

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



Volume 3 No 200 6 April 2011 30p/80p

For a workers' government

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Make rich pay for decent jobs and benefits

What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.



Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of Solidarity to sell — and join us!

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No to AV, no to status quo!

By Ira Berkovic

With the referendum on Alternative Voting fast approaching, most people in the UK can barely contain their excitement.

People have been known to faint simply upon knowing that an election circular from either side had arrived in the house, and sales of Eddie Izzard DVDs have gone up by 341%; a fact we can only attribute to his starring role in the "yes" campaign.

Election material from the "yes to fairer votes" campaign has been delivered to every elector in the country, with a minor storm being generated because black poet Benjamin Zephaniah was left off its

leaflets for outside of London. The gallery of other supporters included Joanna Lumley and Tony Robinson, and if the endorsements of Patsy Stone and Baldrick aren't enough to secure your vote, then what will?

While there are few consistent political demarcations in the debate — with figures from all three mainstream parties on both sides — most major trade unions have come against AV. GMB, ASLEF and the POA all sent circulars to all members urging them to vote "no". But their arguments hardly take working-class democracy as their starting point. The GMB, for example, has "concluded that first past

the post is a tried and tested system which delivers strong single-party government and that it is simple and easy to understand and with it there is a strong constituency link." It is hardly the job of the labour movement to defend FPTP, a system which has effectively disenfranchised working-class people in many areas...

Workers' Liberty is for a "no" vote in the referendum; we believe that an AV system would push parties into horse-trading based on second-preferences, and that it is far too subject to how big parties choose to "play" the system. The success of AV would also mean, in all likelihood, a big setback

for any possibility of securing genuinely democratic electoral reform — such as a move to a proportional representation system — in the near future.

But rather than positioning ourselves as defenders of the status quo, we believe the left and the labour movement should oppose AV and FPTP in the name of real reform — in the first place, reforms to the existing system such as the introduction of PR but ultimately the replacement of parliamentary democracy with working-class democracy.

That is not something that can be secured through referenda, but only through working-class struggle.

Arts funding slashed

By Edd Mustill

The government has cut the budget of Arts Council England (ACE) by 30%, or £118 million. Some projects have had their Arts Council funding withdrawn completely. Theatre companies in particular have been hit badly.

Some are criticising the cuts because the "cultural industries" are apparently vital to the British economy. The director of the Serpentine Gallery was quick to criticise the cuts from this point of view in the *Evening Standard*: "In an HSBC survey, 57 per cent of entrepreneurs thought that the UK's primary focus should be 'world class creative industries.'"

We need to guard against using this argument in the case against cuts. The Arts' Council's ethos has been all about the importance of art in sharpening the competitive edge of Britain's economy in a global market. Some critics, like *Mute* magazine, who have lost 100% of their ACE funding, say it comes close to seeing art itself as simply a form of entrepreneurship. They are right to say that "the relevant story lies in the devastation being wrought upon the social in general."

It is likely that one effect

of the cuts will be a further concentration of cultural activity in London. While Sheffield Museums, for example, lose all their ACE funding, most of the big "winners" this year are London-based: the Barbican Centre, the Arcola, the Serpentine... Big publisher Faber and Faber also ranks among the "winners."

London received half of all the money in the ACE budget. But within this, groups have lost out, including many that promote black and Asian culture.

With the Olympic Games coming up, the rest of the country will no doubt slip even further from the memory of the chattering classes in the capital. Some of the ACE funding gap is to be made up with money from the National Lottery, currently listing London 2012 as one of its priority areas.

It remains to be seen whether small projects will be able to ride out the cuts like big national organisations can. No doubt many will not, unless there is a fight.

Groups like Arts Against Cuts have been a constant presence on, for example, the recent student protests. We must not forget to fight to save the arts as we fight to save welfare and education.

Civil war in Ivory Coast

By Gerry Bates

The UN has intervened in civil war-stricken Ivory Coast as Laurent Gbagbo continues his attempt to cling onto power.

In an election which the UN oversaw, Gbagbo was defeated by Alassane Ouattara but has refused to step down. As we went to press, forces loyal to Ouattara were claiming to have overrun Gbagbo's residence in Abidjan. UN and French helicopters had previously conducted airstrikes against Gbagbo's arsenals.

Nearly 500 people have been killed since the disputed election in November, with more than one million fleeing the country. Both Gbagbo and Ouattara have historically whipped up ethnic and sectarian bigotry against their political rivals, and both have a record of attempting to mobilise working-class support despite both being entirely pro-market in their

politics. Civil strife between Christians and Muslims, a key feature of political life in other African countries such as Nigeria, has been a factor for many years.

Some have analysed the situation as European imperialism, particularly France, attempting to re-establish a colonial foothold in the country, which is the world's biggest cocoa producer. Whatever the impact of this particular imperialist intervention, no socialist should fall into supporting Gbagbo as a progressive "anti-imperialist" against the UN.

Ouattara is the formally "legitimate" president of the country but that cannot resolve democratic questions here. In the long-term Ivory Coast's workers and urban poor — both Muslim and Christian have to unite against all factions of the ruling class, rather than putting their faith in one section against another.

Zimbabwean workers against Mugabe

Mike Sambo of Zimbabwe's International Socialist Organisation spoke to *Solidarity*.

Tell us about the recent repression in Zimbabwe.

Recent arrests of ISO comrades as well as officials from different trade unions, show [ruling party] ZANU PF's desire to send a clear message to the Zimbabwean working class and opposition — do not attempt to emulate North Africa!

Mugabe shares power with two MDC [Movement for Democratic Change, previously the main opposition party] factions in a Government of National Unity after a deal brokered by the South African Development Community in September 2008, following a disputed election. The coalition government opened up some limited democratic space, though Mugabe maintained the upper hand. But the resurgence of repression has also involved the arrest of senior MDC officials. Mugabe is not happy with power sharing and so is attempting to decimate the opposition and civil society ahead of the upcoming general elections.

What is the situation for the class struggle?

The advent of the coalition government created some economic as well as political stability. There is less talk of inflation, scarcity, the black market, company closures, etc. Many companies which closed have since recapitalised and reopened. This is partly because of a multi-currency regime replacing the Zimbabwean dollar.

So far this has meant a low level of class struggle in Zimbabwe, as people feel the MDC should be given time to bring in reforms. On the other hand, I think the

relative economic stability opens up possibilities of sharpened class conflict.

For a period sections of the bourgeoisie and the working class forged a common front to remove their common enemy Mugabe. With greater political stability — though this is now under assault — plus the inability of the GNU to deliver as expected, we may see a shift from narrow anti-Mugabe slogans to more gritty social and economic demands that also challenge the profiteering of the bosses, who have taken advantage of the crisis to make super profits.

At the moment we see isolated workplace-based clashes between workers and bosses as workers push for economic demands such as a living wage. These struggles are being held back from spreading across the country by the belief of many workers that the MDC needs to govern alone for there to be genuine change. More conscious workers already challenge the MDC, given the fact that ministries headed by MDC ministers are involved in attacking the working class. MDC secretary general Tendai Bitai is

minister of finance and has been at the forefront of attacking wage increments for workers, saying they are detrimental to his economic recovery plans.

The MDC is a valve regulating the class struggle. It is only a matter of time before this valve explodes.

What is the ISO doing at the moment?

ISO was among the groups that did not welcome the GNU. By agreeing to the coalition the MDC threw a life jacket to ZANU PF when it was beginning to sink.

With a low level of class struggle, our organisation has taken an inward turn, training our cadres to prepare them as class strugglers in the near future after the GNU fails.

Between 1999 and 2008 Zimbabwe witnessed massive class struggles, and that is when we recruited the bulk of our members. These people were trained in practical daily experiences, but did not undergo serious theoretical training. We are using this period to make up for that. We are also trying to broaden our base of recruitment from social movements like HIV

and AIDS groups back to our original base — trade unions and students. These have become our main areas of activity. We are, for instance, very active among health workers in the private sector.

We have also maintained a presence in the constitutional reform process which is underway. We do not have illusions in this process, but we want to push for the inclusion of socio-economic rights in the constitution.

What's your position on US/NATO intervention in Libya?

There is no justification for the intervention; they should leave Qaddafi to be dealt with by Libya's working people. We know their agenda is not about liberating Libyans from Qaddafi's tyranny; they are after Libyan resources, particularly oil. They want to replace Qaddafi with a stooge who will guarantee them cheap oil — they are not friends of Libya, but plunderers. Qaddafi must go, not at the hands of NATO, but the Libyan people supported by the working class of the whole world.

Solidarity from socialists around the world has been vital. It is very difficult to build a revolutionary organisation in Zimbabwe under harsh conditions and repression, but because of financial donations and solidarity from comrades abroad we have managed to push on. International solidarity was particularly important recently when ZANU PF put us under siege, arresting all our leadership. We really treasure such assistance.

Brutal face of racism in Italy

By Hugh Edwards

Two years ago in Rosarno, southern Italy, thousands of migrant agricultural workers rose up in open revolt against the grotesquely obscene living and working conditions imposed upon them by a mafia-linked network of farmers and the local state.

It was all legitimated by the conniving silence of the Italian trade union movement.

Now the brutal face of Italian racism reveals itself again on the island of Lampedusa, where thousands of desperate people fleeing Libya and its borders sought refuge, hoping

for the necessary conditions to help them rebuild their shattered lives.

But the government of Berlusconi had no intention of turning back on its ruthless determination to exploit racism — for that has played a major part in the prostration of the working-class movement before the systematic assault on jobs, welfare, education and political rights in general.

Led by the odious Maroni, Northern League member and Minister of the Interior, it was announced that “a biblical exodus” of refugees was on its way to Italy, deliberately inflaming the already ignorant and hostile perceptions widespread in the country. The

same Maroni announced that among the exodus would be not only those “illegally” seeking work, i.e. not “real” asylum seekers, but also followers of al-Qaeda bent on sowing terrorism across the country.

What happened was predictable, an example of the putrid depths to which Berlusconi's regime has taken this country, undermining basic human decency and humanity.

Thousands did begin to arrive to find that not one single act of preparation had been undertaken — no toilets, no water, no food. A population of frightened, famished and deracinated masses was left to forage for itself in conditions of in-

describable and mounting degradation.

All grist to the mill of the racist media, fomenting hatred and ignorance in equal measure, here, in one of the richest countries in the world, about the impossibility of finding accommodation for 20,000 people.

Finally Berlusconi arrived on the island, as he had done in the refuge crisis in Napoli and the earthquake in Acquila, addressing himself exclusively to the islanders.

He never once made reference to the reality surrounding him other than to reassure everyone that the refugees would be taken back to where they came from. He promised a new

golf course, a casino and freshly painted homes — guaranteed to make the natives proud of the prospect of another Las Vegas in Italy.

Let no one be in any doubt that what has happened here underlines the profoundly critical depths of the political crisis in which the Italian radical left and trade union movement finds itself.

