

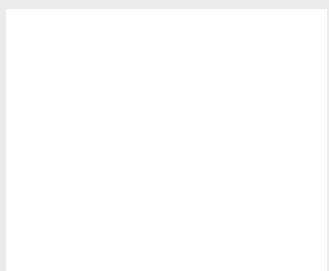
Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty

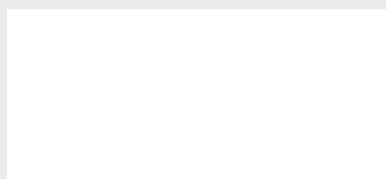
Volume 3 No 172 29 April 2010 30p/80p

an injury to one is an injury to all

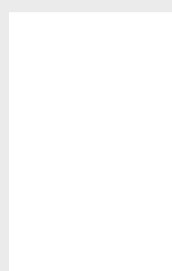
**NO TO A
LIB-LAB
DEAL!**
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**WHAT IS A
WORKERS'
GOVERNMENT?**
PAGE 16



Stop cuts!

Keep out the

Tories and

Lib Dems!

Re-elect Labour,

but don't trust Brown!

Make unions fight for working-class policies

Defeat BNP racism



**Vote Alliance for Workers' Liberty
Jill Mountford in Camberwell and Peckham**

Will the Greek crisis spiral into default?

By COLIN FOSTER

The economist Wolfgang Munchau has written a series of articles in the big-business paper the *Financial Times* over the last month arguing that Greece is now bound to default (i.e. fail to pay its international debts) sooner or later.

His argument runs as follows. In the run-up to the global financial crisis, and even in the early phases of it, the eurozone ran with a big trade surplus for Germany matched by a big flow of loans from German and other richer-country banks to the poorer eurozone countries, like Greece, which were running trade deficits.

Now the flow of new credit is drying up. Greece has to pay its debts. But drastic cuts will depress its economy and leave it with less output to pay its debts from.

Other countries which have scraped through similar debt crises have done it by devaluing their currencies, thus expanding their exports and getting more income to pay the debts with.

Because Greece is in the eurozone, the Greek government cannot do that. It has no control over its exchange rates.

By 25 April, Munchau's predictions were becoming more, not less, alarmed. "Unless we hear some implausibly good news from Athens by Friday, [the crisis] will soon blow up". And "the crisis will spread to Portugal and beyond". It will then be a huge crisis for the whole eurozone, not just Greece.

Thus it looks as if the huge cuts planned by Greece's Pasok (social-democratic) government may not even allow the government to go on paying its international bills.

Greek unions have organised renewed strikes against the cuts, and plan a further general strike on 5 May.

The European Union and the IMF have agreed in principle on IMF loans to Greece, and the first loan money is due to be delivered by 19 May. But meanwhile:

"The interest rate that Greece would have to pay to borrow new funds soared to 11.142 percent from 9.73 percent late on Tuesday [27 April].

"Greek 10-year bonds have now lost 30 percent of their value since mid-March as the... government in Athens struggles to contain its debt and public deficit to ward off default.

"The latest surge in yields followed a move Tuesday [27th] by ratings agency Standard & Poor's to slash the country's credit status to junk levels, meaning that big investors such as pension funds will no longer be allowed to buy Greek debt" (AFP).

A little-discussed factor in the crisis is Greece's high military expenditure. It spends much more, in proportion to national income, than any other European country, about two-thirds more, proportionately, than the UK and France, and has spent a lot on military imports (<http://bit.ly/1aQSiL>).

JERSEY CUTS

Politics for the struggle

By BEA MILLS

The enthusiastic demonstration and rally in defence of public services on 24 April was Jersey's first since the 1920s. But critical questions face the movement behind the protest.

The march, called by the teaching union NASUWT, was against £50 million in cuts on the island. It came at a time when teachers, nurses and uniformed services are all at various stages of organising industrial action over an imposed pay freeze.

Unite announced in the rally that it will now seek to become more political and will back candidates for election to the island's Senate. But what form will this take? Funding for an existing politician or favoured aspiring candidate would seem likely. This is a threat to the independence of the newly formed council of unions, and its need to grow to become a political force as well as an industrial force.

At present the union council is made up public sector union representatives heavily dominated by Unite and its affiliate Jersey associations. There is pressure

to subsume the new council into the moribund Trades Council rather than let the new council continue to grow in the form it has, based upon solidarity in struggle and a focus on fighting the island's government.

The council needs to retain its independence and to bring in more union activists. It needs to link up with all those who campaign for democratic reform on this island, which has feudalistic political structures intertwined with its capitalist system.

It should stand its own working-clas

candidates for elections who can work for democratic demands, using the impetus of the industrial struggles.

Jersey actually has a rich past history of working-class struggle that is surprising for such a small island. But its labour movement has never yet realised the importance of fusing the industrial and political. In the past the working class has always concentrated on one or the other front and has never pushed and won even parliamentary democracy.

It's time for the cycle to be broken. The weeks ahead are critical. Union activists from the private sector are becoming attracted to the union council and its aims; those aims need to remain independent and the council should not become dominated by one union alone.

FACT FILE:

LOCAL CUTS

Privatisation, job cuts and the sharing of services between boroughs is the pattern now taking shape, in local government in London. The following information taken from a recent *Barnet Unison* newsletter shows how cuts are going to take place over the next three years in four London boroughs...

- Haringey: a government sponsored cross-service review of support functions (admin, finance) may, according to Unison, lead to cuts and privatisations.
- Southwark: Around 148 jobs are at risk this year (2% of workforce). In 2011-12 a projected 20% cut in jobs. Labour wants the council to share its top brass with Lambeth.
- Brent: Plans to reduce the workforce by 10% this year.
- Camden: A budget gap of £59 million to be closed over three years. Cuts planned for next year, while outsourcing plans are already being stepped up.

Workers' Liberty in Jersey

Around a dozen Jersey trade unionists, students and leftists attended a meeting organised by Workers' Liberty on Sunday 25 April, on the subject of "socialism and democracy". Many had come along after meeting us on the demonstration.

It was probably the first meeting organised by a Marxist group on Jersey for decades, and there was a lot of curiosity about our ideas. But this was more than idle curiosity — the trade unionists and island campaigners who attended were clearly anxious to get a grip on socialist ideas in order to use them as a practical guide for how to structure their campaigns.

With the unions on the offensive over public sector cuts and the development of a workers' committee, Jersey democracy campaigners have started looking

to the labour movement as an ally. Workers' Liberty will be working to strengthen this alliance, and to keep up regular socialist educational meetings on Jersey.

A left-wing deputy in the Jersey states (senate) told us about the informal, corrupt system of patronage by and for the rich which defines Jersey politics:

"We are fighting against the unfair tax regime; we haven't got a history of progressive taxation. Now that money from finance is drying up, the rich aren't pulling their weight and ordinary people on Jersey are being made to pay.

"People need to know that the candidates are going to do what they say and know what the candidates stand for, because at the moment it is too easy for an individual to come in and have no accountability to either the electorate or their colleagues in the chamber."

VOLCANIC ASH

Stranded abroad? Can't get to work? Tough.

By DARREN BEDFORD

Penny-pinching and sheer blood-mindedness has been the response of some bosses towards workers stranded abroad due to the recent volcanic ash cloud. "Act of god" or not, they want to dock workers' pay.

During the heavy snowfalls of 2008/9 and 2009/10, employers all over the UK docked pay from workers prevented from getting to work, prompting RMT general secretary Bob Crow to refer to them as "throwbacks to the worst excesses of the Victorian mill-owners."

That statement was closer to the mark

than the meek official response from the TUC to the volcanic ash crisis. They comment: "it seems unfair if people lost money because of a situation which is out of their control."

The attempt by bosses to shift onto workers the financial costs of a circumstance completely outside of human control is more than simply "unfair". It is a small but clear demonstration of the twisted anti-human logic of capitalism. Profits are everything, people's rights are nothing.

A spokesperson for the Federation of Small Businesses said, "the whole situation could cost businesses a lot of money and employers generally take the view

that pay is given for work that is actually done." No matter, then, that the work was not done for reasons the workers couldn't possibly have foreseen or controlled, and no matter that the super-rich bosses can obviously far better afford to take the financial hit than their necessarily lower-paid employees. All that matters is that docking workers' pay is the easiest way to mitigate the damage.

Unions should fight not only for all work days missed through circumstances such as this to be paid, but for a system of absence and sick pay policies that take workers' rights — and not the bosses' profits — as their starting point.

ELECTION 2010

How to get ready for after 6 May

Two months ago David Cameron's Tory Party was heading for a general election win decisive enough to push through its programme of "deep" cuts and extensive privatisations.

Labour then narrowed the gap in the polls. But that minor reversal in Labour's fortunes had more to do with dismay at the Tories' unashamed agenda of cuts than with positive support for Labour's own programme. That too promised cuts, less cuts but cuts all the same.

In the last weeks before 6 May there has been a Lib Dem surge. A hung Parliament is widely predicted.

Some working-class voters may have been persuaded that levering the Lib Dems into power — as a junior partner in a coalition government — could put a brake on the cuts. If that is the case, millions of people could wake up on 7 May with something they did not expect. What was Nick Clegg's promise to voters? "Cuts that are savage and bold".

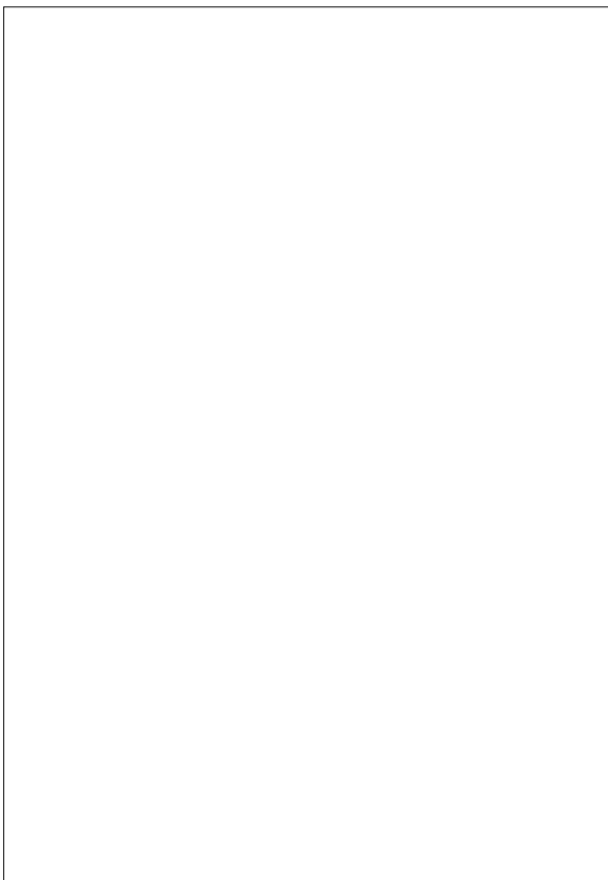
A Tory-Lib Dem coalition government — with its bigger than normal electoral mandate — could even be less inhibited than a straight Tory regime about pushing through cuts. And a Labour/Lib Dem coalition will cut harshly too.

Most of the blame for this sorry state of affairs lies squarely with Labour's leaders who, since 1994, have systematically turned the Labour Party into a shameless lackey of the ruling-class and of the rich. They hacked back the democratic channels in the party that made it possible for them to be put under political pressure.

They have disillusioned millions of working-class people.

Blame also lies with the leaders of the trade unions, who have woefully mis-served their members, the workers who will now be hit by cuts in benefits, jobs and services. The major trade unions all chose to stay inside Labour (not without logic), but failed to use the leverage they had to alter the course of New Labour in government or even to protest against it effectively.

Yet New Labour is still backed and financed by the biggest unions, and the unions still have potential political weight. That is a fundamental reason why we advocate a vote for Labour on 6 May, where there is no credible socialist candidate.



Blame lies at his door

An effective fight against the cuts will not be based on vaguely social-democratic policies about "fairness" (such as the Greens sometimes advocate) but will come from inside the labour movement, and will be based on adequate working-class policies.

Our advocacy of a vote for Labour is tied to a fight to get the unions to rebuild their strength to do what is needed politically. In the first place the unions should stop any chance of a coalition between Labour and the Lib Dems after the election. They should use the power they have in society to mount thoroughgoing opposition to the cuts, in workplaces, in communities.

In this election the AWL is active around two political projects, both of which we want to build on.

We are backing the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists, which advocates better political organisation of the left in the unions and where feasible in the Labour Party. We combined advocating a Labour vote with educational and preparatory work against New Labour. We argue for that idea on street stalls and doorsteps, wherever we have activists.

That political work needs to continue. If the unions do not mount a fight they will, even after the new government has been in place for quite a short time, further demobilise workers, spread demoralisation and fertilise the ground for the far right. We must organise to make them fight.

AWL is also standing our own socialist candidate, Jill Mountford, in Camberwell and Peckham, south London. Jill is standing against New Labour's Deputy Leader Harriet Harman. The campaign has been proposing clear socialist ideas, canvassing for support on the many run-down council estates in the constituency. It is one way to get across the key message — cuts are *not* inevitable.

The AWL believes we need to persuade the rest of the left — including those that are standing under the banner of the Trade Union and Socialist Coalition — that a very clear and distinct socialist message is necessary. While individual socialist candidates will have worthwhile things to say in this election, the left as a whole needs vastly better politics if it is to be of any use in the big struggles that lie ahead of us. Those battles will not be won by using vague or populist arguments or by accommodating to the spinelessness of the trade union bureaucracy.

We say money for public services can easily be found — by raising across-the-board taxes on the wealthy and big business. We say the bosses — not the workers — should pay for the crisis in their capitalist system. That is the policy we advocate for a government which serves the interests of the workers — for the workers' government which we want the labour movement to aim to create.

Much of the rest of this issue of *Solidarity* will explain these arguments and ideas in detail.

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2010:

TROTSKYISM AND THE CAPITALIST CRISIS

A weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty

10-11 July 2010 (film showing on the evening of Friday 9 July) Highgate Newtown Community Centre, North London

After the 1929 crash, it was several years before working-class movements regrouped and started a militant fight back. How should the labour movement regroup to fight the cuts we know are coming?

Many of the ideas and arguments of Leon Trotsky, killed by a Stalinist agent 70 years ago, are acquiring fresh relevance:

- How do we fight fascism? "Maximum unity" or working-class united front?
- How do we develop independent working-class politics as a "Third Camp", opposed to both capitalism and the dead end "anti-capitalism" represented in the world of 1940 by Stalinism and today by Islamist clerical fascism?
- How do small Marxist groups relate to mass workers' movements which are politically tied to capitalism
- How do we build links between the workers' movement and other struggles against exploitation and oppression?
- Do we need a revolutionary party, or are loose coalitions a better answer?

Invited speakers include

- "Red Tory" Philip Blond on community and capitalism
- The Socialist Party, on whether Labour is dead for working-class politics
- Israeli socialist Moshe Machover on boycotting Israel
- Neal Lawson of Compass on the rise of the Lib Dems
- Bob Crow and John McDonnell on the way forward for the left of the labour movement

Other sessions will include

- 2009: the year of workers' occupations
- Why should revolutionaries bother with elections?
- Being a revolutionary at work
- Religion, secularism and working-class politics
- Forum on the state of the unions with BA, rail, Unison and other activists
- Socialist feminism today

We will also be running an "Introduction to Marxism" series with a focus on Trotsky's contributions to Marxism:

- Trotsky on the Russian revolution and the defeat of revolutions in Europe
- Trotsky on what fascism is and how to fight it
- Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution"
- "One, two, many Trotskyisms"? How is the AWL different?
- The workers or "the people"?

Creche, accommodation and cheap food provided.

Weekend tickets bought before the end of May are £18 waged, £10 low-waged/student and £6 unwaged/school students. Day tickets also available: £10, £6, £4.

Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

For more information email awl@workersliberty.org or ring 020 7207 0706.

Vote Greens or Respect?

BY COLIN FOSTER

To judge by the April-May 2010 issue of the left-wing magazine *Red Pepper*, a much-mooted option among the bien-pensant left for the general election is to vote Green or Respect.

Red Pepper rehearses all the obvious facts about the neo-liberalism of all the main parties; ignores the possibility of a fight within the unions to shake up or "reclaim" Labour; gives the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition of the SP and the SWP only a "benevolent" but uninterested editorial mention; and doesn't mention other left candidates, such as the AWL's Jill Mountford in Camberwell and Peckham, at all.

Columnist Mike Marqusee favours voting Labour where the candidate is left-wing, or in marginals, but his main hope is getting one or two Green or Respect MPs elected, Caroline Lucas or Salma Yaqoob. Radical lawyer Mike Mansfield agrees.

From a point of view where your vote on polling day is a "thing in itself", not part of a systematic and continuing chain of political activity, there is some rationale for this approach. SCSTF makes sense only as part of ongoing activity within and focused on the labour movement.

Judging from its launch rally and its website, the candidates of TUSC will not have a sharper socialist or working-class message in their leaflets than Respect or the Greens, who are also against cuts, etc., and have a better chance of winning seats. Some of the things which TUSC candidates think make them more left-wing — support for political Islam, for the SWP; or the No2EU message for the SP — make them more right-wing.

The trouble with the "gesture vote" approach is that a systematic chain of political activity is necessary to bring serious change. Marqusee himself admits building up the Green Party is not a road to working-class emancipation.

"Its record in office, and its nature as a party, is mixed. In Leeds its councillors sustained a Tory-Lib Dem coalition and gave no support to last year's successful bin strike.

"On the London Assembly Jenny Jones has acted as an apologist for the Met. The party... seems to have little interest in mass campaigning of any kind. Many Green cadre are hostile to the left and the unions..."

The Greens do not have a defined activist social base that can give leverage to the left-wing things they sometimes say.

The telling thing about Respect is that both Marqusee and Mansfield cite Salma Yaqoob as the prime Respect candidate, and write as if George Galloway — Respect's MP, its best-chance candidate this time round — does not exist.

But he does — complete with his record of friendship with Saddam Hussein's deputy; admitted financing of his political enterprises by Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, and Pakistan; etc. He has unchallengeable sway as leader of Respect.

Some SCSTF supporters will vote for left-of-Labour candidates if they can. But as a general approach, SCSTF makes sense as the tactic best integrated into ongoing activity within and focused on the labour movement.

Are the Lib-Dems left-wing?

BY RHODRI EVANS

The Lib-Dems have policy for banning strikes in public services, and imposing compulsory arbitration of all disputes there.

During the BA dispute, Lib-Dem leaders accused Labour of being "in hock to militant unions" (if only it were true!). When Simon Hughes, supposedly the left-winger in the Lib-Dem leadership, stood for Mayor of London, his boast was that he would "sort out" the Tube workers' union, the RMT.

The Lib-Dems' policy on cuts tries to position them neatly between Labour and the Tories. They want "cuts, cuts that are savage and bold" (Nick Clegg, September 2009), but not as fast as the Tories.

They cite as their model of how a government should deal with a budget crisis the Liberal government in Canada in 1993-8. It made huge cuts, resulting in decayed public services and cardboard villages sprouting in Toronto.

The Lib-Dems opposed the national minimum wage when Labour first proposed it, and came to accept it only grudgingly.

In 2004 a right-wing faction in the Lib-Dem leadership published a manifesto, the Orange Book. That right wing, in the persons of Nick Clegg and Vince Cable, now controls the Lib-Dem party.

The Orange Book proposed something which is considered way out even in the Tory Party — the outright scrapping of the National Health Service.

Clegg and Cable would prefer to replace the NHS by a "social insurance" system, as in many other European countries on in Australia. Under "social insurance", health care is provided on the market just like any other commodity, the only difference being that there is compulsory enrolment in a government-run BUPA-type scheme which reimburses you for what you spend like an insurance company reimburses you for losses.

Ducking the Academies issue

Nick Clegg and the Lib Dems supports the Academy school system. It seems he is not confident enough in his support to find out what one group of teachers at an Academy think of working at their school.

On 21 April Clegg was due to visit Crest Boys' Academy in Brent. But his visit was cancelled.

We don't know why... but perhaps it was because the majority of teaching staff at Crest Boys' Academy were on strike over redundancies.

The school is run by E-Act (previously Edutrust) a so-called "social enterprise"

company. These redundancies are happening at a time when E-Act's Chief Executive, Sir Bruce Liddington, is drawing a salary and bonuses approaching £300,000 per year. And according to the teaching union the company's top executives have been staying in luxury £300 a night suites in hotels, and taking £250 pound taxi rides — all financed by public money.

Shane Johnschwager, Brent NASUWT Secretary, said "If [Nick Clegg] is really interested in seeing what is happening in these schools he should have come down to the demonstration and met the hard-working teachers forced into taking strike action by E-Act."

the media has publicised those issues more than the economic issues on which the Lib-Dems are as right-wing as the Tories or more so.

The Lib-Dems are against the Trident replacement (though they want to continue Britain's nuclear arsenal: they just say they could find some, unstated, cheaper way to do so).

The Lib-Dems are for an amnesty for "illegal" immigrants settled here (though not for any substantive easing of Britain's restrictive and racist immigrant and asylum laws).

The Lib-Dems have a better record on civil liberties, opposing some of New Labour's "anti-terrorist" laws.

The Lib-Dems are "for Europe" (though for a bland bourgeois cosmopolitanism rather than for Europe-wide workers' unity).

If the New Labour leaders are paralysed from raising the economic issues on which the Lib-Dems are so right-wing by fear that we'll look at their own record, why don't the union leaders speak out?

POLICY FILE: CLASS SIZES

All three main parties think talking about small class sizes makes them popular.

Labour have perhaps been less forthright than the other parties, having made promises on class sizes in 1997 which were only partially, and very unsatisfactorily delivered.

The Tories talk about reducing class sizes a lot, but without promising any money or quoting any numbers.

The Lib Dems promise to fund class sizes of 20 for children starting school — presumably just Year One classes — as well as expanding Labour's recent idea of one-on-one tuition for struggling students.

There are good reasons (backed by academic studies) why smaller class sizes should be a popular pledge. Smaller classes give teachers more time with each student, allowing a better educational experience, not to mention reduced workload for teachers. The much lower class sizes in private schools are one of the main reasons richer parents choose to avoid the state sector.

