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workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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Take over

see
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the energy

companies!

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:

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Free Shahrokh Zamani!

By Omar Raii

Iranian trade unionist Shahrokh Zamani was imprisoned in June 2011.

Many workers like Zamani have been imprisoned, and some tortured, on charges of "propaganda", "endangering national security", and "participating in an illegal organisation".

Iran's clerical rulers are no more friends of labour rights than they are of women's rights, religious freedom, or LGBT rights.

The labour movement in Iran was instrumental in the overthrow of the hated despot Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The strikes that took place and the workers' councils that were set up in 1978-9 brought the country to a standstill,

hastening the end of Imperial Iran.

Since the Islamists took advantage of the weakness of independent working-class organisations by employers and the security services. As these councils are often observed closely by the government, workers quite understandably put little trust in them, instead keeping their grievances to themselves for fear of being sacked as trouble-makers.

Labour leaders like Zamani, as well as others like Ali Nejati (a member of a sugar cane factory trade union in Iran) and Reza Shahabi (a member of Tehran's bus workers' union) are often imprisoned when they attempt to organise outside activity.

Because of the neo-liberal

economic policies and the corruptness of Iran's rulers over the last decade, and the US-led sanctions, pressure on the Iranian working class has increased.

During the eight years of Ahmadinejad's presidency, the poverty rate went from 22% to 40%. Youth unemployment is 26% (even according to the official figures) and unemployment generally is 12.2%.

ECONOMY

The economy shrank by 5.4% last year. Inflation is officially 42%, and 60% for food prices.

When workers try to hit back and organise, they are treated as Shahrokh Zamani is treated. The Islamic Republic is aware that the workers of Iran were once

powerful enough to topple one dictatorial regime, and could do so again.

Repression of labour rights is an important tool for the government to keep itself in power.

Shahrokh Zamani was a house-painter and a member of the Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations, a group campaigning for the establishment of independent trade unions in Iran.

In prison he has suffered conditions such as visitors being banned for 10 to 20 days in a month; a ban on phone calls to his family; and transfers from one prison to another every few months.

The length of his sentence has recently been arbitrarily increased. Medical treatment that he needs is often delayed.

Workers' Liberty is currently involved in a campaign to get 10,000 signatures to petition for his release.

We hope not only to get him released, but to send a message of international solidarity with the workers of Iran against their repressive regime and in support of independent trade unions in the country.

● More: bit.ly/szamani

Free Reza Shahabi!



Reza Shahabi, a transit worker and a member of the

board of the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, has been in Tehran's Evin Prison since 12 June 2010 because he advocated workers'

rights and supported the demands of his fellow workers.

Reza has suffered from an array of health problems, including severe back problems.

Due to severe symptoms, on 19 October 2013, Reza was transferred to hospital. Physicians have recommended that Reza is

in no condition to be returned to prison: without hospital treatment, his entire left side could become paralysed.

The International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran are demanding Reza's release. Please support their protests at workers-iran.org.

No to anti-Roma racism!

By Charlotte Zeleus

Solidarity 301 (25 October) reported on the case of Maria, the "unusual" girl found living in a Roma community in Greece and removed from her family.

Fanned by racist outcries from the media, Maria was quickly proclaimed to probably be of Northern or Eastern European origin and in all likelihood trafficked, all based on her physical appearance.

The reason the Greek authorities gave for their suspicions about her origin was the inability of the family to produce documents for Maria. *Solidarity* rightly pointed out at the time that many Roma travel and live without documents, often unable to obtain them, and fear reprisals because of this.

Shortly after *Solidarity* went to press with the arti-

cle about Maria, it emerged that Maria's biological mother was a Roma woman in Bulgaria. Sasha Ruseva, Maria's biological mother, said that Maria was born in Greece.

However when Ms Ruseva needed to return to Bulgaria to look after her other children she was not able to take Maria with her because she did not have the necessary papers. Ms Ruseva is now defending herself against claims that she sold Maria to the family in Greece.

I find this very disturbing, firstly it continues to show a complete lack of respect for Ms Ruseva and the family Maria was living with in Greece, but it also says nothing about the conditions that might have led Ms Ruseva into "selling" Maria if she did.

Any multitude of complex issues and thought processes going on, the one that is being ignored com-

pletely is what Ms Ruseva was thinking was best for her child.

Through all of this, Maria is still being looked after by a charity in Greece. This must be a terrifying and confusing situation for a four year old child. It is not hard to see that as Maria has lived with the family in Greece since she was seven months old she will have made bonds with them.

No evidence has yet been put forward to suggest that Maria was mistreated by the family in Greece, and nobody seems to be talking about how Maria feels and thinks about her families.

Predictably shortly after the case of Maria, stimulated by a by no rabid press interest in "unusual children" in Roma communities, several other cases of "unusual" children came to light.

An anonymous message to a TV channel in Ireland about "fair haired and blue

eyed" children in Roma families in Dublin.

Shockingly quickly both children were removed from their families, seemingly the only evidence for a reason for doing this was a lack of documentation at the hospital where one of the children was born.

Both of these cases were unfounded, and both children returned. However the effect on the families will have been significant, one family was quoted as feeling like they were "treated like savages"¹. Again, as in the case of Maria, the primary concern of anyone working with children, that of the threat to the child's health and well-being, was not taken into account.

We must not allow racist ideas about Roma to be whipped up, certainly not under the guise of protecting children.

¹ bit.ly/1gp1pd3

Teachers' strikes suspended

By Patrick Murphy,
NUT Executive (pc)

On 25 October, NUT and NASUWT (the two largest teachers' unions) called off a planned national strike, pencilled in for 27 November.

It will not be at all obvious to teachers, who struck in huge numbers in regional strikes in June and October, why the national strike has been pulled. And that is because there is no discernible reason.

It isn't because the regional strikes were not well supported. The turnout and mood at the rallies and marches organised on those days could hardly have been better. Union leaders continued to talk at those events as if the next step was a national strike.

Nor has the strike been called off because unions

have won any concessions. Michael Gove remains unmoved on the main issues, and has written to the NUT and NASUWT during the regional strikes to restate this.

At an emergency meeting of the NUT Executive on 25 October, the real reason for suspending the action was made clear. NASUWT simply refused to proceed with it, claiming to have had unspecified "feedback" from "some of their members" to indicate that a second strike this term is too much to ask of them. NUT leaders argued with their NASUWT counterparts at length. Since NASUWT simply wouldn't budge, the NUT negotiating team came back to the Executive with a recommendation that the strike be suspended until a later date.

Except there is no defi-

nite later date. The two unions agreed that if there is to be a national joint strike it will take place by 13 February at the latest.

In the meantime they will claim to keep the campaign going by, amongst other things, organising a lobby of Parliament on 27 November (the planned strike day), an event which will not engage working teachers and almost certainly be pitiful.

At the NUT Executive,

an amendment was proposed by Martin Powell Davies and myself (both prominent supporters of the Local Associations for National Action Campaign) to proceed with the November strike, hold it on the day of the lobby, and invite the NASUWT to reconsider. It also proposed to change the strategy for action beyond February, which currently consists only of regional strikes with no additional national strikes. This won the support of ten NEC members, but was defeated.

The problem for both unions is that they have had to explain this decision to members. NASUWT don't want to say publicly that their members are reluctant to take more action this term, and NUT doesn't want to publicly "blame" their partners.

Therefore it is claimed

that Michael Gove has offered talks to resolve our dispute, which apparently would not have happened without the regional strikes in June and October.

A union press release on 25 October gave "confirmation" that "the Secretary of State is willing to discuss a basis for genuine talks on the unions' trade disputes on teachers' pay, pensions, workload and conditions of service and jobs." In fact, the letter from Gove to the two General Secretaries offered nothing of the sort. It states plainly that "the government's policy direction on pay and pensions is fixed" and offers to meet to discuss "your concerns about the implementation [emphasis added] of these changes".

There is nothing new here. Gove has always said he was happy to meet, just not to reconsider the pay

and pension changes. He will never reconsider unless he is forced to by the pressure of sustained strikes.

The latest decision is just one of a series going back to December 2011 which has seen union leaders retreat in the campaigns to defend pensions, pay, and conditions. Proceeding with the national strike, even if only the NUT took action, would not, on its own, have reversed this retreat, but it would have at least tried to maintain the momentum rebuilt over recent months and challenged the unaccountable and unaccounted for u-turn of the NASUWT leadership.

NUT associations should ensure that they send a delegate to the next LANAC Steering Committee on 23 November in Nottingham.

Lewisham win

On 30 October the Save Lewisham Hospital Campaign and Lewisham Council beat the government at an appeal hearing in the High Court.

A judge once again ruled that Kershaw and Hunt had acted beyond their powers, and that it was unlawful for them to have overridden the objections of the Lewisham Clinical Commissioning Group.

The government may now want to go to the Supreme Court but the more real and pressing danger is that the government will rush through changes to the law.

The government still wants powers to cut the NHS and this court ruling puts a real limit on their ability to do that within current legislation. This ruling may, for example, help overturn damaging changes in Staffordshire.

We need to campaign against a change in the law.

A petition on that issue was launched on the day of the court victory.

• savelewishamhospital.com for more

Red lines on Collins

By Martin Thomas

24 December is the end of the consultation period for local Labour Parties and trade unions on the proposals about Labour's trade union link being prepared by Ray Collins.

Much will depend on the stance of Unite, the biggest union affiliated to the Labour Party.

Although Unite is considered a left-wing union, and although its United Left group, which commands a majority on the union executive, has voted for uncompromising defence of existing union representation in the Labour

Party, the union's position is ambiguous.

We understand that the union's National Political Committee has passed a resolution to defend 50% union representation at Labour conference.

However, a 26 October circular from Unite political director Jennie Formby says that the decision will be taken by the Unite Executive at its December meeting. She says the EC will "consider views... from last week's NPC meeting", but does not tell union activists what those views were.

She outlines four "key points". One will be welcomed by union activists: "The principle of collectivism of trade union affiliation is a red line issue; we will not tolerate any attempt to convert it to affiliation on the basis of individual sign-up".

Collins was called in by Ed Miliband to draft proposals after Miliband's speech on 9 July saying that, because of the allega-

tions about Unite union misconduct in Falkirk Labour Party, he wanted to change things.

Both police and Labour Party investigations have since found no evidence of misconduct by Unite in Falkirk, but Miliband is pressing on.

The shape of what he and Collins will propose is unclear.

Everything depends on the unions' response. With 50% of the vote at Labour Party conference, and large support on this issue from local Labour activists, they have the power to block harmful proposals at the spring special conference planned by Miliband.

So far almost all unions other than Unite have opposed any weakening of the unions' say in the Labour Party.

Local Labour Parties and union branches should apply maximum pressure for the unions to stand firm.

We should draw the red line firmly and clearly, so that it is not crossed, and insist also on keeping the present level of union representation and that unions should not have changes in their rules imposed by external dictate.

• defendthelink.wordpress.com

Brooks, Coulson, and the press

By Gerry Bates

Government minister Maria Miller says that the clash between the three big political parties and the main newspaper lords can be finessed.

Newspaper publishers will be free to decide whether or not to sign up to the royal charter on press regulation which will eventually lead to a "recognition panel" being set up to vet the regulatory body. In the meantime, says Miller, she encourages "the press to go forward with their own self-regulatory body".

She may even be right. The differences between the government's scheme and the newspaper lords' is thin. Both include the most worrying proposal to come out of the Leveson inquiry: that smaller publications, like *Solidarity*, outside the regulatory framework, will be liable to increased punitive damages for libel.

At the same time, the government is mooting plans to shift Britain's libel law, which is already a much stronger defence mechanism for litigious rich people than in other countries, to make it even easier to sue.

Neither government nor newspaper lords' plans would do anything to restrain future abuses like the phone-hacking for which

Rebekah Brooks and Andy Coulson are now on trial. Both are former *News of the World* editors, both are close friends of the Tory leadership, and Coulson was "communications director" for David Cameron.

From the prosecution evidence presented so far, it is hard to see how Brooks and Coulson can get off, but they have hired deft and expensive lawyers.

The newspaper lords, driven by profit and attuned to the interests and ideas of the rich, are not fit people to control our flow of news.

The presses and communications networks should be taken into public ownership, put under democratic control, and made available to every sizeable body of opinion that wants to publish.



Defend Bob Carnegie!

After beating a contempt of court charge, Australian trade unionist Bob Carnegie faces a civil case on 4 February. His supporters will be organising protests in the run-up to the case. For information, and to download the latest campaign leaflet, go to

bobcarnegiedefence.wordpress.com

Greece: a “strategy of tension”?

By Theodora Polenta

On Friday 1 November a motorcycle stopped outside the party offices of fascist Golden Dawn movement in the north Athens suburb of Neo Iraklio, and the riders shot the Golden Dawn members that were guarding the offices.

Two Golden Dawn members were killed, and another critically injured.

No-one knows who organised the killing, but regardless of that the murders are, politically, a provocation that will harm the anti-fascist movement and the left.

The “professional” form of the attack suggests a prescribed professional execution plan and experienced operators.

Such actions are unlikely to have nothing to do with the anti-fascist movement or the organised working class. Nor can they be interpreted as results of people’s legitimate anger over the assassination of the anti-fascist hip-hop artist Paul Fyssas by a Golden Dawn member on 18 September.

Politically, the main beneficiary of the attack is Golden Dawn. They had been indicted as thugs and murderers; now they can portray themselves as victims.

Golden Dawn can now hope to gain sympathy from the most backward-looking layers of the public, to plead “self-defence” and call for “protection” of its members.

Whoever organised the 1 November attacks, armed conflict between groups that operate in the dark will not solve any of the major social problems of economic collapse, unemployment, and poverty that are leading millions of people to despair. It is exactly that despair, which is the operative social cause for the rise of fascism.

