

# Solidarity

& Workers' Liberty



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

For a workers' government

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virgincare

serco

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## What is the Alliance for Workers' Liberty?

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



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

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

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

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

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

### We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay, 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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## Brooks arrested, cancer persists

By Andrew Smith

"But don't rejoice too soon at your escape  
The womb he crawled from is still going strong"  
*Bertolt Brecht*

It is good news that former Sun and News of the World editor Rebekah Brooks was arrested on 13 March, along with five other senior News International officials, for conspiring to pervert the course of justice.

Brooks is one of Rupert Murdoch's top aides. She is close friends with both

David Cameron's family and Tony Blair's. It is relatively rare, in this society, for such big fish to get reeled in. Also pleasing is the fact that she did not seem to know that the arrest was coming.

It is still a number of big steps, however, from here to senior News International figures being convicted of anything serious. These people have a lot of money and very good lawyers; and their connections with various wings of the political establishment mean there will be a lot of pressure for some sort of fudge.

But even if Brooks et al do go down, and even if it seriously impacts on Murdoch's empire, the capitalist press system which produced these monstrosi-

ties will remain fully functioning. Even in the best possible variant, it will produce new Rupert Murdochs and new Rebekah Brooks, all over the world, in the future.

Socialists must argue for a democratic media which combines public ownership of large-scale media resources with freedom from state control.

**Such a media would allocate those resources to political parties, workers' organisations and groups of citizens based on their support in the population.**

- The socialist alternative to the capitalist "free press": [www.workersliberty.org/freepress](http://www.workersliberty.org/freepress)

## Don't let Mugabe jail Zimbabwean socialists!

Six Zimbabwean activists arrested in February 2011 at a meeting about the Egyptian revolution face up to ten years in prison after being convicted of "inciting public violence".

They were due to be sentenced the day Solidarity went to press: they face up to ten years in prison, or a fine of \$US2000, or both.

The six convicted are

Munyaradzi Gwisai (a former Movement for Democratic Change MP, before the MDC purged its left wing and then entered government with Mugabe), Tafadzwa Choto, Tatenda Mombeyarara, Edson Chakuma, Hopewell Gumbo and Welcome Zimuto. They plan to appeal the verdict.

Please send solidarity messages to [solidarity@freethemnow.com](mailto:solidarity@freethemnow.com)

Send protests to the Zimbabwean embassy in London at [zimlondon@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:zimlondon@yahoo.co.uk), ring 020 7379 1167, or write to Zimbabwe House, 429 Strand, London WC2R 0QE.

You can also send money to support the defendants:

**ISO Zim Solidarity, Unity Bank, Birmingham, Sort Code: 08-60-01, Account number 20136938**

## Labour HQ: unholy alliances, hidden agendas

The Labour Party is creating a new Executive Board. Jon Lansman comments.

**There are some unholy alliances and hidden agendas here that the leakers are not keen to expose.**

Firstly it seems that Sir Charles Allen, Labour supporter, senior adviser to Goldman Sachs, former CEO of Granada and ITV, appointed to help review Labour's management structure to make it fit for purpose, is himself to chair the new board.

So Labour's national executive is not going to get the board of six the executive approved, appointed and led by their chosen general secretary. Instead, a totally different structure has been approved without consulting them.

This structure is to be coled by Tim Livesay, who is accountable to the Leader and not the whole executive, with a chair whose accountability and objectives are as yet unspecified.

So much for governance.

And these details were not in the party press release but have since emerged in a letter from Ed Miliband to National Executive members and other key people which revealed that the new board would be "led by Tim and Iain [McNicol], and chaired by Sir Charles".

We have no grudge against Sir Charles (unlike others) but his experience is not exactly in empowering the footsoldiers and we agree with Emma Burnell who argues forcefully that what is at stake here is whether the party is going to devolve power to its members. She is confident that it will:

### DEVOLVED

**"Power will be devolved to Labour Party members because we will demand nothing less."**

We know what we want, we are no longer shy of demanding it and we have more ways of doing so loudly and forcefully every single day."

And she doesn't mince her words about those responsible for this public shambles:

"The process has exposed rich seams of division between the Leader's office and the Party Headquarters.

"Like aged, tired and starved coyotes the characters involved circle the picked-clean remains of their last good meal as they miss the point completely. The cadaver they are fighting over may look alive, but the monster of centralised command and control has died. This is merely a fight to the death over its zombie corpse."

And yet I am concerned when Peter Watt, former

general secretary in the age of "centralised command and control" launches into a defence of the defenders of Labour's members:

"If I was on the NEC I would be worried. I would worry because it looks like the leader's office has taken over the running of the party. It looks like the general secretary's role is being watered down. And the danger is that when all of this plays out, the role of the NEC in overseeing the good governance of the party is being watered down."

Since when have the Blairites been defenders of the role of Labour National Executive? What is going on here is a power struggle.

In one corner, you have some of those chosen to advise a leader elected to sweep away command and control who are themselves unwilling to let go.

In another corner, you have the corrupt and rotten remnants in the party machine of the old command and control regime, who manipulated and cheated to deliver what they thought their leader wanted, always happy (as [right-wing blogger] Luke Akehurst would have it) "in giving the left a kicking".

In between, you have those who want to clean up the party, empower the members, make the machine fit for purpose.

And though the press may write about the good, loyal, party staff reacting to change "with fury", the truth is rather different.

There are, of course, widely held concerns about change and how that will affect people's jobs. Legitimate trade union issues, and we sympathise with the staff though change is certainly needed. But the corrupt and rotten remnants amongst them are whipping up the fury, spinning and leaking and casting the blame widely, without concern about the damage to the party.

In fact, destruction is their strategy for survival: damage the leader, his staff, the NEC, the general secretary, it's all worthwhile, they're all on the wrong side. If they don't win, at least they'll take a few down with them. The culprits here complain about "the lack of leadership" but what really infuriates them is that the leadership is not the leadership they wanted.

Labour's national executive needs to get a grip — to ensure that the general secretary they appointed is allowed to do his job.

**And Ed needs to get a grip on his office — to see that they focus on doing their jobs not that of the party's executive or general secretary.**

- From Left Futures. More: [bit.ly/leftfutures](http://bit.ly/leftfutures).

# French killer targets Jews and Africans

By Ed Maltby

**Between 11 and 19 March 2012 a lone gunman shot dead three soldiers, three children and a teacher in the Toulouse region of France.**

Two of the soldiers were of North African descent and the third was from Guadeloupe; the teacher and children were Jewish, killed when the gunman randomly fired at crowds outside their Jewish school.

The killer – it is almost certainly the same killer – is still at large. We only know that he appeared to target his victims and plan the killings carefully.

We don't know the exact motivation for these horrific killings but the possibility that this is the act of a French fascist should be taken seriously.

In 2008, three members of the military unit that the murdered soldiers belonged to, the 17th RCG parachutists, were found to be part of a neo-Nazi



## Military neo-Nazis

group and were kicked out.

Far-right infiltration in the French army is not new. Fascist groups have a long history of involvement with the French military.

## COLONIAL

**In 1961 the Organisation of the Secret Army (OAS) was founded to fight against Algerian independence.**

Racist, colonialist sentiment was rife in the French establishment. In the same year riot police killed between 100 and 300

Algerian demonstrators in Paris, throwing the bodies into the Seine.

Since then for the French far right, ranging from large organisations like the Front National to small paramilitary ultra-right groups like Action Française, the natural territory has been military types, the countryside, and depressed white working-class communities.

The organised far right feeds into and feeds off establishment racism. Sarkozy, like his hero Thatcher, has always been conscious of using the politics of "identity" and nationalism to steal votes from the Front National to boost himself.

Sarkozy has given speeches calling the Catholic Church a better guardian of "morality" than the state. In 2010 he embarked upon a brutal mass deportation of Roma gypsies, an act without precedent in France since the deportation of Jews in World War 2.

As the 2012 election

campaign has heated up, the FN appear to be leading Sarkozy by the nose. Sarkozy gave an interview in which he declared that the number one issue of concern facing French people was the use of halal meat in their children's school dinners.

## INFLUENCE

**His minister Claude Guéant has warned against the anti-French influence of allowing foreign nationals to vote in local elections.**

The increase in mainstream politicians' use of racist tropes in response to the unrest caused by the crisis has given a new lease of life to the far right across Europe.

Given such power-hungry cynicism from capitalist politicians, can it come as a surprise that the fascists might take heart?

**If the labour movement does not fight to dispel the nationalist, racist response to the crisis, further racist violence is almost certain.**

# Whose school? Our school!

By an east London primary school teacher

**Last year Education Minister Michael Gove rushed through legislation which allows him to force schools to become academies against their wishes.**

Now hundreds of primary schools which are not achieving Gove's "floor targets" in Year 6 SATs are under threat of being taken out of the democratic control of local authorities, and put into the hands of private sponsors regardless of the opinions of staff, parents and governors.

## CAPITULATE

**Schools are being told: capitulate and hand over their school to the private sector, or democratically elected governing bodies will be disbanded and heads told to clear their desks.**

This is exactly what has happened in two schools in Haringey which refused to give in to harassment; another two have agreed to become academies in the face of intense pressure and victimisation from the DfE.

Downhills Primary School is an improving school that delivers an inspiring curriculum to a di-

verse community of children. The school has in fact met Gove's floor targets and argued that having been told to improve by their last Ofsted inspection, it was only fair that Gove wait until the report from their next Ofsted inspection before making a decision.

Sure enough, within the week Ofsted came a-knocking and put the school in special measures.

This set in motion the transition to academy.

The highly respected and well liked head teacher resigned and the governors were removed.

Nightingale Primary School has met a similar fate; the governing body was disbanded and replaced by an Interim Executive Board.

## CAMPAIGN

**However these schools and the communities they serve did not simply roll over.**

A bold campaign was quickly established by parents of the schools in alliance with teachers, students and community members, including local MP and former student of Downhills School David Lammy.

In January over 1000 people marched through Haringey demanding the right to make a choice over their future. The new

school song, written especially for the campaign and recorded with accompaniment of students on guitars (all pupils at Downhills get a year's free music tuition on the guitar, violin or cello) appeals to common sense.

*Save our school! Save our school! This is an S.O.S. to common sense,*

*Get us out of this mess, And help us save our school!*

The new policy will mean more schools will teach to the SATs test rather than provide children with a well-rounded creative curriculum that fosters a love of learning.

In Haringey the academy programme has put four local schools up in competition with each other rather than be able to continue long-term collaboration.

These schools will not longer benefit from the experience and expertise of a local authority, which enables them to share resources and skills; they will be forced to buy in services from the open market the cheaper the better.

They will be competing for pupils, pupils that preferably will not need a great range of specialist services if the school is to be even more cost effective.

Two representatives of the Harris Federation, the

government's preferred academy sponsor, have been appointed to the governing body of Downhills School. Coincidentally, Lord Harris, Carpetright mogul, got presented with an award from his close friend David Cameron only hours later.

Surely it defies common sense is to remove local people with such faith and investment in a place that they are willing to fight tirelessly to save it, from its running and replace them with anonymous private interests.

No amount of panicked hot-housing or booster classes to raise SATs results will save schools from this attack on our state education system. The government will simply move the goal posts in order to continue setting schools up to fail.

There is no other option but to stand firm, proceed with integrity and conviction both inside and outside the classroom, gather strength as a community of workers, parents and students and use our power to put every barrier in their way.

**We should also pose an alternative model of education based on the founding values of the comprehensive education system.**

# Assimilation or liberation?

By Paul Penny

**The government has launched a consultation on marriage reforms, which would allow gay couples in England and Wales to enter into civil marriage.**

We have already witnessed an unrestrained fit of homophobia from many religious leaders and anti-gay groups, including the Coalition for Marriage. They say same-sex couples may choose to have a civil partnership but no one has the right to redefine marriage for "the rest of us" – presumably those who support the existing patriarchal concepts of marriage and sexuality.

