

# Solidarity

## & Workers' Liberty

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an injury to one is an injury to all

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## EUROPE: WHAT WE THINK

# Now for a workers' "Lisbon Treaty"

BY COLIN FOSTER

**O**n 1 December the Lisbon Treaty will come into force. The new European Union of 27 member states will acquire a more or less workable political structure, and one in many ways more unified than the old structures for six, 10 or 15 states.

More decisions will be made by a sufficiently large majority rather than by unanimity. The European Parliament will have more powers. There will be a EU president. A Charter of Fundamental Rights will set a baseline across the EU, although Britain has got an "opt-out" intended to ensure that the Charter cannot be used to ease Britain's anti-union laws.

The nudging-down of barriers between nations, the establishment of more or less free movement for people across a whole continent, the creation of a larger political structure more in line with the scale of modern technology and economic affairs — all these are *steps forward*, from the point of view of the labour movement, the working class, and the prospects for real democracy and for socialism.

It would have been better if the semi-unification of Europe had been done democratically, transparently, faster, and without the accompaniment of EU policies which make the neo-liberal consensus shared by the EU's capitalist governments into EU directives. That could not have happened without the labour movement being stronger and more unified across Europe. So the bourgeoisies have carried through the semi-unification, in their own way.

It will be better now if the cause of European unity can now be taken in hand by the labour movement. That cannot happen until the labour movement across Europe rallies itself, unifies itself, and develops a common purpose and a common campaign. And that, in turn, cannot happen until the activists of the labour movement clearly recognise the bourgeois semi-unification of Europe as a fact, a progress, and something to build on and go forward from.

The most obstinate opponents of the Lisbon Treaty were the Czech Republic's hardline-neoliberal president Vaclav Klaus, and the British Tories. Those on the left who campaigned to stop the Lisbon Treaty — who prefer to keep up the barriers between nations in the expanded EU, to try to stall the process of EU integration — were really only giving backhanded aid to such right-wing forces, who fear that EU integration may be used to impose some social "levelling-up" on them.

The workers of Europe need our own "Lisbon Treaty" — an agreement to move forward towards a unified labour movement for a semi-unified Europe.

## THE BANKS

# Compensation without nationalisation?

BY RHODRI EVANS

**B**ack in January, John McFall, a mainstream New Labour MP and chair of Parliament's Treasury select committee, called for the complete nationalisation of Lloyds Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland.

It's a pity he didn't stick to that, and that unions and others in the labour movement did not take up the call, extend it, and force the Government to nationalise the whole finance sector with minimal compensation.

Instead, the Government went for pumping taxpayers' money into the banks to help them scrape through the crisis and come out of it as much as they went in — as private-profit machines. Even when the money-pumping took the form of buying up large numbers of shares — making the Government by far the biggest shareholder in RBS, and thus effectively nationalising it — bosses were left free to run their banks.

Now, on 3 November, the Government has pumped another £31 billion into RBS and Lloyds, buying more of their shares, and promised another £8 billion to RBS if it wants it. As the Tories pointed out, the sum comes to £2000 for every household in the country, paid into the bank bosses' pockets.

## CUTS FIGHTBACK

# Jersey workers prepare to fight

BY MARY BURGESS

**T**he tiny island of Jersey may be about to host some major class struggle. This year the island's States (Parliament) decided to withdraw the money budgeted for public sector pay rises, over the head of the States Employment Board, which usually negotiates with the unions.

At the end of October, a motion to reinstate free collective bargaining fell, with Chief Minister Terry La Souer commenting: "At a time when private sector jobs are being frozen or cut, a pay rise for States staff is not viable."

What was previously on the table was not a pay rise at all, but a real-terms pay cut. At the same time, workers' living standards are being cut further by the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, a new indirect tax of three percent levied by the States to fill the hole their "zero-ten" tax policy has created.

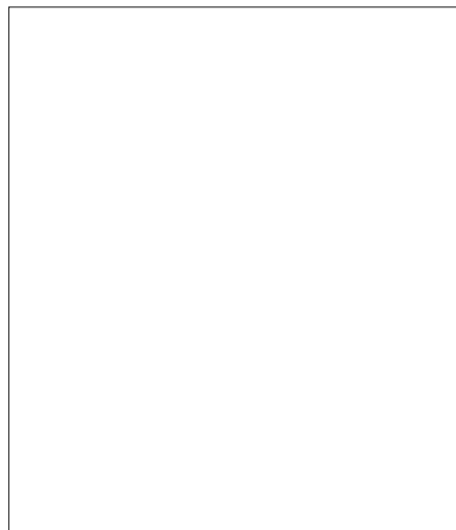
This system, also operated by Guernsey and the Isle of Man, means that financial institutions operating from a permanent place of business and utilities companies pay ten percent corporation tax, while other firms are exempt.

In addition, bizarrely, profit-making companies eligible for their tax can come to an arrangement with companies making no profit to reduce their tax bill!

Richard Murphy, a tax consultant for the Jersey government, describes "zero-ten" as follows:

"What can one say? They've voted for a tax strategy which if translated to the UK would read like this:

1. We're going to cut government rev-



Socialists have habitually called for nationalisation without compensation where capitalism leads industries to collapse. This is more like compensation without nationalisation, or... nationalisation without nationalisation.

Dan Roberts, in the Guardian, rightly skewers the "Treasury orthodox that insists the stockmarket is the only judge of long-term value and the reliable source of capital. Neither seems to be the case at the moment, and instead the taxpayer is paying a high price to preserve the fiction that British banking is back on

its own two feet".

Chancellor Alistair Darling has defended the new cash-pumping by saying that it will enable the banks to opt out of the Government's scheme to insure their risky assets, and thus reduce the Government's total commitments.

The fact remains that the Government is handing over huge amounts of hard cash to the banks in return for paper assets (shares) with dubious prospects. It sees sustaining the banks as central to sustaining the whole economy in a way that sustaining jobs, welfare, and public services is not. And, if capitalism is the economy to be sustained, that is true: the banks are central.

The Government promises some limits on bankers' bonuses, but these are cosmetic. Simultaneously, the banks are axing ordinary bank workers' jobs.

RBS made a loss in its half-year to 30 June 2009, but generally banks and financial institutions — helped by cheap loans from governments — have been doing quite well in recent months. There is a serious risk of new financial bubbles swelling up — with another real economic crash when they burst — scarcely a year after the last big bubble-bursting, in September 2008. Pumping up the less successful banks may just help swell the bubbles.

enue by £100 billion - that's more than the cost of the NHS. We have no idea how we will make good this deficit, if we ever can;

2. You will be paying much more tax despite this cut in our revenue, and the inevitable cuts in services that will follow on everything from health to education to pensions to transport and social welfare;

3. We've done this so that residents of other countries who are evading or aggressively avoiding the tax they owe to their own governments can continue to do so in your country - for which you are now paying a very high price."

Jersey also has a *flat-rate* income tax of 20 percent!

Treasury Minister Phillip Ozouf has announced a whole range of inflation-busting taxes in his budget, and the freezing of tax allowances, bringing more low earners into the tax net.

It is clear that the government intends to take on the unions Thatcher-style, whatever the cost.

A workers' committee including all of the public sector unions is considering its choices carefully. There is a danger of it falling prey to the government's delaying tactics. Year on year negotiations have been dragged out until workers get demoralised and give in to another pay cut.

Jersey workers must fight now, and fight hard, or suffer another cut this year and open the way to further attacks in the future.

There is every possibility for such a fight. The mood on the streets is rebellious. Everyone you meet complains about the government and is willing to

discuss how to change things.

What workers in Jersey need to learn is to rely on their own strength to make that change. With 7,000 public sector workers edging towards action, and private sector workers angry at tax increases and the rising cost of living, now is the time to strike.

## A Workers' Plan for the Crisis

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## OPEN LETTER TO A MEMBER OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

# Anti-fascism: lessons from Leeds

Dear comrade,

**O**n 31 October, hundreds of supporters of the English Defence League marched through Leeds, despite the nearby presence of more than 1,000 anti-fascists. They were able to do so because of the misleadership of the anti-fascist movement by Unite Against Fascism and by your organisation, the SWP.

The events of that day tell us a lot about the deep-rooted problems of both UAF and the SWP.

**1. UAF, including leading SWPers, worked with the police to prevent protesters marching against the EDL.** In the run up, it had argued for the police to ban the EDL march — a tactic that strengthens the state in also cracking down on left-wing, labour movement and anti-racist protests, and miseducates people to believe we can rely on the police. On the day, after the police crushed anti-fascist demonstrators into a pen, UAF stewards worked with them to prevent people from marching. After hundreds broke out, but were blocked by police and returned to the rally, a vote was taken on whether to march. When an overwhelming majority voted to do so and tried to leave the pen, they were pushed back — with the help of UAF stewards. Despite repeated promises from UAF/SWP leader Weymann Bennett, they were kept there until the rally dwindled and the opportunity was missed.

Meanwhile, the EDL marched unopposed through the centre of another city, repeating its triumph in Manchester on 10 October.

**2. UAF effectively handed over an anarchist demonstrator to the police.** At one point, an EDL supporter somehow infiltrated the rally; he started ranting about immigration and was set on by a mix of anarchists and socialists. After the EDLer was thrown out of the pen, a young anarchist found himself on the wrong side of the barriers. The UAF stewards refused him re-entry, and he was promptly arrested.

**3. UAF put strike-breaking bosses on the platform of the rally.** Among the speakers was Glenn Pickersgill, one of the Leeds refuse workers who have been on strike for two months, against the attempts of the Liberal-Conservative council to impose a one third pay cut. Glenn inspiringly described how the strike had united workers of different backgrounds (black, white British, Polish) in the struggle to defend pay, conditions and organisation.

Unfortunately he was preceded on the platform by a Lib Dem councillor — a representative of the bosses seeking to smash the strike!

What does this tell us about UAF and the SWP?

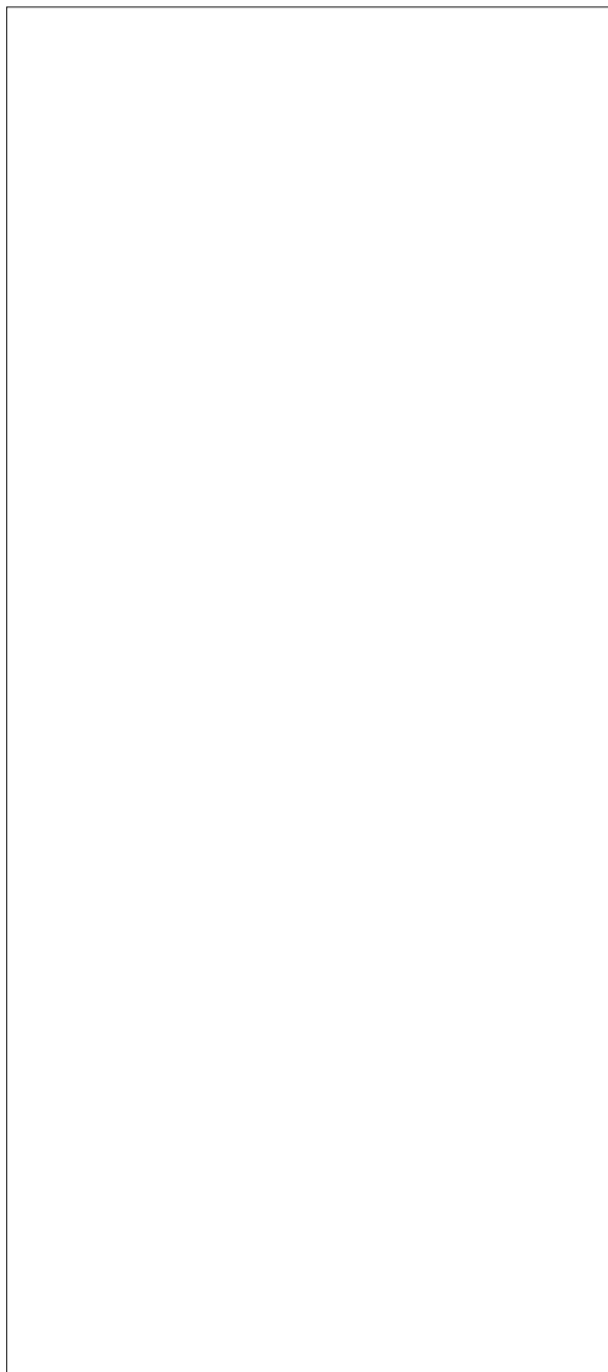
## LESSONS

**1.** Protests involve a variety of tactics; it is not a principle to always do what looks like the most “militant” thing. The problem with the UAF/SWP approach is its dishonesty and bureaucratic manipulation.

UAF, under the leadership of the SWP, has repeatedly shown itself willing to lie to demonstrators; to impose its decisions on local campaigns; to hold back militancy to look respectable and maintain good relations with the police; and to work with the police against its critics in the anti-fascist movement.

The events of 31 October are appalling, but they are only the latest in a long line of similar incidents on anti-fascist demonstrations — notably in Derbyshire in August and Liverpool in November 2008.

Sometimes, when the SWP wants to look militant, it will organise some stage-managed radicalism. But its fundamental approach remains the same. It is not concerned with pushing the fascists off the streets through mass action, but with organisational advan-



**Leeds 31 October. An anti-fascist movement needs to be open, democratic and a genuine united front of organisations and individuals committed to championing working-class interests**

tage for itself.

This is possible because of the kind of organisation UAF is — undemocratic, with no real structures where labour movement and anti-racist activists can hold SWP and other leaders to account for their actions.

**2. The decision to invite the Lib Dem speaker goes to the heart of what is wrong with UAF.**

The far right is growing by exploiting real problems — job losses, cuts, privatisation — imposed on workers and the poor by the bosses and the mainstream parties. It presents itself as a “radical” alternative, and the left as supporting the status quo. Only a class-struggle movement, mobilising workers’ organisations in a united front to challenge fascism and the social conditions which feed it, can undercut these ideas and the growth of the fascists. That means championing battles like the Leeds refuse strike.

By putting a strike-breaker on the platform, UAF is telling workers and poor people attracted to the EDL or BNP that the fascists’ claims are true; that the left is indeed lashed up with the “liberal” establishment, that our “anti-fascism” means defending the status quo and nothing radical can be expected from us.

This is true even when the BNP etc. fail to dema-

gogically “support” workers’ actions. They have other, racist “explanations” and “solutions” for the problems working-class people face — their “answer” to job losses and cuts is a racist programme of ending immigration and persecuting minorities. If we do not counterpose our own rational, working-class programme, their poisonous one will grip more and more people. That is why the BNP is growing.

When protesters heckled and booed the Lib Dem speaker in Leeds, one of your leading student comrades, Hanif Leylabi, shouted a reply: “You don’t have to be in favour of strikes to be against fascism”. As a socialist, don’t you find this response astonishing?

