Hispano-Ford workers show us how it’s done... go forth and occupy!
mitie cleaners resist city of london bosses

by Jake Lagno

The story

In mid-2007 around 25 cleaners at multinational insurance brokers the Willis Group based in the City of London began to organise under the umbrella of Unite’s Justice for Cleaners campaign, for the campaign’s main demands of the

In the midst of this some unorthodox tactics were used: for example the cleaners leafleted the office workers desks. Also workers successfully persuaded the union to include a key activist who had been fired.

The problem returned when the temporarily relocated workers including the shop steward came to the end of their temporary contracts. A few were relocated on a permanent basis, others got other jobs. In that way the size of the group was reduced. Few stood the all-night working long – the workforce at Willis now is reputedly a different set of workers altogether.

Mite offered the remaining six workers unsuitable alternative positions in order to meet its legal requirements, and finally made them redundant in December 2008. They appealed the decision anyway and independently wrote to the workers they would demonstrate if no response was received. When the company found out about this they arranged for the workers to come in. The workers called off the demo at the union’s request, only for the meeting to be cancelled. That evening, informed that although they had another right of appeal, there was really nothing more to be done. At the end of their tether, the workers called the first of their protests, but not before desperately trying to seek further advice from their union.

The weekly protests have now been going on for over two months. They have inspired because they go against the grain of the usual resignation that meets redundancies. Victory perhaps lies not so much now in reinstatement, but in showing that fighting back is possible.

At the time of The Commune going to press the union has made no public pronouncement, but has worked hard in the face of adverse publicity to persuade those on the inside of the union that this is a cause not worth supporting. Why?

What is the answer of the British Left leaders? “No2EU” It completely misses the point, and is at best a diversion.

“The Left” has had five years to work out a strategy for this European election. Parties like the Greens decided their strategy years ago. The TUC has been collecting the necessary finances. Two months before an election is not serious. Furthermore, what is going to happen in the General Election next year? The new party is not going to be continued after June 4th, so are we going to see another half-hearted attempt two months before that election? And what will the slogans be? “No to the British capitalist state!” And the MPs won’t take their seats?

Over the past twelve years we have had the Socialist Labour Party, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Socialist Alliance. Respect and Campaign for a New Workers’ party, all of which have failed to build an open, democratic mass movement of the working class. We have Gordon Brown and global capitalism on the ropes and no organisation ready to challenge them. “No2EU” is exactly the opposite of what is needed - it is bureaucratic and nationalistic - where we want democracy and internationalism, nothing less.

Some comrades have called the politics of “No2EU” “left-wing nationalism”. Perhaps this is to keep the embarrassment within the left family. Personally I cannot see how British nationalism in the context of global capitalism can be anything other than reactionary, pure and simple. All nation states and governments have lost some power within global capitalism and with the IMF dictating their domestic policies The tentacles of international capitalism are everywhere.

The car industry. In the 1950s in Britain it was popular to talk about the Big Six British car firms, down from 120 firms in the 1920s. The call for the nationalisation of the Big Six made some sense. Now in 2009 there is talk of the Big Six car firms in the world. In Britain there is no ‘national’ car firm. Jaguar Land Rover is owned by the Indian conglomerate Tata; Toyota and Honda are based in Japan; Nissan (Japan) is linked to Renault (France); Vauxhall is part of the European operation of General Motors (USA) together with Opel, Fiat... the list goes on. The factories making the parts for the car plants are subcontracted. The units that make the cars are all part of global capitalism. Decisions are made in boardrooms all over the world usually with no reference to the British national state. To call for the nationalisation of the British car industry is not a straightforward matter anymore.

The internationalisation of the industry would make more sense. International solidarity among workers, workers’ control of workplaces and plants and the creation of an alternative workplace could make socially useful products would be a start.

