Vote Labour—but prepare to fight!

Make the bosses pay for the crisis! page 2

The reality of class is the elephant in the room in this election; Gordon Brown bounces in the polls under chauvinist attacks from the Tory Sun.

In Maghaberry prison the members of the Prison Officers Association brutally repress Irish Republican prisoners whilst their General Secretary, Brian Caton, dons the mantle of revolutionary Trotskyism, courtesy of the Socialist Party.

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Unity is strength. L'union fait la force. Es la unidad fuerza, Η ενότητα είναι δύναμη, Ένας είναι μυριά, unity is strength, Einheit ist Stärke, Единство сила, Единосъствие силен, vienybės jėga, ādauna, unità è la resistenza, 团結就是力量。A unidade é a força, eining er styrkur, De eenheid is de sterkte, الوحدة قوة. Ni neart go chur le cèile, pagkakaisa ay kalakasan, jednota is síla, 일상은 이다 합함, Workers of the World Unite!
Vote Labour—but prepare to fight!
Make the bosses pay for the crisis!

Editorial

The reality of class is the elephant in the room in this election; Gordon Brown bounces in the polls under attacks by the Tory Sun as seen on the cover. Class has established itself in this election despite the best efforts of all sides to prevent this happening. Looming over this election is the universal understanding now that whoever wins the election they are intent on saving capitalism by imposing massive cuts on the working class and the welfare state.

Jonathan Freedland makes good points on this issue in his Guardian article on 14 April. The Gene Hunt poster backfired on Labour because the Tories are still delighted that Thatcher dealt such blows to the working class in defeating the miners’ strike, privatisation etc in the 80s and Hunt was a popular TV detective character; portraying Cameron as Hunt was an own goal. But the ‘step outside posh boy’ poster did work very well. Brown was afraid to face down the captains of industry who slated his increase in national insurance as a ‘tax on jobs’ and it was left to the Social Democrats’ Vince Cable to condemn this as ‘nauseating’; they were trying to escape their taxes whilst the workers and poor were about to be pummeled. Labour’s claims that the Tories are putting tax cuts above public spending also hits home. Freedman recounts that a Prospect magazine survey found that 40% of those questioned thought that Margaret Thatcher had made Britain a better place and 41% thought she had made it worse. The class battles of the 1980s are clearly about to re-emerge and the relationship of the ideological struggle to the strike struggles in now being determined. Revolutionaries have something to say, hopefully a decisive thing, in both the one and the other.

A really false dichotomy is being posed now by left establishment figures, the Stalinists and even so-called revolutionary groups. That is that a type of con is being perpetrated on us, there is really no crisis of capitalism at all; if only we could control the greedy bankers, stop their excessive bonuses, clamp down on the non-dom tax avoiders and stop the war in Afghanistan then all would be well. That was the theme of all the speakers at the Save the Welfare demo on Saturday 10 April at Trafalgar Square and it is the main message in the centre-page spread of the Socialist Worker of the same date – Why there’s no need to slash spending; The deficit is £310 billion, if we crack down on tax evasion and avoidance we will bring in £123 billion (how likely is that?), if we stop the war and abolish Trident we will save £136.5 billion (not going to happen) and by taxing the rich we would bring in only £27.5 billion (turns out this is only making them pay full national insurance and increasing the top rate from 40% to 60%, an extremely modest proposal for ‘revolutionaries’). Of course all these things apart from the last, (surely we can propose a far higher rate and a decent wealth tax too?), are excellent demands as part of a Transitional Programme. But on their own, as advocated by the SWP and other lefts, they are Keynesian rubbish, quite compatible with the future of capitalism and designed to be so.

There is a need for the capitalists to slash spending to save capitalism, they are going to do it and we must be prepared to fight it with revolutionary politics. But these are thin on the ground now.

So why does it matter who wins the election if all are intent on making the same cuts? “From the stand point of the working people, it makes no difference whether Gordon Brown’s Labour Party or David Cameron’s Tories win the general election” say Workers Hammer. “General election, general fraud, don’t vote, organise!” say the third period Stalinists of the Revolutionary Communist Group and the Socialist Party simply calls for a vote for the Trade Unionists and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and no vote for Labour. The SWP calls for a Labour vote where the TUSC is not standing. Workers Power calls for a vote for itself, Jeremy Drinkall in Vauxhall, and a vote for Labour elsewhere, whilst advocating its “build the Anti-capitalist party” line, in isolation. The French version has “bombed” in the recent local election at 2.7%, half the total it got when it called itself Trotskyist and advocated policies twice as radical when it was the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR). French workers were evidently not impressed by its move to the right, which the comrades of Workers Power ridiculously told us was a move to the left. Revolutionaries cannot support a centrist group who has become reformist, this remains a shared Trotskyist attitude, so WP has to deny reality.

The Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) calls for a vote for itself, Jill Montford in Camberwell and Peckham, and Labour elsewhere but not the TUSC. Their electoral intervention is called ‘the socialist campaign to stop the Tories and fascists’ (SCSTF). It seems principled enough on first glance and the demands are radical so the campaign is supportable. But they refuse to support TUSC candidates and Respect who are standing against Labour because they ridiculously allege that the TUSC and Respect are to the right of Labour ’if we thought about it’. This indicates they are on another opportunist entrench trajectory towards the Labour party, which they stymied as a ‘stinking corpse’ just a few years ago. In a previous period of entrenchism in the LP, they capitulated to the bureaucracy, even denouncing other leftists like Lesley Mahmood to save themselves. She was the bureaucratically excluded Militant Tendency ‘official Labour’ candidate in the Liverpool Walton by-election, caused by the death of Eric Heffer in 1991. The AWL even canvassed for the imposed right-wing candidate Peter Kilfoyle; they presumably argued he was really to the left of Mahmood ‘if we thought about it’.

The majority of the 1991 split in the Militant Tendency left the Labour party and became Militant Labour until 1997 and are now the Socialist Party. The minority is Socialist Appeal, still in the Labour party. It calls for a vote for Labour and is still trying, a la Ted Grant, to ‘reclaim the Labour party and fight for socialist policies’. It still advocates its Enabling Act, which would allow the Executive to rule by decree, avoiding parliament, and impose the nationalisation of the ‘commanding heights of
the economy’ by nationalising the 150 biggest monopolies. In other words a sham dictatorship of the proletariat without the proletariat, via a capitalist parliament. This is total reformist hogwash developed by Ted Grant which could only end in a 1973 Chile-style debacle. Soviet democracy, workers councils based on direct, participatory democracy is the Trotskyist programme. Voting for Labour with these illusions, and most groups on the left have them, they just do not spell them out in such graphic terms, is completely wrong. All Labour governments are capitalist governments, defenders of imperialism. Even Michael Foot, the most left of the Labour leaders, clearly defended the interests of British imperialism, as he did over the Malvinas war in 1982.

The workers united front (WUF) tactic is the method of exposing the contradictions within a bourgeois workers’ parties like Labour. This is Trotsky’s position on it in 1931:

“No common platform with the Social Democracy, or with the leaders of the German trade unions, no common publications, banners, placards! March separately, but strike together! Agree only how to strike, whom to strike, and when to strike! Such an agreement can be concluded even with the devil himself, with his grandmother, and even with Noske and Grezesinsky. On one condition, not to bind one’s hands.”

Crucially our position is based on Trotsky’s position of the WUF from above and below;

**From above**: placing demands on the reformist leaders to fight and fighting alongside them when they do – no diplomatic ‘non-aggression pacts’ before, after or, when necessary, during united front engagements.

**From below**: engaging with the ranks of the reformist workers to show them that we are the real force that demands the unity of the working class against fascism and reaction and in exposing their leaders as being unwilling to pursue any struggle to the end because they are covert defenders of capitalism like the reactionaries who are its open defenders. This requires an open party with an independent programme and press, the “march separately” part. This is where we part company with all the left ‘revolutionaries’ who call for a Labour vote like the SWP, the AWL, Socialist Appeal, etc. The first two cannot even break from the TU bureaucracy to the extent necessary to call for a vote for Jerry Hicks for Unite General Secretary.

Socialist Fight No 3 has spelled out its reasons for voting Labour, “Bourgeois-workers’ parties: behind the mask of pseudo-revolutionary intransigence”. In 1920 Lenin mocked the German ultra lefts in his famous, *Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*:

“All reversion to parliamentary forms of struggle, which have become historically and politically obsolete, must be emphatically rejected” This is said with ridiculous pretentiousness (says Lenin), and is patently wrong. “Reversion” to parliamentarianism, forsooth! Perhaps there is already a Soviet republic in Germany? It does not look like it! How, then, can one speak of “reversion”? Is this not an empty phrase?

We quoted Trotsky in 1936,

“As for the legislative elections in France, I don’t think that we can accept a boycott. Propagandize for Committees of Action, yes. Oppose the future Committees of Action to the present electoral action, no! One can only boycott parliament when one is strong enough to replace it by direct revolutionary action”.

We have spelled out our view on how the workers united front should operate; through rank-and-file committees in every industry to pressurise the bureaucracy into action when possible and to initiate independent action without and against them when necessary. This election sets the battle positions between the working class and ruling class for the coming class struggle. These ‘battle positions’ have a big influence on the outcome of the battle. But they are not the battle itself. The ‘do not vote Labour’ groups are not seriously contemplating this ideological battle for the soul of the working class. To quote the AWL’s *Solidarity and Workers Liberty* ‘indifference to the character of the next government is a variant of defeatism’. We agree, but an opportunistic relationship to the Labour and TU bureaucracy promotes defeat as well, only in a different way.

**Demo: Reinstate Alberto Durango!**

**Date:** Friday, 23 April 2010,

**Time:** 17:00 - 18:00,

**Location:** UBS, 100 Liverpool Street, London.

The next demo in solidarity with cleaners at Swiss bank UBS will take place on Friday 23rd April. The cleaners are still refusing to sign the contracts and accept a pay cut in spite of management intimidation. Last month’s day of action has the bank bosses and cowboy cleaning firms rattled, let’s keep up the pressure. Solidarity with the migrant workers’ struggle against the bank bosses! Bring friends, bring banners, bring stuff that makes a noise!

Cleaners at the London branch of the bank UBS began a drive to form a union when the bank changed the subcontractor that hires the cleaners. The new contractor, Lancaster, began an attack on the working conditions of the cleaners and fired Alberto Durango, one of the leaders of the unionization drive. The firing was a clear example of the union busting. Join us to give international solidarity to the workers at UBS in London. Let UBS know that workers everywhere support Alberto Durango and the workers organizing in London! Solidarity knows no borders! 23rd April demo - solidarity with UBS cleaners.

**WRP Explosion**

Gerry Downing’s 1990 work on the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) explosion can be found online by googling “WRP Explosion”, or Gerry Downing’s documents. It is at:


Its 13 chapters (90,000 words) deal with the imploding of the WRP in 1985 and follow the developments in the Workers Press side mainly, both internal and international, up to 1990, when the Preparatory Committee collapsed, the Argentinean LIT (Workers International League) departed and the Slaughter wing linked up with Michel Varga and others to form the Stalinophobic Workers International to Refound the Fourth International.

Gerry Downing said, “I was in the Revolutionary Internationalist League/International Trotskyist Committee at the time I wrote the book, so naturally the account reflects their politics; nevertheless I have little to retract from this political document. I hope it will assist in current regroupment efforts.”

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
Birmingham Care Homes, Nurseries, Libraries, Leisure Centres and Neighbourhood Offices all face the axe

Plans for council services based on what is REQUIRED rather than on "what can be afforded" or on what's in the interests of the profitiers needed by Steve Bagal

Birmingham City Council, the largest local authority in Europe, is proposing millions of pounds of cuts. Care Homes, Nurseries, Libraries, Leisure Centres and Neighbourhood offices all face the axe. Already 1,380 council workers have been issued with notices warning them that they may face the sack. If the council get away with this they will devastate our services.

News, petitions and campaign leaflets at: www.sosbirmingham.org.uk, email: sosbirmingham@gmail.com. £69 million in cuts, of which £2.5 million are in Nurseries. Where are the other £66.5 million going to fall? What other services are they planning to devastate?

Join the resistance - Save Our Services Campaign

Steve Bagal reports:

The situation of the Birmingham City Council (BCC)'s 40-odd thousand workforce is a grim one! Financial conglomerate Capita (capita.co.uk) have 'taken over' the running of the Council - the largest Local Authority in Europe, in an "undemocratic swindle"; Capita are proud to be "the UK's largest outsourcing company"!

This means that all the Council's jobs and services are being handed to the private sector, while the council workers have to endure an endless round of attacks.

In Social Services, provision is being handed to the private sector by means of shutting down all of the council's homes and Daycentres.

Of course - the people with disabilities and the young or elderly in care are still there, only in future they will be looked after by the private sector with all that means... BCC say that units are shutting due to financial constraints, but of course in the private sector only the wages and conditions of the workers are cheaper and the Council will still pay! A similar situation exists in all departments of the BCC, and UNISON are now saying that one third of all BCC jobs will be gone within a year unless their plans are stopped!

The problem with UNISON, as with the other BCC unions (TGWU-Unite, GMB, UCATT) is that the real reasons for the closure programme are that all of the units - residential homes for people requiring specialised care: disabled people, elderly people and young people as well as those with mental health problems, and Daycentres have all been systematically underfunded for more than twenty years, so are now in a decrepit state and actually we shouldn't have to work in such places, nor the service users have to live there! They DO need knocking down, but BCC is using the opportunity to shut them and transfer provision to the private sector!

Meanwhile, the workers are being subjected to a strict regime of controls and restrictions as part of the new, disputed contract - imposed on us in April 2008 without agreement, which means we are totally flexible and with the closure of units the Council are able to "reprovision" us to working in the places that have replaced the Council units - our wages have been lowered annually for more than ten years, but are still well ahead of the conditions of the workers in the private sector though our jobs are being continually degraded!

We have to fight for Council services that are under the control of the workers and of the service users – all Council services are currently under attack, when it's well recognised that they actually need to be expanded!

How should they be built up?

The workers and the service users know! Council Unions have had little to say about the systematic underfunding that has led to the situation faced today where whole swathes of Council provision are being handed to the private sector as a direct result of this underfunding (CSCI the 'official' regulatory body says that the units - care homes and daycentres, are "unfit for purpose" and must close which is true actually!)

The unions have now decided to resist the closure programme - the closure of the units where the bureaucrats are based and they say they are in favour of "committees of carers" at each threatened unit: that's a start though not a very good one, so many years too late and now that the plans of BCC/Capita are so advanced! And the bureaucrats only put it forward to save their positions in the Branch elections!

So what IS required?

Resistance to the closure programme! All threatened units must be kept open while new facilities are built! Committees must be formed, led by the workers in each unit and to include service users and families plus the local Labour Movement, which can not only run the services on the basis of need but can spread the struggle to keep the services away from the private sector/"new providers"!

These committees - open to all who are prepared for action in defence of council services, should draw up plans for council services based on what is REQUIRED rather than on "what can be afforded" or on what's in the interests of the profitiers hoping to take over; committees must link up across units and departments in order that a genuine, coordinated plan can be arrived at!
Reinstate Abdul Omer!
“This attack on the trade union needs to be stopped”

Comrades,

On March 31st, I was sacked for being an effective union rep at Sovereign buses.

Sovereign Buses is owned alongside London United by the Transdev group. I began working at London United in February 2003 before joining Sovereign Buses in July 2007. The wages at Sovereign were about £4000 less than that paid at London United.

When I joined Sovereign, I made my colleagues aware of the huge gap in wages and we began to campaign for parity.

As the drivers at both the Harrow and Edgware garages rejected the pay offer in 2008 voting for strike action, the rep at the Harrow garage resigned and I became elected as a rep in October 2008 in the Harrow garage. At this time we had only 39 members of UNITE out of 120 drivers. Once I became the rep membership increased throughout the garage and we are now 100% UNITE. All the drivers are in the union.

In August 2009, I was elected convener for both Harrow and Edgware garages. We continued challenging the management over many issues, but now at both garages.

A couple of weeks after my election, in September, the management tried to unilaterally impose new rotas on one of our routes at Edgware. Drivers walked out unofficially and within 2 hours the Company agreed to reimburse all of the members involved in the unofficial action. The Company also agreed to organise a race awareness course in engineering, so clearly there is a problem. In truth, the problem of racism exists across the garage. The engineer’s grievance alleged institutional racism. I represented the engineer, and challenged the Company’s line of questioning and attitude to racism at the hearing. I also challenged witnesses’ account of events at the hearing. For this I am being accused of intimidating witnesses. Yet, none of the witnesses have complained. I denied these charges with the support of my R.I.O and was sacked on 31st March. I have been sacked for robustly defending another trade union member who is challenging the racism at Sovereign buses. I have been dismissed for being an effective trade union rep.

I have been subjected to all sorts of harassment at Sovereign since I became a rep. The company agenda has been to try and stop me from being an effective rep. Once this proved unsuccessful, they decided to dismiss me on spurious grounds.

This attack on the trade union needs to be stopped. If Sovereign can sack an union convenor for being effective, this will likely encourage other bus operators to do likewise. I have been a supporter of the United Left from the outset and I am asking comrades to support our union reps at Sovereign and support the campaign for my reinstatement.

Please can you send all messages of support to defendabdulomer@yahoo.co.uk

In comradeship, Abdul Omer Moshin

Support the struggle for political status for Republicans in Portlaoise and Maghaberry Prisons.

Write to the Prisoners, details from:
- http://southarmagh32.blogspot.com/
- or http://www.rsfcork.com/

Portlaoise Gaol
Portlaoise
Co. Laois
Éire

Maghaberry Prison
Old Road
Ballinderry, Upper
Lisburn, BT28 2PT

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
Rank and File Campaign

Secretary: AJ Byrne
Chair: Mark Brown
Treasurer: John Tymon
Contact: PO Box 59188, London, NW2 9LJ

The victimisation of Abdul Omer, who attended our founding meeting, follows a long line of victimisations of militant shop stewards, convenors and activists by the employers. Increasingly the response of the trade union bureaucrats is to allow the victimisations to go almost unchallenged. In many instances the trade union bureaucrats or their local representatives have initiated the victimisations themselves in close and pre-planned collaboration with the bosses. Everything in the situation cries out for a co-ordinated effort to rally the rank-and-file against these victimisations because, as we must tirelessly explain, the ranks are the real targets of these attacks, it is their wages and conditions that are under assault and victimisation like Omer’s, if it is not defeated, is an open invite to the employers on the buses to begin a new assault on the workforce, to help to fill the “black hole” in Transport for London’s finances to which Tony Mayor Boris Johnson constantly refers. We can expect these attacks to intensify after the General Election on 6th May.

