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workers'
government

Solidarity

For social ownership of the banks and industry

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RECOVERY

FOR RICH,

See
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MORE

CUTS FOR POOR

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!

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Private sector fuels housing crisis

By Pete Gilman

Britain faces a housing crisis, possibly the gravest housing shortage since 1945.

Simultaneously we have colossal housebuilding programmes which dramatically worsen the crisis.

Travel through Hackney, east London, for example and you see massive housing projects being constructed. But it is all luxury housing. Rents start at £500 a week, rising to £1,500. Some houses cost up to £1,500,000. One Tory-controlled local authority is building whole new estates, but only for those on incomes of £90,000 a year or over.

LUXURY

Luxury developments are bought up before completion, often by Russian oligarchs, Saudi oil sheikhs, and Hong Kong and New York bankers.

Some of these have allegedly already been "sold on" to other buyers for a "healthy" profit in a form of pyramid selling. Meanwhile some housing associations are changing their role, becoming dual HAs and property "developers", in order to get their snouts into this very lucrative trough.

Private sector house



Protesters outside a private letting agent in north London

prices and rents are soaring. A June 2012 internal Labour Party report stated private sector rents in London are increasing at around 14% a year. The Office for Budget Responsibility predicts the price of residential properties will increase by 27% over the next few years, and in London by 50%.

It has now become a widespread practice for landlords and landlord companies, when tenants on short term tenancies are forced to move, to give the property a luxury "makeover" and then increase rent by as much as 100%. The case of a property in Battersea where the monthly rent was increased from £1,915 to £3,445 is not

untypical.

Private tenants are ruthlessly exploited, pay extortionate rents, have little or no security of tenure, and often the accommodation is appalling. A 2010 survey showed 37% of dwellings in the private sector failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Recent years have seen the re-emergence of the slum landlord, much of whose property is in a very bad state of repair and regularly lacking basic amenities, and whose tenants are often the poorest and most vulnerable in society. In some cases what we are seeing is the return of "Rachmanism" — exploitative slum landlordism.

The Regulation of the

Private Rented Sector Bill, sponsored by left-wing Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn, designed to give some measure of protection and legal rights to private sector tenants, goes before Parliament in the New Year. If the Tories throw it out, Labour must pledge to resubmit it if they win the next election.

A Labour government must create a powerful regulatory body with legal powers of enforcement to oversee the entire private sector. In addition it should require all landlords to go onto a central registry which entails them signing up to a specific code of conduct towards their tenants. Failure to register or failure to comply with that code of conduct should lead to compulsory purchase orders on property, heavy fines, or in extreme cases confiscation or even imprisonment.

Crucially, a Labour government must impose a cap on private sector rents. Most of all housebuilding must be for need not profit. A future Labour government must commit to building a minimum of 100,000 council homes every year.

It is only by building council, not luxury, housing that the housing crisis can be solved.

Resist housing co-op evictions in Lambeth

By Rosalind Robson

In the early 1970s Lambeth council (like many others) began purchasing housing for "slum clearance", demolition or renovation.

Due to lack of funding many councils were unable to afford to bring the properties up to minimum standards to rent them out. They designated some properties as "short-life" homes and allowed people to live in them paying low rents.

Later on Lambeth council asked these tenants to form housing co-ops. Those co-ops organised rent collections and considerably improved the properties. Having set them up, the council and the secondaries (housing associations) then remained at arms length and the residents ran their own



self-reliant communities, repairing and maintaining houses with no involvement from outside authorities.

Many many years later, in 2009, Lambeth said the remaining short-life properties (about 170) would be recalled. Many of the properties are now worth over £500,000 because of the inflated property market, and the council want to sell them. They want the money, but if the council followed a strictly capitalist logic that money should go to the people who have re-built and "added value" to these houses over four decades. The residents just

want the chance to stay in their homes above all else.

The council say they will use money raised to bring other council homes up to standard, but there is no guarantee they will do this and when they are questioned about this they admit that it is not ring-fenced for housing. In any case, making people homeless to find this extra cash is wrong.

The residents have advanced a plan for a "super-coop", one strand of which would turn residents into rent-paying council tenants (something that was never offered to them over the 40-year period that some people have now been in their homes) but Lambeth, the so-called "Cooperative" Council, are neither interested in people setting up co-ops nor in gaining more council tenants.

Some of the short-life

tenants are physically and mentally vulnerable. If the residents chose to fight for their right to stay they will lose the right to be rehoused.

Their campaign to stay in their homes is being supported by Labour MP Kate Hoey amongst others. They were also supported by their three local Labour councillors, but two of them have sold the residents out and voted for their eviction!

The residents have had support from many other people locally, from members of all political parties, and even from the council's own "co-operative commissioners"!

- More: bit.ly/lambeth-coop
- @LUHousingCoop
- [facebook.com/LambethUnited](https://www.facebook.com/LambethUnited)
- chn.ge/16PkKwv

Councillors' anti-cuts pledge

By Rosalind Robson

The worst of the cuts in local government are yet to come. Cuts in England in Wales amounted to £5.2 billion in the last two years, and are estimated to be £6.3 billion in the next two.

Leaders of Birmingham city council say they need to find £840 million over the next eight years. They have announced 1,000 job cuts and are warning they may not be able to fund all statutory services. Many other smaller councils are looking at the same kind of future.

With 500,000 jobs already gone, many further job cuts will be by compulsory redundancy. These have to be fought in the first place by industrial action.

Good, then, that there is some evidence that the main local government union, Unison, is supporting local ballots on disputes over jobs and conditions. Last year, says Unison leader Dave Prentis, the union authorised 41 local ballots, and rejected no requests. But more vigour is necessary.

A new statement by Councillors Against Cuts calls for Labour councils to refuse to implement the cuts. This can help generate discussions on the



kind of political fight we need. It says: "We do not accept that the local government cuts are necessary. Not in this era of increasing inequalities of wealth, low tax rates on the super-rich and huge profits for the banking sector and their senior staff."

"We cannot simply wait for the general election. Implementing cuts will not help Labour beat the Tories. We pledge:

- To fight the cuts demanded by the Tories and not just criticise them
- To campaign alongside unions and the rank and file of local government workers in explaining to the public why these cuts are unjustified and to mobilise in opposition to them.
- To support local government workers in their fight for jobs and for the protection of local government services.
- To defend the living standards of working class communities by refusing increased charges or taxes.
- To refuse to vote for budgets that will lead to an attack on jobs or reduce services.

"[...] We call on the Labour Party to pledge that if successful at the next general election they will restore local government funding so that councils can do the job that was expected from them – providing care, education, housing, and other services for our people regardless of income and outside the grasping hands of companies driven by profit."

• More: councillorsagaincuts.org

Miliband woos "Tory collaborator"

By Gerry Bates

The Observer on 8 December published a leaked Labour Party memo showing that Alan Milburn is to have a role in Labour's planning for the general election in 2015.

Just how big a role is really not clear. The memo outlines no fewer than 22 committees to run election strategy!

But Labour's elected National Executive figures nowhere in the maze of committees. Nor do trade unionists. Milburn does figure.

Milburn was a Blairite Labour minister from 1998 to 2005, responsible for introducing Foundation Trusts and PFI in the Health Service.

Since he has been serving the Tory-led government as



Alan Milburn

its so-called "social mobility tsar". Tsar of a small domain rather than a big empire, but for the government.

When Milburn took the job, former Labour deputy leader John Prescott called him — and John Hutton and Frank Field, other former Labour ministers who had accepted jobs with the

government — "collaborators".

Andy Burnham, Labour's current health spokesperson, said that Milburn accepting the job was a "kick in the teeth" to Labour supporters.

Milburn has served the Tory government so well that in February 2012 the Times reported Downing Street officials discussing the "intriguing idea" that he should be offered a seat in the Lords and a job as Health Secretary for the coalition. That was scuppered, as far as we can tell, by Cameron preferring to give the job to Jeremy Hunt rather than by objections from Milburn.

Labour and trade union activists should demand an election campaign run by elected, accountable party committees, guided by party conference policies.

Unite can block "opt-in" plan

By Martin Thomas

The official consultation period for the Collins report on Labour-union links closes on 24 December.

Then Collins, commissioned by Labour leader Ed Miliband, is due to produce proposals to go to a Labour special conference in spring 2014.

The whole thing starts from a speech by Ed Miliband in July when said

that individual trade unionists in affiliated unions should "opt in" to paying political levies to Labour.

Since 1946 the system has been rather than individuals can "opt out". It was "opt in" only between 1927 and 1946, under a law passed by a Tory government.

Labour right-wingers want "opt-in" so as to reduce trade unions' voting weight in the Labour Party. Miliband has not

signalled that he wants to go that way, at least not in the short term.

The Executive of the Unite union is meeting on 9-13 December. Its attitude may be decisive.

"Defend The Link" is campaigning to keep the current level of union representation, and against rule-changes imposed on the unions from outside.

• More: defendthelink.wordpress.com

LGBT solidarity fund launched

By Paul Penny

Trade union and LGBT liberation activists came together on Sunday 8 December to launch the Rainbow International LGBT Activist Solidarity Fund.

It is a new initiative which will provide critical financial assistance to front-line LGBT rights activists — principally in the countries where being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgen-

der is still illegal — so as to empower individuals and groups to campaign for LGBT rights, sexual liberation, equality, justice, democratic change, and working-class unity.

A fundraising target of £10,000 in the first six months was announced at the launch. Applications for financial assistance will be processed after 8 June 2014.

For more information, see rainbow-international-fund.org



Mail deal restricts strikes

By Darren Bedford

The Communication Workers Union (CWU) is recommending a deal to its members in Royal Mail that secures a 9% pay increase over three years and legal protection against outsourcing, casualisation, and zero-hours contracts, but also radically restricts the union's ability to strike.

The deal creates new structures of governance and mediation that the CWU will be legally committed to exhaust before its members can strike at a local level. The agreement also makes clear that any national strike would negate the legal protections offered: "The Employer shall be entitled to notify the CWU at any time that any of the Protections will no longer continue, if [...] there is national-scale industrial action (in the form of a strike or action short of a strike) which has been authorised at national level by the CWU [which] will have, or is reasonably likely to have, a [...] disruptive effect."

The protections in the deal would be material improvements for Royal Mail workers. **But these terms and conditions will come under inevitable scrutiny, and, ultimately, attack, and the restrictions on the ability to strike mean workers will be forced to defend them with both hands tied behind their backs.**

Migrant solidarity news in brief

On 29 November, the Home Office attempted to deport Isa Muazu, a Nigerian refugee.

Muazu had been on hunger strike for over 100 days against his detention at Harmondsworth immigration removal centre and was feared to be close to death. However, the privately-chartered jet the Home Office hired to deport him was not allowed to land by Nigerian authorities, and Muazu is now back in the UK.

The Home Office says that his deportation now has Nigerian approval and that they will try again. Muazu says returning to Nigeria would put him at risk from the Islamist militia Boko Haram, which he refused to join before fleeing to the UK. Protests have taken place outside the Home Office in defence of Muazu.

A witness to the alleged sexual abuse of inmates at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre is being threatened with deportation.

Afolashade Limidi says she saw guards working for Serco push and physically threaten another female inmate who had complained about sexual misconduct from staff. Another witness, Sirah Jeng, was released from detention after the Observer revealed she had been threatened with being deported, and three members of staff have been sacked in connection with the case. It is feared that the Home Office is now trying to deport Lamidi as a way of covering up the mistreatment of detainees.

Irina Putilova, a Russian political dissident and LGBT rights activist, has been released from Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre after a campaign to save her from deportation.

Putilova is a member of the radical art collective Voyna and has campaigned for gender equality, environmentalism, and against the authoritarianism of the Russian state. She fled to Britain after a criminal case was brought against her for her political activities.

Chinese migrants die in Italian factory



By Hugh Edwards
Chinese migrants mourn the death of eight workers in a factory fire

"The old dies and the new cannot manage to see day. In the interim a large diversity of morbid symptoms surges forth"
(Antonio Gramsci)

The latest data on the state of Italy's economy puts it in second place behind Greece for the level of absolute and relative poverty, with half of its population on €1,000 a month or less and nearly 45% of young people without work.

The victory this weekend of the Blairite mayor of Florence, Matteo Renzi, in the election for leader of the centre-left Democratic Party only added salt to the wounds. Renzi is a vile opportunist and enthusiastic cheerleader for his party's role in the current government coalition.

Meanwhile, just up the road in the city of Prato,

funerals had taken place just a few days before for eight Chinese workers, burnt alive in one of the tiny textile "factories". Thousands of workers are enslaved, on €1 an hour for 15 hours a day, imprisoned overnight behind locked doors and barred windows, almost inviting the tragedy.

The kneejerk language of the whole malignant Italian establishment, as we saw at Lampedusa, is to talk solely of "legality". This includes, criminally, the trade union leaders, who are fully aware of the reality, but who, like the rest of the hypocritical chorus, are equally complicit in the maintenance of the rule of profit — the only "law" that matters to the opulent fashion houses of Milan and Rome, for whom these murderous practises are carried out.

Meanwhile, the "pitchfork protests" launched by farmers and small businessmen in Sicily have spread nationwide, causing huge disruption in many towns. In many places they have been met with severe police repression, but riot police in Torino took off their helmets to join demonstrators.