When there is an economic recession, the first reaction is to look for scapegoats, usually immigrants or foreigners. The No2EU leaflet complains about “social dumping” which refers to foreign workers coming to Britain. Is this what we have not done? The workers at Mitie have an agreement with it, the union that this is a cause worth supporting. Why?

By Dave Spencer

no to “no2eu”

Just and two and a half months before June 4th’s European elections, the RMT leadership came up with a new party “No2EU - Yes to democracy”. Without a hint of irony (remember “Yes to democracy”) we are told that this “party” is for election purposes only. There will be no membership, therefore no voting for the slate of candidates needed for the election and so on. Still, there will be no continuation of the party after the election. Indeed the whole thing has been cobbled together by the RMT, Communist Party of Britain and Socialist Party leaders, who will run it by themselves.

Furthermore if any “No2EU” candidate is elected to be an MEP they will not take their seat in Brussels. The voice of the British working class will not be heard in Europe. There will be no speaking tours to make links with European workers in struggle, no greetings brought to mass demonstrations and the like.

In the midst of this some unorthodox tactics were used: for example the cleaners leafleted the office workers desks. Also workers successfully persuaded the union to include a key activist who had been fired. The problem returned when the temporarily relocated workers including the shop steward came to the end of their temporary contracts. A few were relocated on a permanent basis, others got other jobs. In that way the size of the group was reduced. Few stood the all-night working long – the workforce at Willis now is reputedly a different set of workers altogether.

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no to “no2eu”
the commune

editorial: we can defy the jobs massacre

Workers have nothing to rely on other than our own strength. Petitions and charters, appeals to statesmen and grand plans for what we think a ‘workers’ government’ would do in Gordon Brown’s place are not much use to anyone being put out of a job. They are little better for these workers than TUC’s pamphlets on how to access the JobCentre, and will do no more to solve the greatest problem in the British labour market than the notoriety of a number of relations with some seven million trade unionists—as the lack of confidence which has afflicted unions and most social movements since the crushing of the miners’ strike a quarter of a century ago.

What really shows the way forward are the struggles coming from both sides of the fence which are reported on in this issue of The Commune. We should not collapse into euphoria that capitalism is collapsing—most class fights at the moment are about resistance rather than actively taking up the mantle of employment—but there is certainly room for optimism, because the idea of taking collective action and fighting back is being popularised and confidence is being restored.

The most significant example is perhaps the Ford-Visteon factory occupations in Belfast and London (pages 15 and 17) which echo the long-lost assertive tactics used by the British labour movement at its peak in the early 1970s. The Ford-Visteon workers are not only challenging their bosses’ right to cast aside their agreements, but also show that it is possible to fight back. Unlike the TUC bigwigs (the supposed ‘leadership’ of our movement) these workers do not accept that the recession is some unstoppable force of nature which legitimises the jobs attacks and the right of bosses to the rein for bosses to get rid of their workforce as they please.

By taking over the building where the workplace is situated, occupations pose a real challenge to the capitalists’ right to manage and their sacred property rights, and we can only be reassured occupations are not just for factories! Fighting the slashing of public services, on Friday 3rd April parents at two primary schools in Glasgow facing closure barricaded themselves in the gym and assembly halls, saying they would stay overnight and vowing to stay until the council caved in. Two weeks later, as The Commune went to press, St. Gregory’s and Wyndford Primary Schools were still occupied.

Abroad too we can see evidence of the use of assertive tactics, such as the FCI Microconnections factory in the western suburbs of Paris, where half of a workforce of 400 have been in occupation for seven weeks in an effort to stop their jobs being farmed out to Singapore. At a Sony plant in the southwest of France the chief executive was thrown in an office by dozens of workers who had been made redundant.

The spectre of Tory and New Labour anti-union laws has long weighed heavily on the minds of those who wanted to take action, and has been even more loudly trumpeted by ‘left’ union leaders like PCS general secretary Mark Serwotka who needed an excuse to resist strike calls. Just before we went to press the RMT postponed strike action on the London Underground to re-ballot—despite having a huge mandate already from the membership—after a court injunction from the employers.