The key proposals of the consultation are:

- to enable same-sex couples to have a civil marriage (in a registry office or approved premises);

- to make no changes to religious marriages which will continue to be legally possible only between a man and a woman;

- to retain civil partnerships for same-sex couples and allow couples already in a civil partnership to convert this into a marriage.

- civil partnership registrations on religious premises will continue on a voluntary basis for faith groups and with no religious content;

- individuals will, for the first time, be able to change their gender without having to end their marriage.

## FURORE

**The current furore over gay marriage in the UK and the US raises questions about the gay assimilationist politics behind the current pursuit of same-sex marriage.**

It also raises questions about the gay rights movement's often passive tolerance of homophobic hate speech delivered under the pretext of religious expression and free speech.

In January Pope Benedict XVI kicked off the current spate of gay bashing with his apocalyptic warning that gay marriage is one of several threats to the traditional family unit and undermines the future of humanity itself.

The archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, has argued that the law should not be used as a tool to bring about social change.

The former archbishop, Lord Carey, has stated that gay marriage would be "cultural vandalism".

But homophobic rant of

the month came from the head of the Scottish Catholic Church, Cardinal O'Brien, who wrote in the *Sunday Telegraph* that marriage equality would represent a "grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right". He likened equal marriage rights to the reintroduction of slavery.

Ben Summerskill, chief executive of Stonewall argued that gay marriage is about the freedom of a small group of people to be treated in exactly the same way as everyone else.

But do the current proposals go far enough? Will the prevailing gay assimilationist politics behind the push towards gay marriage unwittingly result in the perpetuation of the unequal, patriarchal institution of marriage?

Is the Tory party using the issue to divert attention away from the economic crisis, public spending cuts and attacks on the NHS, and hoping to make itself "acceptable to metropolitan voters", to quote Conservative MP Francis Maude?

Shannon Gilreath, Women's and Gender Studies Professor at Wake Forest University School of Law in North Carolina, reminds us that in the early years of gay liberation, revolution was about de-stabilising the nuclear family unit and liberating sexuality.

## LIBERATION

**Gilreath argues that the gay liberation movement once aspired to fundamentally change the existing social system.**

Now, however, it appears to be "abandoning the communitarian conception of family in favour of a heterosexualised, privatised, monogamous family model".

She says, "it is appealing to believe that if gays get married then millenia of patriarchal/heteroarchal customs will somehow be reversed. There is no data to support this and 'equality' within this model can only perpetuate the model itself".

The consultations will last for twelve weeks and the opportunity to radically change the structure of marriage once and for all will not come about again soon.

**Meantime, it does appear that the revolutionary principles of queer liberation are being worryingly overlooked in favour of gay assimilation ideology. All at a pivotal moment in LGBT history.**

# Remember Bayard Rustin



Eric Lee

**This March marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Bayard Rustin, the American civil rights leader who passed away in 1987.**

Rustin is remembered as the organiser of the great 1963 March on Washington at which Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream” speech.

But to socialists, Rustin’s legacy is richer than that.

I first met Rustin some 40 years ago when he agreed to co-chair the Socialist Party together with Michael Harrington and a long-forgotten Jewish trade union leader named Charles Zimmerman.

Rustin was at that time already unfashionable on the left because of his strong opposition to Stalinism and his unflinching support for the state of Israel.

I was to learn later on in life that being unfashionable was nothing new for Bayard. He was never fashionable, and always championed the causes he believed in, regardless of how unpopular it might make him.

## CAREER

**He began his political career with a brief membership in the Communist movement, though he quickly resigned in the wake of the Hitler-Stalin pact.**

But his being an “ex-Communist” was to haunt him later in life, when Southern racists in the US Congress were to accuse of him of every sin they could think of.

Not only was Rustin a red, they would say, but he was a draft-dodger and a homosexual.

Rustin’s response was to say that he did indeed refuse to serve in the second world war due to his pacifist convictions — and he paid the price for that.

As for his sexual orientation — and this was back in 1963, long before the Stonewall uprising — he denied nothing. He told his accusers to raise that issue, if they dared, with his employers. Later in life, Rustin became an outspoken advocate of gay rights.

Today Rustin’s sexuality, his early flirtation with Stalin-

ism and his pacifism make him to a certain degree acceptable to some parts of the left.

But in his lifetime, his views on the Cold War and on Israel won him few friends on the left.

Rustin moved in the same circles as Max Shachtman, and eventually shared Shachtman’s views on issues like the Vietnam War. While many on the left supported a Communist victory in Vietnam, seeing Ho Chi Minh as some kind of Vietnamese George Washington, Rustin took a more nuanced view, and supported a negotiated settlement that might result in an American withdrawal from the country without necessarily giving Ho control of the south.

When the North Vietnamese army triumphed in 1975, Rustin spoke out at small, hastily-organized demonstrations called to highlight the plight of the “boat people”.

Rustin, like his mentor, the legendary A. Philip Randolph, was a lifelong supporter of the trade union movement. He set up the A. Philip Randolph Institute which for decades served as the centre for Black trade unionists and build strong ties between the Black community and trade unions. And he did this despite the overt racism of many of those unions — a racism he fought against from within the movement, and not as an outsider.

Like most Black leaders in the US in the early 1960s,

Rustin felt very close to the Jewish community and the state of Israel. The bonds formed in the early days of the civil rights movement between Blacks and Jews were still quite strong.

When this became unfashionable following Israel’s victory in the 1967 Six Day War and a bitter teachers’ strike in New York City, Rustin remained firm in his beliefs.

As tensions increased between the Black and Jewish communities, Rustin organized the Black Americans Support Israel Committee (BASIC) and continued to push for reconciliation between the two communities.

He was by no means uncritical of the Israeli government. On his visits to Israel he pushed hard for better and fairer treatment for the small community of “Black Hebrews” who had settled in the country’s south.

## MEMORABLE

**I met Bayard on a number of occasions but the most memorable, to me, took place in 1974.**

I was then a student at Cornell University, which had established a dormitory for Black students at the same time as many college fraternities were still “whites only”. Our small socialist student organisation campaigned against this renewed form of segregation, pitting us against the campus left which tended to support Black separatism as if it was somehow progressive.

Bayard organised a public message signed by himself and other key Black leaders supporting us, as we were standing in the great tradition of the fight against Jim Crow. And then he agreed to fly up to Cornell and give a public speech on the subject.

We were very concerned about security as emotions were running high, and naively asked Bayard over dinner what he wanted us to do — should we involve the campus police? Absolutely not, he said. The police are never welcome at our meetings.

Bayard spoke to a packed hall full of young Black students with a handful of white socialists in the back. I won’t say that he won them over — that would have been impossible, even for someone with Bayard’s considerable rhetorical skills.

But he did challenge them, and raised the question of — as he put it — “tribalism”.

**It was not fashionable to oppose Black separatism back then, in the early 1970s. But Bayard Rustin never gave a damn about being fashionable.**

# Why “default Stalinism” is still a problem



Dave Osler

**A Tory councillor in Redbridge recently described calls to limit tweeting in Town Hall meetings as “Stalinist”. It’s amazing what you can learn from the *Ilford Recorder*, I guess.**

When words are commonly used with that degree of hyperbole, you know that the concept has become virtually meaningless in the public mind.

Yet according to the home page of the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty website, the AWL’s *raison d’être* is to create a socialist alternative to “both capitalism and Stalinism”.

At first reading, terminology like that seems wilfully anachronistic, and perhaps a throwback to the days when people used to think it was a bit of a laugh to shout “get back to Russia” at lefty paper sellers.

You’re against capitalism? No surprises there; all socialists are against capitalism. But Stalinism? Really? Whatever their relative weights once were (and in my boyhood and early adulthood, capitalism and Stalinism were regarded as competing social systems) the latter is distinguished from the former by scarcely existing any longer.

Stalinism in the most common sense — the purges, the show trials, the gulags, those kitsch posters depicting musclebound Stakhanovites gloriously over-fulfilling the tractor production quota — disappeared over half a century ago.

Stalinism in the more precise definition — of a class society based on collective ownership of the means of production, legitimated by nominal adherence to Marxism — describes a phenomenon widespread until a couple of

decades ago.

But today there are just five countries left to which the designation could possibly apply. Only China has any importance on the world stage, and no serious commentator regards it as anything other than a vast seething capitalist sweatshop.

Vietnam is heading in the same direction, and Cuba is seemingly on the verge of following suit. North Korea would be regarded as a bit of joke were it not for the nukes. Oh, and there’s one other place, isn’t there? But most people would be hard pushed even to find the Lao People’s Democratic Republic on the map.

Solidarity with workers in those countries is essential, but perhaps not the most pressing internationalist task at this point.

## SLOGANS

**As I am not a member of the AWL, it would be impertinent of me to tell the organisation what its slogans do mean or should mean.**

But there is a fourth sense of the word Stalinism, over and above municipal bans on social media, the state terror that gripped Russia in the 1930s and satellite countries forced to model themselves on the USSR after the war.

Stalinism can also be defined as the ideology of those layers of the labour movement formed or influenced by Communist parties in non-communist countries. In Britain, that means primarily the CPGB tradition, today instantiated by the CPB.

Few contemporary leftist groupings or individuals are Stalinists of the crudest type. There are still a handful of sects for whom Uncle Joe was one of history’s good guys, but their combined forces can be counted in the dozens.

What chiefly remains is a mindset that has effectively become the default setting for many activists and functionaries who see themselves as socialists, and in some instances even Trotskyists.

The manner in which some minor league trade union bureaucrat guru can be called “Stalinist” is very different to the sense in which Lavretiy Pavlovich Beria was a Stalinist.

Frequently these people profess to have learned from historical experience. Formally speaking, many will tell you that they regard the USSR as a degenerated workers’ state, or perhaps even as state capitalist.

## SOFT

**But their soft Stalinism instead manifests itself in a tendency to stifle democracy, and a propensity to settle controversy by decree from the top.**

It is characterised by deafness to rational argument, and invocation of party or union discipline to close down debate whenever anybody disagrees with the leadership line.

It also leads them to a misunderstanding of world politics, marred by deference towards, or at best muted criticism of, various thuggish regimes. Unable to break from a “them and us” mentality when considering international affairs, mere verbal criticism of Assad or Ahmadinejad is dismissed as “objectively” lining up with imperialism.

So it is that members of Socialist Action and the Socialist Workers’ Party — the latter of which once liked to think of itself as the only authentically anti-Stalinist current on the far left — end up contributing regularly to the *Morning Star*, producing copy that is indistinguishable from lifelong CP-Bers.

After 1989, the Trots were supposed to bring the Tankies round to their way of thinking; but so far the process looks to have been largely the other way round.

It is testimony to the failure of Trotskyist currents that Stalinism remains hegemonic within the left of the labour movement, eerily exerting its monstrous gravitational pull from beyond the grave.

**So as far as I’m concerned, the AWL formulation is pretty much on the money.**

# Vultures out of the NHS!

The diversification of Richard Branson's Virgin Group seems to know no bounds. He's already done planes, trains, record companies and a bank. He now thinks that healthcare is the logical next step.

What motivates him? A deep-seated desire to deliver high quality health care, or a deep-seated desire to further line his and his shareholders' pockets?

Virgin now owns the majority share in Assura Medical, which is bidding to run frontline children's services across the whole of Devon. This would include community children's nursing, health visiting, child and adolescent mental health services and some safeguarding services.

Reports suggest that they are likely to be successful in their bid; and that is scary news.

There are already serious problems in the delivery of children's healthcare; long waiting lists for services such as speech and language therapy; heavy caseloads mean vulnerable families and at risk children are not given the service they need and deserve.

To exacerbate these problems by putting the health of the children in Devon in the hands of a profiteering company like Virgin (or any other set of private vultures) is revolting.

The stated criteria of the Devon tender is for the "most economically advantageous bid" to be accepted; this is nothing more than a race to the bottom.

