

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty



No 263 7 November 2012 30p/80p

www.workersliberty.org

For a workers' government

**Tories and
child abuse**
page 5



**The other
America**
page 8

**Greece and the
eurozone**
pages 9-10



Cleaners' disputes spread

See pages 6-7



Members of the Industrial Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) union who clean the London branch of French bank Société Générale protest outside the company office on Friday 5 October. They had won the London Living Wage, but then the company cut their hours and suspended all those who had taken action.

Photo: © Shahin Shahablou

Revolt of the low-paid

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, bisexual and transgender people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.
- If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!

Contact us:

● 020 7394 8923 ● solidarity@workersliberty.org

The editor (Cathy Nugent), 20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG.

● Printed by Trinity Mirror

Get Solidarity every week!

- Trial sub, 6 issues £5
- 22 issues (six months). £18 waged
£9 unwaged
- 44 issues (year). £35 waged
£17 unwaged
- European rate: 28 euros (22 issues)
or 50 euros (44 issues)

Tick as appropriate above and send your money to:
20e Tower Workshops, Riley Road, London, SE1 3DG
Cheques (£) to "AWL".

Or make £ and euro payments at workersliberty.org/sub.

Name

Address

I enclose £



Irish left falls apart

By Micheál MacEnis

Mere weeks before yet another brutal cuts budget in Ireland (backed by the Irish Labour Party as a junior partner in coalition government), the United Left Alliance (ULA) appears to have fallen apart.

Formed in November 2010, the ULA won five seats in the Dáil in the February 2011 elections. The Socialist Party and the Socialist Workers Party formed the bedrock of the organisation, along with the Tipperary-based Workers and Unemployed Action Group (WUAG).

However, the ULA has been plagued from its inception by problems of programme, democracy and the attitude of its two major components, which have led to constant tensions and prevented it from realising its initial large promise.

It never really became more than a top-level lash-up between Ireland's two largest revolutionary Trotskyist organisations, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Socialist Party (SP).

Its programme is a watered-down list of social democratic demands. It falls somewhere between using the Dáil to support and publicise workers' struggles and offering a governmental alternative to Fine Gael and Labour.

The SWP in particular have been averse to adopting a revolutionary programme, a reflection of its opportunist desire to choose its slogans on the basis of what "catches the mood" rather than what is needed to strategically orient the working class. A leaked in-

ternal SWP bulletin in February shows that the party has all but given up on sustaining the ULA. This was confirmed with the re-launch of its People Before Profit front in October, with an even more catch-all approach.

Compounding the confusion has been the lack of internal democracy. Most decisions were made by an unelected national committee dominated by the SP and the SWP leaderships. Apparently it has only been since April this year, when a group of non-aligned mem-

bers won the right to representation, that minutes have been circulated to the membership.

The proposed ULA conference in November now looks to be not happening, and the last few months have seen the organisation rocked by the ignominious resignation of ex-SP TD Clare Daly and the departure of the WUAG. It is possible that too much has been lost for the resuscitation of the project in its current form to be a viable, or indeed desirable, option.

What is needed is a open and democratic revolutionary party putting forward a programme of transitional demands rooted in the struggles of Irish workers, aiming to increase the class-consciousness and organisation of the working-class, and indicating the ultimate aims of the struggle for socialism.

This can only be built by the patient work of socialists in the labour movement, not through the means of a top-heavy electoral alliance with a passive membership.

Discussing with French revolutionaries

By Martin Thomas

On 3-4 November I attended, on behalf of AWL, the annual conference of L'Etincelle, a French Trotskyist group with whom we have had contact and discussion since about 1997.

From its origins in the mid-90s to 2008, L'Etincelle was a faction in a larger Trotskyist organisation, Lutte Ouvrière. It still officially styles itself "the Etincelle faction of Lutte Ouvrière". It was expelled from LO in September 2008.

The trigger for the expulsion was the refusal of town councillors, members of the faction, elected on the LO ticket, to accept a new LO policy that year of joint lists for town council elections with the Socialist Party.

The faction joined the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), a broader group which had 9000 members on its formation in 2009 and which, despite many troubles since, still has about 3000.

Mostly, however, the ac-

tivists of L'Etincelle do L'Etincelle activity, with some slower-paced NPA activity in the background. Although the NPA is more active and vastly more left-wing than the Labour Party, in some ways L'Etincelle being in NPA is like an activist left group in Britain being in the Labour Party.

In line with Lutte Ouvrière tradition, L'Etincelle gears its activity round fortnightly workplace bulletins. It publishes 42 bulletins, mostly under the L'Etincelle masthead, though some as "L'Etincelle/NPA", and some as "NPA". In the NPA L'Etincelle figure primarily as the people who organise systematic political (as distinct from trade-union) activity aimed at workplaces.

The other main activity, for L'Etincelle as for LO, is sales, meetings, individual discussions and so on aimed primarily at winning new young recruits at universities and at the equivalents of sixth-form colleges. One theme of the conference was a call to increase this sort of activity.

The NPA is a relatively low-intensity group. Its local committees often meet only once a month. Its paper, *Tout est à nous*, has a print run of 6500, which, given that a paper sold hand-to-hand by activists cannot even at the best to sell much more than half the print run, shows that most of its 3000 members do little to promote the paper.

Its members are often active in unions and in campaigns, but mostly as unionists and campaigners rather than as fighters for clear-cut NPA ideas. Its public visibility comes mostly from the profile in the media of spokespeople such as Olivier Besancenot and from its election campaigns.

The discussions at the L'Etincelle conference covered four main areas.

- Detailed reviews of L'Etincelle activity: recruitment, bulletins, sales of the group's magazine, work in NPA committees.
- Assessment of the class struggle. This discussion

centred mainly on the battle against closure of the PSA car factory at Aulnay.

● Reports by L'Etincelle's sister groups in San Francisco (*Speak Out Now*) and Berlin (*Sozialistische Arbeit-erstimme*). There was a short report on discussions with the RSO, a group mainly based in Vienna but with offshoots also in Berlin, Zurich, and Manchester. Several members of the RSO attended the conference.

● Election of a committee (in fact a short item, since the outgoing committee re-proposed itself, minus one member who wanted to withdraw, and was unanimously re-elected en bloc).

Speaking briefly at the conference, I outlined the defence campaign for Bob Carnegie.

And I mentioned the discussions, and plans for further discussions, between the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency, Marksist Tutum (Turkey), AWL (and its sister groups), and L'Etincelle (and its sister groups).

Euro-strike on 14 November

By Gerry Bates

14 November will see Europe's first ever continent-wide general strike. It will be far from complete, but workers in several different countries will be out "for jobs and solidarity in Europe: no to austerity".

There will be full one-day general strikes in Spain and Portugal. Greek unions are expected to follow up their two-day general strike on 6-7 November by striking again on 14 November.

In Italy, the CGIL union federation has called a four-hour general strike.

According to some reports there will also be general strikes in Cyprus and

Malta. In France, the unions are organising numerous demonstrations in working time: the Paris one assembles in Montparnasse at 2pm.

The Rumanian unions, and the usually very cautious German unions are also organising demonstrations (one at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin at 3pm).

British unions, sadly, are lagging. In London a solidarity protest at the European Commission office (32 Smith Square, SW1P 3EU) is planned, but called by a left-wing campaign, COR, rather than by the unions.

The crisis and the cuts are Europe-wide. The fight back needs to be Europe-wide.

• www.etuc.org/a/10446

No Trident replacement!

£83.5 billion to buy a like-for-like replacement for Britain's Trident nuclear-armed submarines — the Tories say they still want to spend it, despite saying there is no money for hospitals, schools, and benefits!

The Lib-Dems say there could be a cheaper option. The government coalition plans no decision this side of a 2015 election.

The media report hints that Ed Miliband and Labour will go for the cheaper-nuclear-weapons

option.

Yet nuclear weapons, even cheaper, can only "defend" by threatening mass murder of civilians. Labour should oppose them outright.

93 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion (in effect, a petition signed by MPs: it doesn't get debated) for scrapping British nuclear weapons.

Most are Labour, but the 93 include a fair few Lib Dems.

• www.parliament.uk/edm/2012-13/96

Defend Bob Carnegie!

The Maritime Union of Australia Sydney branch, the Victorian public sector rank and file unionists' network, and the NTEU University of New South Wales branch are supporting Bob Carnegie, the Brisbane activist being sued on multiple charges by construction giant Abigroup.

Abigroup is bringing "contempt of court" charges against Bob to gain revenge for having to concede the workers' demands in the nine-week dispute at the Queensland Children's Hospital construction site, where Bob helped as a community protest organiser.

• Add your support, or get campaign news, at bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

In brief

EBacc

The announcement that subjects such as drama and art will not be included in the new "English Baccalaureate" (EBacc) and that it will only focus on "core" subjects (English, maths, science, history and languages) has provoked criticism from people in the arts that the country's "creative edge" is at threat. But this misses the point.

The narrowing of the curriculum will badly affect working-class students who have fewer opportunities for self-expression.

Stop Uni demolition!

On 31 October, a packed meeting organised by the University College London Union (UCLU) against the university's proposal to build on the Carpenters Estate in Newham heard from residents, students and housing experts opposed to the plans.

UCL plans to build a new £1 billion campus in Stratford. The council has been running down the 705-home estate for a decade, encouraging residents to leave and boarding up empty properties with squatter-proof metal shutters, despite a housing shortage in the borough. The estate still has 318 homes and many members of the close-knit community are defiantly opposed to plans to move them out.

Members of Carpenters Against Regeneration Plan (CARP) attended the meeting at UCL and argued that the council is treating their community as a "social problem" and wants to change the class character of the area. The meeting showed films narrating the broken promises of the so-called "Olympic legacy" and the contemptuous manner in which the council has treated residents opposed to the plans.