In February the oil refinery wildcat strikes which broke out at Lindsey and spread across Britain just swept these anti-union laws aside with impunity. Thousands of workers went on strike without ballots, had picked lines far longer than the permitted six people, and furthermore strike sympathisers such as the 600 Polish workers at Language Power Skill Action mounted illegal solidarity action. The workers did not need permission from the state or the Unite leaders—they decided they wanted to stand up for their jobs and then just went ahead and did it.

Aside from its symbolic significance, that strike wave was also succeeded in material terms, developing principles that are the national agreement in the industry and saving the jobs of a hundred workers threatened with redundancy.

No, the wildcats were not the first steps of revolution: but they did point to the movement as a whole that there is a way forward; that defeat is not inevitable; and that we can stand up for ourselves at a time when our rulers say that we have no choice but to be ‘all in it together’. With more solidarity, and with a concerted effort by others in the labour movement to spread the wildcat movement, the strikers could have dealt an even greater blow and put us on an even better footing to organise: in that sense there was an opportunity missed. But in France at least there are emerging signs of confidence in the labour movement.

We can look to the massive strike days in France and Greece, where millions of workers defy the ruling class, and sit in awe at ‘revolutionary’ types abroad, apparently always taking to the streets. No doubt, such struggles are inspiring and we have much to learn from them. But there is no God-given or cultural reason why the same and better is not possible even in Britain before the 1984-85 miners’ strike the labour movement here was the strongest in Europe, and a renaissance is quite possible.

In order to re-compose a real, living labour movement, as strong and stronger than what existed in the 1970s, labour movement activists must both learn lessons from the great struggles of that period—including promoting the use of tactics and strategies which can build confidence in the self-organisation happening today and try and generalise its democratic and confident means of organising. These typify not only the movement we want today but also the character of the communist society that such a movement might eventually lead to.

Certainly there are big struggles ahead. The ruling class is in ideological retreat, Brown’s government is spiralling into collapse, and after Lindsey, the anti-union laws look powerless. There have been several cases of self-organised resistance to the jobs cut, and there is potential to pull the strands together into an embedded class movement. We must not miss this chance to make concrete victories.

of policemen and mad professors: communism and physical force

by Chris Kane

The Police operation around the G20 was entitled “Operation Glencoe” — named after the massacre in Scotland in 1692 when the order was given that “the rebels, the Moravians, the hydrophili are to be put all to the sword”. Operation Glencoe lived up to its namesake resulting in the Police operation, St. Gregory’s and Wyndford being put under all to the door of the Dead’, who would have us engage in directionless struggles.

We find this posturing amongst the middle class left such as the antics of the aforementioned Chris Knight’s ‘Government of the Dead’, who would have us engage in directionless attacks on a stronger force, as if that was ‘revolution’. These theatrics and elitist styles of organising actually make workers more vulnerable to repression with-out in the slightest assisting in the development of their self-organisation or ability to defend themselves.

On the other hand, to declare the use of only legal methods as a matter of principle can doom our class. Adher-ents of this view range from ecological activists to Labourite socialists. They want to tie the working class to a moral code formed out of the actual conditions of this society which forces the working class into struggle, but their own worst enemy, the oil companies and financiers. From their point of view, the working class are forced into action, not by their own initiative, but by self-organised workers, from occupying workplaces and factories, by self-organised workers, from occupying workplaces and factories and we can only be reassured occupations are not just for factories! Fighting the slashing of physical services, on Friday 3rd April parents at two primary schools in Glasgow facing closure barricaded themselves in the gym and assembly halls, saying they would stay overnight and vowing to stay until the council caved in. Two weeks later, as The Commune went to press, St. Gregory’s and Wyndford Primary Schools were still occupied.