News presenters are shedding tears in front of the cameras over the two young men who were killed. We are bombarded with family photos of the victims and appeals to end the “blood cycle”, “independent of its origins”.

The murder of Paul Fyssas is conveniently juxtaposed to the murder of the Golden Dawn members. The theory of the “two extremes” is boosted. People speak about “guerrilla warfare in the cities” and the “ultra-left” as “a breeding ground for disrespect of democracy and illegality”.

The other big winner from this kind of event is the government and the repressive apparatus. In the name of fighting terrorism, the government will attempt to legitimise in the

minds of society cutbacks of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Samaras and Venizelos could scarcely imagine better political gift for their government, a few days before the general strike called by the GSEE and ADEDY union confederations for 6 November general strike, and with university administrative staff entering a defiant ninth week on strike.

When Paul Fyssas was murdered, polls showed the government parties losing support to Golden Dawn, and major industrial actions by teachers and other public sector workers had begun. The government made the most of the murder. By moving vigorously against Golden Dawn, it regained the political initiative and became able to exploit the contradictions of the forces of the Left.

It forced the opposition, Syriza, to vote with the government and to Article 187A, the “anti-terrorist law” which it had previously denounced, as the basis for the parliamentary decision on 23 October to cut off state funding for Golden Dawn.

EXTREMES

The Left must denounce the theories of “the two extremes” and “the constitutional arc”. The Left must refuse the ideology of bourgeois stability and counterpose, against the false distinction instability-stability, the actual destabilisation imposed on Greek society by the memorandum government.

The Left should highlight the need for stability from a working-class perspective: stability in workers’ rights and social benefits.

The Left must redefine, through effective radicalisation and a worker-centred transitional plan, both its autonomy from the dominant political system and its identification with the working class and popular strata.

The government which has caused the social disaster now wants to reappear as the “referee” and “saviours” to save us from the phenomena that its policies created.

The EU-ECB-IMF Troika arrived in Athens on Monday 4 November, bringing with it suitcases full of new tough measures to be imposed on a devastated country.

If the memorandum is left to continue its macabre work alongside poverty and hunger, Greece will be drawn into bloody conflict between forces bred by the government’s

policies. Moreover, if elements of the state machine and sub-state institutions, maybe linked with vested centres abroad, have decided on “strategy of tension”, deliberately stoking up violence in order to create the conditions for repression, as in Italy in the later 1970s, that will worsen the trajectory.

A united front in defence of working-class freedoms, democratic rights and the anti-fascist struggle, is crucial. The first answer is massive participation in the 6 November strike and linking of the struggle for the overthrow of the memoranda with the defence of freedoms.

Unless there is now a massive response from the labour movement, the Left and the youth, the outcome may well be the imposition of a generalised reactionary climate. We need:

A united front of the Left, unions, and youth organisations in defence of democratic freedoms

Joint stewarding and effective self-defence of the labour movement, the Left and the youth against the provocations of the fascists and the state

No illusions about the mechanisms of the bourgeois state, which are the breeding grounds for reactionary plans and provocations against the labour movement and the Left

The united front of the Left, unions and youth organizations should organise, in every neighbourhood and city, massive demonstrations against the plans of bourgeois reaction.

The answer of the Left should be to aim for power and for the implementation of a programme of transitional demands: refusal to repay the debt, nationalisation of the banks and the strategic sectors of the economy under workers’ and social control and management, planning of the economy according to the needs of society. This is the only way to remove the social base that generates fascism and terrorism of all forms.

Syriza, as the main party of the Left, has the primary responsibility for proposing such a struggle to the left and the working-class movement. The rest of the Left must contribute to it.

The answer to the memorandum government, the escalation of anti-working-class attacks, the theory of the “two extremes”, and the answer to the “provocations” and strategies of tension, is the same: radicalisation, an intransigent spirit, united struggle, a combative rank and file working class movement, a government of the Left as a first step towards workers’ power.

Stop spying on us! Defend the whistleblowers!

Edward Snowden

Xkeyscore: Programme used to search and analyse internet data about foreign nationals across the world, run jointly with agencies including Australia’s Defence Signals Directorate and New Zealand’s Government Communications Security Bureau.

Tempora: Operated by the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) to gain access to internet users’ personal data in the UK and abroad. Data is shared with the NSA.

There has been a massive post-9/11 expansion of US intelligence capacity. The US intelligence budget was \$75 billion in 2012, 2.5 times the size it was in September 2001.

INEFFECTIVE

As well as being obtrusive, much of the espionage done is ineffectual. A 2010 investigation by the *Washington Post* showed that:

- 854,000 people in the US hold top-secret security clearances.
- Many security and intelligence agencies duplicate work.
- Analysts publish 50,000 intelligence reports each year – many of them are never read.

The *Washington Post* concluded that all these resources are not effective at defending against terrorism or other threats: “lack of focus, not lack of resources, was at the heart of the Fort Hood shooting [in 2009] that left 13 dead, as well as the Christmas Day bomb attempt [in 2009], thwarted not by the thousands of analysts employed to find lone terrorists but by an alert airline passenger who saw smoke coming from his seatmate.”

And it is unclear whether the surveillance done complies even with US law which is very permissive in this area.

In the UK, the equivalent of the NSA is the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ). Bodies such as NSA and GCHQ monitor electronic communications – “listen in” or spy on telephone calls, emails, radio transmissions, etc, ostensibly for security purposes. But whose security?

Occasionally, such bodies gather useful information that helps prevent the loss of innocent life. But the overall purpose of these bodies is to defend capitalist states. The people they identify as potential enemies include anyone who wants to subvert those states, including socialists. It is we who have most to fear from the extension of their reach and power. We have strong interests in investigating, exposing and protesting against their work.

Right now that means we should defend whistle-blowers such as Chelsea Manning, recently jailed for 35 years, and Edward Snowden, who faces spying charges in the US and has temporary asylum in Russia (of all places), and the right of the press to expose and investigate such matters.

POLICE SPIES

We should also take up campaigns where the left has clearly been targeted by the state.

For example, those women who were victims of a British police spying operation on the environmental movement. These women, who had personal relationships with the police spies, have just learned that their court case that their human rights have been breached must be heard in secret.

Socialists should protest against this and support the women’s campaign.

- <http://policespiesoutoflives.org.uk>

By Vicki Morris

Revelations of US and other state espionage on their own and foreign citizens has taken a farcical turn with the claim by *Der Spiegel* magazine that the US National Security Agency (NSA) monitored the mobile phone of the German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

The NSA is accused of spying on several European and other government communications. The US and UK ambassadors in Berlin have been summoned for questioning.

The huge scale of spying became clear in June 2013 when the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* newspapers published evidence provided by whistle-blower Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee and NSA contractor. Secret electronic spying programmes included:

PRISM: The NSA demanded stored internet communications from companies including Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, Facebook, YouTube, Skype and Apple. Meant to target non-US nationals, it nevertheless drew in US citizens communicating with non-US nationals.

Socialism, CPA, and Facebook

By Martin Thomas

Fully 48% of young people in the USA say they find out what's happening in the world not from newspapers, not from TV, but from Facebook.

In the USA, 48% of 18-34 year olds check Facebook before they do anything else in the morning. 28% check Facebook before they get out of bed. 57% of all people now talk to other people online more than they do in real life. 18% of people under 25 in the USA say that they can't go more than two hours without checking Facebook.

In the UK and many other countries, as in the USA, over 50% of the entire population (including small children and the very elderly) are Facebook users.

This is all new, and much newer even than the widespread use of the internet, which dates only from the late 1990s.

Since 2008, Facebook has grown from 100 million users to 1.1 billion.

More and more Facebook activity, and web activity in general, is carried on smartphones. The smartphone percentage of web traffic doubled between 2012 Q1 and 2013 Q1. Modern smartphones took off only in 2010. Today in the UK 72% of people between 16 and 64 have a smartphone, and 89% of people between 25 and 34.

People are connected to Facebook not only when they sit down at a computer, but often whenever they have their phone switched on.

Isn't this more communication? And isn't that a good thing, from a socialist point of view? These new modes of communication are credited with helping movements like the Arab Spring. Facebook and similar channels can spread protests at a speed impossible with leaflets, newspapers, and word-of-mouth.

But it's not all good. A brief message flashed up on a small screen to which you're giving partial attention while doing something else may bring you to a protest you'd otherwise miss, but not more. Even when people are sitting at a computer desk, relatively focused, research has found that from screens they almost always skim-read, on average taking in about one-sixth as much as if they read from paper. Skim-reading won't generate deep thought, or reconsideration of inherited ideas, or involvement in long-term organising.

For all those, we still need conversations, meetings, debates, time spent in quiet study of newspapers, pamphlets, and books.

IMPEDES

In the meantime, having people wrapped around by Facebook impedes serious discussion rather than helping.

Getting your news through Facebook is not as poor as being a medieval village-dweller dependent for news on village gossip fed by words from travellers from the big cities, but it's not much better.

By definition it limits your access to those news items which stir the interest of a small circle around you, and filters your access through their reactions. It breaks up the flow of political information into an array of relatively sealed-off swirls, and undermines wider debate.

The always-on, wraparound character of Facebook militates against concentrated thought. Social psychologists talk of "continuous partial attention" (CPA). Paradoxically, CPA makes the ultra-connected often harder to communicate with, thus again breaking up the flow of political information into distinct swirls and eddies.

In the not-so-long-ago 1970s, there was no internet and most people did not even have phones, but if you met someone and talked with them they would almost always listen. If you wrote them a letter, they would almost always read it. If they were in range of their (landline) phone, they would almost always answer it.

Now no-one fields all their messages. People routinely ignore, or quarter-read, messages even from friends or comrades. Even if you get to speak to someone directly, they are likely to fob you off with: "Email me about that".

Social psychologists also write about the "online disinhibition effect". People who are mild-mannered face-to-face become wildly abusive online.

Writing for print, you ponder and revise, at least a little. Face-to-face, instinctive human empathy impels you to put

your argument in terms which the other person could at least theoretically reply to.

Sat at a computer, or stabbing at a smartphone, you have no such restraint. Online arguments, including among the left, often descend to a level which combines the worst of old-fashioned pub brawls with a permanent record and instant amplification.

That happened enough with email to get the terms "flaming" and "trolling" coined. In the last few years, such online brawling has become qualitatively quicker-spreading and more virulent.

Polemic within the left has always been harsh, ever since there have been such things as "left wing" and "right wing" in politics. No wonder: it is argument between people who are embattled and anxious to prevail.

But, until the time of high Stalinism, and for a while after the decline of high Stalinism, it was polemic which presupposed a common cause and, at least in theory, a possibility of debate. Opportunist, sectarian, capitulator, petty-bourgeois, are harsh words, but they always carry with them at least some room for argument that the policy complained of is in fact sober realism rather than opportunism, a sticking to principle rather than sectarianism, and so on.

That room for debate distinguished political discourse from religion. The religious do not debate, except in specialised disputations among theologians. Christians and Muslims do not hold joint meetings where they weigh evidence on whether Jesus was the son of God or just a prophet. They either rub along with a shrug — "you have your faith, I have mine" — or condemn each other as infidels.

Under high Stalinism, supposedly "communist" politics became more like a religion. Trotskyists were not people with views to be debated. They were "fascists".

After the decay of high Stalinism, that sort of denunciation was discredited for a while. It revived in Britain in the 1980s, without help from the internet, when defeats for the labour movement brought the rise of a mentality which saw fencing off each group's clique or "party" from the infidels as central.

Recent new defeats for the labour movement — the public sector pensions dispute in 2011, effectively-unresisted Royal Mail privatisation — have promoted that mentality again, perhaps most among the remnant of the 2010 generation of left student activists, now at the end of their university days, living "in exile" from the 2010 student militancy which radicalised them, and unsure where to go.

The rise of wraparound political chatter through Facebook and smartphones has made the heresy-hunting culture more widespread and faster-moving.

Real debate within the left is rare. More common is interaction between different trends on the left which oscillates between mutual indifference and charges of being "racist", "misogynist", "pro-imperialist" or such. The polemicists do not want debate from those they polemicise against: they want to put them on the defensive with charges that their

words "really" mean something shocking.

Continuous partial attention helps the spread of this culture. A considered, balanced argument is unlikely to spread fast on Facebook. A vivid accusation that so-and-so is "racist", even if with little supporting argument, can spread like wildfire. It can quickly create a mood in which even those who bother to scan the text accused of being "racist" (probably by skim-reading on a screen) come to it already preconditioned to see "racism" there.

Another factor contributes to making the effect of Facebook culture like that of religion. Researchers have found correlations between heavy Facebook use and narcissism, low self-esteem, and loneliness.

In his book on Muhammad, the Marxist writer Maxime Rodinson noted that "those modern psychiatrists who hold religious beliefs are troubled... since, in all honesty, they are forced to admit that no clear distinction exists between the experiences of the mystics" — the prophets and saints honoured by the religious — "and those of the mentally ill".

For a whole era of human history, the vivid sayings by the mentally ill when they were most hurt by their illnesses, and least able to grasp reality, were hailed as the word of God. Science has changed that. We attend to the austere scientific work of Kurt Gödel, the greatest mathematician of the 20th century, but not to the mysticism of his last 30 years.

Wraparound Facebook pulls us backwards. We are more likely to "flame" on Facebook when we are drunk, sleepless, overwrought, least "in our right mind". Where face-to-face conversation with our friends would help us regain balance, Facebook sends every extravagance across the world. Gets it picked up and relayed precisely because it is extravagant. Amplifies it.

This surrounds the serious left with constant noise, just as in other circumstances the left has had to deal with background noise generated by undebatable religious babble which branded socialist ideas as "infidel" or "godless".

Socialists can use Facebook and similar tools positively in many ways. Other new technologies may be almost-unqualified boons: e-readers, for example.

