

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 218 28 September 2011 30p/80p

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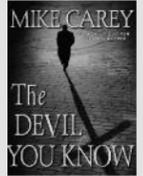
For a workers' government

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# Save jobs and services, not bankers' wealth

**Tax the rich. Expropriate the banks!**

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## 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.
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## Support the Palestinian bid for statehood

### Palestinians demonstrate for independence

#### By Sacha Ismail

**Defying Israeli and US pressure, the Palestinian leadership is pressing for a vote on its demand for recognition at the UN as soon as possible.**

The UN Security Council began considering the bid on 26 September. The process could go on for months.

The Palestinians are also considering the resumption of negotiations with Israel. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said, reasonably enough, that "the Palestinians cannot negotiate any proposal that is not based on 1967 borders and does not ensure a settlement freeze in the West Bank."

Israel is responding by stepping up its campaign

against the Palestinians. Binyamin Netanyahu's hypocritical and duplicitous speech at the UN, blaming the Palestinians for the lack of progress, is one face of the official Israeli reaction; the other is far-right foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman, who has promised "tough repercussions" from the Palestinians' move.

It is not just a question of Lieberman's speeches. Israel may punish the Palestinian Authority by withholding tax revenues. And on the ground, too, tensions in the occupied West Bank are mounting. Reports suggest a spike in Israeli settlers' attacks on Palestinians.

On 23 September, clashes between settlers from the outpost of Esh Kodesh and Palestinians from the village of Qusra ended with Israeli troops murdering a 33 year old Palestinian

man, Issam Odeh. Qusra has recently seen four mosques vandalised by settlers; in response it has set up a "vigilance committee", which claims to have foiled at least one attack. Other villages are apparently doing the same.

Many settlers seem to be preparing for major violence against the Palestinians.

Tactically, the Palestinians might be wise to avoid clashes. Whether they will be able to do so, given settler aggression and IDF protection of the settlers, is another matter. In any case, if clashes take place, we are on the side of the Palestinians. The settlers should not be there.

**We need to expose settler and Israeli military violence as part of our support for the Palestinians' campaign for an independent state alongside Israel.**

## Reinstate Edd Bauer

**On 27 September, Birmingham University Guild of Students sabbatical Edd Bauer (also a member of the national committee of the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts) was released on bail. He had spent several days in prison for his part in a banner drop at Lib Dem conference.**

On returning to the Guild, he found that he had been suspended by its (majority non-student) Trustee Board! He is banned from even entering the union premises.

The decision to grant Ed bail came following a NCAFC-organised demonstration outside the court. Two other Birmingham student activists are also on bail.

If the Guild bureaucrats can get away with this, it will be an outrage against Birmingham University students' democratic rights. And it will set a precedent that any left-wing student union officer, any campaigning student union officer, anywhere, is fair game.

**We need to fight for Edd's reinstatement as part of the campaign to reclaim control of our student unions from bureaucrats, and put control back in the hands of students and their elected representatives.**

• Meeting to discuss the campaign for Edd's reinstatement and democracy in Birmingham University Guild of Students: 5pm, Monday 3 October, in the Nuffield Learning Centre (R28 on campus map).  
• More: [anticuts.com](http://anticuts.com)

## Keep supporting Dale Farm!

#### By Rosalind Robson

**Residents at Dale Farm travellers' site have been granted a further temporary injunction (until Thursday 29 September) by the High Court, stop-**

**ping Basildon Council from proceeding with their eviction.**

If a judicial review brought by Dale Farm is allowed to go ahead the eviction could be postponed indefinitely. But

that is not certain.

**Dale Farm still needs our support: see [dalefarm.wordpress.com](http://dalefarm.wordpress.com)**

• Picture: scaffolding and barricade between "legal" pitches and those the council say are "illegal".

## US Tea Party's true colours

**At a recent US Republican Party debate supporters of the ultra-right wing of the party, the Tea Party, could not contain their glee when certain facts about the Republican Governor of Texas were read out.**

In his 10 years of office Rick Perry has overseen the

execution of 234 death row prisoners. The cause for "whoop, whoop" cheering by the TPer.

At another, television debate, the moderator asked the participants (including Perry) whether it was okay to let a person die for want of health insurance. At that point Tea Party people

yelled out "yeah, yeah!". Even Perry apparently found it a bit off.

Getting a bit carried away? Only if you think Nazi supporters beating up Jews and left-wingers in the days before Hitler came to power, was "getting a bit carried away".

**Chilling is more like it.**

## DEMONSTRATE FOR FREE EDUCATION

- no fees • no cuts • solidarity with 30 Nov strikes

**WEDNESDAY 9 NOVEMBER, CENTRAL LONDON, 12 NOON**

**Backed by the National Union of Students  
Called by the National Campaign Against Fees & Cuts**

**More: [anticuts.com](http://anticuts.com)**

# Labour delegates protest at stitch-up

## By a delegate

**The Labour Party conference debate on “Re-founding Labour”, on 25 September, was a mockery. It was Restitching Labour.**

The conference was presented with a long list of rule changes, some of which had been agreed by the National Executive only the previous evening

(24 September), and hustled into a snap omnibus vote on the whole package.

Meanwhile, most of the rulebook proposals from CLPs had been excluded from the agenda on artificial procedural grounds.

No speakers against the leadership’s snap rule changes were taken in the “debate”. Oddly, there were no speeches for the rule changes, either. A

string of obviously-pre-arranged speakers enthused vaguely about building the Labour Party, but said nothing about the rule changes.

One speech got heard against the rule changes, in an earlier challenge to the Conference Arrangements Committee by Wirral delegate Elaine Jones. It didn’t get the CAC overruled; but it did win applause from a thoughtful minority

of delegates and get (so we’re told) the biggest vote for a reference-back for many, many years.

The unions all backed the platform. The Unite delegation meeting, so we hear, was rallied to back the platform by general secretary Len McCluskey, despite all his speeches about democratising the Labour Party.

McCluskey told the delegation that Ed Miliband is

“listening” and “doing his best”; he is “new in the job” and should be cut some slack. If Miliband doesn’t deliver, then maybe next year, or the year after next, the union should consider making a fuss. But not now.

The best that can be said for the changes is that the unions faced down (but maybe only for now) the worst proposals, such as reducing the union vote at

Labour Party conference; and most of the changes are small. But many are damaging.

**For example, Local Government Committees and District Labour Parties, the delegate bodies to which council Labour Groups are supposed to be accountable, are abolished and replaced by “Local Campaign Forums” dominated by cabals of councillors.**

## Balls and Miliband duck cuts fight

**In his Labour Party conference speech on 26 September, Ed Balls proposed:**

- Repeat the bank bonus tax again this year
- Bring forward long-term investment projects – schools, roads and transport
- Reverse January’s VAT rise for a period; an immediate one year cut in VAT to 5% on home improvements, repairs and maintenance
- A one year national insurance tax break for small firms which take on extra workers.

The vapidness of this list is shown by the fact that TUC general secretary Brendan Barber, at the TUC congress earlier in September, had exactly the same talk as Balls and Ed Miliband about a “new economy” and breaking from neo-liberalism, yet the TUC’s actual proposed measures — stop tax loop-

holes, start a Robin Hood tax on financial transactions — don’t even overlap with Balls’s.

Ed Miliband’s speech to Labour Party conference repeated the call for a “new economy”, but with even less substance than Balls.

He said that Labour should be “pro-business”, but discriminate between businesses, favouring the “producers” and not the “predators”.

Miliband said: “we have allowed ... a Britain that is too unequal. The people at the top taking unjustified rewards...”

He recalled that: “The wealth of our nation is built by the hands not just of the elite few but every man and woman who goes out and does a day’s work”.

But what about capitalists who are both “producers” and “predators” (the majority)? What does

Miliband actually propose against the “predators”? Just repeating the bank bonus tax?

He also went out of his way to endorse some Thatcherism. “Some of what happened in the 1980s was right. It was right to let people buy their council houses. It was right to cut tax rates of 60, 70, 80 percent. And it was right to change the rules on the closed shop, on strikes before ballots. These changes were right, and we were wrong to oppose it at the time”.

Some of Miliband’s talk about “values” had a sinister twist.

He said that council housing should be allocated preferentially to “the person who shows responsibility”.

**What does he mean? Morality checks, administered by local authorities, to sift out the “deserving poor”?**

## Workfare heading for meltdown?

**The UK’s official number of unemployed is now an appalling total of 2.51 million.**

The situation will put pressure on the government’s strategy for reducing unemployment — the so-called Work Programme.

The Work Programme is based on the same principle as New Labour schemes such as the New Deal. Under these schemes government employs private companies to (supposedly) do intensive job searches, CV writing etc, with individual long-term unemployed people.

Under the Work Programme, all unemployed people will be included

(not just target groups) and the private contractors will only get paid if and when they find jobs for their “customers”.

Radio Four’s *The Report*, (Thursday 15 September) raised a number of questions about whether the Work Programme will... work.

The private companies who benefited from Labour’s schemes, are the same companies, more or less, who will be running the show now. But according to Radio Four’s *The Report* programme (15 September) they have a terrible track record.

In the period of its work for New Labour A4e (Action for Employment) managed to find jobs for

only 13% of its “clients”. Its target was 50%.

According to Radio Four the new / old contractors fully expect the government to bail them out — in the current economic situation — when few people can find work.

The government, who need to keep up fiction that they will, and they can, find work for all the “benefit layabouts”, say they will not bail out the contractors.

**That means the contractors will cut corners, sub-contract out their trickiest “customers” to the voluntary sector, or simply default on the contracts.**

• More: [watchinga4e.blogspot.com](http://watchinga4e.blogspot.com)

## Patience running out

By Jon Lansman

**On 27 September, Labour’s conference gave another indication that its patience with party managers’ manipulation is running out.**

There was noisy dissatisfaction on Sunday [25th] with the railroading of Re-founding Labour.

On the 27th, delegates

clearly resented the further gagging of those constituencies who proposed a rule change 18 months ago designed to prevent the “parachuting” of Parliamentary candidates into safe Labour seats.

When the chair asked for approval of the conference arrangements report, hands were slow to rise in favour, but a forest of hands rose against. The

chair refused loud demands for a card vote.

**There is undoubtedly a dramatic shift at Labour’s conference. Delegates are showing a level of independence of thought and action not seen for 30 years.**

• Jon Lansman is the secretary of the Labour Party Democracy Task Force. This article appeared on [leftfutures.org](http://leftfutures.org)

## Unions need political strategy

**Pete Firmin, joint secretary of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), spoke to *Solidarity* at the Labour Party conference.**

**How do you see the LRC going now?**

It’s been growing, in terms of individual membership and affiliations from union branches and bits of the Labour Party.

