

Respect

A monthly newspaper

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Palestine pages 10-11

Brown's bluster won't halt climate change

**Phil Thornhill,
organiser of the
Campaign against
Climate Change**

In 2001 when Bush rejected the Kyoto protocol it didn't make the front page of the *Guardian*. Now climate change seems to pop up on the front pages all the time. Now everyone knows it's an issue.

So as campaigners on this issue since 2001 can we say we're getting somewhere at last?

● *More on climate change and debate on contraction and convergence – see inside pages 12-15*

In fact emissions of greenhouse gases since 2001 have skyrocketed globally – even here in the UK CO₂ emissions have risen, not fallen. But our failure is not just measured in such statistics, it's frighteningly apparent all around us as Greece and California burn, as the Amazon dries out, as the arctic ice shrinks to 60% of what it should be. Anybody who has cast an even faintly dispassionate eye on the science knows we are engaged in a desperate race against time.

In these circumstances increased awareness is not enough – not unless it's channelled in such a way as to result in effective action, real and rapid reductions in emissions. That why the kind of awareness, the sort of messages that are out there, matters.

What we have so much of is TV adverts telling you to switch off the lights, posters in the tube telling you not to boil too much water in your kettle, a thousand websites telling you how to reduce your 'carbon footprint'. As if by all living purer more carbon-free lives we could solve the problem.

Well yes in theory we could: but we all know it just isn't going to work that way. The reality is that only a minority will be doing these things, so at best the process will be deeply unjust because a carbon-virtuous minority will be carrying the can for a don't-care majority.

But in fact the total amount of carbon saved by all these good intentions remains, in the grand scheme of things, negligible – it could be easily wiped out by one bad investment decision made by government.

Just about everything that can be done by individual effort can be done better and more fairly by government regulation.

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Did you know?

■ In India and Bangladesh, over 700 people lost their lives this summer due to flooding and mudslides (not counting those who subsequently died of water-borne diseases.)

■ The Canadian Arctic Survey recorded temperatures of 22 degrees this summer: that's 15 degrees above the long term average.



Brown's credibility collapses into farce
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Catastrophe in Bangladesh
East London responds to cyclone disaster page 15



Nurse's vital fight against victimisation
Defend Karen Reissmann! page 7

EDITORIAL: What Respect stands for

We all need an answer to New Labour and Tories

Privatisation... de-regulation... pensions... pay cuts ... PFI... student fees... city academies... racism... climate change... Islamophobia... war... job losses... civil liberties... NHS closures... housing crisis... ward closures...

The list could go on.

In all aspects of our lives we face the consequences of New Labour/Tory polices.

All of the three main parties support policies that benefit the better-off in Britain; they support the rich, the company directors and big share-holders. In return, the rich give massive amounts of money to these parties

Ordinary people – those who have to work every week to pay the bills or those who depend on state benefits – have no party which supports them, and no party to support.

If you are a student, a cleaner, a civil servant, a postal worker, a teacher or bus driver, who speaks up for you?

Working-class people and all those who want to see a fairer and more equal society need a party that fights back.



Unity in action: Respect Renewal speakers side by side on a Manchester platform with Preston councillor Michael Lavalette and victimised UNISON activist Karen Reissmann. 180 attended the successful rally.

The Respect party is different.

We want to represent all those left behind in today's Britain; all those who feel that the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is far too wide; all those who want to see a society which cherishes every single person.

Everyone deserves access to a decent education, decent health care, decent housing and a decent job at a decent rate of pay. Older people deserve a decent standard of living in retirement.

Young people must have a future to look forward to. Parents should not have to worry about what the future holds for their children.

We oppose privatisation. We think that public services should be run in the interest of those who use them, not to make a profit for the multi-millionaires.

Today, the earth's resources are owned and controlled by a few multi-national corporations who misuse them to line their own pockets,

with no regard for the environment, the people or for future generations.

The resources of society should be the property of all, and used for the benefit of all. Everyone should have a say in how those resources are used.

Our name Respect reflects our values

– Respect, Equality, Socialism, Peace,

Environment, Community and Trade Unions.

We don't claim to be the finished article. We want to work together with all those who share a vision of a better, more equitable society, to create a broader, united party to represent the interests of all working-class people. That party must be democratic, transparent and open to all who want to work together to change things for the better.

With your help we can build it.

We are part of a global movement for social justice, peace and equality for all.

Join us.

Respect's 14-point programme

- An end to the war and occupation in Iraq. We will not join any further imperialist wars.
- An end to all privatisation and the bringing back into democratic public ownership of the railways and other public services.
- An education system that is not dependent on the ability to pay, that is comprehensive and gives an equal chance in life to every child no matter how wealthy or poor their parents, from nursery to university.
- A publicly owned and funded, democratically controlled NHS, free to all users.
- Pensions that are linked to average earnings.
- Raising the minimum wage to the European Union Decency threshold of £7.40 an hour.
- Tax the rich to fund welfare and to close the growing gap between the poor and the wealthy few.
- The repeal of the Tory anti-union laws.
- Opposition to all forms of discrimination based on race, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs (or lack of them), sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin or citizenship.
- The right to self-determination of every individual in relation to their religious (or non-religious) beliefs, as well as sexual choices.
- The defence of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers. Opposition to the European Union's 'Fortress Europe' policies.
- We will strongly oppose the anti-European xenophobic right wing in any Euro referendum. But we oppose the 'stability pact' that the European Union seeks to impose on all those who join the euro. This pact would outlaw government deficit spending and reinforce the drive to privatise and deregulate the economy and we will therefore vote 'No' in any referendum on this issue.
- Support for the people of Palestine and opposition to the apartheid system that oppresses them.
- An end to the destruction of the environment by states and corporations for whom profit is more important than sustaining the natural world on which all life depends.

RESPECT RENEWAL

www.respectrenewal.org

I would like to join and enclose £10/£5 unwaged or low waged payable to Respect Renewal Conference

I would like to make a donation of £..... payable to Respect Renewal Conference

I would like to offer my time and skills

I would like further information

I am a student/ a trade union member

Name	Date of birth
Address	Post code
Phone/s	
Email	
College/ trade union	

I wish to take out a standing order for Respect Renewal Conference. Amount £..... per month. Amount in words Payments to be made monthly. First payment to be made on (date) and each month thereafter on the same day.

Bank name Bank address Bank post code

Account holder's name Account number Sort code

Please pay NatWest, Temple Bar Branch, PO Box 10720, 217 Strand, London WC2R 1AL, sort code 60-80-08, for the credit of the Respect Renewal Conference, account number 60601051, the sum of the value indicated above.

Signed

Date

Respect Renewal c/o PO Box 1109 London N4 2UU. respectrenewal@gmail.com

Deepening crisis for New Labour ...

Between a Rock and a new police inquiry

**George Galloway,
Respect
MP,
Bethnal
Green and
Bow**



A spectre is haunting Gordon Brown – the spectre of the hapless Labour prime minister Jim Callaghan.

He too prevaricated over calling a general election – in autumn 1978 – and it resulted in Margaret Thatcher's Tories coming to power after the Winter of Discontent that followed.

After what we were told was Brown's glorious summer, an autumn of deep despond has gripped the parliamentary Labour Party.

The sight of clunking fist Brown being bested by the Lib Dems Vince Cable, of all people, says it all.

Incredibly, less than six months into his premiership there are already mutterings about whether Brown will be leading Labour into the next general election.

The party funding scandal is not just one damn thing, it's one damn thing after another. A few weeks ago, when Brown said he was holding off from calling an election in order to promote his vision, he had a reputation for competence even if no one expected him to be a visionary.

Now he has neither. To the spectre of Callaghan we can add, following the loss of 20 million pieces of personal data, a touch of the John Majors. A great stain of incompetence is spreading across the government's front benches. And it is lapping at the prime minister himself.

More and more people are pointing out what the civil service unions had already predicted – that the discs debacle

was the likely consequence of cutting the number of staff, increasing their workload and contracting out such vital services as couriering sensitive government documents.

All these policies, of course, have Gordon Brown stamped all over them. If all that there was to this turn of events was discomfort in Downing Street, then there would be little to trouble most people, other than concern that the Tories may benefit.

But a lot more is at stake than that. For at the centre of Brown's travails is the worsening turn in the economy and the collapse of the Northern Rock bank – something that cannot be dismissed as a fevered spat in the Westminster village.

The Northern Rock collapse will, in my view, rapidly come to symbolise a breaking point in the credit-fuelled, neo-liberal consensus that has dominated policy discussion for a generation. It is not an aberration, but is itself a product of the shattering collapse of the high risk, or sub prime, mortgage market in the US.

There's a tendency for discussion of economics to invoke rarefied language, even euphemisms, which obscure the real impact of the movement of points on a graph.

What the housing crisis in the US means is millions of families, overwhelmingly poor families, facing homelessness, turfed out into the trailer park, humiliated, their lives crushed, whole communities torn apart and drowned in a wave of sickening uncertainty.

Northern Rock is the first indication of that kind of slowdown and financial crisis spreading to this country. The Bank of England is predicting hard times next year. Anecdotal evidence, including from my own constituency, shows that for many they are already here.

Grassroots Labour people know that Brown's party has little to offer the five million people who say they would vote Labour but won't do on account of the policies it is pursuing, and the corruption and venality it is seen to represent.

And with the first whiff of such economic difficulties the nostrums of neo-liberalism are found wanting.

Aren't we supposed to have moved on from the days when the state would move in to prop up lame duck companies, throwing good tax payers money after bad management decisions?

That's what car workers in Birmingham were told, wasn't it? It's what thousands of Bangladeshi people, many in Tower Hamlets, were told when the First Solution money transfer business went belly up leaving them out of pocket.

The Treasury minister Kitty Ussher, explained to me and a delegation who had lost money that there would be "moral hazard" in the government stepping in to ensure that people did not lose out from that collapse.

But now we find that the government is prepared to throw tens of billions of pounds - £30 billion and rising – into propping up Northern Rock only to discover that the assets it was meant to be securing are not actually there.

It seems 70 percent of the mortgages the bank is meant to own are actually registered to a Jersey-based company.

Guess who has just received a few dodgy donations?
PHOTO: Andrew Wiard



The policy appears to be to provide an almost limitless line of credit to shore up the bank and make it attractive for Richard Branson to take over.

Well, I'm no economics expert, but shouldn't the answer in fact be for the Bank of England to take over Northern Rock entirely – after all, it's already forking out good money for it?

It would be an advantage for the Bank of England to have a branch on every High Street providing mortgages, not with an eye to unwarranted profits by selling on the debt half way round the world but with a social responsibility to lend cheaply and use the surplus to invest in council housing.

In other words, the obvious answer is to nationalise Northern Rock (and to renationalise policy-making at the Bank of England while we're at it).

We on the left should not fear that such policies might be described as old-fashioned, outlandish or unworkable. I detect a widening sympathy for them.

fleshed out, and we need to develop socialist policies to combat the onset of economic slowdown, ensuring that those who are already suffering do not get hit.

I think it's time for the left and progressive movement to start refining those policies and translating them into bite sized chunks that we can agitate around and force onto the political stage.

Something like this was attempted with the Alternative Economic Strategy in the 1970s, and I think that kind of approach is needed again.

It would come about through the collaborative and pluralist approach that informed the Respect Renewal conference. With millions already fearing a bitter first few months next year, we have no time to lose in advancing answers from the left.

Brown's catastrophic performance is creating deep disquiet across the labour movement. People, good people, fear that it might result in the return of the Tories.

roots Labour people know that Brown's party has little to offer the five million people who say they would vote Labour but won't do on account of the policies it is pursuing and the corruption and venality it is seen to represent.

Those of us who are seeking to renew Respect have an understanding of our responsibilities.

We want to build Respect, which is founded on real Labour policies, but we don't think we have all the answers. We want to be part of constructing a wider progressive coalition that can have a serious impact.

The alternative is for the left simply to sit back, to carry on with business as usual, to narcissistically dwell on the slightest differences between us, while forces to the right – some of them extremely ugly – gain from what we must now see as an ongoing state of crisis for the Brown administration.

Fight Ken's tube sell-off!

Tony Collins, RMT safety rep

London Underground

Ken Livingstone is still determined to press ahead with the privatisation of the East London Line, despite opposition from the RMT union, tube workers and the public.

The line closes in December, and when it opens it will be run by a private company.

If the plans succeed, this could just be the start of the full-scale fragmentation of the tube.

London Underground is determined to break the tube unions. Union members have fought hard to win decent pay and conditions, battles which have been an inspiration to low-paid workers across London and which have helped to recently

win tube cleaners a rate of £7.20 per hour.

Fragmenting the tube like this will lead to big drops in safety standards. But it will also lead to a huge waste of public money.

Recently, one of the companies in charge of tube maintenance, Metronet, went into administration after massive cost overruns and major safety incidents.

In Tower Hamlets, Respect councillors have been trying to raise the issue of the East London Line at every council meeting, despite New Labour's continued attempts to stop it being discussed.

The RMT called a demonstration against the privatisation at City Hall on 13 December at 11am.

Respect members on the tube will be there with local Respect activists and councillors.



Postal workers sold shoddy deal

Union leaders deliver... for Royal Mail

By a London postal worker

Postal workers have voted to accept the "Pay and Modernisation" deal negotiated by Royal Mail and the Communication Workers' Union by 64% to 36% on a 64% turnout.

The deal gave Royal Mail much of what they wanted at the outset of the dispute – a wage increase below the level of inflation, a "flexible" workforce and an agreement from the union to scrap the current pension scheme.

For many postal workers, pay was never the main issue at stake, recognising that the other issues had more far-reaching effects. However, the pay settlement itself is a big con – the media reports it as a 6.9% increase over two years.

In fact, there is no increase at all between April (the due date) and October this year, and 1.5% of the increase is dependent on "full" flexibility. So the basic 5.4% increase is in fact a 2 1/2 year deal, amounting to 2.2% a year. In addition a £175 sweetener will be paid, but this is, in fact, money already owed to postal workers under a previous bonus scheme.

The flexibility issue is a major attack on conditions and, ultimately, pay.

Under the smokescreen of using the media to attack "Spanish practices" (mostly, in fact, encouraged by management as a way of getting the job done), Royal Mail has won the right, among other things, to vary start and finish times by up to half an hour a day (on "reasonable request", i.e. as determined by management), to introduce long and short days,

The deal itself leaves many issues unresolved, including the future of several mail centres which are under the threat of closure

and to share the workload of an absent worker among others without paying them for doing it.

This will attack earnings because many rely on overtime to top up their low wages.

The agreement on pensions, signed by Royal Mail and the CWU leadership, commits the union to supporting the scrapping of the final salary scheme and raising the retirement age from 60 to 65. It is not even clear what kind of pension scheme new workers would have, but the agreement says they would have to wait a year before joining it.

There are several reasons why the deal was agreed in the ballot:

■ Despite 5 members of the Postal Executive voting against the deal (the vote was 9-5 in favour), only one, Dave Warren, was willing to campaign against it, with union President, Jane Loftus, being conspicuous by her silence:

■ The union leadership claimed, despite the insistence of Royal Mail and Brendan Barber, General Secretary of the TUC, that the agreement on pensions is not part of this

deal, despite the agreement having been circulated to branches.

They argue that there will be a separate consultation and vote on pensions, while failing to point out that this is a vote of *all* pension fund members, including non-CWU members and the managers who delight in scabbing on strikes, and that the national union is committed to supporting the scrapping of the current arrangements during the consultation;

■ While many postal workers were appalled by the deal, the campaign for rejection had to be started from scratch, since many activists put their loyalty to Dave Ward, Deputy General Secretary (Postal) above their duty to the membership. Despite this, over 30 branches (about one-third) recommended rejection.

■ Particularly the London branches leadership, traditionally among the most militant, sold the line that pensions are a separate issue, that flexibility would not be so bad in London (defying the trade union principle of defending the weak as well as the strong), and even that London could put special measures in place to safeguard against the worst aspects of flexibility.

Which rather begs the question as to why, if the deal were acceptable, such measures would be necessary? It also ignores the fact that, even if management do go for the weaker workplaces first, they will certainly go for the stronger ones later.

■ Of course, workers received mailings from Royal Mail and the national union urging a "yes" vote, the most

dishonest of which was a postcard from the CWU that **only** mentioned the money on offer. The "no" campaign did not have the resources to compete, and management did their best to prevent the circulation of material calling for rejection of the deal.

■ Many workers who didn't like the deal either voted "yes" or didn't vote because they had no confidence in the leadership which negotiated this deal winning a better one, while they might be expected to lose more money through strike action.

The deal itself leaves many issues unresolved, including the future of several mail centres which are under the threat of closure and disciplinary action being taken by management against activists arising out of the strike.

All in all, the deal is a major blow to postal workers, and a major task now is to replace those responsible for it in the union elections next year. Disputes will also continue to break out around flexibility and victimisation and solidarity needs to be built beyond the weak efforts of the national union.

Those, like the London leadership, who supported the deal but say they will fight for a no vote in the pensions consultation, have to be taken at their word and backed on this.

Above all, a campaign has to be launched against the "liberalisation" of postal services, at the root of this dispute and the decline in service to the public, going beyond the union's feeble call for a "level playing field" for Royal Mail and its competitors.

