

Green

Socialist

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Alliance for Green Socialism

Where's Ya Bin?

Steve Radford: Demise of the Trades Councils

Matthew Jenner - Silvia Madrid: Public Sector

Trade Unionism in Decline?

Jim Boumelha: Journalism - a Dangerous Profession

John Chambers: Plays That Aren't Just Playing

Celia Foote: German Greens' Right-Turn

Review: a Life of Thomas Paine

Plus - **football - punk rock - and more**

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Photo: Leeds bin workers on strike to defend their pay and conditions

Trade unionism in crisis

For the first time since the 1984 pit strike, a union (CWU) has been forced into industry-wide strike action against its nationalised employer in a make-or-break conflict which the union cannot afford to lose. However, it is also a vital test for Royal Mail bosses whose core job is not, as you might expect, to run an efficient and cost-effective public service to collect and deliver post and parcels across the UK. Their real job is to prepare the industry for privatisation, and an essential part of that task is to break the power of its organised workforce - ie. to smash the union.

Of course, it may not be necessary to completely de-unionise a workforce in order to break its ability to fight and defend itself. There are numerous examples of union organisation in a given enterprise or industry being effectively neutralised, while retaining formal trade union recognition. For example, an employer might reach an understanding with a *yellow* union. Such a union could discourage, or even proscribe, genuine workplace organisation, sign no-strike deals, organise scabs to break strikes by other unions (or its own members) and limit its activities to representing individuals in formal proceedings; all in return for the employer deducting union dues from members' wages. The deal between Rupert Murdoch and the EETPU to break the print unions at Wapping in 1986 comes to mind.

An employer with deep pockets, or government backing, may try to crush workplace organisation so completely (eg. by engineering a strike or lock-out at a time of their choosing) that the union is rendered powerless. Typically this involves sacking the most effective shop stewards and imposing conditions which facilitate systematic discrimination against other activists. A defeated and insecure workforce is then told, repeatedly (by the employers and by the media), that only total obedience to management will keep them in a job. This tactic was used in several public sector and state regulated industries prior to full privatisation (steel, coal, road transport, registered docks etc.) and maybe this is what Royal Mail have in mind.

Of course, in the real world, these tactics are often mixed and matched and *yellow* unionism may be defined by local or regional factors (though tolerated by national union leaderships). Some unions with a proud record of fighting for members and building strong workplace organisation in one sector may be doing sweetheart deals and purging troublesome militants in another. The fact is that our unions are riddled with corrupt practices,

complacency, incompetence, careerism and, often, an unpleasantly authoritarian and bullying culture. This is not to say that all trade union bodies are corrupt, or that all union officials are incompetent careerist bullies. Certainly there are some unions served (and occasionally led) by honest, sincere and competent officials, but there are few that can claim an entirely clean slate. Even supposedly progressive wings of the movement are often tarnished by sleaze. Some so-called *Broad Left* networks are, in reality, little more than cabals of officials existing to carve up jobs and influence for career advancement rather than class politics.

A major factor in this dismal state of affairs is the relationship with the Labour Party, which has always been rotten. A culture which encourages influence peddling, buying votes (from CLPs right up to conference level), corrupt patronage and the laundering of money (from both political and general funds) for the Labour Party that never appear on any declaration to a Returning Officer (the standard justification being "*big business does this for the Tories all the time, so why shouldn't we?*") is very unhealthy for a genuinely democratic workers' movement. It is not so long ago that some unions paid affiliation fees to the Labour Party (and the TUC) for more members than they actually possessed (ie. buying votes) and the attitudes and assumptions behind that practice remain in place (as do many of the officials who actually did it).

Even as ministers denounce postal workers as "*lemmings*" and back Royal Mail's attempts to destroy the CWU as an effective trade union, the CWU website still has a Labour Party logo on every page. The thinking is clearly that they can still mobilise a few Labour MPs (under a weakened Labour leader) to delay privatisation, but with a Tory government they would have no hope. However, they will get a Tory government anyway in six months and New Labour are still smoothing the way to privatisation. CWU members should be demanding that their union joins the RMT in looking for a new political home.

The unions' failure to grasp the nature and scale of the industrial and economic change needed to avert climatic disaster is something GS will come back to in future issues. However, an immediate priority for the renewal of our movement is to sever ties with the rotting corpse of the Labour Party and to renew a commitment to organising workers (not just collecting their union subs). Maybe, hopefully, the current RMT led initiative will help kick-start this process, but it has to be done, and done soon.

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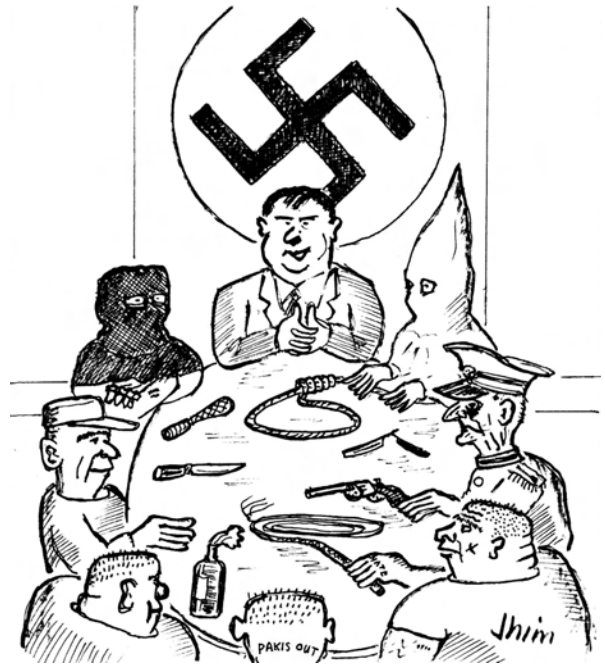
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The leader outlines his tactics for Question Time



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The demise of the Trades

In 1868 several Trades Councils in Northern England, called a conference in Manchester which gave birth to the Trades Union Congress. One-hundred and forty-one years later the TUC presides over the sharp decline of its parent bodies. Steve Radford asks whether this is a deliberate policy or caused by factors beyond the control of Congress House.