Despite general anti-government, anti-austerity rhetoric, the protests currently have a right-wing populist character.

US hushes up force feeding



By Gerry Bates

The US military will no longer publicly disclose whether prisoners at Guantanamo Bay are on hunger strike.

Hunger strikes have taken place at the prison camp since it was opened

in 2002, but normally it was possible for the press to discover how many inmates were making the protest, and how many of them were being force fed.

A Guantanamo Bay official said the camp authorities would "no longer further [prisoners'] protests by reporting the numbers to the public." The US holds 164 prisoners at Guantanamo, most of them without charge.

Earlier this year, over a hundred of them were refusing food in protest at their detention.

Greece's "new normal"

By Theodora Polenta

On Sunday 1 December, a 13 year old girl died in the Xirokrini district of Thessaloniki (north-east Greece), where she lived with her unemployed mother.

Originally from Serbia, the girl had lived in Thessaloniki for the last ten years. Her mother struggled along by doing casual jobs such as cleaning houses and washing dishes in restaurants.

In recent months the jobs ran out. According to neighbours, the mother and daughter had lived for the last quarter without electricity. It had been cut off because of their inability to pay.

On Sunday the mother lit a brazier to warm the flat. Around 10pm she fainted. When she regained consciousness, she saw her daughter unconscious. In fact she was dead.

POISONED

According to the coroner, the girl was probably poisoned by gases from the brazier. The mother was arrested and charged with manslaughter, but then released.

Meanwhile, however, the police discovered that she is living illegally in the country...

The number of household electricity cut-offs due to unpaid bills has increased. An alarming number of families are left without electricity or any form of safe heating at the beginning of winter.

Also recently, a 55-year old woman, also of Serbian origin, drowned in her home in the city centre of Argos (in the Peloponnese).

When the local rivers flooded, flood relief failed to work due to cut backs and lack of funding. The council does not have the staff necessary to operate the machines.

When wages, pensions and benefits are cut, when unemployment is 30%, such things are not just accidents. Or they are inevitable accidents.

In March two young university students in Larisa died when poisoned by fumes from a brazier. Then, government representatives blamed "lack of education", and not the fuel poverty and destitution which are the root case.

The greatest danger in Greece today is for us to



A health worker holds up an unpaid electricity bill at a protest in 2012. Since then, the number of people unable to pay for basic utilities has increased.

get accustomed to the blackness and barbarism that surrounds our daily lives.

The greatest danger, ultimately, is not to have squares and parks filled with homeless people. It is not to have to work for 300 and 400 euros per month.

It is not having people searching in trash bins for something to eat and forming long queues at soup kitchens; or a million workers being owed between one to 12 months' arrears of wages; or 1.5 million unemployed people living in conditions of poverty and depression.

The greatest danger is of us as a society learning to live with such conditions and accept that they are "normal".

If the government gets us to accept that it is normal for people to die from braziers, for the streets to be filled with homeless and beggars, for poverty, destitution, and suicides to be widespread, then the government will have crushed our spirits as well as our material conditions.

As Albert Camus wrote in his book *The Plague*, there is something worse than the plague. That is getting accustomed to the plague.

That half a century ago people got to the moon, but now, when we have unprecedented scientific and technological capacities, half of humanity cannot afford good food, is not "normal".

That in the country with the richest ship owners in

the world, 68% of Greeks live under the poverty line is not "normal".

It is not "normal" that a thousand families a day have their electricity cut off.

Memorandum policies have turned the clock back decades for the working-class movement, Greeks and immigrants alike.

However, as always, the migrants are the first and the worst hit.

ALARM

This should be an alarm for the working-class movement and the left.

The left should demand that the government takes responsibility for the consequences of its policies and immediately tackle the huge gaps in infrastructure and flood protection work. We should fight for the abolition of the excise duty and VAT on fuel.

The right to heating and cheap electricity and oil are non-negotiable.

We need a strong resistance movement which will claim and fight for effective and unhindered access for all households in cheap electricity and heating oil, which will contribute to the overthrow of the government and its memorandum politics.

We should demand that no home be left without electricity.

In 2014 measures already initiated by the previous agreements with the Troika will be implemented, including massive layoffs in the public sector. All that

brings nearer the moment of a new round of anti-working class measures in the probable third Memorandum which will accompany the new borrowing to cover the Greek government's financing "gap" for the three years from 2014 to 2016.

If the solutions are left to the "automatic workings" of the market, then the next two or three generations of workers will be devastated. The gains of the labour movement, and its general tradition and culture, will be flattened.

That is the actual program of Merkollande and SamaroVenizelos. It is, however, also the material base for the search for radical solutions by the working class.

The promise of the government of the left must be directly linked with a commitment to specific ruptures (cancellation of the memorandum and its austerity policies) and for restoration of conditions (collective-bargaining agreements, wages and pensions, education, health care, heating and electricity).

Even those modest commitments cannot be achieved by a class "consensus". They will be possible only through measures taken by a government of the left.

This is the critical programmatic issue on which Syriza and the rest of the left must respond urgently.

Another SWP split?

By Dale Street

The mid-December national conference of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) looks likely to result in yet another split.

According to the "Statement for Our Revolutionary Party", signed by nearly a hundred members and printed in the first Internal Bulletin (IB) of the latest series:

"Comrades who continue to belong to a permanent faction [i.e. the oppositional Rebuilding the Party (RtP) faction, formed in September] should be expelled to ensure that they do not damage and undermine our Party." (IB1)

Contribution from members of the Merseyside branch and from in and around Sheffield argue for the same approach or take it as read that members of the RtP faction, which over 250 members have signed up to, will simply quit the SWP after the conference.

The SWP Central Committee (CC) makes the same assumption, and is not averse to expulsions. A CC motion for conference demands "an end to the existence of permanent factions in the organisation" (IB1). It does not take much imagination to work out how the CC would put an end to the existence of such factions.

Apart from the allegation that it constitutes a "permanent faction" in direct breach of what the SWP claims to be the norms of a Leninist party, the RtP faction stands accused of a host of other misdemeanours.

It has begun "developing ideas which are moving away from ideas which are central to the SWP" (IB1). It "fosters discontent amongst the ranks of the party" and carries out "relentless attacks on the CC" which have "taken on the proportions of a crusade." (IB2)

The faction is "not a rebuilding operation but an insidious demolition job", some of its members are "drifting away from revolutionary politics", some "probably never really embraced our politics", and "a few work for the secret state and will help to stoke the fires of discontent within our ranks." (IB2)

In the history of the SWP the "unscrupulous methods, distortion of facts and events, and sometimes outright lies in pursuit of a political objective" which are used by some faction members are unprecedented. (IB3)

The faction is "characterised by a tendency towards pessimism over the potential for resistance by the organised working class, combined with an exaggerated optimism towards the current ideological radicalism." (IB1)

It has accommodated to "movementism — the substitution of movements for the role traditionally accorded by Marxists to the struggles of workers — along with voluntarism more generally." (IB2)

The dominant elements within the faction aim to "force a fundamental change in the SWP as a Leninist organisation", whereas the CC and its supporters are united by "a shared and absolute commitment to building the Leninist party." (IB3)

And yet.. despite it all, the SWP goes from strength to strength!

In Manchester the SWP has become "the living organic expression of the most militant revolutionary workers (in the city)" (IB1). In Wigan "our SWP branch meetings are bigger and better" (IB2). In Barnsley a recent public meeting was "our largest since January 2012" (IB2). In Sheffield the branch has "recruited in the last six months double the number of members that left in April" (IB2)...

Special mention must be made of Ipswich and the reasons for its growth: "The branch has gone from 2 to 24 members! ... Ipswich SWP does not have a single supporter of the faction and never has done. We do not navel gaze." (IB3)

Such anecdotes are consistent with the CC's overall assessment of the state of the SWP:

"...we continue to play a central role in the trade unions, in workplace struggles, alongside others in the anti-fascist movement, in many of the bedroom tax groups, in Defend the Right to Protest and elsewhere." (IB2)

"Our total membership now stands at 7,180. This is down 217 from the number last year but up on 2011's figure of 7,127, the 2010 figure of 6,587, the 2009 figure of 6,417 and 2008's of 6,155." (IB2)

Contributions from RtP members paint a very different picture:

"Over the past year we've lost around 500 members, seen our student work largely collapse, had a Marxism little over



half the size of 2012, and lost the support of much of our periphery. The CC has at best tolerated, and at worst encouraged, a situation of near civil war in some branches." (IB2)

"From a claimed membership of 7,597 only 1,300 members attended pre-conference aggregates. Less than a third of the membership regularly pays subs. The circulation of *Socialist Worker* is approximately the same as the claimed membership. 'Marxism' [the SWP's annual summer "festival"] this year saw a 40% drop in attendance and a 60% drop in recruitment compared to the previous year." (IB1)

The "real" factionalism, and most of the lies and abuse within the SWP, according to the RtP faction, is being conducted by the "Undeclared Faction" (UF) — some members of the CC and their supporters among the broader membership.

"There has indeed been a 'permanent faction' in the party for a number of years, and it has been made up of those who have organised to defend MS [an SWP full-timer accused by two SWP women members of rape and sexual harassment] at any and all costs, and by any means." (IB3)

"The UF organised around a petition that called for M to be reinstated to the CC slate. This faction continues to exist and to operate. One section of it has hardened into a sectarian and conservative rump intent on driving anyone who raises criticisms of the dispute out of the organization." (IB2)

"The UF... has been able to exert an influence over the strategy of the central committee and the functioning of many branches and districts. Comrades associated with 'the opposition' have been systematically removed from local positions." (IB1)

"[The leadership] ... sought to suppress information and debate..." (IB2)

"The CC has sought to focus on a variety of other important issues such as Leninism, movementism and tried to pretend that the dividing lines in the faction fight coincide with dividing lines on these questions." (IB3)

CRITIQUE

The RtP's basic critique of the SWP's leadership runs as follows: When M was accused of rape by a female member and then of sexual harassment by another female member, members of the CC put their loyalty to M above the need to conduct a proper enquiry.

"The ability of the CC to act in this way is a product of a wider malaise in the SWP's political culture." (IB2)

That "wider malaise" consists of a number of overlapping elements.

A leadership can function effectively only where it is accountable to an informed and politically educated membership. But in the SWP the membership is kept in the dark.

In a form of "substitutionism", SWP full-timers act in place of an informed and engaged membership:

"The low level of class struggle in recent decades has led to ... SWP full-timers doing what activists should do, activists doing what members should do." (IB3)

"(This) encourages a form of uncritical over-reliance on party leaders who either have influence with the (trade union) bureaucracy, or who are able to pull off impressive interventions with our limited resources." (IB3)

The "substitutionism" results in priority being given to protecting such full-timers, even from justifiable and necessary disciplinary proceedings.

The "substitutionism" of full-timers for an active and politically educated membership reduces the actual SWP membership to mere foot-soldiers for decisions from above, periodically energised by "endless over-optimistic headlines in *Socialist Worker*".

"We live in a kind of permanent conditional future tense:

what we claim might happen hasn't actually happened yet, but give it another year, wait until the stars are in alignment and it will. ... What we have is a style of wishful thinking: at some point 'the anger' will explode, and the lack of confidence which has held workers back will finally be overcome in a revival of militancy." (IB3)

All this results in a failure by the SWP to think through the problems confronting it in the real world:

"The real explanation for our failure to grow is that it is not so much the nature of the objective conditions, as our failure to understand them: analytic failure led to a long-term mistaken perspective which in turn strengthened the most bureaucratic aspects of the organisational structure which was consolidated by 1975." (IB3)

The RtP faction is calling for an apology to the two women whose complaints of rape and sexual harassment resulted in a campaign of vilification and slander against them. (IB2)

It is also calling for a review of the relationship between members and the elected leadership, a strengthening of the SWP trade-union and other fractions, more proper and open debate, proper accounting of where the SWP is as an organisation, an acknowledgement of the damage done to student work, and election of conference delegates to reflect diversity of opinions. (IB2)

Alex Callinicos, his supporters, and members of the UF must be removed from all the posts they currently hold.

The RtP faction is very much an opposition within the SWP tradition. Its members repeatedly hark back to some "golden age" of the SWP (and, before that, the International Socialists) in which the late Tony Cliff supposedly provided the leadership and democratic space now absent from the organisation under the leadership of Callinicos and Kimber.

Despite much that is positive in their criticisms, they inevitably fail to understand that they are merely the latest victims of the tradition which they seek to defend.

They overlook the fact that Cliff's turn to "democratic centralism" was a means to stamp down on debate and dissidence in the party, the first victims of which were the forerunners of *Solidarity*.

In a sense, though, all of this is of little or no account. The RtP faction will be defeated at the SWP conference, and decisively so, especially as, in a number of areas, RtP supporters have been systematically carved out of conference delegations.

Gaining a hearing for their arguments so that they can win support for them is made even more difficult for the RtP faction by the systematic abuse and misrepresentation to which they are subjected in the pages of the IBs and in local meetings.

All "success stories" in the pages of the IBs have been written by CC supporters. This will be used to pigeon-hole and isolate the RtP faction as navel-gazers — in contrast to the rest of the SWP, which is busy building the Revolutionary Party.

Unfortunately in many of their contributions RtP members come across as "old and stale". Too often, there is an undercurrent in their contributions of "the good old days" and on "do you remember when ...?".