Strong vote triggers fresh civil service strikes

Members of the Civil Service union PCS in the Department of Work and Pensions have voted by 62 per cent to strike over pay. Action has been called by the group Executive for December 6 and 7

Management's three-year offer means a pay cut now. It squanders £38 million on performance bonuses instead of using that money to address the real problems of low pay and below inflation increases.

Given the poverty wages that most workers in the Department take home – in many cases barely above the minimum wage – it's not surprising there is such strong feeling against the deal, which is being imposed.

It is a shame however that many of the other groups of public service workers who have had pay cuts imposed not only by management but by their trade union leaders won't be on same picket lines. The trade union movement needs to relearn the principle that unity is strength.

Prison bosses seek to provoke new dispute with POA

Prison workers have been banned from wearing their new union badge by their bosses, despite the fact that the badges are being sold to raise money for Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Prison Officers' Association (POA) members have been threatened with suspension if they wear the badges.

In a message of support to the prison officers, George Galloway said, "This is a shocking attack on trade union and workers' rights by the prison service management. The fact that money raised from the new union badge is going to help sick children simply underscores how out of touch the senior management are."

The National Chairman of the POA Colin Moses said:

"With all the problems the Prison Service is currently facing, with cuts to its budget and the ongoing crisis of the prison population, it is typical of this Director General to attempt to divert the attention of the public from his mismanagement of the Service by attacking the professional men and women who work for him."

The POA General Secretary, Brian Caton added:

"Unfortunately, members of the Prison Service Management Board are clearly and deliberately engineering a dispute between POA and the Prison Service. I believe it is because they know that in the very near future the prison system could explode because of their mismanagement and the Government's underfunding of the Service for years. I think they are engineering a dispute so they can shift the blame from themselves to the POA. We will not let the public be duped in this way."



No academies in Manchester – or elsewhere!

DEREK FRASER, Vice President Rochdale NUT, (personal capacity)

NUT, NASUWT and ATL members together with members of the public filled the streets of Manchester on 1st December with the chant, 'Academies, Academies, Academies, No, No, No'.

Hundreds of people marched opposing the attempt by Manchester City council to impose Academies on the parents and children of Manchester and heard a variety of speakers including Steve Sinnott (NUT Gen Sec), children's author Alan Gibbons, and Alistair Smith (Anti-Academy Alliance).

Speaker after speaker talked of the horror stories of the lack of any democratic control over Academies, the threat to children's education (being taught the basics and nothing else) and staff's terms and conditions being attacked.

The march and rally is just the beginning of the organized opposition to this attempt to privatise schools in Manchester.

Many now want to set up a Public meeting in Manchester to bring together this opposition and ask why is a Labour government and Labour Council backing businessmen taking over our schools.



Organising migrant workers

Andy Newman,
Race Officer, Wiltshire
and Swindon GMB W15
branch.(personal capacity)

The large numbers of Polish and other migrant workers who have arrived in Britain over the last few years pose an important challenge for the Labour movement.

Firstly, the Poles are often subject to extraordinary levels of exploitation, not knowing their employment rights, nor about British benefits or housing law.

Unscrupulous agencies are recruiting in Poland, and then getting migrant workers to (illegally) sign away their rights in contracts they don't understand. Migrant workers are sometimes being housed in properties owned by their employers, and charged way over the market rate.

Secondly, the influx of immigrants has caused some problems for the host communities. It is often the poorest working class areas – who already suffer from inadequate affordable housing, and overstretched education, health and transport infrastructure – that are being expected to cope, without the government providing extra resources.

In some cases the far right have sought to exploit this, as they did in the small Somerset town of Chard following recruitment of hundreds of Portuguese at the Oscar Meyer factory.

Whatever other faults he may have had, the then GMB

leader Kevin Curran behaved in an exemplary way, personally coming to Chard and working to recruit both Portuguese and British workers to the union, and ensuring the bosses were not allowed to exploit national differences.

Migrant Workers North West (based in Manchester, and supported by the T&G) has worked with employers to get them to sign up to a charter of best practice, and reports that some employers are surprisingly good, for example employing a welfare worker to solve housing and other non-work related problems.

One employer had introduced a "buddy" system to pair a newly arrived migrant worker with an indigenous British worker who showed him or her the ropes. Of course some other employers, and unfortunately far too many, are unscrupulously exploiting migrants.

Learning by doing

So far the trade union movement is learning as it goes along. Some unions have taken on Polish workers into their recruitment/organising team, but do not have a specific strategy for migrants.

In the Southern region of the GMB, there has been a recognition that the particular problems of migrant workers go beyond the workplace, and involves non-workplace issues.

In Southampton the GMB have established a Migrant workers branch (M48), which is an interesting experiment.

My own GMB branch, Wiltshire and Swindon W15, is par-

ticipating in project funded by the European Social Fund, that has enabled a young Polish woman to be employed as an organiser.

We have about 400 Polish members in the branch, about a sixth of the membership, and quite a few come to branch meetings, including younger people, particularly women.

Vision

Our view is that the migrant workers do need a vision of trade unionism that goes beyond the workplace, so we have organised drop in events in the small town of Trowbridge, and also in Swindon, where not only the union organisers and activists, but also solicitors and advice workers are there for employment, legal, housing and benefit advice.

However, to be sustainable, trade unionism needs to be based in the workplace, and needs lay reps to be trained up to do the work themselves.

We have found that the new Polish recruits have in some places reinvigorated shop floor organisation, and provided a stimulus for the British workers.

In one factory we have two young Polish shop stewards and two British shop stewards who work together. In other factories the Poles have helped recruit their British co-workers to the union.

But language remains a problem. The GMB has a policy of translating all documents, but at a recent branch meeting there were about 10 native English speakers and

8 Poles. Two of the Poles had to leave the meeting half way because they couldn't follow it well enough.

However we are reluctant to have a separate branch, because that would mean workers in the same workplace would be in separate union branches.

What we are trying instead is a migrant workers sub-committee, that will send delegates to the branch committee, and there will be a two way flow of information. Whether this works or not of course we don't yet know.

The heavy lifting for organising migrant workers is probably going to have to come from the big general unions, the GMB and T&G-UNITE, because they organise the sectors where most migrants are employed.

Myths

It is good to see both unions taking this seriously, but we do need to squash some myths:

Firstly our unions do sometimes reflect racism within them but in many cases we have been very pleasantly surprised at how strongly the white British reps within the union have risen to the task of fighting for migrants. We can be proud of this.

Secondly, I still hear some officials and activists from various unions arguing that migrants aren't interested in unions. On the contrary, the young migrant workers are often very keen to join and build the unions, and can breathe fresh life into branches.

Shame on New Labour

Campsfield marks 14 years of human misery

Liz Peretz

Campsfield Immigration Detention Centre near Oxford has been open for 14 years. The first protests started in November 1993 as the first busloads of detainees arrived.

A protest to mark 14 years of human misery inside Campsfield 'House' "prison" (the building which houses over 200 men is surrounded by high razor wire fences) took place on Saturday November 24.

50 people gathered, to share information and show solidarity with detainees. Detainees displayed protest banners and shouted out for freedom as demonstrators outside listened to speakers including some who had suffered detention themselves in Campsfield, Yarl's Wood, Colnbrook, and Harmondsworth.

The Centre is now run by GEO (ex Wackenhut), who run immigration centres across the world including a centre in Guantanamo Bay.

The following story appeared on the Associated Press on November 13:

"GEO recently paid out \$100,001 to a former detainee of theirs in New Jersey, USA. The lawyer who defended the Somalian refugee who is now a US citizen claimed 'corporate greed' created miserable conditions."

So far, GEO seem to be following similar patterns here. 14 cases of self-harm were reported at Campsfield in 2006, the use of 'segregation' (isolation cells) and handcuffing has risen, and basic grade guards with

minimum training are being used to provide 'education'. There have been repeated calls from the detainees themselves about conditions.

The last, just a week before the anniversary protest, complained to the press that conditions were appalling inside the centre and that things could 'kick off' at any time.

There was a mass protest by Campsfield's detainees in March and the UK's biggest-ever immigration detainees' breakout from there in August. See www.closecampsfield.org.uk.

Some 20,000 decent, vulnerable, innocent people are locked up under the 1971 Immigration Act each year. The government are set to increase the number of places even further next year. GEO have assured their shareholders that they are in discussion with the UK government about providing another 1800 detention places, which would represent misery for thousands more innocent people every year.

If you want to do something to halt this:

- bring the issue up at your workplace or in your community and write to your MP or to the Borders and Immigration Agency (BIA) to protest;

- subscribe to the Campsfield list at closecampsfield-subscribe@yahoogroups.com or the Barbed Wire Britain national anti detention network list at barbedwirebritain-subscribe@yahoogroups.com;

- give active solidarity to all migrants including people seeking asylum.

Complaints bombshell

The Border and Immigration Agency's own complaints audit unit report (November) confirms what immigration detainees have said all along about how their complaints are dealt with.

This bombshell criticises the denial of rights to those dealt with by private firms on behalf of the Immigration Service. In 95% of cases, those investigating the complaints had been from the companies under investigation.

Overall in the UK, it found just 8% of complainants were interviewed, and 89% of investigations were 'neither balanced nor thorough'; 83% of replies received were 'indefensible'.

A complaints procedure introduced in October 2006 for the immigration detention estate was given an 'amber/red' rating, indicating an above-average probability of fraud and impropriety.

(from *Campsfield Monitor, Winter 2007*)



Only 7,000 marched through London on November 3 in response to the trade union call to "celebrate and defend" the NHS. Many areas had seen larger local turn-outs to defend threatened hospitals against closure.

Is Darzi just a decoy for fresh cuts and privatisation?

Campaigners have warned that the Darzi plan for the future of health services in London, released for public consultation on November 30, is in danger of degenerating into nothing more than a smokescreen for another wave of hospital closures, service cuts and privatisation of key facilities.

The consultation document has been gutted of any specific recommendations on local service changes, but its thrust is to reduce the number of district general hospitals in London.

The whole package is overshadowed by a massive financial crisis at the sharp end of the capital's NHS which has been deliberately covered-up in official statistics.

London Health Emergency pointed to the example of new figures issued at the end of November which claim that the NHS in London has a surplus of £300 million, but which ignore historical levels of debt.

For example, Bromley Hospitals Trust is said to have a deficit of just £9 million when the true figure is £99 million. The same bogus figures have been applied to many other Trusts.

Dr John Lister, London Health Emergency Information Director, said:

Cash driven NHS cuts have forced the closure of 5,500 acute hospital beds (5% of the total) in the last two years, the first closures on this scale since 1993.

"Rather than the serious attempt to address the health inequalities in London which we hoped for, debate over aspects of the Darzi report looks like degenerating into an expensive smokescreen for a fresh wave of cuts and closures which would be an absolute disaster for staff and patients in the capital.

"We are also alarmed that Lord Darzi, who since his initial report been elevated to a straight political position as a Minister in the New Labour Government, has been openly advocating private sector involvement in the NHS.

"£15 million is being spent on the new consultation in

London, which is being run through spin doctors Ipsos Mori. We have seen how outrageously they have distorted the findings of a recent so-called "consultation" in South East London.

"We fear that the real views of Londoners will again be engineered out of the picture, giving the management consultants and bureaucrats a clear run to target hospitals for cuts and closures.

"Along with the patient forums and staff, we will be fighting to make sure that the real views of Londoners on the future shape of services that we really need are heard loud and clear."

the use of private sector providers for GP services and providing large-scale GP premises as well as elective hospital treatment. Further revelations have

of privatisation in the NHS.

■ One the senior US managers of UnitedHealth, the biggest and most profitable of the US health insurers, is Simon Stevens, a former health advisor to Tony Blair – who told the Observer on November 11 he had met Lord Darzi, who was 'one of his big admirers.'

■ UnitedHealth has now been included on a list of 14 corporations approved by ministers to bid for contracts advising Primary Care Trusts on how to

Campaigners protest against Haringey 'polyclinics' proposal

Around 40 people turned up to lobby the Board

Meeting of the Haringey Primary Care Trust (held at St Ann's Hospital) to protest against the PCT's 'polyclinics' proposals, which would threaten the existence of local GP surgeries and local chemists.

The controversial proposal is for four such clinics in Haringey (plus one at the Whittington and one at the North Middx hospital), each serving over 50,000 patients. Those present at the protest included representatives of older people's organisations, patients' groups, residents associations, health campaigns and trades unions.

Dave Morris, the Secretary of the Stop Haringey Health Cuts Coalition, made a brief presentation to the Board saying that the Coalition had been opposing 'a wide range of government-driven cuts in Haringey's health services' over the last 2 years.

GP surgeries were the 'cornerstone' of the NHS in our communities and it was 'shocking and unacceptable' that they were being put under threat by the latest PCT proposals for Super Health Clinics. No-one wanted this. Any new clinics must be additional to existing services.

He called on the PCT Board to join campaigners in demanding more resources from Central Government for the front-line services our communities need.

Mario Petrou, the Chair of the Save St Ann's Hospital Campaign Group, made a detailed presentation explaining how the PCT's consultation over their proposals for polyclinics was 'deeply flawed and fraudulent - people have not been told the truth about the threat

to local GPs and pharmacist practices.

He read out an extract from a PCT report which had not been circulated, which stated: 'we envisage there will be a network of Super Health Centres and potentially a greatly reduced number of general practices.'

He accused the PCT of 'cronyism' in choosing members of their own Board to do an 'Environmental Impact Assessment' which played down the effect of the unpopular proposals, and also in alleging support for their proposals from a couple of sources close to the PCT.

In contrast, he explained how his group had organised 2 successful public meetings involving over 80 people those attending were totally opposed to the proposals. The results of the PCT's 'consultation' were contained in the Board papers.

The PCT claimed up to 15,000 consultation documents were circulated, but admitted they had received only 120 replies.

Even though the consultation documents failed to outline the truth of the threat to local surgeries, most of those responding had concerns about the proposal.

Nevertheless the Board decided to ignore public opposition and to press ahead with the Super Health Clinics proposals, with a decision expected in January.

Campaigners have also lobbied Haringey council's Overview & Scrutiny meeting and will fight on against the proposals. **Their next planning meeting is on Monday December 10, 6.30pm at the Chestnuts Community Centre. Contact SHHCC c/o the Union Office, St Ann's Hospital, N15**

Straws in the wind: privatisation is New Labour strategy

■ NHS London, the Strategic Health Authority covering the capital's 7.5 million population, has agreed to spend £15 million on consultation and implementation of Darzi's proposals which include a wholesale reorganisation of hospital services and the establishment of a network of "Polyclinics" at a cost of £3.1 billion.

■ Lord Darzi's interim report on the NHS in England in October specifically endorsed

spend £75 billion a year in "commissioning" services.

■ The approved list was signed off by NHS Commercial Director Channing Wheeler – also a former senior executive with UnitedHealth in the USA.

■ Heart of Birmingham Primary Care Trust has drawn up a "bold and ambitious" plan to franchise its primary care services to companies including Virgin, Asda and Tesco. These proposals turn out to

follow meetings between Lord Darzi and retail chains aimed at forging a new provider role in primary care.

■ Challenged repeatedly from the platform of a BMA conference on the Darzi report in London on October 25 to promise Londoners that no plans for privatisation would flow out of the Darzi consultation, leading representatives of NHS London refused to respond.

Child benefit record fiasco: New Labour job cuts to blame

Liam Mac Uaid

The loss of two CDs containing the entire child benefit records, including the personal details of 25 million people in 7.25 million families puts the spotlight on two of New Labour's obsessions. The first is privatisation. The other is detailed surveillance of as many people as possible.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) entrusted the two discs to the private courier company TNT. They contain the names, addresses, dates of birth and bank account details of people who received child benefit. They also include National Insurance numbers. These are just the details criminals need to create bogus identities or clean out bank accounts.

Helen Lord, a computer security expert a company called Experian told the Observer newspaper:

"The children whose names, addresses and dates of birth have been lost are also at risk, especially those who are between 15- and 17-years old. The fraudsters will wait until they turn 18 and start applying for loans, credit cards, mobile phone contracts and other credit products in their names.

"That could have a

catastrophic effect on their ability to get on the housing ladder, rent a flat, obtain their first credit card, obtain a loan for their first car, even open a bank account."

Mark Serwotka, general secretary of the Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), which represents civil servants said:

"The extremely serious loss of confidential data should be set in the context of the enormous pressure being placed on HMRC by government imposed job cuts totalling 25,000 by 2011, the recent merger and massive ongoing restructuring, which will see large scale office closures.

"With additional security checks expected to be put in place for people claiming and making enquiries about Child Benefit we urge the government to put extra resources into HMRC rather than continuing with cutting jobs.

"The union and its members are co-operating with the department and the authorities in their enquiries into the missing Child Benefit data."

So this was more than just a careless lapse by one civil servant. It was made easier

by increasing the pressure on HMRC staff leading them to take shortcuts. In fact the National Audit Office (NAO) had specifically asked HMRC to remove much of the sensitive data. HMRC replied NAO that it "overburdened the business" to filter out personal information as the NAO had requested.

The government's inability to protect some of the most sensitive information it holds on citizens has raised concerns about New Labour's plans to introduce identity cards.

