

the★commune

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as army deaths fuel media pressure for 'more british helicopters', we say...



troop deaths soared in august, yet much of the media is clamouring for a stepping-up of the war in afghanistan

troops out of afghanistan!

editorial of *The Commune*

The withdrawal of the last UK combat troops from Iraq at the end of May 2009 has only served to heap more attention on the 'forgotten war' in Afghanistan.

In April 2006 the then Labour Defence Secretary John Reid told the House of Commons that British troops would preside over Helmand province and leave "without a shot being fired": yet day-by-day the tally of the dead increases. Over two hundred British soldiers, many of whom were recruited to the Army as mere teenagers, desperate to get out of sink estates, have been killed: the number of Afghan civilian dead, largely ignored by the mainstream media in this country, now stands in the tens of thousands.

These deaths are a criminal waste of human life. None of these people are dying 'for democracy': the recent elections were a sham, the atmosphere of terror and social meltdown so severe that only 150 out of a potential 80,000 electorate turned out for the polling which Britain's "Operation Panther's Claw", in which ten troops died, was supposed to facilitate.

The 'freedoms for women' so loudly trumpeted by the likes of Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush are still less of a reality, with not only US-backed warlords in outlying areas, but even the central government of Hamid Karzai now decreeing laws which allow men to refuse their wives food if they refuse their sexual demands, and force women to seek their husbands' permission to go to work. The *Times* reports that "the United States and Britain are now opposed to any strong public protest because they fear that speaking out could disrupt [the] election"; never mind that half the population has no rights whatsoever, and the election itself has been plagued by ballot-stuffing as well as low turnout.

The grim spectacle of the world's lone superpower lashing out at one of the world's poorest countries in 2001 in the name of 'national security' has been followed by a remarkable military quagmire, with no exit strategy. Much of the media has clamoured for "more British helicopters", or another "surge" of troops to tighten the occupation's grip, insisting that the troops' deaths should not have been in vain.

Yet the war in Afghanistan is not one between barbarism and modernity, Islamist terrorism and civilisation: or, to the extent that it is, the western coalition is as much on the wrong side as the Taliban are, and for the same reasons. The imperialist occupiers are not some sort of 'buffer' protecting democracy in the country: they have wasted no time at all in striking alliances with the 'right' warlords and seeking a strongman to hold the place together, using the policy once described by post-war US President Harry Truman as "he's a bastard, but he's our bastard".

No doubt it is true that many troops have insufficient equipment for the job demanded of them: but we oppose the task itself, not just how it is conducted, and therefore oppose any measures which have the aim of helping "our boys" repress the local population and prolonging the war. The USSR-backed regime in Afghanistan in the 1980s was felled thanks to the desertion of some 32,000 troops a year: if only British troops followed this example, or indeed that of Lance Corporal Joe Glenton, now on trial for desertion.

We, like the Afghan communist women who explain the situation on pages 6-7, demand the immediate withdrawal of troops. Not because we support the Taliban, not because we are indifferent to democratic rights, but because the occupation retards rather than accelerates the struggle against fundamentalism, and that at the cost of thousands of lives.

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wildcats show how to fight royal mail bosses

by Paul Haste

Postal workers continue to fightback with wildcat strikes against Royal Mail bosses' attempts to bully staff and slash jobs, but the CWU union continues to stand back from leading the kind of coordinated national action that can win this dispute.

Royal Mail managers are on the rampage, tearing up contracts, sacking union reps and preparing the ground for massive job losses, but the CWU, instead of using the weeks before the September ballot on national industrial action to win the biggest vote possible in favour of a strike, insists on imploring bosses to get back to the negotiating table.

And as the situation in delivery offices and mail centres across the country gets worse, the union has even begun demanding that CWU reps "discipline" union members who argue for unofficial action.

The CWU has also indicated that requests for local official strikes will be rejected in the run up to the national ballot, in which voting begins on September 9th and ends on September 23rd.

Such moves will clearly take the pressure off Royal Mail — the earliest that a national strike can begin is October — and a lack of action in the meantime could run the risk of demoralising activists as managers continue their onslaught.

But there are signs that postal workers remain determined to fight and have the confidence to resist bosses' attacks regardless of whether the CWU endorses their action or not.

After two year's absence, the rank and file newspaper *Post Worker* has just been revived to spread word of the strikes and solidarity action that is sweeping mail centres across Britain as the ballot papers go out.

Its first issue reports on the most recent fightbacks, such as the 65 workers in Wallasey's main sorting office who have started an unofficial strike after managers tried to discipline union reps.

One of the strikers declared that, "Royal Mail are trying to use bully boy tactics on us and we're just not having it," while workers at Liverpool Mail Centre then refused to handle scab mail from Wallasey, and went on strike when managers tried to dock their pay for effectively taking illegal secondary action in solidarity.

Royal Mail drivers at East Midlands Airport also had pay deducted after they refused to cross picket lines — prompting most of the day shift to walk out on unofficial strike in response.

Managers had previously called the drivers into meetings individually and demanded that they sign letters that said they would cross pickets, but many refused.

Meanwhile, over 100 postal workers at Stoke mail centre have been on all-out indefinite strike action since August



defiance: a post worker on a cwu picket line earlier this summer. but the union has been slow to coordinate action

18th after bosses threatened to close the entire office and transfer their work to Wolverhampton.

CWU branch secretary Andy Plant reported that the strike is "100 percent solid. We've got about 40 people on the picket line in rotating shifts from 5am to 6pm, and the support from the public has been great."

"Around 200 postal workers in delivery offices in the city took unofficial action in our support."

It is this kind of action that can put Royal Mail bosses on the back foot and give other post workers around the country the confidence to stand up to management's offensive — no matter how much the CWU wants to talk about "talks" — in the lead up to the national ballot.

★The Commune is holding a series of meetings in London under the title 'unions: schools for communism?' Following our recent series on 'communism from below', this set of discussion groups will look more closely at how the working class organises and the strengths and limitations of different means of struggle.

The first such meeting is on September 14th, 'why do workers form trade unions' (from 7pm at the Artillery Arms, 102 Bunhill Row, near Old Street), then 'two views of trade unionism' on October 5th. Reading materials for the whole of the autumn series, along with all venue details, are available at www.thecommune.wordpress.com/events

government attacks on civil service: crunch time for pcs left

by Steve Ryan

The PCS civil service union faces yet another massive challenge.

The government have signalled the intention to alter the Civil Service Compensation Scheme (CSCS) as it is apparently "too generous". The effect would be dramatic, halving redundancy payments for example. The union is getting ready for massive consultation exercise with members, No doubt industrial action will be necessary.

However there are problems. Having backed down on pay last year (as noted by *The Commune*), there is a mistrust and in some areas outright resentment to that tactics of the "left" led NEC. The much vaunted deal which led to the cancelling at the last minute of the November strike has proved worthless, leaving tens of thousands of members having to accept or having imposed derisory pay deals. Currently the second largest group within PCS Revenue and Customs face either having to accept a deal rejected twice by members or its withdrawal. The bosses, heartened by the continual backing down of PCS, are scenting blood.

Aside from the fact that pay has not be addressed, tens of thousands of jobs have gone in the civil service. This has left many members under great stress with LEAN type management practices introduced to cope. Also offices are closing leaving thousands without future. The NEC claim that they will fight if there are compulsory redundancies....but there have been at least 80 and nothing done so far. The proposed changes to the CSCS if implemented will enable the bosses to get rid of thousands nice and cheaply. The response front PCS will be interesting!

All told this is now crunch time for the Left in PCS. Members see that there has been no real victory on pay, jobs, and even the victory on pensions is looking short lived.

Workers in other unions such as CWU and RMT are fighting. It is no use looking to the big Labour affiliates who currently seem more obsessed with expelling activists rather than upset a rabid labour government.

PCS needs to:

★Draw up a campaign of rolling action, targeted to cause maximum disruption to the government. This will be easy as

wind turbine factory occupation ends, but struggle continues

by Gerry Emmett

Workers occupied the Vestas St. Cross wind turbine factory on the Isle of Wight from July 20th to August 7th. They are calling for the plant to be nationalised under the workers' control. Vestas is the only wind turbine factory in the UK, which has thousands of such turbines in use, and indeed has plans for increasing their number.

Some speculate that the company just wants to mothball the plant until the current economic crisis picks up and a new group of workers could be found to fill the jobs of those who are fired now.

Although it is a "green" business, Vestas has hardly been friendly to its workforce. One worker described it this way: "Vestas bought out NEG Micon in 2003, and since that time things just got worse as it tried to squeeze the last drop of work out of everyone, sapping them dry. Long hours in a highly stressful environment and fear of repetitive strain injuries amongst other conditions have given it a very high staff turnover. It is extremely anti-union and some workers who have joined unions have been singled out and fired on various grounds. The nearest thing to a union was a consultation network imposed by European law, where supposedly elected representatives (but in reality hand-picked by management) attended meetings where they had no input whatsoever, and were forced to relay management diktat to the rest of the workers."

There has been good community support. The closure of Vestas would be a blow to the Isle of Wight economy which otherwise might have to return to tourism. Local people and fellow Vestas workers challenged police lines to bring in food to the occupiers. The Rail, Maritime and Transport union and the Fire Brigades Union, among others, lent support as the struggle came to national attention.



forced out: bailiffs put an end to the occupation

Matt, the worker quoted above, brought out the range of issues involved here: "None of us involved in this occupation ever thought we would take part in anything like this. We quickly realized that we were at the centre of a perfect storm; we had a golden opportunity to seize the factory and force the issues of green energy, massive job losses and corporate responsibility into the international spotlight. We knew we had to step up and take action, as this was bigger than all of us put together."

Although bailiffs forced an end to the occupation, the struggle continues.

★For updates on the struggle at the Vestas plant, visit www.savevestas.wordpress.com

many departments are imploding, and others such as the Department for Work and Pensions cannot cope due to the extra work being generated by the recession. Billions remain uncollected in Revenue and Customs.

★Link up with other unions and campaigns to draw together all those fighting back, this could give confidence to many others suffering cutbacks to join in.

★Build support in Trade councils and the National Shop Stewards Network.

As for the Left Unity grouping in PCS there is now a real need to reflect on why LU was necessary. Uncomfortably LU is supporting actions and outcomes that are often not dissimilar to the old right wing. Its time for a big change and some decisive and bold thinking. The contact centre dispute in Revenue and Customs shows what happens when serious, imaginative and serious action is proposed.

If this does not happen the union may well be in trouble. Certainly the left may end up split and discredited, which would be a disaster after the years of hard work to gain influence.

purnell's new 'old labour' is just new 'new labour'

by David Broder

American conservatives' televised attacks on the National Health Service erupted onto the British political scene in August, with the great and good of the Labour Party leaping to the defence of the system which this government is itself undermining with its privatisation campaign. Gordon (and Sarah) Brown joined the "#welovethenhs" Twitter campaign, as did Health Secretary Andy Burnham, who also took time away from tweeting to criticise Tory MEP Daniel Hannan as "unpatriotic" for taking part in the American right-wing crusade. Here the Labour Party was very much fighting on its traditional home turf: but is it turning to the left?

With such a revival of enthusiasm for national healthcare, countering David Cameron's incredible claim that the Tories are now "the party of the NHS", and with Royal Mail privatisation plans stalled for now, some in the labour movement believe that the government is shifting leftwards. Given Brown's attempts to expose the fact that the Tories are going to make harsh cuts, such people have wasted much ink on grand predictions that recent Keynesian measures to shore up the economy show that the Labour Party is opening up clear red water between itself and the Conservatives, and indeed that when it loses the next General Election, the party will become a fulcrum of resistance to Cameron.

Clearly Brown himself is highly unlikely to hang onto the leadership of his party beyond a General Election defeat, and already leading figures in the party are positioning themselves for the fallout of the current Prime Minister's downfall. Already last July David Miliband wrote a *Guardian* piece outlining his vision of a renewed Labour Party, making the vacuous conclusion that "the modernisation of the Labour party means pursuing traditional goals in a modern way". This attempt to define a new direction for Labour was widely characterised as putting out feelers for a potential coup against Brown: and indeed others who see themselves in future leadership roles, such as Harriet Harman, John Crudas, and now James Purnell, have been making all sorts of "left" noises in a bid to gain support from the party rank-and-file and affiliated unions.

The case of James Purnell, who resigned from Cabinet in June as part of the latest botched effort to unseat the Prime Minister, demonstrates particularly well the emptiness of such posturing. Recently named director of "OpenLeft", a project launched by think-tank Demos, one of the most aggressively right-wing members of the government now wants a wide debate on "strategy for the Left".

Before abandoning his Department for Work and Pensions on the grounds that Gordon Brown was heading for disaster



courting disaster: james purnell (right) ditched the prime minister in june and is looking for a new niche

in the European elections, Purnell authored and promoted the Welfare Reform Bill, a package of swingeing cuts in benefits, particularly damaging for single parents and the disabled but also looking to force hundreds of thousands of unemployed people to work for less than the minimum wage.

No doubt such feelings were far from the mind of the new James Purnell when he posted an interview on the OpenLeft website with a reader of his who railed against "the horrible inequality and the malice which is directed at those who are struggling most" and defended "the common person on the street who demands to be respected and fulfilled rather than maligned, ignored and confined". Purnell himself declares that the mission of the left is to "convince working class voters that the state can protect them".

