled in history.

The Polish labour movement was born in conflict with a state tyranny much of whose power over society comes from the state's control of the means of production.

Even if Solidarnosc leaders, in reaction against Stalinism, come to advocate restoring capitalism, that could not lead working class socialists to side with a Jaruzelski standing for nationalisation and "socialism" against "counter-revolution".

Real socialism, which liberates the working class, and therefore society, from both exploitation and state tyranny, can only be created by the working class itself, acting in freedom.

The Polish labour movement — even making terrible errors — is a great deal more important to socialism than is nationalised property under the control of a tyrannical bureaucracy, parasitic on the labour of the workers, and holding them in a police-state vice.

The right of the labour movement to live, its ability to grow and to discuss its experience and its programme for society — nothing in Poland, or in any of the Stalinist states, has a greater value than that, for socialists who base themselves on the first letter of the socialist alphabet, formulated by Karl Marx as follows:

"The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves".

In fact it is by no means certain that Walesa said what the *Sunday Mirror* puts in his mouth. In so far as I can find out, an interview was in fact given by Walesa to Robert Eringer who is an American or Canadian freelance journalist.

The quotes are all just snippets, too short for any context to be discernible. It is not indicated to what questions Walesa was responding. You have to take it on trust that Walesa is not being quoted out of context by the interviewer, or by the office sub-editor who gave the article its final shape.

Many oppositionists in East Europe and the USSR — and probably Walesa — do have a friendly attitude to people like Thatcher and US President Reagan because they are strident enemies of the Kremlin. Their attitude is: my enemy's enemy is my friend.

Oppositionists in the East who favour the West are merely a mirror image of those workers in capitalist society who adopt a friendly attitude to the Stalinist dictatorships. Our Stalinists and quasi-Stalinists see only everything negative in the West and think nationalised property is working class socialism in the East. So they favour the East.

The oppositionists in the East see that there is personal freedom in the west, the right of the workers to organise trade unions and political parties and to publish more or less what they like. That, in contrast to the arbitrary state tyranny in the Stalinist states, there is the rule of law. So, they idealise the west.

Both views are one-sided and false: indeed, the easterners' view is probably less one-sided and less false than that of the Stalinist workers in the west.

It is no small difference, after all, that in the advanced capitalist countries we have won the right — through centuries of struggle — to organise freely, while everywhere in the east the workers are subjected to a savage repression which nips in the bud every stirring of independent working class activity and jails or kills its organisers.

It is easy to understand why the eastern oppositionists and, especially, the fighters for free trade unions in a Stalinist state, might idealise the advanced capitalist countries. They shouldn't, of course.

We who live in a country like Britain know how hollowed-out much of the freedom and democracy is, where the multi-millionaires rule, backed by an anti-working class state. We know that the workers are savagely exploited under capitalism and have to fight every inch of the way, as the miners are having to fight now.

Scargill's hostile comments on Solidarnosc will have been used by the Polish media against Solidarnosc just as the *Mirror* used the Walesa interview against the miners.

Scargill said at a meeting in Sheffield a couple of months ago: "I think I owe Lech Walesa an apology".

In any case, he owes Lech Walesa and Solidarnosc basic working class solidarity.

We need independent working class politics east and west. Workers, east and west, should support each other against the oppression of both the capitalist and Stalinist systems. We need consistent international working class solidarity.

For the British labour movement that must mean:

- Active support for Solidarnosc.
- Support for free trade unions in all the Stalinist states and for those trying to organise them.
- Breaking off "fraternal" contact between the TUC unions and the police-state fake unions which exist in the Stalinist states.

MI5 HISTORY

Not a spy story

BY JOHN O'MAHONY

According to the official history of MI5, Britain's spy-hunters considered Jack Jones, the leader of the Transport and General Workers' Union in the 1970s who died recently, to be a paid agent of the USSR,

What secrets did he pass on to Moscow? Brace yourself for the shock: he passed on secret... Labour Party documents!

Here the "official history" turns into an Eric Ambler or a Graham Greene spy novel. In Greene's *Our Man In Havana*, a British agent there, a vacuum cleaner salesman by trade, is paid for what he says are photos of deadly Russian weaponry but are really parts of his vacuum cleaners photographed from odd angles.

It is surely improbable that Russian spies in Britain were so ill-informed as to value Labour Party documents and pay Jack Jones for supplying them. It is altogether improbable that a man like Jones would seek money for helping the USSR.