The card would hold personal details as "registerable facts". These would have to be disclosed and constantly updated. This would go along with the collection and checking of "biometric data" (e.g. fingerprints) by the state.

The potential value of this information is enormous. But it also allows the state to track every key detail of every citizen's life from the cradle to the grave and all points in between.

Defending civil liberties and public services is at the heart of Respect's politics. This New Labour fiasco shows that we have to keep fighting for both.



Huge student revolt against fascists

Over 1,000 protestors, mainly students, and the majority of them from Oxford took to the normally sleepy streets to protest the decision of the Oxford Union (a private members' club) to invite two fascists, holocaust denier David Irving and BNP leader Nick Griffin, to address a debate on "free speech". The campaign to stop these purveyors of race hate being given a prominent platform was led by the Oxford University Student Union and the local Trades Council, and backed by a coalition of local parties – with the notable exception of the Liberal Democrats and Tories. Unite Against Fascism mobilised students and supporters, and Respect MP George Galloway, who had promoted the issue on his radio show, turned up with a delegation of solidarity from East London. Photo: John Lister

Stand up for civil liberties

Piers Mostyn

We've now had five months with Gordon Brown as Prime Minister. Far from turning over a new leaf on civil liberties, it is clear that New Labour is approaching its authoritarian agenda with a renewed vigour.

Top of the list has been the drive to extend the time limit for detaining suspects without charge from its present level of 28 days.

Two years ago Tony Blair suffered a House of Commons defeat of his proposal to increase this to 90 days.

This time round Brown hoped to avoid a repeat of this humiliation by not publicly stating how much it should be increased.

There are serious principles at stake – the liberty of the citizen and our ability to hold the government to account when it takes away that liberty.



Dependent on New Labour support: gun-happy Met boss Blair

New Labour's defeat last time reflected widespread hostility to the so-called "war on terror".

The millions who marched against war have not yet succeeded in getting the troops out – but we have created a climate in which a real fight back can take place against these attacks on civil liberties.

This time round at least Brown appears to have got the police on board – although with Met Chief Ian Blair on the ropes and dependent on Labour's support to hold on to his job against furious criticism over the shooting of Jean Charles De Menezes – this is not that significant.

The claim that this extension is "necessary" has been contested by a string of senior establishment figures.

These include the Director of Public Prosecutions, Ken MacDonald, former Lord Chief Justice Woolf and former Attorney General Lord Goldsmith.

Even the police accept extended time limits would not have made any difference to any investigation so far. And Home Secretary Jacqui Smith has been forced to concede that the circumstances have not yet arisen where it might be necessary.

Research by Liberty has established that Britain's existing 28-day limit is already the longest in any comparable democracy.

Even Russia and Turkey – two states notorious for their authoritarianism, both plagued by so-called "terrorism" – have limits of five and seven and a half days respectively.

As part of a "hearts and minds" offensive to win over a hostile public, new MI5 chief Jonathan Evans was sent out on the eve of the Queen's speech to ratchet up anxiety about the terrorist threat. The problem, he said, is an ideological one and the root causes have to be addressed.

But his list ("identity, relative deprivation and social integration") missed out the most important causes – Britain's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, its support for Israel's occupation of Palestine and the government's assault on Britain's Muslims.

Evans warned there were at least 2,000 terrorists in this country. But this ten-fold increase on MI5 estimates at the beginning of the decade represents the clearest signal of failure in the government's strategy.

Nonetheless MI5 is having its strength doubled to 4,000 over the next four years. And Whitehall officials are drawing up "counter-narratives" designed to explain the government's "foreign policy in its totality" to counteract the influence of "anti-western ideologies".

Blair was stopped in his tracks – his twin-brother Brown can be as well.



Council staff face cut on single status

Birmingham City Council are sending out new contracts to Council workers with changes to pay, flexibility and working hours.

Thousands of staff are losing pay which impacts on their whole family and the councils package does not deliver equal pay.

Workers from all the council unions are demanding that council withdraw their imposed package.

They are circulating a petition demanding that the Government should be made to put in the money needed to increase the pay of low paid workers without cutting the pay of others.

The government has committed £76 billion to a new Trident nuclear missile system and has so far given Northern Rock £22 billion. The money is there but the Governments priorities are wrong.

Trade unionists will be lobbying the councillors on December 4 asking that they lobby the government to fully fund the Single Status package.

A snap-shot of the life of a Respect councillor

Ger Francis

Over 90 people attended the South Birmingham Respect meeting earlier this week. The bulk of the meeting was given over to a comprehensive report from our two local councillors, Salma Yaqoob and Mohammad Ishtiaq.

Environmental concerns are a top priority for our councillors. Sparkbrook is a poor, inner city ward, with very high housing density, a high number of restaurants and fast food outlets, and inadequate council cleaning services.

Problems with rubbish and rats are a major concern for residents. There is a general sense that the area is dirty and because of that some residents feel a lack of pride in where they live.

The councillors are challenging this perception with a 'Respect your area' campaign. This is an initiative involving local residents, the Sparkbrook Neighbourhood Forum, Balsall Heath Forum and over 100 local youth which has led to 26 clean-ups in the ward over three months.

The thinking behind the

campaign is to be proactive in generating greater local pride in keeping our streets clean, while also highlighting inadequate council provision. The feedback on the campaign has been very positive.

The positive working relationships between a number of local community organisations has been one of the most encouraging features of this campaign. In the past we have been hampered by rivalry and division between residents' organisations who often feel in competition with each other over funding.

This has been compounded by the decision of the council to cut funding for community support agencies like the Birmingham Association of Neighbourhood Forums and the Birmingham Community Empowerment Network.

To try and overcome this Respect councillors have used NRF funding to help build the capacity of neighbourhood forums so that residents do not feel disempowered in the decision making process.

To that end, Salma is chairing the Ward Development Initiative, which has funded three support workers to work

with the forums in identifying local needs and to facilitate cooperative working.

This is now beginning to pay off. Instead of being in competition with each other, all forums will now work together to share knowledge and expertise. All will be aware of what funding bids each are submitting so that they work together to support each other's bids, and share in any success.

This may sound like a small achievement, but personality tensions, competition and jealousy, have undermined local community organisation.

Getting people to work together in this way is an important step forward, and testimony to the people skills and a commitment to a bottom up approach of both councillors.

On this last point, Salma is also doing a lot of work with local women's organisations to encourage greater participation on Ward Advisory Board and Ward Committee. Many women find the involvement in these bodies difficult because they are male dominated, often acrimonious and intimidating.

The councillors also reported that they had also secured funding for two people and a van to provide an additional flexible clean-up service that can supplement rubbish collection between designated times.

Salma and Ishtiaq reported on their attendance at a meeting, organised by St Paul's Trust and Balsall Heath Forum, on tackling climate change at a neighbourhood level.

An action plan was drawn up with an emphasis on increasing local awareness and take-up of solar paneling, making new builds more energy efficient, examining existing energy supply contracts to see how environmentally friendly our suppliers are, and increasing the number of landmark environmentally friendly buildings.

At present Sparkbrook has the first eco-friendly Mosque and Gudwara in the city. Salma also announced she would be speaking at the Climate Change demo in London on December 8th and encouraged people to attend.

Concern was expressed at the meeting at the attempt by

council management to discipline two local environmental wardens for delivering 'political' leaflets.

The leaflet in question was a council leaflet, highlighting an additional extra council bulky rubbish collection but funded locally as a result of a decision taken by our councillors. Management alleged the leaflet was 'political' because it advertised surgery details of the three local councillors (two Respect and one independent).

Salma attended one of the disciplinary hearings, intervened, and no further charges or disciplinary action were taken. There is a feeling that this is politically-motivated interference from elements of the so-called 'Progressive Alliance' – the Tory/Lib Dem coalition that runs Birmingham.

Ishtiaq reported that £25,000 was being allocated for improved street lighting and that both he and Salma, in conjunction with residents, had done a tour of the ward to identify the most suitable sites.

Salma reported on a meeting with senior regeneration officers in which she was

The council has cut funding for community support agencies like the Association of Neighbourhood Forums and the Community Empowerment Network.

asked to take a lead in identifying worklessness issues in the ward, with hopes of large scale funding for immediate and long term strategic goals. She promised to keep everybody up to speed as this developed.

Drug abuse is a source of concern in the ward. Respect Sparkbrook councillors have committed the highest level of financial support of anywhere in the city to fight this problem at ward level.

Some of the funding allocated has been used to finance the opening of the new KIKIT centre on the Stratford Rd. The centre provides prevention and treatment services for drug addiction as well as help for parents and carers who are often ignored by mainstream services.

Salma expressed concern that both she and Ishtiaq are receiving complaints of new identification hurdles when travelling to India.

Apparently, British passports holders of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin, with family ties in India, are being asked to provide letters of confirmation of identity from their local councillors or MP.

Salma reported on the battle over single status in the council. In the name of a national equal pay deal the City Council is trying to cut the wages of thousands of already low paid staff.

She said it should instead be demanding that the government pay the shortfall citing the example of the £24 billion - nearly £1,000 from every taxpayer - the government is spending to bail out the bankers of Northern Rock. Salma encouraged people to support the union protest over single status, next Tuesday, before the full council meeting.

Unfortunately, the protest clashes with an invite from the Venezuelan Embassy to attend the presentation of letters of credence from the new Venezuelan Ambassador, *Samuel Moncada*, to the Queen!

Salma said how proud she was to receive the invite, and how proud she was of the association between our patch of Birmingham and the Bolivarian Revolution, mentioning both Venezuela's resolute anti-imperialism and commitment to equality and social justice.

She will, however, be speaking this weekends Latin American conference in London, in addition to visiting the Stop the War conference, and encouraged people to attend both. On other international issues, Salma announced plans in conjunction with the South Asian Alliance for a meeting on the crisis in Pakistan demanding the restora-

tion of democratic rights.

Salma offered congratulations to Raghib Ahsan - Respect candidate for East Lozells and Handsworth at last years local elections - on the success of his 10 year battle to prove racial discrimination against the Labour Party.

The judgment of the Law Lords was damning, with its conclusion that Labour had directly discriminated against him because he was of Pakistani origin, and then victimised him for taking the matter to court.

The effect of Labour's victimization had been to effectively kill Raghib's political career at a time when he was the most high profile black political figure in the city. A letter from Salma to this effect had been printed in the Birmingham Post earlier in the week.

Finally, both councillors presented a positive report of the Respect Renewal conference. Ishtiaq explained he had never attended anything like that before and found it uplifting.

Our chair, Mark Holland, praised Ishtiaq's intervention at the Renewal conference when in response to allegations of communalism, Ishtiaq explained that he had been put under pressure not to stand against the Lib Dem candidate on the grounds he was from the same biraderi, and by standing he would split the biraderi vote. Ishtiaq resisted those pressures out of a conviction that this kind of politics had to be broken.

There was a proposal to take a report on the 'other' conference, with one speaker for and against. This was overwhelmingly defeated.

A new 19 strong committee was elected. There was a short, frank, but civil and disciplined exchange by all concerned about the appropriateness or otherwise to have people on a committee hostile to George and Salma. It was the overwhelming view of the meeting that it was inappropriate.

There was a round of applause for long standing SWP member and Respect treasurer, Andy North. Andy had expressed a wish to resign the post of treasurer, and he was thanked for his hard work since the establishment of Respect in Birmingham.

After the meeting was declared over, everybody hung around for some tasty samosas and snacks, where most of the discussion I was engaged in was upbeat and positive, with several ideas to make our meetings more interactive and enjoyable.

All in all, a very informative and productive experience.



Effective and coordinated student protest demands a democratic organisation and independent leadership. Photo: Andrew Wiard

Students fight to defend their democratic voice

**Steve Sweeney,
Anglia Ruskin
University student
environment officer**

The future of the National Union of Students (NUS) as a democratic body, fighting for students is under threat.

The right wing NUS bureaucrats were attempting to push through structural changes via an extraordinary conference in Leicester as we went to press. The changes would reduce the NUS to a charity lobbying on behalf of its members.

The proposals include replacing NUS conference with a "congress" and the creation of a senate which would run the union, the majority of which would consist of unelected full time officials.

Motions to congress would then go through the separate "zones", with increasingly bureaucratic layers.

A further erosion of democracy is the proposal that local student unions would no longer have to hold cross campus ballots to elect delegates to congress.

The extraordinary conference was called undemocratically in order to push through these changes and present them as a fait accompli at the NUS National Delegates Conference in 2008. Many students' unions

Respect opposes the undemocratic changes proposed for NUS and calls for an extension to democracy instead. The cuts to conference made in 2004 should be restored and more time allowed for debate on key issues.

are taking a position to support the changes without consulting the students that they effect.

We have seen the impact students have had in the history of the movement. They played a key role in the events of France in 1968, with widespread opposition to the Vietnam War and anger at overcrowding of universities.

Student resistance,

culminating with the occupation and re opening of the Sorbonne University showed that these tactics could be successful and gave confidence to other sections of society.

More recently, French students united with workers to overturn the draconian CPE laws, forcing then President Jacques Chirac to retreat. In Greece in 2006, students occupied 420 out of 450 colleges against neo-liberal educational reforms

The right-wing leadership of the NUS, many of them Labour Party members, has held back students in their fight back, against top up fees and for free education for all.

The decision to affiliate to the Stop the War Coalition is a positive step, however the NUS Education Funding Campaign would mean no action would be taken by students, and proposes instead lobbying of education ministers and MP's.

Despite accusations of young people and students being apathetic, evidence would point to the contrary. In February 2003, students across the country led classroom walkouts, protests and organised demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq.

They are playing a role in the environmental movement in a more radical way than the three mainstream parties and

many are concerned about the spiralling debt they will incur thanks to the policies of those who themselves received a free education.

With the three mainstream parties offering varying degrees of war, cuts, privatisation and attacks on free education, students need a voice that offers an alternative.

Respect remains the only party that was against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and opposes any attempts to attack Iran. We believe in a fully funded education system that is free for all and will continue to fight against top up fees.

Respect opposes the undemocratic changes proposed for NUS and calls for an extension to democracy instead. The cuts to conference made in 2004 should be restored and more time allowed for debate on key issues.

The number of part-time members elected to the national executive should be increased to improve democracy.

Respect will be campaigning and organising on campuses throughout the country and will be holding a national tour next term with speakers including Salma Yaqoob and George Galloway.

Israeli teachers strike hits at neoliberal rulers

The longest Teachers' strike in Israel's history - a new brand of workers' struggle

The public support for the teachers strike in Israel seems unprecedented. Also the readiness of the teachers – some of them after 20 and 30 years in schools – to stand in the streets in daily demonstration, creates the feeling of a new spirit.

The longest teachers' strike in the history of Israel is no accident. Nor is the fact that 60% of the public supports the strike. The Government's refusal to raise the meagre salaries of the teachers in this time of Israeli prosperity looks unfair to many.

The Finance Ministry insists on restricting the budget ceiling to an annual 1.7% increase despite the existence of a surplus and more than 5% growth in 2007. The teachers' strike puts on the agenda a simple question that many in Israel ask today: whose land is it? The New billionaires' or the working people's?

The huge demonstration that took place on November 17 in Rabin Square, Tel Aviv, was something that no trade union or social movement in Israel ever organized before. Labour disputes organized by the Histadrut in recent years tend to involve a strike in a particular branch, or even sometimes a general strike, but never have the workers gone into the streets to demonstrate for weeks on end, all over the country.

The strong workers' committees at the airport or the Electricity Company threaten to stop the movement of planes or to cut the power supply, but there has never before been a serious attempt to make the struggle a general one – inclusive of everybody.

It is unclear whether the decision to step out to the streets was a central one made by the High School Teachers Organization or a spontaneous initiative. What is clear now is that this type of militant, direct-action strike has mobilized tens of thousands of teachers, high school students and the parents' association, all of whom participate in the daily activities.

Three years ago in the midst of former

Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's neoliberal reforms, the government put forward a reform plan for the educational system, formulated by a committee headed by businessman Shlomo Dovrat.

The essence of the reform was to privatize the system by giving school headmasters powers to manage the budget, hire and fire teachers and even to decide on the curriculum. At the time both teachers' unions – the Israeli Teachers Union (ITU) and the High Schools Teachers Organization (HSTO) refused to cooperate. As a result, the reform died.

The teachers are not fighting for luxuries. Public schools have deteriorated in recent years as a result of government cuts in public spending. According to data supplied by Mr. Shlomo Weinberg, the secretary of the HSTO in the Carmel Region, the education budget was cut in the last 5 years by NIS 4.5 billion.

This means that 285,000 hours were slashed from the high schools – about 8.5 hours per week for each student!

The stakes are great. The Government sees this fight as a test of its ability to stick to budgetary discipline and not give in to public demands. The teachers have nothing to lose: they reached a level of frustration and a feeling of degradation so deep that they prefer to lose their jobs rather than return to work under the old conditions.

The support HSTO has gained, and the amazing energies of its members and their students, could prove to be a new beginning for a social movement in Israel.

We at WAC will do whatever we can to materialize this promise, so that Arab and Jewish teachers and students, as well as all workers, can find new ways of organizing and fighting to create a future for all.