Purnell is now not only an advocate of "market socialism" but is moreover keen to encourage "an open debate" about the Labour Party's political priorities and strategy for re-entering government in future. Some see this as evidence that the chaos engulfing the party may see it open up, in contrast to the recent hacking away at party democracy such as the 2007 'Bournemouth decision', which removed conference's power to initiate policy and slashed trade union control. They say the unions should stay affiliated to Labour, continuing to fund it and trying to reform the party.

Tony Benn, the great champion of "my-party-right-or-wrong", welcomed Purnell's OpenLeft project with an article on the *Guardian* website featuring a denunciation of "sectarianism" (i.e., any criticism of Purnell) and managing to avoid any reference to Purnell's actual politics. What this reflects is not really openness of debate at all—rather, the debate is entirely closed, because, exhausted at the end of Labour's rule, none of the participants have anything to say except to agree on the defence of the unity of the Labour Party itself, hardly a sign that they will loosen their control.

Indeed, the now-existing relationship of the trade unions to the Labour Party is one of structural subordination, with the union leaders' desire to tread the corridors of power and fetish of keeping Labour in government seeing millions of pounds' worth of members money poured down the drain with nothing in return.

Moreover, it is not the case that the Labour rank-and-file is challenging the leadership's absolute control of party structures and thus forcing concessions: merely that different factions among elite circles are posturing to try and undermine one another. It is ministers who we already know and loathe who will be taking charge when Brown goes.

Not only is there little resistance forthcoming from the existing membership—those who have stayed are mostly unmoved even by electoral disaster, never mind the government's actual policies—but there is no reason to believe that other activists who want to fight the Cameron government would see the Labour Party as a worthwhile means of resistance. There is still less reason why the radical left should copy the prattle of union bureaucrats who encourage false hopes in the party and defend affiliation.

After all, the test of value of affiliation is not whether Labour MPs start dropping the word 'socialism' into blog posts or talk about 'openness', or agree to a policy debate once they are in opposition. The test is what they do in the here and now, when in power and presiding over the capitalist crisis. With massive government attacks on benefits even as unemployment soars, the verdict for the unions is clear.

resisting redundancy and recession: appraising the tactic of occupation

by Gregor Gall

In times of recession and restructuring, the occupation or sit-in tactic is potentially a powerful tool when workers are faced with redundancy because it provides leverage that strikes often cannot. Yet, since late 2007 when the global downturn began, we have witnessed very few examples of occupation – certainly far fewer than might have been expected given the depth and extent of recession.

So to date the numerical roll call of occupations has been: Australia (two), Britain (seven), Canada (four), Eire (seven), France (twenty-eight) and the US (one). It is worth bearing in mind the relative context of the size of the labour forces of each of these countries. Respectively, these are 11m, 31m, 18m, 2m, 28m, and 153m.

We can presuppose the foundations for occupation are aspects of consciousness, primarily, anger and organisation. Anger at being at the end of the line with nowhere to go and wanting to do something about this: union organisation allowing something collectively to be done about this. This contrasts with other facets of worker consciousness such as fatalism and resignation that nothing can be done, and that the workers themselves have no power of remedy (even with union organisation).

But this is insufficient to explain the action compared to the inaction. To flesh out the issues, we need to look at the main characteristics of the stimulus to the occupations. These are:

- ★Redundancy of a high percentage of workers (often with closure)
- ★Timing of closure announcement: immediate notice of immediate redundancy and closure

- ★No severance pay and loss of pension rights as a result of bankruptcy
- ★Unionised workforces
- ★Previous high profile examples of occupation in recent times.

Taking these in turn, the fully collectivised nature of the redundancy helps create a critical mass while the immediacy of redundancy provides for no period of consultation or dialogue with the employer and, thus, a greater shock to the system. This grave sense of procedural injustice is heightened by the substantial justice of no compensation and loss of deferred wages.

But this explanation provides only limited illumination. First, not all occupations had all these features. The only common one was the first. Indeed, in some cases workers became unionised in the process of an occupation. Furthermore, where occupation in both absolute and relative has been sparsest – the US – the absence of any preceding occupations may help account for this. By contrast, in the other countries the precedent of occupation in the last five or so years existed. And, there were many cases where all the features were present but no occupation was engaged in. This suggests that other factors were at play.

So the key material factors are the labour market situation and terms of redundancy. Some workers will believe that they have better or worse chances of finding other employment depending on the state of the local labour market. Across the six economies, unemployment levels vary widely, with Australia being just 5.7%. However, it is not as simple as saying that workers with no sense of alternative employment are more likely to think of occupation than those that do for other factors have a bearing.

Nonetheless, it can be suggested that this sense of no alternative employment is a necessary – without being sufficient – factor. That said, the terms of redundancy have an important bearing on this calculation for payoffs of certain sizes can blunt or delay the impact of redundancy. But again, there are still cases where reasonable redundancy terms have not provided a bulwark against occupation.

The article has sought to explore explanation for the phenomenon of occupation. In doing so, it has gone beyond the ultra-left tendency of some to shout from the sidelines, 'Such and such workers have occupied their workplace – you should do it too, you can do it too'. This approach is mistaken because it fails to appreciate the complexity of social processes involving worker agency as well as the material foundations of concrete circumstances. This complexity relates to workers' assessments of their situation and their expectations about whether occupation will bring useful leverage in terms of a cost/benefit calculation.

The starkest examples of our lack of understanding of why some workers occupy and other do not can be found in the cases of Visteon and Thomas Cook. In both cases, it appears that the crucial spur was that one workplace was occupied first, so setting a precedent for the others. Yet we do not know why the occupations happened in particular workplaces first and not in others.

We need to put our thinking caps on here if we are to be able to understand and then assist workers in struggling against redundancy and recession.

★Gregor Gall is professor of industrial relations at the University of Hertfordshire

amey struggle: burn your bridges, save your dignity

by Mónica del Pilar Uribe Marin

Two of the workers sacked by Amey in September 2008, who had fought for reinstatement and compensation, recently lost their legal battle, which had lasted almost a year. A judge made clear on August 10th that the verdict was final and cannot be appealed: the plaintiffs had defamed the company by handing out leaflets where the names of Amey and its manager Laura Jordan were in bold capital letters, something deemed aggressive and 'inexcusable' in the English language.

Julio Mayor and Pedro Rengifo thus lost the case, their jobs and the money they had been offered (an attempt to buy their silence: they refused with – and for the sake of – their dignity).

However, they did not feel defeated... Failures can involve conquest too. It starkly displayed the persecution of immigrants organising for their rights and showed that solidarity exists. They learned from it, and kept fighting by themselves. They conquered fear and busted myths.

Julio Mayor explains this well, "During negotiations we did what we felt necessary: setting a precedent against the bosses' abuses. We were facing Amey, a multinational, but their arguments were very weak. We were very keen to show that the manager and Amey had broken the law. We feel satisfied by what we did."

The fight

It was an exhausting, instructive, long, drawn-out fight with hills and bends. "The Amey case" highlighted a common but deliberately ignored situation: the exploitation of "illegal" immigrants and persecution of those who organise (in unions or otherwise) against it; but above all, the undeniable alliance between employers, immigration police and state bodies to enforce immigration policy. Moreover, it means exploitative companies need not answer for their staff, exploiting them before casting them aside when they become an irritant. To avoid paying wages and improving work conditions, with the words "no papers", they can have workers locked up. The result: thousands of immigrants mercilessly exploited, arrested then deported in a process denying them no rights and ignoring their protests. Hundreds of companies act with impunity, complicit in the employment of "illegals": employing them in full awareness of their status, or even giving them the means and information to work... "legally"... An unfair "justice" where foreigners always lose.

There have been other cases like Amey - before, then and since. Bosses hire immigrants, knowing them to be illegal; exploit them; the immigrants protest; Immigration "appear"; wages go unpaid; deportations keep stacking up; the exploiters do it all over again and nothing is done about it... They are not condemned, not penalized.

That is perhaps why some people, determined to stop this cycle, immediately rallied round Julio and his sacked colleagues. CAIC (Campaign Against Immigration Controls) heard of the case and supported it with numerous demonstrations around England, which were also backed by No Borders, the Latin American Workers Association, universities, media, human rights organisations, groups and individuals across the country.

Time was not on the five cleaners' side, so they had strategy meetings mainly in working hours and Julio and his colleagues worked nights, Monday to Friday.



cleaners and their supporters staged numerous protests against amey's union-busting

The obstacles

Moreover, after ACAS called for conciliation, they refused Amey's offer of £3000 each. Then, Julio recalls "the Prospect union, clearly supporting Amey, argued that the company had spent a lot of money on the disciplinary proceedings and investigations, so we should be more reasonable. But we told them that the fault lay with Amey, not us. Given our stance, Prospect decided to withdraw their legal support."

For their part, Unite [which had also supported them] began to cave after the Employment Tribunal talks. "At that time three of us were Unite members. The lawyers they assigned to us said that we had no chance of success, we had slandered the company and so were rightly sacked."

In the course of the dispute many organisations expressed their interest in helping out when the unions would not represent them. Unfortunately, nothing happened. Julio's perception was that "no-one was interested in our case any longer, since there were only two of us left, not five like there were to begin with."

Jorge Loaiza and Rubén Jiménez had abandoned the struggle because they had no time for meetings and tribunals. But Rengifo and Julio decided that they would keep going. Their memories stopped them from taking a backwards step, no matter whether they were with or without the unions, with others or alone. They remembered the events of May 2007 when three cleaners were deported and another four sacked.

The background

Days beforehand, the 36 Latin Americans employed by Amey to clean the National Physical Laboratories had determined their fate. Tired of accepting Amey's abuses – and because they were organised – they began to protest when, without reason, the company decided to cut wages and staff numbers; doubled the workload; permanently re-assigned them, unjustifiably; and disregarded health and safety standards.

At first they believed Amey would re-consider its behaviour, only to be betrayed: Amey called them to a meeting... at which more than 60 immigration police arrived. A raid, in which several were jailed.

Those who survived this ambush re-doubled their protests, verbally and in writing, as individuals and publicly. This time they protested the injustices of working for Amey, and indeed because their workload was doubled when no-one replaced the deported workers. But they also protested the

way in which Amey silenced their colleagues. They gave out leaflets explaining the situation, and shouted people's names and their crimes.

The consequences of their tenacity and courage were however unfavourable and gave little room for hope: they were sacked, because, in the employers' eyes, "their actions damaged the company's image".

Refusing to be intimidated, they demanded Amey appear before an Employment Tribunal, on grounds of unfair dismissal, racial discrimination and shortcomings in health and safety.

They sought reinstatement in their posts and financial compensation for the hardship endured when they were forced to go without any wages.

Then, on February 10th 2009, Amey met with them and their Unite and Prospect representatives. ACAS were also present. Amey wanted to make a deal and offered a third of the pay-off demanded, but no reinstatement. They told them that they needed an answer by the 17th: this was a "no". The offer was "inappropriate and unfair, given the losses and hardship caused".

Prospect had advised them to accept Amey's offer and withdraw the Tribunal case. They warned that if they did not, the "union would withdraw its legal backing".

And so it was. Then Unite withdrew its support, as Julio Mayor explained, "It is a policy of the unions that when one takes away its support, the others do the same out of 'solidarity'. This makes no sense: when workers join a union, it is because they expect 100% of the benefits of being in the union. Membership also allows you to get backing from certain organisations and campaigns not dependent on the unions, and this helps significantly in developing a higher level of struggle."

The cutting-loose did not surprise them. Even at that time, in declarations to the press, Julio showed that their withdrawal of support did not seem strange to him: "In the past I have seen the same attitude from unions: to represent or give legal support to a worker before a Tribunal, they must have more than a 60% hope of success. If that is not the case, they will not fight, since the unions will lose face and it will cost them a lot. The unions in this country will only give something up in order to gain something."

Julio and his comrades knew they had to keep going by themselves, seeking representation independent of the unions, warning: "With them or without them we will continue onwards. We will continue fighting, whatever happens, even if we forfeit Amey's offer".

"What other option do we have if they will not meet our request for help? The only options we were left with were to withdraw the Tribunal case or represent ourselves. We chose the latter."

Yes, they lost, but the experience was positive in teaching them that workers can appear before a Tribunal "without begging for unions' representation. The unions acted as if they were offering a service to the workers, as if they were doing us a favour, rather than a service which we had previously paid for".

For this reason, there was success amid the defeat, because although they know that larger numbers have greater chance of victory, now they are not afraid to fight any battle – with support or not – and are determined "to continue helping workers win their rights" and offer their solidarity whenever it may be necessary.

latin american migrants: organising against racism and exploitation

★Members of The Commune attended the Latin American Workers' Association event on August 15th, distributing our new Spanish-language bulletin *La Comuna*. Below is a report on the conference by an Ecuadorian worker present.

The general assembly of the Latin American Workers' Association began at 4:30pm on Saturday August 15th, at SOAS university.

Derek Wall, national representative of the Green Party, opened the event before the reading of messages of support from various parts of the trade union movement, such as the Unite hotels and restaurants branch and the RMT transport union. This was followed by a detailed presentation of the Association's activities in terms of education, voluntary work and campaigns in defence of Latin American workers.

Among the points which stood out most, we might mention the October 7th 2006 "No-one Is Illegal" march; the May 7th 2007 "March for regularisation"; that same May the fight against the abuse of staff by OCS bosses at the BBC; the March 2008 creation of the Campaign Against Immigration Controls (CAIC); in September the start of the campaign in



at may's 'strangers into citizens' demo: "papers for all—no-one is illegal"

solidarity with workers sacked by Amey at the National Physical Laboratory.

