

UAF AND EDL

Kick the fascists off the streets – no platform!

JUST A matter of months after the British National Party (BNP) won two MEPs in the Euro elections, the English Defence League (EDL) – a gang of Nazi thugs – have been on the march. Twice they have visited Birmingham. They have threatened to march in Luton. Manchester is next up, with the EDL planning to march there on 10 October.

The EDL is a bit like the old Combat 18 – a violent wing of fascism that pretends to be independent of the BNP but one that everyone with half a brain knows full well is the tooled-up, street fighting wing of that party. Check the mug shots from the demo photos if in doubt.

During their attacks in Birmingham the EDL smashed up a bus, assaulted black and Asian passers by and tried to beat up counter protesters. Fortunately, on both occasions they failed. They were met by determined resistance from Birmingham socialists and anti-fascists. The community mobilised, even while community leaders told people to stay and home, to avoid trouble and do nothing. The message was “rely on the police”.

Don't rely on the cops

Unite Against Fascism (UAF) put forward tactics that, despite the best intentions of consistent anti-racists in its ranks, served to undermine and demobilise the opposition to the Nazis. Salma Yaqoob, a leading councillor for the Respect Party, demanded that the council ban the EDL demonstration and sought to build a broad, non-political, cross-party front against the Nazis.

She stressed that whereas the EDL did not obey the niceties of agreed marching times and locations, UAF worked with the

police “before, during and after” the EDL march. It was only due to the spontaneous determination of mainly Asian youth, bursting through lines of UAF stewards and the police, that the EDL were driven away the first time.

Salma Yaqoob and UAF were determined there would be no repeat. Before the second EDL

The SWP are right to call for a direct mobilisation against the fascists, but they need to quickly realise that calling for state bans is a disastrous tactic

demonstration, they demanded that the police and the council ban the demo, built a “unity carnival” far from any possible confrontation in an attempt to divert the opposition from confronting the fascists. When the anti-fascist carnival was banned by the council, it opposed any mobilisation in order to maintain “unity”.

They were prepared to allow the EDL to march through Birmingham unopposed rather than break their hoped-for but unrealised alliance with the Tories, Liberals and New Labour. What sort of anti-fascism is this?

Two days before the second EDL demonstration the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) finally saw sense. With UAF refusing to act, they called a mobilisation.

Actually there was already one underway. Fortunately, anarchists, socialists, anti-fascists and Asian youth, were not prepared to wait around until the SWP made up its mind whether or not to heed the advice of UAF to stay away from Birmingham town centre and leave the EDL to strut their stuff. The

sporadic resistance on the day was more than enough to send the EDL packing again.

Manchester

In Manchester the SWP and UAF seem to have learnt nothing from the experience of Birmingham. At a meeting on 8 September, the UAF chair defended the decision of UAF to absent itself from the streets in order to “maintain unity”. UAF in Manchester resolved to call for a state ban with every member of the SWP present supporting that resolution. The UAF chair proposed, just as in Birmingham, that UAF organise a carnival well away from

any threatened confrontation with the EDL. Unlike in Birmingham this was too much for the SWP, who insisted that they would confront the fascists if they sought to come to Manchester.

The SWP are right to call for a direct mobilisation against the fascists, but they need to quickly realise that calling for state bans is a disastrous tactic in fighting fascism. It has nothing in common with militant anti-fascism. Indeed Chris Bambery, a leading SWP member, explained why in Socialist Worker back in 2001:

“We cannot rely on the ruling class, whatever liberal noises it makes, to stop the Nazis. This is especially true over the question of banning the Nazis. It seems an attractive option – after all, how better to get the Nazis off the streets – but the experience is that such bans have nearly always been used to stop the left mobilising. The 1936 Public Order Act was rushed through after 100,000 workers stopped the British Union of Fascists marching through the East End of London at Cable Street. The police

had made a determined attempt to clear the way for the fascists but were defeated by mass mobilisation. A Tory government promised the new law would stop the fascists. In reality it has been used against trade unionists and the left.

Bans have been used to demobilise the anti-fascist movement. What is happening under New Labour is worse than that. The bans are primarily aimed at preventing anti-fascist and anti-racist activities. It reached a new low in Welshpool, where the BNP staged a 'Red, White and Blue Festival', when Anti Nazi League activists were individually banned from the town, an exclusion zone was created round the town, and police said nobody would be allowed through unless they produced a BNP membership card! Anti-fascists are then presented as the problem."

(pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/sr255/bamberry.htm)

Given the SWP's current wobbling over state bans we would suggest Bambery tells the SWP to stick with the line he outlined back in 2001. But that would probably mean breaking with the organisation the SWP took the lead in founding – the UAF. It is by no means certain the SWP will do this. But it should, and quickly.

UAF – the unity of the graveyard

David Cameron, the Tory leader, is a member of UAF. He didn't turn out to oppose the EDL in Birmingham. Salma Yaqoob, the Respect councillor, is a member of UAF. She didn't turn out to oppose the EDL in Birmingham. Peter Hain, the former New Labour minister, is a member of UAF. He didn't turn out to oppose the EDL in Birmingham.

UAF seeks to build broad non-class, cross party, coalitions to oppose fascism. Above all they want to be respectable. So they have consciously sought out politicians and reactionaries from the bosses ranks to try and bolster their credentials. Funded by the trade union bureaucracy, UAF employs

many SWP apparatchiks.

Under the circumstances it is literally more than their job's worth to fight for a militant and socialist strategy in UAF. Unfortunately, the political concession made in founding this organisation, now threatens to poison its founder.

The EDL have broken the rules of the game. The BNP's search for respectability fooled some into thinking that old style anti-fascism was out of date. Many on the left wrongly began to suggest that an orientation to the working class self-defence and self-organisation were no longer the way to smash the Nazis. By marching, by taking the battle to the streets, the EDL have exploded the entire strategy of the UAF, and exposed the contradictions in the SWP and the right wing of Respect almost overnight. UAF have failed the test of struggle.

Under the circumstances it is even more remarkable that in spite of everything the anti-fascists still drove the EDL from the streets and scored a major victory. This will be what is needed in Manchester and anywhere else the EDL target.

Free speech for fascists?

Some groups like the CP or Weekly Worker think that the fascists have the right to their opinion, that they should have the

vicious unprovoked assaults on black and Asian people. In 2000 the Oldham riots began after Nazis broke down the door of a pregnant Asian woman's house and assaulted her and her family in her own home. The EDL want to do the same thing in Manchester.

Democracy and free speech are not the real issue; the real issue is racist violence by fascism, the suppression of all democracy by fascism and their ability to build themselves up so they can actually start carrying out these attacks. We have to smash them before they become powerful. That is the lesson of Italy in the 1920s, Germany in the early 1930s and Spain in the late 1930s. We don't want to repeat the nightmare of those two decades.