Private providers will want to reduce staff numbers, attack pay and conditions and cut corners to maximise their moneymaking potential. This is already happening in healthcare; private contracting began under New Labour.

Serco, another company bidding for the Devon children's contract, were contracted in 2006 to deliver an out-of-hours GP service which was almost immediately identified as inadequate, corner-cutting and unsafe. An improvement notice was served in 2007, but Serco kept the contract.

In 2010, a boy died when an understaffed and overstretched out-of-hours service advised parents to put him to bed instead of sending a GP. Tragedies like this are almost inevitable when services are understaffed. Not only do the boy's family have to live with the tragedy, but so does the

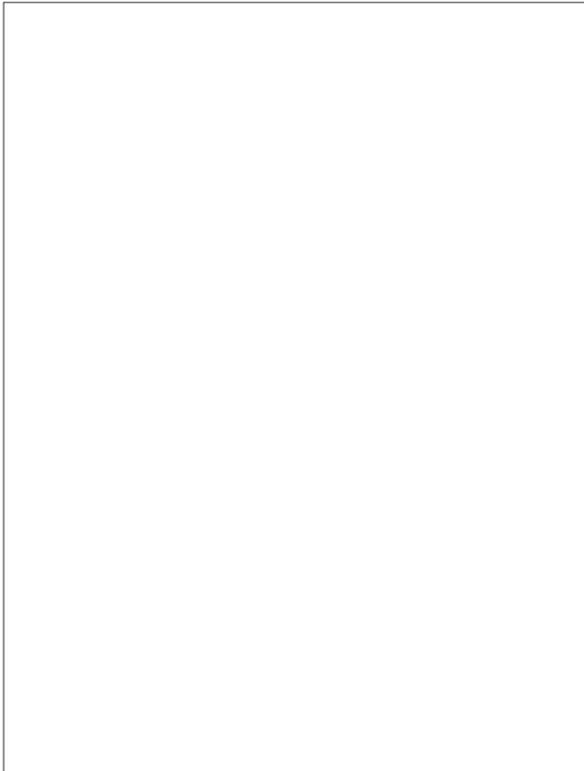


Photo: Vicki Morris

worker who was put in the position of having to work within a deficient, overstretched service that wasn't up to the job.

**The next step in campaigning to defend the NHS has to be local campaigns against contracts going to these private companies. Vultures out of the NHS!**

## Help AWL raise £20,000

Britain's roads are crumbling. But David Cameron has a brilliant idea to fix that.

He will get his mates in the city to compete to lease the most popular roads; they'll fill in the pot holes and, as is only fair, in return, they will get to levy tolls.

Whether it's VirginHighways, Serco or Balfour Beatty that gets the lease to the M25 etc, imagine what the less busy roads are going to look like in ten years time? And that's why the AWL is saving up to buy a donkey and cart.

Actually we need money to continue fighting Tory stupidities. Publishing *Solidarity* as a weekly, maintaining our website, and organising events such as our Ideas for Freedom summer school are key ways in which we do that.

We depend on donations, subscriptions and sales to help us.

Please consider:

● Taking out a monthly standing order to the AWL. There is a form at [www.workersliberty.org/resources](http://www.workersliberty.org/resources) and on this page. (Even a few pounds a month really does help.)

● Making a donation. You can send it to us at the address below (cheques payable to "AWL") or do it online at [www.workersliberty.org/donate](http://www.workersliberty.org/donate).

● Organising a fundraising event.

● Taking copies of *Solidarity* to sell at your workplace, university/college or campaign group.

● Getting in touch to discuss joining the AWL.

For more information on any of the above, contact us: tel. 07796 690 874 / [awl@workersliberty.org](mailto:awl@workersliberty.org) / AWL, 20E Tower Workshops, 58 Riley Road, SE1 3DG.



**Total raised so far: £10,345**

We raised £372 this week from a donation, an increased standing order and new subscriptions. Thanks to Karen, Liam, Lynne, and Max.

## Wipe the smirk off Osborne's face!

More confident now that even the unions which reject the public-sector pensions deal have relegated further national strikes to an undefined possibility in late April, chancellor George Osborne may cut income tax for incomes over £150,000 in the Budget on 21 March.

Only a short time ago, even the Tories thought it too risky, politically, to cut the 50% marginal rate at time when poverty is increasing for the majority of the population at a rate outstripping the Thatcher era, while the ultra-rich are doing well and inequality is increasing sharply.

Especially risky at a time when tax credits for low-paid workers are being cut in real terms, and cuts in housing benefit and other benefits are working their way through the system.

But, on the day before the Budget, it looks as if Osborne just might do it, claiming to "balance" it by raising the income threshold below which very low-paid workers pay no income tax.

The big story of the Budget will not be in the tax adjustments, but in the ongoing social spending cuts. Osborne is unlikely to announce significant change there, but those cuts are still working their way through.

An analysis in January by a right-wing thinktank, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, showed that so far only 12% of Osborne's planned cuts to welfare spending and only 12% of his planned cuts to spending on public services have been implemented. There is 88% still to come.

The cuts so far have not reduced the government's Budget

deficit, because they have depressed most incomes so much as to cut tax revenue even more than spending. Their real purpose is not budget-balancing, but to "use" the crisis to push down wages, harshen work regimes, and cut social overhead costs several notches for the sake of greater profitability in a capitalist revival, some years in the future.

As the IFS reported: "Over the next few years, the UK currently has the fifth-largest planned reduction in public spending as a share of national income [among relatively well-off countries]. Only Iceland, Greece, Estonia and Ireland are planning larger cuts..."

"If the current plans are delivered, spending on public services will (in real terms) be cut for seven years in a row. The UK has never previously cut this measure of spending for more than two years in a row... Over the seven years from April 2010 to March 2017, there would be a cumulative real-terms cut of 16.2%, which is considerably greater than the previous largest cut (8.7%)... from April 1975 to March 1982".

The setbacks over pensions do not mean that the 88% of cuts to come are guaranteed safe passage. Already, though belatedly, protest over the NHS has erupted as the Health and Social Care Bill comes near to passing into law.

**We demand of the union leaders simply that they use union resources to assist, nourish, publicise, and generalise every bout of working-class resistance, instead of downgrading local struggles in favour of promises of future one-day "spectaculars".**

### Standing order authority

To: ..... (your bank)

..... (its address )

.....

Account name: .....

Account no. ....

Sort code: .....

Please make payments to the debit of my account:

Payee: Alliance for Workers' Liberty, account no.

20047674 at the Unity Trust Bank, 9 Brindley Place, Birmingham B1 2HB (08-60-01)

Amount: £ ..... to be paid on the ..... day of ..... (month) 20 .....

(year) and thereafter monthly until this order is cancelled by me in writing. This order cancels any previous orders to the same payee.

Date .....

Signature .....

## Fight for a workers' government!

**The Labour Party's record in the pensions dispute has been dreadful. Labour leader Ed Miliband explicitly opposed the 30 June strike, and remained silent on the 30 November strike.**

Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls said something which was reported by the media as supporting the 30 November strike, but fell far short of that.

Labour leaders' criticism of the Government's plans was never better than weaselly. They did not even defend the rotten, supposedly long-term, settlement to cut public-sector pension costs which Labour made in government after 2005.

The Labour left and some union leaders rightly criticised Labour leaders on these points.

The Labour leaders should have done more, not just supporting the unions' industrial action but supplementing it with a political campaign:

- to defend and level up pensions across the board, public-sector, private-sector, and state;
- to expose inequality (recent research by the *Financial Times* has shown that for the first time ever people in the years soon after retirement are now on average better off than people in their 20s: alongside the millions with poverty pensions there are many very well-off older people);
- to demand taxes on the rich.

The Labour leaders were never going to do that, despite Ed Miliband's talk about "predators". The Labour left and union leaders should have criticised them on that, and conducted the political campaign themselves, as far as they could.

Too much of the agitation in the pensions campaign was limited to technical actuarial disputation about the long-term balance of the old schemes, rather than raising the class issues.

As an alternative to the Tory / Lib-Dem coalition government, we need, not a government with more optimistic actuarial assumptions, but a government with a different class allegiance.

The Tories and Lib Dems, loyal as they are to the bankers and the bosses, are out to use the economic crisis to shift the balance of class forces. They aim to ensure that an eventual capitalist revival comes on the basis of reduced wages, harsher workplace regimes, lower social overheads, and thus bigger profits.

**The labour movement needs to re-equip itself politically so that it can propose, as an alternative, a government as loyal to the working class as the Tories are to the capitalists. A government which deals with the crisis by taking aggressive measures against capital, like expropriation of the banks and high finance. A workers' government!**

## Two years that damn the union leaders

**A timeline of the pensions debacle from 2010 to the present day**

**[workersliberty.org/pensionstimeline](http://workersliberty.org/pensionstimeline)**

# Time for a re

By Martin Thomas

**To turn round the public-sector pensions campaign now will need not much less than a miracle.**

Activists will work for that near-miracle: to make the London strike by teachers and lecturers on 28 March so strong that it bounces the National Union of Teachers (NUT), at its 6-10 April conference, into organising an escalating series of regional strikes, and forces the leaders of the PCS civil service union, at last, after three months of prevarication, into calling strikes.

Even if the London teachers' and lecturers' strike cannot rise above the scale of a token protest, still, a token protest is better than quiet compliance, and a spirited token protest is better than a flat, perfunctory one.

One young teacher in a relatively well-unionised London school, in a left-wing NUT area, told *Solidarity*: "Despite my disappointment with the [NUT's decision to strike only in London] I feel there's scarcely any point attempting debate here as it's all so gung-ho in support of [the 28 March London NUT] strike action".

Don't get into arguments about perspectives or strategy, or criticisms of the leadership? Be positive? Build the next action, set everything else aside, and later there will be time for debate?

That attitude may seem militant and left-wing, but it has rotted the whole pensions campaign. It works to shield the union leaders from scrutiny, and to put the "gung-ho" activists in a position where they are disabled from responding to the questions of non-gung-ho union members with anything other than tinny "compulsory optimism".

To turn the union leaders round now, and to get them to organise action when 70-plus per cent survey majorities for a national strike on 28 March could not get them to do it, we will need to have a sudden surge of militancy from the rank and file erupt after months of squandered momentum. If the London teachers and lecturers cannot find the extraordinary bounce for that, it cannot be surprising, and the blame lies not with the London workers, but with the union leaders.

### FUTURE

**It will disable activists for future battles if the union leaders are allowed to get through their conference times (NUT, Easter; PCS, May) by offering the same old jam-tomorrow promises, and by blaming shortcomings on the supposed reluctance of workers to mobilise or on the most right-wing union leaders (the TUC's Brendan Barber, or Unison's Dave Prentis).**

Think back almost two years, to when the Cameron government took office. Everyone knew it meant big cuts. Before the election, George Osborne had said: "After three months in power we will be the most unpopular government since the war".

In the midst of slump, industrial resistance would be difficult. The union leaders in the public sector had not used the almost-decade of rising public sector budgets and payrolls, up to 2008, to build organisation and strength. They had instead barely kept union membership rolls steady. They had allowed real organisation, as measured for example by the spread of active workplace reps, to decline. They had trained members to think of strikes as one-day protests "about" issues, and strike ballots as devices to strengthen union officials' hands in negotiations more than as instructions from the members to the officials.

But now the union leaders said they would fight. After the Government outlined its plans in June-July 2010, the union leaders proposed a cunning scheme. The whole complicated myriad of attacks was hard to fight. Pensions were different.

With its plans for public-sector pensions, the Government was willy-nilly uniting public-sector workers. Millions of workers could be unitedly mobilised on a clear-cut, uniform issue, and a breach could be forced in the wall of Government attacks.

The civil service union PCS and the teachers' union NUT, especially, took that line, and, with their reputation as left-wing unions, were able to set the tone. From late 2010 onwards, much of the attention of union activists was focused on getting industrial action on pensions.