WAC, the Workers Advice Center (or Ma'an in Arabic), is an initiative for building an independent labor association. For more information go to WAC's website or contact them at: maan@maan.org.il



Palestine: new smokescreen over injustice

Betty Hunter, General Secretary of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign

Behind the razzmatazz of the Annapolis meeting at the end of November when the Americans managed to corral 49 states into a one day show of unity for the establishment of a Palestinian state, lies the deepest Middle East crisis for half a century. It is a crisis for which Israel and its Western backers – including the UK and the EU – are largely responsible.

A genuine meeting for a sustainable peace would have had an agenda based on the implementation of international law and UN resolutions to allow the Palestinian people to exercise fully their right to self determination. Instead the exclusion of the elected Prime Minister made a mockery of the use of the word democracy.

Sixty years of ignoring the wishes of the Palestinian people will continue, since the purpose of this meeting for Israel backed – as always – by the US, is to prevent such an outcome.

A declaration that talks about final status issue will take place within one-year rings hollow after the failures



of Oslo and the Roadmap. Yet it is this very roadmap that has been resurrected as the framework for the new talks.

In Annapolis, the US succeeded in bringing together a large international gathering but the invited participants were there to be urged to normalize relations with Israel and to demonstrate that the US can still muster support for its war policies and bolster Bush's bullish policy against Iran.

Key absentees to any serious discussions about the region were, besides Hamas, Lebanon, Hezbollah and Iran.

The Arab states already have a clear position of recognizing Israel on condition of ending its occupation, withdrawing to the pre- 1967 borders, dealing justly with refugee rights and recognizing the Palestinian right to east Jerusalem as its capital.

Israel has steadfastly re-

fused to have anything to do with their 'peace plan' yet these same Arab states sat round a table with Israel while it continues to consolidate its land grab and tramples on the national and political rights of the Palestinians.

The dozens of states represented heard George Bush say that a negotiated settlement "will establish Palestine as a Palestinian homeland, just as Israel is a homeland for the Jewish people."

This formulation of the two state solution not only denies the rights of Palestinians driven from their land and homes inside the 1967 borders of Israel but raises serious concerns about the fate of the 20% of Israeli citizens who are Palestinian.

The racists already calling for transfer, some of whom are in the Israeli government, will be emboldened.

Palestinian refugees will continue to be refused their inalienable rights while Jews, worldwide, without any connection to the historic land of Palestine will be able to live in modern day Israel.

While the participants listened to the exhortations for peace, the assault on Gaza's 1.5 million people continued.

At the end of December in London, John Ging, Director of UNWRA (Gaza) stated,

"Their [the Gazans'] living conditions continue their relentless downward spiral, to what can now only be described as truly appalling. ... This year, 649 Palestinians have been killed and 2819 have been injured, in those figures are the deaths of 63 children with 86 children injured...."

The siege of Gaza is creating a humanitarian disaster, with the destruction of the economy, the collapse of health and education services.

It has been manufactured in order to destroy support for Hamas and to bolster the position of Abbas. Hamas will have been weakened by the presence of the Arab states at Annapolis, but that does not mean that Abbas' position has been strengthened at home.

While he was in the USA, thousands of Palestinians were demonstrating in the cities of the West Bank and Gaza to express their refusal to surrender their rights.

This indication of the continuing resistance of the people is remarkable given the pressure of collective punishment imposed on them by international leaders.

Hundreds of people protesting in each of the cities of Ramallah, Bethlehem, Hebron and Nablus were attacked by PA forces, resulting in 200 ar-



Photo: Molly Cooper

rests and 30 injuries. In Gaza, two thousand demonstrated peacefully.

This willingness on the part of the Palestinian Authority forces to attack their own people and their right to freedom of speech shows the weakness of Abbas' position.

It is also a dire warning of how he might behave towards the people of Gaza, since the Israelis will continue to insist that Palestinians provide security for the state with the fourth largest military in the world.

Ehud Olmert was reported in Ha'aretz on Monday November 26 as saying,

"We will not be able to accept the fact that they [the Palestinians] will be relieved of the obligation to prevent terrorism from the Gaza Strip."

When President Bush declared that "while the borders of a Palestinian state are important, the nature of a Palestinian state is just as important. ... Israel must demonstrate its support for the creation of a prosperous and successful Palestinian state by removing unauthorized outposts, ending settlement expansion," he is endorsing his 2004 letter to Sharon about 'facts on the ground'.

In effect he is rewarding the Israelis for their decades of violations of international law with the theft of Palestinian homes and land.

However mention of giving up even 'unauthorised outposts' creates problems for Olmert. In Jerusalem on Monday thousands of Israelis demonstrated against Annapolis, declaring that they would not allow their government to retreat from the settlements.

Three members of Olmert's coalition: MKs David Tal (Yis-

The continuing resistance of the people is remarkable given the pressure of collective punishment imposed on them by international leaders.

rael Beiteinu), Nissim Zeev (Shas) and Zeev Elkin (Kadima) promised the protesters they would not allow Olmert to give up Jerusalem or freeze construction in the settlements.

These sentiments may not be those of the majority of Israelis, but support for them is visibly growing, as is the confidence of settlers to step up attacks on Palestinians through-

out the West Bank.

When John Dugard, UN Special Rapporteur on Palestine, in September 2006 declared his disgust with the UN, the Quartet and Israel for their blatant disregard for Palestinian rights he urged people around the world to take up the responsibility shirked by their leaders.

Since then understanding of the need for action has grown internationally and here in Britain it is becoming increasingly accepted that people of conscience can no longer remain silent.

The Lobby of parliament called to mark the UN day of solidarity for the Palestinian people on November 28 was more successful than ever, with nearly six hundred people from all over the UK, and all walks of life attending to lobby more than 150 MPs.

The response from MPs is growing ever more favourable with Early Day Motions winning significant support.

A packed meeting of 200 in the evening heard the Bishop of Winchester, the Palestinian Delegate to the UK Prof. Manuel Hassassian, trade union leaders, Alison Shepherd and Hugh Lanning and MPs Gerald Kaufman, Richard Burden, Jeremy Corbyn and Brian Iddon speak about the need for immediate action from the British government to put pressure on Israel to implement international law.

The purpose of the Palestine Solidarity is to create a mass, broad-based campaign to effect such a change on government policy.

We will be campaigning hard to make 2008, the 60th year of the Palestinian Nakba (catastrophe) one which sees real progress towards this.

OCCUPATION

60 year countdown to today's crisis

Patrick Scott

1947: United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 all for Palestine to be divided into a Jewish state (57% of Palestine) and an Arab state (43% of Palestine) even though Jews occupied less than 7% of the land at the time.

1948: Civil war in Palestine after the end of the British mandate. Israel declares independence and Arab states declare war against Israel in defence of Palestinian rights. Israel seizes control of 78% of Palestinian land. Jordan and Egypt hold the West Bank and Gaza respectively whilst the city of Jerusalem is divided. The overwhelming majority of Palestinian refugees who fled their homes during the civil war are prevented from returning after hostilities have ended. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 194 supports right of Palestinian refugees to regain their homes if they so desire or to receive compensation if they choose not to return.

1950: Israel passes the Law of Return and Absentee Property Law. Any Palestinian not present at the time of the national census would be determined an "absentee" and the rights to their land would be transferred to the Israeli Knesset; extensive confiscation of Arab property.

1956-1957: Suez War begins when Israel, supported by Britain and France, occupies the Gaza Strip and Sinai. Israel is subsequently forced to withdraw under pressure from the United States.

1964: The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is formed with the support of Egypt and other Arab states.

1967: In the Six Day War Israel attacks Egypt on the spurious grounds that it was pre empting an Egyptian attack. Israel subsequently occupies the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, and the Golan Heights. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 calls for withdrawal of Israeli troops from the newly occupied territories. About half a million new Palestinian refugees are created, many of whom had previously been refugees from the 1948 civil war!

1968: Israel begins to establish Jewish settlements in the post 1967 occupied territories, a process which has continued to the present day.

1973: Egypt launches a military offensive against Israel in the Yom Kippur War in order to regain the lands it lost in 1967. Egypt subsequently regains control of Sinai though Gaza remains under Israeli control

1974: The Arab League recognizes the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

1975: The United Nations grants observer status to the PLO.

1980: Israel annexes East Jerusalem. This action is condemned by the United Nations Security Council.

1982: Israeli invades Lebanon, the PLO evacuates from Beirut to Tunisia. Thousands of Palestinian refugees murdered in the massacres at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps near Beirut.

1985: Israel withdraws from most of Lebanon, leaving control of the southern areas to an Israeli-allied Lebanese force.

1987-1993: The first Palestinian intifada. It is largely non violent in form through demonstrations, strikes and other mass actions but is met with violent repression by the Israeli state.

1993: Israel drastically restricts Palestinian movement between the post 1967 Occupied Territories and Israel. Israel and the PLO sign the Declaration of Principles (aka the Oslo Accords") on interim self-government arrangements.



1994: 29 Palestinians praying in the Hebron mosque are murdered by Israeli far rightist Baruch Goldstein in a machine gun attack. Goldstein is beaten to death in the mosque: his death certificate describes the cause of death as murder! The first Palestinian suicide bombing against Israeli civilians is carried out as a response to the Hebron massacre.

1996: The first Palestinian elections for president and parliament result in a victory for Yassir Arafat and his supporters.

1998: The PLO renounces anti-Israel clauses in the PLO charter.

2000: The second intifada begins after Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount.

2002: Israel reoccupies nearly all Palestinian areas evacuated as part of the Oslo Accords whilst Yassir Arafat is under house arrest in Ramallah. The Arab League endorses a plan to recognize Israel in exchange for an end to the occupation of the post 1967 occupied territories. Israel starts to build the Separation Wall within the West Bank, confiscating additional Palestinian lands.

2004: The International Court of Justice finds the Separation Wall "contrary to international law". Yassir Arafat dies in Paris and is buried in Ramallah.

2005: Mahmoud Abbas is elected President of the Palestinian Authority; Israel increases settlement activity in and around Jerusalem; Israel unilaterally evacuates all Israeli settlements in Gaza and four from the northern West Bank.

2006: Hamas wins a majority in the Palestinian Parliamentary Elections in January. Israel launches a massive military offensive against Gaza leading to the deaths of about 400 Palestinians. In July Israel launches air and sea attacks against Lebanon, over 1,000 Lebanese die and over 100,000 are displaced.



Last December in London: climate change protest. Photo: Andrew Wiard

Brown's bluster won't tackle climate change

**Phil Thornhill,
organiser of the
Campaign against
Climate Change
(Continued from
front page)**

We are currently faced by the insanity of a government that urges us to boil less water in our kettles while it builds more roads, airports and coal-fired power stations.

The worst is that the way the issue is put across takes away the urgency that ought to be there. We all know that if the government really thinks something is urgent it *tells* us to do things, is doesn't *ask* us.

In the 1940s it didn't say, "the Germans are sinking our ships – please don't eat too much" ... it imposed rationing.

Moreover we had solemn addresses from the Prime Minister on the gravity of the threat we faced at that time, there was a massive information campaign to explain it and the whole of society was mobilised to deal with it. Overcoming the threat was the key and absolute priority for all departments of government.

That's clearly the kind of thing that should be happening in our struggle against what is an even more dire threat, faced by not only our nation but the whole

The march in London will be part of a truly global protest, one of at least fifty events occurring around the world.

world, from the catastrophic destabilisation of global climate.

But given the government is not doing those things, is not showing the resolution and leadership it should, then clearly it's got to come from us.

In this context that increased 'climate awareness' can be a critical resource, but only in so far as it is used to get the government to act, whilst personal carbon-cutting will only be any use in so far as it builds the moral argument – to get the government to act.

To the extent that it removes the focus from urgent government action, or we are deluded into thinking our personal, or 'community' efforts will be sufficient, then it can

be a negative factor.

Getting the government to do something that at the moment it isn't is a familiar enough challenge faced by all sorts of campaigns in the past, and what we need to do is pretty much the same as what they had to do: mobilise as many people as possible, inspire them with as passionate a commitment as possible and make as loud and visible an impact as possible and generally raise the temperature around the issue in every way possible.

This is the best way to inject the sense of urgency that's not coming from the government, and is what *has to* happen – as well as that building of the moral argument through personal action.

That is why – at a minimum – we should be mobilising more and more people in visible displays of passionate commitment every year. This is why the Campaign against Climate Change tries to get as many people as it can to protest – at the seat of government power and hub of media attention, in the capital – every year.

And yet none of this is enough because – to continue the metaphor – the whole world is now at war – with the common enemy of 'ecological catastrophe' and the whole world needs to act together.

So anything our nation does is only useful insofar as it builds the moral argument for other nations to act, and for the whole world to act together.

And anything done at the international level is a million times more worthwhile than that done at the national level. That is why the damage done by Bush in blocking international progress – as not reported on the *Guardian's* front page in 2001 – remains an infinitely greater weight on the negative scales than any amount of increased 'climate-chatter' and conscientious carbon cutting is on the 'positive'.

That's why our march targets the US embassy yet again.

But more important that's why we have tried to project our campaign into the international arena, to build an international movement that can focus maximum 'global' pressure on wherever the greatest obstruction to progress at the international level lies.

That's why the march in London will be part of a truly global protest, one of at least fifty events occurring around the world. And that's why we have to keep building that global movement and keep coming out onto the streets until we get our and other governments to act, with the resolution and urgency that's required.

The problem with biofuels

Phil Ward

Biofuels are usually food crops which to make alternatives to petrol and diesel to run motor vehicles. The idea is that the plants grow again after they are harvested, taking up carbon dioxide from the air.

The fuels are supposed to be "carbon neutral", not increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and thus not contributing to global warming.

Suddenly, there is a huge market in biofuels, partly due to George Bush's decision to give a massive subsidy to US-produced petroleum substitutes. The effects are devastating.

The price of wheat has doubled and all other grain prices have gone up, as food crops are forced to compete with fuels.

In South-east Asia, large areas of forest are being destroyed to make way for palm-oil plantations to feed cars in the West.

This is worsening the greenhouse effect, as tropical forests are very efficient at absorbing carbon dioxide, and peat-bogs get drained, releasing huge amounts of the gas into the air.

One product that is becoming popular is jatropha, a plant from Central America, whose oil can be used for diesel and that can grow on land not suitable for food crops.

Already, there are ½ million hectares being grown in India, with 2 million in

China and large plantations in Burma, Philippines and several African countries. This is despite the fact that the plant has not been studied as a plantation crop at all.

In India, there is a dispute that sums how the global market in crops works. One jatropha pioneer is promoting the idea that the crop should be planted by small farmers, inter-cropped with food, so that they are not totally dependent on the fuel crop.

Village-based processing would enable the oil to be used locally – generating electricity for example.

At the other end of the scale, DaimlerChrysler carried out a publicity stunt, using jatropha diesel to take a Mercedes 6,000 km around India and up the Himalayas. The biggest commercial jatropha diesel producer is D1 Oils, based in the UK. Their main interest is supplying the UK haulage industry.

This sums up the choice for agriculture in the third world.

It can be used to supply the world market under conditions dictated by large corporations (and they don't come much bigger than DaimlerChrysler – sales in 2006: £108 billion), with plantations that will soon suck in large amounts of fertiliser, pesticide, herbicide, water and indeed fuel, causing their own ecological problems.

Or it can be used to support life and improve conditions for local farming communities.



Palm oil worker: biofuels divert resources from food production

Fighting for trade union action on climate change

**Roy Wilkes,
Secretary of the
Campaign against
Climate Change
Trade Union
Conference**

Most people in Britain will remember this year's summer with a simple two-word sentence: it rained. It seemed like the rain and flooding would never stop, especially for those living and working in places like Hull and Tewkesbury. But what was the cause of this, and can we expect similar problems in the future?

We are often reminded by the media that it is impossible to attribute any single weather event to climate change. And strictly speaking that's true. But flooding at these levels should only happen once every hundred years or so.

Yet already this Century we've seen patterns emerging which confirm all the predictions of the climate change models. 2000 saw the wettest Autumn in Britain since records began in the 1700s, with severe flooding particularly in York.

Then we had Cambridge 2001, Oxford 2003, Bocastle 2004 and Cumbria 2005. And that's just in Britain.

In India and Bangladesh, over 700 people lost their lives this summer due to flooding and mudslides (not counting those who subsequently died of water-borne diseases.)

This illustrates a general rule of thumb about climate change – it is the poor who suffer the most, both in the poorer countries themselves, which lack adequate housing and flood defences, but also in richer countries like ours, where those who can't afford the ever rising insurance premiums will risk losing everything.

In the words of Rajendra Pachauri, Chairperson of the

Climate change is not about changing behaviour at the level of the individual. What is needed is a collective response, by the whole of society,

United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change,

"It's the poorest of the poor in the world, and this includes poor people even in prosperous societies, who are going to be the worst hit".

But actually the most important weather event this summer wasn't in Hull or Tewkesbury; it wasn't even in South Asia. The most important event, in terms of the health of our planet, occurred in the Arctic.

The Canadian Arctic Survey recorded temperatures of 22 degrees this summer, that's *15 degrees above the long term average*. This unprecedented arctic heatwave meant that by September ice coverage was fully 39% below the average for that time of year.

Why is this such a huge problem? Because the arctic provides our planet's natural air conditioning; ice reflects heat from the sun, and less ice means more heat being absorbed by the oceans.

