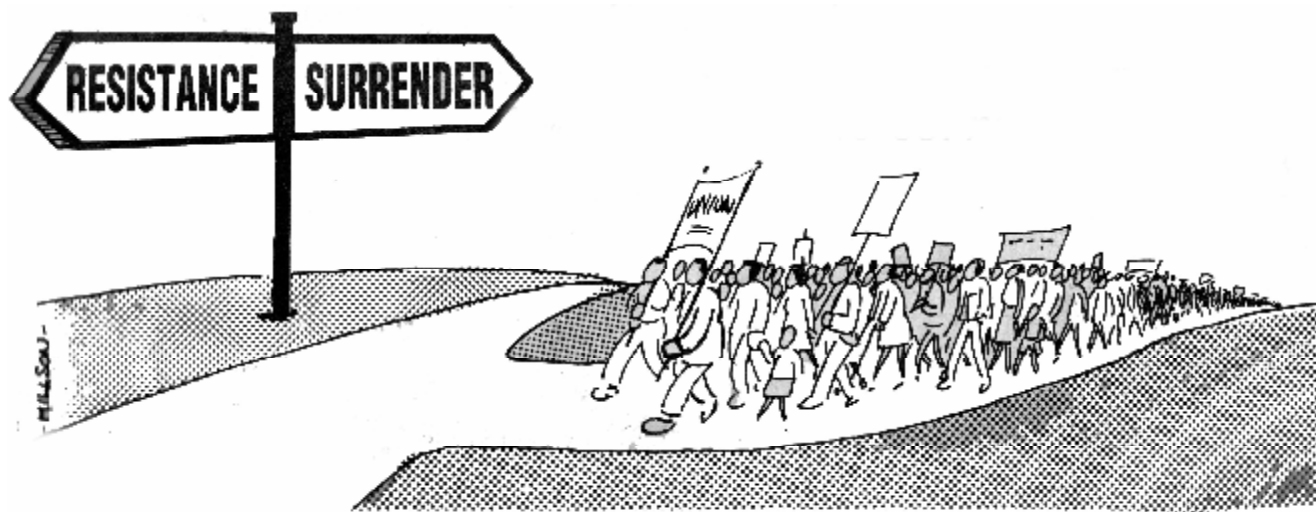


the★commune

for communism from below and workers' self management

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lindsey oil refinery workers show us it's possible to resist the recession, so...



don't moan, organise!

editorial of *The Commune*

Day after day we hear of yet further job cuts. The rate of job losses is now so great that the Labour Research Department apologised it could only report the "bigger announcements". Unemployment is predicted to rise to two million by spring and three million by 2010: official reports from the OECD to the Office of National Statistics have confirmed that the UK is facing the worst recession since the 1980s.

Against the backdrop of the storm in the global economy pundits are focusing on the mass unemployment of the Thatcher years, but there is another aspect of that period of importance today. This year marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Great Miners' Strike of 1984-85, and it could not have come at more pertinent time. So far there have been two responses to the anniversary. On the one hand there have been a series of TV dramatisations of the rise and fall of Thatcher, and the message is clear – she was a necessary evil to "modernise" the country. On the other hand the great and the good of the official labour movement are marking the anniversary as if they, the bureaucrats, are heirs of that struggle.

With the passage of time the union bureaucrats and New Labour politicians who would not touch such militant struggle in the present feel safe to mark the anniversary of the miners' strike. They do so to smother the real message of the miners' battle for jobs and to relegate it to the strong-box of history. But the miners are not historical mythology – they posed an alternative to Thatcher and mass unemployment. Rather than passively *accepting* the recession, the Great Miners' Strike shows us that we can fight to *resist the recession*.

Just as in 1984 we are once again facing an employers' offensive, meagre pay offers, job cuts and mass unemployment. The stark warnings made by the miners in 1984 echo down the years with redoubled force. On the eve of

the Trades Union Congress, Peter Heathfield, General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers, in an address to the movement wrote:

"It is now time for the unions attending this historic TUC to rediscover themselves and join with us. Britain is at the crossroads. The events of the next few weeks will determine the course of our country until the turn of the next century. The choice is stark. We either bend the knee to further mass unemployment or we fulfil our responsibilities to the people who have elected us, saying loudly and firmly, enough is enough. Millions are feeling the despair of long-term unemployment. Millions of others ask who will defend them against this deliberate onslaught. If not the trade unions, then who?"

Heathfield reminded the unions they had policies to "fight against unemployment" and to "resist anti-union laws". First and foremost, he said, "observe the most principled of all trade union laws—that picket lines are not to be crossed." If they failed, he warned "what would this generation be left with? The dole queue? Emigration? The military – or fodder for fascist groups which breed on discontent? Fail and we set our country on an oppressive downward spiral for the next generation." (*The Miner*, August 31st 1984). The miners stood against the state's onslaught, and they could have—and should have—won. Instead they were betrayed by the Labour Party, the TUC and the union leaders, all of whom failed to abide by their official policies to provide the solidarity action which could have secured victory. The rail, steel and transport unions and others pledged full support at the start of the strike – all failed to deliver on their pledge. The legacy of the miners' defeat hangs over us to this day.

Here we are again, another recession is descending on us with increasing severity and the questions posed by the NUM in 1984 are precisely the questions many among the working class may well ask themselves today.

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workers in ukraine occupy the kherson engineering factory... and the local council

An abridged version of an article from a comrade in Kyiv

Over a month after 300 workers at an engineering plant in the Ukrainian town of Kherson launched an occupation of their factory in defence of their jobs and demanding the payment of unpaid wages, the movement took a step forward early this month with the occupation of the provincial government building. This followed large demonstrations through the town, also including other trade unionists and young activists.

On Monday 2nd March workers from the Kherson Machine Building Plant (KHMZ) occupied the ground floor of the building of the Kherson provincial state administration and provincial council. About 500 workers arrived at the building in the centre of Kherson and demanded a meeting with management and the council, in order to seek payment of wages in arrears.

Part of the picket - about 200 people - was invited into the small hall on the ground floor of building for an audience with Kherson's governor Boris Silenkov. The governor said to KHMZ workers that the provincial administration had already done everything in its power and that it was now a matter for government: but more time would be necessary before the problem could be resolved.

However, as his 'conversation' with those angered by the lack of pay continued, voices were raised, and after the

meeting workers refused to leave the office building. The leader of the independent trade union 'Petrovets', Leonid Nemchenko, commented "we took the ground floor of the administration building, and we will stay until our demands are carried out: until we are paid our wages and the factory is put back to work again." Nemchenko voiced his belief that workers were prepared for three or four days of occupation, and by March 4th workers received the first news that the government would pay some of the money owed.

The leader of the provincial administration and an attorney were also expected to arrive in order to investigate the behaviour of KHMZ officials. When the occupation began on February 3rd the workers were owed £450,000. Protests have continued since then, with management paying off just £78,000 of that debt.

The main demands of protesting workers are:

- payment of wages in arrears, which have been held up since September 2008;
- nationalization of the plant without compensation to its owner;
- government security of distribution of the factory's products.

Not only are the workers taking radical measures such as occupations, but their means of organising are also promising. As opposed to accepting business unionism or the bureaucratic machinery of Stalinist outfits, the workers at

Kherson have elected a workers' council with five representatives meeting in what was until recently the office of the plant's technical director.

This use of democratic organisation and the factory occupation tactic is an excellent example of how workers can resist management's right to manage and stand up for ourselves in these difficult economic times.

strategy for industrial struggle

A reprint of a 1971 *Solidarity* pamphlet with a new introductory essay by Chris Kane.

The *Solidarity* piece explores different forms of action (strikes; occupations and sit ins; sabotage; work-to-rules and go-slows; etc.) and how they relate to rank-and-file involvement and control over struggles. Chris's introduction examines the lessons and relevance of these ideas for today, and stresses the centrality of self-organisation, democracy, and resistance to the conservatism of trade union bureaucracies when faced with the anti-union laws.

£1 + p&p — to order, use contact details on p.12

unions and left parties let down greek youth uprising

by Valia Kaimaki

If anyone has managed to understand the causes and analyze the results of the uprising by Greek youth last December, it is surely not Greek society itself. After writing an article exclusively for foreigners trying to explain what exactly happened here I was amazed to realise how many Greeks, friends, neighbours and colleagues complimented me on opening a debate on the subject. Any analysis, social, political or economical remained marginal and incomplete. There are a number of questions that should have been addressed by political groups, journalists and the public and at least some answers should have been formulated. The reason why nothing of the sort happened is that nobody was ready to open Pandora's box.

On Saturday December 6th, a 15 year old school boy, Alexandros Grigoropoulos was killed by a police Special Guard in the centre of Athens. It has not yet been proven that this Greek Rambo targeted the boy directly, but for anyone who has seen the video on YouTube it is more than clear. The reason why this is not expressed officially is obvious. The boy supposedly "verbally abused" the policeman and that provoked his anger. Let us keep in mind that Exarchia is regarded as a "hot" area. Situated next to the Polytechnic University, where the mass student uprising in 1973 became one of the most significant events in the fight against the 1967-74 dictatorship, the neighbourhood attracts youth from all over Athens (a city of 5 million). It is not infrequent that the Exarchia police station is attacked by rebel youth, with stones or even Molotov cocktails. Most Athenian youth can remember an incident or two in Exarcheia, as a sort of rite of passage. The same police force is said to be doing excellent business with drug dealers, who also find refuge in the area. In general, the Greek police excel in fighting demonstrators rather than organized crime, but in Exarchia there is a kind of vendetta between police and youth.

The first discussion that opened was about the role of the police. We learnt that police officers are supposed to pass psychological tests at regular intervals, but they don't, as there are not enough doctors. We learnt that when a policeman 'loses control', the internal "omerta" (code of silence) is well kept. We learnt a number of things... and then discussion was closed down as abruptly as it opened.

Just after the murder, youth, mostly from far-left and anarchist organisations, demonstrated in the Exarchia area. They burnt cars, broke shop windows and destroyed ATMs. On the other side, police constantly lobbed tear gas at them. By the Sunday, all Greece was on fire. Numerous protest marches were organized in almost every



Greek youth hit the state where it hurts but had insufficient support

town. School boys and girls, who have never had any contact with any political or workers' organization, were out in the streets.

Side by side with school kids, students, young workers and the unemployed also protested. But social problems need political solutions and the kids out in the streets did not propose any. The only adult movement that stood by them was the migrant movement, but we all understand that it has no real strength. Why didn't the workers' movement stand by them? Because the youth were not organized, because they were violent and because they were spontaneous: things that organized trade unionism is afraid of. Of course the main union federation participated in some of the protest marches, but it didn't exercise any real pressure on the government. Without allies their protest was doomed not to go very far.

It is true that the right wing New Democracy government is facing a multitude of problems and the youth revolt was not the least among them. Major economic scandals have led to the resignation of two ministers, both of them close to the Prime Minister Kostas Karamanlis. But the government is not facing serious opposition. The leader of the Socialist Party (PASOK), George Papandreou is following the same tactics as Karamanlis five years ago: he's biding time. It will eventually be his turn, as in many European countries: the centre-left Socialists succeed centre-right

conservatives, and vice versa. The other three parties of the opposition followed usual tactics as well. The far right LAOS was only worried about broken shop windows and burnt cars, and the Communist Party (KKE) didn't recognize the movement as 'orthodox' enough. Both of these parties attacked the third one, SYRIZA for defending violent actions. SYRIZA is a peculiar case. Part of it comes from KKE, another part represents what is left of the 'revisionist' KKE-Interior split. And the rest of it consists of various small radical groups. Its biggest component, SYNASPISMOS, comes from the KKE and although sometimes what they say is innovative and modern-sounding, most of the time we can clearly see their wish to prove themselves "truer" than the Communist Party. It is the only party, though, that stood next to the youth movement and actively participated to it. And it now seems they had more to lose than to gain. The arrows of the KKE found their target and people really did withdraw their sympathy from a party that 'supported violence' (which was not, however, true).

The youth movement could not go any further because it was not political. It expressed no real programme, just the growing anger of a youth without future. Perhaps it is difficult to understand that such a massive movement did not have any organised political support at all. A deeper social movement is needed, not just youth, but workers and anti-capitalists too; this alliance could be a force for change.

the commune

editorial: the recession—don't moan, organise!

Workers are asking—who will defend them against this deliberate onslaught? The Labour Party? Many workers are long disgusted with the party financed and loyally supported by their unions for over a century. At the last general election nine million people, many with gritted teeth, voted for the Labour Party in the belief that, for want of any better option, it was a lesser evil.