Left-wing unions said it was best to wait until right-wing unions could be nudged into line for united action. PCS leaders told their activists that PCS "could not defeat the Government on its own", and deduced that PCS could not even give a lead, or take its own action to force limited concessions on its members' pensions.

In June 2010 the government outlined its broad pension plans; the same month it legislated the RPI/CPI shift in pension uprating that same month; in October 2010 it announced an average 3% increase in workers' pension contributions (to start April 2012). September / October 2010 saw a wave of strikes and occupations by French workers and students against pension cuts, but the British unions did not budge. It was not until 30 June 2011 that the main left-wing unions struck (along with the ATL), and not until 30 November 2011 that most unions struck.

The mobilisation was slow; but it happened. We wrote in *Solidarity*: "The... mass public sector strike on 30 November... demonstrate[d] the potential social power of the working class to a generation of workers who had not experienced it before. It gave a glimpse of the mass labour movement as a vital social force".

Within three weeks union leaders would drop that glimpse into a black hole.

After 30 November, even the left union leaders announced no definite plans for further action, and organised no real debate among their activists and members. The line was: wait and see.

Workers waited. On 16 December the big unions in local government, Unison, Unite, and GMB announced they had agreed a formula with the employers to put to the Government (a variant of what local government employers had proposed back in September).

### FINAL

**On 19 December, the Government announced "final" outlines for all the big public-sector schemes (health, education, local government).**

The changes from the Government's previous outline, on 2 November, were "sideways" — improvements on accrual rates balanced by worsening in the formulas used to calculate "career average". The essence was unchanged: pay more, work longer, get less. Most unions said, in one tone or another, that they would pause and consult. Only PCS and the Northern Ireland public sector union NIPSA explicitly rejected the outline.

The media reported that the pensions dispute was more or less over. Over the Christmas / New Year holiday, activists had little chance to get a different message out.

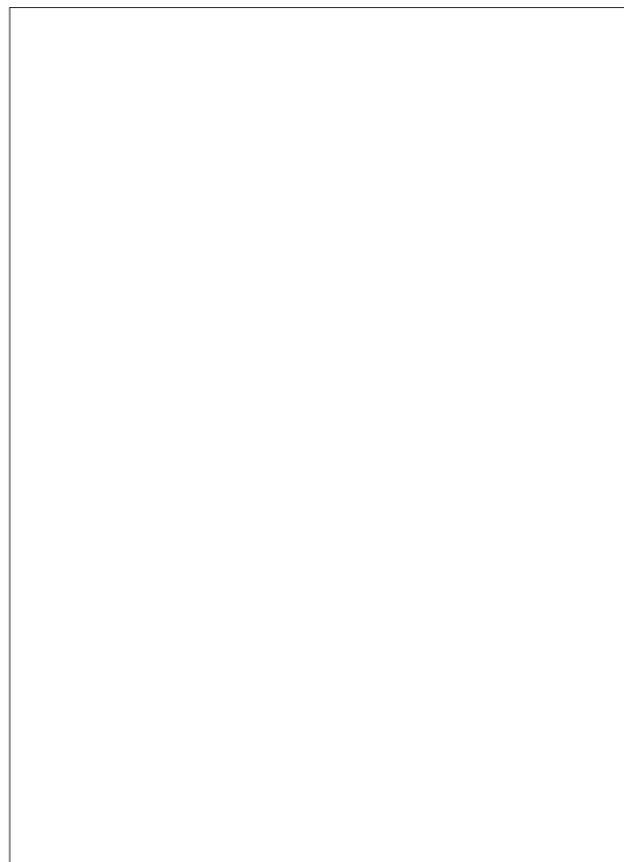
In January, when union activists were able to meet, NUT and Unite shifted towards rejection of the December terms. PCS's dominant faction, Left Unity, called a cross-union activist conference on 7 January; but blocked any vote on whether PCS should call further action. Not until late February, not until after two further months of lost momentum and confidence, did PCS, NUT, and UCU go for a strike on 28 March. Then they did it via "surveying" their members — "we know you voted for strikes on pensions, but do you *really* want another one?" — which further hurt momentum. They got 70%-plus majorities for strikes, and largely ignored them.

Some union activists say that the dispute was shaped by a lack of pressure from below on the union leaders. 30 June and 30 November rallies generally saw workers applauding bland speeches from the leaders rather than heckling them to demand more definiteness.

Workers faced the myriad of other attacks — cuts in jobs, forced conversion of schools to academies, etc. — which often hit them more sharply and quickly. They knew the union leaders were sluggish on those issues. They knew that the pension changes could not be fought by local action, so required national unions to take action. No wonder there was some mood of scepticism, of being pleased that the union leaders had at least organised *something*, of not expecting much more from them.

But when union members had a chance to discuss the issue, at union conferences, the union leaders felt they had to display a more militant tone. When union leaders called action, members responded well. The problem was not a general un-

# reckoning



willingness by workers to fight.

It was a lack of democracy and honest dealing by the union leaders in their relations with members. In June 2011, Dave Prentis said he was offering “not a token skirmish, but a prolonged and sustained war”. The PCS kept on asking members to “support the union’s campaign”, boasting about how strong that support was, yet being vague about what the campaign would be.

Workers’ Liberty, from the start, advocated a simple strategy:

- a rapid, sustained, and self-controlling campaign — not just one-off strikes, but also rolling and selective strikes financed by strike levies, and action short of strikes, and demonstrations, rallies etc.

- meetings (with debates and votes) on strike days, rather than just rallies; rank-and-file strike committees to control the dispute

- a public, political “Fair Pensions for All/Tax the Rich” campaign, connecting the public-sector pensions issue with the simultaneous and linked threats to state pensions and private-sector pensions, and advocating levelling-up.

- not counterposing the pensions campaign to battles on other fronts, but building on, boosting, and generalising those battles. “Fight the cuts? Where? On the ground. When? Now”.

The problem was not that this strategy was debated, and defeated in favour of another strategy. On a good day, even non-left union leaders like Dave Prentis of Unison and Paul Kenny of GMB would make speeches that sounded somewhat like what AWL was arguing.

## DEBATE

**Over two years of the campaign, there was never a proper debate. Nothing was ever pinned down.**

The response to what AWL argued was not so much “that’s wrong”, as, again and again, “that’s right, but it would be premature and might cut chances of broader unity to decide details now. For now, build the next action, and we’ll see...”

Unions never publicly demanded any specific concessions (no contribution increases for workers below a certain wage level, higher than the Government offered? smaller pension penalties for early retirement? better algorithms for calculating “career averages”?)

At the same time, the unions, especially PCS, have made their headline demand that the Government “negotiate” on the pension changes: that inescapably implies that the unions’ aim is some softened version of the changes. (Or else what is there to negotiate about? The Government said early on that

it would negotiate, and indeed has conceded, on details, but the main elements were non-negotiable). The union leaders never told their members what precise softening they were proposing in the long, long negotiations.

They equally never called for “levelling up”, although a major weakness on the union side is that, as a result of a rotten deal with the Blair government in 2005, every workforce is divided between workers on worse post-2005 schemes, with less to lose from the new changes, and older workers on pre-2005 schemes, many of them “bought off” by the Government’s agreement not to cut pensions for those within 10 years of retirement (except by way of the CPI/RPI change).

Everyone said that a series of one-day strikes could not force the Government to back down completely; but no union leader made definite proposals for more than one-day strikes, or opened a discussion on what could be won by such limited action as they were prepared to organise.

The result was that the strikes have been “about” pensions, rather than *for* particular demands. There was a sort of tacit agreement to pretend that the strikes were demanding a complete retreat by the Government, and to ignore the obvious fact that the action under discussion was inadequate for that. With the bigger unions now out of the pensions campaign, more or less whatever PCS, NUT, and UCU do, that tacit agreement has become surreal.

Fresh attacks by the Government are to be expected, now that Cameron and Osborne can see they got less resistance on pensions than they probably expected. The Government’s plan to shift to regional pay is only the first.

Morale has dipped after what’s happened over pensions; but that does not mean that future battles are lost in advance. We must expect moves to de-recognise unions in some workplaces and to cut union facility time, but union organisations are still intact.

## OFF-CENTRE

**Often in history workers have limply succumbed on what seemed the “main” issue, and the one most likely to rally a broad working-class mobilisation, and then an apparently secondary or off-centre issue has created a bigger stir.**

But that depends on what the new activists roused up by 30 November, and the left, learn from the last two years.

There would have been some debate on strategy in the unions, only the organised left in the unions failed to demand it. At NUT conference at Easter 2011, for example, the only amendment proposing future strategy was manoeuvred off the floor, not by the central union leadership but by the left.

Unison United Left, Unite United Left, Left Unity in PCS, the Socialist Teachers’ Association — none has gone out to the broad membership of their unions, at any time over the last two years, to argue a distinct line from the union leadership (other than in Unison UL’s opposition to Prentis’s December acquiescence).

The main distinctive call from the Socialist Workers’ Party and the Socialist Party has been for “a general strike”. If it is analysed, the SP’s and the SWP’s demand has really been that a different, more revolutionary-sounding, name be attached to what the unions were *already* planning, on 30 June or 30 November; or that we should pretend that a big enough 30 June or 30 November would soon elicit a bigger version (the SP has habitually suggested a *two-day* public sector strike which will somehow “bring down the Tories”).

Such agitation has reinforced, rather than cutting against, the union leaders’ line: “No time for debate on ‘details’! Wait for, or build, the next big action, then we’ll see”.

The pensions campaign signals the debacle of the bulk of a whole ageing generation of the left in the unions — a generation of activists who entered trade-unionism in the years before the miners’ strike of 1984-5, who have now “risen” to prominent full-time or facility-time positions, who remain left-wingers in general terms, but who have trained and habituated themselves in manipulative, bureaucratic, short-sighted trade-unionism. The best activists from that generation now need to strike out and develop a new left with new young activists.

**The way to unity and energy in the new struggles comes through division, rancour, and recrimination now over the pensions campaign.**

# Battles can win

**In August 2011 Lambeth Council in south London agreed to a deal saving all the jobs in its library service, following the workers announcing they would strike.**

By combining a high-profile public campaign with the threat of strike, the workers saved every job in the service, and reading groups, story times and enquiry services will continue.

Rawmarsh School, in Rotherham, in mid 2011, wanted to cut 25 jobs. The NUT immediately called a members’ meeting, gave the case for industrial action and balloted. Once they started strikes, they escalated, eventually to three days a week. All decisions on negotiation, strike dates, tactics for picket lines and communication with the wider labour movement were put to the NUT group at the school at regular meetings. Result: no compulsory redundancies.

The two examples show that sustained, democratically-controlled trade-union action which reaches out to win wider working-class support can win, even in difficult times.

**No-one expects union leaders to be able to generate militancy where there is none, or to guarantee to win every dispute. What they can do is support, nourish, publicise, and generalise every spark of resistance as it emerges, and communicate with members honestly and democratically.**

## IDEAS FOR FREEDOM 2012:

### What is capitalism and can it last?

**29 June-1 July, north London  
workersliberty.org/ideas**

Ideas for Freedom is an event which combines a serious approach to Marxist ideas with a commitment to activism in the workers’, student, feminist and other social movements. We emphasise accessibility, mutual education and free debate. Weekend tickets brought before the end of April are £22 waged, £14 low-waged/HE students, £6 unwaged/FE/school students. Day tickets also available.

Workshops, talks and discussions will include:

- How do we make socialism a force again? • What’s wrong with conspiracy theories? • The NHS we had, the one we have and the one we want • Roma communities and the rise of the far right across Europe • Where is the “Arab Spring” going? • Iran: war and solidarity • In the Diamond Jubilee year: 1649, when British revolutionaries established a republic • The Minority Movement union rank-and-file movement of the 20s and its lessons for trade unionists today • Is Marxism “Eurocentric”? • The Marxism of C.L.R James • Introduction to Marxism sessions

Ideas for Freedom will open on Friday 29 June with a meeting to celebrate the massive workers’ struggles which convulsed Britain in 1972, paving the way for the downfall of Edward Heath’s Tory government, with film footage and speakers who were involved.