But what an ungrateful class the British ruling class is! Whatever small services Jones may, or may not, have rendered to the ruling class of Stalinist Russia, his services to the British ruling class in the 1970s were immense. If Jack Jones was anyone's "agent" in the labour movement, he was primarily an agent of the British ruling class.

Jones was one of the two "left" trade union leaders on whom the Labour government of 1974-9 relied to control the labour movement and demobilise the working class. Waves of strikes destroyed the Heath Tory government of 1970-4, finally forcing it into an ill-judged general election on "Who Rules, Government or Unions?" which it lost. Waves of strikes, including occupations of factories, continued into the Labour government period.

It took a considerable time to calm things down. Here Jack Jones and the engineering union leader Hugh Scanlon, another man with "left" credentials, were invaluable to the Wilson government and to the British ruling class it served.

Everybody knew that then. In 1977 an opinion poll reported that a majority of the British electorate thought Jones and Scanlon more powerful than prime minister Harold Wilson. They were; but they used that power to sustain a government that, as it turned out, was a "transitional regime" between the Heath Tory government and the far more determined and ruthless Thatcher Tory government.

They deserve the gratitude of the British capitalist class for that — and the detestation of the working class.

If what they say about Jones and Russia is true, it is trivial and unimportant. And it muddies the political water.

The support that trade union leaders like Jones and Scanlon gave to the Stalinist regimes was a matter of rotten politics, not of them being tempted by Russian money or of "spies". There was widespread support for those ruling Stalinists, but for political reasons.

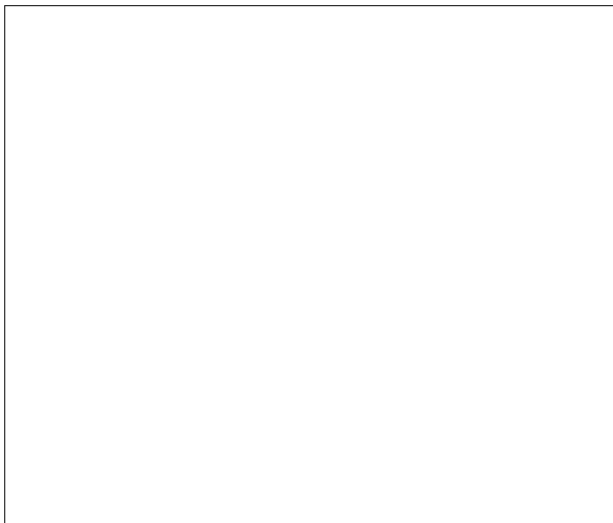
Many British union leaders - by no means only those on the left — and vast numbers of rank and file trade-union and Labour Party people supported and sympathised, in varying degrees, with the Stalinist regimes that controlled one-third of the earth's surface up to 1989-91. Why?

There was widespread support for those ruling Stalinists, but for political reasons.

It was widely accepted that the Stalinist regimes were "socialist" to one degree or another. In any case, those regimes were the enemy of our native ruling-class enemy, and that was all-important.

Britain's trade unions had and stubbornly maintained official and open links with the "trade unions" in Russia and Eastern Europe — which were not trade unions at all, but agencies of the state for regimenting and controlling the workers there. They were more akin to fascist labour fronts than to the British trade unions.

Support in Britain for the attempts to form real, illegal, trade unions in, for example, Russia, was limited to segments (not all) of the revolutionary left and to hardcore right-wing trade union leaders (of the Electrical Trades Unions, which its British right-wing leaders ran as a mini police state). An attempt to form a state-independent miners' union in the Ukraine, whose organis-



Jack Jones

ers were imprisoned in mental hospitals, found little sympathy or support in the British labour movement and least of all in the National Union of Mineworkers, where *Socialist Organiser* (forerunner of *Solidarity*) supporter John Cunningham tried in vain to build a campaign to back the persecuted independent trade unionists.

When Solidarnosc in Poland erupted in a vast strike wave and then, for fear of Russian invasion, turned itself into a political movement, it met with very widespread suspicion and hostility in the British labour movement — from Tony Benn, for example, the Labour Party's leading leftist.

In the middle of the Solidarnosc strikes of August 1980, it took a large outcry to stop TUC leaders, right and left-wingers both, keeping an engagement to visit their strikebreaking official Polish "trade union" "colleagues". Not even all the revolutionary left wanted to stop the visit. The Mandelites, for instance, refused to back demands that it be cancelled. One of those who backed his Polish "colleagues" was Bill Sirs, leader of the right-wing and heavily bureaucratised Iron and Steel Trades Confederation, who in British politics was a Stone-Age labour movement right-winger.