Of course you don’t have to support strikes in order to say and believe you are “against fascism”. *But what is fascism? Where does it come from? Why is it growing? Who can stop it and how? Who are reliable allies in the struggle against it?*

We advocate a movement whose central core is workers’ organisations; which adopts a programme of class-struggle demands, like taxing the rich to fund jobs, homes and services for all; and which supports workers in struggle.

We do not argue that individuals who support bourgeois parties should be driven off demos; that the involvement of all non-working class organisations (e.g. students, organisations of oppressed minorities, religious groups) should be excluded; or that the anti-fascist movement should adopt a full Marxist programme.

But we *do* advocate the exclusion of bourgeois parties and politicians — not individuals in the crowd, but Lib Dem or Tory councillors and MPs on the platform. We also advocate an approach radically different from UAF’s orientation to the trade union bureaucracy — which means unions handing over many thousands of pounds to UAF, but doing little or nothing to mobilise workers against the fascist threat.

UAF opposes both the adoption of class demands and, usually, genuine mass action against the fascists because it fears these things would disrupt the “unity” it has established with bourgeois politicians and union bureaucrats. And it is right.

**O**n the rare occasions it attempts theoretical self-justification, the SWP claims that UAF “deploys the spirit” of the workers’ united front Trotsky advocated in the 30s (SWP leader Martin Smith).

Leeds made clear, once again, that UAF is more like the “popular fronts” Trotsky denounced as incompatible with socialist politics and incapable of defeating fascism.

Look at the UAF website! The “key signatories” list includes not only the Metropolitan Black Police Association and the North West Lib Dems, but... David Cameron. And not only David Cameron, but Teddy Taylor and the Reverend Martin Smyth (no relation!) — both former vice-presidents of the far-right, racist Monday Club group of Tories. Smyth is a former Ulster Unionist MP and Grand Master of the Orange Order. No doubt these “anti-fascists” would either have applauded the Leeds councillor enthusiastically — or perhaps considered him too left-wing!

The SWP’s record in sustaining such an alliance — including its behaviour in Leeds — is a particularly stark evidence of its political degeneration: how it puts what it believes will benefit it as an organisation ahead of political principle and the needs of the class struggle. It should give you, as a revolutionary socialist who wants to destroy fascism, serious pause for thought.

**Let’s discuss what we must do to avoid a repetition in Glasgow and Nottingham, when the EDL marches again.**

*Solidarity*

## JOB LOSSES

# Diageo workers vote for industrial action

BY DALE STREET

**O**n 30 October the Unite union announced the result of a consultative ballot on industrial action which it had run among its members employed by Diageo in the West of Scotland.

In early July Diageo, which manufactures and bottles Johnnie Walker and other drinks brands, had announced 900 job losses in Kilmarnock and Glasgow. Three weeks later some 20,000 marched through Kilmarnock in opposition to the proposed closures and job losses.

## IN BRIEF

**MEDIA:** Two journalists covering far-right demonstrations have received death threats. Their union the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has filed complaints with the police. General Secretary Jeremy Dear said: "These are direct, named threats made by individuals who can be traced — in one case an individual already convicted of stabbing someone. They are designed to silence the media and stop photographers showing the true nature of the protests and protestors. The police must act now before a journalist is killed or seriously injured".

Writing in the *Guardian* on 4 November, Jason Parkinson, one of those threatened says: "On Saturday, I covered the [EDL]'s protest in Leeds. After the event, a well-known EDL organiser saw fit to email a death threat to me: "A fatwa has been issued on you my communist friend. Enjoy any money you've made from EDL protests, as if you are spotted again you will be fed up." The email was signed "Simples". But a little investigation discovered it originated from an organiser of the English and Welsh Defence League divisions.

**BRITISH AIRWAYS:** 14,000 British Airways (BA) cabin crew are being balloted by the Unite union for strike action. Workers are bitter at measures taken by the company in an attempt to restore profitability. BA are cutting full-time staff, which means workers working harder, extending a pay freeze into next year, and plan to recruit any new staff on lower pay. Three thousand workers attended a meeting called by the union ahead of the ballot, the result of which is due to be announced on 14 December. BA cabin crew last struck in 1997.

**TEMPORARY WORKERS:** The government has delayed implementation of the Directive on Temporary Agency Work, the EU policy which grants contract and agency workers the same rights as permanent staff. The directive had already been watered down. In May 2008, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and the bosses' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), struck a deal giving agency workers equal protection rights and similar work conditions as permanent workers but only after 12 weeks' employment. This was meant to take effect in winter 2009, but has now been pushed back to 11 October 2011, the latest date possible that would fall within the EU's implementation deadline.

A set of alternative proposals — drawn up by Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish government, trade unions and local authorities — was rejected by Diageo in September, despite the fact that the 'alternative proposals' accepted a large part of Diageo's case for cutting jobs.

After Diageo's curt dismissal of the 'alternative proposals' much of the non-trade-union support for the campaign decided that it was time to throw in the towel, accept that Diageo's decision was set in stone, and look for scapegoats.

Local Labour MP Des Browne, for example, attacked the SNP government for failing to have produced a good enough plan to persuade Diageo to keep

open their Kilmarnock plant. But the plan criticised by Browne was the very one which he himself — as part of an 'all-party' campaign — had backed to the hilt.

In mid-October Unite announced a consultative ballot amongst its members in the Kilmarnock, Port Dundas and Shieldhall plants. But the GMB, which also represents Diageo workers, chose not to follow the Unite initiative.

The results of the Unite ballot were an overwhelming vote for moving on to "the real thing". Of the votes cast, 87% in Kilmarnock, 90% in Port Dundas, and 75% in Shieldhall were in favour of a ballot on industrial action, as required by the anti-union laws.

From media releases put out by Unite it is less than clear what the aim of any eventual industrial action will be — whether it is to attempt to pressurise Diageo to drop its plans for closures and job losses, to secure better redundancy terms, or to force Diageo back to the negotiating table (after they effectively walked away from talks a fortnight ago).

Despite the degree of the confusion, at this stage, about the aim of eventual industrial action, the staging of the ballot could be the trigger to kick-start the campaign to oppose all job losses, notwithstanding the desertion of the Diageo workforce by many of their celebrity short-term supporters.

## SHEFFIELD DISPUTES

## Firefighters, bus, post all in battle

BY GEMMA SHORT

**T**wo big and important industrial disputes — on the buses and in the fire service — are currently going on in Sheffield.

Workers from First Buses have been out on clusters of 24 hour strikes in two separate disputes over pay, management bullying and disciplinary procedures for several weeks now.

The pay dispute, which was South Yorkshire wide, has now been settled. Sheffield is the only place the bullying dispute is going on and is therefore now on strike on its own.

Despite being knocked back when Rotherham and Doncaster went back to work, the picket lines in Sheffield are still strong and workers are determined not to back down.

Bullying has increasingly been becoming a huge fact of working life for

bus workers. At First Buses in Sheffield, any incident on the road often leads straight to a final warning. Every day workers are in fear about who might be next to get the sack.

This sort of management bullying must be challenged; this is not the only workplace this is happening. We need to show the bosses that they won't break our unions.

Firefighters in South Yorkshire are also in a dispute over hours. Without meaningful consultation management has decided to move firefighters from a two nights nine hour, two nights 15 hour shift pattern to a four nights 12 hour shift pattern. Workers say that this will not only does this effect them, but will be also be detrimental to the service.

Firefighters have already staged a few 24 hour strikes. Management's response was to tell workers that if they took the

shift pattern changes now, they could go to ACAS in the new year.

Firefighters are now staging a series of eight hour walk outs until Wednesday 4 November. In addition CWU picket lines remain strong, with workers organising to try and convince temporary workers not to scab.

However, firefighters on the picket line felt they had little control over the dispute and had little information from their union's headquarters. Workers from all sections need to take control of disputes, organise local committees to prevent strike breaking, organise pickets and propaganda.

We also need to link up these disputes, with that of the postal workers. Here are three key industries in Sheffield, and a defeat for one will be a blow for all. The local labour movement and the left should rally support and solidarity for all three disputes.

## What do we need? A union

## MY LIFE

## AT WORK

**Naomi Barrett, a shopworker from Sheffield, spoke to Solidarity**

**Tell us a little bit about the work you do.**

I work in a food outlet. It calls itself a bakery, but the goods are made at a bake house and then delivered to each shop in the morning. It's a small South Yorkshire chain, family owned. My colleagues and I amend the order for daily deliveries, prepare the food made on site (things like salads and fillings), serve customers (make their sandwiches etc), and keep the shop clean. It's pretty mind numbing, but it's a "local shop", so we have a lot of banter with old ladies.

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

We're all on minimum wage. I think my last pay rise brought me up to £5.80. So yes, we're underpaid. Although the job isn't stressful, all the women that work at the shop besides me have fami-

lies to support. It's a nice environment to work in because I'm lucky enough to have decent colleagues and a personable manager (although she's a bit bonkers), but it can be very boring. If I were stuck in a space that small and everyone were horrible it would be a different story.

**Do you enjoy your work?**

Yes, but I do several other jobs to support myself. If I were just at the bakery I would go nuts; I don't feel I'm making the most of my time or my brain while I'm there. I'm just making people ham sandwiches repeatedly. I get a lot of free cake however...

**What are your bosses like?**

My manager is a nice person, although she has to be in control. She would take it personally if we were to query our working conditions or pay. She thinks we get treated incredibly well because we receive holiday pay! She tries hard to keep employees she gets on with, so she's very enthusiastic about all the perks. She's on our side, fiddling the hours so we don't go without wages, even when we've been unofficially off etc. The shop is so small, you couldn't organise anything without her finding

out, and she's after a quiet life. The rest of the women are apolitical too. One said she understood that the recent local strikes by posties and the buses were fueled by greed. It's difficult to argue about e.g. strikes when customers are in and out of the shop.

The boss of the chain visits our shop irregularly. She just snoops a bit, like an inspector, but mainly she's after a sandwich. She has a chat with our manager and then sometimes complains about things she notices we do wrong. My manager tends to use this information when she has a personal vendetta against one of us. We have secret shoppers who do the real inspecting. It means a lot to my manager that we get 100%.

**Is there are union in your workplace? Does it do a good job?**

No, but I'm an individual member of the GMB.

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

Union recognition, which would hopefully encourage more discussion about the working environment from our perspective, not just the customer's important view.

## ROYAL MAIL

# How post workers can win

By Ed Maltby

## PICKET OUT THE SCAB CENTRES

**L**arge numbers of casuals are being employed in an attempt to break the strike. Under UK employment law, the use of agency staff as strikebreakers is illegal.

Royal Mail are using the excuse that these casuals are merely the normal Christmas staff, recruited early this year. Postal workers are under no illusions as to their function.

Generally casuals are employed on manual sorting in large scab mail centres. How successful this operation is in shifting mail is unclear, and reports on the size of the backlog are confused and contradictory. Smaller numbers of casuals are being employed in regular mail centres and delivery offices alongside CWU members.

Although the CWU is challenging the use of casuals in the courts, the union has yet to organise large-scale picketing of the scab centres, or a major drive to organise casuals into the union.

Casuals experience all the exploitation that Royal Mail bosses are attempting to heap onto regular postal workers — job insecurity, low wages, little training and a bullying management. The CWU should recruit them into the union and fight to improve their conditions, as well as preventing them from being used to break strikes.

The labour movement and the left should help in the picketing of scab mail centres. Casuals who are sent to work in regular workplaces should be encouraged to join picket lines.

## RANK AND FILE CONTROL

**I**n the last week of October, as TUC-brokered talks between the CWU and Royal Mail began, many activists feared that CWU leaders Dave Ward and Billy Hayes were on the point of cutting a sell-out deal with management.

Ward and Hayes made loud noises about being determined to find a deal soon to end the strike. Remembering the poor deal concluded in 2007, and the fact that the content of that deal was not revealed to members until weeks after the union leaders had called off action, one London postie commented: "if management offered him a few crumbs, Dave Ward would bite their hand off".

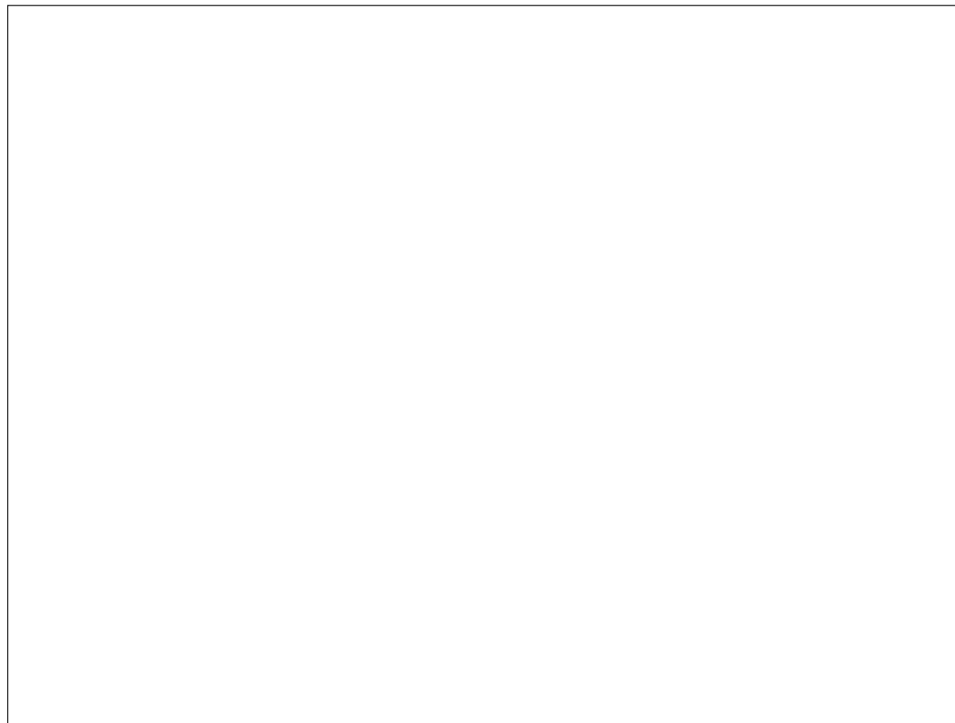
As we go to press in the first week of November, Billy Hayes has gone on TV to attack Royal Mail management, and announced a new round of all-out strike dates.

It seems that talks have stalled, and that for the time being the union leaders will continue action.

There is still an urgent need for national and regional reps' meetings to take place regularly, and to make binding decisions, in the first place to set precise demands for the dispute, and in the second place to control and monitor what the top officials say in negotiations.

Reps' meetings are happening across the London region, but they are poorly publicised and not enough members are aware of them.

The need for a rank-and-file movement to keep an eye on the CWU lead-



ership was thrown into sharp relief by Dave Ward's comments as reported in the *Guardian* on Friday 30 October:

"Ward admitted to the *Guardian* earlier this month that he was under pressure from some members of the executive to announce immediate action without any further talks.

"He said the union was prepared to make changes over how it managed its side of industrial relations at Royal Mail.