The TUC was set up, in part, to counter the perceived dominance of the London Trades Council in the Trade Union Movement and was not immediately accepted as the undisputed voice of trade unionism in Britain. It was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that it finally achieved recognition throughout Britain and internationally as the British trade union centre. The bodies that had given birth to the TUC, the Trades Councils, continued to be the collective voice of the trade unions at local level and after the TUC established the Labour Party Trades Councils and local Labour Parties were often one and the same organisation (Trades and Labour Councils). These bodies were powerful political and industrial constituency within the Movement as a whole.

The 1926 General Strike saw Trades Councils across the country setting up "Councils of Action" (seen by many on the left, and the right, as proto-soviets), organising pickets, soup-kitchens, demonstrations and issuing permits for the transport of essential supplies. Trades Councils continued to be influential bodies, with some in the larger cities having full-time Secretaries. They were both forums of discussion and decision making with the Trade Union and Labour Movement and served as a power base for many ambitious politicians and would-be trade union leaders.

From its founding in 1920, the Communist Party of Great Britain saw the Trades Councils Movement as a vitally important arena for influencing the most advanced sections of the working class and from that time, until its dissolution in 1991, Communist Party members played an active, and often leading, role in many Trades Councils, as (to a far lesser extent) did cadres from other leftist and ultra-left groups, both outside and within the Labour Party. The post war period saw an intensification of anti-communist witch-hunts within the Labour and Trade Union Movement



Southwark Trades Council and Southwark-Peckham Labour Party, marching together in the days when Labour politicians still thought of Trades Councils as a power base to launch their careers. Harriet Harman (see photo on right) sought, and got, the support and nomination of the Labour affiliated Trades Council when she went after the safe Labour Parliamentary seat of Peckham in 1982.

and various purges and re-organisations of the Trades Councils conducted by right wing TUC leaders. However, the left remained well-entrenched in the Trades Councils and their crucial role in linking trade unionism with local communities and Municipal politics and the need for locally based organisations able to campaign on broad issues of concern to the movement remained obvious to even the most right-wing union leaders. By the mid-seventies a uniform structure of local Trades Councils (usually organised on the basis of one per

district or borough council area but with some stubborn exceptions), County Associations and TUC Regional Councils (where the County Associations of Trades Councils were sometimes the largest delegations) operated across England and Wales.

However, by this time the right-wing and careerist bureaucrats in the movement were already making moves to isolate and marginalise Trades Councils. In some cases this was motivated by political hostility to bodies which were often dominated by the left (both within and outside the Labour Party). Another motivation was a desire for businesslike conformity and a failure by a rising generation of professional trade union bureaucrats (many of whom had never been in the movement, except as employees) to understand that local campaigning was part of what the trade unions existed to do. In the world envisaged by the bureaucrats, local co-ordination between unions would be done by working parties and committees of officials meeting in congenial surroundings, not by elected lay branch delegates debating in Town Hall annexes or Trades and Labour clubs. Trades Councils, dependent on volunteer input from delegates (with a few exceptions such as Birmingham, Sheffield and Glasgow) had to mobilise opposition to TUC attempts to abolish the Annual Conference of Trades Councils and curtail the role of County Associations of Trades Councils as the representatives of the Trade Union Movement in the county (particularly in London where

Councils - neglect or patricide?

GLC Councillors and their officials much preferred to deal with the suits from the Regional TUC rather than the Greater London Association of Trades Councils, whose officers and members were not available for day-time meetings in County Hall or Congress House).

However, the greatest threat came from the decline in branch activity in many unions: a long-term trend which was exacerbated by organisational and structural changes which often saw branches relegated to a purely administrative role (and sometimes not even that) with little or no connection to their members' workplaces or employment issues. This factor, combined with the fact that public sector workers made up an increasing proportion of union members overall, has led to many Trades Councils becoming dominated by public sector delegates as their unions are much more likely to be employer-based and therefore Branch Committees are often made up of shop stewards and workplace representatives.

A sharpening of the class struggle during the early Thatcherite period saw a resurgence in Trades Council activity in many areas. The numerous campaigns and mobilisations in solidarity with workers in struggle and the unemployed often saw Trades Councils at their best, with local campaigns feeding into regional and national activities. However, the failure of many of these struggles and the re-assertion of bureaucratic and "pragmatic" control by union and TUC leaders led to a further decline in the standing of Trades Councils and increasing pressure from the TUC to "modernise".

What modernisation actually meant was adapting to the *new realities* of the Trade Union Movement. Re-branding as "Trades Union Councils" and a dilution of the co-ordinating role of County Associations of Trades Councils followed in the 1990s and the increasing decline in union branch activity, with more and more branches playing a nominal (or even wholly fictitious) role within the union structure and often never meeting, accelerated the decline.

Just as the Blair/Brown Labour leadership has presided over a catastrophic decline in party membership and local activity, so the TUC has presided over the marginalisation of the bodies that created it in the first place. The thinking in some circles of the Labour Party is that a modern political party must seek support and sponsorship from organisations (and corporations) and from wealthy individuals, that campaigning is done through national media, advertising campaigns and targeted interventions in marginal constituencies (controlled and co-ordinated by the centre). In this kind

of scenario the need for many thousands of local members knocking on doors, canvassing for support and mounting local campaigning activities is greatly reduced and at some point having a mass of members who think they have some right to influence party policy becomes more trouble than it is worth.

The thinking in the TUC runs along similar lines I suspect. They regard Trades Councils as old-fashioned; either hotbeds of unrealistic political idealism/extremism or moribund historical baggage, contributing little towards the goals of modern, businesslike twenty-first century trade unions. As for practical support from the TUC for the work of their local representatives – in 2008 the TUC's Trades Councils Development Fund was granted a budget of just £21,000.



Harriet Harman speaking at a Trades Council rally to support striking hospital workers in 1982 during her campaign to become Labour candidate for Peckham.

The decline in the Trades Councils is not quite terminal and it is still worthwhile for progressive socialists and environmentalists to build links and establish contact with them wherever we can. However, there is no doubt that they are greatly diminished from the role they played just a few years ago. Is this decline due to a lack of effort and factors beyond the control of Congress House, or has the TUC deliberately tried to kill them off – neglect or patricide? Well, both may be true – the people who run the TUC (its own staff and the General Council) have little or no interest in maintaining Trades Councils as viable and functioning local bodies and seem happy to see them die away. At the same time the decline in membership participation and the increasing professionalisation

of collective bargaining (mentioned elsewhere in this issue of *GS*) undermines all lay trade union bodies, branches and Shop Stewards' Committees included.