In Scotland, the SNP have made, and broken, various promises on smaller class sizes, and the EIS teachers' union have run a lively, if limited, campaign to try and hold the administration to account.

The mainstream parties' populist rhetoric on this issue presents a good opportunity for other teaching unions to exert some pressure on whoever takes power after 6 May.

Why coalition government will be bad news

By MARTIN THOMAS

Unless opinion shifts drastically in the next few days, no party will have an overall majority after 6 May. There will be strong pressure from big business for a coalition government.

The immediate political answer from socialists does not depend much on the details. We would advocate Labour seek to form a minority government. From that position it should rally support by pro-working-class measures. When eventually brought down by the Tories' and Lib-Dems' unwillingness to let the pro-working-class measures through, it should seek on that basis to win a majority in a new election.

Others than us will seek to shape the outcomes, though. And to orient ourselves, it is useful to discuss how they may shape them.

The capitalist class needs a government to push through cuts. A minority government of any sort will not be good for that, because the governing party will want a new general election soon in the hope of a better result, and will avoid unpopular measures in the meantime.

A coalition government — which might be able to boast a sort of endorsement from over 60% of voters — would probably be an even better instrument for pushing through unpopular cuts than a clear single-party majority government.

It would not be a good outcome from the point of view of the labour movement. A Tory/Lib-Dem coalition government might be more confident in pushing through cuts and restrictions on union rights than a straight Tory government.

Leverage for progress then would reside in the possibility of the unions pushing the Labour Party to a markedly oppositional stance against the Tory/Lib-Dem coalition government; that opposition bringing new life into the labour movement; and meanwhile some of the hardcore New-Labourites hiving off into the newly successful Lib-Dems.

A Labour/Lib-Dem coalition would "keep the Tories out", but at the cost of giving the New-Labourites, in their Lib-Dem coalition partners, a powerful counterweight to labour-movement pressure to defend social provision and workers' rights.

Sections of what now passes for the "centre-left" in the Labour Party, such as Compass, would be as keen on the coalition as the ultra-Blairites.

Lib-Dem policy is for "state funding of political parties" and "a cap on political donations" (i.e. a legal ban on union affiliation money of any consequence. Unions' large votes in the Labour structures would also be scrapped). A Tory/Lib-Dem coalition would be happy to introduce it, and it is not ruled out that a Labour/Lib-Dem coalition might do it too.

Many New-Labourites have not even the poor connection with the labour

movement that the "old Labour" right wing had, and will readily jump ship into the Lib-Dems if they see the Lib-Dems outstripping Labour.

The lever for progress here would be in labour-movement mobilisation against the Lib-Dem alliance, and against moves for a permanent electoral alliance between Labour and Lib-Dems or a full merger of the two parties.

Pressure for electoral reform will be strong if the Lib-Dems do well and have to be got into a coalition government, and even more so if the seats won by the different parties are wildly out of line with the votes they get, as now looks likely.

The Labour leadership's plan is for an Alternative Vote system, as in Australia. It retains constituencies and "first past the post", but people cast second, third, fourth, etc. preferences as well as first-preference votes, and the winner gets "past the post" only when transferred preferences take him or her past 50% of the turnout.

Like the current system AV leaves smaller parties (other than those with a very localised base) without representation. But it makes parties' "transfers" — their recommendations as to how the voters who rank them no.1 should use their second, third, etc. preferences — very important.

Before the recent Lib-Dem surge, at least, Labour could hope that AV would produce a Lib-Dem/Labour deal to exchange preferences and thus lock the Lib-Dems into a position of junior partner to Labour, with electoral reform seeming "settled" for a good while.

The Lib-Dems would have to be stupid to accept AV as a good-enough electoral reform for a coalition deal now.

The Lib-Dems want single transferable vote in many-member constituencies, as in Ireland. They might settle instead for some "additional member" system, as in the Scottish Parliament. As well as "constituency" MPs (for a reduced number of larger constituencies), the parties would also get "list" MPs, depending on their share of the vote.

The "additional member" system helped the Scottish Socialist Party in its heyday, enabling it to win six seats in the Scottish Parliament. But the decline of the SSP since the split engineered by Tommy Sheridan with the help of the SWP and the Socialist Party shows that this electoral reform is no wonder-cure for the left.

It would make no sense for socialists to be last-ditch defenders (on spurious grounds of "ensuring stable government" or the like) of a "first past the post" system producing obviously distorted results. But it is not true that electoral reform would be a decisive step forward for the left.

It would help the Greens. It might help a Labour Party temporarily reduced to a rump after a big New-Labourite defection to the Lib-Dems. The key to political progress would still lie with political mobilisation in the roots of the labour movement, not in electoral technique.

Against their coalitions, build our coalition!

John McDonnell spoke on 28 April about the current talk of coalition government after 6 May.

We hear a lot of talk about coalition governments now. But there is already a coalition in fact.

All the party leaderships are pursuing a neo-liberal policy of cuts. In fact there is already a neo-liberal coalition.

Our response has to be to build a coalition of trade unionists, socialists, campaigners, MPs, and activists to resist and prevent the attacks on services, wages, and conditions which are planned.

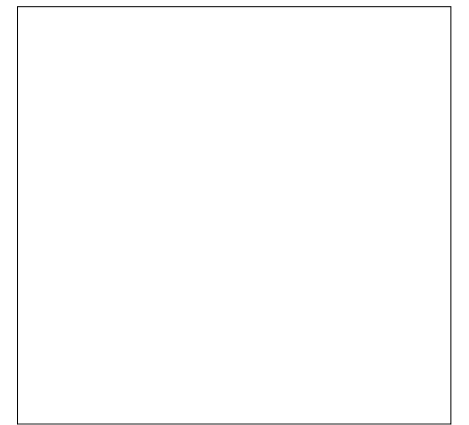
Of course have to use the ballot box to keep out the Tories. And I think Gordon Brown will try to stay in office almost no matter what happens in the election.

But the fact is that the Lib-Dems will demand exactly the same cuts — "savage cuts in public spending", as Nick Clegg put it — whether they are in a coalition government with Labour or with the Tories.

The answer is a broader coalition against neo-liberalism, linking up not only with people across Britain but also in other countries, including the trade unionists who are now striking against cuts in Greece, as we see the European Commission intervening to demand neo-liberal cuts.

What happens in the machinations of the elites of political parties to stay in office or get into office is their business. Our business is to mobilise against them, industrially, on the streets, with mass demonstration, and through putting an ideological alternative.

From the conference called by the Labour Representation Committee after the election, on 15 May, I'm hoping for



a clear understanding of the need for a collective mobilisation across the labour movement when the next government, whatever it is, comes to attack people's jobs and services.

Part of our campaign has always been about seizing back democratic control of the Labour Party. Part of our analysis of what's gone wrong since 1997 is that many destructive policies have gone through because of the lack of democratic control in the Labour Party.

At last year's Labour Party conference the leadership promised a comprehensive review, after the general election, of the structure imposed on the Labour Party in 1997. We should ask for a thoroughgoing reinstatement of democracy in the party.

We have to restore the right of unions and local Labour Parties to debate and decide policy at Labour Party conference. And we should insist on democratic control in selections, both for the positions in the bureaucracy of the Labour Party itself, and for parliamentary and local government candidacies.

"De-Labour-ising" Labour?

By MARTIN THOMAS

"The ultimate fulfilment of the New Labour mission." BBC political reporter Nick Robinson says: "That is how one senior Labour figure described... the prospect of a Lib/Lab deal in the event of a hung Parliament."

According to Patrick Wintour in the *Guardian* of 20 April: "Beneath the dispute is a concern that some figures are using Labour's campaign as a vehicle to bring about the formation of a progressive coalition between Labour and the Liberal Democrats."

"Some cabinet members were deeply concerned..."

In the late 1990s, as Blair pushed through his "coup" in the Labour Party, it was often remarked — and without Blair and his friends contradicting it — that his aim was to reverse the historical step forward through which the British labour movement made between 1900 and 1918.

In those years, the trade unions and the socialist groups formed a Labour Party — at first a satellite of the Liberal Party which had been allowing a few trade-

unionists to stand for Parliament under its banner — and built it up to a point where it contested elections without a formal alliance with the Liberals.

Blair didn't push things as far as fully "reversing" the Labour Party back into the Liberals. He found he didn't need to, he wasn't confident enough to do it — whatever, he didn't go that far.

Some of the most outspoken advocates in the late 1990s of "de-Labour-ising" Labour, like Stephen Byers, are now out of politics or more marginalised in the Labour Party. But some, evidently, are still "senior Labour figures".

They may have in mind a full merger of Labour and the Lib-Dems, like the merger in Italy in which the rump of the old Communist Party merged with the Margherita (Daisy) splinter of the old Christian Democrat party, or a long-term alliance, like that in Australia between the two conservative parties, Liberals and Nationals.

Either way, "concern", to put it at the mildest, is certainly in order. Let's hear some trade union leaders express it in public, as well as "some cabinet members" in backroom conversation with the *Guardian*.

Childcare battle in Hackney

An activist from Friends of Hackney Nurseries spoke to *Solidarity*

Hackney is relatively well-endowed with nursery places. A lot of that is to do with struggles that were fought and won in the 1970s and 80s by feminists and community activists, who set up community nurseries and got funding for them.

Since then it's been a constant struggle to defend those gains.

Our campaign, Friends of Hackney Nurseries, has reactivated recently in response to big cuts planned by the Learning Trust (LT). The LT is the body that looks after education for Hackney Council, which is convenient for them, as it allows the council to deny responsibility for cuts like these. The LT has said it will cut between £40,000 and £50,000 from the budget of many nurseries, with immediate effect. For many nurseries that represents losing over 50% of their grant.

There are three types of nurseries in Hackney: community (of which there are about 23); council-run (about 10); and private (maybe another 10). It looks like it's the community nurseries that are being targeted. Until around 10 years ago there were no private nurseries in the borough at all, but over the past few years the council has been forcing even the community nurseries to function more and more like businesses.

The LT has tried to use the election as a veil to push through its cuts; it thinks no one will notice. It's tried to pick nurseries off one by one, sending them individual letters without talking to anyone, or informing them verbally without writing a letter. A lot of nurseries didn't know the cuts were taking place, and certainly not on this scale. The LT were hoping that by employing these stealth tactics no one would make a fuss, but we've been able to expose the scale of the cuts.

All of this is particularly upsetting in the context of government rhetoric about support for early-years childcare, and it's made all the more galling because the LT has told the press that "there is definitely no programme of cuts".

Our campaign aims to mobilise parents, nursery workers and community activists. I think there's a direct link between the reactivation of our campaign and the rise in feminist activism. There are a lot of feminists based in Hackney, and local networks like Hackney Solidarity Network have been important too. Everyone in Hackney has always valued our nurseries; our communities are very diverse, but we all have children, so this is an issue that unites us.

We're holding a hustings meeting to put some of the election candidates on the spot on this issue. How we pose our demands will depend on how the struggle develops. Some people involved in the campaign want to explore ideas around radical childcare. One of the people at our recent meeting has a child on the waiting list for four nurseries, and that shows that we need to expand as well as defend services.

● Contact the campaign at fhn@live.co.uk.

UNISON HEALTH

Calm before cuts storm

BY MIKE FENWICK

The Health Sector conference of UNISON on 19-21 April saw only very superficial discussion of the upcoming threat to the NHS and its staff.

Indeed, the agenda sped by so quickly that nearly all the timetabled business was completed a day early. It was called under the banner of "A Million Voices for the NHS", but the voices of the delegates were generally quite muted.

We described it in our bulletin as the calm before the storm. Delegates had their heads down, numbed perhaps by the scale of the cuts to come, a pay freeze, redundancies and an attack on our pensions. Even general secretary Dave Prentis was quite subdued when speaking on Monday morning.

Attacking the Tories, he said Labour cannot take our support for granted. We would not tolerate a pay freeze. He made a commitment to lead any strikes over pay the members voted for. Rousing words that fell hollow on a conference that had heard it all before.

Health Secretary Andy Burnham visited conference in the afternoon and received the usual stage-managed questions that had been through the filter of regional meetings and full-time officers. One woman delegate just lost patience with him and challenged his answers, which reportedly shocked him. Conference responded to that but the mood soon dropped again.

Most of the debate on Monday was about our response to the attacks on the NHS. Strategy passed was OK on paper, as usual, and there were a few more nods towards working with community organisations and other unions than usual from leadership. By end of Monday we were already through to Tuesday afternoon's business.

Tuesday morning saw the annual pay debate. Only one composited motion was heard and passed, which included a commitment to industrial action and call on the Service Group Executive to prepare for a ballot if there should be any imposed pay freeze.

The key word here is "imposed". Because if a 0% recommendation (i.e. pay freeze) was made by the Pay Review Body (PRB), UNISON would likely accept it. It would have been the result of a "fair and objective" process rather than just the decision of the government.

Last year's Health Conference debated the PRB. The left made the case for a breaking from it and returning to free collective bargaining.

The PRB is made up of current and retired health service and private sector bosses, appointed and given their terms of reference by the Secretary of State for Health. The Tories are just as likely to change the terms of reference and have them rubber-stamp a pay freeze as to risk strike action by ignoring the PRB.

Like New Labour, they'll use it as they like to impose pay deals but be seen to

have it all done by an independent body. A fiction the union continues to support and reinforce.

Business sped through in the afternoon, with the right wing only trying to slow things down in the last hour when it looked like the whole agenda would be completed in two days! Conference closed early on Wednesday lunchtime, and there was no improvement in the mood during the last session. Expectation seems to be that next year is going to be much more important when people are actually facing cuts. This chance to organise in advance of those cuts was not taken.

When the leadership won't lead, the members must. There were positive signs that activists have started to organise themselves along these lines. The existing Health Activist list continues to grow and is a good resource for discussion and information around casework and disputes. The large attendance at the HealthWorker meeting demonstrates that there is an interest in sharing experiences and information between activists.

Workers' Liberty supporters and others have set up a blog to support union democracy and rank and file initiatives.

We want it to develop into a source of rank and file news and debate on how to fight the cuts. Find out more at

unisonrfa.wordpress.com

To join the Health Activists list, email healthactivists-subscribe@unionlists.org.uk with the subject "subscribe".

Karen Jennings shows how not to fight

BY A HEALTHWORKER

Karen Jennings, Head of Unison Health, spoke at a recent meeting held in North London for workers at the Whittington Hospital who are facing the closure of their A&E and maternity services.

The meeting was designed to get more workers involved in the Defend the Whittington Hospital Coalition, and build their confidence to mount a fightback from within the hospital against the proposed cuts.

You would have thought that Jennings would have made an attempt to boost the confidence of the workers and the Whittington Unison branch. In fact, she did the exact opposite.

She started by saying that there were no concrete plans to close the A&E, leaving a lot of the staff confused.

When asked if there was any strategy to fight the cuts, she replied "Well, I don't see many hospital workers here tonight, I don't think the branch is strong enough to take any action. Perhaps an academic could write to the government explaining how the cuts wouldn't be a good idea."

Brilliant! Yes, Karen Jennings, that's exactly how unions have won the fight against cuts before!

Later she went on to explain that polyclinics are actually OK and so are Private Finance Initiatives. Let's get this clear — Unison is not in favour of polyclinics. She has publicly gone against democratically decided policy of the union.

At this point of the meeting the mood was very downbeat. Jennings left to go

and canvass for her upcoming election battle in Hornsey and Wood Green, where she is Labour PPC. Thankfully, other people involved in the campaign managed to turn the meeting around, and workers and union members in the hospital are discussing how to take the campaign forward.

The most frustrating thing is that Jennings probably won't be held to account for any of this; she will continue to go around saying these kind of things and simultaneously claiming to represent thousands of healthworkers. At a time when the Unison bureaucracy is viciously witch-hunting left activists, a time when we'll be facing cuts like we haven't seen since the 1980s.

What we need is a democratically accountable leadership, one that is going to inspire and build fights against cuts, not crush the first attempts at fightbacks they see.

WHITTINGTON DAY OF ACTION

The campaign to defend Whittington Hospital's A&E and maternity services is going strong.

A day of action is planned for Thursday 29 April, with local stunts and a lunchtime rally outside the hospital.

Trade unions and staff are discussing how the campaign can move forward from within the hospital.

Rachel Tyndall, Chief Executive of NHS Islington, has been very dismissive of the campaign so far and said that the North Central London NHS sector (which includes the Whittington and four other

hospitals) will lose £560 million over the next five years and needs to start making cuts.

The Whittington campaign is an example of how campaigns can be built to stop the closure of services. We need a coordinated fightback to attacks on the NHS across London.

NHS cuts

£20 billion in cuts are forecast for the NHS in the next few years. These cuts have already started...

- Leicestershire Hospitals — £58 million and 700 jobs to go in 12 months.
- Southampton Hospitals — £100 million cut and 1,400 jobs to go in four years.
- Salford Royal Hospital — 750 jobs to go in three years, budget cut 15%.
- Oxfordshire Hospitals — £45 million cut in 12 months.
- Cambridge University Hospitals — £35-£40 million cut over three years, all sections of staff urged to consider taking redundancy.
- Gloucestershire Hospitals — £27-£30 million cuts, 200 beds.
- Nottingham University Hospitals — £28.8 million cut over 12 months.
- Gateshead Hospitals — 100 beds face closure.
- Arrowe Park Hospital, Wirral — £30 million cuts per year for three years.

LONDON UNDERGROUND

Cuts call for more than token action

BY A LONDON UNDERGROUND
WORKER AND RMT MEMBER

In February, London Underground announced 800 front-line stations job cuts: 450 ticket sellers, around 200 station assistants, alongside a handful of managers.

Facing a slick campaign from London Underground, RMT activists are campaigning hard, and are now waiting for a fighting response from the top of the union.

Latest figures show that every station will lose a significant number of staff, when we have too few already! Even current numbers leave some stations regularly understaffed. There are never enough to deal with incidents. When a

NETWORK RAIL TALKS

Rail maintenance workers' union RMT is in talks at ACAS with bosses Network Rail. RMT called off four days of strikes after the company successfully challenged the legality of strike ballots. The dispute is over plans to axe 1,500 maintenance jobs and change rosters.

short delay leads to overcrowding on platforms, staff need to control the flow of people into the station. If someone falls on an escalator, or activates a passenger alarm on a train, or finds a suspicious package staff are needed to keep the service running and safe. Workers genuinely fear that they will not be able to run stations safely if these proposals go through.

Customer service will go out of the window. Boris Johnson, elected on the pledge to save ticket offices, will close them in all but name, restricting opening hours to as little as an hour a day.

RMT activists have kicked off the "S.O.S. — Staff Our Stations" campaign. We have gone to the press and are doing regular public leafleting, tapping into sympathy on customer service and safety issues.

But we are facing a new breed of London Underground management, who are fighting hard and strategically. A document that recently fell out of management into union hands revealed their plan to prepare for and provoke a strike. They will not give in easily. They rode out a very effective two day strike last year. They are also playing different grades against each other by leaving station supervisors and drivers out of these

attacks, convincing some that these cuts "won't affect them". Drivers' union ASLEF is feeding this division by recruiting drivers who don't want to strike for station staff.

We need a concerted, united fight. Sustained action, not one or two day strikes, uniting all grades.

RMT's leadership are not treating this battle with any urgency. They are in dispute, alongside the smaller, more conservative stations union, TSSA, but not yet

More staff are needed to run stations safely

preparing a ballot. The court injunction that prevented the Network Rail strike has been a perfect pretext for sluggishness, illustrating why union leaders secretly love the anti-union laws they publicly decry. Workers' Liberty activists have been at the forefront of building this fight. We will continue public campaigning, building unity across the grades and putting pressure on our union leadership to take the fight up seriously, as it deserves.

Organising betting shop workers

Ryan Slaughter is an organiser for Community, a trade union formed from a merger of steel, ceramics and textile workers' unions. He spoke to *Solidarity* about the union's organisation campaign in betting shops.

We were traditionally a steel and manufacturing union, but we found a lot of workers who had manufacturing jobs have over the past few years gone into retail. We had a few members who went to work in betting shops, so we started organising there.

We currently have members across the whole of the sector — Ladbrokes, William Hill, Coral, Paddy Power. We also have membership in smaller independents as well, but their issues are slightly different.

There are some particular issues we campaign around. A campaign we launched in November 2008 focused on the issue of violence in the workplace. Alongside banks and post offices, betting shops are the most targeted workplaces on the high street for robbery, including violent robbery. We felt man-

agers weren't doing enough to protect workers against violence, and the after-care they were giving staff was really poor. Suffering that kind of violence was seen as just part of the industry that workers should accept.

General conditions in the sector are pretty bad. A lot of people are paid only just above minimum wage and are working long and extended hours.

The demographic of people who work in the shops is extremely diverse; like any retail sector we've got a lot of migrant workers, and jobs in sectors like ours are the only jobs they can find. It's about 65% women working in shops.

One of our big campaigns was against lone working and single-staffing. You'd never see a lone person working in a bank or any other high-street workplace, so why is it okay in a betting shop, which can be quite an intimidating atmosphere?

There's been a big rise in racist and sexist abuse from customers. Again there's an attitude from management that this is something workers should just accept as being part of the job. Our

campaign has been about letting people know that they have a voice and can deal with these issues collectively.

Over the last 18 months we've seen a race to the gutter in terms and conditions, with increased hours and attacks on pay. The companies compete with each other to see who can cut most. Ironically, betting is one of the only industries that's done quite well through the recession, but managers are still on the offensive.

Levels of density and union membership in the sector were pretty much at zero when we started. It's a very adversarial atmosphere — companies in the past have been extremely anti-union and people have been scared about joining. We've tried to break through some of that and build people's confidence.

We're fighting for 10 minimum standards on health and safety: on lone working, provisions on security, and demands for the installation of magnetic locks and proper protective screens for workers. We want to changing the culture of bosses trying to get workers to accept trouble as part of the job.

Postal workers accept lousy deal

By EDWARD MALTBY

Postal workers voted two-to-one to accept the deal drawn up between the CWU leadership and Royal Mail management.