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The tradition of physical force is an intrinsic part of our movement’s history which desperately needs reviving. This is not to advocate ‘anarchist adventurism’ but direct action when the situation demands it, taking the weight of the state’s power off our shoulders and securing them to organising protests that are capable of effectively defending themselves with clear objectives. Crit-ics of communists will call us ‘ultra-left’ advocates of vio-lent force when an ‘ultra-left’ advocate is not individual or elitist: it is a call for organised force controlled by the workers. The development of physical force is intimately linked to generat-ing consciousness in our class of its position in society, and building the offensive against capital and forming organisations capable of replacing the existing state with a system of communal self-government.
workers occupy visteon factories

by Samantha O’Driscoll

Background

At 2pm Tuesday 31st March, 565 of Visteon’s 610 UK workforce at three sites in Belfast, Basildon and Enfield were given six minutes notice of their dismissals, as Visteon UK filed for administration. That night, the dismissed workers at the Belfast plant entered the factory and began their occupation. The next day, Enfield workers went back to the factory to collect their belongings and having heard news of the Belfast occupation, seized the moment and found a fire exit unlocked and entered the plant to begin their occupation.

Workers in Basildon, however, were unable to enter the plant but began their fight with pickets and protests at Ford and Visteon sites.

Back in 2000 the Ford owned global components subsidiary Visteon was sold off as a ‘highly profitable’ company, with a turnover of $17.96 billion, in order to generate funds for Ford and restructure production. Pre-sale, Visteon UK Swansea plant employed 1000 workers, Enfield 900, and Essex and Belfast each employed 600. When the sell-off was negotiated, Ford guaranteed to Visteon workers that their terms and conditions as Ford employees would be protected for life, as the company itself stated in documents given to workers ‘For the duration of your employment with Visteon UK, your terms and conditions will mirror Ford conditions. This means lifetime protection while an employee of Visteon UK of all your contractual conditions of employment.’ Despite this Ford claims it has ‘no legal or moral obligations’ to the Visteon workers.

In the years after the sell-off Visteon embarked on a new direction that involved transferring operations to lower-cost countries and significantly cutting its UK workforce, to the extent that by the time the company filed for administration only 10 jobs remained, out of the previous 2500, and the Swansea plant closed in 2007. Internal documents have revealed that the company was preparing for closure of the Belfast plant as early as January 2007. This indicates that the global downturn is being used by Visteon as a cover to carry out its plan to shift production to low cost areas as cheaply as possible by evading consultation with workers and several packages.

The workers

The story told so far could have easily concluded at this point as it has in many workplaces and companies around the UK and the world, were it not for a spark that ignited the resistance to Visteon’s treatment of the workers. The worker’s initial feelings of disbelief and anger, but acceptance, within a day of hearing about the Belfast occupation, turned into a spirit of defiance, resilience and refusal to submit to the new fate their bosses had handed them, declaring ‘This is a fight we can win, we’re off our knees and fighting fit!’ They quickly set about organizing the occupation, establishing rota, barricading doors, and setting up the factory to make it as comfortable as possible for the occupiers. Workers also organised daily visits to the Basildon factory and the Dagenham Ford plant, highlighting the Ford-Visteon link and gaining solidarity from Ford workers in Southampton and Bridgend who are said to be blacking Visteon components.

Whist in Enfield and Basildon the workers were demanding severance terms outlined in their contracts, the workers in Belfast were demanding not only severance terms but also severance terms outlined in their contracts, the workers in Belfast each employed 600. When the sell-off was negotiated, Ford guaranteed to Visteon workers that their terms and conditions as Ford employees would be protected for life, as the company itself stated in documents given to workers ‘For the duration of your employment with Visteon UK, your terms and conditions will mirror Ford conditions. This means lifetime protection while an employee of Visteon UK of all your contractual conditions of employment.’ Despite this Ford claims it has ‘no legal or moral obligations’ to the Visteon workers.