But, just as the balance among newspapers between titles like the *Sun* and more informative papers is not fixed by technology, the balance between uses of new technologies which bring enlightenment and those which bring background noise depends on political conditions.

A consumer satisfaction survey in the US found Facebook ranked low. People may use Facebook a lot and still not like it much — find it more irritating and worrying than a bringer of joy.

Face-to-face communication and serious study can light up our lives in a way that Facebook never does. To focus on them is not to make a hopeless attempt to turn back the clock. It is to do what we must do to change the world rather than give "continuous partial attention" to it.

Organising for revolutionary socialist ideas

AWL by Ira Berkovic



The Alliance for Workers' Liberty (AWL) met for our annual conference on 26-27 October at the University of London Union. The purpose of the AGM is to review our activity over the previous year, debate and decide policy, agree our political priorities, and elect our National Committee.

The conference noted some significant successes. AWL has been integral to the Save Lewisham Hospital campaign, which has beaten back Tory attempts to cut maternity and A&E services, preparing the hospital for closure.

We helped coordinate the international campaign to defend Australian trade unionist Bob Carnegie, victimised for his role in a successful construction workers' strike.

Now contempt of court charges against him have been dismissed.

AWL members at the University of London have been centrally involved in the "Tres Cosas" campaign of outsourced cleaning, catering, and security workers, launching a rank-and-file workplace bulletin in coordination with the campaign.

But we face lots of challenges, too. We remain a small group, operating in a period defined not by high levels of struggle and significant victories, but one in which even a well-organised, industrially-powerful workforce like that at Grangemouth can go down to total defeat. The conference's main focus was on how we could step up and improve the essential work of AWL — agitating, educating, and organising for revolutionary socialist ideas in the labour movement.

A debate on our perspectives and work for the next 12 months recognised that neo-liberalism was still dominant and assertive, and organised labour weak. The ongoing squeeze on real wages makes explosions of class conflict likely but we can't know when. The conference agreed a number of key activities and initiatives

AWL members will work to hasten those explosions, and to help support and shape them when they arrive. We agreed to expand our workplace and industrial bulletins, building

Daniel Lemberger Cooper introducing a report on student work to AWL's 2013 conference

on the successes of *Lewisham Hospital Worker* and *The Open Book* at the University of London, as well as looking for opportunities to build or rebuild rank-and-file networks in trade unions, like the Local Associations Network in the National Union of Teachers to which we have been central.

We'll support the establishment of "Left Forums" on campuses, discussion groups that can give students a space to discuss a range of anti-capitalist ideas.

We'll work on the campaign to free jailed Iranian trade unionist Shahrokh Zamani, petitioning and organising direct action. And we agreed to focus on self and mutual education within AWL, as well as implementing a system of "mentoring" to help new comrades develop and sustain their activity. The conference received reports on the group's socialist-feminist activity, our industrial work, and our pub-

lications and literature.

In a debate on the left, the conference noted the ongoing shifts and realignments created by the continuing disintegration of the SWP, but also acknowledged that many of the splinters and regroupments are yet to break with SWP orthodoxy on, for example, international issues, or are breaking only inconsistently. We agreed to seek discussions, both at an individual and organisational level, wherever possible, and work towards the maximum possible left unity in action accompanied by the maximum possible openness in debate.

A specially-scheduled session on Sunday morning began a discussion about the controversy surrounding the introduction to *Workers' Liberty* 3/1, from 2006, which has recently been attacked (on social media and elsewhere) as "Islamophobic" or straightforwardly "racist". Conference preferred to have a general discussion on the issue than a snap vote on an emergency motion. Unfortunately one comrade, rather than stay inside the AWL and fight for his view on the article, opted to resign and spread false reports about the debate (see bit.ly/ps-resig).

We will continue this discussion (in which there are a range of views) in meetings, on our website, in future issues of *Solidarity*, and in internal bulletins (for more: see page 9).

The conference voted, in a wider discussion about climate change and environmental activism, to modify our previously-held position of opposition to nuclear power (see page 9). The new policy accepted that, given the timeframe now implied by the scale of climate change, nuclear must be considered as an option in any non-fossil-fuel-based energy mix.

The conference heard international greetings from Amin Kazemi of the Iranian Revolutionary Marxist Tendency, Gona Saeed of the Worker-Communist Party of Iraqi Kurdistan, Victor from L'Étincelle in France, and received a written message from Marxist Tutum in Turkey. The comrades from Iran and Kurdistan also participated in a discussion about the Middle East, which noted the possibilities and necessity for solidarity with workers' organisation in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere, but also noted the ongoing dangers posed by Islamist repression and sectarian reaction.

The documents discussed and voted on can be read at bit.ly/awlagm2013.

For debate, not bans!

By Sacha Ismail

A culture of trying to ban people you don't like is edging into the student left.

Administrative exclusions are fairly common on the right wing of the student movement. Right-wing or "apolitical" student union officers will often find excuses for shutting down left-wing meetings and activity; but they won't call them bans.

It is on the student left that a culture of banning, more openly proclaimed as what it is, is starting to develop. Such bans are usually aimed not against right-wingers, but against others on the left.

Following the Socialist Workers Party's terrible and cynical mishandling of charges of sexual assault against an organiser, some at the University of London Union wanted to shut down, at short notice, the SWP's "Marxism 2013" event scheduled at ULU. Workers' Liberty consistently argued against this. It would allow the SWP leadership to present itself as persecuted and rally its troops, and anyway it was wrong. We argued for a culture of debate in the movement, and for intervening to raise the issues at "Marxism".

Last weekend, 2-3 November, the Socialist Party's "Socialism" event took place at ULU. We raised the question of the SP's response to the Steve Hedley cases, and there was again argument for trying to stop the event by cancelling the booking at the last minute.

In the recent controversy about the AWL and Islamism, one or two of our more hostile critics at University College London have demanded that the Workers' Liberty society be banned. (By chance, the president of the society is a Muslim-

background Afghan refugee. This is not the fundamental issue, but a reminder of how strangely the issues were posed by some.)

All this mirrors a similar, though more vigorous, trend in student politics in the mid-1980s. Then there was agitation on the student left to ban university Jewish Societies on the grounds that they refused to condemn Zionism, and "Zionism equals racism". A few university student unions did ban J-Socs. At what is now Manchester Metropolitan University, there was a campaign to ban the J-Soc; down the road at Manchester University, there was a campaign to ban the Islamic Society. The Easter 1986 NUS conference saw one faction demand "No platform for Zionists"; delegates voted to ban a "Zionism = racism" badge.

The forerunners of the AWL opposed all those bans.

Of course, there should be basic standards of decent behaviour upheld in the movement and its institutions. Of course, physical spaces should be safe, accessible and welcoming. But all that is a different matter from seeking to ban meetings or organisations because of your objections to them. Such bans should be kept for fascists and the like ("no platform"). Violence against the student movement, labour movement and oppressed groups is part of fascism's essential political character. The same cannot be said of e.g. the SWP and the Socialist Party.

When SWP and SP members were aggressive towards those intervening at their events to criticise them, or whether or not to exclude particular individuals, are different issues again.

Such bans are rarer in the labour movement, but they happen there too.

Behind the controversy about the SWP and SP events at ULU were real issues about women's rights. But four Socialist Party members were banned from office in the trade union Unison because a leaflet the SP distributed at Unison conference in 2007 was artificially construed as "racist". One of those banned was of non-European background.

We should oppose the student left's incipient "banning" culture seeping into the labour movement.

Bans hinder or exclude debate, replacing it by a culture of anathemas and prohibitions. They hurt all of us and weaken the possibilities for left-wing and liberation struggle. Instead of tackling political problems, they freeze them by dividing the labour and student movements into segregated sectors, each with its ban against others.

Arguing, as some do, that student union members should have a right to decide who does or doesn't have meetings in their union is really beside the point. Of course they should, but how should the left advocate that power of decision-making be used?

Again, when activists objected to the National Union of Students feting anti-immigration Labour right-winger Maurice Glasman as the "keynote speaker" at a recent conference, they were not saying Glasman should be banned, or ruling out the idea that NUS might debate him.

Democratic control of student union spaces, events, etc. should as a norm be used to promote debate, not shut it down. We will solve the problems on the left, and go on to transform our whole movement, through debate and argument free of barriers erected by rival anathemas, or we will not do it at all.

Not looking after our world!

Take the power!

Thousands of people in Britain will die needlessly this winter because they can't afford to heat their homes adequately. Many hundreds of thousands more will have to chose between heating and eating.

Since Ed Miliband spoke on energy prices at Labour Conference, a debate has been raging on snug TV sofas and in temperature-controlled offices of newspapers about how energy prices are affecting people and what sticking-plaster policy will play well in key marginals. Scarcely mentioned, though, has been the real answer: take the energy companies into public ownership and put them under democratic control.

Even better-off workers are struggling to budget. The average household bill for dual fuel is now over £1250 a year. Four of the Big Six energy companies that dominate 98% of the domestic electricity and gas markets have just put up prices between 8 and 11%. They have imposed similar rises for the last 3 years in a row.

The energy companies argue they are simply passing on the rises in wholesale prices. They forget to mention that all of the Big Six own power generating facilities, too, and so often benefit from rising wholesale electricity prices as generators.

Even on the supplier side, the regulator Ofgen says on average the Big Six profit margin had more than doubled in the last year before the recent price increases.

The Tories look likely to cave to pressure from the energy companies and right wing press to cut green levies. These are obligations and costs put on suppliers which make up 5% of the bill. They fund home insulation for the poorest, help subsidise the cost and the feed-in tariffs of renewables, and deliberately drive up the cost of fossil fuel generation.

The initial idea was that these costs would be born by the companies but they have always passed them on to the user in price rises.

If the levies are scrapped, then the energy companies' record indicates that they will swallow the extra money as profit rather than cutting bills. Even if they did pass on the saving, that would be a 5% cut at most, while help for the poorest and investment in renewables would be scaled back.

Another idea that has been trailed is a windfall tax on the Big Six. We should be taxing the rich anyway. A one-off tax on profits will make little difference to bills, and anyway some of these companies are good at hiding their real profits.

Labour's policy is a two-year price freeze while the Big Six are broken up into smaller companies.

The companies can afford this. Despite their wailing, it will not affect investment on the generation side because the companies only invest when the government promises them lucrative fixed prices for energy generated.

Sadly, Labour is not talking about the transfer of the ownership of the power stations.

There is little talk about climate change in the current debate on energy, and even less about the workers in the industry.

The industry still has a higher union density than most of the private sector. On the distribution and generation side workers still have some industrial muscle. Pay and conditions used to be a bit better than other parts of the private sector.

The Big Six have steadily eroded pay and conditions, and the unions' response has often been weak. In the last period, outsourcing and off-shoring have been used to undermine workers' conditions and cut costs. This seems likely to gather pace as the Big Six are under pressure.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The issue of man-made climate change is also ignored by much of the debate at the moment. Compared to many European nations Britain lags behind in renewable energy and low-carbon generation like nuclear energy.

Electricity generated by coal emits three times as much carbon as the same unit of electricity generated by gas stations. Yet many gas stations stand idle while coal power stations are burning day and night, entirely because coal is currently a cheaper fuel than gas and more money can be made by generating companies out of coal.

Many workers in the industry fear that public ownership would make them redundant because their current jobs revolve around the fragmentation imposed by privatisation or the duplication of effort inevitable when big vertically-integrated companies compete.

Workers in carbon-intensive power stations also often fear for their jobs if there is a serious push on nuclear and renewables. The unions in the sector sometimes reflect this by lobbying alongside the Big Six for the status quo or for extreme energy.

Enforce the living wage!

"We need the kind of strong increases in wages that will genuinely make people all across Britain better off", said Labour Party leader Ed Miliband on 3 November.

Sadly, the detailed policies which the Labour Party announced the same day do not match up to the general aim.

Labour leaders say a Labour government would give companies a tax rebate of up to £1000 a year if they pay the living wage, now set at £8.55 an hour in London and (from 5 November) £7.45 outside, well above the legal minimum wage of £6.19 an hour.

The accountancy giant KPMG has estimated that 5.2 million workers in Britain get less than the living wage.

The Labour leaders' argument is that the government gets 49p from every £1 hourly wage rise paid to low-paid workers, through higher income-tax and national insurance revenues, and reduced payouts of tax credits and benefits. Thus the government can hand out cash to bosses who pay wage rises, and still be better off.

John Cridland, head of the CBI bosses' federation, has deplored what he sees as Labour's "shift to the left", but "welcomed" the living-wage scheme. "It is a carrot [for the bosses], not a stick, and at the margins it should help".

Workers need more than "help at the margins". We need a stick which forces bosses to pay the living wage as a minimum.

The electricity and gas to heat and light our buildings are necessities of life. Current methods of supply are degrading the environment and generating obscene profits.

Socialists demand that the entire energy industry be taken under democratic public ownership, with workers in control in the workplace. Immediately, the profit principle can be abolished along with the complex market structure of Suppliers, Agents, Distributors and Generators.

The savings can be passed to users in lower bills. Prices should also be heavily graduated and progressive according to quantity used, income and need. This way the richest, the most wasteful and the most polluting pay for the energy the poorest need.

Even with profit and waste removed, the cost in both monetary and environmental terms will remain high until energy generation is de-carbonised and shifted to renewables and new-generation nuclear.

The way our societies use energy also needs to be addressed. We need to improve our housing and public spaces, Old and new ideas like combined heat and power, public laundries, urban allotments, etc. all could make a huge difference.

There is no national solution to the issues of energy. The world energy and climate crises show the bankruptcy of the system of bourgeois nation states. The working class is the truly international class with an interest in ending the environmental chaos inherent in capitalism.