Protests are planned.

Virgin moves to a new business model



By Todd Hamer

Virgin Care has abolished its partnership agreements with over 300 GPs due to concerns over the "potential conflict of interest" when these GPs take control of commissioning in April 2013.

Under the old arrangement these GPs had a 50% stake in Virgin Care partnerships (GPCos) providing services like GP surgeries, diagnostics and dermatology. If they continued with the partnership agreement then these GPs would be in a position to award themselves NHS contracts!

The news that these partnerships have been dissolved is an admission by one of the big players in NHS privatisation that the new system is potentially riddled with corruption.

In their press release Virgin say they are moving to a new business model. "As the business has grown rapidly in the last two years, we now find that far fewer of our patient contacts are seen in services run by our GPCOs. With many more new service contracts set to start, this proportion will reduce significantly" In other words, the GPCOs

were a useful way for Virgin to get a foothold in the NHS but they now need to concentrate resources on taking over bigger chunks of the NHS.

Tax-dodging Virgin has won £750 million contracts with the NHS and is set to get bigger. A recent Dispatches documentary revealed how it made its profit by driving down standards.

The fact that Virgin cannot provide decent services at NHS prices is no surprise. Before the Health and Social Care Act was passed, a Department of Health report showed that the NHS was 14% more efficient than its nearest private sector rival. The only way that Virgin can make a profit on its NHS contracts is by driving down the quality of patient care. It achieves this largely through staffing cuts.

From April 2013 GPs will be handed £60 billion NHS money and will sell off large chunks of the NHS to private sector parasites like Virgin Care.

Firms like Virgin and Care UK, which have channelled thousands of pounds of donations into the Tory Party in recent years, stand to make a killing at the expense of our health and well being.

We need mass civil unrest to save the NHS!

South London: cuts and chaos

By a Lewisham health worker

South London NHS Trust was taken into administration in July, because it was massively underfunded. Four hospitals were left in limbo until 29 October when the administrator announced their plans.

A neighbouring Trust, Lewisham Healthcare will suffer, with its A&E, some surgery, and maternity services all threatened with closure.

Lewisham Hospital is a small Trust, struggling to resist merger by applying for Foundation Trust status. A previous consultation had already proposed the closure of Lewisham's A&E. In the event, the A&E in Sidcup was closed and the South London NHS Trust was formed.

Lewisham is a densely populated area. Its A&E became noticeably busier after the Sidcup closure, and sometimes the maternity services in the whole region are so stretched that Lewisham residents have to be sent to Queen Charlotte's Hospital at the other side of London when they're in labour.

The staff at Lewisham hospital have responded

with alarm at the threatened closures, and local NHS campaigns have combined with the BMA, UNISON, and local Labour MPs to have a campaigning meeting on 8 November.

It is a positive development that the unions are becoming involved in the campaign at Lewisham, as workers' involvement will be key; but solidarity is our main weapon, so we must link up on a regional, city-wide and national basis to ensure that campaigns are not played off against each other.

The *National Health Service*, is a network of health facilities; to function it must remain so. The government's strategy has long been to divide it up and sell it off bit by bit.

For the government, this is part of a wider strategy not to "waste a crisis" and to cut back on all services. For us the NHS is literally the right to life. With all its problems, the NHS allows the population to access healthcare regardless of their income.

The fight is not over yet. Wherever services are threatened there will be local opposition. We must engage with these struggles wherever they arise, and help to link them up, providing resistance to render these cuts unworkable.

• www.lewishamkonp.org

Sell out

Lambeth council, which bills itself as the "Co-operative Council", is on the verge of selling its last stock of "short life" social housing, much of which is run by local housing co-operatives.

Around 170 tenants, many elderly, face eviction so that the properties can be made uninhabitable to "prevent squatting" (another developer will then be paid to make them habitable again).

A number of co-ops have joined together into Lambeth United Housing Co-op to campaign for the properties to be left in social ownership and Lambeth Save Our Services have organised demonstrations against the destruction of local communities.

Criminal Injuries

Plans for cuts of around £50m to the £200m budget of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, which the government had appeared to have shelved in response to widespread opposition, are back on the agenda.

This cut has been packaged with "reforms" which will remove the entitlement of sufferers of "minor" injuries to compensation, and would explicitly disqualify from entitlement the consequences of railway trespass including suicide or attempted suicide, regardless of any negligence on the part of railway owners.

Comet, rotten apples, and capitalism

Eric Lee

The announcement that another high street retailer, Comet, had bit the dust was hardly unexpected. We're in the midst of a recession, competition is fierce, the company had long been in trouble. There's not much Marxists can add to the debate — or is there?

We can of course start with an analysis of the inevitability not only of Comet's collapse but also the (barely-noticed) collapse of its American rival Best Buy, which withdrew from the UK market in the midst of a recession before you could say "bad idea".

And you don't have to be much of a financial wizard to predict the eventual failures of those high street electronics retailers still standing — primarily Curry's.

Capitalism is a constantly shifting, fiercely competitive environment and at a time when anyone can order anything online, why would someone go the old-fashioned route to buy, say, an MP3 player or laptop computer on the high street?

Anyone who's been inside a Curry's or Comet recently can tell you that this can be an entirely unpleasant and demoralising experience, one that many of us would avoid at all costs.

Marxists would go a bit further than that and say that an outstanding feature of the collapse of Comet is the fact that the venture capitalist who bought the business eight months ago for just £2 will probably lose no money at all, and might even make a profit as he sells off unsold stock, shops and so on.

And the company's 7,000 staff who all face the sack? No one will do much for them — and they'll be added to the increasing number of people seeking work and living on the dole.

But what struck me in the coverage of Comet's collapse in

the *Sunday Times*, for example, was the way in which it was none of this really was the focus of the story. Not the 7,000 workers (this is the *Sunday Times*, of course), and not the nature of technology and the likely death of high-street retailers in this field.

No, the entire focus of their coverage has been on Henry Jackson, the "smooth talking American" who had picked up Comet for less than the price of a cappuccino last winter.

The *Times* was keen to show that it had predicted that Jackson's period at the helm of Comet would end badly and showed its headline from last February — "Starry couple behind Comet" — with a photo of Jackson and his wife.

Mrs Jackson gets noticed in this week's coverage with just a quick mention of how her husband devoted time to "helping his glamorous Canadian wife Stacey forge a semi-respectable career as a pop star". Jackson, it seems, was so keen to help his wife — perhaps to help her move up to a "fully-respectable" rather than "semi-respectable" career — that he sent out regular emails to his contacts in the City "urging them to buy her music".

The article I'm quoting from didn't appear in the gossip columns of the *Sun*, or in *OK* or *Hello* — it appeared in the business pages of the *Sunday Times*.

It reeks of misogyny, of contempt for women, but more than that, it plays up to an image of "smooth talking Americans" that sneak up on good, old-fashioned British businesses, buy them for a song, milk them for all they're worth, and then toss them aside, destroying the lives of hard-working British families.

It's all part of a broader narrative that divides capitalists into two classes — the worthy ones, who run productive family businesses that create jobs, and the others.

The others are often described as "vultures" or "predators" who are value-less scoundrels who are in the business just to make a quick buck. They are often Americans, often linked to Wall Street or New York, and there's more than a hint of xenophobia in all this.

KESA

The fact is that Henry Jackson was trying to make a quick buck made him no different from Kesa, a French-owned concern (more bloody foreigners) that had previously owned Comet.

Kesa which got out at the first opportunity and passed on what was a ticking time bomb to Jackson. Kesa, like Jackson, was only interested in making money.

The notion that there are good, productive family-owned businesses — especially at the level of Best Buy, Comet and Curry's — is an utterly reactionary one, and a fantasy. It's part of the world-view that says that the global economic crisis was caused by greedy bankers, rather than being something endemic to capitalism itself.

Marxists have the often-thankless job of telling the unvarnished truth, which is that lowlife like Henry Jackson and his "glamorous" and "semi-respectable" wife are not the rotten apples in the barrel.

All the apples are rotten because the barrel rots them. The system itself is rotten, the rules are rotten, and that is truth we need to tell.

Ultra-Stalinists still a threat in Britain

Letters

italism," etc. etc.

They were joined by a lone member of the *Economic Philosophical Science Review* who railed against a "decadent international ruling class". Coming from the anti-semitic and homophobic *EPSR*, this has very dodgy connotations. Only AWL and a Socialist Party member represented the Trotskyist left. When I was chatting later to the SP member, a young CPGB (M-L) member hissed at us "Trotskyites".

The CPGB (M-L) members were not old "tankies" that were recruited to Stalinism before the fall of the Berlin Wall, but rather struck me as people recruited without ever being in other groups. Their focus on populist anti-banker sentiment is obviously attractive to enough people to overcome any aversion to the group's Stalin and Kim Jong Un worship.

Many people on the left treat this group as a joke. But the fact they are recruiting working class people to their noxious politics and educating them to hate Trotskyists is not a laughing matter.

Dave Kirk, Leeds AWL

ANC and the working class

I am writing to disagree with one of the arguments Martyn Hudson made in his article on the current situation in South Africa in *Solidarity* 262 (26 October).

Martyn introduces the article with a quote from Engels in which Engels was discussing the peasant war in Germany in 1850. The quote says that "the worst thing that can befall a leader of an extreme party is to be compelled to take over a government in an epoch when the movement is not yet ripe for the class which he represents ... what he ought to do cannot be done...he is compelled to advance the interests of an alien class."

The quote is used to back up his assertion that the ANC

government was "governing in the name of a black working class which had hoisted it to power on the back of its liberation struggle but unable and unwilling to challenge the rule of capital."

This seems to suggest that Martyn thinks the ANC had no choice, and were "compelled" (because "the movement [was] not yet ripe") to govern in the interests of capital.