The union

The union movement’s (in this instance Unite) response to massive job cuts and closures of entire workplaces so far has been weak and ineffectual, demonstrating no tangible resistance to the employers’ offensive. Faced with a tangible fight back in the case of the Visteon occupations, the union’s lack of practical support for the continuation of the occupation and its persuasion of the workers to leave the factory, before any deal had been reached, was seriously misguided and contrary to the workers’ interests. Unite’s press release on the closure of Visteon did not even mention the fact that the workers had taken action to occupy the factories, instead it merely stated that ‘Unite will press the case for compensation. We hope Visteon will do the right thing. ’ Hope is a very weak bargaining tool having persuaded the workers into giving up the occupation and thus losing the best leverage they had of winning the dispute. Furthermore, even when Belfast workers were demanding that the plant be reopened, Unite’s statement makes no reference to this demand forming part of their negotiation. The lack of coordination of demands taken up by the union weakened both occupations’ longer term viability.

The Visteon occupations have kick-started the fight back against the employers’ offensive in the recession. Court threats and the ousting of Unite have presented major obstacles to the workers’ struggle, but the experience at all three sites will contribute to the strength of the movement as a whole and allow us to understand how we can better organise to stop redundancies in their tracks.

For more news and updates on the fight at Visteon Enfield, visit www.visteonoccupation.org. The site carries some news on the other two plants too. Until the workers get their own account, they are asking for solidarity cheques to be addressed to ‘Haringey Solidarity Group’, PO Box 2474, N8. Join the solidarity email list at visteon_support@haringey.org.uk

The rough conditions in the factory shouldn’t be underestimated, but another few days might have made all the difference.

London

The Commune can be found on most demonstrations and we also hold our own regular public meetings.

We are currently engaged in a series of ‘uncaptive minds’ forums on the subject of “Capitalism and the working class today”. There is a meeting every three weeks—see thecommune.co.uk for details.

We also organise a reading group on “communism from below”, which also meets every three weeks. Texts and details available online.

Join the London announcements list: https://lists.riseup.net/www/info/thecommune-london

Wrexham

by Steve Ryan

Communards have been busy pushing a May Day march and rally through the local trade council. The theme will be around May day as a workers movement day as opposed to the racism and hate of the BNP, who are active in the area.

After the march a series of meetings are being arranged around the title “Storming the heavens—alternatives to capitalism”. Paper sales will also be launched in and around the town centre.

Contact via uncaptive minds@gmail.com

Coventry (and everywhere else...)

We are trying to start some activities in the West Midlands, so if you’re in the area, get in touch with our comrades via uncaptive minds@gmail.com

We also have a new Facebook group with details on all of our activities nationally (and which will also feature some political discussion and debate).

You can sign up at: http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/ group.php?gid=100973580952

All correspondence should be sent to: The Commune, 2nd Floor, 145-147 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY
The union and the left have already begun to claim this struggle as a victory on the grounds that it forced the company to the negotiating table and that it has inspired other workers. These are partial truths, though any real assessment would have to be made after any deal is sealed. But the fact that the workers have been manoeuvred by the union into a vulnerable position where they could easily be screwed is something not to be glossed over, as the left will want to. This false optimism is only a means of repressing reflection on limits and strengths of what has happened, and a recipe for a repeat of the same errors in the future.

In the final meeting of occupiers no real opposition was expressed to the union’s direction to walk out. This despite some occupiers in earlier conversation expressing a desire to carry on, and to try to persuade the company to settle the dispute. Those who in the beginning had said they and the other occupiers would never leave until a satisfactory deal was agreed, were now obliged to convince the workers they must leave with no guarantee that another deal can be struck. The process becomes remote and secret from the workers’ authority to ultimately decide the fate of the workers.

Some in the meeting voiced serious criticisms of the union for keeping them in the dark about developments. The union and the left have already begun to claim this struggle as a victory on the grounds that it forced the company to the negotiating table and that it has inspired other workers. These are partial truths, though any real assessment would have to be made after any deal is sealed. But the fact that the workers have been manoeuvred by the union into a vulnerable position where they could easily be screwed is something not to be glossed over, as the left will want to. This false optimism is only a means of repressing reflection on limits and strengths of what has happened, and a recipe for a repeat of the same errors in the future.