In 2009, working with the London Coalition Against Poverty, we highlighted the abuses by ICM against the staff working

in Fitness First gyms: the Association's actions meant that all wages were paid in full no matter what the worker's status, and some of the managers were dismissed. At the same time a group of workers were sacked by MITIE, and when Unite did not offer union backing, the Latin American Workers' Association assumed the role of supporting the workers and calling weekly pickets outside the building. The conflict became more bitter – and won more backing – when MITIE invited workers to attend a demonstration of chemical products, only to be met by immigration police. This action sparked solidarity from various human rights groups, who every Friday carry out pickets in front of the Willis offices. Finally, Sandy Nichol, secretary of SOAS Unison, was introduced to the meeting by Latin American members, and gave a report on the educational and protest activities due to be carried out in September in response to an immigration raid which recently took place at the institution.

This was followed by the election of a new committee. The new leadership made a call for the whole Latin American community to actively participate in all its campaigns with the slogan "United we are stronger".

exposed: soas unison, rmt and unite cleaner activists in the pay of the bosses

by Chris Kane

According to shocking information obtained by *The Commune*, union activists, with cleaning companies organised with Unison (SOAS), RMT (LUL) and Unite (Mitie and Lancaster) – are in the pay of the bosses!

This is of course a pack of lies; nevertheless it is a disgusting lie being officially circulated, in writing by a senior full-time official of Unite, Jose Vallejo Villa, and an un-elected organiser responsible for cleaners.

At the Migrant Workers Branch Committee/Justice for Cleaners on July 3rd attendees were informed that:

“we all know our campaign to be successful and as a result other unions are copying from us. The difference is that those unions are operating wrongly. Their biggest mistake is approaching and dealing with the companies before organising their members. The so called Cleaners for Justice called the members to disobey and as a consequence some were arrested facing deportation. We should ten [sic] have every reason to believe that the organisers of this campaign, Cleaners for Justice are paid by the Cleaning Bosses to attack the cleaners.

“Upon the arrest of the SOAS cleaners the organisers of the Cleaners for Justice Campaign celebrated after meeting the director of the University to which he Jose V. Villa was invited but with the support of his bosses refused to attend. These organisers never thought of it that the meeting of the University’s director was of no value as the director has no power against deportation.”

This is a direct reproduction of the official minutes which have been circulated by Unite.

Cleaners for Justice does not exist: it is an idea which originated with sacked Unite members at Mitie (Willis) and Lancasters, who have called for a campaign that encompasses all cleaners from Unison, RMT and Unite. The Unite full-time-official also uses the term generically for his slanderous attack on trade unionists. Such is the scale of lies being propagated that it is almost beyond belief!

It is completely untrue that other unions have copied the TGWU/Unite model of organising cleaners. The RMT organised cleaners democratically under the sponsorship of the Finsbury Park a Branch with the full support of the union structures. RMT cleaners elected their own reps and were self-organised in their own cleaners’ grade committees. In contrast for most of its life TGWU-Justice for Cleaners was a top-down campaign run by un-elected full-time officials/organisers: principles which largely continue to this day.

According to Jose the biggest mistake of other those unions is approaching and dealing with the companies before organising their members. This is a lie: the RMT and Unison did organise their members – they organised them on the basis of fighting to improve their terms and conditions. The RMT campaign on London Underground and Unison campaign at SOAS for the living wage were campaigns of organised cleaners.

Following these campaigns the cleaning companies have responded with vicious attacks on the workforce to break union organisation. They have colluded with the UK Borders Agency using immigration raids, to sack, arrest and intimidate workers. But according to this Unite full-time official perversely it is the fault of trade unionists for encouraging members to disobey their bosses “and as a consequence some were arrested facing deportation.” Thus Unite activists at Mitie/Lancaster, Unison at SOAS and RMT on LUL are entirely to blame for what has happened to the mainly migrant workers during the bosses’ backlash against union organising!

But the unelected Jose goes further: he concludes that “the organisers of this campaign, Cleaners for Justice are paid by the cleaning bosses to attack the cleaners.” So union activists who have themselves been arrested, sacked and deported, are in the pay of the bosses. Even by the low moral standards of the Unite bureaucracy – this is beneath contempt!

In coming to terms with the counter-attack of the cleaning companies some unions have been disorientated, this is especially the case with Unite. Others such as the RMT have attempted to re-organise, whilst suffering mass sackings they have successfully defended some key activists and began campaigning again. Another case is Unison at SOAS: it has mounted industrial action, and a campaign of solidarity including students and UCU members. Unite however has been impotent in the face of attacks. Where the

lack of direction by their own union has been questioned, such as at Mitie (Willis) and over the victimisation of Alberto Durango by Lancaster, the Unite bureaucracy has responded with fierce hostility. Unite members and activists are being seen as the problem, not the employers.

The resources of a powerful union like Unite have not been deployed to defend the members sacked; not a finger has been lifted to assist them, or protest the deportations such as at Willis. Instead the whole machinery of full-time officials, supported by parrots in the union’s United Left, has been deployed against courageous migrant workers trying to fight the bosses and the UK Border Agency.

As such the disgusting statements of Jose V. Villa are not the ravings of a rogue individual; he has the full support of the Unite bureaucrats. Jack Dromey, Deputy General Secretary, told Mitie cleaners that “the Union generally and through its Officers, Paul and Jose in particular, has moved mountains in your support. That is precisely the kind of Union that we are, one which always fights for its members even if, sadly, we do not on all occasions succeed.” Dromey’s rhetoric amounts to little more than vacuous lies: we have seen very different attitude towards sacked workers and their shop-steward! A lie campaign has been underway against the struggle at Mitie and recent deportations. Steve Hart, London Regional Secretary for Unite has issued a briefing laced with untruths about what is happening with these migrant workers, claiming that Unite:

“...are stepping up the battle to organise more and better across the City. So it is desperately disappointing that this union is under attack from tiny groups seeking to undermine our united campaign. People need to decide whose side they are on. The side of the mass of cleaners led by their branch and the union which is seeking to win for the members, and transform the pay and conditions of tens of thousands of cleaners. Or against the union, and in reality allied with the employers who would dearly love to see our campaign disintegrate into warring factions, and defeats following impossible demands.”

These “tiny groups” are Unite members themselves, some of whom are activists who Hart has abandoned to their fate despite their outstanding record. They have been denied basic representation and assistance due any member facing the sack! Hart claims that at Mitie the “union after a long and sustained campaign had secured alternative job opportunities for the membership – a level of job security not achieved prior to the union.” A mythological campaign which has not included defence of the sacked Unite shop-steward and other members: or opposing the detention and deportations of migrant worker?

At the Unite Branch Committee meeting when the ‘Willis Cleaners/Durango Victimisation/SOAS Occupation’ was discussed the only action decided upon was to discipline Alberto Durango. Why? Because it was discovered he had worn a Justice for Cleaners t-shirt at the SOAS occupation and it was reported that “Durango and his group” were seen with union banners demonstrating in Canary Wharf and “something has to be done about it.” The protest in question was on the occasion of sacked activist Alberto’s appeal hearing. Instead of solidarity the Branch Secretary, Kwasi Agyemang-Prempeh informed him after this meeting he was under “investigation” and banned from Unite training courses. They have established a ‘commission’ to investigate Alberto Durango, in breach of Unite’s own constitution.

Despite all the efforts of the Unite bureaucracy, the Latin American workers have continued their resistance. They have gained widespread solidarity in the labour movement, including of the Labour Representation Committee. Whereas the Unite officialdom ordered their members on the London Underground to cross RMT cleaners’ picket lines, the “group” now under attack are working for greater unity of cleaners no matter what union they are members of. The Unite bureaucrats are now undermining these efforts. We must ensure they do not succeed in wrecking the emerging unity of cleaners’ struggles.

Steve Hart in his briefing on Mitie stated: “We have kept quiet up until now, because we did not want to bring into the public domain such matters; but if others don’t stop telling lies about us, then we have to tell the truth about them.” The truth is Jose Vallejo Villa and Steve Hart are serving the interests of the bosses. They are a parcel of rogues reduced to slanderous lies to cover their own abandonment of migrant workers.

If what is written in *The Commune* is untrue – sue us!

viva la comuna!

★ We have produced the first issue of a Spanish-language bulletin for Latin American migrant workers, *La Comuna*. The publication will be a space for discussion of activism and organising in workplaces and the trade union movement, as well as the fight against immigration controls. The objective is that *La Comuna* should mostly be written by migrant workers themselves and appear at least semi-regularly.

The first issue features one woman’s testimony of an immigration police raid at the Willis building in the City of London, an article by Alberto Durango about Unite and its Justice for Cleaners campaign, and an article about the need for a communist movement today.

A website has been set up at www.lacomuna.co.uk. Email uncaptiveminds@gmail.com for more info.

la★comuna

por la autogestión obrera y el comunismo desde abajo www.lacomuna.co.uk



cuerpo de personas manifestaron ante las oficinas de Willis el 31 de julio

reunión pública: solidaridad con la lucha de los limpiadores

con John McDonnell MP, Alberto Durango (activista de Unite en Lancaster), Clara Ossajede (RMT cleaners – London Underground) y representantes de los limpiadores de SOAS y Willis

martes 4 de agosto a las 6:30pm

lugar: Sowerthons Community Centre, 150 Ossulton St, NW1
metre: Euston está a 5 minutos

willis: redada policial contra inmigrantes

★ Cerca de siete trabajadores de limpieza fueron detenidos en una redada por la policía de inmigración en Inglaterra con la complicidad de Mitie y Willis el 14 de julio del 2009. Entre sus nombres de apellidos y nombres de nacimiento: Alejandro, Hermes Ayala, José Serrano, Karina Cruz, Claita, Sonia y Selma María Domínguez. Exigieron el pago del salario y los 30 días de vacaciones.

testimonio de una trabajadora de Mitie desde la cárcel de inmigración

Ella se llama Lidia, y se le avisó como a las 4 de la madrugada que tenían una reunión de productos químicos en el edificio de Willis y, que era a las 5 de la mañana en el salón donde está un sofá, citaron a los del día y los de la madrugada. Ella dice que tenía un mal presentimiento por la hora de la reunión. Cuando llegó a esa sala, la manager Donna Sidley estaba muerta de la risa con la otra mujer llamada Ivon. Empezaron a pasar, y los legales a un lado y los legales al otro extremo, o sea que ya tenían separados a los indocumentados, y la Donna tenía un frasco de químicos y dice para que sirve esto y luego otro y dice y para que sirve este otro.

Todos se miraban unos con otros preguntándose, porque ella preguntaba esto y los del otro extremo los legales solo los miraban a ellos, pues sabían que venía inmigración a detener a sus propios compañeros y no dijeron nada, si les llamó la atención a los indocumentados que había una mesa llena de bebidas cosas para contar café vasos, y pensaron que eran para ellos.

No pasó 15 min se abrió una puerta de un lado y la otra puerta del otro lado y empezaron a entrar policías, y dicen migración, y no se movían, y uno de los policías tenía una carpeta con solo los nombres de los indocumentados con las fotocopias de los documentos, y no ten los nombres de los que eran legales, los nombraban uno a uno y los interrogaban, diciendo donde sacó el documento donde vivan y muchos lloraban y los reataban y los insultaban, y la mujer Donna mientras se reía y hacía comentario a toda risa a los otros policías y ellos se reían con ella, los insultaban, no los dejaban que se movieran así asustado, y los que lloraban los amenazaban, en ese momento los obligaron a firmar unos papeles que si siquiera se los leyeron, muchos no lo querían hacer y los trataron con insultos

Luego los policías se pusieron a comer y a beber café bebidos y los miraban a ellos y hacían comentario y se reían muy fuerte burlándose, y la Donna con la otra mujer también se burlaban y se reían todo el rato. Los miraban y comían y disfrutaban burlándose de ellos y las prohibieron hablar y solo estaban callados. Nadie les dio aunque sea un vaso de agua, se llevaron hasta las 11 de la mañana, sin darnos nada de comer y ellos disfrutando con las manager. Luego los sacaron y los subieron a dos furgones, los que eran negros los separaron de ellos y no supieron más, y se los llevaron a لندن bridge y a ella Lidia la llevaron pasando toda la día, luego a Liverpool y luego la llevaron a las 2 de la madrugada para acá (al cárcel de inmigración). Pero acá se encontró con dos compañeros más que una quecía en libertad porque su marido tenía documentos y la otra la deportaron.

the commune's activities around britain

★ London: The Commune are at most major demonstrations in the capital and also have our own activities. We are running a new series of reading groups on the theory of trade unionism and workplace organising this autumn, as well as our monthly forums.

Join our email announcements list at <https://lists.riseup.net/www/info/thecommune-london>. Phone David on 07595 24594 for more info.

★ Bristol: The first meeting our network has held in the city will be a workshop at the Saturday September 12th anarchist bookfair, and is on the subject of 'The spirit of utopia today'.

The event takes place at The Island, Bridewell St, Bristol, 10.30am to 6pm. Our session is from 5pm in Room 2 (first floor).

★ West Midlands: we participate in the Coventry Radical Network and will also be initiating a meeting on local organising work. If you're interested in the meeting or our network, call Dave on 02476 450027.

★ Wrexham: we are planning a series of meetings around the title “Storming the heavens—alternatives to capitalism”. Paper sales will also be launched in and around the town centre.