For Marx and Engels, the revolutions of 1848-49 could not be socialist revolutions because the productive forces of capitalism were not sufficiently developed. The same argument doesn't hold for South Africa in 1994. South Africa was a successful capitalist economy with a large urban working class.

By 1994 union membership was 3.5 million — a density of 26%. From the early 1980s, there was a massive upsurge in working-class struggle. On 1 May 1986, 1.5 million workers "stayed away" from work to demand an official May Day holiday — the largest strike in South African history.

Socialist Organiser (forerunner of *Solidarity*), argued then that if COSATU and other workers' organisations had formed a political party, they could have won power in their own right.

The reason capitalism continued is because the ANC and South African Communist Party's popular front politics meant the subordination of working-class politics to the national and democratic revolution. They opposed direct links between workers' organisations to marginalise and isolate the independent voice of black workers and substituted instead guerrilla warfare and diplomatic pressure.

It is not that the ANC weren't able to act in the interests of the working class — it's that they didn't represent the working class at all.

Those who advocated independent working class politics weren't strong enough to develop the political organisations that were needed.

Jayne Edwards

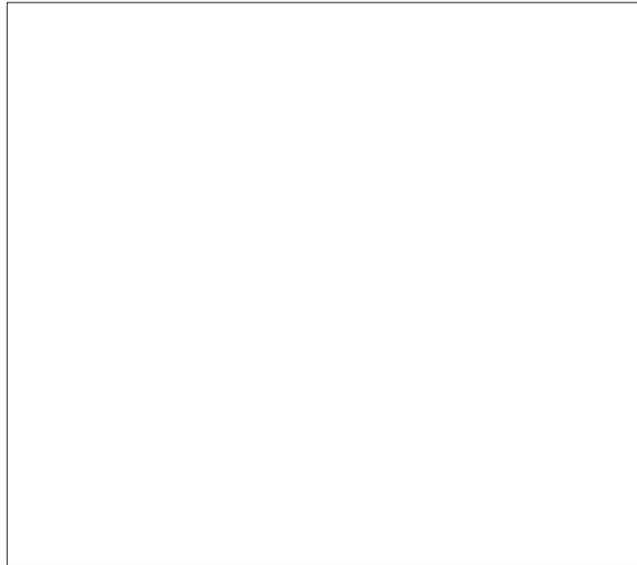
In Leeds, our Keep Our NHS public group had a public meeting which included a Labour Party councillor as a speaker, on the basis we want to try and put Labour on the spot.

There was a good turn out of maybe 40 people which included a dozen or so med students. By all estimates the meeting was a success.

But what really concerned me is the left in this meeting. The Communist Party of Great Britain (Marxist-Leninist), which a year ago did not exist in Leeds and up until now had not to my knowledge intervened in meetings, managed to dominate the discussion along with a couple of other ultra-Stalinists.

There interventions were pure Third-Period Stalinism: "All politicians including Labour are the same and are just tools of the bankers, what we need to focus on is overthrowing cap-

A system where the rich get away with child abuse



Steve Messham and other victims of child abuse were not listened to

If you're rich and well-connected, you can get away with child abuse. That's how this system works.

Ex-Tory MP Rod Richards claims to have seen evidence implicating Peter Morrison, a very high-placed Tory, in systematic child abuse around North Wales children's homes between 1974 and 1990.

Morrison was parliamentary private secretary to prime minister Margaret Thatcher in 1990, and organiser of Thatcher's failed effort to retain the Tory leadership that year.

Another leading Tory, not yet named, is also said to have been involved.

The North Wales child abuse took 16 years to get out. Then there was an official inquiry, which got some children's home workers brought to court.

But the inquiry dismissed claims that prominent public figures were involved. It was limited to abuse within the children's homes, and excluded cases of children taken from the homes to be abused.

Steve Messham, one of those abused as a child, has told the BBC: "You were taken by car, where basically you were sexually abused. Various things would happen, drink would be involved, it was basically rape..."

"It was like you were sold, we were taken to the Crest Hotel in Wrexham, mainly on Sunday nights, where they would rent rooms".

In the aftermath of the Jimmy Savile case, it is no longer possible to keep a lid on this case, and the Government has ordered two new inquiries.

It's 38 years since the abuse began. 38 years! Peter Morrison died many years ago, and now the Tories think it's safe to allow wider inquiry.

The Tories sit at the top of a system where abuse of the poor by the rich, the weak by the strong, the isolated by those with powerful connections, is routine, at every level from relatively mild bullying by bosses in the workplace through to horrors like this case and the Savile scandal.

Each level of abuse builds on the lower levels, until the people at the top think they can get away with anything. Whistle-blowers are discouraged, harassed, and often persecuted.

An unequal society is an abusive society. Fight now to replace it by a society based on human solidarity and protection for the weakest!

Drawback of EU vote

On 31 October the Government was defeated in Parliament on an amendment from a right-wing Tory MP calling for the EU budget to be cut.

The Government's line is that the budget should be frozen, and the odds are that it will do a deal with Germany to keep the increase small.

The parliamentary vote does not bind the Government, but has embarrassed it and further inflamed differences between the Tories and the Lib-Dems.

Labour MPs, including left-wing ones, voted solidly for the amendment.

If the vote had brought the Government down, then those tactics would make sense. But it was nowhere near that.

Socialists have no brief for any capitalist budget. But some shift of public spending from national to EU level is necessary to win our demand for a levelling-up of workers' rights and conditions across the EU.

It is also necessary for any policy which would mobilise European resources to help, rather than worsen, Greece's crisis.

The bad effect of Labour's EU vote in strengthening nationalist anti-EU demagoguery outweighs all positive effects.

• bit.ly/eu-dema

Even the Tories pay lip service to the living wage. Labour should do more.

Enforce the living wage!

According to Labour leader Ed Miliband, "Almost five million people in Britain aren't earning enough for the living wage" — now £8.55 an hour in London, and £7.45 outside.

Those rates are estimated by the Greater London Authority (for London) and the Centre for Research in Social Policy (for outside London).

Even the Tories play lip-service to them. Labour should do more.

But Ed Miliband's latest suggestion is that bosses be coaxed into paying these rates by offering them tax cuts if they do.

So that means service and benefit cuts elsewhere, resulting from the tax cuts, in order that the living wage can be nudged along without costing the bosses?

Inequality has been increasing in Britain since the Thatcher era, and is increasing even faster in the slump since 2008. The bosses should pay!

Labour should simply commit itself to raising the minimum wage to equal the living wage.

The *Financial Times* also notes: "Despite Labour's warm words on the policy, not all Labour-run local authorities pay the living wage".

Help the AWL raise £15,000

Nadine Dorries, the MP who is leading a new campaign to cut abortion time limits (see back page), has been suspended from the Tory parliamentary party over her decision to appear on *I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here*.

Dorries has said that she has no ambitions, and that all she wants to do is god's work. Getting at least £40,000 as an appearance fee for hanging out in the Outback means nothing to her, then.

It will take more than a dressing down from a Tory whip to keep Dorries in check. Defending abortion rights will be one the central focus of the AWL's work in the next period.

You can help by getting involved in the broad campaign to defend a woman's right to choose. But also by donating to the AWL!

Help us raise £15,000 by May Day 2013. You can contribute in the following ways:

- Taking out a monthly standing order using the form below or at www.workersliberty.org/resources. Please post completed forms to us at the AWL address below.

- Making a donation by cheque, payable to "AWL", or donating online at www.workersliberty.org/donate.

- Organising a fundraising event.

- Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell.

- Get in touch to discuss joining the AWL. More information: 07796 690874 / awl@workersliberty.org / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, London SE1 3DG.

Total raised this week:
£3,075

£4,936

We raised a fantastic £2,135 in a fund collection at our conference last weekend. We raised a further £940 in donations after the conference and increased standing orders. Thanks to everyone who put into the collection and also Eric, Gemma, Louise, Paul, Ruah, and Tony.

Standing order authority

To: (your bank)

..... (its address)

Account name:

Account no:

Sort code:

Please make payments to the debit of my account: Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no. 20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ to be paid on the day of (month) 20 (year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date

Signature

The revolt of the low-paid

First TransPennine Express cleaners picket Manchester Piccadilly station on 2 November

How can we win?

Coordinate the fights: If we synchronise strikes on all our disputes, striking cleaners will feel less isolated. Employers will find it harder to organise strike-breaking, as it will be less easy to borrow managers from other contracts and the agencies which supply strike-breakers (even though this is unlawful) will be over-stretched. Coordinated strikes will have more impact, attract more publicity and apply more pressure. Cleaners on other contracts may be inspired to go into dispute too.

A financial appeal would attract a lot of solidarity donations, enabling the union to make payments to strikers to enable them to stand firm for long enough to win.

Coordinating action does not guarantee victory, but it is a powerful step forward. We have to be prepared to keep up the momentum when management start to concede and some disputes settle.

Industrial trade unionism: Unions should organise cleaners alongside other workers in their industry. Sometimes this is posed as “the strong helping the weak”; I am not sure that it is helpful to label a group of workers as “weak”, but it is true that cleaners have less industrial muscle than some other grades, and that, for example, station staff, engineers and drivers should act in solidarity with rail cleaners. Unfortunately, a minority of workers sometimes talk down to cleaners, adding to the sense of being undervalued that they get from their employers. In the interests of working-class unity, this should stop.

Self-organisation and rank-and-file control: All-grades unity has to be balanced with cleaners themselves being in the driving seat of their disputes.

Organise, organise, organise: Trade unions need to get out round workplaces and recruit cleaners, using materials in the various languages spoken by cleaners. RMT offers reduced-rate subscriptions (£1 per week) as part of campaigns to achieve union recognition.

Unions must identify, train, support and defend cleaners’ representatives; and train branches to involve cleaners alongside the grades they already involve. Unions should fight for pay and conditions claims that reflect cleaners’ priorities.