Until and unless we can re-focus our unions on the need to build campaigning mass organisations of *organised* workers, rather than just promoting them as clubs whose members pay into a fund to employ professionals to negotiate for them, and perhaps represent them at a disciplinary hearing or a Tribunal, then the decline will continue.

If Trades Councils have a future then it will only be because the British Labour and Trade Union Movement re-discovers the absolute necessity for campaigning political mass action.

Steve Radford is the editor of *Green Socialist* and a former Assistant Secretary of the Greater London Association of Trades Councils.

Public Sector Trade

The public services have long been bastions of trade union organisation and membership. In parts of the country the public sector is now the only significant area of employment where unions still represent more than half the workforce. Moreover, it is only public sector membership which has kept several unions viable when the rapid contraction of membership in the manufacturing and service sectors would otherwise have led them to the verge of collapse and bankruptcy.

However, even the core of the modern British Trade Union Movement, council workers in Northern working class cities like Leeds and Hull, is fraying at the edges and continued dominance of these workplaces by trade union organisation is threatened by a mixture of disillusionment and disinterest. Here, trade union activists from these two Yorkshire cities give their personal take on the health of union organisation in their respective councils.

Trade unionism and its relevance today relies heavily, just as the financial markets do, on the belief of the people. So, when people say to me that trade unionism is dead, I can only reply by stating that I believe in the value of the consequences of the struggle. The moves may be small, and the work may seem futile, but that is never a reason to give up, because the *outright* power of organised labour and grassroots democracy is something that we believe in.

It is not the unions that have been in decline, it is a decline in belief in their ability to operate effectively in the system. This, unfortunately, has a real foundation in truth, but it is also this negative belief that helps to perpetuate the fact. The task of unions, and those who believe that organised labour represents one of our only routes to a more just society, is to inform and empower members and non-members alike. The people who really have to be informed are those who are not members of unions, and this number is absolutely phenomenal.

I found out recently that only half of the thirty-thousand people working for Leeds City Council are union members, which seems to reflect both a failure of the unions to organise and mobilise workers, and a collective failure on the part of society. It seems that we have been sucked into a system that saps our collective energy, and that relies on credit to feed our desire for consumer products on a scale that is unsustainable. We are

UNISON - the giant of the public sector

Both the articles on these two pages concern the largest public sector union, UNISON. Formed in 1993 through a merger of NALGO, NUPE and CoHSE, UNISON now dominates the trade union scene and industrial relations in both local government and the NHS, with substantial membership in the water, gas and electricity industries as well.

The division of public sector workers into so many unions (the TGWU and GMB also have many members in local government and the NHS) had long been a problem for socialists in the public services and the eventual achievement of the merger was seen as a step forward for progressive *industrial unionism*. *Green Socialist* would welcome letters or short articles from other public sector trade union members about their views on the issues raised here.

facing increasing evidence of the reality of climate change as a result, and this demonstrates the need for a fundamental shift in the way we live. We have to consume less; this is a blatant fact. However, this doesn't have to be bad in the long term. If we did consume less, then surely, in a productive society, good food (and wine) would be in abundance! Imagine if we only had to work a four-hour day and a twenty-hour week.....!

It is with these thoughts in mind that we must combine a position of solidarity with our fellow workers, and people generally, to overcome our collective slumber, and find a

way to halt the chaos that will be caused through climate change.

We also have to discover what it is like to spend time talking through the realities of our world and how we want to live, rather than the passing pleasure of reality television shows and mundane entertainment that some of us vegetate in front of day-after-day. Politics has become a dirty word, and will remain so while the politicians of the three main parties renege on their promises to society. Their service seems now only to themselves, and will remain so as long as we let them. We have to take control of our own destiny and find a way for new leadership to emerge. Although it is difficult to see how this might happen, it must. We're taking from our children what is rightfully theirs, and we owe them a chance at least.

Matthew Jenner is a member of the Branch Executive Committee of the Leeds City Branch of UNISON.

Unionism in decline?

In Hull, long-term industrial and economic decline has left the City Council as the largest employer. UNISON is the major council worker's union but, says Silvia Madrid, its' commitment to strong workplace organisation is sadly lacking and a "member-led" union it certainly is not. Below, she explains why she is no longer in UNISON.

I have been a union member since I came to the UK in the seventies, and a council worker for over twenty years. Trade union organisation across the council was always patchy, with some departments well organised and others with few, if any, functioning shop stewards who played little or no role in collective bargaining.

My department was relatively well organised. We had a network of shop stewards who had enough credibility with the members and with management to have proper negotiations at departmental level. We called on the branch or the full-time-officials (FTOs) for help when we needed it but we were able to deal with a lot of issues ourselves.

For many years we had a Branch Secretary who we believed was slotted into the post through a secret agreement between the Council and the union's Regional Office.

We were always aware that the branch had problems of various kinds. Decreasing levels of membership participation meant that more and more negotiation and representation was taken on by FTOs or branch officers on full-time release. For many years we had a full-time Branch Secretary who was widely believed to have been slotted into the job through a secret agreement between the union regional office, where he previously worked, and our employers (who created a sinecure post for him in the council so that he was eligible to be Branch Secretary). People who have experience of UNISON across the country tell me that this sort of thing happens elsewhere. However, the branch members accepted him as secretary so we cannot say he was imposed on the branch against our will.

We also heard worrying stories about the branch finances, which seemed to us to be less than transparent, especially in relation to the sports and social activities budget, but we busied ourselves in looking after the members we represented and had little energy left for involvement in the politics of the branch. The inefficiency and incompetence of the branch office did annoy our Shop Stewards' Committee (which I chaired) and we felt we got poor value from the branch officers and staff we paid for, but we just got on with our job.

Then a few years ago, the branch and the FTO

agreed with the council that all the "convenors" on facility-time would be appointed by, and accountable to, the branch. This meant that we lost the ability to call our convenor to account and that he was, in effect appointed by the branch (not even elected by a branch meeting as these are rarely quorate). This made negotiations and representation more difficult and discouraged some people from getting involved in the union. A few shop stewards got fed up with this and dropped out of activity, while those of us left grew more and more discouraged by the lack of support for organisational work amongst the members. We also began to doubt if the branch would support us if we ever had a serious dispute, such as a victimisation issue or compulsory redundancies.