Nothing could express it more eloquently than the fact that as the above events unfolded, the latter were devoting most of their time to organising protests about the no-fly zone and intervention in Libya. That, I believe, says it all.

Workers of the world

By Darren Bedford

INDONESIA

Following a three-year campaign, Indonesian union SBNIP has finally won a recognition agreement at the Nescafé factory in Panjang, Indonesia.

Nestlé, which owns Nescafé, has traditionally refused to enter into any collective-bargaining agreements in Indonesia — a country seen by multinational corporations as fruitful ground for sweatshop-style exploitation. The union said: “This victory is not for IUF [the international union federation to which SBNIP is affiliated] and the SBNIP only; this is a real victory for all Indonesian workers. This is a very historic victory. From now on, the Indonesian workers will have rights to determine their own wages through negotiation.”

CANADA

Members of the United Steel Workers union (USW) are occupying the legislature in Queen's Park, Ontario after right-wing politicians prevented a second reading of a bill that would have banned employers from using replacement workers during strikes in order to undermine collective bargaining.

Hiring replacement labour is described as a “growing practise” by USW, and the union argues that the blocking of the bill “has set the stage for a Wisconsin-style attack against every unionized worker in Ontario.”

USW's Ontario director Wayne Fraser has stated that he and his members will continue the occupation until they secure a commitment to move the bill forward.

BAHRAIN

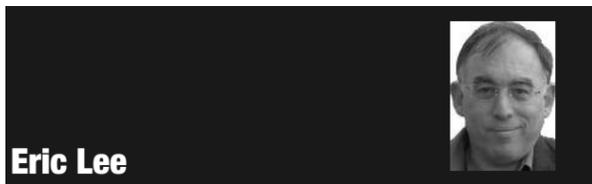
Trade unionists who took strike action as part of the growing democracy movement in Bahrain have faced serious reprisals, including sackings.

According to the ITUC, about 300 workers have been dismissed for taking part in the strike and in demonstrations, mainly from the aluminium company Alba (Aluminium Bahrain BSC) and the Khalifa Sea Port. Around 40 workers have apparently also been dismissed by Gulf Air.

Abdul Ghaffar Abdul Hussain, the president of the trade union at the Bahrain Petroleum Company, has been sacked, and leading members of the Bahraini Teachers' Association have been arrested.

For more, see tinyurl.com/itucbahrain

New website maps strikes in China



Eric Lee

Manfred Elfstrom, a PhD student at Cornell University in the United States, has produced an extraordinary resource for the trade union movement.

It's a website called China Strikes (<http://chinastrikes.crowdmap.com>) and is essentially a map of China with red dots representing strikes.

Elfstrom is taking this quite seriously and is producing some interesting results. For example, he's categorised the strikes not only by region, but also by sector.

Some of this will not be surprising — for example, he finds 15 strikes at electronics factories, such as the infamous Foxconn.

There are another dozen strikes reported in auto factories. But click on "sex workers" and you'll read about a surprising protest by prostitutes in Wuhan in August 2010.

"Only actions by workers over workplace issues are included," writes Elfstrom. "Thus, land disputes or environmental protest, for example, are excluded."

Accuracy is, of course, essential if the site is to be useful to anyone.

Elfstrom writes that "Reports are 'verified' when they a) come from a reliable source, such as an NGO that has produced many accurate reports or a major Chinese or foreign news outlet or b) when I can find more than one report of an incident."

The site is much more than just a static map to look at.

It includes, for example, a sophisticated system of email alerts.

If you're a trade union activist in, say, the food sector, you tell it to email you when a strike breaks out in that sector anywhere in China.

You can do the same by region, by clicking on the map.

You'll get an email alert any time a strike happens within 20 kilometres of where you clicked.

Elfstrom encourages readers to submit strike news and has an online form to do so — which once again involves clicking on a map to show where the strike is taking place.

Readers can submit photos and detailed descriptions of strikes as well.

Though the site is largely in English, there's a page in Chinese that invites workers to submit their strike reports directly.

Some of the reports are in Chinese only.

So far, the site lists 69 strike reports, three of them from March of this year. The most recent one describes a kindergarten teachers' strike in Shenzhen.

This is only the tip of the iceberg. There are many more strikes taking place in China.

Nevertheless, it's an extraordinary use of cutting-edge technology by an individual which could prove very useful for trade unionists who are interested in China — as we all should be.



Letters

Horses for courses

I doubt that the most ardent protagonist of "Twitter revolutions" would disagree with Eric Lee's statement ("How Twitter is like a horse", *Solidarity* 197) that social media such as Twitter and Facebook are tools. That does not get us very far. New tools can create new possibilities and render old tools obsolete. Paul Revere wouldn't have needed a horse if he'd had a mobile phone.

So the point is not to counterpose old tried and tested methods to "Twitter revolutions" (from whichever side of the argument) but rather to examine what social media can and can't do to build revolutionary and labour movements.

I feel embarrassed to make these points in response to Eric as he has for many years experimented with new technologies and introduced them to the labour movement and may well agree with much of what I say, but I feel his piece was one of the rather too general, negative responses to the wide-eyed, naive techno-enthusiasts who are telling us that everything — particularly our methods of organisation — has to be remade as a result of new methods of communication.

After Egypt, the question is what function social media can play in such uprisings rather than whether they have any role. Would Tahrir Square have happened anyhow without the initial use of Facebook to draw people together? Quite possibly, as in East Germany in 1989. However, social media did give Egyptian dissidents the confidence that they were not alone and others were prepared to take the same risks and got people to demonstrate at the same time and place, while the marchers in Leipzig were dependent on smaller scale personal contacts and the churches' networks.

It seems to me established that social media can serve to make new contacts, mobilise people, organise demonstrators and notify both local sympathisers and activists and the outside world of what is happening in real time — all on a larger scale than would otherwise be possible. More controversially, and contrary to prominent sceptic Malcolm Gladwell, they can also serve to create a collective identity and strength and build a conduit for solidarity — none of which is to deny the decisive importance of the other factors Eric

mentioned.

But these are only part of the forms of organisation needed to make a revolution. Social media may help to create the negative force necessary to bring down a regime but are of far less use in the more long term aspects of creating and maintaining institutions and organisations that are durable and can win long term commitment and in forming a structure for democratic decision-making, accountability and the formulation of political strategy. These still require largely offline institutions such as unions and parties.

If "Twitter is like a horse", then it is a question of "horses for courses", assessing the appropriate and useful tools for our goals and being neither overawed by the "wow" of new technologies nor insisting that the old ways are always better.

Bruce Robinson, Manchester

A done deal

An update on last week's article on the Galloway/SPS/SWP/Solidarity electoral bloc. It has been registered with the Glasgow City Council Returning Officer, and will therefore be appearing on the ballot paper, as: The Respect Party – George Galloway (Respect) Coalition Against the Cuts.

Given that "The Respect Party — George Galloway (Respect) Coalition Against the Cuts" is a bit of a mouthful, BBC coverage of the elections is already helpfully referring to its candidates simply as being candidates of "The Respect Party".

The election agent of "The Respect Party — George Galloway (Respect) Coalition Against the Cuts" is Ron Mackay. McKay has been variously described as Galloway's friend, political assistant, press spokesperson, aide, press officer, publishing venture partner, and general fixer. He has held that position since 1977.

Effectively (i.e. in the real world, as opposed to the fantasies of the Socialist Party (Scotland) and the SWP), Galloway has control of just about everything — from the party name on the ballot paper, through the financial fundraising appeal, to the election material (as this must be endorsed by the election agent).

Dale Street, Glasgow

Jihad is over

"Socialism is what it is everywhere — weak and still trying to get its political bearings. The idea that in the Middle East the 'masses' can quickly become socialist, unleash a 'process of permanent revolution', and offer a socialist alternative can not but function in socialist observers to dissolve political standards, critical faculties and sober political judgment — and replace them with open-mouthed credulity and naivety towards political Islam." (*Solidarity* 3/199)

Socialism is never the same thing anywhere. The Arab people want to be unafraid to speak and organise. They might well want a dose of consumerism as a reward for their confinement, but it is an insult to them to assume that after their ordeal and struggle they will be prepared to surrender their future to either a corporation or a divine beard. In fact, it's highly likely that this eruption of political-consciousness has pulled the magic carpet out from under Global Jihad as a strategy for resistance. Any mass appeal it once had is gone.

*Posted on the AWL website by the blogger —
littlerichardjohn.blogspot.com*

Not a joking matter

In defending broadcasting comedian Frankie Boyle's "joke" about the eight year old disabled son of Katie Price, Channel 4 essentially had this to say: Price had already exploited her son by putting him in the media spotlight, so why shouldn't we? What a rotten, self-serving argument.

You don't have to endorse Price's celebrity antics to recognise that making a joke at the expense of a child is wrong. This is Frankie Boyle's "humour": "Jordan and Peter Andre are still fighting each other over custody of Harvey — eventually one of them will lose and have to keep him." He went on to say some things involving incest and Harvey's size which are not worth repeating.

Defend freedom of speech? Certainly. Stretch the boundaries of "taste" so that artistic freedom can be expanded? Absolutely.

But this was a) not funny; b) deeply unkind. But most importantly it was *uncivilised*. Children need protection. Because parents aren't always up to that job, all the more reason for there to be "official" social boundaries and norms — the best we can do short of a much more democratically organised and equal society — to protect children.

Frankie Boyle and Channel 4 — leave the kids alone! Pick on someone who deserves your pathetic attempts at public humiliation and low-grade spite.

Cathy Nugent, south London

Workers' Liberty London forum

Wednesday 20 April

7.30-9.30pm

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WC1, nr King's Cross**

**WHAT SORT OF
REPUBLIC DO WE
NEED?**

**Debate with Sean Matgamna,
AWL and Graham Smith,
Republic**

The ConDems hope the Royal Wedding will revive patriotic fervour and distract the nation from their plan to destroy the welfare state and slash the living standards of working class people. The monarchy in is a bulwark of reaction and entrenched power, a fetter on real democracy. We need to get rid of the monarchy. But what sort of republic do we need?

More details: awl@workersliberty.org

Millionaires' government batters the poorest

At the same time that its policies send unemployment skyrocketing, the Coalition government is persecuting the unemployed.

On 1 April the *Guardian* cited Jobcentre Plus workers whistleblowing on a practice of bosses imposing arbitrary targets for throwing people off the dole. Claimants have been deliberately confused tricked into failing stringent obligations placed on them to look for work. Staff at one Jobcentre, for instance, were given a target of three people a week each to refer to "sanctions" i.e. removal of benefits. Individual advisers, teams and regions are being pushed to compete for who can be most deceitful and brutal.

According to DWP statistics, the number of cases where people have lost their benefits soared to 75,000 in October 2010. 20,000 claimants with registered disabilities were cut off. That figure is likely to increase dramatically when people claiming Incapacity Benefit are "reassessed" this month. The work test involved in assessing people who are sick or disabled is notoriously inaccurate — and it has got worse.