What the LRC has to do is two things — be at the cutting edge of the struggles, such as strikes and anti cuts campaigns and so on — and be at the cutting edge of taking that up within the party.

That’s what we try to do. It’s not always easy because you’re persuading people to go to Labour Party meetings and argue with rightwing shits, which is not always very exciting, but it’s what has to be done.

You see some unions which are nominally to the left but they don’t have a political strategy. We have

to change that. They have to challenge within the Labour Party.

**Is there any sign of the 70,000 new members at conference?**

Well, there have been resolutions put to conference that the leadership would not want to see passed.

There are motions on the riots from the LRC and a motion from Unison on pensions which the leadership won’t like. But even during the Blair years sometimes radical motions would get passed. It’s not clear yet that this is part of some new wave.

There is a danger that a lot of these new members join, then the leadership’s attitude towards say the pension strikes pisses them off and they leave again.

There isn’t a new spirit here at the conference. There was a certain amount of belief that Ed Miliband would do things a bit different but he hasn’t. The whole Refounding

Labour facade of democracy has been a damp squib. Indicative of this is that on the eve of conference he announces his new policy on tuition fees.

Leaving aside the fact that the policy is crap — where does this policy come from? It comes from Ed Miliband’s head, not from party procedure or anything like that.

I think it’s pretty much a continuation of New Labour. The party machinery hasn’t changed. During the debate on Refounding Labour they didn’t call a single person in opposition to the proposals.

The new Labour Party General Secretary, Iain McNicol, spoke to Conference. He slipped in that he would never cross a picket line, and he got a lot of support for that. That’s a clear contrast to Miliband’s line on the strikes.

**Now that’s just a small thing — and whether anybody will challenge Miliband on it is another question.**

## Police dodge charge of racism

**Some UK police forces have a record of targeting disproportionate numbers of black people in “stop and account” operations (where people are stopped by the police on the street and asked to say where they are going and what they are doing).**

Those same police forces have decided to stop recording the ethnicity of people in those operations!

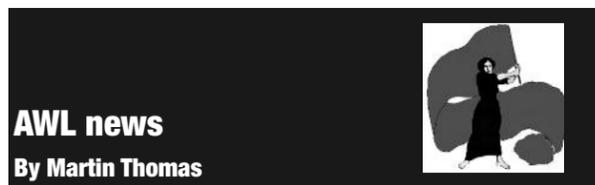
Keeping records was one of the recommendations of the the McPherson report into the Stephen Lawrence case. But recent changes to the law have made this possi-

ble and mean the police can now dodge being held to account for potential racist behaviour.

**The campaign Stop-watch, whose research brought this issue to light, are bringing a legal case against the police forces involved.**

• More: [stop-watch.org](http://stop-watch.org)

## AWL debates the crisis



**AWL news**  
By Martin Thomas

“Global economy pushed to brink” read the front-page headline of the *Financial Times* as the AWL’s national committee met on 24 September to discuss amendments and redrafts of the main documents up for debate at AWL annual conference on 22-23 October.

We decided that the conference agenda should be geared around the challenges posed by a very-possible new capitalist crash, and an almost-certain extended capitalist depression.

The rest of the left — from the mainstream Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, through the left union leaders, right to groups like SWP and SP — have been timid on the economic issues. The message varies from “cut VAT” through “stop tax loopholes” to “stop the cuts”, but includes no strong transitional measure against capital.

Our conference should centre on whether we are right to raise demands like “Expropriate the banks”, “a workers’ plan”, “a workers’ government”, and how to gain traction for them.

A main perspectives document on “AWL and the next year”, a report on “Building the AWL”, and other documents were amended and endorsed by the NC.

The committee also debated procedures for the conference electing a new national committee. Some members argued for a “nominating commission” — an ad hoc body, elected by conference and separate from the outgoing national committee, which discusses the nominations in detail and reports to conference with a suggested list. Candidates not on the suggested list can then be advocated, and the vote is then by simple first-past-the-post.

When AWL used this procedure before, some years back, the conference never or almost never ended up voting for exactly the suggested list; but some argued that the suggested list helps promote discussion on the overall shape of the NC, rather than just the merits of individual candidates.

The majority of the national committee thought that this was unnecessarily laborious; might hive off too much of the discussion on the new committee to a small subgroup; and would give signals of small-group control when we need to emphasise openness and broad involvement.

The national committee minority will now take its views to conference for debate.

Further regional pre-conference meetings, for AWL members to familiarise themselves with the documents, issues, and debates, will be held in London on 9 October, York on 15 October, and Sheffield on 16 October.

• [www.workersliberty.org/conf2011](http://www.workersliberty.org/conf2011)

## Turmoil in civil service union



**Left**  
By Colin Foster

**The ruling Left Unity faction in the civil service union PCS is in turmoil, with the Socialist Party (the main force in LU) withdrawing support from Jane Aitchison, union president in the union’s most important sector, the Department of Work and Pensions.**

Aitchison, a long-time member of the SP, has resigned from it.

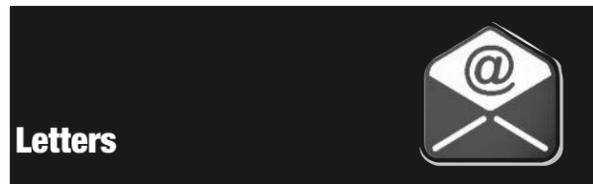
The SP has said nothing publicly about this. First reports inside the union were that the SP had turned against Aitchison because she and her partner Rob Williams (also an SP member, and a PCS Exec member) send their daughter to a private school.

Later reports are that the SP blames Aitchison for the failure of the PCS’s DWP Contact Centre Campaign. She refused to accept the employers’ first offer despite advice to do so from senior SP people in PCS, and now the union has accepted a second offer worse than that first one.

An AWL member active in PCS DWP comments: “the main reason for the failure of the campaign was a complete lack of communication between negotiators and branches or members. We have gone months without a peep”.

Aitchison is known as a capable public speaker, but is also a Methodist, and in the past an enthusiast for witchcraft.

## No more threats and punishments!



**Letters**

**I am a midday assistant at a primary school. The observations I have made in my job have confirmed what I think about how children are treated by all those who have authority over them — teachers, teaching assistants and the midday staff.**

Control of children is maintained by the threat of something bad happening to them — get sent to the head, call in parents, low scale public humiliation or just shouting to reduce them to tears. Even “good” teachers demand this kind of conformity.

Children who are considered bad or naughty are always in trouble and it is these same ones how get punished everyday. Such children develop a variety of defences and one response is to fit the role they’ve been given. Even at a young age they believe they are the bad person their parents and teachers tell them they are. One boy told me he’ll be a gangster when he’s bigger, another how he’s not clever so will need to be tough.

Others are visibly scared and frightened and will internalise their fear — learn to conform and be timid and scared in other social settings.

Adults seem oblivious to the damage their behaviour causes or think their threats are harmless and mild. Some even seem to enjoy the misery they inflict.

Is it possible within the current education system to do things differently? I think so.

### A DIFFERENT APPROACH

**Children are inundated with petty unnecessary rules which get them to seek approval of their behaviour from adults. If rules are stupid I’ll say so. If I see that children have been unfairly treated by adults I tell them they are right to be angry. That they should only respect adults who treat them well.**

When I am supervising a playground no one is ever punished or sent to the head. If fights are brewing I try to talk to children before it kicks off. I recognise why children are angry, explain that I can see they are trying to keep control, tell them that I think they are really a decent person who doesn’t want to hurt anyone.

Children are so used to being asked “who started it” etc. it takes awhile to realise that I am not trying to control them and that I will stick to what I say. They will then talk about how they feel, and what they think about school. What do they want from school, why food fights, music at lunch time would be good, about not having to ask permission to go to the toilet. About learning about interesting things like protests, rebellion, school students’ strikes, Mohammad Ali, physics.

Explaining and talking to the children about why they shouldn’t use violence, why they can’t leave school and climb the spiked fence, why someone might be frightened by something they’ve done, does work in my opinion. And it can be done without a threat to back it up.

After a while this strategy works. One time I talked to one of the boys who was always aggressive and in fights. He swore at me endlessly but he did control his aggression, didn’t hit anyone and after recognised he’d done really well (though he was too cool to admit it.)

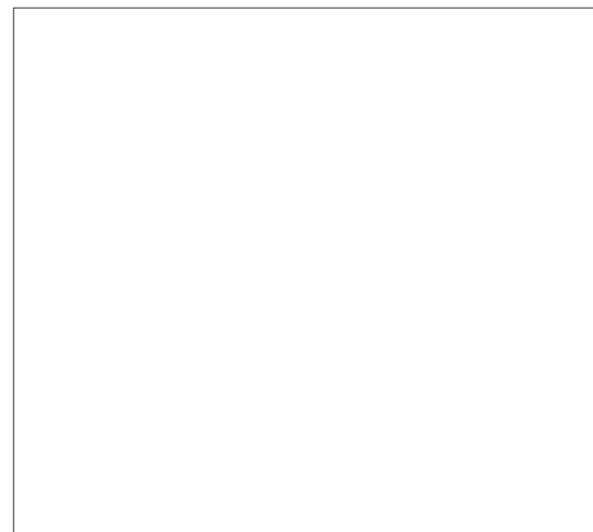
Another time I talked to a boy who was expelled from his previous school for fighting and being out of control. I tried to teach him how to ground himself when angry, stop him getting told off for petty rule breaking, ask him what sort of person he wanted to be, what interested him... He is very bright and wants to know about how things work but is sick of being told to stand still, don’t talk when the whistle goes, walk in silence to class etc., etc.

### INFLICTED

**If I see a child is frightened by the behaviour of either another child or, more often, frightened of a teacher I’ll talk through how best they should deal with it.**

From one end of the day to the other a complicated system of punishment and reward is inflicted on children. As well as becoming hardened to it or scared, children seek control through refusing to eat at lunchtime, or trying to outwit those who are controlling them.

It is undoubtedly easier to make threats and punish because you get immediate results, but in the long term you end up reinforcing a world view which says respect authority, do as adults say or you will take the consequences. Adults in that role forget that the power given to you to demand respect regardless of what you do damages children’s view of themselves. Regardless of how interesting your teaching the main thing they will take from school is “know your place”.



It is not a rational system. For instance children with learning disabilities are — including one boy with Asperger’s Syndrome — are sometimes yelled at by teachers for bad behaviour. Other children can’t understand this. They know the boy with Asperger’s couldn’t help his behaviour, so why is he being yelled at?

One of the teachers in my school is very strict and uses the threat and reward system. She has a large number in the class with a variety of behavioural problems. What she doesn’t realise is that she has the children “onside” without those threats — they liked her lessons. She could have done them more good if she didn’t resort to threats.