The deal represents a pay rise of 7%, but over four years. It also represents the abolition of the per-item payment rate for junk-mail deliveries, which will be replaced with a standard weekly payment of £20.80.

For delivery workers, the deal is yet another shoddy let-down from their union leadership and scant reward for

the courage they showed throughout months of strike action. The union negotiated the deal almost entirely behind closed-doors and sprang it on the membership as a "take it or leave it" offer.

Unfortunately, although many branches did come out against the deal, there was no coordinated campaign for a "no" vote. This sell-out of a strike with massive potential is further evidence of the need for strong rank-and-file organisation in the CWU that can hold the leadership to account and demand that strikes and negotiations are controlled from below in future.

EDUCATION UNIONS

Teachers will block tests

PPrimary school head teachers, members of the National Union of Teachers (NUT) and National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) will boycott the SATs tests due on 10-13 May.

They will lock up the test papers when they receive them, before 10 May, and not issue them.

Labour schools minister Ed Balls has staged an apt finale to his term in office by urging school governors to bypass the head teacher and enforce the hated tests, maybe even by instructing the head teacher to stay off school during the test period!

On 16 April the NUT and NAHT announced their ballot results. The result of the NUT ballot was:

Total number of ballot papers returned: 2,478 (turnout 33.8%)

Number voting "yes": 1,853 (74.9%)

Number voting "no": 622 (25.1%)

The result of the NAHT ballot was:

Total number of ballot papers returned: 8,755 (turnout 49.7%)

Number voting "yes": 5360 (61.3%)

Number voting "no": 3386 (38.7%)

The unions say that SATs are bad for teachers, bad for children and bad for education. They advocate instead a system of assessment that highlights what children *can* do, rather than focussing on failure.

- Australian teachers' unions, who voted to boycott the similar NAPLAN tests around the same time, have been legally prohibited from doing so by the Industrial Relations Commission, but have decided to defy the IRC: <http://bit.ly/naplan>

BA CABIN CREW

According to Unite, talks are ongoing between the union and British Airways in an attempt to resolve the dispute around cabin crew's pay and conditions.

In a dispute that has seen some of the most aggressive class warfare from the bosses for some time, a (not-very-radical) briefing from Unite estimates that the dispute may have cost BA up to £100 million, and that the airline's figures of the number of planes it was able to keep in the air were inflated.

MEDIA

Why is the BNP on TV?

By Vicki Morris

A BNP election broadcast went out on Monday 26 April on BBC 1 in England. A few dozen people demonstrated outside Broadcasting House against the transmission, in a protest organised by Unite Against Fascism, Expose the BNP and the broadcasting union BECTU.

Earlier BECTU had issued a statement aimed at its members inside the BBC:

"BECTU's advice to its members is that where they are requested to work on a BNP party political broadcast and do not wish to do so, in the first instance they must advise their line manager and also inform BECTU. Past experience suggests that broadcasters have ensured that those, who, as a matter of conscience, do not wish to work on such productions are rostered to other work."

The union has stated that where an employer insists that an individual works on a BNP broadcast, despite a request for release from the individual, that the member should inform BECTU without delay.

"In the event that a member faces disciplinary action, then BECTU will give its full support to the member."

The tone would lead one to believe that broadcast technicians pulling the plug on the broadcast was likely, but it was always unlikely, for several reasons.

Insiders suggest that it was far easier in the past for union members to refuse to work putting out material by or about the BNP, but all that would happen was that a manager or someone else would do that work. There would not be much likelihood that a broadcast would actually be stopped.

These days it would be a brave employee indeed who would refuse to work on the broadcast, conscience or no. They would be defying a BBC management that is being very hard-nosed about covering the BNP "impartially" — that is, rather uncritically — in the interests of "fairness". For BBC management this is a political issue. They would come down like a ton of bricks on anyone who tried to stop a broadcast.

Moreover, whatever the union says, many BECTU members would probably, like most people, see it as common sense that the broadcast should go ahead. Many people buy into the idea that, since BNP politicians are properly elected, they must be treated the same as all other politicians. Also, isn't every main-

stream politician in the land taking up their main political campaign, against immigration, anyway?

Nick Griffin on Question Time

stream politician in the land taking up their main political campaign, against immigration, anyway?

The media unions are battling to expose the BNP for what it is, against media bosses who seem determined to do the opposite and give the BNP an easy ride. The NUJ has its own website www.reportingthebnp.org, providing resources to journalists "to help challenge the party's claims on housing, immigration and race... why the BNP is not like any other party".

An activist campaign for media workers and students has been set up, with

NUJ and BECTU support, called Expose the BNP (www.exposethebnp.com).

But they are up against a media culture which seems bemused about how to handle the BNP or just plain soft on them.

In January the BBC's editorial complaints unit found that Radio 1's "Newsbeat" programme had been too soft in an interview last year with BNP activists Mark Collett and Joseph Barber. The programme had described them as "two young guys who are members of the BNP", and did not challenge their statement that Ashley Cole is "not ethnically British". Many interviews with the BNP, for example, Jeremy Paxman interviewing Nick Griffin on "Newsnight" on 24 April, treat them with arch humour rather than as a serious party with seriously nasty politics.

The protest outside Broadcasting House on the night of the BNP election broadcast was not just meant for media workers but for the public as well. Everyone has a role to play in commenting on how the BNP is reported in broadcast and print media, for example, writing to local newspapers to challenge lousy reporting.

Local readers complaining to the *Brentwood Gazette* about a gushing report of a BNP meeting — it described the BNP as "proud nationalists" — have apparently convinced them to take the report off their website.

EDL shut down left meeting

By Ed Whitby

On 7 April, members of the English Defence League closed down an SWP meeting in Newcastle.

Seven SWP members were meeting in Tyneside Irish Centre to discuss the EDL. (Evidently the SWP is much diminished since its split with Counterfire — one of whose bases is Newcastle.) When 10 EDL members turned up, outnumbering the SWP, the comrades felt they had to abandon the meeting.

Judging by YouTube footage of what happened, the EDLers heckled, but did not disrupt the meeting with violence. You could make a case that the SWP should have stayed to argue with them.

That is a tactical judgement it is difficult to make in hindsight and from a distance.

But there is no doubt that the EDL could start violently disrupting left-wing meetings.

Socialist, labour movement and anti-racist activists need to be prepared to defend ourselves. We must offer unconditional solidarity and assistance to the SWP and anyone else who needs to defend their meetings in future. We cannot and should not rely on the police.

Naturally, the union bureaucrats, liberals and even Tories who make up the SWP's allies in UAF will not be willing to mobilise the kind of physical defence that is necessary. All the more reason for the SWP to reconsider the nature of its anti-fascist activity!

Anti-fascist dayschool

Activists from Sheffield, Nottingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Hull and London attended the northern Workers' Liberty dayschool on fighting fascism in Sheffield on 24 April.

Sheffield AWL has been running an anti-fascist campaign in the BNP target-area of Firth Park; AWL activists from a number of cities participated in the 27 March Nottingham conference to launch a working-class network.

All too often, anti-fascist activism is politically blind, "the politics of the next mobilisation". We wanted an opportunity to discuss a Marxist analysis of fascism and its implications for how we fight the far right.

Sessions included Trotsky on the rise of Nazism; the politics of the BNP and EDL; nationalism, migrant workers and immigration controls (a discussion with very useful contributions from the young PCS members taking part); "no platform"; and the political limitations of UAF and Hope Not Hate.

We hope to hold similar dayschools in other areas soon.

We nod and smile while they screw us over

MY LIFE AT WORK

Dominic Warner works in a commercial call centre in north London.

Tell us a little bit about the work you do.

I do customer service work in a call-centre, for a company which buys gold. It mainly involves being abused and shouted at by dissatisfied customers, and dealing with prank calls from kids. About 70% of our time is spent sitting around waiting for calls to come in; it's a great opportunity to catch up on some reading.

Do you and your workmates get the pay and conditions you deserve?

We're paid just above the minimum

wage, which is not great, but the main sticking point is hours. The boss will walk in at 11am and tell a handful of people to go home if it's a slow day. Some of my colleagues have young kids to look after, we all have bills, and getting sent home early on can really mess up your week's budget.

Has the economic crisis affected your work? Has it affected the way workers think about their jobs?

I work for one of the businesses which has benefited from the recession. Now the economy seems to be growing business has slowed; we've had our days cut and my supervisor has told me off the record to start looking for another job.

What do people talk about in your workplace? How easy is it to "talk politics on the job"?

My co-workers' favourite topic is the nasty behaviour of management, but everyone holds very traditional, conservative views and when I suggested unionising, people looked at me like I was from Mars. Over the past few months they've been training staff from other parts of the call centre to do our job; so if push came to shove and somehow we did manage to strike, management already has a large pool of scab labour coming in every morning.

Do you enjoy your work?

I can't say I enjoy the work — getting abused over the phone would wear any-

one down — but compared to some of the other jobs out there it's a cakewalk.

What are your bosses like?

The bosses aren't particularly impressive. The top boss is a bit of an oddball, he aims to instill a culture of fear in his employees but he can't pull it off, and as a result is a bit of a laughing stock. The supervisors are friendly and act interested in you, but it's pretty clear they only build up a relationship to make their job easier — we're supposed to nod and smile while they screw us over.

If you could change one thing about your workplace, what would it be?

There's no union, so getting one would be a good start!

Support the college strikes

BY IRA BERKOVITZ

Teaching staff at nearly a dozen Further Education colleges in London, as well as University College London and Westminster University, will take strike action on 5 May in the first coordinated wave of strike action in response to the government's education cuts.

Because cuts are being delivered locally, the UCU is prevented from taking national action on the issue (which would fall foul of the anti-union laws). However, the May strikes show that coordinating workplace-by-workplace action so workers strike on the same day, and with the maximum impact, is clearly possible. Socialists and other rank-and-file activists

in UCU may be wondering why it has taken their leadership this long to organise some coordinated strikes.

The FE sector faces £340 million of cuts in the next year alone, an absolutely staggering amount for a sector in which many workers are still hourly-paid. Some estimates of the total cuts faced by HE reach as high as £1 billion. This is unquestionably a full-frontal assault on entire sectors that will not just effect the academic workers organised by UCU but the cleaners, catering staff and other auxiliary workers who work in universities and colleges.

The question of how students and students unions should respond to industrial action by education workers is, unfortunately, a contentious one in the student

movement. In response to a potential UCU strike earlier in the year, Leeds University Union ran a scab-herding campaign through which it encouraged students to lobby their lecturers to vote no in a ballot for industrial action. Socialists active on campuses in London must explain why students and workers' long-term interests are the same, and why students should support lecturers' strikes even if it means short-term inconvenience for them.

Workers' Liberty activists in UCU will produce a strike bulletin for the day, and AWL students active in the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts will be organising solidarity with the strikes, including leafleting to persuade students not to cross picket lines.

EDUCATION

NUS sinks further into mire

BY DANIEL RANDALL, NUS TRUSTEE BOARD

Despite a background of grassroots struggles against cuts and fees, NUS conference 2010 saw the Blairite leadership entrench itself and push further down the road of bureaucratisation, depoliticisation and capitulation to the government.

Conference was dramatically smaller than in previous years. Nearly 50% of delegates were full-time sabbatical officers. They voted overwhelmingly for the

anodyne-sounding goal of "progressing the Collaborations Agenda". What this actually means is the merger of part of the union's structure with its commercial services organisation NUSSEL and, bizarrely, AMSU, the "union" of top managers in student unions! The result will be a commercial behemoth with a shrivelled campaigning arm.

On education funding, the conference voted down the left's proposals for free education and endorsed support for a graduate tax. It opposed the call for occupations and direct action. Delegates did pass a left-proposed call for solidari-

ty with industrial action by UCU and other education workers. Pro-trade union demagoguery is fashionable among the NUS leadership; Wes Streeting even commented in his leaving speech that he stands solidly with "my comrades in the BA dispute".

How seriously they take such statements is shown by their failure to back UCU in recent anti-cuts disputes, symbolised by Streeting's written comment that students need industrial action "like a hole in the head", and by the scab-herding of Jak Codd, NEC member and Leeds University Union communications officer. He ran a campaign for his members to tell their lecturers not to strike, until he was forced to retreat by grassroots student outrage.

Toward the end of the conference, Streeting bombastically whipped up delegates into re-electing as Trustees not only David Fletcher, the former Sheffield Uni registrar who used the courts against student Gaza occupiers, but Kate Davies, the CEO of Notting Hill Housing who has cut her workers' pay and conditions so viciously that they have voted 95 percent to strike. Apparently, she knows "how to make tough choices".

On the last morning, with only 200 people in the hall, conference voted to censure Bell Ribeiro-Addy, who as Black Students' Officer organised protests when Durham Union Society (a posh debating club) invited BNP MEP Andrew Brons and one of the BNP's

WILL LODGE, A DELEGATE FROM HARLOW COLLEGE

"This was my first time at a big conference, and it was quite a daunting experience at first. Everyone else seemed to know what was going on, and how things worked, but I soon picked it up.

"Conference was a shambles politically. The central bureaucracy got most things rubber-stamped, including their favourites in the elections.

"I did gain a lot of confidence from my experience, especially after making some speeches, some of which I had to do on the spur of the moment. Talking to people, flying and attending fringe meetings was also interesting and helpful to me politically."

revolutionary socialist. Radicalism and direct action did not alienate people: the promise of a union that involves and fights for students struck a chord!

With the election of left-wing sabbaticals at London unis, including UCL, SOAS, LSE and London Met, and at ULU, there is a counter-trend to the continuing right-wing degeneration of NUS.

At Westminster, the real job of transforming our union and using it to build up anti-cuts activism and political consciousness begins!

Anti-cuts activists win Westminster

BY JADE BAKER, UWSU VP
EDUCATION-ELECT

Last week anti-cuts activists swept the board in our student union elections. All three candidates on the "Stop the cuts! Shake up YOUR union" slate were elected — Robin Law as President, Fatima Hagi as student Trustee and myself as VP Education.

Less than a year ago there was little activist culture at Westminster. The SU was dominated by a bunch of self-serving incompetents, with those who wanted a fight isolated. The anti-cuts movement has changed all that.

Westminster is facing almost 300 job losses, course cuts and the closure of our nursery. After a period of patiently building up the Fight Cuts campaign, March saw a mass protest and occupation at our Regent Street campus, with students fighting in solidarity with revived staff unions. Lecturers have voted for action and will be coordinating their strike with UCU's day of action on 5 May.

Our opponents in the election relied on traditional SU election stuff: friendship networks, dancing round sound systems, free sweets. We argued for a campaigning union that fights on issues like fees and cuts, not a popularity contest; and I stood explicitly as an AWL member and

WHO IS... THERESA MAY?

Theresa May, the most prominent woman in the Tory Party, as the Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and Shadow Minister for Women most directly "opposes" Harriet Harman in the House of Commons.

This Oxford graduate has only been an MP since the 1997 (for Maidenhead). She worked in the City during the Thatcher years and as a local councillor.

Having been part of the movement of "reforming" Tories — she famously dubbed her party the "nasty party" — which culminated in David Cameron's election as leader, she has styled herself as the most brass-necked of the new Tories. That is, she is fond of denouncing Labour for everything the last Tory government was itself either responsible for or equally guilty of — from rail privatisation (when Shadow Transport person) to, most recently, youth unemployment.

She has said the Tories would "get Britain working" for the sake of millions of people on benefits. How will she get people working? By being very nasty... forcing people on benefits to work!

With James Dyson at her side, May is keen to promote British manufacturing. Being an irony-free zone she can't see a problem with her once being part of the British ruling class project which put the boot into "failing" British manufacturing back in the 1980s. That was then, and this is now. Now it is all about "rebalancing the economy" — cuts, privatisation and the nurturing of rapacious capitalism. Nasty.

local councillors to speak. (It almost censored LGBT Open Place Officer Daf Adley, but a few more delegates had made it into the hall by then.)

The furore had resulted in Durham SU disaffiliating from NUS; the leadership want Durham's tens of thousands in affiliation fees, so they backed the censures, despite their formal support for "no platform for fascists". Thus they provided the BNP with a propaganda coup in the run-up to the general election and a green light to intervene on campuses.

The left was divided, the SWP preferring to ally with the left-bureaucratic remnants of the Student Broad Left group and its periphery than with grassroots radicals such as supporters of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC). Although SWPer Mark Bergfeld was elected to the NUS NEC, the conference cannot be seen as any kind of success for the left.

Is it still worth attending the conference, and intervening in the structures of NUS more generally?

The NCAFC fringe meeting attracted a number of people and the campaign met new contacts, including from Further Education colleges. These opportunities, along with the fact that there is currently no groundswell inside any SU for disaffiliation from NUS, are the positive case for continued intervention. But the left will have to change the way it works inside NUS if it wants to relate to conference as anything more than a pool in which to fish for contacts.

ENVIRONMENT

No climate solutions in Cochabamba

By PAUL VERNADSKY

The pretentiously titled “World People’s Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth” took place in Cochabamba, Bolivia, between 19 and 22 April.

Called by the president of Bolivia, Evo Morales, the conference attracted over 30,000 people discuss the way forward after the failure of Copenhagen climate talks.

While participants were rightly critical of the existing neo-liberal political economy of climate change, which puts market instruments at the centre of its strategy to tackle the issue (and leaves the dominant social relations untouched), their positive proposals lacked clarity or substance.

The Bolivian government made four proposals: 1. that nature should be granted rights that protect ecosystems from annihilation (a “universal declaration of Mother Earth rights”); 2. that those who violate those rights should face a “climate justice tribunal”; 3. that poor countries should receive compensation for the climate crisis they face but had little role in creating (“climate debt”); and 4. that there should be a “world people’s referendum on climate change”.

None of these proposals has any purchase at all. Framing the whole discourse in terms of “Mother Earth” makes far too many concessions to backward-looking, semi-religious patriarchal values that socialists and eco-feminists rightly reject (e.g., “We call the world to regain our ancestral spiritual essence...”).

To speak of “rights” for the earth is also problematic. It involves human agents advocating these rights on behalf of others beings, plants and ecosystems, yet it blurs the specific social agents and structures (i.e. capital) that do the damage.

The universal declaration also lacks the power of enforcement — hence the idea of a climate court is a distraction.

Dragging executives and ministers through this kind of court, with no sanctions, is a complete diversion from holding these people to account through political action — through demonstrations, strikes, occupations, voting and ultimately revolution to overthrow them.

Similarly, the idea of climate debt is incoherent. The idea that historic responsibility for emissions rests with developed countries appears to make sense — it is a fact of geography that most industrial emissions have so far come from Europe and North America. However climate debt, like other reparations arguments, is a rebranded relic of woolly third worldism. People living in “developed countries” now did not make those decisions. They were not born then — and the vast majority of people then and today do not hold the levers of power. Workers did not sconsiously decide to pollute, and don’t now.

Climate debt also leads to the conclusion that people in developed countries must pay for the debt by cutting their living standards. Yet the justice argument should apply equally to workers here as well. Workers in relatively affluent countries did not cause the problem, yet they are expected to pay for it. And who gets off the hook? Capital — the real root of the problem.

Finally, the proposal for an international vote seems like a good idea, until the practicalities are thought through. Who would organise it? What will happen in places like China, Iran, Saudi Arabia etc — big polluters with no democracy — how will people there register their view? But most importantly, what would such a vote, with probably a dismal turn-out, actually signify? At best, that many people are bothered about climate change and want to tackle it. We know that already.

What is needed is a coherent political programme around which to unite workers and our allies to fight. The vote won’t be about mobilising people to

tackle climate change at the expense of the bosses and their states.

The report of the summit in *Socialist Worker* (24 April) was odd. The SWP fantasised that “The centre of resistance over climate change is shifting to the oppressed”, making far too many concessions to the romantic fetishism of indigenous peoples that is prevalent on the left. Whilst indigenous peoples suffer from the effects of climate change and from capitalism, their social power is weak and social solutions proposed by people speaking in their name are often utopian or reactionary.

The gathering was not an improvement on the social forums of the last decade and was hardly packed with genuine representatives of the industrial working class. The circular from the ITUC saying “don’t go to Cochabamba” might have been a factor, but would hardly be decisive for militant unions. The SWP was closer to the truth when

Bolivia’s water wars, 2000

stated that “there is little talk yet [at the meeting] of unemployment, of the economic crisis, of green jobs or of workers”.

Cochabamba was chosen for the venue of the “World People’s Conference” because it is threatened by the effects of climate change — particularly its water supply. And a decade ago Cochabamba was also the site of the water war, a magnificent struggle against water privatisation that fed into a whole period of working-class uprisings against the old Bolivian state. Morales owes his ascendancy to that fight. But the lessons of those struggles do not appear to have been learned.

Working-class forms of struggle, linking industrial and community direct action, including strikes, mass mobilisations and even armed militias, threw back the privatisers then. But this time we had wishful thinking, warm words and little action on climate change.

LETTER FROM ISRAEL:

Tel Aviv: Las Vegas of online betting

Solomon Anker begins a regular feature

A new popular term in Israel for the country is “IsraHell”. This is popular among some left-wing football fans, radicals and so on.

You might imagine the term refers to the military occupation of the Palestinian territories, but actually it is something else. It refers to the depressing quality of life in the country for its mainly Jewish citizens as capitalism sinks deeper and deeper.

In the 1950s, Israel had possibly the best health care in the world, and had managed to house huge amounts of people in accommodation which was better than what Britain and France managed to build after the Second World War.

The French Prime Minister in 1956

(Guy Mollet of the Socialist Party) even used the excuse of Israel being a “socialist” country to justify its colonial alliance with it against Egypt in the Suez Crisis.

Yet the Kibbutz movement has been totally uprooted from any socialism, the gap between rich and poor in the cities is widening, and the nasty sides of human nature are surfacing — from greed to violence.

New segregation on class lines develops, with bars, shops and restaurants for the new wealthy Israelis, while beggars, crack-prostitutes and homeless people become more numerous on the streets.

The upper classes often make their money in high tech, now becoming the second biggest industry in Israel. And internet gambling dominates the offices in the skyscrapers of Tel Aviv.