The Labour Party

New Labour falls over itself to re-assure the capitalists that they have their interests at heart and are doing all in their power to restore the viability of British capitalism. The unelected Business Secretary Lord Mandelson assures the rest of us that after the current difficulties there will emerge "a renaissance in UK manufacturing and the expansion of the UK's knowledge-based industries". This promise of jam tomorrow is no more comforting than Brown's job creation schemes, a drop in the ocean of the jobs cull underway. Such talk of how things will look after the recession is even more ridiculous when we consider the fact that things could get worse: *much worse*. Having poured £37 billion into the banks in October 2008, it required another rescue package of up to £300 billion to shore up the financial system just three months later. Having *de facto* nationalised the banks to preserve them, New Labour now sets out to privatise the Royal Mail. If some MPs pose as "old Labour" over this it is motivated more often than not by self-preservation—hoping to hang on to their seats at the next election—rather than the needs of working class people in the recession.

If anything reveals whose interests New Labour serves it is the Welfare Reform Bill, also backed by the Tories, Liberals and Confederation of British Industry. With fifteen different measures covering benefits, services for the disabled to child maintenance, it is modelled on the American 'workfare' system which has reduced the poor there to destitution. At a time of growing unemployment it represents a savage cut in benefits and a further means of coercing people into even lower paid, insecure jobs, or poverty.

The TUC and the captive unions

But what of our trade unions: will they defend us from the onslaught? The employers and the government fully realise the scale of their predicament and are prepared to take drastic measures. The official labour movement, however, as opposed to responding in kind, is showing itself too closely tied to this government and this system to put up effective resistance. The TUC, which is meant to represent the working class, has responded with an 'emergency ten point plan to tackle unemployment' but in the entire document there is not one word on *stopping* the job cuts. After years of preaching social partnership with employers, for the career bureaucrats at the TUC it is neither possible nor desirable to stand in the way of the employers' efforts. Instead they call for "further interventions in the banking and financial systems" to get credit flowing, and a series of palliatives: extending 'Train to Gain', utilising union reps' skills not to fight but to serve as career advisors, increase redundancy pay and create more job clubs. The TUC has a lot to say about training but very little about trade unionism.

John Hannet, leader of the shop workers' union USDAW says – "The recession is worrying news but it may not be as bad as some people fear". On a salary of £104,663 Hannet has indeed little to fear, but sadly he is symptomatic of the inadequate union response to the crisis. Many have abandoned any pretence of being instruments of defence of working class conditions and jobs. We have witnessed the GMB sign up to pay cuts to stop redundancies, only to fail. We have seen the despicable agreement by UNITE to the dismissal of agency workers en masse at Cowley: this has done nothing to stave off the jobs cull in the car industry.

Breaking with the past

The recession is underlining limitations of the official labour movement. To measure up to the scale of the problems we face, the movement urgently requires a new direction. But so far the entire debate on the crisis of our movement has been confined within the parameters of recreating some form of electoral alternative, delusions of reclaiming the Labour Party, or a protest movement around a *People's Charter*. In fact we desperately need a re-composition of the entire movement. We do not need another Labour Party or even the existing TUC. The movement needs to be transformed and restructured by the rank and file. We need to start the discussion on creating a *new organising centre* – combining any unions and those rank and files who are truly willing to stand up for workers' interests. To reforge our movement into one that combines political and industrial wings and rejects the restrictive and divisive politics of Labourism. It would be ludicrous to imagine this can be done overnight by simply proclaiming it – but if we are to achieve this we need to start building these values into our current activities or we will remain captive to the current inadequate set up.

Fighting for jobs

Under capitalism, a job is the most basic need of every worker: we need jobs because in this system selling the only thing we own—our capacity to work for a wage—is the only way to survive. Capitalism cannot function without making job cuts, since to restore profit rates the employers aim to make fewer people work harder for less. Communists say that the fight to save jobs exposes a fundamental conflict of interests between the present system of capital and the interests of the working class. Employers invariably argue we are "all in it together": 'rationalisation' is a necessity, a temporary measure on the road to a recovery. In fact redundancies offer a bleak future for all workers, employed and unemployed.

We need to respond to the recession by recognition that we have no common interests with the employers and that the crisis flows directly from the logic of their system. The working class needs every job it has got just to maintain its present standard of living. For some years now, struggles against redundancies have rarely been successful in saving jobs. This is partly because of the union leaders' reluctance to lead a real fight to save all jobs. Instead, 'left' union leaders have reduced their horizons to opposing only compulsory redundancies. Fighting for limited objectives and accepting the same logic as capital has allowed them to claim job losses as victories: for example in the Civil Service we have seen devastating cuts, while the Trotskyist leadership of PCS claim no 'compulsory redundancies' as a substantial success. Nevertheless, management have achieved their cuts by 'voluntary' means such as 'natural wastage' and making working life intolerable. It is vital to adopt a principle of no job losses, voluntary or compulsory, otherwise those left behind are left with more work on their plates for the same money. If our goal is to maintain workers' livelihoods then we can be objective about the success or failure of industrial action and form a realistic assessment of its efficacy.

Rebuild workplace organisation

The official labour movement squandered the period of partial recovery in the economy to rebuild the movement: trade union membership density is only 28% of all employees, overwhelmingly in the public sector. The TUC pumped money into UnionLearn as opposed to organising. To resist this recession *we have to rely on our own initiative*. Workplace organisation needs to be rebuilt. Part of that involves restoring control over our own organisations: we should to break off all partnership ar-

rangements and negotiate on our terms as independent workers' representatives. If the officials will not fight then we learn to combine and gain the confidence to act independently of the official structures. This is no longer about the romantic slogans of small left groups: the Lindsey Oil Refinery strikers have proven that we can combine, in a more democratic way, break the anti-union laws and secure victory. That strike wave gave us a snapshot of what is now a real possibility. It brought to the fore new possibilities of workers' self-organisation and militant actions, even though it had many contradictions, not least of all the necessity to develop solidarity across Europe against a capital which is well organised on an EU level.

Our starting point must be what is realistic and necessary for the working class. Every worker needs a decent job, a living wage and the right to organise. We need a movement that can put forward coherent viable strategies for action, one that is based on the self-organisation and self-management of the members themselves.

Communism from below

Unemployment is a man made evil, not a natural disaster. It is a result of the capitalist system, and as such fighting job cuts means developing a fight against the system itself. The only way we can make a safe, secure, and better life is to uproot capital. Millions of people now recognise that capitalism is the cause of the crisis, but they do not have any confidence that there is a viable alternative society. Many who have experienced the defeats and failed initiatives of the past feel demoralised and disoriented. Instead many are looking to the possibility of subjecting capital to varying degrees of greater control *by means of the state* such as nationalisation. This is even though nationalising capital has been used extensively to *preserve* capitalism. Such ideas of state-socialism have led to historic failures, whether of Labour governments or the totalitarian regimes in the USSR and elsewhere.

Drawing on the lessons of the past we believe workers' self-management is central to our vision of a 21st century communism. Self-management is the opposite of state-socialism with its bureaucratic power. By organising and uniting in our workplaces, we are developing the means and power to gain greater workers' control, by which to eventually secure workers' self-management. Our own organisations of self-management can be the means to transform the economy. This idea of communism is not a utopia which falls from the sky but something that grows out of our living, real struggles today. Blunting the impact of the recession is important, but we need to recognise that there is no alternative to fighting the system.

This month a new *People's Charter* will be launched which avoids this glaring reality. So it is worth recalling the original 19th century Chartists, the first revolutionary workers' movement in this country, who had no such fears. Criticising 'Inadequate Remedies for Social Evils', Chartist leader Julian Harney wrote:

"It is not the any amelioration of the condition of the most miserable that will satisfy us, it is justice to all we demand. It is not the mere improvement of social life of our class that we seek, but the abolition of all classes and the destruction of those wicked distinctions which have divided the human race into princes and paupers, landlords and labourers, masters and slaves. It is not any patching and cobbling of the system we aspire to accomplish; but the annihilation of that system, and the substitution in its stead of an order of things in which all shall labour and all enjoy and the happiness of each guarantee the welfare of the entire community."

making plans for our organisation

On January 31st The Commune held a meeting with comrades from London, Coventry and Wrexham at which we discussed our coming activities and publications.

It was agreed that such meetings will take place every three months, in tandem with organising meetings of our London group every three weeks. Hopefully the London group will become just one in a network of committees.

Comrades also discussed the progress that the group has made since it was established in September 2008. We have held a series of meetings on 1970s trade unionism; we have produced seven pamphlets, including republishing a number of 'lost' texts; and we are regularly producing this newspaper. We have attracted quite some interest for our ideas and have a solid base from which to run forums on "capitalism and the working class today" and a

reading group, with a meeting in each of the two series every three weeks.

Our organisation is new and is by no means perfect, but we invite all those interested in our project to come and take part in our discussions. The meeting passed a motion on how we plan to organise—**see page 12**.

Lessons of the oil refinery

by Professor Gregor Gall, University of Hertfordshire

Introduction

The engineering construction workers' strike has been the most significant instance of workers' resistance to the recession and its effects so far. Its significance is not just to be found in that it was a strike taking place in a recession – when conventional wisdom suggests workers do not strike because of their weakened labour market position. Rather, its significance is to also be found in the militant and successful collective action which took place and the dynamics of this which were driven primarily by the grassroots. It threw up critical issues of workers' collective leverage, how labour markets operate, xenophobia, neo-liberalism and state regulation of labour.

Origins and Background

Redundancy notices were issued in late 2008 at Lindsey oil refinery for Shaws' workforce after Shaws lost part of a Total contract at the site. Just before Christmas holiday, Shaws' shop stewards were informed this work had been contracted to IREM, an Italian non-union company. Stewards explained to members that IREM would employ its own core (non-union) Portuguese and Italian workforce so the redundant workers would not be re-employed on the contract. This precipitated meetings with IREM to press the case for re-employment. Stewards were also told that IREM would pay the national rate for the job but this was met with suspicion.

Meanwhile, the National Shop Stewards Forum for construction met in early January to discuss Staythorpe power station where Alstom was refusing to hire local labour and relying upon non-union Polish and Spanish workers instead. It was decided that all 'Blue Book' sites covered by the National Agreement for the Engineering Construction Industry (NAECI) should send delegations down to Staythorpe to ramp up the protests against Alstom. And, since last October, Unite – under pressure from stewards – had organised demonstrations at Staythorpe for the employment of local labour.

Then, on Wednesday 28th January 2009, Shaws' workers were told by their stewards that IREM had definitely stated it would not employ local labour. Between 800-1000 workers met and voted unanimously to take immediate unofficial strike action. In this meeting, calls for striking were met by the stewards' committee recommending to workers to stay within the national disputes procedure. But when workers voted for a strike anyway, the entire shop stewards' committee (on advice from Unite officials) resigned to distance the union from unlawful action. The following day over 1,000 construction workers from Lindsey, Conoco and Easington sites descended to the refinery's gate to picket and protest. This was the spark that ignited the unofficial walkouts of construction workers across the length and breadth of Britain, amounting to over twenty groups of workers and involving up to 6,500 workers for a week.

On Monday 2nd February, the Lindsey strike committee put the following proposals to the strikers to be adopted as their demands (which they were): no victimisation of workers taking solidarity action; all workers in Britain to be covered by the NAECI agreement; union controlled registering of unemployed and locally skilled union members, with nominating rights as work becomes available; government and employer investment in proper training/apprenticeships for new generation of construction workers - fight for a future for young people; all migrant labour to be unionised; union assistance for immigrant workers - including interpreters - and access to union advice to promote active integrated union members; and build links with construction unions on the continent.

Dynamics of Revolt

The internal dynamics of the revolt were complex and intriguing. The dispute was driven by stewards and activists in terms of the Lindsey strike and how it spread. Yet, it seemed that the two unions involved (GMB, and Unite in particular) were giving support to it, publicly representing the strikers and negotiating on their behalf despite the strikes being unofficial and unlawful. What happened was that the strikers were pushing in an industrial direction while the unions were pushing in a political direction in a way that played to their respective strengths and objectives. However, while there was compatibility with this, there was also friction over means and ends.



The media and much of the left were mesmerised by the slogan 'British jobs for British workers': in fact the motivations behind the use of this Gordon Brown quote by some strikers, as well as the dynamics of the dispute, were much more complicated.

In the absence of threats of injunctions (and thus the options of compliance or defiance) and lawful dismissal of strikers (for unofficial action) because the employers knew this would inflame the situation, the unions worked with the strikers – as opposed to strenuously and seriously calling on them to go back to work – even though they distanced themselves from it in other ways (see below).

Sympathy walkouts and the congregations of protestors and strikers were coordinated by grassroots activists through mobile phone, email and the web, and the Bearfacts website. Given the degree of support flying pickets did not seem necessary given the technologies deployed. Mass meetings at sites took place with show-of-hand votes on what course of action to take.