CC supporters will use this to portray RtP supporters as a spent force, people who are well and truly past their revolutionary prime.

A further weakness of the RtP faction is its lack of clarity about what exactly it is demanding, apart from an apology to two (now former) SWP members.

This vagueness allows their opponents to attack the RtP faction for failing to spell out just what it stands for politically, and to argue that this is due to the faction's own internal divisions:

"Where do they plan to lead the party? What do they think about the arguments raging about the nature of the contemporary working class. Do they accept any responsibility whatsoever for the party's work in these areas?" (IB2)

By contrast, the existing CC leadership can present itself as a safe pair of hands with a clear strategy for building the SWP.

The questions triggered by the SWP's conference — its third this year — are how many members will end up resigning, how many will end up being expelled, and how many will continue to politically work through their experiences of the SWP's politics.

• Abridged from: bit.ly/swp-split

No gender segregation in universities

By Cathy Nugent

Last month Universities UK, the organisation which represents university managements, published guidelines which said it could be discriminatory (undermining of free speech) for universities not to allow segregation by gender in meetings if external speakers wanted that arrangement. The ruling has been backed by the National Union of Students.

The ruling said steps to accommodate the wishes or beliefs of those opposed to segregation should “not result in a religious group being prevented from having a debate in accordance with its belief system”.

The fact that university bosses think that gender segregation is unimportant enough to bargain with in this way is both outrageous and instructive. What’s going on? It is obvious that “the establishment” (of which universities are a central part) want to privilege the practices of religious organisations. In this case they are most concerned about Muslim groups and/or the demands of particular speakers; this is the way they chose to “clarify” and justify a situation which is already going on.

Who knows how the law works here or what the outcome would be if it was tested in court? The ruling is, in principle, wrong.

Whether men and women of religious faith chose segregated seating is beside the point. They are completely free to sit, stand or move around in any way they like in private and/or religious spaces.

STRUCTURAL

But the lecture hall of a university is neither a private nor a religious space.

There is an awful lot of voluntary sex segregation in society. We fight it, but how we fight it will vary. I don’t like the fact that my daughter attends a single-sex school. That was her choice, however, and it was right to let her choose. But if there had been only single sex schools available in our area I would have been duty-bound to fight that situation.

The voluntary religious/cultural practice of women and men that involves sex segregation cannot be opposed by ostentatious “we know better”-ness; we can’t set up a gender police which marches into mosques, synagogues, or orthodox churches to re-organise the seating arrangements.

But we can demand that universities, as *public institutions*, consistently oppose gender inequality. As sex segregation is, in all societies, the structural underpinning of gender inequality, it is important that universities set very clear boundaries *against* sex segregation.

In some parts of most religions, the ideology that justifies sex segregation is very rigid — more so, often, than that which underlies other social divisions on sex lines. A university should not be part of the legitimisation of fierce absolutes — that men and women are fundamentally different, that gender roles should never be transgressed.

As many people have pointed out, if it were a matter of segregating along racial lines there would justifiably be an enormous outcry. It is because sex segregation and gender inequality are so pervasive, seemingly so intrinsic and “natural” to human culture, that they are often tolerated.

If sex segregation were to be tolerated in this or that public meeting just because an outside speaker insists that it is so, it could set a precedent for other many other different kinds of meetings where individuals in the audiences try to insist that it become a rule, a *compulsory* segregation — in the student union, in lectures and so on.

This ruling should be reversed!

• More: humanism.org.uk

Grist and the Islamist mill

Letters



I think my reply to Yassamine Mather covers Janine Booth’s first point about the introduction to *Workers’ Liberty* 3/1 (“Prioritise clarity over rhetorical flourish”, *Solidarity* 306, 4 December 2013).

“Of course modern political Islam is modern... but [it] responds to modern problems by invoking bygone times as a model. That political Islamists hark back to the caliphate (Islamic empire) and to what they see as original Muslim virtue is not a ‘chauvinistically offensive’ slur on them, but what they pride themselves on”.

Janine queries the term “much of the Islamic world” in a much-reviled sentence of the introduction. But in that whole section of the article, the subject of discussion is political Islam. The two sentences before the much-reviled one use the term “political Islam”; the sentence following it, “Islamic fundamentalism”.

For literary variation, in one sentence, the writer used the term “much of the Islamic world” to denote the same subject of discussion. Better if he’d put the variation in a different sentence? Yes, in hindsight. But...

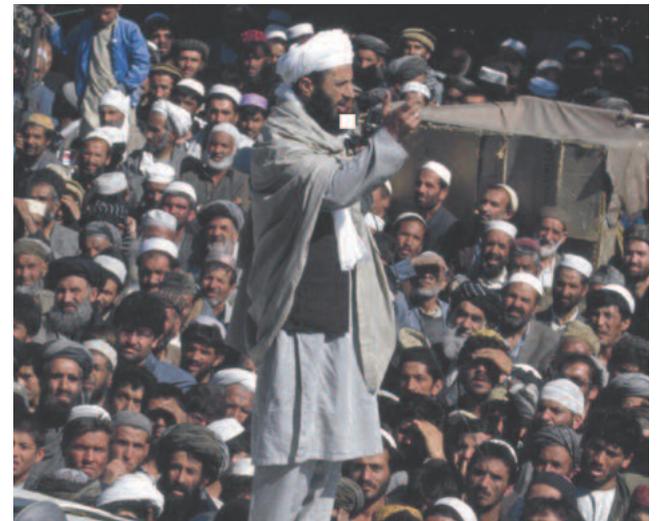
Political Islam is characterised by “envy and covetousness” towards the wealth of advanced capitalist societies. It is not a levelling doctrine. It aspires not to liberate nations from big-power control, but to create a different big power, “the caliphate”. It aspires not to equalise societies, but to make the rich observe their religious obligations to the poor.

In this respect, political Islam draws on the mythologised foundation-narrative of Islam. Muhammad became a rich man, and his successors conquered a huge empire. They did not raze the wealth of the great cities they conquered, but took them over (which is why the Islamic world became a great thoroughfare for culture for some centuries).

Some movements merge Islamism with nationalism.

But I don’t think “response to Western governments’ military adventures against mainly-Muslim countries” explains much about political Islam. The rise of political Islam in Iran and Afghanistan was not a response to Western military action. The Islamists in Afghanistan got Western support.

In Syria today, the Islamists are funded by the closest local



Taliban rally, 1996: not a response to Western military action

allies of the Western big powers.

The invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan by the US and its allies have been grist to the Islamists’ mill as they spread their influence. But the Islamists could use grist only because they had a strong mill beforehand.

When the Arab countries, and Iran, and Turkey, were directly combating colonial imperialism, secular nationalists rather than Islamists led the battle.

The irreducible objection to the much-reviled sentence is that by saying things that are true about political Islam (about its violence, or its imperialistic aims), it may reflect badly on other Muslims who do not support political Islam. But the answer must be to tell the truth on both counts — that political Islam is reactionary, and that ordinary Muslims are its first victims.

Clarity rather than rhetorical flourish? Yes, but vivid language often makes things clearer, and it is often worth at least trying to be vivid.

No revolutionary cause ever made headway by sticking to always-fully-hedged and bland language.

Martin Thomas, Islington

Space in schools

I missed an important point in my article in *Solidarity* 305 (“How schools should change” 27 November).

Schools should include comfortable spaces for students to socialise in their breaks from study. They don’t.

Schools provide staffrooms and workrooms (good or not-so-good) for staff, and sometimes common-rooms for older (Sixth Form) students. The other students, for their breaks, are bundled out into playgrounds, often cramped, often bleak, often raucous, often cold and damp, where there isn’t even space to sit down comfortably.

The traditional refuge of the shy or timid student, the school library, often restricts entry in break times.

Rebuilt or new-built schools generally have huge atria as show-off spaces for the architect, but smaller libraries than old schools.

At school, students should learn about quadratic equations and iambic pentameters and Ohm’s Law — but also how to socialise, to make friends, to cope with enemies and with soured friends, and to cooperate.

The British school system’s focus on individual competitive exam success and its use of imposed classroom seating plans cut are counterproductive here. So is the lack of comfortable common-rooms and of “safe spaces” for students’ breaks.

Martin Thomas, Islington

New Unionism 2014

A conference for activists

Saturday 22 February,
11am-5pm

University of London Union,
Malet Street, WC1E 7HY

This conference will discuss and seek to learn from the experience of organising the unorganised, in Britain and other countries, in history and today. It will hear from working-class activists on the frontline of today’s class battles, and of struggles to reshape trade unions. It will discuss issues including the changing shape of capitalism and the working class, the struggles of young, migrant and women workers, organising in the private sector, outsourcing, fighting in bureaucratised trade unions and “revolutionary unionism”, approaches to working-class politics and much more.

Recovery for rich, more cuts for poor

“Even more austerity than we’d expected” was the verdict from the mainstream, conservative-minded Institute for Fiscal Studies on the government’s Autumn Statement of 5 December.

“The rich”, said the IFS, are “likely to do better than the poor between 2011-12 and 2015-16”.

The aim of the government’s cuts was always to use the crisis to shift the balance of forces in society heavily in favour of the rich, and against the working class, and so to ensure high profits in an eventual recovery.

Chancellor George Osborne says the recovery is now underway. Evidence is very patchy so far, but possibly he is right. Every capitalist slump, unless the working class is able to use it to overthrow capitalism, eventually creates conditions for some capitalist recovery.

But, encouraged by his ability to defeat resistance to cuts since 2010, Osborne now says that public spending cuts will continue. Before they were explained as necessary because of economic crisis. Now they are to continue in recovery.

According to IFS analysis, Osborne’s plans mean not only continued cuts, but cuts at an “accelerated rate”.

Osborne’s plans announced already had cut spending on public services by 8% since 2010. Continued roll-out of those plans already announced means another 20% cuts in the next few years. Now Osborne plans to add more.

If he gets his way, spending on public services will fall to a smaller share of economic output than since before 1948 — that is, since before the National Health Service started, and before more than a small proportion of working-class kids stayed at school beyond 14.

The state pension age will rise quicker, although experts warn that two-thirds of us will have some limiting disability by the time we reach the new pension age of 68 (soon to rise to 69 and beyond).

More young people will have their benefits cuts if they do not do “workfare”. Universal Credit, when finally introduced, will be frozen for two years while prices rise.

The government will legislate for a “cap” on welfare spending, which would force automatic cuts in benefits in future crises when unemployment surges again.

Osborne had some “giveaways to middle-income households and small businesses”, as the IFS puts it. He hopes through them to solidify Tory support before the 2015 general election.

He promised transferable tax allowances for married couples; free school meals for the first years in primary school; cuts in business rates; a continued freeze in fuel duty; financial juggling to get a £50 cut in average annual household energy bills without hurting the energy companies’ profits.

The IFS also found that shadow chancellor Ed Balls’s estimate of a 6% cut in average living standards since 2010 is “pretty consistent with” estimates from data other than and

At Christmas 2013, there are still 168 million children across the world subject to child labour, according to the International Labour Organisation.

85 million are in hazardous work. Child labour is imposed by family poverty and lack of school opportunities. This cartoon, from the newspaper of the US Communist Party when it was still a revolutionary socialist organisation (27 December 1924), is still relevant.

The artist, Robert Minor, became a professional cartoonist at the age of 20, after a series of odd jobs. Entering politics

later in his 20s, when already well-known as a cartoonist, he was first an anarchist and then, at the age of 26, a founding member of the Communist Party. Later he became a diehard Stalinist. As the historian Theodore Draper (brother of the Trotskyist theorist Hal Draper but himself a liberal and former CP supporter) wrote: “If as an anarchist [Minor] had believed that politics was a filthy business, as a Communist he still seemed to believe it was — only now it was his business”.

But in 1924 Minor’s talents were still serving honest revolutionary politics.



better than what Balls used.

On top of that, tax and benefit changes leave the poorest 20% over 4% worse off than we were in 2010. Some sections of the worse-off, like disabled people and those subject to the bedroom tax, have been hit much harder than 4%.

On two issues, but only two issues so far, battle by trade unions and community campaigns has pushed the Labour leaders into promises of action by a Labour government after 2015: to abolish the bedroom tax, and repeal the Health and

Social Care Act.

We need discussion and decisions about other demands on which to focus effort. The list should be open-ended: victory on each demand should encourage us to go for others, right up to fully socialist demands. But the first thing is to start.

The economic recovery, small though it is, means it will be a bit easier to win demands. Let’s start demanding.

No to physical attacks on the SWP!

At least twice in early December, anarchist students at Sussex University have carried out physical attacks on Socialist Workers Party stalls.

Sussex Autonomous Students (sussexasn.tumblr.com) report: “A few days ago the SWP turned up to one of the Sussex 5 Solidarity demos. They brought a mass of placards and papers, which they proceeded to distribute from the obligatory stall. We binned their placards, turned over their stall and burnt their papers.”

AWL supporters at Sussex report that a second, similar incident took place at the demonstration against management repression and in support of workers’ fight against outsourcing on 10 December.

Worse still, the Autonomous Students statement says “We will not tolerate the SWP on our campus” and “Burn the SWP”.

These events are part of a wider phenomenon, e.g. the push to ban the SWP (and later the Socialist Party because of the Steve Hedley domestic abuse case) from holding events

at University of London Union. AWL students opposed this and advocated political interventions in the events instead.