Socialist answers

Anti-fascists need to organise independently of UAF. We certainly can support and participate in their actions, provided we are not bound by their leadership's decisions to avoid confronting the fascists. Nor should we be dependent on them for intelligence or organisation.

We need to re-iterate that fascism will be defeated by independent working class organisation, by the self-activity of the working class people, lesbian or gay, black or white or Asian, women or men, working or unemployed, in every working class organisation, uniting

Anti-fascists need to organise independently of UAF. We certainly can support their actions, provided we are not bound by their leadership's decisions

right to free speech and democratic freedoms. They think that the fascists should be allowed a platform to spread their ideas.

Socialists and anti-fascists on the other hand have fought to impose a position of no platform for fascists for many decades. Ask yourself what is the content of the fascists' "free speech"? They propose and organise

together to drive the Nazi scum from the streets.

We call on all who oppose fascism to join us on 10 October to keep Manchester a Nazi-Free Zone and to support mobilisations in any other town and city where the Nazis – in the guise of either the BNP or the EDL – try to take the streets.

Bill Jefferies

VESTAS

From the balcony to the blockade

THE TWO week occupation of the Vestas wind turbine plant on the Isle of Wight was an inspiration to all those who care for the future of the planet. In those days in late July/early August the determination of a dozen or so men to risk arrest, conviction and loss of redundancy money in order to try to keep the factory open brought hundreds of supporters down to the factory gates to join the tent camp. Thousands more people across the UK joined local days of action, raised money and support in their workplaces and union branches.

In order to cut carbon emissions we need massive investment in renewables like wind, wave and solar energy. And if we are serious about doing it on a scale and in a timeframe that holds out any hope of stopping runaway global warming then we cannot afford to let factories and jobs like those at Vestas go to the wall.

In all likelihood the Vestas occupation would never have happened without “outside agitators”. It was to the credit of supporters of the Workers Climate Action that in June a group of them went down to the Isle of Wight on hearing of the plan to close the factory and establish contact with the workers and the East Cowes trades council.

By leafleting in Newport town centre and at the factory gate they were able to place the idea that something could be done to prevent the closure. The socialist and trade union movement on the Isle of Wight is not that strong and it was absolutely the right thing to do to take the arguments to the workforce from the outside, while encouraging the workforce to make its own decisions and not bouncing them into an action they were not convinced of.

Once the action was underway

the RMT to its credit took up the workers’ cause. It stepped in to recruit and provide union backing to the Vestas workforce. Bob Crow did more than just give moral support to the action, visiting the plant several times. Before long the RMT was effectively in control of the occupation through the newly

Blockading a factory from the outside and preventing the components being shipped out requires widespread solidarity from other trade unionists

recruited stewards. Once this happened, the nightly factory gate meetings, which were meant to be the means of discussing strategy, in effect became little more than report back sessions.

Eviction

On 4 August the courts on the Isle of Wight issued an eviction order. Although the 200 or so supporters immediately marched back to the plant on rumours of an immediate attempt by bailiffs, it soon became clear that there was no real intention of resisting the bailiffs when the time came. The RMT stewards from among the Vestas workers made this clear, as did the national leadership of the RMT. When the bailiffs did arrive a few days later, the occupiers left with minimal resistance.

Obviously, it’s difficult for a dozen occupiers to secure the factory properly and defend it from the larger security and police forces, and of course there was a serious chance of arrest, fines or worse. It may even have put redundancy payments at risk. But

the decision to leave meant that the dispute lost much of the initiative gained.

The advantages of staying inside and resisting eviction were obvious. While the occupation continued Vestas were not able to get their hands on valuable equipment (not least Mold 8 which they want to ship to the USA), which gave the workforce leverage over the bosses. Plus the occupation could have been a beacon for the whole labour movement, which is being knocked sideways by the recession, and where in too many cases workers (and their union leaders) are not putting up a fight or are sacrificing

pay in order to stay in a job.

At any point the occupation could have been reinforced by other Vestas workers not named in the eviction order, or even non-Vestas workers from among the supporters outside. The borders of the factory were not secured at all. But the political will to keep the occupation going was not there.

Solidarity strike action was also vital but not really on the RMT’s agenda. The bargemen agreed not to ship the finished blades out of the factory. But the RMT needed to organise political strike action of their members (starting with the Portsmouth ferry workers) to put pressure on the government to step in and save the jobs.

This was another important aspect of the dispute that needed to be pursued with vigour; Labour was highly vulnerable as it claimed to be “leading the fight” against climate change yet refused to challenge the bosses closure plans. The obvious demand, raised by the workers, was to nationalise the company outright and integrate the company into a planned expansion of wind-power across the country –

this would have led to job creation not destruction.

After the occupation ended the workers and supporters on the ground in the Isle of Wight have turned to trying to prevent Vestas' bosses moving the 11 blades and other equipment (worth more than £750,000) out of the factory and onto the river barges at the back.

But blockading a factory from the outside and preventing the components being shipped out requires widespread solidarity from other trade unionists as well as mass action from supporters. This would have been much easier if the occupation had been sustained and reinforced.

Although the move out of occupation was a step back, the fight is not over. A core of activists including Vestas workers and supporters are continuing to struggle. Some attempts to move equipment have been frustrated. In the middle of September protesters occupied a crane on Southampton docks being used to load the Vestas blades. In an action typical of New Labour Britain the occupiers fighting for jobs were threatened with being charged under the Terrorism Act if they did not come down off the crane!

The workers are continuing to take their arguments to trade unions and communities across the country. These sorts of struggles are exactly the kind of direct action that is needed to tackle both unemployment and climate change. Climate camps and stunts in the city raise publicity, but at the end of the day we need to take control over these industries, take them out of the hands of the bosses to stand the best chance of saving the planet from environmental, social and humanitarian disaster.

Labour's green wash exposed

In the same month that the workers launched their occupation of the Vestas plant, the government launched its white paper – the Low Carbon Transition Plan. In it Labour say they will create at least 400,000 jobs over the next ten years in the

low-carbon sector, with the aim that by 2015 business should be employing one million workers in this sector.

But the current reality is rather different.

➤ In March Shell pulled out of wind, solar and hydro-power claiming that they were not economic (it can make more money extracting oil from the massively polluting coal tar sands in North America).

➤ BP then cut 620 jobs in its solar energy division, and Scottish Power owner Iberdrola has so far cut half of its green investments this year.

➤ The developers of the London Array in the Thames Estuary, planned as the biggest offshore wind farm in the world, are considering pulling out on financial grounds.

➤ Even one of Britain's most efficient wind farms, in Cumbria, may be knocked down to make way for a nuclear power station.

The government made it clear from the outset of the Vestas occupation that they were content to let the company close the Newport and East Cowes factories and see nearly 600 workers out the gates forever, never mind the hundreds more in supply industries locally and those in shops who depend on people being in work and having money to spend.