Protest and political campaigning: We need regular protests targeting the employers, the hirers, and the political decision-makers. In the case of London Underground, Docklands Light Railway, and Tyne & Wear Metro, the ultimate employer is a local government body. Campaigning has forced Transport for London (in 2008) and Newcastle Council (in 2012) to endorse the Living Wage, which boosts cleaners’ pay once contracts are renewed.

The ability of the trade union movement and the left to mobilise and win for super-exploited cleaners is a measure of our ability to carry out our most basic task of advancing working-class interests.

Janine Booth

By Janine Booth, London Transport region representative, RMT Executive

If you can imagine the amount of filth that is generated by a working railway system carrying millions of passengers, then you might try to imagine the working life of a railway cleaner.

Dust, grime, litter, graffiti, food, packaging, fag ends, endless free newspapers and leaflets, plus booze, vomit and even excrement, reaching a peak on Friday and Saturday nights.

Railways need cleaners as much as they need drivers or signallers. Schools and universities need cleaners as much as they need teachers. Banks need them as much — and perhaps rather more — than they need bankers. But cleaners are paid rubbish wages and made to work without the basic rights enjoyed by other workers in the sectors in which they are employed.

Many cleaners get only the minimum wage, often with no extra for antisocial hours or public holidays. They are usually excluded from company pension schemes, receive legal-minimum leave and only Statutory Sick Pay, and have inadequate safety equipment and poor facilities at work.

One Tube cleaner told me: “You might start your working day at 5am, work until 2.30pm, then go to your second job and get home at midnight. Many cleaners have more than one job just to make ends meet. One guy collapsed at the bottom of an escalator, exhausted from working four jobs to feed his family. We are working ourselves into an early grave.”

Harassment and discrimination against cleaners is rife. Many cleaners are black, female and/or migrant workers, and managers and others often abuse their power against them. It is hard to complain when you can be sacked on the demand of a “third party” client.

Cleaners’ employers have been collaborating with the Borders Agency to organise “swoops” in workplaces, entrapping workers and deporting them even while immigration appeals are outstanding.

Against this exploitation, railway cleaners are fighting back.

Friday 2 November saw RMT members on four separate cleaning contracts (ISS on East Coast mainline and London

Midland, Churchills on the Tyne & Wear Metro, and Carlisle on First TransPennine Express) strike for 48 hours. The start of the Olympics saw RMT strike on three London Transport cleaning contracts. Cleaning workers in retail (John Lewis Oxford Street), leisure and tourism (Tower of London, Barbican, British Museum), the financial sector (Société Générale bank and others), education (University of London), and elsewhere are also involved in ongoing struggles.

The union will soon hold a meeting of representatives of all the cleaning workforces in dispute to agree dates for a co-ordinated national strike. This in turn forms part of welcome moves towards a national strategy to win justice for transport cleaners.

PRIVATISATION

Cleaning used to be a railway job alongside others; or work carried out by railway staff alongside their other duties. But in the 1980s, Thatcherism chopped slices off public services and hawked them to the private sector.

London Underground’s cleaning (along with other sections) was contracted out. British Rail privatisation ushered in a similar process on the mainline, and while a few train operating companies employ their own cleaners, most have handed the job to a private contractor.

ISS, Initial, Carlisle and Churchill’s are among the “big names” of contract cleaning – multinationals trousering massive profits through super-exploitation. Contracts frequently change hands, with cleaners bought and sold like modern-day slaves, the companies out-bidding each other in a race to the bottom: bid low, pay low.

Trade unions should fight for companies to bring the work “in-house”. For example, RMT is to campaign for London Underground maintenance firm Tube Lines to take back its cleaning services rather than re-let it to ISS or transfer it to a rival when it expires in March.

The danger is that each separate dispute, while entirely justified and widely supported, will lose. To win our battles, it is not enough just to be right: we have to be powerful enough to force the bosses to concede.

• More interviews, pictures, and analysis: tinyurl.com/cleanersrevolt

“Coordinated action is the way forward”

Stewart Roberts, a Tyne & Wear Metro cleaner and RMT rep, spoke to *Solidarity* on the picket line at Newcastle Central station.

Why are cleaners from several different employers striking today?

We are out today to fight for our members’ right to decent living standards. The cleaners at the company I work for, Churchill’s, pay us the bare minimum, with very few terms and conditions. We are on strike today because we deserve a living wage, not poverty pay.

Today is the first day of coordinated national strike action by cleaners. In the RMT we believe this is massively important, because it is through unified struggle that we can win. Individual struggles often stagnate and falter. Co-ordinated action is the way forward.

How have the negotiations with management been?

There have been some talks, but the bosses have made it very clear that in our case that they are unwilling to negotiate any pay rise. The situation we are put in is now to carry on taking action, or to back down. Churchill’s says it is a minimum wage employer. But don’t believe a word of

it: those at the top of the company certainly aren’t paid a minimum wage.

How can those not directly involved in the cleaners’ dispute help their struggle?

One thing we have been getting people to do is to lobby their MPs, and to hassle the Local Transport Authority, Nexus and Deutsche Bahn. However, many of the reasons we are faced with poverty pay stem back to the capitulation of the Labour Party to policies of privatisation. Dave Woods, the Labour councillor who chairs the LTA, refuses to support struggling workers such as ourselves. I doubt we will get any joy out of the Labour councillors. If we need to strike for another year, so be it. I can’t see it ending any time soon. We have perhaps had less effect since the drivers’ dispute ended. In retrospect this can be seen as a mistake by the union leadership.

There are still individual drivers who will argue that they can’t run the service on health and safety grounds if the transport has not been cleaned, but the numbers, and the ending of their own strike makes things more difficult. In a sense our hands are tied by Thatcher’s anti-trade union laws.

Tower of London cleaners organise

By Rosalind Robson

Four cleaners working for the contractor Mitie (three at the Tower or London, one at the Barbican) spoke to me about what it is like to work for the contractor.

There are just ten cleaners (working both part- and full-time) expected to do all the work at the Tower of London. Conditions are appalling.

Workers are paid the minimum wage but as they are often expected to do “cover work” their actual wage rate can be significantly less. There is no sickness pay, no holiday pay. Recently, staff rostering has been changed without consultation, meaning an earlier start.

The cleaners are particularly fed up with the pressure and stress piled on by supervisors. Pregnant women feel they are made to do the kind of physical work, or work with chemicals, that is risky to their health. And workers do not have proper safety equipment.

The Industrial Workers of Great Britain (IWGB) organised a demonstration on Saturday 3 November, which was supported by RMT and PCS branches. One cleaner told us about how his wife had suffered a miscarriage; she felt this was because she had been directed to do risky work, and work her doctor had stipulated in a letter to her employer that she should not do.

The company’s managers tell workers that “times are hard”. In the year to April 2012 the company reported a 26 per cent increase in its order book. A turnover of £8.6 billion. Mitie executives even say cuts in government budgets are creating “exciting opportunities”. The disgusting truth is that they are exploiting those opportunities by making workers work harder for poverty pay in unsafe conditions.

As elsewhere, Mitie cleaners are demanding the London Living Wage (now £8.55 a hour), proper contracts of employment and decent conditions. Support their campaign!

“All the cleaning companies are abusing their staff”

Philip Salih, ISS cleaner on the East Coast mainline and RMT activist, spoke to *Solidarity* on the picket line at Kings Cross station.

“We haven’t had a pay rise in 11 years. 90% of the staff don’t get sick pay or London weighting.

We don’t get travel allowance or a pension fund; we get £6.19 an hour, and that’s it. All we’ve had in the last 11 years is what we’ve got through the government’s minimum wage increases, which amounts to about 60p. The main demands of our strike are around these issues.

We’re doing more work, with more trains to clean, but there’s no extra money. Even people who work overtime don’t get any extra pay — just a flat overtime rate. Management are using agency labour to break our strike. We don’t think that’s legal, to be quite honest.

“All the cleaning companies are abusing their staff. What we’re looking for is a London living wage. The Mayor says it’s £8.30 [£8.55, from 5 Nov]; £6.19 is well below that. People cannot survive on £6.19 an hour in 21st-century London.

“ISS claim they can’t pay us any more money because East Coast won’t pay them any more money. But East Coast is run by the government now, so the government is allowing these companies to get away with exploiting cheap labour.

“We’re going to end up hungry and homeless if things carry on like this.

“It can’t carry on. That’s why we’re on strike today.”

Top: Tyne & Wear Metro cleaners picket Newcastle Central station. Bottom: East Coast cleaners picket Kings Cross station.

“Managers do everything they can to divide us”

Two cleaners at the University of London Intercollegiate Halls spoke to *Solidarity* about the “3 Cosas” (Three Causes) campaign. The causes are sick pay, holidays, and pensions.

What’s it like working in the Intercollegiate halls?

We have problems with the supervisors and the managers. For example, we are regularly harassed and bullying is a daily experience. The manager really gives us a hard time, she’s never in agreement with the workers, always finding problems and defects with what we are doing.

We have had a lot of problems with our pay. For example, when they under-pay us, our manager blames others for her own mistakes, meaning we always lose out and don’t get an answer. They get mad at the workers for asking why they have been underpaid. When we do ask why we have been underpaid, she changes her attitude.

A lot of us are very unhappy at work. We have to do it out of necessity because we have families and we have to live. We came from Spain, where we lost everything because of the economic crisis. We thought we had another opportunity to move forward but that hasn’t been the case — we are routinely humiliated and treated badly by the managers.

Most of the managers are experts in intimidating the workers and lying. A lot of my co-workers are afraid of the supervisor too. When she isn’t around people say we should protest against how bad they make us feel, but when she comes to the residence halls they do what she says because they don’t want to lose their job. It’s not in their interest that the workers are united, so she does everything she can to divide us.