It ranges from sports gambling sites to poker and casinos. All the major British

sporting gambling chains, like William Hill and Ladbrokes, have marketing and customer service offices, as well as the huge internet casinos like 888.com.

There are also 100% Israeli companies — mainly casinos — running businesses very much on the edge of legality (and miles away from any line of morality).

All this happens in a country where gambling is illegal and poker events and horse racing are banned!

Israeli internet casinos register their companies in a tiny island like Gibraltar or Jersey and run the casino from Tel Aviv. They hide the fact they are from Israel, possibly because many of their clients are from Saudi Arabia and also possibly because they are breaking Israeli law.

Many of the workers are American, British and French people, in order to give the false image that the company is not Israeli and that it is not “dodgy”.

But the dirty tricks of gambling companies are very obvious. These companies successfully manage to trick their customers in many ways, especially with their “bonuses” they offer.

If you communicate with a customer support worker from a sports betting or casino website, then that worker is likely to be sitting in Tel Aviv even if he says he is in Cyprus, Gibraltar or Bermuda.

The workers are not getting much out of this business.

They work under terrible conditions, as many workers’ rights have long since gone in Israel and the boss has never had so much power.

Ironically these capitalist industries are also the strongest anti-Zionist force! They employ and abuse many Jewish workers from the west. These people find Israel is not what they expected, and return home to America, France and the UK.

IRAQ

Iraqi workers fight for rights

BY COLIN FOSTER

The AFL-CIO, an American equivalent of the TUC, has launched an international campaign for a democratic labour law in Iraq.

At present, Saddam Hussein's labour law from 1987 is still on the books, making trade unions theoretically illegal in the public sector, i.e. in most of the Iraqi economy. In addition, Decree 8750, from August 2005, gives the Iraqi government arbitrary powers to seize union funds.

Successive Iraqi governments have promised that they will legislate for workers' right to organise, to have representation, to strike, etc, but have not yet done so.

The AFL-CIO may well do not much more than put a petition and briefings up on a website, but that it has done so gives useful leverage to rank-and-file activists campaigning for Iraqi workers' rights. For example, on 15 May, the local AFL-CIO council in Metropolitan Washington organised a demonstration at the Iraqi consulate there.

Above-ground trade unions emerged in Iraq in 2003, after the US-UK invasion and the fall of Saddam Hussein, and have

lived in a legal grey area ever since.

The simmering civil war in 2006 set them back, but the beginnings of political consolidation in Iraq, from late 2007 or early 2008, set the scene for a race.

Will the trade unions be able to use the relative calm to build up their strength and secure some legal guarantees? Or will Iraq's dominant political parties — all right-wing, from a working-class point of view — be quicker to gain the strength and confidence to use the existing laws to snuff out worker organisation?

The race was made more urgent when, in late 2008, the USA signed a deal to withdraw its troops from Iraq's cities by June 2009 and from Iraq altogether by the end of 2011. US combat troops are due to be out of Iraq by the end of August 2010, and US commanders have recently said that they are on schedule for that deadline.

There has been much sparring between unions and the government. The latest case came after industrial action by oil refinery workers in March and at the end of the February, over wages and similar issues.

The (government-controlled) management retaliated by ordering the transfer of four leaders of the Iraqi Federation of Oil

Unions from their bases to other workplaces.

The current flux in Iraq after the parliamentary election of 7 March has set the scene for increased bombings and killings of civilians by guerrilla groups, probably Sunni ultra-Islamists, but may also increase the opportunities for trade unions to win commitments from rival politicians anxious to gain credibility.

The results of the 7 March election are still uncertain. The official figures so far give:

- 91 seats for the coalition led by Iyad Allawi (ex-Ba'hist, former favourite of the CIA. US-appointed interim prime minister in 2004-5), which came out ahead in the Sunni Arab areas of Iraq;

- 89 for the coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki (prime minister since May 2006, and leader of a section of the Shia-Islamist Dawa party);

- 70 for an alliance of Moqtada al-Sadr's movement and the Supreme Islamic Council (other Shia-Islamist groups: this alliance also included a Dawa splinter led by Ibrahim al-Jaafari, prime minister from April 2005 to May 2006);

- 43 for the Kurdish alliance, and 32 for other groups.

However, one of Allawi's successful candidates has been disqualified on grounds of Ba'hist links, and it is not certain that he will be replaced. And the vote is being recounted in Baghdad.

Since 2005 Iraq's government has been dominated by a coalition between Shia-Islamist and Kurdish groups. That could change now. The US is reported to be pushing for an agreement between Allawi and Maliki to share the job of prime minister, two years each. The Sadrist are calling for a grand coalition of all four big blocs, and promoting Ibrahim al-Jaafari for prime minister.

Amidst the jockeying for power, it remains possible that all the precarious stabilisation since late 2007 could collapse, and Iraq could fall back into sectarian civil war.

The Iraqi labour movement urgently needs our help so that it wins as many guarantees and positions of strength it can in the current turmoil.

- See <http://bit.ly/iraqtu> for a useful briefing (from 2008, but still relevant) by the AFL-CIO on Iraqi labour law and www.iraqitradeunions.org/cgi-bin/campaign1.cgi for the international campaign.

BELGIUM

Oppose burqa bans and the spread of fundamentalism

BY ELAINE JONES

In Belgium the home affairs committee of the Brussels federal government has voted unanimously to ban the partial or total covering of faces in public places. The parliament is likely to approve the ban and it will be in force by the summer.

In France Sarkozy looks set to use emergency procedures to push through a complete ban on the burqa (full-length head, face and body covering) and niqab (detachable face veil) in public places by July.

The Canadian province of Quebec last week introduced a ban on facial covering in public service employment.

In the Netherlands the right-wing libertarian politician Geert Wilders continues to call for Muslim veil bans as part of his campaign against the "Islamification" of Dutch society.

Although legal moves in Europe are focused on the burqa and the niqab, the wider debate in Belgium is about the simple headscarf (i.e., a headcovering), with Muslim parents pressing for schools to allow their daughters to cover their heads or threatening to send their children to private schools.

Headscarves are banned in schools in France.

The debate on the banning or restriction of these different forms of "hijab

dress" raises many issues for socialists.

The right wing who support bans do not do so out of any concerns for women's rights. They are not interested in "freeing" women from the hijab because they oppose women's oppression.

They may at the same time be in favour of attacks on abortion rights, bolstering marriage, against equal pay, and for cuts in welfare provision.

It may also suit them to whip up hostility and racism towards Muslims. They may point to the "hijab" as "detrimental" and "foreign" as a means to strengthen calls for immigration controls.

We reject all this ideology as a means of dividing the working class in a time of economic crisis.

How is fining and even locking people up for non-compliance with this ban going to help bring about liberation?

In past discussions the AWL has said "the veil" is part of an oppressive system, a reactionary tool in the control of religious patriarchs and sometimes the state (e.g. Saudi Arabia), but we oppose the French ban on headscarves in schools.

That's still broadly right but I also think it is more complicated than that.

For example, I would not be in favour



of lifting the ban on headscarves in schools. If it means girls go to school and have freedom from controls and threats from their families or from Islamists in their community. That is a good thing.

We should be in favour of extending the areas in which there is some freedom for children to fight on their own behalf, to think and be critical and to be in control of their own life, independent from their parents' views.

To my mind that means being in favour of consistently secular education,

fighting the spread of faith schools, an end to private schools, and for a compulsory curriculum that includes PE and sex education.

We shouldn't view this discussion as all about a "woman's right to wear what she wants" because it is *always* also about the right of girls and women *not* to have to wear what their religious leaders or fathers or male peers tell them.

We are not neutral on this issue. We are against the growth of religious fundamentalism, which is part of the background to the increasing observance of religious dress (by both women and men).

We shouldn't just tail-end those liberals who talk *only* about respecting freedom of religion. It is about freedom of religion, but it is also about a lot more than that.

If there are campaigns led by Muslim religious leaders against the bans, we shouldn't line up with them. If the left opposes bans in the name of anti-imperialism and wants to side uncritically with religious leaders or various shades of political Islamists, we should keep our distance. Such people are against the working class and women.

We defend people's right to believe what they want. We are against the right wing whipping up hostility to Muslims. But we also oppose the spread of fundamentalism.

The left and the labour move

“Set out an alternative socialist vision”

Jeremy Dear is the General Secretary of the National Union of Journalists

Sadly none of the major parties are really addressing the issues which matter to working people. The debate is framed in terms of what to cut and when as if that is the only choice.

It isn't. Clamping down on the tax avoidance of the rich is just one alternative to cuts. Of course there are differences between the parties but Labour should put some clear red water between them and the other parties.

The NUJ is not affiliated to any party and have always made it clear we will fight the cuts whoever is responsible for them — public or private sector, Labour, Tory or Lib-Dem government. We currently have around 30 workplaces being balloted, trying to link up the issues affecting one group of our members with others and demonstrating that where attacks are successful against one group of workers the same cuts affect another group pretty soon afterwards. That way we try to build a united fight against the cuts facing our industry.

It's not easy — there is fear, there are huge obstacles with the anti-union laws — but our job is to try and give members that confidence that if they fight they can win.

For a Tory government would be a disaster. They would cut BBC funding further, they have ruled out any public support to fund regional and local news on ITV meaning its almost certain collapse, they would sweep away rules on impartiality in broadcasting, opening the door to Fox News style programming, they would dilute further the rules governing media ownership leading to further concentration of ownership and power in the hands of a wealthy few individuals and large corporations. The last decade has been bad, the next would be worse if they came to power.

We've been running a Make Your Vote Count campaign — asking candidates to sign up to a set of core union demands. We will publish the responses for all members to make up their own minds for this election. The NUJ went on a long journey — from being a craft union, to seeing itself as above politics, to finally becoming part of the TUC, to electing a left leadership.

It's a journey that's still continuing but we firmly now

see our fundamental interests as no different from those of other workers in other industries. So we helped found the Trade Union Co-ordinating Group to bring together left-leaning unions around some key issues. We've actively supported a range of campaigns against the anti-union laws, for public services and so on working with others to build practical solidarity around disputes and campaigns.

For me it's about people being accountable to those who elect them — that's in trade unions or Parliament. I have no time for self-appointed political messiahs. I firmly believe the trade union movement has the power to bring about political change — it just has to find the will to make it happen. All those unions who pump millions in to New Labour and get nothing in return would be better off using that money to pay members to join local constituencies, deselect those who act against our interests and replace them with MPs accountable to the local labour movement.

The key issues for the labour movement in this election are the defence of public services, scrapping of the anti-union laws, economic and social justice. In terms of fighting fascism, it's not enough for us to say Nazis are bad. We need to set out an alternative socialist economic vision. The Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists statement is a useful contribution to doing that.

“What matters most is how we organise”

Tali Janner-Klausner is a socialist active in the London School Students' Union.

I think the fact that there isn't a huge amount of public enthusiasm around this election just shows that people have common sense! The mainstream media is complaining about the lack of participation and low turnout but there are good reasons for all that; the main parties offer cuts and a commitment to maintaining the status quo for business and the financial sector.

It shouldn't be surprising if people can't relate to that. That's not to say the election doesn't matter, but what's more important is how we organise on the ground in the long-term, in our workplaces and day to day life.

A lot of my friends have recently decided to vote for the Liberal Democrats. That's just indicative of how fed up people are, it doesn't mean that Nick Clegg has any real answers for us. Like the Labour government and the

Conservatives, they are fervent defenders of free market capitalism.

Nevertheless, which party wins power next week will have a significant effect on the conditions in which we can organise. So, I'll be voting Labour. Conditions for trade unions and other working-class campaigns will be a lot worse under the Lib Dems or Tories. That's absolutely not to defend Labour's record on trade unions, but they don't have same plans as far as banning strikes in the public sector goes.

There's also the Labour-union link; at the moment using that link is only a potential, but it could become important in the future. If the trade union movement becomes more radical and assertive, then the link to the Labour Party could provide a political expression for that.

It's also true that there'll be a real impact on day-to-life if Labour loses. For example, if you rely on Sure Start, if you or a relative are in sheltered accommodation, or if you receive benefits, then the Tories would make life worse for you.

However we should keep in mind that Labour is talking cuts because they want to protect the system that created the financial crisis, and not have any illusions that a Labour government would mean that we have less to fight for.

In the struggles around education that I'm active in, the implications of a Tory government wouldn't necessarily be that different. Labour's track record in this area is appalling. They've used the National Union of Students, which their student section has historically led and controlled, to try to silence the student fightback. It was Labour who brought in tuition fees and they've enthusiastically rolled out academies.

But the key thing is the potential to subvert and put pressure on a Labour government which exists through the union link and simply wouldn't exist under the Tories.

I think that the key thing in terms of building a movement capable of exerting that kind of pressure will be industrial action. There are significant UCU strikes coming up as well as strikes in transport. Industrial action not only expresses the problems of a given dispute but highlights more general frustration and discontent, and strengthens the fightback against cuts.

“Fight for workers' representation”

James Nesbitt is the Scottish Socialist Party candidate for Glasgow Central.

My work around this election has been the most enjoyable campaigning work I've ever done. We've had people queuing up to sign petitions and stop to talk to us about all sorts of issues; the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan has been a big focus.

There's a huge amount of anger and disillusionment with the political class in general but we've been able to win some of those people round with arguments like a worker's MP on a workers' wage and the right of recall for elected representatives.

There are areas of Glasgow where our election campaigns have been specifically well-received because of our involvement in local campaigns like Save our Schools. This election has also reactivated some old members, so it's been very useful for rebuilding the SSP.

The mood in the SSP compared to a couple of years ago is a lot better. We've been looking at new ways of campaigning and putting a focus on youth issues like unemployment.

I think there's also a growing recognition that the SSP isn't the revolutionary party that's going to lead us to proletarian revolution, so at some point down the line there will have to be some sort of realignment. But for the here and now we're the best thing going for the left in Scotland.

There's also been a bit of a thaw in our relationships with the rest of the left. TUSC is standing some candidates in Scotland, but at a recent PCS-sponsored hustings one of their candidates called for a vote for me in Glasgow East because there's no TUSC candidate standing. However, I think we'd need to see some significant improvement in terms of the democracy in the way projects like to No2EU and TUSC came about.

The left is punching well below its weight not just in elections but generally. We need a coordinated strategy

May Day greetings from RMT London Transport Regional Council

Support our campaign to stop London Underground cutting 800 jobs!

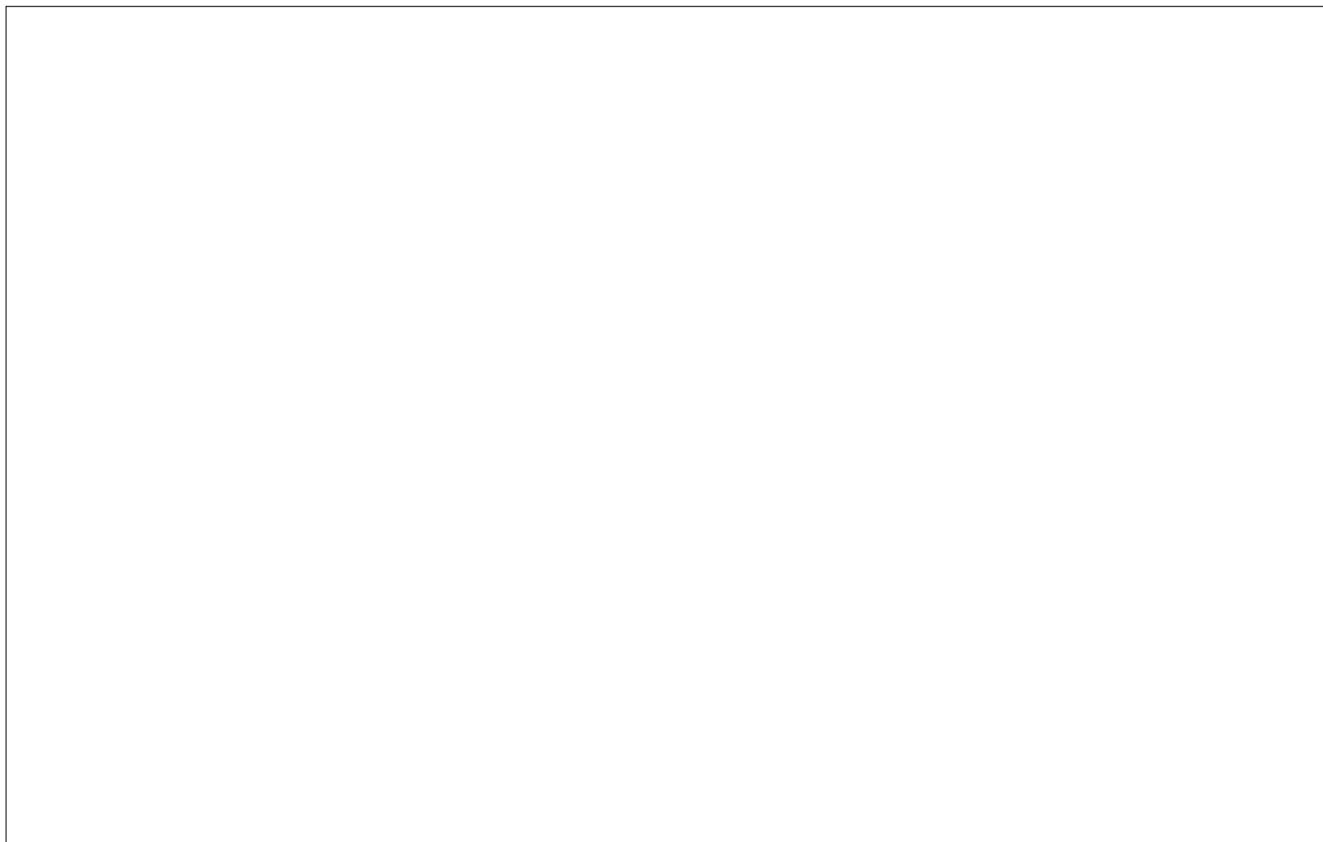
Janine Booth Secretary

Vaughan Thomas President

www.rmtlondoncalling.org.uk

all grades united for public transport and workers' rights

ment in the general election



NUJ members on strike in York in 2008. All unions will now need to get more political

around a fight for workers' representation. Work in the unions, using tool like rank-and-file workplace bulletins, is key but we also need to look at wider community work including anti-fascist campaigning. Essentially we need the consistent adoption of a united front strategy.

The SSP has been active in building militant, direct action anti-fascist campaigns against the mobilisations of the Scottish Defence League. That's led to the formation of the Scottish Anti-Fascist Alliance, although some of that work has stalled due to tensions between socialists and anarchists.

The most important points of unity in that work have been a rejection of working with the police and a rejection of the whole model of responding to fascist mobilisations by having tame counter-rallies with establishment politicians speaking at them. Scotland United [Scottish equivalent of UAF] had the Liberal leader of Edinburgh council speak at its anti-SDL rally in Edinburgh at a time when the council was engaged in vicious attacks on public sector workers' pay, conditions and jobs. We're clearly against that; it's those kind of policies that allow the BNP and the SDL to grow. There are debates within the SSP about what attitude to take towards Scotland United, but there is a clear position from the SSP against making establishment politicians the focal point of anti-fascism.

My experience of talking to worker-activists on picket lines is that there's a greater understanding than ever that the Labour Party is failing the unions. For those unions that remain affiliated and continue to bankroll

the Labour Party's campaigns, of course they should put demands on the content of that campaigning and fight for pro-union policies. But I also think there's a growing appetite for arguments about breaking that link and creating a new workers' party.

The general situation is very different in Scotland because of the SNP factor. The SNP obviously has a very mixed character — it's funded by people like Brian Souter, a right-wing transport oligarch! But it also has a programme that's been to the left of Labour and in government it has introduced some positive reforms.

The SNP candidate standing against me is a socialist; if I wasn't standing, I'd vote for him. Any SNP vote I'd advocate would be critical, but I do think they represent something to the left of the Labour Party.

“Socialists should join Labour”

George Owers, 21, has been in the Labour Party for six years. He is a Labour & Co-Op Party candidate for the Abbey ward in the Cambridge City Council election.

I am left of the leadership [of Labour], but was never interested much in the extremely useless, futile factionalism of the far left. Hopefully at some time we will have a proper leadership elec-

tion, and Labour will have the first real opportunity since 1994 to choose a leader.

We cannot allow another New Labour person in; I think for this reason that socialists of all stripes should join the Labour Party and fight for change within it. The Labour Party is the only way that a real democratic, socialist programme can be realistically put forward.

I do not support the government on lots of things, such as the Iraq war, Private Finance Initiatives (PFI), the contracting out of public services and so on. I think that the best strategy of the left is to reclaim the Labour Party, as it is the best vehicle for holding government. I see why people ripped up their Labour membership cards after the Iraq war, but it is not the best way to affect change.

Would I support a campaign such as SCSTF? You need to differentiate on a candidate-by-candidate basis; within the Labour Party there will be a range of politics. I obviously can't advocate against a New Labour candidate, but this would be much more acceptable. I am very worried about splitting the vote; this could allow the Liberal Democrats or the Tories to get in. It also depends upon the political situation in the ward or seat. I am glad to hear that Workers' Liberty is taking a pragmatic view on it.

I have been following the major disputes and support all of them. Why shouldn't working-class people fight to save their jobs?

A lot of these unions are striking not on pay, but conditions, and often just to uphold agreements that they had already made, such as the CWU modernisation agreement. It is crucial that unions stay affiliated to the Labour Party; a lot of unions who disaffiliate are emasculated even more. If there is to be a leadership election within the Labour Party soon, then unions need to be involved.

The Labour Party grew out of trade unions, and to break the link would be crazy. Labour need to start honouring their side of the agreement. If the Tories get in, they will certainly attack party funding, and it will become more difficult for unions politically.

If you had asked me last year I would have predicted a Tory majority of 50-70 seats, but now I am not so sure. Perhaps the best we can hope for is a Labour majority in a hung Parliament. I think we may have a small majority of perhaps 10 seats. Two elections in a year will be tough for Labour, especially in terms of funding; it could really screw us over.