In these circumstances the election for a unitary General Secretary for Unite later in 2010 supplies a unique opportunity which we would expect the entire left to have welcomed and exploited. Jerry Hicks is a self-declared rank-and-file candidate, he will rally the masses, we will support him and from the mass movement generated we will recruit many radicalised militant workers. But the election of another left General Secretary will make little difference without this mass movement and without an organisational form. The Right to Work Conference on Saturday 30th January 2010 in Manchester resolved the following in its Conference Statement:

“We support all those taking action in defence of working people, whether officially or unofficially. We will act with union officials when they represent and defend their member’s interests but are prepared to act independently when they do not. Our aim is to help bring into existence rank and file organisation.”

But what type of rank-and-file movement?

There is an article from 1975 London Busmen: Rise and Fall of a Rank & File Movement, International Socialism, January 1975 by Pete Glatter, who died a few years ago (http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/glatter/1975/01/busmen.html). It is a remarkable document in that it charts in detail from a Marxist perspective the London Busworkers struggles in the 1930s in what was the most powerful rank-and-file movement ever seen in Britain. The politics and political perspectives implicit in the document never became the political line of the SWP.

Their rank-and-file perspective of 1970s consisted of an anarchist-syndicalist avoidance of conflict with the TU bureaucracy in an agreed division of labour. They never stood for shop steward’s positions, let alone higher offices. In contrast the 1930s struggle fought the bureaucracy head on and mobilised the busworkers against them in what Ernest Bevin, the right-wing Gen Sec of the TGWU called an “internal breakaway” - demanding official backing, standing for all electable office with an egalitarian set of rules and calling frequent and effective industrial action over the heads of the bureaucracy when they were seen to sell out.

But the theoretical foundations of a real development were laid, not just by Glatter but by Duncan Hallas and others. But, as with the WRP of the time, Tony Cliff and Gerry Healy subordinated the intellectuals to the need to ‘build the party’ by whatever opportunist turn they hit upon, in this case the turn away from the working class to the ‘movements’. Andy Newman explains just how good these intellectuals were at the time in his Socialist Unity blog (http://www.socialistunity.com/?p=3219):

“And as Duncan Hallas said in “White Collar Workers”, International Socialism #72. October 1974, While no substantial and lasting movement can exist without a core of politically committed activists, it is also true that such movements have to operate on the basis of agreed, stated and limited platforms if they are to retain the activity and support of politically uncommitted militants. The influence of revolutionaries is exerted through ideas, not by administrative means. Naturally such platforms are not fixed for all time. They will change as the movements themselves change and develop in the course of the struggle.

Whether or not we accept the argument of the IS, it was clear that there was a coherently articulated conception of transitional politics, and what is more that set of politics was derived from the actual lived experience of the British labour movement, rather than conceptualised from a schema of Trotsky’s or Lenin’s. In particular they saw the rank and file movement as a transitional form of organisation growing from the self-activity of organised workers, rather than having a concept of transitional politics based upon the party developing a political programme.

It stands in distinction from the Broad Left strategies, associated with both the Communist Party and the Militant, because the emphasis of the IS was always on creating a network between established militants at the base of the union, which took much less interest in winning elections within the union; or on maintaining friendly relations with left trade union leaders.”

Glatter details also how the Communist Party infiltrated this movement and gradually corrupted and destroyed its leaders, Papworth, Bill Jones and Snelling, by the adoption of the 1935 policy of the Popular Front and facilitated its capitulation to Bevin and the bureaucracy. The account of the defeat of the 1937 Coronation Strike by Glatter is a classic Marxist analysis of betrayal by the CP and Bevin to destroy the movement. It should alert us to be open to what is progressive in other movements and welcome and support every step forward comrades in these groups make.

In contrast the 2007 Busworkers Punch from the SWP (http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=10633) is a complete fraud. It lies and covers up the role of the CP in this betrayal. In line with the adaption of a section of the SWP today to the bureaucracy it portrays the only enemy of the busworkers as the right wing Bevinate bureaucracy and has not a single word of analysis or criticism of the “lefts” or the treachery of the CP then or now. This demonstrates the crisis of the SWP today.

It is torn between the push from a radicalised membership, disgusted at the debacle of Respect, where they were forced to adapt to the Islamists around the Muslim Association Of Britain (MAB), abandoning women’s right to abortion (also Galloway’s reactionary position) and pretending to be reformists. After the split the members want to reassert their leftist and are not really satisfied with the scapegoating of John Reese and Lindsey German, who have now split to form a movementist group, Counterfire. Does this leave enough SWPers with some memory of the progressive nature of its 1970s turn and also able to learn what were its syndicalist drawbacks? The class struggle will answer that question.

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
Jerry Hicks’ candidature for Unite General Secretary has posed a real political dilemma for the far left in Britain. When he stood against Derek Simpson for General Secretary of the Amicus section of Unite in 2009 the SWP eventually backed him (having initially backed right-winger Len Faircloth) as did the Socialist Party, Respect (including the USFI’s entryst Socialiist Resistance), Socialist Appeal, Workers Liberty, Workers Power, Permanent Revolution and Socialist Fight. The Morning Star having initially backed Len Faircloth as a “left-progressive” then switched to Simpson when he withdrew. Simpson became another “left-progressive” over night, having been previously dubbed a right winger by the United Left and that mendacious Stalinist paper when he had a spat with Woodley over who was to dominate the new “United Left” - Woodley won that one.

The issues are clear-cut. This is a rank-and-file candidate who is entirely outside the bureaucracy, both the actual bureaucrats’ machine and their fake united front organisation. If he is to win he must pitch his campaign at the ranks, both the 40,000 odd voters he won against Simpson and the 86% of members who did not vote the last time. It needs a real appeal to those members’ interests and to their real problems. Already the London Campaign, launched on Friday 26th February, has begun to make plans to target individual workplaces and industries with specific leaflets designed to appeal to those workers more immediately that a general leaflet can. In other words his hands are freed from bureaucratic constraints to mobilise the ranks of the union against the bureaucracy and initiate a real movement. Such a movement could only be sustained after the election if it resulted in a series of nationally co-ordinated, industry-based rank-and-file bodies that adopted the traditional anti-corporate, anti-bureaucratic rules that have traditionally evolved in the labour movement for such bodies; contest all elective positions on a pledge to accept no more than the average wage, election of all union officials, no votes for union employees or full time officials, etc. Hicks has indicated that these are his pledges, these should be the pledges of the movement his campaign ignites. These are clear class struggle objectives, a clear case of the traditional communist united front in action, uniting against the common enemy with no hiding of political difference - “march separately, strike together” is the necessary tactic for revolutionists to engage in this type of action.

Surely every serious leftist must grasp this opportunity, support for Paul Holmes is obligatory in the Unison election, but this is a chance of far greater significance given the circumstances and the way the issues have become posed. And it is this opportunity and the responsibility it imposes that has split the left, apparently disastrously. Surely they would all recruit massively from the movement that their intervention would help to generate and this could begin to alter the relationship of class forces in a significant way. But the far left groups have progressively lost faith in the ability of the working class to defend itself and to begin a new offensive against capital. They have begun to ingratiate themselves into the TU bureaucracy as a means of gaining “influence” for their group. This has led to cynical adoptions which are at odds with their own declared programmes (or in the case of the SWP, assumed programmes as they do not have one). At the same time the SWP has made a left move in response to the split from Respect and now to the - very bureaucratic and ill-discussed – right split of German, Reese and their followers.

Their ranks are beginning to move left, as demonstrated by the SWP-sponsored Right to Work conference in Manchester on 30th January, they are beginning to think for themselves after the long bureaucratic bar on any real internal life since the early 1970s which resulted in those splits back then – the origin of the AWL, Workers Power/Permanent Revolution and the RCP.

Socialist Fight immediately (19 September) backed Hicks when he walked out of the Manchester hustings meeting, recognising the stitch-up there for what it was. Socialist Appeal and Respect/Socialist Resistance also immediately backed him; Permanent Revolution has also done so and so has Workers Power. After internal debate the SWP must surely back him. But the Socialist Party has definitely gone for McCluskey. The AWL are backing McCluskey for General Secretary. Respect/Socialist Resistance also immediately backed the rank-and-file candidate Owen Jones and Trotsky’s are surely burning in hell because of all the flexibility they displayed in these matters) they condemn all before the altar of the maximum programme.

The LRC is in a similar dilemma. In response to a demand from Chris Ford of The Commune to back the rank-and-file candidate Owen Jones made matters clear: “There are LRC members and sympathisers who will vote for Jerry Hicks, while others will support McCluskey (including Chris Ford’s former comrades in the AWL). An intervention by the LRC will simply represent a sectarian intervention on behalf of one side of a divided left, alienating the only organised left bloc within the biggest union in the country, and a union which will have an absolutely fundamental role to play in the post-election struggles within the labour movement and the Labour Party. Given that even LRC members...
are divided on the issue, our best policy is to stay out and simply call for the right to be defeated. Owen. Definitely no rebellions from the ranks will be encouraged by the LRC.

What were the reasons for the SWP’s wobble in 2009 and their indecision now and that of the LCR and AWL? They are trying to face two ways at the same time. You cannot mobilise the ranks against the bureaucracy and climb the greasy pole of the bureaucracy’s career structure at the same time. Either you compromise with the united left, who have now in their gift all the lay and paid positions in the union or you fight them. If you fight them you end up like Alberto Durango, denied the right to speak to the London United Left meeting because he fought for the ranks against the bureaucracy. But you are giving your allegiance to putting your faith in the working class and its ability to burst the straight jacket of the bureaucratic apparatus and open the door for revolutionary politics. The Stalinalised Communist parties long ago abandoned that aspiration, the Socialist party have now abandoned it but for others, if they are engaged in the class struggle, there is hope. Not that we think that the leadership of these groups are salvageable for the revolution but their ranks surely are if give revolutionary leadership in the coming struggles.

When Jerry stood for General Secretary of the Amicus section of Unite his opponents coined the slogan “vote Hicks, get Coyne” (the right-winger). This time we might put forward the slogan, Vote McCluskey, get Woodley/Simpson/Status Quo (not the rockers, unfortunately). This was the result a year ago: Derek Simpson 60048, 37.7%, Jerry Hicks 39307 24.7%, Kevin Coyne 30603 19.2%, Paul Reuter 28283, 17.8%, [spoilt votes] 1031 0.6%.

And remember what is was like when Jerry Hicks stood against Simpson just one year ago: “Jerry is a grassroots activists who would work as General Secretary on a workers wage not the approximately £100,000 plus perks enjoyed by Simpson. He is gaining support pretty rapidly, the Socialist Party have thrown their weight behind him, along with the SWP, Socialist Appeal, Workers Liberty and Green Party Trade Union activist and Unite member Matt Sellwood.” Derek Wall, Another Green World blog.

Where have all the flowers gone?

The United Left is the successor organisation to the TGWU Broad Left and the Amicus Unity Gazette. In his history of the TGWU [reviewed in Socialist Fight No. 3] Andrew Murray tells us that, “The removal of the ban on the Communist Party members holding office also contributed to the growing strength of the Broad Left, which increasingly came to set the union’s political course, and influence the appointment of a new generation of full-time officials” (p142-3). This supposedly left body fighting for “a members’ union” has always supported the bureaucracy against the membership. As Murray unwittingly suggests it functioned as a system of patronage where all the jobs and lay positions in the union were available only to those who paid the ideological Danegeld and acknowledged the CP’s agenda of capitulation to the bureaucracy. And until 2007 this body, which was illegal under union rules designed to protect the bureaucracy against the membership, determined the union’s political course, admits Murray! Of course any genuine attempt to mobilise the membership felt the full force of the bureaucracy’s anger, unlike this bogus body.

That is why its successor group in Unite, the United Left (UL) were so hostile to organising cleaners that they denied speaking rights to Alberto Durango, a sacked and victimised cleaner on 18 July. His ‘crime’ was to mobilise his membership to fight the bosses. Bureaucratic control of everything that moves within its orbit is Bevin’s real legacy to the entire TU bureaucracy. This can be overcome in periods of increased class militancy by a determined rank and file leadership, something every bureaucrat since - including Murray and the United Left, is at great pains to avoid.

In order to ensure a majority at that London meeting the United Left leadership mobilised heavily from the buses; together with the full time officials and other union employees. The leading “leftist” from the buses was Steve O’Rourke, Convenor of North West London Metroline buses and chair of the London Convenors’ Committee. You may examine the extract from Metroline’s Metlife of September/October 2007 below to satisfy yourself that Steve is, in fact, a right-wing company man to his backbone, but quite acceptable to mobilise voting fodder against genuine militants. Together with his entourage he also participated in the infamous Manchester hustings meeting, where Jerry Hicks staged his double walk-out. The purpose of the London mobilisation was primarily to remove the SWP and other leftists like Ted Knight from the leadership of the London and Eastern Region, Alberto Durango’s silencing was a bonus for these reactionaries. This was a warning shot across the bows of the SWP, the SF and other leftists; either you play ball with us, or do our bidding in all we ask or you will be “filtered out”. UL Chair, the arrogant bureaucrat Martin Mayer, gave short shrift to the leftist Jim Sheridan in this exchange;

From: johnsheridantg@hotmail.com, Date: 1 Feb 2010

Hi Martin,

Your report is not factually correct. Steve Davidson’s proposal was NOT put to the council to vote on. It was my proposal for Branches to directly submit motions.
UNISON United Left witch hunts
From Permanent Revolution—http://www.permanentrevolution.net/

The ongoing series of attacks on left activists in Britain’s second largest union, UNISON, has continued and intensified in March. The most sensational development came on Friday 5 March with early morning raids on the offices of three London branches where the elected branch officials – all members of the Socialist Party – were ousted after a disciplinary process that consumed more than two and a half years while eating tens of thousands in members’ subs. There were partially successful attempts to remove computer hard drives and assorted files from the Greenwich office in particular, with evidence of collaboration between regional official and senior officers of the local Labour-controlled council.

The day before the raids Glenn Kelly (previously a national executive member), Onay Kasab and Suzanne Muna had seen their ‘sentences’ commuted to bans of two to three years on holding any official position in the union. Their three branches, Bromley, Greenwich and the Tenants’ Services Authority are under the yoke of ‘regional supervision’. This means that un-elected, full-time regional organizers will exercise direct control over the branches’ resources and oversee elections to officers’ positions. The pretext for these dramatic interventions, as stated in a letter to other London branch secretaries, was that the branches were ‘ineffective’.

As March drew to a close, John McDermott, a SWP member and a widely respected in UNISON’s Yorkshire and Humberside region, learned that senior officials had barred him from office for five years. His crime? After winning an election to the national executive in spring 2009, John was informed that he had actually been ineligible to stand due to a brief period of unemployment resulting from victimisation, acknowledged by UNISON, by his previous employer. Another non-aligned left activist, Caroline Bedale, who had led strike action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, in 2008, is currently challenging an action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, by his previous employer. Another non-aligned left activist, Caroline Bedale, who had led strike action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, in 2008, is currently challenging an action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, by his previous employer. Another non-aligned left activist, Caroline Bedale, who had led strike action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, in 2008, is currently challenging an action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, by his previous employer. Another non-aligned left activist, Caroline Bedale, who had led strike action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, in 2008, is currently challenging an action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, by his previous employer. Another non-aligned left activist, Caroline Bedale, who had led strike action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, in 2008, is currently challenging an action in defence of sacked activist, Karen Reissmann, by his previous employer.

Perhaps UNISON, a union of 1.3 million members, concentrated in a public sector that is about to face attacks on an unprecedented scale, really is a lost cause. If so, things are REALLY BAD. But the resistance to the witch-hunting to date has suffered from the lack of a sustained united campaign that cuts across the undeniable divisions on the left. In those branches under regional supervision there needs to be a push for meetings independent of the imposed ‘branch secretaries’ to map out an alternative to the prospect of indefinite direct control by unelected, unaccountable and increasingly arrogant bureaucracy.

Fri 16, April 2010

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
When they wanted a man to lead in the van
Or to harry the foe in the rear,
Or to storm a redoubt up went the shout;
"The Muslim youth are here!"
(with apologies to Percy French)

Marxism teaches us in the first place who the enemies of the working class are and secondly how to fight them. But all the accounts of the confrontations between the UAF and assorted anti-fascists and the EDL/police read like Napoleon vs. Wellington at the battle of Waterloo. "You engage, and then you wait and see!" Napoleon was fond of saying about his battle tactics but this can be taken either as a brilliant example of a dialectical application of an already worked out strategy or simply blind empiricism. It is the latter in most cases for the UAF anti-fascist movement and their opponents on the left. "I would have outflanked the police kettle and attacked from the rear" they pontificate against the very obvious reluctance of the SWP/UAF to mount any serious confrontation with the fascists and their over readiness to accept police instructions, particularly after the brutal treatment by the police and their dogs at Bolton. Apparently there was a severe internal dispute in the UAF after Bolton and before Dudley but the conservative approach won, hence the repeat of the debacle at Dudley.

But it really is the strategy for the whole class that is missing here. Of course David Cameron is only "in" the UAF in a political sense. He is not really there in person, he does not need to be, he just delimits the parameters on how far it can go in fighting fascism: never, under no circumstance, so far as to threaten capitalism itself. That is his bottom line as a UAF member. And that must be the UAF's too! Hence the Dudley farce and attempts to depict the defeat by the UAF as a victory - hollow phrases belied by events on the ground!

We cannot reduce this political argument to tactical manoeuvres. Trotsky wrote strategically in his volumes about fascism in Germany, France and Spain and said very little about no-platforming. He did support it completely - "If you cannot convince a fascist, acquaint his head with the pavement" - he famously said and was, as we all know, no slouch when it came to the use of revolutionary violence as the recent Robert Service biography has attempted to exploit.