Vestas manufacture turbines for onshore wind farms, and up to now there has been little demand in the UK – proposed developments have met with massive obstruction from largely Tory-backed NIMBYs. The government white paper made it clear that they planned to expand offshore wind farms as part of the renewable mix rather than invest in the onshore turbines that Vestas make. So Vestas argued that there was no commercial case for keeping the plant open in the UK. In response, climate change minister Ed Miliband, made lots of noise about how sad it was, but conceded that Vestas bosses were making a

WHAT WE NEED

Green nationalisations now!

➤ IN THE UK the Campaign against Climate Change in the UK is demanding a 10% cut in emissions by the end of 2010, a million green jobs by the end of 2010, a ban on domestic flights, a 55 mph speed limit and the scrapping of the roads programme and an end to agrofuel use (using land to produce biofuel instead of food).

Although limited, these are demands that we should support, but even to achieve these demands we need a mass movement in the trade unions, on estates, in communities and colleges to force the government to act.

A key demand to achieve even these goals is the immediate nationalisations of the energy and transport industries. They need to be taken over, without compensation and placed under

the control of the workers and communities. Only in this way can we ensure that carbon reducing measures benefit the mass of the population not the rich and the multinationals. The closure of the Vestas plant and wholesale retreat of the big energy monopolies in the UK from developing non-polluting industries and technologies re-inforces the importance of this demand.

EVENTS

17 October Mass action in Nottinghamshire against Ratcliffe-on-Soar coal-fired power station:

www.thegreatclimateswoop.org/

5 December Campaign Against Climate Change demonstration 12.00pm, Hyde Park, London

12 December Demonstration in Copenhagen – for transport see:

www.campaigncc.org/node/223

understandable decision “based on sound commercial principles”.

To hell with commercial principles. Firstly any government serious about climate change would overrule Tory planning committees where it was clear local prejudices were being pandered to over the need to reduce carbon emissions. Secondly by taking over the research, development and production facilities of Vestas and using state backed investment, a new company could be used to develop turbines for offshore use.

The fact is this government would rather pour billions in to propping up its city banking friends than invest in preventing climate change. Once again Labour bows before the free market, a market that is incapable of tackling the urgent issue of climate change.

In 1939-40, faced with the threat of war, the British government did not hesitate to take command of the key sectors of the economy in order to turn Britain into a planned war economy: production of private cars and household goods gave way overnight to tanks and guns. In short, industry was reconfigured more or less overnight because the political will existed to make it happen, shoving aside all protests about private

property, commercial decisions.

The threat of run-away climate change is a global emergency and we are running out of time. Every single job in this sector has to be defended and built upon. Instead the government relies on the market to sort out the problem: carbon trading to determine a “market price” for pollution, commercially run nuclear power plants, tenders for theoretical carbon capture plants. The result has been prevarication, delay and a growing climate emergency.

Only an emergency plan, linked to central national planning, that rationally puts it all together all the necessary industries, and has all the levers in the hands of democratic and accountable bodies, can possibly have a hope of squaring local community concerns about “unsightly” wind farms with the urgent need for decommissioning coal-fired plants. Only such an energetic and socialist approach to tackling carbon emissions can offer a solution to the climate emergency

Clare Heath

Messages of support to savevestas@googlemail.com
For more information go to <http://savevestas.wordpress.com>

change is happening now.”

She is right. Global warming is not a theoretical possibility, it is a reality. Faced with mounting evidence of this reality, world leaders will meet in Copenhagen in December to discuss a new international treaty to tackle climate change. The United Nations Climate Conference, COP15, will bring together environment ministers from 192 countries to try and agree a replacement for the Kyoto protocol which expires in 2012. What are the issues?

The first is the extent to which the countries will commit to reducing their emissions, with binding targets. This is the major challenge for the richest countries, and will be resisted particularly strongly by the USA, Australia and Canada. Latest predictions show that to avoid a dangerous 2°C increase in temperature there need to be massive cuts, and soon. Economist and government adviser Nicholas Stern argues that the target should be a 90% cut in global emissions by 2050.

But even more important than the long term target is short term actions, and there is little chance of getting the world leaders to agree anything approaching what is needed. It is far easier for them to adopt an ambitious goal for 2050, or even 2020, because they know they will not be in power then and someone else will be blamed. Getting them to commit to a cut of 10% by the end of 2010 is both more important and more difficult because it means they actually have to do something.

Some countries, including the UK, have adopted legislation that includes specific targets, but the USA's attempt to do the same appears to be stalling. Obama's draft Bill was supposed to be discussed in Congress in September but has been put back to later this year and therefore it is unlikely to be agreed before Copenhagen, if at all. The bill is being held hostage in the US Senate by senators from coal producing states. That means the USA will not be able to sign up to a specific target when they get to Denmark in December.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Campaigning around Copenhagen

▶ IN SEPTEMBER two ships completed a voyage never previously managed by a commercial cargo vessel. They went from South Korea to Siberia and on to Rotterdam by way of the infamous Northeast Passage that, because of ice, has thwarted numerous expeditions from the 16th century onwards. The route is more direct than the usual sea journey from Asia to Europe (through the Suez and Panama canals), and knocks more than

3,000 miles off the journey.

While shipping companies and Russian businesses celebrate the opportunities ahead, the achievement signals bad news for the planet. “This is not a cause for celebration but cause for immediate action,” said Melanie Duchin the Greenpeace Arctic Expedition leader. Unprecedented reductions in the volume of ice in the Arctic have opened the route up to vessels without the need for ice-breakers. “This is further proof that climate

This leads to the second issue, namely the balance between rich industrial countries and the expanding economies of developing world. China and India will refuse to sign up to a slowing down of their expanding emissions unless the USA agrees to an absolute cut. The USA in turn has said that it expects China, India and other expanding economies to take major steps – refusing to acknowledge the need of these and many less developed countries for more industrial growth and a greater share of the world's emissions.

Other issues to be discussed will be a commitment (and money) to invest in low-carbon technologies, the preservation of carbon sinks such as forests, and support for “adaptation” in the countries worst affected by existing climate change; many countries like Bangladesh will be inundated by rising sea levels.

The environmental movement is focusing all its attention on this conference, with the aim of achieving the best possible treaty and using the opportunity to pressure governments into taking action. Thousands of lobbyists will be there from the major campaigns and charities each with their own or shared demands.

While it is important to join the protests and demand that governments take action, we should have no illusions in these capitalist governments coming to an agreement that can curb carbon emissions to the level needed. Their free market solutions have already been shown to fail.