“Unions must get more political”

Vicki Morris is the Publicity Officer for Barnet TUC

Barnet TUC had a debate last September about our attitude to the council elections. We couldn't agree on whether to back Labour, back someone else, or stand our own candidates — strictly speaking, trades councils can't stand or back anyone in elections, but we could have stood as trade unionists in Barnet.

However, we did agree that we need to act more politically, by publicising our views on national and local political issues and leading local grassroots campaigns.

Through our campaigning to date — for example, against sheltered housing warden cuts, and the Tories' "easyCouncil" plan — we believe we have pushed the Labour group on the council to the left. Then again, in loony-right, Tory-led Barnet there wasn't really anywhere else for them to go if they wanted to be noticed!

Personally, I will be glad if my local Labour MP Andrew Dismore is re-elected — I don't like him, but I totally buy the SCSTF argument that the best political conditions for a fight against cuts and privatisation would be under a Labour government.

However, as the election campaign has worn on and we have been out campaigning against a BNP candidate in one council ward, I have strongly wished that we had stood some candidates in a Tory ward, as a way to get our message across better. We are the only ones saying what we are saying, and what we are saying needs to be said. I think there is scope for standing candidates where you are not letting another party in besides Labour. It would have felt good to make Tory Brian "Mr Toad" Coleman work for his council seat!

More contributions on page 14

Help the socialist alternative!

In the 2010 General Election the Alliance for Workers' Liberty has tried to raise the banner of a socialist alternative — to give clear political answers to both the Tories and New Labour — in the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists and by standing a socialist candidate in Camberwell and Peckham.

If you think we have done a good job why not donate some money. We have no rich donors or "captains of industry" to finance our work. Whoever wins on 6 May we need to continue our fight for our socialist ideas. We want to raise £25,000 in the course of this election year

CAN YOU HELP US?

- Could you take a few copies of our paper to circulate at work or college (contact our office for details);
- Give us money each month by standing order: contact our office or set it up directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number 20047674 at Unity Trust Bank, 08-60-01).
- Donate directly, online — go to www.workersliberty.org and press the donate button
- Send cheques made payable to "AWL" to our office: AWL, PO Box 823, London SE15 4NA, or make a donation directly through internet banking with your bank, to directly with your bank (to "AWL", account number as above);

* Contact us to discuss joining the AWL.

THANKS

In the last fortnight we have received £100 from J, £20 from A and £15 from P. We also had a new monthly standing orders totalling £20 a month. Our grand total now stands at £8,258.50.

The left and labour movement in the general election

“Challenge the consensus”

Martin Booth is an NHS worker, Unison member and TUSC candidate for Cambridge.

Cambridge Socialists is a coalition of socialists from existing parties and none (like myself); we weren't aware of TUSC until after we had decided to contest the local and national elections.

I agreed to be a candidate because I believe it is necessary to challenge the consensus between the Tory, Labour and Lib Dem parties that working people have to pay for a capitalist crisis that is not of our making.

Many people from a variety of socialist backgrounds, are involved as well as some who have not been involved in political activity before.

The main issue on the housing estates where I have mainly been canvassing is the economy, and the threat to public services and jobs. Amongst students there are also a lot of questions about the environment, and to a certain extent electoral reform and civil liberties. There is huge support for ending the war in Afghanistan.

The biggest unions are not in a position to support non-Labour candidates, but we've had £100 from FBU Eastern Region. There is also plenty of support from individual trade unionists.

In Cambridge, Tory, Labour and Lib Dems are doing what they generally do — play at political conflict whilst hiding their consensus against the working class. The Green Party is making a strong effort, making it all the more important for us to stress the class-based, socialist nature of our campaign.

[We asked Martin: “We would criticise TUSC, certainly at a national level, for not being very democratic or open. What's your view on this?”]

I wouldn't want to take a view on this at this stage, as we have not really been involved in TUSC in any organised way. If it develops after the election I think it will need to develop democratic structures in order

to have a future.

In general I support the idea, where there is no socialist standing, of a vote Labour combined with a union fightback. There may be occasions where votes for another party are best for tactical reasons, e.g. in Huntingdon where there is a huge Tory majority which Labour won't overtake, and there is an independent candidate who opposes the privatisation of Hinchingbrooke Hospital.

“We need more than Old Labour”

David Braniff-Herbert is a labour movement activist and community organiser, currently working for the Hope Not Hate campaign against the BNP.

The big issues in this election are not necessarily what you'd want them to be. Knocking on doors you hope people will raise the living wage, what we're going to do about housing, the nature of policing.

In fact there's a lot of personality politics, focused on the party leaders. There's also a focus on whatever the Murdoch press is putting out, and the biggest issue is immigration. That wasn't helped when most of the TV foreign policy debate was actually about immigration!

The BNP is growing because of that, because of apathy, and because the three main parties have failed to provide answers on issues like jobs and housing. Communities are let down, and working-class people are disenfranchised from politics. In some traditionally Labour areas, the Tories destroyed local industry and New Labour has failed to provide new jobs and services. A lot of these areas haven't had much immigration, but the BNP are convincing people that's the issue, and presenting themselves as a radical alternative.

I don't know if the BNP are going to win a seat. At the moment a lot of our activity is just firefighting, stopping them at the ballot box but not in the commu-

nity. On the other hand, we've run a strong campaign — more than 500 people out one weekend in Barking and Dagenham.

I think there'll definitely be a hung Parliament. It's good to see the Tories aren't going to win despite the press. It's the *Sun* wot lost it. We're supposed to have a free press, but it's totally dominated by the rich, and people are saying “Fuck you”. The other thing it obviously shows is the need for electoral reform. The current system is a joke.

As an activist on the left of the Labour Party, I find it embarrassing that the Lib Dems could bring up Trident, ID cards and so on. Labour is the only party that can deliver for working-class people, but the leadership is deeply misguided, doing stupid things like marketisation of public services even when it loses them votes.

New Labour is dead. For thirteen years we've had not only policies which fail the working class, but a negative attitude to the class — opposing strikes and supporting big business. That's why Labour is so unpopular. Yet the left outside Labour has failed to build a new working-class party, despite the capitalist crisis. If the choice is Galloway, I'd rather have Brown!

If you're in an area where there's a Labour MP who has shafted the labour movement, and an independent working-class candidate standing, you should seriously question whether you're going to vote Labour. But the main fight we need is in the Labour Party.

Groups like the LRC and Compass are becoming much more organised and vocal, and after the election we'll have a situation where we can try to take back the party. We should aim not for Old Labour, but for something completely different!

We can't wait for another left leadership challenge, by McDonnell or whoever — we need to start organising at the grassroots. That also means challenging the leaders of our unions. Look at the Labour-affiliated unions, which nominated Brown so he could attack the BA workers! They've also helped undermine Labour Party democracy. Workers need an independent voice, not reliance on the union leaders.

Send a message to the bankers and bosses

From the back page

Basic to all of this is the right for workers to organise in trade unions, to withdraw their labour power in a collective show of strength and bring a halt to attacks on jobs, services and rights at work.

We want the anti-union laws brought in by Margaret Thatcher and the Tories all those years ago and boasted about by Tony Blair when he was New Labour Prime Minister and upheld by Gordon Brown — we want all of them to be scrapped.

Is it so unreasonable that those who create the wealth in our society, the working class, might have the freedom to organise without the shackles of the bosses' anti-union laws? We don't think so!

When that tide of cuts starts to push back our living standards, decimate our services, and rob us of our dignity, we will need to be prepared to stand shoulder to shoulder, linking arms — workers across the public sector, with service users and workers in the private sector.

The cuts seem to be inevitable. How the working class responds is not. While we may not yet be able to control natural disasters, we do have the potential to control capitalist made disasters. We have the ideas, the creativity, and we have the numbers — the working class is in the majority.

The task ahead of us, the challenge that we all have a responsibility to strive to rise to meet, is to organise — to flex our collective muscle in the interests of building a fairer, better society where the majority's needs sit triumphantly above the minority's greed.

Never go to bed thinking this is the best we can do, never wake up in the morning thinking this is the best humanity can achieve. It can't be and it isn't!

CAMBERWELL AND PECKHAM

Union hustings feeds debate

By JOE FLYNN

The Croydon branch of the National Union of Teachers hosted a meeting for prospective parliamentary candidates on Wednesday 21 April. The speakers were sitting local MP, Andrew Pelling (Independent), and his Labour, Tory and Green challengers, a member of the Communist Party of Britain and Jill Mountford of the AWL.

Andrew Pelling, a former Tory, appears to have moved some way to the left since the last general election. He came out strongly against cuts and for more state intervention in the economy. He also stole the thunder of the CPB speaker when he announced that he has signed the People's Charter — a good indication of how vacuous and populist that document is. Indeed populism was the message — he mentioned a need for “straight talking” a lot, and it was a somewhat bizarre sight seeing a man who is essentially a Tory toff reading a copy of *Solidarity* and nodding appreciatively to himself.

The Tory candidate was unable to defend his party's positions on Academies and the abolition of national pay bargaining for teachers, which made him unpopular in the room, although when asked about immigration he gave a surprisingly liberal response.

The Green speaker won some applause when she attacked the oppressive nature of school assessment as opposed to just being against SATS, as all the candidates seemed to vaguely indicate they were (!), but she was much less convincing in reply to a question about the links between social inequality and class divisions.

The Labour candidate made a number of dreadful contributions, including one in which he appeared to blame people who took out sub-prime mortgages for

the economic crisis, and one on immigration which was so incoherent it was impossible to tell what his position on the issue actually is. He was also heckled by local trade unionists when he claimed to be against cuts to Croydon College. The Tory was at least honest enough to say that if he supported a Tory budget which indicated cuts he wouldn't then pretend to campaign on a local level against them.

Jill Mountford attacked the Labour candidate's attitude to the crisis and was able to put forward socialist answers to questions from the floor on immigration, the BNP and cuts to services and her contributions were well received.

It was refreshing to attend a vibrant union-hosted political meeting with a range of mainstream and left viewpoints, where genuine debate was able to flourish on local, educational and big political issues. It would be very positive if more union branches organised such events.

Support our socialist candidate in Camberwell and Peckham

Get in touch to help us in the last few days
Get in touch if you want to know about our activities after the election.

jill@workersliberty.org
07796 690 874

Help John McDonnell!

By JOHN MOLONEY

One of the most important constituency battles in this elections is going on Hayes and Harlington. There, John McDonnell, is defending a 10,000 majority against the Tories.

John McDonnell is one of very few voices for organised labour in the House of Commons. If he were to lose then many non-affiliated unions such as the PCS, FBU, POA would in effect lose parliamentary representation, and many important trade union issues would never get raised in Parliament.

Given McDonnell's record in defending unions and union members, standing on picket lines, you might expect that organised labour would be heavily backing and supporting his campaign. Unfortunately not.

RMT has given money and has urged people to volunteer for John's campaign, but it has not thrown its full organised weight behind the campaign. The RMT is doing much more than the other unions.

My union, PCS, is dominated by the Socialist Party. As far as I can see the SP is not calling for a vote for John McDonnell; in any case, the union is officially politically neutral! No help is being given. Therefore it has been left to individual PCS activists to organise what help they can. The same applies for the other unions.

A 10,000 majority should make Hayes and Harlington a safe seat. That ignores three factors: Labour is very unpopular and this is dragging John's vote down. The Tories have promised not to build the third runway in Heathrow (which will swallow up a chunk of his constituency). John is also against the runway but the Labour Party is for it. And lastly the Tories have put in more resources and money than in previous elections.

The trade union movement should be matching that Tory effort. If you want the movement to have at least one effective voice in the House of Commons, then John McDonnell has to be supported. Every day there is canvassing. To join in please call 020 8573 3535; now is the time to help.

Wirral TUC

sends a May Day message to readers of *Solidarity*

Unite workers for socialist policies — reject the fascist BNP

Prepare to fight the cuts — whoever wins the general election

President: Mick Sandbach
Secretary: Alec McFadden

CAMPAIGN

SCSTF gets on the streets

With less than two weeks before polling day, the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists has two priorities: to get out on the streets and doorsteps, and to do a last trawl for activists who will sign the SCSTF statement and support the campaign, even if only on the scale of distributing some SCSTF broadsheets in their workplace or trade-union branch.

SCSTF supporters have been out on the streets in London, Sheffield, Leeds, and other cities, with stalls advertising the presence of campaigners who support a Labour vote but are also organising a force to put pressure on the Labour Party and intervene in the labour movement from the left.

We use the posters, broadsheets, and leaflets available from the SCSTF website, the trade-union petition against the cuts (also available from that website), and megaphones to attract attention.

A new factor in the last week has been the number of people stopping to talk at the stalls who think of themselves as left-wing but are now inclined to vote Lib-Dem.

It isn't surprising, since in the TV debates the Lib-Dems have come across as more left-wing than Labour. But at the street stalls we tell them that:

- The Lib-Dems are for a ban on strikes and compulsory arbitration of disputes in the public services. The Tories are only toying with that idea.

- The "Orange Book", the manifesto of the Lib-Dem right-wing which now controls the Lib-Dem leadership in the persons of Nick Clegg and Vince Cable, calls for scrapping the National Health Service and replacing it by "social insurance" on the model of many European countries and of Australia - a much more "market-oriented" system, and one where erosion of the principle of health care as a free public service is much easier and quicker.

- The Lib-Dems initially opposed the National Minimum Wage.

- The Lib-Dems cite Canada's Liberal government of 1993-8 - the nearest equivalent in Canadian history to Thatcherism — as their model of how to deal with a budget crisis.

- A Labour vote can be linked to a fight in the unions, and to some degree even in the local Labour Parties, to rally the labour movement for working-class policies and against the leaders. There is no such social base in the Lib-Dems.

Pulling together the left after 6 May

Pete Firmin is a Communication Workers Union activist and joint secretary of the Labour Representation Committee. He talked to *Solidarity* about the conference. "After the Election, Join the Resistance", which has been planned by LRC for 15 May (from 10:30 at ULU, Malet St, London), and is co-sponsored by the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists and other groups.

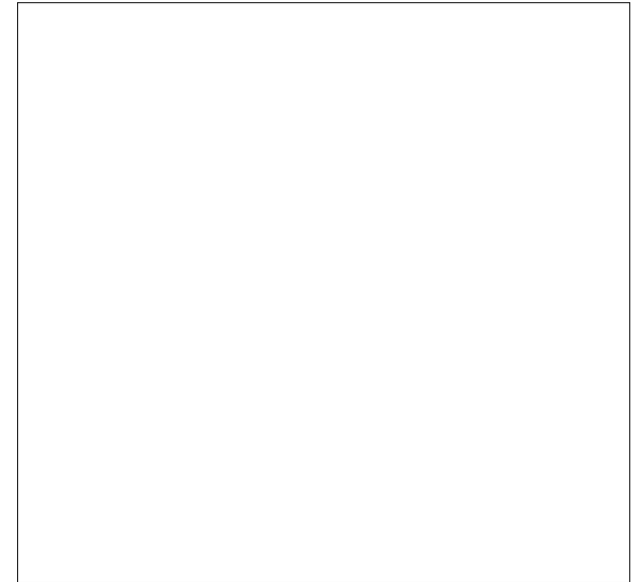
We're hoping the conference brings together activists from the unions, from within the Labour Party, from other struggles, against the war in Afghanistan and so on.

We'll be in a new political situation after the election — whatever that is — and people will want to discuss the implications of that, whether it's a Lib-Lab coalition, whether it's a Tory government, whatever.

We know that whoever is in government is going to bring in big public sector cuts.

We need to discuss among the left how we are going to respond to that, what campaigns we can build, what we can do in different unions, how we can link up with community campaigns.

Hopefully we can have a day when the left puts forward positive ideas on how we can do those things together.



Need to step up arguments against the BNP

Campaigners in Sheffield report a worrying number of Afro-Caribbean voters there saying they will vote BNP out of hostility to East European migrants. The arguments explained in SCSTF's anti-BNP leaflet are vital here. Unlike most other anti-BNP leaflets, it takes up the media lies and prejudice about immigration. There are also people who stop at SCSTF stalls for the opposite reason: that they are glad to find someone, at last, speaking out publicly for migrant rights.

SCSTF activists round the country are now planning meetings for after 6 May. Combatting the cuts, pursuing the Labour leaders' promise of a comprehensive review of the entire anti-democratic structure imposed on Labour by Blair in 1997, campaigning against the anti-union laws, and maybe arguing against Lib-Lab coalition, are already obvious items for the agendas of those meetings.

The London SCSTF meeting is organised as a follow-on from a conference on 15 May initiated by the Labour Representation Committee and co-sponsored by SCSTF, and some after-6-May meetings in other cities will be jointly organised with, or have speakers from, local LRC groups.

Check out the details at <http://bit.ly/scstf>.

What we mean by a “workers’ government”

By SACHA ISMAIL

“The workers will prefer a coalition of labour parties which would guarantee the eight-hour day and an extra crust of bread. Shall we recline upon this soft cushion and take a good rest, or shall we rather lead the masses into the fight on the basis of their own illusions for the realisation of the program of a Workers’ Government? If we conceive of the Workers’ Government as a soft cushion, we are politically beaten. If, on the other hand, we keep alive the consciousness of the masses that the Workers’ Government is an empty shell unless it has workers behind it forging their weapons and forming their factory councils, such a Workers’ Government will become a lever for the conquest of power.”

— Karl Radek, 1922

As we approach the election, the economic crisis has massively discredited free market ideas. Even capitalist politicians accept the need for large-scale state intervention in the economy.

This “socialism for the rich” means governments intervening in the interests of the capitalist class, managing the economic slump in the best way for capital and, as far as possible, returning to “free markets” as fast they can.

That’s why the banks the Labour government has nationalised or part-nationalised have not stopped paying their executives huge salaries; they have not stopped sacking workers; and they have not stopped repossessing the homes and ruining the lives of working-class people. They are still under the control of their bosses, and will be returned to the private sector when it is judged viable. Their losses have been socialised — underwritten with tax-payers’ money, now being paid for by our class through job losses and huge cuts in public services — while their profits continue in private ownership.

To win socialism worthy of the name — democratic control of the economy by society’s working-class majority, so that the wealth we produce can be used for the benefit of all, not a tiny elite of bankers and bosses — we need a revolution. We need to make a clean sweep of the capitalists and replace the state machine that serves them with a more democratic workers’ state. Yet as things stand in Britain, the big majority of not only the working class, but the organised labour movement and even its left wing, are not prepared in either sense of the word to fight for that.

WHAT WE PROPOSE

The great majority of working-class activists, including those who call themselves socialists, still operate under the assumptions of capitalist democracy.

That is why we use elections to rally a movement for working-class politics, both through standing independent socialist candidates and through a fight in the Labour Party. We want to convince workers that there is no parliamentary road to a new society — but we will not do that by standing aside from the political struggle today and limiting ourselves to propaganda for revolution.

We propose to working-class activists and organisations: if you are serious about fighting for workers’ rights, and about transforming society, then do not stop at lobbying one or other variety of anti-working-class government. Put in power your own government, based on and accountable to the organisations of our class, and serving workers as New Labour and the Tories have served the bosses and the rich.

A GOVERNMENT OF STRUGGLE

The call for a “workers’ government” is not counterposed to working-class direct action in the workplaces and on the streets, or to rebuilding our movement from the grassroots up. On the contrary, it seeks to give such struggles a clear goal and political expression.

The principle of a “workers’ united front” — that to struggle effectively requires united action by different working-class organisations, unions, political groups and campaigns — is as true for large-scale class battles as for the smaller, defensive ones we are mostly limited to at present. At the same time, the class struggle does not stop at the door of the workplace. It exists at every level of society and in the last instance is shaped at a society-wide level, by politics.

Look at the kind of demands necessary to defend and extend the rights and living standards of working class in this economic crisis:

- Jobs for all. Cut the working week without loss of pay. Nationalise companies that cut jobs, under workers’ control.

- Stop cuts and privatisation. Tax the rich and business to rebuild the NHS and public services. A crash program of council house building and repairs.

- Scrap the anti-trade union laws and introduce a legal charter of workers’ rights: to strike, picket, take solidarity action.

- Nationalise the banks and financial institutions, sack their bosses and use their resources to fund jobs, homes and services for all.

Many of these and other similar demands are inescapably demands for government action — control over the banks and high finance, for instance. But that in turn begs the question: what sort of government is going to carry out these demands? To pose them as a programme to be carried out by New Labour, the Lib Dems or the Tories is clearly nonsense. We may be able to impose elements through determined action, but the programme as a whole clearly implies a different kind of government.

If the different workers’ organisations should unite to defend our class against attacks, and win positive reforms, why should this unity in struggle stop at the level of lobbying the existing government? Why should the labour movement, which after all represents the interests of the great majority of people in Britain, not seek to create its own government in the interests of the working class?

The call for a workers’ government is a call on the organised working class to rally itself to win political representation and fight for its political representatives to take power and form a government that will carry out working-class policies.

OLD LABOUR GOVERNMENT?

Even the best Labour government of the past, in 1945-51, ruled through the institutions of the capitalists’ state and carried out policies serving the needs of the bosses (combined with real reforms for the working class, like the NHS and welfare state).

Whether a future labour movement-based government is any different will be determined by:

- Whether a real attack is made on the wealth and entrenched power of the capitalists;

- Whether it rests at least in part on the organisations of the working class instead of on those of the state bureaucracy, the military and Parliament; whether in response to demands and direct action by the working class it does what we want, or supports what we do (e.g. strikes and occupations), and avoids becoming a captive of the state machine.

In a country like Britain, with its presently conservative labour movement and long traditions of parliamentary democracy, the fight for a workers’ government will certainly involve a fight to elect workers’ representatives to Parliament and win a majority there. Yet to create such a government, the working class would also need to organise itself outside the rhythms, norms and constraints of parliamentary politics. It would need to rebuild its union organisation, trades councils, etc, and establish workplace committees, shop stewards’ networks and so on, as an industrial power that could as necessary dispense with the parliamentary representatives. Without such organisation, it will not be possible to transform society.

THE BOSSES WILL RESIST

The working class needs to organise itself for direct action in industry and on the streets because the real wealth and power of the capitalists does not lie in Parliament.