According to the *Guardian's* analysis, the number of people losing benefits has grown by about 40 percent, far faster than the number of claimants — and grown most in the most deprived areas. Throwing people off the dole is starting to replace pushing people into crappy, low-paid jobs as the main aim of Jobcentres.

While this shift is primarily an attack on the rights of the claimants — and particularly young, uneducated and some disabled people, who are easiest to manoeuvre off benefits — it is also ramping up pressure on benefits workers, under ever greater administrative and psychological pressure to brutalise unemployed working-class people.

Such changes come in the context of the Coalition's Welfare Reform Bill, which introduces an across the board attack on entitlements of all sorts.

And all this misery is not just aiding profit-making indirectly, but directly too. The woman appointed by the Coalition to get people off benefits and (supposedly) back into

work, Emma Harrison of Action for Employment (A4E), is paid £365,000 a year, lives in a Peak District stately home and is estimated to be worth £1.4 million. A4E has won five of the 40 new DWP contracts under which private companies net a total of £5 billion for pushing people off benefits and/or into crap jobs. Serco of private prisons and Dockland Light Railway fame is also in on the action. It pays its chief executive £1.86 million and its finance director £984,295.

It is not surprising that the government finds it easier to throw people off benefits than push them into work, when their policies are destroying so many jobs. 2.53 million are out of work, the largest number since 1994, and rising. (In the three months to January, this figure grew by 27,000, while the claimant count dropped by 10,200!) There are 974,000 16-24 year olds out of work — an increase of 30,000 and the highest since comparable records began in 1992. And while some of us are denied the right to work, others are working harder and longer: the number of over-65s in work is at a record high of 900,000, up 56,000.

These figures tell us all we need to know about the callous class war the government is inflicting on the poorest and most vulnerable people.

"Social mobility" is a con: fight for real equality!

The millionaire toff Nick Clegg is fronting the government's new "social mobility" scheme, a plan it says is aimed at making Britain "a fairer and more socially mobile place".

The spectacle of a government claiming that it is attempting to make Britain "fairer," while simultaneously carrying out an assault of unprecedented savagery on working-class living standards is gallingly hypocritical. The government's strategy is based precisely on increasing the kind of social inequalities that Clegg claims they want to address with this "radical new package".

Of course, the scheme is neither new nor radical.

It is a warmed-up version of proposals that Labour's Alan Milburn made in 2009 as part of the "Report on Fair Access to the Professions". Both that report, and the government's new package, focus almost exclusively on unpaid internships as a primary source of social immobility.

Clegg claims that because young people from richer backgrounds can exploit family connections to get better internships, and because they can afford to spend several years working without pay because of family support (internships are frequently unpaid), they are given an automatic head-start when they enter the job market for real.

In a *Daily Telegraph* article, Clegg and Iain Duncan Smith (one of the chief architects of the dismantling of the welfare state) are at pains to point out that the target of the new social mobility package is "not just the poor" but the so-called "squeezed middle", so beloved of mainstream politicians of all three parties.

So behind the bluster and rhetoric about "fairness" we have a very flimsy scheme aimed at helping middle-class kids get better jobs by giving them more access to internships.

A clampdown on unpaid internships is good, but "tinkering around the edges" is a massive overstatement here. This millionaire government lives in a fantasy world. Tory minister David Willetts has already gone on record blaming "feminism" for social inequality in Britain! The idea that inequality of opportunity in the race to get internships is the key factor behind Britain's gaping wealth gaps is perhaps less bigoted but no less ludicrous.

In their *Telegraph* article, Clegg and Duncan Smith wrote: "We want a society in which success is based on what you know, not who you know or which family you are born into [...] So our social mobility drive is aimed at helping the majority of people to move up the rungs of the ladder of opportunity."

The drive is based on two great ideological lies of capitalism — meritocracy and "social mobility" itself. That lie says that if you "level the playing field", people will be able to move upwards as long as they've got the (presumably innate) merit to do so.

In the ideal world of Clegg, Duncan Smith, Willetts and the rest, the people at "the bottom" would be the irredeemably lazy and/or stupid, and the people at the top would be those hard-working, go-getting few (from whatever background, of course) who took advantage of their opportunities.

They are capitalist utopians. For them, "a fair society is an open society, one in which opportunities are not determined by background but by drive and ability." But where do "drive and ability" come from? Drive and ability are themselves products of, and conditioned by, class relations.

And class position itself is not about innate ability; it is based on power, and relationship to the means of production.

A child from a wealthy background gets her or his greater "drive" and ability from such things as access to education, a life free of stress, a life with expectations instilled by the experience of wealth and success.

Individuals from a given class *can* move up or down into another, but the fundamental inequalities in wealth and opportunity between classes as collective social groups cannot be addressed other than by overthrowing the entire class system.

Against the cons of social mobility and meritocracy, we fight for equality. We fight for a society without classes.

IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2011

Ideas for Freedom is the annual weekend of socialist discussion and debate hosted by Workers' Liberty.

Friday 8-Sunday 10 July

Highgate Newtown Community Centre, Archway, North London

- Should we be saying "General strike now"? • The rise of the Egyptian working class
- Revolution in North Africa, with socialists from Morocco and Tunisia • The fight against cuts: where does Labour fit in? • Celebrating the Paris Commune
- Imperialism and Islamism a decade after 9/11 • Iraq 2003, fees and EMA 2010: school student activism then and now • Owen Jones on his book *Chavs: the demonisation of the working class* • Are socialists "multiculturalists"?
- The strengths and weaknesses of anarcho-syndicalism • 70 years since Virginia Woolf's death • Who was Rosa Luxemburg?
- The 1880s: the first British Marxists and the rise of the mass labour movement
- An alternative history of the Second World War

Includes a Saturday night social, free creche and accommodation and cheap food.

Tickets bought before the end of May are £18 waged, £10 low-waged/students, £6 unwaged/school students. Book online at www.workersliberty.org/ideas

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Can we build a revolutionary workers' movement?

In *Solidarity* 3/199, we printed an "open letter to a direct-action activist" as a contribution to the debate about actions which took place around the TUC-organised 26 March "March for the Alternative", and the relationship of those actions and the activists involved to the mass labour movement. Ira Berkovic continues that debate by examining arguments which come up in discussion among anti-capitalist activists about the mass labour movement and involvement in it.

Argument: trade unions are a spent force. They're half the size they were in the 1970s; most workers know little about trade unions, if they've even heard of them at all. By focusing your activism on the labour movement and rooting it in trade unions, you're cutting yourself off from the majority of working-class people.

It's true that trade unions have suffered historic defeats over the past generation which have diminished their size and power. The decisive defeat suffered in the mid-1980s, when Thatcher succeeded in defeating the miners' strike, broke the back of the labour movement. It has yet to recover. But why assume that defeat is permanent, and then abandon the political terrain of the labour movement to the sell-out bureaucrats who currently lead it?

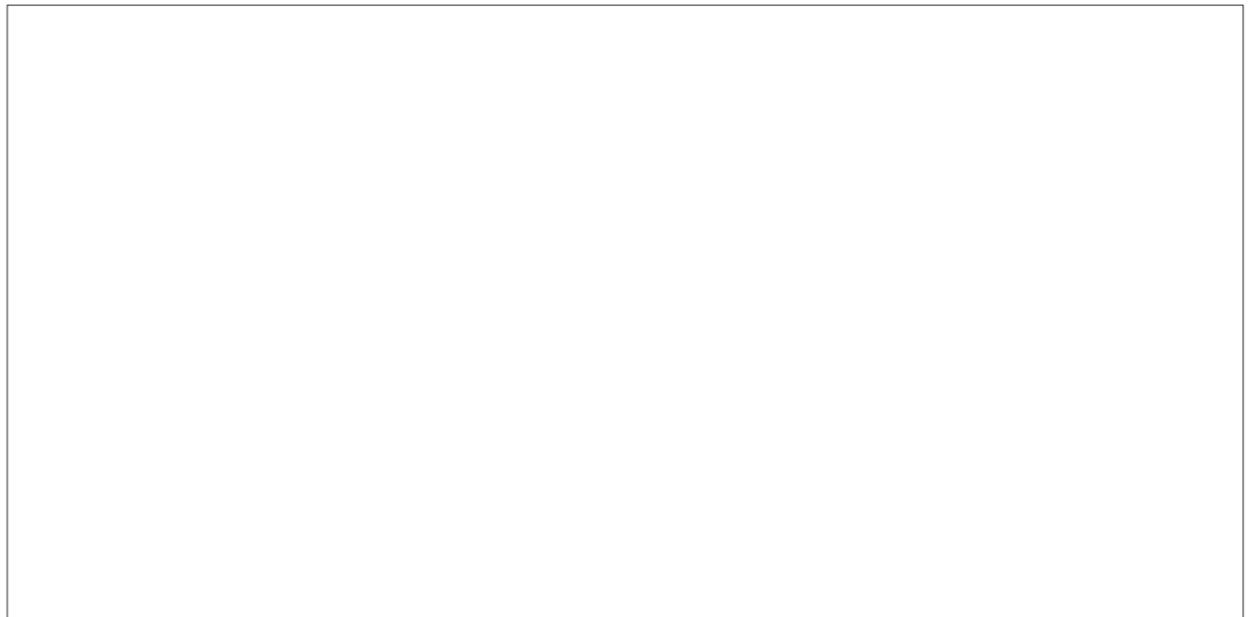
For us, rooting our activism in the trade union movement is not about whether the movement in a given period is stronger or weaker, or whether it has more or less members. Trade unions represent something unique and "special" as social and political forms under capitalism. They're not alien organisations implanted in society by some outside force; they are the basic self-defence organisations that workers have always created throughout the history of capitalism. They are an inevitable, organic product of class struggle. In some ways they are a concrete, organisational manifestation of that struggle. They organise workers, as workers, at the point of exploitation in workplaces.

That's not to say that class struggle only takes place at work, or that only currently-employed workers can participate in class struggle, or that capitalist society does not breed other oppressions (such as gender and racial oppression). But the nucleus of capitalism is the exploitation of wage-labour by bosses. Workplaces — and the self-created organisations which organically emerge in workplaces — are a key site for building and shaping anti-capitalist struggles.

The class-struggle experiences that we experience at work are different from our class-struggle experiences elsewhere. We can form tenants' associations or claimants' groups to fight class battles around issues like housing and welfare, but it's only at work that we're in a position to organise collectively with our fellow workers to not only disrupt but actually take control of production. Workplaces are capitalism's engine room, and that means the relationships which exist there and the organisations which emerge are particularly important.

We do not think that existing trade-union organisations are adequate in terms of revolutionary class struggle. We don't even think they're adequate for fighting for basic reforms within the framework of capitalism. Within our focus on the labour movement, we fight for very different forms of trade-union organisation — more democratic, more militant, more expansive. We also believe in the need for political organisations for revolutionary workers. But none of that can be built by "going around" the only movement in which workers are currently organised as workers and which still has between six and seven million members. As such it is the only real mass movement in British society.