Political parties fight to conquer political power. Even when in opposition they build their apparatus, which guides the party’s agenda and policies and in turn defines the party’s public image. Political parties, especially when adapted for a parliamentary method of struggle, are under the control of a party leadership and the party bureaucracy. The idea of self-management because of the process of decision-making should be under the control of party elites or self-organised workers and citizens.

Instead leftist political parties which advocate radical social change often see themselves as the bearers of such change, seeing any institutions of direct democracy by representatives. If a party has already developed its bureaucracy it would certainly not be interested in developing such forms of social organisation which would decrease its power and influence. If the masses are despite this self-organised, the party bureaucracy may allow a degree of economic democracy (some form of participatory democracy). It may even allow the idea of direct democracy (some form of participatory democracy) but would struggle hard to accept only those solutions which do not substantially jeopardise its position.

Bureaucracy can sometimes even draw such legislation as to enable it to delegate some of its representatives to manage only those functions of the union which it deems necessary. For example, in some cases the workers’ collective voice could control the union structure. But once negotiations were organised by officials - on the other side of the world - and the whole process was then carried on by workers in the hands of specialists, they become dependent not on what they know, but on what they’re told. And we know from long experience that the union hierarchy has its vested interests to protect that often don’t coincide with that of the workers.

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Documents uncovered by Visteon workers at Basildon suggest that closures have been planned for several years with the intention of restarting production with cheaper labour - and that the creation of trade-off company like Visteon is part of a long-term strategy to restructure and trim away the least profitable parts of the car industry. So the lessons and outcome here are important for whoever is next in line for the chop.

political parties and workers’ self-management

By Goran Marković

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goran markovic is one of the editors of the magazine novi plamen which he founded in 1968 to promote self-management and anarchism. he is also one of the editors of the magazine eszé-
the struggle for women’s emancipation today

Liz Leicester spoke to our 9th March London forum on the meaning of International Women’s Day

First of all, as a socialist I would always say that the struggles of women and the self-activity of women is very much a part of the struggle for the self-emancipation of the whole working class, and I’ve always seen it in that context. That’s where we have to place the issues that are called ‘women’s issues’.

A small quote I think is good, which I think The Commune has published on its website, by Francois Chanesia is “Inequalities and oppression do not exist separately from each other. They translate into concrete realities the way in which this mode of production, capitalism, functions.” For me that’s at the centre of this discussion about women’s issues. There are some very real and concrete things. There is an extremely genuine, international understanding that women do do as much unpaid work in the home than they do paid work. That is not unimportant. But women in paid work are still as much unpaid work in the home than they do paid work. For instance, by a UN report, women internationally do twice as much unpaid work as men. But of course in larger areas of the world, there is extreme poverty, exploitation, violence, rape, semi-slavery or slavery. But of course in larger areas of the world, there is extreme poverty, exploitation, violence, rape, semi-slavery or slavery. 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by Nathan Coombs

First was the March 28th 'Jobs, justice, climate' rally: a quickly forgotten TUC organised trot through central London. Second was the April 1st protest at the Bank of England, where the denouement played out to an audience of the Bank, against a fever pitch expectation set by the police and the media about the eruption of a 'summer of rage.' Something like 5,000 to 10,000 joined the protest at Bank, but the police called it off after the fifth battle line was set up, as a con
glomeration of events, in a similar vein to the 'anti-
globalisation' movement of the 1990s and beyond.