## Pasok heads towards new coalition

By Theodora Polenta

**Former Greek finance minister Evangelos Venizelos has been elected leader of Pasok and announced the start of a campaign for the general election due in late April or early May.**

Venizelos joined Pasok in the dark years of 1989. He was not part of the progressive left wing forces that emerged from the battle against the junta (1967-74) and formed Pasok as a vibrant movement, breaking from the Centre Party.

He was active in the Macedonia naming dispute of the early 1990s, when the darkest forces in Greece opposed the use of the name "Macedonia" by the newly independent neighbouring Republic of Macedonia.

He was in cabinet positions during all the three last Pasok governments (Andrea Papandreou, Kostas Simitis, George Papandreou).

As minister for Justice in the Simitis government (1996), Venizelos authored a law according to which ministers are practically immune to public prosecution in cases of political corruption. Not even one politician could be prosecuted effectively in the huge financial scandals that have shaken Greece the last decade.

In the 2007 Pasok leadership elections, Venizelos was defeated by George Papandreou, receiving 38% of the vote against 56% for Papandreou. Venizelos's manifesto was for a further shift of the Pasok movement to the centre and the breaking of its links with trade unions, the conversion of Pasok into a party similar to the US Democratic Party. Papandreou gained the support of the rank and file of Pasok, its "historical" members, and the trade unions.

### SURVIVAL

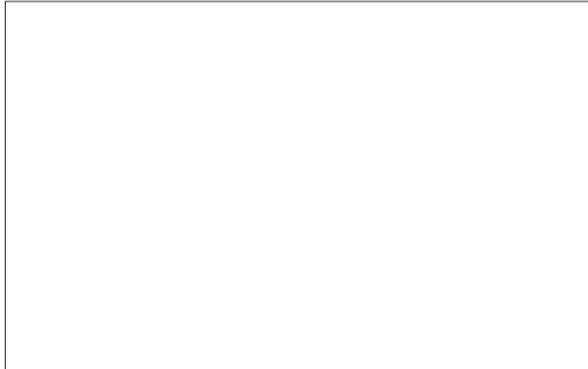
**Now a sizeable "chunk" from the old historical Pasok and the trade union bureaucracy are shifting their support to Venizelos, in the short-term interests of political survival.**

Ironically, Christos Papoutsis posed as the left wing candidate. He has been the minister for Citizen Protection; recently passed a law to protect the police against prosecution; voted for both of the two memorandum policies and laws, without a word of criticism of the Troika. That record, and his past as a maritime minister who covered up the Samina ferry tragedy that led to the death of eighty people, leaves him no space to claim left-wing credentials.

Papoutsis and the third candidate, Stefanos Tzoumakas, were excluded from the poll because Pasok's new constitution, as altered by George Papandreou, requires each candidate to acquire the signatures of at least one third of the National Committee.

However, political pressure was exercised on Venizelos by the EU/ ECB/ IMF Troika to eliminate the other two candidates.

On Sunday 18 March Venizelos was officially elected as



### Evangelos Venizelos

the new president of Pasok.

Voting took place in electoral centres that were "protected" by police forces. The much celebrated participation of the party members reached 200,000 - compared to 770,000 in the 2007 poll that led to the election of George Papandreou and the defeat of Venizelos.

Venizelos's slogan was "We are starting again". His only plan is the continuation of the memorandum policies and the securing of the interests of the Greek bondholders.

He stated that he intends to safeguard Pasok traditions, but in the name of securing Greece's places on the Eurozone and consequently the interest of the most dynamic section of the Greek capitalism Venizelos has accepted the abolition of democracy, the compromise of Greece's sovereignty, poverty, and more. And all that to get Greek bondholders their money back...

Pasok's old division was the vague one between the progressive forces and the forces of conservatism. Pasok's new dividing line is against the "the forces of extremism and the front of dishonesty".

Venizelos attacks the left for a "lack of responsibility and empty promises". He emphasizes that Greece needs a "real plan" and a powerful government; but the only plan he has is the memorandum.

Venizelos is ready to open the way to a third memorandum: the Troika and the IMF have asked for an extra €14 billion cuts in Greece for 2012 and 2013 and further reductions in pensions and wages.

Despite his proclamations that he is aiming at a Pasok victory in the coming election, Venizelos does not even believe it himself. He is ready for a new coalition government with the conservative party New Democracy (ND). ND will govern and the ministers of Pasok will play a secondary role.

It looks impossible for ND to form a government after the coming elections. It is considered feasible for ND and Pasok combined together to win 151 seats, enough for a (narrow, unstable) majority.

Venizelos's closet political allies are stating clearly their

intention to be part of a potential coalition government led by ND leader Samaras. The transformation of Pasok to a centre party, detached from the labour movement, from its grass roots, from its ideology and history, and exclusively focused on government power, may provides some rescue for its parliamentary life. But it will burn its links with the working-class people who have supported it and voted for it during the last two decades.

A lot of middle-rank "historical" party members left Pasok in protest at Venizelos and all the manipulations that took place in order to impose Venizelos as the only viable candidate. "Only Venizelos was permitted to succeed George Papandreou in a party that is under the absolute control of the capitalist elite", stated a member of the national committee after handing in his resignation.

More grass-roots and "historical" Pasok members may shift to the new "Social Agreement for Greece in Europe" party announced by former Pasok cabinet ministers Louka Katseli and Haris Kastanidis.

### DOTS

**Their party motto is: "Between the destructive 'yes to all, and the left's utopian and irresponsible 'no to all', there is an alternative proposal".**

They are trying to attract people that believed in a social Pasok. They believe in a memorandum with dots of social justice. Kastanidis made no word of criticism even during the most unpopular turns of George Papandreou's government. As a minister, he viciously attacked the refuse workers' struggle, hired strike breakers, and propagated the privatisation of the refuse collection services.

Louka Katseli was the minister of Labour in Papandreou's government. She implemented the first memorandum anti-working class politics which led to the destruction of the pension funds and raised only a timid criticism of the second memorandum, on the abolition of the collective bargaining agreements.

The alternative solution for working-class Pasok members does not lie with Katselis and Kastanidis, or with the Democratic Left, which has been promising to conduct tougher negotiations with the Troika.

Only the revolutionary left can provide a viable alternative to the crisis of the capitalist system, by mobilising the working class to resist the offensive of the bosses on the industrial plane as well as by contributing to the creation of a political mass force to provide an alternative to this crisis-ridden system.

**The revolutionary left has argued in the working-class movement for default and abolition of the debt; for nationalisation of the banks and workers' control; against Syriza's technical solutions about Eurobonds and renegotiation of the debt; and against the sectarianism of KKE, which first attacked the slogan of defaulting on the debt as "ruling class-opportunism" and then adopted it later on without a word of criticism.**

## Greece: a workers' government?

Discussion article by Rhodri Evans

**According to the latest opinion poll in Greece, on 15 March, the two main parties in Greece, the ones which European Union leaders hope will form a new coalition after the election due in late April or early May, stand at 23% (New Democracy) and 13.5% (Pasok).**

In the last two years they have lost half the support they had in the last parliamentary elections, in October 2009.

In recent weeks people turning away from ND and Pasok have begun to cluster, not yet around the revolutionary left, but around the reformist left that has opposed the bailout "memorandum" cuts packages.

In the 15 March poll, the Greek Communist Party (KKE), Syriza, and Democratic Left (a splinter from Syriza), totalled 35.5%, about the same as ND and Pasok. Some other recent polls have given them even higher percentages.

To deal with the current crisis, the revolutionary left in Greece has to raise demands like nationalisation under workers' control of the banks and big business, demands which can be implemented only by a government, and not by local struggles, however militant. If the revolutionaries demand the immediate overthrow of the current "technocratic" government, or of a future ND/ Pasok coalition, they need to offer some answers as to what sort of government they want instead.

We should always be cautious about offering tactical demands from a distance. But experience from history suggests three levels at which the questions about government could be given answers of a type that will help take the struggle forward and speed up the crystallisation of a real revolutionary socialist force in the Greek working class.

The first is general advocacy of the *type* of government which we want to replace the pro-cuts regimes: a *workers' government*, a government as loyal and as accountable to the working class as the present Greek government is to the bondholders, the bankers, and the capitalists. "Of all parties and organisations which base themselves on the workers", as Leon Trotsky put it, "we demand that they break politically from the bourgeoisie and enter upon the road of struggle for a workers' government... At the same time we indefatigably develop agitation around those transitional demands which should in our opinion form the program of the 'workers' government'."

### RECOMPOSE

**The second is to look to the organisational recomposition of the Greek labour movement.**

The big union federations, GSEE and ADEDY, have as far as I know been very bureaucratic. The union confederation leaderships, financed mainly by allocations from government welfare spending rather than by union dues (which are scarcely collected), stand above a very large number (about 4000) of individual unions, mostly quite small, often limited to single workplaces or cities.

But new connections have been made, notably in the neighbourhood struggles against the new property tax and the threat to cut off electricity to non-payers of that tax. Revolutionaries should argue for the consolidation of those connections into "neighbourhood commissions" like those in Portugal in 1974-5 or in Chile in 1972-3 and for the development of those "commissions" towards real workers' councils. They should explain that those workers' councils could begin to promote workers' control locally and become the

base for a workers' government.

Thirdly, revolutionaries should put the reformist left to the test by demanding that they form a united front and agree to collaborate in the creation of an alternative government which would refuse to make the cuts demanded by EU and IMF; nationalise the big banks and businesses under workers' control; and seek to impound the wealth of Greece's ultra-rich.

The approach would be similar to the call which the Bolsheviks made in Russia in 1917 for the reformist left, the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, to break with the "capitalist ministers" in the Provisional Government and form an administration which the Bolsheviks pledged to side with against reaction and to oppose only peacefully.

Paradoxically, the Bolsheviks won over workers and peasants from the Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries as much by "supporting" them in that sense as by flatly opposing them, and they eventually overthrow the bourgeois Provisional Government on the back not of agitation to bring it down but of "defence" of it against the proto-fascist Kornilov revolt.

Greece is not Russia in 1917. It does not (yet) have workers' councils or dual power. Yet the approach of putting the reformist left to the test could still be valid.

KKE strongly, and maybe unbreakably, opposes a united front. Agitation for a united front could still be a good way for revolutionaries to win over workers attracted to KKE by its pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric.

**The Greek revolutionary-socialist group Xekinima, linked to the Socialist Party in England, advocates something like this united-front agitation, and as far as I can see is right to do so.**

## “You have to oppose both governments”

**Ayob Rahmani of the International Alliance in Support of Workers in Iran (IASWI) spoke to Solidarity**

### What do you think about the build-up to war?

I do not think full-scale war — invasion of Iran by the US and its allies — is going to happen. It seems impossible, given the problems the US and its allies have in Afghanistan and Iraq. Politically and militarily they failed to achieve what they intended.

Iran is a big country with around 75 million people and with a bigger and stronger army in a strategic position in the Middle East.

They don't have the military capacity to put troops into Iran. US is a declining economy and cannot afford another big war.

However, there is a possibility of a military strike against Iran, from the air or the sea. The US has the biggest military force in the world, and no other army can stand up against it in a conventional war.

If they strike against Iran they can destroy military bases, missile bases, factories, and infrastructure in Iran and bring down its military and economic capability. This is the danger.

### And they could give the green light to Israel?

At the moment Israel is more keen to strike Iran than the US. The pro-Israeli lobby has been pressuring the American government to strike against Iran. But Israel will not strike Iran without getting the green light from the US. They are trying to persuade the US and the British to get broad agreement, that if the situation gets out of hand from their point of view, there will be a strike against Iran.