"One example he cited was that, because officials [Executive members, not Ward himself] have to be elected every year, they are in 'perpetual election mode' and therefore constantly feel the need to talk tough to appeal to the CWU's rank and file. He said the union was prepared to hold elections less frequently to improve relations with management."

Reducing union democracy to suit the wishes of management — perhaps Dave Ward would prefer to just let Adam Crozier choose who sits on the Postal Executive! This gives a clear indication of the direction the union will take without a strong rank-and-file

movement to control the leadership.

## ESCALATING THE ACTION

**M**any postal workers are of the opinion that the only way to win before Christmas is to significantly escalate the action.

Several reps have told *Solidarity* that, having been out for so long already, many London posties would be happy to see an escalation of the action as they feel that they have nothing to lose. Certainly, no-one wants to see the strike end without a major concession to justify so much sacrifice.

Some postal workers are making the argument for more all-out strikes to replace or augment the rolling action deployed up to now. This is a debate to be had out at the rank-and-file level of the CWU, though properly-organised reps' meetings.

## BUILD SOLIDARITY COMMITTEES!

**P**ostal solidarity committees already exist in many towns in the UK.

Where they do not, they should be set up, if possible through the local trades council.

They should meet regularly, and organise to raise money for the strike through collections in workplaces and on the streets; they should organise big meetings, leafleting and other demonstrations of political support for the postal workers, against management's propaganda offensive, and they should send delegations to help out on picket lines.

## Sack Mandelson and Crozier!

**I**n this dispute the postal workers are pitched against two particularly aggressive and conscious fighters for the ruling class: Peter Mandelson and Adam Crozier.

Both have made it clear that it is their intention to break the strike. Mandelson has been manoeuvring behind the scenes to undermine the union, and has made public statements in support of Royal Mail bosses.

Even though Mandelson has toned down his act in recent weeks, the labour movement should recognise Mandelson for what he is. They should not tolerate a member of a Labour government openly organising to break the strength of the CWU.

There should be a labour movement campaign to force him out of office. Such a campaign would make the government less able to intervene on management's side in the strike, and would reassert the role of the labour movement in national politics. It would also draw a clear line between the right-wing New Labour leadership and those elements in the Labour Party still loyal to the working class.

It could put on the spot those union leaders who have supported the CWU and deplored Mandelson's attitude without drawing active conclusions.

## "We're fighting for the right to a say"

**A** picket at the Cubie Street Delivery Office in Glasgow on 31 October told *Solidarity*:

"Support in this office for today's strike is 100%, as it has been for other strike action all through this dispute.

We know what Royal Mail's tactics are from a leaked document that the media got hold of a couple of weeks ago. Royal Mail planned for this dispute months in advance.

They mapped out in advance what they would be doing each month in order to break the strike, and to carry on with 'modernisation' without any consultation or negotiations with the union.

And that's the main reason for this dispute — Royal Mail wanting to unilaterally change our terms and conditions. Under the 2007 agreement [which ended that year's national strike action by the CWU] all future changes were to be made through negotiation.

Our branch recommended a vote

against that agreement. There were weaknesses in the deal. There were some national guidelines, but everything was to be decided locally. The result of that has been that different agreements have been reached in different workplaces.

We're doing more work now than we were three years ago. Over the same period Royal Mail has reduced its workforce by a third. Royal Mail wants to impose further change through executive action.

We are fighting for the right to negotiate our members' pay and terms and conditions. We know that there will be 'modernisation' but any changes have to be negotiated in.

Members of the CMA [the union for Royal Mail managers, which is part of the Unite union] are doing the same as what they did in 2007. They are supporting the business. I don't know how they can call themselves a union. What

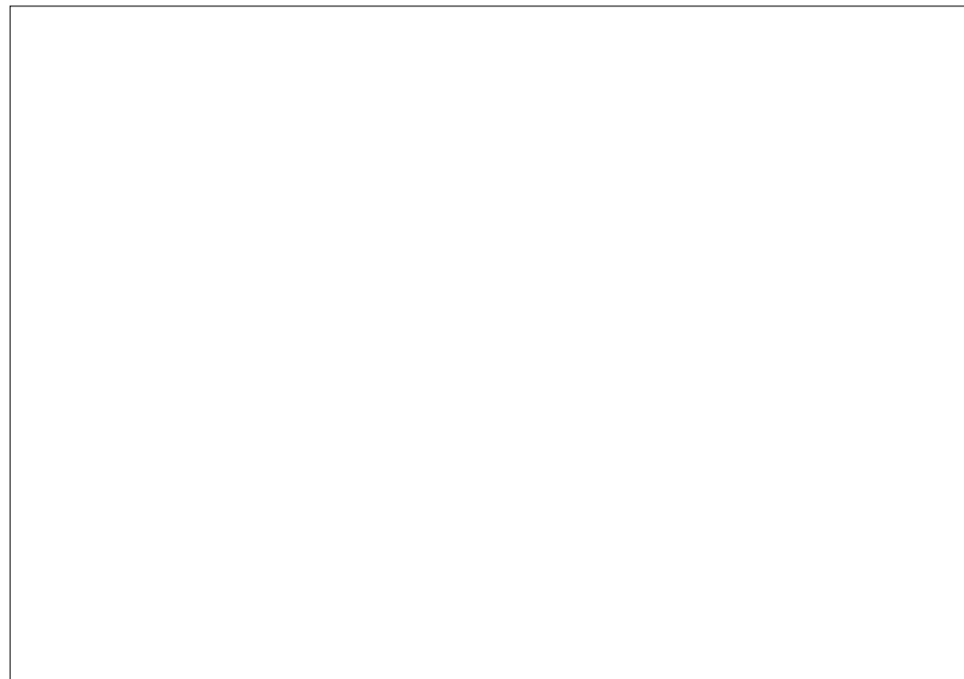
they are doing is abhorrent.

By sorting the mail, they're doing our jobs. They are delivering the priority mail, such as guaranteed-next-day-delivery. Managers have been shipped from Scotland to England to sort mail and do the work of posties down there (where there have been more local disputes than up here). We've also had Glasgow managers sent up to Dundee to sort mail there.

Royal Mail has also taken over the old Motorola factory in Bathgate, to use it as what they call a super mail centre. That's where the casual staff Royal Mail is taking on will be based.

This strike action is a last resort. We've tried negotiations but got nowhere. I think there's a deal to be got. But every time agreement seems close the Royal Mail negotiating team go back to their seniors, who then veto the possible agreement."





# Tories talk of strike ban

BY SACHA ISMAIL

**I**f they win the election, the Tories want to privatise the whole of Royal Mail. They also want to change the law to ban many of even those strikes still legal under the current anti-union laws.

According to the *Guardian* (30 October): "The Tories are looking at introducing laws setting new minimum turnout thresholds for strike ballots on the basis that they can only be lawful disputes if a majority of those being called out on strike have voted for it in a ballot".

The Tories' exact plans are unclear. When we phoned Tory Central Office, they could not tell us. But the *Guardian* report is one of several straws in the Tory wind.

The *Evening Standard* (22 October) has reported the Tory Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, as likely to press an incoming Tory government for "a ban on any strike which fails to get a required minimum turnout in a ballot of union members". The *Daily Mail* (11 June) has written: "John Major's Government had plans to outlaw strikes in essential services such as the Fire Brigade but lost office before they had a chance to imple-

ment them. David Cameron should revive those plans and make clear that transport will be included".

The Lib-Dems, who may be coalition partners for a Tory government, already have policy to ban strikes in "essential services".

The CWU had a big majority for strike action: a 76 percent yes vote on a 67 percent turnout. That is 50.9% of the members called out. But a 70% majority on a 70% turnout — a clear strike mandate — would be only 49%, and so no lawful basis for a strike on the basis of the Tory scheme reported by the *Guardian*.

Why should the law assume that all of those who do not vote are against a strike? And why, especially, when the anti-union laws enforce postal ballots, rather than workplace ballots, which would have a higher turnout?

If the Tories win the next election, they will do it with the votes of probably 20-25 percent of the electorate (40-45 percent on a 50-60 percent turnout). Will they say they have no democratic mandate?

In fact the right to strike is, or should be, a fundamental democratic right for every worker and every group of workers.

## "Out to crush our union"

**NORRIE WATSON, CWU  
DIVISIONAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN  
IRELAND SAYS:**

**"I**'ve been working for Royal Mail for 36 years and a member of the union for 34 years. Never in my life have I seen such solidarity in the union, and such solidarity from other unions.

Even members who have never been militant-minded are now taking to the streets, because they have been betrayed by their employer and by the government as well.

What's quite clear is that Royal Mail wants to crush this union, like a spider against a wall.

Thankfully, we've never seen such

public support, now that they understand what this dispute is about. We want a future for ourselves, for Royal Mail, and for the public as well. It's not about pay, although there are issues about pay and pensions involved.

When Mandelson came back on the scene after having been twice escorted away from government, it was just before the Hooper Report on Royal Mail was published [which recommended part-privatisation].

Mandelson had the report changed, to put the blame on the CWU. So it's a pack of lies when he says he's not interfering in the dispute."

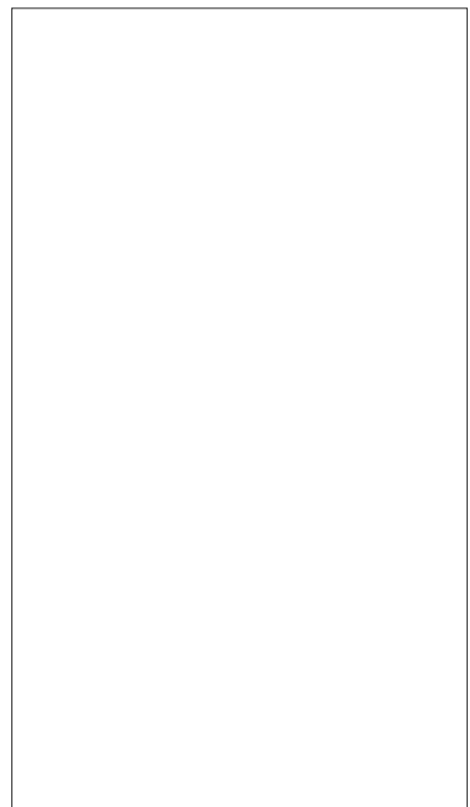
• Watson was speaking at a meeting of the United Left (the Broad Left in the Unite union) in Glasgow on Saturday 31 October.

## ENGLISH DEFENCE LEAGUE

# Anger in Leeds

Mike and Dave report from the Leeds demonstration against the English Defence League on 31 October

**E**ven apart from the invitation of the Lib-Dem local councillor currently embattled in trying to force pay cuts on local bin workers, the speeches at the rally had problems.



Being told repeatedly that Nazis are nasty does little to educate the movement. Most demonstrators seemed to have little time for such hollow talk, and there was a clear mood to directly confront the EDL.

We were told by Weyman Bennett of Unite Against Fascism (UAF) that a march would take place to "reclaim City Square" (the EDL's rallying point). But it depended on the police first dispersing the EDL. This "wait for the police" approach would have meant marching on an empty square, and was greeted by jeers from the rally.

Young people, and a group of young Asians, were at the forefront of pushing for a march, despite the unprecedented efforts of the police to scare students and young Asians off.

A letter had been circulated to local students warning them that they could get thrown off their courses if they got into trouble on the demonstration. The police, with the apparent support of community leaders, visited local mosques to warn against the risks of attending.

No march ever happened. After nearly four hours the demonstration had dwindled to the point where there was no one left to march.

The EDL had a rally and march in the centre of the city with hundreds looking on. They were able to propagate their nationalist, racist views from behind a police line, unchallenged.

The anger at UAF's approach seen in Leeds should mean a serious rethink for anti-fascists.

# Getting on to the doorsteps

BY XXXXX XXXX

**S**outh Yorkshire Stop the BNP was launched from a meeting of trade unionists, anti-fascists and residents of the city in July to mobilise working-class anti-fascism on the basis of "Real Problems, BNP Lies!"

We have chosen Firth Park, in the north of the city, as a target area where we can support local people to oppose the BNP on a positive basis of working-class unity and action to deal with real problems.

It is a council ward in which the BNP's "paper candidate" last year, Michael Smith, won 19.5% of the vote coming second to Labour. It is in a newly-created parliamentary constituency, Sheffield Hillsborough and Brightside, which brings several of the higher polling wards for the BNP — 21.3% and 25% in two others — together into one constituency.

We have been talking and leafleting door to door, building for a local meeting on 21 November. Many have been inter-

ested, showing real opposition to the fascists. Some who agree with some of the BNP's aims have been willing to discuss and to agree that bosses are exploiting both foreign-born and local-born workers.

After our first day of door-knocking, we were confronted by the BNP... on the picket lines of striking postal workers. In Woodseats, one striker was identified as a BNP council candidate for the area. He has been ejected from the CWU, but was still allowed to join the picket line. However, workers at the nearby Eccleshall Road office had responded to a BNP activist's attempt to intervene in the strike by forcing him away from the picket line.

Our meeting is just the start of our efforts to find out what the priorities are for the community and looking at ongoing ways to assert workers' interests in Sheffield. We believe that the fascists must also be combated in workplaces — the heart of exploitation and of the workers' fight back.

- [www.systopthebnp.com](http://www.systopthebnp.com)
- [info@systopthebnp.com](mailto:info@systopthebnp.com)

14 NOVEMBER

# Fascists target Glasgow

BY STAN CROOKE

**T**he Scottish Defence League (SDL), an offshoot of the English Defence League which has staged anti-Muslim demonstrations in several cities, plans an event in Glasgow on Saturday, 14 November.

According to a report in the Scottish *Sunday Mail*, "a mob of English racists and neo-Nazis" will be "invading Scotland" that day. "Despite portraying themselves as Scots", this "ragbag army of football hooligans, far-right activists and racist thugs" will travel to Scotland "from Birmingham, Luton, London and Carlisle."

"Most of the marchers will come from England," claims the article, and their aim will be to provoke "a confrontation with Scots Muslims".

The *Sunday Mail* is surely right to predict that the SDL event will receive support from England, and that it will aim to "confront" (i.e. intimidate and attack) anyone assumed to be a Muslim.

But it is wrong to imply that the SDL cannot mobilise support in Scotland. In the last Euro-elections, one in 40 votes cast in Scotland went to the BNP.

The SDL plan has triggered the launch of "Scotland United", bringing together trade unions, religious groups, political parties, and voluntary sector organisations.

The "Scotland United" founding statement calls on the City Council and the police to ban any SDL activity. (It is still not clear if the SDL plans a march or a static rally.)

"Scotland United" will also be staging its own rally — well away from anywhere near where the SDL are likely to be gathering. The slogans for the rally are: No to Racism and Fascism! No to Islamophobia! No to the English/Scottish Defence League! Yes to a Multi-Cultural, Multi-Religious, Multi-Racial, United Scotland!