★ North-West: if you're in Blackpool, Preston or the surrounding area, contact uncaptiveminds@gmail.com. We will also have a stall outside the Manchester Anarchist Bookfair on September 26th (Jabez Clegg, 2 Portsmouth Street, near Manchester University Students' Union).

★ South Yorkshire-based activists interested in The Commune should get in touch with Barry in Sheffield on 07543 652629.

★ The Commune also have a Facebook group. You can sign up for news and debate at <http://facebook.com/home.php?#/group.php?gid=100975860952>

★ Visit the website at www.thecommune.co.uk or get in touch via email— uncaptiveminds@gmail.com

afghan women bear brunt of hypocritical 'war on terror'

A piece for *The Commune* by members of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

Recently the media has widely reported the deaths of British troops in Afghanistan with the escalation of violence. Additionally, there is much debate of British policies in Afghanistan. What the people of Britain miss here is the suffering of the Afghan people. Foreign troops have not even killed half as many Taliban as innocent civilians. Blind bombings have killed more than 8000 people, a figure which is bound to increase. Even wedding parties have been targeted several times, killing many women and children. The so-called 'new' strategy of Obama's administration and the influx of troops to Afghanistan has dragged our people further into the bloody war, and this government has proved itself much more war-mongering than Bush with his killings and ever-horrifying oppression. Some people prefer the Taliban over the foreign troops, as they provide better security and safety from attacks of foreign troops, while others simply join to take revenge for the death of their loved ones killed in air raids or other attacks.

If we glance back at history, US governments have never brought "peace" and "democracy" in any country. It has only forced war on countless countries, causing destruction, killing and disasters. Afghanistan is no exception. Everyone knows that the so-called "war on terror" of the US and allies is just a fake. It is an open secret today that all of the terrorist bands in Afghanistan and region, from Osama to Al-Qaeda, Taliban and Mujahideen warlords are products of the Cold War-era White House. The US poured billions of dollars into the pockets of Islamic fundamentalists who not only turned Afghanistan to ashes and hell for its people, but also posed a threat to the people around the world. And this dirty game is still going on.

The US and allies invaded our country under fine slogans of "democracy", "women's rights", "liberation" and so on, but today they are supporting and helping the dirtiest enemies of such values in Afghanistan. They talk about democracy, but shake bloody hands of fundamentalist elements such as Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Qasim Fahim, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Yousif Qanoni, Ismail Khan, Din Mohammad, Haji Almas, Atta Mohammad, Rashid Dostum, Mirwis Yasini (all of them part of the current puppet regime) and many other such warlords who for decades have waged war against democratic values in Afghanistan and have committed untold crimes and brutalities against Afghan people. It is to throw dirt on values like "democracy" and "human rights" to impose the above-mentioned criminals and their like as policy-makers in Afghanistan. But this is what the US and its allies have done to our poor people in the past eight years.

The US and its allies are in Afghanistan only for their own regional, strategic and economical interests. Having its military bases in Afghanistan, the US can tighten its grip in Asia and compete with its rivals: China, Russia and Iran. In addition, it has opened its new Guantanamo in Kabul, the Bagram Airbase. This prison houses more than 600 inmates who have no right "to challenge their detention". There have been many reports of abuse in the prison and many prisoners are said to be innocent.

The world has been deceived to believe that the US brought "democracy" to Afghanistan but everyone should know that they have turned Afghanistan into the opium capital of the world, controlled by a drug-mafia. Nourishing democracy in such a situation is a fantasy! While they talk about a "counter-narcotics drive", in fact hidden efforts were made to increase the production of opium over 4,500% since 2001, and now Afghanistan produces over 92% of the world's opium. The whole country is in the grip of a drug-mafia and its consequences are alarming not only for Afghans but for the people of the world, as the drugs of Afghanistan mostly finds their way to the streets of London, New York and other Western cities. But the US, Britain and some other Western countries gain hundreds of billions of dollars from this dirty business. The biggest drug-traffickers of Afghanistan are all friends of the US and high-ranking officials of its puppet regime. For instance Wali Karzai, brother of Hamid Karzai, controls the largest drug network in Kandahar province.

Elections are one of the most important principles of democracy and a lot of hue and cry was raised to show the world this 'democracy'. But the election in Afghanistan is just a dirty show to legitimise the puppet regime of Hamid Karzai



'liberation from above'? the united states and britain have spent years bombing one of the world's poorest countries in the name of 'democracy', but their own closest allies there are among the worst of the warlords

for another term. Even children in Afghanistan know that the next president has already been chosen by Washington and not the people's vote. Our people knew this therefore they had no interest in taking part in the election. Even international observers and many media reports confirm the low standard of voting processes and the large-scale fraud in the election, and a low turnout of voters.

Freedom of speech is another key pillar of democracy harshly crushed in Afghanistan. 23-year old Pervaiz Kambakhsh printed some articles from the Internet about women and Islam and distributed it among his friends. Initially accused of blasphemy, he was sentenced to death but after a lot of pressure from around the world his sentence was reduced to 20 years in prison. Malalai Joya, the brave young MP who unmasked the warlords of the Parliament and their Western masters, was suspended because these criminals, who only talk in the language of guns, couldn't tolerate her. Today no democracy-minded, serious anti-fundamentalist group can operate openly in Afghanistan. RAWA still runs its programs and activities semi-underground and our members are facing daily threats and risks both from the warlords and the intelligence agency of the puppet regime. Even the book shops that sell our publications have been threatened.

Western-supported warlords still control much of the country and impose their law-of-the-jungle on our suffering people. They are killing, looting and oppressing our people, but according to US terminology, they are not regarded as terrorists, since they work according to the directions of the Pentagon and White House. Prominent warlords such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, Atta Mohammad, Pirum Qul, Alum Siah, and many others have their own independent "governments" in different regions of Afghanistan. They have their own local bands, belonging to certain commanders backed by much more powerful warlords, who are involved in looting people, the abduction and raping of girls, drug smuggling, bribery and many other crimes. The local police and judiciary are composed of people appointed by these warlords. Therefore there is obviously no implementation of law, justice and security in such places; and our people have no door to knock on for help.

Despite great claims of a "war on terror", today the Taliban and other terrorist groups have become stronger than ever and dominate large swaths of Afghanistan. They have also been able to carry out suicide and road bombings, killing scores of innocent people. We believe the US is not serious and honest in its war, since annihilating such a band of illiterate men would be a piece of cake for a superpower. These Taliban provide a perfect justification for the US to extend its occupation in Afghanistan because if the Taliban are defeated and "terrorism" is uprooted then the US would have to leave Afghanistan. In fact there are reports on how the US is extending a friendly hand towards the terrorist Gulbuddin

and Taliban - the dirty, bloody enemies of our people - and holding secret negotiations and talks with such brutal groups. Other foreign countries, like Iran and Pakistan, have a hand in supporting these Taliban bands.

Security is one of the vital needs of our people but it is currently in the most disastrous state, as we have described. Piled on top of this, poverty, unemployment, corruption and the lack of access to all kinds of amenities, makes life hell for our people. 20 million out of an estimated 33.6 million population are today under the poverty line. The rate of unemployment has never been this high, forcing people to join the ranks of the Taliban, turn to armed robbery or flee the country.

The US puppet regime of Hamid Karzai is the most corrupt in our history. Afghanistan was ranked 172nd out of 180 countries in Transparency International's *Global Corruption Report 2008*. Bribery and the embezzlement of money is a norm in government institutions. There is no sight of reconstruction despite the jaw-dropping 32 billion dollars of aid. An international aid expert recently discovered that 80 cents of every dollar somehow goes back to the donor countries, and the rest of it is grabbed by national and international NGOs, while only a few cents reach the people.

The Western media created a lot of hype about the so-called "liberation of Afghan women". But in fact, shamefully, the situation of women has got worse in the past eight years. Our women still endure catastrophic conditions. Girls have been abducted, raped and shot dead on their way to school by warlords. Both the warlords and Taliban still oppress our women. The famous case of acid being thrown on the faces of schoolgirls shook the world, but what is heart-wrenching is that this is just the tip of the iceberg and such horrible crimes against women are increasing. Many schools have been burned down, or been threatened and consequently shut down. Due to this insecurity the number of girls in education has dropped dramatically in the recent years. Laura Bush proudly calls the 6 million female students an achievement, but still today the literacy rate for women is 5%.

Many women working in television or radio stations have been threatened, assaulted and even murdered. Shaima Rezai, Zakia Zaki, Saange Amaj and Nadia Anjuman were killed. Nilofar Habibi, a girl working in a local television station in Herat, was stabbed by men who had warned her not to appear on television again.

Today, our women are suffering from two sides: at the hands of the misogynists in power, and domestic violence. 70% of Afghanistan is lawless, that is, in the hands of the Taliban or warlords. The appalling anti-women laws of the Taliban are well-known to the world, but the regions which warlords and other local commanders control are far worse than under the Taliban. Women are vulnerable and silent victims of rape,

abduction, murder and other crimes. There are limitless cases of rape, from 3-year old children to 73-year old women.

Domestic violence is another pain our women suffer. Women have gone through unimaginable tortures at the hands of husbands and family members. Nafisa's husband scalded her with hot water and cut her nose and ears with a knife. 16-year old Nazia's inhumane 40-year old husband cut both her ears and nose, shaved her head, broke her teeth and drove her mentally unstable. These women see no support from the courts. The criminals are not punished and this is why many women see suicide as the only way out in such situations. The rates of self-immolation among women have risen very high in the recent years, with hundreds of cases officially acknowledged. In all the cases of the sufferings of women we should remember that this is a very small fraction of the actual number of cases, as many families hide such incidents due to the backward traditions of our society.

The Afghan government, which is comprised of misogynists, not only provides no support to suffering women, but further still it passes anti-women laws which push women to despair. Recently Karzai made a secret deal with fundamentalists to gain their support for his re-election by signing a law which permits Shia men to deny their wives food and sustenance if they refuse to obey their husbands' sexual demands, and has many more such shocking articles against women. Brad Adams, of Human Rights Watch said, "The rights of Afghan women are being ripped up by powerful men who are using women as pawns in manoeuvres to gain power. These kinds of barbaric laws were supposed to have been relegated to the past with the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001, yet Karzai has revived them and given them his official stamp of approval."

From above, we can see that today our people are faced with a total of three enemies: the Jihadi fundamentalists in the government, the Taliban and the foreign troops. There is a war raging in our country and the situation for the people can't get any worse. If the troops withdraw from Afghanistan it will lessen the problems of the country.

The Western governments not only betray Afghans but also their own people. They are putting their soldiers' lives in danger for a war which only adds to pains of Afghan people. Afghans are day by day rising against the occupation and now demand the complete withdrawal of troops. We do not want the occupation, and know that no nation can liberate another nation. It is duty of the democratic minded forces and individuals of Afghanistan to fight for liberation, democracy and justice in the country. The troops have only complicated the Afghanistan situation. With the withdrawal of troops one of the problems of Afghanistan is solved, then it will be up to our people to struggle against the fundamentalists. If Western powers stop their support and sending weapons to such groups, then they may not have any chance of standing up to our people's resistance.

latin america's future is being played out in honduras

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With the crocodile tears of the OAS (Organisation of American States), UNASUR (the Union of South American Nations), MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market), so too ALBA (the Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of our America) and all the other institutions of the region, history repeats itself: the policy of appeasement cannot stop the coup. Nor can round-table negotiations like those staged by President Arias in San José, Costa Rica, where everything has been conceded to those who made the coup, save the question of the conditional reinstatement of Zelaya... with the result that Micheletti not only continues to hold power, but can also refuse to receive Insulza (General Secretary of the OAS) himself, accusing him of "partiality".

There are also recent precedents for this, and in Central America itself, with the "mediation" role played by that same Costa Rican president Arias at the time of the Nicaraguan revolution of the 1980s, "mediation" in which the Sandinistas and the Salvadorian FLMN capitulated along the line, giving up even the revolutionary process itself[7].

In any case, the impotence of these institutions whenever called to action in the interests of the masses shows once again their character as capitalist organisations in submission to US imperialism.

Coup by night, rebellion by day

"Are they afraid? No. Are they afraid? No. So, forward, forward, keep up the fight"[1].

However, the reality in the region is much less simple than superficial analyses might have us believe. As our comrades in the PST commented on the situation in Honduras: "We are not facing a normal situation in the class struggle but one of its highest points, where all everyday live breathes politics and the mobilisation of the masses is both generalised and constant".

yes, chris ann, obama is punking us

Ernie Haberkern writes on the row over healthcare reform in the USA

In a sense, the right wing tub-thumpers organized by the pharmaceutical and insurance companies through media hysterics like Rush Limbaugh and Sarah Palin, have done Barack Obama a favor. They have drawn attention away from what the administration is really doing by making stupid charges and turning their demonstrations into clown shows. It is easy enough to poke fun at Sarah Palin's charge that a provision allowing doctors to be paid for advising elderly, ill patients about the possibility of setting up living wills, making clear to their loved ones what they would like done in the event they become incapacitated, amounts to setting up "death panels".

Increasingly, however, the liberal centre is beginning to voice concerns about where Obama is going. The headline of this article is based on an op-ed piece in The New York Times by Frank Rich titled "Is Obama Punking Us" in which he quotes a real estate broker from Virginia who voted for Obama, Chris Ann Cleland, as saying "I feel like I have been punked!"