Then, UNISON decided to do away with the Shop Stewards Committee altogether and all negotiations were taken over by FTOs and the full-time secondees appointed by the branch. The system of local bargaining by elected workplace representatives built up over years was simply abolished. UNISON loudly proclaims that one of its' core principle is to be a "member-led" union, but in our case (and elsewhere too I suspect) the exact opposite was true and members were simply told about decisions made by others on our behalf.

Several of us were so disgusted by this that we decided to join another union. We chose the TGWU, which seems keener on supporting local members, but although I know there are some good people in Hull TGWU I have few illusions and I know that in other areas of the UK the situation might well be reversed.

I will do my best for the people I work with and I hope that Unite/TGWU will support me in this. However until there is a lot more integrity, and a commitment to actually organise members rather than just take their subscriptions, then trade unionism in local government, as elsewhere, will continue to decline in the face of widespread cynicism and apathy amongst workers, many of whom believe that council unions are hand-in-glove with Labour councillors anyway (although I haven't noticed an upsurge in membership interest since the Liberals have taken over in Hull...).

Silvia Madrid is a Unite/TGWU member working for Hull City Council

Right-turn for German Greens

Whether the Green Party is naturally socialist is a big question. In Germany the Green Party has strong support and has even been part of a coalition federal government. Celia Foote looks at the German example?

The German green movement kicked off in the mid 1970s, principally around opposition to nuclear power. They early sought political representation, an aim easier to achieve under Germany's system, where 5% gets you parliamentary seats. By 1979 they had representation in a state government.

They also early diverged into "fundis" and "realo" wings. The *fundis* stressed action outside conventional politics, a green lifestyle, and issues like feminism and opposition to war. The *realos* concentrated on elections and, although environmentalists, were politically right-wing.

Founded in 1980, the German Green Party initially adopted a left programme. In 1983 it won seats in the Federal Republic of (West) Germany's parliament. Two years later it formed a coalition with the social-democratic SPD in the state of Hesse and gained some seats in the federal Bundestag. Finally, in 1994, they won 49 seats and became coalition partners in the federal government with the Social Democrats!

In government the Green Party dropped its pledge to close all nuclear power plants, despite this being the issue that had largely given rise to the party. They supported economic changes that reduced taxes for the rich while cutting benefits for the poor. Tellingly, they supported the (illegal) NATO bombing of Serbian forces, and later the (illegal) invasion of Afghanistan.

In 1997 Die Linke, a left coalition of the East German PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) and West German left activists, trade unionists and disillusioned left greens, was formed. The Green Party wanted nothing to do with it.

Instead, the following year in the state of Hamburg, the Green Party entered a coalition government with the right wing Christian Democrats, the CDU – despite the latter's poor environmental policies. Green Party spokesperson Cem Ozdemir said: "We have no problems with the CDU ... we also want to offer a home to conservative voters ... in some situations we can promote our green contents better with the blacks

(the right-wing CDU) than with the reds (the Social Democrat SPD)."

The recent statement from Die Linke (below) sums up the situation in Germany.

IF YOU VOTE GREEN, YOU'LL END UP SEEING BLACK

"The speed with which The Green Party is swinging to the right is breathtaking" declares Ulrich Maurer, member of Die Linke's Executive Committee, referring to the announcement that the leader of Saxony's Green Party wants talks with the CDU's Stanislaw Tillich about a coalition - and that the Green Party would also like to work in the Saarland towards a traffic light coalition.

He states: "The Green Party have let the cat out of the bag with their definitive refusal in Thuringen to support a left wing Minister President; with the announcement by Trittin in The Saarland that, in no circumstances, will Die Linke's Oskar Lafontaine be elected Minister President; with their determination to strive for a traffic light coalition which will have no chance of succeeding; and, finally, with the offer of a coalition with the CDU in Saxony, they make it clear where their preferences lie: Not with the left but with the right.

"This is an historic u-turn. The Black-Green (right-green) coalition in Hamburg could have still been written off as a special case. But look at the announcement by the Greens' Chair in the Regional State Parliament of Baden Wuerttemberg that '*Black-Green could bring the ecology question to the centre of economic thinking*'. Also, today's statement by the former MP Kleinert that '*Black-Green has more clout in society than ever before*' indicates a country-wide u-turn. Now Saxony and the Saarland are coming on board. It's no surprise then that in Parliament the Green Party are in favour of, among other things, the German army staying in Afghanistan, as well as increasing the retirement age to 67 and supporting the deregulation of wages and cuts in benefits."

Until now the Greens in coalition have always officially supported the 'left' position. However, poll researchers have for some time now identified Green supporters as being from society's higher earners. With this change in strategy towards the CDU, the Green Party's political programme now reflects their class base.

Celia Foote is the National Secretary of the Alliance for Green Socialism. With translation assistance from Iris and Steve Williams



Reviews

A look the latest ammunition for the struggle



A New World: A Life of Thomas Paine

*Played at the **Globe Theatre**, London: September - October 2009*

Reviewed by Mollie Foxhall

This wonderful, intelligent play combines music, humour and a magnificent script by Trevor Griffiths to give the audience a fast paced, boisterous historical spectacle of the great events of the 1790s. Throughout his life Paine produced hugely influential pamphlets and polemic on liberty, justice and freedom, though his high mindedness, principle and a refusal to compromise found him at odds with the rich and powerful after the American Revolution and later imprisoned as the French Revolution degenerated into The Terror. An ardent revolutionary who was anti-monarchy, Paine championed the rights of women, slaves and native Americans.

Never a political player, once American independence had been established, Paine the class radical was not involved in the establishment of the new republic by the bourgeoisie and returned to Europe spending his time between Britain and France. Though not responsible for any reforms, Paine's fidelity to ideas as set out in *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*, parts 1 and 2 have left a lasting legacy. He died in 1809 in America ostracised and abandoned for his criticism and ridicule of religion with only six people attending his funeral, two of whom were African-Americans.

Marking the bicentenary of his death, this celebration of

Paine's life and work has been crammed into three hours with reports that Griffiths pared down his original screenplay (never filmed) as much as he could. The witty asides and songs by Stephen Warbeck, however, make the vast scope of the play and many set speeches digestible and one's interest doesn't flag. The Globe Theatre is a perfect setting too with the cast and props mingling with the audience to give a sense of the ferment and fear of the times as the people's world turned upside down.