This is one of the feedback effects climate scientists have been warning us about for years, although it's all happening far sooner than most of them predicted.

Hardly anyone now doubts that climate change is real, that it is getting worse, and that it could lead us to catastrophe. The question is of course, what do we do about it?

One thing we can't do is

rely on the 'powers that be' to sort out this mess. The British Government, for example, despite all its green talk, refuses to include annual targets for emission cuts in its climate bill. And now we see Gordon Brown back-tracking on the absurdly modest proposal that 20% of electricity should be generated by renewable sources by 2020. Even the government's own adviser on these matters, Sir Jonathon Porritt, has described government policy as "crabby incrementalism."

Many environmentalists suggest that we should all concentrate on trying to reduce our individual carbon footprints. This approach is not only ineffective it is dangerous.

Even if everyone who reads this article reduces their carbon footprint to zero, it would not delay for a single minute our headlong march towards catastrophe.

The laws of supply and demand dictate that if every one of us stops buying plane tickets or cars or petrol or electricity or whatever, then the price of those commodities will fall, which means of course that others can buy more.

Climate change is not about changing behaviour at the level of the individual. What is needed is a collective response, by the whole of society, and that's why this issue has to become a central concern for all trade unionists.

The Campaign against Climate Change will be hosting a conference for trade unionists in February 2008, to discuss the big questions thrown up by climate change. The conference aims to provide an arena for both education and networking, so that we can discuss what needs to be done in our own workplaces and within our own unions, and how we can best organise for real change. Ensure that your branch is represented.



Measuring the footprints

Phil Ward

The United Nations Environment Programme has just released its fourth Global Environment Outlook, announcing that humanity is using resources at such a rate that it needs "1.4 worlds" to keep it going. This method of accounting raises many questions. You might ask: "how come we haven't seen total collapse, if we need 1.4 worlds?"

The idea is based on what is called the "Ecological Footprint", devised by the Global Footprint Network. The footprint is the total area of biologically productive area of land and sea required to sustain humanity's activities. A recent study by the Network, for example, shows that there are 11.2 billion "global hectares" (gh) available for our use and in 2003 we used products and services equivalent to 14.1 gh.

This can happen for

two reasons. Firstly, with activities like fishing we are using resources faster than they can be replaced. So in 2003, the Network calculates that we used fish that would be produced by 936 million gh, when we only had 859 million gh of productive fishing ground available to us. The over-fishing crisis is well-known, so this difference is expected.

The second calculation is more controversial. The Global Footprint Network also includes the amount of land needed to soak up humankind's carbon dioxide emissions. This amounts to nearly 7.3 billion gh, more than half of the 14.1 gh we "used" in 2003.

The reason that we are still surviving is that this land is NOT used to soak up carbon dioxide: the gas is just being released with little thought for the future. Other means of dealing with carbon dioxide emissions are being sought,

but with little urgency from world's major governments. The Ecological Footprint Network has also looked at different countries' footprints, to see which are living sustainably. Not surprisingly, they found that, because of their "carbon footprint", no Western country was doing so, but many third-world ones were.

They then looked at each country's Human Development Index (HDI), which is the UN's estimate of quality of life, and includes measures of literacy, health and income. Only one country, Cuba, was shown to have a "western" level of HDI and to be living sustainably.

Cuba is the only country where capitalism does not reign supreme, while having quite low levels of inequality.

These two conditions, it seems, are required for an ecologically sustainable society, with reasonable living standards.

In my view

What would he know about climate change?

Kevin Evans, a member of Newham Respect and the PCS union

What does the twenty first century threat of climate change have to do with a nineteenth century philosopher called Karl Marx?

Surely he has nothing to say about the environment? Not so, Marx had a lot to say about the mechanics and process of capitalism, the latter would in its pursuit of profit endanger the planet and all our lives.

Marx also had concerns over the environment as did his friend Frederick Engels who said "at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature".

Marx was clear that no understanding of society was possible unless it was based on the natural environment in which that society existed.

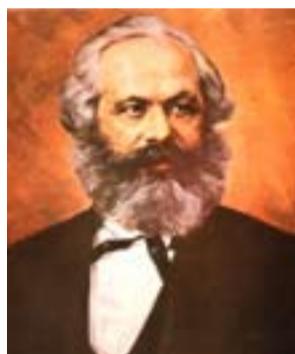
Marx has been portrayed as anti-environmental but this is far from the truth. He came up with an understanding of sustainable development and argued that we have to protect the earth and talked about the dangers of destroying it.

He knew that capitalism could produce benefits but also that it was a system that could destroy the environment in its search for global domination.

In my view capitalism is the source and cause of our predicament and climate change issues.

K. William Kapp *The Social Costs of Private Enterprise* notes that

"the entire neoclassical [economic] view, it should be clear beyond any doubt, rests on turning the environment into a set of commodities... If environmental degradation and pollution are evident, the



That's Karl, not Groucho

economist reasons, it must be because the environment has not fully incorporated within the market economy, and does not operate according to the laws of economic supply and demand."

However, John Bellamy Foster's *Ecology and Capitalism* states "nature is not a commodity produced and sold on the market... the market is extremely inefficient compared with nature itself".

Foster is clear that it is not individuals who are responsible for the environmental problems that face us "but rather the treadmill of production on which we are all placed that has become the main enemy of the environment".

As individuals we can do our small bit to halt global warming. However, individuals on their own are not enough. We need a political organisation and a different structure of society that can shape and help the environment.

We need a better and more effective transport system not based on profit but on people's needs.

Millions of people are getting involved in environmental campaigns and many trade unions are becoming engaged in climate change issues.

It is these human pressures and forces that need to come together, if we are to tackle successfully the climate change problems that we face.

This was not a bank borrowing short term and lending



George Galloway speaks at protest over First Solution collapse, July 2007. Photo: Guy Smallman

Government ignores plight of victims

Anger lingers over First Solution

By Rob Hoveman, Parliamentary Assistant to George Galloway MP

At the end of June 2007, First Solution Money Transfer Ltd collapsed, owing 2,000 creditors around £2million.

This was a business that grew from £4million turnover to almost £100 million turnover in just three years. It offered money transfer to Bangladesh cheaper, and quicker and to more outlying locations than its rivals.

And it seemed to come with an impeccable pedigree. Aggressively and constantly promoted on Bengali TV in Britain, and particularly Channel 5 whose managing director, Dr Fozol Mahmood was the brains behind First Solution.

He was very well connected to members of the British Bangladeshi political establishment, members of whom lent themselves to promoting the credibility of the business.

The collapse was devastating. Many of the poorest people in Britain had been sending small but vital sums of money to the poorest people in the world, their friends and family in Bangladesh, for vital operations, for family support and for weddings and other events. And there seemed no coherent explanation for the collapse.

This was not a bank borrowing short term and lending

The contrast with Northern Rock could not be more stark. And a voluntary "charity" campaign set up by New Labour Baroness Uddin was closed after just one month with just £100 in the fund,

long term on dodgy mortgages. It was simply transferring money from Britain to Bangladesh, taking from Peter and giving to Paul. The directors' various explanations for the collapse simply made no sense.

Azmal Hussain, the chair of Respect in Tower Hamlets, moved quickly to set up a creditors group which now boasts some 850 members owed over £1.3 million.

He and local Respect MP George Galloway started to raise serious concerns about the collapse. As a result the government moved with unprecedented speed to seize the books of the company in a

dawn raid just one week after the company ceased trading.

An investigation was launched by the Companies Investigation Branch of the Insolvency Service.

Towards the end of July, George Galloway initiated a debate in the Commons with a minister Kitty Usher in order to keep the pressure up.

In August the Secretary of State for Business obtained a court order to place the company into official receivership, taking its liquidation away from an insolvency practitioner, Panos Eliades, with a colourful history.

All of this was very welcome. But from the beginning of August things went very quiet.

Despite repeated emails from Azmal Hussain to the Official Receiver and Minister Stephen Timms, the government failed to keep him and the creditors who they were supposed to be representing and protecting informed of their plans to sell on the company and come to a deal with the company's directors and agents.

Moreover the government has washed its hands of providing any help to the creditors despite the fact it gave the Bangladesh £7 million in 2004 to encourage money transfer out of the informal sector and into the hands of companies like First Solution, whilst putting in place no financial security regulation.

The contrast with Northern Rock could not be more stark. And a voluntary "charity" campaign set up by New Labour's Baroness Uddin was closed after just one month, with just £100 in the fund,

On 21st November the company, whose name had now been changed by the Official Receiver to XTL Ltd, was wound up in the high court.

The receiver announced a deal whereby the assets of the company had been sold for £30,000 and another £415,000 was promised in a potentially legally enforceable deal with the directors and agents. Over a two year period, under the deal, creditors could get back up to 25p in the pound.

However how much money the creditors will ever really see under this deal is as clear as mud.

Azmal Hussain has called a meeting of all creditors for 1pm on Saturday 8th December at 49 Hanbury Street to discuss what to do next. George Galloway will be attending and addressing the meeting.

This will be followed by a formal creditors' meeting on Wednesday 19th December in the Conway Hall which will appoint a liquidator.

What is clear is that creditors regard the deal concluded with the agents and directors as an insult and they and we will not rest until the creditors have not only got their money back but they have also got justice.

Bangladesh climate protest will go ahead

Despite the devastating effects of the cyclone, campaigners in Bangladesh are still planning a demonstration on December 8 as part of the international day of action against climate change.

Originally the campaign had planned to organise mobilisations in each of the country's 30 districts but the effects of the cyclone itself and the fact that many activists have been putting resources into relief activity means that this is now not possible.

However Matin from the Bangladesh Campaign on Climate Change reports:

"We are expecting that police will allow us to go ahead with our plans though it won't be certain until we get the permission letter in hand. However, we hope we can do something.

"We planned to stage a peaceful, colourful rally in Dhaka city with 50 organisations altogether at 10 a.m. starting from the National Museum, Shahbag and ending at the National Press Club. Multiple banners, balloons, placards, festoon will make the rally an attractive one."

Phil Thornhill in London responded:

"Thanks very much

for this. Of course we appreciate the problems you must be having in Bangladesh, and we would all like to send our sympathy and support to yourself and the people of Bangladesh who are suffering from this latest climate-related disaster.

"It's a terrible irony that a climate-related disaster like this is what is making it so difficult for you to express your call for urgent action on climate change from the conference in Bali.

"We really appreciate that you are organising a demonstration in Dhaka.

"And we really appreciate the work you are doing in Bangladesh to explain to people that now the weather and weather-related disasters are not JUST phenomena of nature, but that there is now a human-created element..... and that this is something that the international community can and should do something about before it becomes too much worse....

"So thanks again and I will put your information up on the website. Let us know if there is anything else you would like us to put up there. Best wishes, Phil"



Last year's climate change march in Montreal: December 8 is another world-wide effort, linking efforts north and south



East London responds to cyclone disaster appeal

By Cllr ABJOL MIAH, leader of the Respect group Tower Hamlets council



The devastation caused by climate change is not something just to fear in the future. It is happening now. And it is the poorest people in the world who are paying the price.

Southern Bangladesh has suffered its worst cyclone since 1991. Thousands have died and millions have been rendered homeless.

Whatever the exact relationship between this cyclone and climate change we know two things for sure. First, a warmer atmosphere means tropical storms will become more destructive.

Second, rising sea levels mean that already 11 percent of the landmass of Bangladesh will suffer repeated flooding within the next few years.

This tragedy will be the first of many – unless action is taken now to halt climate change and to help the poorest people deal with the problems it has already created.

In Tower Hamlets – home to the largest Bangladeshi population outside Bangladesh – Respect has been part of the community response.

First of all we are alerting the whole of the community

in east London and beyond to the scale of the catastrophe. Respect is part of the community and our own members have been no less affected than anyone else. Two of our members gave interviews to ITV and BBC London about the cyclone.

Nasrin Akther has lost her aunt, her grandmother and 35 friends in the cyclone. Her home village has been flattened and one of her daughters is missing.

Communication is very difficult with the area but she has heard from other members of her family that virtually every building in her village has been destroyed and they are being forced to live in a primary school with no electricity and little food and water.

Nasrin showed tremendous courage in telling the television journalists about what had happened so that her story would bring the tragedy into the public's mind.

All of us in Respect are very proud of her for speaking out and have her in our hearts at this most difficult time.

Beauty Akther, who is not related but comes from the same area, is a member of the Tower Hamlets Respect committee. She says, "The homes of many members of my family have been destroyed.

"The area is devastated. I have two daughters and they are living with relatives. We don't know how the area will ever recover. We are asking people to give to the emergency appeal. But the gov-

ernment should act as well to give aid."

It is vital that aid is rushed to the area right now. Quite small sums of money go a long way in Bangladesh because it is so poor.

But Beauty Akther is right. The reason the death toll is as high as it is because of the grinding poverty of the region.

This has prevented people from building storm proof homes or getting the early warnings of extreme weather, which would enable them to evacuate the most vulnerable areas. That is why we also need more long-term development aid.

The British government has a particular role to play, given its connections with the sub-continent. Bengal made the British Empire rich.

The cyclone also brings home the urgency of action on climate change and global warming. This government has a miserable record so far on the reduction of carbon emissions.

There are double standards at work. There's a lot of talk about the carbon emissions of developing countries, but no serious action to reduce those of the big polluters like Britain.

Much more is needed than making individuals aware. It is about the government – local and national – stepping in.

To give you a small example. There's a recycling scheme in Tower Hamlets. But the collection of the recycling sacks

has been privatised. So it often doesn't happen on the day it should and rubbish is left in stairwells. The result is that residents give up participating in the scheme. They lose heart.

You won't be surprised to know that Tower Hamlets and Newham have the worst green ratings of any councils in Britain.

I don't believe that the culprits are the residents of east London, that's a copout for the council, the government and industry.

We are linking together collecting money for the cyclone appeal with information and calls for action over climate change.

In East London, with our connections to Bangladesh, we don't see climate change as a side issue. It is a matter of life and death and it is happening now. We are taking that message into the council chambers and onto the streets.

● You can find out how to donate to the Bangladesh Cyclone Appeal through this website - www.dec.org.uk. Please donate generously.

● Respect in Tower Hamlets is organising a number of fundraising events. See www.respectrenewal.org for details.

■ Abjol was overwhelmingly selected on Sunday 25 November to be Respect's prospective parliamentary candidate for Bethnal Green and Bow. George Galloway was unopposed as candidate for Poplar and Limehouse.

After the 'surge' in Iraq: Spot the invisible US presidential candidate!

**By Sharon Walia,
member of Stop
the War Coalition in
Nottingham**

Ex Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez's recent public announcements regarding the bleak situation in Iraq spawned a number of debates in congress and the mass media circuit.

Sanchez, who was the active general during the capture of Saddam Hussein and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, harshly condemned the lack of post war planning and overall incompetence of the government and the affiliated officials. Abstaining from naming George W. Bush personally, Sanchez stated that the administration and state department must "shoulder the responsibility for this catastrophic failure, and that the American people must hold them accountable".

Sanchez also commented on the January 2007 troop 'surge', labelling it as an act symbolising desperation and an attempt to retreat from the "political and economic realities of this war".

Admitting that he identified the invasion as a strategic failure immediately after taking command in Iraq, Sanchez offered no solutions on what should be done about the violent occupation of Iraq and conveniently glossed over the Abu Ghraib disaster.

Alan Greenspan who was chairman of the Federal Reserve from 1987-2006 and an adviser to Gordon Brown is another hard-line conservative who last month slated the occupation of Iraq, declaring it was "all about oil".

Prior to the March 2003 invasion, Greenspan told White House officials that ousting Saddam Hussein was crucial for protecting the vast oil supplies. Greenspan and Sanchez have accepted some praise for their comments criticising the dismal state of affairs in Iraq, but this raises a few questions.

Should these recent condemnations by top right-wing officials be seen as contributing to the 'bold' and 'brave' anti-war rhetoric? If the war had been more of a strategic 'success', with little Iraqi resist-



ance, then voices from the far right criticising the invasion would have been significantly reduced.

Senior conservative officials act as if it is simply a recent fad to pass judgement on the violence and occupation of Iraq which greatly overshadows those in Congress and the media who have been vocal protesters from the very beginning.

Congressman and presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich is the unsung hero of the anti-war movement in America, who has passionately reviled the invasion from its origins and made it a focal point of his presidential campaign.

Kucinich, whose presidential hopes are consistently discounted in the mainstream media, has affirmed that a complete troop withdrawal, the closing of military bases and the halt of funding is the only way to ease the devastating circumstances in Iraq.

The American media's insistence of keeping Kucinich out of sight, thus making him the 'invisible' candidate, is heavily 'dumbing' down the public and creating an illusion of choice among the Democrats.

During live coverage of the hugely successful CNN/YOUTUBE debate Kucinich's



Kucinich: echoing a mass US anti-war sentiment

responses were barely highlighted, and as soon as he spoke of 'ending the occupation immediately', he was cut off the air.

In similar fashion, during a Democrat candidates' debate broadcast on ABC, the host George Stephanopoulos waited 35 minutes before asking Kucinich his first question, and overall posed a shamefully small number of questions to him in comparison with the other candidates.