The reason why these means of organisation have been so effective was because of i) the prior and heavy unionisation of these workers, ii) the inter-site network of shop stewards as an authentic and organic voice of members, iii) the intermingling of these workers through working together on different projects, thus helping to create a common shared sense of interests and grievances. Also of note was that many unemployed construction workers took part in the protests, indicating that the gap between being unemployed or working or not is not a great one given the nature of the projects and employment in the industry.

The unions began to recommend returns to work by the sympathy strikers after the first two or three days but these were often rejected because the Staythorpe workers were still out. The argument of the unions concerned returning to work and balloting on official action as well as raising money to support the Lindsey strikers. The reasoning behind this seemed to be that the strikers had made their point, the Lindsey strikers were in meaningful negotiations, and, with the head of steam built up, the unions could take over and use this to push the political agenda.

In the media, the unions made it clear that the action was not official and that they could not support it. That aside, they did not condemn it. But more than that, they as national unions were one of the main voices of the striking workers and their urging of returns to work were not particularly vehement. Practically, the two unions at their national officer levels were amongst the negotiators in talks aimed at resolving the Lindsey dispute as well as the political dispute over exclusive use of non-domiciled labour and the Posted Workers' Directive.

While one would expect national officers to be less involved on the ground, it was noticeable how involved regional officers were. Some reports suggest that there were meetings between union officers and stewards on construction sites and that information about the strikes was spread between the sites via official channels, effectively encouraging solidarity action (although there seemed to be little coordination between Unite and the GMB).

However, there were significant tensions at Lindsey between the strikers and the national unions over the way to resolve the dispute and on what basis. For example, in the first meeting between Total and the strike committee, the employers kept looking at their watches. When asked why the meeting was being cut short, they said they had a meeting to go to with Unite officials and ACAS in Scunthorpe. This was news to the strike committee and they immediately organised to go up to the Hotel with other strikers and demanded to be let into the negotiations. Another report recounted: 'The strike committee only found out through the management that two national officials from Unite and the GMB were in talks with ACAS in Scunthorpe. Fifty strikers set out for Scunthorpe, where the officials were ensconced in a hotel with ACAS. When the strikers got there they were blocked from the hotel by police. Only by smuggling a note past the police did the strikers get the national officials to come out and talk to them. As a result the strike committee forced their way to the table to ensure that no deals are done behind their backs.'

Responses and Outcomes

Politicians of mainstream parties (Tories, Liberals, SNP) by Friday 30th January repeated lines like 'strikes are not the best way to sort this out', 'you've made your point now so get back to work' and 'this will start to damage the economy'. None outlined just how the strikers could continue to exert pressure without striking. Only Labour called the strikes 'indefensible', 'xenophobic' and mounted an attack on them (although some ministers commented the strikers had legitimate concerns). The pressure the strike created led the government to instruct ACAS to investigate the claims of wage undercutting and to mediate in the Lindsey dispute as well as an investigation into the sector's productivity.

Total was involved in the talks despite the issue being with IREM. Initially, it refused to negotiate with the strikers until they had returned to work. However, it conceded and cajoled IREM into offering a third of the 198 disputed jobs to local workers. This was rejected leading to a new offer of 102 jobs available for local workers of any nationality but primarily for the soon-to-be redundant Shaws workers, with no redundancies of the Italian workers and with all workers paid on NAECI rates. Two further aspects of the agreement were that stewards can check that the jobs filled by the Italian and Portuguese workers are on the same conditions as the local workers covered by the NAECI agreement, and that unionised workers will work alongside the IREM workers in order that further verification of NAECI rates being paid.

Politically, a case was being built - and support gathered for it – for the government to revisit and revise its extremely neo-liberal 1999 interpretation of the Posted Workers Directive into national regulations. These stipulated that terms and conditions should not be below the legal minimum as per the minimum wage and the like rather than not be below the collectively bargained industry rates. It is this revision – to the collectively bargained

wildcat strike movement

industry rates – to the British regulations which seems more likely to be achieved rather the revising of the EU directive itself or the European Court of Justice rulings which mean that it is unlawful to prevent a company using the Directive to undercut union rates.

Xenophobia?

From the placards on the pickets and demonstrations, the one demand that stood out most clearly above all other was 'British jobs for British workers'[1]. Indeed, at the outset of the strike it seemed to be the only demand from the workers, and due to the continued usage of these images by the media seemed to transcend more than just the first few days of the strike.

Did this mean that some sections of the left (like the Socialist Workers Party) were right to say this was tantamount to a racist strike, the strike was playing with fire and that the wrong target of Italian and Portuguese workers had been chosen (rather than the correct target of the employers)? Or was the rest of the left (Labour left, SP, CPB, SSP, Solidarity [Scotland]) correct to say this was a strike for the right to work and was a strike against employers, neo-liberalism and recession?

The original dispute at Lindsey concerned IREM's practice of exclusively using Italian and Portuguese workers. In other words, IREM was bringing in new workers who were permanently employed by it to do the work and not permitting any other workers, whether British or non-British in the local labour market, to be eligible to apply for this work. So this was not a strike against the use of foreign workers *per se*. It was a strike against the exclusive use of certain workers at the expense of others workers in the local labour, or British, labour market. The strikers were not calling for the expulsion, repatriation or sacking of 'foreign' workers. And given the expanded nature of the labour market in Britain in recent years, it was not just British-born and British self-identified workers that were ineligible for the work but all other skilled workers already in Britain. The mistake by some on the left in the unions to criticise or oppose the strikes was down to their mesmerisation with the slogan 'British jobs for British workers'.

Of course, this in and of itself is not conclusive proof as words and actions can diverge for a number of other reasons. The demand of 'British jobs for British workers' (and its other imitations) owes much to the attempt to make political capital out of the phraseology of the promise coined by Gordon Brown in 2007. The strikers did so in order to try to exert some leverage over the government by taking up its phrase and trying to put pressure on them to deliver upon it. After spending billions of pounds of public money bailing out reckless bankers and indemnifying them against their losses, the strikers were seeking to make the point that they too demanded government protection.

So using the slogan was a tool of tactical leverage at the level of a single and simple slogan but which hid a much more complex phenomenon. The fuller demand that could not easily be encapsulated in a slogan and which would not fit onto a placard or banner, as alluded to above, concerned the right of workers in Britain – whether 'British' or not – to be eligible to apply for vacant work on construction sites in Britain (as opposed to demand the right to get the jobs). The strike by some 600 workers at Langage Power Station, which included hundreds of Polish workers, again indicated that at base the strikes were about a demand for the right to work for workers who are domiciled in Britain.

Finally, and in recognition of the attraction of the BNP and the ability of the media to portray the strike as racist and xenophobic, some of the slogans began to change from Monday 2nd February to demands for the right to work for local workers and workers in Britain. Thus, Bearfacts posters changed from 'British jobs for British workers' to 'Fair Access for Local Labour' where local meant existing workers in the local labour markets and was not a cipher for 'British' or white 'British' workers.

But just as telling as any of these factors was that understanding how the strike began explains why the few placards of 'British jobs for British workers' came to such prominence and threw many media and commentators off the scent of the actual demands. The resignation by the stewards on Wednesday 28th January led to a vacuum amongst the workers in terms of leadership of the strike and it was not for a two or three days that the unofficial strike committee was established and began to exert itself. Consequently, there were then almost no Unite ban-

ner and placards initially because of the unofficial, unlawful nature of the strike to which the stewards had acted to distance themselves. In was into this initial vacuum-cum-leaderless strike that some workers downloaded posters from the Bearfacts website to use on the demonstrations and pickets. It was not until the Lindsey strike committee asserted itself and its demands that the openly displayed demands changed.

Now, of course, none of this is not to suggest that there was no racism or xenophobia involved. There was inevitably some amongst the workers at Lindsey because these workers are a reflection of workers (and people in Britain in) in general who, in turn, reflect some of the dominant views that exist in society. The same can be said for the wider numbers of strikers and those out of work construction workers that became protesters.

But where much more evidence of this was seen was amongst those people who left comments on newspaper websites and the like and who were not directly involved in the dispute as well as the attempts by the BNP through their specially created website, British Wildcats, to encourage and support the 'little Englander' attitudes.

Conclusion: difficult next steps

Having highlighted and created a political sensitivity to the issue as well as achieving a good compromise at Lindsey, the next difficult steps facing the activists and national unions is not just to maintain the pressure and profile but make genuine advance in achieving union objectives.

The history of building up heads of steam only for them to dissipate is an age old problem. If we recall the Gate Gourmet dispute of 2005, the ability of the union movement to secure a change in the employment law that restricted secondary action was unsuccessful when the *Trade Union Freedom Bill* was rejected on several occasions in Parliament as a result of the Labour government's opposition.

Since the strike revolt ended, weekly demonstrations have continued at Staythorpe and Isle of Grain sites and there have been lobbies of Parliament, meetings of sponsored MPs in different union parliamentary groups and so on. Indeed, on one occasion, some 60 workers at Staythorpe walked out to join the demonstration despite being threatened with dismissal and were joined by 250 workers from Easington, East Yorkshire who struck for the day to join the protest. Of greater significance is that grassroots pressure is building for an industry-wide one day national strike and march on Parliament to stop employers from exclusively using foreign workers to undermine the Blue Book, and the GMB stated it is prepared to sanction an official strike ballot to that end if its shop stewards decided that was an appropriate course of action.

So momentum has been maintained and may step up a gear or two. But the problem remains that the target of this pressure is a considerable distance away from it and thus any leverage or power over them from construction sites is diffuse. The Parliamentary Labour Party and Labour government as well as the European Commission and European Court of Justice are unaccountable to these workers in any direct sense.

For the required changes to be made, the struggle needs to be generalised amongst all unions and progressive social forces. In other words, there needs to be a broad leftwing alliance against neo-liberalism which can mobilise the numbers of people in Britain that we've seen mobilised in recent years in Ireland, France and the Netherlands when their populaces voted against the EU treaty. Thus, the strikers and their unions need to make common cause with other progressive forces that oppose the other results of the EU's neo-liberalism. And if they seek to change the EU position and the court verdicts another necessary component of this alliance has to be action with their brothers and sisters on the continent for the mathematics of the EU means one country cannot change things on its own.

All this means Britain is going to have to see sustained and escalating demonstrations, protests, strikes and shut-downs of the like not seen since the poll tax and before. British workers will have to shed their conservatism as a labour movement and act more like their continental cousins who are schooled in direct, mass action.

This article was originally written for Frontline magazine, which will be appearing shortly.

[1]Consequently, rightwing forces ranging from the *Daily Mail* to UK Independence Party and BNP were quick to

lend their support and champion the strikers' cause. Indeed, the BNP attempted to join the picketlines and protests and recruit out of the revolt but was ejected and rejected.

the impossibility of class struggle in the mind of the bbc

by Joe Thorne

It is perhaps not surprising that the BBC and other mainstream media represented the Lindsey strikes in terms of nationalism, not class struggle. After all, the Corporation's recent 'White Season' showed that, for the BBC, white British working class people are scared, vulnerable, and not a little xenophobic. The strikes – in overwhelmingly 'white' areas of the country, but involving many Irish and Polish workers – were therefore understood by journalists and editors unwilling to get to grips with details, as being simply against “the use of foreign workers” in inspiration. This attitude was reflected in headlines, captions, articles and interviews.

The starkest reflection of this preoccupation was the selective editing of a striking worker on BBC television (2nd February). The worker was heard to say “we can't work alongside of them”, referring to continental workers. Later the same evening a fuller version was played: “we can't work alongside of them: we're segregated from them. They're coming in in full companies.” Here, it seems, pre-conception passed to manipulation.

In fact, a basic logic of industrial struggle drove the strikes. According to the *Financial Times* (9th February) “companies working in the sector state privately that the attraction of using foreign rather than British workers is that they are much less likely to stage illegal strikes”. (As the in-house journal of the capitalist class, the FT is often fairly reliable; they lie to us, not to each other.) Strikers were aware that, though the Portuguese and Italian workers may have been employed on the same terms and conditions this time, the practice of posting workers represented a threat to the nationally negotiated agreements. This concern was driven by the fact that 'posted' workers are systematically isolated from local workers in day to day work, making them harder to organise. Furthermore, two rulings by the European Court of Justice suggest that organising industrial action to defend national agreements, were they to be undercut through 'posting', would be unlawful. (The 'Viking' and 'Laval' cases.) In this context, the wholesale 'posting' of workers across Europe, as a substitute for local hiring, can be understood as a boss tool to undermine workers' power.