The cast are generally excellent but Keith Bartlett's Franklin provides spirit and humour as he takes us through the spectacle, John Light portrays Paine as passionate and irrepressible whilst James Garnon lifts the pace as Danton. Directed by Dominic Dromgoole, the pacing and complicated staging are perfect, giving us an appreciation of Paine's unflagging idealism and faith in reason sometimes at odds with other historical players in those extraordinary times. *A New World* has contemporary resonance and Paine's ideas for democratic republicanism based on the need to defend the equal rights of all with social legislation to address the condition of the poor is still of relevance today. In *Common Sense* he wrote America 'had the power to begin the world over again' which could be a rallying cry for today.

Punk Rock and working class culture

Born in the 70's in the midst of recession, punk was a reaction against the hippie and disco styles in popular music and the lack of prospects for youth at the time. Punk seemed to be trying to shock and the tabloids had a field day. However, underneath all the hype and fashion was something that differentiated punk from previous musical genres.

This was because punk was more than just a style of music, it was an ethos. The media attention died down after a few years but the punk spirit was alive and well and new bands formed all the time. Never mind the antics of the *Sex Pistols*, the real political bands came later on: *The Clash*, *Crass*, *Dead Kennedys* and more. Unlike many earlier musical styles, anyone can get involved in punk without expensive tuition. Anyone can set up a small label or a fanzine and arrange gigs. Even the distinction between band and crowd is reduced at gigs (particularly at smaller venues) with members of the crowd encouraged to get on the stage. The whole idea is DIY and not-for-profit. The greatest crime for a punk band is 'selling out' or signing to a major label.

This anti-commercial spirit of punk makes it attractive to those with more radical views than mainstream music caters for. It is generally associated with anarchism and anti-authoritarianism but actually covers a range of

anti-establishment (usually leftist) political views.

The sub-genre of *Oi!* originated in the UK as a working class reaction against a perceived art student takeover over the punk scene. *Oi!* bands contained both punks and skinheads and generally combined both youth cultures. Song lyrics typically covered topics such as unemployment, police harassment and working class power. Although skinheads are stereotyped as violent racists, the roots of the culture are multi-racial, mixing Jamaican reggae and ska with British punk and *Oi!*. While some skinheads were recruited by the far-right for street fighting, the majority were non-political or left-wing. Anti-racist and left-wing skins formed their own organisations, SHARP (Skin Heads Against Racial Prejudice) and RASH (Red and Anarchist Skin Heads) and physically confronted the far right on the streets.

Today punk is less in the public view than in its heyday in the 70s and 80s – the press now demonises 'chavs' and travellers instead - but is still going strong. New bands are being formed all the time and even some of the old ones are still around (see: www.ukpunkandoi.com www.punknews.co.uk www.ukskinheads.co.uk).

Dave Marlow is from Leeds

Journalism - a dangerous

Journalists are not well regarded by the general public, nor, by-and-large, by most socialists and environmentalists who see the daily barrage of lies and reactionary bile spewed out by the yellow press. However, it is unfair to judge the profession by the vile standards of the Express, Mail and Sun says Jim Boumelha.

It would be all too easy to measure the state of journalism today by the obnoxious anti-asylum seekers headlines of the *Daily Express*. The reality is that journalists and their unions all the over the world are today one of the most courageous groups in their attempt to break down the walls of prejudice, ignorance and injustice in the face of a deep global crisis – economic downturn, conflicts, climate change, poverty and disease.

For a start, the profession of journalism itself has become a risky business. Chris Cramer, boss of CNN, dubbed the targeting of journalists all over the world as “a hunting season for journalists”. Since John Milton’s defence of the “unbridled pen” back in the seventeenth century and the gaoling of John Lilburne, leader of the radical Levellers movement for “dispersing scandalous bookes in the kingdom”, journalists have started playing the role of watchdog of our society, monitoring those in power on behalf of the people, also described as the fourth estate. Today journalists are going through the toughest time since the beginning of the free press three hundred years ago. They have been targeted, brutalised and done to death in almost every corner of the globe by the enemies of press freedom. Some have deliberately been sought by crooks and hired assassins. Others have been gunned down by soldiers and militias. In the last 10 years over 1000 journalists – on average two journalists die every week. The International Federation of Journalists, the global trade union, publishes a report every year on killed journalists. Last year all records have been again broken – for the third year in succession – with 172 journalists and media workers killed. Iraq alone counts for over 290 journalists killed since the beginning of the invasion. In Russia, a country not at war except from the traumatic events in Chechnya and Georgia, over 300 journalists have been killed and disappeared since 1993.

Most shocking is how many of the murdered are local beat reporters whose names do not resonate in the media. This is different from the sadly familiar fact that by-lined

war correspondents, who knowingly risk their lives, get fatally caught in the crossfire of a battlefield – they walk on a landmine, they hitch a ride on a fated combat plane, they are mistaken for combatants. Every conflict claims its press victims. It is heart-wrenching for their families and colleagues when a war correspondent dies like this on some foreign country. However, the majority of journalists’ deaths are not bad luck. They are planned assassinations. They have been targeted, sought out for death at home for a very simple reason: they did their jobs of seeking the truth

Worse still is the crisis of impunity and the failure of governments to bring to justice killers of these journalists. In two-third of the cases the killers were not identified and probably will never be. In fact IFJ statistics prove beyond doubt that it has become virtually risk-free to kill a journalist – murder has become the easiest, perhaps cheapest and most effective way of silencing troublesome journalists and the more the killers get away with the more the killings increase.

The record of governments in cases of killed journalists is appalling. You have at the end of the spectrum countries like The Gambia, a small impoverished African country run by a military dictator like a private holding where journalists have been targeted, oppressed and gaoled. In response to an international campaign in support of the Gambian Union of Journalists, Yahia Jammeh, the president of this country, declared a few weeks ago on television “I will kill anybody caught tarnishing the image of my government. If you think that you can collaborate with so-called human rights defenders and get away with it, you must be living in a dream world. I will kill you and nothing will come of it.”

“I will kill anybody caught tarnishing the image of my government. If you think that you can collaborate with so-called human rights defenders and get away with it, you must be living in a dream world. I will kill you and nothing will come of it.”