We should seize the moment to win the argument in our class and in general — put pressure on Labour and the unions to move from mildly populist Big Six bashing to advocating workers' control and public ownership.

Polls show that public ownership of the energy industry is backed by up to 69%. Socialists in Britain have had few such easy openings recently to start discussion on why democratic common ownership of the economy is necessary.

The role of the workers in this sector is vital. In Workers Liberty we have been involved in the recovering of a lost tradition in working-class politics — the idea that workers in industries take control and lead the transition from socially or environmentally harmful production to socially useful production. This is sometimes called worker-led just transition.

In this case we need to argue the hundreds of thousands of workers in energy are not an inconvenient obstacle in the way of developing a carbon neutral energy policy but an agency to bring it about. We argue for unions to fight for better pay and conditions and for workers' control over a transition to a better, cleaner energy sector using the skills and expertise in the industry.

For the future of humanity, the working class needs to take the power.

How the media attacked our movement



Unite convenor Stevie Deans and the whole movement have been subjected to sustained abuse in the media.

By Dale Street

It's been a busy week for media hacks who hate trade unionists. And what better opportunity for hacks to vent their spleen than the fallout from the Ineos dispute in Grangemouth?

The *Sunday Times* (27 October) led the way with lengthy articles about the contents of e-mails sent or received by former Unite Ineos convenor Stevie Deans.

A dossier of these e-mails had been "passed to police last week". But subsequent press coverage suggested that the e-mails had also been passed on to half of Fleet Street. And the source of the "dossier" was Ineos itself — hardly a disinterested party in the matter.

The opening sentence in the *Sunday Times* front-page article had all the right buzzwords: "Ed Miliband is facing a crisis this weekend as a cache of *bombshell* e-mails expose a concerted union *plot* [emphasis added]".

A few paragraphs into article, however, the "crisis" eased off to become mere "pressure" ("... Miliband is facing pressure ..."). And by the end of the article the crisis-cum-pressure turned out to be no more than a rent-a-quote from a Tory MP in Crawley called Smith.

Pages 10 and 11 carried a lengthy article about the e-mails, headlined with the lurid quote: "A Blueprint of How to Hijack a Constituency"

On closer inspection, however, the quote turned out to emanate from a "company insider" whose qualifications for making such a judgement remained as unknown as the insider's name.

In terms of the e-mails' contents and volume, there was certainly little or nothing in the article to give weight to the claim by the "company insider" that "Deans spent most of last summer organising his union's infiltration of the Labour Party."

The *Sunday Times* on 3 November continued its attacks on Unite, this time in the shape of three articles and an editorial focusing on the Labour Party report into allegations of vote-rigging by Unite in Falkirk.

"Revealed: Miliband's Dossier on Union Plot" read the headline over the front-page article, while a spread on pages 14/15 appeared under the headline "The Secret 'Vote-Rigging' Report Labour Suppressed".

The headlines suggest that the newspaper had obtained a copy of the report. In fact, the paper had a Unite docu-

ment (discovered in Stevie Deans' "cache of bombshell e-mails") which appears to be an early draft of the union's response to the Labour Party report.

The *Sunday Times* articles re-quoted the various Labour Party allegations quoted in the Unite document. But it did not quote a single one of Unite's responses to those allegations.

Such poor-quality one-sided "journalism" did at least display a fine sense of timing: Falkirk CLP was meeting the same day, and the Scottish press had been reporting that a motion of no-confidence in Stevie Deans as CLP chair would be proposed at the meeting.

(This was based on various anonymous statements by "a key figure in Falkirk CLP", "another local party member", and "sources at the local party". Given that these articles had appeared several days before the CLP meeting, this hardly constituted "reporting" in the normal sense of the word.)

While the *Sunday Times* focused on a report which it had never even seen, the midweek issues of the *Daily Mail* focused on the terrors of a giant inflatable rat.

A "sinister unit" (Unite's Organising and Leverage Department) sent "mobs of protestors" to the homes of Ineos directors as part of a "campaign of bullying and intimidation" intended to "humiliate executives and their families".

"THREATENING MOB"

"It was a mob, a threatening mob," explained a Dunfermline-based Ineos director who described how "25 Unite members protested on his driveway with flags, banners and an inflatable rat. ... Children as young as seven who were playing on the street were coaxed into joining the mob."

The article was accompanied by a grainy picture of the "threatening mob". But there is no "threatening mob". There are simply some Unite members standing around. They are not on the driveway. They are on the pavement. They are not threatening anyone. (In fact, not only was chanting banned on the protest, so too was smoking.)

There is certainly a giant inflatable rat in the picture. But it is hardly fearsome. As for children being "coaxed" into the joining the non-existent "mob", if a giant inflatable rat suddenly appears at the bottom of your road, natural curiosity is going to attract the average seven-year-old to take a closer look.

In a follow-up article the *Daily Mail* reported that the previously unheard-of Jonathan Roberts had resigned from Unite "in disgust after the *Daily Mail's* revelation about the union's bullying tactics."

Bang on cue, Roberts, who stood for Labour in the safe Tory seat on Thirsk and Malton in the last general election, attacked Unite for "picketing the family homes of company bosses and intimidating their children" and for generally failing to represent its members.

Of course, there had never been any evidence — not even in the lurid pages of the *Sunday Times* or the *Daily Mail* — that Unite members were "intimidating children".

But what did facts count for when the sole concern of such newspapers was to whip up an anti-Unite hysteria on the back of the threat by a billionaire tax-exile to shut down Grangemouth unless his workforce, their union, and the Scottish and British governments gave him everything he wanted?

Not that there might be anything in Jim Ratcliffe's behaviour, of course, which might merit closer investigation by the fearless journalists of the *Sunday Times* and the *Daily Mail*.

Lessons fr

By Anne Field

It wasn't just the Ineos workforce in Grangemouth or Unite the Union which suffered a major defeat last month. It was all of us in the trade union movement.

Ineos workers will see their basic pay frozen until the end of 2016. There will be no bonus payments until then either. The shift allowance is being cut from £10,000 to £7,500. Overtime rates and holiday entitlements are being cut, and staffing levels are likely to be cut as well.

Contractual redundancy pay is being replaced by the statutory minimum, and the final salary pension scheme is being replaced by a defined contributions one. Workers will pay higher contributions in exchange for a worse pension.

The scope of collective bargaining with the recognised union (Unite) is being cut back. Full-time convenors are to be replaced by part-time ones. And Unite has agreed not to engage in any industrial action for the next three years.

After months of a sustained witch-hunt Stevie Deans, one of the Unite convenors in the plant, has been hounded out of his position and out of the workforce.

Stevie was suspended and reinstated by the Labour Party. He was investigated by the police, who found no case to answer. He was suspended and re-instated by Ineos. And he was subjected to three different investigations by the company.

Stevie was subsequently scapegoated for Ineos' decision to threaten closure of Grangemouth. He was denounced in Parliament by Cameron. His e-mails were handed over to the police and half of Fleet Street. And he was then targeted in yet another round of media abuse.

ABUSE

Unite itself is now the object of a sustained tirade of abuse in the mainstream media. Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey is portrayed as a throwback to the 1970s, Unite's Organising and Leverage Department is accused of "thuggish tactics", and the Labour Party is denounced for failing to challenge the behaviour of its "paymasters" in Unite.

Trade union activists will instinctively see through this display of manufactured pretend-outrage. But others, including some union members, are likely to be — and have been — swept along in its slipstream.

Over the next few months employers up and down the country will be likely to seek to follow in the footsteps of Ineos' Jim Ratcliffe, the venture capitalist they now revere as a hero. As an article in the *Spectator* describes him:

"Arise, Sir Jim, the hero of the Grangemouth affair. ... Jim Ratcliffe is not a capitalist monster but an industrial hero, and once he's written that cheque (for £300 million) he should also be a Knight of the Thistle."

Unite's defeat is all the more bitter in the light of the fight put up by the workforce and their shop stewards over the summer and autumn.

When Stevie Deans was first suspended in July, a mass meeting of Unite members threatened to shut down Grangemouth if Ineos did not lift the suspension. Ineos backed down (albeit only temporarily).

When Ineos again attacked Stevie in the following months, Unite members voted for strike action (81%) and action short of strike action (91%) on an 86% turnout. A ban on overtime and a work-to-rule were implemented, and notice given of a 48-hour strike (subsequently called off).

When Ineos first announced the new terms and conditions which it wanted to impose of the workforce, the shop stewards successfully campaigned for members to reject them. A majority handed their forms back to the stewards, unsigned.

A hard-hitting stewards' statement was published and circulated inside and outside of the plant. Shop stewards in the

From the Grangemouth defeat

plant also organised a solidarity rally to coincide with campaigning against the Ineos “survival plan”.

MSPs were lobbied by Unite to put pressure on Ineos to fire up the plant and not shut it down, and Unite’s Organising and Leverage Department (OLD) staged a series of activities designed to put pressure on Ineos.

According to unconfirmed reports, there were also discussions within Unite about occupying the plant, but this would have faced major practical problems.

Once Ineos announced that they were going to shut the plant, however, a majority of the Unite membership, and a majority of the workforce as a whole, saw the new terms and conditions as a lesser evil, compared with the closure of the plant. And no-one can blame them for doing so.

Was Ratcliffe bluffing? Ineos had registered a new company, Grangemouth plc, which would have allowed them to walk away from Grangemouth without paying redundancy pay or environmental charges.

This does not mean that Grangemouth was not profitable unless the workforce agreed to the “survival plan”. What is does mean is that Ratcliffe probably calculated that, without the ‘survival plan’ in operation, he could make more money elsewhere.

DIFFERENTLY

Could it have ended differently? No-one can say for sure. And it is certainly easy to be wise after the event. But if re-runs of Grangemouth are to be avoided in future, there are certainly a number of questions that need to be raised and discussed.

Unite wanted to emphasise that it was the reasonable party in the rapidly escalating dispute. That was why, for example, it chose to call off the 48-hour strike in support of Stevie Deans.

There was certainly a rational case for Unite to want to appear “reasonable”. But was it taken too far? Did Ratcliffe interpret the decision to call off the 48-hour strike as a sign of weakness and thereby feel encouraged to press on with his attacks? Did Unite’s emphasis on how “reasonable” it was cut across other tactics it was using against Ineos, such as those being used by the OLD?

And, more fundamentally, did Ratcliffe even care whether or not he was seen as reasonable? UK tax-exiles resident in Switzerland who also move their head offices to Switzerland in order to avoid paying corporation tax tend to be pretty indifferent about their image.

The same question is raised by some of the media statements issued by Unite at the crucial point during the dispute.

When Ineos announced closure Unite responded: “The ball is now in the court of Jim Ratcliffe and the respective governments in Edinburgh and Westminster and we await their responses.” Another statement the next day concluded: “The decision as to whether or not the plant stays open remains with Ineos.”

This was certainly at odds with the tone of earlier statements from Unite. If it did not disorient the workforce, it certainly must have been encouraging for the Ineos bosses. And it also made Unite appear as if it were no more than a passive bystander.

Nor did Unite continue to emphasise in its media statements that labour costs represent only a minor proportion of operating costs at Grangemouth. This made it that much easier for Ineos to claim that its attacks on employees’ terms and conditions were crucial to the survival of the plant.

And whatever lobbying was going in behind the scenes, Unite did not wage a campaign in public for re-nationalisation of Grangemouth. (It had been a nationalised plant prior to Ineos buying it out from BP.)

This was despite that fact that neither the SNP government in Holyrood nor even the Con-Dem government in Westminster

could afford to let the plant and refinery close.

Given the importance of Grangemouth to the Scottish economy as a whole and to its manufacturing sector in particular, it was imperative for both governments, with the independence referendum less than a year away, to take whatever action was needed to keep the plant open.

While Unite did not mount a campaign for privatisation, it did repeatedly state its support for another (private) owner to take over the plant: “If the Scottish government along with the UK government has to find another owner, they have the union’s support.”

But would not a new private owner simply have made the same cost-cutting demands on the workforce, and the same demands on the Scottish and UK governments for loans and loan guarantees?

ASSESS

Unite’s OLD could also usefully assess its own role in the events of recent weeks. It is true that whatever a trade union does will be misrepresented and attacked in the media.

Even so, it is important to try to minimise the opportunities for the media to do so. Did the OLD’s tactics and ‘hits’ do so, or did some of them provide the media with an open goal?

Unions abroad with members in Ineos were contacted by Unite and backed a statement condemning the company’s behaviour. But could they have been called on to take industrial action in support of the Grangemouth workforce, especially as they were not hampered by Tory anti-union laws?

The Scottish TUC produced a stream of statements rightly condemning Ineos, But nothing suggests that Unite called on the STUC to convene an emergency conference of union representatives from throughout Scotland (or at least the Central Belt) to begin to mobilise support for the Ineos workforce on a broader front.

Such questions need to be addressed. At the same time, trade union activists need to organise to confront the immediate and longer-term issues arising out of the Grangemouth defeat.

Unite needs to produce a pamphlet explaining what hap-

pened at Grangemouth as a matter of urgency and send it out to all its members in Scotland. It should also produce a leaflet covering the same issues, using its Area Activist Committees to organise distribution of the leaflets in public campaigning.

The recent launch of the Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, backed by all the major affiliates of the TUC, should be a signal for serious campaigning against the anti-union laws which held back the Grangemouth workforce from mounting immediate responses to Ineos’ manoeuvring.

Renewed attacks on Unite, McCluskey, and the Labour link are already underway. We need to organise to oppose those attacks and step up making the case for working-class political representation.

This includes demanding that the “special measures” imposed on Falkirk Labour Party be lifted, that all Unite members recruited to the party under the UnionJoin scheme be allowed to take part in the pending selection process, and that Unite finds another candidate to replace Karie Murphy

Ratcliffe’s behaviour highlights the scandal of an asset such as Grangemouth being left in the hands of a venture-capitalist millionaire. His behaviour underlines the need to take vital economic assets — refineries, petrochemicals, ports, banks, utilities companies, etc. — into public ownership.