Some comrades, including some anarchist comrades — those who believe in class politics and want to see a militant workers' movement — seem to want to build a revolutionary workers' movement from scratch. Perhaps they think that our approach of revolutionising the existing movement will take too long and is too hard. It will certainly take time, and it will certainly not be easy. But, compared to the goal of building a revolutionary workers' movement from scratch that "short-cuts" around the organisations, experiences, history and consciousness of the ex-



A labour movement campaign to fight the cuts is held back by the misleadership of the union bureaucrats. We cannot allow that to go unchallenged

isting mass labour movement, it is infinitely more possible as well as more necessary.

Trade unions are controlled at every level by the worst kind of sell-outs and bureaucrats. Reactionary attitudes about race, gender and sexuality are still rife within many trade unions and many trade union officials are more interested in maintaining their own position than helping their members organise. The so-called "political wing" of the labour movement, the Labour Party, is led by insipid careerists who'd make pretty much the same cuts the Tories are making.

All true. But if you want the situation to be different, how does it make sense to allow such people's control of the movement to continue unchallenged?

Again, the relatively better or worse politics of labour-movement leaders has never been the reason for working-class revolutionaries to focus their activism in the labour movement. It's because of the organic relationship of trade unions to the class struggle.

The history of the labour movement is full of examples of ordinary workers, trade union members, organising together to wrest control of their unions from bureaucrats and reactionaries in the most adverse conditions imaginable.

Rank-and-file networks like the US Teamsters for a Democratic Union even took on the power of organised crime to fight for greater militancy and member-leadership in their union. Democracy activists in the United Mine Workers of America had to contend with their candidate for the union presidency in 1969 being assassinated by the union's leadership.

Activists in Britain don't face similar dangers. What stands in our way is the inertia and demoralisation instilled in us by so many years of defeat. But small sparks can light big fires. Already, the student mobilisations of November-December 2010 have inspired significant numbers of workers. Many trade unionists are asking why there aren't activist networks within their movement capable of organising actions on a similar scale. That's a question that will bring them into conflict with their own leaderships and bureaucracies.

If the "direct-action activists" (for want of a better term) who currently don't see the labour movement as a focus for their activism and organising were to turn their energies towards building up grassroots networks inside and across trade unions that could challenge the power of the kind of people we heard speak on the Hyde Park platform of the "March for the Alternative", a world of possibilities opens up.

Sometimes, struggles to transform trade unions begin as seemingly small-scale battles over very day-to-day issues. The grassroots network that eventually took over and rev-

olutionised the New South Wales Builders' Labourers Federation in Australia in the 1970s first came together to campaign around basic health-and-safety issues on building sites. Workers developed skills and ideas by fighting on the "bread-and-butter" issues, and built up the confidence to then go after the bigger issues too — for example, they fought important environmental battles.

Trade unions only organise in particular workplaces. The most vulnerable and exploited members of the working class — migrant workers, precarious workers and workers employed by high-street corporations like McDonalds and Starbucks — are largely ignored by the trade unions or dismissed as "too hard" to organise.

It doesn't have to be like this. The history of the trade union movement internationally, both recent and more distant, proves it.

Britain's big general unions — GMB and Unite — trace their origins to the "New Unionism" of the late 19th century. These were a series of struggles, led mainly by revolutionary socialists, to organise workers such as dockers and gasworkers — the semi-skilled, precarious and often migrant workers frequently ignored by the old, conservative "craft" unions. New Unionism organised workers on a militant basis, in contrast to the conciliatory approach of the older craft unions, and won significant victories.

And more recently? In 2006, the small New Zealand union Unite launched a campaign to organise workers working for employers such as McDonalds, Pizza Hut, Starbucks and KFC. These workers were overwhelmingly young and had had little or no contact with trade unions before.

Unite organised on a democratic basis and took on the power of notoriously anti-union corporations that bigger, more established unions had been too timid and conservative to confront.

The Supersize My Pay campaign that Unite ran succeeded in securing the abolition of the discriminatory youth rates of the New Zealand minimum wage, amounting to a serious wage increase for thousands of workers.

The dynamism of the campaign also shook up the rest of the New Zealand labour movement. Unite was affiliated to the NZCTU (the New Zealand equivalent of the TUC) and saw itself as part of an attempt to radicalise trade-union politics across the country, not as a breakaway attempting to build an alternative movement outside of the existing one.

Although the experiences of New Unionism and Supersize My Pay are separated by history, geography and scale, they both prove that hyper-exploited workers can and do organise. The experiences of sweatshop workers from Haiti to Mexico to Indonesia who have taken on their bosses and won prove the same. The more activists believing in the pol-

itics and spirit of struggles like New Unionism and Supersize My Pay are active in the mainstream labour movement the greater the chance of building a New Unionism in 21st century Britain.

What New Unionism and Supersize My Pay also have in common is the central role of a dedicated core of revolutionary socialist activists. The role of Marxists such as Eleanor Marx, Tom Mann, Ben Tillett, Will Thorne and John Burns to New Unionism was crucial in the 1880s and 90s.

Supersize My Pay happened in part because a group of New Zealand socialists made a conscious decision to dedicate themselves to the work of building it.

The lesson for us today is twofold. First, it shows that political organisation is necessary to help clarify ideas, build bonds of solidarity between activists and help us educate and train each other. Second, it shows that a group of anti-capitalist revolutionaries who decide to commit to the long, hard struggle of transforming the labour movement can have an enormous impact.

You say strikes are a more effective form of direct action than taking action against banks or shops, but strikes rarely win anything. London Underground workers, supposedly the most powerful group of workers in the country, recently took four days of strike action against cuts and won absolutely nothing.

Strikes are rarely successful in Britain today because the unions — including the supposedly more militant ones led by non-revolutionary leftists and Stalinists — have developed a culture in which strikes are not really strikes, but incidental exercises in chest-beating; abstract expressions of protest and letting-off-steam.

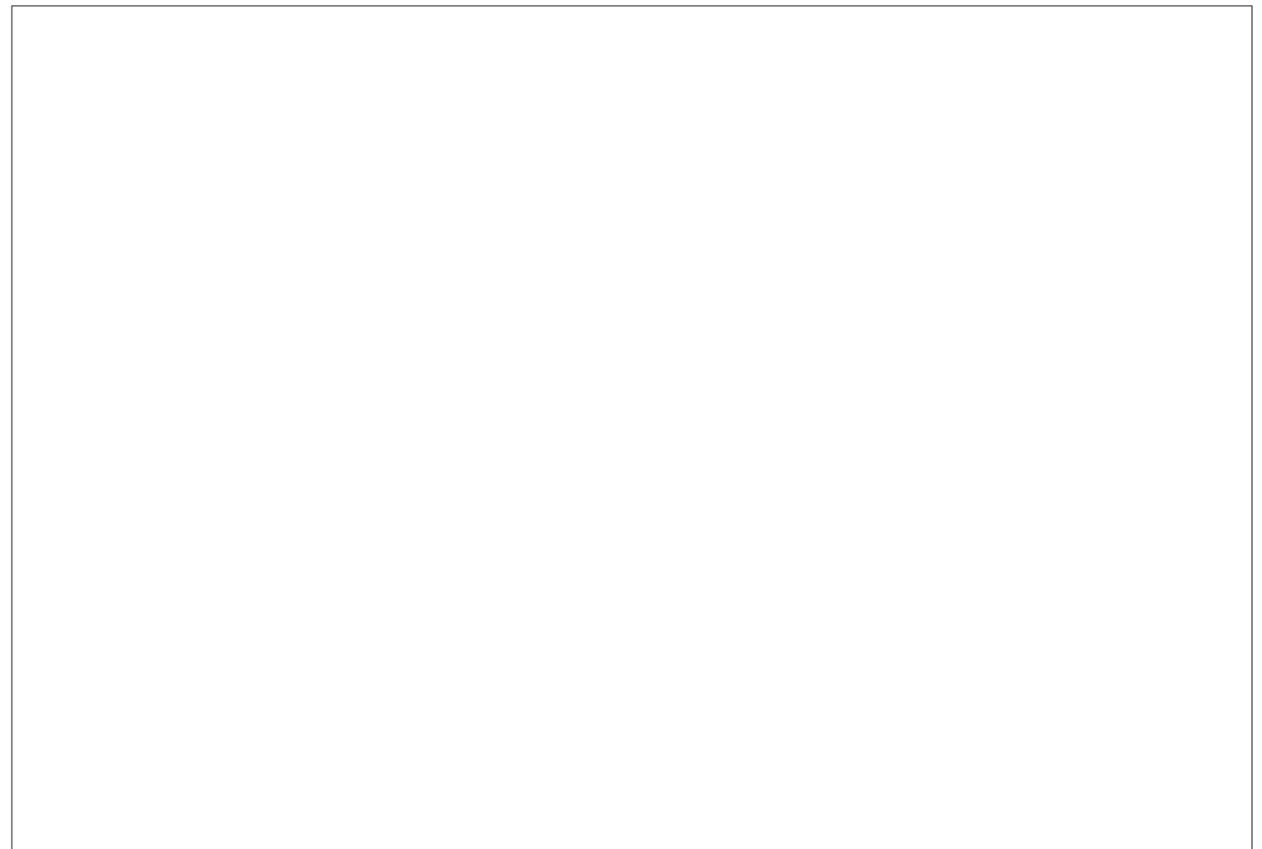
Even in the “militant unions” like the PCS and RMT, strikes usually happen for one day only and with little or no strategy for using workers’ industrial strength to force concessions from management. Picket lines don’t function as picket lines; in most places strike-breakers are allowed to walk past with little but a disapproving tut or two from their workmates.

That culture needs to change. But even despite this, it’s not true that strikes never win anything.

Where workers have taken higher-impact or escalated action recently, they have won victories. The indefinite strike at Tower Hamlets College in autumn 2009 was partially successful and the sit-down strikes (occupations) at Ford Vision and Vestas also secured some concessions.

The 2006 pensions dispute, the single-biggest piece of industrial action in the UK since the 1926 general strike, forced the government to change (partially) its plans for pension reforms. Looking abroad, the mass student-worker strike movement of 2006 in France forced Jacques Chirac to scrap his new labour law (the CPE) even after it had been passed by parliament.

All of these campaigns involved radical, imaginative and



1889 London dockworkers’ strike. A monumental struggle by the most precarious workers against their exploitation. Their creative processions went through the city of London so they could pass by all the institutions of wealth and power.

daring direct actions — but they were actions that were linked to, and carried out in solidarity with, workplace-based direct action taken by workers.

To imagine that, because most bosses and the state are capable of riding out the odd day or two of strike action, strikes are a less effective form of direct action than the actions we saw on the edges of the “March for the Alternative” is to miss the point about how capitalism functions. Our understanding about the fundamental mechanisms at the heart of capitalism has to be our guide.

What makes the capitalist class shift its perspective (to make concessions or to strike back at us) isn’t stopping the shopping at Fortnum & Mason or getting Philip Green to pay his taxes. What bothers capitalists most is workers withdrawing their labour power — when workers do it enough, and over a sustained period of time, it bothers capitalists a lot.