Can you tell us about your campaign, “3 Cosas: sick pay, holidays and pensions”?

We don’t have sick pay. It’s basically prohibited to get sick at work. We don’t have a fair amount of vacation days, the amount we deserve. If someone has a family emergency, the vacation days are denied. And we don’t have fair pensions.

We deserve to have the same rights that all workers have at the University of London. The fact that workers in the 21st century, at a university as prestigious as the University of London of London don’t have them is an absolute disgrace. To put it into the words of a fellow worker, we are “modern slaves”.

How are you organising your campaign?

The workers from the different halls get together once a week to decide the ways to take the campaign forward. We regularly visit the halls but that has been stopped by the University.

How supportive has your union, Unison, been in the campaign?

We are members of the union but we receive almost no support, it’s been very poor. I feel like they don’t like to help us. It may be because we are cleaners and they are higher up workers, or maybe they think “what do we care about their rights?”

What can people do to support the 3 Cosas campaign?

Support us on the protest on 28 November, which is the same day as the University’s “Foundation Day” event. Encourage others to participate in the campaign too.

• More — sites.google.com/site/3cosascampaign/home
• Facebook — facebook.com/3coca, Twitter — @3CosasCampaign, Email — 3cosascampaign@gmail.com, phone — 07771783094

Tower of London and Barbican cleaners demonstrate at The Tower on Saturday 3 November. Cleaners at the British Museum have also been on strike, against the outsourcing of their contracts.

Planning the year ahead

Sacha Ismail reports on the 2012 AWL annual conference

Most discussion at this 2012 conference focused on assessing our work over the last year and planning for the next.

Introducing a document on “crisis and perspectives” Jayne Edwards argued that despite the lull in class struggle in Britain, the capitalist crisis remains feverish. With the continuing crisis, many more Tory attacks to come and major working-class ferment in southern Europe, particularly Greece, a new series of struggles in Britain is likely.

Moving to a weekly *Solidarity* and the increase in AWL public meetings and stalls are achievements to build on, even if progress has slowed in the more sluggish atmosphere of the last year, following the defeat of the public sector pensions’ struggle.

Other areas to build on are new workplace bulletins, our involvement in establishing the LANA rank-and-file initiative among teachers and our campaigning, virtually unique on the left, for expropriation of the banks.

We need to use this relatively quiet period to build on the basic routines of public activity and to develop our education and self-education, while also remaining alert to possibilities for campaigns and interventions.

A few comrades felt the document was too optimistic in relation to struggles within the Labour Party and that provoked some discussion. An amendment calling for campaign of demands on Labour was passed. It included comrades seeking to build local labour movement conferences to provoke discussion of these issues in the movement.

Another amendment, passed without opposition, warned against attempts to try to fabricate the semblance of a “broad” new Labour left by our own efforts, where none really exists. An amendment from Daniel Randall, attempting to develop a series of proposals for Labour-affiliated trade unions to challenge the Labour leadership was remitted to the new AWL committee for further discussion.

The conference discussed and passed documents on recruitment, political education and training on activist skills.

In the same session the conference also discussed our publications. *Solidarity* editor Cathy Nugent reported on how the weekly paper can help us develop AWL organisation. She also discussed plans to publish more books and pamphlets. Conference passed an amendment mandating our National Committee to investigate establishing a regular theoretical journal in the next year.

Conference also discussed:

- the state of the student movement after the great revolt of winter 2010-11, noting both regression and lasting gains for the movement.
- the AWL’s workplace and trade union work which noted important workers’ struggles such as those by London and other cleaners, rank-and-file organising among the electrical construction workers
- a document on feminist work where there was a lively discussion about the focus of our feminist activity, what we think about women only meetings and educationals.
- **a report on international work, noting that in addition to international solidarity work we are now establishing closer relationships with revolutionary socialist groups in other countries.**

• Much fuller report: www.workersliberty.org/2012report

Why no American Labor?

By Tom Harris

Watching the US presidential elections is a dispiriting experience for socialists. American workers are once again forced to choose between a capitalist Democratic party, firmly tied to the ruling class and over which the trade unions have no control, and a Republican party that is even worse.

In most developed capitalist societies, major parties based on trade unions — however reformist, uninspiring or however treacherous their role — have emerged. But in the US, this has never happened. Why not?

Some put it down to Americans being inherently right-wing, anti-socialist by nature. The American right like to portray things this way. But the absence of an American labour party is not written in the stars. It is the product of a specific set of historical conditions.

The US has a history very distinct from most European capitalist countries. In France, Germany or Britain, the capitalist class fought its way to power in competition with the feudal and monarchical system that had come before it. Big chunks of the capitalists’ profits were hived off by the king and the church to be spent on wars or patronage.

In contrast, the American bourgeoisie was far less hindered. After winning independence from Britain at the end of the 18th century, it was able to rule more or less unchallenged, giving it a social weight disproportionate to its relatively early development and small size. The vast space and abundance of natural resources in North America also gave the US bourgeoisie the opportunity to become extremely strong.

The sheer scale of America also led to a demand for immigrant labour and enormous waves of immigration from Europe lasted throughout the 19th and into the 20th century. The American working-class was far more diverse, ethnically and religiously, than in other industrial countries. With such cultural differences, and with slavery as a relatively recent memory, racism was an easy way for the bosses to divide workers against themselves.

Hostility was generated between Protestants and Catholics, whites and blacks, Christians and Jews.

MILITANCY

Despite all these difficulties, the American labour movement began to achieve an impressive power and militancy.

The American workers were beginning to exert a serious clout, challenging their treatment in the workplace. The response of the ruling class was particularly brutal — as Mike Davis points out in his book *Prisoners of the American Dream*, the working-class “never had to face the carnage of a Paris Commune or a defeated revolution, but it has been bled in countless ‘Peterloos’ at the hands of Pinkerton or the militia”.

However, this labour militancy never fully translated itself into an electoral challenge.

Many workers still identified themselves with either the Republicans or Democrats whatever was appropriate to their racial, regional or religious allegiances. The bourgeois parties took ready advantage, manoeuvring to curry favour with various groups on sectional, cultural lines.

Nevertheless, the Socialist Party of America, built on strictly non-sectarian and class struggle lines, began to build real support, with Eugene Debs, receiving around 915,000 votes in 1920.

In the 1930s, Democratic president Franklin D Roosevelt embarked on the New Deal, an attempt to resolve the enormous capitalist crisis of the time though large-scale Keynesian investment. Along with a number of other factors which this pushed working-class militancy into an uneasy cross-class alliance with a Democratic party whose declared aim was to “save capitalism”.

Large sections of the trade union leadership came to see Roosevelt as a saviour of industrial unionism. In the late 30s, with the approach of the Second World War, the “Popular Front” strategy of the Communist Party further pushed working-class radicalism into following the Democrats.

The illusions of this approach were soon to become appar-

ent. The New Deal was not to last, and its relative achievements foundered. Support for the Democrats, who sucked up trade union funding without allowing trade unionists any real influence on its policy, became a policy of ever more diminishing returns.

Many decades later, and the American labour movement is still caught in this punishing trap. A break from lesser-evilism and from reliance on bourgeois politics is as important now as ever.

Eugene Debs

One of the greatest revolutionary socialists America has so far produced was Eugene V. Debs who stood as a candidate of the Socialist Party for US President five times. The last time was in 1920, while he was serving a 10 year jail sentence imposed on him, when he was 63, because he had opposed the First World War.

In 1920 Debs received nearly one million votes — the highest vote ever for any sort of socialism in the USA. And there was nothing vapour about Debs’ socialism. He stood for the most militant class struggle of the working class, industrial and political, and stood openly under the banner of the socialist revolution.

Debs was born on 5 November 1855 in Terre Haute, Indiana. At the age of fourteen he dropped out of high school and went to work in a railway paint shop.

In 1875 he joined the “Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen” at its organising meeting. He was straight away made secretary of the Terre Haute branch.

Debs was to remain active in the trade union movement as an officer, organiser, editor and strike leader — officially and unofficially — for some thirty years. In 1905 he helped organise the “Industrial Workers of the World” (IWW).

At this time the trade union movement was tiny and organised only the skilled craft (i.e. permanent) workers in conservative and hidebound unions.

Politically the working class was amalgamated within the populist movement of small farmers and “small people” generally which swept America in the latter part of the 19th century.

Marxism, imported from Europe, had shrivelled into sectarian impotence.

Out of this mixture, two distinct tendencies emerged. One ended in the Democratic Party, which snuffed out any radicalism that wing contained; the other moved towards socialism and formed part of the base on which the Socialist Party was founded.

In 1901 Debs helped to organise the Socialist Party, of which he was to remain a member until his death in 1926.

He fought tirelessly against racism, bans on immigration, the war in Mexico and imperialist pillage. Most of all, though, he is to be remembered for those clarion calls of outrage to which he gave vent against the horror and injustice of capitalism.

Debs offered “hope” to the American working class, hope based on self-organisation and struggle.

North Korea by the Acropolis

John Grahl (Professor of European Integration at Middlesex University) reviews *Crisis in the Eurozone* by Costas Lapavitsas et al. (Verso 2012)

Costas Lapavitsas, professor of economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London University, has become well known recently as the most prominent left-wing advocate of "Grexit," Greek departure from the eurozone.

Many of the papers in which this course of action is proposed have been jointly written by Costas and several of his colleagues as members of a research group based at SOAS, Research on Money and Finance (RMF), although not all researchers in the group necessarily agree with the proposal. *Crisis in the Eurozone* brings together three such papers, written between March 2010 and November 2011.

It is important to say straight away that only a small part of the book is devoted to the arguments for Grexit. The book as a whole is an analysis of the eurozone crisis, its origins, its effects and the policy responses to it so far.