One new teacher to the school agreed with me on why punishment and rewards doesn’t help develop children’s confidence in their own abilities and wanted to try something different. However he didn’t have was confidence to stand up to the other teachers and head and challenge the dominant opinion.

Teachers and other staff face all sorts of problems but that shouldn’t mean we don’t address the way children are treated by adults in school. Children’s opinions are not heard when they are treated unfairly nor can they usually articulate why the way they are treated is wrong. It is far too intimidating, and they do not have the experience or language to challenged the world view of parents and teachers.

That is why socialists have a duty to articulate and explain alternative ways of guiding and teaching children.

**As Louise Michel said during the Paris Commune: we should strive for an education system in which there should be no punishment or reward apart from your own feeling of having done your duty or having acted badly.**

Jayne Edwards, north-west England

## Israel not like South Africa

**It’s legitimate to compare the situation in the West Bank and, in different way, Gaza to an apartheid set up (Paul Field, Letters, *Solidarity* 217). The AWL has said this many times, including in our reports back after the solidarity delegation we organised in November/December last year. For instance, in my speech at an AWL London forum on 14 December I said:**

“It’s worth thinking about the apartheid comparison. We have argued, rightly, that Israel is not an apartheid state but a mini-colonial power. The Israelis are not a narrow caste but a nation with the whole spectrum of social classes — working class, bourgeoisie, intermediate layers — and therefore the right to self-determination. But the society which is now developing inside the Occupied Territories, as opposed to Israel itself, is something like apartheid.”

And that’s just the point. In Israel minorities face severe discrimination, including legal discrimination. We highlight this, condemn it and oppose it. But it seems obvious that the set up is fundamentally unlike apartheid South Africa. And it’s qualitatively different (though obviously linked) to the situation in the Occupied Territories.

If you could take the West Bank in isolation, if there was no Israel, then you could talk about a South Africa-type scenario. But Israel, with its working class, does exist!

Most colonies of foreign powers maintain an apartheid-style set up to hold down the indigenous people; what was distinctive about South Africa was that the country was one big, “internal” colony, with no motherland: no Israel, just one big West Bank.

**A lot of people use the apartheid label lazily, while also advocating a two-state solution. But those two things are in contradiction. No serious democrat, let alone socialist, advocated anything but a single unitary state in South Africa. What’s Paul’s view on that?**

Sacha Ismail, south London

# Save services and jobs, not bankers' wealth

**Samuel Brittan, a conservative columnist in the *Financial Times*, argued on 24 September that the crisis demands "a Treasury directive to [state-owned] banks to replace profit maximisation with a requirement to promote economic recovery".**

The labour movement should demand that all the banks and high finance are expropriated (taken over), and put under democratic control with a priority of saving and improving services and jobs, not maximum loot for bosses and shareholders.

Neo-liberalism, and capitalism itself, are signalling their delirious inhumanity and infirmity. "Global economy pushed to brink", headlined the *Financial Times* on 24 September. Even if there is not another crash like 2008 soon, a period of depression is certain.

The escalation of the eurozone crisis (bond price slump for Italy and Spain, expanded but failed bail-out plans for Greece) and the dollar crisis in August 2011 (drastic cuts forced through, ratings agency downgrading creditworthiness of US Treasury bonds [IOUs]) has reached the point where Tory Chancellor George Osborne talks of "six weeks to save the eurozone".

Yet mainstream politics is as if seeing economic life in an inverting mirror. Everything the "Keynesian" critics, of the stripe of Ed Balls, said against the Tories' cuts plans in 2010 has been confirmed, even in a bourgeois economic framework.

Yet:

- the Tories (and neo-liberals everywhere) are on the offensive politically;
- the banks feel confident enough to indignantly (and successfully) demand loosening and delay of the mild regulatory measures aimed at them;
- the diehard Blairites like Mandelson are on the offensive in the Labour Party, demanding more Labour commitment to cuts;
- Balls is mumbling, almost defensive;
- the union leaders demand no more, economically, than "closing tax loopholes", etc.;
- \*• The street-campaigning left mostly limits itself to defensive calls to "stop the cuts" and "save pensions", sounding a militant note only by talking up action like 30 November and injecting phrases like "24 hour public sector general strike".

Under the carapace of labour-movement sluggishness, millions know these are drastic times calling for drastic measures. Socialists must educate and agitate, orienting to the possibilities of unexpected explosions, rather than tone ourselves down to the political level set by dead-weight influences in the labour movement.

The current turmoil is a culmination of thirty years' spiralling expansion of a bubble, or house-of-cards, of financial speculation and credit (or, in other words, to look at the other side of the coin, debt). The bubble had partly deflated several times before:

- the 1987 crash of world stock markets;
- the US savings and loan (mortgage) crisis of the early 1990s;
- the European Exchange Rate Mechanism crisis of 1992;
- the "Asian crisis" of 1997-8, which also involved the managed collapse of one of the USA's biggest hedge funds;
- the "dot.com crisis" of around 2001.

Big capital had recovered fast from all those crises, with limited damage, and continued blithely on the credit-expansion spiral.

The September 2008 crash, following on a US mortgage-market crisis developing since late 2006, was big enough, and full enough of ricochets, to wreck the global banking system.

Lehman Brothers went bust, and many other banks would have done the same but for governments bailing them out.

## Protestors are now camping out in Wall Street

The governments' stepping-in, their "socialism for the rich", "privatisation of gains and socialisation of losses", allowed capitalist production to start recovering. By 2010 world trade and output were increasing fairly briskly, especially in China, India, Brazil, etc. though less so from the richer countries (except Germany).

The 2008 bail-outs shifted the focus of the stresses from private capital to governments.

Government creditworthiness is more durable than the creditworthiness of individual banks, but has progressively come under pressure, culminating in the current twin crises of the eurozone and of the US budget. These crises have been compounded by the slow fumbling and haggling in the eurozone, and the resurgence of "voodoo economics" in the US Tea Party and Republican right wing.

## COMBINED DEVELOPMENT

**In 2008-9 the crash was limited by the Chinese government launching what must be the biggest programme in world history of investment in fixed capital: new factories, roads, airports, buildings...**

It will be very difficult for the Chinese government to offset a new sagging in world markets for its manufactured exports by a new fixed-investment boost. Already the Chinese government is anxious to clean up rapid price inflation (now 6.5%) and local-government debt blow-outs.

According to Nouriel Roubini: "China did not suffer a severe recession [in 2008-9]... only because fixed investment exploded. And the fixed-investment share of GDP has increased further in 2010-2011, to almost 50%."

"China is rife with overinvestment in physical capital, infrastructure, and property: in sleek but empty airports and bullet trains... highways to nowhere, thousands of colossal new central and provincial government buildings, ghost towns, and brand-new aluminium smelters kept closed to prevent global prices from plunging..."

"Eventually, most likely after 2013, China will suffer a hard landing..."

A greatest unknown is the response to the turmoil of the Chinese working class, now hundreds of millions strong, concentrated in huge factories, and already militant despite its organisations being illegal.

In 2008 analysts such as Paul Mason argued plausibly that the financial crash had fatally discredited neo-liberalism even in ruling circles.

They were wrong, and the fact they were wrong has shaped the sequel. As soon as the perceived immediate threat that "if money isn't loosened up, this sucker could go down" (George W Bush, September 2008) had faded, the leading capitalist states sought a rigidly neo-liberal, profit-prioritising path for recovery.

The ruling classes had never forgotten or abandoned Keynes, and willingly went for a brief Keynesian moment; but once the first panic was over, all their attention went to using the crisis to beat down labour, increase social inequality, squeeze social overheads, marketise, and privatise. Germany passed an amendment to its constitution mandating balanced budgets in future, and pressed other EU states to do similar.

The USA was the slight exception to that rule for a while, its federal government rejecting cuts for much longer than European governments did; but it has been pulled into line by the Tea Party pressure in its budget crisis. The Democrats have now had to promise a debate in Congress on an amendment to the US constitution mandating balanced budgets.

Rising inequality since 1990 — in the US, in Britain, in much of the world — has been one of the main forces driving global financial fragility.

The cascade of cash into the pockets of the rich produces a waterfall of buying in the markets for financial paper of various sorts — all essentially speculative "tickets" to future profit. The expansion of financial markets also claws in the poor (sub-prime mortgages, credit-card debt). Eventually the bubble bursts.

Slumps generally narrow inequality, at least for a while. Ruined capitalists fall further than ruined workers. This time, although the USA has scarcely started any economic recovery, inequality has sharpened. The average daily spend of middle and lower-income Americans in July [2011] was \$63, down from \$64 a year ago [despite 3.6% price inflation]. The daily spending of upper-income Americans rose from \$119 to \$128 (FT, 4 August 2011).

In Britain, while top bosses at the top 100 FTSE companies had median earnings rise 32% last year (FT, 27 July 2011), workers' real wages dropped 2.7% (Daily Telegraph, 13 July 2011).

**The driving force here is the greed of capital to use the crisis to trim costs and prepare for maximum profits in a future recovery, and the relative weakness of unions. It is rational for each individual capitalist, but makes escape from depression more elusive overall.**

# 10 reasons why you should

Many more people than relatively recently, particularly young people, are thinking about socialist politics and committing to join a socialist group. Why should they join Workers' Liberty rather than another socialist group?

## 1. We live in a capitalist world — meaning exploitation and poverty for the majority to guarantee profits and luxury for the few.

The current crisis, the cuts, and the growing fightback by workers and students worldwide make it clearer than ever: society needs to be radically reorganised in the interests of the working-class majority.

That will take a revolution against the entrenched wealth and power of the capitalists, who have many weapons at their disposal — not just the army, police, courts and prisons, but a system of ideas developed over centuries, ideas which dominate society and tell us that tinkering with the current system is the best we can do. To challenge the ruling class, socialists need to build a movement which can develop and act around alternative, anti-capitalist ideas. Workers' Liberty exists to help build that movement.

*If you think we need to overthrow the exploitation of the vast majority by a tiny minority, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

## 2. For us, socialism — a society in which the workplaces and means of producing wealth are owned collectively and run democratically for the benefit of everyone — can only come about as a result of the working class (the people who produce the wealth) liberating ourselves from capitalist exploitation. The fundamental basis of our politics is class struggle.

"Socialism" is a word that can now be used to mean almost anything. But a common thread is that many on the left see it as something handed down from above by a government workers do not control, whether it's a Stalinist state (like Cuba or the old USSR), a populist-nationalist regime (like Hugo Chavez's Venezuela) or based on a parliament (like old-style Labour governments in Britain). Most socialist groups think that Stalinist "communism" was, if not really socialist, at least a "degenerated" form of workers' rule.