In the Scottish Labour Party and the national Labour Party, Unite — and not just Unite — should also be advocating that in any future re-run of the events of recent weeks the party will refuse to allow workforces to be taken hostage and will instead campaign for nationalisation.

Finally, and most fundamentally of all, the Grangemouth defeat confirms the epochal task of the transformation of the trade union movement — to rebuild unions not just in terms of levels of membership but also in terms of their becoming combat organisations capable of taking on and defeating the Ratcliffes of this world.

More discussion on Grangemouth online — bit.ly/grangemouth-lessons

Against racism, against religious reaction

Over the past weeks, there has been an online outcry against an article AWL published in 2006 (see bit.ly/2006-article), which has been attacked as “Islamophobic”. Over our next editions, *Solidarity* will feature debate and discussion on the article and the issues. Here, we reprint (abridged) a statement from the AWL Executive Committee in response to the outcry, and carry a letter from an AWL comrade. Future editions will carry further debate.

Much of the recent online response to a 2006 AWL article on Marxists’ attitude to religion and religious fundamentalist politics has acted as a reminder of how disoriented much of the British left is on these questions.

Some have claimed that the article is “racist” and “Islamophobic”, i.e. bigoted against Muslims. Of course the left should unequivocally side with Muslims against racism and bigotry. That is absolutely not what is in dispute here.

This is not a dispute in which groups or people with a different political position to the AWL’s state their position and argue why they think ours is wrong. It is a dispute in which critics seize on phrases in an article and claim that they can be read as implying that we hold views which we do not hold, and which record over the eight years since the article confirms we do not hold.

The issue is not, fundamentally, whether the article is brilliantly worded or expressed. It is whether it is reasonable, in the context of the article as a whole and in the context of our wider literature and activity, to assume that the article is making a “racist” argument.

DEBATE THE ISSUES

Of course we have no objection to being criticised, as such, and we want to debate these issues. If you disagree with any of the arguments in the original article (or this one), we are happy to discuss that.

Not just misreading

Notwithstanding the fact that the article has been resurrected to stir up trouble on the student left, there are a couple of bits that I think are hard to defend by saying that people are misreading them, deliberately or otherwise, or taking them out of context.

“Like desert tribes of primitive Muslim simplicity and purity enviously eyeing a rich and decadent walled city and sharpening their knives, or country folk in former Yugoslavia eyeing a city like Dubrovnik, so, now, much of the Islamic world looks with envy, covetousness, religious self-righteousness and active hostility on the rich, decadent, infidel-ridden, sexually sinful advanced capitalist societies.”

I think this is a pretty accurate description of how Islamists see the West. The problem is that it equates them with “much of the Islamic world”. If Sean is talking about how the Islamist movements see the West, it is not “totally clear” from the words themselves that that is what he means.

Similarly with “The existence of large Muslim minorities in Europe is making political Islam a force well beyond the traditionally Muslim world: the Islam which failed outside the walls of Vienna over 300 years ago is now a force in the great cities of Europe.”

It’s hard to argue that this doesn’t mean — unless there’s some special reading of these words that I’m missing — that large-scale Muslim immigration to Europe has created a basis for Islamist attacks on the West, again equating Muslims and Islamist terrorism.

I don’t think that the article is racist or that Sean opposes Muslim immigration into Europe.

I agree that Islamism is a major force in the Middle East and South Asia, just as Christian fundamentalism is a major political force in the United States.

That does not mean though that most people in either South Asia or the United States are fundamentalists. It means that the fundamentalist minority is highly organised, determined and has succeeded in capturing parts of the state machine in some countries.

Matthew Thompson

If you agree with the article’s arguments but think its language was “problematic”, or something like that, we are happy to discuss that too.

The article compared Islamist and Islamist-shaped attitudes towards advanced capitalism to the attitudes from which most Islamists themselves proudly draw inspiration, those of the 7th century Muslim tribes which carried through the first great Muslim conquests. Its use of the word “primitive” to describe these tribes is taken as evidence that AWL believes all Muslims are “primitive”.

The article used the word “primitive” six times. One was a reference to the Afghan countryside in its conflict with Afghanistan’s cities (both Muslim), from 1979 — which also argued that the revolt of rural Afghanistan against the Russian imperialist occupation was a “just war”.

Three other uses of “primitive” were in attacks on Christian fundamentalism in the US, which we described as “ignorant fundamentalism... as primitive and anti-rational as anything in the Muslim world”. The last “primitive” was to describe the widespread belief in horoscopes and so on in the West.

The sentence in which the word “primitive” appears alongside the word “Muslim” (both as adjectives referring to the “simplicity and purity” of the 7th century people following Muhammad and his companions) also included, as a comparison for the attitude of political Islamists today, reference to the attitudes of rural Serbian Orthodox Christians in their siege of Dubrovnik in 1991-92. (The article said “much of the Muslim world”, not “Islamists”? But the sentence before and the sentence after used “political Islam” and “Islamic fundamentalism” to denote the same large but by no means all-overwhelming part — “much” — of Muslim politics).

Some have suggested that because the article referred to the Ottomans’ siege of Vienna in 1683 (a turning point at the end of a centuries-long series of wars between Christian and Islamic powers in Europe and the Middle East), we are defending “Christian civilisation” against Islam. This ignores not only our long history of attacking and fighting organised political Christianity, but the fact that *this article* is an attack on the increasing influence of Christianity in European and US politics.

The question of religious influence in politics is very much alive in Britain today — from the growing activity of Christian bigots against women’s right to access abortion, to the spread of religious schools. The SWP notoriously refused to oppose the Blair government’s drive to create more “faith schools”, the great majority of them, of course, Christian. The International Socialist Network, too, has so far failed to separate itself from that long-standing SWP position.

It has also been suggested, bizarrely, that the article was agitating against Muslim immigration into Europe. In the week the controversy took place, the centre page headline in our paper, advertised on the front page, was “Open Europe’s borders!”, over an article demanding the right of overwhelmingly Muslim people from North Africa and the Middle East to come to Europe and denouncing the immigration controls that keep them out and all that follows from them.

“DEFEND MUSLIMS AND MOSQUES”

In the eight years since the article was published, AWL has repeatedly mobilised against the English Defence League and other far-right, anti-Muslim groups, and called for the left and labour movement to “defend Muslims and mosques” against racist attacks (as in *Solidarity* 287, this year, in the aftermath of the Woolwich killing).

No one who has read the AWL’s literature or spoken to AWL members actually thinks we want to defend Christianity against Islam, or that we think “Muslims are primitive”, or that we say there are too many Muslim people in Europe and want to stop more coming in. Rather there is an attempt to scandal-monger by repeating a few words over and over, hoping that people will be scandalised enough not to read the article carefully, put it in the context with everything else we say and do, or speak calmly to our members about it.

The second issue is about the left’s attitude to “political Islam”, i.e. “fundamentalist” Islamist politics.

The real differences are nothing to do with defending Muslim and Muslim-background people against oppression, discrimination and bigotry. We helped to organise the defence of mainly-Bangladeshi, mainly-Muslim Brick Lane against the National Front in 1978, when the SWP refused to cancel its Anti-Nazi League festival to join the defence..

We sided with mainly-Muslim peoples like the Afghans, the

Bosniacs, and the Kosovars against Russian and Serbian imperialist conquest. Workers’ Power, one of the groups whose members have denounced us, supported the Russian occupation of Afghanistan, and responded to the Russian invasion in 1979 by changing its description of the USSR from “state capitalist” to “workers’ state”. The ISN has yet to separate itself from the political tradition of the SWP on former Yugoslavia — the SWP who refused to back the Muslim Bosniacs and Kosovars in their struggle for self-determination against Milosevic’s blood-soaked (and certainly “Islamophobic”) drive in the 1990s for a “Greater Serbia”, and in 1999 effectively backed Milosevic against the Kosovars.

If the article, written in early 2006, had been motivated by anti-Muslim bigotry or Islamophobia, then such politics would surely have manifested themselves in the eight years since then, around events such as the rise of the EDL, the racist backlash after the Woolwich killing or the military coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. No such argument has or can be made, because we have taken no “Islamophobic” positions.

People might also note that the AWL has closer links than any other socialist organisation in Britain with socialists in Iran, Kurdistan and Iraq. We have also collaborated over the years with socialist and labour movement organisations and activists in North Africa, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia (many of their members religious Muslims). All of them, whatever their other differences with us, have had very different attitudes to Islamism from the ones dominant on the British left.

Much of the left thinks that Islamism should be regarded as a positive political force (or at least not sharply opposed as a reactionary one) because it is supposedly anti-imperialist.

A broader swathe of left and liberal opinion is also influenced by the current bourgeois celebration of “faith groups”, and tends to think that sharply attacking religious ideas is wrong in a way that sharply attacking secular political ideas is not. The whole left, even those with a more critical attitude to Islamism, has been shaped by these things.

JEWISH FUNDAMENTALISTS

To note that religious-reactionaries hold in their grip “much of the Muslim world” is no more anti-Muslim than it is anti-semitic to point out that Jewish fundamentalists who believe the Jews are a chosen people with a God-ordained right to oppress others are at the cutting edge of the Israeli colonisation of the West Bank, or that the primitive and reactionary politics they represent are now a large and growing part of Israeli society.

The reason for all this is the defeat of class-struggle socialist ideas on a world scale. The reconstruction of an international working-class socialist movement in struggle against capitalism is the only possible answer to the contradictions which breed the reactionary politics of religious fundamentalism, and the starting point of such a renaissance is sharp Marxist analysis of and opposition to such politics. Yet the left has failed completely in this regard, in large part because it is not even trying.

The SWP’s adventure with Respect was a communalist political project which boosted British Islamists, wasted an opportunity to win over Muslim and Muslim-background people to socialist ideas, and weakened and demoralised the left.

Solidarity against racism does not require socialists to self-censor, or abandon our militant criticism of religion — and even more so, of right-wing religious politics. The idea that it does is wrong, and in this case implies a patronising attitude to Muslim and Muslim-background people, assuming they cannot be won over to class-struggle socialist ideas through common struggle, discussion and argument.

We will be holding a public discussion on these questions in London in the coming weeks. We extend an open invitation to come and debate the issues there. We urge those who genuinely want to discuss these issues and understand what we are saying to come along, or to approach us for discussions.

As for political groups denouncing us, we challenge them to publicly debate these issues at a time and place of their choosing.

- Abridged from bit.ly/article-response
- Another reply to our critics: bit.ly/shardy

Why we don't oppose nuclear power

By Paul Vernadsky

We recognise that climate change alters the conditions in which we formulate our socialist politics. Climate change is ultimately caused by capitalist social relations of production, which permit capitalists to simultaneously exploit wage labour while despoiling the ecology of the planet for the pursuit of profit.

Climate change is already impacting on working class communities across the globe. Floods, drought, wild fires and storms are frequently in the news. Climate change is already affecting food supplies, ecosystems, water and health. It is already integral to government policy on energy, transport, taxation and a host of other areas. All these issues affect the terrain on which the labour movement operates. It affects what Marxists say — from the fight for immediate reforms under capitalism right up to the material foundations of socialism.

The risks from climate change are now greater than ever before. IPCC reports confirm that global temperatures have risen by nearly a degree over the last century and may increase by 2-6°C in the next 100 years. They confirm that human activity is the principal cause of climate change, particularly fossil fuel burning in energy and transport, and agriculture.

A significant turning point was reached in May this year when the global carbon dioxide concentration briefly hit 400 parts per million. Greenhouse gas emissions have increased by a quarter in half a century and are accelerating. The planet is already heading away from the zone which has sustained life for countless millennia.

Contemporary climate change politics has reached an impasse. None of the bourgeois factions of advanced capitalism in energy, finance and industry, nor of their representatives at the head of states and multilateral institutions, has devised a significant plan to tackle climate change. Capital has failed to meet the climate challenge.

A new “golden age” of fossil fuels is emerging. There is a resurgence of oil and gas production, spurred by unconventional sources such as tar sands and hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”), with coal demand growing faster than renewables. If no action is taken by soon, much of the energy infrastructure will be locked in for decades. This “extreme energy” scenario threatens to derail global efforts to prevent dangerous climate change.

The global “carbon budget” — how much oil, coal and gas could safely be burned and still have some reasonable hope of staying below two degrees — is roughly 565 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide by mid-century. However fossil fuel companies have perhaps five times the reserves of coal, oil and gas on their balance sheets and are allocating billions to developing more. The New York and London stock markets are becoming more carbon-intensive. This is the paradox of neo-liberal climate politics: either a carbon bubble leading to financial collapse, or continued profitable fossil fuel burning with dire climate consequences.

The AWL has established our own distinctive tradition on climate change in recent years. We have developed the Marxist understanding of the interdependence of ecology and social transformation — well summed up by Marx's conception of the metabolism between nature and society. We understand how capital exploits waged workers and degrades the climate through its deployment of technology and energy.

We have highlighted the way climate change and climate policy hits working class people hardest. Most of all, we have emphasised the need for a working class-based climate movement to have the power and the interest to tackle climate issues and fight for socialism and for conscious, democratic planning as the answer to both ecological and social questions.

Our comrades have intervened in the unions to promote urgent action by the labour movement on climate change. We played an important role in the Climate Camps that took direct action around key climate issues. Our comrades played an irreplaceable role in the Vestas occupation in 2009 — the most significant climate class struggle to date in Britain. We believe the re-emergence of climate campaigning through recent actions against fracking is very important and should be supported by socialists.