The SWP’s conduct in connection with the Martin Smith cases was disgraceful. But it is hard to see what physically barring the SWP from campuses (and by logical extension student unions, trade union branches and labour movement buildings, the streets...) will achieve. It won’t protect people from abuse.

There are still many oppositionists in the SWP seeking to challenge its leadership about these issues. But the issue here is broader and more fundamental than that.

It is difficult to participate in a demonstration, campaign or movement alongside loyalist members of an organisation with such a record on sexual abuse and women’s liberation — and survivors of abuse may find it particularly difficult. But physically attacking the SWP and attempting to drive it out of the movement will not solve the problem, because the problem is not that SWP members go round public spaces organising sexual assaults. Turning over a stall and burning

newspapers might feel like effective direct action, but its effects will be negative and counter-productive.

The “ordinary” population of any campus, workplace, or community contains within it many people with far worse attitudes than the worst members of the SWP. Generally (with the exception of fascists), we should challenge their ideas, not try to drive them out.

Similarly, we will sort out the degenerate political culture of the left by political argument and debate, or not at all. Physically attacking or seeking to ban our opponents on the left will make it harder to do that, and at the same time degrade the political culture of our movements.

We appeal to activists in Autonomous Students to reconsider these issues.

Socialists, anarchists, and student and labour movement activists who see the SWP being physically attacked should intervene to try to stop it.

The SWP has a long record of thuggish behaviour. Ironically, these attacks on the SWP are even worse.

Athens and Berkeley

By Michael MacEoin

Policing has inevitably been an issue whenever student struggles have reached a certain pitch of struggle. In many cases, heavy-handed policing has provided a spark to the movement.

At the University of California in Berkeley, the Free Speech Movement (FSM) was kick-started when civil rights activist and alumnus Jack Weinberg was arrested 1 October 1964 for defying a campus ban on soliciting support for "off campus political and social action."

According to participant and veteran civil rights and feminist activist Jo Freeman: "The police brought a car onto Sproul plaza and after he went limp, carried him to it. Students spontaneously surrounded the car to keep it from moving and deflated the tires. The police temporarily retreated while thousands of students took over the Plaza.

"The car was held hostage for 32 hours. With Jack inside, the police car became the platform for a continual rally."

The FSM continued the campaign against the university's draconian restrictions, and was bolstered by management's decision to charge four students with a breach of university regulations.

Following a rally, featuring folk singer Joan Baez, around 2,000 students occupied the Administration building for the second time that term. In the middle of the night, Democratic Party Governor Pat Brown ordered police to clear the building. 773 people were arrested and the FSM called a student strike in response.

Pressure from the FSM, and from grad students and sympathetic faculty members, led to the largest Academic Senate in memory voting for no restrictions on speech and assembly on campus, though skirmishes continued over the details for some time to come.

On 14 November 1973, a student uprising began at the Athens Polytechnic against the military regime of the Colonels in Greece. The students barricaded themselves in and broadcast messages across the city from a make-shift radio station constructed from laboratory equipment.

They were joined, both inside and outside the campus, by thousands of workers and young people.

In the early hours of 17 November, the crackdown began.



At 3am, an AMX 30 Tank crashed through the gates of the Polytechnic.

A total of 24 deaths were reported, all of civilians from outside the institution, including a five year-old boy. Hundreds more were injured. The uprising put an end to the brief period of "liberalisation", and martial law was restored in a counter-coup by junta hardliner Dimitrios Ioannidis.

In exposing the fractures and factionalising within the regime, this incident destroyed the myth of the junta as a united and idealistic movement to save Greece from a corrupt political system. It was a factor in the eventual fall of the regime months later.

In 1982, with memories of the repression still raw, the Greek government introduced "academic asylum" laws. It became illegal for police to enter university property without the permission of rectors, and students were guaranteed protection against state brutality and arrest.

Following the murder by police of Alexandros Grigoriopoulos in Athens in 2008, and subsequent demonstrations and riots, the right-wing agitated for the removal of the laws.

The PASOK government of George Papandreou repealed the laws on 24 August 2011, as part of an education shake-up which also introduced UK-style administrations in universities ending the election of vice-chancellors by students and academics.

Mobilise for workers and "cops off campus"

By Daniel Cooper, University of London Vice President and AWL Students

In response to the surge of police, legal and management repression against student protesters, an alliance of activists and organisations, including the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, called a National Day of Action to defend the right to protest and for "Cops off campus" on 11 December.

Meanwhile, after major concessions from management, University of London workers organised in Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB) and the 3 Cosas campaign have announced they will strike again in January.

As Christmas approaches, we need to discuss keeping the action going next term. That's why activist groups are working together to organise a demonstration and conference in Birmingham on 22 January.

The conference will allow us to discuss the way forward for this struggle. Meanwhile, though the holiday is intervening, activists should get meetings organised on their campuses — this year or early next year, through existing anti-cuts or activist groups or ad hoc — to discuss the campaign. If you can get student union endorsement and promotion of such meetings, great.

Without in any way relying on NUS or having any illusions in its leadership, we should demand they do what they've said they will and support the struggle. That means actual financial and legal support, and it means seriously using NUS networks to mobilise for events. We should also demand the NUS leadership drops its equivocation and defends University of London Union against being shut down.

Beyond the immediate struggle against repression and the wider demand for an end to police intervention on our campuses, we need to focus on the political questions about how capital is reshaping our universities, and on the frontline of the fight against the capitalist offensive in education — workers' struggles.

It is the national higher education workers' fight over pay and the IWGB/3 Cosas outsourced workers' dispute in London which have inspired this wave of students' struggles. And in turn students' response has inspired and encouraged workers in their fight. "Students and workers unite and fight" is becoming a reality. We need to push that forward.

Outsourced workers at University of London will strike again for pensions, job security and union recognition on 27, 28 and 28 January. This is a massive deal. We need the biggest possible student participation in their picket lines and demonstrations in London, and solidarity mobilisation across the country. I'd like to see this as a National Day of Action too, raising other demands but with a focus on supporting 3 Cosas.

Let's not miss the fact that the level of police and management repression at University of London is precisely because the outsourced workers' struggle has made such an impact.

Build solidarity nationally and locally

Michael Segalov, Sussex Against Privatisation

Today (10 December) there was a demonstration on campus of over 200 people. This was part of a week of action called in support of the Sussex 5, students, including myself, who have been suspended by management for taking part in protests.

Instead of a normal demonstration, we organised a "student strike", with educational picket lines, hugely reducing the numbers of students coming on campus.

On Monday we had a 600-strong meeting of the Students' Union which decided this course of action and passed motions of no confidence in the Vice Chancellor and Vice Chancellor Executive Group.

What's been important at Sussex and elsewhere is that organisations have been patiently built on campuses, rather than coming together for one-off national things.

For over two years we've been campaigning against the privatisation of our services. It's meant students coming out alongside staff, campus workers. That has built a resilient movement which can grow. When management take dictatorial action, we can be ready to take action.

As we've seen with Birmingham, the movements already exist on our campuses. The fight isn't at Westminster any more, it is first and foremost on our campuses. This is what will allow our movement to come together and make a stand nationally.

We've got to use the momentum and start working towards building a democratic campus, run by ourselves. We need to keep an eye on the same things happening on campuses elsewhere, like London and Birmingham. We need to build on those similarities.

The way forward is about building that solidarity nationally and building locally.

Birmingham Defend Education, the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts, Sussex Against Privatisation, and other student activist groups have called a conference in Birmingham on 22 January, to discuss how to advance the student struggles against privatisation of education, the criminalisation of protest on campuses, and in solidarity with workers' struggles. More: anticuts.com

Workers' struggles on campus"

In that respect, UoL management must be seriously worried.

More generally, student activists need to deepen and extend our links with workers and their unions on campus, and prepare to take action together.

If we keep up and develop the momentum of this struggle, we can push the police off our campuses, revive the student movement, drawing in new activists, and make a real contribution to workers turning the tide against the ruling class and the Coalition. Let's mobilise as hard as we can for all the upcoming actions, and debate and discuss the way forward.

"Shockupation"

Max Crema, Edinburgh Uni

We did a "shockupation" from 2 December in support of the university workers' strike. We took over the Finance Director's office in the main administration building.

We occupied because of the disgraceful way that management had handled pay negotiations. As strikes are meant to cause disruption, we decided to do what we could to maximise that disruption. The occupation had an energising effect. Staff responded very positively to our action when we came to join them on picket lines. We need to improve our networks of communication so that we can better link struggles in England and Scotland.

The police repression we are facing is a result of increasing pressure on university managements — we can hit them, by organising actions like this.

Escalate!

An activist, Birmingham Defend Education

We held an occupation from 20-28 November; it had been planned since the beginning of term, inspired by Sussex and Warwick. We decided to use the occupation to bring together the slogans of the different campaigns we had been running all term.

We also wanted to escalate the action in our campaigns from being just one demo after another. We wanted to chime in with the action taken by striking higher education workers.

We stated 11 demands. I think the most important issue was the demand for the highest-paid to be paid no more than ten times the lowest-paid.

We also wanted to get the Vice Chancellor to take a position on important national issues like the sale of student debt. We wanted to put forward a positive vision of a democratic university run by students and staff.

Around 150-200 people were involved over the course of the occupation. We raised awareness and changed minds.

Management offered various deals to get us to leave, but refused to negotiate seriously. We have put more pressure on the management than they have experienced in a number of years. Our attention has now turned to the national picture, but we are ready to escalate even further next term.

It was really good that NCAFC met in Birmingham during the occupation. Activists from all over the country came and organised two demonstrations over the two days of the conference.

It played a good role in connecting the Birmingham occupation with the national scene.



Liverpool occupation. Photo: David J Colbran

We want a broad coalition of resisting groups

By Beth Redmond, Liverpool John Moores Uni

On Tuesday 4 December, a small contingent of students and staff from the University of Liverpool and nearby institutions left a rally organised by UCU to occupy the Irish Studies building on Abercromby Square. We stayed for two nights and three days, before being kettled by our own management and forced to leave.

Initially we were told by security and the campus police officer that management were happy with us being there, as long as we were well behaved. Three agency security staff were put on the entrances and exits twenty-four hours a day, and we managed to get people in and out through a bathroom window in the basement.

At midnight on Thursday morning, two security staff who had been on strike that day came back to work; they came in for cups of tea and we discussed the situation more broadly and they were wholly positive about what we were doing.

One of our aims was to create an open space for free educational purposes. We devised a two-day agenda where people spoke about feminism, the student movement in Quebec, the trade union movement in Europe, radical alternatives to education and activism in the LGBT society and more.

We created our own safe spaces policy and devised a statement about how our space was geared toward ensuring that

women felt safe, empowered and equal.

Discussions led to the proposition of a broad coalition of "resisting groups" across all four universities, all colleges and all further education institutions in the Liverpool area; the general consensus being that this would be a difficult task and would take a lot of energy and time, but would inevitably be worth doing.

Eventually, on Thursday morning, Deputy Vice Chancellor Patrick Hackett entered our occupation and told us to be out by 12pm. Around 5pm the occupiers were ready to leave, only to find management had kettled us inside with iron fencing.

Although it didn't last long and it didn't end on our terms, the occupation has generated a really inspiring sense of community amongst a lot of students and staff from universities all over Liverpool.

I have never been in a political space which has been completely non-hierarchical before, where I have felt completely equal.

This was a relatively spontaneous form of protest, involving a group of people who had come together for the first time that day around a specific set of demands; factors which, in my opinion, contributed to the success of the work done inside the occupation.

Sheffield strikes back

Olly Clay, Sheffield Strikes Back

Sheffield Strikes Back was set up at the start of this term as a coalition of left activists and groups on Sheffield Uni and Hallam campuses as a means to coordinate our resistance to austerity and the privatisation of education, and to support the staff strikes.

We've reached a point where the old institutions of the student movement — like the NUS — have lost their legitimacy. There is a huge assault on the working class going on. Struggles over the last three years has helped create a bank of experience that we can draw on in building a new movement.

The fracturing of the SWP has allowed the student left to become more open and pluralistic, as with the alliance between anarchists, Marxists, and others on Sheffield.

Things have kicked off recently because of the last round of strikes, which have provided a focus for action.

We had a very successful occupation that supported the strike and prevented strikebreaking lectures from taking place. We had two demos in solidarity with student struggles elsewhere, in London, Birmingham and Sussex. We've also done leafleting campaigns around the privatisation of the loan book and education and to raise awareness of the fight in London.

We've had some feedback about the use of black-bloc tac-

tics and masks on demonstrations which some felt was counter-productive. We want to put on more "friendly demonstrations" so that we don't get pigeonholed as people using one tactic or another.

One of the strengths of the occupation was the no-platforming of the SWP [*] and the emphasis on women's self-organisation and the establishment of safer spaces.

SWP papers have been burnt in Sussex? [*] That might be unhelpful in Sheffield but I don't know about Sussex, if that's what they wanted then I defend their decision.

I think that the emphasis should be placed on education of young comrades about what's been going on in the SWP and why it's not a safe space.

I would prioritise the safety of women and enforcing safer spaces policies. I think that if they are accepted within the left and allowed to recruit then that leads to greater danger. I don't see them as allies; I don't think that people who diminish the seriousness of rape should be involved.