There is, however, no need to paint the events redder than they were. Currents of xenophobia and sexism cut through the logic of the class struggle. Unite General Secretary Derek Simpson posed for the *Daily Star* with 'page 3' models holding British Jobs for British Workers signs. The same newspaper intervened at picket lines to set up photos with willing workers. Reports from Workers' Liberty activists visiting the Grain picket suggest that understandings of the strike politics were varied. “On the 'British Jobs For British Workers' slogan, some seemed unrepentant and definitely chauvinist. Some obviously seemed to think it had been daft tactically, and some others that it shouldn't have been used.” We need to recognise and challenge these currents, but not assume that they characterise the movement. One of the victories of the Lindsey strike was to ensure that 'posted' and locally hired workers would work alongside each other, allowing for better integration.

The role of the media is not only immediate misrepresentation to a passive audience. The fact is that many workers – not only those involved in sympathy wildcats, but those who have watched passively – will have been encouraged to understand the strikes in terms of nationalism, not class struggle. Communists have a responsibility to redress this.

This dispute should teach us to distinguish between strike objectives, political ideas, resolutions and slogans: to recognise that these things are dynamically related, but not the same – and that they can develop, even in the space of a week. Further, it should teach us that all these things are different from the idea that exists in the mind of the mass media; for whom class struggle is alternately frightening and impossible.

occupations for gaza: activism goes back to university

by Taimour Lay

When students at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London shut down an on-campus Ministry of Defence exhibition on January 13, the one-day occupation was seen as both a qualified success and a missed opportunity. But with the atrocities committed in Gaza creating a sense of outrage and urgency among thousands of people, what SOAS activists failed to carry through, other students resolved to achieve.

Two days later the London School of Economics' Old Theatre was under occupation and a day later Essex University followed. The major ground and air offensive, Operation Cast Lead, 'ended' on January 18 but from January 20-22, the second wave of occupations in solidarity with Gaza had begun in earnest: Kings College London, Birmingham, Sussex, Warwick, the London College of Communication, Manchester Met, Oxford, Leeds and Cambridge were all under occupation, communicating formally and informally, sharing tactics, drawing up broadly similar demands and settling in for the long haul. The immediate context of Israeli military aggression had broadened into a critique of the education system's financial links with Israel and the increasing commercialisation of all aspects of university life. Success in one place emboldened the rest; clampdowns by the authorities generated a discontent that may keep growing.

By the last weekend of January – and just as the mainstream media were picking up on the phenomenon - Sheffield Hallam, Nottingham, Bradford, the University of East London and Queen Mary's had joined in. And still it hadn't stopped: on February 4 students at Manchester took the Simon Building at the heart of the campus and, one month on, at the time of going to press, show no sign of leaving. In mid-February, students in Cardiff and Edinburgh were only just beginning. In total, 28 institutions had become part of a protest movement the scale of which few had anticipated.

But does the spate of occupations represent a genuine change in the basis for organising among Britain's 2.5m students? What sorts of coalitions were built and how central was the organisational power of the Socialist Workers Party? What were the conditions in which some occupations succeeded and others failed? What was their political content? And how can a renewal of student politics be channelled into class struggle?

28 occupations – one model?

The occupations were characterised by their focus on demands for university condemnation of the Israeli aggression against civilians and educational institutions, calls for divestment from arms companies, and scholarships for Palestinian students. These three categories were met by universities in different ways: most were willing to make an anodyne statement expressing "regret" for the loss of civilian life ("on both sides", most were swift to add), but the degree to which activists were able to extract genuine concessions on ethical investment and scholarships was dependent on attitudes towards negotiation and duration of occupation.

The model for occupation followed by the majority was not just coincidentally similar. It reflects the existing levels of activism at each institution: the typical make-up appears to have been a core of perhaps 40-50 people comprising independent socialists, SWP students, greens, anarchists, and members of Palestinian and Islamic societies, bolstered by dozens –and in some cases, hundreds – more students prepared to engage politically in response to the shocking levels of civilian casualties in Palestine, combined with a longer-term frustration with expensive, bureaucratic university authorities and an equally undemocratic and unresponsive National Union of Students. That such a core group was able, in many cases, to maintain a strong hand in negotiations with the Universities was precisely because they were operating at the forefront of significant, and increasingly vocal, support from the student population as a whole.

The LSE occupation and others fitted this mould. Most activists recognise the role played by SWPers – but, while admitting to occasional tensions over political direction, deny that splits ever threatened the unity of the group. In



Students at Kings College London demanded the revocation of Israeli president Shimon Peres's honorary law doctorate.

Sheffield Hallam, for example, one anarchist activist spoke positively about the cooperation between the Anarchist Federation, Stop the War/SWP, Hands Off the People of Iran, Amnesty and the Islamic Society.

University clampdowns

The response of university authorities varied widely: from a willingness to negotiate and respect the occupation space to early and heavy-handed attempts to end political mobilisations before they could gather strength. The most striking example of direct assault on protesters came at Nottingham University on Sunday February 1, day six of an occupation that had attracted some of the highest numbers in the second wave of mobilisations. An unusually large group of up to 100 people were sleeping overnight in a politics department lecture theatre, with 450-500 regularly attending events during the day.

Hicham Yezza says the university management had planned their attack carefully. "They waited until the Sunday evening when lots of people had gone home to shower and get supplies. We just didn't expect them to make a move, especially as it was snowing so heavily. But at least a dozen West Midlands police and another 20 private security guards came in and dragged people into the snow. There were injuries: I saw the scars and marks on protesters' bodies."

Nottingham authorities are now pursuing disciplinary proceedings against those they believe were key organisers. "The university is trying to intimidate people. Letters have been sent out saying that they are under investigation and if people 'come to their attention' for any other issue in the meantime, they are going to get hit very hard."

Yeza believes that protesters were making connections between Gaza and political relations and power dynamics more generally. "This [the conduct of the university] was just another example of the senior management refusing to engage with people, to listen to students. They're obsessed with sponsorship money and private investment. It takes time for a collective mindset to develop in reaction to this."

The clampdown at Sheffield Hallam that same weekend was no less harsh. Students agreed to end their sit-in when threatened with the use of force and a court order – but the university reneged on the deal, reserving the right "in principle" to suspend ringleaders. Two Student Union activists, who have been outspoken campaigners for gov-

ernance reform and were involved in the Gaza protests, are now undergoing disciplinary procedures.

Mark Harrison, an independent leftist, was one of the organisers at Manchester Met which went into occupation on February 4. Over 100 students occupied an engineering faculty building and the university post room. A core of 35 activists was supplemented during the day, with at least 20 sleeping overnight. He says that the senior management of the university adopted a no-compromise position from the outset. "They weren't letting new people and food in, and they weren't engaging in negotiations. They flushed us out by the weekend that way."

But Harrison hopes the occupation has provided momentum for a new kind of politics at the university: "I'm standing in the student elections this year and there's no way that a left candidate would have been able to before this. People are realising how undemocratic the Student Union is – there's not even going to be a proper student council next year. This has been a start. Most of us have three years to keep the pressure on." Activists are doing just that, with protests planned in March to democratise the student union.

Birmingham students are still seething about the response of the authorities when an occupation of one room in the Arts building on January 22 was met by the immediate warning that students were in "breach of the peace" if they did not leave the building. During negotiations the entrance to the room was breached by security guards and police making it impossible to maintain a secure hold on the space. Outside the building the dozens of protesters walked a gauntlet past two police vans and numerous police cars.

When universities reacted with negotiations, activists were in nearly all cases prepared to stay significant periods of time, but this seems to have been driven by a 'demand' focused strategy so that spaces were handed back once the authorities had offered face-saving combinations of words. Occupations ranged in durations from just one day (Oxford, Bradford, Birmingham), to two or three days (Manchester Met), one week (LSE, Cambridge, Sussex, Leeds, Nottingham, Queen Mary's), ten days (KCL, Warwick) to two weeks or more (Strathclyde, Manchester University). At Manchester's marathon occupation demands have been raised, but protesters are placing more emphasis on the inherent value of occupying itself, the creation of an alternative space for activism and discourse.

Victories ‘declared’ and concessions won

While nearly all of the 28 occupations declared ‘victory’ at some stage, some had won more concrete concessions from the authorities than others. In fact, there was a marked trend of occupations apparently ending too early, to the regret of activists unsure that their demands had really been met.

At Oxford, the occupation of the Clarendon building by 80 activists lasted only seven hours, ending after a vague promise on January 28 from the Proctors (a separate authority to the University administration itself) to “raise issues” of investment in arms companies at the University’s Council and “to send a letter” to the Master of Balliol College “drawing his attention to the protesters’ concerns about the proposed title of a lecture series inaugurated by (Israeli President) Shimon Peres.”

Juliette Harkin defended the decision to leave. “The demands we made we will continue to work on and campaign for, but it takes time. Yes, there was a hardcore prepared to stay. We did seriously intend to stay. We’d brought in food but the majority decision of those present was to leave.”

Other occupations’ success was a function of limited demands: the agreements for “reviews” of university investment policies and “in-principle” commitments to the establishment of scholarships for Palestinian students — as at the University of the Arts and Leeds, for example - paled in comparison to the detailed and apparently binding concession won elsewhere. Goldsmiths’ occupation of Deptford Town Hall from February 11-13 won four new scholarships a year until 2020, two of which will be reserved for Palestinian students. The letter from Hugh Jones, University registrar, also included a commitment “not to take action against students involved in the occupation”, a guarantee which protesters at other institutions were not as careful to secure before ending their sit-ins.

An Autonomy and Solidarity activist at Goldsmiths commented afterwards that the coalition of protesters had been, on the whole, cohesive and democratic, and not dominated by the SWP: “For us, it is the act of occupying in itself that is revolutionary. This was borne out by the staggering change of perspective that all the occupiers underwent, with ideas and actions that had previously seemed ‘radical’ being (democratically) voted through by larger and larger majorities as time went on; and by Thursday evening, we were debating the different paths to social change and the makeup of a fair society.

“To win what appears to be a concrete victory in just 29 hours is a clear vindication of direct action. Moreover, the general feeling at the conclusion of the occupation was that direct action had proved itself so effective that our demands were seen as too timid, and that our action had been too brief. Through the smokescreen of student politics and bureaucratic wrangling, some of us caught a glimpse of an emancipatory form of participation: But why settle for a glimpse?”

Another site of significant gains was Strathclyde University, where the occupation of the McCance building by 50 students lasted from February 4 -21. By the end of the second day the university had already agreed to terminate its contract with the water-supplier Eden Springs — an Israeli-owned company operating in the occupied Golan Heights.

Cardiff students were part of the second wave of occupations in mid-February, almost one month after direct action had begun at SOAS in London. What is remarkable is the length of the occupation (just three days and two nights) in relation to the demands met: Cardiff University agreed to end £209,000 worth of investment in, among others, BAE systems and the infrastructure arm of General Electric.

Sebastian Power was part of a predominately Green Party campaign for divestment at Cardiff. The outrage over Gaza created a momentum which activists used to pressure the university with demands focused almost exclusively on investment in arms companies. Again, the pattern is of a ‘core’ group of 30-40 protesters, with significant mobilisation by the SWP, with larger numbers of independents attending sporadically. Power said that “politics” was carefully framed in order to include as many people as possible but at the expense of broadening the message. “The support for divestment ballooned and that’s when the SWP came in but we made it clear this wasn’t a ‘political campaign’.

“We learnt a lot from the other occupations,” Power said. “We were in touch with a lot of people at other places and so we decided to use a lecture event [on ethical investment] to suggest an occupation.

“Students clearly saw the strength of the argument. We said to them, ‘Your tuition fees are going straight to Gen-

eral Electric!’ We were educating students and acting democratically. The student union is just a bureaucracy that wears you down and where it takes years and years to achieve what we did in just a few days.”

Manchester and beyond – a new kind of student politics

Six weeks on from the first mobilisation of students at SOAS on January 13, the occupation at Manchester University shows no sign of ending. The Simon Building remains an autonomous space for teach-ins, workshops (on direct action politics and non-violent resistance) and rallies. And it’s spreading out rather than looking inwards. A Union general meeting attracted 1,100 people. A national demonstration is planned for March 3 to pressure the vice-chancellor, Alan Gilbert, who has threatened the occupiers with permanent exclusion from the University, to enter into substantive negotiations.

Beyond the last occupation, activists across the country are seeking to coordinate at a grassroots level to improve communication and support, synchronise national actions and provide advice to the next wave of occupiers. But now the Gaza crisis has faded from view, will students mobilise as effectively on the cost of fees or the commercialisation of university space? And who will attempting to direct it?