But it is the politics of having David Cameron as a member that is crucial to this mistaken approach of the fight against fascism. This can only be defeated when the crisis of working class leadership is tackled and solved. It is a thousand time wrong to let David Cameron set the boundaries of the fight against fascism. This clearly implies that the UAF judges that this is in essence a reformist and not a revolutionary task. Cameron and all Liberal capitalists, not to speak of the reactionary ones, would and will choose fascism before socialism – in France they said "better Hitler than socialism" and in Spain after 1936 they even joined the Communist Party to save capitalism and defeat the revolution.

So the UAF must not make a real fight for no platform either as a consequence of this. Where would David Cameron and his ilk go if the UAF really took on the Fascists? Where would all the TU bureaucrats and left Labourites that were assembled at the UAF conference go? The UAF would be thrown back on the working class and the fight against bureaucratic misleadership and here their SWP leaders cannot even support Jerry Hicks against the bureaucratic monstrosity Len McCluskey for GS of Unite! That would be the single biggest blow you could strike against the rise of the EDL and the BNP but it seems the SWP and the UAF are already too much in hock to the TU bureaucracy to make an open fight of it. We trust this does not apply to all its members. The motion to the UAF Conference on 13 February from the Harrow UAF and the Jewish Socialist Group was the only one to raise the question of the Popular Front and its dangers and also the intimately related question of the total lack of democratic structures in the UAF. The fate of the motion brilliantly confirmed the correctness of the analysis. The conference was simply a rally to woo the "leftist", respectable establishment figures and there was no facility whatsoever to discuss any motion. If we are to take the question of the fight against fascism seriously we must have the democratic structures to wage the class struggle in open debate and conflict to take the battle forward. That is of necessity the mode of operation of the working class, who do not exist as a class at all outside of its organisation and democratic traditions of debate and struggle. If you kill that, and the TU bureaucracy is doing their best to do so, you doom the working class to defeat by fascism. So to whom do we orientate, the working class or the TU bureaucracy? The SWP and the UAF must decide.

Does the politics of forming Popular Fronts, as Trotsky defined them; an alliance between working class parties and capitalist parties, limit the UAF in its fight against fascism in any way? To ask the question is to answer it. Even if the UAF only seems to be capitulating to TU bureaucrats like McCluskey to keep them on board, they are the "Labour lieutenants of capital" in the workers' movement and so to capitulate to them is to capitulate to capitalism itself in a real if indirect way. Trotsky correctly warned that popular frontism would destroy the revolutions in France and Spain and he was unfortunately correct. Let us learn some lessons of history as we approach what must be an increasingly severe class struggle after this election!
Unite Against Fascism and the rise of the EDL
by Mark Brown

Unite Against Fascism (UAF), as a Popular Front organisation largely coordinated by members of the SWP, have managed to continue mobilising large numbers of people from the left including trade unions, political and religious groups, to oppose various rallies organised by the English Defence League (EDL) across the country, most recently in Bolton on 20th March and Dudley on 3rd April 2010, with numbers of around 2000 and 1500 respectively. In Bolton, UAF organisers were arrested early into the demonstration. Weyman Bennett was arrested and charged with ‘conspiracy to commit violent disorder’ in relation to what was deemed to be provocative literature in a UAF leaflet. He was afterwards released on bail, along with Martin Smith, who runs the Love Music Hate Racism campaign, also arrested on the same charge. This was curious since UAF’s action was pre-planned with police. The conspiracy charge may have been a temporary expedient to ensure the police get the bail conditions they’re after. It is interesting to speculate why this happened to a senior UAF (SWP) leader at this late stage. With the Labour Party concerned with holding onto their electoral base amongst both the white working class in the north and ethnic minorities in urban metropolitan areas of the UK, it could be that, ahead of the General Election, the purpose of the message that his arrest sends out may have been to “back away from any set piece confrontations with the EDL before the general election, or face legal sanctions.”

What was of concern at Bolton, however, was the disproportionate force metered out on the UAF crowd by the police - largely from the Greater Manchester constabulary - as compared to the violent provocation by EDL supporters during the day, as well as the biased media reporting of what happened (the misleading impression was given that UAF were largely responsible for all the violence in Bolton, reflected in the arrest figures – 54 UAF supporters were arrested on the day out of a total number of 73). It was clear to anyone amongst the main part of the UAF demonstration in the town square, where lines of police separated both opposing crowds literally a stone’s throw from each other, that the EDL threw small objects and bottles filled with urine at the UAF crowd. In retaliation, a small number of UAF demonstrators threw sticks of wood from placards over police lines back at EDL supporters. Yet it was the UAF crowd who largely felt the strong arm tactics of the police. The police, using cameras on sticks to see into the crowd, used snatch squads to go right into the crowd to arrest identified individuals.

A further purely speculative explanation for this disproportionate police action may have been to have placated those amongst the local population with the feeling of antipathy to uncritical support for Islamic interests, for the reason of attempting to address a perceived need to redress the balance of any possible persecution complex (and repercussions thereof) amongst the local white working class with sympathy for the views of the EDL after the police clamp down on the EDL in February when the EDL leadership were arrested and bailed. This is based on the fact that these events in February may have provided a source of political capital for the far-right - portraying the multicultural, urban metropolitan support base of the UAF as a ‘left wing Semitic, racist and homophobic organisation….The police’s primary role is to ensure safety and public order. It is not in the public interest to allow EDL ‘demonstrations’ to proceed. These so-called demonstrations should be banned.” [1.]

Chris Bambery, a leading SWP member, explained in Socialist Worker back in 2001 why calling for state bans of fascist demonstrations is a bad idea: “We cannot rely on the ruling class, whatever liberal noises it makes, to stop the Nazis. This is especially true over the question of banning the Nazis. It seems an attractive option – after all, how better to get the Nazis off the streets – but the experience is that such bans have nearly always been used to stop the left mobilising. The 1936 Public Order Act was rushed through after 100,000 workers stopped the British Union of Fascists marching through the
Casuals United
the base of its support amongst the ranks of
the war in Afghanistan. EDL went on to court
Anglian Regiment returning from fighting in
parade of members of the 2nd Battalion Royal
group Al
nounced protest by the right
ised protests in reaction against a widely de-
football hooligans and BNP supporters organ-
"EDL represents part of a new phenomena
vations or hiding behind a ve-
fascism is attempting to revive itself inside
we currently live in a post fascist era where
EDL and others.
The demonstration in Bolton was actually well
planned by UAF; there had been a decision to
split into two groups to stop the two main
access routes through Victoria Square so that
the EDL route was completely cut off in both
directions, with UAF occupying the central
area of Victoria Square.
However, with these tactics, the UAF have
foregone a more confrontational approach in
holding to police jurisdiction. Clearly, it is up to
anti-fascists independent of UAF to organise to
pursue an alternative tactic in large numbers
to confront the EDL. However, they will have
to do so in large numbers.

Is this the start of a new fasc-
cist movement?
The background to the growth of the EDL and
obviously the BNP/Far-right in general lies in
resentments and scapegoating of ethnic mi-
orities by a white working class, who perceive
itself to have been neglected by the social
fascism of the metropolitan elite as an eco-

ommunity was ideologically justified at the time by
EDL formed in March 2009 after a group of
football hooligans and BNP supporters organ-
ised protests in reaction against a widely de-
nounced protest by the right-wing Islamist
group Al-Muhajiroun on March 2009 against a
parade of members of the 2nd Battalion Royal

Anglian Regiment returning from fighting in
the war in Afghanistan. EDL went on to court
the base of its support amongst the ranks of
Casuals United - a social network of past and
present football hooligans all over the country
who each used to belong to football firms of
their own clubs. EDL’s raison-d’être is to con-
flate Islamic extremism onto anything and
anyone considered Islamic. This ideological
rational plus EDL and Casual Utd’s own racism
stems from the influence of the NF and its
historic cultural crossover with the football
terraces, particularly during the 1970s and
1980s. Throughout the 1980s, the NF put re-
sources into canvassing support on football
terraces; its paper ‘Bulldog’ ran a racist league
table where supporters competed to earn the
title of most racist in the country. [4.]
The EDL has parallels in the first beginnings of
past fascist movements, for instance the ele-
mentary beginnings of Nazism in Germany
during the 1920s with the Sturmabteilung (SA,
otherwise known as Brownshirts), or the black
shirts under Mussolini in the early 1920s.

Where is the EDL coming
from?
Here in the UK in the 21st century, where the
majority enjoy a greater standard of living than
ever before, mainstream society views fascism
socially unacceptable. It could be said that we
currently live in a post fascist era where
fascism is attempting to revive itself inside
various organisations or hiding behind a ve-
neer.

"EDL represents part of a new phenomena
maybe call it "culturalist", that is it isn’t based
on white supremacism but a reaction and

counter to Islamic supremacism.” [3.]

EDL has been used against trade unionists and the
new law would stop the fascists. In reality it

gets for several years now).
The state’s policy of integration
The state’s policy of integration - concentrated
wholly on economic prosperity and aspira-
tional consumerist trends of an advanced capi-
talist system – has had limited scope for ma-
ноeuvre in ‘integrating’ those loyal to a more
traditional Islamic identity and culture based
on varying degrees of religious stricture – like
the Orthodox Jewish population – into the
typical ‘free and easy’ libertarian culture of the
UK population, effectively amounting to a co-
existence of parallel lives. What the far-right
have done is to mobilise as a reaction against
popular fears of Islamic sectarianism in a post-
9/11 world, with white, working class kids
being encouraged to organise on the basis of
their own ethnic affiliation and religious iden-
tity.

The EDL has been the result. Funded by Alan
Lake, a middle-aged businessman, it is ide-
ologically supported by the ideas and narrative
of Dutch conservative politician Geert Wilders.
However, its ideological root stems directly
from the BNP who see the EDL as their version of
a “United Front” [5.] Prominent EDL mem-
bers are long standing members of BNP, such
as Chris Renton, the man behind the EDL web-
site (EDL co-founder Paul Ray has now admit-
ted BNP activist Chris Renton is “de-facto Com-
mander of the EDL), and Davy Cooling, the
administrator of the Luton EDL site. [6.]
The idea that EDL are not racist is completely
misinformed. They have flirted with a racist
agenda through their provocative choices of
location for their rallies, in keeping with their

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
conflation of Islamic extremism being associated with anything Islamic. They enjoy organis-
ing marches against local mosques such as in Dudley (two demonstrations in Sept and Dec 2009 in Harrow against a newly built mosque there were organised by “STIOE”). Since the time of the crusades, Islam and its adherents have been cast as the strange and deviant other, the polar opposite to the reasonable and civilized West. Such prejudice has been normalised further/again in this post-9/11 social landscape. Rhetoric focuses on the barbarity, brutality and oppressiveness that exists within the practice of the Islamic faith, exploiting grievances attached to the sacrifice of British troops in Afghanistan, as well as cultural sensitivities emanating from the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings.

Violence around Birmingham city centre

In Birmingham it was estimated that around 250 people were involved in violence around Birmingham city centre which included bottle and brick throwing and racist chants of “No more Muslims.” Members of the rally were filmed giving Nazi salutes, aping the salutes given by BNP members at a recent Red White and Blue festival. They also chanted the BNP slogan “WE WANT OUR COUNTRY BACK.” In Nottingham on Sat 5th Dec 2009, a few hundred EDL supporters turned out, with a large concentration of fascists amongst them openly chanting racist slogans and chants such as “Muslim bombers off our streets” and “no surrender to the Taliban”.

Since then the EDL have attempted to adopt a veneer of respectability, courting mainstream opinion through cultivating an acceptable public image that they are not racist, portraying themselves as being ‘singularly opposed to the advance of Islamic values at the expense of cultural values that people living in UK society have become accustomed to’, whilst denouncing racist elements as being not part of their constituency.

They have flattered to deceive in trying to do this, with some individuals resorting to flying Israeli flags at demonstrations to emphasise this rationale, actions which only succeed in further antagonising those they oppose (the Muslim community) which is their obvious intention. The EDL may claim they are not racist, but UK fascists have come out more and more in large numbers to their demonstrations, particularly in Nottingham and in Stoke. In Stoke, the only time there hasn’t been a large counter-demonstration by the UAF, fascists ran through the town and smashed up Asian shops.

The worrying trend is that in the two most recent demonstrations in Bolton and Dudley, EDL numbers have increased sizably from those at earlier demonstrations. At Bolton, there were an estimated 2000 EDL supporters, and a slightly larger number than this in Dudley 2 weeks after. In Dudley, some EDL supporters turned on their own stewards trying to prevent them fighting with the cops; a large group eventually managed to break through from police lines later in the afternoon and get closer to the UAF demonstration whereupon a group of militant Muslim youth succeeded in breaking through police lines to counter them, throwing rocks at the opposing crowd. Reports that the local mosque had been attacked had added to an escalation in tensions.

Increase in support for EDL

Increase in support for the EDL is a worrying trend. Unless there is some attempt to visibly provide an alternative to focus this anger and violence in a progressive way – which doesn’t exist at the moment (the UAF as discussed before in Socialist Fight, are not equipped to do this because they are reformist) – then sadly the EDL is going to grow even larger.

In the white working-class areas where the BNP have already gained a toe-hold (primarily former Labour strongholds where people rightly feel betrayed by the mainstream parties and have been conned into seeing the BNP as some form of ‘radical’ alternative), as well as confronting the BNP physically, we should aim to challenge the BNP’s fascist politics and replace them with our own anti-racist, anti-capitalist and pro working-class politics.

Our common cause amongst all working class communities irrespective of colour and creed is the complete overhaul of the capitalist system.

On Saturday 20th February 2010, members of the leadership team of the English Defence League were arrested as they travelled to Scotland to support the Scottish Defence League demonstration. While in custody the team members homes and families homes were raided by police armed with automatic machine guns. Computer equipment was seized during raids. Leadership team members were banned from attending any meeting with more than 3 EDL members then bailed to return to a police station in Sheffield in the near future. As a result of this turn of events, an EDL demonstration planned to controversially take place in Bradford on May 20th was called off. As this article goes to press a further demonstration by the EDL has been planned in Aylesbury on Saturday 1st May.

References:

Defend the Jewish anti-Zionists, Reject anti-Semitism

by A.J. Byrne

The growing influence of anti-Semitism in the opposition movements to Zionism in the West is doing big damage to the fight to defend Palestinians against Zionist imperialism. If the struggle is reduced to this abysmal level then it is lost. Because bourgeois nationalism of any hue is a dagger at the throat of working class solidarity, the only force on the planet which can defeat both Zionism and Arab nationalism. David Rosenberg of the Jewish Socialist Group was quoted as saying a few years ago: “During the summer of 2006 there were two big demonstrations over the Lebanon war in London…. On the second one there was due to be a speaker from Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfJfP). The proposal to have a speaker from JfJfP was strongly supported by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. But this proposal was blocked within the Stop the War committee. I have been told, on very good authority, who blocked it - a leading member of the SWP.”

And he went on to claim, “Western anti-Semitism is increasingly infecting anti-Zionist movements in the Arab and Muslim world. Left unchallenged it will grow and become hegemonic within this discourse over the next generation.”

The Palestine Solidarity Campaign AGM in March 2007 saw two motions opposing anti-Semitism voted down, although the compromise Executive amendment was accepted by Jews Against Zionism (JAZ) because it “accommodated our two resolutions” and made clear that the PSC did not have any links with the Holocaust denying Deir Yassin Remembered (DYR) group. A number of leading anti-Zionist Jews, including Lea Tsemel, Michael Warschawski and Jeff Halper, resigned from that organisation because it included the anti-Semite Israel Shamir. In his resignation letter Jeff Halper made the following comment, “...Shamir is a “problem” in two senses. First, he deflects the discussion from the essentials of Deir Yassin onto the supposed characteristics of the perpetrators. To cast all “Jews” as perpetrators of such heinous crimes, which is exactly how the discussion has been going for the past number of months, is racist, absolutely unacceptable - and deflects entirely from the issue of Deir Yassin itself. Just look at his response to Uri Davis: “A Jew is called upon by his religious law to do utmost damage to one who accepted Christ...” Anyone who knows Uri Davis would know that such a statement is beyond absurd, but the bigger question is: Who in the hell is “a Jew”?

Others who resigned reported that on March 30, the Jerusalem Post published an op-ed, “Two weeks ago, Russian-language journalist Israel Shamir told a largely Jewish audience: ‘Jews only exist to drip the blood of Palestinian children into their matzas.’”

The JAZ statement said in part, “At the PSC AGM on 10th March, after debate on our two resolutions, the conference passed an Executive amendment, which began: Conference reaffirms its opposition to all forms of racism, including anti-Jewish prejudice and that the expression of or support for anti-Semitic viewpoints are incompatible with membership of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign. Conference rejects any attempt by supporters of the State of Israel to try to label those who criticise or condemn actions and policies of that state as guilty of anti-Semitism.”

But the near-unanimous rejection of the two detailed motions gave encouragement to opponents of Tony Greenstein and Roland Rance, two of the principle representatives of Jewish anti-Zionism in Britain. The reasons are wholly political and closely related to the state of the class consciousness of the international working class. The failure of the leadership of the PSC, mainly Socialist Action and the Communist League (related to the US SWP of Jack Barnes) to fight this advance is because their political tendencies have capitulated to every substitute for the revolutionary working class since the early 50s when Pablo abandoned Trotskyism and bowdlerised the theory of Permanent Revolution so that Stalinists and the national bourgeoisie could substitute for the working class and revolutionary Trotskyism to overthrow capitalism. They capitulated to Yasser Arafat but now they were beginning to lean towards the anti-semitic Hamas and Hezbollah.

We stress “lean towards”, Betty Hunter, Bernard Regan and Sarah Colbourne and their followers in the leadership of the PSC have not become anti-Semites as the Zionists charge in attempting to portray the motions by comrades Greenstein and Rance as a struggle against anti-Semites. It was a struggle that did force the PSC leadership to take stock of their positions and apparently forced them to delete a link to DYR from their website. As there is an undoubted swing to the right in Israel, including its working class, this lends credence to those who wish to write it off entirely. For instance Gilad Atzmon, in an article on 17 December 2009 (http://www.redress.cc/global/gatzmon20091217#bio), said, “In response to the warrant, Livni, deflecting personal guilt, said on 15 December that “she would not accept any accusation that compared Israeli Defence Forces soldiers to terrorists”. She is actually correct. The so-called “terrorists” are in fact freedom fighters. Israel on the other hand is a racist, expansionist state. Its military forces are engaged in a continuous crime against humanity. Israel is as vicious as Nazi Germany but, in practice, it is far worse for it is a “democracy”. Its murderous practices are a direct reflection of its people’s wishes as expressed in a democratic vote. At the peak of the IDF’s brutal Gaza campaign 94 per cent of the Israelis supported the lethal measures against the Palestinian population. Israelis are not terrorists, they are actually the embodiment of terror” (our emphasis—ed.)