During the 1984-5 British miners' strike, Arthur Scargill organised an international federation of miners in which the British union, fighting the most important class battles in many decades, was linked up with Stalinist police-state unions.

When, in 1979-80, Russia invaded Afghanistan and started a horrendous colonial war of conquest, there was widespread support for that "extension of the revolution" — not only among bonehead "revolutionaries" such as Militant (now Socialist Party), Workers' Power, and the not invariably boneheaded Mandelites, but also in the Labour Party. Indeed, while the British Communist Party condemned the invasion and the colonial war, a number of Labour MPs supported it, and so did every "orthodox Trotskyist" group in the world, except AWL.

My own experience debating the matter with the pro-Russian Labour MP Ron Brown on his home ground in Edinburgh will give the reader some idea of the atmosphere on the left then.

It was one of the rowdiest labour movement meetings I've ever attended. It was a Saturday afternoon at the end of some miners' gala or conference, and a big proportion of the large meeting were miners, many of them bevvied-up. The meeting was overwhelmingly pro-Russian and very hostile to those of us who denounced Russian imperialism and its invasion of Afghanistan. "The Yanks are against the Russians, so is Margaret Thatcher, so is the CIA — and so is *Socialist Organiser!*" was the theme of a number of speakers.

Some of them were, but most of them were not, diehard old Communist Party "Tankies" (believers in a "Russian tanks" road to socialism). Most of them would have been Labour Party people.

Ron Brown, the Labour MP for Leith was a former engineering worker and an honest man, but a political idiot who thought that Leonid Brezhnev and Colonel Gaddafi — and probably Saddam Hussein — were socialists. Just back from Afghanistan, he was keen to tell British workers that the Russians were doing great progressive work there, and, moreover, that they were very popular. To the loud approval of much of the

meeting Brown praised the Russian leaders for sending tanks to Kabul.

When I argued that we should condemn the invasion and call on the Russians to get out of Afghanistan, I attracted fierce abuse and much interruption.

I'd taken part in open-air mass meetings of dock workers in Manchester — noisy, sometimes conflict-ridden, affairs in which a genteel middle class outsider would have seen imminent violence where there was none. But at a number of points in that Edinburgh debate, I did think the meeting was about to break up in violent disorder.

I was struck by the fact that at no point did Ron Brown appeal for order. Even he was intimidated, or so I thought at the time, by the fierce feeling whose tribune he was.

I remember the Edinburgh meeting as a distressing experience, and not only because it is a bit unnerving to stand in front of two or three rugby teams' worth of pissed and half-pissed miners, and continue telling them that they are suicidally wrong, when some of them are acting as if they are about to rush you.

What distressed me then and distresses me now, remembering it, is who and what these angry supporters of Russian imperialism in Afghanistan were, those people who looked on what I was saying as treacherous and a comfort to the class enemy in Britain — and the tragic gap between what in reality they were supporting and what they thought they were supporting when they cheered on the Stalinist dictator Brezhnev.

These were some of the best people in our movement then. But they were hopelessly disoriented. Politically they had no future.

The examples could be multiplied many times over. Political confusion about Stalinism, and the prevalence of the idea that "my ruling class's enemy is my friend", were the problems, not the influence of paid agents of Russia.

And it is not a matter of the past. European Stalinism is dead, but the pattern and attitudes that led labour movement people and socialists to sympathise with it and support it are still with us. The dominant attitudes on the "left" now are transposed from what used to be the dominant attitude to Stalinism in power. The fact that SWP did not have that attitude to Stalinism has not saved it from aping the Stalinists in its attitude to political Islam, supporting clerical fascism in the name of "anti-imperialism" and the sacred duty to say no when our ruling class says yes and yet when it says no.

In fact it is worse than the old support for Stalinism. The pro-Stalinists thought that Stalinism was socialism being built; the political bag men and women of Islamic clerical fascism have no comparable delusory expectation. Jack Jones at least went to fight fascism in Spain.

The *Morning Star*, for which all sorts of leftists still write, is scarcely less supportive now of the vicious mixture of Stalinist state totalitarianism and red-in-tooth-and-claw market capitalism that dominates the Chinese people than it once was of Russian and Chinese "high Stalinism". (Its opposition to the invasion of Afghanistan and earlier to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia were exceptions in a long and vicious record.)

The story of the British labour movement's toleration, sympathy, and support for foreign Stalinist regimes is a terrible one - as is the recent collapse into sympathy for Islamic clerical fascism. It is not to be explained as a mere spy story.