The SWP called a “coordination meeting” in February, the base of which was questioned by some who didn’t believe the students actually involved in the occupations were present. With Workers Power calling for the “radical coordination of student struggles”, Education Not for Sale’s proposal for a new student union network alongside the NUS, and a number of activists not wanting to work within the bureaucracy of the StWC, the political landscape is as fragmented as ever.

February 25th saw around 700 students march through London in protest against top-up fees and demanding free university education for all. A Commune activist present came away disappointed: “The bulk of those attending were either from Trotskyist groups and their peripheries or a bloc of people with anarchist flags. Although most of the speakers at both the start and end of the protest called for student-worker unity, and many of the slogans advocated support for trade union struggles, in fact there were very few workers on the demo, even from the ranks of the UCU or NUT, since there is in reality little integration between workers’ organisations and the student movement, even its left wing. Nor did working-class students from sixth form/FE colleges attend in strong numbers, although some are building a London School Students’ Union.”

But one of the more intriguing developments during the Gaza protest movement came when students at the Byam Shaw School of Art at Central St Martins went into a 10-day occupation demanding the reversal of course cut-backs and their representation by an elected student officer. No mention of Gaza: this was learning the lessons of the past few weeks, engaging in direct action against a chronically unresponsive institution. It suggests a road ahead: the possibility that the next phase of student struggle against top-up fees and privatisation of education — in the context of recession and rising graduate unemployment - will not be dominated by the supine compromises of the NUS, but driven by new coalitions of committed activists, swelled by the mass ranks of the disenchanted, who now realise that the universities — our universities - are there for the taking.

more arrests in iran

by Sam Parsa

The Iranian government’s recent offensive against student and worker activists continued on 1st March when four students, called Amirhosein Mohammadifar, Sanaz Allahyari, Nasim Roshanai and Maryam Sheikh, were arrested. All of them are members of the Freedom and Equality Seeking Students group, who have led protests and actions against the regime as well as against the war. This has brought great concern among our comrades in Iran.

The Freedom and Equality Seeking Students website (not yet in English) is at www.azady-barabary.org

For information on how you can support Iranian activists, see the Hands Off the People of Iran website at www.hopoi.org

school students get organised

Tali Janner-Klausner spoke to us about the London School Students’ Union

How did LSSU come into existence?

A group of school student activists from Edinburgh had already set up a group, and a loose group of school students down in London discussed the idea and agreed that it will be increasingly important for school students to organise in the next few years.

We held a meeting in early February to discuss the need for a School Students’ Union and what issues we should be campaigning on. We also had a member of the Edinburgh School Students’ Union come down to talk about their group and campaigns, and about the student movements in Europe.

What precedents are there for such an organisation?

There are strong student unions across Europe, this is no new idea - in Lithuania, Norway, France and in Spain, where 90% of school students are members of the powerful Sindicato de Estudiantes. They recently organised mass walkouts against cuts and privatisation brought in by the Bologna process - 96% of school students walked out in October in protest to these attacks on their education system.

Sindicato de Estudiantes also organise on broader political issues, as we would do. They organised an 80,000-strong protest in January against Israel’s attacks on Gaza. Furthermore, in France, school students joined in the January 29th general strike, and have held huge protests against the government’s proposed ‘reforms’ of France’s prestigious teacher training programme - these would see huge funding cuts, and the course brought down to one year instead of three.

What issues will LSSU campaign on?

School students should unite to campaign against cuts and school closures, and to stand in support of staff. We will also work with student campaigns in FE colleges and universities against tuition fees, as higher education should be available to all, not just those who can afford it. Privatisation is a problem facing increasing numbers of school students. So-called Public-Private Partnership schemes (PPPs) are being pushed forward by New Labour, whereby school buildings and grounds are sold off to a private company to be rented back by the school itself.

These companies are then completely unaccountable and need no previous experience working in education. The schools are run solely as a profit venture, so of course situations arise where, for example, students have to pay for photocopying or can’t do retakes of exams because they are not considered ‘economically efficient’. It is disgraceful to see schools being run as businesses instead of for our wellbeing.

What do you think of the existing structures meant to represent school students?

Well school councils are a farce, everyone knows that. We need a real, democratic representation for school students that would be a force to contend with - on national issues, but also in individual schools. At present, for example, if a school wanted to stop teaching certain subjects, or to take on a PPP scheme, the school council would of course be powerless. But a School Students’ Union group could threaten walkouts, could apply real pressure on the school and provide a way for teachers, school students and parents to work together on important issues.

Do you think that the anti-war movement shows that school students can also play an important role in protests in society at large?

Absolutely. Young people have historically been very active in important social movements, as in May 1968. The walkouts over the war in Iraq showed that school students can and will take mass action, and can be very effective and militant organisers. More recently, Britain has seen a wave of university occupations in solidarity with the people of Gaza.

A fighting union for school students could grow into a powerful mass movement, as we have seen recently across continental Europe.

To find out more about the LSSU, contact londonssu@gmail.com or 07800 921828

Lassalle's state socialism

Below we publish a section of American communist Hal Draper's work *Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution*. Kindly supplied by the Center for Socialist History, this piece looks at the ideas of Ferdinand Lassalle, a leading figure in the German workers' movement in the mid-19th century who collaborated with the military junta of Bismarck in pursuit of 'socialist' reforms. Lassalle's elitist 'state socialism' was no mere freak of history, but a set of ideas tragically echoed throughout the twentieth century.

As so often before, we must begin with a "political lexicon," an inquiry into the meaning of a term. 'State-socialism' is a protean thing. It has no meaning except insofar as a definition is stated or understood in a particular context. In the history of socialism, 'state-socialism' has been used in three or four quite distinct senses, not infrequently two at a time. We are concerned here only with usages that Marx had to take up.

There was a later usage which was favored by Bakunin and other anarchist writers, and which was sometimes taken over by liberals for their own purposes. This defined 'state-socialism' as *any* socialism that "recognized" a state or aimed at establishing a socialist state or workers' state of any kind—that is, any socialism other than anarchism. This semantic strategy is one way of emptying the term of any useful meaning; but it is of no interest in the present context.

The state-socialism which imposed the term on Marx's attention, and which will be our main concern here, was that which arose in Germany in the 1880s, giving currency to the term *Staatssozialismus* as well as 'Bismarck-ian socialism,' 'socialism of the chair,' 'monarchical socialism,' and other now exotic labels. This current, which originally arose outside of the Social-Democratic Party and socialist movement proper, will be taken up in the next chapter. In this chapter we discuss related tendencies *inside* the socialist movement, which were retroactively clarified by the Bismarckian phenomenon. (Marx himself did not usually discuss Lassalleanism under the label 'state-socialism')

1. Forerunners

Once the term 'state-socialism' had established itself in popular parlance and academic treatises as a "type of socialism," attention was directed back to early socialist history to identify its progenitors. As far back as 1850, Lorenz Stein had pinned the label on Louis Blanc, but (as I read Stein) he did not use the term as if it were original with him. Perhaps it was; but there is no information on the first introduction of the label in political literature.

Stein had so labeled Louis Blanc because, he said, for Blanc "In the end, the state will gain complete control over production.... This is the basis for state-socialism. The state is the only producer.... The state has a complete monopoly over the economy."

As a definition of state-socialism this was quite clear; but in point of fact it was rather unfair to Blanc, who answered the charge by insisting that he looked to the state only for temporary aid in establishing "workers' associations" that would thenceforth control production. There is no reason to doubt Blanc's sincerity in thus repudiating unlimited and complete dependence on the state; it is enough to note that his earlier writings and ambiguities gave color to the charge, and that there is a difference between insincerity and confusion.

If Stein's definition of 'state-socialism' is used, it may describe an element or ingredient in the socialist movement but not a prominent school or organized tendency. ('Bismarckian socialism' outside the socialist movement is a different case, but of course Stein was writing before this came into being.)

Later it became a fixed dogma of academic history that Louis Blanc was the father of something called state-socialism, without clear definition. Neither Marx nor Engels referred to him by this label; to them he was simply a reformist ("petty-bourgeois socialist" or "opportunist").

But there *were* forerunners of Lassallean state-socialism worth mentioning from Marx's standpoint. It is necessary to look for two programmatic ingredients.

(i) *The demand for state aid to establish socialistic institutions.*

As we will see, the central plank of the Lassallean platform, indeed the shibboleth of the tendency, was the demand on the *existing* state to advance large loans to finance the establishment of producers' cooperatives—cooperatives that constituted the boundary of Lassallean socialism. (Lassalle made no other socialistic demands.) In other words, the old state was to be persuaded, or pressured, to bring socialism into being.

In attacking this approach, Marx pointed out more than once that, in making "state aid versus self-help" the "central point of his agitation," Lassalle "merely took up again the watchword which *Buchez*, the leader of *Catholic* socialism, had given out in 1843 against the genuine workers' movement in France."

Buchez—whom Marx once described as an ex-Saint-Simonian "glorifying Robespierre *and* the Holy Inquisition" both—broke away from the Saint-Simonian school to orient toward the working class as his field of operation, but the group around his organ *L'Atelier* acted as a conservative-religious tendency; in 1848 it was to the right of Louis Blanc. Still, there was a direct line between Buchez's *L'Atelier* and Blanc's program for *ateliers nationaux* (national workshops) as the road to socialism. Blanc developed the collectivist and political side of the program to its practical outcome. The common ground, a common ground that would include the Lassalle-ans, was this: *they all looked to the existing state for the key assistance in establishing socialistic institutions.*

Louis Blanc put it succinctly in a propaganda question-and-answer piece entitled "Socialism":

“Q.—How are we to pass from the present order of things to that which you contemplate?

A.—By the intervention of the government”

That was putting it as flatfootedly as you can. The operative aspect of Blanc's state-socialism was that the state which was to perform this service for socialism was the existing state of the ruling class. Workers' movements from below could help only as pressures to convince the tops. Indeed, when in the June Days of 1848 and then again in the Paris Commune of 1871 the French workers moved beyond this role and aimed to set up a different state, their own government, Blanc denounced them, and in both cases supported the massacre of the insurgents by the forces of the same state that was to usher in his "socialism." This was far more important in fixing Marx's view of Blanc than the exaggerated claim that the Frenchman wanted a state monopoly of the economy.

Though Marx and Engels saw Blanc primarily as a reformist and "the representative of sentimental phrasemongering socialism," yet they also noted the statist orientation of his type of reformism. Even before 1848, when (before the revolutionary experience) they held a hopeful view of Blanc, Engels already commented on his national-chauvinist outlook. In 1854, when Marx explained to his *NYDT* readers the difference between the gathering over which Blanc had presided in 1848 in the Luxembourg Palace, and the labor congress then going on in Manchester which called itself the Labor Parliament, the first distinction he offered was "this great difference, that the Luxembourg was initiated by the people themselves. ..." The very name Labor Parliament showed that the workers' movement looked to establishing its own government. In short, the basic distinction was (and is) *between the existing government of the present ruling class and a workers' state to be established by a revolution against that ruling class.*

Louis Blanc, Buchez, and the Lassalleans were among the many socialists who overtly put forward demands giving to the existing state the basic role in introducing socialism, while the role of the workers' or people's movement was essentially to pressure the state into fulfilling its historic role. *This was what defined state-socialism, in Marx's view.* At the same time, it meant that this state-socialism was one variety of reformism among others.

(ii) *The tendency to glorification of, as against hostility to, the state as such.* (This loose distinction will be tightened up; anyway it is clearer than the vague term 'statism' or *etatisme*.)

Louis Blanc, who was moderate in all things, afforded only a moderate example of state cultism, as in the question-and-answer article previously cited:

Q.—Why is it desirable for the Government to take the initiative in Social regeneration?

A.—Because it is too vast a work ... to be easily accomplished by isolated individual attempts. It requires nothing less than the united energies of all, powerfully exercised by the most upright and intelligent. The Government undertaking to regenerate society is like the head consulting for the health of the body.

Along the same lines: in his *Organisation du Travail*, which launched his reputation, Blanc described the government as "the born protector" of labor and capital alike. This way of thinking, including the head-body metaphor, was common among reformists; in this sense most forms of pink radicalism have a 'state-socialist' component. For if you do not look for social change to a subversive (transformatory) revolution from below, then is there a good alternative to putting faith in a state power which is seen to hover high above society and its class antagonisms?

This problem—*What power can bring about the desired social change?*—points most reformisms toward reliance on the existing state. But for Marx, the guiding issue is not some desired social reconstruction, but something else: the question of *who controls society*. The crux was the control of society from below, or in Marx's customary language, what class ruled the state power. As *KMTR 2* explained: "Marx and Engels habitually stated their political aim not in terms of a change in social system (socialism) but in terms of a change in class power (proletarian rule)."