This also includes some pseudo-Trotskyists, like Nahuel Moreno, the Argentinean “father” of Latin American Trotskyism who made the following anti-Semitic comments in 1982: “You are dissolving the concrete, which is the Muslim and Palestinian struggle for the destruction of the fascist state (…) If you want to insinuate that a Constituent Assembly will appear with non-Jewish, Palestinian people, we respond: those imaginary inhabitants do not exist (…). We do not recognize any democratic right to enslave people sent by metropolitan states (…) if one can clarify correctly, the destruction of the Israeli state is dissolved in an abstract formula. It necessarily implies the removal of the present inhabitants. Otherwise, we would mean accepting the accomplished fact of the Jewish occupation of Israel.” (Correo Internacional N° 8, Sept 1982)

The first blast that brought out this development clearly was an attack on Robert Fisk in The Palestine Telegraph, tiny.cc/bernard-lewis-syndrome entitled Is Robert Fisk Suffering from the Bernard Lewis Syndrome? 16 December 2009 by PT Editor Maysaa Jarour. Hezbollah had objected to the teaching of Anne Frank’s Diary in the schools of South Lebanon and Fisk accused them of anti-Semitism. Hamas, for instance, support the anti-Semitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a Tsarist forgery proved as such the best part of a century.
friends ramp up campaign to distract Palestine activists from core issues, again by Salaheddin Ahmad said: “as for our true friends in the struggle, Jewish and non-Jewish, those who will not tolerate any deviation from the urgent need to stay focused on the struggle for justice for the Palestinian people, our advise remains this: steer clear of time-wasting pretenders like Greenstein, Elf and their ilk. Do not engage with them or else they will drag you down to the subterranean hovel they inhabit.”

Democratic principled Jewish anti-Zionists are not needed here, is the message, let alone principled revolutionary socialists. Confessional states is the logic of this nightmare scenario, which would make the socialist revolution and human liberation an even more distant prospect.

Tony Greenstein on Atzmon and anti-Semitism

I don’t accept the opening statement viz. ‘The growing influence of anti-Semitism in the opposition movements to Zionism in the West is doing big damage to the fight to defend Palestinians against Zionist imperialism.’

The Atzmonites are politically much weaker now than they were three years ago. Indeed the victory of five Scottish PSC members in the Edinburgh Sherriff’s Court last week, when they were acquitted of racially aggravated abuse, for disrupting a concert of the Jerusalem Quartet, is yet another nail in their coffin. Scottish PSC have always been clear as to their position on PSC.

The David Rosenberg statement is really out of date. Redress carries little influence and Mary Rizzo and Atzmon have parted company. The real issues are the attack on the Boycott campaign from PSC Executive and their bourgeois politics.

To me, anti-Semitism is not a big issue so far as it barely exists in Britain. It is an ideological weapon at best or worst. Today there is not the social or economic basis for it and much of the ‘anti-Semitism’ that one hears is of no more than the Idiot’s Solidarity with Palestine. It is primarily the result of Israeli’s actions. In Gaza etc. it is reflective of the oppressor and is a product of the reactionary politics of Hamas and Hezbollah, who cannot think outside their own narrow confessional box.

As I have repeatedly said to Atzmon, I don’t oppose his anti-Semitism because of what it will do to the Jews. It’s because of the damaging effect it will have on support for the Palestinians!

Best Tony Greenstein

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This is a political question, not a moral one. Of course anti-Semitism is rife among those who have suffered constant bombings and have lost family and friends to the Zionist murder machine. It has to be politically fought, not accommodated if we are to ever make the revolution that will unite Arab and Jewish workers and peasants against Imperialism, Zionism and the Arab bourgeoisie themselves. And of course it is not to be equated with the ideology of the Nazis as it is a reactive and defensive form of anti-Semitism but its conscious propagation in a political manner by leaders and the Arab media in general it makes common cause of Jewish and Arab workers against capitalism in general impossible. It is the crudest form of anti-imperialism which demands unquestioning allegiance to the reactionary Arab bourgeoisie. But Jarour argues wholly on a moral plain against one of the best known, principled and even-handed anti-Zionist journalist in the world who does not give an inch to the reactionary Arab bourgeoisie: “Robert Fisk... suffers from the Bernard Lewis syndrome - the neo-conservative orientalist whose scholarly outputs credibility deteriorated with his age- that the Arabs have an own history; rich and varied. And this history does not only entail the scholarly outputs of Ibn Khaldun or Ibn Sina, but Arabs have their own tragedies and sufferings. The pogroms of Lebanon and Palestine are-Qana, Shatila, Deyr Yassin, Sabra, Jabalya, Jenin-, their Anne Franks - Huda Ghaiby- their Auswitch-Khiam -, their Dresden-Quneitra in the Syrian Golan-, and their Warsaw Ghetto -Gaza-. The Arabs have their own ethnic cleansing, and the Palestinians are living it.

Now what did Robert Fisk really mean when he said that Hezbollah is anti-Semite? Did he forget that Nasrallah had a meeting with Noam Chomsky: a Jew! And with Neteruei Karta: a Jewish organization. How anti-Semitic? Norman Finkelstein, another Jew met representatives of the anti-Semitic Hezbollah, Mr. Fisk! And only two weeks ago did Nasrallah present Hezbollah the new political document, and in the speech in which he presented the new politics of Hezbollah, Nasrallah reiterated that his strife was with Zionism and the Zionist state, not with the Jews. Does Fisk not know Arabic? Cannot he decipher the simple truth that the Arabs have their own history; rich and varied.

Such rhetoric does not hide the true situation. But worse was to follow. On 1 January 2010 Salaheddin Ahmad, the editor of Redress Information & Analysis, blogged the following story.

Israel’s hidden friends, Troubled misfits in our midst and he claimed he “highlights the problem of false friends in Britain’s Palestine solidarity movement and urges genuine activists to steer clear of them” This is some of it:

“A far more insidious genre of fellow travellers consists of some self-proclaimed anti-Zionist Jews. These are potentially far more damaging to the cause than the more transparent right-wing extremists. There are at least a dozen of them in Britain and they include such people as Tony Greenstein and Mark Elf. We can name more but will not for the time being...

It would be easy to label the likes of Greenstein and Elf as Israeli agents because in effect their seditious behaviour can serve only Israel but that would be too easy. Judging by their activities and utterances, these are people who believe that being Jewish and claiming to be anti-Zionist entitles them to hijack the Palestinian solidarity movement and set its agenda. This was evident, for example, in motions submitted to the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) in 2007 in which Greenstein and others tried but failed to make anti-Semitism and the Holocaust among the criteria for membership of the PSC.

It would also be easy to dismiss them as childish and ignorant nincompoops. That is precisely what we have done over a number of years. Our observation of the behaviour of Greenstein, Elf and their ilk led us to conclude that another of their motives, in addition to hijacking the Palestinian solidarity movement, was to distract genuine supporters of the Palestinian cause with ceaseless, tedious and time-wasting arguments that have nothing to do whatsoever with the Israeli occupation, land theft, colonization, Zionism or apartheid. Our position and our advice to others was, and remains: “Do not engage with these Judeo-centric, narcissistic misfits.”

It is clear from this diatribe that Salaheddin Ahmad regards Jews and all those who fight anti-Semitism as “childish and ignorant nincompoops” and he wrongly concluded that the defeat of the two motions meant that it was now OK to proceed with anti-Semitism, not knowing or ignoring the fact that the compromise motion from the PSC Executive specifically did make anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial criteria for (non) membership of the PSC.

In a further post on 3 January , Israel’s hidden...
November 9, 2009 – Where is the socialism now? Frenetic right-wingers spent a good part of the US summer shouting about the “government takeover of health care” or the “stealth socialist health-care plan.” Now that the Affordable Healthcare for America Act has been passed by a slim margin in the US House of Representatives, on November 8, there are few traces of anything even resembling socialism. Instead, Americans will find the good, the bad and the ugly of health-care reform all contained within the 1990-page bill.

The good

The longer a rotten system lasts, the more any change to it is perceived to be a giant leap forward. In this light, the House health bill contains some positive changes. Insurers will now be prevented from refusing enrollment based on a pre-existing condition, or from dropping subscribers who become ill. Such policies have allowed private insurers to maintain profit margins and, consequently, are contributing factors to the swelling ranks of the uninsured. Their elimination is certainly a positive reform.

Another provision in the bill removes the anti-trust exemption for private health insurers. Since 1945, insurers have been exempt from federal anti-trust law but subject to whatever state-by-state provisions existed. Insurers argued that this allowed them to share essential information about pools of subscribers in order to determine risk. In practice, much more than information was shared. The American Medical Association reports that large insurers now control 94% of health-care business in most regional markets. A few large-scale private insurers lord over each segment of the country. House Democrats view anti-trust law enforcement as a means to combat this concentration, but it presents a more ominous prospect when viewed inside of the rest of the reform proposal.

Transforming the mass number of uninsured in the United States, at last count around 48 million people, into the new market. For a time, prices may drop, but only at the cost of further monopolisation, this time on the national instead of regional scale. Anti-trust law is a notoriously weak weapon to break up monopolies, since enforcement is contingent on the political appetite of whatever administration directs politics in Washington. Removing the exemption is positive, yet creating the conditions to expand the problem of monopolisation seems to neutralise the benefits.

The bad

Many emotional pleas and an equally large number of words have been delivered for and against the public option. Right-wingers point to it as the crux of the secret “socialist” plan, while honest liberals made it a litmus test for the utility of the bill. What emerged from the debate is a watered-down version of a public plan sabotaged by concessions made to a vocal right wing and paid for by campaign contributions to Democrats from the private insurance lobby.

Key to the watering-down was de-linking reimbursement rates from the Medicare schedule. Medicare operates as a price-fixed program where rates are negotiated into annual budgets through the legislature. These are, generally, significantly below rates in the private sector. The House bill version of the public plan will operate with rates determined by the marketplace. This means that the private sector will play a primary role in determining the cost structure in which the public plan will operate. This will end the deflationary effect a Medicare-compensation structure would have and may also mean, as the Congressional Budget Office has argued, that a public plan will be forced to offer more expensive plans than private insurers.

The weak public plan will have negative ripple effects inside the overall reform. The uninsured who can prove financial need, can now apply for “insurance credits” to purchase coverage. However, since the public plan may prove to be more expensive than private plans, it is likely that a significant amount of public subsidies will be funneled into the coffers of private health insurers. This fits with a larger pattern being developed by the administration of US President Barack Obama of funneling good public money into bad private sector businesses that have failed to meet the needs of the US people. The double problems of price inflation inside the plan and the issuance of insurance credits to private companies threaten to drive the already inflated price tag for the reform well past the estimated US$ 1.2 trillion.

The Ugly

In another act of right-wing sleight of hand, House Democrats shifted the mandate burden from the business community onto indi-

Obama’s America: Where’s the socialism? The good, the bad and the ugly of Health-care reform by Billy Wharton
be forced into a new market for low-cost health insurance. Such plans are sure to skimp on coverage and run high on costs.

The site of the herding will be the new health insurance exchanges. This idea, championed by the conservative Heritage Foundation, will ensure that market-based ideology frames the new health-care system. Rates will be determined, insurance offerings will be made and terms of care will be formulated here. All this with the continued logic of the marketplace where profits are a central concern and people’s health an afterthought.

Not socialism

None of the changes outlined above amount to socialism. Nor do they even signal the opening of a road which could lead to a socialist health care plan. The hope for genuine reform rests in the same place as it did before the bill was passed – in the certainty that the private sector will make such a mess of health care that the US people will be outraged enough to move towards socialising health care.

A single-payer plan would cut across the good, the bad and ugly of this round of health-care reform. Our health would cease to be a commodity and be guaranteed as a human right. Plenty of organising is needed to win a single-payer plan and, in the immediate term, we have plenty of myths to dispel about the wonders of small reforms.

While citizens in most other industrialized nations enjoyed the benefits of publicly administered healthcare from the aftermath of WW II forward, Americans have suffered under a healthcare system dominated by private corporations. For-profit healthcare has produced negative health outcomes at all levels of the system. More than 48 million people have no health insurance, 30 million more are underinsured and 6 out of 10 Americans report that they have either delayed or deferred a necessary medical procedure in the last year. Americans are more than ready for publicly-run healthcare that guarantees access at all levels of the system.

Unfortunately, the bill recently passed by the House of Representatives, The Affordable Healthcare for America Act (HR 3962), and the proposals being considered by the Senate will not provide the relief Americans so desperately need. Instead, these reforms were shaped and, in some cases, authored by the same private interests who have spent decades collecting massive profits by restricting access to care. As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama sensed the growing public anger about healthcare and scored many popularity points for promising “universal healthcare care.”

Once in office, after taking millions from the healthcare lobby, his rhetoric shifted to the neoliberal promise of “choice and competition” in health-care.

The primary problem with HR 3962 and the Senate proposals is that all of the changes they propose are made within a for-profit system. The House Bill strips the insurance companies of the right to deny coverage based on a pre-existing condition. Yet, it de-links the public option from Medicare reimbursement rates, thereby surrendering pricing to the private sector. The Bill removes the anti-trust exemption enjoyed by private insurers. However, it simultaneously mandates that all Americans carry some form of health insurance, thereby herding millions into low-coverage high-fee private plans. Each step in a positive direction is coupled with a restructuring that will enrich private insurance companies and pharmaceutical makers.

The bills lost further reform credentials as Democrats cut last minute deals with Republicans. Immigrants were removed from eligibility for the public option, abortions were written out of the proposal and Medicare funding was cut. The Medicare cuts are particularly cruel, since they will reduce an already compromised plan to bare bones coverage. Some of the cuts will limit private insurance profiling, but others will slash necessary items such as exercise programs for seniors. Overall, these omissions signal that the reforms are not about providing comprehensive medical coverage, but about political expediency within the establishment political class. The next round of negotiations in the Senate is sure to produce even further regressive measures as campaign-donation driven legislators cut more deals.

What people in this country need is healthcare. It is their right as human beings. The only way to secure this right is to place the healthcare system in public hands—to remove the profit-motive from the system. The Socialist Party USA therefore encourages its members and supporters to continue their work in the single-payer movement and to pressure elected representatives to vote “No” on the Senate proposal and, eventually, on the merged bill. All non-violent forms of protest should be employed to prevent the passage of this legislation. The protests should clearly oppose the legislation. We do not want a stronger public option, we want what is rightfully ours—unfettered access to health-care services.

The passage of the weak and contradictory reform bills threaten to disgrace the notion that the public sector should play a prominent role in the administering of healthcare. Resisting the Obama, House and Senate proposals for reform not only promotes the idea that healthcare is a human right, it sends the message that people will not allow private sector campaign contributions to drive politics—the satisfaction of our needs as humans should shape legislation.

Access to healthcare is our human right. We must build a movement to secure this right.

Say no to HR 3962!
Say no to Obama Care!
Yes to single-payer!
Yes to a socialized medical system

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
Roman Polanski, Rape Shield Laws and the Sparts

by AJ Byrne

In an article, Hands off Roman Polanski, in Workers Hammer No. 209 (Winter 2009-2010) the Spartacist League finish by saying “Our defence of Polanski, like our longstanding defence of NAMBLA (North American Man Boy Love Association which advocates the decriminalisation of consensual sex between men and boys), is based on our Marxist program for women’s liberation through socialist revolution, Government out of the bedroom! Hands off Roman Polanski! Drop the charges!” Yet the article itself and the subsequently quoted Workers Vanguard article (No 192 10 Feb 1978) display such reactionary and backward attitudes to women that no women’s organisation will have anything to do with the group internationally.

In 1985 the WRP broke up amidst allegations that Healy had sexually abused women in the organisation. Twenty six women were named and I witnessed the harrowing testimony of some, as did the expelled minority who subsequently denied everything. The Sparts and David North’s followers – the Workers League was even more sexist and homophobic that the WRP then – claimed this was a matter of no consequence and a diversion from the real political issues. Healy had molested the 14 year old daughter of a leading member from east London, who met him in the middle of the yard in the Clapham HQ and shouted “Healy” before London, who met him in the middle of the yard

“The reporting rate of rape is increasing, but the conviction rate is diminishing. The ‘justice gap’ for victims of rape is therefore widening.

UK conviction rates for rape 1977: 33.3%, 1999: 7.7%, 2002: 5.6%, 2004: 5.3%,” Different systems, similar outcomes? Tracking attribution in reported rape cases in 11 European countries - Authors: Jo Lovett, Liz Kelly

A central feature of the pre-split WRP, the ICL and the SEP was patriarchal antifeminist prejudices, that was the reason for their fellow feeling with Healy on this matter. The cultural level of these groups is akin to barbaric Maoism. There is no appreciation of the power relationships enforced by sexual abuse. Read the young girl’s testimony. She was 13, she wanted to be a film star/model and her mother was pushing her on. Polanski spotted his victim and groomed her. He told her he wanted to take photos of her to put on the front page of Paris Vogue. This was a lie, of course, but she believed him so he engaged in one photo session in which he got her to take off her top. In the second session, some days later, he plied her with champagne, he gave her a drug and he raped her anally, twice, after enquiring if she was on the pill and when her last period was. From the casual attitude of the other woman present this was a frequent occurrence. This is the standard Hollywood casting couch routine with the difference that he raped her. The Sparts insist that it was “consensual”; how do they know? This is the relevant part of her testimony

“Q. What did you do when he said, ‘Let’s go into the other room’?
A. I was going ‘No, I think I better go home’, because I was afraid. So I just went and I sat down on the couch.
Q. What were you afraid of?
A. Him.... He sat down beside me and asked if I knew what she was doing.”