We disagree! For us, socialism will be brought about by workers' own efforts, our struggles in the workplace and society, the fight for workers' power, or it will not be socialism. As Karl Marx put it: "The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the workers themselves".

*If you believe that socialism means working-class self-liberation, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

## 3. Because we think only the working class can create socialism, we are active in workplaces and in the basic organisations of the working class, trade unions.

We have "fractions" in most of the biggest unions, with activists in sectors including the railways, the NHS, local government, newspapers, schools, colleges and universities and the civil service.

Unions in Britain, and in most countries, are dominated by middle-class bureaucrats, on huge salaries and expenses, who see themselves as peacemakers between workers and bosses and fear working-class struggle.

We fight to transform them into strong, democratic, fighting organisations, controlled by their members and mobilising workers for struggle in the workplace and society,

### Workers' Liberty helped to found the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

including through strikes, occupations and other forms of militant action. As the battle against cuts heats up, this is more important than ever.

We fight for "rank and file movements" in every union to challenge the bureaucrats and organise the struggle when they won't. Our members produce workplace bulletins to help organise the rank and file and argue for class-struggle socialist ideas within their workplace and industry, for instance the Tubeworker bulletin on London Underground. We fight for the unions to "organise the unorganised", reaching out to young, precarious, migrant and private sector workers.

*If you believe you can fight exploitation most effectively by organising where exploitation takes place, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

## 4. We are active in the student movement, and have played a central role in the recent upsurge of student struggles.

College or university is where many people first get involved in socialist politics, as students have traditionally had more time than others to think about and get involved in political activity (although this is increasingly less true due to fees, having to work etc). We organise regular meetings in a number of colleges and universities in order to create a visible profile for our working-class socialist ideas among students.

We are active in grassroots student struggles against cuts and fees, and helped to found the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts — the network of campaigns and groups that has been central to the growing wave of student struggles over the last two years and is organising the 9 November student national demonstration (see [www.anticuts.com](http://www.anticuts.com)). The NCAFC fights for free education, against the growing marketisation of education, and for an education system run to produce critically thinking human beings — not docile material for capitalist exploitation.

As part of this we work in student unions and in the National Union of Students, fighting to transform them into member-controlled, campaigning organisations, and arguing for them to make links with the workers' movement, starting with workers on campus. We see the NCAFC in part as a rank and file movement which can help grassroots student activists take over and transform these official structures.

We are also active among school students, producing the school students' magazine *Barricade*.

*If you want a militant, campaigning student movement which links up with workers in struggle, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

## 5. The society we want to see will be one of radically expanded democracy and individual freedom.

Democracy, and a culture of open debate, are also necessary in the movement we are trying to build. Without this, we will never be able to bring into being a movement of educated and competent activists capable of helping our class overthrow capitalism.

Not every member of Workers' Liberty agrees on every issue. Look at our website or read our newspaper *Solidarity*, and you'll see that we debate differences and disagreements openly. We don't think that enforced homogeneity on the left, hiding disagreements for the sake of "unity", is helpful.

Workers' Liberty's perspectives and actions are democratically debated and agreed upon by the whole group, but we don't expect members who disagree to pretend they hold opinions they don't.

It's easy to look at the far left, divided between many groups, and wonder "Why can't they all get together?" — but there are many real differences on how best to fight for socialism. Rather than pretending those differences don't exist, or trying to ignore other groups' existence, we believe in debating them openly in a comradely way. But there is plenty of room for greater unity at the same time. In fact, the two things — united activity and debate — can and should go together!

We can start by more working together in struggles and campaigns (real united campaigns, not the tightly controlled fronts which some left groups are so expert in building); by holding more debates about issues and ideas; and by uniting to create a higher-profile socialist voice in wider politics, including elections. Workers' Liberty fights to build an alliance of socialists and socialist groups as a first step towards a united working-class socialist party.

*If you want to fight for an effective, united, honest left that works together when it agrees and debates its differences openly when it doesn't, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

## 6. Oppression by nation, race, gender or sexuality are linked to, but not identical with, class oppression.

For instance, capitalists benefit from women's domestic labour — but working-class men also benefit to some degree from the subordination of women. Racism divides and weakens the working class and strengthens the hand of the bosses — but that does not mean class struggle will automatically solve the issue of racism.

Women, black people, gay people, disabled people and others who face specific forms of oppression under capitalism should not have to somehow suspend their struggles for equality until the labour movement takes up these issues in a more active way.

Public sector unions are fighting to defend pensions

# ould join Workers' Liberty

gal" and insist that the unions organise all workers, no matter where they come from and what their immigration status is. The struggles of migrant workers, like cleaners in the City of London and on London Underground, are crucial to rebuilding the strength of the labour movement.

*If you believe in working-class unity across borders, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

**8. Internationalism also means workers of different nationalities respecting each other's national rights. Only on this basis can national conflicts be overcome, and workers unite to struggle effectively.**

Some socialists see the world in terms of "good" and "bad" peoples: the Palestinians are good, for instance, and the Israelis are bad. We say there are no bad peoples — and within every nation there are exploiters and exploited. We oppose Israel's oppression of the Palestinians, and believe that Israeli workers must fight against "their" government's policy of continuing this oppression; but we don't accept this means opposing Israel's right to exist or boycotting everything Israeli, as many socialists advocate.

Our approach is consistent democracy: every nation should have the right to decide its own future, up to and including independence, in so far as this does not conflict with the rights of others. We are also in favour of full equality for minorities within a nation, and of local and regional autonomy where necessary. By fighting for this workers of different nationalities can unite against their common enemy, the bosses.

National questions, like Israel-Palestine, are one area where we have tried to rethink some of the "common sense" of the left, and develop a more coherent viewpoint. That is Workers' Liberty's approach in general: thinking things through, clarifying ideas, constantly attempting to update and renew the socialist tradition.

*If you believe in a rational, consistently democratic approach to national conflicts, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

**9. In a world where the capitalist drive for profit threatens to destroy the whole basis of life earth, we take ecology and environmental politics seriously.**

We were active in the Climate Camp movement, and helped found Workers' Climate Action, an organisation which built links between the workers' and environmental movements, to fight dangerous climate change and environmental degradation on a working-class, anti-capitalist basis. WCA activists, including Workers' Liberty members, played a key role in the sparking the 2009 struggle of the Vestas wind turbine workers, who occupied their factory to stop its closure.

*If you agree that "climate change is a class issue", you should join Workers' Liberty.*

**10. We believe that the working class and oppressed can only liberate themselves as a conscious project, based on ideas which are debated, tested in reality and constantly reviewed and improved.**

The working class can only learn from history — including previous workers' struggles, victorious or defeated — through a conscious political movement which preserves and develops these lessons.

In the Vestas occupation, many ideas from the history of the workers' movement — like workplace occupations, nationalisation and workers' control — were crucial to the struggle. Those ideas came to play a central role because Workers' Liberty, and other socialists active in the dispute, were able to draw on the history and lessons of past struggles.

Or take the unfolding revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, where the degree to which socialist ideas can influence the newly burgeoning workers' movements will play a crucial role in the outcome.

To create a mass socialist movement, it is necessary for workers who have already drawn revolutionary conclusions to organise together in a political organisation. This kind of party does not yet exist in Britain. Instead we have a variety of small groups, of various sizes, including some which call themselves parties but aren't really (Socialist Workers' Party, Socialist Party).

Workers' Liberty does not pretend to be "the party". We are open about what we are: a tendency of activists organ-

ised around shared ideas, fighting to build a real socialist party on the foundation of consistent working-class politics. If you meet different socialist groups, the key questions to ask is not "Which group is the biggest?" or "Which did I meet first?" The key questions are "Which group has the best ideas?", and "Which group plays the best, most effective role in class struggle?"

*If you want to build a movement up to the job of overthrowing capitalism and winning socialism, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

**Our members and supporters in the trade unions, the anti-cuts movements, the student movement, the women's movement and many other struggles organise together, on the basis of common ideas, as part of a concerted fight for workers' liberty.**

*If you agree with our basic ideas, join us. If you don't, work with us, debate with us and continue the discussion!*

**750,000 are at risk of starvation in the East African drought.**

At the same time, we have to ask: where does this oppression spring from? How do we begin to tackle all the oppression and misery which exist in the world? We believe one of the main lessons of history is how complementary and inter-linked the struggles of workers and other oppressed groups can be. Again and again, big workers' struggles have thrown up questions of oppression and liberation not only of, but also within, the working class. We can support the struggles of the oppressed now and argue for them to be fought in alliance with organised workers. That is why we are active in all sorts of struggles for liberation, for instance in socialist feminist campaigning. For us, workers' revolution will be a "carnival of the oppressed", involving self-liberation by all oppressed and exploited people.

*If you want a world without gender, race, class or any other oppression, you should join Workers' Liberty.*

**7. Workers all over the world have far more in common with each other than with the bosses of "their own" country. To fight effectively, workers in every country have to support the struggles of workers in every other country. This is what we mean by internationalism.**

We are against imperialist adventures and bullying by strong states like Britain and the US. But we reject the idea, promoted by some socialist groups, for instance the SWP, that any force which opposes Britain, America and Israel is automatically "anti-imperialist".

The former Qaddafi regime in Libya was a case in point. So is the Iranian Islamist dictatorship, which is not waging an anti-imperialist struggle but clashing with the US over who will dominate the Gulf. And as well as being expansionist and repressive to national minorities inside Iran, this regime is deeply hostile to women's and gay rights and brutal towards workers trying to organise. Our anti-imperialism is part of our democratic, anti-capitalist, working-class politics, not something separable from it!

We also reject the nationalism which exists in parts of the British left, like the Socialist Party's idea that we should say "No to the EU", rather than linking up with European workers to level up wages, conditions and rights, and fight for a democratic and socialist Europe.

We oppose immigration controls; against the bosses' attempts to divide the working class, we say "No one is ille-

## FOR MORE DETAILS ON JOINING WORKERS' LIBERTY

- Email [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org)
- Phone 07775 763 750
- Write to AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London SE1 3DG



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# Why we defend bourgeois democracy

The democracy that exists in Britain today was not handed down from above; it was won by centuries of struggle. Marxists insist that this democracy is profoundly limited. We call it "bourgeois democracy", by which we mean elements of popular self-rule intertwined with and limited by the domination of the distinct minority that owns the means of production.

Why do we defend this democracy against attempts to replace it with military or dictatorial rule? What is it we value in bourgeois democracy?

The refusal of some on the left to acknowledge the difference between, for instance, Qaddafi's totalitarian state and the new regime in Libya suggests this question needs revisiting.

Leon Trotsky discussed it in his writings during and after the rise of Nazism.