That is not to say that direct actions against Fortnum & Mason etc are illegitimate or pointless; far from it. But if our goal is disrupting and ultimately overthrowing capitalist class relations then our primary focus has to be on building the kind of direct action best placed to do that: strikes.

The mini-wave of 2009 has put radical industrial direct action such as indefinite strikes and workplace occupations back on the agenda for labour movement activists. These actions pose the question of power much more sharply than any number of paintbombs thrown at any number of banks.

Your task of revolutionising the existing labour movement could take generations. In unions like Unison, it’s incredibly difficult to get the bureaucracy to sanction strike ballots. We can’t wait that long; we need to take action that will make bosses and the state sit up and listen now. Passing radical motions in the odd union branch or Trades Council won’t make them do that, but radical direct action against the corporate property they care about might.

Yes, it might. And Workers’ Liberty has never said that direct action of that kind is illegitimate. Far from it. Our members support and have been involved in UK Uncut-type actions and our student members were at the forefront of the Millbank protests in November 2010.

There is not necessarily a counterposition between sometimes organising or being involved in actions of that kind and the longer-term project of revolutionising the existing labour movement. In fact, the two things can have a symbiotic relationship.

Millbank did have an impact on the political culture inside the trade union movement.

Every picket line that took place in the aftermath of the student movement was full of conversations about what the students had done and whether the trade unions could ever do something similar.

The debate is about where our activism should be fundamentally rooted and what we see as the means which can achieve our ends. If our end goal is working-class self-emancipation, then our focus must necessarily be on helping our class organise. For that, there can be no shortcut around the

existing organisations organically and inevitably generated by class struggle. Focusing elsewhere may be easier. It may be more exhilarating. In the short-term it may have more impact. But it will not — it cannot — serve the goal of working-class self-emancipation in anything other than a limited and symbolic way.

In part, it comes down to a question of whether we simply want to give the capitalists — or rather, some capitalists — a bloody nose from time to time or whether we want to overthrow and replace their entire system. That latter goal cannot be achieved merely by an accumulation of spectacular, symbolic acts. It is a lengthy process, and one which will involve going through, and learning from, the experience of losing before we eventually win. As the American socialist Hal Draper, quoting Rosa Luxemburg, put it, “the socialist revolution is necessarily a continuous series of defeats, followed by only one victory.” If we are serious revolutionaries we should commit to going through those experiences, learning political lessons from those experiences, as part of our class, for as long as it takes.

We believe that many of the activists who are ostensibly on the “other side” of this debate from us are probably much closer to us politically than most of the self-proclaimed “Trotskyist” left with whom we notionally share a tradition. That is why we want to understand and engage with the reasons why so many young activists do not see the labour movement as a necessary political focus. We believe that if we can combine the energy, dynamism, innovation and indeed the militant anger represented by the best of the “direct-action” movement with a consistent focus on working-class organising and a long-term struggle to revolutionise the labour movement, then something like New Unionism becomes possible again.

The New South Wales BLF becomes possible again. The CPE movement becomes possible again. Supersize My Pay becomes possible again. And, ultimately, working-class revolution becomes possible again.

Some reading

New Unionism: “The birth of the new unions”, from *Solidarity* 3/116 – tinyurl.com/newunionism

Teamsters for a Democratic Union: “TDU history”, from *TDU* – tinyurl.com/tduhistory

Trade union democracy: “How to fight for trade union democracy”, from *Solidarity* 3/180 – tinyurl.com/tudemocracy

New South Wales Builders’ Labourers Federation: “Lessons from the past: the New South Wales Builders’ Labourers Federation”, from *Workers’ Climate Action* – tinyurl.com/blfbriefing

Supersize My Pay: “We can cause the bosses some mayhem”, from *Solidarity* 3/131 – tinyurl.com/supersizeinterview

Direct action stunts have their place, but what do they help us build in the long run?

The Dublin Labour War

By Sean Matgamna

When Margaret Thatcher's Tories outlawed "secondary" or solidarity strikes, they knew what they were doing.

The solidarity strike had defeated the ruling class again and again throughout the 1960s and 70s.

When they come out in sympathetic strike, workers act on behalf of interests not directly or narrowly their own. This is class action far more advanced than mere sectional trade-union action. Implicitly, and sometimes openly, it challenges capitalist rule in society.

That is why the Tories, the Labour leaders and most trade union officials hate the idea of the sympathetic strike. They would like to banish both the idea and the memory of it to a museum of labour history.

British workers now face a many-pronged assault by the bosses and their Tory-Lib Dem government. A drive to radically reorganise welfare benefits, to privatise the NHS, cuts that drive workers out of employment, perhaps new anti-trade union legislation. If we don't fight back, we will be stream-rollered.

The trade unions must be prepared for a full-scale fight-back. An irreplaceable part in this work is the spreading of knowledge of the experience of past struggles, knowledge of what the working class has been through and has done and what, if we mobilise and fight, we can hope to do now.

For these reasons in the next three issues of *Solidarity* we

will publish articles by James Connolly. Connolly was one of the best ever propagandists for the solidarity strike, bringing to that work personal experience of labour struggles in Britain, the USA and Ireland.

More than that, these articles were written as part of the greatest working-class struggles in western Europe in the 20th century — the Dublin Labour War of 1913-14 in which Connolly was a central leader. The struggle impressed socialists all over the world, as the article by Lenin (below) indicates.

Connolly's brilliant articles following the strike were weapons in that struggle, explaining, rousing and heartening the workers and putting things in the perspective of a historic class struggle.

James Connolly was the chief lieutenant of Jim Larkin, the founder of the modern Irish labour movement, leader of the workers during 1913 and General Secretary of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. That union became the Irish expression of the great wave of working-class militancy which struck the "UK" in the years before the First World War.

Jim Larkin set up the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in 1908 after the leaders of a British-based union (the ancestors of today's Unite union) for which he was an organiser sold out the strike he was leading in Belfast.

In the next few years he organised the "unskilled" workers — the coal heavers, dockers, carters, drivers — of Dublin, thereby creating a new Irish labour movement

based on "general", "unskilled" workers.

Until then unions in Ireland had mainly been small, old-fashioned, skilled craft societies. Larkin was doing in Ireland what had been done in Britain at the time of the "matchgirls" strike and the great London dock strike of 1889, out of which had come Britain's general unions — a movement known as "New Unionism".

Using the solidarity strike ruthlessly, Larkin got the bosses on the run and created a new spirit of self-respect and self-reliance in the Dublin working class. No trade, no group of workers was left to fight alone. The weight of the whole union was brought into play on their behalf where necessary. Labour in Dublin was no longer a driven rabble but a movement conscious of itself as a class.

The bosses fought back. They organised a Federation that pledged to "destroy Larkin". They put money into a common war chest which an individual employer would forfeit if he made peace. Then they gave the workers an ultimatum: leave "Larkin's union"; have nothing to do with the ITGWU; pledge yourself never to join it. The alternative? You will be sacked.

But the workers had felt their strength: everywhere they chose to be locked out, facing starvation rather than surrender.

It was open war. In the course of the labour war, three workers were beaten to death by the police and one, a young woman, Alice Brady, was shot dead in the streets by an imported scab.

Lenin: "a new spirit in the unions"

In Dublin, the capital of Ireland — a city of a not highly industrial type, with a population of half a million — the class struggle, which permeates the whole life of capitalist society everywhere, has become accentuated to the point of class war.

The police have positively gone wild; drunken policemen assault peaceful workers, break into houses, torment the aged, women and children. Hundreds of workers (over 400) have been injured and two killed — such are the casualties of this war. All prominent workers' leaders have been arrested. People are thrown into prison for making the most peaceful speeches. The city is like an armed camp.

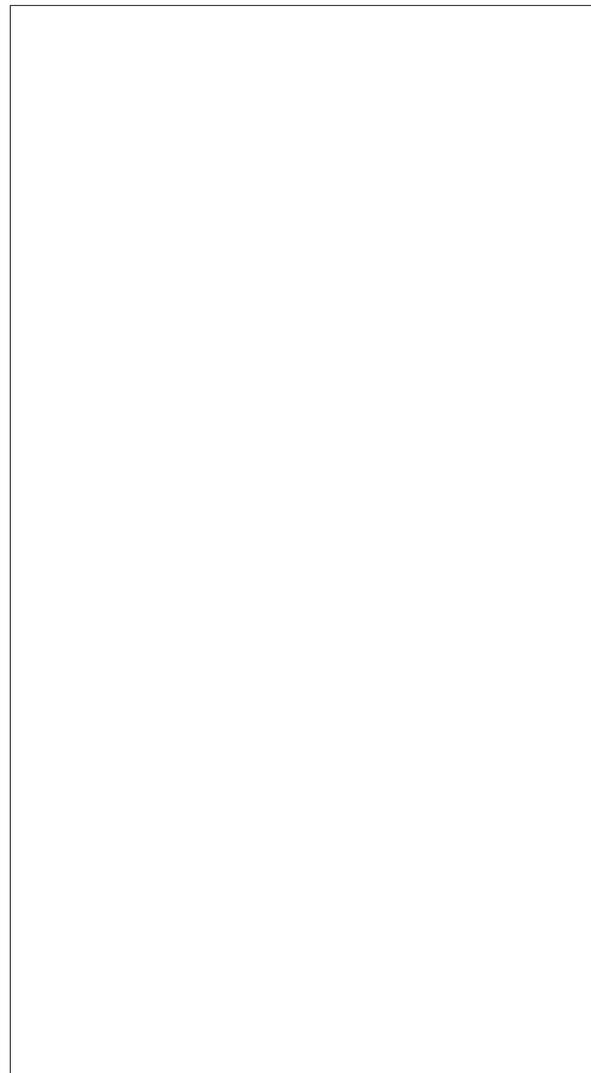
Ireland is something of a British Poland... National oppression and Catholic reaction have turned the proletarians of this unhappy country into paupers, the peasants into toil-worn, ignorant and dull slaves of the priesthood, and the bourgeoisie into a phalanx, masked by nationalist phrases, of capitalists, of despots over the workers; finally, the administration has been turned into a gang accustomed to every kind of violence.

At the present moment the Irish nationalists (i.e., the Irish bourgeoisie) are the victors. They are buying up the lands of the English landlords; they are getting national self-government (the famous Home Rule for which such a long and stubborn struggle has been going on between Ireland and England); they will freely govern "their own" country jointly with "their own" Irish priests.

Well, this Irish nationalist bourgeoisie is celebrating its "national" victory, its maturity in "affairs of state" by declaring a war to the death on the Irish labour movement.

The unions have begun to develop magnificently. The Irish proletariat, awakening to class-consciousness, is pressing the Irish bourgeois scoundrels engaged in celebrating their "national" victory. It has found a talented leader in the person of Comrade Larkin, Secretary of the Irish Transport Workers' Union. Larkin is a remarkable speaker, a man of seething Irish energy, who has performed miracles among the unskilled workers — that mass of the British proletariat which in Britain is so often cut off from the advanced workers by the cursed petty-bourgeois, liberal, aristocratic spirit of the British skilled worker.