Q. How old were you then?
A. I was, I think, 11 or 10. I’m not sure.
Q. What did you do with them?
A. I broke it and I took part of it.
Q. Looking at exhibit No. 6 marked for identification

The Grand Jury testimony of the 13 year old on her history of “drug taking”. She earned the title of ‘precocious’ from the Sparts and “whore” from Polanski and “young hooker” from Gore Vidal (‘anti-Semitism got poor Polanski’ this sexist opportunist also claimed) for this and her sexual history — twice with her boyfriend — and she is the only source of the evidence, she could just as just easily have denied it all. It is totally opportunist for Workers Hammer to use and endorse these reactionary quotes from Polanski and Vidal.

“However, rape uniquely involves an act the victim is here? http://www.themokinggun.com/archive/polanskicover1.html.

The Socialist Fight article said “Whether the girl had had sex or taken drugs before or not is totally irrelevant; we reject the reactionary ‘precocious Lolita ‘defence, only pleaded by those imbued with patriarchal antifeminist prejudices.” Workers Hammer responded, “However, rape uniquely involves an act the circumstances of which determine whether it is a crime or voluntary sexual intercourse. In this case the information about the young woman’s sexual activity with her boyfriend and her drug use is actually important in assessing what happened and determining that she knew what she was doing.” The only knowledge we have about her sexual history and her drug taking is from her Grand Jury testimony of 1978. At the age of “10 or 11” she had found a Quaalude tablet and taken some of it and by the age of 13 she had had sex with her boyfriend twice. And the Sparts approvingly quote Polanski’s attitude,

“Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!”
And they crow: “Good for him. We are cheered to see that this ordeal of puritanical witch-hunt- ing has not broken Roman Polanski’s spirit”. Of course any reasonably cultured socialist organisation would know that, “Rape shield laws have been in existence in the American legal system for many years. Although these laws vary from state to state, they generally have one common purpose: protecting a rape victim by preventing evidence of prior sexual history from being used against the victim in court... In the late 1970s and early 1980s, almost all jurisdictions in the United States adopted some form of rape shield statute. The laws in each state differ according to the scope of sexual behaviour shielded and time limits of the shield. Many American states do not permit any evidence relating to the past sexual behaviour of the plaintiff witness.” (Wikipedia – Rape Shield Laws).

Similarly in Britain. And you have only to go to the Women against Rape website (http://www.womenagainstrape.net/homepage) to see what view of this matter politically developed socialist feminists take; “End the use of women’s sexual history in court and ‘belief in consent’,” they headline, “In rape trials, victims of rape have traditionally been questioned about their sexual history... The Youth Justice & Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced some restrictions on such questioning, which trashes the rape survivor’s character in front of the jury... Vera Baird, Solicitor General, has admitted in Parliament that this “belief in consent” excuse that is written into the law is an open door for rapists’ lawyers to bring women’s sexual history into the courtroom. How many more women will be humiliated and discriminated against by the authorities bow to women’s pressure and do something about it?”

In fact the case that led to the change of law in 1999 was that of a woman who had been raped but had made porn movies, the Court of Appeal overruled two lower court judgements that allowed this as evidence. But the Sparts say “Government out of the bedroom” but the “government” (i.e. capitalist law) cannot refuse to enter the bedroom of a paedophile or a rapist and must make judgement on what “effective consent” means—“don’t take daddy away” does not serve as a defence.

In the same article they attack the Weekly Worker’s Eddie Ford, “In other words, there are some bedrooms in which the government does belong, if it deems that ‘sexual misconduct’ has taken place. This exposes the CPGB’s touching faith in the benign nature of the capitalist state, which you entrust to establish the principle of ‘effective consent’ and to regulate the sexual activity of youth and children.” In his 26 November response, Eddie Ford reiterates the call for “alternative legislation” and adds that the Communist Party of Great Britain’s call for the abolition of “age of consent” laws form “part of a whole raft of demands that we fight for in the here and now”, i.e. under capitalism. The idea that the capitalist state will ever introduce legislation based on “effective consent and the empowerment of youth” is downright laughable. The capitalist state— including its cops, courts and prisons—is not a neutral arbiter and cannot be pressured into acting in the interests of youth or the oppressed.

Really? Take this spook quote from Karl Marx; “to demand that the capitalist state passes legislation to prevent nine year old children working down mines shows a touching faith in the benign nature of capitalism. The idea that they will ever introduce such legislation is downright laughable. Everybody know that the only way to stop this brutal exploitation of children is the socialist revolution. And those who make such demands are horrible reformists who are seeking to derail the revolution, just like those fake Trotskysts who demand the jailing of the killer cop Mehserle in the US, sowing illusions in the US justice system.”

No serious Marxist would take this attitude but ridiculously the US Sparts opposed the demand to jail this cop who murdered a youth because... this “sowed illusions in the capitalist state”!

And we would add that NAMBLA (North American Man Boy Love Association) itself does not make a libertarian “government out of the bedroom” demand but also, like the CPGB, “call for fundamental reform of the laws regarding relations between youths and adults”, even if the deliberately provocative “boy” in the title of their organisation (3 of 13?) leaves them completely vulnerable to charges of paedophilia.

In the intense discussion on sex and sexuality in the WRP in 1986 one book that we constantly referred to was Marge Piercy’s Woman on the Edge of Time. But the central character, Connie Ramos, learned about the sexual relations of the future while in a mental institution now, the insights are disturbing and fascinating but really do assume the communist future of individuals and a society free of oppression and the alienation that distorts and destroys character and personalities. There will be no Dennis Nielsen (mass murderer of gay boys) or Peter Sutcliffe (mass murder of women with an engineer’s hammer) then, there will be no law, no inequality, no exploitation and no violence.

But now we have to rely on the capitalist state to enforce the cultural norms of human civilisation by pressure, by mobilisation and fundamentally by fighting for the socialist revolution. Not to demand such reforms is to abandon the class struggle entirely and to abandon women to rapists. Having got rid of reactionary age of consent laws, no law at all to protect children, as the Sparts demand, because you cannot trust the capitalist state, is absurd and criminally negligent.

In the here and now, under capitalism, we must make demands on the capitalist state, that they jail killer cops, rapists and paedophiles. We cannot say to women, “look, only the socialist revolution will free you from oppression, wait for that and in the meantime put up with it”. Politically conscious feminists won’t go for that and will never join a so-called revolutionary party with that attitude.

Finally let us look at the chart of the real situation of women in Britain on the question of rape compared with other European countries. Appallingly the conviction rate for Scotland is 3% and that for Luxembourg is 85%. Shall we say to Scottish women that they had all better emigrate to Luxembourg or wait for the socialist revolution? Or should we demand something be done in the “here and now”, “under capitalism”, as the Sparts scoff, so that women can walk the streets in some safety?
Transitional Demands and the "three whales" of Bolshevism

Hi Comrades,

re: ongoing(?) discussion on transitional demands, slogans, program.

Remember I didn't like the slogan nationalisation of the banks under workers control? I'll try and explain why.

In your co-written piece "Bourgeois Workers Parties..." in SF3 you quote Trotsky, I think, saying effectively that the slogan of soviets was correct in China during 1925-27 but was wrong after the defeat of the revolution. This is my point. Slogans relate to the period. It is not a revolutionary situation in Britain today so it is a bit leftist to raise the slogan of soviets. This did not stop Workers Power from doing this in Wales when the Welsh Assembly was in planning. We, instead, were more informed by the constituent assembly slogan: we argued that the proposed assembly should be supported but we were critical of the limited powers proposed and said that the assembly should have powers of a constituent assembly, i.e., should have the power to decide Wales' relationship to the union. WP stupidly counterposed soviets!

Similarly, outside of a revolutionary situation it is wrong (leftist) to raise the slogan of workers control. Here is what Trotsky wrote in 1932 in "What next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat":

"The slogan of workers' control over production relates, particularly and in general, to the same period as the creation of soviets. But neither should be construed mechanically. Special conditions may draw the masses toward control over production considerably prior to the time when they will show themselves ready to create soviets." [SAFG, p 241]

At best, the "period" above is a pre-revolutionary situation, i.e., when the bourgeoisie can no longer rule by its traditional means (but unlike a revolutionary situation - where the subjective factor is developed among the proletariat: they are approaching/relating to the question of state power.)

In Russia, workers' control took place after the seizure of state power in October 1917. It was related to the period October 1917 to, say, end of 1918(?) i.e. the period when the revolution was "growing over" (Lenin) from a bourgeois revolution to a socialist revolution, i.e., after the seizure of state power. Workers' control outside of a revolutionary situation is quite rare and will only exist under "special conditions" see above quote.

The task of transitional demands and slogans and program is to lead up to the seizure of state power. It explicitly says this in the TP:

"...This bridge should include a system of transitional demands, stemming from today's conditions and from today's consciousness of wide layers of the working class and unalterably leading to one final conclusion: the conquest of power by the proletariat."

In other words, and this is a very common mistake, they do not relate to the period of the socialist revolution, e.g., to Russia in the period from October 1917 to the wholesale expirations in autumn 1918(?).

If you look at the Bolsheviks' transitional program it does not contain any "socialistic" demands or slogans. The Bolsheviks had popularised a program of three demands over a number of years (the "three whales" of Bolshevism): 1. the democratic republic 2. the eight-hour day 3. confiscation of the landed estates

Each of these demands was a transitional demand. But each of these demands was also a bourgeois-democratic demand, i.e., not at all "socialistic" in character. (Lenin constantly argued that nationalisation of the land was a bourgeois measure and, e.g., was instituted in Australia by the British.)

It took years for the Bolsheviks to establish this short program in the minds of the proletariat, i.e., they didn't suddenly appear with these demands/this program during the revolution.

Of course the slogan of soviets (which "crows" the transitional program) was effectively posed from February 1917 onwards but most significantly wasn't raised in the period June 1907 to February 1917.

In other words, we can't just suddenly announce a new slogan out of the blue: "nationalisation of the banks under workers control".

Moving on to another related matter, that of "period". Trotsky expected a revolutionary period following/during the WW2. There was one but it was over in the advanced capitalist countries by the time of the '53 split. I think the whole problem behind the '53 split was how to get to grips with the incipient post-war boom period (which I think started with the "Korean war boom").

I think that you tend to suggest that there is a global revolutionary period stretching from April 1938 (when Trotsky wrote the TP) up to the present. You seem to ignore the idea of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations as being something quite different from, say, a period of defeat.

Today in Britain we are not in a pre-revolutionary situation. The bourgeois political system is not in a particularly deep crisis: the bourgeoisie can continue to rule as it has done. In fact, we are in a period of defeat in a two-fold sense:

1. Nationally, the defeat of the miners strike in 1984-5 is still with us: the unions have not fully recovered.

2. The loss of both China and Russia as workers states constituted a defeat for the international proletariat on a scale equivalent to that of the seizure of power by the fascists in Germany in 1933.

In other words: it is leftist to raise "socialistic" demands or slogans in the present period.

We must also acknowledge that Trotsky's belief that capitalism, in the late 1930s, was entering its death agony was wrong, i.e., proved wrong in later hindsight.

Trotsky himself argued that it is always difficult/impossible to predict concrete events. He, for example, thought the bureaucracy in USSR would not survive the war. He was wrong. Trotsky could not have predicted the agreement between this bureaucracy and imperialism encompassed in "peaceful co-existence". Trotsky was right to try and prepare the FI for the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations that would inevitably arise in connection with WW2. He was right to effectively "go for broke".

If one reads the TP carefully, one can discern the period that Trotsky was characterising. For example:

"The strategic task of the next period - a pre-revolutionary period of agitation, propaganda and organization..." (my italics)

In other words, the TP was not aimed at the period of the post-war boom where, generally speaking, pre-revolutionary situations did not arise in advanced capitalist countries.

Moving on yet again. We have to build a party based on our full program. In a word, this is socialism.

But of course we can't head off down the high road with placards saying "Socialism Now", that would be too abstract. The TP is not our full program. It addresses the period leading up to the seizure of state power but not really beyond it. We have to distinguish ourselves from others on the left by our full program being based on Marxism.

Trotsky said that Lenin's "State and Revolution" was simply a restatement of the Marxist position on the state. It talks of "smashing" the existing state power. Contrast this with the ex-WIL comrades (Richard Price et al) who leave the door open to reformism, i.e., fundamentally changing the state by peaceful means. We have to explain this difference in propaganda (we can only aspire to being a propaganda group in this period). But we have to point out that the seizure of state power is not on the immediate agenda. To suggest otherwise would be guilty of propagandism.

Instead of raising "maximum" demands and slogans ("Socialism Now", "Smash the Bourgeois State") and possible transitional slogans of a "socialistic" variety ("Workers Control", "Three Whales of Bolshevism") we need to build a unified party on Trotsky's Transitional Program.
“Expropriation”), we are, in this period, going to get more success by supporting chosen bourgeois reforms.

For example, I think we should raise the slogan of a United States of Europe (but not a Socialist United States of Europe). In other words, we essentially agree with the direction of the Lisbon Treaty - towards a single-state federation of European nations, but including Russia. Of course we only critically agree with the Lisbon Treaty - we think there should be more bourgeois democracy at a European level.

Trotsky considered that a united bourgeois Europe was an impossibility. If we agree with that (it needs discussion), then the slogan United States of Europe is a transitional slogan, i.e., Europe will only be united after a seizure of power at a European level.

This slogan would have to be born in mind when looking at the questions of Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland. We are in favour of a break-up of the British union. Those who oppose this are simply defending the wretched status quo.

Moving on slightly, the slogan "Israel/Palestine - For a Bi-National Workers State" is "maximalist", not transitional.

I’ll stop now,

Roy Wall

Polanski and the Age of Consent

19 November, 2009

Hi Gerry,

I agree with what you say about Polanski. I really appreciate your taking issues about sexism so seriously; and I also appreciate that most of the left are too, if what you have told me is correct.

There is an issue about the timing of the arrest (and I partly agree with this); - what was the motivation for it-whether it is to distract attention from war crimes including rape in Iraq or Afghanistan for example-however I still think we should support the arrest, even if drawing attention to the possible motives for it at this time as well. Thus we could have an analysis that included both sexism and imperialism.

I think it is important to be willing to recognise that women can be oppressed by sexism and by men (but this does not mean that all men are sexist or abusive); and that every oppressive sexist act does not have to be described under the imperialism (or even class) umbrella before it can be admitted to (although I do agree that class and sex oppression are vitally interconnected).

I think you are quite right that this is an important issue for women and for feminists and if the rape of a 13 year old cannot be taken seriously by the left then how are women to take the left seriously?

I disagree with the view that we should not ever use "bourgeois courts" because some human rights (such as the legal right to not be raped) have been hard won under capitalism; and we don’t just throw them away because we are still in a bourgeois system!

I disagree with anyone who would regard sex between an adult and child, or rape, as not being very important; or not even wrong in the case of age of consent cases. I wonder if those who use the bourgeois court argument re rape or child abuse are doing so to distract from their lack of commitment to the issue. Pornography is another case in point. I realise that at times the bourgeois courts can certainly be oppressive and persecutory. However I cannot accept that pornography does not oppress women and does not need addressing now.

I felt that the article in SF was actually very mild in the support it took for the feminist point of view, in that it only argued for the arrest of an actual rapist; and did not advocate arresting people who broke age of consent laws, and implicitly seemed to disagree with such laws altogether. I don’t agree with this.

Socialists who oppose using bourgeois courts often say that they support women’s rights and want to deal with these issues in a working class way.

Of course this is right that we need to develop our own working class ways. But where are they now? Until we have these fully in place I think we have to use what we have, when we can-at the same time as developing our own responses. When we have enough power, we can ditch the bourgeois methods all together.

I have also heard someone argue that most rape or abuse cases are not dealt with by the courts, so we should not support them when they are. This does not make sense to me.

Some (mostly male) leftists do not want to have an age of consent at all. I think this would remove the protection that vulnerable children and young people need. You have mentioned the grey area of puberty. The law could be fine tuned to take into account teens’ relationships with each other. But I think that adults should leave them alone-there is always a power imbalance. In responding to cases, the actual power imbalance needs to be looked at and the harm done, if any etc. The case of the jailed lesbian school teacher showed an injustice towards that teacher, and shows that the age of consent laws need reform-but not to be abolished all together.

From my perspective getting rid of these laws altogether would be getting rid of the protection that we have at the moment.

There are some people who don’t support prosecution for rape either. They would probably say it should be dealt with in a working class way.

I am tempted to say then, let’s use the method used by the IRA and just kneecap the abusers....

I met a young man Ireland who told me proudly that this is how they deal with such issues there. I was actually quite gratified to at least hear him taking the issue seriously! I don’t support the lack of natural justice where the accused may not be able to defend himself. But I can see how communities might feel compelled to resort to harsh measures in desperate times; and according to this young man the IRA did these things at the request of women in the community.

Another approach could be restorative justice-as socialists we could be trying to develop community and workplace based approaches now, with the aim of stopping the abusive and criminal behaviour.

Definitely there should be strong social pressure within working class communities to stop these behaviours and also such things as consumption or dissemination of violent pornography-so that even if we don’t want the courts to intervene in the latter case it should not be seen that the working class accepts at all the denigration and objectification of women in these films (and as we know many of the actors are pretty much raped anyway.)

The women’s movement has already developed refuges for women and children at risk from violence; and the socialist movement needs to take these initiatives further. At the same time; while we have a state-we need to press the state to provide funding for refuges, and free protection orders etc.

Anyway Gerry, I am really pleased to see you taking issues of sexism really seriously and I was pleased to see your disapproval of the photo of the two women with the T-shirts promoting the Morning Star as well, as being sexist.

Best wishes

Sarah Reeves (New Zealand)

20 Nov 2009 Polanski

Sarah,

This is a serious reply, and I have not thought seriously about these issues since about 1995. You are right, I gave too much to the Sparts in not stressing the power relationship in the Polanski affair, and that is why the Northites and the Sparts defend him; they have a cultist internal regime which depends on power relationships - Gerry Healy was just one expression. So I will have to reconsider.