When ABC came to releasing a press photo of the Democratic candidates on their website, Kucinich again was not displayed. Many of the democratic 'left' are surprisingly scared to voice sup-

port for Kucinich, due to them being classified as unpopular and radical.

When scrutinising Kucinich's policies, which denounce imperialism, highlight the wrongdoings of corporations and macro-economic institutions such as the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) and also bolster support for trade unions and health care for all, it becomes transparent that his aims are not 'radical' but realistic and obligatory.

The spurious democratic 'leftist' candidates comprise three comparable frontrunners: Hilary Clinton, Barack Obama and John Edwards. Obama who is referred to as a 'breath of fresh air' and a genuine 'liberal' (which actually undermines the true meaning of liberal) is a Clinton-esque favourite who adheres to playing it safe.

His weak and loop-holed policy concerning Iraq does not hold America accountable for its imperialistic invasion and like his two counterparts, feebly advocates an aimless troop reduction strategy.

Obama has also declared that "drawing down our troops in Iraq will allow us to redeploy additional troops to Northern Iraq and elsewhere in the region as an over-the-horizon force."

The patchy outlook on Iraq is not the only criticism of the 'liberal' Obama. He received much criticism for his comments on redeployment of troops in Afghanistan and Pakistan -

"When I am President, we will wage the war that has to be won, with a comprehensive strategy with five elements: getting out of Iraq and on to the right battlefield, in Afghanistan and Pakistan".

These two vague quotes concerning Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan indicate Obama's confused foreign policy techniques and ill-considered effort to fit both the liberal and hawkish mould.

Hilary Clinton has also uttered similar rhetoric, designed to appeal to the majority of the American people rather than focusing on a strong withdrawal plan which would be beneficial to Iraqi's and the British and American troops.

Kucinich has been succinct on his vision for Iraq, and in his January 2007 'plan for Iraq' he spoke of the need for Iraq to maintain its political and economic sovereignty without the 'assistance' of structural adjustment measures of the World Bank and its sister institution the IMF.

He is also one of the few members of congress to mutter the word 'reparation' by stating that Britain and America owe the Iraqis war reparations and labelling it essential in order to enable reconciliation.

Iraq needs reparations - not World bank/IMF 'aid', contracts with US corporations and intense privatisation of its key institutions. Kucinich's vision is not based on imperialism or isolationism; he is a liberal in the true sense. Kucinich is what America and the world needs.

Most importantly Kucinich's vision is what is required in Iraq and other countries feeling the wrath of imperialism and World Bank/IMF impositions.

If we look at the climate in Iraq after Bush's controversial troop escalation it is clear that Greenspan and Sanchez spoke out far too late: Kucinich should have been listened to before the March 2003 invasion.

Since then the current Iraqi

death toll has exceeded one million, which has overtaken the controversial 655,000 statistic from John Hopkins University researchers.

The war has resulted in over four million Iraqis being displaced, although Britain and America have let in a shamefully few refugees in comparison to other European and Middle East countries.

The majority of Iraqi families (one in four) have experienced one death and when a family member leaves the house for work/visiting relatives etc, they commonly say an uncomfortable goodbye; in case they are caught up in the deep-rooted violence.

The 'free' and 'open' democratic elections brought to Iraq by a self-congratulating US merely symbolise the ethnic/religious divides, as people prefer to be seen as Sunni, Shiite or Kurdish over an 'Iraqi citizen'.

With little comprehension of the origins of the Sunni/Shiite tensions, the general delusion shared by the majority of the world is that this conflict signifies Islam as a 'confused' and internally aggressive religion.

The Sunni/Shiite conflict has exploded since the occupation, and it could be argued that it has not been this bloody since the first civil war fought after Mohamed's death in the city of Medina.

Kucinich has also contextualised the sectarian fighting in Iraq, which he argues is all about the control over oil, after the coalition forces have left. This discredits mainstream myths of Iraqi groups killing one another for the sake of it, or due to their 'barbaric' nature.

The Iraq situation has reached an impasse, and what we are witnessing is the intense 'Balkanisation' of Iraq into three sectors - Basra, Baghdad and Kurdistan. The US has a track record of destabilising and disintegrating countries/regions.

We have also seen this behaviour when Europe and the US sought to stifle pan-Africanism and pan-Arabism by targeting such leaders as Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and Jamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt.

The recent fighting in Kurdistan (Northern Iraq) between the Kurds and Turkish soldiers has also been significantly downplayed by the US, perhaps due to Northern Iraq being hailed as one of the success stories of the invasion.

The hypocritical American behaviour regarding the Kurds is particularly revealing. One of the factors in targeting Saddam Hussein in the first gulf war was his mistreatment of the Kurdish population.

However America and Europe choose not to acknowledge Turkish repression of the Kurds and continue to showcase Turkey as a major ally.

Pakistan: a new suit of clothes is not to enough for real democracy

Terry Conway

Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf finally took off this army uniform on November 28 in Islamabad, and took the oath of office as civilian president the following day.

In a country which has been under dictatorship for the majority of the time since the state was created sixty years ago, these issues have a particular resonance. Musharraf himself took power as a result of a coup in 1999.

In the run up to the planned parliamentary elections on January 8, one of George Bush's closest allies in the so-called "war against terror" wants to paint a picture of a man committed to democracy.

While the parliamentary

opposition is currently divided, it seems as if Benazir Bhutto, who returned to the country is about to give those elections some legitimacy by agreeing to stand.

But despite the outward show of change, the reality is very different. The former General has not even promised to lift the state of emergency he imposed on November 3 until December 16.

The reason he took that action in the first place was in defiance of the country's independent judiciary.

The Supreme Court was about to declare unconstitutional his plan to run for a further Presidential term while remaining head of the Army.

He put Iftikhar Chaudhry, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, under house

arrest and tried to force other judges – at both Supreme Court and regional level – to bow to his authority.

But a majority refused, were then removed from office and replaced by stooges of the president.

In the meantime the judges didn't just stand by their principles as individuals, they headed up a movement that took to the streets in protest against the crack down.

And while judges might have been the catalyst for the movement erupting they were far from the only people involved. Lawyers, journalists, students, trade unionists as well as left activists all made their voices heard against the dictatorship.

For ordinary people the situation under Musharraf's neo-

liberal rule was already becoming increasingly difficult with growing unemployment and almost daily price rises including of basic foodstuffs.

Only through the imposition of a draconian state of emergency did Musharraf succeed in regaining some control as thousands were arrested and others silenced by the threat that the same would happen to them.

On November 20, as Musharraf began a visit to Saudi Arabia, an interior ministry spokesperson Javed Cheema said that 3,400 people who had been imprisoned for opposing the state of emergency had been released that day.

About 2000 remain in prison and they will be released soon, he continued.



Plain clothes are no disguise: Musharraf

French workers and students fight back against Sarkozy

Ingrid Hayes

Sarkozy's election in May 2007 was a serious political defeat. But the recently elected president, hand in hand with the bosses' union, had yet to inflict a major social defeat to the working class.

But the government had started off by giving billions of euros to the richest among the rich, leaving nothing much for anyone else. Now, as a result of the economic crisis imported from the United States, the uncertainty is over: apart from the ruling classes, everyone is under attack.



November 20 strikes in facts and figures

■ 700,000 demonstrators joined 148 demonstrations across France of which: 70,000 in Paris, 8,500 in Orleans, 5,000 in Brest, 3,000 in Quimper, 8,000 in Tours, 10,000 in Toulon and Saint-Etienne, 15,000 in Grenoble, 15,000 in Lyon, 60,000 in Marseilles, 30,000 in Nantes and Bordeaux, 35,000 in Toulouse, 25,000 in Rennes, 4,000 in Strasbourg, 19,000 in Lille, 20,000 in Caen, 18,000 in Rouen, 15,000 in Le Havre, 30,000 in Nantes, 5,000 in Saint-Nazaire, 15,000 in Grenoble...

■ The employees of the three production sites of Yoplait France struck massively, following the call of the CGT, to demand the reopening of the 2007 wage negotiations.

■ UNEF [the main student union] estimates at 40 000 the number of

students and high-school pupils who demonstrated on the one hand, in support of the public sector workers, while on the other demanding the abrogation of the Pécresse law on the universities.

■ Nearly six out of ten teachers in colleges and high schools were on strike on the day of the mobilization of the public sector. The mobilization was particularly strong in the colleges, with rates of 60 per cent and peaks of 80 per cent according to the SNES [the main secondary school teachers' union].

■ "There is something of the odour of 1995, there is something which is mounting", said Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR, in an allusion to the retreat of the French government exactly twelve years ago when faced with the mobilization of the railway workers.

A few examples:

- on the pensions issue, workers are supposed to work longer to get less in the end, sick people will have to pay a "franchise" (fixed rate fee) to be allowed access to social security,
- immigrants are submitted to more restrictive laws, the possibility of DNA testing of immigrants to prove family relationships was voted in Parliament, illegal immigrants' children are threatened,
- the right to study is put in jeopardy both by the loss of thousands of teacher jobs and the autonomization of universities, preparing the competition between them...

But the government is facing two major problems. First it is quite risky to carry out all the attacks at the same time.

Second, Sarkozy was elected not only because of the absolute lack of a serious political alternative from the Socialist Party, but also on a fairytale: he would increase buying power. And buying power is not increasing.

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) had said from the beginning that there would be some resistance to Sarkozy's attempt to deepen neo-liberal policies in France, and it had called for resistance when virtually everybody sank into depression, or got ready for the next presidential

elections, or – like a good number of Socialist Party leaders – decided to join the government.

The consensus was that nothing could be done because the president had the legitimacy of the vote. This consensus has been proved wrong.

The resistance has now been active for a number of weeks, involving fishermen, junior doctors, judges and more recently (and more classically) railway workers, students, and employees in the state public sector, which is very broad and includes health services workers and teachers.

The major conflict has been between the government and the railway workers.

They form one of the last remaining categories of workers who do not have to have 40 years of contributions to qualify for a full pension: they are still on a special regime (which is self-financing!) of 37.5 years.

These last special regimes are also the last deadlock left to break so as to force everybody to work 41, 42 or even more years. Therefore it is a priority reform for Sarkozy.

The movement started on the 18th of October with a massive 24 hour strike among railworkers (75% of the workers were on strike: this hadn't happened since 1953!).

Then the strike started again on the 13th of November and lasted for ten days, although the leaderships of all the main unions (sometimes even publicly) disapproved, and didn't even try to oppose the massive campaign waged against the strikers by the government and the media.

The strike has now been suspended, but the railway workers are not defeated, they have already forced the government to make some significant changes, and the strike may start again in December depending on the results of the negotiations in process.

The students are still blocking a good half of the universities around the country.

This movement came as a surprise as the government had negotiated a deal during the summer with the main students union and the presidents of universities. But the deal didn't convince the students.

They reject a reform meant to privatize university education by introducing private funding, disengagement of national government, submission of education to the immediate needs of the bosses.

The movement is strong and radical, and seems to be spreading to secondary schools.

We must now build a movement unifying on the key questions, wages, pensions and jobs. Prices are rising, rent, food, petrol, health expenses, while Sarkozy has given himself a 172% rise of his wages!

Pensions are under threat while the members of Parliament voted themselves a special regime of 22.5 years to qualify for a full pension!

Ingrid Hayes is a member of the National Leadership of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International), with particular responsibility for work in the global justice movement.

Howard's End down under

The Labor-Green victory over John Howard's Liberals in Australia's federal election saw a record swing against the government. HALL GREENLAND reports on why this took place, and the hopes for a Rudd Labor government.

For only the second time in Australian history a Prime Minister lost his own seat as well as government. And while Howard kept up the pretence as the results came in on November 24 – his speech was Milosevic-like in its air of defiance – the Liberal party has already started to disintegrate.

The day after the defeat, the man Howard anointed leader, Peter Costello, announced he doesn't want the job and will almost certainly leave parliament in the coming year. If the record of state Liberal parties in opposition is any guide, this will lead to a period in the federal Liberal party marked by wars of succession as one wannabe leader undermines the temporary incumbent.

The Liberals position nationally is dire. Their most senior elected official in the whole country is the mayor of Australia's third largest city, Brisbane.

Only one voter in a million could tell you his name. (It's Campbell Newman.) It may prove only temporary, but the Liberals are consigned to the dustbin of history. Whether they can be recycled remains to be seen.

At the top of this report you read right – it was a famous victory for the pink-green alliance. In 23 of the 24 seats Labor won from the government, it relied on Green preferences to win.

This pink-green united front could be felt at the polling booths. In my neighbourhood the Greens and Labor, as the main contending political forces, are usually in something like a permanent tribal war.

Not on Saturday; it was



Howard won't be missed ... but how much different will life seem under Kevin Rudd's Labor?

peace and love. Veteran Marxist activist and bookseller Bob Gould reports that at the Labor victory party he went to, the second biggest cheer of the night went to Bob Brown, the Greens leader.

Saturday was also a triumph for extra-parliamentarism. There was a minor mass movement out there. Labor and the Greens mobilised tens of thousands of booth workers – the polling booths were teeming with volunteers.

In addition to the parties' own troops, there were activists from internet network GetUp and the rights-at-work committees – there are 55 of them scattered around New South Wales, for instance, and they have been campaigning for months against the hated WorkChoices.

And the arrival of the Rudd Labor government will generate a more hopeful climate for activist campaigns.

If the forced departure of Howard was the high point of election night, Rudd's victory speech was the most uninspiring aspect of a day to remember. He's a talented, likeable and sometimes witty man who dragged Labor out of some of its most demoralised years following Howard's landslide victory in the 2004 election. And he did it in

just 12 months.

But there was nothing of that in his victory speech -- it was bland, verbose, centrist, clichéd and deflating.

Next day he rediscovered some of his wit but more worrying was his revelation that when George Bush phoned to congratulate him, he solicited the lame duck president for an invitation to visit him in the United States next year.

I wouldn't have expected him to think it was an appropriate occasion to tell Bush to leave Iraq now but one cannot help recalling the occasion earlier this year when he dropped his usual civility to call protesters against the visiting Dick Cheney "feral scum".

The next few weeks will tell us more about the Rudd government and whether it will heed the hopes of the Labor-Green surge that delivered the country from the Howard gang.

It's 35 years ago this week the Whitlam Labor government was elected and in its first week abolished conscription, released jailed draft-resisters, opened diplomatic relations with Beijing, initiated the equal pay for women case in the arbitration commission -- and abolished sales tax on the contraceptive pill.

Can Kevin do as well?



Venezuela's President Chavez has faced sustained attack in the British press

London solidarity with Latin America

A festival of radical ideas

By Sharon Walia

The Latin American festival took place on Saturday December 1 in London and brought hundreds of dedicated speakers, activists and members of the public together to celebrate Latin American politics, history, culture and the current success of the socialist revolutions.

The event which was organised by the Cuban Solidarity Movement was diverse and lively, and accompanied by a number of stalls and guest seminars.

The first half kicked off with some strong speeches by members of Parliament Diane Abbott, Chris Burdon and Jeremy Corbyn who spoke of the significance and necessity for British solidarity with Latin American nations, and also highlighted the overall misconceptions of Latin America harboured by the British government.

The first half also saw the Ambassador of Bolivia for the UK Beatriz Souviron provide a wonderful speech focused on the major transformations within Evo Morales's Bolivia.

Souviron touched on Morales's policies of nationalisation, the inclusion of the indigenous population in the constitution and the unity which now exists in Bolivia.

The second half showcased 'voices of Latin

America' and was perhaps the most insightful. Osiris Oviedo from the Cuban Trade Unions Federation (CTC) presented a sophisticated speech where she commented on the monumental successes of Castro's Cuba, and she centralised upon Cuba's phenomenal health care system and doctors who assist our brothers and sisters all around the world.

The most memorable speech came from Samuel Moncada the Ambassador of Venezuela to the UK who had the audience in stitches.

British media

Moncada was armed with examples of quotes from English reporters and journalists condemning Hugo Chavez – two examples were the alleged links between Chavez and Osama Bin Laden, and the shortage of toilet paper in Venezuela!

During the second break I was fortunate enough to attend the Che Guevara 'forty years on' seminar, which reached full capacity. George Galloway MP gave a touching talk filled with humour, nostalgia and his favourite memories of Che Guevara and personal meetings with Fidel Castro.

Galloway echoed that Guevara's achievements and commitment to international solidarity will be acknowledged and revered for centuries on.

The last half of the event was exceptional, and the speakers successfully engaged in presentations which sought to showcase the respect for and similarities with Latin America in other parts of the world especially in the Middle East and Africa.

Leonard Weinglass the lawyer for the five Cubans (commonly known as the 'Miami 5') who remain locked up in an American prison for their persistence to protect Cuba from US aggression spoke about their heartbreakingly situation.

Weinglass illuminated the disgrace and hypocrisy of the American government and stated that the 'Miami 5' urgently requires the public's support.

Birmingham councillor Salma Yaqoob and journalist Victoria Brittain presented dignified and warm speeches concerning global solidarity with Latin America whilst Tony Benn and George Galloway were humorous and strong as ever.

The 2007 Latin American festival was attended by over 600 people, which firmly indicates that more and more of the British public want to reach out and commend the Latin American principles based on solidarity, equality and unity which are a far cry away from imperialism and narcissism embodied by America, EU and its other supporters.