One of its organisers has explained:

"Their [the SDL's] intent is to provoke a hostile response within the Muslim community, similar to the

scenes of the 1930s Cable Street protests led by Oswald Moseley, in which Jews were provoked into violent response to justify further injustices against them. ... Scotland's diverse and multiracial communities are not falling for that trick."

But Jews and anti-fascists did not "fall for a trick" at Cable Street when they kept the fascists out of the East End — they beat them. And they beat them by mobilising the numbers needed to confront them — not by going to a park on the other side of central London and holding a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial celebration!

The most energetic support for "Scotland United" probably comes from the Scottish-Islamic Forum, which appears to be loosely tied to the Muslim Brotherhood (and whose leading figure has been adopted as a parliamentary candidate by the SNP.)

Supporters of the "Scotland United" statement include Unite Against Fascism (UAF). In fact, the statement seems to be based on a UAF "template",

given that virtually the same text was used on the occasion of the 31 October EDL march in Leeds.

But *Socialist Worker* simultaneously plays the other side of the street, claiming: "UAF activists are gearing up for 14th November, when they will confront the racist thugs of the SDL."

Local SWP members claim that the UAF will be organising to confront the SDL, and that it will be supporting a meeting being held this week to organise against the SDL's attempts to take control of the streets.

That meeting has been organised in the main by members of the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP). But more recent versions of the "Scotland United" statement include among its signatories the SSP's sole elected representative and the SSP as an organisation. It is unclear how the SSP's name has ended up on the statement.

With only a fortnight to go to the SDL event, time is short for the secular Left to organise a proper challenge to the SDL.

## HISTORY

# The real lesson of Cable Street

BY IRA BERKOVIC

**T**he SWP claims that in the earlier part of the 20th century, socialists "united with the Jewish community" to fight racism, and so their call to "unite with the Muslim community" today has good precedent.

In fact, far from straightforwardly "uniting with" the Jewish community (as if it were a homogeneous bloc), revolutionaries — both from inside the community and outside — attempted to fight for socialist politics within it, and to split it along class lines.

Before World War One, when anti-semitism was the biggest form of racism in Britain, and immigration controls such as the Aliens Act of 1904 were specifically directed against Jews, Jewish anarcho-syndicalists led by Rudolph Rocker in East London (then heavily Jewish) defiantly held annual balls on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, a most important and solemn day in the Jewish religious calendar, and Saturday rallies outside synagogues at which they waved ham sandwiches.

In 1936, the Independent Labour Party and other socialists defied the right-wing conservatism of the Board of Deputies and the Jewish Chronicle — who were advising Jewish workers to stay away from anti-fascist demonstrations and rely on the police — in order to build the famous Cable Street blockade that prevented Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists from marching through the East End of London.

Socialists united with religious-minded workers in struggle, of course, and used good sense to avoid having strikes or demonstrations disrupted by artificial the arguments over religion. But they also expressed an explicit and irreverent hostility to religion. The record stands in stark contrast to the SWP's recent activity. In 2004, the SWP promoted George Galloway, the figurehead for their Respect front, as a "fighter for Muslims", with "strong religious principles" and teetotal.

The SWP claimed that their years of courting political-Islamist groups would enable them to win radicalised young Muslims over to socialism. In fact they have left the SWP helpless today when the conservative leaders of the Muslim communities counsel young Muslims to stay away from the anti-fascist demonstrations against the English Defence League.

In the 1930s there was a substantial and well-organised left within the Jewish community — people who had already reached socialist conclusions and who were prepared to struggle against the rabbis and their backward ideas.

With the chief exception of the small Worker-communist groups in Britain's Iraqi and Iranian refugee communities, no such organised element exists in the big majority of Britain's Muslim and Asian communities, and one cannot be "imposed" from outside. But there are workers and youth within Muslim communities open to radical and left-wing ideas. How will they gain the confidence to organise and expand their

influence if the socialists they come into contact with on demonstrations constantly advise them to "unite" with the conservatives in their communities

whom they are rebelling against?

- For more on Cable Street: <http://www.workersliberty.org/cable>
- Further reading: William Fishman,

# Opposing Islamism and the EDL

By DANIEL RANDALL

On Saturday 31 October, “Islam4UK” — a hardline Islamist organisation descended from Al-Muhajiroun — was due to hold a demonstration through central London in which it would demand the unilateral imposition of religious Sharia law on the UK.

The far-right English Defence League and the bourgeois-liberal British Muslims for Secular Democracy both planned counter-demonstrations.

In opposition to the politics of both Islamic fundamentalism and English nationalism, Workers’ Liberty worked with Iraqi and Iranian socialists to organise another mobilisation, to put forward a positive programme of working-class, anti-racist and anti-capitalist politics.

In the event, Islam4UK didn’t show; it is widely suspected that the entire operation was a provocative stunt designed to generate press interest (successfully, the

*Daily Express* gave them a disproportionate amount of coverage).

Around 80 EDL members spread between Trafalgar Square and Piccadilly Circus. And 50 BMSD supporters met at their rallying point. BMSD’s slogans and placards made no attempt to challenge the racists rallying so close to them. They concentrated all their fire on the now-phantom March4Sharia.

Our action, which took place in Trafalgar Square itself, involved comrades from various Worker-Communist groups (anti-Stalinist, internationalist socialists active in Iraq, Iran and Kurdistan).

As both the EDL and Islam4UK continue to assert themselves and their poisonous politics, it is vital that British socialists work closely with socialists, secularists and other radicals active within Britain’s Asian and Middle Eastern communities to fight for an alternative set of politics to those offered by fascism and religious fundamentalism.

## “The key is to struggle for equal rights for everyone.”

Nasrin Parvaz is a member of the Worker-Communist Party of Iran (Hekmatist), one of the organisations involved in the protest against March4Sharia and the EDL. She spoke to *Solidarity*.

**Q: Is the growth of Islamism within Britain’s Muslim communities a serious threat?**

**NP:** If the Islamists see no resistance, they’ll promote themselves. Official government policy is essentially anti-integration; they prefer us to be separated into our own distinct “communities”. That’s what’s helping minorities like Islam4UK gain power.

Government support for the religious establishment — for building mosques or religious schools, and so on — also helps entrench religious ideas within these communities; the religious right has significant financial resources which we don’t have access to.

The “Muslim communities” label is an unfair, unjust and untrue category that the government has stamped on immigrants and refugees from certain countries. This categorising policy is intended to marginalise immigrants on the one hand, and gives a boost to the most backward tendencies on the other.

It also silences those of us who fought with, and had to escape from, Islamism and religious law.

**Q: What do you think about the idea that opposing Islamism at a time when Muslims are under attack and anti-Muslim racism is on the increase actually feeds into racism?**

**NP:** We need to look at what “the Muslim community” actually means. Our “communities” aren’t single blocs — they’re full of all kinds of differences; political, cultural, even religious. It’s actually more offensive to buy into the Islamists’ claim that they’re the sole

legitimate representatives of our communities and that criticising them equates to racism. It’s also important to remember that it’s not only Muslims who are under attack by racists here; everyone who looks different might become subject to racists’ attacks.

**Q: How strong are radical and secular voices within these communities?**

**NP:** The media perception that secular voices within Muslim communities are in a minority — and that Islamists speak for the majority — is false. The media gives Islamists a platform and talks up their strength, but in reality the majority of people are pro-secularism.

**Q: What do you think about the threat posed by the EDL and other far-right/fascist organisations, and how should the left — alongside immigrant and refugee communities organise — to resist this threat?**

**NP:** I think to answer this question we need to look at a wider picture of the left; unfortunately, the left is fragmented and scattered. Because of that we cannot address important issues. We lack the basic solidarity which would bring us together to defend our basic rights. If we had solidarity, not only could we change this unjust social order, but we would have a strong enough voice to challenge both fascism and Islamism.

**Q: What do you think about groups like British Muslims for Secular Democracy, who approach the issue from a pro-capitalist, liberal perspective?**

**NP:** They’re about defending the status quo; we’re for a radical struggle for equality. They don’t share that view. It’s as simple as that. The key to all of this — fighting the Islamists, organising against racism — is to struggle for equal rights for everyone. That’s the starting point.

## BRITISH MUSLIMS FOR SECULAR DEMOCRACY

# “Re-promoti

On the weekend of 31 October, British Muslims for Secular Democracy organised a demonstration against the (cancelled) Islam4UK march in central London. Its vice-chair, Dr Shaaz Mahboob, spoke to *Solidarity*, about their aims and political views.

British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD) began in 2006. It was felt that the concept of democracy was being slowly eroded within the British Muslim community. More and more Muslims had the idea that politics is entirely about foreign policy — the Iraq war, Palestine and so on — and confidence in democratic forces and the governing principles of democracy were fading.

The organisation was begun by those who wanted to “re-promote” the idea of secular democracy — the idea that only a secular democracy can provide the breathing space for people who follow different faiths or no faith at all to prosper, to create an environment without preference or discrimination in which people can live according to their own wishes.

The founders were Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, the journalist, and Nasrin Rahman, the well-known playwright — good friends who agreed to work together.

I joined because, after 7/7, I had been involved in a group called Progressive British Muslims, but I decided we should pool our resources.

We launched formally in May 2008, after we’d successfully registered with the Charity Commission.

We don’t have members, as we don’t claim to be a representative organisation. We function more as a think tank, commenting on issues, lobbying, influencing policy. We have a vast range of individuals on our mailing lists.

**What sort of people are involved in the organisation?**

In terms of ethnic origin, there are people on our board from South Asia, East Africa, and now North Africa as well. In terms of religious belief, it’s not important to us. Some people are religious, some are not, but for our activity it’s not relevant. From our point of view, if you identify yourself as a Muslim, you are, whether it’s religious, cultural or whatever.

One important thing to note is the involvement of women in BMSD. We were founded by women, our director Tehmina Kazi is female, so is our chair Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, so is my co-vice-chair Nasrin Rahman.

**What have you done since you were founded?**

Dr Shaaz Mahboob

Last weekend was our first demonstration. Prior to that, we’ve focused mainly on holding low-key events which would get together 10 or 15 young people to discuss contentious issues they felt unable to discuss in their community, in their family, among their friends, whether it’s for cultural reasons or whatever — issues like the burkha, or sex before marriage. We would involve these people via our email lists, through Facebook and so on.

We have also run “democracy workshops” alongside Praxis, which supports new immigrants and refugees when they arrive in the UK. These discuss the basic ideas of democracy and allow people to discuss their reservations about how they perceive democracy in this country. It’s a two-way dialogue.

In addition, we’ve held high-level meetings with the Home Office and the Foreign Office to discuss policies that are being formulated, and participated in delegations to Muslim countries.

**Why do you think political Islam has been growing?**

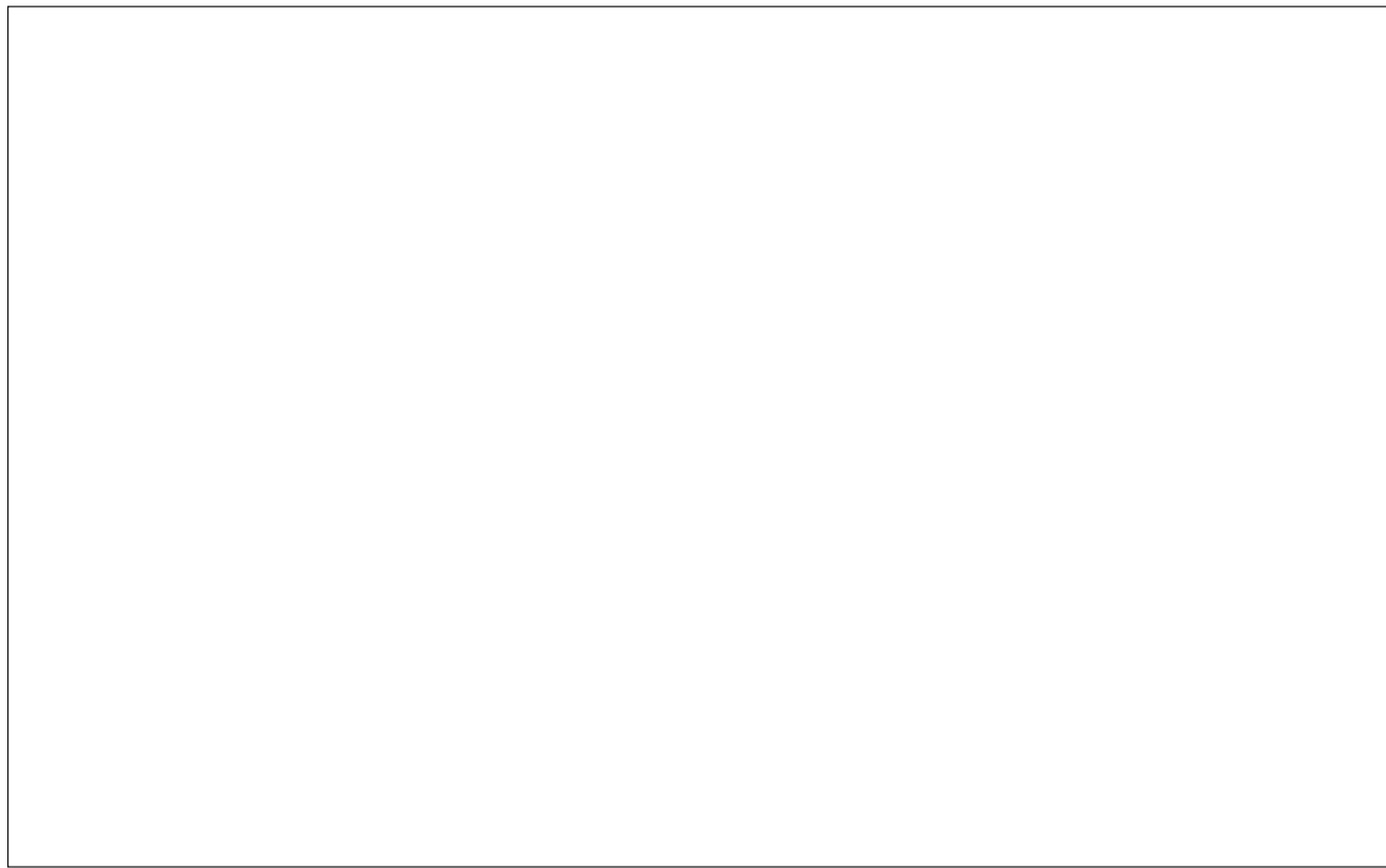
It’s partly a reaction to events since 9/11. Because of certain policies that have emerged from the western powers, from Britain and the US, people have asserted their religious identity. Before that, racism and discrimination were a focus for communities, but since then religion has taken precedence — particularly for Muslims, who have faced a lot of discrimination as Muslims. So it’s a good time for hard-line religious organisations to capture the imagination of young people.

Of course there were influential Islamist organisations before, for instance the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jamaat e-Islami in Pakistan. But after the fall of the USSR their influence was on the decline — until 9/11.