The specific issue that set Rich off is the administrations secret deal (well, it was secret until The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times found out about it) in which the pharmaceutical companies were assured that their prices would be protected. As I write this article, officials of the administration like Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Health and Human Services, have been saying in interviews that the public option, a government financed insurance program that would compete with private insurers could be dropped as part of a compromise to get the deal through.

Let me suggest that there is something more going on here than more of the same special interest lobbying and liberal collapse in the face of it that have characterized American politics for decades.

There is a real health care crisis. Partly as a result of the aging of the population and partly as a result of increasingly expensive treatments and drugs, the percentage of the GNP devoted to health care is growing. Add to this the gross profits of the drug companies, and the insurance companies who spend enormous amounts trying to avoid making payments, and the possibility of a financial collapse like that of the banking and real estate sectors looks like a real possibility.

And the response of the Obama administration and the Democratic Party is similar.

What is going on is a form of nationalization which preserves and protects the existing private bureaucracies by incorporating them into the state bureaucracy, with no effec-

tive democratic control or regulation. When the town hall tub-thumpers point out the size and complexity of the bills, the Senate bill is over 600 pages and the House bill over 1000 pages, they have a point. No one except the lobbyists and the administration representatives and the carefully selected Congresspersons and Senators knows what has really been agreed to. The tub-thumpers are also right to be worried about the undetermined price too. Where they are wrong is in their assumption that the pharmaceutical and insurance companies are on their side. Leaving aside the fact that these people are exploiting the general population, the present system is unsupportable. They know that and that is why this time around, unlike during Clinton's administration, the companies are eager to make a deal. It is the only way they can continue to exist. Like the banks they understand that they need "socialism" and "big government".to survive. They just want to make sure they get the best deal they can and continue to collect their bonuses.

I don't see how anyone interested in a democratically responsible, decent, egalitarian health care system can support the Obama proposal. Some of the worst abuses of the system may be alleviated. The insurance companies which now function as "death panels" denying medical treatment, not only to the aged but to young people with, for example, leukemia, may be forced to amend their most outrageous practices but they will preserve their profits and pass on the costs to the taxpayer. Or just add them to the growing deficit. Medicare, which now functions like a half-way decent single payer system, may be absorbed into this new monstrosity. The tub-thumpers again have a point.

So where do we go from here? For now I think the energy and enthusiasm, the momentum, generated by the Obama campaign and victory will be dissipated. But the problem won't go away and the 60 percent of the population who want public health care will probably become a larger percent. In the US, because of the federal nature of the system, the possibility of fighting for a single payer system at the state and even local level exists.

A crucial role here will be that of the unions. They too face a crisis. When Harry Truman's attempt to introduce universal health care was defeated in 1948 the response of the unions, led by Walter Reuther and the UAW who had supported Truman, was to make health care for their members and retirees part of their contracts. Aside from the fact that this led to their members being put in the position of a privileged minority, this too is no longer affordable. Among other things it is one of the pressures forcing manufacturers to outsource production overseas or to non-union plants in the US.

The problem won't go away even assuming there is a revival of the economy.

In the same sense, the openly pro-coup Argentinian daily *La Nación* informs us that "the Micheletti government finds itself harassed every day by demonstrations, road blockades and occupations by the members of the so-called Frente Nacional de Resistencia contra el golpe de Estado (National Front of Resistance to the Coup), which demands the reinstatement of Zelaya"[10].

That is to say that in the concrete case of Honduras, the coup represents a polarisation of the country's class struggle in a way rarely seen before. However, there is also a tremendous contradiction in the character of the Honduran coup: the situation continues to be one which we might call "coup by night, popular rebellion by day".

That is not to say that those who carried out the coup are not firmly installed in power and what the Honduran masses are confronting is not a done and dusted coup d'état. But there are not many precedents where, 40 days after a coup d'état, the resistance of the masses continues to prevent any normalisation of the situation in the country.

To explain further still: it is evident that having managed to stay at the helm for five weeks is a triumph for the gangsters. They have control of the country, control which for now it does not seem possible to challenge as such.

However, there continues to be an enormous contradiction in the Honduran political situation. Not by any measure can we say that the country has been normalised: the resistance continues to be massive and defiant. When people are not afraid of a dictatorship, there is a very serious problem for the latter, since its own character demands that it can generate fear, respect, authority and terror to be a proper dictatorship: "The damage Honduras has now suffered and the risk that the social, political and economic situation will worsen, is sufficient reason to recognise errors, but not such that we should waste the possibility of dialogue to bring an end to the crisis and reconcile ourselves with a world which, without

exception, does not consider the current government legitimate". This editorial appeared on the website of the pro-coup Honduran daily *El Herald* on Monday August 10th.

A tendency towards the extremes

Lula and Argentina's Cristina Kirchner did not like what Hugo Chávez said at the last UNASUR meeting when he asserted that "war drums" were starting to be heard in the region. For our part, we can be clear that the bravado in the Venezuelan president's words never results in action. However, that does not mean that what he referred to is not something real. The political polarisation introduced by the emergence of the military factor in Latin American political life brings with it the idea Chávez suggests: the region could end up sliding to a more polarised scenario marked by conflicts in the relations between given states, including the eventuality of military clashes and/or more reactionary coups. But, remember, also more radicalisation of the masses and – even now – revolutionary responses. This is the classic dialectic of the social and political polarisation of the class struggle.

Exactly for this reason, this situation has its own flip-side, a concrete danger for those in power: in recent decades the privileged form of capitalist politics has been "mediation" via bourgeois democracy, avoiding extremism like the plague: not only the far right, but also leftists. The reactionary course weakens the mediation of bourgeois democracy and introduces an element of unpredictability: the eventuality that among the polarisation will be opened a way forward for the left, a revolutionary opportunity, a factor which has been absent in all these years.

In the event that in tandem with this tendency towards polarisation of economic, social and class interests, comes the paring-down of the traditional mechanisms of the bosses' democracy via reactionary offensives, it will result in the opening of a new period of crises, wars and revolutions.

[1] a popular chant on anti-coup demonstrations

beyond props for capital

by Allan Armstrong

Neo-liberalism and neo-Keynesianism – two options for capitalism

In the face of the deepening economic crisis enveloping the US and world economy, Alan Greenspan, former Chair of the US Federal Reserve and prime architect of Republican neo-liberalism, was summonsed to a Congressional hearing on October 23rd 2008. Asked to account for the failures of the 'free market' he shamefacedly admitted, "I have found a flaw. I don't know how significant or permanent it is. But I have been very distressed by that fact."

Greenspan is not the first capitalist spokesman to discover we live in a fundamentally crisis-ridden system. As the 'Roaring Twenties' gave way to the 'Great Crash' in 1929, an earlier Republican President, Henry Hoover and many business leaders were unable to accept that their economic system was off-course and heading for the rocks. However, as production plummeted and unemployment soared in the early 1930's, a new economic guru, Maynard Keynes, tried to persuade reluctant bosses and politicians, brought-up on the sureties of the Gold Standard and the 'Free Market' that without government intervention their beloved capitalism was going to fail.

Keynesianism offered a political economy for a crisis-prone capitalism. A few capitalists might have leapt to their deaths out of top-storey windows, but many others became convinced their system faced possible terminal crisis, to give their backing to the new Democrat President Roosevelt, and his Keynesian-inspired New Deal.

Of course, just as the Republican Party majority in the 1930's did not accept that Keynesian state intervention was necessary if capitalism was to survive, neither has the infuriated Republican Right rump in the USA today. However, today's political division, between the neo-liberal fundamentalists and the neo-Keynesian pragmatists, should not disguise the fact that capitalism, in both its upswing and downswing phases, represents a single unified system. Neo-liberalism and neo-Keynesianism represent two alternative capitalist strategies, one more suited to 'boom', the other to 'bust'.

Left and Right United on what constitutes capitalism and socialism

However, it is not only the neo-liberal Right which has been wrong-footed in the wake of the current economic crisis. Many socialists, particularly from Left Social Democratic, orthodox and dissident (e.g Trotskyist) Communist traditions, share a common understanding with the neo-liberal Right of what constitutes capitalism – 'free markets' – and what constitutes socialism – nationalised property. The difference lies in that neo-liberals put a + sign against free markets and a – sign against nationalised property, whereas these socialists reverse this particular assessment.

Therefore, after two decades of workers, their families and communities facing the woeful consequences of successive deregulations and privatizations, many socialists have been quick to acclaim the new state promoted interventions in the economy. "We are all socialists now". Criticisms have largely been confined to calls for more state nationalizations and direct government control, rather than the current half-hearted government measures, which still leave the new nationalized concerns in the hands of failed bankers and their friends.

In the past there was opposition to Keynesianism on the Left, and this was focused on the limited scope of its government interventions, compared to the wholesale nationalization founded in the 'Communist Bloc'. Nevertheless, the existing British national economy and the growing state economic 'achievements' were seen as the basis for the more thoroughgoing statist measures. These were advocated by the official Communists, in a *British Road to Socialism*, and by the Trotskyist Militant with its support for the nationalization of the top 200 British companies.

Many socialists still look back to these post-war decades with some nostalgia. The Welfare State provided from the 'cradle to the grave', trade unions had some real influence, and the Labour Party still talked in class terms and had at least a nominal commitment to 'Clause 4 socialism'. Today, battered by two and a half decades of neo-liberal assaults, and chastened by the collapse of their USSR-inspired statist economic alternative in 1989, these sentimental socialists are to be found earnestly hoping that the current economic crisis will permit a return of the 'old days'. They think that the current greater acceptance of neo-Keynesian measures could provide new possibilities for socialists to be heard once again. The latest Left campaign, backed not surprisingly by the CPB and the Socialist Party, No2EU/Yes to Democracy (No to the nasty European capitalist conspiracy/



the nationalised royal bank of scotland earned many leftists' wrath at protests during the g20 summit in april: but still they demand further state intervention

Yes to 1975 independent Labour Britain) is a good example of Left nostalgia and national Keynesian revivalism.

What would full-blooded Keynesianism and nationalization bring about in practice?

But just what would it mean for the working class today if a future Left government did take full control of the economy? We can get some idea by looking at the much more extensive Keynesian-inspired interventions taken in the 1930's, including the New Deal in the USA. Despite large increases in government spending, economic regulation and innovative state backed projects (e.g. the Tennessee Valley Authority), which did provide some boosts to the economy, there were still continued downturns in the '30's and a further much deeper one was anticipated for 1939-40. Only the Second World War, with its massive destruction of capital in Europe and the Far East, prevented this. It was this war, not Keynesianism, which brought about economic recovery, but at what a cost.

Today, the prospects for a full neo-Keynesian recovery are even slimmer. Since the 1980's, more sophisticated, and even more fraudulent financial products and policies have allowed finance capital to preside over a considerably longer boom (up until 2008) in the US and Western Europe, compared to that of the 'Roaring Twenties'. The only problem is, since this recent and longer credit-induced boom was not based on any commensurate expansion of real wealth, so the consequent economic necessity for a 'clear-out' of unprofitable capital is even greater, before any real recovery can take place.

Any government adopting more full-blooded national neo-Keynesian measures would soon become involved in competitive 'beggar-thy-neighbour' policies to maintain its economy's position in a shrinking world market. Thus, if any national state took over the running of particular industries, it would soon be forced into imposing austerity measures on their workforces – unemployment, short-time working, wage and pension cuts and the undermining of working conditions. The massive attack on Chrysler workers' jobs, pay and conditions, under Obama's new regime, is a warning of what nationalization under capitalism can mean.

A vision to inspire rooted in the reality of our living labour

So, what does all this mean for socialist or communists today? We should be using the opportunity of the current crisis to point out that this is as good as it gets under capitalism. Neo-Keynesianism only leads to further dead-ends for our class. Any economic recoveries will be short. They will be followed by deeper recessions. Furthermore, the shallow recoveries will all be made at our expense, with ever more calls for cutbacks and greater austerity. Moves to national protectionism (or further entrenched EU protectionism) will be accompanied by ever shriller anti-immigrant calls, racism, homophobia and attacks on women's rights. Far Right thinking and personnel will become increasingly accepted into the mainstream (as can already be seen in Berlusconi's Italy). The current curtailment of democratic and civil rights will be accelerated. The endemic wars on imperialism's periphery will move closer to its centres.

That capital, which today's corporate executives need to write-off or destroy, in order to restore their profits, is the product of our labour. They use our living labour to create their 'dead labour'. This is stored up in plant, machinery and raw materials. Our living labour also provides the surplus

value they convert into the profits to undertake further rounds of production. Thus, the product of our living labour is constantly being used against us. In this manner, the capitalist appropriators and controllers of our labour appear to be the initiators of all production in society, a factor that enables them to claim much of their political power too.

As long as our living labour is used to produce their dead labour, or capital, we remain wage slaves. Wage slavery is the real essence of capitalism. Capital rules us in the daily grind at work, by constantly trying to limit our needs to their socially-necessary minimum, and then by throwing us on the scrapheap when no longer required. Thus the controllers of capital constantly restrict and blight our lives.

Furthermore, when deep-seated economic crises, like the present one arise, the competing controllers of capital have only one ultimate get-out – war. Then they demand sacrifices of an altogether different order, hoping they will be the ones to emerge as the victors presiding over the next 'recovery'. The First World War cost 15 million lives, the Second World War cost 55 million. Rosa Luxemburg's prediction of barbarism turned out to be very well founded, if socialists fail to completely uproot capitalism. Today, Istvan Meszaros has written that the choice lies between, "Socialism, or barbarism if we are lucky!"