Making another world possible

Assassinated leader
Thomas Sankara

On December 1 a major conference took place in London under the title Latin America 2007: Making Another World Possible (see www.latinamerica2007.org.uk for further information). The event was addressed by a number of key note speakers from Latin America itself, also involved people active in the solidarity movement here. VICTORIA BRITTAI was one of the contributors and this was what she had to say:

The desire for transformation, and the belief in its possibility, is at the heart of this conference, and of the huge enthusiasm felt for Venezuela, not just in this room, but widely in Britain today. And, as goes without saying, throughout the Third World.

I want to look at two of the conference's themes – the Bolivarian alternative for the Americas (ALBA), the alternative regional integration project, and the 40th anniversary of the death of Che Guevara. I want to reflect on them both, from experiences on a different continent – Africa.

Almost half a century ago, Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah hosted a summit in Accra to discuss a continental Government for Africa.

Pan-Africanism was Nkrumah's dream, and one that ordinary Africans in their millions dreamed with him in those heady early days of independence.

Nkrumah's was the consistent voice warning that fragmentation of the continent would be the downfall of Africa's hopes for economic and political transformation in the post colonial period.

His ideas were submerged by a chorus of leaders of newly independent countries who had no wish to be subsumed inside a larger, stronger, project, and in many cases

remained quite comfortable under the guidance of their former colonial masters.

But Nkrumah's anti-imperialist leadership struck such a chord amongst ordinary people throughout the continent and in the diaspora.

He was regarded as sufficiently dangerous to the *status quo* to suffer assassination attempts, and then to be ousted in a coup backed by the US and Britain. He ended his days in a tragic powerless exile in Sékou Touré's Guinea.

(Chavez was extremely lucky to survive the crude coup attempts the US backed against him.)

How little some things change in half a century.

Today's African leaders are busily signing up individually to the misnamed Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with Europe due to be finalised this month, despite sharp criticism from trade unions and civil society leaders, who see them as a receipt for deeper impoverishment.

And, this summer, when the African Union met in Ghana (on its 50th anniversary of independence) there was a one item agenda: Union Government. But the only leaders' voices for it were, the veteran left politician, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, and President Muammer Gaddafi of Libya.

Meanwhile, in a pre-summit meeting across town, civil society groups from across the continent espoused a political agenda which could have come from Nkrumah.

They demanded concrete actions for Continental citizenship, such as removing all visa requirements, and giving all Africans the right to work or live in any country on the continent.



That would still be a long way from Continental government, but in any event these popular demands have virtually no echo from the leaders of Africa, who are further from the kind of participation at least aspired to in ALBA presentations, than the leaders of an earlier generation.

ALBA is contesting core power structures on the continent – both political and economic. The three signature countries: Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia, have leaders prepared for the political earthquakes such ideas bring both at home and internationally.

The appetite for such confrontation among today's African leaders is nil, (and both Wade and Gaddafi have in fact made significant capitulations to Western political demands in recent years.)

Nor are the leaders of Africa's oil rich countries – Algeria, Nigeria, Angola, but excepting Libya, at all inclined to use their wealth to change the balance of power inside their own countries, as Chavez is.

For an example of the ruthlessness of imperialism and its power to block progressive ideas, look at the situation today of the African countries which were given their own schools in Cuba on the Island of Youth in the 1970s and 80s as a generous contribution to their own liberation struggles then.

Angola was destroyed, physically and politically. Mozambique, Ghana, Ethiopia, Namibia, and South Africa un-

der the ANC, have all now embraced neo-liberalism.

Nkrumah was not the only independence leader on the continent who paid a heavy price for cooperation projects sometimes less dramatic than ALBA's regional integration with a human face, but which nonetheless threatened, or were perceived to threaten, imperialist interests.

The sobering historical record goes some way towards explaining why ALBA is not on the horizon for Africa.

This brings me into the second strand of this conference: the assassination of Che Guevara on the orders of the CIA. Che was killed for the force of his revolutionary ideas, and his willingness to try and put them into practice not only in America's backyard of Latin America, but also in Africa.

He failed dismally in Congo. But he and his Cuban successors ensured that the CIA failed to overturn the Angolan revolution militarily by their proxies from apartheid South Africa, and mercenaries from Europe.

There is a poem by Martin Carter, the Guyanese poet and activist in the anti-colonial struggle and afterwards, who died 10 years ago next week, that perfectly encapsulates the lives of the unknown humble people that men like Che, Sankara and the others I have mentioned, died for:

"I have learnt

From books dear friend

Of men dreaming and living

And hungering in a room without a light

Who could not die since death was far too poor

Who did not sleep to dream, but dreamed to change the world."

(Poems of Succession 1977)

The Cuban role in Angola

Looking for creative solutions

DO IT YOURSELF: A handbook for changing our world. Edited by the Trapese Collective (Pluto Press, 2007).

Reviewed by
PHILIP KANE

The Trapese Collective comprises three young activists who describe themselves as "a popular education collective...using participatory education to critically inform, inspire action and build sustainable alternatives to the current economic system".

Do It Yourself is, in a compendium of the ideas and practical skills that Trapese have been accumulating since their inception in 2004. So, if you've been hoping to build a compost toilet or a solar shower, or start a community garden, or set up a "self-managed social centre", this is the book to get you started.

OUR HISTORY:

A graphic account of the Russian Revolution

Ten Days That Shook The World, by John Reed. (Penguin Books 351 pages, paperback £8.99)
reviewed by Alex Miller

John Reed's classic account of the Russian Revolution of November 1917 isn't an attempt at dispassionate historical analysis. Rather it's an eyewitness account of the Bolsheviks' rise to power penned on the spot by a sympathetic American socialist.

It is a mark of the respect in which Reed was held by the Bolsheviks that *Ten Days That Shook The World* was published with a short but very appreciative introduction by Lenin, in which the Russian socialist leader says that he would like to see Reed's book "published in millions of copies and translated into all languages".

Reed was a founder member of the Communist Party of the USA and when he died in Soviet Russia shortly after the publication of the book in 1919 he was buried in the Heroes' Grave in Red Square in Moscow.

The book captures the spirit of the Revolution of November 7. It is based largely on notes that Reed took at the time, on hundreds of Russian

I'll be honest and admit that I can't absolutely vouch for the accuracy of much of the book's contents. I have never tried building a compost toilet, for example, and thus have to take at face value such assurances as, "A composting toilet can be very hygienic and if properly operated does not smell". But the Trapese Collective give the impression that, on this level at least, they know what they're talking about.

There are chapters, on the other hand, which deal more with issues of collective action and there are sections on popular education, alternative media, cultural activism and campaigning that I found useful in parts.

Where the problems with *Do It Yourself* lie is not so much in the practical material it contains, but in its politics.

The editors are clear that they are writing from an "anarchist/autonomist"

perspective. What this means, in real terms, is that they propagate the usual fetishes of contemporary anarchism – direct action, "consensus" decision making, and so on – without much, if any, critical evaluation.

There is no mention, for example, of the many pitfalls faced by social centres; usually short-lived squats lacking credible political or community support.

Locking on to bulldozers has an assumed equivalence or even superiority to strikes, which gain a brief mention under the subheading of "Direct action in the workplace". Nor is there any genuine assessment of the weaknesses of the "consensus" process as a form of democracy.

Lifestyle changes, meanwhile, tend to be given equal weight with collective political activity. There's an implicit assumption that



"greening" our lifestyles as individuals, families, or (vaguely defined) communities is somehow radical in itself; in the authors' words, a way to "make governments and corporations increasingly irrelevant".

But the "how to go green" programme has turned into a

staple of primetime television. The aspiration, at least, has become absorbed into the mainstream of capitalist society. While governments and corporations, even McDonalds, are keen to flag up their own supposedly "green" credentials.

Having said all this, there is a glimmer of hope in

the fairly conciliatory tone reserved for the wider Left. As the organised Left engages more consistently and deeply within the ecological movement, the ingrained hostility of many established Greens, anarchists and "autonomists" will necessarily be an issue that we will have to deal with.

The Trapese Collective suggest that we can all, in fact, learn from one another, that we can all be a part of developing creative solutions to the problems that we all face.

That may be the most useful lesson to be derived from this book.

Because while *Do It Yourself* unfortunately fails to live up to its promise to serve as a handbook for changing the world, its tone and its optimism are at least positive signals for the potential to build a movement that really can achieve just that.



newspapers that he collected interspersed with quotes from proclamations, decrees and announcements recovered from the walls of Petrograd.

Sometimes the story has a dreamlike quality, with figures such as Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev fleeting past Reed in the middle of the night. His accounts of the many meetings and debates have an immediacy and vividness that is hard to describe.

Reed doesn't hide his own sympathies, but readers are left to make up their own minds. He never stifles the

Women march through Petrograd March 1917: the banner reads: 'Comrade workers and soldiers, support our demands'

voices of the opponents of the Bolsheviks, and there are plenty of quotes from publications and speeches from the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries.

Three things are notable in Reed's account. First, the vastness of the tasks faced by the new government are clear.

A passage from Reed's notes on November 8 gives a

flavour:

"Smolny was tenser than ever, if that were possible. The same running men in the dark corridors, squads of workers with rifles, leaders with bulging portfolios arguing, explaining, giving orders as they hurried anxiously along, surrounded by friends and lieutenants. Men literally out of themselves, living prodigies of sleeplessness and work—men unshaven, filthy, with burning eyes, who drove upon their fixed purpose full speed on engines of exaltation."

"So much they had to

do, so much! Take over the Government, organise the City, keep the garrison loyal, fight the Duma and the Committee for Salvation, keep out the Germans, prepare to do battle with Kerensky, inform the provinces what had happened, Propagandise from Archangel to Vladivostok

... "Government and Municipal employees refusing to obey their Commissars, post and telegraph refusing them communication, railroads stonily ignoring their appeals for trains, Kerensky coming, the garrison not altogether to be trusted, the Cossacks waiting to come out ...

"Against them not only the organised bourgeoisie, but all the other Socialist parties except the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, a few Menshevik Internationalists and the Social Democrat Internationalists, and even they undecided whether to stand by or not. With them, it is true, the workers and the soldier-masses—the peasants an unknown quantity ..."

Second, Stalin's name appears only twice in the course of the book, once in a list of People's Commissars and once on a proclamation, and the man himself never appears in person.

Third, that Lenin and Trotsky – both the undisputed leaders of the Revolution in Reed's narrative – had no dreams of constructing a

totalitarian state or "socialism in one country", but were fully aware of the fact that the Revolution was a gamble whose success depended on what happened in Germany, France and Britain.

As Trotsky puts it in a speech captured by Reed: "There are only two alternatives; either the Russian Revolution will create a revolutionary movement in Europe, or the European powers will destroy the Russian Revolution!"

This no doubt accounts for the fact that the book was banned in the Soviet Union following the death of Lenin, the expulsion of Trotsky, and the gradual destruction of the generation of Bolsheviks involved in the Revolution.

Despite recognizing the immeasurable odds against the success of the Revolution, Reed's book ends on an optimistic note on November 29 1917 with the union of the Congress of Peasants and the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.

As socialists worldwide mark the 90th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and as Revolution stirs in South America in the early years of the 21st Century, Reed's book is worth reading and re-reading by all those who share his optimism and vision.

■ Reed's book is available free and in full at: www.marxists.org

Over 1000 campaigners from across Britain supported an 'invisible' protest at Westminster on Wednesday October 24, as part of a nationwide campaign for pensioners' rights.

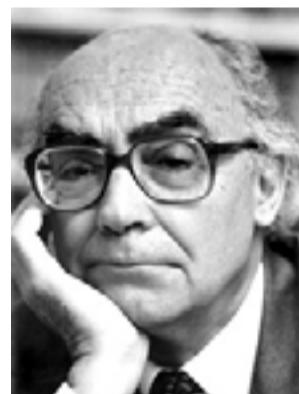
The campaign, organised by Britain's biggest pensioner organisation - the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) - was to highlight the concern that many older people feel their needs are being ignored by government, as if they were an 'invisible generation'.

Around 30 protestors carried placards and dressed up in bandages, dark glasses and hats like the Invisible Man in the many film versions of HG Wells's classic story. Joe Harris, NPC general secretary said: "Three million older people will have died before the government restores the link with earnings and the £3.40 a week rise in the state pension next year will do nothing to end the poverty felt by 1 in 5 older people. The real cost of inflation felt by millions of older people is so high that such a small increase will be immediately swallowed up by council tax, utility bills and the rising costs of living." Photo: Andrew Wiard



A fresh look at the political systems we live under

JONATHAN WALKER
reviews *Seeing*,
by José Saramago,
translated Margaret
Jull Costa (Harvill
Secker, £11.99)



Saramago

Many who participated in the demonstrations last year against Israel's war on Lebanon will have noticed the statement of protest signed by Noam Chomsky, Harold Pinter, Naomi Klein, Arundhati Roy and others.

They could be forgiven if one of the names – the Portuguese novelist, José Saramago – lacked the same familiar ring.

Unable to afford higher education, Saramago began his working life as a mechanic in the Portugal of the fascist dictator Salazar. Moving through various jobs, he eventually settled for lowly work in the publishing business, but although he had already tried his hand at a novel, his literary career was stunted while the dictatorship remained in place.

In 1969, when he was already in his late 40s, he took the courageous step of joining the banned Portuguese Communist Party. When the dictatorship was finally overthrown by the revolution of 1974, he became editor of a left-wing

newspaper in Lisbon.

The left phase of the revolution came to an end after 18 months, and Saramago had to resign his position. But in the relative freedom of the parliamentary democracy that emerged, he began to produce bold novels in a highly distinctive style:

He produces enormous sentences lacking punctuation other than a full stop at the end. This device is no mere gimmick, since he takes advantage of it to produce effects both startling and subtle that could hardly be achieved through other means.

Some of his novels drew fierce criticism from the conservative establishment, and the Portuguese government withdrew one of his works from a major European literary competition, on grounds of blasphemy. International protest reversed this.

His critical acclaim spread, he won a large international readership and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1998.

Saramago wrote *Seeing* in 2004, and in a very loose fashion it serves as a sequel to his earlier *Blindness* (1995), but the books can be read alone, or even in reverse order quite satisfactorily.

The recent English translation of *Seeing*, by Margaret Jull Costa fully preserves the flavour of Saramago's prose style.

The novel opens at a polling station in the capital city of an unnamed country on election day. The driving morning rain deters the voters, but in the afternoon they arrive, and the eventual turnout is significantly larger than usual. But nearly three-quarters of the voters returned a blank ballot sheet.

The two establishment parties (the "right" and "centre" parties) are alarmed, and unite in condemning what they see as the "criminal" actions of the capital's citizens.

They fix another day for a re-run of the election, only to find that the proportion of blank papers is still higher the second time round (thanks largely to the supporters of the small left-wing party switching to this tactic).

Saramago spends the rest of the novel working out what the ruling class of a present-day industrialised

parliamentary democracy would do in such a situation. Given his politics, and his own experience of fascist dictatorship, he is under no illusions that such ruling classes will continue to respect democratic niceties once they feel under threat.

But the reader will notice something strange and jarring: the election results of the opening pages were not brought about through any campaign or plot, but inexplicably as the sum of the spontaneous actions of individuals who were fed up with the system.

Saramago, of course, is not offering this as a plausible, real-world scenario. Instead, he uses it as an artificial literary device that allows him to offer his readers a fresh look at the political systems they live under – after the initial shock, the reader gradually awakens to the connections with the real world.

Seeing is not unique here. In several of his novels, Saramago sets out from a startling, implausible event and then works out the consequences in a realist manner (keeping his readers alert and by reminding them frequently of the narrative is artificial).

After a brief consideration of tactics, the government decides to leave the capital city, while the military place the city under a kind of seige. This is bound to cause serious

damage to the economy of course, but the ruling class considers it more important to mete out punishment to a citizenry that rejects the political system.

But because there is, as yet, no force capable of mounting a challenge for power, the ruling class is divided about how soon it can afford to confront its citizens with naked force.

One faction launches into a violent "strategy of tension" while others prefer a campaign of disinformation in the news media. Eventually, as a temporary compromise, a police detective is sent in to the city to investigate the possible origins of the rebellion.

Saramago makes it very clear that the election results cannot by themselves overturn the political system. At the beginning of the novel, the system is rejected by the voters, but in the absence of a mass movement nothing can be done to replace it. Although the ruling class is thrown into disarray, it still has the upper hand.

Without giving away the rest of the plot, I should point out that Saramago sees his role as asking questions more than providing answers – but these are the questions of a politically engaged socialist writer, not the abstract musings of the detached liberals who predominate in the contemporary literary scene.

From rebellion to revolution

José Martí Reader: Writings on the Americas, Ocean Press; 330pp £9.99, Reviewed by Liam MacUaid

José Martí is one of the great figures of Latin American revolutionary history. In his native Cuba only Che Guevara is more honoured and across the continent only Simón Bolívar is more revered by revolutionaries and progressives.