**Isn’t there a social element too? I mean, don’t we have to look at the**



# ing secular democracy”



**social conditions in which they are recruiting young people?**

I think if you look at the differences between Britain and America, they are significant. In the US, there was much more careful control of which Muslims were allowed to enter, for economic needs, and you got mainly people from educated backgrounds, often from the big cities. In Britain, you had mass immigration in the 1950s and after, often people from rural backgrounds who ended up working in industries like the textile mills. They often had very conservative ideas, and clinging to their traditional religion and culture seemed like a way of preserving their identity in a period of flux. This was particularly true after jobs like textiles started to disappear.

That’s the mix in which the Islamists are recruiting today.

**Isn’t there another element to this, by which I mean the decline of working-class organisations like unions which previously would have integrated migrants but are now much, much weaker? And the decline of the left? Even 20 years ago many disaffected Asian youth looked to the left, but now these people are going to the Islamists and other communalists.**

You’re right that institutions like unions faded away. But don’t assume that people were always engaged by these organisations. A big problem is that bodies like

unions failed to engage immigrant workers, and left them to their own devices. They experienced racism not only from the state, but from institutions at every level of British society. To an extent, there was a wall between the native British population and newcomers, a wall running all the way down.

**On a related point, some might say that yours is a middle-class movement which can’t relate to those the Islamists attract. How would you respond?**

I would say that somebody had to come up with the organisation, and we did it. All we can do is use the channels available — including the press outside the mainstream, like your paper — to reach the communities that are facing serious discrimination and social problems. And, in fact, more and more people are approaching us and asking for guidance. We are looking to form alliances and expand our network. If we do that we are confident we can engage with young Muslims, and help them take control of their destinies independently of the extremist clerics and the sectarians.

**Could you be seen as endorsing the status quo? After all, we don’t live in a secular state. And there is an erosion of secularism, for instance with religious schools.**

What we believe is that in all practical senses, British is a secular

democracy, more secular in fact than France or Turkey (which take discriminatory measures such as banning headscarfs) or the US, where there is a massive religious influence in both political and daily life. So in a way we do endorse the status quo. If there are moves to rethink the constitutional set up in Britain, we wouldn’t object to that, but for the time being we want to make the best of the democracy we have and encourage people to engage with it.

We feel that when people turn to the Islamists, or to far-right organisations like the EDL, they are like a youngster with a new car who doesn’t know how to drive — and then curses the car. We need to get people to learn to engage with democracy again.

On schools, we are absolutely opposed to all-state funded religious schools. You can’t stop private schools, but state-run religious schools are against everything we stand for. By subsidising religious schools we move towards a model of institutionalised religious discrimination, where a few people are favoured and a majority discriminated against. I mean, there are people who claim Jedi is a religion — logically, why shouldn’t they have their own schools too?

**What’s your assessment of the demonstration on Saturday?**

It was a huge success — to be honest we weren’t expecting such suc-

cess in terms of turnout and in terms of Islam4UK cancelling their march. In fact, they moved it to another location in East London, where they felt more secure; an obscure location, so that the press only found out later.

They cancelled because they felt it would be embarrassing to be challenged by a large group of democrats, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. They would have been exposed as a tiny fringe, as against the large majority of British Muslims and non-Muslims who are sick of people trying to use religion or nationality as a political punchline. So we had our counter-demonstration, but instead it turned into a positive celebration of democracy and freedom.

**Why didn’t you raise anti-EDL slogans too?**

The police told us that the EDL were not involved, as did the English Democrats. The people there on the day had none of the slogans or rhetoric the EDL bring with them. There was no friction, and they said nothing against us. As far as we could tell they were not racist or Islamophobic. We kept our distance from them, but I want to repeat that there was no friction.

We only had minimal interaction with the English Democrats, but there was nothing that implied that they are racist or homophobic. We’re watchful of what people do or might do in future, which is why we kept our demonstration separate, but there was no indication of anything like that.

Please note that we didn’t even attack Islam4UK, or al-Muhajiroun, or [their leader] Anjem Choudary directly. Our slogans were positive slogans in favour of democracy.

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# Berlusconi: some further questions

BY CATH FLETCHER

**W**hile Hugh Edwards' article (*Solidarity* 161) gives a useful account of Berlusconi's history, there are a few further points that should be made about the current state of Italian politics.

Much of the current furore around Berlusconi, at least in the British press, has centred on the sex scandal. He has been criticised for an alleged affair with a much younger woman and over whether or not he paid for sex. But frankly, none of this is very relevant to our judgement of Berlusconi.

At most we might observe that it could create problems for him with some of his more Catholic-minded right-wing milieu, but we should be very clear that we do not judge politicians on the basis of their private sexual activity. In recent days, the president of the Lazio region, Piero Marrazzo, a member of the centre-left Democratic Party, resigned after claims he had been associating with a transgender sex worker. As with Berlusconi, the scandal is largely reactionary, and we should have no truck with it.

On the more positive side, the Berlusconi scandal does seem to have prompted some discussion in feminist circles about broader issues of sexism in Italian society. An internet film by Lorella Zanardo, a journalist, reflecting on sexism on Italian TV, has attracted considerable attention with public screenings in a number of cities. (A version with English subtitles is at <http://www.ilcorpodelledonne.net/> — the title means "The Body of Women".) The politics of the discussion are, as yet, limited, focusing heavily around the question of body image, but the existence of a debate is certainly to be welcomed.

On Berlusconi's position more broadly, the likely impact of the revived corruption trials is hard to judge. He has said that, even if found guilty in the Mills case, he will not resign. The sad truth, though, is that he is more likely to be brought down by right-wing rivals deciding his position is untenable than by any serious campaign of the left.

There is plenty of unhappiness within the Italian bourgeoisie at Berlusconi's failure to tackle organised crime and at his undermining of the judiciary. Yet, despite the impact of the economic crisis, the left remains in disarray following the collapse of the Prodi government. The major unions, tied into the project for a new Democratic Party, have managed to staff a series of street stalls in Rome as a protest against job losses. That's about it. Some of the small rank-and-file unions called a general strike on 23 October, but without winning over substantial sections of the big federations it was never likely to have much impact.

Finally, I would take issue with a couple of points made by Hugh Edwards in the conclusion to his article. The idea of an Italy "deep in the throes of economic decline" is a popular image in Italian politics, but we should remember that Italy, unlike the UK, is out of recession. Its relatively conservative banking sector survived the credit crunch far better than Britain's, and its manufacturing industry also held up pretty well.

Italy is still one of the top ten richest countries in the world: indeed, it's only in the last few years that China has overtaken it in terms of GDP, and think of the vast difference in population.

I'm also a little sceptical about comparisons between Berlusconi and Mussolini. Berlusconi is, essentially, a populist demagogue. That doesn't make him a fascist. The various ex-fascists in his political party seem, for the most part, to be happily making their careers in bourgeois politics. In a real political crisis that might change but for now I think our assessment should be a little more measured.

## AUSTRIAN FREE EDUCATION FIGHT

# Occupations in Vienna

BY PATRICK ROLFE

**S**ince 22 October around two thousand students and university staff have been occupying several parts of the main university in Vienna, demanding an end to restrictive admissions practices, tuition fees, and the marketisation of education. Their action has swept across Austria, with seven universities now occupied around the country.

Students and workers are fighting the Bologna process — a process of standardisation across the whole of European higher education, which seeks to reorganise the university sector as a selective, expensive, two-tier system. What began as a protest against the reorganisation of degrees into two categories (bachelor's and master's), has broadened out into a mass movement against an elitist, anti-democratic, neoliberal style of education.

The protestors' demands are radical and uncompromising: the abolition of all fees for EU students and foreign students, an end to precarious working conditions for university staff, the removal of all restrictions to education, free access to master's degrees, and the full democratisation of all universities.

These demands go further than funding, or administration of education, and fundamentally challenge the organisation of universities in a neoliberal system. They challenge the conception of education as a commodity that can be produced in a factory for learning, and then sold on the open market. They challenge the idea that institutions can be run by a hierarchy of unelected bosses and managers.

Students and workers in Austria are fighting for better education, but they are also creating a better world in the bloated corpse of the old — the occupation in Vienna "is a place where current educational questions are discussed in open working groups and presented to the public in regular basic democratic plenary sessions." No struggle against cuts, against fees, or

against university management can succeed unless it poses an alternative way to run education — no struggle can succeed unless it points towards a better world in every one of its demands, and in every one of its actions.

- English-language website: <http://emancipating-education-for-all.org/content/academy-arts-vienna-occupied>

- German-language website: <http://www.malenach-zahlen.at>

# Student struggles go global

BY DARREN BEDFORD

**S**tudents all over Europe — and, indeed, the world — are planning a wave of high-level direct action as part of the Global Week of Action, called by the "International Students Movement".

This movement, while originating as the initiative of a small number of activists based in Germany, has used the internet and social networking sites to create an impressive worldwide network of contacts that have responded to its calls for international action for free education.

The upcoming week of action (actually ten days) is scheduled for 9-18 November, with a "warm-up day" on 5 November. The supporters' list includes UK organisations such as Education Not for Sale, as well as a huge range of organisations from across the globe. Germany, France and Italy are all traditional centres of student activism, but the list also includes organisations from Morocco, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Bosnia, Poland, America and Canada.

The last week of action, which took place in April, saw protests, rallies and occupations in a wide range of countries. Finnish students coordinated a banner drop from the roof of their university in Tampere, while students at the university of Zagreb in Croatia occupied the Faculty of Philosophy. Moroccan students organised public exhibitions putting the case for free education, and students in Catalonia occupied Sabadell's Escola Industrial. Thousands of students took part in various actions across Austria, and in the UK students at the University of Sheffield used the week to disrupt a university-run careers fair that was attended by several arms manufacturers with whom the university has substantial financial links.

Radical student struggles also took place across

Europe in countries like Italy in September and October 2009. Thousands of students sparked a wave of occupations against cuts — including significant redundancies — at various universities and colleges throughout the country, culminating in a mass national demonstration in Rome on 3 October.

Against the backdrop of such struggles, and of course an ongoing and thousands-strong occupation in Vienna, the upcoming Week of Action has the potential to be even bigger. In France, high-school and sixth-form students are leading the way with a call for a national mobilisation on 17 November. This is intended to build up to united action with education sector workers, whose unions have called a day of action on 24 November. German student activists based in Stuttgart have called for demonstrations on 17 November, and are planning a state-wide demonstration on 21 November in support of strikes taking place in the education sector. Bosnian students are planning coordinated actions across several universities, including Sarajevo and Zenica, for Sunday 1 November. Students in Nepal are also planning activity.

The global nature of the protests is significant precisely because of the global nature of the attacks faced. Governments and education sector bosses right across the globe are united in their project to create education systems where learning is a commodity and in which schools, colleges and universities are training grounds for the obedient workers of tomorrow. While it might be difficult to coordinate joint action between students in Europe and, say, Nepal, any group of activists taking on their university management can only be emboldened by the knowledge that there are thousands of others like them doing the same thing across the world. The bosses have built their global consensus around their vision of education; it's time for us to start building ours.

“STALIN’S NEMESIS”

# Leon Trotsky and the annihilation of classical Marxism

Paul Hampton reviews *Stalin’s Nemesis: The Exile and Murder of Leon Trotsky* by Bertrand Patenaude

**I**n the early hours of 24 May 1940, twenty men in uniform led burst into the last refuge of Leon Trotsky. The muralist David Siqueiros and his Stalinist cohort riddled Trotsky’s Mexican sanctuary with over 300 shots.

Seventy three bullet holes were counted in the doors, walls, windows and mattresses. Trotsky survived because his partner Natalia had the presence of mind to slide out their bed and drag the Old Man into a corner. Trotsky’s grandson Vsevolod (Seva) Volkov scrambled under his bed and was grazed by a bullet shot through his mattress. Several unexploded bombs were found on the patio — intended to obliterate the Trotsky archives — testimony to the horrors of Stalinism.

The assault was the first attempt to carry out Operation Utka (Duck), the Stalinist secret service (NKVD) codename for Stalin’s order, issued in 1939, to liquidate Trotsky by whatever means necessary. The second attempt, by a lone assassin, would prove successful just three months later.

Bertrand Patenaude’s book has been widely reviewed and discussed in both the bourgeois press and on the left. His account has some of same breathless literary-journalistic intensity that characterises Isaac Deutscher’s trilogy on Trotsky. The book cannot be faulted for readability; despite the known ending, the author has composed a compelling narrative.

What do we learn from Patenaude that has not been known before? Politically almost nothing — for example on the Russian question, or on Trotsky’s assessment of Bonapartism in Mexico, or his discussions on the *Transitional Programme*. There is a little more about Trotsky as a person — particularly in the realm of his “sexual indiscretions”. However we learn rather more about the conduct of the assassination, particularly from the Russian side.

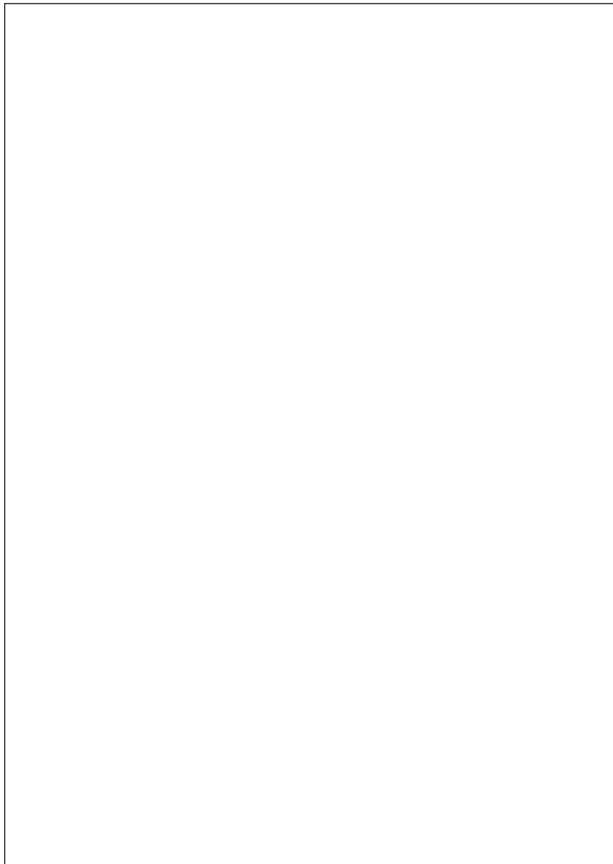
The personal tragedy of Trotsky’s last years is well brought out by Patenaude. Essentially Trotsky lost most of his family before his own death — including many at the hands of Stalin’s executioners. It is not surprising to learn of Trotsky’s ill-health, which was more than just the product of what he called “the sixties”. This included well-known and longstanding headaches, dizziness and high blood pressure, psychosomatic fevers as well as agitation, sweats and persistent insomnia. In February 1940, fearing he had advanced arteriosclerosis and would have a brain haemorrhage, Trotsky wrote his last will and testament.