We raise important transitional demands around climate change. First, privately owned energy firms and bourgeois-

state corporations run according to market imperatives continue to invest in fossil fuels at the expense of less polluting sources such as renewables and nuclear. Taking ownership and control of these capitalist energy giants is necessary, so that climate change can be mitigated to the extent necessary and in the time left.

Second, private ownership and control of energy makes democratic oversight and accountability much harder. This is true at various scales, from getting a global agreement between states to tackle climate change, to government policies (like the Tory tax-breaks for shale gas), all the way down to local people who find firms fracking without their say-so. Socialists need to advocate maximum democratic control and planning. The basic answer for workers in extreme energy industries is conversion, paid for by the employers and the state. Climate-related employment is also the direct answer to the economy mired in economic stagnation.

We advocate and fight for a big programme of research and investment to expand renewable energy generation. We advocate and fight for a comprehensive programme of measures to redesign living spaces, industry, transport, etc to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions while protecting and improving living standards. This includes fighting for a shorter working week and longer holidays.

DISCUSSED

AWL last discussed climate change in depth at our conference in 2008. At the time, and after a robust debate, we decided to oppose the development of nuclear power.

Many comrades have since changed their minds after further discussion. At our 2013 conference (26-27 October) we decided that we can no longer oppose nuclear technology in principle, particularly given the scale of the climate risks.

We still put most emphasis on the development of renewable technologies, as these provide the most sustainable, low-carbon sources of energy in the long run. However, the sheer amount of energy necessary to sustain and indeed improve human living standards means that the real choice in the actual conditions we face today is not renewables vs nuclear, or renewable vs fossil fuels, but between nuclear and fossil fuels. This is partly because renewables have not been developed on anything like the scale necessary to replace other sources of energy. It is also because at present, there are real practical problems with renewable sources — such as when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine at times when energy demand is high — where a baseload supply is unavoidable. For generations this has come mainly from fossil fuels and to a lesser extent from nuclear. That dilemma cannot be wished away.

Nuclear technologies can provide a reliable source of low carbon electricity. Life cycle analysis of different technologies per unit of power suggest that nuclear emits around the same amount of carbon as wind and hydro, and less than solar or biomass. Most significantly, coal emits 30 times more emissions than nuclear, oil 25 times and gas 17 times.

The most notable objections to nuclear are cost, waste, and safety. The cost issue has been starkly posed in the last few weeks by the announcement of a new nuclear power plant at Hinckley Point. With a “strike price” of £89-93 per megawatt hour and guaranteed for 35 years, the first point socialists should make is what a rip-off this is. Again workers pay the price in high energy bills to guarantee the profits of capitalists.

However this is not decisive against nuclear technology in general. The Treasury's “Investing in the Future” document (June 2013) had prices for other renewable energy sources. The nuclear price is less than the current and projected esti-

mates for onshore wind (£100) and less than offshore wind (£155), solar (£125) and wave/tidal (£305).

The irony of the Hinckley deal is clear: largely state-owned companies from France and China are given guaranteed profits of 10% to build and operate the plant. That is not an argument against nuclear, but it is a cast iron case for public ownership and democratic workers' control of the nuclear new build. Even nationalisation in capitalist conditions would give more leverage over prices and safety.

A more substantial objection concerns the waste generated by nuclear power, some of which remains radioactive for very long periods and would be a terrible legacy for future generations. Currently, storing fuel rods in huge vats is a hazard both for the immediate workers involved and potentially for the wider area where they are stored. There is no currently no geological storage options available, although some sites are still being investigated. This is a real concern and cannot be ignored.

However, relative to the massive risks of climate change, nuclear waste is a lesser evil compared to continued reliance on fossil fuels. In reality, the past legacy of nuclear waste would still have to be dealt with by a workers' government. However technical solutions are possible. According to Mark Lynas, Hitachi has a design of integral fast reactor that can burn spent nuclear fuel to generate more power — sufficient for many years. The experimental thorium reactors apparently have the same sort of capability. These advanced technologies should be explored, not shut down before they've even been given the chance to work.

Perhaps the greatest concern with nuclear is safety. After Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima this is again a real objection. The arithmetic is grim. At Fukushima, an estimated 1,000 people are expected to die from cancer after exposure to leaked radiation. We know that workers in the plant have had potentially lethal doses of radiation. This is terrible for everyone affected.

However, as the worst nuclear disaster in recent memory, it also has to be put in perspective. Fly ash from coal fired power stations also produces lethal doses of radiation. Last month the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) said that in 2010, there were 223,000 deaths from lung cancer worldwide resulted from air pollution. Much of this can be attributed to fossil fuel burning. In China, more coal miners die every year than nuclear workers, and some Chinese cities have had to shut down due to pollution caused by fossil fuel burning. That's why even the Chinese government is pursuing nuclear and renewable technologies.

The highly-regarded climate scientist James Hansen co-published a paper in March this year in the journal *Environmental Science and Technology*. He estimated that nuclear energy since 1971 has saved 64Gt of carbon dioxide equivalent and saved 1.8m lives by displacing fossil fuels. He estimates nuclear could save 7m more lives in the future as well as drastically reducing further emissions. The juxtaposition is valid: when the German government decided to phase out nuclear after Fukushima, despite its existing and future commitments on renewables, it also committed to replace some of that capacity with fossil fuels.

We are not pro-nuclear, but nor can we sustain an anti-nuclear stance in the face of climate realities. We are not advocates for the nuclear industry or for government nuclear policy; we will criticise and campaign against the inadequate, pro-capitalist energy and climate politics of the ruling class.

However we will not fetishise opposition to nuclear technology when this means the continuation of far more damaging fossil fuel use. Thousands of scientists, well beyond those who work in the nuclear industry, see nuclear as a necessary part of the answer to climate change. Environmentalists such as Mark Lynas and George Monbiot have also reassessed their opposition after rationally weighing up the issues. Even Friends of the Earth UK has dropped its demand for the immediate closure of nuclear plants on climate grounds.

Socialists have no special authorities to appeal to. We can only assess the arguments and formulate rational political conclusions that flow from them. That's part of taking climate change seriously and helping to rearm the new climate movement with coherent, working class politics. It's about honesty and accounting for your political line.

We hope others in the labour movement and in climate campaigns will discuss these issues with us, as we fight for common goals on climate change.

The legacy of Norman Geras

By Patrick Murphy

On Friday 18 October, Marxist political philosopher Norman Geras died of cancer at the age of 70. Geras was born in what was then Southern Rhodesia in 1943 and came to England to study at Oxford in 1962. He graduated with a first in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics in 1965 and took up a teaching post at Manchester University where he remained for the rest of his academic life, retiring in 2003.

He became more widely known in recent years through “Normblog”, which quickly became one of the most widely read and influential political blogs. Official obituaries, including that from his friend Eve Gerrard in the *Guardian*, tended to deal exclusively with this late period in his political thought and activity during which he became an advocate, in certain circumstances, of what is now known as “liberal intervention” to avoid humanitarian catastrophes. One consequence of this shift in his thinking was his support for the Iraq war in 2003.

In fact Geras had, by that time, been a Marxist in the classical tradition for many decades and had a long record of involvement in the non-Stalinist left. He was an important part of the New Left movement of the 1960s and an editorial board member of *New Left Review*, briefly a member of the International Marxist Group and regular contributor to the *Socialist Register*.

He made a number of distinctive contributions to that tradition, particularly in the 1980s. From the start he was an enthusiast for Rosa Luxemburg, whose contribution to Marxism he examined in his first published book *The Legacy of Rosa Luxemburg* (1976). He developed a major concern about the importance of social justice and plurality within any putative socialist society and considered Trotsky and, in particular, Luxemburg to have more valuable and insightful things to say about these matters than Lenin.

He brought these ideas into public view in a collection of essays entitled “Literature of Revolution” and specifically in “Classical Marxism and Political Representation” (1986). For Geras there was no question but that any socialist society worth living in would contain a plurality of different parties including, if supported, pro-market capitalist parties and no

question either that this was entirely consistent with the Marxist tradition as he understood it.

He also insisted that the left was wrong, in the face of persistent claims by the right that human nature was intrinsically conservative, to deny its very existence. He argued persuasively and with characteristic rigour (in *Marx and Human Nature*,

1983) that human nature not only existed but that this was recognised in the work of Marx and was very far from being any obstacle to an egalitarian or classless society. There is no doubt that his work on these areas developed into a comprehensive and settled view that revolutionary socialism had to have a moral dimension at its heart, or would have no hope of winning human emancipation.

His final substantial work was *The Contract of Mutual Indifference*, which uses reflections on the Holocaust (Geras was of Jewish heritage) to argue that the society we live in is one where the deal is that we generally ignore each others’ suffering as long as it doesn’t immediately impact on us, and that any body of ideas with a claim to human liberation or emancipation must reverse that “contract”. In its place he argued for the “primacy of the human duty to bring aid”. All of this he continued to see as part of and, indeed, a development and enrichment of the socialist tradition.

He ended *The Contract of Mutual Indifference* with the words “Not responsible for all evil, capitalist social relations and values contribute their massive share to it. Socialism represents the hope of another moral universe”. He presented the key ideas in the book to a discussion session at Workers’ Liberty’s Ideas for Freedom event in 1998.

Norman Geras’s own legacy on the left will be affected for sure by the last decade of his writing and thinking when he supported the Iraq War and was a founder of the predictably short-lived “Euston Manifesto” group in 2006.

Maybe it’s because I knew and was taught by the man, and kept in contact ever since, but I’m inclined to be generous to him on this and to insist on the value of the lifelong body of work in which the consistencies outweigh the contradictions.

He wrote perhaps the best available defence of Marxism against post-modernism in his debate with post-Marxist theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantelle Mouffe in the late 1980s (in *Discourses of Extremity*). Concerns about morality, justice, and human solidarity in the here and now (not simply in the socialist future) saturate all of his work. They weren’t discovered late in life as convenient justification for difficult or apostate political positions. He had no time whatever for those on the left who found it expedient to ignore or make apologies for totalitarianism or deny or minimise the existence of human suffering when it didn’t fit a pre-determined worldview.

He had less time for those unwilling to reflect and think. He distinguished himself in this regard when later, and without giving any ground to the pro-Ba’athist “anti-imperialism” that had gripped much of the left, he conceded that the Iraq war had been a mistake.

He did that on the same basis that he initially supported it; the management of post-war reconstruction was disastrous and the human cost had been far too much though, he insisted, not predictable.

When he was wrong, it was for the very best of reasons. In the case of the Iraq war he was pitted against people who may have been right in the very narrowest of senses (they opposed the US/UK invasion) but often for the very worst of reasons and with little or no concern for how Iraqis were ruled or how they might build a movement to liberate themselves.

Anyone unfamiliar with Norman Geras should not be put off by the fact that he was an academic (a “Professor of Government”, no less). His writing was always accessible, thorough, and explanatory. His style of argument was rigorously logical and methodical and even when he thought an argument was empty and valueless (such as “post-Marxism”), he gave it and the reader the respect of a patient and thorough deconstruction. The effect was all the more devastating for it.

Norman Geras was a man for whom Marxism was a living, evolving body of ideas to be engaged with and developed not a set of immutable texts to be rifled through selectively to justify the latest fashionable left prejudice. We can learn a lot from the legacy of such people.

We need our own remembrance

By Micheál MacEoin

On 28 October, the *Daily Telegraph* accused the University of London Union (ULU) of having “banned” representatives of the union from attending the University’s official Remembrance Service.

Quite how the union’s democratic body taking a decision not to officially attend constitutes a “ban” is beyond comprehension. However, what is in danger of being lost here is the debate about the politics of Remembrance, over and above any manufactured “scandal” or constitutional wrangle within ULU’s Senate.

The chief charge laid against those who refuse to engage with official Remembrance ceremonies is that they have “politicised” the act of Remembrance. Yet, declaring something to be “beyond politics” is highly political. It effectively insulates certain institutions and practices — invariably those of the ruling-class — from criticism. In doing so, it restricts the parameters of what is considered up for discussion to a very narrow terrain and acts as an ideological buttress for those in power.

Remembrance ceremonies, much like the Crown and other venerated official institutions, are political — they can and should be contested and opposed. This is exactly what ULU student representatives Michael Chessum and Daniel Lemberger Cooper have done.

The politics on display at the official ceremonies are those of the ruling-class, at whose behest millions of working-class people have killed one another. The symbolism at Whitehall is not a humanistic display of regret at the legalised mass slaughter of the 20th century, but a pageantry of monar-

chism, militarism and imperialism. This is evidenced by the prominence of the Royal Family, the heads of the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force, and the British government.

Last year’s ceremony was officiated by Tony Blair, architect of a war in which over a million Iraqis died. This is a ceremony commemorating the dead, presided over by those institutions which murdered them, and the individuals who gave the orders.

Centrally involved in official Remembrance is the Royal British Legion. The Legion was established by Douglas Haig, commander at the Battle of the Somme, who was responsible for some of the highest military casualties in British history. It was set up quite deliberately to circumvent grassroots veterans’ organisations, such as the Labour-aligned National Association of Discharged Sailors and Soldiers which excluded officers from membership, and the left-Liberal organised National Federation of Discharged and Demobilised Sailors and Soldiers, which campaigned under the slogan “justice not charity”.

The Remembrance ceremonies of these official institutions are predicated on forgetting who was responsible for death in war. Official Remembrance was part of a post-war nationalist drive to displace class-struggle with the myth of national

unity and consensus. These ceremonies present a view of history which writes out of existence any dissent which runs counter to this myth of unbroken national glory.

Marginalised are the struggles of demobilised soldiers against the mass unemployment, slums and degradation in the promised “land fit for heroes” after World War One. Excluded from memory are the mass anti-war marches in 2003. Ignored is the history of mutinies and fraternisation in the armies of the imperialist powers.