A new spirit has been aroused in the Irish workers' unions. The unskilled workers have brought unparalleled animation into the trade unions. Even the women have begun to organise — a thing hitherto unknown in Catholic Ireland. So far as organisation of the workers is concerned Dublin looks like becoming one of the foremost towns in the whole of Great Britain. The country that used to be typified by the fat, well-fed Catholic priest and the poor, starving, ragged worker who wore his rags even on Sunday because he could not afford Sunday clothes, that country, though it



Poverty in Dublin in 1913

bears a double and triple national yoke, has begun to turn into a country with an organised army of the proletariat.

Murphy [the bosses' leader] proclaimed a crusade of the bourgeoisie against Larkin and "Larkinism". To begin with, 200 tramwaymen were dismissed in order to provoke a strike during the exhibition and embitter the whole strug-

gle. The Transport Workers' Union declared a strike and demanded the reinstatement of the discharged men. Murphy engineered lock-outs. The workers retaliated by downing tools. War raged all along the line. Passions flared up.

Larkin [...] delivered fiery speeches at meetings. In these speeches he pointed out that the party of the English bourgeois enemies of Irish Home Rule was openly calling for resistance to the government, was threatening revolution, was organising armed resistance to Home Rule and with absolute impunity was flooding the country with revolutionary appeals.

[...] Larkin was arrested. A meeting called by the workers was banned.

Ireland, however, is not Russia. The attempt to suppress the right of assembly evoked a storm of indignation. Larkin had to be tried. At the trial Larkin became the accuser and, in effect, put Murphy in the dock. By cross-questioning witnesses Larkin proved that Murphy had had long conversations with the Lord-Lieutenant on the eve of his, Larkin's, arrest. Larkin declared the police to be in Murphy's pay, and no one dared gainsay him.

Larkin was released on bail (political liberty cannot be abolished at one stroke). Larkin declared that he would appear at a meeting no matter what happened. And indeed, he came to one disguised, and began to speak to the crowd. The police recognised him, seized him and beat him up. For two days the dictatorship of the police truncheon raged, crowds were clubbed, women and children were brutally treated. The police broke into workers' homes. A worker named Nolan, a member of the Transport Workers' Union, was beaten to death. Another died of injuries.

On Thursday 4 September Nolan's funeral took place. The proletariat of Dublin followed in a procession 50,000 strong behind the body of their comrade. The police brutes lay low, not daring to annoy the crowd, and exemplary order prevailed...

The Dublin events mark a turning-point in the history of the labour movement and of socialism in Ireland. Murphy has threatened to destroy the Irish trade unions. He has succeeded only in destroying the last remnants of the influence of the Irish nationalist bourgeoisie over the Irish proletariat. He has helped to steel the independent revolutionary working-class movement in Ireland, which is free of nationalist prejudices.

VI Lenin, September 1913

Police attack workers on “Bloody Sunday”

On the eve of the lock-out

By James Connolly

Perhaps before this issue of *The Irish Worker* is in the hands of its readers the issues now at stake in Dublin will be brought to a final determination. All the capitalist newspapers of Friday last join in urging, or giving favourable publicity to the views of others urging the employers of Dublin to join in a general lock-out of the members of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union.

It is as well. Possibly some such act is necessary in order to make that portion of the working class which still halts undecided to understand dearly what it is that lies behind the tyrannical and brow-beating attitude of the proprietors of the Dublin tramway system.

The fault of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union! What is it? Let us tell it in plain language.

Its fault is this, that it found the labourers of Ireland on their knees, and has striven to raise them to the erect position of manhood; it found them with all the vices of slavery in their souls, and it strove to eradicate these vices and replace them with some of the virtues of free men; it found them with no other weapons of defence than the arts of the liar, the lickspittle, and the toady, and it combined them and taught them to abhor those arts and rely proudly on the defensive power of combination; it, in short, found a class in whom seven centuries of social outlawry had added fresh degradations upon the burden it bore as the members of a nation suffering from the cumulative effects of seven centuries of national bondage, and out of this class, the degraded slaves of slaves more degraded still — for what degradation is more abysmal than that of those who prostitute their manhood on the altar of profit-mongering?

Out of this class of slaves the labourers of Dublin, the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union has created an army of intelligent self-reliant men, abhorring the old arts of the toady, the lickspittle, and the crawler and trusting alone to the disciplined use of their power to labour or to withdraw their labour to assert and maintain their right as men.

To put it in other words, but words as pregnant with truth and meaning: the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union found that before its advent the working class of Dublin had been taught by all the educational agencies of the country, by all the social influences of their masters, that this world was created for the special benefit of the various sections of the master class, that kings and lords and capitalists were of value; that even flunkeys, toadies, lickspittle and poodle dogs had an honoured place in the scheme of the universe, but that there was neither honour, credit, nor consideration to the man or woman who toils to maintain them all.

Against all this the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union has taught that they who toil are the only ones that do matter, that all others are but beggars upon the bounty of those who work with hand or brain, and that this superiority of social value can at any time be realised, be translated into actual fact, by the combination of the labouring class. Preaching, organising, and fighting upon this basis, the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union has done what?

If the value of a city is to be found in the development of

self-respect and high conception of social responsibilities among a people, then the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union found Dublin the poorest city in these countries by reason of its lack of these qualities.

And by imbuing the workers with them, it has made Dublin the richest city in Europe today, rich by all that counts for greatness in the history of nations. It is then upon this working class so enslaved, this working class so led and so enriched with moral purposes and high aims that the employers propose to make general war.

Shall we shrink from it; cower before their onset? A thousand times no! Shall we crawl back into our slums, abase our hearts, bow our knees, and crawl once more to lick the hand that would smite us? Shall we, who have been carving out for our children a brighter future, a cleaner city, a freer life, consent to betray them instead into the grasp of the blood-suckers from whom we have dreamt of escaping? No, no, and yet again no!

Let them declare their lock-out; it will only hasten the day when the working class will lock-out the capitalist class for good and all. If for taking the side of the Tram men we are threatened with suffering, why we have suffered before. But let them understand well that once they start that ball rolling no capitalist power on earth can prevent it continuing to roll, that every day will add to the impetus it will give to the working class purpose, to the thousands it will bring to the working class ranks and every added suffering inflicted upon the workers will be a fresh obstacle in the way of moderation when the day of final settlement arrives.

Yes, indeed, if it is going to be a wedding, let it be a wedding; and if it is going to be a wake, let it be a wake: we are ready for either.

From Irish Worker, August 30, 1913

Larkin draws a crowd

Who’s who

Jim Larkin

A Liverpool Irishman, Larkin was a foreman on the docks there until he sided with his men in strike and was sacked.

He became an organiser for the National Dock Labourers Union (which merged with other unions to form today’s GMB) in Belfast.

There, in 1902, he succeeded for a while in uniting Catholic and Protestant workers in a struggle on the docks. Later, there was a spectacular dispute during which even the Belfast police went on strike!

Union leader James Sexton, who would become a Labour MP and end his days as “Sir James”, sold out the Belfast workers. Strike pay was stopped and a demoralising deal made over Larkin’s head.

Larkin broke away from Sexton’s union and started the Irish Transport and General Workers Union.

In 1914 Larkin went to the USA where eventually he was jailed in the anti-red witch hunt, returning to Ireland in 1923 and joining the Communist International. He fought the bureaucracy of the Irish labour movement.

In the Stalinist ultra-left period he drifted away from the “communist” movement. Living through the decades of clerical reaction in Ireland, he never repudiated the communism of the Russian Revolution.

When he died in 1947 many tens of thousands of Dublin workers braved the sub-zero temperature to mourn at his funeral.

James Connolly

James Connolly, the son of Irish immigrants, was born in the Irish ghetto in Edinburgh in 1868. He left school at 10 and joined the army at 14.

Back in Edinburgh, he married and, with a job as a dustman collecting “night soil”, stood as a socialist candidate in a local election, losing his job for doing it. Although, like Larkin, he never ceased to be a Catholic, he was both a radical Marxist and a Fenian Irish Republican.

In 1896, he went to Dublin and founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party. He adhered to the “De Leonites” a group of Marxists centred mainly in the United States who made the sort of criticisms of the official socialist movement Lenin would make over 10 years later, when that movement collapsed.

Between 1903-10 Connolly was in the USA where he fell out with De Leon and was an organiser for the Industrial Workers of the World. He returned to Ireland in 1910 and became an organiser for the ITGWU in Belfast. He led the “Citizen Army” into the 1916 Rising in Dublin and was badly wounded. He was shot — strapped in a chair — on 12 May 1916.

Songs of Liberty & Rebellion

We Only Want the Earth

By James Connolly. From *Songs of Freedom, 1907*

Some men, faint-hearted, ever seek
Our programme to retouch,
And will insist, whene'er they speak
That we demand too much.
'Tis passing strange, yet I declare
Such statements give me mirth,
For our demands most moderate are,
We only want the earth.

"Be moderate," the trimmers cry,
Who dread the tyrants' thunder.
"You ask too much and people fly
From you aghast in wonder."
'Tis passing strange, for I declare
Such statements give me mirth,
For our demands most moderate are,
We only want the earth.

Our masters all a godly crew,
Whose hearts throb for the poor,
Their sympathies assure us, too,
If our demands were fewer.
Most generous souls! But please observe,
What they enjoy from birth
Is all we ever had the nerve
To ask, that is, the earth.

The "labour fakir" full of guile,
Base doctrine ever preaches,
And whilst he bleeds the rank and file
Tame moderation teaches.
Yet, in despite, we'll see the day
When, with sword in its girth,
Labour shall march in war array
To realize its own, the earth.

For labour long, with sighs and tears,
To its oppressors knelt.
But never yet, to aught save fears,
Did the heart of tyrant melt.
We need not kneel, our cause no dearth
Of loyal soldiers' needs
And our victorious rallying cry
Shall be we want the earth!

The left and Libya

Left

By Ira Berkovic

A statement about Libya has appeared on the website of Unite, declaring itself simply to be a "Unite statement" without any indication of what committee of the union it was endorsed by. It seems to have been presented to the national executive as a ready-made "take it or leave it" statement. Its line is "end the intervention now!"

Amongst other spurious reasons, the statement cites the opposition of China and Russia as reasons for straightforwardly campaigning against the intervention — as if the position of these gangster-capitalist, totalitarian states was any kind of benchmark for the trade union movement.

The statement says that the union "holds no brief for Colonel Gaddafi [sic]" and that it "supports the movements for democracy and freedom now developing across the Arab world", but that's as close as it gets to actually supporting the Libyan rebellion or acknowledging that there is any dynamic at work here other than the western intervention.

Could it be that, rather than reflecting a cavalier lack of concern for the fate of the Libyan rebellion amongst the membership of Britain's biggest union, the statement is more a reflection of the politics of Andrew Murray — Stop the War's head-honcho, Unite's national communications and press officer and former employee of Stalinist state news agency Novosti?