The dominant attitudes on the "left" are transposed from what used to be the dominant attitude to Stalinism in power. The fact that SWP did not have that attitude to Stalinism has not saved it from aping the Stalinists in its attitude to political Islam, supporting clerical fascism in the name of "anti-imperialism" and the sacred duty to say no when our ruling class says yes and yet when it says no).

We have called that left "kitsch-left" to express our belief that our own political positions and attitudes are the authentic left and to note the fact that what passes for left-wing politics now is mainly an eclectic mix - an inorganic pastiche, rather than coherent working-class politics. It is an inorganic and even more senseless pastiche of the old attitudes of the Stalinist-oriented and Stalinist-sympathising "left".

Maybe it might be more accurate to call it the "posthumous left".

FRANCE

How the New Anti-Capitalist Party is progressing

By SACHA ISMAIL

On 4 October, I attended the 70-strong Lille and district conference of the New Anticapitalist Party, the revolutionary socialist party founded in February by activists of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire and many other independent socialists.

The NPA now has about 10,000 members. The LCR had around 3-4,000 members. Discussions centred on the political situation — strike struggles against the Sarkozy regime have fallen away in recent months — and organisational consolidation and development in an organisation where the majority of members are new to socialist groups, with little political baggage.

I spoke to Damian Scali, a Lille university student who is a member of the NPA's National Youth Secretariat.

The founding congress of the NPA was eight months ago. How have things gone since then?

Quite well. The party is still being built, but it is a big step forward compared to what we had in the LCR. There was an initial burst of enthusiasm, but now we are concentrating on the practical tasks.

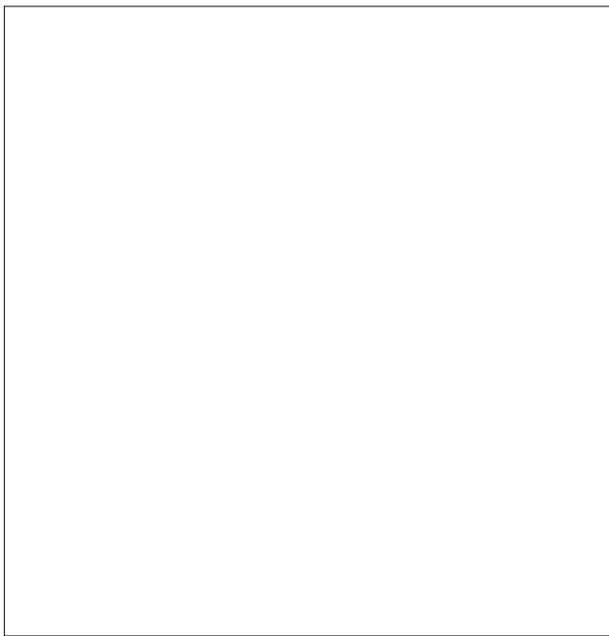
What were the main issues at today's conference?

We discussed our analysis of the current political situation, and what this implies for our tasks. We also discussed the development of our internal structures at a city and regional level. But I will concentrate on the political questions.

The main factor in the political situation is the crisis and the bosses' attempts to make workers and youth pay. Last year, before the summer, there were many, many struggles, in response to the crisis and the government's policies. However, we didn't win and the balance of forces is still for the government. The problems remain the same, but it is now more difficult even to build local struggles.

Our aim is to popularise what have been called transitional demands, for instance, increased wages and a ban on sackings. The NPA is planning a campaign about the issue of jobs. But these questions have to be posed in the framework of breaking with capitalism.

In the conference we discussed the extent to which we must focus on propaganda. I think it would be a caricature to say anyone thinks we should only be propagandist. But my view is that the big struggles are ahead, and it is a priority to agitate in the class struggle.



What is your view on united fronts?

Well, more or less the classical united front — the broadest unity in action, from the Socialist Party and the Communist Party through to the anarchists, but maintaining our own politics and criticisms. That is the basis on which we fight, right now for instance against the privatisation of the post. But elections are a different matter. I do not think we should have common electoral slates with the reformist parties, for obvious reasons.

What is the NPA's intervention among youth?

The government's goal is to break the rights and living conditions of the working class — starting with the youth. In the crisis, it is the temporary workers who suffer most, who are fired first, and so on — and usually this means young workers.

As part of our campaign on jobs, we will be campaigning against casualisation. Among students, we will be opposing the government's university reforms, as our activists in the universities did last year. These reforms are linked to a project to turn the majority of students into casual workers.

Does the NPA have a youth section?