Trotsky does not come out of the book as a terribly likable human being. He was famed for his explosive temper. Perhaps the harshest verdict came in a letter from Lyova to his mother, which he never sent. He wrote: “I think all Papa’s deficiencies have not diminished as he has grown older but under the influence of his isolation... have gotten worse. His lack of tolerance, hot temper, inconsistency, even rudeness, his desire to humiliate, offend and even destroy have increased.”

Patenaude’s account is probably the most extensive account to date of Trotsky love life. He describes in detail Trotsky’s affair with Frida Kahlo. Trotsky was judged to be an “experienced philanderer”, though apparently the relationship with Kahlo was his first “romantic adventure” since he left Russia in 1929. The narrative does none of the characters any favours. It verges on voyeurism — though this is much in keeping with modern biographical writing.

The book is probably at its best in describing the assassination, particularly its use of Russian sources.

Trotsky arrived in Mexico on the Norwegian oil tanker Ruth on 1 January 1937. *Time* magazine printed a blunt assessment of the situation: “Today Trotsky is in Mexico — the ideal country for an assassination”. His first months were spent refuting the



Leon Trotsky in Mexico

slanders of the Moscow Trials at the Dewey Commission. Dewey, then a world famous philosopher in his late seventies became convinced of Trotsky’s innocence. Apparently he told Trotsky, “If all Communists were like you, I would be a Communist”, to which Trotsky replied, “If all liberals were like you, I would be a liberal.” Dewey wrote to his former student (and Trotsky’s translator) Eastman that his experience of the Commission, “if it wasn’t exactly a ‘good time’, it was the most interesting single intellectual experience of my life”.

The Moscow trials were, in Lyova words, “a labyrinth of sheer madness”. They were also a precursor to the assassination. Lyova was betrayed by Étienne (Mark Zborowski), whose NKVD codenames were Mack and Tulip. In 1936 he was responsible for the theft of part of Trotsky’s archives in Paris, some 103 letters including his correspondence with Eastman, which ended up in the Kremlin. Zborowski also supplied his masters with a copy of *The Revolution Betrayed* before its publication and a copy of Lyova’s notebook, containing the addresses of Trotskyists living outside the USSR.

In March 1939 Pavel Sudoplatov, head of the Administration for Special Tasks, which included sabotage, abduction and assassination was taken by NKVD chief Lavrenti Beria to meet Stalin. He was told by Stalin: “Trotsky should be eliminated within a year.” Sudoplatov planned his operation from room 735 of Lubyanka, the headquarters of the NKVD in Moscow. He recruited Leonid Eitingon, the chief of intelligence in Spain. The details were finalised on 9 July 1939. Operation Duck envisioned an assortment of methods: “poisoning of food, of water, explosion in home, explosion of car using TNT, a direct strike — suffocation, dagger, blow to the head, gunshot. Possibly an armed assault by a group.” They requested a budget of \$31,000 over six months. Stalin authorised the operation in the first days of August 1939.

In Spain, Eitingon started a relationship with Caridad Mercader. As a result her son Ramón was recruited to the NKVD in February 1937. In late 1937 Eitingon sent him to Paris, with forged Belgian identity papers as Jacques Mornard. His NKVD code-name was Raymond. He hitched up with Sylvia

Ageloff, an American Trotskyist whose sister Ruth had served during the Dewey hearing. Leaving Europe on 1 September 1939, he became Frank Jacson, a Canadian born in Yugoslavia in order to enter the US. From there Eitingon and the Mercaders went to Mexico, setting up an operation codenamed “Mother”.

At the same time the NKVD had a larger network in Mexico City, around Siqueiros and codenamed after his flaring nostrils, Horse. Siqueiros had enlisted in the International Brigade in Spain, working with well-known Stalinists such as Vittorio Vidali, known as Carlos Contreras. The leading figure in the network was Iosif Grigulevich, codename Felipe, who had taken part in the suppression of socialists and anarchists in Barcelona in May 1937. In February 1940 Grigulevich and Eitingon met in Mexico City to coordinate their operations.

Patenaude argues that the NKVD had contacts in the Trotskyist movement. He states that Robert Sheldon Harte was recruited in New York, and known by his codename Amur. Harte took over as a guard in Coyoacán on 7 April 1940. He held clandestine meetings with Felipe, who told him the objective was the destruction of Trotsky’s archive, including his “slandorous” biography of Stalin, said to be based on forged documents supplied by Hitler.

It was Harte who, upon hearing Felipe’s voice, opened the heavy bolt on the door of Trotsky’s house on 24 May 1940 to let in the raiders. Harte left with the attackers, although it was not clear whether this was under duress. Local paper reports at the time said a picture of Stalin had been found in his room in New York, but his family denied this. More seriously, the police found a key to Room 37 of the Hotel Europa, where he had spent the night of 21 May 1940 with a prostitute. She told police he was carrying a large amount of money that night. He was further implicated as participants were caught. Only the manner of Harte’s death sustained his reputation. He was killed by the attackers in his sleep and buried in quicklime in the hills above Mexico City. Trotsky identified his remains at the morgue and continued to protest his innocence.

In the two and half months following the Siqueiros raid, the American SWP raised over \$2,250 to improve Trotsky’s security. The sale of Trotsky’s archives raised an additional \$6,000 — the precious cargo arriving at Harvard, as fate would have it, on 20 August 1940.

Ramón Mercader met Trotsky for the first time four days after the assault. He ingratiated himself with Alfred and Marguerite Rosmer, and even drove Natalia back from Veracruz when she went to see off the Rosmers. On 17 August he visited Trotsky with an article he had written against Burnham and Shachtman. Trotsky told Natalia he didn’t like the man, while other guards had suspicions about his accent, the spelling of his name (Jacson) and his callous comments about Sylvia Ageloff. He came again about the article three days later, using the opportunity to bludgeon Trotsky with an ice-pick. Although Trotsky survived for a further day in hospital, he died on 21 August 1940, cut down by the Stalinists.

On 17 June 1941 Caridad Mercader and Leonid Eitingon were awarded the Order of Lenin at a ceremony in the Kremlin. After the war Iosif Grigulevich received the Order of the Red Star for his role. Ramón Mercader was imprisoned for 20 years. His real identity was revealed in 1950. Upon his release, he went to Cuba, Czechoslovakia and then the USSR. On 8 June 1961, Brezhnev awarded him the title Hero of the Soviet Union, and gave him the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star medal in a secret ceremony in the Kremlin. The award citation praised him for displaying “heroism and bravery” in carrying out a ‘special task’. Mercader lived in the USSR and Cuba for the

Continued on page 12

From page 11

rest his days, dying in Havana in 1978. It was only in January 1989 that a Russian publication told its readers that the Kremlin had ordered Trotsky's murder.

Patenaude's book is an evocative description of Trotsky's murder. But it is less good on why he was killed or its significance. At times his account appears to reduce the murder to a personal vendetta. He recounts the stormy scene in the Politburo on 25 October 1926, at which the opposition finally endorsed Lenin's Testament, published in the US. After Stalin had railed against them, Trotsky declared: "The First Secretary poses his candidature to the post of gravedigger of the revolution". Stalin turned pale and became flustered, then rushed out of the hall, slamming the door behind him.

But for all the undoubted desire of Stalin to "mark" his opponents (and even his allies), this explanation is insufficient. Stalin's purge was the work of an ascendant bureaucratic ruling class sloughing off the last remnants of its distant origins. Stalin wanted to break all the living links with the great revolution of 1917 save his own, obliterate its actual leaders and annihilate its real tradition. Trotsky was the last and most powerful bond with that past.

The killing of Trotsky effectively meant the destruction of the classical Marxist tradition. What Trotsky embodied was the culture of Marxism, the accumulated wisdom of a century of working class self-emancipation, the congealed insights of countless battles on the economic, political and ideological fronts of the class struggle. With Trotsky's death, the main living trunk that ran from Marx and Engels through the best of the second and third internationals was terminated, able to live on only in reified form spread among the branches of squabbling epigones.

Trotsky was killed, but Stalin did not succeed. It is Trotsky's tradition, not Stalin's that lives on. It is Trotsky's line that represents the hope of the present and the harbinger of the socialist future. And it is Trotsky's legacy that still provides vital signposts for our own struggles.

• A longer version of this review is at <http://www.workersliberty.org/blogs/paulhampton/2009/09/18/leon-trotsky-and-annihilation-classical-marxism>

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### TELEVISION

# Debunking racist myths

The US state education system is based on "a white middle class paradigm"

Bruce Robinson reviews *Race and Intelligence: Science's Last Taboo*, 26 October, Channel 4. (Still viewable on Channel 4's website).

**S**omali-born Rageh Omaar's programme entered the "dangerous territory" of the purported relationship between race and intelligence. Every few years it reappears in the form of the assertion that IQ tests show black people to be less intelligent than whites and that this is caused by genetic differences.

It is pushed by a small group of academics and taken up by the far right but never, in Omaar's (wrong) opinion, resolved because of a reluctance to confront and refute the evidence they produce.

Omaar sets out "uncomfortably" to face its proponents — Richard Lynn, who talks of the dangers of immigration of low IQ people into Europe, and J. Philippe Rushton, who claims black people and women have smaller brains — and to examine their arguments critically.

He first demolishes IQ tests as a measure of intelligence. Rather a high IQ shows an aptitude for the type of abstract reasoning and highly culturally specific knowledge the tests test. The "Flynn effect" shows that over time, as societies become modernised and those forms of reasoning dominate, all scores rise and the "race gap" closes.

Later in the programme, the idea of race comes in for the same treatment. For Steve Jones, there are genetic differences between humans, but they are small, and heredity tells us nothing about race and IQ. Steven Rose states that the persistence of the debate, rather than being based on science, can only be explained by our living in a racist society.

Controversially, for Omaar there is more to it than that, as, even if one rejects any genetic or hereditary explanation and IQ as a measure of intelligence, there

still has to be a reason why black kids score lower on the tests than white and East Asian ones do.

His explanation, given that "the 'race gap' isn't about race at all", centre on cultural background and class.

That East Asians score well is put down to a Confucian work ethic, which slides into the explanation that what is necessary is the adoption of "middle class values" and more parental involvement in their kids' education.

However as African-American psychologist Reema Reynolds points out the problem is rather that the whole US state education system is based on "a white, middle class paradigm" in which IQ tests serve as a better prediction of "whose Mother drives a Volvo" than of intelligence. According to Reynolds, poorer black parents often do not take such an active part in their child's education because it would mean losing money at work or because they are inhibited by their own experience of education. Much is also down to the opportunities and support provided in schools, as Omaar shows in a highly academically successful school in the South Bronx with small classes where the students are involved and ambitious.

Some will argue that Omaar should have respected the taboo on discussing race and intelligence, as raising the question only gives publicity to non-scientific myths. However as long as there are people prepared to present those myths as scientific and they force their way into public debate, it is necessary to take them on and debunk them as this programme did.

He ends by saying that if the reasons for differences are economic and social rather than racial and genetic, that is not something that we as a society should be proud of. Rather for socialists they are another spur to creating a society where all forms of intelligence and creativity are recognised, and where there is real equality.

## WHERE WE STAND

**T**oday 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.

## SANS PAPIERS STRIKES

# Migrant workers strike for legal status

BY ED MALTBY

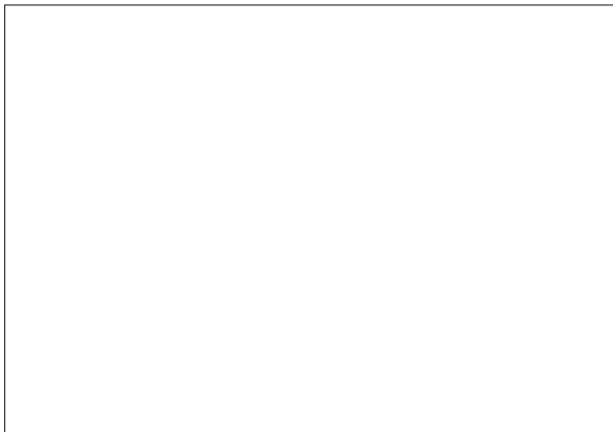
**S**ince 12 October, a new wave of strikes by around 4,000 undocumented migrant workers (*sans-papiers*, “without papers”) has swept France. At the time of writing, over 40 workplaces have been occupied by the workers, who are demanding “regularisation” (legal status), employment rights, and changes in immigration law to make life easier for France’s hyper-exploited immigrant workforce.

The French labour movement has learnt its lessons from previous *sans-papier* strikes in May 2008 (see *Solidarity* 3/133), and has rallied to support them. The movement is using a variety of imaginative tactics to beat the bosses’ repression, and the French government is now coming under increasing political pressure. Most of the strikes are concentrated in the Paris region, but they are also taking place as far afield as Essonne.

Some strikers are in workplaces that employ a large number of migrant workers; others either work alone, or have been sent to a particular workplace by an unscrupulous employment agency, where they have a different contract to all their workmates. The movement has organised these “isolated” workers and helped them to find a collective strength.

For instance, the offices of several employment agencies have been occupied by hundreds of “isolated” *sans-papiers* workers, some of whom work for them, others of whom are employed by a different agency. When one occupation is cleared out by the police or bosses, the workers go and take over another building. Many temping agencies are now refusing to open their offices, for fear of being overrun by strikers! Elsewhere, pickets are set up at a particular workplace, and isolated workers from across that district are invited to attend.

Undocumented migrant workers are some of the most exploited workers in French society. Prevented from organising by fear of deportation, obliged to pay social security contributions but barred from access to benefits or health insurance, they live a twilight existence in Victorian conditions. They are employed in dangerous and dirty jobs — security, construction and cleaning. Although invisible, they work at the heart of



This centre is used as a base for organising

the French economy. Their industrial muscle is huge. Employers are begging the government to intervene. The Sarkozy government has made a lot of political capital out of scapegoating migrants. Now, in the face of the economic chaos and the political pressure generated by the strikes, Sarkozy’s racist chickens are coming home to roost.

In the May 2008 strike wave around 600 workers, mainly concentrated in Paris, staged a series of workplace occupations. Those occupations did not involve “isolated” workers, and had more limited demands. However, they solidified networks of communication and organisation between *sans-papier* workers in Paris and also introduced organisers in the main union federations to the *sans-papiers* communities and the neighbourhood collectives which had previously been the focus for migrant organisation. Those strikes were organised almost entirely without union involvement until just before the strikes began.

Now, networks of *sans-papiers* exist in workplaces and through union structures, which makes co-ordinating action easier and faster. In addition the NGO-style groups that have traditionally supported *sans-papiers*, like the Collectives, or the *sans-papiers* school-student organisation RESF, have played an important role in solidarity work. As one union militant put it, “What the

movement is, is not just trade unions, but a social movement analogous to the LKP alliance that animated the Guadeloupe general strike, between unions, associations, NGOs and community groups, which forced the Guadeloupe government to make a deal. This is neither pure political pressure, nor pure industrial pressure, nor NGO-style ‘awareness raising’ or ‘issue creation’, but a mixture of all three, in a way which complements each other. What you have is an active movement based on industrial muscle, a political agenda and an emotive, moral case. That is truly indomitable. That is where I think we can see the strength of the movement.