As analysis the book is highly recommended. It argues, in the reviewer's opinion very correctly, that the dislocation of the eurozone derives from the structural weaknesses of the European monetary union itself and from the global financial crisis. The preceding boom in global finance at first disguised, and in doing so aggravated, the growing imbalances in the eurozone; the crisis then revealed them in the harshest light.

The book combines detailed but lucid analysis of the complex financial and economic processes at work with a clear account of the political context and of the reactionary nature of the policies currently being imposed, especially on the economically weakest countries, by the EU and its dominant states, above all the German state.

However, the rest of this review will be devoted to the issue of Greece leaving the eurozone, because of the political importance of this question. The position taken here is that this is an incorrect strategy. It is impossible to be sure of this but the unavoidable doubts relate to the huge uncertainties surrounding the project and these uncertainties are themselves strong arguments against it.

GREXIT

It is significant here that when the book turns to the question of Grexit, indicative clauses give way to conditional ones, "is" to "might be."

For example: "To keep the analysis manageable....only the first order effects on European banks, the ECB and other institutions are considered. Effects of a further order, for instance, through the interbank market, are left out of account because the degree of complexity would be simply forbidding." (page 207). The real problems are likely to be even less manageable than the analytical ones.

Or again, "The real analytical difficulty lies not in working out the likely long-term results [of Grexit] but in ascertaining the adjustment path, especially during the initial period." (page 223).

And again, "Real incomes, in particular, would be likely to fluctuate in unpredictable directions." (page 223). "The price system and the domestic functioning of the new drachma would probably settle down within a few months." (page 233). But perhaps not.

In other words, Greek people are being encouraged to make a huge leap in the dark, with possibly very adverse consequences. This is justifiable if the alternative to making the leap is certain catastrophe — one leaps into a turbulent sea rather than go under with a sinking ship. But dreadful though the actual plight of Greece is, it is difficult to see a catastrophe of those dimensions.

The preface to the book, by Stathis Kouvelakis, states, "Let us note that the method followed here by Lapavitsas and his colleagues is faithful to what a certain tradition of the workers' movement has called 'transitional demands'." (page xxi)

The reviewer does not adhere to that tradition but a transitional demand, one that is intended to launch a political dynamic towards more radical and more comprehensive political and economic transformation, seems to him to be acceptable, provided that this intention is acknowledged and



The authors argue for "Grexit" although that is only one small part of their book

explained to those to whom the demand is being recommended. Otherwise it would be more accurate to speak of a manipulative demand.

Two specific arguments against Grexit will now be advanced (there are several others for which space is lacking).

The first concerns the actual introduction of a new national currency, which everyone calls the drachma. In the book, it is assumed that this introduction would be relatively easy. The second concerns the functioning of the economy on the assumption that the drachma has indeed been successfully introduced.

Beginning students of economics learn that money rests on a social convention: it is accepted because it is accepted. Likewise a potential monetary object is rejected because it is rejected. "The monetary problem of switching is conceptually trivial, although it presents several technical complexities." (page 231).

The problems are only conceptually trivial if it is assumed, quite wrongly, that they are of a technical nature. Why should businesses or individuals in Greece accept the drachma? State employees and pensioners might have no choice, although many of them would be extremely reluctant. Even with the drastic reductions in their euro incomes which have taken place, the purchasing power of those incomes is at present relatively stable. It is bound to fall to an unpredictable level if the drachma is introduced. As is completely recognised in the book, a substantial depreciation from the initial conversion rate of drachmas into euros is unavoidable.

The state employees and pensioners might take the drachmas and seek to change them into hard currency as quickly as possible and at any rate that was available. But what about the private sector?

Greece has a very large number of small businesses and a huge "informal" sector, where the writ of the authorities hardly runs. Would these businesses and workers accept the drachma? They would certainly not refuse the euro. If, then, they were ready to accept both currencies, would they be prepared to do so at a relatively stable conversion rate between the two or would they put continuous downward pressure on that rate by cutting their euro prices and raising their drachma ones?

It is recognised in the book that capital controls would be needed. "...it might be possible to exercise some controlling influence on the exchange rate through administrative controls on particular foreign exchange transactions, and through controls over capital flows." (page 233). Are such

controls feasible in the Greek case? It would not be possible to use the Greek banking system to transfer capital out of the country because an immediate consequence of Grexit would be the isolation of that system.

But how could cash movements and movements via the millions of external bank accounts held by Greeks be blocked in a mercantile nation with a huge diaspora and interconnections with other countries which are as varied in kind as they are unlimited in number? It is not made clear in the book that "administrative controls" would have to require the surrender to the authorities, at an official exchange rate, of the hard currency revenues of businesses exporting goods and services. Otherwise imports would soon cease.

Could such an obligation be imposed on the owners of Greece's mercantile fleet? What about the key tourist industry? Could tens of thousands of cafés, hotels and tavernas be compelled to declare and surrender their euro receipts?

It seems to be assumed in the book that the drachma would be rendered acceptable by the government requiring it to be used to pay taxes (and perhaps bus fares). This is a weak reed to stand upon — taxpayers might use drachmas to pay their taxes and for no other purpose. Even if the drachma was used to a certain extent in exchange it would become neither a unit of account (everyone would continue to calculate in euros) nor a store of value — who would hold drachma denominated assets?

"Once the new drachma found itself in circulation it would take time to gain public confidence." (page 232). How is this interval to be bridged? How can an object in which there is no public confidence "find itself" in circulation? The French economists, André Orléan and Michel Aglietta, have shown the frequently close association between the birth of monetary regimes, often linked to the establishment of state sovereignty, and the use of social violence. Would violence be necessary to reclaim the sovereignty of the Greek state and put the drachma into circulation? If so, how much violence, of what kind and against whom? How could the contagious spread of violence be avoided?

There is a logic to the imposition of comprehensive economic controls which can indeed be "transitional" in the sense specified above. One begins with "administrative controls" and ends with a state monopoly of foreign trade. Since that kind of North Korean logic is not applicable to Greece it is necessary to think hard about the limits to the range, feasibility and effectiveness of the controls that are envisaged.

DIFFICULT

A lot could be done in terms of tax revenues and the functioning of labour markets. External trade and payments pose much more difficult questions.

As regards taxes the book states, "Restructuring the tax system would also eliminate institutionalised tax evasion by the ship-owners, the Orthodox Church, and the banks." (page 230). One can only agree, but the restructuring proposed does not depend on, and might well be impaired by, re-introduction of the drachma. These very usual suspects would be happy to pay in super-abundant drachma and keep their hard currency for themselves.

The second objection which will be raised concerns the management of the exchange rate after the drachma has been, by assumption, re-established.

To maintain a trade balance in the short to medium term (a trade deficit would be impossible to finance) it would be necessary to depreciate the exchange rate. On page 234 we find the following howler: ".....currency depreciation does not work by reducing workers' income. This is a misconception that is often purposely cultivated in the media and elsewhere. Rather, depreciation works by changing the relative price of imports and exports, therefore influencing demand." Demand for imports is indeed discouraged by their rising prices but these rising prices most certainly constitute a reduction in the real incomes of the population.

To some extent exports are stimulated by hard currency price reductions but this is not the main mechanism. Especially in the short run, exports are stimulated by the widening margin, both in drachmas and euros, between their costs

Continued on page 10

Left in Syriza debates next steps

By Theodora Polenta

The Left Stream of Synaspismos (the largest component of Greece's left-wing coalition, Syriza) has responded to the Syriza leadership's proposals for a draft programme for the new unified party which Syriza aims to become.

The leadership draft states that "the fate of Greece is inter-related with the fate of Europe". "Our Europe is against today's Europe of neoliberalism and growing authoritarianism... Our Europe is the Europe of nations, the Europe of revolutions, the Europe of welfare state, the Europe of scientific revolution, the Europe of Enlightenment, the Europe of radicalism".

The draft commits Syriza to:

- cancel the memorandum (the cuts imposed on Greece by the EU-ECB-IMF Troika)

- renegotiate the debt at a European level
- place the banks under public control

It calls for: "renegotiation of the debt at a European level, given that the issue of sovereign debt is not only a Greek problem but a pan-European problem. The aim of renegotiation should be the discarding of a large chunk of the debt as illegal.

"An independent and impartial international commission should audit the Greek debt. The remainder of the debt must be repaid on fairer terms and through a clause linking the amount of repayment with the rate of growth of the economy".

The draft says that Syriza will fight for the united front of the left; that Syriza encompasses streams of the revolutionary left; and that Syriza aims to form a government with "the left at its centre".

Panayiotis Lafazanis, the main representative of the left stream of Synaspismos, has called for a commitment to a united front at both a trade-union and a political level with KKE and Antarsya.

He wants the call for a left government to be directly linked only to KKE and Antarsya and trade union and neighbourhood community movement formations, and to close the door to government coalitions with mainstream political parties such as the Democratic Left (an ex-Eurocommunist group in the current government) and Independent Greeks (a right-wing anti-memorandum party).

He wants the perspective of a left government to be directly linked to the escalation of struggles and the overthrow of the three party coalition government.

He believes that Syriza should openly develop a plan B for the case of Greece being expelled from or quitting the eurozone and the EU. The Left Stream wants an "even more critical view of the participation of Greece in the European Union and the eurozone".

The Left Stream has made it clear that it is not advocating an open confrontation with the European Union and it is not suggesting that the solution lies within a return to a Greek national currency (drachma).

But, says the Left Stream, "all options and scenarios are open, even that of the exit from the eurozone and EU, if a government of the left is prevented from implementing its program by the EU organs and institutions". Syriza should be prepared.

They want Syriza to adopt a stance of: "Cancellation of the debt, even if it leads to default and exit from the eurozone".

The Left Stream wants Syriza to declare, explicitly and unequivocally, the aim of forming "a Government of the Radical Left", rather than "a government with the Left at its core". The Left Stream is trying to close the door to Syriza evolving into a social democratic party like Pasok.