Gambian President Yahia Jammeh

If you look at the other end of spectrum, you will find the United States, one of the world’s leading democracies, which has been adamantly refusing to carry out a credible and independent investigation on the killing of journalists at the Palestine Hotel and elsewhere in Iraq. The IFJ has catalogued 16 other cases of journalists and media

and courageous profession

staff that have died since March 2003 at the hands of US soldiers. Protests have been made to the US authorities every year since April 4th 2004 but they have gone nowhere. In the case of ITN British journalist Terry Lloyd who died in Iraq, the judge at the inquest into his death subpoenaed US soldiers, alleged to have been involved in his killing but the Pentagon refused to co-operate.

When the world's leading democracy (the USA) refuses to take up its responsibility in prosecuting those responsible for serious violations what chance has anybody in confronting the likes of President Jammeh of The Gambia.

When the world's leading democracy refuses to take up its responsibility in prosecuting those responsible for serious violations what chance has anybody in confronting the likes of President Jammeh of The Gambia.

If they are not targeted and done to death, journalists have been routinely harassed, assaulted and even thrown in gaol since, almost all over the world, draconian new anti-terror legislation sprang up following 9/11, undermining civil liberties and clamping down on free speech in the media and academia while limiting the rights of citizens at large. The so-called war against terror, is a war fought in the killing fields of Iraq and Afghanistan, but there was another war fought in the shadows, a conflict in which press freedom and pluralism have suffered.

Ever since September 2001 Western media have been struggling to maintain even basic levels of professionalism in a charged atmosphere of fear, violence and intolerant political rhetoric. In the US, constitutionally home of the world's freest media, journalism has suffered, particularly as a result of self-imposed censorship. The monstrous failure of the US media to challenge the spin and dishonesty of the White House information machine and, particularly, the two lines of deceit that were fed into the public consciousness – that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction and that his regime was linked to Al-Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden – has provoked an unprecedented bout of hand-wringing and self-doubt among journalists. Commentators who suggested that American policies in the Middle East, for example, may have contributed to this drift towards extremism and terror were isolated. Some were sacked. People did not get any answers because media did not ask the right questions.

Elsewhere journalists have been dragged to court to reveal their sources and even gaoled in the case of Judith Miller of the *New York Times*. Anti-terrorist legislation in old democracies in Europe has made journalists subject to special monitoring and increased surveillance and phone tapping. Even harmonious Sweden introduced new laws requiring communications providers to keep traffic data, including details of e-mails and telephone calls and allowing security forces to snoop on journalists.

There is clear evidence that the so-called "war on terror" has brought a sea change – the forging of a new global hegemony similar, but quite different, to that of the Cold War era. The basket of rights embraced by freedom of expression, (freedom of association, freedom of movement, freedom of assembly) have all been tested by the changing policy landscape in dealing with terrorism. Everybody recognises there is now a real crisis of press freedom in almost every country and every continent.

Deaths of journalists since 1992 worldwide

The topics being covered by journalists killed over the past seventeen years have been broken down as follows:

Beats Covered by Victims *

Corruption	15%
Crime	12%
Culture	9%
Human Rights	21%
Politics	48%
Sports	3%
War	42%

* Rounded to nearest full percentage point. Many cases appear under more than one category so total exceeds 100%

Source: Committee to Protect Journalists
(<http://www.cpj.org/killed/2009/>)

Jim Boumelha is President of the International Federation of Journalists - the global voice of journalists, representing 600,000 journalists in 120 countries.

For more information - www.ifj.org.

Plays that aren't just playing

Politically committed writers need to believe that their work makes a difference, but they must also have a sense of their own limitations and of what writing can, and cannot, do. Playwright John Chambers look at the influences on his own work and considers what impact it has had.

I've been a professional writer for twenty-five years. My writing has been divided between television (which pays the bills) and theatre, having plays premiered at most reps in the North West, fringe and youth theatre.

Before becoming a writer I was a Social and Community Social Worker involved in, for example, Housing and Community action and a NUPE shop steward during the '78-9 strike.

My decision to have a crack at writing was based on two things - a vague urge to do something creative, and a very specific intention to write things that said something, that challenge the system. I suppose my early work was very much issue-based, told in a naturalistic style. I tackled the nuclear arms race; class; the Care system; football violence; and in "Two Wheel Tricycle" at the Contact Theatre, the waste of consumer society in terms of people and the planet - all set on a municipal tip. They hopefully weren't as worthy and humourless as it might sound - if it's not engaging there's no point doing it. Thirty odd plays later, I hope my approach is slightly more refined - less naturalism and a belief that *everything* is political.

However, does it make any difference? Not just my puny efforts but political theatre in general. Come to that, does "art"? On a subjective level, as someone brought up on popular culture in the '60s, Dylan, Lennon and The Who all had a direct impact on me - if nothing else it was a licence to question, to rebel. Then writers like Jim Allen, Colin Welland and Trevor Griffiths in the '70s. But on a wider level though - and this might sound trite - Brecht didn't stem the rise of fascism and all the brilliant agit-prop of the '60s and '70s didn't prevent the obscenity of Thatcherism.

It would be facile to believe theatre, no matter how well crafted, accurately observed and truly radical could alone bring global capitalism to its knees. Only people can do that, the great mass of the people. Radical theatre can I think though play a small part in that - by opening up new possibilities to maybe even one person or small groups. By offering new ideas, ways of seeing things, presented in an exciting way.

Some personal experiences, tiny though they might be, have convinced me that theatre can get

through to people. I co-wrote a play for Manchester Youth Theatre, "Red Ellen", about the woman Labour MP. An epic. The director cast a black actor as Oswald Mosley! The audience roared their approval. I was commissioned to write a couple of shows for The Arden School of Theatre. The plays were no-holds-barred politically - "City of Gold" set in a Mall addresses consumerism; "The Meek" deals with criminal depravity. The way the twenty-odd bright, talented actors took on the issues involved, researched them, discussed them - which in turn transmitted itself to the audiences, convinced me that not only could it work but that there was a *need* for it.

Lastly, an example of writing changing something, not necessarily radical, but illustrating the effect one writer can have. It's from an unlikely source - Emmerdale! I came up with a story about testicular cancer. (It was as much about an Alpha male coping with, in his terms, losing his manhood.) After it went out I got a treasured letter from an Oncology Consultant in Ipswich saying they'd had more self-referrals from young men who were concerned as a result of it than a costly national campaign featuring Robbie Williams.