On the age of consent the Sparts say abolish it - it is obviously used to jail consensual sexual relationships and what would the actual age be? But cannot other legislation be used to prosecute abuse, there is no question of a consensual (effective) sexual relationship between a child and an adult but what about the transitional time of puberty? And do we automatically conclude that a young adult may not have a sexual relationship with a more mature adult - is ‘inter-generational sex’ automatically reflective of power relationships? I will address some of these issues in SF4

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
Comrades,
The position of some comrades seems to be close to the position of the ICL-Fi (Spants). As often, this position sounds very orthodox, but has some dangerous twists. I agree that the bourgeois state must not interfere in human relations, especially in human sexual relations. But the Sparts position towards sexual relations between adults and youth or even children has, in my position, a dangerous flaw, when they speak of consensual sexual relations. Because I think it is very difficult to find out at which age humans are capable of consenting.

Reading Workers Vanguard, I find some strange arguments in the Polanski-case, like the line that the teenage girl Polanski had sex with had already a sexual relation with her boy friend. This smells a little bit like the “Lolita” arguments and tends to whitewash the adult in the play.

I am, at the same time, against the extradition of Polanski to the United States "justice". I think we have to be aware that today the working class by no means can impose its own laws, its own morality or its own revolutionary courts nor can the proletariat investigate severe crime charges by itself. Of course, if we have to defend class-war prisoners we will reject the right of the bourgeoisie to judge over political militants. In the case of small crime (thefts etc.) we would analyze the social reasons for such crimes and demand fair trials, humane treatment of the defendants and so on.

In the case of Polanski, I think, we should also demand a fair trial and denounce the frame-up used against him. We should argue that such frame-ups are part of the reactionary juridical system of the USA, and that one can imagine which frame-ups are constructed against unknown political prisoners or militants like Mumia Abu-Jamal, if they are even used against a rather prominent and wealthy artist as Roman Polanski. This seems to be, in my opinion, the only way how we can use the discussions about this case.

Paul - GKK Austria, 28 March

Dear SF comrades

Yes, there is some influence of the Robertsonists in SF debate. It is not a problem in itself: we cannot fight in the aftermath of the defeat of the last revolutionary wave without any glance at other currents that have survived (SEP, WP, SL, IBT, LRP, PTS...) Please let me add to Paul Mazurka’s arguments that it is curious that an organisation that uses the “propaganda group” explanation to justify not fighting daily in the unions uses the “people agitator” justification to print a lot of pages any time that adults are accused (wrongly... or not) of sexual abuses of youth (not a tradition of the Bolshhevik papers, besides). The SL explains that any consent sexual relation must be free. It gives a Marxist flavour quoting that the family is the nucleus of the capitalist society.

Many religious sects (and big religious apparatus: the Catholic Church, Buddhist Monasteries...) are a cover for the sexual desires of the old males that lead them. It is probably only a phantasm in the psychology of the SL’s guru. Like every religious sect, many political sects try to destroy any kind of personal life besides the organisation. For instance, LO France leadership used to make pupil steal from their own parents (for “political motives”, of course).

The theoretical weakness of the SL is in the confusion of any form of family with the patriarchal family. The practical defect is to confuse sexual equal relations (between adults and between very young people) and abuses of authority by old men on girls or boys.

Lenin wrote that a civilised society protects women (State and revolution, 1917). We can add that any civilised society protects young people.

In personal capacity,
Philippe Couthon (GB France)

Divvying out the bones

Comrades,

I’m not quite sure that revolutionaries should embrace prescribed remedies to be applied by the capitalist courts, whose main enemy are revolutionary socialists. The Catholic Church served capitalism well in Ireland with its pronouncements on Revolutionaries, Socialists and Trade Unionists in the 1920s and 1930s. Working as the agents of the British and Irish states spying and campaigning for the removal of revolutionaries.

Hence the Eucharistic Congress of 1932, which summoned god to their rescue to denounce Communists. The institutional abuse that the Catholic Church used to control a whole population is what we should attack, not the individuals. The state and catholic and in deed every other reactionary and abusive force would just be delighted to have the whole world condemn “one bad apple that has given the whole Church a bad name”.

It’s all such organisations that must be exposed. This is the same church that in the middle ages made a saint out of a living priest/ monk, by telling lies about his accomplishments, and queued up waiting for him to die, so that they could boil the corpse and divvi out the bones, to append to their own new expanding churches. Does this church promote ‘cannibalism’ when they explain transubstantiation? They insist that there is no question about it, you eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus Christ. The very base of their beliefs or Gospels were selected by a non Christian who selected four accounts of the great man (Gospels) and ignored twenty two, the most significant one being that of his partner Mary.

Such organisations rely on basic raw human emotions ignorance and fear, and will attract social misfits , including potential paedophiles. The ruling classes would much prefer to have “reactionary” pro capitalist regimes in place, in Iran, Arabia, Israel, Ireland, Spain, Germany, US, etc, etc to step in as “counter revolutionaries” or a buffer zone, or buffer state as a last resort, before allowing revolutionary workers’ control. It was the US who put the Shiias into power - for fear of the revolutionary socialists and trade unionists.

I believe it is the institutions that are the threat to humanity, another tool of the ruling class to slow down the progress of the world revolution - which they believe will happen, more than us - not individuals inside them, that they are no longer able to cover up for. They are the ones who dispense justice FOR NOW. They do not do it well in hundreds of thousands or indeed millions of cases.

The one good service these reactionary religions Catholicism, Judaism, etc. produced was a great crop of Revolutionary Socialists.

As revolutionaries in power we would reform/ revolutionise how people are educated, treated for all sorts of illnesses, putting more and more research and effort into detection and treatment of such illnesses, as early as possible, in a society that would have the eradication of all types of violence towards vulnerable people at the very top of our agendas.

Eoghan Rua, Kilburn
What the Irish community endured in the 1970s and 80s the Muslims are enduring today

Comrades,

The recent hysteria, racism, witch hunts, accusations, abuse and attacks by the media, politicians and the police on the Muslim community in Britain is reminiscent of the experience of the Irish community here in Britain in the 1970s and 80s. At that time to be Irish and especially to be Irish with a point of view opposing the occupation of the six north eastern counties of Ireland often led to arrests, harassments and intimidation of the Irish community and Irish political activists under the notorious and draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA).

I was arrested in December 1974 at Holyhead on my way home to Ireland and held for five hours under the PTA. I was photographed, fingerprinted and questioned all because I had political literature about what was happening in the North. This atmosphere of hysteria and anti-Irish racism led to the framing of the Birmingham 6, the Guildford 4, the Maguire 7 and the Winchester 3.

The result of these frame-ups sent out a clear message to the Irish community; don't even think of politics, never mind about getting involved in political activity about the issues in Ireland. The Irish community was terrified into silence by the PTA and by the British state and all its institutions. This allowed the British state, the politicians, the army, the police, aided and abetted by a supine media to defend all the terrible deeds and injustices perpetrated by Britain's state forces in the north of Ireland.

From internment without trial to torture and ill-treatment, British army and police repression, confession only evidence beaten out of suspects in Castlereagh and other police barracks, no jury courts, SAS assassinations, shoot-to-kill, police attacks on Republican funerals, the indiscriminate use of rubber and plastic bullets causing death and severe injuries, collusion with Loyalist death squads, the SAS assassinations of the three IRA volunteers in Gibraltar and of course the death on hunger strike of the 12 Republican volunteers, ten in Long Kesh and Michael Gaughan and Frank Stag in Britain.

Today the same black propaganda, labelling and stereotyping is reserved for the Muslim community and I am sure must feel very vulnerable and uncertain about their future and what might happen to them and their community in the present climate created by this constant barrage of lies and half-truths against this community.

The same political establishment, the same police and most of the media are all guilty, some in more ways than others, of accusing the Muslim community of being "a terrorist community and sympathetic to terrorism". The right-wing gutter tabloid press along with the television and some of the so-called liberal papers are guilty in my opinion of inciting racial hatred and encouraging the right-wing neo-Nazi bigots and political boneheads of the English Defence League, Combat 18 and the more 'respectable' British National Party to target and to attack members of that community in their homes, businesses and places of work. This, of course, is happening all the time throughout the country although the same media are usually very slow in reporting these attacks.

Like many in the Irish community here who were opposed to what British imperialism were doing in Ireland, many of the Muslim community are opposed to Britain's foreign policy and its involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and are also angry about Britain's support for Israel and its occupation of the Palestinian lands and its oppression of the Palestinian people. It was upset about Britain's refusal to condemn Israel's 2006 bombing and occupation of Lebanon and the terrible slaughter of 1,400 civilians and fighters in Gaza a year ago (13 Israelis dead).

What is happening in Kashmir and Chechnya is also of concern to that community. Because of press hysteria and half-truths many non-Muslim people believe that the Muslim community is not entitled to any rights. For example when the community gets planning permission or any public assistance to set up a Mosque or community centre this is somehow deemed as getting preferential treatment. For what lies behind this is virulent racism which clouds and prevents any kind of rational debate about what kind of society we want to build here and about how we care about and have respect for all in that society.

We Irish well understand and remember our long struggle for rights to be respected, for the right to have churches and community centres for our wakes and wedding and all other cultural events and to have pitches to play hurling and football. We should show solidarity with the Muslims and support the struggles to win their rights and a future for their community.

We Irish have arrived here in Britain with all our rights to practice our religion (although I am an atheist). We have our own cultural and sporting venues. And we can feel fairly confident and positive that our rights and needs will continue to be respected in the future. But it was not always like that.

Charlie Walsh

Obama's Health Care Act

Comrades,

Gerry writes: "We really have stood with the neocons outside the House to stop its passage and now demand its repeal with them and North's SEP?"

Obviously not, but principled socialists are opposed to the Bosses' Europe i.e. the EU, as are the right-wing and there ARE positive gains for workers from the EU, e.g. the working time directive and other "social chapter" measures introduced here in the UK by Labour.

"Question is, after all the exclusions and concessions to the insurance and drug companies,..." But that is what the Health-care reform is about!

our job is to expose the nature of the reformed, and the nature of the O'buster government.

And I really don't see how "critical support" for them helps our aim at all!

Steve

Comrades,

Its one of those: You could say that the reform is a step forward in that millions of previously uncovered people will now receive health care, when previously they had to pay or resources were so limited in the "free" hospitals that inequality was extreme.

Or you could say that the reform is a state subsidy to the Insurance companies, health care providers (private), with reactionary aspects in which women's health in regards to their right to abortion is excluded and that the millions 'sans papiers' are to be denied free health care as well.

As the GB comrade states its the effect of the class struggle and to the future class struggle, that is key. Let's not support illusions in Obama, lets look at the effect of limited compromised reform in terms of workers demands - Free Health Care for All - make the bosses pay.

Its really so central in terms of British Labour History - that the central unifying class demands for reforms were achieved through the Social Democratic (reformist) party.

We have to sharply delineate that in the absence of a US Labour Party it has taken another 65 years for the American working class to get a measure of welfare state provision as important as this. It still needs a US Labour Party and the political activity of the trade unions to follow through this Liberal version and transform it into a universal right to free health care for all.

The Asylum Act 1992 which introduced the start of nationality checks was the start of a continuous and growing denial of universal welfare in Britain to the exclusion of workers from abroad. It is an interesting and notable change that in the US workers rights to free health care is extending whilst in Britain and Europe rights to welfare are being reduced.

All the best Brian Smith

Dear comrades

Of course, the SEP (David North Social Equality party) is not interested, as the ITC and the Collective are, in participation in the real class struggle. But even the SEP was not in favour of supporting reactionary demonstrations against the new health system.

The problem is rather: why Obama was unable to mobilize anybody? That is typical of the bourgeois at the imperialist epoch, of the decline of capitalism.

Obama gathered masses to be elected, but refuse to do it to break the corporate and clerical resistances. Obama is not Lincoln, and not even Roosevelt. There were massive struggles of the
US working class in the mid 1930s. There were black upsurges and mass opposition to Vietnam war at the beginning of the 1970s. There are some resistance in USA, but not this scale of struggle yet.

So, the health plan is a kind of modernisation of a backward and ineffective health system (lot of money but bad results), but it stopped half-way.

or third-way?), far away from the West Europe reforms of the mid 1940s (NHS in Britain, Sécu in France, etc.):

The reform will start in 2014, Obama was more in a hurry to send more troops in Afghanistan. The state will give public money to be used to finance private insurance companies. Abortion is excluded. The illegal migrants (a part of our class) will stay outside.

The unions should stop to support Democratic Party capitulations and ask for free health for all, for a complete public system, nationalisation of hospitals, insurance and pharmacy corporations...

Philippe Couthon (GB France) in personal capacity

### Roman Polanski and the capitalist state – disclaimer

We the undersigned wish to declare differences with the article in Socialist Fight No. 3: page 15, "Polanski, Goddard, Balogh and the Age of Consent", by Angela Byrne. These differences are over a revolutionary Marxist approach to the state and not over the central importance of defending women’s rights and equality.

We feel that Marxists must be against the current bourgeois capitalist system of exploitation and imprisonment. We must clearly reject Imperialism’s current use of rendition and extradition. We must not seek to promote a ‘throw away the key’ position. We disagree fundamentally with this article where it calls for the ‘jailing for a very long time’ of Roman Polanski who was found guilty of having sex with a 13 year old girl in 1977. Polanski spent six weeks in jail for this, after ‘plea-bargaining’ from an original charge of molestation of the girl; these six weeks were spent undergoing ‘psychiatric tests’/‘treatment’.

The article also demands Polanski’s deportation (‘extradition’) to face trial. There is no mention of the workers’ movement, although it is true that the organised Labour movement has no part in the matter, but no view is expressed except for that put forward by Angela Byrne in Socialist Fight No. 3. Neither is the ‘central idea’ of Socialist Fight mentioned: that is, that the bureaucracy of the organised Labour Movement is the main problem for workers to deal with if they are to conquer power and establish a socialist society based on workers’ councils. We are completely opposed to the repressive arms of the capitalist state, such as those that the article in question calls for the use of. We note the opinion of some who think that Polanski is being framed. Unlike Angela we do not feel that we are prepared to act as judge and jury and pronounce sentence - we do not agree that Socialist Fight should take such a position.

Who should jail him? The prison guards whose union in UK whom we say should be thrown out of the workers’ movement! We are not in favour of the police, immigration officers, bourgeois courts and jailers! Once you demand retribution be administered by the bourgeois state for Polanski, then to be consistent you are saying retribution and long term imprisonment for all who have sexually abused. How many hundreds of thousands are guilty of child sex abuse? How many more prisons would the author build to accommodate those like Polanski? What would have been achieved?

How many people guilty of child sex abuse were themselves abused? Do people sexually abuse others through being ‘evil’? Are the abusers (or some of them) themselves people who are damaged? In what system have these ‘abusers’ been damaged to such an extreme? Do these abusers understand? Have they mental health or learning difficulties which mean they don’t perceive their abuse as abuse?

We support many parts of the article: Free Balogh and Goddard. We agree that the Bourgeois state uses its courts in a reactionary way, homophobic, sexist and racist. Our experience of imprisonment and popular demands for imprisonment has been in opposing them, fighting miscarriages of justice, like the Birmingham Six, Guildford Four, Satpal Ram etc. We are not going to agree that sometimes its right to say we support extradition as this weakens the efforts of others to resist US/Imperialists extradition and rendition. ‘Lock them up for long time’ is not part of our agenda. Byrne now extends the list to rapists and paedophiles. We think this is the wrong agenda.

Comradely Brian Smith, Steve Bagal

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### Socialist Fight: Where We Stand

We stand with Karl Marx: ‘The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves. The struggle for the emancipation of the working class means not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies but for equal rights and duties and the abolition of all class rule’.

We see democratic soviets/workers’ councils as the instruments of participatory democracy which must be the basis of the successful struggle for workers’ power.

We are for the nationalisation and expropriation of capitalist private property without compensation and under workers’ control.

The capitalist state must be overthrown and smashed to achieve socialism.

The revolutionary process of transition to communism is based on the struggle to form an international federation of workers’ states and such a federation is required in order to overcome the domination of global capital.

We defend the heritage of the Russian Revolution and critically support the revolutionary thrust of the first four Congresses of the Third Communist International before the victory of the counter-revolutionary Stalinism.

No to popular fronts with the political representatives of any capitalist class to ‘defeat fascism’, stop war or for any other reason.

No to sectarian abstention from the class struggle.

We recognise the necessity for revolutionaries to carry out serious ideological and political struggle as direct participants in the trade unions (always) and in the mass reformist social democratic bourgeois workers’ parties despite their pro-capitalist leaderships when conditions are favourable.

We aim to develop a programme for the emancipation of the specially oppressed. We support the right of women, Black and Asian people, lesbians and gay men, bisexuals and transgender people to caucus inside the unions and in social democratic parties.

We fight racism and fascism. We support the right of people to fight back against racist attacks. Self-defence is no offence!

We oppose all immigration controls. International finance capital roams the planet in search of profit and imperialist governments disrupts the lives of workers and cause the collapse of whole nations with their direct intervention in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan and their proxy wars in Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, etc. Workers have the right to sell their labour wherever they get the best price.

We demand of all governments a world plan to combat climate change and the degradation of the biosphere which is caused by the anarchy of capitalist production for profits of transnational corporations. Ecological catastrophe is not ‘as crucial as imperialism’ but caused by imperialism so to combat this threat we must redouble our efforts to forward the world revolution.

We support Trotsky’s Transitional Programme of 1938 in its context. We always practice the method embodied in that document because it is the Marxist method of mass work as advocated by Lenin in Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder in 1920.

As revolutionary international socialists we support Trotsky’s theory of Permanent Revolution and its applicability to the present era of globalisation.

We are for the refoundation and reconstruction of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution and will fight for the fusions and splits necessary for this in our international work.

Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!
Maghaberry Repression: Political Status now!

"Regardless of one’s political opinions, the reality is that these prisoners would not be in jail were it not for the ongoing British presence in Ireland - they are clearly political prisoners and they should be treated as such." - Eirigi general secretary Breandan MacCionnaith

The following are slightly edited extracts from the posts of Marcie Caudell on the Irish Freedom Committee news (http://www.irishfreedomcommittee.net) detailing the development of the struggles of the Republican prisoners in Maghaberry prison in Antrim in April.

Note the actions of the Prison Officers Association come in for particular criticism from Republicans. Perhaps they should appeal to the Socialist Party of England and Wales, as this ‘revolutionary Trotskyist’ party now counts Brian Caton, the General Secretary of that union amongst their members.

Shamefully not only has the British and Irish media totally ignored this appalling situation but so also has the press of the Irish and British left that we have seen.