The experience of implementing Kyoto is a prime example. While it has been in place global emissions have grown not fallen, up 38% worldwide between 1992 and 2007. The level of CO₂ in the atmosphere is now 387 parts per million. Two years ago the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report recommended that levels needed to stay below 450 ppm to avoid dangerous global warming. Most scientists now agree that this is wrong, and that the levels need to fall to around 350 ppm to be sure. That means heading as quickly as possible for an end to carbon

emissions, and implementing measures to absorb CO₂ currently in the atmosphere (though re-forestation for example).

The mechanisms put in place to try and reduce emissions, primarily based on carbon trading, are all based on the market, and have so far proved a major source of profit for the polluters rather than a lever for reducing outputs.

It would be wrong to think that the market can never lead to a reduction in emissions, although it would undoubtedly be too slow to prevent dangerous climate change. With sufficient regulation these schemes could put a price on carbon emissions and eventually lead some companies to shift to lower carbon alternatives in order to increase profits. So the problem is not that the market is inevitably ineffective, rather it is the way in which in which it works that is the problem.

The market approach effectively privatises the atmosphere, and then hands out shares with the value of the right to pollute. This creates a market and trading occurs, with those who don't need all their

emissions vouchers selling them, and others buying them. It can allow rich countries to offload their carbon reductions onto poor countries while doing little to bring down world emissions.

We need to make Copenhagen a focal point for actions and demonstrations, demanding that more is done to tackle climate change. We know that existing governments and the UN institutions will always favour the rich nations and powerful business interests, and we need to counter this with calls for an emergency plan to decarbonise the economy while addressing the poverty and inequalities that exist worldwide.

Such a plan will not come out of the Copenhagen talks, but must be developed by workers' and poor farmers' organisations worldwide and include demands such as the nationalisation of energy and transport under workers' control, with massive investment into the technologies that can replace carbon-based economies and improve living standards.

Helen Ward

GREEN NEW DEAL

The Greens and Labour: too little too late

➤ THERE HAS been much debate recently among climate change campaigners and some political parties about the need to launch a “Green New Deal”. This has been most clearly outlined so far by the Green Party. The idea is to tackle the threat and impact of global warming with a programme of public works which would create massive numbers of “green jobs”, at a time of economic recession.

The name harks back to a reform programme originated by US President Franklin D Roosevelt between 1933 and 1936. In the wake of the Great Depression he pledged himself to “a new deal for the American people”, that would give

work to the unemployed, reform business and financial practices and to lead to economic recovery.

It was a clear example of state-backed intervention to try and rebuild an economy and reduce unemployment. Not surprisingly, the New Deal was vigorously opposed by the right wing in the USA, including many in the Democratic Party itself. For Roosevelt it was a populist move that he referred to as “more than a political campaign – it is a call to arms”.

This phrase is certainly applicable to today's need to fight climate change. In their July press release the Green Party liken

Briefings

Roosevelt's "100 days of law-making" to the "100 months or less time we have left to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases at before we hit the a potential of no return". They continue, "the most serious global crisis since the Great Depression calls for serious reforms the like of which has not as yet been considered by politicians".

So what do they propose, and how will it be done? Their main proposals are as follows:

- ▶ A bold new vision for a low-carbon energy system, that will include making "every building a power station".
- ▶ Creating and training a "carbon army" to provide the labour for a vast environmental reconstruction programme.
- ▶ Establishing an "Oil Legacy Fund" paid for by a windfall tax on the profits of the energy companies. Other financial innovations to include Local Authority Green bonds, and green family savings bonds.
- ▶ Ensuring more realistic fossil fuel prices which include the cost to the environment, to help create economic incentives to bring alternative fuels to the market. This will provide funding for the Green New Deal and safety nets to those vulnerable to higher prices via rapidly rising carbon taxes and revenue from carbon trading.
- ▶ Minimising corporate tax evasion by clamping down on tax havens, and corporate financial reporting, hence providing much-needed public finance.
- ▶ Re-regulating the domestic financial system. This would include cutting interest rates across the board. This is designed to help those borrowing to build a new energy and transport infrastructure.
- ▶ Breaking up the discredited financial institutions that have cost so much public money in the credit crunch. The de-merged units would be split into smaller banks.

On an international level the following is proposed:

- ▶ Allowing all nations far greater control over domestic monetary policy and fiscal policy.

▶ Setting a formal international target for greenhouse gases that keeps future temperature rises to as far below 2°C as possible.

▶ Giving poorer countries the opportunity to escape poverty, without fuelling global warming, by helping finance massive investment in climate change adaptation and renewable energy.

Socialists certainly support some of the above measures, for instance the creation of a "carbon army", a windfall tax on energy companies, cracking down on corporate tax

that we're seeing at the moment. We want to see a much stronger social and redistributive agenda."

Climate change activists will not find any radical or socialist answers in the Green New Deal. Like Roosevelt's programme on which it is based, it remains firmly embedded in reforming capitalism to tackle a crisis.

Labour's plans

In July the government announced details of its Low

The government's plan has been criticised as falling short of the level of cuts scientists are demanding, and being virtually impossible to achieve in such a short period of time

havens and green investment in poorer countries. But ultimately this is a programme which doesn't even begin to tackle the seriousness of the situation which they claim to address.

Although many of the demands are excellent, it is certainly not a "call to arms" to fight climate change. For a start it is aimed at governments rather than the workers and poor farmers around the world who have most to lose if climate change continues to accelerate as at present.

This is not surprising, since the Green Party, is firmly in the camp of reformist parliamentarianism and does not represent any break from the political status quo, however green and radical some of its ideas might sound. In a recent Guardian interview, Caroline Lucas, leader of the Green Party was asked if she was anti-capitalist. She replied:

"The label I would prefer is that we are progressive and care about the environment". She also went on to say that "we're not anti-markets, we're not saying everything should be in common control. We want to see well-functioning markets, but we don't want to see the kind of capture by huge corporate interests

Carbon Transition Plan. This so-called energy revolution aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 34% by 2020, and aims at an overall cut of 80% by 2050. Government ministers hope that the huge array of measures and targets will rapidly cut energy use in homes, transport and industry.

The hope is to put Britain in pole position as a carbon cutter ahead of the crucial climate change negotiations in Copenhagen at the end of the year. Building on the measures announced in the April budget, the main pledges are as follows:

- ▶ 40% of electricity to come from low-carbon sources, including nuclear power, by 2020
- ▶ £3.2bn to be invested by energy companies to improve the poor energy efficiency of UK homes
- ▶ Smart electricity meters in every home by 2020
- ▶ Support for ultra-low carbon cars
- ▶ Cash for households which generate their own energy
- ▶ The creation of 400,000 green jobs

The White Paper is expected to become law by the end of the year. Every government department will be forced to provide detailed plans for cuts in the next few months. The

energy and climate Secretary, Ed Miliband stated that “every business and community will need to be involved. The scale of the task is enormous.”