Whilst we remain wage slaves, unable to think beyond merely better terms of exploitation, higher wages and better conditions, then our potential power remains crippled. Marx was quite clear in his opposition to the limited trade union demand, "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work", insisting on the necessity of "The abolition of the wages system". As the only truly economically creative power in society, we can use the ongoing crisis, not as an opportunity to cheer on and push the neo-Keynesians further, but to begin to explain the pressing need for a new social order. We need to point out that our living labour is indeed the real creative force in the economy. Only if this power is organized directly, through new forms of associated labour, can we move beyond ever-deepening and potentially catastrophic crises, which continued capitalist imperialism has in store for us.

Furthermore, our living labour doesn't just have the capacity to take full responsibility for economic production in the future. It also provides the basis for our independent class organization in the here and now. Today, New Labour represents one wing of the UK Business Party. Under 'social partnership', trade union leaders offer a cheap personnel management service for the employers. However, trying to revive 'Old Labour', either from within (e.g. Socialist Appeal and the Labour Representation Committee), or by starting all over again (e.g. Campaign for a New Workers Party), or trying to capture the 'commanding heights' of the union bureaucracy (Broad Leftism) can only lead us back to the failures of the late 1970's and early 1980's.

The pages of *The Commune* provide the opportunity to debate our internationalist alternative, integrating our economic, political and cultural challenges to their crisis-torn order. We need to further develop revolutionary democratic methods of debate and organization. 'Another world is possible', but call it International Socialism, World Communism, or the Global Commune, the vision informing all our activity should be the abolition of wage slavery and the creation of a world based on the principle of 'From each according to their ability and to each according to their needs', where, "the free development of each is the condition of the free development of all".

liberalism, citizenship and democracy

by Mark Ellingsen

A lot has been written recently about the corruption of politicians, the crisis of democracy and the legitimacy of Parliament. This is particularly apt as this year marks 200 years since the death of Tom Paine, the radical liberal who was an inspiration to movements fighting for the vote. On the Left the analysis of this crisis has revolved around the interconnected reasons of the failure of the Labour Party to deliver job security and prosperity to its 'natural' constituency of working class voters on the one hand, and on the other, the class nature of the capitalist state which ensures that the policies enacted by governments will ensure the profits of the capitalist class even to the detriment of the majority of voters. Quite rightly these arguments take centre place in any discussion of the problems now confronting both voters and the mainstream parties. However, there is a complementary argument that even on its own terms the ideas associated with liberal democracy are never going to provide a sufficient long-term basis on which the majority of people were going to be motivated to be engaged with what currently passes as the political process. But in order to understand the perceived crisis of liberal democracy we need first to understand the crisis of liberalism.

Freedom

Liberalism is associated with the freedom of speech and the toleration of different views; the protection of the individual's privacy, particularly from the intrusions of the state; and the protection of private property. A political philosophy which originated in the 17th and 18th centuries with the rise of a capitalist class and its challenge to the aristocracy, liberalism has always championed the freedom of the individual. It is this respect for the individual that gives it a popularity with those who are faced with state repression. It was often used as a stick by the Western media to beat the regimes of the former Soviet bloc for their suppression of free speech and individual expression, whether in terms of artistic freedom or consumer choice. While much of what passes in the West as free speech and individual expression is constrained by the control of the newspapers and television networks by capitalist corporations, nonetheless the importance of liberalism for a humanist communism is its respect for the individual and the choices he or she makes.

However, the freedoms that liberals advocate are always under pressure from the consequences of the dynamism which characterises capitalist development. The disruption to people's lives from the dislocating effects of economic upheaval and war often leads to the partial breakdown in social order or a political challenge to the state. Even before the current economic recession, the West was faced with continuing structural unemployment, the exclusion of sections of the population from the gains of the economic bubble and a reaction to racism and imperial adventures, which all added up to the fear amongst mainstream commentators and politicians of the partial breakdown of social order. The abandonment of working class estates where social order is under threat from crime and anti-social behaviour and the emphasis on the protection of private property and crime-free zones around shopping malls and nightspots so that others can continue to consume unimpeded has led to a massive increase in surveillance cameras. The more the political elite abdicate responsibility for the impact of economic upheaval and looming environmental devastation, the more they become obsessed with crime and social order to the detriment of our civil liberties, to the extent that our electronic communications are collected and our biometric data stored in police databases. The dwindling numbers of liberals are finding it difficult to hold the line.

Citizenship and Democracy

Contemporary liberal theory places a great emphasis on citizenship. However, one of the earliest understandings of citizenship is to be found in ancient Greece. For those who were citizens of Athens, citizenship was synonymous with participation in democratic decision making which affected the people of the city. Although it excluded women and slaves it is interesting to compare this with the ideas of citizenship which are prevalent today. Unlike modern liberal democracies in which people are given the right to vote for representatives every few years, Athenian democracy expected its citizens to be involved in the making of decisions and direct rather than representational democracy was seen as the ideal. Where representative democracy was unavoidable due to the scale or organisational complexity representatives were most often chosen by lot rather than by election because it was understood that all citizens should be equally competent at making decisions. The election of officers with technical expertise such as military or financial was an exception to the rule of democratic participation. The contrast with the current idea that there ought to be a group of professional politicians who can take decisions on our behalf, because they are somehow more competent than the rest of the population couldn't be sharper.

Of course, today we often equate citizenship in liberal capitalist societies with a modicum of democracy, meaning the right to vote once every few years, rather than democratic participation. Yet even that has not been a cornerstone of liberalism for very long. In the 18th century, those who adhered to the classical liberal ideas which emphasised the freedoms we now associate with democratic countries did this on the basis of a very restricted franchise. It was only men of substantial property who could participate in parliamentary politics. Not until the Reform Act of 1832 was this extended somewhat, but even that still left most of the adult British population without a vote. In this sense, liberalism was not inconsistent with a restricted citizenship, although the repression of Chartist newspapers calling for the vote for working class men didn't sit comfortably with the liberal ideal of free speech. It was only in 1928 that property restrictions were lifted for both men and women. That it took so long in coming only highlights liberalism's fetish of private property, a key element of its philosophy. For early liberalism, only the propertied man was capable of making decisions which affect the political and more importantly the economic life of the country. Only the propertied can safeguard property.



today's 'democratic process' relies on mass passivity

That liberals no longer adhere to such views is in good measure a response to the rise of labour and socialist movements from the mid-19th century. Indeed, under pressure from socialists, some liberals went further and argued that the working class could not fully participate in the political process without the eradication of poverty, ill health and the lack of education. This social liberalism, as it came to be known, supported the introduction of a welfare state and became the cornerstone of social democratic and labour politics. Citizenship then became more than just the formal political equality of all adult men and women but also the recognition that being active and engaged citizen required a minimum standard of living. However, this social liberalism is now under threat from the crisis of profitability within the capitalist economy. The welfare state is being undermined in order to cut the social wage which makes up for the lack of the means for most people to afford private education, health care and social insurance against unemployment. That social liberalism has never been accepted by the ruling class in the United States underlines the tenuous hold that substantive citizenship has for liberalism.

Listening to the rhetoric of the Labour Party, one could be forgiven for believing that here was one party which was trying to stop the undermining of citizenship. The irony is that not only is this party intent on undermining a welfare state based on need and replacing it with one based on private profit but its notion of citizenship is one in which the population, especially immigrants, are obliged to show allegiance to the state and the values of the ruling class, rather than being part of a community of citizens underpinned by a decent standard of living for all. The discussion around citizenship has been about the balance between rights and obligations and with the increase in social disorder it is unsurprising that the political elite have stressed the latter. At no point had there been any discussion about democracy, until the expenses scandal so exposed the cynicism and careerism of the majority of politicians that afraid of losing personal position, they mouthed platitudes about connecting people with politics. But democracy is not about connecting people with politicians, it is about people being able to influence decisions which affect their lives either directly or through delegates who represent the decision of their constituents. We don't need professional politicians.

As the percentage of people voting falls at each election it is often argued that democracy is under threat from apathy, that there is a crisis of liberal democracy. There is undoubtedly a crisis for liberalism and for the Left as rights and freedoms are undermined by emergency legislation introduced to curtail dissent and social disorder. But to argue that liberal

democracy is under threat is an exaggeration. Liberal democracy thrives on apathy. It depends on a passive electorate which is content only to vote every few years for parties which are similar in outlook. This is not to say that the political elite are completely unconcerned about voter apathy but the concern is more about legitimising the political decisions that are made and the role of political elite rather than a concern about engaging the electorate in the process of government. The problem for the political elite is that the potential voter is not stupid. People are apathetic because elections make little difference as the parties provide little choice.

For all its rhetoric, rather than providing the epitome of citizenship, the ideology of liberalism has devalued it. Unlike in ancient Athens, in modern capitalist societies, being a citizen does not give people the facility to participate in a democratic process of decision making. Rather it gives people a set of individual rights profoundly constrained by the power of large corporations and the state. The modern notion of citizenship is ironically much narrower than the idea of citizenship of ancient Greece despite the latter's restriction to males who were not slaves.

Civil Society and the State

However, there is another way in which citizenship is constrained within capitalism and in a way which is much more profound than the constraints in the political sphere. This is the lack of democracy and freedom within the workplace. Our relationship to our employer is as workers not as citizens. Citizenship is limited in scope; it does not include our rights to participate in decisions within the workplace, across the company or institution, with regard to how it relates to rest of the economy, or the locality in which the workplace is situated. The separation of the economy from the polity in capitalism is precisely why there is some form of political democracy, albeit limited. By confining democracy to the political sphere, liberalism leaves untouched the arbitrary power wielded by the employer in the workplace. What little democratic accountability that exists in our society does not extend to the workplace, where the majority of us spend most of our adult lives.

Since the eighteenth century, the state has been seen as separate from 'civil society', namely the economy and other social institutions. Civil society was seen as a bulwark against the excesses of state power and this idea was given a new lease of life in response to the repression and arbitrariness of state power in the state socialist societies of Eastern Europe and the USSR. This concern to protect the individual citizen from state power is admirable and it is something that libertarian communism shares with the liberal. However, liberalism retains a blind spot with respect to the power wielded by those who run the economic institutions and this is because liberalism is committed to the privatisation of the economy. At the same time as seeing private property as a bulwark against state power, it fails to see the despotism within the private corporation. This is a consequence of liberalism's fetish of private property. The freedom and democracy won in the political sphere have been tolerated because it leaves untouched the root of capitalist power which has its foundations in the economy.

The democratisation of the economy is an anathema to liberalism because it would challenge that very despotism which liberals defend, the largely arbitrary power of managerial authority within the workplace and the economy as a whole. Not only does liberalism leave that power untouched, but what little democracy it allows in the political sphere comes with the proviso that capitalist property remains sacrosanct and that the state remains subordinate to the economy. For all its rhetoric, liberalism merely provides us with a pale imitation of democracy. If it was democratic, as it professes, then it would not hesitate to champion substantive democracy in the economy and the workplace. This it leaves to the communists and anarchists while disparaging both.

Introducing democracy to the workplace and the economy is the key to empowering people in their daily lives. People will not be engaged with a democratic process if it leaves large parts of their lives subject to the arbitrary power of an employer and an economy which is subservient to profit maximisation rather than the needs of working people. It is for this reason that workers' self-management must be at the centre piece of any politics which aims to empower people to make their own choices in life. However, the political sphere cannot remain untouched. If the economy is run along democratic lines then what is the need for a separate state? In a democratic communist society, it is not the state that manages the economy, but the democratic economy managing the economic functions of the state, to the extent that the two are no longer separate. Both are subject to the principles of democratic self-management. Libertarian communism takes the principles of freedom and democracy which liberalism professes to champion and extends these into both the political and economic sphere abolishing the division between the worker and the citizen.

the workers' self-management alternative

by Chris Kane

Discussions about workers' control and self-management which were once at the heart of the labour movement are now once again on the agenda, both among British activists and internationally. The network of communists who produce *The Commune* are the most determined advocates of self-management among the English and Welsh radical left, and have generally found a positive response. However there remains a lot of confusion about self-management, with antagonism even from some people who regard themselves as socialists and Marxists. Part of the explanation of these attitudes can be found in misconceptions of both what capitalism is and of the communist alternative.

The method of critical Marxism

Marx, unlike many of his followers, was prepared to reconsider his opinions in light of historical events; taking the highest point of the previous revolution as the point of departure for the next. In contrast to the advocates of socialism-from-above he saw the masses as the shapers of history to be learned from. It was the Parisian masses, who created the Paris Commune, not Blanqui or Marx, much as it was the workers that created the soviets in Russia, not Lenin or Trotsky. Similarly for over half a century the working class put self-management on the agenda, most forcefully in the revolutionary upheavals in the former Eastern Bloc, where various dissident Marxists sought to conceptualise a humanist, emancipatory communism as an alternative to both the 'state-socialist' regimes and private capitalism. Since the "collapse of communism" there has been a concerted effort to bury this experience in the strongbox of history, with global capitalism declaring 'there is no alternative'. If our generation is to succeed in renewing communism for the 21st century then we need to take on board those previous high points as our point of departure.