The main point here is the Islamic regime's strategy — the fact that it wants to be recognised as a major power in the region. Neither Israel nor the West want that. But the Iranian government is not against American imperialism or against capitalism — the Iranian economy is part of the global capitalist economy.

Iran still is a regional power, despite the eight-year war with Iraq. But the problem for the Iranian government remains that the West doesn't recognise it as a major power; they don't trust them. The Iranians have their foreign policy in the region — in Afghanistan, with their support for Hamas and Hezbollah — and the Americans and the West in general are opposed to this policy. And of course the Iranian regime has a good relationship with the Syrian regime and fully supports Assad's regime.

### ENGULFED

**If either America or Israel make a strike against Iran they are going to embroil themselves in a regional conflict, conducted by Iranian proxies in the region...**

That is true. The regime will try to attack US military bases, troops and interests in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and elsewhere, and will try to attack Israel directly or indirectly by using Hizbollah in Lebanon. Even some Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, would not be immune from such attacks. In such a scenario, the whole region would be engulfed by a conflict with unforeseen consequences. This is what now makes America and its allies cautious in making a decision to strike against Iran militarily.

We should stand against the threat of military action from a working-class point of view.

But America is very good at waging proxy war. It has been successful at this since the Second World War — and not so much at full-scale wars. It was successful in arming the mollahs in Afghanistan and overthrowing the Soviet Union-backed government in the 1980s. Another example is the success of the US-backed Contra paramilitaries in the war against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

### How does the situation in Syria affect the calculations?

The US wants to see the back of the Assad regime. But they can't do what they did in Libya — military strike by Nato. The Americans (but also Qatar and Saudi Arabia) are supporting the opposition but so far they haven't been successful. In Homs the Syrian regime have suppressed the opposition and destroyed part of the city, killing many civilians; but arms are being provided to some sections of the opposition: the Free Syrian Army, for example.

The Syrian regime is one of the most repressive in the Middle East. But there are different communities living together — Sunni, Shia Allawi (the biggest group), Kurds, Druze and Christians — and they are not united against the regime. Many still support Assad, because they fear what might happen afterwards. We don't know the opposition. Some of them are definitely Islamic fundamentalist. Fear of that gives the regime a base. But that does not mean the regime will survive.

If the Assad regime falls Iran will lose its most powerful ally in the Middle East.

**Abdolreza Ghanbari, teacher, faces the death penalty in Iran for “enmity towards God”**

### What position do you take on the policy of America and its allies towards Iran?

Because of the sanctions the economy is deteriorating very quickly. Even with all the planned sanctions Iran will be able to sell some of the oil at lower prices to India, China, or some other countries, but it will still have a big effect.

The key sanction is the one they have put on the Iranian Central Bank. They can't spend dollars even on basic food imports.

The economic sanctions and forthcoming oil embargo (from July) is against the Iranian government, but is more of a burden to the Iranian working class and the majority of the people. We have a very rich capitalist class in Iran and they can buy whatever they want — including food and consumer goods.

The official rate of inflation, according to the government, is 22%. But the real rate of inflation over the last six months, according to independent economists, is 40%. The price of basic food has increased. The Rial is in free fall and has lost half of its value against the US dollar in the last two months. There is a fear that in the near future there will be a scarcity of food. Socialists must condemn these sanctions.

Unemployment is already high and it will increase further. Iranian factories need to import raw materials and parts and this they can't get. In many factories people haven't been paid for months.

We should not forget the example of the sanctions on Iraq in the 1990s. Even with the Oil for Food programme, 500,000 children died.

We also have to stand against military action. The imperialist powers do not have the right to strike against Iran. They are pursuing their own interests, not those of the Iranian people. Working people in Britain or in America and elsewhere do not have any interest in any war.

But at the same time we should not forget that the Iranian regime will use the economic sanctions and the possibility of a military strike as an excuse to increase the suppression of the people. The regime will try to militarise the political atmosphere. That is good for them.

I was in Iran when the Iran-Iraq war started. At the time Khomeini said the war was a “gift from God”. In a sense he was right. The war killed 500,000 people in Iran, maybe the same in Iraq, but for the ruling class it was an excuse to suppress the Iranian working class, the left, socialists and women, and impose a dictatorship, with their rigid interpretation of Islam, on society which continues to this day.

During and after the revolution in Iran in 1979, there were independent working-class organisations in oil and other industries and strong left-wing political parties. They used the war as an excuse to suppress all of this.

Immediately after the end of the war in 1988, they executed thousands of political prisoners.

When socialists and progressive forces have a rally or demonstration against the threat of military action or sanctions against Iran, they should not forget what is happening in Iran now to the workers and others. They should say what is the nature of the regime. But this is not what the Stop the War Coalition is doing.

At a demonstration at the American Embassy organised by the Stop the War Coalition in December last year, we went, and had our own banner and so on. There was a whole series of speakers, but none of them mentioned the political prisoners in Iran's prisons. This is wrong.

But unfortunately this is the overall policy of the left in the UK. For a left group like the SWP, anti-imperialism means that you stand even with the reactionary forces against imperialism.

Just before the invasion of Iraq, two million people were on the streets of London. I was one of them. It was good. But

there was nothing on that demonstration to say we do not agree with Saddam Hussein or with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Imagine you are a worker activist in prison in Iran. When you hear that socialists, trade unionists and progressive organisations in the West are staging a campaign regarding Iran, you naturally expect that they support you and call for your freedom. But we do not see this.

Worker activists in Iran are paying a heavy price. For example, Mansour Osanloo, the president of the Tehran bus workers' syndicate, spent nearly five years in prison just for setting up an independent working-class organisation. And many of these worker activists are in prison as we talk. How can the left demonstrate against sanctions and the threat of military strike against Iran but not demand freedom for trade unionists and other political activists?

Socialism is the movement of the working class. We should base our theory on the practice and interests of the working class.

You have to stand against both governments. To do anything else is not going to defeat imperialism.

The SWP said they opposed the Iran-Iraq war but said we should not oppose Khomeini's regime because the war was a proxy war on behalf of Western imperialism.

We knew that the West were mostly supporting Iraq against Iran. But also at a certain stage the West tried to shift the balance because they didn't want either Iraq or Iran to win and become a major power in the region — that would unbalance things for their Israeli ally.

During this period the SWP said that the working people of Iran should not go on strike in the military section of the economy. Why not? Because, they said Iran was fighting imperialism — Iran's enemy is supported by imperialism.

Yet a significant part of the Iranian left were against the war but at the same time against the Iranian regime. They stood for peace, for democratic rights and for workers having the right to organise.

The rhetoric that the Iranian regime use against imperialism or that the Taliban use against imperialism is just rhetoric. They make this rhetoric from a reactionary point of view — to help them suppress their real enemy, the working class.

### STRIKES

#### What state is the Iranian opposition in?

There is no big organisation, but there are networks of committed people, using the internet to communicate and so on. The Iranian government does not tolerate independent organisations of any kind, especially trade unions. From 2005, when bus workers and sugar workers set up independent workers' unions, they were immediately suppressed.

Iranian people were very aware of what was going on with the Arab uprising. In February 2011 there was a demonstration in Tehran in support of the uprising in the Middle East and north Africa, but it was immediately put down. That indicates that the opposition is there.

There are many strikes and demonstrations in Iranian factories, big and small. These are over factory closures, non-payment of wages and so on. I don't think the regime will have the same success in using the war to repress workers.

But increased poverty won't automatically lead to a revolution. Of course there may come a time when people can't take any more. But this cannot be predicted. On the other hand, the government is aware of this danger and that puts pressure on them. This guides the reasoning of the US and EU. They are trying to get the Iranian government to the negotiating table and impose their own policy on them.

The red line for the Iranian regime is to stay in power. If they realise they can't survive without compromising, they will back down.

Ahmedinejad talked about “wiping Israel off the map of the world”. Then people who support military action said “this is the most irrational regime in the world. They will use the nuclear bomb against, for example, Israel”.

But how do you define irrationality? The Israeli government has the nuclear bomb — are they rational? Or the US? Or the British government?

I am not defending the Iranian regime but they are rational. They know their own interests. They use this phrase about Israel to get more support in the Middle East.

But they do not go to war against Israel. They support reactionary forces against Israel because of their own interests. They say they are against the powers in the West, they are against imperialism. But at the same time until recently they have had a good relationship with the big European countries, they are part of global capitalism.

**But the Iranian regime is not just another capitalist regime. It is a theocracy, it is fascistic, it is more ruthless...**

Yes, they are ruthless, yes, it is a theocracy, but that does not mean it is irrational. Any government can be irrational.

*Continues on page 10*

# Merseyside: new challenge from far-right

**Phil Dickens is an anti-fascist activist involved in Liverpool Anti-Fascists (LiverAF). He spoke to *Solidarity* about recent clashes with the English Defence League (EDL) and their splinter organisations**

**What's the current situation with street-based fascist activity in the north west? Who are the "North West Infidels"?**

The North West Infidels (NWI) are a splinter group from the English Defence League (EDL). Whilst the EDL bill themselves as "anti-extremist" and liberal/civic nationalists concerned with militant Islam, the NWI have taken a more overtly racist, ethno-nationalist tone, as well as declaring open season on the left and the organised working class.

Most of their activity to date has been around the northern mill towns and areas of Greater Manchester. Rochdale has been a particular favourite, and Bury and Hull have also been targeted. They come from the same street-activist tendency as the EDL, but want to be more militant and not to be kettled in a car park. The electoral collapse of the BNP and the disillusionment on the far-right with the EDL leadership has allowed them to do that.

**What happened around fascist provocation against an Irish Republican march in Liverpool on 18 February?**

We saw the local fash talking about targeting it and, basically, we under-estimated what would happen. There was talk by some of them about getting tooled up and confronting people who stray from the march outside the city centre; the expectation was that there would be a local mob

shouting from the sidelines, so we organised for that.

Meanwhile, the "Combined Ex-Forces" group (CXF) called in their supporters for a national mobilisation, and there were posters in Manchester saying the IRA were in town. These people genuinely believed that they were here to face down a Republican paramilitary organisation. Loyalists harangued the march from its start, whilst the CXF and NWI were joined by veterans and the British Legion in town. It was a tactical mistake on our part, but also a really horrible situation.

LiverAF ended up having to steward a tiny youth demonstration against police brutality in the city centre and lead it to safety, whilst the Irish march had to turn back under threat from the police. It didn't so much highlight the far-right's strength — the conditions on that day were unique — but more our own organisational weakness.

## TREND

**To what extent are these phenomena local, and to what extent part of a national trend?**

The NWI have only recently come to Liverpool, as a result of linking up with Liverpool EDL when the entire division "went rogue" and re-branded themselves as the "Scouse Nationalists".

There's a lot of crossover, but basically the NWI here have ties to both the local BNP branch and long-standing neo-Nazis formerly in groups like the British Freedom Fighters. The Scouse Nationalists keep some distance because there are tensions over the white power/neo-Nazi imagery and the obsession with paedophiles, but they're still not "moderate" nationalists in the vein of, say, the EDL and British Freedom Party.

**How are local anti-fascists organising?**

The events around the Republican march basically served as a wake-up call. Whilst many of us have been overtaken with other issues, from the NHS to pension strikes to Workfare, the fascists have been building in confidence by picking on Occupy Liverpool as an easy target.

Since then, we've regrouped, drawn in new militants, rebuilt links with others in the region, and sharpened our focus. We were able to provide security for an Occupy General Assembly so that the fash didn't show, and mobilise against a BNP stall in the city centre with half an hour's notice. We made very definite tactical and organisational mistakes, but we're learning from them and hopefully growing stronger as a result.

**What do you think anti-fascist activists should do nationally?**

There's a definite need for a national network of militant anti-fascists. Some have already tried to initiate this and we will be looking at supporting that in whatever way we can, but particularly in the North West there is a growing sense of urgency about it.