**There are no "class distinctions" between democracy and fascism [say the Stalinists]. Obviously this must mean that democracy as well as fascism is bourgeois in character. We guessed as much even prior to January 1932. The ruling class, however, does not inhabit a vacuum. It stands in definite relations to other classes...**

Is there a difference in the "class content" of these two regimes [bourgeois democratic and fascist]? If the question is posed only as regards the ruling class, then there is no difference. If one takes into account the position and the interrelations of all classes, from the angle of the proletariat, then the difference appears to be quite enormous.

In the course of many decades, the workers have built up within the bourgeois democracy, by utilising it, by fighting against it, their own strongholds and bases of proletarian democracy: the trade unions, the political parties, the educational and sport clubs, the cooperatives, etc. The proletariat cannot attain power within the formal limits of bourgeois democracy, but can do so only by taking the road of revolution: this has been proved both by theory and experience.

And these bulwarks of workers' democracy within the bourgeois state are absolutely essential for taking the revolutionary road. The work of the Second International consisted in creating just such bulwarks during the epoch when it was still fulfilling its progressive historic labour.

Fascism has for its basic and only task the razing to their foundations of all institutions of proletarian democracy. Has this any "class meaning" for the proletariat, or hasn't it? The [Stalinist] theoreticians had better ponder over this... pronouncing the [existing Weimar Republic] regime to be bourgeois... overlooks a mere trifle: the position of the proletariat in this regime. In place of the historical process they substitute a bald sociological abstraction.

But the class war takes place on the soil of history, and not in the stratosphere of sociology. The point of departure in the struggle against fascism is not the abstraction of the democratic state, but the living organisations of the proletariat, in which is concentrated all its past experience and

which prepare it for the future...

• From *What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat* (January 1932)

**Assuming a defensive position means a policy of [the Communists] closing ranks with the majority of the German working class and forming a united front with the Social Democratic and nonparty workers against the fascist threat.**

Denying this threat, belittling it, failing to take it seriously is the greatest crime that can be committed today against the proletarian revolution in Germany.

What will the Communist Party "defend"? The Weimar Constitution? No... The Communist Party must call for the defence of those material and moral positions which the working class has managed to win in the German state. This most directly concerns the fate of the workers' political organisations, trade unions, newspapers, printing plants, clubs, libraries, etc.

Communist workers must say to their Social Democratic counterparts: "The policies of our parties are irreconcilably opposed; but if the fascists come tonight to wreck your organisation's hall, we will come running, arms in hand, to help you. Will you promise us that if our organisation is threatened you will rush to our aid?" This is the quintessence of our policy in the present period. All agitation must be pitched in this key.

• From *The Turn in the Communist International and the Situation in Germany* (1930)

**If the composition of the Reichstag [Parliament] proves to be hostile to the government; if Hitler takes it into his head to liquidate the Reichstag and if the Social Democracy shows a determination to fight for the latter, the Communists will [i.e. should] help the Social Democracy with all their strength.**

We Communists cannot and do not want to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat [i.e. the rule of the working class] against you or without you, Social Democratic workers. We want to come to this dictatorship together with you. And we regard the common defence against fascism as the first step in this sense.

Obviously, in our eyes, the Reichstag is not a capital historical conquest which the proletariat must defend against the fascist vandals. There are more valuable things. Within the framework of bourgeois democracy and parallel to the incessant struggle against it, the elements of proletarian democracy have formed themselves in the course of many decades: political parties, labour press, trade unions, factory committees, clubs, cooperatives, sports societies, etc. The mission of fascism is not so much to complete the destruction of bourgeois democracy as to crush the first outlines of proletarian democracy. As for our mission, it consists in placing those elements of proletarian democracy, already created, at the foundation of the soviet system of the workers' state.

To this end, it is necessary to break the husk of bourgeois democracy and free from it the kernel of workers' democracy. Therein lies the essence of the proletarian revolution. Fascism threatens the vital kernel of workers' democracy. This itself clearly dictates the program of the united front. We are ready to defend your printing plants and our own, but also the democratic principle of freedom of the press; your meeting halls and ours, but also the democratic principle of the freedom of assembly and association.

We are materialists and that is why we do not separate the soul from the body. So long as we do not yet have the strength to establish the soviet system, we place ourselves on the terrain of bourgeois democracy.

• From *The United Front for Defence* (February 1933)

**As long as the majority of the working class continues on the basis of bourgeois democracy, we are ready to defend it with all our forces against violent attacks from the Bonapartist and fascist bourgeoisie.**

However, we demand from our class brothers who adhere to "democratic" socialism that they be faithful to their ideas, that they draw inspiration from the ideas and methods not of the Third Republic but of the Convention of 1793.

Down with the Senate, which is elected by limited suffrage and which renders the power of universal suffrage a mere illusion!

Down with the presidency of the republic, which serves as a hidden point of concentration for the forces of militarism and reaction!

A single assembly must combine the legislative and executive powers. Members would be elected for two years, by universal suffrage at eighteen years of age, with no discrimination of sex or nationality. Deputies would be elected on the basis of local assemblies, constantly revocable by their constituents, and would receive the salary of a skilled worker.

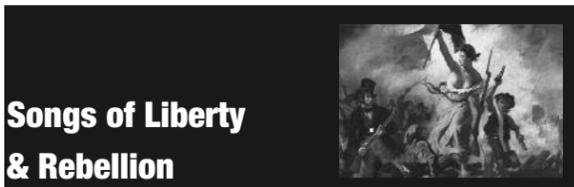
This is the only measure that would lead the masses forward instead of pushing them backward. A more generous democracy would facilitate the struggle for workers' power.

If, during the course of the implacable struggle against the enemy, the party of "democratic" socialism (SFIO) [Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière], from which we are separated by irreconcilable differences in doctrine and method, were to gain the confidence of the majority, we are and always will be ready to defend an SFIO government against the bourgeoisie.

We want to attain our objective not by armed conflicts between the various groups of toilers but by real workers' democracy, by propaganda and loyal criticism, by the voluntary regrouping of the great majority of the proletariat under the flag of true communism.

**Workers adhering to democratic socialism must further understand that it is not enough to defend democracy; democracy must be regained...**

• From *A Program of Action for France* (June 1934)



**Songs of Liberty & Rebellion**

## Come All You Coal Miners

This song was composed by Sarah Ogan Gunning. Sarah was born in 1910 in Bell County Kentucky. One of fifteen children she was the daughter of a coal miner who was a keen trade unionist.

In 1925 Sarah married Andrew Ogan. Andrew was a member of the (short-lived) Communist Party-led National Miners Union.

Unemployment hit the mining community of Kentucky and many migrated — the Ogans end up in the slums of lower East Side, New York City in around 1935. Sarah later married Joseph Gunning, a skilled metal polisher and migrated once again to Detroit in the early 1940s.

It was while she was in New York that Sarah met folk singers who were part of a revival of folk song — Pete Seeger, Burl Ives, Huddie Ledbetter, Earl Robinson, Will Geer, Woody Guthrie. Many would go on to "cover" her songs. Sarah herself, caught up in the everyday reality of poverty and surviving poverty, never made a "career" for herself in songwriting. However in the early sixties she performed in public at folk festivals.

This song was "inspired" by the Great Depression and was one of many of that time and place (southern pits and

mills) which blended "radical" anti-capitalist lyrics and traditional melodies. It was written about her husband, who at the time (late 30s) was dying of TB.

Come all you coal miners wherever you may be  
And listen to a story that I'll relate to thee  
My name is nothing extra, but the truth to you I'll tell  
I am a coal miner's wife, I'm sure I wish you well

Coal mining is the most dangerous work in our land today  
With plenty of dirty slaving work and very little pay  
Coal miner won't you wake up and open your eyes and see  
What the dirty capitalist system is doing to you and me

They take your very life blood and they take our children's lives  
They take fathers away from children and husbands away from wives  
Oh miner, won't you organize wherever you may be  
And make this a land of freedom for workers like you and me

Dear miner, they will slave you until you can't work no more  
And what'll you get for your living but a dollar in a company store  
A tumble-down shack to live in, snow and rain pours in the top  
You have to pay the company rent, your paying never stops

I am a coal miner's wife, I'm sure I wish you well  
Let's sink this capitalist system in the darkest pits of hell

## Background

**In the 1928 general election, the Nazis had won 2.6 percent of the vote. Two years later, on the back of the economic crisis, they leapt to 18.3 percent.**

Alarmed not only at the growth of fascism, but at the response of Germany's two great working-class parties, the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Communists (KPD), Trotsky attempted to sound the alarm. The KPD's position, handed down from Moscow, was that "fascism" was already in power in Germany, and that the coming to power of Hitler would not be a decisive defeat.

After the September 1930 election, the Nazis grew fast, and the Trotskyists stepped up their agitation for a workers' united front to beat them.

In January 1933, President Hindenburg, a former imperial general elected with the support of the Social Democrats as a supposed barrier against fascism, appointed Hitler as Chancellor. It took some months for the Nazis to destroy the working-class organisations and establish total power. Trotsky appealed urgently for a last-minute united front against Hitler.

The official Communist Parties, controlled by Stalin, insisted that their refusal of a united front with the Social Democrats had been correct even while the mighty KPD collapsed without a fight before Hitler. In February 1934, the French Communist Party was forced to change its line, calling a united counter-demonstration with the Socialist Party and the trade unions against a fascist upsurge in Paris.

# A widdershins writer

By Daisy Thomas

**You know the books that draw you in and won't let you leave until you've read every page?**

I had that feeling with Mike Carey's Felix Castor series. The series mixes detective work with a science-fiction twist. The "detective", Castor, is a professional exorcist, operating in an early 21st century London where ghosts, zombies and loup-garous (were-kin) are becoming numerous and active.

Carey seems to have modelled aspects of Castor upon himself. Like Carey in real life, Castor in the books hails from working-class Liverpool. Castor was a teenager there in the 1980s (Carey in the 70s).

Liverpool was rife with turmoil at that time. In 1984-85, Militant (a supposedly revolutionary-socialist group within the Labour Party) gained control of Liverpool's Labour council and led big demonstrations against the Thatcher government. After shoddy compromises and ignominious retreats, it collapsed, and much of the Liverpool labour movement collapsed around it.

Castor is described as having been a member of the Communist Party when a student at Oxford. Carey has him refer sourly to that time; he seems disillusioned, but his sympathies and roots are with the working class.

Castor is acidly critical of religion. Carey is clever here. Castor's older brother, Matt Castor, is a Catholic priest, and a sympathetic character, but Castor has no time for religion.

Carey also creates a sympathetic policeman character (Gary Coldwood), but by doing so allows Castor to be scathing about the police, without caricature.

The loup-garous or were-kin are animal bodies that have been possessed by human ghosts. The human ghost tries to make the animal body look human, ending up with a half-animal/half-human monstrosity.