This meant that Marx came at the problem of change in society from an angle entirely different from the reformist's slant. For Marx the political movement was in the first place the movement of the working classes to take over state power, *not* primarily a movement for a certain scheme to reorganize the social structure. Therefore, for Marx, hostility to the existing state was not merely a state of mind or a personal predilection, but the basic element of his theory of revolution. *The first* question of politics which the young Marx clarified for himself, in his 1843 notes on Hegel's political philosophy, was not the program of socialism but rather the rejection of Hegel's exaltation of the state and its bureaucracy.

When Mazzini, the Italian republican nationalist, denounced the Paris Commune in concert with European reaction, Marx explained to the General Council of the International that this was not a new turn for him: Mazzini had always been a bitter enemy of the "workmen's movements." Marx concluded (in the words of the GC minutes, which are sometimes a dubious secretary's paraphrase):

"In Italy he [Mazzini] had created a military despotism by his cry for Nationality. With him the State—which was an imaginary thing—was everything, and Society—which was a reality—was nothing. The sooner the people repudiated such men the better."

True, Mazzini was not a socialist of any kind, hence not a state-socialist. When such state-liberalism as his was combined with the view that the apotheosized state should also intervene massively in socioeconomic life, then the resulting "socialism" had to be repudiated all the sooner. The same was true of what Marx came to call "Bonapartist socialism."

We have seen that in the late 1850s Marx published a good deal of denunciation, particularly in his *NYDT* articles, against the "Bonapartist socialism" or "Imperial socialism" represented by the Credit Mobilier adventure in economics by Napoleon III and his Saint-Simonian finance-capital operators. This "Bonapartist socialism" was, in a small way, the forerunner of the "Bismarckian socialism" which gained more attention twenty years later. The term 'state-socialism' can be applied to it with as much insouciance as 'state-capitalism,' and with equal vagueness, though neither Marx nor Engels did so.

But this Bonapartist socialism, despite the presence of a clique of Saint-Simonians (or ex-Saint-Simonians), was plainly something engineered by the state from above; it

did not pretend to be the work of a people's movement. When glorification of the state was joined to the organization of a workers' movement from below, and the combination was represented as the embodiment of Social-Democracy, then state-socialism reached a new level. This was the case with Lassalle and the Lassallean tendency, on the basis of which the German Social-Democracy was originally founded.

Another preliminary word, about the 'socialist' label: it should be clear by now that neither Marx nor Engels had any inhibition against calling many things 'socialist' which later socialists would probably call pseudo-socialist or 'socialist' only in quote marks. In part this reflected the early amorphous meaning of socialism, and Marx's lack of attachment to the term (he preferred 'communism'). In part the later "strict" use by socialists reflected the exclusivist thinking of sectist organization: the label 'socialist' was thought of as a seal of approval, an import it never had for Marx.

Furthermore, Marx was aware that 'socialism' was used with different connotations in different countries; thus, in the *Grundrisse* notebooks, written while "Bonapartist socialism" was still making hay, he commented that "Bastiat is right insofar as in France, as a result of its characteristic social formation, many things pass for socialism that in England are political economy." By this he meant state interventions as well as the manifestations of Bonapartist socialism. Perhaps he was more aware than modern marxologists of how the terminology of the social sciences itself reflected the development of different societies.

Lastly on this point, we need only note that Engels' usage was similarly loose. In *The Housing Question* Engels said, of a housing enterprise which was a case of "open association between the Second French Empire and the capitalists of Alsace" that "It was one of Louis Bonaparte's socialist experiments, for which the state advanced one-third of the capital." It was actually a case of "state assistance" to capitalist enterprise. Of the Katheder-socialists Engels used the appellations "reactionary socialists" and "pseudo-socialists" in one letter. But there was no consistency in this usage.

2. The cult of the state

The apotheosis of the state as the predestined master of society was not merely a characteristic of Lassalle's ideology; it was its centerpiece. Lassalle proclaimed this idea; it does not have to be deduced from his writings. There was no other socialist figure who came close to him in this respect. And this was the starting point of Marx's political hostility to Lassalle, as it was the starting point of Lassalle's own politics.

There have been many complaints, including mine, that Marx and Engels failed to produce expositions of a general theoretical character on many important political questions. But this complaint cannot be made in the case of Lassallean state-socialism. There was a work, promoted by Engels though not written by him, which presented their analysis in some detail. This work is of great historical value and permanent theoretical ("scientific") value. It has been obscured in part because the name of Eduard Bernstein is attached as author.

It was written by Bernstein in 1891, during his leftist period, writing in London virtually directly under Engels' tutelage. It was undertaken to accomplish a political task that Engels was anxious to get done, namely, the education of the German movement in the meaning of Lassalleanism and the exposure of the Lassalle legend. Though the pen was Bernstein's, there can be no question that it closely reflected Engels' views, and by the same token Marx's. To underline this fact, it will be referred to here as the Bernstein/Engels critique, without impugning Bernstein's authorship.

Bernstein wrote this study as his editorial introduction to a new edition of Lassalle's writings. Immediately upon its publication in German in 1892, an English translation by Eleanor Marx appeared under the title *Ferdinand Lassalle as a Social Reformer*. Engels' letters of the time showed how delightedly he greeted this publication; on the other hand, the German party leadership was rather appalled, and the hostility generated against Bernstein exerted great pressure on that far from staunch spirit. Soon after Engels' death and his own promulgation of Revisionism, Bernstein distanced himself from this great study of Lassalle, and later rewrote it. The original work eventually fell into a twilight zone: for the Revisionists it was too hostile to a figure who had much in common with them; for the Marxists it was rendered suspect by Bernstein's by-line.

It is immensely educational to look at Lassalle and his brand of state-socialism through the eyes of this penetrating critique by Bernstein/Engels.

Lassalle took his concept of the state directly from Hegel and Fichte, as if nothing had happened after them to render this old-Hegelian "philosophy of right" (political theory) as backward as the theory of monarchy by divine right. The Bernstein/Engels critique duly traced this current in Lassalle's writings even before the start of his political agitation in 1862, back to his first philosophical work on Heraclitus. But it was in the major political speeches of his 1862-1864 campaign that Lassalle gave this ideology its rounded form and linked it with his political program.

"The old Hegelian ideological concept of the State," said the Bernstein/Engels critique, "induced Lassalle to instill into the workers a semi-mystical reverence for the State at a time when, above all, it behoved them to shake off the police State"—that is, the existing state of Prussian absolute monarchy."



Otto von Bismarck represented the interests of the Junker land-owning elite and yet was able to win the backing of Lassalle.

"It is no exaggeration to say that of the idea of the State he made a veritable cult. "The immemorable vestal fire of all civilization, the State, I defend with you against these modern barbarians" (that is, the Manchester party), he exclaims to the judges of the Berlin *Kammer-gericht* (Court of Appeal) in his speech on "Indirect Taxation," and similar passages occur in almost all his speeches."

The context of this speech (the Berlin judiciary) was as significant as its words. Addressing himself to an arm of the absolute-monarchist state, Lassalle demonstratively aligned himself with the state bureaucracy in a united front against the liberal bourgeoisie (the "Manchester party").

He had started along this road with one of his first agitational addresses, in June 1862, published under the title "The Workers' Program." Bernstein/Engels pointed out that, already here, "his ideology leads him to sing paean to the State, to the 'Concept of the State.' " The ideology was given an "ethical" cast: Lassalle asserted that workers have "quite a different conception of the ethical aim of the state from the bourgeoisie." The liberal bourgeoisie's concept was that the sole function of the state was to protect the personal freedom and property of the individual. But this, said Lassalle scornfully, was a "night-watchman idea" of the state.

Bernstein/Engels summarized Lassalle's idea further:

"To accomplish the development of the human race toward freedom, *this* is the true mission of the state. The state is "the unity of individuals in an ethical whole" ... And further, the object of the state is "to bring man to positive expansion and progressive development, in other words, to fashion the human *destiny*—i.e., the culture of which the human race is capable—into actual being"; it is "the education and development of man to freedom." So clearly is this "the true and higher mission of the state" that this mission "has been more or less carried out by the state through all time, by the force of circumstances, and even without its own will, even unconsciously, even against the will of its leaders."

This Lassallean theory of the state was straight out of Hegel—a pure distillation of Hegelian idealism which provided the theoretical basis for supporting the state of an alien class (alien to the working class). Lassalle ascribed this view to the "workers" (with whom, incidentally, he had never had the least substantive contact)—"workers" who have "the profound instinct that this is, and must be, the destiny of the state," *because the workers were in a helpless position?* The beneficent state must emancipate them

because self-emancipation was impossible. For Lassalle the concept of the state was "an eternal one," and classical antiquity was right, as against modern bourgeois liberalism, in viewing the state as "the institution in which the whole virtue of mankind shall realize itself."

But, stated the Bernstein/Engels critique, "the grafting, upon the society of today, of the state concept as understood by the ancients, involves the danger of a modern state-slavery."

The critique then showed that even if Lassalle's intentions were taken to be "democratic and socialist," his view meant the cult of the *existing* state:

"The cult of the state as such, means the cult of every state, and even if Lassalle's democratic and socialist views made it impossible for him to support directly the existing state, it did not prevent this cult from being exploited later on by the advocates of the existing state in its interest. Indeed, the Achilles heel of all ideology, of all theory built upon preconceived concepts, is that, no matter how revolutionary in intention, they are really always in danger of being transformed into a glorification of existing, or of past institutions. Lassalle's concept of the state is the bridge that was one day to bring together the Republican Lassalle and the men fighting for absolute monarchy, the revolutionist Lassalle and the out-and-out reactionaries. Philosophical absolutism has at all times had a tendency inclining it to political absolutism."

The *existing* state that was guarding the vestal fire of all civilization in Lassalle's Prussia was the state of the absolutist bureaucracy, still aspiring to autonomy from the ruling class of civil society, the bourgeoisie; that is, it was the monarchical state of Bismarckian Bonapartism, still fighting the rearguard action which we have discussed elsewhere. If the state that Lassalle confronted had been a more or less modern state like England's, his ideology might have clothed itself in political forms indistinguishable from other reformisms.

We may add here that eventually Lassalleanism did merge into the main body of reformism. But in 1862 *reformists still had a choice between Contending ruling classes*, the old one still in control of the state and the new one dominating the economy. Lassalle chose the power that still visibly monopolized the state machine, whereas other reformists (especially in south Germany) made the other choice, viz., chose the leading-strings of the liberal bourgeoisie.

In this pattern, which will be useful in order to understand subsequent developments, the south German bourgeoisie, being anti-Prussian, was hostile to a German state still dominated by Prussia. Part of the south German condition was the existence of an immature socialist and labor movement that was tail-ending a liberal bourgeois party. When the "Eisenacher" party, led by a young turner named Rebel and the experienced confusionist Wilhelm Liebknecht, opted for unification with the Lassalle-ans at the Gotha Congress in 1875, Marx's pressure (and other influences) had only recently weaned them away from their collaboration with the South German People's Party, a typical liberal-bourgeois organization that kept its back door open for workers' support. For a whole period before this, Marx had chafed at the choice between, on the one hand, the sectist policies of the Lassallean party, which however at least openly advocated socialism, and, on the other hand, the opportunist line of the Liebknecht-Bebel wing of the People's Party in failing to practise *independent* working-class politics. It is important to understand that until the south Germans broke with their People's Party and formed their independent Eisenacher party, *Marx refused to support them against the Lassalleans*, in spite of his dim view of the latter.

3. The state-aid nostrum

From his cultist view of the state, it was easy for Lassalle to conclude that the state, indeed the existing state—"even unconsciously, even against the will of its leaders"—was destined to bring about the solution of the Social Question, that is, the socialistic reorganization of society. The idea of a "Social Monarchy" had been around for a long time; at bottom it meant the possibility that the Crown-cum-bureaucracy, as the old ruling class, might see its way clear to using the working masses, below and behind the bourgeoisie, as a counterbalance against the growing political power of the bourgeoisie—the new ruling class in civil society which was also reaching out for political power.

The state had to be helped to see its destiny; a clever man could help destiny along, and Ferdinand Lassalle was cleverer than most.

A philanthropic-minded petty-bourgeois Democrat, Schulze of Delitzsch (who liked to hyphenate his name as Schulze-Delitzsch), had tried to solve the Social Question

by founding self-help cooperative societies of workers. In part these were simply attempts at producers' cooperative associations such as England and France already knew; but Germany was more backward, and Schulze-Delitzsch's scheme was even more suitable for the small handicraft masters who still abounded. By cooperative management of credit, raw materials and distribution outlets, these obsolescent producers would be enabled to better compete with modern industry.