Unite Against Fascism are all but ignoring the NWI, and even if they weren't they wouldn't be a suitable vehicle for opposing it. What we have always needed is militant anti-fascism: based on physical and ideological opposition to the far-right, and working-class unity. The EDL was a sign of fascism moving back to the streets and away from electoralism, and the NWI/CXF/Scouse Nationalists are the result.

**They are able to mobilise quickly, and nationally, and to beat them we need to make sure we can respond in kind.**

From page 9

For example, the Israeli government attacked south Lebanon in 2006 and were defeated by Hizbollah. That policy was irrational, it was against their own interests.

**But the Iranian regime with a lot to fight for will want to ruthlessly maintain its own power; so the very fact of Iran getting nuclear weapons makes for a dangerous situation.**

As socialists we oppose all nuclear weapons anywhere. The Iranian regime says that it does not want to build a nuclear weapon. Indeed no one can prove that the Iranian regime is building the nuclear bomb. They are suspicious. In my opinion the Iranian regime is using the process of talks and wrangles over the enrichment of nuclear material as a lever, to say to powers in the West that Iran should be recognised as a major power in the Middle East. For example, alongside Turkey, which is playing a bigger role in the region.

The Iranian regime also thinks that if they can get nuclear weapons no one will dare to attack Iran or try to change the regime. They look at North Korea. The US and the West don't like the policy of North Korea (just as they don't like Iranian foreign policy) but they don't dare to strike against them.

**But the power play is making the west more hostile...**

The regime knows, as we know, that the US and Israel have a devastating capacity to destroy not just Iran's military capability but also its infrastructure and economy. If the regime survived such an attack it would be ruling a country with a destroyed and ruined economy. Faced with any real possibility of that, the regime has to give up its regional ambitions and obey the terms dictated by Western or even regional powers. At the same time the Iranian regime knows that the US has to take their response into account when making a decision to strike Iran. The regime is not immune to the sanctions; it is very dangerous economically and politically for them. If the Iranian regime calculates it is going to fall, it will retreat, but not before that. Now it says it is ready for talks.

**What should we do about solidarity and opposition to sanctions and war?**

We should do our best to organise a big campaign against sanctions and the threat of military action against Iran. But at the same time we should not forget that the Iranian regime does not represent the people.

We should support the Iranian working-class struggle and progressive movements in Iran, and we should highlight this in our campaign against sanctions and military treats. Trade union organisations in the UK should say they want to investigate what is happening to worker activists in Iran and call for freedom for political prisoners. That will encourage the activists in Iran.

**But this cuts across the dominant ideology of the left and some trade union organisations.**

• [www.workers-iran.org/](http://www.workers-iran.org/)

# Not surveys but agitation

By Stuart Jordan

**It has become habit for public sector unions, even when they have a legally-valid ballot mandate for strikes, to conduct "surveys" of their members to see whether there is a mood for further action.**

In the 1960s sociologist John Goldthorpe undertook a survey of Vauxhall car workers in Luton. His study was technically sound. After detailed analysis he concluded that the workers were content with their working lives, thought well of management, and had no sense of working-class solidarity.

Goldthorpe's study is now famous for its profound failure to judge the mood. Within a month of publication, the workers were in full rebellion. The front page of *The Times* reported: "Near riot conditions developed today at the Luton factory of Vauxhall motors... Two thousand workers streamed out of the factory gates and tried to storm the main offices... The scenes outside [saw] men singing 'The Red Flag'... Across the road hundreds of men linked arms and prevented a heavy Bedford truck from entering the factory."

There was no fault in Goldthorpe's survey technique. The problem lies in the inability of surveys to accurately investigate the thoughts and feelings of groups of workers.

In its pure form, as a piece of disinterested research, Goldthorpe's study shows that the survey method is inadequate. Workers often hold a number of contradictory ideas in their heads at any one time — for example, "My boss is a good person, but I wish I didn't have to work such long hours". Even the best surveys are unable to reflect these nuances and contradictions in people's minds.

But union surveys are not even objective scientific investigations. By conducting their "up-for-further-action?" surveys, union leaders are signalling to members that they are indecisive and nervous about calling more action. This in itself will play a huge role in skewing the results.

Anyone who has been involved in organising collective action knows that this method is a recipe for inaction. The recent experience has shown this; the National Union of Teachers' survey returned a 73% majority in favour of further action, but because of the low (23%) turn-out (almost an inevitability with a passive postal survey) the Executive voted against calling a national strike.

The key factor in whether workers will take collective action is whether they have the confidence they can win. This confidence is a belief that everyone else is willing to see the dispute through to the end. Only a leadership actively agitating for action — linked to and based on an active, engaged, organised rank-and-file — can inspire this confidence.

Workers might disagree with the leadership, of course, but a proper investigation into working-class consciousness and

its contradictions can only be conducted on the basis of this agitation.

Trotsky explains this method of investigating working-class consciousness in an article in the 1930s:

"But is the general strike possible in the immediate future?" [The approach here is not limited to the question of a general strike, or of highly militant actions. It is general.] "To a question of this sort there is no a priori answer possible, that is to say, none ready made. To obtain an answer it is necessary to know how to question. Whom? The masses. How question them? By means of agitation.

"Agitation is not only the means of communicating to the masses this or that slogan, calling the masses to action, etc. For a party, agitation is also a means of lending an ear to the masses, of sounding out its moods and thoughts, and reaching this or another decision in accordance with the results. Only the Stalinists have transformed agitation into a noisy monologue. For the Marxists, the Leninists, agitation is always a dialogue with the masses.

## DIALOGUE

**"But in order that this dialogue give the necessary results, the party must estimate correctly the general situation within the country and outline the general course of the immediate struggle.**

"By means of agitation and probing the masses, the party must bring into its concepts the necessary corrections and exactitude..."

Much of the would-be Trotskyist left today conducts "agitation" as a "noisy monologue" — crudely intervening in the labour movement on the basis of radical-sounding slogans or catch-calls ("general strike now!") intended not to play an active relationship with fluid, shifting consciousness and the logic of struggle but simply to act as a calling card for sect-building.

Trotsky explains eloquently, but he did not invent the nuanced, dialogue-with-the-class approach to agitation. It is how socialists and trade unionists have related to working-class consciousness since the very beginnings of our movement, often in conditions vastly more difficult than those faced by activists today.

Large numbers of public sector trade unionists have no experience of organising collective action. Most trade unionists are dedicated individuals who have spent the last few decades buried in casework. The survey mania at the moment is not simply a sign of an equivocating leadership, but also a sign that the movement has forgotten the ABCs of organising.

**We need a new generation of activists with the confidence to inspire and lead struggle and carry out the vital agitational work so we can accurately judge the mood.**

## Union leaders surrender on pensions

### By a civil servant

The leaders of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) have voted not to call national strike action on 28 March.

PCS leaders claim that, since the government's policy has been applied across the whole public sector, only nationally-coordinated action by as many unions as possible can win any concessions.

Of course, we are not let into the secret of exactly how many unions are need to win concessions. Only the National Union of Teachers and the University and College Union were even "in the market" to take action alongside PCS on 28 March; after the NUT's retreat and refusal to call action, we must conclude that the PCS's magic number was three.

A PCS statement looks to the 6-10 April NUT conference for "decisions on further action", but even if the NUT and PCS take joint action in April, will this be enough? The government can ride out one-day strikes, separated by months of inaction, very easily.

The PCS Executive's statement says: "a strategy to win a fair settlement to the dispute must involve a programme of action involving joint national strike action with other unions; joint national, regional and local protests; lobbying of ministers, MPs and other politicians; and co-ordinated targeted industrial action in some sectors."

### STRATEGY

**We are not told what "a programme of action involving joint national strike action with other unions" means; is it a strike once a month; once every four months?**

We agree that there should be "joint national, regional and local protests; lobbying of ministers, MPs and other politicians", but that is not going to win by itself.

In PCS we have a number of departmental and local disputes ongoing: are they part of "co-ordinated targeted industrial action"?

So what do we say in reply to this waffle?

Our starting point is that part of the PCS statement which says: "PCS members voted by 90.5% to re-

ject the government's 'final offer' on pensions, and by 72.1% to support a programme of further action with other unions, the highest vote for action we have ever had".

We think that the "highest vote for action we have ever had" means something.

If members have democratically voted to continue the fight then that

fight must go on.

Members voted in the knowledge that 28 March was to be the next day (this was explicit in voting material) and we should honour members' wishes.

The decision of the NUT not to join in with that action is unfortunate, but each union must mount the maximum possible fight for its members' interests, even when other

unions will not. That sometimes means fighting alone.

Members' confidence and morale maybe undermined by waiting even longer after the 30 November strike to take action.

By late April, the increase in pension contributions will be in place; at that point, the battle will appear very decisively lost.

It is not too late to rescue matters.

We do hope that NUT activists force a u-turn from their leadership and that we fight together in April.

**In the PCS, the Independent Left group is standing the upcoming NEC elections to challenge the leaders who have orchestrated this surrender.**

## Teachers' union limits strike to London

By Patrick Murphy, NUT Executive (pc)

**The National Union of Teachers (NUT) Executive ignored the views of a huge majority of members (as expressed in an internal survey) and decided not to proceed with a further national strike on pensions on 28 March.**

Despite a 73.4% yes to strike action, the majority on the Executive decided that there was insufficient support for continuing action. 15 NEC members pushed a vote to proceed with the action but they were opposed by 24 mem-

bers, including a significant number who would regard themselves as being on the left of the union.

The NUT leadership have failed to show anything like the degree of urgency required in this dispute. Having started by announcing that the union had "reserved its position" on the pensions deal (rather than rejecting it), the NUT then went on to reject any possibility of strike action in January, February or early March despite proposals being put to the Executive and a specific proposal from the University and College

Union for action on 1 March.

The idea that we would get a yes vote comparable to the 92% last year was fantasy, and no-one in the run-up to the survey ever suggested we would. Turnout is always variable across the country and was not significantly more so in this case. Not a single division or association failed to vote yes for action.

In place of national action, the NUT has decided to call on members in London to take action on 28 March with a view to rolling out action across other regions after Easter

(after reviewing the London strike). This "strategy" is incoherent; how can a potential regional strike help us rebuild support for national action?

Nevertheless, it is important that the strike is supported and that members outside London who are prepared to take action work with London divisions and associates to keep up the pressure for more national action.

**If that can be done the central job is to ensure that, this time, there is a strategy to win rather than the very occasional one-day protest strikes we have seen so far.**

## London Troublemakers' Group

How can we organise to win power in our workplaces and our unions? Come and meet other rank-and-file trade union activists to discuss strategies for fighting back at work — and winning. We'll be using *Labor Notes' Troublemaker's Handbook* and will be joined by *Labor Notes* co-founder Kim Moody. This is our first meeting, and we hope to develop an ongoing programme of workshops and training. Anyone interested in worker organising, from any trade union, is welcome to attend.



**Wednesday 28 March, 7-9.30pm, upstairs at the Exmouth Arms (Starcross Street, nr. Euston)**

**For more information, contact skillz\_999@hotmail.com or ring 07961 040618**

## Scots strike for NHS pensions

By Dale Street

**Thirty Unison members working in the Central De-Contamination Unit in Ayrshire Central Hospital (Irvine) staged a 48-hour strike on 13-14 March as part of the union's ongoing campaign in defence of NHS pensions in Scotland.**

The unit had been opened just a week earlier by Scottish Health Secretary Nicola Sturgeon.

"She was happy to meet the staff then, have the plaudits, have the photo opportunities. This week, she's chosen to ignore us. Rather than come and discuss the pensions issue, she decided to put the legislation through Parliament the same day," said Unison rep Elaine McLeod.

Unison is demanding "a Scottish solution to all aspects of pensions changes, including the year one increases to employee contributions of up to 2.4% (due to take effect on 1 April)."

The strike action in Irvine is due to be followed up by further selective action in Lanarkshire, Lothian and Greater Glasgow, beginning on 27 March.