Former Theatre Workshop stalwart, Howard Goorney, best sums up what radical theatre might achieve: "*The capacity to stimulate man's critical awareness and question the accepted tenets of our society makes it a danger to conformism... The concept that Art generally, including theatre, exists to enrich our spirit, to inform and extend our horizons, is quite alien to those who are content to see it as a form of relaxation for a largely middle class minority.*"

Drama with a message doesn't have to be po-faced, haranguing the audience- it can be funny, emotional, sexy, startling. In my experience, at its best, it can re-invigorate the already committed and more importantly engage and provoke many others. Most important of all it should have a feeling for humanity at its heart - the fundamental notion that people matter and we're all interdependent. That we have the ability, the right - the responsibility to choose and to try to change things.

John Chambers is a writer and playwright. Details of his work, including where to find some plays downloadable for free, can be found at www.doollee.com/

What's it like being a football fan?

Modern professional football, with its emphasis on money, celebrity and the extravagant lifestyles of overpaid young men and their WAGS is not naturally fertile territory for the progressive and green left. Despite this however, Malcolm Christie tells us why he remains a football fan and tells us that not all football supporters are mindless followers of whichever team has paid the most money for its players and collected the most silverware for its trophy cabinet.

Measured by numbers attending live events, or by sizes of television audiences, spectator sport is arguably the most popular manifestation of any form of culture. Football is the most popular spectator sport in many parts of the world.

Football fans are incredibly loyal and intensely tribal. Their allegiance is usually formed in childhood and lasts for life. Often it runs in families. It survives geographical separation and also seasons on end of poor performances and results.

Most football fans support teams which never win anything, other than the occasional promotion to a higher league.

What is more, the game is structured so that as many teams are relegated as are promoted. Despite these facts, each August every football fan looks forward hopefully to the new season. Maybe this will be the year when everything clicks into place and we shall win our league, or maybe have a good run in a cup competition.

Groups of fans have their own rituals on match days. Some like to meet for a drink before the game. Others like to arrive early in the stadium, to watch the players warming up and to enjoy the atmosphere as the crowd builds up.

Noise and emotion reach a climax as the teams run out and again when the game kicks off. Each club's supporters have their own favourite songs and chants. These often refer pejoratively to other specific clubs, which they love to hate.

Each club's supporters have their own favourite songs and chants. These often refer pejoratively to other specific clubs, which they love to hate.

Football fans enjoy seeing examples of skilful play, but not so much from the opposition's players. They appreciate good organisation and teamwork, but most of all they love players with energy and spirit, who seem to give everything for their team.

As the game goes on, you share common emotional responses with the other supporters of your club. You shout together in anticipation and encouragement as an opportunity seems to

present itself. You groan in unison when it is missed. You all celebrate madly when your team scores. You are all reduced to angry silence when they concede a goal. You cheer at the end if they have won or at least played with spirit. Occasionally you may boo them off after a particularly bad performance.

There are negative aspects. Racist and homophobic chants are still aimed at specific players. The abuse of fans of other certain other clubs can become threatening.

Overall however, it is the shared expression - often in ritualised forms - of common emotions with the other supporters of your club, which reinforces the feeling of belonging to something collective. It is a powerful and easily accessible sense of solidarity and people keep coming back to more games to experience it again and again.

Unfortunately football reflects many of the downsides of twenty-first century capitalism. The game is controlled at its highest levels by oligarchs who make more and more money by exploiting the fans, whom they view as passive consumers. Ticket prices are now far more expensive in real terms.

Unfortunately football reflects many of the downsides of twenty-first century capitalism basically, it's all about money.

Television and its advertising revenues have undue influence. The best players all go in the end to a small handful of clubs, which then win all the competitions. The richest clubs promote themselves as global brands. Basically it is all about money.

There is however a movement to promote cooperative principles in football, through supporters' trusts and their umbrella organisation *Supporters Direct*. You are invited to visit www.supporters-direct.org to get an idea what this is all about.

Malcolm Christie is the National Treasurer of the AGS and Treasurer of the Leeds United Supporters Trust.

Environmental sound-bites by Bryn

In a short while, on Monday 7th December, heads of state and other world leaders will sit down in Copenhagen to discuss climate change. This will be the fifteenth such conference, though probably the first which has received so much advanced publicity. The other big difference this time is that none of those around the table will be able to claim ignorance of the indisputable fact of global warming and its principal causes. There will be those who will still attempt to deny the phenomenon, or its cause, but they will do so in the face of all scientific reason.

A successful outcome, whatever that may mean, is by no means assured, judging by the flurry of caveats and weasel-worded cop-out statements that are being made by a number of nations in these weeks leading up to December. The compromise reached by the pre-Copenhagen Euro-Summit (to agree to share the cost of helping the developing world reduce carbon emissions - but failing to specify how each EU member's contribution would be calculated, thus putting the wrangling off until later) was hardly the most encouraging start. This article proposes to consider the possible outcomes, and to highlight the meaningless promises to look out for while scrutinising any final communiqué.

There seems to have become some sort of collective consensus that our planet can tolerate a further average temperature rise of 2°C. From a personal position, I reject that for two reasons. The first is because of the unscientific glibness and neatness of the figure; it arises from some sort of general compromise and is based on no firm observational grounds. The actual safe limit could be 2.5°C, it could just as easily be 1.5°C - we have no way of knowing and our only proper course of action is to aim to minimise any possible future rise. The second reason follows from that, because a target to aim *under* becomes a target to aim *at*, in the sense that world leaders and captains of industry will relax and feel safe for so long as we remain below it.

The principal protagonists will be the US and China, with India allying itself with the latter. Europe and the rest of the world will sit uneasily between these two sides, afraid to cause too much commercial offence to either, and the sharpest contributions will come from those nations most immediately threatened with rising sea levels, such as the Maldives. The position of both big sides will basically be summarised in the five words. "We will if you will" or more realistically, "We *might* if you do". Space does not here permit a detailed look at the two economies (a two-page spread would hardly suffice), but enough to observe that in each case protectionism *will* overrule planetary concern.