Lassalle found his own solution in a "statified" version of Schulze-Delitzsch's; for him the key was *state aid*. A massive state loan to provide the capital for founding large-scale productive cooperatives, which would proceed to take over all industry and all branches of the economy in the course of time: this was the key political demand.

This plank was not new. Julius Vahlteich, who became the first secretary of the Lassallean organization, wrote in his history of the movement:

"His proposals—producers' cooperatives with state credit, universal suffrage, and the organizing of a workers' association extending through all of Germany—were in themselves nothing new or startling, but to us were thoroughly familiar. We were aware that the whole plan, including the 100 million thaler state credit, had already been placed before a workers' congress in Berlin in June 1848."

That is, the plan emerged from the 1848 revolution. Later, Engels summarized as follows, but he was reminded of the similar program devised by Buchez's group in Paris (already mentioned by Marx, as related earlier in this chapter):

"... this was no longer the bold socialism of the Manifesto; what Lassalle demanded in the interests of the working class was the establishment of producers' cooperatives by means of state credit—a new edition of the program of the Paris workers' group which before 1848 adhered to the pure-republican [i.e., bourgeois republican] *Le National* of Marrast, hence a program which the pure-Republicans counter-posed to Louis Blanc's "Organization of labor." Lassallean socialism, as one can see, was very modest."

Modest indeed; all that Lassalle really claimed was that it would some day lead to socialism, in a distant future. To obtain this political demand (state aid), the workers had to organize politically, independently of the liberal bourgeoisie, in order to lead the state to its historic mission. To give clout to the workers' political movement, universal suffrage was necessary. Lassalle knew that Bismarck had been contemplating introducing universal suffrage in order to dish the liberals, so the demand was not unrealistic. In this calculation, universal suffrage could be won by a grant from above. The Bernstein/Engels critique tied this state-aid plank up with Lassalle's economics:

"To convince the workers of the futility of self-help as preached by the bourgeoisie [and Schulze-Delitzsch], Lassalle adduced the law of wages in capitalist production as formulated by the classical political economists ... [especially] Ricardo. The "iron and inexorable law, according to which, under the domination of supply and demand, the average wages of labor remain always reduced to the bare subsistence which, according to the standard of living of a nation, is necessary for the maintenance of life and the reproduction of the species." ... [According to Lassalle] "workers and the wages of labor circled for ever round the extreme margin of that which, according to the needs of the time, constitutes the necessary means of subsistence," and this "*never varies*."

Because of this "iron law of wages" every effort by workers to improve conditions through their own efforts was doomed to fail, not only cooperatives but also trade unions. The working class must become its own employer, and this could be accomplished only on a large state-sponsored scale. Lassalle insisted (stated the Bernstein/Engels critique) that "the means to do this—the necessary capital, i.e., the necessary credit—must be provided by the *state*."

Lassalle insisted that his programmatic plank (state aid) did *not* amount to socialism, yet provided the "germ" of it: "I can't understand," he wrote to Rodbertus, "how anyone can fail to see that the association, proceeding from the state, is the organic germ of development that will lead on to all that lies beyond." Yet the state and its rulers were expected *not* to see this (otherwise would they finance their own demise?) and the workingpeople who were not yet ready for socialism were also expected to ignore the "germ." Lassalle's scheme was to organize the movement on a plank which contained the "germ" of socialism without being socialism, so that the movement would be led to fight for socialism without knowing it. The workers were supposed to back up into the future.

Writing to Rodbertus about the ultimate goal on which they agreed— "supersession of property in land and capital"—Lassalle emphasized that the "mob" must not be made aware of this:

"Certainly, not yet today need one tell this to the mob; for this very reason I have very much avoided it in my brochures. But I believe that if we get the state credit for associations, this is precisely the little finger that must lead thereto, with the logic of self-developing life, gradually, to be sure only in a hundred to two hundred years (even if not five hundred)."



Lassalle was a highly influential figure in the early German labour movement. Yet in practice he fought not for workers' self-emancipation, but for reforms by 'enlightened despots'.

The secret goal (socialism) might as well remain secret if it were going to take some centuries of "self-developing"; meanwhile the vestal fire of civilization, the state, would fortunately be around to rule. Socialism was for the distant future; for the present, the road was a statified society.

The Bernstein/Engels critique commented on this clever scheme to change society before changing mass consciousness:

"The excuse that the "mob" must not be told what this [ultimate] end was, or that the masses were not yet to be won over to it, does not hold. If the masses could not yet be interested in the actual end of the movement, the movement itself was premature, and then, even were the means attained, they would not lead to the desired end. In the hands of a body of workingmen not yet able to understand their historical mission, universal suffrage might do more harm than good, and productive cooperative societies with state credit could only benefit the existing powers of the state, and provide it with a praetorian guard. But if the body of workingmen was sufficiently developed to understand the end of the movement, then this should have been openly declared. It need not have even then been represented as an immediate aim, to be realized there and then."

And the critique ends this passage with an instructive lesson about means and ends:

"Not only the leaders, however, but every one of the followers that were led ought to have known what was the end these means were to attain, and that they were only means to that end."

Thus once more the principle of workers' self-emancipation had to be spelled out, as against the crafty idea of making the revolution behind the backs of the people themselves. (We need hardly comment on the marxological myth that is here added to the Mother Goose list: the myth that Marx and Engels believed in a principle called "the end justifies the means.")

Incidentally, this passage was an advance comment on the aphorism with which a transmogrified Bernstein was going to inaugurate Revisionism a few years later: "the final end [of socialism] is nothing, the movement is everything." Lassalle had already said something similar in his verse drama *Franz von Sickingen*: "Show not the end and aim, but show the way." (The way *to what*? Why, to an end and an aim that your guide does not want to show you.)

Lassalle followed through by asking his followers to think of nothing but universal suffrage: "Don't look either to the right or to the left, be deaf to all that is not called universal and direct suffrage, or is related thereto, and may lead to it." Reformism itself was to be reformed into a single-issue tactic, with blinkers.

To support the expectation that the state—the existing state—could somehow be induced to back its way down the road to socialism, Lassalle developed an argument identifying the state with the working class by means of arithmetic. The "true" function of the state was to facilitate the great forward march of humanity. "For this," he cried, "the state exists, for this it has always served and must serve." But "what then is the state?" He cited statistics to show that over 96 percent of the population were miserable and oppressed. "To them, then, gentlemen, to the suffering classes does the state belong, not to us, to the upper classes, for of them it is composed! What is the state? ... the answer: Yours, the poorer classes' great association—that is the state."

If, after some millennia of the state's existence, 96 percent of the people were miserable and oppressed, ordinary minds would conclude that this was so because the state did *not* belong to the 96 percent, but rather was the instrument of the 4 percent or part of it. Certainly if the state belonged to the masses by definition, there was no need to conquer it.

We must assume that this rather simple-minded demagoguery reflected the actual role of the state mystique in Lassalle's mind.

4. State-socialism and state-Caesarism

Lassalle's dealings with Bismarck at the time were no dark secret, but were heavily rumored and reported in the ranks of the German movement. Marx heard about them from his friends in the Lassallean organization, and was able to piece together much of what was going on, from reports not only by Liebknecht but also from information gained through Countess Hatzfeldt, Lassalle's patron. But what Marx had to piece together we can now read in a single letter, which was discovered in 1927—the letter sent by Lassalle to the Junker chancellor about a fortnight after the founding of the General German Workers' Association (GGWA) in May 1863.

With this letter Lassalle sent Bismarck the statutes of the new organization, to show him how the dictatorial powers of the president were tailored to Lassalle's demands. The new "workers' leader" crowded over

"the constitution of *my* empire, which perhaps you'd have to envy me! But this miniature picture will plainly convince you how true it is that the working class feels instinctively inclined to dictatorship if it can first be rightfully convinced that such will be exercised in its interests, and how very much it would therefore be inclined, as I recently told you, in spite of all republican sentiments—or perhaps on those very grounds—to see in the Crown the natural bearer of the social dictatorship, in contrast to the egoism of bourgeois society, if the Crown for its part could ever decide on the (to be sure, very improbable) step of taking a really revolutionary and national direction and transforming itself from a kingdom of the privileged classes into a social and revolutionary People's Kingdom!"

Lassalle then asked Bismarck if it was "really your intention, as Your Excellency expressed it, to move the Crown one day to the turnabout, to the proclamation of universal suffrage and to the alliance with the people" (The dictatorship aspect of this modest proposal was discussed in *KMTR* 3, Chapter 7.)

The proposed partnership—an alliance of the Crown representing the absolutist bureaucracy with a workers' movement under a Lassallean dictatorship—was based on the desire of the *old* ruling class to dish the aspirations of the *new* economic rulers who were reaching out for political power. This was the reality behind the talk about the prospects of a "Social Monarchy"; this talk was undercutting the liberal-bourgeois pressure for a Constitution.

Lassalle, who had been rejected by the liberal movement as its would-be leader just before he accepted the mantle of "workers' dictator," made no secret of his hostility to the liberal bourgeois forces. He even blurted it out in public, in a court speech. The fight for a Constitution, he sneered, was only that of a "clique" against the monarchy; the Crown could not yield to this clique, but it could "call the people upon the scene," remembering its own origin, "for all monarchy has originally been the monarchy of the people." And Lassalle added:

"A Louis Philippe monarchy, a monarchy created by the bourgeoisie, certainly could not do this; but a monarchy that still stands as kneaded out of its original dough, leaning upon the hilt of the sword, might quite certainly do this, if it determined to pursue truly great, national and democratic aims."

Leaning upon the hilt of the sword... "This," said the Bernstein/Engels critique, "is the language of Caesarism."

Lassalle, in this his last year of agitation, went on to spell out the content of his social-Caesarism as he continued to glorify the Crown and the monarchist regime. In his so-called Ronsdorf Address, he publicly boasted, as he had privately to Bismarck, that the entire authority of the GGWA (the Lassallean party) was in his single hand. He represented "his" workers as saying: "We must weld the wills of all of us into one single hammer, and must place this hammer in the hands of a man in whose intelligence, integrity, and good faith we have the necessary confidence, so that he may be able with that hammer to strike!" (This, of course, was what *he* was hammering into the heads of "his" workers.)

Our organization, claimed Lassalle, has reconciled Freedom and Authority. (This meant, translated: *his* authority had been freed—from all control from below.) And "thus [it] becomes on a small scale the prototype of our next form of society on a large scale," he went on to explain. "With us there is not a trace of that malcontent spirit of Liberalism, of that malady of individual opinion and superiority with which the body of our bourgeoisie is eaten up...."

To this proclamation of social-Caesarism, the Bernstein/Engels critique replied with a longish section. There is good reason to quote the whole of this Marxist reply to the aspirations of the workers' dictator; it makes important reading today. But because of practical considerations we give only the essential lines of the reply. It emphasized that mass workers' action does *not* mean "personal dictatorship."

"... indeed, where the masses abdicate their will, they are already on the road to become, from a revolutionary factor, a reactionary one. In the struggles of modern society, personal dictatorship has invariably been the sheet-anchor of the reactionary classes, seeing their existence imperilled; no one is so ready to renounce "negative acrid individualism" as the modern bourgeois so soon as his moneybags and his class privileges seem seriously threatened.... The classes that feel themselves incapable of self-government do that which Lassalle is here imputing to the workers: they abdicate their own will to oppose any private interests of this person as "restless, malcontent individualism.""

The example of Bonapartism followed. The French bourgeoisie attacked its own "malcontents" in this spirit—"until Napoleon [Louis Bonaparte] was strong enough to proclaim himself dictator *against* the bourgeoisie, instead of contenting himself with the role of mere maintainer of law and order *for* the bourgeoisie."

"A growing revolutionary class [continued Bernstein/Engels] has absolutely no reason to abdicate its will, to renounce the right of criticism, to renounce its "superiority" vis-a-vis of its leaders.... He [Lassalle] needed the dictatorship in order to be sure of the workers whenever he should require them for his actual ends, and he needed the endorsement of his dictatorship to appear to those in higher circles as a power to be treated with."

That last point was the crux of Lassalle's tactic. "The policy he was pursuing," the critique went on to say, "could only be carried through if the members and adherents of the movement followed their leader without criticism, and did his bidding without a murmur," but this "meant nothing but pure Caesarism; so his adherents also were to be ready, on the word of command, to don the livery of loyalty." Caesarism outside the workers' movement had to be shored up by Caesarism inside it. Lassalle had the GGWA secretary, Julius Vahlteich, disloyally expelled because Vahlteich would not go along without a murmur.

"But no one man can serve two masters.... It is doubly a pronunciamento of Caesarism—Caesarism within the ranks of the party, and Caesarism in the politics of the party."