We need a strategy to make the country ungovernable and impossible to enforce austerity. We need to break the binary of Labour and Tory governments when both serve the same interests; but that isn't the same as refusing to work with leftwing members of the Labour Party.

[*] See page 7.

Can re-wilding help the planet?

Stuart Jordan reviews *Feral: Searching for Enchantment on the Frontiers of Rewilding*, by George Monbiot (2013, Penguin)

Dig down a few metres beneath the fountains in Trafalgar Square and you will find the remains of elephants, lions and hippopotami.

These giant beasts grazed, stalked and wallowed through British rainforests just over 100,000 years ago. In evolutionary time this is the blink of an eye and George Monbiot, in his new book *Feral*, makes a powerful argument for their (eventual) reintroduction.

Monbiot's call for "rewilding", the restoration of biodiversity through reintroducing large predators and allowing nature to run its course, is a hopeful vision for the future. At a time when environmentalists are gripped with apocalyptic visions of climate change, Monbiot's call to focus on biodiversity reminds us that there will be no "end times". The planet and the natural world will continue to exist. The key question is whether we will be able to engineer an ecology robust enough to allow the survival of human civilisation into the 22nd century and beyond.

The pressing question for the environmentalist movement is how to carve out a future that will be most resilient to climate change. Monbiot's call for rewilding seems to provide some of the answer.

His work is based on a recent discovery in ecological science called trophic cascade. The trophic level of an organism is the position it holds in a food chain. Plants, herbivores, omnivores, top predators all occupy different trophic levels. Traditionally it was thought that each level rested on the one below. Remove one level and the levels below will thrive, the levels above will adapt or die out. This view was mistaken.

There is now a large body of evidence for trophic cascade, the process where animals in high trophic levels support thriving populations further down the food chain. The best example of this is the reintroduction of wolves to Yellowstone Park. Wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone Park in 1995, 70 years after they had been exterminated. When they were reintroduced many of the streams and river banks were bare due to grazing by elk (red deer). The reintroduction of wolves changed the elk's grazing habits. The elk no longer grazed openly on the river banks, and this allowed the river bank plants to grow.

Within six years, riverside trees had quintupled in size. Fish populations boomed as there were more shady, cool areas for feeding. There was an increase in the number of songbirds who found nests in the trees. Beaver populations grew from one colony in 1996 to twelve in 2009. Beavers in turn slow down rivers, reduce erosion, ensure cleaner water and create small bogs and wetlands. This creates niches for otters, muskrats, fish, frogs, and reptiles.

The wolves also reduced the number of coyotes. That increased the number of small mammals (mice, weasels etc.), providing prey for smaller hunters such as foxes, badgers and hawks. The wolves had a positive impact on the bear population. Bears feed on the deer carcasses left by the wolves and berries which became more abundant as the deer stopped eating sapling trees.

The reintroduction of a single species had a myriad of positive effects. Most surprisingly the rivers changed course (due to less soil erosion) and the soil itself became more fertile (due to changes in the behaviour of grazing animals). The web of life in Yellowstone Park is much richer for this reintroduction.

Monbiot believes that many centuries of human activity have created barren landscapes where only a few species of plants and animals survive and many become extinct. He describes the "sheepwrecked" British uplands as "deserts" where all but a handful of grasses, shrubs and ferns have survived the sheep. Remove the sheep and all manner of plants and animals would begin to thrive. Remove the sheep and reintroduce missing species like wolves, beaver and wild boar, and within a few decades the British uplands would be heaving with species that are currently under threat of extinction.

According to the Centre for Biodiversity set up after the Rio Earth Summit in 1983 we are "experiencing the greatest wave of extinction since the disappearance of the dinosaurs". The numbers are disputed but the trend is unmistakable.



Human activity is destroying habitats, introducing non-indigenous species (sheep, grey squirrels etc.) and driving climate change, all at the cost of biodiversity.

The scale of this destruction has led among conservationists to what Monbiot calls "shifting baseline syndrome". He argues that most conservationists take the state of the natural world in their childhood as their baseline and see their task as trying to recreate that golden age. This tendency will be familiar to militants in the labour movement who after years of defeat see the aspirations of the movement dwindle to the most uninspiring and paltry demands. With every defeat the baseline shifts towards an ever increasing poverty of expectation.

The shifting baseline is most apparent in the biodiversity of the sea. It is estimated that fish stocks are down over 94% globally since records began in 1889. At this time small sailing boats, with primitive equipment and no fish-finding technology landed twice the weight of fish that the modern fishing fleets land today. Colonists in the Americas wrote about rivers that were so full of salmon that you would shoot a gun into the water and pick out your evening meal. In the 19th century there was a reef of scallop shells in the North Sea that was the size of Wales. The size of fish is also in decline. The average weight of tuna has dropped by half in 20 years. Yet the UK's National Ecosystem Assessment states that around half of UK finfish stocks are at "full reproductive capacity".

Monbiot argues that the dwindling populations of large fish and sea mammals are reducing the populations of smaller fish and plankton. There are also less obvious global consequences. Just as the Yellowstone wolves had an effect on soil composition and river course, Monbiot argues that the dwindling whale populations are having an effect on global warming.

Whales feed at depth and defecate near the surface. This recycles large amounts of nitrogen and iron which fertilises the surface water and leads to big plankton blooms. The plankton removes carbon dioxide from the air, sinks into the deep ocean and is one of earth's major carbon sinks. By some estimates whales remove tens of millions of tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere each year.

Monbiot believes rewilding is good not just for the plants and animals but also for humans. Following on from Jay Griffiths's new book *Kith*, he argues that the destruction of biodiversity is part and parcel of the enclosures – as a historic event and as an ongoing process of privatisation of land. The loss of the commons has had a devastating effect on children's right to outside play, which in turn is associated with a whole range of physical and mental health problems.

With these basic principles Monbiot sets out his strategy. The UK's National Ecological Assessment calls for 30% of seas to be protected from fishing. Big predators still exist in the sea and the trophic cascade effects will occur if we just left the seas alone. Where protected areas have been created and properly enforced there has been a dramatic rise in the fish populations. Around Lundy Island (one of Britain's only reserves) lobster populations trebled in just 18 months after the creation of the reserve. In the 2% of world's seas that are

protected fish populations have on average quadrupled – and some of these reserves are just a few years old. Yet the large fishing corporations – against their own long-term interests and despite a petition of 500,000 people – have successfully blocked protection for all but 0.01% of Britain's territorial waters.

Having overfished European waters, the big fishing firms are now working their way through West Africa's fish stocks with the help of 1.9 billion Euros in EU subsidies. Monbiot quotes research that claims the failure to implement adequate protection zones is costing the EU 82,000 jobs and 3 billion Euros a year.

On dry land missing species will need to be reintroduced before humanity steps back and allows the rewilding process to run its course. Much of the British uplands have been desertified by sheep and deer. If sheep (a species that has its evolutionary roots in ancient Mesopotamia) were removed from the British uplands and top predators were reintroduced, much of the land would revert to woodland.

Few proletarians would argue with reclaiming the hunting grounds of the super-rich, but would we need to give up lamb chops? And does Monbiot want to dispossess small sheep farmers and their rural way of life?

Monbiot has argued elsewhere that we need to reduce the amount of animal products we eat and radically transform farming methods for simple environmental reasons. Here he makes a convincing case that sheep products would be better sourced elsewhere than the Welsh hills.

On average sheep farmers in Wales receive £53,000 in EU subsidies, which they spend in order to produce just £33,000 of income. In effect, sheep farming costs them £20,000 a year. Most farmers keep sheep because it is a rule of the EU subsidy that the land cannot revert to nature.

Farmers do not have to produce anything to receive the subsidy, but they do have to artificially maintain the land in its desertified state – by grazing, ploughing or otherwise chopping down signs of resurgent life.

DROPPED

Monbiot argues that this rule should be dropped and farmers should be free to do nothing if they want to. The subsidy should be capped to stop the large landowners cashing in on this rule.

In Britain 69% of the land is owned by 0.6% of the population. A cap in the subsidy could be the first step to bringing this land back into common ownership. Farmers that did allow their land to rewild may see other economic benefits. The reintroduction of white-tailed sea eagles to the Isle of Mull has created a £5 million tourist industry.

Monbiot's program is reformist but its strength lies in addressing areas of politics that are often ignored by the city-dwelling British left. It combines a class struggle against the landowners and fishing barons with practical efforts to access and rewild areas that have been reclaimed for us commoners. The campaign for sustainable fishing, like so many environmental problems, can only be won by an international working-class movement that can assert an alternative logic to that dictated by capitalist national competition.

In our world where capitalist relations have seeped into all the pores of our world, the rewilding project is a new way to conceive of the struggle for control over the means of production. Capitalist agricultural and fishing methods are inefficient and ecologically unsustainable. If they are allowed to continue they will threaten the foundation of human life on earth. The anarchy of the market and perverse state subsidies prop up an anachronistic landowning class and fishing empires that are destroying the conditions of their continued existence.

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx calls for the abolition of the division between town and country. It is a puzzling demand that is politely ignored nowadays. But perhaps alienation from nature was something that was felt very acutely by 19th century socialists and is part of our shifting baseline that this sense of loss is now forgotten. *Feral* should be the start of a conversation about how we can reimagine a future in which productive powers can be directed democratically for the benefit of people and planet.

The struggle to win control of the means of production from the capitalist and landowning classes may result in us ceding that much of that control back to nature.

Nelson Mandela, 1918-2013

Robert Fine, author of *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa* (Pluto 1990), looks back at the life of Nelson Mandela.

Nelson Mandela was a big man and his long life was punctuated by huge personal and political achievements. Foremost among his personal achievements was the dignity and apparent lack of bitterness with which he emerged from 27 years of imprisonment by the apartheid regime in South Africa.

He had the personal grace to embody the long struggle against racism and for democracy when he re-entered the public sphere in 1990 and by nearly all accounts he set an example of leadership during his own long years in gaol.

During this period Mandela was himself rather forgotten for much of the time, out of sight in the 1960s, eclipsed in the 1970s by the Black Consciousness Movement and Steve Biko, denounced in the 1980s by various world leaders (including Thatcher, Reagan and Bush Senior) as a terrorist, but increasingly in this period lionised in political and cultural circles.

Foremost among his political achievements was of course the role he played in steering South Africa from apartheid to democracy, from a state in which to be black was to be less than human to one man, one woman, one vote. This was no easy road. There was violence from members of the old regime, from Zulu nationalists in the Inkatha Movement, from "white" ultra-nationalist in the AWB, and not least from among some black radicals (including Mandela's wife, Winnie) within the black townships. Once in power as the first President of the new South Africa Mandela formed a government of National Unity with the Afrikaner Nationalists and Inkatha, oversaw the drafting of the new constitution including a strong Bill of Rights, and gave the go-ahead for Bishop Tutu to establish his famous Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

One of the many iconic moments of the Rainbow Nation Mandela sought to establish was presenting the Rugby World Cup trophy, held in South Africa, to the Springboks captain Francois Peinaar. Rugby was a generally "white" sport and those of us who remember the anti-apartheid



demonstrations we held against the visiting Springboks will understand the great symbolism of this occasion.

Mandela was a human being, and despite all the efforts to sanctify him we do him no honour to subsume his politics, or indeed his patrician personal peculiarities, beneath an aura of sainthood sometimes constructed for the narrowest of political purposes. Mandela came from a Christian, aristocratic, and propertied African family — very different in culture and social status from the mass of "blanket" Africans. He became involved in ANC politics in the 1950s, when he was active in the non-violent Defiance Campaign and then in organising the Congress of the People in 1955. It put forward the famous and at the time controversial Freedom Charter:

"We the people of South Africa declare for all our country: That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people".

In a context of plural political movements vying for popular support, the notion of "we the people" had obvious political advantages for the ANC, but what was more important was that it set a basically multi-racial path for the liberation movement.

There has been debate over whether Mandela ever joined the South African Communist Party, which had of course strong Soviet connections, but, he certainly worked closely with some of its members.

What first thrust Mandela into international fame, his first moment of glory, was perhaps his least auspicious contribution. He was involved in the late 1950s in the turn to armed struggle, the establishment of an armed wing of the ANC, known as MK or Umkhonto We Sizwe, and the reorganisation of the party in accordance with the "M-Plan", setting up a cell structure for military operations. Mandela was acquitted at the long drawn out Treason Trial of 1956-61, but he was then convicted of "sabotage" at the Rivonia Trial in 1962 and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The so-called turn to armed struggle was a disaster. The bombing campaigns were ineffective and those involved in them were quickly rounded up. More importantly, the mass democratic campaigns, which rocked the apartheid regime in the latter half of the 1950s, all quickly collapsed as sabotage, secrecy and vanguardism took over. The murder by the police of 69 protesters at Sharpeville — a protest organised by the PAC, a rival organisation to the ANC — was treated by the ANC-SACP leadership as a sign that peaceful protest was no longer possible. However, it was also a sign that the mass democratic movement as a whole — which comprised community movements, trade union movements, women's movements and even tribal peasant movements — was seriously impacting on the apartheid regime.

After the turn to armed struggle there ensued a decade of state repression and intensified racist legislation, marked by the defeat of popular struggles. I do not think this downturn can be separated from the ill-advisedness of the "turn" Mandela helped to implement.