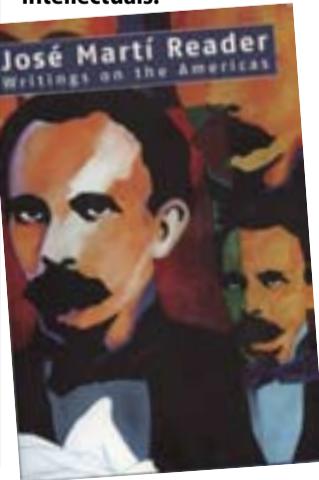
Martí was born in Havana in 1853. By the age of seventeen he had been imprisoned by the Spanish colonialists for treason. He spent most of the rest of his life in exile and spent fourteen years living in New York. He died in Cuba in 1895 fighting in that island's War of Independence against Spain.

The Australian publishing house Ocean Books has compiled an anthology of Martí's writings pulling together a range of articles, letters and poetry.

Among the articles are his account of the New York memorial meeting for Karl Marx and the funeral of the Haymarket Martyrs, executed after a show trial found them guilty of murdering a police officer.

Martí was an anti-racist before the phrase had even been coined. He wrote passionately about how blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans were treated.

This collection, much of which will be unfamiliar to readers of English, is a valuable introduction to the life and struggle of one of Latin America's outstanding revolutionary intellectuals.



Welcome to our new newspaper

The editorial team and the National Council of Respect Renewal welcomes you to the pages of this newly-launched newspaper, which we have sent to press just two weeks after our conference in London's Bishopsgate Centre.

The development of the newspaper represents an important step for our organisation, following the public and damaging split that has taken place between our supporters and the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party.

We see the newspaper, which will initially be published monthly, as playing a number of vital roles:

- It will serve as a public voice for Respect, publicising the activities of the organisation and its elected councillors and its MP, and raising our public profile.

- It will offer a forum for debate on alternative policies, opening up a space in which activists inside and outside our organisation can exchange ideas and information.

- It will be a means to help inform and organise our members, supporters, sympathisers and many others active in campaigning and political work.

- And the development of a collective and representative editorial board, drawing in many of the talented, experienced and knowledgeable members, will help develop Respect's analysis and political programme, as the newspaper responds to new events and challenges at home and abroad.

We hope this first issue gives a foretaste of the continued development that we expect on all these aspects.

We are proud to include articles, photographs and information from a very wide range of contributors around the country, and we already have offers of further contributions to come. We are grateful to all who have already come forward to help.

Respect needs a broad, inclusive publication, which allows people new to political activity and those from diverse political and cultural backgrounds to feel able to contribute and to find information that is accessible and consistent in advocating the kind of political alternative we are all trying to build in the fight against New Labour and the old Tories.

We hope you will agree with most of what you read, let us have comments, letters and discussion articles responding to anything you disagree with, and that you will want to help us build its circulation and the organisation of Respect in your area.

Never have the working people of Britain had more need of a principled, left wing alternative to Gordon Brown and new Labour: help us in our effort to build one.

Join us!

Acting Editorial Team for this first issue:

John Lister, Kevin Ovenden, Terry Conway. If you want to join the team, contact us on editorial@respectrenewal.org

This is your paper!

We want this Respect newspaper to reflect all the news and views of our members and supporters on the ground up and down the country, and all the campaigns that are challenging exploitation and oppression around the world.

- Send us your news, photos, information, notice of local events, and your letters and comments on what you see in this first issue.

- We aim to run a regular letters page (try to keep letters to 400 words or less to avoid editing), but we also welcome reviews of books, films, music and other cultural issues.

- Email copy and photos where possible to news@respectrenewal.org

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The views expressed by named authors do not necessarily represent the views of Respect Renewal.
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Renewing

Nick Wrack

The Respect Renewal Conference on Saturday 17 November was a stunning success.

It took place at the Bishopsgate Institute in the City of London. Notification of the conference had first gone out only on Saturday 3 November. In the intervening two weeks hard work by a team of volunteers ensured a wonderfully uplifting day.

Called at just two week's notice it could have been a desultory affair. Given that it came after an acrimonious split in Respect it could have been rather depressing. Instead, it was a lively, if at times unpredictable, event attended by over 350 people.

As the Morning Star reported (Monday November 19), "The hall was packed out with a genuinely diverse crowd – young and old, men and women, black and white, Asian, Muslim, Christian and those of no faith, plus trade unionists and socialists from different traditions."

People came from all over the country, with significant delegations from Tower Hamlets, Newham, Waltham For-

est, Dorset, Manchester and Bristol. Birmingham brought a coach load. The hall was decorated with banners and photographs showing Respect's successes and from the anti-war movement.

Stalls from various left-wing campaigns hugged the walls of the conference hall. A tremendously inspiring video display projected onto the back of the stage images of working-class struggles from the last hundred years.

Behind the scenes a large army of volunteers ensured that the conference was properly prepared and ran smoothly. At many times throughout the day there was standing room only. Refreshments prepared by a fantastic team of volunteers kept everyone going.

The spirit of optimism and enthusiasm was demonstrated by the response to the financial appeal in which over £2,000 was collected. This was on top of the registration fee and travel costs that people had already had to pay. Membership forms and standing order forms for Respect Renewal Conference were also filled in or taken away.

There were many speeches, both from the floor and from the platform, which expressed the frustration that Respect's development had been held back by the controlling hand of the SWP leadership. This is because of the SWP's approach towards Respect, which sees it as something to be turned on for elections (in very few places) and then turned off.

Those attending the Renewal Conference were very much of the view that Respect needs to be built continuously and broadly across the country. She has also had to suffer a campaign of vilification from some members of the SWP in an attempt to undermine her, with one of his usual tours de force – a great way to start conference.

He outlined the reasons the Renewal Conference had been called and answered some of the ridiculous charges that the SWP leadership have levelled against him and others on the Renewal side. He poured scorn on the idea that this was a left-right split, or that he was anti-trade union.

Salma Yaqoob, Respect National Vice-Chair, spoke, and outlined her opposition to free market capitalism and the idea that there is no alternative to it. She explained how US capitalism relied on its massive military might to dominate economically.

She repudiated the charge of 'communalism' made against her by the leaders of the SWP, outlining the practi-

How one critical letter triggered a crisis

When George Galloway's letter to the Respect National Council, containing criticisms about the administration and organisation of Respect, was sent out on August 23, no-one could have predicted that we would end up, just twelve weeks later, with two conferences being held on the same day.

No-one could have predicted, and no-one surely wanted, the split in Respect that has taken place.

However, the way in which the dispute was conducted by the leadership of the Socialist Workers Party meant that this split became inevitable. This was recognised by the SWP leadership itself and they entered into negotiations to separate.

It was an irony that the Respect Renewal Conference was taking place in the Bishopsgate Institute. This was the venue where the four breakaway councillors who had resigned the Respect whip in Tower Hamlets held their press conference on Monday 29 October.

That press conference was organised and attended by John Rees, SWP Central Committee member and National Secretary of Respect. This was one of the key events in the developing division, with the SWP leadership condoning and encouraging a split in the Respect group on Tower Hamlets council.

It's been a pretty unpleasant three months for most of us, as we have watched Respect split asunder. This split could have been avoided, if only the SWP leadership had been prepared to

discuss criticisms and implement agreed compromises.

Instead, at each stage it has increased the temperature of the debate, refusing to implement compromise decisions of the Respect National Council, illegitimately ruling out valid delegations to conference while ruling in other invalid delegates and vilifying those who disagreed with it.

Ludicrous claims of a "witch-hunt against the SWP" are still being made, despite the involvement of many prominent socialists in the Renewal conference. Criticism, even were it unwarranted, does not make a witch-hunt.

The political justification for this by the SWP leadership is that there is a "left-right split" taking place. Again, this will come as a surprise to those at the Respect Renewal conference, who will all identify themselves as being on the left.

A political split on the left is seldom good for either side. It can reinforce the idea that the left cannot be unified, that minor differences always outweigh agreement on bigger issues.

We recognise that this split is a set-back. However, there was a sense of liberation at the Renewal conference which reflected a feeling that we can now get on and do many of the things we should have been doing over the last three years – building branches across the country, linking up with others on the left and promoting our image and politics to a much wider audience.



Respect



Throughout the day there were many speakers from the floor.

They spoke about the reasons for the split and about how to go forward. Inevitably, there were many contributions that dealt with the role of the SWP leadership.

Several of these were all the more powerful because they were made by people who have recently resigned from the SWP: sacked union militant Jerry Hicks gave the most impassioned speech, along with Jo Benefitfield (35 years in the SWP), Richard Searle, Kay Phillips and Nadir Ahmed, a young member from Newham who resigned from the SWP during his speech.

The presence of these and other former members of the SWP should be answer enough to the suggestion that Renewal is right-wing or anti-trade union.

The SWP leadership were given the opportunity to put their case, with Weyman Bennett and Michael Bradley, both members of the SWP Central Committee, called in to address conference. They were listened to politely.

forward to working with Derek and others from the radical environmental movement in the future.

We hope that we can reach out with Red Pepper to the many thousands of unaffiliated people on the left, to work together on the many issues that concern us all.

One of the silliest arguments made by the SWP leadership against those at the Renewal conference is that we reflect the "right wing" of Respect. It was amusing to watch the SWP-Respect conference systematically ask each of the speakers that had agreed to speak at the Renewal conference to speak at theirs.

This included Andrew Murray, Sami Ramadani and Derek Wall, who quite rightly took up the invitation to speak at both conferences.

Derek Wall makes the amusing point that Rania Khan, speaking at the SWP-Respect conference, attacked the Renewal conference for having Derek speaking at it – only to then learn that he was speaking at her conference as well!

Brian Caton, General Secretary of the Prison Officers Association, one of the more militant of British trade unions, sent greetings and best wishes to the conference ... but I stupidly forgot to pass them on.

Several of our councillors spoke. Mohammed Ishtiaq councillor for the Birmingham Sparkbrook ward answered the charge of "communalism" by explaining that one of his opponents had come from the same village as his family. People had tried to persuade him not to stand against this person, but he had stuck to his guns because it was a matter of politics for him, not family or village.

Councillors from east London who have not normally been put on Respect public platforms revealed their tremendous abilities, which will no longer be hidden.

Councillors Sheikh from Newham and Abjol Miah, leader of the councillors group in Tower Hamlets addressed conference. Abjol's powerful



speech showed his prowess as a speaker and his politics as being clearly on the left.

Patricia Armani da Silva, the cousin of Jean Charles de Menezes, who was brutally murdered by the police on July 22 2005 spoke about the campaign to get justice for Jean. She called for the resignation of Metropolitan Police chief Ian Blair, a demand that was unanimously endorsed by conference.

An important international dimension came with speeches from campaigners on Venezuela, France and Pakistan.

In the final session National Council members Alan Thorntott and I mapped out the way forward for Respect Renewal supporters.

Conference endorsed proposals that the 19 National Council members who had called the conference continue to co-ordinate Respect Renewal work over the next six months, along with volunteers who want to help to organise things.

There will be a series of rallies and smaller meetings across England and Wales to discuss and debate the way

forward, culminating in a recalled conference either in the Spring or after the May elections next year. Everyone who wants to contribute to the debate will be welcome.

One of the most important announcements was that the Socialist Resistance group, whose members had played a prominent part in building this conference, had agreed to hand over their paper to Respect Renewal [of which this is the first edition, Eds].

The main message from this conference is that the task of building Respect and the broader opposition to New Labour continues. Of course, there are weaknesses. Emerging from a split means that we have only the skeletal outline of an organisation in most places outside east London and Birmingham.

Although there were significant contingents of young Asian men and women from east London and Birmingham, we do not have anything like as many young people as we want.

We need to reach out to young workers. There are very few African and African-Carib-

bean members of Respect and we need to address this issue urgently.

Respect is not the finished article – far from it. We are just one small part of the process of building a new party to represent working class people. We have had fantastic successes in Respect's short existence, with the election of an MP and several councillors. But that cannot be enough.

We want to build Respect Renewal. But we also want to reach out to everyone else who wants to build a left alternative to New Labour, the Lib Dems and the Tories. We want to build a bigger, broader and more unified party of the left, representing the desire of working-class people for change.

That is our main task: to work with others to create a radical, left party for all, whatever background or tradition. We have energy, enthusiasm, optimism and – most importantly of all – we have the radical, left-wing politics to appeal to millions.

If you want to join or find out more about Respect Renewal then contact us.

Be a subscriber!

We want our newspaper and our policies distributed and discussed far and wide. You can help.

● If you agree with what you have read here and want to support, why not take out a supporter's subscription – for just £4 per month you will receive 7 copies of each issue delivered to your door – or **6 months for just £20**.

● Contact us if your branch wants a large number, and we can arrange a bulk delivery.

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Cheque with order, please, made out to Respect Renewal Conference, and posted to PO Box 1109, London N4 2UU

Please send me 7 copies/1 copy per month. I enclose £.....

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Respect

INSIDE:

- Postal workers face shoddy deal
- Civil servants vote for strikes
- Fight East London tube sell-off
- Organising migrant workers
- Prison officers face new battle



Manchester strikers defend free speech and NHS services

Reinstate Karen Reissmann!

By Dr Kay Phillips,
North Manchester

As we go to press, 150 nurses and health workers from Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust are still on indefinite strike action.

They are demanding the reinstatement of Karen Reissmann, the Chair of Manchester Community Health UNISON branch.

She has been sacked for speaking out about the problems within the Mental Health Trust.

Health workers are refusing to allow their bosses to victimise Karen, and have made this huge commitment until she is reinstated.

We have seen a fantastic level of support from the people of Manchester and the trade union movement.

The demonstration through the city centre on Saturday November 24 had so many union banners and delegations from all around the country and really showed that level of solidarity.

Meanwhile Sheila Foley the

Chief Exec was sunning herself in Dubai!

In 2006, Karen led the trade union opposition to changes in mental health services.

Staff felt the proposed changes would lead to a worse service for patients and job losses amongst nurses, occupational therapists, and support workers.

In January and February of this year, UNISON members took 2 days strike action to protest against these management proposals. Then in June, Karen was suspended, ironically on the same day she had gained a promotion!

She was charged with 'seriously affecting the reputation' of the Trust, 'undermining their confidence in her as an employee', misusing time, and also telling others she had been suspended and why, AND telling others that she is innocent of any wrongdoing.

She has been sacked for all the accusations except misusing time - ie for speaking out, and then for telling people she is innocent!

It is clear that this is a political victimisation in order to stop a Trade Union from legitimately speaking out about cuts, job losses and privatisation within the NHS. If Karen were to be silenced, the Trust hope others will be too scared to speak out in the future.

This is a dispute is about the future of our Health Service and one that concerns all of us, whether we are workers within the health service or users of the NHS.

It is also an issue about freedom of speech for Trades Unionists. Karen's sacking is a crude attempt by an overpaid Chief Executive to silence a democratically elected Trade Union representative and critic of cuts and privatisation - something many public sector workers are already too familiar with.

One of the things this dispute has highlighted is that privatisation is costing the NHS dear. For example, the cost of beds in the PFI (Private Finance Initiative) Wythenshawe Hospital (south Man-

chester) is 4 times as much the NHS beds in North Manchester.

To pay those extra costs, when Withington Hospital was closed and services were transferred to Wythenshawe hospital 45 beds were cut.

Why do they cost so much more? - Because the private companies that are taking over our health services are guaranteed a profit. This sucks money out of the NHS and services are cut as a consequence.

This madness was started by the Tories but has been accelerated under Blair and Brown.

There is a huge determination amongst Manchester Community Health UNISON members to stand up for Karen, support their union and defend the health service. 87% voted for strike action.

They have now been on strike for almost 4 weeks. They have received lots of public support and have held lively demonstrations, pickets, and been on delegations up and

down the country.

They are calling for support from the public and health workers from around the country - solidarity and donations for the strike fund are vital.

For the latest info and news on the dispute, to download petition/leaflets. You can visit the website. www.reinstate-karen.org

You can do something to help:

- Send a donation to 'UNISON Manchester Community and Mental Health' Branch c/o union office, Chorlton House, 70, Manchester Rd, Manchester M21 9UN, mob. 07990 957 174, email. unison@zen.co.uk

- Write to your MP

- Invite Karen or a striker to address a meeting

- Protest to the chief exec Sheila Foley on Sheila. foley@mhsc.nhs.uk and send a copy to Karen's union branch unison@zen.co.uk

- Write to Alan Johnson, secretary of state for health on Johnson@parliament.uk

Another UNISON activist victimised

Defend Michael Gavan!

Michael Gavan, the chair of the Unison local government branch in Newham, east London, has been sacked in a scandalous victimisation by a flagship New Labour council.

As well as being a principled and conscientious campaigner for the rights of his workmates, Michael has been instrumental to the success of Respect in Newham.

George Galloway wrote immediately to Michael on hearing of his sacking.

"Dear Michael,
I am utterly appalled at your sacking by Sir Robin Wales's regime in Newham. Michael Gavan

"You have my wholehearted support in the campaign to reinstate you.

"So shocking are Newham council's actions that I am sure outrage will go beyond the usual suspects and can reach deep into the labour movement.

"You are a shining example of effective, politically engaged trade unionism, as the esteem you're held in in east London testifies.

"Please let me know what you would like me to do in your support.

"In solidarity,
George Galloway MP
Please support the campaign to reinstate Michael. Contact newham-unison@btconnect.com or 020 8555 9351.