At the forefront of the government’s plans are giant offshore wind parks. The renewable energy industry will be given £120m to develop offshore wind technologies and £60m will go to marine energy. In addition, planning laws will be changed to make it easier to build onshore wind farms, and all new coal-fired power stations will have to be equipped with some degree of carbon capture and storage (CCS) by 2020.

The government expects British companies to profit from the transition to a low carbon economy, claiming “huge opportunities for UK business to take part in the £3tn low-carbon market that will employ more than one million people in the UK by 2015”. Among environmental groups, Greenpeace Executive Director John Sauven welcomed the “creation of thousands of green jobs which will make Britain a more prosperous country”.

Miliband has promised to meet over 30% of Britain’s green energy targets with wind and other renewables by 2020 (this is in fact down from a commitment of 32% in the budget). Wind energy currently provides less than 6% of Britain’s electricity while solar and tidal power provides virtually nothing. He has resisted CBI demands to give nuclear power financial support; he wants more nuclear stations but the private sector will have to build them.

Overall there will be a fall in the contribution of nuclear power in generating electricity, from the current 13% to 8% by 2020. Likewise coal will provide only 22% of energy generation in 2020 compared to 32% at present.

The government plans to meet its wider carbon reduction targets with extensive use of “clean coal”, with four CCS demonstration models being built in the UK, and the first plants up and running by 2014 – a highly optimistic scenario

for an untried technology.

The government’s plan has rightly been criticised by many as falling short of the level of cuts scientists are demanding, and being virtually impossible to achieve in such a short period of time using the market mechanism that Labour is committed to.

But there are more serious criticisms to be made. For instance, the government can use carbon offsetting overseas to meet its targets if emissions are not cut sufficiently in the UK. As the director of the World Development Movement commented “this is a dangerous get-out-of-jail-free card which could be disastrous for the climate and for the world’s poorest people. The government has to be completely committed to reducing our emissions here in the UK.”

Commenting on the dangers of carbon offsetting, George Monbiot said that it “makes sense if you are seeking a global cut of 5% between now and forever. It is the cheapest and quickest way of achieving an

insignificant reduction. But as soon as you seek substantial cuts it becomes unfair. Yes, let us help poorer nations to reduce deforestation and clean up pollution. But let us not pretend that it lets us off the hook.”

Monbiot has also highlighted the findings of two recent papers in Nature magazine. These supersede the recommendations of the International Panel on Climate Change upon which the government has based its figures. It seems that the timing and the rate of an 85% cut in emissions by 2050 is crucial. To deliver a good chance of preventing a global rise in temperature of 2°C (the target announced to much fanfare at the recent G8 Summit) we will have to cut global emissions by around 10% by the end of next year and by 25% by 2012! This is certainly not going to be achieved if the government’s current plans are adopted by Britain and the other richer nations.

Pete Ashley

NUS

Build a real, fighting student movement!

THE NATIONAL Union of Students (NUS) has abandoned its support for free education paid for by central taxation. Its recently launched “Blueprint” for higher education funding, proposes replacing debt repayments with a 20 year graduate tax.

What’s the difference? According to Aaron Porter (“Vice President Higher Education) the NUS is ensuring that it is “listened to”. Porter and his co-author NUS President Wes Streeting, have sold the principle of free education in exchange for “seizing the political initiative.” But vacuous New Labour rhetoric never paid the rent.

That the National Union of Students has abandoned its commitment to free education – let

alone the question of universal grants – is the inevitable consequence of its leadership by New Labour’s next-generation bureaucrats. They have ensured that little has been done to counter the defeat after defeat suffered by students since Tony Blair’s victory in 1997, most notably the introduction of £1,000 fees back in 1998 and then, in breach of a New Labour Manifesto commitment, the start of capped variable fees (“top up fees”) in 2006.

Top up fees passed by just six votes in parliament. Labour MPs feared that a loss of this particular vote combined with the publication of the Hutton (Iraq war) enquiry’s findings just one day later, would jeopardise the existence of the Labour government.

A student who had the misfortune to enter university in 2006, would have graduated this June. They would have been part of the first generation of UK students saddled with a debt in excess of £20,000. The impact of top-up fees has been felt by students in a very tangible way, with an 86% rise in students working full-time in addition to their studies.

Furthermore, for all Labour's talk of "widening participation", still

Aaron Porter argues the NUS Blueprint has found, "credibility across the political spectrum" – hardly any great achievement when that spectrum stretches from David Cameron to Gordon Brown. This time round Porter stresses, unlike the last two reviews of higher education funding, there's a real possibility of the NUS having a representative on the funding committee.

But then, what difference will

universities across the country. The University of Wolverhampton, for instance, is set to make one in eleven of its staff members redundant. Back in July, the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) declared that almost half of the universities planning staff cuts at that point in time, had failed to meet legal requirements that the job losses would not disproportionately affect women, black and disabled staff members.

London Metropolitan University, which is proposing some of the highest job cuts to compensate for three years of over-funding from the government which it now has to pay back, is also getting rid of its nursery, which will have a hugely detrimental affect on both female staff and students. Across the country, universities are saving money by reducing student contact time and streamlining courses.

The blame for all this, of course, lies with the Labour government and its hollow commitment to have 50% of school leavers attend university. It set this target without setting aside the funds for such a goal. Rather, Blair and Brown have squandered money on war and banking bail outs, while spending a considerably smaller percentage of its GDP on higher education than Mexico, Belgium, Korea and the Slovak Republic to name but a few.

Considerably less is spent on each student today than in the 1970s (prior to years of spending cuts suffered under four successive Conservative governments, 1979-97), meaning the student experience really has become about quantity rather than quality.

Higher education shouldn't be about getting a certain quota to complete a three-year degree, anymore than it should be about denying tens of thousands of able students places at university; anyone who wishes to and is able to go to university should have that opportunity.

Labour's approach to widening participation is meaningless, while it continues to sacrifice quality state secondary education. When 50% of A-level passes achieved by private school students are A grades,

Considerably less is spent on each student today than in the 1970s prior to years of spending slashes suffered under four successive Conservative governments

only 71.8% of students attending the prestigious Russell group of universities are state educated (and state, in this bizarre reckoning, includes independent grammar schools), compared with 97.2% of those attending the Million+ Universities, many of them ex-polytechnics.

The elite universities, the Golden Triangle of Oxbridge and London, and to a lesser degree the Red Brick institutions, still remain the preserve of Britain's elite. At London Metropolitan University, which ranks low in the league tables, there are more black students than in all 20 Russell Group universities put together.