Before the NPA we had the JCR [Jeunesses Communistes Révolutionnaires, LCR youth section], which was an independent organisation. The NPA youth are not independent. Why? Because we decided

on a unified approach to overcome some of the divisions that have existed in the past. Inside the NPA, however, we have autonomy.

Not all young people in the NPA are active in the youth committees. Active within the committees, however, we have about 600 comrades. It's hard to be exact, but they are mostly students and school students.

At the same time, we are recruiting more and more young workers. In some towns there are good young workers' committees. We are trying to develop this intervention at a national level by producing a national young workers' bulletin.

In October we will have our first young members' conference since the creation of the NPA. We need to decide a more precise orientation in the difference areas of activity; the question of our structures, leadership and so on; and whether to have a separate youth paper.

What are the NPA's international links?

The NPA is not affiliated to the Fourth International; the FI's French section [the LCR] is dissolved.

But international links are very important. We want to keep links with the FI, while also raising the question of a new internationalist organisation, based on the recomposition of different political tendencies. We want the left in different countries to overcome its sectarianism, as for instance has been happening in Greece since the youth movements last year.

The NPA is not Trotskyist. What is it?

It is hard to be precise here because things are still developing. The NPA is anti-capitalist, working-class and revolutionary. There is a lot of politics in the texts of our founding congress. For instance, do we see the existing state as a vehicle for overcoming capitalism? Are we focused on elections, or on class struggle?

There is enough of a common base to move things forward, to organise educational and so on.

At the same time, we don't say — I certainly don't say — forget the past. There are theoretical gains that must be preserved. But we need to learn from the past, to draw the best from different traditions, including Trotskyism, to create a new common tradition.

With rapid expansion and many new people, there is a lot of potential for disagreements. However, I don't think those disagreements will be about the class nature of the USSR! They will be about the immediate questions of the class struggle — and, of course, Trotskyism has a lot to say on those questions too.

More on the NPA, www.workersliberty.org/lcr-npa

Ructions behind the scenes in election talks

By JACK YATES

On 2 October, an internet report claimed that the Communist Party of Britain (*Morning Star*) had split. CPB general secretary Rob Griffiths and *Morning Star* editor John Haylett were reported to have quite and started forming a new organisation.

This move was said to have been prompted by a decision by the CPB executive to withdraw from the talks for a "son of No2EU" slate for the general election which have been under way since June, between the CPGB, leaders of the rail union RMT, the Socialist Party, and the Alliance for Green Socialism.

The post-No2EU attempt to organise a left challenge to Labour at the next general election, however, seems to be proceeding, with or without the CPB. On 19 September, Bob Crow was interviewed in the *Times* and claimed he had been meeting with union leaders, socialists and other campaigners to plan a "workers'

alliance" for the election. We are told that a public launch of the No2EU successor organisation is likely within the next few weeks.

On 7 November, the RMT is sponsoring a conference on working-class representation, or rather a rally: it will not feature motions or take binding decisions.

Meanwhile, the SWP has called its own meeting to discuss left electoral challenges on 31 October, inviting the Socialist Party, Respect, the CPB and the Barrow Socialist People's Party (a left split from the local Labour Party, with some councillors) to participate.

What all these initiatives have in common is extreme murkiness. RMT members know nothing about the talks since June. Neither the *Morning Star* nor *The Socialist* has given any report. It makes New Labour look positively transparent and democratic.

Griffiths and Haylett are said to be at odds with others in the CPB who want to emphasise a vote for Labour candidates in the big majority of constituencies at the general election and shy away from too close a

link with the SP.

A split in the CPB will not automatically reduce all tensions in any future coalition. Griffiths and his followers are still significantly at odds with the likes of the Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party (who now seem keen to be centrally involved). Writing in the *Morning Star*, Griffiths has used a variety of formulations, from a catch-all appeal for general "left unity" to calls for the left to stand candidates against only the most egregious of Labour candidates.

Contrast this view to the Socialist Party's blanket condemnation of the Labour Party and the SWP's weather-vane prognostications of mass extra-Labour movements and you can see the potential stumbling blocks.

An open, democratic regroupment of socialists is what we need, not this sort of backstairs intrigue.

• The initial web report:
averypublicsociologist.blogspot.com

FBU LEADER SPEAKS

The FBU's case for "boycott Israel"

John McGhee, FBU National Officer, spoke to Martin Thomas about the FBU's "boycott Israel" motion to TUC Congress.

We're glad there was debate at the TUC about Palestinian rights. But we think that the boycott of Israeli goods which the FBU motion proposed as its main practical measure would be counterproductive.