Resigned to a footnote too is the radicalisation of soldiers at the end of the Second World War, which saw a “Forces Parliament” in Cairo vote to nationalise the banks, build four million houses, and nationalise land, mines and transport. In April 1944, it was forcibly shut down by the military authorities; press reports of its decisions were censored, and the servicemen responsible for instigating it were re-posted. Even during the Second World War itself there was no consensus on the sort of society people wanted to see afterwards.

We need our own Remembrance — for instance, meeting where we can discuss the history — one which does not whitewash history but seeks to learn from it, and apply its lessons to the struggle for a better world.

If we are to break the grip of ruling-class ideas and institutions over our class, we must challenge the potent nationalist myths which permeate the official Remembrance ceremonies.

Part of building a movement capable of achieving a society cleansed of war and militarism is ensuring that the honourable act of remembering the war dead goes hand in hand with anger and contempt for those who sent them to their deaths.

How the US uses torture

Les Hearn reviews *Doctors of the Dark Side* (2011, dir. Martha Davis)

Western democracies have prided themselves in applying humane standards to the treatment of prisoners of war. This treatment is encapsulated in the Geneva Convention, first formulated in 1864 and modified since, most recently in 1949.¹

They have also signed up to the UN Convention against Torture.²

These conventions have been flouted by some democratic states (France in Algeria, Britain in Northern Ireland, USA in Vietnam, ...). The US explicitly banned torture and harsh treatment by military interrogators after the Vietnam war, introducing the Army Field Manual on Interrogation (FM 34-52)³ in 1992.

However, in recent years, the US has subjected captives to treatment which had previously been recognised as torture or, at least, as inhumane. A particularly disturbing aspect has been the involvement of medical professionals, doctors and psychologists, in advising or agreeing to such treatment. This is the subject of the 2011 documentary film *Doctors of the Dark Side*, directed by Martha Davis.

This important film received its first UK showing on 29 October at University College London. Over 300 people attended the screening and the discussion that followed, including contributions from the film's director, who had flown from the US specially for the showing, and from Philippe Sands and other human rights activists.

Intriguingly, the film opened with the case of US Navy Petty Officer Daniel King. In 1999, he was working as a cryptanalyst when a routine polygraph ("lie detector") test proved "inconclusive". He was then subjected to extensive interrogation, including 29 days of sleep deprivation (described as torture by AFM 34-52) to get him to admit to spying. This had the effect of so confusing and disorienting him that he thought he must be guilty but had "forgotten" the details.

Crucially, a psychologist working for the navy, Michael Gelles, was shown trying to get King to admit to something, while King asked him for help in recalling the "memory" he thought he had lost. Gelles had forgotten that his responsibility was to his patient and that he should "first do no harm". (Later, Gelles turns up at Guantanamo Bay where he plays a rather more honourable role in exposing abusive interrogation practices.)

The US has tortured prisoners at Abu Ghraib, above

Complicity of medical personnel in torture was a key feature in interrogation of suspects in the "war on terror". Psychologists in particular helped to develop a programme of techniques to "break down" suspects. Leading these were Drs Bruce Jessen and James Mitchell, who took as their guide the SERE programme.

Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape was designed partly to help US armed forces members to resist abusive interrogation, including torture. They reverse-engineered the programme to come up with enhanced interrogation techniques (EIT) that would be used on Al Qaeda suspects ... and anyone else who happened to be in the wrong place when people were rounded up. Perhaps 85% of prisoners at Abu Ghraib were innocent.

The problem that EIT amounted to torture was solved by simply asserting the opposite! The problem that these techniques typically produce useless or untrue information and false confessions was ignored. The problem that EIT psychologically damaged victims, many innocent, permanently was also ignored. And so was the problem that any admissions made could not be used in a court of law.

The film shows some of the abuse of prisoners by soldiers at Abu Ghraib to set the scene, and then shows staged examples of some techniques: sleep deprivation, extreme isolation, enforced nudity, sexual humiliation, extremes of temperature, loud noise, bright light and darkness, confinement in a

cage or tiny box, the use of uncomfortable stress positions, slamming into a specially-built plywood wall, and of course waterboarding or simulated drowning.

Doctors would be on hand to monitor blood pressure, pulse rate and blood oxygen levels, and to authorise interrogation to continue. They were not protecting their "patients" but allowing them to be abused up to the time where their lives might be in danger.

Dissenting doctors, psychologists and psychiatrists are interviewed in the film (supporters of EIT were not available!). One of these is retired Brigadier General Dr Stephen Xenakis, a top army psychiatrist, who states that it is "extremely cruel to keep someone awake - they will have psychotic-like thinking, they will be very disorganised and ... very unreliable."

Thus what is "the single greatest scandal in the history of American medical ethics" unfolded, where doctors were "the centrepiece of torture", devising methods of torture that "do not leave wounds" and supervising their use, "keeping alive those that are meant to be kept alive". One military psychologist is quoted: "If producing some pain does the most good for the most people, it's entirely ethical."

However, as Nathaniel Raymond (Physicians for Human Rights Campaign Against Torture) points out, "When people committed these same acts, we prosecuted them in the past in places like Nuremberg. What's different here?"

• More: doctorsofthedarkside.com

¹ Article 3: "Noncombatants, combatants who have laid down their arms, and combatants who are hors de combat (out of the fight) due to wounds, detention, or any other cause shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, including prohibition of outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment."

² UN Convention against Torture (and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment): Definition of torture — "Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity."

³ <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm34-52.pdf>

Surveying homophobia

Charlotte Zeleus reviews *Out There* (Stephen Fry and Fergus O'Brien, BBC, 2013)

In this two part documentary, Stephen Fry and the director Fergus O'Brien set out to survey what the situation is for LGBT people around the world.

A laudable task, and a good way to use your celebrity. In some ways the documentary lives up to its good intentions to expose homophobia across the world; the interviews with victims and survivors of some of the most extreme consequences of homophobia moved me.

Fry's journey surveying the situation for LGBT people took him to the US, Uganda, Brazil, Russia, and India. He did not visit the likes of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Yemen or Mauritania where homosexuality is punishable by death, or the Gulf states which are reportedly developing medical "tests" to exclude gay migrants, or Nigeria or Cameroon, who parliaments debate anti-gay laws similar to those of Uganda. Clearly there is only so much one documentary can cover, however I found the selective nature of those places mentioned frustrating, especially when space was found for a "look-we-can-have-normal-lives" segment on Elton John that took up a sizeable chunk of one programme.

The documentary fails to properly address what causes homophobia, and its cultural, social, and historical roots, too often attributing it to the ravings of mad bigots (usually from non-white or non-western countries), although Fry does seem to try and counterbalance this by discussing the origins of many homophobic laws in old British colonial laws.

The program was best when Fry was interviewing those

who had suffered at the hands of the worst homophobes. Including a very touching interview with a woman from Uganda who had suffered "corrective rape" due to her sexuality. This is shown after Fry is invited onto a Ugandan English-language radio station to debate a Pastor who preaches against homosexuality. As expected, the arguments of the Pastor are ridiculous. He claims that he has worked with women that suffer UTIs from sexual activities using carrots, talks of "penises terrorising young people's anuses", and holds up a newspaper headline that reads "how bum shafting shattered my whopper".

Fry quite rightly makes the point that it is easy to write off the views of people such as the Pastor he debated as those of marginal fanatics, but that these ideas have influence in society and directly lead to the abuse that many have suffered.

The documentary also showed the case of Farshad, a gay man from Iran who has fled to Britain fearing for his life. Despite the fact that he almost certainly faces the death penalty in Iran for his sexuality, the immigration system here has told him that he "needs good proof that he is gay."

The main failing of the documentary is any serious attempt to discuss the issues that lead to homophobia. The program was peppered with very twee comments from Fry about the unnatural or illogical nature of homophobia. Announcing at one point that "over 500 species have been observed to engage in homosexual behaviour, but only one



species engages in homophobic behaviour". This an overly simplistic look at the issue that does not take into account the prominence of the nuclear family unit in society, the role of religion, and general issues of expression (or lack thereof) of sexuality in our lives.

Fry does go some way to talking about the social conditions that lead to homophobia, however in a faltering and narrow way. Fry talks about how it is "much easier to be gay if you live in an area of a city that is full of educated people, because educated people aren't filled with hatred towards gay people. You only hate when you are ignorant and afraid. Ignorance and fear is fostered by a lot of things, poverty is one and fundamental religion is another."

I can agree with this to an extent. Education is important in challenging oppressions of all kinds. However, Fry seems to imply here that it is "more educated" middle or ruling-class communities where it is easier to be gay. To an extent this maybe true, but I think this its cause is usually more economic than ideological. Fry seems to have a distaste for working-class culture and communities, which he sees as unable to break from backward ideas.

Fry rightly identifies that: "Homosexuals are not interested in making other people homosexual, homophobes are interested in making other people homophobic."

We are dealing with dangerous ideas that require us to show solidarity with LGBT people across the world, to fight homophobia at home, and to fight against the ideological structures (including the idea of the heterosexual "nuclear family", and reactionary religious institutions) which breed it.

Why art fairs are thriving

"Frieze Art Fair" was held in Regent's Park, London, from 17 to 20 October. *Solidarity* asked Lisa Le Feuvre, an art curator, about it. The interview started with Lisa putting a question to *Solidarity*.

Lisa Le Feuvre: My first response would be to ask *Solidarity* why you are choosing Frieze Art Fair as the impetus to talk about art, given that this is the most commercial side of art?

Are you not simply fuelling the market side of art by making this your choice of art to discuss? Indeed, why is it that you want to talk about the market and not the art?

***Solidarity*:** We don't have the resources to cover the visual arts regularly. We asked for comment on Frieze because the extent of publicity made us think readers would be interested.

So, in a way, the reply to the question is another question: why does the commercial art fair now get more publicity than exhibitions which are more accessible to most people?

L: I think in part it is the "festival" nature of an art fair that causes so much excitement — there are parties, perceived glamour, events and so on.

The ancillary events attract much attention because of the glitterati who attend them. This is not a bad thing in and of itself, but it does distract from the art and the fact that art is an intellectual activity. You say "We don't have the resources to cover the visual arts regularly", but I think what you mean is that you do not prioritise the resources to cover the arts. I wonder why not?

S: We have tiny resources and we're a political paper, so our coverage is focused on political and social things.

The wider world has changed in the last five years with the onset of the global economic crash and depression. Have those changes been reflected in changes in the Frieze art fairs?

L: Art is both social and political! Your question is about the art market, which is doing very well right now. The commercial side is not my area, but from all I can tell it is very robust.

Where art is suffering is in the non-commercial sectors, and we have an odd situation where sometimes commercial galleries make better exhibitions than public galleries because, very simply, they can afford to.

Most, although not all, public galleries rely on support from private dealers who commercially represent the artists. The spaces where the most challenging exhibitions can be found today are as likely to be in the commercial sector as the non-profit sector.

You asked what Frieze is; well, it is an art fair and all art fairs are commercial enterprises — just like any trade fair. Artworks are for sale in art fairs through commercial galleries, who take a stand within the Fair.

The galleries themselves represent artists within the art market. The buyers are private collectors and public collections.

The galleries pay a fee to have a booth and apply to be included. A changing selection panel of international experts makes the selection, and there are many more applications than acceptances.

Although sales are the driving force of the Fair, it is also a

place where curators, artists, and those interested in art go because you see wonderful works of art that you otherwise would not see.

The art on show is between collections, or moving from the artist's studio into a collection.

Without question Frieze Art Fair has had a major impact on the arts ecology of the UK. It has made London a site that international collectors, artists, curators and institutions travel to.

An art fair is not the best place to look at art. It is noisy, busy. Artwork is positioned to be sold, not to be intellectually engaged with.

But the fair does provide an opportunity to see artworks that would never otherwise be seen. In many ways, an art fair is designed for specialists in art who look at the artworks and imagine them somewhere else.

S: Frieze Art Fair has taken place only since 2003. It has grown from 28,000 visitors to 70,000. Some other contemporary art fairs are older, for example Arco in Madrid dates back to 1982 and FIAC in Paris to 1974, but evidently the genre is recent and growing. What lies behind that?

L: Frieze London, and its sister fair Frieze Masters, are important because they do the job so very, very well. London is one of the international centres of art because across Britain we have the strongest galleries, the best art schools, one of the highest concentrations of artists and, because Britain is relatively small, it is easy to travel.

Because I am not in the commercial side, I do not travel that much to see art fairs, but Frieze is my home one and I find it a great pleasure to see art and exchange ideas with others.

Because of the fair's intensity, museums and galleries across the country present strong exhibitions alongside it, and as a result for one week we can uncontestedly say that Britain is the most important place in the world for art.

This year I saw drawings by Malevich that I know I would never have seen otherwise, as well as sculptures by the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, drawings by the Turkish feminist pioneer artist Nil Yalter, and other artworks that I would need to get on a plane to see otherwise.

Frieze is a place for art. Everything else is secondary.

A fighter for freedom

Omar Raii reviews *I Am Malala*, by Malala Yousafzai, with Christina Lamb (Little, Brown and Company, 2013)

When it was revealed on 11 October that Malala Yousafzai, the teenage girl that captured the world's imagination after being shot by a Taliban rifleman, was not awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, it came as a relief.

Malala no doubt deserved it more than any other person in the world, but to tarnish her name by giving her the same prize given to such renowned peacemakers as Henry Kissinger and Menachem Begin would have been a disservice to everything she had stood for.

The memoir of the young girl who had been standing up for her and her schoolmates' right to an education since she was 11 is not at all as gloomy as it could have been. The book is filled with humour and charm as Malala (with the help of Christina Lamb) talks about her activism as well as the courage of her parents, particularly her father.