Mandela was inspired, as many radicals were in that period, by Castro's 26th of July Movement, the example of Che Guevara, and by various armed African liberation movements. The long period of his prosecution in the Treason Trial may have cut him off from active involvement in the mass democratic movement (I am not sure of this). In any event the strategic turn taken by the ANC, which Mandela supported and personified, probably had more to do with the wider strategic turn enforced by leaders of the Soviet Union

on most Communist Parties they supported, than with any local conditions.

Mandela's ringing speech at the Rivonia Trial — "I was the symbol of justice in the court of oppression" — was undoubtedly true but of course did not address the democratic and class issues involved in turning away from mass struggle.

There was always a patrician and intolerant edge to the ANC movement, but it was the turn to violence in 1961 that for many years broke its connection with grass-roots democracy. The protests that broke out in the mid-1970s, a decade and a half after Sharpeville, were conducted more in the name of Black Consciousness and Steve Biko than the ANC and Mandela. In the 1980s the ANC began to get back into the picture internationally as a largely exiled movement, but the internal movement of new non-racial trade unions (especially under the umbrella of FOSATU) and new community movements (especially under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front) showed a considerable degree of independence from the ANC-SACP alliance.

In the UK I remember ANC-SACP people in the anti-apartheid movement in this period denouncing the new industrial trade unions and their supporters in the UK, including myself, for undermining the "official" trade union wing of the movement, SACTU — or worse, as "collaborators".

Once Mandela was out of prison in 1990, his conciliatory strengths were manifold: he certainly deserved the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. There was at the time violence in the air — the murder of Chris Hanu, massacres at Sebokeng and at Shell House, the AWB car bombs, the "necklacing" of "collaborators" committed by young activists in the townships, even the tortures and murders committed by the Winnie Mandela's thuggish "United Football Club". Directly or indirectly, Mandela helped to resolve tensions between the independent unions and the ANC and the former head of the Mineworkers Union Cyril Ramaphosa led the ANC delegation into negotiations with the government. Mandela was a force for reconciliation but this did not mean that he simply gave in to stronger forces. He was strongly critical of de Klerk, the leader of the Afrikaner Nationalists, when the latter granted amnesty to the police and defended his old Defence Minister, Malan.

However, reconciliation meant reconciling oneself to the present as well as to the past — and to forces that would keep the great majority of ordinary black people in poverty and subjection. Mandela's undoubted strengths were also his weaknesses. The ambitious social and economic plans of the ANC-SACP, articulated in the election campaign of 1994 in the Reconstruction and Development Programme, were frustrated by business friendly policies (tight budgets, free trade, debt responsibility, etc.), the allure of unheard of riches corrupting all manner of officials, and an increasingly evident anti-pluralist streak within the ANC and SACP themselves. The trade union independence so carefully built up in the 1980s was compromised by its alliance with the ANC and SACP in the 1990s.

By the time Mandela decided not to stand again as President in 1999, there were pronounced signs of growing unemployment, inequality and governmental authoritarianism — as well as the peculiarities of certain policy traits like Mbeki's almost unbelievable refusal to recognise the existence of AIDS or the importance of anti-viral treatment.

Mandela was not uncritical of his own role, notably in relation to the whole question of AIDS, but whether or not he spoke out publicly on these issues, he remained a force for decency in the background of a state that was becoming disturbingly violent, anti-egalitarian and grasping. The police murder of 34 striking miners at Marikana mine, owned by a British company Lonmin, one of whose well paid directors is Cyril Ramaphosa, the former leader of the Mineworkers Union and Deputy leader of the ANC, and its cover up and normalisation by leading figures in the ANC-SACP-COSATU alliance, is just one exemplar.

Mandela will be missed today not because he was a perfect role model — he was certainly no saint — but because he knew what is important in life and represented something authentic in the South African revolutionary tradition.

Now that he has gone, I wonder what is in store for the revolution, which his presence did much to foster and civilise but which his aura served to insulate from the normal processes of intellectual and political criticism.

Cameron's hypocrisy

By Martin Thomas

After Nelson Mandela died on 5 December, Tory prime minister David Cameron was full of praise for Mandela.

Full of hypocrisy, too. In 1989, when Mandela was still in jail under the apartheid regime, Cameron went on an all-expenses-paid trip to South Africa, organised and funded by Strategy Network International (SNI), a group created in 1985 specifically to lobby against the imposition of sanctions on the apartheid government.

Asked about the trip by the authors of a book on Cameron about the trip, Alistair Cooke, who was Cameron's boss when he worked in 1989 at Tory Central Office, was "simply a jolly".

Cameron worked for Tory Central Office from 1988 (soon after he finished university) to 1993. At the time, Britain's Tory government, under Margaret Thatcher, was the biggest voice in international diplomacy for opposing sanctions on South Africa and branding Mandela a "terrorist".

There is no record at the time of Cameron dissenting from Thatcher.

Only in 2006, when both Thatcher and apartheid were irretrievably out of the way, and Mandela had been president of South Africa for five years and had then retired from public life, did Cameron consider it safe to sanitise the issue.

He went to South Africa, visited the aged and frail Mandela, and said he apologised for the "mistakes my party made in the past with respect to relations with the ANC and sanctions on South Africa".

The Tories would admit now that they were wrong to oppose votes for working-class men and for women in Britain, too.

The history of Britain's anti-apartheid movement

By Harry Glass

If you grew up in radical politics in the 1980s, anti-apartheid activism was ubiquitous — a reference point, an inspiration, and an accessible vehicle for campaigning.

Demonstrating outside the South African embassy, attending cultural and political meetings and demanding freedom for Nelson Mandela were rites of passage across the spectrum of the left.

The lessons of the anti-apartheid movement retain their contemporary relevance. Some within climate and anti-war campaigns have looked to it as a model. More widely, the Palestinian boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaign has explicitly tried to make the analogy between Israel and apartheid-era South Africa, and to mimic anti-apartheid tactics. Roger Fieldhouse's detailed history, *Anti-apartheid: a history of the movement in Britain: a study in pressure group politics* (Merlin 2005) recounts many important episodes, although it is highly deficient politically.

Racial oppression in South Africa dates back to the beginnings of colonial white minority rule over the majority black population. Apartheid — literally “apartness” — was the codification of racial segregation in the years from 1948 to 1994 under National Party rule.

The South African Native National Congress was founded in 1912. In 1923, it changed its name to the African National Congress (ANC), which together with the Indian Congress constituted a “moderate, law-abiding and largely ineffective opposition” to apartheid.

The ANC formed an alliance with the Stalinist South African Communist Party (SACP), epitomised by the ANC's Freedom Charter in 1955, and later with the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). But the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa was never homogenous — for example, the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) broke away from ANC in 1959, and the Black Consciousness movement led by Steve Biko had a high profile in the 1970s.

GLOBAL

The global struggle against apartheid was part of a decolonisation movement in the post-war world. The Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) was founded in April 1960.

It coalesced during the wave of protest following the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960, when 69 Africans were killed and 186 injured — over 70% shot in the back. After a continuous week-long picket outside the South African embassy, some 4,000 participated in a protest march and 15,000 were present at the rally in London.

Over 35 years, AAM expanded into a substantial and high-profile social movement. Membership peaked at 19,410 in March 1989.

The ANC was “instrumental” in founding the AAM in 1959. Over the next thirty-five years the two organisations maintained “a close, if not always harmonious relationship”. The 1990 AGM called for further campaigns around the themes: stop apartheid repression; boycott apartheid — sanctions now; solidarity with the ANC. The perceived strength of AAM “derived from its role as a solidarity movement that accepted (by and large) the position of the liberation movement”.

If the politics of the AAM were set by the ANC, then the line originated in Stalin's Moscow. In 1928 the Stalinist bureaucracy had instructed the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) to strive for an “independent native republic”, part of an evolving two-stage perspective in which socialism was pushed into the future, displaced by immediate demands in the interests of USSR foreign policy.

The party was banned under apartheid and changed its name to South African Communist Party (SACP) to reflect the national liberation orientation. In 1962 the SACP's *Road to South African Freedom* “reaffirmed the strategy of seeking to work with a multi-class liberation movement to attain a national revolution in South Africa”, as a first stage of a two-stage process (the second promised to overthrow capitalism).

This two-stage approach put the AAM ideologically at odds with Trotskyist conceptions of permanent revolution, which held that the working class should lead and integrate the fight against apartheid with the struggle to overthrow capitalism.

Fieldhouse acknowledges that AAM was “quite heavily in-



fluenced by communist ideas”. Many of the leading figures, particularly in the early days, were members of the SACP or CPGB, or were fellow travellers. However, the CPGB was not officially represented on the AAM National Committee, due to fears about Cold War anti-communism. He quotes a 1970 Foreign Office secret assessment of AAM: “AAM is, and has since its foundation in 1960, been subject to considerable communist influence... But because of the presence of many articulate non-communists — Liberals, Trotskyists, Socialists and pacifists, for instance — it has never been merely a front organisation run by the Party”.

The AAM was openly inclusive of other parties, including those representing the bourgeoisie. Although AAM's predominant political support came from Labour Parties and Labour Party Young Socialist branches, its relationship with the Liberal Party was “at least as close as that with the Labour Party”.

Tories like Lord Altrincham and the Bow group were involved in AAM at the beginning, and in the early 1970s, the Pressure for Economic and Social Toryism (PEST) ginger group affiliated to AAM and sent a representative to the Movement's national committee. In 1976, the Tory Reform Group took PEST's place on the committee. AAM also enjoyed “a great deal of support from religious organisations and the churches for its moral crusade against the evils of apartheid”.

The anti-apartheid movement advocated boycotts as a tactic throughout its history. The boycott took two forms — individuals refusing to buy South African goods, and more organised, institutional boycotts of shops or businesses trading in South African merchandise or with South African connections.

The boycott was launched by the ANC in South Africa in April 1959 against South African firms supporting apartheid. It was supported by other bourgeois-nationalist parties and by SACTU. In Britain, the Committee of African Organisations distributed over 100,000 “Boycott South African Goods” leaflets, and organised a series of other events to raise awareness of apartheid and to launch a complete boycott of South African imports into Britain.

When the AAM was founded in April 1960, its activities included “continuation and extension of the boycott of South African goods”. In the winter of 1962-3, AAM promoted a cultural boycott which attempted to ban the distribution of British films in South Africa and persuade actors and musicians not to perform, writers not to publish, and teachers not to teach there.

However, the boycotts were not very successful. AAM decided in 1960 to switch the emphasis of its work from consumer boycott to economic sanctions. In June 1965, the PAC, in conjunction with the South African Coloured People's Congress, wrote a stinging criticism of AAM's policies and activities. It dismissed the boycott campaign as a futile gesture and “well-nigh impractical”.

A new consumer boycott campaign was launched nation-

ally in 1974, and yet again in 1980. It was only in 1985, with the beginning of a significant increase in membership, that a national consumer boycott really became sustainable. In 1985 the Co-operative Societies agreed to stop buying South African goods. Sainsbury's, Tesco, and Next began to respond. Other major stores gave assurances to trade unions that members would not be required to handle South African goods, after the TUC agreed to back the boycott campaign. A new boycott pledge was launched in February 1989, but the campaign “was still proving difficult”.

AAM found it extremely difficult to get the idea of a sanctions policy accepted by almost anyone. Trade with South Africa actually rose during the late 1980s.

Fieldhouse believes that the campaign to discourage economic collaboration and investment in South Africa was “probably the most significant and influential of all the campaigns”.

Barclays bank commenced a disinvestment programme in August 1985 and announced that it would no longer use the name “Barclays” in South Africa. “Barclays did admit that its withdrawal was brought about primarily by the adverse effect on its customer base”.

During the 1970s, the boycott was constantly undermined by two influences. Within South Africa, “relatively small cosmetic changes, permitting occasional mixed audiences for special performances, confused some artists; while at home the argument that cultural links would defeat apartheid more effectively than a boycott kept on asserting itself”.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, the academic boycott experienced the same pressures, contradictions, and confusion. It began at the end of 1964 when AAM persuaded a number of British academics to not to accept posts in South Africa. Increasingly, the academic boycott was implemented at local level by groups of academics and/or students in their own institutions. In 1980 the lecturer's union AUT voted to support the academic boycott. In May 1988, the AUT reaffirmed its support, although this was “advisory rather than mandatory”. During the 1980s the National Union of Students also gave full support for an academic boycott.

Fieldhouse concludes that for much of the 1960s and '70s, “AAM struggled to make any meaningful contact with the British trade union movement”. It had more success in the 1980s.

The AAM felt it should seek support and assistance from the trade union movement and called on British unions to

BDS and anti-apartheid

The AAM is currently the model for BDS campaigners who claim to speak for the Palestinians.



They make an analogy between apartheid-era South Africa and the current regime in Israel, and from this draw the conclusion that AAM's strategy and tactics, particularly boycott, divestment, and sanctions, are the answer. The analogy is false, and so are the political conclusions that follow from it.

The nature of the oppression suffered by Palestinians is different to black South Africans under apartheid. The consistently democratic solutions are different. When AAM started in 1960, black people constituted about 70% of the South African population, with whites around 20%. By the end of apartheid, it was closer to 80%/10%, with the so-called “coloured” mixed race population accounting for a further 10%. In Israel today, 70% of the population are Jewish, while 20% are Palestinian Arabs.