Murray is a straight-down-the-line Stalinist Cold Warrior; now that his beloved Eastern Bloc is no more, he has replaced it in his world schema with an abstract "anti-imperialism", which Qaddafi presumably represents on some level. Whatever they think about the situation, Unite members should ask why their union is putting out seemingly unilateral statements on major international issues.

SWP

To be fair to Murray, though, he is an out-and-out Stalinist who has never pretended to be otherwise. The politics in Unite's statement are consistent with his tradition. More galling is the recent article from Alex Callinicos, one of Britain's most prominent "Trotskyist" "intellectuals" (it's hard to decide to which word Callinicos has less claim).

Structured as a reply to Gilbert Achcar (who, while frequently politically muddleheaded himself, has a far greater claim to both terms and whose position on Libya is closer to that argued by this paper), Callinicos explains that socialists simply have no choice but to oppose the intervention because the people carrying it out are imperialists and a lot of the people who support it are right-wingers. And that's that.

He does not deal with the substantive argument of revolutionaries like Achcar and many others on the left — that,

whatever the motives and intentions of the imperialists, the intervention had the concrete effect of preventing the massacre of the anti-Qaddafi rebellion, an outcome that outweighs other concerns in this situation.

Callinicos does approach this argument in his final paragraph, but it is with the most breathtaking callousness. "There is the final argument," Callinicos says, "that intervention prevented a massacre in Benghazi." Is this argument correct? No says, Callinicos: "the sad fact is that massacres are a chronic feature of capitalism", and "the revolutionary left is, alas, too weak to stop them."

Words fail us. He might as well say "brutal exploitation is a chronic feature of capitalism, the revolutionary left is too weak to stop it, so what's the point in going on strike?" These words by Trotsky could have been written for Professor Callinicos: "An individual, a group, a party, or a class that 'objectively' picks its nose while it watches men drunk with blood massacring defenceless people is condemned by history to rot and become worm-eaten while it is still alive."

GREEMAN

Fortunately not everyone on the international left is quite as bad as this. The debate has been much more open and rational than previous debate on imperialism and voices like Achcar's have added a dose of sanity. The American Marxist Richard Greeman, now based in France, has also provided a thoughtful contribution.

"The alternative to this intervention", Greeman writes, would have been a bloody massacre of the democratic forces by a horrific dictatorship — one that the same imperialists supported with money and arms up until yesterday. I also recognise that the Libyan democratic forces have asked for this intervention — while excluding any Iraq-style on-the-ground NATO invasion.

"So — like many of my Arab friends here in France — I am not signing on to the petty-bourgeois left's one-sided 'stop the bombing' campaign, which distorts reality in favour of 'anti-imperialist' ideology and objectively supports the maniacal Qaddafi's murderous campaign against his own people [...]"

"During most of my life-time the 'left' and much of the peace movement supported totalitarian Communist regimes and parties as 'anti-imperialist', and now it is objectively supporting that great 'anti-imperialist' Qaddafi! When will some people learn that the enemies of our enemies are not necessarily our friends?"

"It is all too easy to soothe the liberal conscience by being *against* — for example against the US government, which I agree is always motivated by power and greed. Much more complicated to say what you're *for* and to develop links of solidarity with people in struggle, like the women and workers' movements US-occupied Afghanistan and Iraq as well as in the newly vibrant Arab world. Radical posturing may feel good, but what is needed is ongoing solidarity with people in struggle — the long haul — which is not so easy. For those who wish to join the popular resistance, I recommend becoming part of US Labour Against the War which gives direct support to the struggle for labour and women's rights in the Middle East."

• The full article can be read at bit.ly/hdeNa9

Libyan connections

By James Bloodworth

According to the *Guardian*, Mutassim Qaddafi (son of Muammar), who has been described as a "war criminal" by Libyan anti-government protesters, was given private lessons at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in the summer of 2006.

This is one of many sordid revelations that have come to light about British universities and their relationship with Colonel Muammar Qaddafi's dictatorship.

Many universities not only profited from ties with the Libyan regime, but actively trained people earmarked for roles in Gaddafi's feared security network.

Sir Howard Davies, director of the London School of Economics, resigned several weeks ago after it was found he had accepted a £1.5 million donation from the "Qaddafi Foundation", the charity run by Colonel Qaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam Qaddafi.

The cuts in funding British universities currently face make wealthy patrons like the Qaddafi family highly attractive propositions. Raheem Kassam, director of the group Student Rights, said: "LSE has the most market-driven fundraising model there is in the UK. Has that model reduced them into a simple gun for hire?"

The relationship between Libya and British universities

could be said to mirror the amicable ties that developed in recent years between the Libyan regime and the British establishment. Not only did Tony Blair famously hug the Colonel, but British arms flowed freely to the country and British companies were up to their necks in Libyan oil money — while the Libyan people continued to languish under terror and dictatorship.

Sue Yates, then SOAS's director of business development, described Mutassim Qaddafi as a "young man [who] was just there for four weeks maximum... This is not unusual at all for members of prominent families. It was special tuition for someone from a high profile background."

There is of course a long and deplorable history of dictators sending their children abroad to get the privileged education denied to the people of their own countries. Those allowed by the Libyan government to study in Britain were themselves carefully hand-picked by the regime.

After 41 years in charge of a regime that brought down an American passenger plane, pitilessly exterminated many political opponents, expelled tens of thousands of Palestinians from the country for being insufficiently willing to immolate themselves for the cause, as well as plundered the Libyan economy for the benefit of Western corporations, to define the Gaddafi regime as "suitable patrons" for British universities is to leave many in the British establishment up to their necks in shame.

Egyptian workers: hungry for change

Army to break strikes?

By Stewart Ward

The British state is preparing to mobilise the army to break a prison officers' strike if they take action against the privatisation of Birmingham Prison.

Commenting on the proposed privatisation, Prison Officers' Association (POA) leader Steve Gillan said: "This is a disgraceful decision. Prisons should not be run for the benefit of shareholders nor for profit. The state has a duty to those imprisoned by the criminal justice system and this coalition government have betrayed loyal public sector workers for their friends in the private sector."

The government has awarded the contract to run the jail to private security firm G4S. The move was part of a "competition" in which companies bid to run one of four prisons put out to tender. Of the three other prisons, Northampton was withdrawn, Buckley Hall in Rochdale will remain under state control

Private companies like G4S could soon be running all jails

and Doncaster will be run on a performance-related-pay basis by Serco.

G4S is the world's largest security company and one of the largest private sector employers in the world (secondly only to retail giant Wal-Mart). It was recently implicated in the murder of asylum seeker Jimmy Mbuenga and is routinely accused of workers' rights abuses.

Serco has also come under attack by workers' organisations; in its capacity as the operator of the Docklands Light Railway it recently had a court injunction against an RMT strike overturned.

Prison privatisation can only be bad news for in-

mates. Any attempt to win prison reform or abolition, to move away from a system of state punishment based on retribution and detention, will be set back by private ownership of prisons and operation for profit.

Whatever misgivings we might have about the potential role of prison officers as police or army-type state instruments, the privatisation of prisons will mean worse conditions. And if troops are mobilised to break a POA strike that will set a dangerous precedent with implications for all of us.

The privatisation of prisons must be reversed and resisted.

Unison leaders betray pensions fight

By a delegate

The standing orders committee (at Unison Health Conference, in session as we go to press) agreed under pressure to allow a motion on the attacks on pensions onto the conference agenda.

We will be debating a motion submitted by Service Group Executive and Scottish Region on Wednesday 6 April. However at least one motion with a clear call for action has still been ruled out. Now conference will not be able to have a debate about how to defeat the biggest ever attack on our pensions.

Unison have been extremely slow to react to these attacks. One can only conclude that the leadership do not want to fight at all.

The government announced the contributions increases in the Comprehensive Spending Review way back in June 2010. De-

spite saying this was Unison's number one priority before the conference, union officials argued that the union should not pre-empt negotiations with the government!

With no decision at this conference there is little chance of us joining the teaching union, the NUT, and other public sector workers taking action in June. This is a dreadful betrayal of hundreds of thousands of health workers and our brothers and sisters facing all kinds of attacks in the public sector.

Where do we go from here? We need to explain the need for action and push motions through branches and regions with a clear strategy and timetable for ballot and action so that it can be discussed at the next SGE in July.

In the meantime we should be building the campaign amongst our members and ensuring our membership records are ready for a ballot.

Demand an enquiry into Smiley Culture's death: demonstrate on Saturday April 16. Assemble from 12 at the Southbank Club, 124-130 Wandsworth Road, SW8 2DL. More info: on.fb.me/hCa30o

In brief

BARNET

Refuse workers in one of the Tory's flagship councils may ballot for strike action against their employer, recycling contractor May Gurney.

The workers have had their pay frozen since 2007 and submitted a claim for an increase to the London Living Wage around Christmas 2010. GMB organiser Keith Williams said "I am seeking permission for an official strike ballot for these members who have seen inflation increase by 13.9% since their last pay rise. The rise in VAT, fuel charges and the general increase in the cost of living means that these GMB members are struggling to keep their heads above water."

May Gurney is operating under a five-year contract from the borough of Barnet. Its hyper-exploitation of its employees is typical for private contractors operating in the public sector. This is the model the Tory government wants to see become the general rule.

NEWCASTLE COLLEGE
82% of voting members of the University and College Union (UCU) at Newcastle College have voted to take strike action. Workers will strike on April 12, against bosses' plans to make more than 170 job cuts, of which 75% are teaching posts.

In a local economy still beset by unemployment, cuts of this scale at a large and significant local employer would have an extremely damaging impact.

UCU official Iain Owens said "UCU members here at Newcastle College have made it crystal clear that they will fight these proposals. If these plans go ahead, they will have a devastating effect on the local community. We need teachers teaching people not on the dole queue."

LONDON UNDERGROUND

The RMT has begun its ballot of all driver members on London Underground as part of a long-running campaign to win reinstatement for Arwyn Thomas and Eamonn Lynch, two trade union reps victimised and dismissed for their activity.

Both men have won Interim Relief Tribunals, showing the legal flimsiness of the bosses' case. Drivers on their lines, Bak-erloo and Northern respectively, have already taken strike action but it was widely felt that the dispute needed to be generalised to be successful. The ballot will close on April 27. See rmtlondoncalling.org.uk for more.

Militant mood in Tower Hamlets strike

By Darren Bedford

Thousands of striking workers marched and rallied in Tower Hamlets as members of NUT and Unison took action together as part of a strike against the council's budget cuts that will make hundreds jobless.

Countless schools and local government workplaces across the borough were closed for the day. Others had their functioning severely reduced, and most big workplaces had lively, well-attended and high-spirited picket lines. Pickets at the Phoenix and Central Foundation Girls' Schools turned their section of Mile End Road into a miniature carnival for several hours in the morning, keeping up a constant stream of noise, which was added to by incessant horn-hooting from supportive drivers-by — in cars, buses and lorries.