The extracts begin on 5 April:

Republican prisoners barricaded themselves into a dining hall yesterday evening at the North’s highest security jail in an escalation of conflict between Republican prisoners and the regime in Maghaberry Jail. Twenty-eight prisoners blocked the doors of the room at Maghaberry Prison on the anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. The protest is continuing today. It is understood the action was taken following the refusal of prison warders to allow the prisoners to wear a lily, the symbol of Ireland’s war dead, traditionally worn in Ireland at Easter time.

It also comes amid a deepening dispute over conditions at the troubled prison and ongoing attempts to criminalise the republican prisoners held at Maghaberry. The incident took place at the Roe House area of the jail after prisoners attended a Mass service in the dining hall. They seized the hall and remained there overnight.

Eirigi general secretary Breandan MacCionnaith called for the reintroduction of political status for the republican prisoners; “Over the last number of years, the prison regime in Maghaberry has gained notoriety for its appalling treatment of republican prisoners and their families. This treatment has been centred on the denial of political status and the attempt to portray those who are detained as a result of the British occupation as common criminals. Regardless of one’s political opinions, the reality is that these prisoners would not be in jail were it not for the ongoing British presence in Ireland - they are clearly political prisoners and they should be treated as such.”

The demonstration comes as breakaway IRA groups continued to launch attacks throughout the Six Counties. On Saturday, a car bomb was abandoned outside Crossmaglen police station in County Armagh. The vehicle, which was packed with containers of flammable liquid, was described as ‘viable’ by the PSNI but failed to detonate. This morning a van was hijacked and set alight by armed militants in Armagh, while there was also an alert on the railway line near Lurgan. In a separate incident several homes were evacuated in Antrim after a suspicious object was discovered on a doorstep of a house on the Rathenraw Estate.

Marcie Caudell 09 April at 05:49

Tensions continue to escalate inside Maghaberry Prison today after republicans were ‘disciplined’ last night for taking part in a 48-hour protest at prison conditions.

A spokeswoman for the Crown Prison service said that 28 prisoners faced “adjudication” after barricading themselves into a prison dining hall and “will face charges accordingly”. Prisoners had been locked in their cells for up to 23 hours a day following an industrial dispute at the prison, while prison visits were also disrupted. It is understood the prisoners have now been moved to the punishment blocks. In a statement, the prisoners warned of further protests over what they said is a deliberate decline in conditions inside Maghaberry. “In recent times continuous lockdown and loss of recreation are becoming more and more common. Searches have also been conducted on our families by the RUC [PSNI]. These lock-downs result in us being locked down in our cells for days at a time with no food, hot water and exercise, showers or contact with our families.”

Republican Sinn Fein spokeswoman Geraldine Taylor said that every prisoner who had taken part in the weekend protest had been informed on Monday night that they were to be moved to punishment cells indefinitely. “When they got back to their cells they found that they had been stripped of all personal belongings,” she said. “They were told that they were all being put on the boards (punishment) indefinitely and would only have the clothes they were standing up in. These men are going through hell on earth and the outside world needs to know about it. We aren’t going to take this lying down. There will be major protests on the streets until this issue is properly resolved and these men are treated with dignity and respect.”

Marcie Caudell 09 April at 14:56

On Easter Sunday 2010, as a consequence of the inhuman and rapidly deteriorating conditions inside Maghaberry Prison, Republican Prisoners of War held an action in order to highlight the deplorable conditions under which they are detained. While the prison authorities are well aware of the issues that are continuing to cause them concern, due to the fact that they have made repeated representations to them. For the benefit of the wider public and those charged with overseeing prison conditions and the inhuman treatment of prisoners. These issues are:

- a, Strip Searching
- b, Control of Movement
- c, Freedom of Association
- d, Access to Academic and Vocational Education
- e, Visiting Arrangements and Family Contact
- f, General Prison Conditions

The above (and other issues) have been raised repeatedly with the prison authorities, however, due in no small part to the influence of the Prison Officers Association (POA) no progress whatsoever has been made. Indeed, since the POA successfully ousted the number one Governor, things have gotten progressively worse. This being the case all Republican POWs despite coming from different back-grounds and affiliations agreed that there was no course left open to them other than this action.

In coming to this conclusion prisoners realise that it will cause further distress and concern to their families and friends and they have apologized for that. However, they are determined to establish their fundamental rights to be treated in a humane and dignified fashion and they will continue on all in the wider Republican Family to support them in this endeavour, especially former Prisoners of War and those in positions of influence.

In conclusion, nothing short of the voice of Irish Republicans, demanding an end to the brutalization and inhumane and barbaric practices of the prison authorities, can resolve these issues.

Action Request - send a letter to Paul Goggins re Maghaberry abuses

Monday, April 12, 2010

Please take a moment to download and sign a letter to British Minister for Prisons Paul Goggins, to demand an independent investigation into the appalling human rights abuses at Maghaberry prison.

A pdf of the form letter can be downloaded from the Irish Freedom Committee website at the link below, or the following text can be copied and pasted into your document, signed and your address added, and posted. We encourage you to forward this link and email widely, and to mail copies of your letter to your local media.
http://tinyurl.com/goggins-lttt, Please advise the Irish Freedom Committee of any responses you receive, at saoirse@irishfreedomcommittee.net

Thank you.
Paul Goggins MP - Minister of State for Prisons
Northern Ireland Office
Stormont House, Stormont Estate
Belfast, Northern Ireland, BT4 3SH

Dear Mr. Goggins,

I am writing with my deep concerns regarding the dire situation at Maghaberry Prison, where recent disturbances brought world-wide attention to a trend of gravely worsening conditions inside. I reference detailed testimonials by the political prisoners in Roe House at Maghaberry jail, in which are described instances of food and fresh water being withheld during extended periods of lockdown, time of up to 23 hours at a time; meals denied to prisoners for up to four days, due to ‘staff shortages’; indiscriminate transfer of prisoners to solitary confinement—where beatings have frequently taken place—for days at a time; an instance of a prisoner being viciously mauled by a prison dog in February; repeated body searches of prisoners up to 40 times in a single day, and strip-searches of family visitors including women.

I am also aware that the prisoners have made repeated complaints about unhygienic conditions, which include being forced to eat meals in their cells with inches of open toilets; rather than being permitted to eat in the dining area. Also, a previous protest at Roe House resulted in the men refusing to shave or cut their hair rather than being required to do so in their kitchen sink, where plates and cutlery are washed.

I further refer to a report of a recent visit to Maghaberry by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). The Committee’s report described unacceptable conditions, including violent attacks by SST officers while being held in solitary confinement instances of degrading and humiliating body-cavity searches, severe overcrowding, poor education and recreation facilities, and inadequate access to mental and physical health care.

There is no reason why these appalling abuses should continue in your facility. An independent review of this worsening situation must be made, if conditions have deteriorated so far as to force prisoners to resort to their action of Easter weekend; where the takeover of their quarters made international news.

The favour of a reply is requested. I have forwarded a copy of this letter to others including local media here.

Very Sincerely, (Your Name/Address here)

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Reply to Roy Wall on Transitional Demands and the “three whales” of Bolshevism

Roy Wall raises very important question about Transitional demands and the Transitional Programme in his letter. The first point to make is that there are no transitional demands that stand on their own independently of the programme. The editorial makes this point in relation to the SWP’s plan to save the £310 million deficit by eliminating tax avoidance, the war, trident and taxing the rich – it is a programme to save capitalism if taken on its own, and not a very radical or realistic one either. But you give an unfortunate example yourself; the ‘three whales of Bolshevism’ 1. the democratic republic, 2. the eight-hour day, 3. confiscation of the landed estates.

These were a part of the revolutionary programme of Bolshevism but remember were part of a mistaken orientation, that towards the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry and not towards the socialist revolution. In the hands of the Pravda editorial board, Stalin, Muranov and Kamenev, they became the means for endorsing the Provisional Government and supporting the war. Trotsky’s Permanent Revolution theory had enabled him to immediately oppose this and Lenin had studied imperialism enough by then to promulgate his April Theses to turn the party towards “All Power to the Soviets”, towards the socialist revolution. It should be noted here that Lenin and Trotsky did not bring a message to an unreceptive audience. Already by mid-March 1917 there was furious opposition to the line of Pravda, with leftist Bolshevik branches demanding their expulsion from the party for betraying the revolution.

So Lenin and his supporters developed a mass agitation slogan, land, bread and peace for the masses and a revolutionary Marxist programme for the advanced layer, the April Theses, so they would understand what they were doing and in what direction to lead the insurrectionary workers. The Transitional Programme is for this vanguard, not for the masses as such. It is for the thinking natural leadership that we see emerging in every serious struggle and which is now again beginning to re-emerge following the terrible defeats of the 80s and 90s. And we must teach them politics. It is therefore nor wrong or ‘leftist to raise “socialist” demands or slogans in the present period’. It is wrong to use these in a ‘straight to the masses’ way, it is not wrong to use them to win and educate the future leaders of the revolution.

But this leadership is only of some use if it retains its initial connection with and sympathy for the masses which first propelled it forward. The bureaucracy seeks out those workers who are more politically developed and corrupts them with the perks of office and sponsored advancement via the bureaucratic machine. Very few resist, most of those who do are recruited by the centrist groups who again teach them a more radical but nonetheless essentially similar method of accommodation to the system.

We do not agree that ‘Trotsky’s belief that capitalism, in the late 1930s, was entering its death agony was wrong, i.e., proved wrong in later hindsight’. This is only the hindsight of the observer. At the time he wrote the TP, 1938, wars and revolutions were on the agenda on a global scale and they did break out at the end of the war as he foretold. But the crucial factor of revolutionary leadership was too weak, caught as it was ‘between the hammer of Hitler and the anvil of Stalin’ and the pact between Stalin and Roosevelt/Churchill was sufficient in the end to defeat the revolutions in eastern Europe, Northern Italy, Greece, Vietnam, etc.

Your point on the disorientation of the post-war Trotskyists is well made and we agree that the TP itself was in its historical context correct but it needed changing for different circumstances of the re-stabilisation of capitalism post WWII. Some, like Healy, never made that change and continued with a ridiculous catastrophism. But the method of the TP is still correct, it is the method of Lenin’s workers united front, it is the method of today’s revolutionary Trotskyists.

Neither do we agree that it is wrong to raise the slogan of the Socialist United States of Europe, and we should raise instead simply the United States of Europe. The latter will be used to promote national chauvinism because this is a bureaucratic nightmare which we can all see. We do not advocate the break-up of the EU and then its reformation as the Socialist United States of Europe but the European wide revolution, nationally co-ordinated against both national and European capitalism to achieve this.

Here we see the need for transitional demands. We must defend the slightest gains of the workers whilst raising the advanced demands for the vanguard, to win, train and educate them as leaders of the class. That is the part we feel you are missing in your letter.

Comradely Tony Fox
Leon Trotsky: I am confident of the victory of the Fourth International; Go Forward!

A Tale of Two Cusacks: Come What May
by Dónal Óg Cusack, Paperback 296 pages, 2009,
Review by Tony Fox

Dónal Óg Cusack is a leading star hurling goalkeeper for Cork for over ten years. He has five Munster titles and three All-Ireland medals. In October 2009 he came out as gay;

“since I was 13 or 14, I knew I was a bit different. I hate labels though. That’s the way I am. I live with it and I am fine with it. People close to me will tell you there were never any tears.

There was never agony. I just know this thing. I’ve had to say this to people I’m close to again and again. This is who I am. This is what I do. I spend a lot of time trying to work things out but once I know something about myself, I know it.

I don’t agonise. It’s logical to me. I thought once I know something about myself, I know it. I’ve had to say this to people I’m close to again and again. This is who I am. This is what I do. I spend a lot of time trying to work things out but once I know something about myself, I know it.

He is also the chairman of the Gaelic Player’s Association, and has led several strikes against the ill-treatment of players by the Cork County board, which has led to improvements for all Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) players throughout Ireland. He tells us in his book that he was subject to homophobic abuse by opposition fans, including a fifteen minute tirade on a loudhailer from a Tipperary fan in Thurles. He also reveals that Sean Óg O’Halpin, was also subjected to vile racist abuse (he is mixed race). When, as captain of Cork, they were losing a match a Kilkenny fan shouted at them,

“Where’s the fucking n***** now?”

Sean Óg took it in his stride; “Mostly it’s just the same fucking thing. The fellas that want to hurt you will go for the personal stuff. Calling you queer, ingenious stuff like that. It makes no difference to me if you call me Brokeback… and queer, ingenious stuff like that. It makes no difference to me if you call me Brokeback… and I mix race. When, as captain of Cork, they were losing a match a Kilkenny fan shouted at them,

“Where’s the fucking n***** now?”

Sean Óg took it in his stride; “Mostly it’s just the same fucking thing. The fellas that want to hurt you will go for the personal stuff. Calling you queer, ingenious stuff like that. It makes no difference to me if you call me Brokeback… and if there are a hundred or a thousand hurlers or hurling games and its amateur status meant that various ways had to be found to reward players within the rules. This involved getting good jobs for star players and, of late, sponsorship such that the Cork captain, Sean Óg O’Halpin, is rumoured to have earned up to 100,000 Euro last year. And of course there were the perks like the trips to New York, San Francisco and even Buenos Aires for exhibition games for the top players. Top footballers could go to the English game or to Australian Rules but there was nowhere for hurlers to go, the fastest and most spectacular land game in the world had not caught on internationally because of the very restrictive code on who could play.

So much of the motivation behind the strikes may have been a frustration at their amateur status and an attempt to regularise the remuneration in some way besides this ad hoc favouritism that operates in the top teams. There were players’ strikes in 2002, jointly with the footballers in 2007-8 and on their own again in 2008-9. During this last strike they mobilised a 10,000 strong demonstration in their defence.

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The conservative hostility to the militancy of Cork players came out in these racist and homophobic attacks. When Dónal Óg came out, immediately he was attacked as a hypocrite; why did he have to do it, everyone knew he was gay anyway? He was only doing it for the money, he was grabbing at the wrong sliotars (hurling balls). But he was strongly defended by his team mates and by his father;

“first there was the short puck outs, now this” was the old man’s brilliant comment. Dónal Óg had developed a theory of possession hurling but in one major game it went disastrously wrong. The puck out went to a Tipperary player and “within seconds it was in the back of the net”, and they got slaughtered. But perhaps the best response came from “Joanne” on the Pat Phelan blog on 23rd Octo-


“How can you pass judgment on something like this? I am presuming you don’t know him, or his family?!? So you don’t know. I think it was incredibly brave. The main reason that everyone is talking about it is because being gay and playing GAA just don’t go together in the country, and that’s a shame. Dónal has given men and women all over Ireland, who play GAA or not, a chance to be who they want to be. Fair fucks to him, I hope he rakes it in from the sales of the book!”

Sean Óg O’Halpin. The Cork captain is the first mixed race player in the top flight and his best friend, goalkeeper Dónal Óg, is the first out gay player. And they led the first players’ strikes — Cork is not called the Rebel County for nothing!
Trotsky: A Biography
by Robert Service (Macmillan 600 pp £25)
Review by Ret Marut

This (Trotsky as “a hero-martyr in the cause of humanity”) has never been a terribly plausible view of the man who welcomed the ruthless crushing of the Kronstadt workers and sailors when they demanded a more pluralist system of government in 1921, and who defended the systematic use of terror against opponents of the Soviet state until his dying day. Introducing a system of hostage-taking in the Civil War and consistently supporting the trial and execution of dissenters (Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries, liberal Kadets, nationalists and others), Trotsky never hesitated to endorse repression against those who stood in the way of communist power. This much has long been clear, but the full extent of Trotsky’s role in building Soviet totalitarianism has not been detailed – until now. John Gray, BEHIND THE MYTH, Literary Review, http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/gray_10_09.html

This review by the reactionary John Gray sums up the purpose behind Service’s ‘second assassination of Trotsky’. In academic standards the biography is as bad as Daniel Goldhagen’s Hitler’s Willing Executioners (1996), demolished so comprehensively by Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn in A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth. But, like Goldhagen’s, Service’s book was not written for academia and dispenses with the normal standards of such works because it is a political work in the first place, designed to appeal to and foster reactionary class sentiments and prejudices and marginalise those of us who fight for the historical truth of revolutionary history. In political tone and content it is very similar to Churchill’s treatment of Trotsky in Great Contemporaries (written 1935, 1939 edition Butler and Tanner). Churchill also makes huge factual errors and gives us rants such as, “like the cancer bacillus he grew, he fed, he tortured, he slew in fulfilment of his nature”. And he did not defeat Stalin because: “he was a Jew. He is still a Jew. Nothing could get over that” – nice piece of anti-Semitism here from the victor over Nazism for Sir Martin Gilbert, Churchill’s official biographer, to chew on! But for Adolf Hitler, Mr Gilbert, the story is one full of praise and admiration;

“While all these formidable transformations were occurring in central Europe, Corporal Hitler was fighting his long, wearing battle for the German heart. The story of that struggle cannot be read without admiration for the courage, the perseverance and the vital force which enabled him to challenge, defy, conciliate and overcome all the authorities and resistances which barred his path” (p.265). The ‘authorities’ referred to would be trade unionists, workers and every other political party and all civil rights and liberties! This edition of 1939 is after the Kristallnacht of November 1938.

Grey begins where Service concentrates his entire political fire, outside of the ad hominem character assassinations, at Kronstadt and revolutionary violence. His task is to equate the revolutionary violence of Lenin, Trotsky and the revolutionary Bolshevists with Stalin’s counter-revolutionary violence. And he makes his preference for Stalin quite clear in the book. This has been the task of reaction down the centuries, was not Robespierre worse than Napoleon, Cromwell worse than Charles I? How many times was revolutionary France massacred and humiliated by its reactionary opponents, from the massacre of the Cathars in Montsegur in the Languedoc (1244) and in the Religious Wars the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre (1572) before Robespierre finally seized the revolutionary weapon of the guillotine in the so-called reign of terror, electrifying the Pari- sian sans culottes? This succeeded to such a degree that when the revolutionaries reached them from Paris, five retreating armies wheeled, defeated and drove out the five all-conquering counter-revolutionary armies when they understood that the Revolu- tion meant serious business for France and for the oppressed of the world. Were not Trotsky’s achievements of far greater mo- ment for Russia and the oppressed of the world when he drove out White reaction and the fifteen armies of intervention sent by world imperialism? Could he have done it without revolutionary violence? Could the Anarchists, the “Left-communists” or the Mensheviks have defeated reaction? No, these forces either joined the Bolsheviks or they joined the counter-revolution because they understood that revolution and civil war leaves no place for half-measures; it is not a “school of humanity” as Trotsky observes in his famous defence of revolution- ary violence, “Their Morals and Ours”.