This autumn will see a review of higher education funding. With two-thirds of University Vice-Chancellors demanding a lifting of the cap and with cross-party support, it seems likely that the cap on fees will be raised, perhaps to £5,000, possibly to even more. If the cap is indeed raised, the inevitable consequence will be a two-tiered education system, with the more prestigious universities charging the most. Oxford will cost substantially more than Oxford Brookes; Liverpool more than Liverpool Hope. Widening participation will be out the window.

this make? The undeniable truth is that in abandoning its commitment to free education and clouding this reprehensible move in rhetoric about "not standing on the sidelines", "engaging in the decision making process" and "really representing students' interests", NUS has sold out a generation.

This year, the number of students able to access higher education was capped and over 100,000 students – the vast majority of them with perfectly acceptable grades – will not be able to enter the university system at this time. Many were seeking a way to make it out of the recession in one piece.

For all the government's song and dance about awarding an extra 10,000 places, many universities – including nearly of all of those in the top 30 of the league tables – refused to take them, as extra funding wasn't offered to cover these places. As a consequence of all this, less than a week after the start of Clearing (the process where students fight for the remaining spaces on degree courses), nearly every single space was taken. A process that normally takes a month, was completed in little more than a week.

It's not only students who are suffering. Wide-ranging staff cuts are being implemented at

compared with only 20% in the state sector, it's clear that money can still buy entry into the most prestigious universities.

And who knows how many working class students might be put off attending university if the fees cap really is raised? How many poorer students will have to balance their desire to avoid debt with their educational aspirations?

The left, still hopelessly divided, needs to wake up and smell the coffee. Porter and Streeting's feeble efforts are nothing when compared with the threat of the Conservatives' proposed attacks on public services.

The Eton Boys of Cameron's shadow cabinet, will have no qualms about the fully fledged privatisation of higher education if they can get away with it.

Student activists need to use the period now, before the general election, to build up networks of socialists and anti-capitalists prepared to resist the forthcoming onslaught, to combine with the unions and working class and rebuild a real, fighting, socialist student movement from the bottom up.

Vicky Thompson
University of Manchester

action. Time and time again the NUT group asked the national union to back action. None was ever sanctioned.

Whilst the most extensive attack by the IEB was a staff restructuring "proposal", it was preceded and accompanied by a series of other attacks. It became increasingly clear to NUT members that the IEB, on behalf of the local authority, was acting according to a definite plan, one aimed at imposing its control over staff and weakening possible sources of resistance.

Workload spiraled as a result of various management initiatives, a strict dress code for staff was imposed without consultation, lesson observations became both more extensive and more punitive, capability procedures became more of a threat in the school – and indeed were used to pressure one teacher into resigning.

A particularly stark example of the IEB's methods was the victimisation of the NUT rep, Adrian Swain, who was sacked for refusing to adhere to the imposed dress code.*

The NUT group was completely committed to strike action to achieve the "unconditional reinstatement" of their rep (a commitment that was shown by the overwhelming Yes vote achieved in the union's indicative and formal strike ballots). Their wishes were ignored. Instead Tim Harrison, the London Regional Official, and Alex

NUT

St Paul's Way: death of a militant school

AT THE end of the summer term 30 teachers, most of them NUT members, left St Paul's Way Community School in Tower Hamlets. Amongst those who left were the whole of the NUT Committee at the school.

They did not leave for better jobs, for new challenges. They left because they were defeated. As a result the teachers who stayed returned in September to a situation in which union membership had been halved and an emboldened management simply ignored NUT policy on class size, meeting times and lesson observations.

How did a well-organised and often highly combative union group and school end up in this position?

Certainly, teachers at St Paul's Way were subject to a sustained onslaught by management, one that was waged over several years and conducted with particular determination after an Interim Executive Board (EB) took control of the school in the autumn of 2008.

This onslaught expressed, in microcosm, the key elements of the neoliberal offensive against state education: jobs, conditions, union

organisation, and progressive educational methods were all attacked. In addition, the IEB made clear that its objective, central to the neoliberal project, was to privatise the school – in this case, through the creation of a Trust.

The ferocity and wide-ranging nature of these attacks do not of themselves explain the scale of the defeat that occurred: the attacks could certainly have been resisted and thrown back. NUT members at

A particularly stark example of the IEB's methods was the victimisation of NUT rep, Adrian Swain, who was sacked for refusing to adhere to the imposed dress code

the school had stated on many occasions their readiness to fight the attacks with extensive strike action.

The most debilitating factor in the situation, one that created intense demoralisation and pessimism amongst members, was the refusal of the union to sanction

Kenny, ELTA Secretary and a leading "left" in the union, cut a deal with the local authority – Adrian would be offered another job or a financial settlement but not be allowed to return to St Paul's Way.

Adrian was told that the union was ending the dispute and that he should accept the deal. Whatever



Briefings

spin has been put on the outcome of this affair, particularly by Kenny, the reality was clear: the union had allowed the employer to remove a trade union rep from a workplace. The failure of the NUT to defend one of its reps was a green light to the IEB to proceed with further attacks – and this is precisely what happened.

Two weeks after the union ended the dress code dispute the

Tower Hamlets College who also faced cuts in jobs and educational provision – and who are currently engaged in a hugely important and inspirational indefinite strike against these cuts.

Despite the wishes of NUT members at St Paul's Way, those whose jobs were actually on the line, the NUT Action Committee, meeting at Conference, refused to issue a strike ballot. The delays and

this result and the obvious commitment to strike action, the union HQ sought to limit action as much as possible. Eventually it informed Tower Hamlets council that there would be two days of strike action at the end of the summer term and two days in the autumn.

Less than a week after this announcement the Action Committee recommended suspending all strike action! In doing so it claimed that the authority was prepared to make a significant concession: it would delay by a term the issuing of redundancy notices. In other words, the authority was using exactly the same ploy as it had used earlier in the term and the NUT officials were going along with it – again! The reaction of NUT members was a mixture of intense anger and incredulity. The union had not achieved its objective, an agreement that all staff would be assimilated into the new structure, and yet it wished to call off action.

The NUT rep, Ammar Al-Ghabban, described what happened when Alex Kenny attempted to sell this thoroughly rotten deal to a meeting of the school NUT group: “Today, our school union group met to consider the offer. Forty people were present. All of those present dismissed the offer as derisory and voted for the strike action to go ahead. There were no votes against and no abstentions, just total commitment to the strikes going ahead. People clapped after the votes were counted and the result was announced.”

What happened after the meeting, however, was pure treachery. Again Ammar described what happened:

“The Action Committee was informed about the meeting; the points that people passionately made and the vote at the end. Four hours ago, I was informed by Alex Kenny that the Action Committee have decided to pull the strike. I am devastated. All of our members are devastated.”

NUT members were clear that they had been sold-out by the national union. This was the view

By calling off the action the union had allowed the authority to achieve one of its key objectives – to drive out those teachers with a commitment to trade unionism

headteacher revealed the staff restructuring plans. These plans represented a “devastating threat to jobs, conditions and educational provision”, as an NUT group resolution put it, with over 20 possible redundancies and a requirement for staff to be interviewed for their own jobs.