British unions could do a great deal in the way of positive solidarity through making links, rather than boycotting. For example, the RMT, when it had a policy of solidarity rather than boycott, organised a demonstration to protest against Israeli Railways' treatment of Arab workers — a battle where the workers have so far been successful — and hosted a visit by an Israeli army refuser, Tamar Katz. It discussed giving support to the Workers' Action Centre, a group in Israel which helps Israeli Arab workers. Isn't that sort of activity better than a boycott?

We think that sort of activity would not be effective on its own. As a union, we're involved in a number of solidarity activities. Later this month, and into November, we have eight firefighters coming from Nablus. We've made arrangements with the Scottish Government and two of the English Fire and Rescue Service authorities to provide practical training to them.

We have sent three delegations to visit Palestinian workers. On each occasion they have said that they wanted professional assistance in training for fire and rescue.

We've had discussions with the Palestinian unions, primarily through PGFTU [the Palestinian General Federation of Trade Unions]. We've raised the issue of boycott with them and they have been calling for us to support boycott. This is something which we believe is being pushed for by Palestinian workers.

What good reason is there to suppose a consumer boycott will have a big positive effect? The Arab states have been boycotting Israel for sixty years, and that hasn't helped. Even the boycott of South Africa — where I think the issues were different — went on for a very long time without visible effect, and what actually changed things there was the movement inside South Africa.

It took some building for the boycott of South Africa to become effective, but it played its role in effecting change in South Africa. Boycotting goods from Israel puts them under considerable pressure.

Boycott from the Arab states doesn't necessarily do that, because Israel's target in terms of trade has not been the Arab countries. The pressure that the Western

countries can put on Israel is considerable.

Of course Israel doesn't trade with the Arab states, because it's been subject to a boycott. But that boycott hasn't produced progress.

It hasn't produced progress because Israel continues to be able to trade with the West. I don't think Israel is concerned about whether it can trade with the Arabs or not. They are certainly not interested in trading with the Palestinians. All they're doing is stealing land and stealing goods from the Palestinians.

This sort of boycott activity has a long history of spilling over into anti-semitism. That has certainly been the case in the Arab states. In this country there is a history of student unions banning Jewish societies on the grounds that they would not renounce all links with Israel. That sort of thing is much more immediate than any positive effect of a boycott.

We've tried to work with a number of Israeli organisations. We haven't called for cutting links with the Histadrut. We have written to the Histadrut asking them to give a position in terms of condemnation of what happened in Gaza in January. They produced a statement which pretty much supported the Israeli state's attack on the people of Gaza, and that's something which we can't condone.

The minute that you criticise Israel as a state, you're immediately labelled as anti-semitic. The Fire Brigades Union has a long history of fighting fascism and supporting Jewish rights. Our members defend communities against attack by fire. We have had no reports of anti-semitism by firefighters around the country.

I have Jewish family members who live in Israel. I've got family who are in the armed forces in Israel. I have the argument with them. Taking a stand against the Israeli state does not make you anti-semitic.

It seems to be the default position that when you try to take action against the Israeli state, you're labelled anti-semitic. This is not about being anti-semitic. This is about trying to force the Israeli state to recognise the injustice that it is imposing on the Palestinian people in the Occupied Territories, including Gaza.

Everyone has condemned the continued building of settlements in the West Bank, and yet it is still going on. The settlements continue to grow. Criticise that, and you're called anti-semitic.

But it's quite possible to criticise Israel and oppose the boycott. Most of the Israeli activists who oppose the settlements and the Occupation don't want a boycott. They want links with supporters abroad.

We're not arguing for a boycott of Jews. We would not support boycotting student Jewish societies. It's a boycott of Israel. Bear in mind that something like 40%

of the population of Israel are Arabs...

Not 40%, I think. [In fact the figure is 20.6%.]

Anyway, there is a high percentage of Arabs in Israel. This is a boycott against the Israeli state, against the Israeli government who are continuing to support the land-grab and the oppression of the Palestinian people.

We believe that the time has come to put as much pressure as possible on the Israeli government in order for them to comply with UN resolutions and reach a peaceful settlement which allows for a two-state solution. We're not arguing against the recognition of an Israeli state.

We're saying that the Israeli state is not treating the Palestinian people properly and we need to deal with that before those two groups of people can live peacefully together. Supporting a boycott helps put them under pressure to deliver the changes that are needed.

Would you support the academic and cultural boycotts of Israel, which obviously are directed against Israelis as people?

We're supporting a boycott of Israeli goods. That's not a boycott of Jewish goods. There's been discussion on the academic boycott, but yes, we're calling for a boycott, an academic boycott, a sporting boycott.