According to the current issue of Unison's "Scottish Pensions Bulletin", the first negotiating meeting with the Scottish government is due to take place on 28 March.

That Unison is continuing with a campaign of industrial action in defence of its members' pension rights is to be unconditionally welcomed. But the information currently available raises a number of questions.

### GAP

**Why a gap of a fortnight between the first and second selective strike action? What action, if any, is being taken by other unions with members in the NHS in Scotland (most obviously Unison)?**

While Unison continues its campaign of selective strike action, the Executive Committee of the EIS (the main teachers union in Scotland) has decided not to stage a 24-hour strike on 28 March.

74% of members who took part in the recent ballot on industrial action had voted in favour of a strike, on a turnout of 38%. But last week's meeting of the

Executive Committee voted by 12 to 7 not to call a strike.

Factors influencing the vote appear to have been the NUT decision not to stage an all-out strike on 28 March and the relatively low turnout in the ballot. (In the ballot for strike action on 30th November 82% voted for strike action, on a turnout of 54%.)

Bizarrely, a statement issued by the EIS also portrayed the need for strike action on 28 March as effectively superfluous in the light of the decision to enter negotiations with the Scottish government and local authorities:

"As a result of the decision to enter negotiations with the employers' side on pensions, the EIS Executive Committee has decided to suspend (sic) plans for a day of industrial action on 28 March.

**"Fellow teaching unions south of the border have already decided to suspend national industrial action on this date, which opens the opportunity to consider a Scottish solution on pensions."**

## Tube workers reject Olympics bribe

By a Tubeworker supporter

**On Friday 16 March, all workplace reps for stations staff, drivers, service control staff, and maintenance workers met to discuss London Underground Limited (LUL)'s offer for Olympics working. The meeting vote unanimously to reject the offer.**

The offer was for an £850 bonus, but some of that included money reallocated from existing bonus packages that we would have got anyway. The new money was a £350 lump-sum plus a £20 bonus per shift worked during the Games. But the offer had substantial strings. For example, on stations staff

could be deployed to any station on their group. As some groups are as big as 13 stations, that could have meant being sent anywhere over large distances. It would significantly increase travel time to and from work. Management also wants to do away with the current two-hour time limit for changing duties; they want to be able to move us or redeploy us with no notice whatsoever. Stations staff would have had to take their meal breaks on station premises, and there would be a compulsory six-day week for service control staff.

The decision of the meeting to reject the offer is a clear message that workers are not prepared to sell out terms and conditions for an Olympics bribe from management. It's an im-

portant signal, because prior to the meeting there had been a feeling from some union officials that compromising on terms and conditions would be the only way to win a bonus. Reps have been clear that our members don't want to sell our framework agreement.

Now the decision's been taken, we need an active campaign in the workplace to involve "shop-floor" reps and ordinary workers. People need to feel ownership over what the union's doing and feel like they have control over the direction of the campaign.

**If we can build that active rank-and-file engagement, we have a chance to mount a serious industrial campaign that could force real concessions from bosses.**

### More industrial news online

- More strikes on Heathrow Express — [bit.ly/GASofP](http://bit.ly/GASofP)
- Carillion workers fight strike breaking — [bit.ly/GAL3aQ](http://bit.ly/GAL3aQ)
- Primark strikes off — [bit.ly/GAuM84](http://bit.ly/GAuM84)

# Solidarity & Workers' Liberty

## Join the Protest Against the Vultures!

**Thursday 5 April, 12am - 2pm, Circle  
Healthcare Head Office, 32 Welbeck  
Street, London W1G 8EU (2 mins walk  
from Bond Street station)  
CALLED BY HEALTH ALARM**

Circle Healthcare is one of the private profit companies making a killing out of the NHS. It is backed by powerful hedge fund tycoons and run by former Goldman Sachs vice-president Ali Parsa. Circle have just been given the contract to run Hinchingsbrooke NHS hospital in Cambridgeshire, paving the way for the wholesale transfer of hospitals to the private sector.

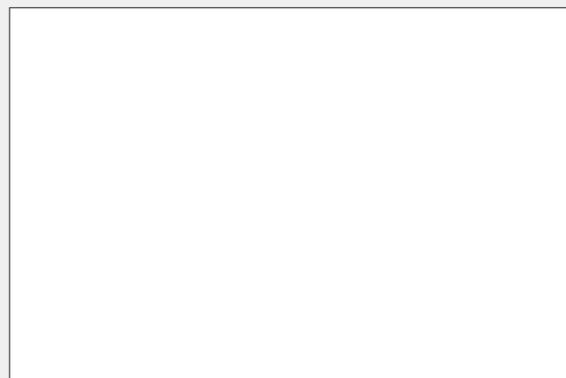
To contact Health Alarm call Jill Mountford (07904 944 771) or Rosie Woods (07734 088 243).

Email: healthalarm@yahoo.co.uk

BM Box 4628, London, WC1N 3XX

healthalarm1159.wordpress.com facebook.com/HealthAlarm

Please support these initiatives: 38degrees.org.uk/page/s/ProtectourNHSpetition; keepournhspublic.com



Picture: Sinister Pictures

## Taking on Branson

By Vicki Morris

On Saturday 17 March Health Alarm leafleted against the Health and Social Care Bill outside the Virgin Health Club in the Plaza Shopping Centre on Oxford Street, London.

Our slogan was "Don't let Richard Branson asset-strip the NHS!" Virgin Care (formerly Assura Medical) is one of the private companies moving in to make profits from the NHS. They are currently bidding to run children's health services in Devon. We had a good crowd, in spite of the persistent rain — enough to worry the management: security guards and two police officers kept us off the premises.

The police followed us to the pub where we dried out after the protest, and then trailed us when we moved off to the Hackney Keep Our NHS Public demonstration at the Department of Health.

## Occupation against NHS cuts

From IndyMedia

On 16 March, 20 people occupied the headquarters of the Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust to protest against the government's plan to scrap the NHS.

One of the occupiers, Larry Saunders, described the bill as "the most destructive bill in a generation" adding that it is not too late to "keep the battle going".

Larry said that they had received a "sympathetic reception" from staff at the Primary Care Trust.

The police and security staff have been less sympathetic, and have been trying to persuade the occupiers to leave. They have refused to do so because their protest is legitimate and non-violent.

**Saturday 7 April, Barnsley: "Save the NHS"  
demonstration Assemble 9.30 Churchfields, rally 10.30  
Peel Square. Organised by local Unison branches.**

# Health and Social Care Bill Universally condemned!

By Stuart Jordan

**"I'm not being disingenuous. I really haven't spoken to anybody who's in favour of [the Health and Social Care Bill]", says nurse consultant Andrew Frazer in the Guardian's "100 NHS Voices" survey.**

The Guardian's interviews of 100 people who work in and around the NHS were heavily skewed in favour of medics, chief executives and other well-healed professionals. However, despite the middle-class bias, it gives a rough picture of where this Bill is at and how it is being understood. There is almost universal condemnation for the plans; their attitude is backed up by the tiny 14% approval rating in the population at large.

The introduction of a conflict of interest by the Bill is a key point. Peter Wilmshurst, consultant cardiologist, comments, "The NHS is the best way to provide healthcare. Where you are getting a fee for a service, patients can't be sure they are getting the treatment they need rather than the treatment that gives the doctor who delivered it the most money."

**CONDEMNED  
Privatisation was condemned even by those that stood to gain.**

Fay Selvan, Chief Executive of a social enterprise, predicts "The private sector will cherry-pick the most profitable services, leaving the NHS without the critical mass to provide the rest."

Lord James Adebowale, the CEO of Turning Point (charity dealing with mental health, drugs and alcohol problems), thinks the market favouring the big health giants: "There is a real danger that the procurement process will favour the organisations from the for-profit sector who lack any track record in health and social care because they have the capital and the right access."

Even advocates of the Bill are worried. GP Johnny Marshall is a major player in the National Association of Primary Care — a shady organisation that receives large portion of its funding from private



health firms and has been lobbying vociferously for GP commissioning. Marshall thinks the Bill will fail because GPs will refuse to engage and the NHS will resist this level of change. He emphasises how smaller GP consortia will have to outsource commissioning to the private sector.

**CLASS  
But the survey also points to a class divide in the NHS which may become significant.**

While most of the well-paid professionals are concerned about the mechanics (or lack of mechanics) in the Bill, the more proletarian grades are feeling the pressure of the cuts.

Midwife Janet Fyle describes the pressure in the maternity suite: "When women are pregnant, they have all these ideas about what it's going to be like. And then you come in and the midwives think: 'Well today we're busy, so we're going to induce you, just get you through the system.' That cannot be right."

Ambulance dispatcher Richard Chow describes the changes he has seen throughout his career:

"When I first started 14 years ago, a busy day would mean 3,000-3,500 calls. Last year we went over 6,000 in a day...Over five years we have to save £50m and shed 580 jobs."

Psychiatric nurse Michael Buxton argues "There is a real worry that the NHS will be broken down by stealth into services that you have to pay for. The most valuable thing about the NHS is the idea that everyone's health is equally important ... this

is what we stand to lose."

Buxton is right. Despite the complexities of the Bill, Tories plan to is a simple one: starve the NHS of funds and then release the private sector vultures to feast on the carcass.

But this big picture is missed by the noisy middle-class commentators. Some of the more affluent professionals emphasise the "unbearable demand" made by patients on the health service. It is a view promoted by the professional associations who collaborated with New Labour's marketisation and PFI waste-creating projects that has sucked £ millions away from front-line care. It is a view that is blind to the fact that NHS is being starved of funds by the cross-party consensus to implement £20 billion cuts.

**UNCRITICALLY  
Like New Labour, these professionals have uncritically accepted of the government's class war ideology of austerity.**

While maintaining unity with the most astute middle-class professionals in the campaign against the Bill, we must also raise our own banners for independent working-class politics.

The founding principle of the NHS was the right to state-of-the-art, comprehensive healthcare free at the point of need. Until recently it was well-understood that this requires a radical redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor through general taxation.

In 1948, the Labour government kept the wartime top rate income tax rate of 98% in order to create the welfare state. Nowadays the tax burden is felt most sharply by the poorest in our society.

If the NHS is underfunded then this is due to social policies that have returned us to Victorian levels of inequality and the attempts of successive governments to turn the welfare state into a slush fund for the rich.

**We must not only fight the Bill, but also fight to reverse our current economic model of socialism for the rich and replace it with a welfare state that benefits the working-class majority.**

## Regional pay is poverty pay!

By Ed Whitby

**Chancellor George Osborne wants to make public sector pay rates more "market-facing" and responsive to private sector pay rates. Regional pay bargaining is to be introduced, starting with some departments in the civil service.**

Osborne claims that public sector pay has risen twice as fast as private sector in the last four years. This ignores the fact that bank nationalisations in 2009 artificially increased "public sector" pay and decreased private sector pay. Anyway, relatively higher union membership in the public sector should mean that we win better pay rises.

This new attack on our pay follows two years of pay freeze in the public sector (three years in local government) and a proposed limit of public sector pay rises from 2013 at only 1% for the next two years. Last year's increase of £250 for the lowest-paid workers was inconsistently applied, with those in local government not receiving it, despite nearly 75% of council workers earning below the £21,000 low-pay threshold.

**13% CUT  
Council workers' pay has been slashed in real terms by 13% between 2009 and 2012.**

The Chief Execs of councils have seen massive increases in pay over the last 10 years of between 27% and 50% according to the Audit Commission.

Regional pay bargaining is all about opening up the potential for private firms to make fatter profits from a cheaper public sector workforce. With almost three million public workers outside London and the south east, the government plan will take billions out of workers' pay packets, and out of regional economies.

Campaigning on low pay can unite layers of workers who have nothing to lose. We should not wait for national or regional unions to produce leaflets and reports or to lobby government.

**We need to build campaigns through local unions to push the union leaderships into a serious campaign.**