In the sense of history repeating itself, Chris Knight, the 'martyr' of the G20 Meltdown movement, declared an im-
permanence in the world: a week was not enough to bring the protest, and the media were quick to invoke parallels with the May Day riots and to label the assorted anarchist groups and hodgepodge of protestors as 'anti-globalisation activ-
ists' [1] even in the absence of any anti-globalisation ban-
ners, chants or slogans. Needless to say, to neither the revolu-
nor, the anti-globalisation protest materialised. Or in other words, the form of the protests might have stayed the same, but its content had changed. Not yet surveying the post-
mortem left commentary about the protest, the blinkers still seem to be on those who only saw what they expected to see, never mind what was simmering in a inarticulate bubble beneath the surface.

If it was a matter of seeing the protests through the eyes of abstraction, the g20 did need no further than a concentra-
tion by Frank Furedi: founder and ideologue of the dis-
banding Revolutionary Communist Party of Great Brit-
ain. According to Furedi, 'What was really striking about the G20 Meltdown movement was its inability to articulate a cause-chaos' - which took place outside the Bank of England and elsewhere in London - was the extent to which the opportuni-

costly confrontation of capitalist social antagonists in the West. This argument - which I posit as a type of political sociology - here takes the theses as simply ideology - that is with the crisis in Western capitalism from the 1970s onwards[3], there was a coinci-
dence between the financialisation of the economy and the mass of twentyJsomething students, intellectuals and activists Sla-

As fun as all this ruckus was, however, it still does not get to the heart of the matter, namely: why, like all such protests nowadays, does the heat of the moment not translate into a lasting shift in social reality? The answer is not to be found in the fads and fashions of the media 
in terms of a gangster, simply to derive their allegiances, ?the others? - one of the most compelling historical materialism too - was the promised utopia, always just around the next corner. The Third Way of 'social democracy,' pre and post Blairite, was no more than an attempt to contain the system: how, by bringing in the ?trickle down gains? of capital accumulation to the masses in advance of what capitalism could deliver, and a little of bit socialism in advance of any portended communist society. What we are witnessing today is the fossilising of that project, without either a corresponding reversion to the spirit of 'triumphant capitalism' or mass communist militancy.

Nevertheless, the truism that the ad-hoc protests at the Bank of England failed because they were not embedded in a radical revolutionary struggle can be explained in two ways. To put it in academese, there is firstly the ontological thesis. Into this category would fall the likes of Frank Furedi and former Marxism Today editor Martin Jacques. They argue that the protests were little more than an attempt at a ?Velvet Revolution? in the week running up to the G20, there has been a seamless and irre-
versible shift in the potential for collective subjectivity. Nowa-
days we act as atomised individuals and with this shift we can no longer hope to act collectively. There is no more pri-
existance of capitalism and politics. The conscious partic-
ulars (Trotskyist, Stalinist, Maoist, Castroist etc.), resulting in a number of key Third World the atres in the 1970s onwards was part and parcel of the collapse of the global revolutionary movement in all but the poorest countries, amongst other factors[4].

That means what is here that the antagonisms between la-
bour and capital, production and consumption, have been papered over by the cheap credit and low inflation derived from high savings in the East. This itself is enough to lower the stakes of class-based politics to the point where mili-
tary seems more detrimental than the risk it involves; and it also involves a qualitative and quantitative degrada-
tion of the working class in the West, reducing their relative power. This tendency has resulted in an abstract anti-capitalist movement, making arguments about the ills of the system of a kind that exists at a distance from the actual struggles. Without an actual, concrete agent, the most wild voluntarism is possible: anything from advocating a return to the so-called ?triumphant capitalism? of 1970s Egypt to cel-

Or, there is a second take on the matter, which is that cer-

[1] Watching the coverage of the protest on BBC News 24, April 1st this was the term used until it was later changed to just ?protestors? or ?anarchist groups.? [2] For a discussion of the TUC's recent pamphlet on 'copying anti-economic downturn tactics takes decisive actions against redundancies,' The Commu-


[4] Another hypothesis for the collapse is advanced by Dayan Jayatilleka: that the extreme use of violence by revo-


leftist opposition gains ground in Algeria

by Solomon Anker

April 9th saw the Presidential Election in Algeria. The final result was an expected easy victory (90%) for the current President Bouteflika, in a country where he and his strong links to the military dominate the country’s political elite. Calling Bouteflika a dictator would be a bit harsh; however calling Algeria’s elections fully free would also not be totally true, but for the left-wing results and the state of Algerian politics is quite interesting.