But most of the people who fall foul of academic and cultural boycotts are Israeli opponents of Israeli government policy, because they tend to be the people most likely to want relations with left-wing or liberal or labour-movement people abroad...

The Israeli foreign minister argued around the time of the TUC that a boycott would only hit the poorest people in Israel, including the workers from the Occupied Territories who work in Israel. The workers in Palestine tell us that is nonsense, that life can't be a lot worse for them. If we can put pressure on the Israeli state to bring about a peaceful solution, then that is what they will support.

We faced the same sort of argument from opponents of the boycott in South Africa, who kept on telling us that it was only affecting black people in South Africa. But in fact the boycott played its part in forcing change.

You've made the comparison with South Africa several times, but isn't there an essential difference? You favour the right of the Israeli Jews, as a nation, to have their own country, whereas in South Africa it was a matter of a privileged social layer, the white minority, which we wanted to get rid of as a separate privileged group. And, over the years, a lot of the energy for the boycott policy has come from people who say Israel should have no right to exist, and there should simply be an Arab state in all of pre-1948 Palestine.

That is not the position of the Fire Brigades Union. The FBU supports a two-state solution. We work with the PGFTU, which also wants a two-state solution. We have no difficulty with recognising the state of Israel, but we would like Israel to recognise the state of Palestine. Of course there are differences with South Africa. We had a white minority in South Africa which set the laws and discriminated against a black majority. In Israel you could say you have a majority which is exerting pressure on a minority, and on a year-on-year basis are wiping out that minority, and moving them out of their own homelands. It may be much more difficult to get the sort of impact that was imposed on that white minority in South Africa. The pressure on the white minority in South Africa was perhaps a bit more instant, a bit easier to effect. But I think the idea is the same.

People have been very careful to see that the views they are expressing are not anti-semitic. They are about supporting the Palestinian people's right to exist on their own lands, which the Israelis continue to occupy and continue to take more and more of.

Why GMB moved an amendment

GMB official Richard Ashcough spoke to *Solidarity* about the GMB's amendment to the FBU motion, which aimed to target the focus of the boycott onto goods produced in the occupied territories. This tactic has some precedent; left-wing Israeli peace campaign Gush Shalom runs a campaign to boycott goods produced in illegal settlements (in Israel, it's possible to distinguish which goods these are by barcode numbers). GMB officer Richard Ashcough said the amendment intended to add some "balance."

"We were concerned that the FBU motion didn't criticise Hamas as well as Israeli violence, and we weren't supportive of an overall boycott; we wanted to target the boycott to the occupied territories themselves."

"Balance" here should not imply equidistance or neutrality between Israel and the Palestinians; clearly, Israel is the oppressing power and the Palestinians the oppressed people. But there is a danger of double-standards of exceptionalisation of Israel, which is by far from the only — or indeed the worst — state engaged in a colonial-style occupation of another people's land.

As Ashcough put it, "if you look at some of the other regimes we don't boycott, Israel doesn't come anywhere near. The only immediate potential for peace is a negotiated settlement, and a general boycott would have an isolating effect."

The GMB's amendment was withdrawn in deference to the TUC General Council's statement, which takes precedence over the FBU motion and thus has much the same effect as if the GMB amendment had passed. It is perhaps unfortunate that this outcome was achieved without a full debate. A full and open debate in the labour movement about the complex politics behind this issue is what we need to fight for.

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

ROYAL MAIL STRIKES

Support the postal workers!

A LONDON POSTAL WORKER SPOKE TO DANIEL RANDALL

As postal workers await the results of their national ballot for strike action, due back on 8 October, regional strikes around the country have remained, in the words of one London postal worker, "very solid."

"A resounding yes vote in the national ballot is very likely; the big question is whether that'll force Royal Mail into serious negotiations in and of itself. There's always the worry that national officers will settle for a deal far short of what people want at a local level."

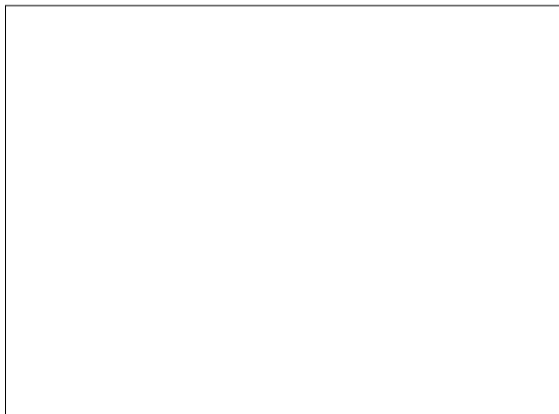
This worry is shared by many CWU militants. The current dispute is widely seen by rank-and-file activists as the legacy of the shoddy deal reached at the end of the 2007 dispute, in which the CWU leadership conceded to Royal Mail's demand to introduce cuts locally (hence the regional, office-by-office aspect of the first phase of strikes). There was a substantial grassroots mobilisation and vote against that deal in 2007.