Castor clashes with loup-garous, demons, ghosts — and also with people who are panicked by these supernatural creatures. Some people feel apprehensive about a new race of supernatural beasts and believe that these characters want to wipe out the human race. Castor has started out in trade as an exorcist who just "eradicates" the undead, but he learns to take more care. One of his best friends is a demon who has decided to live as a human instead, another is a zombie, and yet another is a man possessed by a malicious demon.

These "undead" could be a tentative metaphor for the underclass — people who have suffered misfortune (in their case, the extreme misfortune of death), and some of whom are dangerous. But for Castor, not even demons should be unthinkingly demonised.

Mike Carey is not a one-hit wonder. The Felix Castor novels are his latest work of fiction, but he was an acclaimed writer before that. He has produced and collaborated on scores of graphic novels and comics — most notably: Lucifer, Hellblazer, X-Men, Crossing Midnight, and The Unwritten.

I found his writing style fascinating because of the wide vocabulary he uses. I came across several dozens of new and interesting words. It got to the point that I had to have pen and paper with me so I could jot down the words I liked, and consult a dictionary.

Mike Carey seems to have the whole package — an imaginative vocabulary, an engaging writing style, and descriptions that leap off the page. Descriptions like: "Assuming that Peter was the sullen streak of curdled sunlight hovering at her elbow...", and "The swelling organ chords worked their way through a very impressive diapason that hung in the air like floating furniture" give me reader-bliss.

The stories themselves are (to use two words I learned from Carey) anfractuous and widdershins (or full of twists and turns, and contrary), and the density of nuance and layers in his books calls for a wider vocabulary.

**Read the books, appreciate Carey's writing style, and think about the ideas about the world that he so cleverly weaves into his novels.**

# A life in revolution

**An introduction to Victor Serge by Martyn Hudson**

**Victor Serge's exemplary life as a revolutionary spanned some of the most significant moments of the 20th century. In fiction and journalism he documented "the midnight" of that century — the period of the purges in the Stalinised Soviet Union.**

But what a curriculum vitae! Born in Belgium to revolutionary Russian émigré parents in 1890, Serge joined the ranks of the anarcho-syndicalist movement as a young man. He was jailed for participating in the terrorist activities of the Bonnot gang.

On his release he participated in a short-lived revolutionary uprising in Spain, was imprisoned in France, and then joined the revolution in Russia in 1919. At that point he switched his allegiance from anarchism to Bolshevism. Serge became an agent for the Comintern during the German revolution.

Becoming involved in the Left Opposition he was persecuted by Stalin, arrested, released, arrested again and finally in 1933 sent into exile in Orenburg in Siberia. International protests ensured that Serge was one of very few to survive the purges. Serge found his way again to France and then into exile in the Trotskyist coterie in Mexico City, where he died in 1947.

Serge was an active participant in everything he describes in his many novels and pamphlets. Yet there has been little attempt to analyse his politics or to really take on board some of the lessons that Serge points to holds for those of us committed to the future practice of revolutionary politics. Biographical and editing work by Suzi Weissman and Richard Greeman have recovered the pristine Serge from the grime that has surrounded his reputation.

Surprisingly, however, lies and slanders against Serge came not only from Stalinism but more importantly from within the camp of orthodox Trotskyism where Serge was slandered as a dilettante, a traitor and an accomplice of murder (of the Stalinist defector Ignace Reiss).

Serge is important for two things — the fact that he survived and the fact that that survival allowed him to document his survival.

Serge was at the centre of the Spanish, German and Russian revolutions, the advent of Nazism, the revolt and suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion, the degeneration of the USSR and the tragedy of the Left Opposition. His standing with Trotsky suffered from Serge's inability to keep his mouth shut about what he felt were grave mistakes over Kronstadt, about Serge's relationship to the POUM in Spain, and the fact that he felt that the USSR was not a workers' state (degenerated), but comparable to fascist dictatorship.

It was Serge's unparalleled experience of the Stalinist camps — and his experience of talking to Mensheviks, anarchists, Workers' and Left Oppositionists in the camps — that led him to his view of the nature of the Soviet Union. Essentially his was a "bureaucratic collectivist" analysis (a new

## Victor Serge

bureaucratic ruling class ruled Russia, parallel to but not equivalent to a capitalist ruling class).

Serge recognised — a truth highly unpalatable to orthodox Trotskyism — that the seeds of dictatorship and tyranny were a direct consequence of the actions of the Bolsheviks before the advent of Stalinism. Hence his defence of soviet legality, the plurality of parties, his objection to the rise of the Cheka, his huge misgivings about the Kronstadt suppression — something he defended but felt had been the first sign of a counter-revolution.

Serge never gave up hope. In his last days his closest comrade was Trotsky's widow Natalya Sedova and together they

looked for a new kind of politics free of the filth of slavery.

Serge's novels (*The Case of Comrade Toulayev* and *Midnight in the Century*) are not only political testaments but hugely important literary masterpieces of experimental modernism — the kind of novels that the turncoat Karl Radek would at the Soviet writers' congress of 1934 denounce as the vile work of the bourgeoisie.

Like Orwell, Serge had seen the working class "in the saddle", and he never surrendered his commitment to working class emancipation. But he was also clear that a negative political emancipation from capital meant nothing without a positive liberatory content in socialism. At the heart of the socialist positive programme is freedom of expression and debate and the willingness to accept opposition and dissent. As Craig Raine once said in his poetic analysis of Pasternak's legacy under Stalinism — whether Cheka, KGB, NKVD — what else are they but "the filth in a thousand disguises". Serge's work is a victory against all secret police forces — inside our minds and without.

"I have undergone a little over 10 years of various forms of captivity, agitated in seven countries, and written 20 books. I own nothing. On several occasions a press with a vast circulation has hurled filth at me because I spoke the truth. Behind us lies a victorious revolution gone astray, several abortive attempts at revolution, and massacres in so great a number as to inspire a certain dizziness. And to think that it is not over yet. Let me be done with this digression; those were the only roads possible for us.

**"I have more confidence in mankind and the future than ever before." (Serge — *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*).**

# Calls to action

**Tim Thomas completes his series of articles inspired by the BFI's Ken Loach retrospective**

**Ken Loach is a committed film-maker with 50 years experience of the film business and a prodigious output amounting to nearly a film a year over that period.**

He is a progressive influence and has struggled hard against TV and film censorship. He demands politics be taken seriously and he invites argument. That is why his turn to "Respect" has to be challenged because it didn't just contribute to the demise of the Socialist Alliance, it indicated an adventure. He has also expressed support for the free-booter Assange. And whereas *Hidden Agenda* (written by Jim Allen) confuses, *Wind That Shakes The Barley* (written by Paul Laverty) suggests intransigence might become an unhealthy pre-occupation with martyrdom.

But there is much more to be amazed at and inspired by in his work: his ability to capture, in feature or documen-

tary, an historical relationship in a single moment of conflict, for example. Or his technical brilliance, his innovative way of working with actors and script. Of the TV film, *Days of Hope*, the film director Stephen Frears has written, "There isn't one cinema film which compares in importance with *Days of Hope*. Not one".

Or take my favourite, *Sweet Sixteen*, the story of a community shot through with thugs and drugs. Filmed in Greenock, the acutely observed performances reveal a family drawn into gangland manipulation. While there was hope in *Days of Hope* there is very little hope here and even less in *Route Irish*, his take on Iraq. But, despite the degradation he is witness to in his later films, there are always moments of heroism and always plans for a way through the difficulties.

*Riff Raff* and *The Navigators* (the latter written by Rob Dawber, an AWL member who died not long after the film was made) are full of edgy humour. *Looking for Eric* is the most warm-hearted film I've ever seen. And then there is his epic, *Land and Freedom* which, apart from a description of civil war Spain and the struggle of the POUM against fascism and Stalinism, demands viewers weigh up their own level of commitment to the continuing struggle.

**His films are calls to action. Happy 75th, Ken Loach.**

# Nationalise the banks!

By Michel Husson

**The crisis has taught us a lesson: “neoliberal Europe” was a badly-conceived thing, which has become more and more rickety over the years and appears to be incapable of standing up to the “stress test” of crisis.**

Right now, there are only two ways out: either everyone is going to take their marbles home and quit; or the whole edifice will have to be rebuilt, from top to bottom. But sticking plasters are being stuck over sticking plasters. How things turn out in Greece will serve as a barometer for this whole stop-starting process: everyone knows that Greece won't be able to pay its debts, but everyone is acting as if it could succeed in its impossible task, by means of bail-out plans and inadequate loan extensions, and break its economy in order to pay back its debt.

The other side of the problem is obviously the exposure of European banks to the risk of a Greek default, although it was they who pushed the country into debt. If Portugal, Ireland and Greece defaulted, the loss would be 100 billion euros, but if Italy and Spain followed (for two thirds of their debt), the loss would reach 800 billion euros, which is more than is held by the European Financial Stability Fund (250 billion euros today and 440 billion euros in the future). That the next President of the European Central Bank (ECB) is Mario Draghi, the ex-chief of the European arm of Goldman Sachs, which helped Greece cook its books, is just another element of the comedy that we are watching unfold.

When the crisis broke, states came to the rescue of the banks. But they didn't match this aid with any kind of rethinking of the way finance works. To take one example, “naked Credit Default Swaps” [in which the buyer does not own the underlying debt — you don't own the thing on which you are buying insurance] were not banned, and they allow one today to speculate on public debt which the buyer does not even own. The bill for the crisis has passed from the private sector to the public sector, and states are looking now to pass the bill on to the taxpayer, with all the sense of fairness and equity that you'd expect. The debts weren't cleared — they were just passed on: that is what explains the persistence of the crisis.

Things are even more tangled up by the fact that state budgets are inextricably linked with banks' balances, with a total absence of transparency. It is not even certain that the banks know exactly where they are at themselves. One thing, however, is clear: that the “stress tests” which were supposed to evaluate the resilience of banks were either “laughable” or “pathetic”, to use the words of [French senior civil servant] Jacques Attali. All this explains [IMF chief] Christine Lagarde's recent pronouncement about the “urgent” need to recapitalise a certain number of European banks. But the banks do not want to hear this and prefer to moan about the too-restrictive (for their profits, that is) rules of [the new package of banking rules requiring banks to have greater holdings backing up their investments] “Basel III”.

The only rational means of untangling the skein of debts

would be to nationalise the banks, to take everything back to square one, once and for all, and to organise the inevitable default of the most exposed countries. The distributions of dividends would be forbidden, and a citizens' audit would make it possible to target illegitimate debts. This nationalisation could be permanent (the radical option) or it could be temporary (the moderate option) like in Sweden in the 1990s.