Service cites the Panteleev affair to show how ruthless Trotsky was and discusses it in six pages overall. When a battle was going against them a Bolshevik commissar called Panteleev and his men commandeered a steam ship to escape upriver, Red Army units intercepted them and Trotsky ordered their summary execution. Bolshevik commis- sars complained that Trotsky had shot a Bolshevik; he had not been a Bolshevik him- self and did not back his new comrades. Of course this was a demand for privileges and the subsequent use of the affair was to as- sert the privileges of aspiring Stalinist bu- reaucrats. In fact the first row over the execu- tions had prompted Lenin to give Trotsky his famous carte blanche;

Comrades,

Knowing the strictness of comrade Trotsky’s orders, I’m so confident – to an absolute degree – that this particular order by com- rade Trotsky is correct, sensible and vital for the good of the cause that I unreservedly support the order given.

V. Ulyanov (Lenin)

The affair was again raised in 1927 in his final battle with Stalin and Bukharin in Mos- cow. He was accused of “shooting commu- nists”. He replied that he had killed them as cowards rather than as party members.

But even Service is forced to admit that Trots- sky was a revolutionary leader of tremen-
dous energy and courage. This single incident in the defence of Petrograd is legendary. When he encountered a Red Army detachment retreating he jumped on the nearest horse and rallied the soldier himself. His orderly, Kozlov, an old soldier, ran after him shouting, “courage, boys, comrade Trotsky is leading you” (That little quote is from Stalin’s Nemesis by Bertrand Patenaude (p 24) Service’s account of the incident on p243 does not mention it.

Kronstadt is mentioned on six pages also with the same intentions. We must defend the actions of the Bolsheviks at Kronstadt - it was not a “mistake” but absolutely inevitable and necessary, if tragic, in the circumstances. No revolutionary regime could allow a bridgehead for imperialist invasion at Kronstadt to be established. Their leaders were collaborating with the Whites, their “Soviet” barred communists and 23 communist leaders were just about to be executed when the attack began over the ice. And the Bolsheviks asked for volunteers from the Congress to join the attack, thousands of whom died when the big guns of the Kronstadters smashed the ice several times, taking hundreds at a time down to their icy deaths with it as it rolled over.

We do not defend the CHEKA and the executions without due process which did facilitate the rise of Stalinism, but, for all their mistakes, as long as the Bolsheviks defended the world revolution and opposed the Stalinist-Bukharinist “socialism-in –one-country” backward nationalism they were defensible and have to be defended by all serious revolutionaries.

And of course it was the isolation of the revolution that caused its degeneration, if the Kronstadt sailors and other strikers of the time got what they demanded it would have to be taken off other, more desperate and poorer workers and peasants - there was not a privileged bureaucracy at the time and Stalinism had not yet developed. “All the old crap” inevitably arose again in the face of material want, sheer poverty killed the revolution, Germany 1918 to 1923 was where the revolution failed, not at Kronstadt. On the militarisation of labour Trotsky had proposed a version of the NEP a year before Kronstadt in order to tackle the economic problems but Lenin and the CC rejected it so his alternative was to continue with the militarisation of Labour, a mistake but it was also a mistake by Lenin and the CC to reject the NEP for a whole year.

We can recommend the International Bolshevik Tendency pamphlet Kronstadt & Counterrevolution on this to those who wish to assess the real historical truth of what happened and why, http://www.bolshevik.org/

Lastly on the character of Trotsky, Service mentions this on fifty nine pages, the majority of which are negative traits, ranging from alienating others, arrogance, careless about other peoples’ attitude to him, prickliness, vanity, insensitivity, self-centred and will to dominate, egotism and, outrageously “lack of political skills”, by which he meant that Trotsky did not have Stalin’s low political cunning, which Service obviously greatly admires, in betraying the revolution and advancing his own personal political career at the expense of the world revolution. And that was his real crime in Churchill’s eyes in 1937 and Robert Services’ eyes in 2010.

A review of the reviewers
Reviews by David North, Paul LeBlanc and Hillel Ticktin reviewed

Three other reviewers of the Service biography have demolished the accuracy of the book and its numerous political errors. See in particular In the Service of Historical Falsification: A Review of Robert Service’s Trotsky: A Biography by David North in the WSWS and the Second Assassination of Trotsky by Paul Le Blanc (numerous websites) and Hillel Ticktin in Weekly Worker 806: February 25 2010, In defence of Leon Trotsky. North does the best job of revealing the crass nature of Service’s character assassination of Trotsky as in the following passage:

“Trotsky once declared, as he defended himself against the slanders of Stalin’s regime: “There is not a stain on my revolutionary honour.” Service, however, portrays Trotsky as an individual without any honour at all. He attempts to discredit Trotsky not only as a revolutionary politician, but also as a man. Service’s Trotsky is a heartless and vain individual who used associates for his own egotistical purposes, a faithless husband who callously abandoned his wife, and a father who was coldly indifferent to his children and even responsible for their deaths.

“People did not have to wait long before discovering how vain and self-centred he was,” Service writes of Trotsky in a typical passage.”

But he does not make any detailed political defence of Trotskyism as attacked by Service, in particular on the question of revolutionary violence. Nor indeed does he defend Trotskyism at all. He cannot do so having abandoned all its most important features himself. He rightly castigated Gerry Healy back in 1986 for having abandoned Permanent Revolution only to do so himself from the opposite side. Healy, following Pablo and Mandel, capitulated to the
nationalist and, in particular the Arab Bourgeoisie as a substitute for the working class to lead the fight against imperialism. North now denies the existence of imperialism itself and of the Leninist theory of oppressed and oppressor nations in denying the existence of any progressive content to anti-imperialist struggles. He could not even support the Tamils’ right to self-determination against the murderous Sinhala chauvinism of Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa. He has abandoned the Transitional Programme in denying the existence of bourgeois-workers’ parties and even goes so far as to say that trade unions themselves are mere organs of the capitalist state, as if fascism had triumphed worldwide. He thereby ends up in exactly the same position of refusing to fight the TUI bureaucracy as all those leftists who betray the workers by collaborating with that bureaucracy. In fact the position can easily morph into strike-breaking if taken to its logical conclusion, which has not happened yet.

Paul LeBlanc makes the following reference to revolutionary violence, surely the central attack of the book and the way he equates Lenin and Trotsky with Stalin. But it is a comment and not really a defence, “Trotsky’s trajectory in these years raises important questions” he says but these questions are clearly not going to be answered by Le Blanc: “In the face of all this and more, Service shrugs: “He was no more likely than Stalin to create a society of humanitarian socialism even though he claimed and assumed he would. ... His constitutional assault on Stalin in the 1920s and 1930s distracted attention from the implausibility of his own alternative strategy.” The reason for this, apparently, was the authoritative role he had played in the crisis of civil war and economic collapse from 1918 to 1922. “The Bolshevik party had treated even workers and peasants savagely whenever they engaged in active opposition,” Service writes. “Trotsky’s earlier ideas about ‘proletarian’ self-liberation were like old coins that had dropped unnoticed out of his pocket.” For seriously revolutionary-minded people, Trotsky’s trajectory in these years raises important questions — but for Service it slams all doors firmly shut. He seems to use what happened in this intense five-year period to dismiss everything that Trotsky thinks, says and does afterward, and to question all that went before.”

Hillel Ticktin in Weekly Worker 806: February 25 2010, In defence of Leon Trotsky attacks the academic standards of the book, pointing out that single, unsupported quotations and bald assertions which amount to no more that snide remarks do not pass for a serious historical academic assessment;

“Trotsky: a biography is superficial. It has a scholarly form, but is not scholarly, whatever else it might be. Service makes assertion after assertion as to Trotsky’s motivations, Trotsky’s character, Trotsky’s originality, his intellectual competence (not to speak of his ability as a lover) - all without sufficient reference or argumentation.”

To his credit Ticktin makes a long and politically coherent defence of revolutionary violence against the right, the only one to have done so to this reviewer’s knowledge. And he does make a good defence of Trotskyism in general in many ways. But the review suffers from a failure to understand revolutionary politics and Trotsky’s unyielding defence of it. However he makes a monumental political error in the following passages, which shows him as an academic Marxist reviewer of history and not as one who seeks to change it:

“In my view, with the hindsight of history, Trotsky was wrong. He ought to have taken power. Service, like Trotsky himself, thinks he would have been another Stalin, but that is impossible, if one understands the dynamic of the Soviet Union of the time. With the support that he had, Trotsky would have been able to maintain power for a sufficient time to alter the nature of the regime away from what it was becoming. If Trotsky had taken power, Nazism would not have succeeded, there would have been no world war, the purges would not have taken place, and it is possible that there would have been a revolution or a series of revolutions in Europe and Asia.

Even if no other revolution would have succeeded, and Trotsky would have died as Soviet ruler in 1953, world history would have been very different and almost certainly more advanced than at present. However, no-one could have imagined the utter barbarism to which the world was subjected from then onwards. It was the direct consequence of the Russian Revolution and its subsequent counterrevolution under Stalin. Trotsky clearly hoped that the Soviet left and the Soviet working class would take power and dismiss Stalin.”

Trotsky, who understood the sweep of history better than any other Marxist and the role of the individual within it, has this to say on the question. “In order to defeat Stalin (by taking state power via the Red Army) I would have to become Stalin”. In other words he would have to betray the revolution. Had he done so would history have evolved significantly differently?

Ticktin here succumbs to the bad man theory of history; “the utter barbarism to which the world... was subjected was the direct consequence of the Russian Revolution and its subsequent counterrevolution under Stalin”. Was the revolution then a mistake, even in hindsight?

Trotsky would have severed the vital links he reforged once he was sure what theoretical and political mistakes the Comintern were making about China from about 1925-26 on and began to fight the bureaucracy in earnest.

Who would have fought for and learned those lessons, who would have developed the theory of Permanent Revolution, who would have developed and defend Marxism on fascism and the popular front and the workers united front in Germany, France and Spain in these years if Trotsky had betrayed? Outrageously the philistine Service, who makes almost no evaluation of his writings, asserts that Trotsky made no contribution to Marxist theory.

Had Trotsky become the representative of the degenerate Russian bureaucracy (Trotskyist bureaucracy we would have to call it now) we would be in a far worse position today in fighting to build revolutionary leadership. This is a profound misunderstanding of Marxism and the role of revolutionary leadership and party, possible only in an academic Marxist.
HOPI: Freedom for Jafar Panahi!

Seven things you can do now to support the campaign!

Over a month since his arrest, Panahi, whose most famous films are the widely acclaimed The circle (winner of the Golden Lion prize at the Vienna film festival in 2000) and Offside, has still not been charged with any crime. Twice offered bail during that time, he has refused out of solidarity with all those incarcerated for their participation in the mass demonstrations against the regime that have shaken Iran since June 2009.

His detention is the most serious example of the treatment Panahi has suffered so far. Up to now, the theocratic regime has been conducting a campaign of harassment against the 49-year-old artist. He has been unable to travel abroad since wearing a green scarf – the colour of the opposition movement – at the Montreal Film Festival in 2009. He was also arrested briefly after attending the memorial service for student Neda Agha Soltan, who was murdered by regime forces during a demonstration. Earlier the ministry of culture and Islamic guidance had announced he would not be allowed to make another movie until he ‘re-edited’ earlier films and he was unable to work for a year.

There is a clear theme of social criticism in his work. In a 2007 interview with the LA Times, Panahi described himself as "a socially committed filmmaker" who operates in the context of a brutally oppressive society: “My movies are about limitations and restrictions, and these are restrictions that I have personally experienced.” However, those are minor relative to “the greater restrictions that Iranian women are suffering”, he said.

The prison authorities are piling on the pressure. His wife, Tahereh Saeedi, was only allowed to meet him on March 31 – almost a month after his arrest. She reports that his interrogators continually cover the same ground: “They keep asking him the same questions in order to find contradictions in his comments,” Saeedi revealed in a radio interview.

Moshé Machover, a member of the Hopi steering committee, commented in a press statement: “Jafar Panahi has taken a brave stance. He stands shoulder to shoulder with those brave participants in the mass movement of opposition to the theocratic regime that have been arrested. Now we must stand shoulder to shoulder with him.”

Comrade Machover continued: “Our most effective act of solidarity with the inspiring movement for radical change that has filled Iran’s streets is to ensure that imperialism does not launch another disastrous military adventure in the Middle East, this time against an Iran which is pregnant with radical, genuinely democratic change from below”.

John McDonnell MP, a supporter of Hopi, said: “The world must make its voice heard in demanding the release of Jafar Panahi without charge along with all those incarcerated for nothing more than demanding basic civil liberties and democratic rights. These violations of basic human rights must not be allowed to go unnoticed and without protest.”

Seven things you can do:

Send emails, faxes and letters of protest to the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 16 Prince’s Gate, London SW7 1PT; info@iranembassy.org.uk; 020 7589 4440. Don’t forget to send us a copy.

Sign our statement ‘Freedom for Jafar Panahi and all political prisoners’ Email office@hopoi.info

Put on showings of Panahi’s films: The wounded head (1988), Kish (1991), The last exam (1992), The circle (2000), Crimson gold (2003) and above all Offside (2006). We have been given official permission to show his films, so we can help you to get hold of a copy of the film and DVDs to sell. We can also provide a speaker to introduce the film.

Order Hopi’s ‘Free Panahi’ postcards. Get people to sign the cards and return them to us asap – we will forward them to his family in Iran to show our solidarity. We ask for a donation of £5 or more for 30 cards to cover postage and printing costs.

Order the A4 bulletin we have produced to highlight Panahi’s case (as well as the ongoing threat of a military attack and increased sanctions). We ask for a donation of £5 or more for 30 bulletins to cover postage and printing costs.

Get your trade union branch/organisation to sponsor this important campaign.

Financially support the campaign: please use the Paypal button on our home page or send cheques to Hopi, PO Box 54631, London N16 8YE

Comrades,
We have participated in the initiative around the Conference for a Democratic Left since its inception in October 2008. We have expressed our reservations about the idea and process from the start. For us the initiative is characterised by two approaches that we believe are fundamentally at odds with each other:

1) constituting a new political formation based on the idea of a “unity of the left”;
2) or a united front approach directed at strengthening and co-ordinating existing grassroots struggles and organisations and rebuilding new ones.

We are keen to be part of a practical bloc of all those who see the need to do serious and consistent united front work aimed at developing mass activity and rebuilding mass organisations of the working class.

However, we are not in favour of political diplomacy or fraudulent political unity. Historically, the currents and movements adhering to “socialism” have long been divided along political lines: revolutionary Marxist, Stalinist, nationalist, reformist, centrist and so forth.

We have all lived through a profoundly reactionary period. The neoliberal onslaught launched by world imperialism in the late 1970s intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union and was accompanied by the retreat from revolutionary politics within the mass movement. This was assisted by an intense intellectual assault on revolutionary Marxism by the post-modernist/post-structural “thinkers”. History was declared “dead”; the class struggle not only erroneous but over! Reaction combined with despair - anything, except Marxism and class struggle, was venerated as the “new”, “authentic” solution to the crisis of capitalist barbarism.

On home soil, the working class has also experienced a series of ideological, political and organisational setbacks. The radical petty bourgeois ANC that stood at the head of the mass movement of the 1980s has been transformed into a bourgeois nationalist party that wields state power on behalf of the ruling capitalist class. Even the COSATU leadership feels impelled to mushroom into mass movements; indeed over the last few years they have at best grown marginally or have stagnated or shrunk.

At the same time, over the past few years, the unbroken series of country-wide protests, as well as significant wage battles, are testimony to a renewed mood of militancy within the ranks of key sections of the working class. These localised community struggles and separate strikes struggle out for a bold initiative to co-ordinate and unify them.

We are sure that many workers in COSATU and militants in the SAPC and Young Communist League also recognise the necessity now for joint defensive struggles to rebuild the mass organisations and the fighting capacity of the working class. Even the COSATU leadership feels impelled from time-to-time to, as it has in the case of the electricity price hike, to issue calls to action to workers and communities. We need to show a readiness to respond to this and other calls and take up a joint battle.

For us the next link in the chain of struggle is about building the united front of struggle and not about ‘the unity of the left’.

We believe that what is required now is:

- a conference of grassroots community organisations, activists and unionists to develop a programme of activities to build and strengthen existing organisations and to co-ordinate and unify mass struggles;
- agreement to join up with the battles around all the burning issues: wages, unemployment, living standards, housing, water, electricity, education, health and seek out a workable practical basis for collaboration;
- a serious fight within Cosatu and other unions to develop a rank-and-file movement for democracy and that challenges the conciliation politics of the existing labour bureaucracy;
- systematically build a bridge of common struggles between communities and trades unions; and between the unemployed and employed.

Building the united front involves patient and consistent work over a lengthy period of time. It involves organically connecting with existing struggles and fighting to strengthen or rebuild grassroots organisations.

The existing CDL initiative is more geared to building a new political formation and clarifying its own identity than seriously tackling these tasks.

We therefore call on the Conference to adopt a clear united front approach and to reject the “unity of the left” approach.

**In defence of our lives!**

**In defence of our jobs!**

**FOR THE FIGHTING UNITED FRONT OF THE WORKING CLASS!**

**MARCH SEPARATELY, STRIKE TOGETHER!**

[1] This statement has been issued by the following fraternal Trotskyist organisations: CWGS/LLC (Comrades for a Workers Government/Labour Left Collective) and the BSC (Bolshevik Study Circles).

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**STATEMENT BY THE COMRADES FOR A WORKERS GOVERNMENT/LLC/BSC TO THE CONFERENCE OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT**

**Qina Msebenzi**

**The Journal of the Comrades for a Workers Government in South Africa in 1992. Socialist Fight is pleased to publish this principled call for class struggle revolutionary policies and politics which firmly rejects ‘political diplomacy or fraudulent political unity’.”**