“The tramway occupation at Porte des Lilas is kept strong because all the bakers in the district bring them their unsold bread every evening. People are always there with support — there have been thousands of euros donated, just from solidarity donations on this one picket line, this one part of this whole wave of disputes and strikes. They’ve got tents and sleeping bags from the NPA, the PCF, there are union members on the picket line every day, and massive general support.”

*Sans-papiers* workers are also organising alongside French-born workers in their workplaces to demand basic working rights and to “civilise” the most exploitative industries where they are employed. This movement will not just change the law on immigration in France, but will act as a major organising drive in some of the least-organised, most-casualised sections of the French economy.

As one union activist from the Solidaires union federation put it, “The *sans-papier* movement was defined by what was lacking, what made you different or inferior to others. But this fight is being conducted on the basis of what you have in common with others — the fact that you are workers. So at the end of this struggle they will get their papers, sure, but they will still be workers and they will not leave the struggle.

“There can be no doubt in light of this struggle, that unions have their faults, but they are the universities of the working class. They have shown that they can take the least educated members of the working class, show them that a union is what they need, and leave these workers in the driving seat of a major mass movement and contribute to a major advance in struggle.”

## Strikers speak out

**Badiaga, Camara, Doukouré, Dramé, Gakou, Kouyaté, Siby, Sylla are delegates from the Seni strikers, industrial cleaners at Kremlin-Bicêtre (Val-de-Marne). They are members of the CGT.**

### How do you explain this movement?

The struggle was started by those who are currently contracted with Seni, but we have among us comrades who were employed in the past for short contracts. On our picket line, there are some comrades who are not presently employed by Seni. Some have been sacked, some as long as five years ago. Some of us are in the process of being regularised.

### The movement is demanding a general change in the laws on regularisation...

If such a change is won, we want it to be in our favour, so that the law recognises the undocumented migrant workers who work and live here, and pay their taxes. Without discrimination, even against those who have not worked for a year. We want papers for all workers, even those who work illegally.

### What do you want the support committees to do?

We want them to help us shift the situation forward. By signing petitions, by collecting solidarity money, by participating in our demonstrations. Some of us are parents of schoolchildren: we are counting on the support of the RESF network, who can mobilise other parents of schoolchildren, and their teachers.

### Why is regularisation a trade union demand?

Yesterday, with the CGT, we created a union for workers at Seni, with or without papers. We have elected our representatives. The major struggle is currently

around papers. From there, we want to concentrate on the right to housing, wage demands, the recognition of retirement rights, the respect of our statutory rest period, the right to sick leave, the recognition of work accidents... All things which the bosses deny to migrant workers. We want everyone to be able to live with dignity in this, the land of human rights.

**Sadio Dianka is 41 years old. He came from Mali in 2000 and works in construction. He is knowingly employed on borrowed papers by Suburbaine, the business responsible for the construction of the Paris tramway.**

“As soon as the movement started I got involved and I will stick it out to the end. Since I have been on strike, I have no longer been afraid, and I am fighting for my rights and my future. The presence of trade unions and supporters gives us courage.”

**Mamadou P left Dogon to come live in France. Along with over 2,000 other undocumented migrant workers, he has been occupying the offices of the CPAM health insurance agency on the rue Baudelique in Paris, since the 17 July 2009.**

“I worked various jobs in Mali, as a teacher and football coach. My situation became difficult, so I decided to try my luck in France. But here I only have the right to work horrible jobs which do not meet my aspirations. Currently, I work in a restaurant for a boss who is certainly suspicious of my situation. That made me join the struggle, and join a collective of undocumented migrants.

I am in solidarity with striking workers. We all have the same goal, and I think that the methods of struggle must all converge if we want to see a positive outcome to this movement.”

## Develop Support Committees

The example of the 19th District in Paris.

The new wave of strikes and occupations has sparked a very strong mobilisation around the striking workplaces in the 19th district: TFN, a cleaning company, and Suburbaine, which is building tramlines.

Militants from political organisations (NPA, Alternative Libertaire, Parti de gauche), unions (CGT, Solidaires, CNT), associations (MRAP, an anti-racist group and the League for the Rights of Man) and community groups (Quartier solidaire Belleville), engaged in the struggle for the regularisation of all undocumented migrants, have regrouped under a single support committee. The handing out of leaflets, sticking up of posters, collections, petitions, letters to representatives, all means are being used to make local people aware of, and to respond to the material needs of the strikers.

“It is through the construction of an organisation that we can build and co-ordinate the mobilisation”, says Francoir Charpentier of the NPA. “We regret the absence of the ground of other political forces, but we are aiming to enlarge the collective, by regularly inviting those organisations who are hesitating to join us. We will launch bigger initiatives in November. Relations with strikers are very warm and we spend our evenings drinking African tea.”

Marie-Au’, of Alternative Libertaire, finds it effective to integrate into a pre-existing solidarity network: “Despite the weak media coverage, people from the local area come to discuss with us and learn about what is going on: that creates links and visibility. It is a very tough struggle: we must maintain a broad and united solidarity committee.”

• From the French New Anticapitalist Party website, [www.npa2009.org](http://www.npa2009.org)



## HANDS OFF MY WORKMATE

# A new campaign for migrant rights

Bob Sutton reports on the Hands Off My Workmate conference.

**O**n 17 October around 140 activists and trade unionists met in London for the first “Hands Off my Workmate” conference — a launch pad for a wider trade-union based campaign to defend migrant workers against checks and raids in the workplace.

The event, held at the School of African and Oriental Studies, had been set up by members of the Socialist Workers’ Party through SOAS Unison and UCU branches. In June this year, nine cleaners working at the university were grabbed in a brutal dawn raid by immigration services armed in full riot gear. All but one were later deported. This attack, facilitated by the collaboration of the cleaning contractor, ISS, and university management, sparked an occupation of the SOAS principal’s offices by activists from both inside and outside the university.

A good starting point for a campaign. However, Elane Heffernan, a leading SWP member, speaking at the “open planning meeting” ahead of the conference, explicitly set out the political space she saw HOMW occupying. Groups like the Campaign Against Immigration Controls [and others] had “scared people off” with political positions that could never win over sufficient support in the labour movement and were therefore recklessly cutting migrants off from people that would be willing to offer real solidarity if not linked to such “scary” politics.

HOMW, by not needlessly antagonising, but working with trade unions [bureaucracies], would “actually win”. This was a coded reference to CAIC activists’ support for the victimised Willis cleaners, who, after being abandoned by Unite, have so far been unsuccessful in their fight against victimisation.

The tone of Heffernan’s criticism has at times been fairly hostile. It is probably fair to say that CAIC suffers in its dealings with the SWP because of its association with the AWL — the SWP don’t like the AWL. Whilst some of CAIC’s most energetic activists have been AWL members and sympathisers, a whole host more are not. CAIC has been a banner under which a wide range of political activists have been willing to organise a working class fight against immigration controls.

To be fair, Heffernan did invite suggestions from CAIC for speakers and took most of the responses on. One of these suggestion led to a highlight of the event, the debate between Alberto Durango, the Unite activist and leading organiser of the Willis dispute, Prof. Phil Marfleet, of the University of East London and Neil Jameson from Strangers into Citizens (SiC), on the question of an amnesty for migrants.

In the room for the debate were many of the people who had been on the “papers for all” contingent on the big SiC demonstration in May. That was organised by CAIC, the Coordinadora Latinoamericana and supported by the International Federation of Iraqi Refugees. The debate brought up the issues present on that demonstration — the racist paternalism and class collaboration of the SiC demand for an amnesty. Framed as it is — amnesty only for those who have been here more than four years, been referred by two employers and shown intent to learn English. The demand was exposed and thoroughly deconstructed.

At the final plenary — not in the advertised programme — we were asked to ratify the campaigns founding statement:

“Sustained unity is not possible while some workers are considered illegal and in constant fear of discovery or are removed from the workplace and union by immigration raids.

“We therefore call for the immediate regularisation of undocumented migrants and for the right of all people living in the UK to work.

“We oppose the use of immigration checks and raids at work and demand that employers do not undertake random checks on workers or facilitate or organise raids by immigration services”.

Katerina, from the Coordinadora Latinoamericana, suggested that the slogan “No one is Illegal” be adopted as a summary for the proposed position.

What ensued was something of a panic on the part of the chair, who had not expected discussion or amendments.

Heffernan spoke strongly against the proposal. Having just made a brilliant speech as to why immigration controls were a weapon of the bosses and a question inseparable to that of rights for migrant workers, she was now saying that this message, the one she had just delivered so impressively, was not one that you could make outside of “little rooms full of activists”. In any case, she said, time was pressing, this was the statement that the Fire Brigades Union had already signed up to, and we should move on.

There were then widespread calls for a vote. Evidently with some reluctance, the chair took a vote. After a somewhat questionable hand count, the result came out as a tie. This was again met with exasperated calls to move swiftly on. However again widespread calls from the floor led to Katerina, evidently perplexed at how her proposal was contentious and the strength of the objection, being given opportunity to give her case.

She said the slogan summarised the apparent consensus viewpoint, or at least that coming out of the debate with Strangers into Citizens, in a concrete and consistent principle. After that Sandy Nicoll, the UCU branch secretary, again SWP, was given an opportunity to give the second [longer] speech against. He implored people to drop the call for the slogan as it would be an obstacle to concrete solidarity of the type that could seriously oppose further attacks. The vote was re-taken. The same number voted for. With more people coming into the room to vote against, the “motion” fell.

There were further ripples of bad faith when it was asked if CAIC could have a space on the proposed steering committee. It was agreed, but on the stated condition that “you don’t come to every meeting just to bang on about No One is Illegal”!

As the meeting was breaking up there were several minor arguments as Gabriella Alberti, who had earlier spoken in a session on “the feminisation of migrant labour” took issue with the off-the-cuff “ultimatum” CAIC had just been given. No doubt it was a product of stress on the part of the organisers, but also a quite deep political mistrust and, in some cases restrained hostility. CAIC were accused of using “shibboleths” and not having a serious approach to an arena of struggle which can often have implications of life and death.

So there are questions over the politics on which this campaign is conducted. However for practical purposes the statement is a “No One is Illegal” position. That is why the CAIC activists present did not choose to have a massive fight over the matter. But there are also questions about the name “Hands Off my Workmate”, and who and on what terms it is a slogan for.

The main question about the campaign is one of its openness and democracy. When questions were raised at planning meetings as to whether the conference would elect a committee or take decisions in its final session, they were not answered. This cannot just be put down to a question of capacity. This was a case of the cards being kept close to the chest of the organisers.

If there are genuine debates around activity, then they should be given space, not steamrollered or approached with the “batten down the hatches” of a factional set-piece.

There remains an important discussion around slogans. Many people, even those heavily involved in the work, are unclear on distinctions or potential nuances between “Papers for All”, “No One is Illegal” “Against Immigration Controls” “Open borders”, “No Borders” or “Amnesty”. That discussion is something we must continue.

What can be taken as positive out of the SOAS occupation and this new campaign is the potential for far wider sections of the left and the workers’ movement to act on this issue. Beyond that, time will tell.

In London, key workplace battles for migrants, as well as the fights against deportations, need to be cohered and organised with each other and with the rest of the movement. The scope for that to happen has been shown by CAIC’s work — the conferences of hundreds and securing of trade union affiliations.

The struggles of migrant workers have in many ways been exemplars of what our fight against the crisis should look like. They should be considered, along with struggles at Vestas, Visteon, and, (although the question is slightly different) Lindsey, and held up as

things to be proud of in the working class movement. Solidarity with migrants, and clearly articulated opposition to immigration controls, must become absolute touchstones, indispensable points of reference for the coming period.

A clear, sharp, working-class, internationalist anti racism programme must be the orientation for our fight against the fascists, against attacks on migrants by their bosses and the state, and for the fight against the politics of “British Jobs 4 British Workers” within the workers’ movement.

Workers of the World Unite!

## The City Hall office road to socialism?

**R**edmond O’Neill, a leader of the Socialist Action group, has died aged 55 of cancer. Because O’Neill was an official in Ken Livingstone’s London mayoral administration, his death has received wide attention, for instance in the *Guardian*.

Ken Livingstone’s obituary describes him as a “life-long revolutionary socialist and leading figure on the left for three decades”. In fact, for many years it has been an abuse of language to call O’Neill and his organisation socialist, or even really part of the left.

It was not just their grim support for Stalinist and other “progressive” authoritarian regimes and movements in the developing world. (Hence the cant in Livingstone’s obituary about internationalism — though in fact Socialist Action’s politics are the polar opposite of international working-class solidarity.) Such ideas are, unfortunately, fairly common on the left, though Socialist Action has taken them to an extreme. What was and, to the extent that the group still exists, is unique about Socialist Action is their crawling to the rich and powerful in Britain itself.

O’Neill was paid over £100,000 a year to work, alongside a number of his comrades, for a mayor who was quite openly a servant of the ruling class — breaking strikes, sucking up to bankers and property developers, and lavishly praising the Blair and Brown governments. There is little evidence that Socialist Action had any interest whatsoever in workers’ struggles — except in so far as they came into conflict with their project for a “Progressive London”, in which case they had to be opposed ruthlessly (the Tube workers).

The group’s politics could be summarised as a kind of popular-front Stalinist Fabianism — seeing the “class struggle” not in the living battles and movements of workers and the oppressed, but concealed in all kinds of “progressive forces”, from the Stalinist states to politicians like Livingstone. By working and gaining positions of “influence” within these movements, they would, despite all appearances, remain revolutionaries. Any betrayals of what real socialists would understand as class struggle could be explained by this framework.

An announcement of O’Neill’s death on the Socialist Unity website prompted some debate, with negative comments deleted by the moderator on grounds of respect for the dead. Clearly any individual’s death is a tragedy for their friends and family. But O’Neill was a politician, not a private individual. We would benefit no one by pretending he was anything other than what, by the end, he certainly was — a mortal enemy of working-class socialism.

Sacha Ismail

## SWP CRISIS

# Rot at the heart of “united front” work

BY TOM UNTERRAINER

**V**ery many people are revolted at the state of the world. Whether it be in reaction to war, racism, exploitation, oppression or the sickening displays of meanness and hypocrisy that effuse from the bowels of government, we have all experienced that visceral urge to tear the head off this system and those who marshal it.

We feel this way every day. But unlike those who either sink into despair or comfort themselves with a purely academic understanding of capitalism and its degradations, we — the socialists, revolutionaries, Marxists — aim to change things. We agitate, educate and organise to transform the world.