The exploitative and dehumanising nature of capitalist society is not apparent to most people, hard as it is, capitalism is the normal way life and it seems always will be. Like in the movie *The Matrix* the reality of society is disguised. Marx described it as a 'fetishism of commodities'. A fetish is an object that is given powers it does not have, such as religious idols created by humans who then allow themselves to be ruled by their own mythical creation. We live in a world where ever more aspects of life are becoming commodified; the manufacture of commodities to bring profit is universal. These commodities assume a fetish character taking on a life of their own, as if separate from the workers who created them. The market is allowed to control us like some independent entity whose freedom must be guaranteed.

These forms of fetishism identified by Marx are not an illusion: in capitalism relations between people *do* appear as relations between things. This fetish itself has led many socialists to see the market as crucial, not the social relations of production. We have experienced various inadequate remedies believing capital can be controlled by the state, planning and regulation. But as opposed to controlling capital, it is capital that reasserts its control over them.

The blind alley of the old conceptions

The antagonism towards self-management by those who profess to be socialists and communists reveals a profound antipathy to the very concept of social revolution. Despite the fashion for the slogan 'another world is possible', such is the scale of retrogression in the workers' movement, we are stuck in the politics of the possible – how best to fight *within* capitalism. Few genuinely consider how or if their activity is linked to creating a new society.

Of the strategies that do exist, the one that dominates is the parliamentary road to socialism. Symptomatic is the *British Road to Socialism* of the Communist Party of Britain. This seeks to achieve a "new type of left government, based on a Labour, socialist and communist majority in the Westminster parliament, one which comes about through the wide-ranging struggles of a mass movement outside parliament". The role of the masses is subsidiary to the state apparatus, a fact reflected in the system of "democratic nationalisation of strategic sectors of the economy", to be "on a new basis which ensures worker and consumer representation in management". The operative word here is 'representation', meaning, i.e. not 'self-management'. This schema is replicated in numerous trends of socialism which see current hierarchies as immutable.

The alternative of the traditional revolutionary left consists of two core elements, the primacy of "the party" to lead, and a millenarian historic opportunity. The largest, the Socialist Workers Party, does emphasise 'socialism from below' and the importance of workers' councils. But these are vitiated by the primary role allocated to 'the revolutionary party'. These party-socialists hold that the conquest of power by the party, sovereign above all other workers' organisations, constitutes

the 'workers' state'. In the *Revolutionary Road to Socialism* Alex Callinicos asserts that the entire "future of socialism in Britain depends on the creation of an independent revolutionary party". We find further incongruity with Chris Harman, who sees the first steps in getting rid of capitalism as nationalisation, "of the whole banking system... In the same way, the answer to the world's energy crisis... is nationalisation of the oil, gas and coal industries". As pundits equated state intervention as "socialism and welfare for the rich", on the same basis Harman demands "socialism for the workers". These strategies may appear as opposites, but they are not: both deny the masses' the role as the conscious organisers of their own emancipation, instead engaging their initiative and aspirations within a state-socialist framework.

A living conception of revolution

At present various advocates of state-socialism confront each other in the labour movement, with a majority of socialists and communists still sharing statist concepts. If in the early 20th century reform or revolution was raised as the main line of demarcation, in the early 21st century communists need to make the demarcation line the concept of the system which is aspired to: self-management or statism.

A revolution will be extremely difficult. Since the defeat of Chartism our class has been imbued with law-abiding pacifism, parliamentary cretinism and myths of 'British exceptionalism'. Yet we also have numerous examples of organisations based on working-class self-reliance, such as strike committees, the miners' support groups, and the anti-poll tax rebellion. The important point for communists today is that the idea of self-management is not conceptualised from standing outside of the capital-labour relationship. A dialectical method sees within this antagonistic relationship that workers are not only wage slaves but also engaged in constant, creative, struggles. A concrete expression of this creativity is that there is not only a tendency of workers combining together to seek reforms to ameliorate conditions of life within capitalist relations. There is also a tendency to obtain greater control over life at work that arises in direct response to the conditions of alienated labour. This is expressed in the constant re-emergence of the movement for workers control, which is much maligned by the CBI, TUC, Trotskyism and Stalinism. A concept of revolution which recognises the centrality of self-management is one which flows organically from the conflict of capital and labour itself. It contrasts sharply to one conceived externally, by the middle-class intelligentsia, the aspiring socialist administrators to be imposed on the working class.

Driving self-management forward

The experience of class struggle indicates a line of march in terms of a power struggle in which the boundaries of workers' control are pushed towards self-management. Workers' control means increased influence over the labour process and the erosion of the managerial prerogatives. With self-management the workers would have total control: managers as such would be abolished, and management eliminated as a function separate from work itself. Italian communist Antonio Gramsci saw in workers' control the path to future victory, in that it was preparing the working class to master the organisation of production: in that sense self-management means a cultural revolution.

The organs of workers' self-management would soon come into sharp conflict with the institutions of capital. The goal of communists is to uproot every social institution that reinforces capital. A reduced conception of self-management which confines it to the workplaces would be inevitably self-defeating, as was the case in Italy in 1920 and in Poland in 1981 where the workers took over factories but did not challenge the state. In ignoring the state anarcho-syndicalists and parliamentary socialists are twins; only by an onslaught on capitalism in every sphere where it exercises power can we succeed. The objective must be to develop the organisations of self-management into an alternative governing force. Such a vision rejects the phoney dichotomy of state property versus private property which has blinded the left, something most apparent in the responses to the current crisis of capitalism.

What is social ownership?

The state recapitalisation of banks has been interpreted as an opportunity to call for further nationalisations. This has been embellished with all sorts of socialist colorations with oxymoronic calls for 'nationalisation' by the capitalist state 'under workers' control'. Nationalisation is often rebranded as 'social ownership' and workers resisting the recession advised to adopt this goal. The inadequacy of this is most apparent in the recent factory occupations. The workers who have occupied have done so not because some group told them to but from their own class instincts. In their self-activity they have put into practice the essential characteristics of self-management. Communists need to understand the pro-

gressive spirit of such forms of struggle, to grasp the dynamic and potentialities within them. In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx argued what distinguishes communists is "in the movement of the present, they also represent the future of the movement." But to meet the movement advocating nationalisation disguised as social ownership is neither an adequate remedy of the immediate struggle nor a perspective for a future beyond capitalism.

An instructive example is the Workers' Communist Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina, who, drawing lessons from their own experience, explain: "Nationalisation of the means of production can not bring freedom for the working class, as state-owned enterprises are under the control of the state, in other words, under the control of the ruling party. Exploitation remains. Only socialisation of the means of production can produce real changes in the position of the working class. Social ownership is connected with socialist self-management... by workers' councils elected by all workers."

Put simply, the state is not society. Ownership implies control and social ownership in the Marxist sense implies control by society as a whole. This can only really be the case where the worker-producers actively manage of the resources of society. Marx himself was emphatic in his opposition to state sponsored co-operatives "which the *state*, not the workers, 'calls into being': such initiatives were of "value *only* in so far as they are the independent creations of the workers". (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*).

De-alienation and new social relations

Amongst the criticisms of self-management from the left is that it amounts to workers managing their own alienation. One aspect of this is based on the premise that the organisations of self-management can only remain static within capitalist society. This is the flip side to those who only imagine aspects of self-management within a future communist society, neither considering workers' self-management as part of a revolutionary process. But there is a school of thought that does advocate self-management in a form which will recreate the alienation of the workers and inevitably dissolution of self-management itself. This can be found in the current revival of market socialism.

An example of this is Gerry Gold who argues for "worker-owned co-operatives", and a "genuinely free and competitive market". This is partly a reaction to the failure of the state-socialist economies, but is precisely the wrong lesson. The market is not separate but a direct manifestation of production relations. By producing for a market, competing and trying to increase their income, workers would inevitably come into conflict with other workers' cooperatives and assume the role of exploiters. As opposed to social ownership we would have competing capitalist cooperatives. Just as local, atomised self-managed workplaces cannot stave off bureaucracy; it would suffer from disintegration in a market economy. Such was the experience of Yugoslavia.

Commodity production generates capitalist social relations: labour would remain alienated, a commodity relating to other humans through the production of commodities for a market. Capital lives by obtaining ever more surplus value from the worker who produces it. For this reason any effort to control capital without uprooting the basis of value production is self-defeating and it is capital which inevitably reasserts its control.

Conclusion

Communism should be understood as a system based on social ownership and self-management throughout society. If we recognise this then it has far reaching implication for communist organisation and strategy. Such a society can only be created by organisations which are based on the same principles. In the current process of communist re-composition it calls for a demarcation line the conceptions of self-management and state socialism. The way communists comprehend this requires a great deal of further discussion. It is not coincidental that in both Yugoslavia and East Germany, dissident advocates of self-management both drew the conclusion that a league of communists united around the idea of universal emancipation was a necessary alternative to the now institutionalised Communist Party.

It is through the self-management movement that consciousness matures, gathering the knowledge and strength for a wider social transformation. Far from being an afterthought, self-management is a key element to the transformation of the economy. Neither, however, does self-management offer a comprehensive solution to the problem of getting to a new communist society. What it does provide is a framework within which the de-alienation of labour and creation of new production relations can be achieved. It is an axis of the communist revolutionary process which abolishes the class system, transcends the state, replacing it with communal self-management, and abolishes commodity production.

review of the july/august left press

by Nathan Coombs

It is a well-worn cliché to decry the separation of theory and practice on the Left.

Firstly, you are meant to start by pointing to the specialised jargon and stuffy scholasticism of academic Marxism – a well-deserved reproach in my opinion; at least for anyone who has picked up a text by Theodor Adorno, or, god forbid, the yawn inducing post-Marxist procrastinations of Jurgen Habermas.

Secondly, you are then meant to imply that if only academic Leftists could remedy this state of affairs some sort of revolutionary synergy (praxis) would magically transform the situation – an attitude that could be surmised as “make your works ‘accessible’; take responsibility to lead the vanguard!”

The reality however is surely more mundane and ego deflationary. That is, more mundane in the sense that academic Leftism is a generally a closed circuit of thought in a professional debating chamber. And more deflationary, most people simply don't have the time to keep up with it all – why should they?

Or perhaps worst of all there is the stinging sense in which we could take Louis Althusser's idea of Marxist knowledge after Marx: only a transformative movement that takes action and is thrown into a directly political situation can create knowledge which does not dissolve into idealist speculation. If we take Althusser seriously, then the best academic Marxists can seek to do is describe the situation, give class and production oriented historiographies, and provide critique. The separation of theory and practice is inevitable.

In any case, this unresolved apologia out of the way, what I want to do in this regular column for The Commune is to take a critical reading of the main (non-specialist) Left journals to at least help provide a short-cut to the best of the best and the best of the worst out there.

This includes a survey of old favourites such as the *New Left Review*, the SWP's *International Socialism Journal*, the underappreciated *Radical Philosophy*, and various other forays into territories with questionable Left credentials: the *Monthly Review*, pandering to Greens (of the Islamist and environmental varieties), and *Spiked Online*, whose writers' supposed Leninism and admiration for communism seems to have devolved into a knee-jerk liberalism and cryptic cheerleading for 'subjectivity' and 'self interest.'

New Left Review

The good old reliable *New Left Review*. July/August is fairly typical issue, demonstrating both the merits and pitfalls of the journal. Old faithfuls Etienne Balibar and Frederic Jameson are here. Balibar with a recounting of Althusser's relationship with the Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) University in Paris – surely taking the incestuous nature of academic Marxism to another level: academic Marxists writing about the relationship of other academic Marxists to their Universities! Frederic Jameson, on the other hand, indulges his proclivity for obscure aesthetics and discusses a filmmaker who has used montage to narrate Karl Marx's *Capital* – which I imagine would invoke a certain kitsch curiosity amongst some of us.

Elsewhere in the journal are more timely discussions: the debate between R. W. Johnson and Patrick Bond on what went wrong with the ANC is an example of the journal at its best. As the townships burn, the dialogue in these pieces

helps to clarify the hollowness of the ANC's leftist rhetoric and the uncertainty of any transformative movement in the country in the future with the predominance of ethnic political mobilization.

As usual, the book review section is the liveliest and most political section. Although adding little new to the critique of neoliberalism in Latin America, Tony Wood's piece is at least a good polemical retort to Michael Reid's book *Forgotten Continent*.

International Socialism Journal

The ISJ has the advantage of being free online. Why is it then that I do not often bother to read it, and in fact have only skimmed the current issue (number 123) for the sake of this review?

A small clue is given by the cover story: “How do we stop the BNP?” where the BNP are introduced as “fascists” in the second word of the article – in case we might miss the point I suppose. As David Broder has argued in *The Commune* this questionable strategy of labelling the BNP as fascists and at the same time evoking their ‘successes’ (two MEPs) as a unifying cause for the Left speaks more to the SWP's desperate lack of strategy and inability to build any roots beyond a transient body of student activists, for whom reaction currently trumps the slog of building a transformative movement. It is as if chanting “one solution, revolution!” at the TUC's ‘Jobs, Justice, Climate’ rally – to the chortles of bemused policemen – or pelting Nick Griffin with an egg, is considered productive politics.

Funnily enough, the author Martin Smith even seems to think there is something fishy about his own argument. For instance, he makes the incredible claim: “Worryingly, during the election campaign sections of the Labour Party tried to downplay the threat of BNP election victories. They were backed by some sections of the media.” – totally refuted by the endless scaremongering hype about the BNP we all remember – then follows a paragraph later with the admission: “Overall its national vote went up by 135,397 from the 2004 Euro election figure, increasing its share of votes by 1.3 percent. Griffin's share of the vote only increased by 1.6 percent. The number of votes for the BNP in the two seats it won was lower than in 2004.” So supposedly the media downplayed the threat of the BNP, erroneously, and at the same time the facts supported this supposed downplaying. Eh? Talk about an inverted world.