Malala was clearly lucky in having a father who was so dedicated personally in striving to give every child an education. Not everyone in that area of the world would have been as lucky as her, and it is sobering to think of how many girls there must be in Pakistan who might have shared Malala's stand, but didn't have the slightest hope of getting support for political and social action.

What is striking about her memoir is something that perhaps should be obvious; the fact that Malala is a teenage girl.

We forget that she's like any other person her age. She likes *Twilight*, and chatting to her friends.

When reading about the situation of girls and women in areas like the Swat Valley, it is easy to despair. Malala lived in a society where it is unthinkable that a girl wouldn't get married at a certain age and then be expected to fulfil certain roles after marrying, but her continuing optimism is contagious, and reading her words reminds you that real progress on women's rights is possible even in the most patriarchal societies in the world.

Sometimes, Malala's writing seems naïve. When she recalls her feeling that even the Taliban wouldn't go after a little girl, one's first reaction is something like "they're the Taliban, of course they won't be sympathetic to your calls for women's education". But she wasn't being naïve, she was being brave.

The naïveté about the Taliban comes from the western left, which sometimes allows legitimate and justified opposition to NATO imperialism's role in the region to obscure the fact that the Taliban is also a deadly and reactionary force, and one which cannot be understood solely as a "reaction" to imperialism but which has its own programme for the transformation of society along reactionary lines.

It is sad that it took a young girl being shot in the head to remind us of such things, but one can hope that labour movements around the world will remember and solidarise with the struggles of workers and the poor in South Asia.

The book also plays down Malala's socialist politics, feeding into the media conception of her as brave and courageous but nothing more than generically liberal in politics.

In reality, Malala is a socialist. She has spoken at meetings of the Pakistani Marxists, the Pakistani section of the International Marxist Tendency (represented in Britain by Socialist Appeal). In a written address to its 32nd Congress, she said: "I am convinced socialism is the only answer and I urge all comrades to take this struggle to a victorious conclusion. Only this will free us from the chains of bigotry and exploitation."

Her inspiring faith in the possibility of a socialist future explodes the contention of cultural relativists on both the right and the left that the ideas and values of socialist democracy are somehow "western" concepts, incompatible with the "culture" of people in the global south.

In the end Malala was luckier than the woman she was named after; Malalai of Maiwand, the Pashtun Joan of Arc, who rallied Afghans to victory against the British in 1880, losing her own life in the process. She has now moved away from Pakistan but hasn't ceased in her campaigning, currently raising millions of pounds for Syrian refugees.

After all she has fought for, we can only hope that she now enjoys her life in Birmingham, continuing to remind the world that the battle for education, and freedom, is not yet over, but it can, and must, be won.

University workers strike for better pay

On 31 October, Higher Education workers in three unions (UCU, Unite, and Unison) struck against a 1% pay offer. Here, we feature snippets from picket lines around the country.

“The consensus from UCU members on the picket line was that there should be a “general strike” (their words), by which they meant more coordinated public sector strike action.”
University of Northampton

“There were around a dozen pickets from all three unions at each of the main entrances to University of East Anglia (UEA) all morning.

They were lively despite the showers, and busy, but no-one, or hardly anyone, turned away.

Ideas for escalation include a work-to-contract and a probable marking-boycott after Christmas. I learned a bit more about the extent of zero-hours contracts among the outsourced catering staff (who are in Unison), and the willingness of all three

One of the picket lines at the University of Sheffield

unions to come out together and share experiences and views was obviously a big plus.”
UCU activist, UEA

“Good turn-out for picket lines at Sheffield Uni.

We’ve recruited five new members over the past fortnight. Very few lecturers crossing picket lines into our building, but a rather different picture with the poorly-unionised lower grades (especially Unison).

Elsewhere on campus the picture was more mixed, but there was good support generally from students.

About 200 marched into town from Sheffield Uni to

join 100 from Hallam for a rally — too many for the room we’d booked, so we had to hold it outside.”

UCU activist, University of Sheffield

“Faced with a workforce divided between multiple trade unions, rank-and-file activists decided to step in and build for the strike themselves.

Members of Workers’ Liberty, working with fellow union members on campus, helped produce the third edition of the University of London workplace bulletin *The Open Book* and hurried it out in time for the strike.

The first article

advertised a cross-union rank-and-file meeting for a couple of days before the strike to plan picket lines and build awareness among colleagues. Further leaflets were also produced and were handed out by lay union members outside Senate House. In the event, around twenty workers from different unions attended the meeting and firm plans were made to have picket lines on the day.

On the morning of the strike itself, there was an official UCU picket on the Russell Square entrance to Senate House. Due to the organisation of the network of workers around the bulletin, there were enough members of other unions on strike that day to set up pickets covering two other entrances to the building.

The next step is to set up a more durable cross-union committee bringing together members from all the unions on campus to discuss how to keep action going throughout this dispute.”

Unison/IWGB member, University of London

Fire dispute escalates



By Darren Bedford

The FBU’s dispute over pensions escalated last week after the fire minister withdrew a previous offer in the wake of further strikes.

Firefighters in England and Wales held two further solid strikes on Friday 1 November for four and a half hours and a further two hour strike on Monday 4 November. A further strike is planned for Wednesday 13 November.

However a last minute intervention by fire minister Brandon Lewis just before the Friday strike began has worsened the prospect of a settlement, after he withdrew proposals made in June – increasing the penalty for firefighters forced to retire early on fitness grounds.

The dispute is now reaching a critical stage. On 17 October, the employers put forward an 11 point plan on fitness and capability, a crucial element of the conflict. The

FBU argues that most firefighters will not be fit enough to work beyond the current retirement age of 55, leaving those firefighters without a job and with a pension reduced by over 40%. The government’s own evidence backs this claim.

The FBU called off a planned strike on 19 October to explore the proposals. However just days later the employers admitted they could offer no guarantees on the “no job, no pension” issue. A letter from chief fire officers has underlined that firefighters would face capability dismissal if they cannot meet the fitness standards towards the end of their working life.

The government know their new pension scheme is unworkable, but are not prepared to deal with the consequences of their folly. They simply want to force through the new arrangements and make firefighters pay for any problems.

For its part, the FBU cannot back off, having exposed the contradiction in the government’s position.

This means more action is likely in an increasingly bitter dispute.

Postal strikes off

By Gerry Bates

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has called off a national strike of postal workers, planned for 4 November.

Although the immediate issues balloted over were day-to-day industrial issues including pay and pensions, the CWU explicitly placed the ballot in the wider context of its political fight against Royal Mail privatisation. A strike before the 15 October sell-off could have thrown a spanner in the works of privatisation. By delaying calling action, and then calling it off entirely, the CWU allowed the privatisation to go through unresisted.

A strike due in the separate Crown Post Office dispute was also called off. The union and Royal

Mail bosses are now committed to resolving the dispute by 13 November, and to concluding an agreement which includes “an improved pay and reward offer”.

Royal Mail have also agreed to extend the validity of the ballot to 20 November. That gives a week’s window between the planned conclusion of a deal and the latest date at which postal workers could take action.

Rank-and-file activists and militant branches should begin organising now for strikes to demand concrete concessions, not merely “an improved pay and reward offer”, and pressure the CWU to use its links with Labour to commit Labour leaders to renationalisation.

Tube workers gear up for strikes

By Ollie Moore

The Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers’ union (RMT) is balloting London Underground train-maintenance workers for strikes and action short of strikes.

The union is trying to stop management imposing unilateral changes to workers’ terms and conditions.

Meanwhile, an all-grades ballot of Tube workers for strikes to demand an end to casualisation, and for workers supplied by agencies, including the 33 previously employed by Trainpeople, to be offered permanent jobs, is due to begin this week.

RMT is also in dispute with LU bosses over ticket office closures. Management are gearing up for an-



other assault on jobs and staffing levels.

The rank-and-file bulletin Tubeworker said: “We cannot approach this situation as individuals. We need an effective, collective response.”

Tubeworker supporters are advocating an all-grades battle that uses creative and strategic action, informs and involves members, and links the industrial battle to a political fight for a “workers’ and passengers’ plan” for the transformation of London Underground.

For more, see bit.ly/tw-latest

3 Cosas campaign fights on

By Jonny West

On Tuesday 5 November, cleaning, catering, and security workers at the University of London begin balloting for strikes.

The strikes are part of the workers’ ongoing campaign for sick pay, holiday, and pensions equality with their directly-employed colleagues.

The workers are members of the Independent Workers’ union of Great Britain (IWGB), and have run the rank-and-file “Tres Cosas” (“Three Things”) campaign since summer 2012.

A demonstration in support of the campaign on Thursday 24 October saw university management surreptitiously film activists before calling the

police, who attempted to “kettle” protestors outside the University of London’s Senate House building.

University bosses are continuing their efforts to criminalise and undermine protest and dissent on campus, which has seen an activist arrested and tried for the alleged crime of chalking slogans on university property and, outrageously, assaulting a police officer during her violent arrest. The court proceedings are ongoing.

Workers also face the closure of the Garden Halls accommodation site, which would lead to job cuts.

The strike, which is due for mid-November, will also take up this issue, as well as demanding recognition for the IWGB.



Solidarity

Multi-billion bank scandals exposed

J P Morgan bank boss Jamie Dimon keeps his job in spite of \$13 billion fine for mis-selling mortgage-backed securities

By Colin Foster

Big banks stand accused of rigging the markets for trading between currencies, in which £3 trillion of business — £400 for every child, woman, and man on earth — is done each day.

Through their frantic scramble for speculative super-profits, those banks

brought us the 2008 global crash and the economic depression that still blights us.

They have escaped, so far, with mild reprimands. But with their affairs under more scrutiny, scandal after scandal has tumbled into the open.

UK banks have had to set aside over £16 billion to compensate people whom

they duped into buying useless payment protection insurance on their credit cards and, says the *Financial Times*, “the eventual bill could be far higher”.

LIBOR

Banks across the globe have been under investigation for 15 months now for rigging Libor, the interest rate at which banks lend to each other short-term.

Some banks have admitted rigging and paid fines, and the investigations continue.

The US bank J P Morgan has just done a deal with US authorities to pay a fine of \$13 billion to mop up another scandal, mis-selling of mortgage-backed securities. J P Morgan is holding a scarcely-imaginable \$23 billion in reserve on the same principle as an individual might keep a stash to cover parking fines.

Now at least a dozen traders have been suspended by banks trying to cover their backs on the foreign exchange scandal. The *Financial Times* reports: “authorities around the world are also examining whether other benchmark rates, including oil-spot markets [immediate trading, as distinct from the ‘futures’ markets and long-term contracts], have been manipulated”.

The conservative *Financial Times* columnist Martin Wolf has written: “Banks, as presently constituted and managed, cannot be trusted to perform any publicly important function, against

the perceived interests of their staff [meaning their top bosses, not the ordinary workers]. Today’s banks represent the incarnation of profit-seeking behaviour taken to its logical limits, in which the only question asked by senior staff is not what is their duty or their responsibility, but what can they get away with.”

RICH

So far they have got away with much. Believe it or not, J P Morgan can pay \$23 billion in fines and still be rich. Its boss Jamie Dimon is still in place.

Bankers who swindled people, or rigged markets, get different treatment from desperately poor people who duck and dive to get a few pounds extra on a benefit claim and feed their children.

The neo-liberal regime in which the pushes and pulls of world financial markets dominate life remains unchallenged in mainstream politics.

But there is a limit. Sooner or later, the mass of misery and anger being built up by current policies will explode. Socialists should speed the day.

The TUC should dust off the policy for “full public ownership of the [banking] sector and the creation of a publicly owned banking service, democratically and accountably managed”, decided by its 2012 congress, and campaign for it.

Unions should press for the Labour Party to take up the demand.

Israeli military refuser tour

Israeli military refuser Noam Gur is touring Britain from 12-26 November. *Solidarity* spoke to her about her political activity.

Why did you get active in politics and what has been the personal impact on you?

When I was about 15 years old I started understanding what was really happening in Palestine and Israel, after years of being told scary stories and lies by the educational system, my family, and the Israeli society in general.

At that stage, I believed that something like “enlightened occupation” could actually exist – in other words, that I’d go to the army and serve anywhere I’m sent, but that I’d do that with pity, compassion and “a smile”, that I wouldn’t hurt anyone without cause, and I’d refuse to obey illegal orders, etc.

That stage passed pretty quickly, when I understood there was not really any such thing as an enlightened occupation, and that in order to stop the occupation and work for peace I had to decide not to operate in the Occupied Territories. That phase passed pretty quickly, too.

When I was about 16, I understood that the only right way to act was to refuse completely to take part in the military.

Israel, since it was established, is committing war crimes and crimes against humanity, from the Nakba [the forced displacement of 750,000 Palestinians in 1947-48] until today. We see this in the last massacre in Gaza, we see this in the everyday life of Palestinians under occupation in Gaza and the West Bank, and we see this in Palestinians living inside Israel in how they’re being treated.

My parents, although not agreeing with my actions or beliefs, supported me personally. Since I’m coming from a small city without much awareness of the causes I’m talking about, I’ve lost most of my friends.

What do you see as the “solution” to the Israel-Palestine conflict?

I believe that I, as the occupier, have no part in deciding that. Personally, I would love to see all barriers falling and Palestine turning into one peaceful country. In order for that to occur, I believe that the “two state solution” could get us closer.

What reaction do you get from Palestinian people and activists?

I have been going regularly to Palestine as part of the non-violent struggle in the West Bank. The Palestinians were welcoming

and, of course, I only went to places where I was invited.

What other issues does the radical left in Israel campaign on, and how do these relate to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

The radical left is very much all about one struggle. We deal with demilitarisation, queer struggles, animal rights, etc. I believe that it’s all connected and, in order to promote justice, it’ll have to come from all aspects.

**Tour details:
workersliberty.org/noamgurtour**