Many Tower Hamlets pickets took the radical step of actually trying to function as picket lines and disrupt the functioning of the workplace, including by arguing with scabs and attempting to turn them away. Although some non-union workers

(and a small number of union members) cross the picket line at Central Foundation, some were persuaded to turn away.

MARCH

A march which began at Weavers Fields in Bethnal Green heard speeches from local activists before setting off on a route that took it to Tower Hamlet's border with the city of London, where some of the worst poverty in the entire country sits side-by-side with some of the most obscene wealth. It mobilised around 2,000 strikers and supporters.

There had been a controversy about the location of the rally, which took place at the London Muslim Centre (attached to the East London Mosque). Some activists were worried that holding the rally in the LMC would be seen as an endorsement of the mosque's right-wing leadership as against the secularist-democratic elements within East London's Muslim communities. That debate will undoubtedly continue in the local working-class anti-cuts campaign (and rightly so), but on the day strike rally it-

self — and not the debate over its location — that was the focus.

In introducing the rally, Laura Rogers (the president of the East London Teachers' Association) situated modern-day working-class militancy in Tower Hamlets within the historical traditions of the borough, mentioning the Bryant & May strike, the Poplar rates rebellion and the Battle of Cable Street.

The spirit of the Poplar rates rebellion is currently casting a long shadow over working-class politics in the borough, at least in negative.

The Labour-independent leadership of the council (backed up by the alleged leftists of Respect) are acquiescing completely to Tory cuts, passing on a cuts budget rather than standing up and fighting back as Poplar did.

Unfortunately, the Socialist Workers' Party and their allies — who hold some important positions in the local labour movement — are desperate to let them off the hook. The SWP's John McCloughlin told the rally from the platform that Tower Hamlet's wealthy, possibly-corrupt and cuts-happy mayor Lutfur Rahman was "a

good and honest man" who "genuinely didn't want to make cuts".

VOTE

Although reports that Tower Hamlets workers have "thrown their weight behind calls for a general strike" are unfortunately exaggerated, there is certainly a mood for further action.

Mark Serwotka's calls for immediate coordinated strike action on public sector pensions received very widespread applause. Whatever criticisms we might make of the demagoguery and hypocrisy of a bureaucrat like Serwotka, who takes home a fat pay-cheque and whose actions rarely match his words, his call should surely be a focus. Immediate coordinated strike action around an issue like pensions is the first building block in the struggle to create conditions in which a general strike might become possible.

When an impromptu indicative vote on who would be prepared to strike again as part of coordinated action over pensions, nearly every hand went up.

Meanwhile, hundreds of

striking workers and their supporters marched in Camden as NUT members struck alongside Tower Hamlets. Massive proportions of teachers joined in the action, with up to 80% taking part at schools like Primrose Hill primary school.

The majority of comprehensives in the borough were shut, and local NUT secretary Andrew Baisely said that the support for the march and rally showed that parents were "overwhelmingly" on the side of the strike.

The Tower Hamlets and Camden strikes give us a glimmer of what might be possible if socialists and other grassroots militants can force their union leaders to act. This was only two unions taking action for just one day in just two boroughs, but it has given workers there a taste of their potential power.

If the buoyancy and confidence of the Tower Hamlets strike can be extended and turned into a struggle for more action inside Unison and the NUT, we can hope to see more workers on strike for longer in a greater number of places in the very near future.

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Libya: from revolution to reform?

By Martyn Hudson

Political and military developments in Libya have continued to move at a significant pace over the last few days.

The initially successful rebel onslaught against Qadaffi forces in mid-Libya seemed to promise a decisive attack on the strongholds of Tripolitania and relief to rebel-held Misurata. The potential capture of Sirte would have initiated the end of the regime as it was both the military and ideological heartland of the regime. This did not happen.

The combination of NATO airstrikes and the rag tag rebel army was not sufficient and over recent days the rebels have retreated back to the mid-line of Libya at Brega where there is fierce fighting between the opposing sides for the port and the oil line. Brega is north of the main Tripoli-Benghazi highway but its ownership is critical for both sides as it opens up the line of march either to the east or to the west for the opposing forces. As recently as the last two days it has been taken and retaken by the rebels.

The wider political context is also developing — Turkey, Greece and Malta

have been involved in talks with the Libyan foreign ministry around some form of negotiated settlement — potentially a transitional government in the hands of the sons of the dictator — Saif al-Islam and Saadi Qadaffi — the ex-despot of Benghazi.

Both of these had reputations as “moderates” prior to the uprising but they have signalled that a transition without their father’s involvement is not welcomed. Certainly at this point the exile option is not being mooted.

The UN may look at a transitional government without Qadaffi kindly, particularly bearing in mind the political weakness of the Libyan Transitional Council holding sway in the east, but France, the US and the UK would certainly be reluctant to perpetuate any remnant of a familial Qadaffi regime — whatever the form of transition — whether outright democracy or constitutional monarchy.

France, Qatar and Italy have recognised the National Transitional Council but there are very real doubts on behalf of the US and the UK about the composition of the movement. NATO have warned against “flickers” of al Qaeda and Hezbollah in the move-

ment. It is very clear that some of the best fighters in the uprising have been Islamists although it is not clear whether they are linked to the Libyan Islamic Fighting group.

Three historically significant moments did develop over the last week — the destruction of a rebel convoy by coalition forces, the Misurata blockade breaking aid ship taking civilian wounded to “Free” Benghazi and the first oil tanker to be sent out with a supply from the rebel-held east.

What is perhaps significant about each of these episodes is the level of support that they display for the air strikes and the coalition intervention on the ground. Rebel forces, in advance of any apology from NATO, noted that the fault for the mistaken strike was random celebratory firing from the column, and visibly the level of support on the Misurata ship for NATO was a serious mandate from those in the thick of the fighting that the support of the coalition has been decisive in halting massacres of civilians in the Qadaffi-held west.

There were two issues that we pointed to last week that have been confirmed as recent events have passed — the strength and the mandate of the pro-

Gadaffi forces in the west and which shouldn’t be underestimated and the exact composition of the rebel movement in the east and what it chooses to do next.

There are a number of directions that the situation could take of which the two most likely are a negotiated settlement and transition across the whole of Libya or a tenuous partition regime leaving the old regime standing for a period whilst a democracy of some sort consolidates itself in the east.

A military victory across the whole of Libya from the rebels, or one across the whole of Libya for the regime, seems less likely — largely because of the military weakness of the rebels in the first part and the intervention of the coalition in the second. But there is one caveat to this — military success in the Qadaffi-held west could be possible as part of a wider series of uprisings amongst the people of Tripolitania.

This is happening to some extent already but confidence in the rebel’s capacity to take the east may bolster more democratic uprisings in the heartland of the despotism and signal at least the beginning of the end for its vile tyranny.

Syria: democracy protests spread

By Dan Katz

Pro-democracy protests have spread to the Syrian capital, Damascus. On Friday at least 15 people were shot dead in Douma, a satellite of Damascus.

On Saturday, Syrian security forces arrested dozens of people, mostly in Deraa and Douma. Those that have been arrested have been bru-

talised and tortured. On Sunday, thousands marched in Douma as eight of those gunned down were buried. The crowd chanted “Down with the regime!”

Hafez Assad ran Syria as a one-party police state from 1971 until 2000. The current President, Bashar Assad, has ruled in a similar way since his father’s death. Posters and statues of both have been defaced

during the current protests.

The mobilisations have a potentially sectarian character. Two-thirds of Syrians are Sunni Muslims. However the ruling family are Alawites, a dissident branch of Shiite Muslims and only 6% of the population.

Over 100 people have been murdered by the regime during the past two weeks of protests. The

state — which is unused to having to plausibly explain its actions — has blamed the shootings on mysterious conspirators.

Inspired by the revolutions in north Africa the Syrian protests have yet to reach the scale and intensity of the recent mobilisations in Egypt which brought down Mubarak.

However, they continue to spread and stretch the state’s forces.

National student conference — a chance for the left?

By an AWL student

The National Union of Students conference 2011, which takes place next week (12-14 April) in Newcastle, will be unpredictable.

Incumbent president Aaron Porter is standing down, following repeated embarrassment in the wave of student struggles during the winter; there are two high profile right-wing candidates standing to replace him. The whole leadership is embarrassed and discredited by recent events, and could lose some important policy votes. Certainly at NUS Women’s Conference last month the left was on the offensive, despite having only just re-established itself.

On the other hand, both NUS’s ultra-bureaucratised structure and the failures of the left, which has stitched up a not very impressive slate for the full-time national executive positions,

Events forced out Aaron Porter

will limit any dramatic upheaval in Newcastle.

AWL delegates and observers at the conference will combine pushing for left-wing, class struggle policies as part of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts with promoting our own distinctive ideas — such as solidarity with the Egyptian labour movement and a rational stance on Western intervention in Libya.

There will be a full report in the next issue.

Islamists defeat the left in Westminster student elections

By Jade Baker, outgoing UWSU Vice-President Education

Last year, following a big upsurge in student struggle at Westminster University, activists from the Fight Cuts campaign took over and began the process of transforming our previously moribund student union.

Now that process will be thrown into reverse, after we narrowly lost this year’s elections to supporters of the radical right-wing Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT).

To activists at other universities, where even more moderate Islamist groups remain on the fringes, this probably sounds a bit bizarre. But Westminster has a huge, possibly even majority Muslim student population, and HT have been building a base here for years, long before the reappearance of the student left in the anti-cuts struggles of 2009.

Their front society Global Ideas (HT itself is banned by the university) gets big turn outs for its events. In this election, their candidates did not run openly on anything like their real program — misogyny, homophobia, anti-semitism and religious sectarianism, as steps towards a global caliphate in which all elements of self-organisation and democracy are suppressed — but on a communalist appeal for Muslim students to “Vote for Da 3 Brothers”.

Left-wing Muslims who supported left candidates felt intimidated out of tak-

ing an active role in our campaigns.

Throughout two election campaigns (the first election was cancelled after numerous election complaints, mainly against HT), there were all kinds of minor factors that combined to create a perfect storm for the Islamists. For instance, in the second election the ballot paper was for no obvious reason rearranged so that hundreds of students voted for me for NUS delegate while voting for no one for VP Education (which I lost by 70 votes out of about 3,000). But we should not downplay the real victory for HT: despite recent struggles, the left simply did not build a base fast enough to make up for their communal appeals and their longstanding roots at the university.

When HT had sabbaticals previously, UWSU essentially collapsed, with the officers pocketing their wages but not bother to come into work (and presumably working full-time for HT instead). That must be a real risk next year, since HT hold President as well as VP Education. If they do work hard, it will be to make the student union an inhospitable place for liberated women, gay people, secularists, Muslims who oppose Islamism, and the left.

The left at Westminster needs to use the next couple of months to build up our activist networks so they can survive in more difficult conditions next year, and to launch an open political campaign to challenge Hizb ut-Tahrir on campus.