Much better is Joseph Choonara's survey of “Marxist accounts of the Current Crisis.” This is an excellent comparative piece looking at all the Marxist currents of thought in explaining the crisis, including the unresolved question of the idea of a ‘real,’ as opposed to financial, economy. He even discusses the work of Andrew Kliman, whose recent talk in London was co-hosted by The Commune. It shows that when the *ISJ* is not tied to the absurdities of the latest SWP initiative (i.e. called upon to give some respectable intellectual justification), or promote the legacy of Tony Cliff, it is capable of publishing competent pieces that are worth a read. I, for one, might actually check out the next issue from my own initiative next time.

Radical Philosophy

The subtitle of *Radical Philosophy* is “a journal of socialist and feminist philosophy,” but you will have to look inside to the contents page to find it; or more importantly, pick up the right issue to see it demonstrated. *Radical Philosophy* tends

to swing wildly from issue to issue between engaged radical thought to scholastic post-modern whimsy on aesthetics and the like.

For instance, issue 155 May-June is a good example of the journal: it has a critical symposium on Keynes – where much of the Left since the crisis have either embraced Keynes or stayed politely silent on his legacy. It also has a two-page report on university occupations over Gaza, a review of the Birkbeck Communism conference, and a critical review essay on the new Latin American Left. In the recent past they have also published a three-part article on “Walter Benjamin and the Red Army Faction” (152-154) and a discussion and review of the Tarnac 9's “The Coming Insurrection.” (154, free online) For those that missed the Tarnac 9, they were a situationist collective based in rural France arrested as terrorists in an over the top raid which prompted a wave of fear mongering by the French state about a return to Baader-Meinhof style leftist terrorism on the continent. Thankfully the reviewer, Alberto Toscano, avoids uncritical cheerleading of the total rejectionism of these ‘radicals.’

On the other hand, the latest issue (156) is mostly devoid of any socialist thought; focusing on the theme of the ‘image’ – kicked off a piece by Jacques Ranciere. In one noteworthy exception, there is a fascinating discussion on “The criminalization of the sexual transmission of HIV” (free online) which demonstrates that there is legitimate mileage in the Foucauldian idea of biopolitics – an idea that as Marxist and communists we need to take seriously even if it cannot be traced back to any orthodox pronouncement by Marx or Lenin.

Miscellany

To borrow a catch phrase from Nick Cohen: what's left of the left? Not much it seems once we plunge into the depths of the other journals floating about out there. A glance across to the U.S. publication, the *Monthly Review*, might indicate that we are looking at the journal of New Maoist thought – and that would be the Mao of the Great Leap Forward, rather than the Mao of the Cultural Revolution. The entire issue for July to August 2009 is devoted to agriculture, “food sovereignty,” land reform and, or course, the relevance of climate change to all these matters. The May 2009 issue even has a favourable review of a book of Mao's poetry. It seems that under John Bellamy Foster's editorship (author of the fraudulent *Marx and Ecology*) the *Monthly Review* is becoming entirely devoted to slightly left of liberal North American thought: climate change, anti-Zionism, anti-war. Anything, it seems, than engagement with the working class, the labour movement and the promotion of communist ideas.

At the other end of the spectrum, Natalie Rothschild on *Spiked Online* is having an apoplectic fit about the new invention the LifeStraw, which allows emergency drinking of contaminated water. She asks “Is it the most degrading gadget ever invented?” One thinks probably not if you are in danger of dying from dehydration.

Apart from Patrick Hayes' admirable coverage of the recent factory occupations in Visteon and Vestas, which manage to avoid the usual abject cynicism and smug reflection on the ‘defeat of the working class,’ there is not much of interest going down at *Spiked*. No decrying of Palestinian solidarity as anti-Semitic. No shrill calls for capitalism to be defended. All – and this they would really take umbrage at – appears quite dull on the post-RCP front.

building from below: the case for working in residents' groups

by Dave Spencer

The public sector will be in for a kicking no matter who wins the 2010 General Election – New Labour or the Tories. The new government will plan for jobs to be lost and services to be cut – to a greater extent than we have ever known in Britain. It will not be “decimation” of the sector, because the talk is of 15% to 20% cuts – that is one in five, not one in ten! This is to pay for the £1.3 trillion bail-out of the banks (according to Robert Peston and he seems to know!).

In the 1980s the Thatcher government attacked the working class by destroying much of Britain's manufacturing base and of course by breaking the power of the miners. Now is the turn of the public sector. The key lessons from the bad experience of the Thatcher years are the lack of preparation by the working class for the battle and a complete lack of political nous by the trade unions and the left. Militancy is not enough – you have to have some basic political strategy other than saving your own skin or building your own sect.

Building from below means preparation at rank and file level in the workplace and across Unions in localities – in the

form of Public Sector Trade Union Alliances. In local communities organisations such as Northampton Save Our Public Services (mentioned in the last edition of *The Commune*) need to be built to defend public services against government cuts and attempts to privatise services with PFIs or sub-contracting work out to private agencies. National networks of these organisations should be established.

We have to recognise that cuts in public services have already occurred year after year since Denis Healey's budget of 1976 so that working class communities are already demoralised and fatalistic. At the same time District and County Councils have far less power than they used to have and much less than the general public think they have. It is vital for comrades to find out how local government and the providers of public services operate. It's an eye-opener!

In this situation residents' groups can play a vital role in raising the morale of local communities and developing consciousness – both by demanding change from the authorities and by taking matters into their own hands. In our residents' group we had the usual claptrap from the local Labour councillor and Council officers that we could not have a play

area for the under 7s in our local park because the Council has no money. Everything went quiet until one elderly woman spoke up: “What you mean is – you've got money for them, the bankers, but you haven't got any money for the likes of us!” There was a chorus of, “She's right!” and we have not had that argument since. We managed to persuade the Council officers to lend us some skips on the cheap for a clean up campaign of our back entries. A giant of a man came out with his chain saw and had soon cut down all the overhanging branches. We cleaned the area up instead of moaning about it in our meetings. It's surprising what an uplifting effect that had on the community.

It is not revolutionary activity. It is not even reformist. But this is where new “soviets” will be born in my opinion – in the course of struggle. And there is going to be a severe struggle within working class communities when the next government starts the chopping of public services. Resistance has to come from below and existing organisations like Residents' Groups will be used to fight back. This is already happening. Our local paper is full of articles and photographs of residents protesting about some outrage or other. And not a Leftie in sight – which is probably a good thing!

latin america's future is being played out in honduras

by Roberto Sáenz

★An analysis of the recent military coup against centre-left Honduran president Mel Zelaya

The military's entry into political life in Latin America has created a new situation of reactionary offensives and polarisation in the region. It is related to the four-part cycle since the beginning of the current stage of popular rebellions at the start of the 21st century, a cycle which is still playing out. This firstly meant popular rebellions, properly speaking; secondly, the rise to power of various sorts of "progressives" (from Chávez to Lula); and thirdly, the mediation of rebellion by these same "people's" governments and the emergence of right-wing conservative oppositions. The fourth part is that signalled by the coup d'état in Honduras.

This means growing reactionary offensives and increasing polarisation between certain states (e.g. Colombia versus Venezuela and Ecuador), but also the emergence of a new process of popular resistance to these same reactionary offensives (as in Honduras).

Fitting into the same tendency is the deployment of seven US bases in Colombia, an event representing another significant factor in recent weeks. The fact is that the Obama administration's policies for Latin America have increasingly turned to the right with the deepening of the Honduran crisis.

However, we must not forget that at the heart of any political situation is the concrete evolution of the class struggle, and reactionary offensives, as a 'rebound' effect, can follow a radicalisation of the exploited and oppressed such as has simultaneously taken place in Honduras.

When the military factor returns to the scene

The primary aspect to be taken into account in the new situation is how the military have returned to the political scene. In the region's history it has been commonplace – all the more so in Central America – for the ruling class, in the hands of US imperialism, to call upon its 'naked' power: its weapon of repression, the armed forces.

Unlike in recent decades when the armed forces were the guarantors of bourgeois power but the mechanism *par excellence* of domination was the deception of the masses via elections, in different times this domination was exercised directly *manu militari*. The history of coups across the region is evidence enough to remind us of this.

But in recent decades the bourgeoisies of the region and the USA had pushed the other way, calling upon the means of deception as the main way to carry out their class interests.

This meant "contradictions" in recent years. In a context where, through electoral means, a series of reformist bourgeois governments not responding directly to the diktats of Empire have emerged, Honduras represents the fact that military coups – or at least an 'attenuated' 21st century version being experimented with in Honduras – are again becoming an option as a means of exercising power.

It is clear that neither method has ever been "ruled out": certain political systems such as that of Uribe in Colombia today have combined both elements in different degrees: the stick and the carrot.

What is new in the coup in Honduras and the establishment of new US bases in Colombia is the introduction of the military factor, a qualitative jump which cannot but be a danger to the process of popular rebellion in Latin America, as Argentinian daily *Página 12* explains:



the coup in honduras and the new american bases in colombia point to the militarisation of the region

"It does not take a military expert to understand that with the deployment of these bases Venezuela is left totally surrounded, subject to constant harassment by imperialist troops stationed in Colombia as well as the local armed forces and the 'paramilitaries'. To this we have to add the support brought to this offensive against the Bolivarian revolution by the US bases in Aruba, Curaçao and Guantánamo; at Palmerola, in Honduras; and the Fourth Fleet which has sufficient resources at its disposal to effectively patrol the entire Venezuelan coast. In Paraguay, the USA has guaranteed control of the strategic base of Mariscal Estigarribia and can count on one of the largest and best-defended airfields in South America. In that country it also has at hand an enormous base in Pedro Juan Caballero."

For these reasons the outcome of the current struggle against the coup in Honduras (an outcome which, we insist, is still not yet determined) cannot but be of the greatest importance: elements of the "militarisation" of political life in the region will be reaffirmed or not depending on the result of this heroic struggle.

Speaking softly but carrying a big stick

One important factor in the regional situation has to be the policies of Barack Obama. His commitment to stability in the region is marked by his ever more reactionary role in Honduras (and now with the bases in Colombia). As the political analyst Atilio Baron acerbically commented, "Barack Obama, who the constantly-disoriented European and Latin America 'progressives' keep confusing with Malcolm X, is at root following to the letter the advice of Theodore Roosevelt, the father of US imperialism's great expansion into the Caribbean and Central America, when he said "speak softly and carry a big stick". With his policy of forced remilitarisation of Latin America and the Caribbean, Obama is returning to the path taken by his predecessor".

In the first days of the coup, Obama had appeared in the media "condemning" it, perhaps still preoccupied by the need to win back the legitimacy the USA had lost in the eyes

of the peoples of the region and the world. However, with the passing of weeks, what we see is the same as what is happening on almost all the other fronts of his government: a constant galloping to the right.

With respect to Honduras the imperial hegemony championed by Obama shows ever less "hegemony" and more signs of what we might call the defence of the fundamental interests of imperialism in its back yard: "In 1929, wanting to express how easy it was to buy the support of a politician, Samuel Zamurray (*alias* 'Banana Sam'), president of Cuyamel Fruit, a rival of United Fruit, commented 'A member of parliament in Honduras costs less than a donkey'. In the late '80s president José Azcona Hoyos admitted the submission of Honduras to US strategy, confessing 'A country as small as Honduras cannot afford itself the luxury of keeping its dignity'. Today, its economic relationship with the great US power is one of almost total dependence: 70% of its exports (bananas, coffee, sugar) go there, and some three billion dollars are sent back by the 800,000 Honduran migrants in the USA in remittances for their families. The biggest investor (40%) in textile factories (with cheap labour) in the Free Trade Zones is United States capital".

With almost-as-open cynicism unmasked, 'Obama Sam' recently declared that he "didn't have a button" to press to re-install Mel Zelaya in government in Honduras (but we all know the USA does indeed have 'a button' and that it has been pressed several times, not to mention Hiroshima and Nagasaki...). Furthermore, he accused those "speaking out against US intervention in Latin America" of "double standards", now that they want his government to act against those who staged the coup...

His two-facedness here is scandalous: the policy of verbal condemnation and the absence of any action to take any effective measures against those who carried out the coup, bringing down the mask Obama had thus far managed to hold in place: being put on the spot over Honduras is forcing him to abandon his vacillation, since the truth is that the USA is much more comfortable with Micheletti than with Zelaya.

The tactics of appeasement: when words fail

Appeasement is the name given to the failed policy of the governments of the imperialist bourgeois democracies faced with the Spanish civil war and Hitler's coming to power in Germany. It is clear that this policy failed... apart from the obvious differences, Latin American progressivism – including its most garrulous representatives, like Hugo Chávez – has taken a similar position faced with the Honduran coup, given its fatal class limitations.

They have come out with talk, talk and more talk without being able to take a single practical measure against Micheletti's post-coup government: they have not called a single protest in repudiation of the coup in Honduras (and the growing militarisation of the continent's political life) in their own countries, and still less at a continental level.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves here of the history of the ignominious downfalls of Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina in 1955, of a certain Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954, the fall of Allende in Chile in 1973, in all cases cut down by the same 'scissors': the refusal of these "progressive" governments to organise the masses against the coup!

continues on page 7 >>>

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