It lies in their control of the economy, and in the state institutions which they dominate through a thousand ties, direct and indirect: the prime minister’s office, the civil service hierarchy, the House of Lords, the judiciary, and in the last instance the police and armed forces. In a crisis, the monarchy could become the rallying point for reaction.

A workers’ government that attempted really radical change would face a thousand attempts at bureaucratic obstruction, whether peaceful and constitutional or outside the law and, in the final crunch, violent.

Look at Chile in 1973; or the miners’ strike, where the ruling class was not threatened with losing everything, but still used the police as a centralised military force to baton the working class into submission.

The bosses have not had much need to use force since then — but no one should doubt they will if their privileges are seriously threatened. In addition to the police and the army, they will happily make use of the violent far-right gangs which, in this economic crisis, are already growing.

To be anything more than a passing episode that collapses in the face of capitalist reaction, constitutional and “democratic” or violent and openly anti-democratic, a workers’ government would have to rely on the mass force of the organised working class outside Parliament — including armed force. It would either be the prelude to full working-class power throughout society, replacing the old state in a revolution, or it would fall.

THE ROAD TO A WORKERS’ GOVERNMENT

A big majority of the most militant working-class activists, let alone the working class as a whole, are not yet convinced of the need for revolution.

We will seek to convince them in the course of united action. In the meantime, we propose the idea of a workers’ government as a common perspective that can shape our struggles.

How could a workers’ government come about, concretely? Before the Blairite transformation of the Labour Party, the fight for a workers’ government was centred on using the levers and channels of the Labour Party to transform the Labour Party — and in any case to rally those decisive sections of the working class that found their political expression in the Labour Party. Today, those channels have been to a large extent blocked up, though not completely destroyed.

The job is still to transform the labour movement politically. The future stages of that transformation are unpredictable. But we can tell how to start: resisting the bosses’ attempts to make us pay for their crisis; rebuilding workplace organisation through recruitment drives, campaigns, strikes; building up socialist organisation, including through election campaigns; reviving trades councils; encouraging unions affiliated to the Labour Party to come out against the Labour leaders, and organising working-class activists for this struggle through initiatives like the Socialist Campaign to Stop the Tories and Fascists.

All the details can be tied together by the overall aim. We don’t know at what stage it may become possible to take big, qualitative leaps forward. But we need to start preparing, clearing the road, mapping out the way, now.

To get a copy of our Workers’ Plan for the Crisis pamphlet, send £3 or £1.50 to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA

Why Labour loses elections

The British boss class are an ungrateful lot! Gordon Brown recently found that out when a phalanx of them came out very aggressively for the Cameron Tories. And after New Labour, and Chancellor and then Prime Minister Brown, had wholeheartedly and shamelessly served them and looked after their interests for 13 years!

Blair, Brown, Mandelson and their friends had done their best to turn the Labour Party into just another bosses' party — into Britain's natural party, so they hoped, of bourgeois Government, with many of its old structures abolished and the rank-and-file members trussed up and gagged.

Brown's first act as Chancellor in 1997 was to abandon government control of the Bank of England. New Labour cut income tax for the higher income groups. They maintained the Thatcher-Tory imposed anti-union laws, which outlaw effective trade unionism by banning solidarity action.

Now the ruling class has left Brown in no doubt that they regard the Tory Party, not "New Labour", as their class party.

Not "New Labour" but the Tory Party, perhaps in coalition with the Liberal Democrats, is the natural party of Tory government! They are discovering that all they've achieved in 13 years of belly-crawling is the alienation of many of Labour's erstwhile working

class supporters.

Brown finds himself in a depoliticised "beauty contest" with Cameron and Clegg because the New Labour Party has gutted "politics" of politics, and all but driven the working class movement out of politics. The Labour Party remains the party of the unions, financed by the unions, only by default.

What *Solidarity's* predecessor *Socialist Organiser* said in response to Labour defeat in 1992, at an earlier stage of the move by the Labour Party onto Tory and Liberal-Democrat political ground, sheds light on what is happening now.

Sean Matgamna

BY SEAN MATGAMNA

The General Election of 9 April could have marked the tum of the tide for the labour movement. The Tories could have been defeated. The dead weight of a long decade of major working-class setbacks could have been sloughed off

That chance has gone. Labour lost the election. The Tories have a majority of 21 seats, for 43% of the vote. They look secure for five years.

This Tory victory is therefore — it must be said plainly — a very grave defeat for the working class and for the labour movement. We will pay a heavy price. The recovery of labour movement self-confidence and combativity will be slower, more drawn-out, and more fraught with difficulties.

WHY KINNOCK LOST

Why did Labour lose? Why did the Tories win? The short answer to that question comes in two parts.

The fact is that Neil Kinnock and his friends did not seriously campaign against the Tories over the last five years, as an opposition that meant business would have done, seizing on issues like the poll tax. And Neil Kinnock's Labour Party appeared before the electorate as an untried and untrustworthy gang of Tory understudies, concerned only to win votes at any price.

The voters chose to stay with the Tories they knew rather than take a risk with the "me-too" pale-pink pseudo-Tories who staff Labour's front benches.

The nasty personal attacks on Kinnock were effective because Kinnock does appear in political life with the brand of the turncoat and the traitor on his forehead. He is a man who has, for political advantage, trimmed and changed and abandoned all the political opinions he formed when he was honestly thinking about political issues, and not about how best to gather votes.

Neither Kinnock nor the Labour Party could have had a convincing reply to the jeer that Kinnock was not to be trusted. The very alacrity with which Kinnock embraced and adopted Tory and Liberal policy, abandoning his own previous views, destroyed his credibility as a man to be trusted with any policies at all! When Labour's leaders rushed to endorse calls for the Government to use public money to compensate the speculators who had got their fingers burned at Lloyds of London, a lot of people who agreed with the Tory Government's final decision not to compensate must have been convinced that this Labour front bench of belly-crawling ex-radicals was hysterical and unbalanced, not only by socialist standards, but by any standards of proper political behaviour.

When the Kinnock front-bench gang of former leftists, having shed their own souls, slithered around Westminster, the spectacle was revolting, and not only to socialists.

When Kinnock made his speeches about "dying for his country", or about "serving democracy", or about how he "loved" Britain as much as Glenys, they were embarrassing not because he was insincere — probably he was being completely sincere — but because he was plainly speaking under compulsion and duress, saying what the tabloids wanted him to say (and much good it did him with them!) Kinnock and his team might

He said what he though they wanted to hear but still it did him no good.

have got away with it if they could at the same time have offered alternatives to the Tories' policies, and if they had put up a fight on issues where everyone knew the Tories were wrong. But Labour's central policies have been only marginally different from those of the Tories, and they have been a woefully wet and wimpish Opposition. The consequence is that they appeared to the electorate as an especially tacky gang of politicians on the make, willing to say and do almost anything to win office.

The Thatcher era opened with an unemployed Liverpoolian, Alan Bleasdale's fictional Yosser Hughes, capturing the imagination and sympathy of Britain with his desperate plea: "Gi's a job". The Kinnock era closed with Labour leaders winning only the disdain and contempt of large numbers of Labour's natural supporters with the cry, "Gi's a vote".

Socialist Organiser said all this throughout the campaign and over the long pre-election campaign. We warned that Kinnock's policy of sitting tight and hoping that the Tories would lose the election, tipping the ripe apples and plums of office into the arms of the waiting Labour Party, was irresponsible. It meant passive speculation rather than a struggle to win and to create the majorities necessary for victory.

When John Major took over from Thatcher 18 months ago, he said that he could win the election despite everything because the Tory Party was "one of the greatest fighting machines in Western Europe". That was and is true. And Labour responded to that machine by mimicking the noises its engines made, as if that could give them power; and they stood gawping as it bore down on them, with the confidence of idiots that Major's tank was certain to run out of fuel. They got everything ridiculously wrong.

WHY LABOUR LOSES ELECTIONS

This is the short, immediate answer to the question, why did Labour lose? But the labour movement which is now trying to orient itself after the fourth successive Tory victory needs to look at the more basic explanations also.

Those explanations lie not only in the nature of the Kinnock-led Labour Party, and in its inept performance against Major, but in the political system under which we live.

Consider what really happened in this election. The labour movement which found itself compelled to go into battle under the leadership of the Kinnock gang did not fight just a political party: it fought the dominant forces in our bourgeois society. With odd exceptions like the *Financial Times* — whose readers will not have followed its advice to vote Labour! — the entire Establishment gathered around the Tory party.

The *Financial Times* itself doing an opinion poll of top bosses, found that 92% of them backed the Tories, with 7% Liberal and just 1% Labour.

The Establishment's control over our lives does not depend on elections. The decisions which shape British society are only very rarely submitted to the electorate for a decision, and then only obliquely and indirectly. The key decisions are in the hands of the top capitalists, ensconced in a vast network of social connections, channels of influence, and structures of authority.

The Establishment has a considerable measure of control over what people do in elections. And anyway, as some candid bourgeois commentators put it during the election campaign, elections are to do with selecting the people who will make the decisions — in consultation with the Establishment.

For example, the British electorate never decided to scale down and cripple the National Health Service, and in a straight referendum would, on all indications, vote against what the Tories are doing. All this power, the wealth of the bourgeoisie and its ability to "create facts" and shape opinions, was brought into the balance on the side of the Tory Party.

The gross unfairness of the gruesomely biased tabloids is only one of the visible pustules on the face of this supposedly democratic system.

We live under capitalism, and the Tory party, the party of the capitalists, is this system's "natural party of government". The Tory Party is rampant capitalism conscious of itself and — alter Thatcher — self-righteously asserting capitalism's drives and imperatives.

Against this, what is the labour movement and its political party? The contrast with the bourgeoisie and its political party tells us a great deal.

While the bourgeoisie runs society, and shapes opinion not only by ideas but by the weight of the way they run it and of the institutions through which they run it, the working-class movement is the movement of those on whose exploitation everything else is erected.

The working class does not run society day-by-day, industry-by-industry, firm-by-firm. It has neither the great institutions which shape opinion, nor the wealth and power which exert an automatic influence on the vast middle layers of society.

It mobilises, it struggles; but it is normally, on every level, at a serious disadvantage.

Continued on page 18

In political struggles such as this election was, the advantages are all with the capitalist Establishment. In trade union struggles, unemployment depresses the labour movement and gives the capitalist massive advantages; and the Tories have used their political power to legally hamstring the unions.

On the level of ideas, the naturally dominant ideas are those of the ruling class and they systems they run and personify. Most people do not easily (or at all) form an overall picture of our society, of how it works and how it came into being. It is very difficult to imagine a different society — socialism — and more difficult still to believe in it; and to dedicate yourself to the fight to win a different system, as socialists do, you have to travel mentally quite a long way from the conventional mentality of the capitalist world in which you live.

What is, is. It is difficult, for people who have known nothing else but Thatcherite Britain, to conceive of even a radically modified version of this system, like the capitalism with a more “caring” face which the labour movement gained during and after the Second World War and which is now a receding memory for many, and for a whole generation — the tens of thousands of young people on the streets, for example — something they have never known.

Powerful labour movements like ours have been shaped by combining battles in three arenas: for trade-union advantages, and the elementary working-class solidarity which trade-unionism breeds; for parliamentary power to win laws to our advantage; for the idea of a better world, different from the capitalist one, different from the prevailing capitalist ideas of what the world can be like.

Where Marxists, in the minority, advocated that the labour movement should be reconstructed around a drive to wipe out capitalism, the majority of the labour movement, while it talked about winning socialism “one day”, fought in its best period only for radical reforms. It fought to modify, civilise and humanise the capitalist system. It fought for legislation against extreme exploitation and in favour of working-class

organisation, and for welfare provision, which superimposed elements of “the political economy of the working class” (the expression is Karl Marx’s) on the still-dominant political economy of the bourgeoisie.

When it fights, the labour movement can win. It can, and did, win enough people around the core of the labour movement to gain overall electoral majorities.

It did that in 1945, despite the tremendous advantage that Churchill’s war leadership gave the Tories, and despite a vicious and dirty Tory campaign (they alleged that Labour would set up an authoritarian state “with its own Gestapo”, and so on).

The Labour leaders of that time were a long way from our idea of socialism, but they were honest reformists. They did not go into that election pleading with the electorate for the chance to show that they could make a better job of carrying through Tory policies than Churchill could, nor rely on the tacky arts of the Public Relations consultants or on political beauty-contest razzamatazz to sell the same policies as the Tories under a different label and with pink packaging instead of blue.

When it fights — when it represents something distinctive — the labour movement can win. Kinnock did not fight. He shadow-boxed. The US-style rally before a hand-picked audience in Sheffield was Kinnock’s best idea of fighting — it was as if, like superstitious savages, Kinnock and his advisers believed they could conjure up a triumph by mimicking it in advance.

Kinnock did not represent anything politically distinctive. Even Labour’s pledges on the Health Service were tepid and conditional, “as resources allow”.

In these circumstances, all the natural advantages of the Establishment’s party, the natural party of government, won the election for the Tories. Even the slump worked for them: because Labour had no distinctive policy to win people to, and because Kinnock was palpably untrustworthy — if he could not be trusted to stick to his own beliefs, how could he be trusted with Margaret Thatcher’s or John Major’s beliefs — many unhappy people thought it safer to stick with the natural party of capitalism.

This is the basic, underlying reason why Labour lost the election. Kinnock’s craven, passive, Tory-mimicking politics enhanced and strengthened every one of the natural advantages the Tories always have.

WHAT NOW FOR THE LABOUR PARTY?

If a Labour victory would have been the beginning of the turning of the Tory tide that has flowed for 13 years, favouring and encouraging working-class action, is this fourth Tory victory likely to lead to the opposite? Probably not.

The Tory press brouhaha that the election signifies the death of socialism is no more than a continuation of the long-term bourgeois campaign to achieve just that, the death of socialism: it is just an attempt to improve on their election victory by further pulverising the Labour Party: it is a form of pressure on the Labour Party to go further to the right and finally to cut its links with the trade unions.

Most of the arguments in the press are rhetorical and spurious. For example, the jeering rhetorical question they throw at Labour: if you can not win in a slump, when can you ever win? In the given circumstances, the slump triggered an additional need for safety and caution in those not wiped out by it. Something similar happened in the 1935 election (and in 1931, though that was complicated by the defection of the Labour leader Ramsey MacDonald to the Tories).

Labour is in a much improved position in Parliament. The official Labour Party argument that the Party is well-placed to win in the next election is — other things being equal — not entirely spurious.

And the Tory victory is a victory for a Toryism that has felt compelled to moderate its Thatcherism in order to survive electorally. It is a Toryism from under whose feet the Thatcherite monetarist and free-market certainties have been blown away.

The true measure of what Kinnock is, even in his own reformist terms, is found in the fact that he did not even dare to pick up and run with the banner of resurgent Keynesianism — the old basis of Labour’s post-war politics, now undergoing a certain revival in bourgeois circles as the monetarists are discredited.

No: the labour movement has, because of the Kinnockites, missed a great opportunity to defeat the chosen party of big business and put into government the party still based on the trade unions, and that is a grievous failure: but it does not leave the labour movement positively worse off than we were before.

Politically, the Tories have been forced into a degree of retreat. For sure, the National Health Service is not safe in Tory hands, but when John Major, aker the elec-

tion, emphatically pledged that the Tories would not scrap the NHS, he was not only repeating the old lying Tory denials of what they have already done; he was registering, on behalf of post-Thatcher Toryism, the massive public condemnation of Tory NHS policy.

If Labour’s leaders had any go in them, they would now begin to fight the next election by launching a great single-issue crusade for the National Health Service.

THE LABOUR LEFT

Where now for the Labour left? Left-wing candidates, like Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Grant and Dennis Skinner, got exceptionally high swings in their favour.

They proved that where left-wing policies are advanced they can win the support the right-wing second-class Toryism of Kinnock failed to win.

That is the proper lesson to be learned from Labour’s defeat in the election.

The dominant forces in the Labour Party will not learn that lesson; they will use the election defeat they have brought down on our heads to argue for more of the policies that brought defeat.

They will argue that Labour must complete its transformation into a continental-style “social democratic” party, exclude the trade unions from politics, commit Labour irrevocably to Owenite politics, and do everything to make itself into a replacement for the now-defunct SDP except adopt the name. (And who can be sure even about that, if they get their way?) And what will the Labour left do? The broad Labour left has been crushed not only by the repressive regime that Kinnock and his friends have imposed on the party in recent years — with the banning of newspapers such as *Socialist Organiser* — but also by the great and paralysing wish in the ranks of Labour and the trade unions to get the Tories out at any cost, and not to question what Kinnock says and does if only it works. That mood has made honest rank-and-file members of the Labour Party, reluctantly and not without heart-searching, endorse or vote for the expulsions of socialists.

The election defeat will not necessarily put an end to that mood now, any more than it did in 1987. It may even intensify it.

Yet the resignation of Kinnock, and the offensive of the right wing to pull the party further their way, must reopen the question settled in favour of Kinnockism in the mid-’80s. The central question is: what is the Labour Party? Where is it going? Is it to cease being the party of the labour movement and become a mildly “left” depoliticised machine — perhaps financed by the state, as in so many European countries political parties are — for electing careerists to Parliament? Or will the party, in the wake of its fourth election defeat, take stock of itself?

The entire logic of recent Labour Party history suggests that it will continue down the last bitter stretch of the road on which the renegade socialist Kinnock has led it.

Many Labour Party leaders — not only the Right, but also a section of the “left” who have lost confidence in the working class and in Labour as a working-class party — will argue that Labour should make its central concern between now and the next election a campaign for Proportional Representation, coupled with a commitment to coalition which will bind any future “Labour” government to what its Liberal coalition partners will accept.

Yet they may not prevail. The left may be able to ensure that they do not. We may be able to prevent the tremendous historic defeat for working-class politics that such a transformation and destruction of the old Labour Party would represent.

There is an important parallel here. When in October 1959 Labour lost its third General Election in a row, the Party leaders round Hugh Gaitskell decided to make Labour a continental-style social-democratic party. They immediately launched a big campaign to purge it of all vestiges of socialism. It looked like nothing could stop them.

Then, slowly, the rank and file of the party and the trade unions, even trade union leaders, asserted themselves against Gaitskell. They refused to let the leaders gut the party.

That can happen again, despite the different situation the labour movement finds itself in. It can be made to happen.

Now is the time for the left to reopen the whole series of questions closed in the Labour Party for the last five or six years. Tony Benn should stand for the leadership and use the leadership contest to take the campaign into the unions.

WHO IS...

MALCOLM

(LORD) PEARSON?

Malcolm Everard MacLaren Pearson, Baron Pearson of Rannoch, is the leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

Eton-educated Pearson was big in international insurance until he resigned to become leader of his unequivocally “nasty” party.

One time Conservative, Pearson was dismayed by his party’s softening on Europe, so called for voters to back the UKIP in the 2004 Euro-elections. Expelled from the Tories, he eventually joined UKIP in 2007.

Pearson campaigns to get Britain out of Europe with missionary zeal. He even has his own personal think tank, Global Britain, devoted to exposing the BBC’s pro-EU coverage. This man was once dubbed “God’s Euro-sceptic” by the *Daily Telegraph* because of, so the paper said, his “Manichean vision” in which the Christian god is good and Socialism is the devil.

Hunting, shooting, fishing Pearson has championed many other right-wing and libertarian causes (from Soviet dissidents in the 1980s to the Countryside Alliance today). He is not quite fond of some Europeans — the Dutch right-winger Geert Wilders, for instance. But some of his policies are a little more out there — the reduction in the number of MPs to 250, for example, and the compulsory daily singing of the national anthem in schools and workplaces — sorry, we made that last one up.

Pearson was one of the top home flippers during the expenses scandal (he flipped between his £3.7 million house in London and unquantifiably expensive estate in Scotland). His justification? He had forgone millions by giving up his job and becoming a public servant.

Pearson is on record as desiring a hung Parliament, but as things stand UKIP is unlikely to get an MP on 6 May.

Thousands turn out to debate revolution

BY RHODRI EVANS

Not only the scheduled lecture theatre, but also an overflow theatre connected by video link, were crammed full when David Harvey spoke at the London School of Economics on 26 April about his latest book, *The Enigma of Capital*, a book which analyses the current crisis concludes with a call for “revolution” to “dispossess” the capitalist class.

And that was only one of four meetings which Harvey was doing about the book on his visit to London.

Harvey has been an eminent academic figure in geography since the late 1960s. In the early 1970s he became a Marxist, and started writing a series of books on Marxist theory, of which the most famous is the highly-readable *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990).

As far as I know, Harvey has never been involved with any activist Marxist organisation. His current political involvement is with “Right to the City” in New York, a campaign against evictions and displacements resulting from “gentrification”. But he has consistently been an unashamed, forthright Marxist, and by his own lights a revolutionary Marxist.

The big turnout for Harvey’s lecture gives the lie to the tired people on the left who say that “no one is interested” in revolutionary Marxism and all we can do for now is potter along doing low-level trade-union and campaign activity.

However, the lecture also showed how much work we have to do to redefine Marxism as a coherent revolutionary project after the disarray caused by Stalinism and by the collapse of Stalinism.

Harvey redefined revolution as “co-revolution” (the term is his own invention), a “slow movement” of change across several different “spheres” of society. He saw no real hope of the labour movement being transformed and rearmed so as to become a revolutionary force capable of rallying around it other groups which fight for liberation. Instead he looked to an ill-defined alliance of the “alienated and discontented” (academics and others such as himself) and the “deprived and dispossessed” (the victims of eviction, displacement, clearance).

After the setbacks of recent decades, it is not surprising that would-be radicals find it hard to see the working-class movement as a world-changing force. But to resort to puffing a variety of battles which do exist, unifying them in your head (only), and calling the result “co-revolution”, is to console yourself rather than change things.

To one questioner, Harvey responded with a call simply to practise “subversion” wherever she found herself. It was like a slogan briefly popular in the late 1960s: “In fighting anywhere we are fighting everywhere”. As was pointed out then: maybe, but not necessarily effectively... or even on the right side.

In the earlier parts of his new book, Harvey explains that populist revolt, even when sincerely aimed against the bankers and business elite, can be reactionary. Unlike those who see political Islam as a progressive anti-imperialist force, he brackets “religious fundamentalism” with fascism.