A white racial caste exploited and oppressed the majority black population in South Africa, with the racial oppression reinforcing the economic exploitation of workers. In Israel, the Jewish ruling class exploits mainly Jewish labour, while oppressing the national rights of Palestinian people, both inside Israel and in the occupied territories. The conflict is primarily a national question.

The democratic solution in South Africa was majority rule; in Israel-Palestine today, it is for both peoples to have their own states, as a prerequisite framework for any future single unit.

give the international trade union movement a lead by implementing a trade embargo. However, informal approaches to the transport workers' union TGWU and electricians' union ETU, and a deputation to the TUC, brought no meaningful results. Fieldhouse confesses that, in the early days of the AAM, "there was surprisingly little contact between local groups and local trade union branches", and that "most groups were predominantly middle-class with comparatively few trade union members".

The TUC was generally dreadful. It set up a fund for the victims of Sharpeville, but such humanitarian aid was "about the limit of its commitment to the anti-apartheid struggle at the time". It abstained from a condemnation of apartheid by the ICFTU. In September 1961, TUC general secretary George Woodcock told AAM he "saw no purpose" in liaising with it. In the summer of 1962 the TUC declared its support for the South African trade unions, but it did not propose any specific actions. At its annual conference in 1964 the TUC unanimously passed a resolution calling on the government to implement a diplomatic, economic and arms boycott of South Africa and for an international boycott by organised workers.

In fact the TUC had a long-standing close relationship with the white South African labour movement. It was generally opposed to any action that threatened Britain's economic stake in South Africa and was less likely to take heed of AAM than the white South African TUC (TUCSA), which, a few years later, strongly advised the TUC against economic boycotts and sanctions. TUCSA was founded in 1954 to promote the interests of white workers, "but it did foster the creation of African unions in the belief that it was better that they should be under the control of TUCSA rather than be independent".

WORKERS

SACTU was formed in 1955 as a non-racial organisation aiming to represent all South African workers, in opposition to TUCSA. It was closely associated with the ANC and accepted the two-stage perspective.

By 1961 it claimed a membership of 51 affiliated unions and 53,000 workers, of whom about 40,000 were African. When SACTU refused an offer of £30,000 by the ICFTU to distance itself from the ANC and concentrate its activity in the workplace rather than in political defiance, ICFTU decided to end its association with SACTU and collaborate with TUCSA instead.

Matters were better with some individual British unions. Some early support came from the shopworkers' union USDAW, the Bakers' Union, and the Fire Brigades Union. As early as 1961, the Musicians' Union decided to forbid its members to perform in South Africa. In 1965, actors' union Equity followed the example. Some 25 trade union bodies had affiliated to AAM in 1964 at national or branch level. The television technicians' union ACTT refused to cover the 1970 South African cricket team's tour.

The 1975 TUC Congress recognised for the first time that the trade union movement could most usefully work closely with SACTU. In 1981 the TUC unanimously adopted a resolution that welcomed the development of black trade unions in South Africa. However, the TUC resisted AAM's arguments for all-out support for COSATU in 1985.

AAM was cautious in approaching unions to take direct industrial action. The Labour Party's Jim Mortimer and the CPGB's Bert Ramelson's advice was very similar: "do not seek support for sanctions or a large scale boycott, and certainly not for direct industrial action in support of these, because that was out of the question." Bob Hughes and others recall that AAM never asked the trade union movement to take industrial action.

Despite there, there were some small-scale sporadic outbreaks in the 1970s and 80s. At the beginning of 1971, trade unionists at the Westland factory at Hayes mounted a protest when confirmation of the sale of seven Wasp helicopters was announced, and the Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians Association branch at Westlands in Yeovil passed a resolution refusing to work on arms for South Africa. Concerted efforts of the Bristol anti-apartheid group, the Bristol trades council, the Somerset and South Wales National Union of Mineworkers branch, and the National Union of Railwaymen Bristol branch were successful in forcing the diversion of a shipment of South African coal from Bristol to Amsterdam.

Other efforts failed. In August 1976, the Leyland joint shop stewards committee decided to block the supply of kits and spare parts to South Africa. Unfortunately the shop stewards could not persuade rank-and-file members to take this action. Liverpool docks shop stewards did pledge action to stop South African goods in January 1977, but dock workers over-



turned the decision at a mass meeting.

The biggest setback came when Tom Jackson, chair of the TUC international committee and leader of the Post Office Workers' Union, instructed his members to block postal and telephone links with South Africa during a week of action. The union was taken to court and lost out badly.

AAM's relationship with South African trade unionism "was largely determined by ANC policy". AAM loyally recognised SACTU as the mouthpiece of South African trade unionism. AAM "strenuously opposed attempts, not only by the TUC to give recognition to TUCSA in place of SACTU, but also by the political left in the 1980s to forge links with South African trade unions and federations that rejected the ANC/SACP/SACTU ideology by promoting straightforward working class struggle against capitalism".

WAVES

Massive waves of industrial action, beginning in the early 1970s and continuing into the 1980s, as well as changes in the anti-union laws, saw the development of independent unions, such as CUSA, closely associated with the black consciousness movement and in 1984, the FOSATU trade union federation.

COSATU was formed from a merger of FOSATU and other unions in 1985, with the blessing of SACTU.

In March 1990, SACTU merged with COSATU. The best of the international left, including the AWL's predecessor organisation, sought to forge direct links with militant South African trade unionists, such as Moses Mayekiso, the miners' leader who was at the time a fierce critic of the two-stage strategy of the ANC/SACP. These direct solidarity links were opposed by the AAM leadership.

These differences are not drawn out sharply by Fieldhouse, who clearly agrees with the AAM's orientation towards the ANC. The only sense of debate is his account of the City of London Anti-Apartheid Group (CLAAG), which was dominated politically by the Revolutionary Communist Group.

The ANC tried to prevent the RCG's penetration of AAM by ordering David Kitson, whose wife and two children were founding members of CLAAG, to denounce the group when he returned to Britain after his release from prison in 1984. He refused to obey the order. As a result, his ANC membership was suspended and the funding for his job at Ruskin College — his only income after 20 years in prison — was withdrawn by the trade union TASS (led by Ken Gill of the CPGB).

In July 1984, AAM disowned the CLAAG's non-stop picket of the South African embassy. In February 1985 the AAM na-

tional committee decided to withdraw recognition of CLAAG — effectively banning it from the official movement.

The only other sense of political differences is the brief mention of the South African Labour Education Project (SALEP), which had been formed at the beginning of the 1980s by a small group of Marxist trade unionists working for SACTU in London, who were expelled from the ANC because they criticised it for its "national-revolution-first" strategy.

How important was AAM was to the downfall of apartheid? Fieldhouse alludes to the withdrawal of bank loans, as forcing the hand of the South African ruling class. No doubt that is part of the explanation. But he notes that in Britain AAM did not move governments very far in over 30 years, barely affected trade and consumption, and only dented investment to a limited extent.

A rather more important explanation is revolt among black South Africans. It was their campaigning and resistance that brought about the downfall of the apartheid. It was the black working class, its strikes, the growth of organisation in workplaces, its militancy — those acts of working-class resistance — were a central reason why the apartheid system could not continue any longer. It is an "insider" perspective that is important, rather than focusing on outside pressure, that is the crucial lesson from the anti-apartheid struggle.

Because the militant working class movement was tied politically to the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance and its two-stage perspective, it was never able to emerge as an independent actor as apartheid was wound down and the current regime put in place. In the 1980s, working-class political representation and the abortive demand for a workers' party were discussed but largely discarded. It is why the South African working class finds itself today, nearly 20 years since the end of apartheid and after the Marikana massacre, still without an independent political voice.

The problem with the two-stage conception was that the second, socialist, stage was not simply subordinated or postponed, it was ditched altogether. The anti-capitalist, socialist goal played no guiding role, not least because of the impoverished, anti-working class nature of the Stalinist model that informed it.

It meant that the AAM operated as a classic popular front, with bourgeois politicians, largely bourgeois methods, and confined largely to liberal-democratic politics. There is much to take from the history of the anti-apartheid movement, in South Africa and in places like Britain. But the AAM is not our model, despite its apparent successes.

After Mao and the Tiananmen Uprising

Camila Bassi continues a series of articles looking at the recent history of China.

"It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice." (Deng Xiaoping)

In the second of three articles overviewing a recent history of China, I review the era of Deng Xiaoping.

That the successor to Mao Zedong as head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was to be both a pragmatist and a loyal Party official, who had been there right from the start of the CCP's rule, is telling in terms of China's modern political economy. Deng Xiaoping launched the era known as 'opening and reform', which in the 1980s laid the foundations for what was to become a phenomenal pace and rate of economic growth from 1990 onwards. Deng also oversaw the brutal suppression of China's democratic revolution. "Opening and reform" meant economic opening and reform, with little or no political concessions; and yet such opening and reform created conditions and spurred aspirations for political change.

The era after Mao's death marked a dramatic new period for China — one of incredible change. The backdrop to this was the legacy of Mao: the Anti-Rightist Movement that shut down the Hundred Flowers Campaign, the epic failure, farce and mass death of the Great Leap Forward, and the political terror and annihilation of the Cultural Revolution. The promise to transform a country with one in four of the world's population into an economic powerhouse, and for the benefit of all, failed spectacularly. Deng Xiaoping represented a turn in the CCP toward a form of economic realism and political idealism: the country's economy would be reformed and opened up to outside world trade while the political authority of the Party remained absolute.

The first indication of the tension and struggle embedded in such a political economy was demonstrated in the Democracy Wall of Beijing that began in the summer of 1978.

As a vent for anger about the Cultural Revolution, the Democracy Wall Movement of 1978-79 was, literally, a wall for people to publicly put up their democratic opposition. The Wall included Huang Xiang's poem, "The Fire God Symphony":

*Why can one man control the wills of millions of people
Why can one man prescribe life and death everywhere
Why should we bow and worship an idol
Letting blind faith confine our will to live, our thoughts
and emotions
[...]
Let man be restored to his dignity
Let life become life once again
Let music and virtue be the soul's inner essence
Let beauty and nature be man's once again*

The movement was fuelled by ambiguous reports in the Party newspaper, *People's Daily*, which implied it had Deng Xiaoping's support. Deng officially took post in December 1978.

By the end of January 1979, Deng had made plain his ambition to modernise China by making it part of the world economy. He became the first CCP leader to visit the United States. Concurrently, as the Democracy Wall Movement spread to other cities in China, he commissioned its shutdown. Huang Xiang later reflected on the movement's significance:

"We 'set fire' on Wangfujing Avenue in Beijing. Myself and my three friends, Li Jiahua, Fang Jiahua, and Mo Jianguang, put up my poem 'The Fire God Symphony' in big character posters. This first



A protester stands in front of a line of tanks, in what became the iconic image of the Tiananmen Square uprising.

batch of posters lit a spark for seeking enlightenment and freedom in Communist China. We founded and published the first independent periodical ever, called *Enlightenment*, and staged a poetic campaign to advocate human rights and freedom of expression."

The everyday, pervasive level of China's political economy, i.e. the degree to which it seized control of people's lives, is best illustrated by the introduction of the One Child Policy in 1979. The One Child Policy was essentially the State regulation of women's bodies, and the motivation was essentially political-economic — the population needed controlling to minimise social, economic and environmental resource problems.

In crude terms, the policy was a success in curbing population growth. However, it has fuelled a war on women and girls: China's sex imbalance ratio is extraordinary and alarming, with evidence of female foeticide and infanticide, and the mistreatment and abandonment of girls. In a 2010 article in the *Economist*, titled "The worldwide war on baby girls", it is noted that by 2020 China will have 30 to 40 million more young men (of 19 or under) than young women, which would be the equivalent of the entire young male population of the USA.

ZONES

The designation of four Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in southern China — Xiamen, Shantou, Shenzhen and Zhuhai — ultimately provided the key to China's economic success.

Within these four SEZs infrastructure was rapidly put in place and capital investment from foreign companies flowed in, with the pull of government financial incentives and cheap and "docile" (i.e., unorganised) labour. Internal migration from the vast rural hinterland was driven by the promise of better wages and living conditions. Trade in the 1980s was mostly with Taiwan and Hong Kong. These four SEZs boomed, in particular, Shenzhen. The CCP proceeded to open its coastal areas to 14 more SEZs.

In brief, China commenced its export-led economic growth, which, while in the 1980s was modest, paved the way for a staggering pace and rate of growth by the 1990s.

Two things illustrate the Party's spin on "socialist" ideals and capitalist realism: the Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution and the question of Hong Kong. The unease of some within the CCP with the so-called marriage of socialism and capitalism and with the material-seeking, money-orientated youth of Hong Kong, spurred the 1983 Campaign Against Spiritual Pollution. This was, effectively, a well-publicised clampdown on smuggling, pornography, and prostitution. At a time when the SEZs were attracting foreign investment, and since a consequence of the campaign was to deter much

of this investment, the campaign was phased out.

By the time Britain's post-colonial lease on Hong Kong expired in 1987, Deng had declared "One Country, Two Systems" in order to manage the innate contradictions of its political economy. But appeasing Party hardliners was one thing, the aspirations of students and workers were another.