Ultra-left fantasy? No, just objective analysis. It is striking that two economists, authors of a book [Augustin Landier and David Thesmar, *Le grand méchant marché*] which defends the virtues of the market against a “French fantasy” make the same argument: “recapitalisations must take place under states' hands, and in certain cases temporary nationalisations”.

That liberals see that the logic of the banks cuts against “the public interest” and are calling for “coercion” should give pause for thought. From this point of view, the spinelessness of the left is dreadful. When they are not bowing down before the financial markets, like Papandreou or Zapatero, they are competing to make austerity. [Leading French Socialist Party member François] Hollande: “We have to balance our public accounts from 2013... I am not saying that in order to give in to any sort of pressure from the markets or the ratings agencies”. [Other leading French Socialist Party member Martine] Aubry: “3% in 2013, as it is the rule today”.

**Finance is trembling!**

• From *Politis*, 15/9/2011. Translation by Edward Maltby.

## Greece: real choice is workers vs bosses

**The Greek socialist group Okde has made the following response to the latest developments in the Greek debt crisis**

**Call a general strike! Overthrow the government! Defy the IMF and EU rules! Don't pay the debt!**

The new austerity measures that the Greek government has announced are only the beginning of a new barrage of anti-working-class and anti-social measures that the supposedly socialist Government of PASOK is intended to take in the rest of 2011 and the following years.

They are the continuation of the austerity measures taken in previous years, in the name of the Greek debt and reduction of the deficit, that have destroyed the social cohesion of the Greek society and have led to a massive rise in unemployment, poverty, and destitution for the majority of the Greek working class.

The following extra measures have been announced:

1. Non-taxable income has been further reduced to a meagre €5,000 per year, which is preposterous taking into account that the poverty level is defined at €6,897 per year. The immorality and hard-core capitalist commitment of the PASOK government is exposed — Greek workers/pensioners with a monthly wage of €357 will be taxed! This measure will further reduce the annual income of workers and pensioners by at least €700.

2. Pensions will further be reduced. In particular, from November, reductions of 20% will be imposed on pensioners that earn over €1200 per month. The impact of these reductions should be considered in the context of the attacks on pensions during 2010 (i.e. increase in the pensioners' insurance contributions, cancellation of additional benefit, etc).

### PENSIONS

**3. Workers who “decided” to take their pension at the age of 55 or younger (mostly women and workers in hard manual jobs), will see their pensions further reduced by 40%, for every pension above €1000 per month.**

4. From next month, what is euphemistically referred to as the “homogeneous salary scheme” will be introduced for all public sector, utility sector and council workers. Public sector workers' wages will follow the lowest denominator rule. Similarly, other wage elements such as taxation, contributions, insurances, benefits will be adjusted to the lowest comparative standards. The above measure is expected to reduce the income of a public sector worker and their family by up to 50%. The consequences on family budgets and on mortgage repossession are unimaginable.

5. Introduction of the concept of “workers in reserve employment”, another word for masking unemployment. Be-

### Greek workers are being made to pay for the crisis

tween now and the end of 2011 30,000 public sector workers will effectively lose their current jobs and be placed in the new status of “reserve employment”. The salary of these workers will be slashed by 50% to 60% of their current salary and eventually they will be sacked, with the pretext of making a more lean and efficient public sector.

6. Further enhancement of the structural adjustments and changes. Speeding up of the privatisation program. Sell off €5 billion worth of public property and public services till the end of 2011 and a total of €50 billion up to the end of 2015. Close down a lot of public sector services and dismantle labour laws and workers' rights. Getting rid of the collective power of workers negotiations and introduce “business settlements and agreements” that overwrite “collective workers' rights” and fragments and isolates the collective and negotiating power of the workers.

7. An additional tax on property owners.

The list goes on and on. More attacks on the workers' rights and standards of living are anticipated this year and the years to come. There is no light at the end of this tunnel.

The hated clique of PASOK, Papandreou, and Venizelos is blackmailing the Greek workers and society with false choices: “Acceptance of the austerity measurements or bankruptcy”, “Be members of the European Union and follow the euro, or follow an isolationist anti-EU policy”.

The truth though is apparent: the austerity measures lead to bankruptcy for the Greek working class. The continuous devaluation of the workers' wages, the restriction of our social and political rights, the dismantling and the privatisation of our public services, have a devastating effect on our education system, our welfare state, our health system, the

things which reflect the struggles and achievements of the Greek working class after the second world war.

The real choice is the following: “Us (Greek workers) against Them (Government, capitalists, EU, IMF)”. Socialism or barbarism captures it.

The workers should reclaim the wealth that we produce, or they, the capitalists, are going to carry on accumulating unimaginable wealth and savings (such as the €600 billion that are stored in Greek citizens' accounts in Swiss banks, an amount exceeding the Greek national debt).

We should not save the economy. We should save ourselves — workers, peasants, pensioners, youth. We should refuse to be sacrificed for the needs of the bankrupt capitalist system, financial speculators, the EU, and the IMF.

### LEVEL

**We have to start by reorganising our solidarity and struggle by refusing to obey and pay any illegally imposed new taxes by the unaccountable PASOK government.**

We have to increase our numbers and unify all movements of resistance (public and private sector workers, transportation workers, taxi drivers, utility sector workers, students, pensioners, unemployed). Our action should bring Greece to a standstill.

We have to demonstrate where the real power lies. We should put forward the demand of another society, which has our needs as its priority, a socialist, radical democratic society.

Both our content and form of struggles should match the level and aggressiveness of their attacks. Contrary to the timid calls from the reformist parties (KKE and SYRIZA) for parliamentary elections, we should organise and fight for a continuous general strike. A general strike called and organised from below by us workers, without relying on the union bureaucracy that tries to paralyse the trade union struggles and lead the workers to defeat at the negotiating table.

**United to overthrow this government and the consensus of all the bourgeois parties, EU and IMF, on the attacks on the Greek working class.**

Our core demands should be:

1. Refusal to obey any government impose austerity measures

2. Abolish the national debt

3. Call a general strike to overthrow the PASOK government and its austerity measures

4. Nationalise all banks, utility services and big businesses, without compensation to the capitalists and under workers' control

**5. Fight for a truly democratic, accountable, radical socialist society**

• www.okde.gr. Translation by Theodora Polenta.

## BAE job cuts: workers need their own plan

By Darren Bedford

**Arms industry behemoth British Aerospace Engineering (BAE) has announced plans to axe 7.5% of its UK workforce with 3,000 job losses slated, mainly from sites in the north of England.**

The BAE factory at Brough, near Hull, will lose 900 workers from a workforce of just 1,300.

Responses from politi-

cians and union officials alike have been mainly characterised by sympathetic but insubstantial grumbling and calls to “mitigate the impact” of cuts. Labour’s Shadow defence minister Jim Murphy MP has described the cuts as a “body blow”. His comment comes soon after a speech at Labour Party conference in which he attacked the government over its cuts to the defence budget.

A socialist campaign against the job cuts cannot limit itself to a defence of the status quo or, like much of Unite’s material, descend into quasi-jingoistic paeans to “British manufacturing”. The 3,000 BAE workers set to lose their jobs must be kept in work, but is producing machinery for capitalist governments to kill other workers with really the best use to which their skills could be put? Demands to increase de-

fence spending, to order more military hardware from companies like BAE, are a short-sighted and dangerous response. The labour movement should demand that military budgets are reduced even further, and that workers currently employed in the defence industry should be retrained, and their factories repurposed, to produce desperately-needed products such as rolling stock for railways or renewable

energy resources. BAE workers should link up with workers at companies like train manufacturer Bombardier to demand a massive expansion of socially and environmentally sustainable jobs.

There is a precedent for this kind of action; in 1976, workers at the giant Lucas Aerospace plant responded to a management job cuts plan with their own workers’ plan to convert the plants’ productive capaci-

ties to make medical equipment, hybrid cars and integrated road-rail vehicles. Within a framework where profit comes first, no job can remain safe forever.

**BAE workers need a plan that puts the needs of our class and our planet ahead of the needs of bosses’ profit margins.**

• More on the lessons of Lucas and workers’ plans: <http://bit.ly/oh1Cq6>

## Council strikes make their mark

By Gerry Bates

**Council services all over Shropshire were closed on Thursday 22 September as over 1,000 local government workers struck against the council’s cuts plans, which include a proposed pay cut of 5.4%. 500 workers attended a rally at Shirehall in Shrewsbury.**

250 striking workers in Birmingham also rallied outside the Liberal Democrat conference on Wednesday 21 September as they walked out in protest at council plans to impose new contracts that could see some workers taking a pay cut of up to 33%. 2,500 workers also struck on Wednesday 21

September in Doncaster, where council bosses plan a pay freeze until 2013 and pay cuts of over 5%.

Education and health workers in Northern Ireland will strike for a day on Wednesday 5 October as the threat of public service cuts mounts.

The strikes are part of a growing pattern of “little bangs” leading to the larger set-piece confrontation on 30 November.

**Unions must work out strategies for action to connect up these disputes and turn them into proactive struggles designed to force employers back rather than registering a token gesture of displeasure at their schemes.**

## Tube: no sell-off of drivers’ rights!

By a Tubeworker supporter

**London Underground management are attempting to ride roughshod over tube drivers’ terms and conditions as they seek to impose a new working agreement for the London 2012 Olympics.**

The new terms include 9-hour shifts at weekends (plus a 30-minute unpaid meal break) and the overriding of local agreements such as the one on the Bakerloo line where drivers currently drive through no more than five tunnels per duty but would be expected to drive through six under the terms of the new deal. Bosses also want the right to change drivers’ duties and rest days at shorter notice than before. The working week could also be extended from 36 hours to 42.

Drivers-only union ASLEF has agreed to the deal, citing the £500 bonus LU management is offering to drivers. Because ASLEF has a majority on the Trains

Functional Council (the cross-union body which negotiates drivers’ working conditions with management), LU bosses are claiming that the deal is now agreed and will be imposed. The Rail, Maritime and Transport workers’ union (RMT), which also organises Tube drivers has not signed up to the deal and promises to fight it.

RMT argues that, rather than making existing drivers work longer hours for a paltry bonus, LU should take on some of the workers from other grades currently on the waiting list for promotion to drivers’ positions. A resolution by RMT’s Executive, proposed by London Transport region representative Janine Booth, states that, “all grades of London Underground workers face increased workload and pressure during the Olympics. All grades deserve to be properly rewarded, and to be protected against attacks on hard-won agreements and rights.”

The union also seems set to dig in for a long-term

battle with LU management over the 2011 pay deal. LU is insisting on a 5-year pay deal, 0.5% below RPI in the first year and only fractionally above it in the following years. Not only is this not good enough in cash terms, it also does not give the improvements in working conditions or the better rise for lower-paid grades that three of the unions (RMT, TSSA and Unite) demanded, and would clear management’s desk for five years, enabling them to pursue a wholesale attack on jobs after the Olympics.