The election came 7 years after the end of the Algerian civil war which saw over 100,000 killed in a brutal conflict between government forces and Islamist militants. For the British media, Algeria is just another Muslim or African country in crisis and few people take any interest except for the marmaline Western interests such as terrorist attacks linked to Al Qaeda or issues of immigration.

For the Arabic media the problems of Algeria are also a matter of little interest which they prefer to ignore. While the Arabic media have a love affair with the Israeli-Palestinian crisis, the crisis in Algeria does not fit the magazine’s fantasy of Arab-Muslim being the victim of the Christian-Jewish Westerner. Rather Algeria’s civil war was Muslim killing Muslim and hence the Arab world likes to ignore it. In addition to that while Israel is official at a Jewish state oppressing a Arab minority, Algeria is officially a Arab country oppressing its Berber minority (whom are 45% of the population), and many this Berber minority totally reject Algeria as a Arab state and some even call for independence in their Berber region of Kabylie.

The left wing in Britain generally take very little interest in Algeria both nowadays and during its civil war. Yet, Algeria has the potential for having a powerful left-wing movement and the end of the civil war has seen a rise in support.

1. Our politics

We are communists: we fight for a new self-managed society based on collective ownership of the means of production and distribution and an economy organised not for value production but for the well-being of humanity and in harmony with our natural environment. Communism will abolish the system of wage-labour so that our ability to work will cease to be a commodity to be sold to an employer; it will be a truly classless society; there will be no state, no managers or organisations superior to those of workers’ self-management.

We are internationalists: we seek the greatest possible collaboration with communists in other countries; we build solidarity with workers’ movements around the world; we are opposed to all borders and immigration controls; and we are opposed to all forms of oppression of nationalities.

We know that communism can only come from below, through the organisations of the workers themselves. This conception of communism has nothing in common with the fake “socialisms” of the Stalinist state planning or the mere pretence of “Arab Socialism”.

We are the Party of Algeria’s new self-management and we fight for a new self-managed society with no state, managers or organisations superior to those of workers’ self-management. We are a network of communists committed to the self-management 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 their milieus outside the workplace.

We are the most consistent advocates of social liberation in all its forms. We fight sexual repression, sexism and homophobia and advocate sexual liberation; we champion anti-racist and anti-fascist struggles; we oppose all limits to freedom of speech and free cultural expression. These struggles are not just some adjunct to working-class struggle but are the cornerstone of democracy and human freedom.

The Workers’ Party is far from winning any election and the Algerian working class is not going to bring down the regime of Bouteflika. But the potential is there for a powerful left-wing movement in a country which the youth are increasingly bored and fed up with high levels of unemployment, poor housing, while the image of a confident woman like Louisa Hanoune is an inspiration for many women who struggle to survive in Algeria’s patriarchal society.

2. Our Organisation

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3. 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 participate in the discussions of the network.

4. 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 mobilise 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 want to break with the practice of using the works of this or that socialist of decades past as sacred texts from which “revealed truths” can be read off as gospel. The “traditions” to which the traditional left groups appeal are universally ahistorical and anachronistic, used for the sake of legitimising historical legitimacy rather than to critically examine and draw lessons from the past. We believe that the defeats of the workers’ movement in the last three decades; the decay of the left and the absolute poverty of its ideas and slogans; its abandonment of class politics; and the sectarianism of groups vying for supremacy with their own front campaigns and so-called unity projects; are all evidence of the need for ground-up rethinking of the left’s project and the re-composition of the workers’ movement.

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Political platform of the commune