The lucidity fades as Harvey approaches the end of the book. On the last page he writes: “Perhaps we should just define the movement, our movement, as anti-capitalist or call ourselves the Party of Indignation, ready to fight and defeat the Party of Wall Street and its acolytes and apologists everywhere, and leave it at that”. But indignation is not enough. Least of all from those who write books and give lectures.

● More: www.workersliberty.org/harvey. The Sydney Workers’ Liberty group will soon be starting a study-circle around *The Enigma of Capital*.

Labour should have beaten the Tories in 1992. They were in disarray

There are technical difficulties — Benn would need the backing of 55 Labour MPs to stand — but they are not insurmountable. The Left in the party should start now to argue that we must challenge John Smith, or whomever else the right wing chooses as Party leader.

THE WOULD-BE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT

And the hard left? The dominant mood on the hard left now is to accept as an accomplished fact the complete loss of the Labour Party and the elimination of mass trade union-based — albeit reformist — working-class politics in Britain.

Every serious socialist for many decades has argued for transcending and superseding the old mass working-class politics, replacing the structures created by the trade unions at the beginning of this century with a reorganised labour movement that would consistently and comprehensively pursue the class struggles of the working class and aim, by way of taking state power, at the complete elimination of the bourgeoisie. Only then, we argued with tragic accuracy, could the gains of the reformist working class movement be made secure.

The transformation of the Labour Party now aimed at by some of its leaders is a transformation entirely in an opposite direction. That would be an unmitigated defeat for the working class, a tremendous historical setback.

The “revolutionary” socialists who can contemplate that with either pleasure or resigned acceptance are hopeless sectarians, people unable to relate to or deal with the working class and the labour movement as they really are. The “revolutionary” triumphalism — we told you so — with which a sect like the SWP contemplates what is happening to the Labour Party conceals a paralysing defeatism.

Their refusal to do anything more in the election than mouth “vote Labour” — for catchpenny opportunist reasons of not offending people — is based on the same defeatism.

For more than a decade, we have repeatedly had to tell these people that their real political ancestors — whatever about their claims to be the “Trotskyists” — are the ultra-left Stalinists of pre-Hitler Germany, whose super-“revolutionary” refusal to taint themselves with any connection with the Social Democrats (“counter-revolutionaries” as indeed they were) implied, as Trotsky told them, giving up on the struggle to stop Hitler, and accepting in advance the inevitability of Nazi victory over the German workers.

For the entire period of Thatcherite rule, the “anti-Labour” socialists have masked a passive acceptance that nothing could be done against the Tories with super-revolutionary (and, of course, true) denunciations of the iniquities of the Callaghan-Foot-Kinnock Labour Party.

Serious Marxists do not give up on the working class nor on its mass political movement like that. Serious socialists do not tell workers that nothing can be done with the existing labour movement. They tell them to struggle within their own organisations. Those who say “I give up” may build sects; they will not help the working class to emancipate itself from capitalist ideas or reformist leaders and organisations.

The lesson for the sectarian left, even at this late hour, is: do not abandon the mass labour movement to those who will now try to carry out the will of the ruling class and complete the transformation of the Labour Party! Join the Labour Party! Those who do not share the hardboiled sectarianism of the SWP, but have let themselves be driven out of the Labour Party in disgust over the last period (and many of them turned out to canvass for Labour in the election) should come back into the fight now.

For ourselves, we in the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty will continue to advocate these ideas in the trade unions and in the Labour Party. There is another central lesson to be drawn from the condition the labour movement finds itself in now: the need for socialist education and propaganda.

People do not become socialists automatically, faced as they are with the power of the bourgeoisie and their Tory Party, and living in a world dominated by institutions and economic processes that constitute an intense and persistent form of “propaganda” for acceptance of this capitalist society. They need help. General socialist education in the labour movement is at its lowest ebb in decades. We need to integrate activity in the labour movement to promote the immediate interests of the working class with long-term explanation of what socialism is.

The collapse of Stalinism, the vacating of the field by many of those who have misrepresented socialism for so long, has cleared the way for a resurgence of the real socialism of Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin and Leon Trotsky.

The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty exists to take that socialism into the working class movement and to fight for it there.

Editorial, *Socialist Organiser* no. 520, 14 April 1992

ANTONIO GRAMSCI

Gramsci and “post-Marxism”

By MARTIN THOMAS

Antonio Gramsci was a revolutionary Marxist of the early-1920s Lenin-Trotsky stripe. Yet his prison writings of 1929-35 have been used as a source for quite different politics.

First, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which had cold-shouldered Gramsci in prison as his criticism of Stalinist policies emerged, took him up from the early 1950s and especially in the 1960s. The PCI took Gramsci's discussions of “hegemony” and “war of position” as justifying class-collaboration and an idea of transforming society by gradually winning more and more influence (especially, in practice, in local government).

Gramsci's writings reached the English-speaking world through a short book of extracts published by the British Communist Party in 1957, after Khrushchev's startling anti-Stalin speech of 1956, and via the “New Left” in the early 1960s. For example, in *Towards Socialism*, a collection of essays published by *New Left Review* in 1965, Perry Anderson referred to Gramsci in order to argue a strategy supposedly based on “hegemony” and supposedly “going beyond” Leninism and social democracy. The main practical recommendation in Anderson's article was to urge the Labour Party to boost or to organise Labour-aligned associations among lawyers, doctors, scientists, teachers, and “every intellectual group”.

In the late 1970s and the 1980s, Gramsci was often cited by Communist Parties pursuing a new “Eurocommunist” line to try to rid themselves of the taint of Stalinism.

Since the collapse of the Communist Parties, Gramsci has been a source for a “post-Marxism”, advocating “radical democracy” rather than even notionally working-class politics.

Probably as a result, Gramsci has remained a widely-cited and widely-taught author in universities, while Lenin, Trotsky, Luxemburg and the like have not. There is now a vast volume of “post-Gramscian” studies, and this note can try only to look at some main trends.

LOYAL TO GRAMSCI?

There is nothing new about the texts of a revolutionary writer being used, once he or she is safely dead, to gloss unrevolutionary politics. The operation is easier with Gramsci since his *Prison Notebooks* were fragmentary, never finalised for publication, and often cryptic in style.

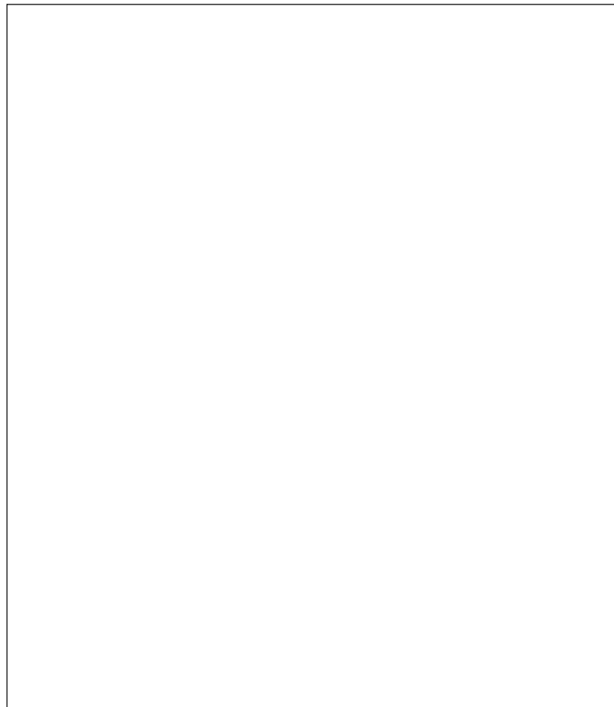
Many Marxist writers have shown that Gramsci did not change his fundamental revolutionary Marxist views in prison (1926-37) and while writing his *Prison Notebooks* (1929-35). A recent and clear demonstration of Gramsci's attachment to class politics comes from Mike Donaldson. (<http://bit.ly/gclass>)

However, the post-Marxists do not deny that they have “gone beyond” Gramsci. They do not particularly claim to be loyal to Gramsci. Their argument is, so to speak, that the “other shore” of the theoretical “bridge” to new thinking provided by Gramsci's writings is their “radical democratic” politics, even though Gramsci himself would not have seen or wanted that.

Richard Bellamy, an important writer in the same political spectrum as the “post-Marxists” — though he prefers the banner, “realist liberalism” — edited a useful volume of Gramsci's pre-prison writings, and agrees that most of the central concepts of the *Prison Notebooks* were also in the pre-prison writings. But he concludes that what Gramsci adapted from the liberal (though sometime Marxist) philosopher Benedetto Croce is sounder than Gramsci's criticisms of Croce — in other words, that Gramsci is valuable for what of

New Insights into Gramsci's Life and Work

Friday May 28, 9-5pm, Chancellor's Hall, Senate House, Malet St, London WC1E 7HU



Gramsci in 1922

Croce has filtered through him, rather than for what differentiated him from Croce.

“The recent post-Marxist reading of Gramsci can be regarded as an implicit return to [the] Crocean radical alternative”, writes Bellamy; but, for him, that is a merit, not a fault, of “post-Marxism”. To answer Bellamy by demonstrating that Gramsci was not a “post-Marxist” is not to answer him.

HEGEMONY

The central concept in all the discussions has been what Gramsci called “hegemony”.

Before 1917, Russian Marxists saw themselves as fighting for “hegemony”, meaning the organisation of the working class so that it could take a leading role in (have hegemony in) the democratic revolt of multiple sectors of the Russian empire's people against Tsarist autocracy, and specifically of the peasant revolt. They counterposed that approach to “economism”, the perspective of those socialists who wanted to focus on agitation and organisation around immediate working-class economic struggles, were willing to leave the other struggles to the bourgeois liberals, and reckoned

that working-class politics could develop spontaneously out of the working-class economic struggles.

Some writers have argued that Gramsci first took the idea of “hegemony” from Italian writers such as Croce, before becoming aware of the Russian Marxists' discussions, but for sure Gramsci considered Lenin's ideas on hegemony important. In the *Prison Notebooks* he strove to develop those ideas, and to construct what he saw as the strategic vision underlying and exemplified in the tactic of the united front argued for by Lenin and Trotsky, against much opposition, in the Communist Parties in 1921-2.

The bourgeoisie had ruled — so Gramsci argued — and the working class must prepare itself to rule, not just by pursuing sectional interests, but by generating political parties which construct a “hegemonic apparatus”: a complex of organisations, united-fronts, interventions, themes of agitation, etc. which enable the fundamental class to see itself as a leader, or potential leader, of society, and which offer other groups an effective alliance.

The political party must polemicise against its opponents not by cheap shots — just picking on their weakest advocates, or just “exposing” petty corruption and mercenary motives — but by tackling their best and strongest advocates, thus achieving an expansive influence among thinking people.

Rather than dawdling with the assurance that underlying economic laws would duly rally people to them in time, the political party must constantly be creative in political initiative. The economic impulse, powerful though it be, always requires a suitable political initiative to express it.

The party's “perspective” cannot be a mechanical calculation from broad economic and historical trends, but must count the party's own intervention as a creative factor. The “perspective” is not mechanical prediction, but an always-conditional guide to action.

The revolutionary working-class party should not assume it faces an immobile enemy. There are periods of “passive revolution” in which the ruling class transforms society, in its own way and in its own interests, but meanwhile opening new perspectives for subaltern sections of the population.

And the party itself must be a continuous process of self-creation, working to make all its members “intellectuals”, rather than utilising the Catholic Church's method of uniting educated strata with the less-lettered, i.e. of imposing rigid dogmatic limits on the educated.

In Gramsci's writings these ideas are counterposed to the traditional “workerist” and “trade-unionist” and politically-passive “maximalism” of the Italian

POLICY FILE: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

New Labour's introduction of “Diploma” programmes marks another step in the sometimes stealthy — oftentimes not — reintroduction of two-tier education and an attack on working-class children. How so? Aren't these programmes designed to equip young people with the skills necessary to find a job? Well, it depends on what you think schools are for.

Diplomas are tied into skills matching the contemporary job market. This could be disastrous. Look at the number of students who were encouraged to take a plethora of IT courses ten years ago. When the IT job market crashed the thousands who “skilled up” became relatively less skilled.

If you think about young people in terms of their “market role” you do two things. You accept that some of them will suffer from the “natural wastage” inherent in all markets. And you will have to make a choice about which students fit into each section of the “market”.

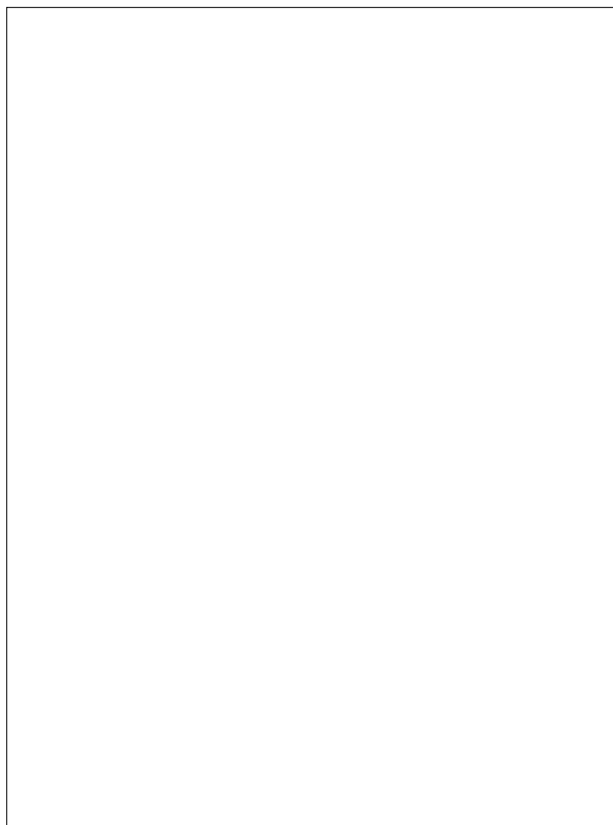
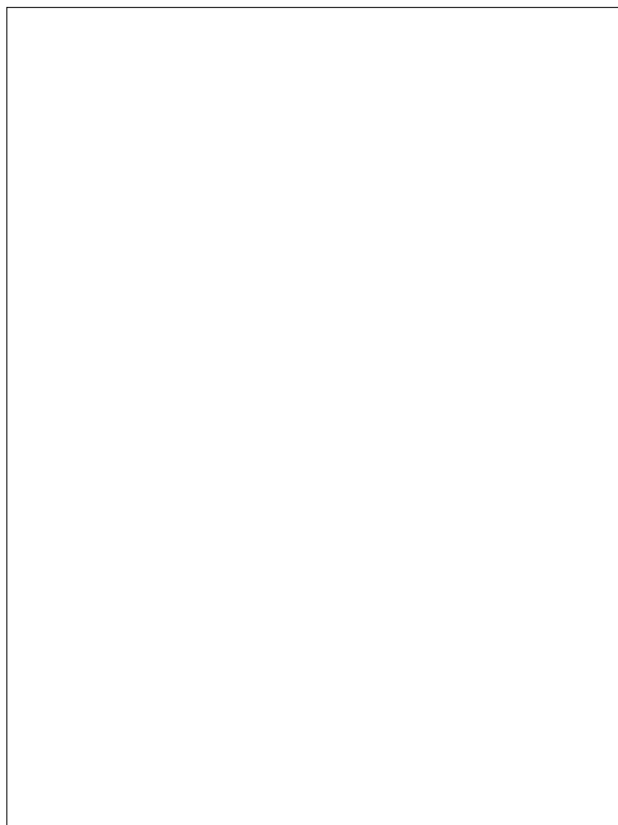
It is working-class children who will be expendable, in much the same way as capital treats working class adults as expendable — as workers.

The issue of diplomas and other vocational courses raises basic issues. Should children be “schooled” or educated? Is education an end in itself or just something children do to prepare for work?

There's nothing wrong with offering a range (ideally massive) of “practical” learning opportunities and skills-based courses as long as this doesn't mean dropping other, more academic subjects. Why shouldn't a young person take courses in car mechanics, for example, alongside history or fine art? Why shouldn't this young person — male or female — be expected to excel in maths at the same time?

How would you make this work? More money? More ‘reform’? Well New Labour ploughed record amounts of money into schools. But most of this money was wasted on new bureaucratic schemes, monitoring and senseless “innovation”. A great deal of it was given to private companies who now make a profit from building and running schools.

The real answers lie in the question “what are schools for?” Socialists answer: to educate. This means “education” is every sense: learning and playing, developing and growing as humans — not just potential workers. It means freeing teachers and children and giving them control over what happens in the classroom. It means turning the dominant view of education — one shared by Labour, Tory and Lib Dem alike — on its head.



Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe

Socialist Party; to the more intransigent and apocalyptic version of similar ideas proposed by the Italian Communist Party's first leader, Amadeo Bordiga; and to the cursory polemics and "statistical"-materialist sociology of a Marxist handbook by Bukharin.

When Gramsci argued, however, that "an appropriate political initiative is always necessary to liberate the economic thrust from the dead weight of traditional policies", he also believed that there was an underlying, shaping, structuring "economic thrust", and that the initiative must come from a *class-based* force. The question is: was he wrong on that?

THE PCI AND GRAMSCI

The Italian Communist Party adapted Gramsci's ideas by fading out the working-class basis of hegemony and Gramsci's assumption that hegemony could be won only by a bold, militant working-class movement.

They transformed "hegemony" into a code-word for repeated recyclings of the "Popular Front" approach of the Communist Parties in the late 1930s, when they formally renounced the political independence of the working class in favour of alliances with miscellaneous bourgeois forces supposed to "stop fascism" as a "first stage" after which direct working-class causes might be taken up in a "second stage".

In 1926 Gramsci, puzzled by the factional dispute in Russia, had complained about the Stalinists' bureaucratic abuses against the Left Opposition, but was inclined to credit the argument of Stalin and Bukharin that their policy represented a restraint on direct working-class and socialist drive necessary in order to keep an alliance with the peasantry — in other words, that the Left Opposition showed a "residue of reformist or syndicalist corporatism".

Such arguments, mistaken I believe, could be seized on by the PCI to rationalise restraining working-class combativity on the grounds that such combativity would spoil the alliance with middle-class groups necessary to win a majority.

Paradoxically, the PCI was able to transform Gramsci's ideas about the revolutionary party's responsibility to be creative, to take initiative, and to educate, into a rationalisation for a notoriously stodgy, passive, routinist policy, pursued by a very bureaucratic party in a very manipulative way.

EUROCOMMUNISM

In the ideology of the Italian Communist Party, however, the whole approach was still, at least notionally and in some supposed last analysis, tied to a specifically working-class project.

The working class was admitted to have distinct immediate and historic interests, and any shelving of those for the sake of alliances was (at least notionally) presumed to be temporary.

In the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, the Italian CP ideology, reformulated to include a marked distancing from the USSR, acquired wide international influence under the name "Eurocommunism". This was the way

that the Communist Parties tried to adapt both to a new generation of radicalised youth and to the distrust by those youth — and increasingly by older activists, too — of the model of the USSR.

Eurocommunism was said to be a new alternative both to Leninism (read: Stalinism) and to social democracy. The links of a strategy of "hegemony" with the working class were faded out further, though still not completely (in formal terms anyway). The Communist Parties attempted, rather clumsily, to court the "new social movements" (feminist, lesbian-gay, anti-nuclear, etc.); and the political goal was posed as intervening "within as well as against the state", transforming it gradually rather than confronting it, capturing it, or using it as an already-given instrument.

The British version of Eurocommunism argued that Margaret Thatcher's Tories had developed a successful "hegemonic project", ideologically capturing great sections of the working class, with the conclusion (even before the miners' defeat in 1985) that direct working-class struggle had no real prospects.

Eurocommunism's flowering was brief. By the early 1990s the Eurocommunist parties had mostly dissolved themselves, or radically shrunk, and most of the Eurocommunist ideologues had moved on.

LACLAU AND MOUFFE

The "post-Marxist" follow-up to Eurocommunism was pioneered in an article in the British Communist Party journal *Marxism Today*, in January 1981, by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

Laclau and Mouffe were academics — of Argentinian and Belgian origin, respectively, but settled in Britain — not members of the Communist Party, but in its orbit, and previously admirers of the French Communist Party philosopher Louis Althusser. From Althusser they valued above all his emphasis on the "relative autonomy" of politics and ideology. They found in Gramsci a similar emphasis — and, they thought, the means to move from "relative autonomy" to straight autonomy.

Laclau and Mouffe first presented their ideas as radically left-wing. In their January 1981 article they criticised the Italian CP as being too stodgy to relate to the "new social movements", and condemned the excessive "concessions to the class enemy" of pre-1914 Marxist parties.

Thirty years later, they still consider themselves left-wing. Mouffe denounces the "third way", "beyond left and right" ideas of writers like the New Labour ideologue Anthony Giddens, and insists: "Right and left are still fundamental categories of politics". She criticises New Labour as having oriented to the middle class and abandoned workers. Despite describing her politics now as "radical democratic" rather than socialist, she denounces neo-liberalism and advocates "different modes of regulation of market forces" (albeit not their subjugation), "basic income", a shorter working week, etc.

Laclau and Mouffe are also clear than they reject Marxism. In the 1981 article their argument was posed

as a call for a "Copernican revolution" within Marxism, but by 1985 they described their views as post-Marxist. They are also avowedly "post-Gramscian".

SOCIETY AS "DISCURSIVE SPACE"

They retained the "broad democratic alliance" orientation which went back to the Italian CP of decades before, but amputated all the notional connections to class struggle, economic determination, and revolution.

Their basic step was to extrapolate "relative autonomy" to full autonomy — and more. Even in Gramsci, they now argued, lurked remnants of "economism" and of an old-Marxist model of society in which one part ("superstructure" — ideology, politics) just expresses or reflects another (the economic "base").

They argued that the "base-superstructure" concept should be completely rejected. The argument proceeded by leaps. Social life is the actions of individuals and groups, none of which are mechanically determined by economic conditions. Yet it could be that the overall directions of social life, and the alternatives which emerge in it, are shaped and often "statistically" determined by the economic relations which structure production and distribution, people's working lives, and much of their conditions outside work too? No, said Laclau and Mouffe. In fact, they came close to inverting the "base-superstructure" idea rather than simply rejecting it.