Union activists can see the benefits of waiting to use the added bargaining power tube workers expect to gain from 2012’s Olympics and Mayoral elections. But activists also worry that if the fight is delayed too long, the financial pressures of the Christmas/New Year period may weaken members’ resolve to fight, and the company may try to impose a deal or one of the unions may break ranks and accept it.

**AWL members working on the tube have been ar-**

**guing for a strategy based on taking the issue out round the workplaces as energetically as possible, so that rank-and-file members are ready for a fight whenever is the right time to do it, and which has opposition to long multi-year deals, and real improvements to pay and conditions, as a bottom line.**

**Celebrate Tubeworker’s 20th birthday!**

**Thursday 13 October, 7pm at Twelve Pins Pub (next to Finsbury Park station)**

Buffet provided

More: [facebook.com/tubeworker](http://facebook.com/tubeworker)  
[workersliberty.org/twblog](http://workersliberty.org/twblog)

## Uni workers to strike

By Padraig O’Brien

**Academic workers at 67 of the UK’s biggest universities have voted for a “sustained campaign of industrial action” to resist changes to the Universities Superannuation Scheme (USS, the pensions scheme for workers in “traditional” — i.e. pre-1992 — universities).**

Bosses want to increase employee contributions, reduce overall pension benefits for new starters and workers made redundant and remove inflation-proofing.

The workers’ union, the University and College Union (UCU), plans an escalating programme of action including working-to-rule, a marking boycott, a full assessment boycott and strikes. Action is likely to begin in mid-October, meaning that

teaching staff at pre-1992 universities could be involved in the 30 November strikes. UCU members at post-1992 institutions are in a separate pension scheme and still have a live mandate for strike action from the 30 June strikes.

On a turnout of 42%, 58% of UCU members voted for strike action, with just under 77% voting for action short of a strike.

**UCU leader Sally Hunt said “there will be widespread and sustained disruption unless USS is prepared to return to the negotiating table.”**

### Middlesex Uni

**UCU and Unison members at Middlesex University are due to strike on Tuesday 4 October against the threat of 300 job losses.**

## Unions hold firm on pensions strikes

**Local government unions have vowed to continue building for strike action on 30 November despite new proposals from the Local Government Association intended to soften the blow of Tory pensions reforms.**

The plan, which the LGA has presented to the Department for Communities and Local Government, would freeze the proposed increase in employee contributions for two years and provide greater protection for the lower-paid. The scheme also includes an option for workers unable or unwilling to increase their contribution to take a cut in their pension benefits instead.

In the LGA’s letter to Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, they explicitly cite “reducing the

risk of industrial action” as a reason for formulating their proposals.

Unions have criticised the proposals as “a short-term fix” that tinkers within the framework of the “savings” (read: cuts) from the Local Government Pensions Scheme demanded by the coalition.

An open conflict with the Tory-led LGA could weaken the Coalition, and the move shows that even the threat of industrial action can frighten local government bosses into acting.

**Now unions need their own plan for fair pensions for all which rejects the starting premise — the “need” for “savings” that must come from increases in retirement age and employee contributions — that both the government and the LGA share.**

## College workers strike in Glasgow

By Dale Street

**Unison members in Stow College in Glasgow are beginning a campaign of strike action this week against the imposition of a pay freeze.**

The union’s 90 members in the college include learning support workers, administration and clerical workers, caretakers, cleaners and catering workers. Many are low paid, with some earning only slightly more the national minimum wage.

With inflation running at over 5%, electricity and gas prices rising by 18% or more, and the ever-increasing cost of food, the pay freeze being imple-

mented by the college management is, in reality, a pay cut.

Management cannot use the excuse that the pay freeze is to save jobs — they are also in the process of privatising a range of support services.

All 90 Unison members are taking strike action for a day on Wednesday 28 September).

**This will be followed by selective strike action by canteen workers on 4, 5, 6, 11 and 13 October.**

• Email messages of protest to Principal Robert McGrory: [enquiries@stow.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@stow.ac.uk)  
• Messages of support to: [enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@glasgowcityunison.co.uk)

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Attack predators? Start by taxing rich instead of cuts

By Rhodri Evans

**Ed Miliband and Ed Balls now talk of taking on "predators", "building an alternative to the neo-liberal settlement", and changing from "an economic settlement that, to a large extent, we [Labour leaders] accepted while we were in government".**

A move against capitalist "predators" has to start with serious measures to control the banks and tax the rich.

Miliband and Balls still won't back workers fighting back against the

"predators".

Balls claimed in his speech that "there is nothing that George Osborne would like better than a strike this autumn to divert attention...". Miliband told the *New Statesman* that he wouldn't answer "hypothetical" questions about backing the 30 November strike.

Unison general secretary Dave Prentis said at Labour conference that his members "would never forgive" Labour leaders who wouldn't back 30 November; but he didn't push a proposal to back the strike for a vote at conference.

Ed Miliband

The nearest thing Balls and Miliband proposed was not new: a continuation of the old tax on

bankers' bonuses. Balls and Miliband propose just tiny tweaks in the old "neo-liberal settlement".

And Ed Balls's speech was geared to get headlines emphasising the "I won't reverse all Tory cuts" message rather than the "break from neo-liberalism" trope.

**Union and Labour activists should demand real action against the "predators".**

• More on the Labour Party conference: page 3

## Site workers gain confidence

By Stewart Ward

**Four hundred workers took part in a protest on Monday 26 September at the Lindsey Oil Refinery as the campaign against the plan by eight big contractors to cut pay for construction electricians continues.**

The 400 included some workers from West Burton and Saltend who had taken wildcat strike action to join the protest.

Protests were also held at the Manchester Town Hall construction site and the Tyne Tunnel site in Newcastle (where the tunnel was briefly blockaded) on 22 September.

Workers focused on leafleting workers going into the sites; building up organisation and union membership among electricians currently employed on sites run by "the big eight" will be essential to any ongoing campaign. Reports from the Carrington paper mill site, the scene of a protest last week, claim that the rank-and-file newspaper *Site Worker* is now "the talk of the site", suggesting that efforts to engage with workers not already plugged in to the campaign may be paying off.

These actions followed a similar protest on 21 September, when about 300 construction workers and supporters demonstrated at the Crossrail construction site in Farringdon, London.

This was the fourth in a series of demonstrations at construction sites in the capital. This time it had support from the leadership of the main electricians' union, Unite. Unite assistant general secretary Gail Cartmail was there.

She said that the union

will ballot members on the site for strikes — *but only when membership on the sites has been built up sufficiently.*

The demonstration organisers, feeling more confident, marched from the agreed demonstration place to the main entrance of the construction site, and staged a brief token occupation of the site.

The campaign's difficulty is that many of the workers on the demonstrations are unemployed or blacklisted. Organisation on the Crossrail site is weak, and there wasn't systematic leafleting or discussion with the workers actually on the site (even in English, let alone in any of the East European first languages of many of the workers).

Some workers on the site said they would support the campaign. Others were sceptical but not hostile.

A programme of further demonstrations in cities across the UK is planned for the coming weeks.

The rank-and-file committee is continuing to demand that Unite ballot its electrician members, but with a lack of organisation on many key sites this may be difficult. The employers' attack may also move at a pace that outstrips the ability of Unite to respond.

Balfour Beatty, one of the big contractors, has already issued legal "notices of termination" to its electricians to force them to accept lower pay.

**While workers are right to demand that their union gives them official support and organises official ballots, more unofficial and wildcat action will almost certainly be necessary if the contractors are to be beaten back.**

• [siteworkers@virginmedia.com](mailto:siteworkers@virginmedia.com)

**TUC march and rally  
outside the Conservative Party conference  
Manchester, Sunday 2 October  
Assemble: 12 noon, Liverpool Road (off Deansgate)**

## SNP passes on the Con-Dem cuts

By Anne Field

**The Scottish National Party (SNP) is passing on the Con-Dem cuts and throwing in a few of its own. Pay, pensions, jobs and services were all targeted for cuts in Finance Secretary John Swinney's first Spending Review earlier this year.**

Scotland's local authority workers already faced a three-year pay freeze.

Now, as a result of Swinney's announcement, the pay of all public sector workers in Scotland is be frozen not only for this year but in 2012 as well.

If there is a pay rise in two years time (a big if), it will certainly be less than

the rate of inflation.

With inflation running at over 5% this across-the-board public-sector pay freeze will mean falling living standards for hundreds of thousands of workers.

Given that Scotland has a higher proportion of jobs in the public sector than the rest of the UK, the resulting fall in consumer demand will have a knock-on effect on the rest of the economy.

Wages will also be badly affected by Swinney's decision to increase public sector pension contributions by 3.2%. This increase will apply to workers employed in the NHS, the civil service, schools, the fire service and the police,

but not to local authority employees.

Unison has declared itself in a trade dispute with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and will proceed with an industrial action ballot among local authority members.

The government will not be increasing the grants it pays to local authorities in order to compensate them for their declining income, in real terms, from the council tax (frozen since 2007, and the SNP is pledged to keep frozen for another five years).

On the contrary, the SNP is "reprofiling" local authority finances. What this means in practice is straightforward: pay them less, force them to borrow

more, saddle them with the interest payments on the money borrowed, and, at some later date, promise to pay them the money that has been withheld from them.

Local authorities will see a total of more than £700 million cut from their budgets in the immediate future.

According to Unison, 31,000 local authority jobs were due to be axed between 2010 and 2012. Swinney's announcement will result in even more.

Despite SNP promises to protect health spending, the budget for health will fall in real terms by nearly £200 million. Worst affected in the NHS will be spending on new capital

projects.

The budget for further education is being cut by £74 million. Funding for the voluntary sector is being cut by over £4 million. Funding for Historic Scotland will be cut by nearly 25%, while the budget for the National Records of Scotland is slashed by nearly 30%.

£20 million is to be cut from the legal aid budget, and £15 million from the prison service budget. Spending on maintaining Scottish Water's pipe network is being slashed by £120 million. Spending on agriculture and fisheries is to be cut by £65 million.

All these cuts in funding will result in round after round of job cuts.

Despite Swinney imposing a levy on big retailers — a revamped version of the so-called "Tesco tax" which the SNP failed to get passed when it was a minority government — there is nothing pro-the-people and anti-big-business about Swinney's Spending Review.

The 1 October Scottish TUC demonstration against public spending cuts should signal a mobilisation not just against the Con-Dem cuts but against the SNP ones as well.

**It has to build support for strike action on 30 November, and step up pressure on Labour-controlled local authorities in particular not to implement the cuts.**