DEMOCRACY

Alekos Kalyvis and Helen Portaliou from the Left Stream warn the leadership of Syriza to safeguard the democratic functioning of the party by giving enough time to the base of Syriza to discuss the new program.

DEA and Kokkino, the two Trotskyist groups which take part in the Syriza coalition, insist that the draft adopt the slogan "no sacrifice for the Euro".

Meanwhile Rudi Rinaldi, the leader of KOE (another group in the Syriza coalition), has called for the establishment of a large, popular, democratic anti-memorandum alliance. The United Social Front of Syriza (ex-Pasok people such as Alexis Mitropoulos) argue for Syriza becoming the "big party of the left" — something like Pasok in the early years after its foundation in 1974.

The Left Stream amendments call for particular weight on the internal democracy of the party. They say that Syriza's new constitution should safeguard Syriza's collectively taken decisions and programme against public statements of central members of Syriza which counteract and negate the programme.

Syriza leaders assume that the Troika's threats to stop the funding, if a left government is formed that will cancel the memorandum, constitute a "mere bluff".

The recent intransigent attitude by Merkel and Holland towards the Greek coalition government's demands for a time extension on the memorandum, and the fact that a bailout instalment overdue since May has yet to be paid to the Greek government, put that in doubt.

It is true that to force Greece out of the eurozone would have dire consequences for Germany and the main powers of Europe. They would be the potential of a domino effect and a break-up of the eurozone.

Yet it may well be that the major eurozone leaders are prepared to risk the destruction of the eurozone rather than agree to continue to finance a government of the left that will implement a progressive anti-memorandum program and challenge the EU's and eurozone's aggressive neoliberalism.

In any case, as long as the Syriza leadership sees Greek exit from the eurozone as the greatest disaster, it disempowers Syriza from calling the eurozone's leaders supposed "bluff". If the eurozone leaders are aware that a government of the left considers Greece's bankruptcy and exit from the eurozone as the ultimate disaster; they will know that they can force that left government to buckle down and adopt cuts.

Lafazanis and the Left Stream of Synaspismos have been scapegoated by mainstream media, bourgeois politicians, the Samaras government. the supposed "Democratic Left" - and the right wing of Syriza as represented by Mitropoulos.

Lafazanis had said that: "Bankruptcy is not necessarily a catastrophic event. It is a weapon of the weak when they reach the point they cannot pay their debts. We should play scaremongering with it".

Samaras jumped and accused Lafazanis of wishing for Greece's bankruptcy. Mainstream newspapers accused him of "national-Bolshevism", "populism", and "ultra-leftism".

Alexis Mitropoulos wrote a letter to Syriza leader Alexis Tsipras and to Syriza MPs to denounce Lafazanis. The substance of Mitropoulos letter was that whoever dares to challenge the debt is an enemy of Greece and compromises Greece's position within the eurozone.

Syriza still remains the main hope for the working class and community movements, because it is the only medium that promises a left government in the next period. The forces of the radical and revolutionary left, whether they are inside or outside Syriza, have a duty to intervene in these processes, to raise a radical-socialist programme for real internal democracy in the party, and to support Lafazanis's call for a "second wave of radicalisation of Syriza".

North Korea by the Acropolis

continued from page 9

and their relatively stable euro prices — that is by a supply effect responding to higher profits. The point is made to qualify the repeated assertion in the book that Grexit could be combined with big redistributions towards labour. Rapid correction of a balance of payments deficit via depreciation involves a significant transfer from wages to profits.

Nothing that has been said should be taken as suggesting that Greek people should accept the status quo. "The Memorandum of Understanding" imposed on Greece by the "troika" (European Union, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) as a condition for very limited re-finance, permitting the government just to service its debts, is a shameful document. It not only imposes impossible targets for public finance, it deprives the Greeks of any choice at all in how they endeavour to meet the targets and it does so in a humiliating way. It strikes at the essence of the Greek industrial relations system and at Greece's (very inadequate) systems of social provision. The impoverishment which has followed this tutelage, comparable to the injustices of colonialism, is alarming. Greek rejection of this regime would be completely justified and in the interests of the Greek people.

Rather it is suggested that Greek rejection of the troika regime need not involve substituting a new drachma for the euro and that it would be advantageous to stay in the euro-

zone (there is no legal provision permitting expulsion from the monetary union) but at the same time ceasing to service the unpayable mountain of state debt or to implement the Memorandum.

Such a stance would put much more pressure on the EU to resolve what would remain a dangerous internal problem of the zone; while Greek departure would actually be welcome to some of the most hard-line reactionary forces in the EU who take the view that, to adapt Voltaire, from time to time it is necessary to kick a country out of the monetary union to encourage the others. Greek revolt within the eurozone would also be more likely to find a positive response in the other clients and potential clients of the troika — Ireland, Latvia, Romania, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Cyprus and perhaps others — because it would not present them with the dilemma — either comply with the troika demands or quit the monetary union.

There would of course be great difficulties with a debt default inside the euro. In particular the banking system would be insolvent and financial pressures would impose an almost immediate elimination of the trade deficit. But, in spite of the assertions in the book, it is impossible to say that these problems would be greater than those either of continuing to accept the Memorandum or of the leap to a new currency.

One of the few analytical weaknesses of the book is a ten-

dency to simplify the options available to different parties: either more austerity, or default by the weaker countries within the monetary union, or departure. The first two admit of many variants and many compromises — including a retreat by the troika and an advance by the indebted countries. It is true that a departure strategy does not admit of such variation and adjustment but this is a weakness of the departure strategy, not a strength.

Finally, it is worth emphasising a political point which is made repeatedly in the book: exit from the euro could only represent a progressive move if it were undertaken as part of a very radical progressive strategy, sharply asserting popular interests against those of the corporations and the elites. Otherwise, "exit could also be 'conservative', that is, led by private interests keen to protect the existing balance of social forces, and persevering with the austerity." (page 208).

The book itself, however, recognises that support for such a radical and progressive departure is not yet sufficient. In the absence of what seems to the reviewer to be an extremely improbable political polarisation the case for Grexit from Costas and his colleagues will therefore remain academic, whatever its economic strengths or weaknesses.

However, this is not a book primarily about Grexit, but an overall analysis of the unfolding crisis in the eurozone. As such it is strongly recommended.

Health workers under attack

By a health worker

Health workers across the country face severe attacks on their terms and conditions unless a deal stitched up between health unions and national employers can be stopped.

For over a year, NHS Trusts at a local level have

been threatening and attacking terms and conditions guaranteed under the national "Agenda for Change" (AfC) agreement. Central Manchester NHS Trust was one of the first, imposing changes including linking incremental pay increases to sickness, a move that was later challenged and overturned in court. More recently, Trusts

in the South West have begun planning a break-away from AfC to form a regional cartel to impose worse pay, terms, and conditions. North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust is planning to sack 5,452 staff on 31 March 2013 and re-employ them on reduced terms and conditions.

In the face of these assaults, health unions have completely failed to build a campaign of opposition amongst members.

NEGOTIATIONS
Instead, they have engaged in cost-cutting national negotiations, which they say aim to ensure AfC will "continue to be the preferred choice of NHS organisations".

Their strategy is to give away terms and conditions in the vague hope that this will feed the hungry employers at a national level and stop them coming back for more locally.

Are there any assurances included in the deal to stop local Trusts going further with the attacks? Has

there been a moratorium on local attacks while these national negotiations take place? Obviously not. Even by the standards we have come to expect from the health unions negotiators this is a shoddy deal.

Just as in the 2011 pensions dispute, a "heads of agreement" document has been released. The main elements of the package are to make all incremental pay rises linked to performance, to stop unsocial hours and other additional payments, to agree a 12 month protection package for workers affected by NHS restructure (this can be improved at local level but is likely to become the standard and is much worse than most current policies) and to end preceptorship payments (the faster progression in the first two years at work in a job like nursing or physiotherapy).

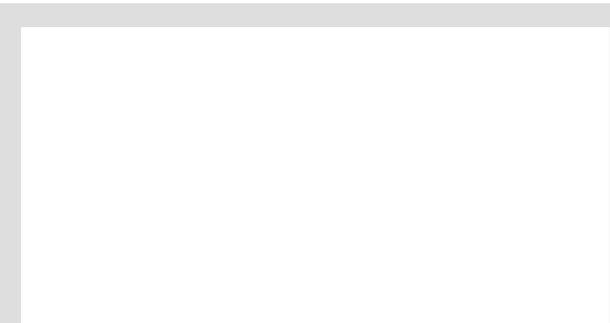
The "deal" is due to be discussed at a Staff Council meeting on 9 November and unions will then take it back for consultation. There are some signs that Unite may reject. Unison will discuss the deal at

their Health Service Group Executive on 21 November.

It is vital that health workers from all unions pressure their executive bodies in opposition. This can be done by passing motions at branch and regional level demanding that they reject the concession bargaining. These negotiations are going on without any consultation with members so it is also vital for stewards and activists to get out and tell union members what is going on.

A coordinated campaign of action in reaction to any attacks on terms and conditions is desperately needed and will only come from democratic, rank-and-file discussion and organisation within and across the unions.

- More information, including a new issue of the *Red Pill* bulletin and a model motion for health union branches, will appear soon at tinyurl.com/afcattack



Administrative and clerical workers at Mid Yorkshire NHS Trust struck on Thursday 1 November. Many workers face huge pay cuts, as the Trust tries to balance its books following a disastrous PFI deal. Strikers held a rally in Wakefield Town Hall. Addressing the rally, Unison Branch Secretary Adrian O'Malley said: "We are not to blame for this crisis. We have done the right thing in standing up for our terms and conditions. The support we have received today has been excellent. We hope the Trust will now reconsider its actions."