The day after the proposal was revealed the NUT group called on the national union to “ballot us immediately for discontinuous sustained strike action with the aim of securing the withdrawal of the restructuring proposals in their entirety. This must be a formal (i.e. NOT an indicative) ballot, which will enable us to take strike action early in the summer term.”

The determination expressed here, the commitment to resistance, was reflected in the activism of NUT members and the NUT Committee. An appeal for support was sent to branches across the union and distributed by supporters (significantly, from Hackney and Greenwich associations rather than ELTA) at NUT Conference.

Local estates were leafleted with details of the campaign and a successful mass lobby of the council offices was organised early in the summer term. This dynamism continued throughout the term and a joint public meeting was organised with UCU members from

blocks to action that had been seen in Adrian's case were about to be repeated. The local authority, at a meeting with an NUT delegation that included Harrison, Kenny and left Executive member Kevin Courtney, promised not to issue redundancy notices that term.

This offer was clearly a ploy to head off action: the key aspects of the restructuring plan, and the threat that they posed to members' jobs, remained intact. The union officials, though, leapt at the offer and turned its attention to attempting to secure concessions during the consultation meetings on the new structure. The NUT group, however, doggedly continued to demand strike action.

A ballot was finally issued in June, three months after the restructuring proposal had been announced! By this stage some NUT members, fearing the union would not defend them, had opted for individual solutions and decided to leave the school at the end of term.

Moreover, while the union officials delayed, the atmosphere in the school had become ever more poisonous and oppressive. Management bullying was rife and regressive educational changes were imposed in a crudely authoritarian way. The ballot result was an impressive 91% Yes vote for action on an 83% turnout. Despite

not simply of the leading activists in the school group but of the membership as a whole. They had been left defenceless, so far as official action was concerned. The ballot would not be live in September, the threats lodged in the restructure remained and further attacks were on the way.

For most NUT members this was a clear defeat – and it is in the context of this defeat that even more NUT members decided to leave the school. By calling off the action the union had allowed the authority to achieve one of its key objectives at St Paul's Way – to drive out those teachers with a commitment to trade unionism or community comprehensive schools, and thereby weaken opposition to the proposed Trust.

How in the battles ahead – over cutbacks or privatisation, for instance – do we prevent defeats of the kind described above? Certainly what happened at St Paul's Way provides a graphic illustration of the trade union bureaucracy's capacity for sabotaging a struggle. These betrayals flow from the very nature of the bureaucracy: it mediates between the workers and the bosses and derives its material privileges and social prestige from this role.

As result it seeks to control disputes, to emphasise protracted negotiation, to limit rather than facilitate action – approaches seen clearly in the actions of NUT bureaucrats like Tim Harrison. A key task of militants must be to wrest control of disputes away from this bureaucracy, to ensure that rank and file members decide when and how to fight. Inevitably this will involve collisions with the bureaucracy and the need for unofficial action.

Often unofficial action will be the only alternative to defeat and demoralisation. Indeed those of us who were active at St Paul's Way should have raised the need for such action more forcefully and earlier in the dispute but knowing this would undoubtedly led to our suspension or expulsion from the union it was not a course to be entered into lightly.

We need a rank and file

movement that has as its objective the transformation of the union (indeed all unions) from top to bottom. Such a movement would seek to ensure that all officials were elected, recallable and paid the same wages as those they represent, that all struggles were controlled by union members – not the officials – through strike committees and mass meetings.

The situation at St Paul's Way also exposed the weakness and vacillation of some of the leading NUT lefts. Alex Kenny, for instance, is national convenor of the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA), the main left current in the NUT. During the dispute, however, his practice, as opposed to his rhetoric, was often indistinguishable from that of the bureaucrats – and many of the school NUT members hold him equally responsible for the defeat that occurred.

The STA is a classically broad leftist organisation and Kenny's practice reflects this. For the STA the key priorities are capturing and

holding onto union positions, proposing left resolutions at the NUT's yearly conference and supporting certain national campaigns. Some of this activity is important but it is no substitute for strong NUT groups, militant action and for a union built from the base up. The STA is not a fighting rank and file organisation, it fails to hold its leaders to account and as a result it can be used by individuals as a stepping stone to a position in the union bureaucracy.

St Paul's Way was a militant and fighting NUT group. It was one of the few workplaces able to shut down in protest the day Bush and Blair launched their war against Iraq. It is a scandal that an Association like ELTA, controlled for decades by the left, could allow it to be destroyed.

Dave Gay

* See www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2632 and www.permanentrevolution.net/entry/2765

EDUCATION

Lewisham Bridge School – direct action does pay!

ON 23 April, in opposition to our children being decanted from Lewisham Bridge Primary School, three parents occupied the roof of the school. The decant meant the school day would start an hour earlier, children would be bussed a mile and a half and there would be no parental contact with class teachers.

All this despite the fact that Lewisham Council had not gained planning permission for their planned 3-16 school to be built on the site and despite the fact that English Heritage had given the building grade II listed status. Added to this, for the last three years parents and the local community had voiced their objections at every consultation and

every public meeting.

We decided we'd had enough. Inspired by the recent occupations of their factories by the Visteon workers in Enfield, Basildon and Belfast, at 7am that morning we went on the school roof. By 9am four more parents had joined us and three parents stayed on the ground below handing out leaflets and asking passers-by to sign the petition to bring the children back, our first demand was "Lewisham Bridge here to stay. Bring our children back!"

On day two, to our total surprise six Visteon workers arrived from their occupation in Enfield and addressed the inaugural meeting of Hands off Lewisham Bridge. They then joined us on the roof. A week

later six of the Belfast Visteon workers came to visit us and invited us to visit their occupation and join their contingent on the Mayday march in Belfast. The solidarity and support from Visteon was infectious.

Over the next few months, we visited the Belfast occupation, regularly talked with parents from Save Our Schools Glasgow, visited the parents of Barrow in Furness and the school kids who had walked out on strike, went down to the occupation of Charlotte Turner, a Greenwich school occupied by parents facing closure.

We heard from the dispute at St Paul's Way NUT, had regular contact and support from students from Goldsmiths who are also facing the privatisation of their college by Lewisham council, went down to a strike at Haggerston school, visited the Vestas occupation and spoke at the Tower Hamlets strike. Everywhere we went it was clear that the message of we need to take direct action against the bosses attacks was a popular one.

Council retreat

So why did we win? The Lewisham Council Chief Officer's Report entitled "PSF Prendagast Vale; Implications of Listing Decision" explains how it was a combination of the legal challenge to the council, through the listing of the school building, and the resistance of activists through the occupation and refusal to be evicted by the police which proved an intolerable combination for the authorities;

"The decision to close Lewisham Bridge and decant the children to the Mornington Centre has been opposed by a group of parents and activists, on 23 April 2009 protestors moved into unlawful occupation of the premises by camping out on the roof of the toilet block of the site, the council issued proceedings and in June obtained an order for the possession of the site forthwith, the protestors have not complied with the order and the eviction has not yet taken place."