When we commit ourselves to an organisation that we feel embodies and fights for our ideas, we do so in all seriousness. Such a choice is not the choice of the confused or the timid. It is a momentous decision. All the more momentous because we see ourselves as part of a great historical tradition, a tradition from which we draw inspiration and whose achievements we strive to replicate. We are partisans of the working class and the working class revolutionary politics of Marx, Lenin and Trotsky.

That is why we in the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty view the unfolding crisis in the Socialist Workers Party, as something worthy of discussion.

From outside the confines of the SWP we have very limited factual information on the disagreements within their ranks. What facts we have suggest that the disagreements are very sharp indeed. The leaked text of the SWP’s first pre-conference “Internal Bulletin” does little to illuminate the processes which we believe are under way. We suspect that SWP members also have little information as to the precise content of the debate and have no real idea why two leading London student members have been suspended from membership or why certain websites have been shut down.

For all of the fuzziness over details and specifics, the political foundations of the crisis within the SWP are clear. The foundations are at one and the same time organisational and political, for in revolutionary politics these things are inseparable. One flows from the other. These foundations are just not a feature of the distant past, they continue to operate on both sides in the dispute.

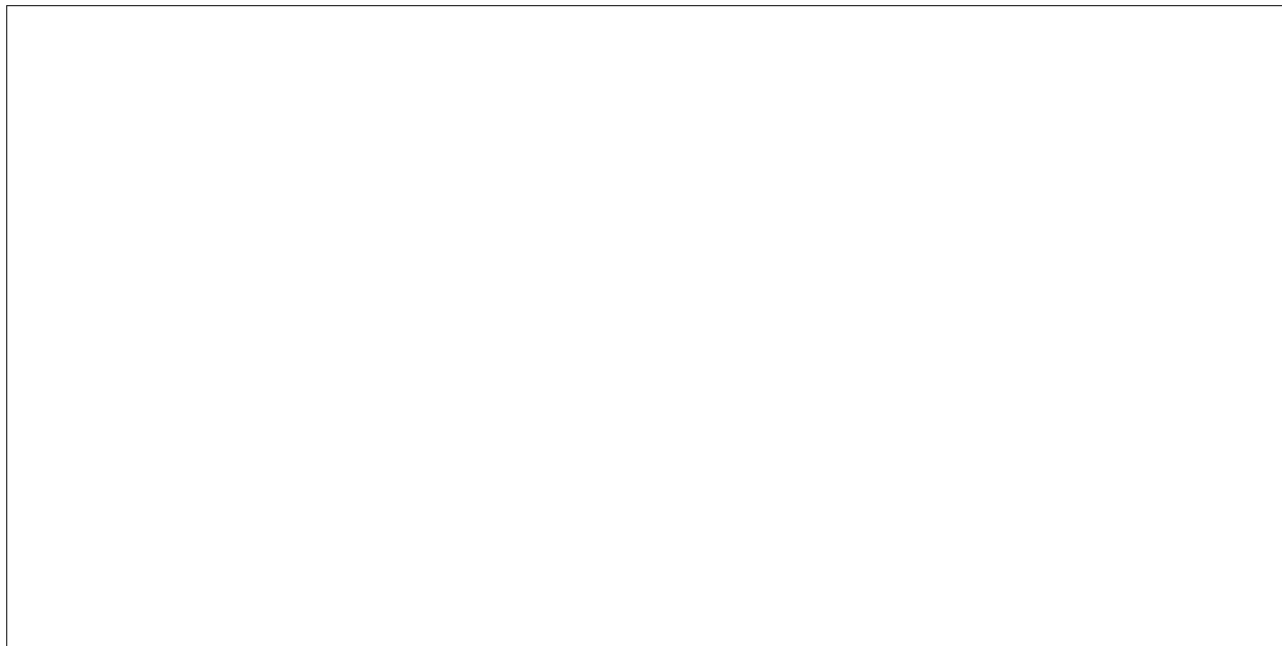
## THE “LESSER EVIL”

**F**or approaching three decades or more the SWP has adopted political positions unashamedly and significantly at odds with the tradition it claims to represent. Leading members of the party justified these twists and turns in industrial proportions.

From John Rees’ dishonest re-writing of the Iranian counter-revolution and other aspects of imperialism in his book *Imperialism and Resistance*, back to the active support given by the SWP to the ultra-right nationalist murderers at the helm in the disintegrating Yugoslavia, the SWP has made some very significant — and reactionary — political choices. These choices repeatedly put the SWP on the side of the oppressor against the oppressed in the name of anti-imperialism. The AWL took a different position, refusing to side with oppressors big or small. We maintained an unstinting international working-class solidarity in the face of much name-calling and abuse. We continue to maintain this position.

So what have these big, international questions got to do with current crisis in the SWP? They exemplify on a larger scale the shifts, twists and turns that have characterised the SWP leadership’s domestic political choices and the failures they produced. They are a very loud echo of the rotten politics at the heart of what the SWP calls “united front work”. One important example should illustrate what we mean.

In international questions the leadership of the SWP stood steadfastly against American or British imperialism. In so doing, however, they often took the side of smaller imperialists and oppressors. They rejected working class independence by choosing a “lesser evil”. Domestically, they identified the need for an electoral alternative to New Labour but sacrificed left-unity, democratic organisation and socialist politics for “unity” with outright reactionary organisations and



A “popular front” won power in France in May 1936. It was launched by the French Communist Party.

individuals — the likes of George Galloway and Islamist groups.

Just as they wilfully confused the rotten state apparatus of Slobodan Milosevic with the Serbs, Croats and Bosnians who composed what was then Yugoslavia and Saddam Hussein’s murderous gang with the Iraqi people, they wilfully confused anti-war opinion with one man and Muslims with a self-appointed, reactionary “leadership”. They abandoned independent working class politics for collaboration with small business owners, dictators and clerical-fascists.

In fact, what the SWP continues to call “united front work” bears closer resemblance to “popular front work”.

## POPULAR FRONT

**T**he formation of Popular Fronts by the thoroughly Stalinised official “communist” parties signalled a complete political about-turn. Preceding 1934, when *Pravda* — the official journal of Stalinist orthodoxy — issued its first endorsement of cross-class alliances, communist parties loyal to the USSR took the position that political forces, like reformist social democratic parties, were in fact “social fascists”.

From 1928, the Stalinists were expecting further working class revolutions and were determined that if such possibilities arose, nothing should compromise the hold on power enjoyed by Moscow. All other political forces were to be discredited and excluded from positions of leadership. Ultimately faulty expectations of great revolutionary movements were not Stalin’s only consideration. Significantly, Stalin also wanted to sideline left-wing opponents in the Comintern and undermine his domestic critics.

The rise of European fascism put a large dent in this perspective and spelled the end for Stalin’s “Third Period” idea (the “period” of revolutions). In its place came the popular front tactic — making all kinds of cross class alliances. Like the “Third Period”, this cynical change in tactics was not only the product of a change in objective circumstances. There were organisational practicalities and political opponents to be dealt with. These changes in tactics were a self-preserving reaction to unfavourable conditions. To preserve themselves, the Stalinists ultimately jettisoned the last scintilla of working class politics. The driving forces behind the SWP’s “united front work” are similarly complex: a mixture of bad politics and organisational self-preservation.

The blame for the disintegration of “Respect” — the crown atop the SWP’s “united fronts” — was laid firmly at the door of John Rees, then the SWP’s most prominent leader, now excluded from the Central Committee and forming a “Left Faction”. Whilst we give no political credit to Rees, such an apportioning of blame is ultimately unfair as it serves to mask the common politics between the “Left Faction” and SWP majority. For “Respect” — a popular front if ever there was one — did not disintegrate just because Rees fell out with

George Galloway over a dodgy donation, but because the muddle of opportunists and right wing forces inside of it could no longer be reconciled.

The SWP majority has not rejected Rees’ popular fronts, as evidenced by the inclusion of a slash-and-burn “yellow-Tory” Lib Dem councillor at a recent anti-EDL demonstration organised by the SWP’s “Unite Against Fascism” group. This councillor is part of a Leeds city administration that is attacking the pay and conditions of refuse workers in the city. This man is an enemy of the working class. To repeat, cross-class “unity” does not make a United Front which can effectively fight for working class interests.

One thing alone seems to be changing in the SWP — that is the voracity with which its leadership acts against political threats, both internal and external. Another example, again from the Leeds demonstration, is the attitude of SWP full-time organisers to other socialist organisations on the day.

Members of the AWL were accused of racism — no explanation offered — and received threats of physical violence. This is not the first time SWP organisers and leading members have resorted to political thuggery, but we suspect more of it is to come. The treatment meted out to external critics is one thing, but the prospect of such an approach being taken to SWP members is real.

Over the years, critical SWP members have had a heavy hand from the Central Committee and the party’s “Control Commission”. Summary expulsion, threats, and abuse were common. In a fight over ultimate political control and legitimacy in the SWP, will oppositionists will be suspended or expelled en masse? How heated does the discussion have to become before physical threats are made? These are not pleasant thoughts, but they are worth every SWP member thinking about.

The SWP in crisis must be a very confusing place indeed. Judging by individual contact with party members and leaked internal documents, the political lines dividing the “Left Faction” and majority are less than clear. The real political argument — or at least the argument the SWP should be having — is nowhere to be seen.

SWP members have choices. They can either go along with the side-show “debate” between John Rees and SWP National Secretary Martin Smith, or start to ask questions.

They can either accept and embrace the popular frontism and reactionary politics that underlie the whole debate, or start to argue for independent working class politics.

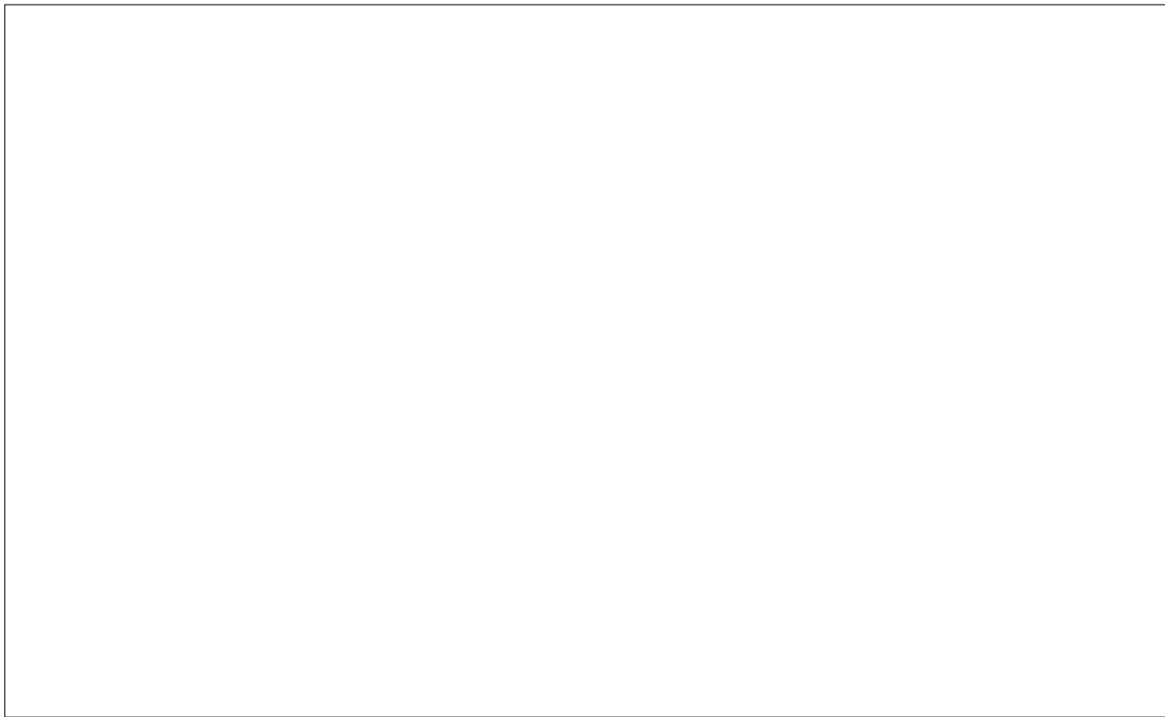
They can either participate in the mounting political thuggery, or argue sharply against it.

They can either forget the independence of mind, the seriousness and commitment with which they joined the SWP, or they can remember why they became a socialist. For our part, the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty hopes they will take this opportunity to think politics through again.

# WORKERS' LIBERTY & SOLIDARITY

**DEMONSTRATE: AGAINST THE SDL, GLASGOW 14 NOVEMBER & EDL, NOTTINGHAM 5 DECEMBER**

## Fascists march in another city centre



Police penned in demonstrators

800 people joined the demonstration called by Unite Against Fascism in Leeds on 31 October to oppose the English Defence League.

Rallied in defence of a "multicultural" Leeds by Unite Against Fascism, the anti-racist demonstrators were penned in by the police almost immediately. Any idea of challenging the fascists directly was written off by the UAF leadership. UAF's tactics on the day show that they learned nothing from events in Manchester where the EDL were left free to march through the city. It's unlikely they'll apply the lessons of Leeds to future demonstrations in against the EDL.

The next mobilisations for anti-fascists take

place in Glasgow on Saturday 14 November (against the Scottish Defence League) and in Nottingham on 5 December. It is up to us to try and shape things so that these racist bigots do not go unchallenged in future. It is equally important that we begin to build an effective campaign based on fighting against the social conditions that groups like the the BNP and EDL exploit.

**Lessons from the past, mobilise for Glasgow, building local anti-fascist campaigns, see pages 6 and 7**

## Organise support for Leeds bin workers

By DAVID KIRK

Leeds Streetscene refuse workers have been on continuous strike since 7 September against the council's attempt to force through massive wage cuts.

The strike by street cleaners and refuse collectors remains solid and has forced the council to the negotiating table.

At the end of October the council offered a "deal" with a shallower pay cut — a cut of hundreds of pounds a year instead of thousands of pounds per worker — and a massive workload increase. In a mass meeting called by the Unison and the GMB unions, workers overwhelmingly rejected this offer.

The council is continuing to use agency staff and moonlighting workers from other authorities to try to break the workers' resolve. And the Lib-Dem/Tory administration it has stepped up its offensive against the striking workers by recruiting permanent un-unionised workers on £4,000 less a year than the current workers. This is a direct threat to the strikers' jobs and is an dramatic escalation of the dispute by the council.

But the workers are making sure the council is not having it all their own way. The unions have demanded direct talks between them and the council leaders. The Lib Dem and Tory council leaders always refused. But this Monday the talks started. The workers enjoy broad public support, and they held a large and successful benefit gig and rally recently. The strike remains solid, and the workers are determined to fight on.

Unfortunately a broad labour movement campaign in support of the workers has not been built up. Equally crucial as a weakness, picketing of the scab depots has not taken place.

In South Yorkshire, striking bus workers, the firefighters and postal workers had a joint rally on Saturday 31 October (see page 4). But so far this sort of joint campaigning has not been called for in Leeds. It should be.

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