The full story of the Tiananmen revolutionary uprising cannot be covered here. Suffice to say that it remains the greatest challenge to CCP rule to date. The protests, which started in Beijing and centred on Tiananmen Square, escalated and spread to other cities.

Whilst students led an encampment in Tiananmen Square, it was ultimately the intervention of the working class that made a difference. As Harry Glass notes in *Solidarity* 53 (10 June 2004):

"At the beginning of the protests in May 1989, students did not generally seek working class support, confining the workers' headquarters to the far side of the square until the end of the month. But as the students were pulled towards the internal machinations of the ruling party, backing the "reformist" faction within the bureaucracy, the workers struck out on the road to independence.

"One of the first signs came on 15 May, when 70,000 steelworkers at the Capital steel plant struck in solidarity with the Beijing democracy movement. In fact, 1989 marked the rebirth of the working class as a powerful force in Chinese politics.

"The Beijing Workers' Autonomous Federation began organising on 17 April, before coming out publicly on 18 May. Workers' federations spread across many major cities, and incorporated steel workers, builders, bus drivers, machinists, railway workers and office staff.

"A small core of around 150 activists managed to register 20,000 workers in those five weeks, including workers in state-run factories such as Shougang (Capital Iron and Steel) and Yanshan Petrochemicals. They denounced the Communist regime as 'this twentieth century Bastille, the last stronghold of Stalinism'."

For those who remember it, coverage of the Tiananmen Square uprising left an impression of student radicalism — notably, the iconic image of the student standing in front of the tank. Yet the legacy of Tiananmen was most deeply felt within the workers' movement.

After the announcement of martial law and the blood-stained massacre (the precise number of which will never be known, but was certainly hundreds, possibly thousands), the student movement declined while the workers' movement grew.

• General article source: Zeitgeist Films (2007) "China: A Century of Revolution".

A poster promoting China's "one child" policy

Marxism at work

Jade Baker reports from Workers' Liberty's "Marxism at Work" industrial activists' dayschool, held in London on Saturday 7 December.

Over 50 trade union activists attended Workers' Liberty "Marxism at Work" dayschool on Saturday 7 December.

The school, featuring both discussion-focused and more interactive workshops, was based on a six-part AWL educational series about Marxism and trade unionism, and included sessions on "our fantasy trade union", the Marxist critique of current trade unions, understanding the bureaucracy, historical examples of the rank and file in action, and the role of Marxists in the workplace.

The aim of the day was to give participants a solid grounding in fundamental ideas about what a trade union is, the role of socialists in the workplace, and how to take industrial and political struggles at work forward.

In addition to the discussions and workshops, Workers' Liberty presented an exhibition of our workplace and industrial bulletins, from *The Hook*, produced on the Manchester Ship Canal in the late 1960s, to our current publications such as *Tube-worker*, *Lewisham*



London Underground worker and RMT activist Rebecca Crocker gives a presentation on the National Minority Movement, a revolutionary-led rank-and-file initiative from the 1920s.

Hospital Worker, and *The Open Book*.

During the first session, participants were paired together by union and had to place on a continuum, from "rubbish" to "brilliant", how they thought their union measured up in six key areas: democracy, militancy and industrial effectiveness (which many participants noted are not always the same thing!), equalities, organising, politics, and one industry-one union-all grades industrial unionism.

The exercise helped move participants away from "union patriotism", and identify strengths and weaknesses in the approaches of different unions. The RMT and the

Independent Workers' Union of Great Britain (IWGB) were rated highly by members when it came to organising and militancy, but RMT activists scored their union much lower for "equalities". Its current Council of Executives is entirely white and includes only one woman.

A follow-up exercise discussed different critiques of trade unions, from the right and the left, such as the claim that unions only represent the already-privileged sections of the working class, or the idea that, while trade unions and industrial organising may be worthy causes, there is no reason to make a special focus of them.

The school also included

historical sessions on three movements of independent rank-and-file organising — the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation and its "green bans" of the early 1970s, the Sheffield Workers' Committee during the First World War, and the National Minority Movement (NMM) of 1924-1929.

Discussions focused on how these inspirational rank-and-file workers' movements can give us ideas for today. Seeing how class struggle was at a low ebb for the first years of the NMM, before the explosion of the general strike in 1926, reminds us how quickly things can turn, and how important independent rank-and-file or-

ganisation, and socialist organisation and education, is to prepare for when those turns occur.

Janine Booth, AWL member and outgoing RMT Executive member, headed up a brilliant session where participants were given statements on the aims and roles of Marxists in a workplace and asked to agree or disagree. The room agreed that aims of Marxists in the work place should include: helping workers fight the bosses more effectively, building unions to bring new working-class activists into struggle, convincing workers of, and educating workers about, Marxists ideas and helping them become convincers and educators, and fundamentally transforming our unions to make them more militant and radically-democratic.

The day finished with short presentations on three current struggles where Workers' Liberty members are applying the approaches discussed during the school — the outsourced workers' dispute for sick pay, holiday, and pension equality at the University of London, the Local Associations Network rank-and-file initiative in the National Union of Teachers, and the "Every Job Matters" campaign to stop job cuts and ticket office closures on London Underground.

Tube union plans jobs fight



By Darren Bedford

The RMT is planning an extensive political campaign to accompany its industrial battle to stop job cuts and ticket office closures on London Underground.

The University of London Union (ULU), which represents students at a number of London colleges, hosted a public

planning meeting for supporters of the "Every Job Matters" campaign on Tuesday 10 December.

The ballot for strikes and action-short-of-strikes closes on January 10, with action due the following week if the ballot returns the expected yes vote.

Workers and passengers face the closure of every ticket office on the London Underground network, as well as the loss of nearly 1,000 jobs.

Union and community activists say that Mayor Boris Johnson and London Underground Ltd.'s profit-obsessed drive to automate as much of the network as possible will hit service quality and passenger safety.

Outsourced workers plan more strikes

By Ira Berkovic

Outsourced cleaning, catering, and security workers at the University of London have announced further strikes on 27, 28, and 29 January.

The workers, who are members of the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain (IWGB), struck on 27 and 28 November and succeeded in winning significant concessions from university bosses and one of their employers, Balfour Beatty Workplace. BBW employees now have holiday and sick pay terms of near-equivalence to directly-employed staff.

However, union activists remain adamant that their fight will not be won until

they have secured full equality with their directly-employed colleagues, and won guarantees that the closure of the Garden Halls (a university accommodation site) will not lead to job losses.

The strike will also demand that BBW and the university recognise and negotiate with the IWGB. Although the November concessions were undoubtedly the result of workers' action, the deal was negotiated only with Unison, which has hardly any members amongst outsourced staff after they left



en masse following bureaucratic sabotage of branch elections.

IWGB University of London branch chair Henry Chango Lopez said: "I can only stress again our (and ACAS's) bewilderment at BBW's failure thus far to negotiate with us on any of these issues. I reiterate our willingness to participate fully in meaningful talks to resolve this dispute".

The IWGB has also issued a statement in solidarity with student activists, whose occupation of Senate House, launched to support the workers' struggle, was brutally broken up by police.

• 3cosascampaign.wordpress.com

Rail Gourmet workers' ballot

By an RMT activist

Workers providing the at-seat trolley service on East Midlands Trains (EMT) will soon be balloting for industrial action over what union activists call "a complete breakdown in industrial relations."

The workers are employed by Rail Gourmet, a subcontracted catering company, and are members of the Rail, Maritime, and Transport workers union (RMT). A successful union recruitment campaign and support from established reps has put these workers in a position to be able to fight back against a management that makes up the rules as it goes along, and whose treatment of staff often has racist and homophobic undertones. In turn, the example set by these workers has sparked a separate aggregate national ballot of all Rail Gourmet employees.

At the last count, the EMT Rail Gourmet workers' campaign included 68 demands ranging from reinstatement of a dismissed colleague to a fairer system of filling vacancies. Talks with management have been unproductive, so it will be important that the industrial action ballot is not called off if management appear to offer concessions; keeping the ballot live means workers can negotiate from a position of strength.

Action should go ahead unless workers achieve several real concessions from management.





Giant protests rock Ukraine



Protesters in Kiev wave EU flags

By Ollie Moore

Mass demonstrations in Ukraine have demanded closer links with Europe, and an end to the government's pursuit of a "strategic partnership" with Russia.

Ukraine president, Viktor Yanukovich, wants the country to enter a Moscow-led "Customs Union" — a reversal of his previous support for political and

free trade agreements with the EU. Ukrainians fear Russian domination, arguing that it evokes the domination of the country during the Stalinist era. Demonstrations on Sunday 8 December toppled a statue of Lenin, still regarded by Ukrainians, unfortunately but in many ways understandably, as a symbol of Russian domination.

The giant demonstra-

tions, which, despite immense police repression, have swelled and now constitute a semi-permanent "Occupy"-style presence in Independence Square in the Ukrainian capital Kiev, have a contradictory character. While their demand for closer links with Europe is internationalist and outward-looking, there is a nationalist element too. The far-right Freedom Party's flags have been seen on the demonstrations, and much of the anti-Russian rhetoric has a nationalist dimension.

JAILED

Jailed former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko, a pro-European conservative, has called for Yanukovich's resignation.

Riot police have raided her party's offices, and the European Commission says that while the offer of trade agreements remain on the table, Ukraine must meet certain conditions, including Tymoshenko's release.

The pro-Moscow and pro-EU wings of the Ukrainian ruling class are both looking for paths out of the country's economic crisis. Ukraine's economy has been in recession for

over a year, and both bourgeois factions believe that foreign investment, either from Moscow and Beijing or from Brussels, will ameliorate the situation. The protests indicate a huge groundswell of public support for the European path, but while EU trade agreements will not tie Ukraine so closely to authoritarian states like Russia and China, they too will come with neo-liberal strings attached.

The divide in bourgeois strategic opinion is also reflective of a real ethno-linguistic divide in Ukrainian society, between ethnic Ukrainians and Russian speakers. A November poll showed that while only 14% of Ukrainians supported the country's entry into Moscow's "Customs Union", the European option did not have a clear majority either (45%), and 41% were undecided. Protesters quoted in the press often describe themselves as "anti-Putin" or "anti-Russia" rather than "pro-EU".

Although organised labour has not thus far been a visible, independent element in the protest movement, a statement from the International Trade Union Confederation said: "Ukraine's trade union movement has pointed to the damaging role played by the International Monetary Fund, which has been pushing economic and social policy 'reforms' which are further weakening the economy.

"The IMF's demand for freezes in public sector wages, social benefits and pensions, as well as for higher utility costs, are strengthening the position of powerful oligarchs whose dominance over the economy would be threatened by closer ties with Europe."

Cops off campus!

By Tim Slater

Last month, the Guardian revealed that Cambridgeshire police had attempted to infiltrate Cambridge University Students' Union, Cambridge Defend Education, and other political groups on the left, such as Unite Against Fascism.

Most worryingly, the paper's undercover "police informant" was asked to record the names of all students attending demonstrations, suggesting that elaborate files are being kept.

Despite 130 academics calling on the University vice-chancellor to condemn the police's actions, university management still remains silent on the issue.

It seems that authorities are subjecting staff to surveillance too.

During the recent higher education strikes, a private security guard muscled into a picket line on the

university's Sidgwick site, knocking a picket to the ground.

Cambridgeshire's Tory police commissioner, Sir Graham Bright, suggested that without surveillance, "something could happen in Cambridge like in did in Woolwich", referring to the violent murder of a soldier in May.

State intimidation will likely deter some students from taking part in activism. But interestingly, many students and academics who have not been involved before have taken part in direct action events and meetings since, outraged that the right to protest is being infringed.

Our task now is to make sure these members of the community remain with us for the long haul — for surveillance and the crack-down on dissent worryingly now seem to be a fact of university life.

• More: pages 8-9

Put MPs on a worker's wage!



By Tom Harris

The Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has recommended a pay rise of 11% for MPs.

Embarrassed, and keenly aware about how their position looks to a public reeling from job losses and wage cuts,

many MPs have declared that their proposed pay-rise is wrong.

However, business leaders have loudly supported the pay rise. "If we are to attract talent into parliament, MPs should be paid a comparable amount to other professionals," said Ocado chairman Sir Stuart Rose.

Socialists should continue raising the historic demands of our movement: annual parliaments, instant recall, and MPs to earn no more than a worker's wage.

More fire strikes

By Darren Bedford

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has called new strikes in England and Wales on 13 and 14 December, both from 6pm to 10pm.

These are the fifth and sixth strikes since the end of September.

The strikes were announced along with the result of its ballot for action short of a strike on pensions. FBU members across the UK voted almost nine to one for this type of industrial action.

The ballot, along with further strikes dates, shows that firefighters have the will and the spirit to carry on fighting. In contrast to many unions, where action takes place for a day but then is followed by a long break, the FBU has kept up the pressure on government.

Over the last month

there has been little movement by government, with the FBU planning for a longer dispute. There is huge bitterness among firefighters as the government announced plans for further contribution rises in April 2014. For the majority of firefighters, this will mean paying 14.2%, one of the highest in the public sector. Other public sector workers in education, the civil service and the health service will also pay more from April.

The government says firefighters pensions are "generous", but firefighters taking home £1,650 a month and paying £340 a month into the pension scheme face a retirement pension of £9,000 a year if they are unable to meet the physical demands of the job after age 55 — even if they have been paying into the fund for 35 years.