The report continues:

"Any application to secure listed building consent would be controversial and making a convincing case extremely difficult in addition there could be serious reputational consequences if the council was to support demolition in the face of the recent listing . . . It is clear that a group of parents and activists are opposed to the council plans for the new school at this site, this opposition may continue despite any decision to move the children back to Lewisham Bridge."

The decision to go for the English Heritage listing was key in providing legal support for our action. We should be prepared to use all legal means to put obstacles in their way. But in the end those who create the obstacles can just as easily side step them. After all they make the rules in order to control working class people and communities.

Labour and Greens together

English Heritage is now working closely with Lewisham to ensure their new build goes ahead. But as the council report recognises resistance will continue, and could well be successful after our victory in winning the return of the school to its existing site.

After all Lewisham's elected Labour mayor Sir Steve Bullock is only following the orders of his party; imagine his shock and surprise, when the very people who he thought were on his side upheld the listing. When Ben Bradshaw, the New Labour heritage minister, made his decision to retain the listing he knew that the government could not afford the embarrassment of the backlash that would have occurred. The council's failed eviction attempt had made the news across London and was featured on BBC GLR the whole morning. It even received the support of right-winger Chris Woodhead the former OFSTED chief.

The parents defiance on the eviction day showed the council what we were made of as the bailiffs left, tails between their legs defeated and humiliated. The very act of fighting back changes the

balance of forces. Organised resistance is empowering to both those who actively take part and to those who are indirectly affected.

The Green Party claim to be an alternative to New Labour, to care about local communities, to support ordinary people, to be concerned about the environment. Well maybe everywhere else except Lewisham and London!

Sue Luxton, a local Lewisham Green councillor, was clear right from the beginning. "Give up," she said. Don't fight New Labour. The decant is the best you can get. Accept the neo-liberal privatisation of education. Alongside Darren Johnston the leader of the Greens on Lewisham Council and representative of the Greens on the London Assembly, Sue and five other Green councillors voted to support the decant, to oppose the parents demands for the return of their children and do everything in their power to defeat the local community and defend New Labour.

Neoliberal education

Lewisham Bridge's battle is only a small part of a much larger battle to save community schools and comprehensive state education. The government is clear it wants an extension of privatisation of education. The recent white paper has set out plans for an acceleration of this agenda. They want more schools to become academies. The excuse that it was about bringing more resources into education was never anything more than a fig leaf. As the recession bites, and their target for academies slip, they have abandoned the token £2m that sponsors had to pay to get their grubby hands on a school. Now a sponsor just has just to prove their "commitment to children".

How did KPMG – an accountancy firm in the City – do that? Or Lord Harris of Carpentright? Or Reg Vardy of Vardy PLC? How does an accountant, a carpet salesman or a car salesman provide evidence (something that this government is so fond of) to prove their commitment to children? Now the government have been clever and

enticed universities and colleges into becoming sponsors. Surely they have already proved their commitment to education.

Take Goldsmiths University for example, a college close to Lewisham Bridge, with many students who supported our campaign. It has one of the most prestigious education departments in the country. Its research and analysis of education methods and theories are highly prized in the academic and educational world.

Yet when Goldsmiths management announced last year they wanted to manage three schools in Lewisham the Education Department opposed that proposal. Why? Because the department understand that the academies scheme has nothing to do with education but everything to do with introducing market mechanisms into our schools.

New Labour believes that a child will learn better if parents have to compete for school places. In contrast the education experts at Goldsmiths understand that by handing over accountability of our schools to a private organisations there is a grave danger that educationalists will lose control of the curriculum. And this will hit them too as their teacher training programme is geared to training teachers not market mechanics. There is an alternative way to running schools, an approach based on democracy and accountability, not balance sheets and targets.

Despite the pockets of determined resistance and well-written articles in the Guardian opposing the government's academies and privatisation programme, these attacks are multiplying. In Barrow-in-Furness, following the defeat of the parents campaign against privatisation, as of September 2009 there are no state secondary schools. Barrow parents know that in a few years the primary schools will be next.

Local fire fighting is necessary. Local communities should join together and resist the attacks on our local services. But we shouldn't fall into the trap of believing that our issues are unique.

This is a national strategy, driven by the GATT agreement, which seeks to enable private companies to have access to public services. The GATT agreement in 1995 paved the way for commoditisation of education, health and housing. The public sector became another "market" for business and so far has been extremely profitable. We need a co-ordinated strategy to stop these measures. The fight back must include teachers, parents and students. Together we are strong.

In spite of the success of Lewisham Bridge, parent power alone is not enough. The one thing that was missing from our campaign, which would have made victory much easier, was solidarity industrial action from the NUT. The NUT in Lewisham, in spite of some teachers coming to support us, delivered no action from the teachers in the school itself. That is not just a problem of the NUT locally, but nationally.

Where was Christine Blower, the NUT president during the struggle

a Tory one. The Tories will not ease up on the gas. Far from it. They are ready to put their foot to the floor.

Despite the NUT's official line of opposition to academies and trusts, despite parents voicing their objections, the government is getting away with their divisive programme and the teaching unions are letting them.

Lewisham

In Lewisham the fight goes on and we have a victory under our belt. The children will return to the school in November but the council are determined to carry out a feasibility study for a new private school. They intend trying to squeeze their square peg into a round hole. This is the determination and arrogance of profit not the motive of providing the best for working class children. Every Child Matters as long as they are gifted, talented and rich!

The action at Lewisham Bridge shows that there is an alternative to

Parents have occupied schools. School students have walked out. The NUT and other education unions need to support them with strike action

of parents across the UK, in Barrow and Glasgow and Lewisham and Greenwich and Wigan and Atherton? Why wasn't she calling for a ballot to strike? These are political attacks on education. We must take political action. This is an ideological attack on education, which must be met by workers in our schools getting organised, and being determined in resistance.

Parents have occupied schools. School students have walked out. The NUT and other education unions need to support them with strike action. We need to follow the example of Haggerston, Tamworth and Tower Hamlets College. These attacks will change the face of education for years to come. The next government will most likely be

the neo-liberal market-driven policies that New Labour is forcing upon us. We do not want our children to be turned into commodities or consumers of education. Education is about empowering young people so that they develop their full potential to take part in a vibrant, free society. Teachers and lecturers provide the scaffolding for students in order that they can explore ideas in a safe and caring environment. It is not about controlling young people and punishing them when they don't fit in or conform to the rules and regulations. It is about defending state education and fighting for the real socialist education we need for all our children's futures.

Eleanor Davies