The Boxer-Kerry Bill to undertake a 20% cut in US carbon emissions by 2020 will probably survive its passage through the Senate, but equally probably, will not do so without amendments calling for the impositions of tariffs against Chinese imports. This will anger China, and it will greatly strengthen their resolve not to commit to any limitations of any sort on their

emissions. The best that can be said about such 10-year targets is that they are rather better than the 40-year targets which most nations have glibly issued. Commitments to reduce by 80% before 2050 are worthless. Most of us will be dead by then and the problem (greatly magnified by previous inaction) will simply have been shunted off onto our grandchildren. Moreover, 10-year targets only have value if we recognise that to achieve them they must be broken down into single year objectives, and Britain's pledge to cut by 20% - a long way short of the 40% that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recently identified as "essential" - will only have value if we actually cut 2% this year and every following year. Apart from the drop caused by worldwide industrial recession, we have steadily and steadfastly increased our emissions every year throughout our lifetimes.

Barack Obama may claim to have achieved one of his goals, spreading the concept of carbon 'offsets', but as this column has pointed out on several occasions in the past, not only is that no solution at all, it also represents a monstrous con-trick and a furthering of imperialism. Do not accept any such deal as representing success at Copenhagen.

The big problem is that mostly, people don't *'get it'*. Ask anyone what is needed and, almost universally, it will be someone else who needs to mend their ways. The wicked Yanks with easily the world's biggest carbon footprint. The Chinese, intent on catching up and who, instead of producing goods to improve the quality of life for their citizens, are flooding the Earth with cheap consumer junk. The capitalists who are moving their production there to exploit cheap labour. The worldwide gas-guzzlers who are destroying the rainforests to plant maize and palm for bio-fuels. Who is actually prepared to say, "*the problem is mine personally and ours collectively, and one way or another it is going to cost us individually to put the world to rights*"?

Copenhagen could be the pivot on which the fate of humanity actually tips, one way or the other. The writer's big fear is that it will collapse in chaos amid accusations and recriminations, and produce national retrenchments and worldwide protectionism. I sincerely hope I am wrong.

To end on an upbeat note: building has just begun on a massive new project in the South of France at Cadarache, near Aix. The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, ITER, is due for completion in 2018. It will not be a working power station, but if the ten billion dollars it will cost are not to be wasted then it should pave the way towards genuinely cheap and universally available electrical power. It is important not to confuse fusion power with fission power simply because they sound very similar. They are actually about as far different as they could possibly be in terms of the physics and of their environmental consequences, and whilst sustaining our complete opposition to any more conventional nuclear fission reactors, we should be welcoming this undoubted step forward in the effort to tame the power of fusion.



Letters and e-mails



From Michael F Cummings,

We have global warming for three reasons:

1. carbon emissions from transport, heating and product manufacture
2. solar radiation because of the loss of protection from the ozone layer at both poles
3. new products produced by interaction with uranium 235.

This uranium is as dangerous underground as it is in someone's front room. Captured carbon is also as big a threat underground as it is in CO2. We should refuse to licence all non-essential production (such as arms) to reduce the scale of the problem and members of the UN should be responsible for policing this.

Finally, the list of measures taken so far to prevent desertification in Africa (particularly the expansion of the Sahara) runs to sweet nothing.

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From Cliff Slaughter

Gordon McLennan (letters *GS* 48) needs to say more than that the Labour Party was never socialist.

For people like he and I, another question - and a big one - is, 'Was the Communist Party (of which he was once General Secretary) ever communist?' I think most readers know what my answer to this was, a long time ago (1956). What is his?

Of course he's right to say the Labour Party was never a socialist party, but is he right to say that New Labour is no different?

I would say that this misses out a historical change of great significance. Even though it was not socialist, the Labour Party in the first part of this century was what Lenin was right to call a sort of 'general association of the working class', and so it was necessary for socialists/communists to have some sort of orientation towards it. That was necessary despite the fact that for half a century or so the capitalist class found it necessary and possible from time to time to "rule through" (as Trotsky put it) this reformist party, dispensing whatever concessions were useful in calming down the class struggle.

The fact is that now (and since the early 1970s) capitalism has not been able to continue along this reformist path, indeed it became necessary to start dismantling the gains previously conceded. 'Neo-liberalism', 'monetarism' and the 'free market' became the order of the day. Hayek and Milton Friedman's

doctrines found willing instruments in Reagan and Thatcher.

'Labour' soon adapted (after all, to quote Thatcher, "there is no alternative") and after a few years the adaptation found its the new name, "New Labour", now serving capitalism (as it always had done) by now being "business friendly", providing an entirely bogus alternative to the Tory Party.

Reformism is dead, and now, as the financial crisis of 2008-09 is showing us, the monetarist 'alternative' is at the end of its tether. So what next? We don't yet know what temporary delays to the unfolding of the structural crisis of capital may or may not be found, but we can be sure that great struggles will be forced (over unemployment, wage cuts, pensions, welfare, etc) upon the working class. The working class will be joined by many who realise that the plundering of nature by capital now threatens the destruction of nature itself.

We must - if we truly want to discover how to organise and act as socialists in the immediate future - try to understand this new historical situation. We must grasp the nature of the changes underlying the transformation (just saying "we were right, Labour was never socialist anyway").

For the greater part of the 20th century the working class internationally was betrayed by the Labour Party (Social-Democracy) and by Stalinism. Both were indispensable to capitalism. The disintegration of both may appear to leave the working class disenfranchised and without a party, but that disintegration removes the greatest obstacle to the self-emancipation of the working class, and is in that sense an enormous advantage in the reconstruction of the working-class movement here and internationally. That reconstruction is the only worthwhile task in which to be engaged.

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From S Robson

I agree with Jeanne Kent (letters *GS* 49) that it was correct to release al-Megrahi - but for different reasons. If he did knowingly murder nearly three-hundred innocent men, women and children then I would let him rot in gaol till he died. However, I suspect that he did not and that the US government did here what they have certainly done in previous court cases - bribed and coerced witnesses into changing their testimony to implicate him because they wanted to smear Libya and Gaddafi. Over half a century ago FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover ordered that Ethel Rosenberg be framed and sent to the electric chair. They haven't changed

Raising Standards



RMT cleaners from Eurostar on strike at St Pancras, London



Camden Trades Council banner

Leeds Trades Council on the march