The hours of conversation that Lassalle spent with Bismarck did not prove to be entirely useless—to Bismarck. The sequel showed that the Junker learned a few things about up-to-date demagogic mass politics and state-socialistic facades.

Bismarck did not need to make actual concessions to Lassalle in order to get something out of it. Soon after a good deal of the Bismarck-Lassalle relationship came to light in 1878 through statements from Countess Hatzfeldt and the chancellor himself, Marx told an interviewer: "Bismarck encouraged Lassalle's course at that time in every possible way.... He wished to use the working classes as a set-off against the middle classes [bourgeoisie] who instigated the troubles of 1848."

We saw at the beginning of this section that, in his now notorious letter to Bismarck, Lassalle pretended to convey

the feelings of the "working class." That this "working class" was a pseudonym for F. Lassalle was shown by the very similar letter that Lassalle sent to the Catholic-social conservative V. A. Huber a few months later, this time openly as his own opinion. After expressing wholehearted agreement with Huber—and Czar Nicholas—that a constitutional monarchy was "ridiculous" and "organized self-destruction," Lassalle went further:

"As I said, I have been a republican from childhood on. And despite that, or perhaps just *because* of it, I have come to the conviction that nothing could have a greater future and play a more beneficent role than the *monarchy*, if it could only decide to become a *social* monarchy. I would then carry its banner passionately, and the constitutional theories would be laid on the shelf quickly enough. But where is there a monarchy that has the courage and discernment to lend itself to a *social* monarchy? You yourself will concede that such can hardly be found."

After Lassalle's death, Dr. Julius Frese wrote about Lassalle's belief in the state's omnipotence in his paper *Demokratische Correspondenz*, the organ of the liberal South German People's Party. Frese related: when he would chide Lassalle for expecting the impossible from the state, the man would answer very seriously: "What would you? The state is God!" Coming from an atheist, this was a fitting summary of state-cultism.

5. Marx on Lassalle

The point of view embodied in the Bernstein/Engels critique is a necessary guide to the political condemnations of Lassalle which dot Marx's correspondence especially after 1862.

The year 1862 marked Lassalle's last meeting with Marx and the beginning of Lassalle's public political agitation. This meeting is described elsewhere in this volume: Lassalle revealed not only his dictatorial ambitions but also his "Bonapartist" proclivities. Before he left London to go back to Prussia, Marx had told him flatly that "politically we agree in nothing except some far-distant ultimate ends."

Lassalle kept sending copies of his speeches and publications to Marx, who read them with rumbles of disapproval. Marx's dilemma was that he was reluctant at precisely this time to come out publicly with the opinion he had formed of Lassalle, since the man had placed himself at the head of a struggle taking place in Germany to form a movement for the first time in decades. He did not want to undermine this movement, or even seem to be undermining it.

When in April 1863 Marx received a copy of the "Open Reply," Lassalle's opening gun in his political campaign, he grumbled to Engels as he exhibited some of its gems:

"He behaves—with an air of great importance bandying about phrases borrowed from us—altogether as if he were the future workers' dictator. The problem of wage-labor versus capital he solves like "child's play" (literally). To wit, the workers must agitate for *universal suffrage* and then send people like him "armed with the unsheathed sword of science" into the Chamber of Deputies. Then they form workers' factories, for which the *state* advances the capital, and these institutions by and by embrace the whole land."

Since Marx was here writing to Engels, he did not have to enlarge on these points.

By June 1863 there were already heavy reports about Lassalle's negotiations with the chancellor: "the fellow is now working purely in the service of Bismarck," Engels opined, exaggeratedly. Marx more than ever became conscious that Lassalle had effected a political switchover from his original attempt to take over the leadership of the liberals; he was now lined up with the Bismarck government *against* the liberal bourgeoisie. "During 1859," Marx wrote to his friend, "he belonged wholly to the Prussian liberal bourgeois party. Now he may find it more convenient, under the 'auspices of government' to fly out against the 'bourgeois', rather than against the '*Russians*.'"

In the course of 1864 Marx received a report, shortly after Lassalle's Ronsdorf speech, which reinforced its effect. Liebknecht wrote to Marx as follows:

"Things are in ferment in the Lassallean workers' association. If Lassalle does not give up his "dictatorial ways" and his "flirting with reaction," there will be a scandal. About this "flirting," a little anecdote: before his departure he gave a dinner, to which about 20 workers were invited. At the end of it he gave a speech, against the bourgeoisie. It was the sole enemy, and we had to swear to him to fight against this enemy to the death, and *in this connection not to draw back even from an alliance with the monarchy*. At these words I sprang up in a rage; he looked at me, taken

aback, turned fiery red, and immediately (resuming the speech he had in fact ended) he protested against possible misunderstandings, the monarchy was itself no enemy of the workers, to be sure, but it would also not help them—without revolution no salvation, etc."

Lassalle had said almost as much in the Ronsdorf speech, but had not openly mentioned an "alliance with the monarchy." In any case, only his sycophants could now close their eyes to the course he had chosen.

Lassalle was "saved" from his own policy by two things: Bismarck's rejection of his overtures on the ground that the "workers' dictator" had nothing substantial to sell; and his death a few months later due to a duel. Lassalle "was very ambitious and by no means a republican," Bismarck explained to the Reichstag in 1878. "He was very much a nationalist and a monarchist. His ideal was the German Empire, and here was our point of contact." Bismarck went so far as to say that he did not consider Lassalle a Social-Democrat.

At the time this was the most acute aspect of the Lassallean malady in the movement: the perspective of an alliance with the old ruling classes (called the Reaction, for short, in contemporaneous language) against the upcoming ruling class, the bourgeoisie, which was already economically dominant. As Engels put it later, "Lassalle demanded that, in the fight between royalty and the bourgeoisie, the workers should range themselves on the side of royalty..."

Interesting historical metaphors for Lassalle's role appear in Marx's correspondence. For one thing, Marx liked to bring up the figure of the Marquis Posa, advisor to Philip II of Spain, as depicted in a famous drama by Schiller, *Don Carlos*. For the nineteenth century the Posa character was the very model of the wise statesman who seeks needed reforms by getting the sovereign's ear and filling it with enlightened advice on how to preserve the power of absolutism by bending a little in a "progressive" direction. In Lassalle's last speech, wrote Marx, he "played the part of the Marquis Posa with handsome Wilhelm [of Prussia] as his Philip II, whom he would push to the abolition of the existing constitution, proclamation of direct universal suffrage, and alliance with the proletariat." Since he was writing to Engels, Marx had only to add a grunt: "The modern Redeemer!"

A second model was Lassalle's own character Franz von Sickingen, in the drama so titled; for Sickingen "wanted to force Charles V to 'put himself at the head of the movement'..." Lassalle dreamt of acting out his own retrogressive hero-figure.

Engels had an even harder attitude on Lassalle's scheme for a deal with the monarchy behind the backs of the workers' movement:

"Subjectively his vanity may have made the affair [with Bismarck] appear plausible to him; objectively it was a rascality, a betrayal of the whole workers' movement to the Prussians.... In addition, it will not be long before the time comes when it will not only be desirable but *necessary* to make this whole business public."

Marx soon echoed this: "now we know, moreover that Itzig [Lassalle] — what was not at all known to us in *this* way—wanted to sell out the workers' party to Bismarck, in order to become known as the 'Richelieu of the proletariat'..."

In this last reference was a third historical model for an aspect of Lassalle's type: Richelieu had established the absolute monarchy against the old feudal class; Lassalle wanted to help establish the absolute monarchy against the rising bourgeoisie. Still a fourth model was suggested by Engels: "it can be seen that Itzig has given the movement a Tory-Chartist character which will be hard to destroy... Everywhere this disgusting cringing before the Reaction shows itself." This referred to the Chartist sympathizers who were politically oriented toward the so-called "Tory Democracy" or "Tory Radicals" such as Richard Oastler.

Engels' reference to the need "to make this whole business public" no doubt had in view a proper public expose of Lassalle's machinations with Bismarck. We know, however, that both he and Marx long held their hands on this, first, for fear of seeming to embarrass the initial steps toward workers' organization, and later because of the pressure of the Anti-Socialist Law of 1878-1890. Engels finally made a move only in 1891, and then under provocation Lassalle's death in August 1864 only shifted the problem to the Lassallean organization that survived him.

self-management and the environment

by Steve Ryan

The recession is an important topic and is certainly preoccupying the minds of all from bosses through government to the Left. This has very much put the debate about climate change and peak oil out of the limelight.

No doubt bosses and governments will be pleased with this. Buried in the news recently have been a number of disturbing items as regards the speed at which the poles are warming and the fact that Labour have watered down their commitment to carbon reduction under pressure from big business. Worse that the average temperature is now looking to rise by 4 degrees in the next 20/30 years... oh, and oil runs out in 2020!

The response recently had been all about government, as evidenced by the "Green new deal", and the TUC call for "government action" on carbon reduction. In the meantime we are extolled to live "greener" lifestyles.

Well-meaning though some of these calls may be, they will fail. Big business will never allow a reduction in profits, no matter what the cost to the planet. There are examples from Coca Cola to Heathrow. Government always bow to big business. Where ARE the green deal jobs Brown promised? They're not there because that would mean increased public spending. Capital has intervened again to protect profit.

So we should all give up and accept our fate? Well no. The forthcoming Trade Union Climate Change conference and the march on 28th March will be excellent opportunities to remind workers that there is a solution. That is a society based on workers' self management.

It is not a utopia. There has always been a green thread in the workers' movement. Read William Morris or Edward Carpenter for example. Marx had much to say on the subject (see John Bellamy Foster's works). More pertinently see Alan Roberts' work on *The self-managing environment*. This gives practical examples of how workers can



A Chinese factory pours out smoke: neither state commandism nor the market can halt the devastation of our natural environment

positively influence environmental challenges, such as the "green bans" of the Australian Builders Laborers Federation—who refused to work on environmentally damaging projects—and Lucas Aerospace, where workers in a military aircraft plant put forward plans for doing socially useful work instead, including the development of solar panels and windfarms. All these were based around an understanding that workers have a direct say in what sort of environment they wish to live in. This is doubly important today as climate change affects the poorest most. From New Orleans to Tewkesbury, it is the less well off who cannot afford insurance, have to live in vulnerable areas and are left stranded when there is a disaster.

A self-managed society would enable society to plan a way through climate change and peak oil. Based on the needs of all and what was needed rather than what makes a profit. Plans around renewable energy would be based on need and practicality. Food production would be tied in with distribution. Resources would be owned collectively and distributed per need. There are examples of this from 1936 in Spain to Scottish islands today!

Workers can start building the new world in the shell of the old. Community allotments, green bans, and protests over environmentally destructive projects such as at Heathrow can all be tied in with the recession....and the wider argument for a communist society!

how the commune organises

Our organisation

We are a network of communists committed to the self-emancipation of the working class, internationalism and opposition to imperialism and all forms of oppression. We reject statist and authoritarian visions of socialism and look instead to the tradition of 'socialism from below', which believes that emancipation can be achieved only through the activity, self-organisation and mobilisation of the working class and oppressed people themselves. Our goal is a communist society, which will abolish the system of wage-labour: a classless society with no state, managers or organisations superior to those of workers' self-management.

Communist revolutions cannot succeed without mass self-organisations of workers, and the leadership of organisations of revolutionary workers and the oppressed. We are a network whose aim is to contribute to the development of such a movement in this country and internationally. We agree to establish ourselves as an organising committee of individual supporters.

We shall function on the basis of consensus or if necessary majority vote: a motion is carried by a vote of more than half (50% plus one) of the people with voting rights in attendance.

Membership

We welcome the affiliation of any individual who accepts our platform as our basis of unity, supports our activities practically and financially, and accepts these principles of organisation. All members may speak, move motions and vote at meetings. Those who join us in these committees do so freely by an acceptance of these general principles. Others, who are not members, are free to contribute material for the paper and to participate in the discussions of the network.

A pluralist communist network

The Commune is a paper, a flow of pamphlets, and an organisation of activists with new ideas. Our purpose is to develop and extend these ideas, to promote their discussion and, wherever possible, to act upon them. Our aim is

to create a pluralist organisation, a network of committees whose members come together to promote their ideas in an organised manner and to renew them in the practice of the class struggle. A network with full freedom of political discussion and platforms - any individual supporter has the right to form a platform (tendency) to present a viewpoint within the network at any time. We reject sectarian vanguardism and adhere to the principle that communists have no interests separate and apart from those of the working class as a whole.

Normally our political platform would appear in this box. To read it, visit www.thecommune.wordpress.com/1

For more information on our group, its meetings and its publications, email uncaptiveminds@gmail.com

Send all correspondence and donations to The Commune, 2nd Floor, 145-157 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY.

thecommune.co.uk