"That was organised in a fairly ad hoc way, but those people are still in touch so those connections still exist. In London and Bristol, workers have established 'monitoring committees' to keep an eye on whatever comes out of national negotiations."

A more immediate question, though, is what CWU leaders will be going into those negotiations to fight for. Much of the rhetoric from the union has comprised wholesale broadsides against the basic way in which Royal Mail management relates to workers. Fine — there's plenty to criticise — but a strike needs more precise demands than "Royal Mail bosses are bad and they should stop being bad". Behind the rhetoric, the CWU leaders' perspective is weak.

"The central demands the national officers will focus on are about getting commitments from management that the union will be consulted on all future job losses and cuts. They want an end to management unilateralism."

It's right that the union wants to put brakes on unrestricted management brutality and claw back some kind of say in what happens to its members' jobs. But this defensive firefighting will not undo the damage already done, or the market set-up which guarantees future damage. Postal workers need to go on the offensive for a positive vision of



a public postal service run by workers and users. Many postal workers at a local level have clearer demands: "They want the specific changes that have been introduced recently [mainly job cuts and "cross-functioning", where delivery workers are arbitrarily moved from one walk to another or asked to do the jobs of workers of different grades] to be reversed." And as for the idea of workers' control in the service, "you'll find that about 90% of posties probably believe we could run the service better than the current management."

It's those 90% of posties — rather than a walled-off group of largely unaccountable national negotiators — who should be in charge of the dispute. There's an urgent need for more frequent national reps meetings, and for city and region-wide reps meetings, in order that ordinary workers can, through directly elected representatives, debate strategy and decide, step by step, what the focus, tactics and demands of the strike should be.

It's a strike that Royal Mail management appears to be taking seriously. Reports of large-scale scabbing operations being organised by management in preparation for the national strike are difficult to confirm or deny.

"We've heard about warehouses in Dartford and Peterborough, and we've heard that management have recruited 500 casual staff through the Manpower agency in Greenwich. But whether these are intended to clear the existing backlog or break the upcoming strike isn't clear." This danger highlights again the need for rank-and-file control over the dispute: "The union doesn't seem to be challenging it. It might be investigating but we've not heard much about it."

Brown courts the Daily Mail

By ELAINE JONES

Gordon Brown used the opportunity of Labour Party conference to pick on a group of people who are poor, powerless and not much older than children.

Did it make him feel big when he announced "from now on all 16 and 17 year old parents who get support from the taxpayer will be placed in a network of supervised homes"?

Did he feel like a proper pillar of the establishment when he assured the tax paying public that "these shared homes will offer not just a roof over their heads, but a new start in life where they learn responsibility and how to raise their children properly"?

He knew that the public were not really angry with the bankers and politicians. No, he said, the truth was that the "decent hard working majority feel the odds are stacked in favor of a minority" those "who let their kids run riot" and "play by different rules or no rules at all".

Having identified the true source of society's breakdown and general disorder, he, Brown, was going to right the wrongs. His remedy — state homes for teenage mothers — would be a beacon in an immoral world.

Brown's reactionary rhetoric, social conservatism, and stupidity cannot help but conjure up the prospect of a Poor Law for the 21st century, a "welfare" system designed to punish poverty by instituting a regime of "less eligibility", harsh work, or compulsory institutionalisation.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, under the influence of the church, single women expecting children were put in reformatories and penitentiaries. These "homes" were to punish sin, reform, and rehabilitate "fallen women". In the 20th century "mother and baby homes" continued to be a last resort for women turned out by their families and unlikely to get social housing.

Brown is drawing on the most draconian traditions of British social policy in order to outdo the Tories at what he considers to be "populist" policy — something that will go down well with the hacks at the *Daily Mail*.

Whether Tories or Labour win the next general election the poor, low paid and people on benefits will be under attack. Single mothers, even very young single mothers, will be scapegoated and blamed for the problems of capitalism. Ruling class politicians will stop at nothing to defend the interests of their class even if that means persecuting and vilifying very vulnerable people.

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