North East councils plan cuts assault

By a local government worker

Newcastle City Council Leader Nick Forbes has warned the government cuts could mean failure to meet even statutory duties of care for vulnerable children and adults by 2020.

Council treasurer Paul Woods has told the *Newcas-*

tle Journal that, according to projections from the Local Government Association, there would be no funding for central services, democracy, highway maintenance, parks, leisure or libraries by 2018. A council announcement on 6 November promised:

- complete axing of youth and play services;
- closure of short break centre for young people;

- closure of an old people's centre;
- an "unknown" number of library and leisure centre closures;
- the closure of customer service centres;
- £400,000 cut to legal services;
- 54% cut to financial services;
- cuts to family support, safeguarding, and Connexions services;

- £110,000 cut to educational psychology services and a £220,000 cut to behaviour and attendance services in schools;
- £2 million (50%) cut to the environmental science budget.

Workers' demoralisation following the sell out of the 2011 pensions dispute is an obstacle, but burgeoning fights involving local government workers and Labour councilors in Southampton and Hull offer glimmers of hope.

CLOSURES

The cuts across the north east (£100 million in Newcastle, a third of its budget; £75 million in Northumberland; £50 million in North Tyneside; £40 million in Sunderland) will lead to mass closure of services.

This could include half the libraries and swimming pools in the region. North Tyneside plans to privatise vast swathes of services. In Northumberland, half the staff in Children's Services could face the sack.

Local union leaders and officials say there is no mood for action. But even workers who may not yet have the confidence to fight don't want to turn their backs on service-users. Demoralisation can be turned round. A fightback could focus on demands such as:

- oppose cuts in services, not just job cuts
- local workers and services users must lead the campaign
- demand the council opens the books
- propose alternative needs budgets, oppose privatisation and outsourcing

Rank-and-file organising of local groups of stewards and workers in workplaces across particular services or councils is the essential first step. Organisations such as the United Lefts in Unison or Unite, however well meaning, have not been able to provide a space for developing a rank-and-file alternative strategy.

Those spaces need to be created by activists at local and workplace levels.

Teachers strike against Academies

By Ollie Moore

Teachers in Worthing (near Brighton) and Leytonstone (east London) have struck to stop their schools becoming Academies.

At Connaught School for Girls in Leytonstone, teachers struck on 16 and 24 October, and, as *Solidarity* went to press, were due to strike again on 7 and 8 November. The vote for Academy conversion on the school's board of governors was extremely close, with eight backing the proposals, six opposing, two abstaining, and two absent. The local council has accused the school's consultation on the conversion of containing "misconceptions and inaccuracies".

Worthing High teachers also struck on 24 October, and have succeeded in pushing their school's proposed Academy conversion date back to December. Meanwhile, the heads of several other local schools have announced that they have no intention of moving to Academy status, a sign that the Worthing strike is creating pressure on heads not to take similar steps.

Teachers at Stratford Academy in east London, Highcrest Academy in Buckinghamshire, Ridgewood School in Doncaster, and Deptford Green school in south London are also planning strikes.

These are part of the ongoing joint campaign by teaching unions NUT and NASUWT around terms and conditions.

Striking for pensions and travel pass equality

By Darren Bedford

Tube Lines maintenance and engineering workers held a lively picket line at the Stratford Market Place depot in east London as they struck to win pensions and travel pass equality.

Workers said that there was a strong mood to fight now that the dispute had resumed after being on hold over the summer.

The strike succeeded in

forcing the postponement and rescheduling of planned engineering work on the Northern Line. Pickets at Stratford said that they thought that action such as the 48-hour overtime ban which follows the strike would be particularly effective in keeping up pressure on management, as it would build up a backlog of maintenance work.

Most strikers said they were enthusiastic about further action. The conces-

sion already won from management on staff and nominee travel passes, which they had initially been intransigent about, has shown that it's possible to make the bosses budge.

Strengthening the strike committee, and improving its relationship to workplaces, is a vital task as the dispute goes on.

For more, see the Tube Lines strike special of the *Tubeworker* bulletin at workersliberty.org/tubeworker

More industrial news online

- **Remploy workers fight on** — tinyurl.com/remployfight

- **Coventry car workers occupy** — tinyurl.com/coventryoccupation

- **Pret A Manger campaign continues** — tinyurl.com/pretfight

Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

Ford Transit closure: unions should fight

By Darren Bedford

Shop stewards and convenors at the Ford Transit Van plant in Southampton have voted to back a campaign to keep the factory open, as Ford threatens a jobs massacre that could see 1,400 workers axed in Southampton and Dagenham.

Ford is attempting to buy off the workers in the Southampton plant with handsome severance packages of up to £80,000 and more.

The packages also include a bonus for “uninterrupted production” — that is, a direct incentive for workers not to take part in any industrial action against the closures.

The news of the planned closures came just days after Ford received an undisclosed sum of money from the government’s Regional Growth Funds. It has since emerged that the government knew of the closure plans before award-

Ford workers in Genk reacted angrily to news of the plant closing, burning cars and protesting

ing the sum. The factory in Turkey to which the Southampton plant’s work will be sent was also the beneficiary of an £80 million loan from the European Investment Bank last October. The EIB’s board of governors includes Tory chancellor George Osborne.

The Southampton plant suffered 700 job losses in

2008, and the closure of the plant is also expected to hit 81 other firms along Ford’s supply chain which provide components and materials.

The decision of the Southampton stewards to campaign against closure must now be ratified by an all-members’ meeting. The Unite union says strike bal-

lots have “not been ruled out”.

Meanwhile, workers at a Ford plant in Genk, Belgium, blockaded the factory’s gates after Ford announced the transfer of the plant’s work to Spain in early 2014.

The closure will lead to the loss of more than 4,000 jobs.

Abortion rights under attack again

By Becky Crocker

Conservative anti-abortion zealot Nadine Dorries MP is pushing for a Parliamentary show-down on abortion time limits “in May or June next year”.

She got a debate in the House of Commons secondary debating chamber on 31 October, intended as a dress rehearsal for next year’s full debate and vote in Parliament.

The 1967 Abortion Act legalised abortion up to 28 weeks. The time limit was

eroded to the current 24 weeks in 1990.

The current goal of Women’s Minister Maria Miller, Home Secretary Theresa May and Dorries herself is 20 weeks.

Health Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, has said he would favour a drastic reduction to 12 weeks. David Cameron favours an unspecified “slight reduction”.

Time-reduction proponents cite “scientific advances” in the stage at which a foetus can survive outside the womb. But this is a smokescreen for anti-

women, anti-abortion views. Their right-wing, often religious, mindset would see women without control over their reproductive capacity at all.

The Government maintains it has no plans to review current legislation. But senior Cabinet members’ statements indicate that the threat is real and the vote could be close if called.

The campaign to defend abortion rights needs an injection of political ideas. In the recent debate, Dorries’ Labour opponents, led by Diane Abbott, pri-

marily argued on the basis that “there’s no scientific evidence for reducing the time limit”. Abortion Rights, the UK’s main abortion rights campaign, commended this as an “effective strategy”.

But what’s effective in Parliament might not mobilise women on the streets.

We need to revive arguments that motivated women to fight for abortion rights in the first place, and convince people that abortion rights are essential for women’s liberation.

Taking a stand on safety

By Ruben Lomas

Electrical construction workers and other trade unionists staged an occupation of the lobby of the Office of Rail Regulation in Holborn, central London, on the morning of Friday 2 November, as electricians continue their battle against blacklisting and anti-union victimisation.

The Office of Rail Regulation oversees health and safety standards on railway sites, and only recently hosted a conference which applauded the role of union health and safety reps in the workplace. They are a publicly-funded regulator, and the sparks were demanding that they take account for the outrageous anti-union victimisation of workers who have raised safety concerns on the Crossrail Westbourne Park site.

Twenty-eight workers employed by electrical firm EIS were sacked when Bam Ferrovial Kier, the main contractor, terminated EIS’s contract early. It is widely believed, including by senior engineers at EIS itself, that this was because EIS employees had raised concerns about safety culture on the site. Some of the workers involved had previously been victims of blacklisting by construction industry bosses, including on the Olympic Park construction project.

Among the threats to workers’ safety exposed by trade unionists were the overcrowding of a tunnel boring machine, which was used by 29 workers when its rescue chamber (where workers can stay safe and breathe in the event of a tunnel collapse) only has capacity for 20. They also witnessed live high-voltage cabling (1,100v) having wooden planks and other debris thrown on top of it.

One worker said: “If the safety culture on that site isn’t addressed, someone is going to die.”

Victimised Unite shop steward Frank Morris told *Solidarity*: “Since the victimisations, we’ve been holding daily pickets at the Westbourne Park site, and episodic actions elsewhere, mainly at the New Oxford Street/Tottenham Court Road Crossrail site. These have been very successful and impacting, and are placing an enormous amount of pressure on Crossrail.

“We’ve got to keep turning up and picketing, and increasing the pressure until Crossrail back down. If they get away with removing me and the H&S rep from the site, it sets a very dangerous precedent and will give the green light to any employer, in any industry, to move against elected union representatives in the workplace.”

Following a lively and noisy protest outside the ORR, workers occupied the office lobby and resolved not to move until ORR directors had agreed to meet a delegation from the protest, including victimised Unite shop steward Frank Morris.

This was eventually conceded, and Frank and other activists were able to meet with the ORR. Although some of the workers in the building grumbled about the “inconvenience” caused by the protest, many said that they were union members themselves and expressed support for the action.

The sparks’ rank-and-file committee held a meeting in Manchester on 3 November, which called a mass picket and demonstration at the New Oxford Street Crossrail site for 14 November, from 7am, to coincide with the European general strike.

Victimised Unite rep Frank Morris maintains a picket of the Crossrail site at Westbourne Park. Picture by Rosie Woods