"There does not exist an essence of the social order beyond a political relation of forces". "Political struggle [is] constitutive of the social order". "All social phenomena and objects can only acquire meaning within a discourse". "Identities — lacking any essence — are formed through political struggle". "Politico-hegemonic articulations retroactively create the interests they claim to represent". We have to recognise "the primacy of politics" even "within the economy itself".

In other words, the shaping of social life is nothing but the workings of "hegemonic" techniques, free-floating from any economic or class underpinning. Those "hegemonic" techniques create the economic or interest-group underpinning, rather than being shaped by it.

They redefined hegemony as "a process of the production of popular-democratic subjects", a "political articulation of different identities into a common project", or a process whereby "a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it", or more simply just as "processes which can bring people together".

Gramsci's concept of hegemony — and Lenin's — involved some element of compromise, of bringing together different plebeian groups in an alliance shaped by definite core interests but also allowing room for divergences and disputes. Laclau and Mouffe moved on from that to the idea of "agonistic pluralism" as the central goal of political action. The goal is to construct a "radical democracy" in which different groups relate as "adversaries" — with mutual accommodation, dialogue, etc. — rather than as "enemies".

The core task for left-wingers is to construct a "chain of equivalence" which can bring together diverse causes into an alliance where each considers itself equally valued.

The chain is not quite all-embracing: "A chain of equivalence needs... a critical frontier. For a hegemony to have a radical focus, it needs to establish an enemy, be it capitalism, ecological destruction, or violation of human rights". But it must be broad and loose. We must reject the "very idea of a privileged subject" — that the working class, or any other pre-defined group, is determined as the core agency of change.

With that, we must reject the idea of comprehensive revolution. Laclau's and Mouffe's "organising principles are the democratic ideas of equality and liberty for all", and their goal is not revolution but "a radicalisation of ideas and values which [are] already present, although unfulfilled, in liberal capitalism".

POST-JACOBIN

As well as being "post-Marxist", they want to be "post-Jacobin" (though they do not use that term). In Jacobinism, the ideology of the radical wing of the French Revolution — in Marxism, too, and in some varieties of liberalism which they reject — they see an excessive rationalism, an impossible drive to meld the whole of society into a single collective will.

Insisting on the necessary partial and piecemeal

Continued on page 22

nature of political action, they argue that “post-Marxism” must eschew the idea of revolution found in Marxism, as well as the ideas of economic base, class, and class interest.

The 1985 book in which Laclau and Mouffe codified their ideas — *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* — made clear in its first pages that this direction in their thought was governed by revulsion against Stalinism. They cited the Russian invasion of Afghanistan (1979), the suppression of the Polish workers in 1981, the horrors following Stalinist victory in Vietnam and Cambodia (after 1975) as facts requiring a rethink of Marxism.

Like many others, they had taken the Stalinist states as more or less good coin, as more or less exemplars of revolutionary working-class socialist rule, and thus wanted to find new left-wing politics that, rejecting Stalinism, would also reject working-class socialist revolution.

Laclau and Mouffe comment that they see much of their approach as having been prefigured by a section of the pre-1914 Marxist movement, the so-called “Austro-Marxists” (ideologues of the Austrian Marxist movement of that time). They must have in mind the idea of a democratic order put together from “cultural-national autonomy”, with an elaborate complex of mutually adjusting institutions for the various national groups in the mosaic of the pre-World-War-One Austro-Hungarian empire.

THE TEST OF EXPERIENCE

Over the last 25 years ideas like Laclau’s and Mouffe’s have spawned a vast literature, and I do not claim to have even a sketchy grasp of it all.

In the 2001 introduction to the second edition of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe seek to refer to, and draw support for their ideas from, a range of writings including those of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Feyerabend, and Lacan. A lot of Mouffe’s recent writing has been in the form of critique of the right-wing political philosopher Carl Schmitt.

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However, we can reasonably do more than just gasp in awe at the length of the bibliographies. Politically, we can make some assessment of the current represented by “post-Marxism”.

There is a paradox. Like many other schools of thought, their ideas were built on trends which appeared factually solid and well-established at the time they first wrote, but which in fact were soon to disappear.

In 1981, one of Laclau’s and Mouffe’s key arguments was that the economic base of capitalism was not determining politics, but, on the contrary, different politics in different places were visibly shaping society in decisively different ways. “The reorganisation of capitalism... increasingly depends on forms of political articulation which affect the supposed ‘laws of motion’....”

The first talk of “hegemony” as the guiding principle in politics, they argued, had come after World War One when a “new mass character of political struggle”, “Lloyd-Georgism” — presumably they mean a general shift towards more populist politics, away from the assured continual domination of traditional elites — had supposedly “obliged socialist politics to adopt a popular and democratic character... totally incompatible with the [alleged] strict ‘class-ism’ of Kautsky or Plekhanov”.

Eurocommunism they saw as a forced recognition of “the far-reaching transformations” of capitalist societies “consequent upon Keynesian economic policies”, for example the broadening of the state to include numerous welfare institutions.

By 1981 Keynesian economic policies were already being discarded by the leading governments. At least, they were being discarded in the form common in the 1960s and 70s. Despite the brief vogues of monetarism and “supply-side economics”, the ruling classes did not in fact forget Keynes’s insights, as they would show in their response to crisis in 2008.

But with the increasing integration of almost all countries into an increasingly fast-moving and fluid capitalist world market, even the “relative” autonomy of politics has been much reduced. Bourgeois welfare-populism of a 1960s-Keynesian or Lloyd-George sort, has been marginalised.

Governments everywhere, of all parties, pursue much the same neo-liberal policies. They are explicit about being subject to the “economic base”. “You can’t buck the markets”. Tony Blair told us that adjusting the Labour Party to the new era meant making it the party, not of some newly-constructed “popular-democratic subject”, but “of business”.

In Britain, and in many other countries, this process of making politics much more a servant of “the economic base”, so to speak, has been openly institutionalised by transferring a large part of state economic decision-making to a central bank mandated to be independent from parliament or government.

The “autonomy”, or the economy-shaping role, of the political is markedly less than before 1980 — and less than when Gramsci, or Trotsky, or Lenin, were writing, or when Marx was writing and exclaimed: “The ‘present-day’ state is... a fiction... [It] changes with a country’s frontier. It is different in the Prusso-German Empire from what it is in Switzerland, and different in England from what it is in the United States”. Neither Marx, nor the great revolutionary Marxists, ever thought that the state simply “expressed” the “economic base”, or did not reciprocally influence it. Perhaps the only ostensible Marxists

who thought that were the Stalinists who said that the USSR’s governing machine must be “socialist” because it was “based” on a nationalised economy.

There is still scope today for individual governments to act differently — in fact, much more scope than they admit. There are still governments which (while going a long way with the general neo-liberal flow) flout the dominant world political trend, though in a malign rather than benign way: Iran, for one. But, especially in the core areas of the world economy, the “autonomy of politics” is visibly much reduced.

Mouffe is aware of this. She calls our times “post-political”, is alarmed by this, and comments ruefully that much of the task today has to be, not to press for more radical democracy, but to defend such democratic institutions as exist.

THE BATTLE FOR DEMOCRACY

The organised working class and the labour movement are at a lower ebb than in 1981. We have suffered from successive defeats followed by a hectic surge of capitalist economic restructuring, and the ground on which to rebuild socialist politics is still poisoned by Stalinism.

But the organised working class and the labour movement still exist, and the “parties of business” still acknowledge that they they are fighting a battle chiefly against that enemy.

What of the “new social movements” which Laclau and Mouffe thought must banish from our minds all ideas of a single class movement as central? In fact they have ebbed more than the organised working class. Some of them have a vigorous sort of after-life in NGOs. But Mouffe does not pretend that NGO politics, or the localised and one-off activism more common today, is a real vehicle for hegemony: she criticises as illusory the perspectives of those who “want a pure movement of civil society” and “do not want to have anything to do with existing institutions such as parties and trade unions”.

“Post-Marxism” has had a very wide diffusion. But as a perspective for the left to recover from the defeats of the late 1970s and 1980s, it cannot claim to have had much grip.

Since the 1980s, a barebones form of bourgeois parliamentary democracy has spread much more widely, to ex-Stalinist Eastern Europe and to most of Latin America for example. That bourgeois parliamentary democracy has simultaneously been more and more hollowed out in its established heartlands — by restrictions on the democratic rights of labour, by the loss of civil liberties (especially in the “war on terror”), and by the increasing transformation of politics into a game played by professional political careerists, think-tanks, and media people, propelled by financing from the wealthy and big business, above the heads of the electorate.

The “post-Marxists” are influential people. What have they done, or even proposed, to reverse that trend?

Perhaps more than any time in history, the last 25 years prove that a battle for democratic forms is ineffectual if not tied together with a socialist battle to reorganise the working-class as an assertive, militant combatant for its own interests, as the champion of democracy, and as the leader of all the oppressed and plebeians.

WHERE WE STAND

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

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

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

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

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

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

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers’ government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers’ charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers’ movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers’ unity against racism.
- Open borders.

- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.

- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.

- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.

- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

AN OPEN LETTER TO SWP MEMBERS

The AWL “doesn’t like black people”?

DEAR COMRADES,

At the SWP fringe meeting at the recent National Union of Students conference, in Newcastle on 13 April, SWP speaker Yunus Bakhsh accused the AWL of racism: “You don’t like black people”.

Three AWL comrades had intervened in the meeting with political criticism of the SWP. Yunus responded angrily, with no connection whatsoever to what we had said, by accusing our Newcastle comrade Ed Whitby of not mobilising for the Bolton anti-EDL demo. When Ed replied that he had, in fact, been in Bolton, Yunus shot back: “Look, I know you don’t like black people, but be quiet.”

This was from the “platform” (the meeting was by the SWP stall), in full hearing of about 20 SWP students. No one denied, or could deny, that it took place. Later that day, leading student SWPer Hanif Leylabi approached us to say Yunus’ comments were “out of order” and apologise (in a personal capacity).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Debate on the left is a good thing. There should be a lot more of it, and sometimes that will include sharp polemics. But accusing other socialists of racism — in a very stark and straight-down-the-line way — is not a “normal” disagreement. If Yunus’ accusation is true, then we should be shunned and politically exposed.

If, on the other hand, Yunus was engaging in dishonest, Stalinist-style slander of political opponents, then it is the interests of all socialists, not least the SWP, that he is called to account.

Some may accuse us of overplaying and exploiting this incident to attack a political opponent on the left. But we think socialists accused of as grave an anti-working class stance as racism have a right to demand the charge is justified or formally withdrawn; and that insisting on basic standards of political honesty in debate is essential for building a healthy, united left.

In addition, we do not want this sort of incident to become more common! In 1993, when AWL members were physically attacked by SWPers outside the Marxism event, we also made a fuss — and although the SWP never responded, there has been little of that kind since.

LUDICROUS CHARGE

The AWL is a revolutionary socialist group. As such we are militant opponents of and fighters against all forms of racism.

Leave aside the fact that we have black and Asian members and sympathisers. We think our record and our politics speak for themselves.

We are a small group, with limited resources but in fact we think our record on fighting racism is better and more consistent than the SWP’s.

One important example: in 1978, when the National Front announced plans to march on Brick Lane, the SWP and Anti-Nazi League refused to cancel their carnival in Brockwell Park. Thus while something like 100,000 attended the carnival, only a few hundred socialists, including the forerunner of the AWL, helped Bengali activists in an unsuccessful attempt to defend Brick Lane against the fascists. Isn’t that disgraceful?

This is not just ancient history. Not only has the SWP never admitted it was wrong but UAF, led by the SWP, behaves much the same way today. When Notts Stop the BNP, in which the AWL is prominently involved, initiated protests against the BNP’s Red, White and Blue festival in Derbyshire, UAF ignored the issue for eight months — and then, rather than working or even discussing plans with local groups, organised its own mobilisation in rivalry with them.

SLANDER — OPEN AND HIDDEN

Yunus’ outburst is not an isolated incident. For instance, one prominent SWP student in Sheffield, Lewie Morris, has claimed repeatedly on the internet that the AWL has links with the English Defence League — resulting in new SWP students asking our Sheffield comrades about this!

What was unusual about Yunus’ attack was that it was not made “behind our backs”, in a private conversation, or even as part of an internet discussion, but from the platform of an SWP public meeting.

The SWP students we spoke to after the NUS meeting had been told all kind of nonsense about us — for instance that our comrade Ed Whitby, who is a Unison activist, had done nothing to defend Yunus when he was victimised by his employer and the Unison bureaucracy. There is a culture of lying about opponents in the SWP which seems to be becoming increasingly widespread. We want to put a stop to it.

ISLAMOPHOBIA...

SWPers regularly claim that the AWL is Islamophobic. This too is a slander.

We think the SWP has substantially abandoned the Marxist critique of political Islam as a reactionary, anti-working class force — in theory, and even more in practice. Your alliance with the Muslim Association of Britain and British Muslim Initiative, offshoots of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood, in the anti-war movement, was a turning point. From there it was a short hop to your disastrous political coalition with Galloway and his supporters, in the name of which you destroyed the Socialist Alliance. Today the SWP still refuses to make solidarity with the worker and student victims of the Iranian Islamist regime, bizarrely claiming that this would weaken the struggle against a US attack on Iran.

Our characterisation of movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Islamists in power in Iran, as “clerical fascist” echoes... Tony Cliff, founder of the SWP, who used the term to describe the Muslim Brotherhood in 1946. (If you don’t believe us, see his article at www.workersliberty.org/node/3266.)

Unable to answer these criticisms, SWPers fall back on lies about us: that we supported Israel’s war in Gaza/support a US attack on Iran, that we didn’t want the anti-war movement to involve Muslims, that we support a ban on the hijab... We think Islam is inherently more reactionary than other religions, we say all Muslims are fascists... the list goes on and on, becoming more and more absurd.

As a Marxist organisation, the AWL is critical of all religions and vehemently opposed to right-wing religio-political movements including (not limited to) Islamism. We oppose the growing influence of religion in politics and society. But we are equally clear on the need to fight the growing bigotry against and persecution of Muslims and people of Muslim background.

The real difference between us is not on the need to fight anti-Muslim racism and bigotry, but on the need for socialists to criticise and oppose right-wing politicised religion. Thus we get the ludicrous situation in NUS where the SWP sides with Labour Students, UJS et al in championing religious schools! Similarly, in the National Union of Teachers, SWP members oppose the call for the abolition of religious schools, claiming this is Islamophobic — even though 99 percent of such schools are Christian. (For a discussion of these issues in depth, see www.workersliberty.org/node/2321).

AND ANTI-SEMITISM

But don’t we call the SWP anti-semitic? Isn’t that the same as Yunus saying we don’t like black people?

Firstly, the AWL has made an extensive, detailed case for why the SWP’s policy on Israel-Palestine has anti-semitic implications. In denying them the right to self-determination and an independent state, the SWP treats the Israeli Jews as it treats no other nation. (For an outline of this argument in more general terms, see for instance our interview with Moïse Postone www.workersliberty.org/node/13693.) Agree or disagree with this line of thought, it is a well-documented and consistently argued position. We do not throw it randomly at SWPers when we feel that we are losing an unrelated argument (the discussion at the NUS fringe meeting until Yunus exploded had not touched on racism).

Secondly, there is a great deal of evidence beyond attitudes to Israel-Palestine of the SWP’s accommodation to anti-semitism. For instance, the repeated invita-

tions, condemned even by militantly anti-Zionist “one state” Jews, for anti-semitic conspiracy theorist Gilad Atzmon to play and speak at SWP events. Or the recent invitation by the SWP in Bradford for the Holocaust-denier-linked Islamist group MPAC to speak on a UAF platform (www.workersliberty.org/node/14037).

Thirdly, we say that the SWP’s politics on Israel-Palestine have an *anti-semitic logic*, despite the intentions of those who hold them. We have stressed that this anti-semitism is not of the far-right *racist* type, and that we are not calling individual SWPers anti-semites. We don’t say “We know you don’t like Jews”. In contrast, Yunus felt free to tell us we “don’t like black people”, out of the blue and without even an attempt at justification.

IRONIC

The claim that the AWL is racist is particularly ironic when you consider who the SWP is happy to work with in, for instance, its anti-fascist campaigning.

The implication of being a “key signatory” of UAF is presumably, at least, that one does not dislike black people! Yet this list includes not only David Cameron, who under pressure from the BNP and UKIP is promising to cut immigration to 75,000 a year, but Tory MP “Sir” Teddy Taylor, of the far-right, anti-immigration Monday Club. So these people are good anti-racists, but the AWL is a racist organisation?

All this might cause some SWPers to think critically about their organisation’s “broad unity” approach to anti-fascism — not broad unity within the labour and anti-racist movements, but unity with bourgeois and in some cases racist politicians who limit what we can say and do in the fight against the Nazis.

CAN WE WORK TOGETHER?

Part of the reason for the SWP lying about the politics of the AWL on these questions seem to be to convince its members and sympathisers in the student movement that we cannot work together.

Yet, although many SWP students seem to be unaware of it, our groups work together in all kinds of other forums. In Unison, for instance, SWP and AWL members are currently standing together with others on a joint slate for the national executive. We worked together extensively at the Vestas occupation where the AWL and SWP were the only two socialist groups seriously involved. Both our groups were prominent in the Campaign to Save NUS Democracy two years ago. We worked together during the occupations against Israel’s attack on Gaza — while your ally in the recent NUS elections, Fiona Edwards, conspired to undermine the occupation we played a leading role in at Sheffield University!

And of course we were in the Socialist Alliance together, until the SWP broke it up in order to pursue its alliance with Galloway.

In April, when our comrade Jade Baker was elected, as a part of a left slate, sabbatical VP Education at Westminster Uni, your new NUS executive member Mark Bergfeld sent her congratulations. Why would he congratulate a member of a racist organisation?

Part of the picture is real political disagreements — over Palestine, Islamophobia and many other issues — being distorted in order to claim that the AWL is racist, as a self-serving way to justify SWP hostility to other groups in the student movement.

CHALLENGE THIS!

You do not have to agree with the politics of the AWL to see that Yunus Bakhsh’s accusation of racism was a grotesque slander, and that it should not be allowed to go unchallenged.

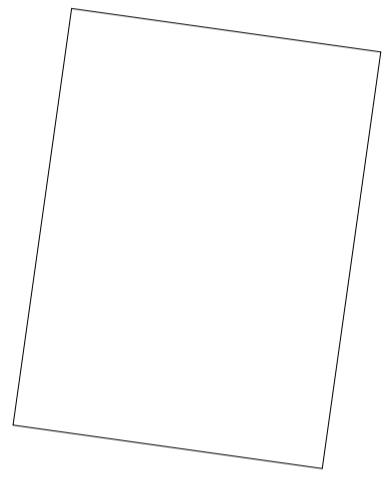
This is as much in the interests of the SWP as in the interests of the socialist, labour and student movements more broadly. We urge you to take this issue up in your organisation, and support our call for the SWP Central Committee to investigate the matter.

**YOURS FOR SOCIALISM,
ALLIANCE FOR WORKERS’ LIBERTY**

WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

**Vote Jill Mountford in
Camberwell and Peckham
Send a message to the
bankers and bosses:**

WORKERS WILL FIGHT BACK!



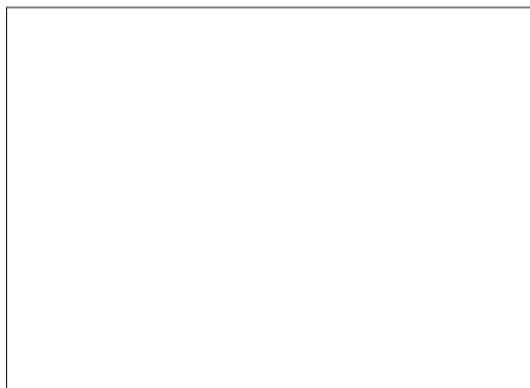
In late April, Jill Mountford, Alliance for Workers' Liberty candidate for Camberwell and Peckham at the general election, spoke to a hustings organised by the National Union of Teachers in Croydon, south London:

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is standing in this election to raise the banner for socialism — to give some positive shape to the revulsion that working-class people feel about the way capitalism functions.

We're raising a set of ideas that oppose the idea that capitalism is the best humanity can do.

We're out at weekends and in the evenings talking to people on estates and on the streets about ideas that will radically change their lives for the better.

We're doing what the Labour Party seems presently incapable of doing. We're talking about the need for a government that fights as hard for the working class as Labour, and the Tories before them, have fought on behalf of the bosses. And we're doing this during a recession where we've seen Labour bail out the banks to tune of billions, while doing nothing to stop the jobs of ordinary workers disappear, and their lives and those of their families slip into the misery of poverty and insecurity.



People not profit! We need socialist policies

And the tsunami has barely hit the shore. All three main parties are talking about drastic cuts to public sector jobs and services. That will send shock waves to the private sector; unemployment and poverty will rise even more.

The devastation caused by these attacks will be a blow to a generation or more — as people are condemned to the scrap heap waiting for better times and boom years.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty proposes a different plan — a plan that will make the lives of the majority better, more secure.

Our plan involves putting people to work through a massive homes, schools and hospi-

tals building programme (and without one penny to PFI business) — creating jobs and services for the working class.

We are proposing the nationalisation of the utilities and transport system and, we dare to say, without any compensation to the bosses. And while we're about it, we'll take control of the banks — we want a democratically controlled banking, mortgages and pensions service that provides for social need, not the greed of a few stinking rats who get way with stealing from pension funds and playing roulette with our money.

We say tax the rich and big business, close the loopholes that allows them to get away with contributing nothing to society. Apply the same vigour to these robbers that the state applies to poor single parents who fail to declare a few extra pounds they earn while trying to live off meagre benefits.

At the same time we must organise to fight for the rights of migrant workers and their families. As far as we're concerned, they deserve the same rights as British-born workers. If jobs and houses are what divide the working class, then we should make sure that everyone who needs a home has one, and that everyone who is able to work is given the opportunity to do so.

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